NOVICE TEACHER EMERGENT CONCERNS

Editors

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FOREWORD

This book is a collection of papers resulting from small-scale studies carried out as part of the professional development of a group of teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Mexico. This particular group of authors have in common being part of a Master's Degree programme in TEFL. As it is expected in this postgraduate program, students are to write a thesis or research report in order to fulfil the graduation process, so they embarked in researching a particular aspect of their teaching practice they detected needed to improve. After completing the process, they were invited to write a chapter, under the close supervision of a more experienced teacher, to integrate this book in order to make their work known by a wider audience.

This resultant collection of papers has the purpose of not only spreading knowledge resulting from solid research but also encouraging young practitioners and those new to the field of research to take a step further in their professional development by publishing, specially after the hard work that researching and writing a thesis in English implies.

The coordinators of the book strongly believe that, in order to have an impact on the effectiveness of teaching English in Mexico, more research and its consequent spreading, via conferences, papers, book chapters and books, should be done. We can only have an impact on the area by letting other teachers, administrators and educational authorities know what is happening inside the classrooms, the efforts made by truly committed teachers who implement strategies to produce better results in the learning of English. The main reason behind this project has precisely been to let the authors express their research experience and the findings of their studies so as to let other educational actors know the diverse and often adverse situations in which teachers work, and the empirical evidence that supports the successful teaching practices.

There are several characteristics that make this book outstand from other collections. To begin with, no other available source has given room to postgraduate MA students and their supervisors to publish papers derived from their research reports. Besides, the papers portray different teaching and learning contexts in both the public and private sectors; different educational levels and different research approaches are depicted. Moreover, each chapter is accompanied by a set of questions/tasks designed to foster further thinking and discussion. In conjunction, all the papers provide a wide panorama of actual teaching practices that seem to provide positive learning experiences. That is, it is a compendium of effective teaching

interventions that have actually worked in the Mexican context. And this is precisely another of the aims of the book: to provide research-based evidence of positive learning outcomes as a result of carefully planned implementations.

In the different chapters that integrate this book, the reader will find the voices of actual teachers narrating their research experience, their teaching contexts, the constraints they had to overcome, and, more importantly, the ways found to develop English competencies amongst their students. This makes it a collection worth your reading.

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PART 1

Boosting creativity through technology

Facebook in the EFL Curriculum as Learning and Teaching Tool

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Abstract

This article presents an investigation that focused on the use of Facebook as learning and teaching tool in EFL at a private institution in Mexico. The study indicated that Facebook was efficient and effective as long as students are motivated and willing to improve their English. Furthermore, teachers needed to play several roles when working with this social network. Facebook also encouraged students to practice English outside the classroom context by discussing current or thought-provoking issues promoting critical thinking. Lastly, Facebook helped to practice language skills such as listening, speaking and writing. However, it had some limitations such as social networks unfamiliarity and dislike.

Resumen

El presente artículo presenta los hallazgos obtenidos en una investigación relacionada con el uso de Facebook como una herramienta de enseñanza y aprendizaje de la lengua inglesa en un instituto privado de inglés en México. Dicho estudio indicó que esta red social puede ser eficiente y efectiva cuando los educandos se encuentren dispuestos y motivados a mejorar su nivel de lengua. Facebook alentó a los alumnos a practicar las habilidades del idioma y a contribuir en temas de reflexión y promoción del pensamiento crítico. Incluso se demostró que los maestros juegan roles esenciales cuando trabajan con esta herramienta. Por otro lado se descubrió que no todos sienten agrado o están familiarizados con esta red social.

1. Introduction

Nowadays learners of English are exposed to a range of information technology which makes it harder for their teachers to maintain their attention. Examples of this emerging technology are blogs, twitter, podcasts, wikis, social network sites, virtual worlds, video sharing and photo sharing called Web 2.0 technologies. Such technologies have mostly been used for entertainment and social communication by a net generation. In other words, young adults (Net geners) who were born around 1982 and grew up with high exposure to the Internet and communication technology, which have become part of their daily life (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005, as cited in Wu & Hsu, 2012). Net geners feel comfortable and have a more positive adventurous attitude toward learning through technology and they enjoy exploring the unknown by themselves. It is therefore important for institutions and instructors to discover the new teaching possibilities to address various types of learning styles and the needs of Net Geners (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007). Hence, teachers should be able to use different sources of technology wisely and intelligently in order to address their students' needs. It seems crucial to be aware of the kind of technological applications that learners like using so as to make instruction more appealing, meaningful and interesting for them.

Facebook is a world-wide social network which helps individuals to maintain communication at all times. Teachers are usually only in touch with their students during class time, or through email. Nonetheless, this is no longer enough for the purpose of learning a foreign language. Thus, if students are logged on to Facebook most of the day, teachers could provide learning material through this application a few times per week. Facebook can provide teachers with a considerable number of alternatives. In Facebook, teachers can create secret groups, upload videos, news, magazine articles, jokes in English, images related to current issues or cultural topics that are not often used in class, due to explicit curriculum and time constraints.

Several studies have tried to find out whether Facebook can work as a tool for teaching and learning. For instance, Promnitz-Hayashi, (2011) conducted research with 27 lower-proficient college students in Japan. The findings of this study showed positive results about working with Facebook. For example, students felt more motivated; they became more extroverted and started to express their opinions. Additionally, Facebook seemed to have boosted their progress in becoming more autonomous learners. Wu & Hsu (2011) in Taiwan, China, obtained similar findings. Their main outcomes were that students were able to learn new words,

build confidence, and increase their attitude to motivation and language learning. In Mexico, Calderón (2013) also used Facebook as a training tool in a course for in-service teachers. He posted texts related to teaching and learning English for the teachers to share their insights. Additionally, he also recorded lessons inside the classroom and then posted the videos for the teachers to discuss and reflect on the activities. He concluded that this tool was of great value for his course.

In view of the above mentioned studies, Facebook seemed to be a useful technological resource for my own English classes in a private English institute as one of my main goals was to increase my students' exposure to English. The main focus of this research was to identify if the social network site (SNS) widely known as Facebook could be integrated into the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). By using this tool, students would have the opportunity to be in contact with English in a more natural way. They would also be more in touch with their classmates outside the school through this mean. It would give them the opportunity to discuss current issues or cultural facts about the world. Facebook could also trigger their critical thinking. In class there is often not much time to give all students the chance to express their opinion and when they do, they are short of ideas or do not go beyond the obvious. Additionally, Facebook could contribute to the students' accuracy by giving them more time to analyze their answers and double-check whether what they write is appropriate. Therefore, this study aimed to discover whether students were willing to practice their English by using Facebook, whether Facebook was helpful to improve the students' written English and critical thinking, and whether Facebook could promote more interaction among the students than inside the classroom.

2. Literature Review

This section will discuss what social networking sites (SNS) and Facebook entail; the place of Facebook in several life contexts; Facebook and English teaching contexts; the main advantages of Facebook in the educational field; and how Facebook can be integrated into the language learning curriculum.

Like personal websites and instant messages, a social networking site (SNS) is a platform which provides an accessible way to connect and interact with others, share ideas and opinions and gather feedback in a fluid way (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007; Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009 as cited in Wu & Hsu, 2012). An example of this platform is Facebook which is a popular

free social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues. Group setting is one of its features that allow members who have common interests to find each other and interact. The feature group is the most relevant for the purpose of this research project as it allows people with common interests, such as learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), to interact.

Lego &Towner (2009) affirm that Facebook has opened up the development of downloadable applications in which people can upload photos and videos. The frequent and seamless updates and maintenance, the generous 1024 MB limit on videos, and the compatibility with a vast variety of web browsers are superior to some courseware options. This may explain why "the popularity of social networking among youth and teachers of the net generation is undeniable" (Schlager et al. 2009, p. 86 as cited in Pilgrim &Bledsoe, 2011).

Facebook is by far the most popular, and it has been gaining media attention. "CNBC's documentary *The Facebook Obsession* (2011) reported a variety of ways that people are using this network. In the world of education, principals are utilizing Facebook to screen potential teacher candidates, and educators have used the site as an interface to promote communication with students and parents (Pilgrim & Bledsoe, 2011)". The rationale behind the use of social networks as a tool for professional learning includes the idea that the Internet is this generation's defining technology for literacy (Coiro & Dobler, 2007 as cited in Pilgrim & Bledsoe, 2011).

According to Boulad (2012), Facebook appears to provide a ready space where students can become autonomous rather than only rely on classroom lessons. Thus, instructors are encouraged to be aware that Facebook is becoming an essential means for higher education and language learning. Optimistically, students and teachers can turn Facebook into a language learning and teaching setting. Promnitz-Hayash (2011) additionally claims that Facebook triggers more critical thinking and language output among pupils. Besides, it is mentioned that it seems to be quite available to students, as even when they might not have a computer at home, most of them own a mobile which allows them to access wherever they are. Additionally to these advantages, Promnitz-Hayash emphasizes that Facebook enables learning to become student-centered rather than teacher-centred.

SNS have become very popular among adolescents. More and more instructors are trying to incorporate SNS to improve students´ learning outcomes. Social networks are prevalent among young adults because of their multi-functionality. A handful of studies concerning the application

of SNSs to instruction showed that SNSs can make headways in students' general performance and strengthen their learning motivation and autonomy. Authors such as Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin (2010); Mazman & Usluel (2010); Pasfield-Neofitou (2011); Runapongsa et al. (2011) as cited in Wu & Hsu (2012) support Facebook as a learning and teaching tool as well they argue that students generally respond to discussions quickly and feel comfortable enough in their ¨space¨ to share their information and opinions. They also mention that the role of the students can shift from simple receivers of knowledge to a more active role, where they search and share their knowledge. By engaging in self-expression, conversation and knowledge sharing with others on SNSs, ESL learner are forming their virtual social identity and gaining the acquisition of the target language simultaneously (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007 as cited in Wu & Hsu, 2012). Facebook is a network that connects students with other students, indirectly creating a learning community, a vital component of student education (Baker, 1999 as cited in Lego &Towner, 2009).

In addition, Facebook facilitates students and teachers to maintain work, life and technology equilibrium. They should no longer stick to the classroom and to the traditional methodology of teaching as Boulaid (2012) mentions. However, the challenge for language teachers is how to gain their students' learning retention and extend their participation beyond the classroom. In a study carried out by (Wu & Hsu, 2012) it was found that in order to increase passive participants' motivation and engagement, facilitators should seek interesting topics from different sorts of material which could be generally accepted. Topic plays an important role toward students' motivation and engagement especially when the novelty effects fade away. When the mid-term or final exam is coming, their engagement may be temporary lower, but it can be restored after short period of time by continuing the interesting topic discussion.

It is crucial for the facilitator to build confidence, increase their motivation and positive attitude toward language learning. Wu & Hsu (2012) affirm that instructors should pay close attention to those factors while applying SNS to their instruction. Future studies should focus on how to mitigate the influence caused by those factors and to strengthen EFL learner's motivation and engagement in other similar environments on SNS or other ICT based learning environment. For example, to get students started on Facebook, instructors should create an icebreaker activity on Facebook, such as a posting a topic to boost student discussion or inserting a video accompanied with study questions in order to help develop a classroom community and establish

positive relationships. When integrating Facebook into their courses, instructors should designate student involvement on Facebook as an option, as not all students are registered users, and provide students other alternatives. Lastly, if using the site as a course tool, it is suggested that instructors post podcasts, websites, and videos on Facebook, and, using Google Documents, link students to study guides, PowerPoint presentations, assignments, and tutorials.

According to Towner (2007 as cited in Lego & Towner 2009) Facebook's networking and social communication capabilities can benefit both the instructor and the student by tapping into a greater number of learning styles, providing an innovative alternative to the traditional lecture or English class format, creating an online classroom community, and increasing teacher-student and student-student interaction. For instance, "if educators are looking forward to engaging learners better in this new trend of communication, they should re-shape their curriculum as that may transform the notion of communication, learning and teaching" (Boulaid, 2012).

3. Pedagogical Design

Throughout this section, the procedure that took place in order to introduce Facebook as means of learning and teaching will be explained. Additionally, it will provide and explanation of the methods of data generation and how the information was collected, coded and categorized.

This research was carried out in a private English Language school of a small town located in the South-East of Mexico. Most students from this institute have access to a computer and internet at home and on their mobile phones. What is more, most of them like being part of social networks. Two groups of students were chosen: one at Level B1 and another at level B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The first group was integrated by 7 students, whereas the second had 5 students. All of them were teenagers and young adults, with ages ranging from 14 to 25. The B1 group took a three-hour English lesson on Saturdays, while the B2 class attended English lessons three times a week during one hour and a half. Some of these students were not very outspoken in class and did not express their opinion very much in conversation activities. Nevertheless, they tended to be more explicit and extensive in their written answers.

Given this context, Facebook seemed an interesting tool for adding it to my English curriculum for several reasons. It allows students to be exposed to different kinds of texts and writing styles, giving them models that are different from the teacher's. Besides, it can promote

learner autonomy as it is a space for more learner-centered activities without interruption from the teacher. Lastly, since Facebook does not require face-to-face interaction, it may give shy learners the self-confidence needed to participate.

Before introducing Facebook to the participants, a list of regulations (appendix 1) was designed in order to give Facebook a proper academic use and avoid misbehaviour and future problems with students. A lesson of how to introduce Facebook was also planned (see appendix 2 and 3) so that students could be familiar with how to work with Facebook for learning purposes and to talk about privacy issues. Lego and Towner, (2009) suggest teaching Facebook professional etiquette to instructors and students. They recommend creating an additional Facebook profile for professional use with personal detail such as email addresses and contact information, and some photos, post items or list of favourite quotes. Lego and Towner (2009) also state that teachers should tell students that they will not be viewing their students´ profiles or other kinds of activities they do except from the work on the secret group and teachers should also encourage students to designate them on their ¨limited profile¨.

Once students became familiar with the dynamic of this project they were informed about the material such as videos, pictures, news items or articles that would be posted twice per week. Unfortunately, two of the participants did not like Facebook and were reluctant to create a profile. Therefore, the activities were sent to them through email so they would not be left outside the project. During three months students were working on this basis. Group level B2 did not received any extra point for working of Facebook whereas group level B1 got an extra point as the former was a FCE course preparation and the latter was a normal class of English. Students did not receive any low mark for lack of participation.

In this action research project I followed the cycle AR model based on (Kemmis & McTaggart (1988 as cited in Burns, 2010). The first step is planning. In this phase researchers identify a problem or issue and develop a plan of action to bring about improvements in a specific area of research context. It is necessary to consider what kind of investigation is possible within the realities and constraints of a teaching situation and what potential improvements are possible.

The second phase is called action. Action is carefully considered and should be one which involves some deliberate interventions into the teaching situation that the research puts into action over an agreed period of time. The interventions are critically informed as the investigators

question assumptions about the current situation and plan new and alternative ways of doing things.

The third phase, observation, involves the researcher in observing systematically the effects of the action and documenting the context, actions and opinions of those involved. It is a data collection phase where you use 'open-eyed' and 'open-minded' tools to collect information about what is happening. Reflection is the fourth step. Here the researcher evaluates and describes the effects on the action in order to make sense of what has happened and to understand the explored issue more clearly. A researcher may decide to do further cycles of AR to improve the situation even more, or to share the ´story´ of the research with others as part of the researcher's ongoing professional development (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, pp.11-14 as cited in Burns 2010).

Throughout this research, the first cycle already explained was followed. Qualitative research was used in order to collect the data. Nelson et al. (1992, p.4) state that "qualitative research is an interdisciplinary, transdiciplinary, and usually counterdisciplinary field. It crosscuts the humanities and the social and physical sciences. Its users are sensitive to use several multi-method approaches". Practitioners are committed to the naturalistic perspective and to the interpretive understanding of human experience.

Hopkins (2002) also claims that qualitative research is more of a way of life than a methodology. It is appropriate to describe and analyze phenomena to construct and to generate meaning out of complex situations. It is also helps the individual to enhance a sense of efficacy. However, in order to achieve this last objective, it is necessary to develop adequate and clear methodological procedures to establish a collaborative and critical research community.

Two qualitative data collection methods were applied to discover if Facebook could be considered learning and teaching tool. The first one was a journal log in which I wrote a weekly entry. According to Lengeling (2012) we can use journal logs as reflection tools of the developmental process of participants in a research project and a way to give possible meaning to what it is being studied. Journals are tools for the research participants´ or the teacher's internalization of the experiences. The use of journal in research can offer an abundance of data. Journal writing is one way to document thoughts, ideas and feelings for qualitative research. They promote reflection, which is conducive to qualitative research (Lengeling, 2012).

After gathering the information from a journal, Lengeling (2012) advises to code it and analyze it. She mentions that the key question of the coding and analysis phase centre on how to organize and reflect the journal information. Research in this area mentions that at this point, it is convenient to raise questions such as: What is a unit of meaning? How to interpret oral or written texts? What are the structures of patterned regularities? What do these regularities infer? However, it is crucial to understand what units of meaning are. Lincoln and Cuban (1985) as cited in Lengeling (2012) define them as having two attributes:

Firstly, units of meaning are aimed at some understanding or some action that the researcher needs to have or to take. Secondly, the smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself. This means that it must be interpretable when there is lack of any additional information other than a broad understanding of the context in which the inquiry is taking place. (p. 354). In addition, Makut and Morehouse (1994 as cited in Langeling 2012) describe that when units of meaning are detected and selected, "they are compared to all other units of meaning and categorized and coded with similar units of meaning. In this process initial categories are changed, merged, or omitted; new categories are generated; and new relationships can be discovered" (p. 134). This research follows the procedure before-mentioned. First I read through the data several times, looking for units of meaning. Then, each unit of meaning was written on an index card. Afterwards, the units of meaning were sorted through, looking for related concepts. Later, the sources of data were compared. In the finding sections, the steps that took place will be explained.

A questionnaire (see appendix 4) was another method for data collection in this research. (Hopkins, 2002 p. 117) states that ¨ questionnaires that ask specific questions about aspects of the classroom, curriculum or teaching methods are a quick way of obtaining broad information from pupils.¨ According to Burns, (2010), open-ended questions look for a free-form response and you can get a different perspective. Usually, the responses may be short but give you information that may be hard to capture numerically. Open ended-questions can be constructed along a continuum form completely open to guided. Whereas guided items are less open as they suggest the kind of things that you want informants to comment on further. Guided items allow participants to clarify or expand on a response and give information that is not obvious.

A six open-ended and two guided items questionnaire was designed and administered to participants. After observing the results from the questionnaires, broad patterns that could answer

this research questions were looked. Secondly, the data was coded into more specific categories. Then a number of hypotheses, and categories that began to explain if Facebook could be used as a teaching and learning tool were established. Nonetheless, the main hypothesis needed to be validated so the technique triangulation took place in this research as well. (Elliott and Adelman 1976:74 as cited in Hopkins, 2002) argue that triangulation "involves contrasting the perceptions of one actor in a specific situation against those of other actors in the same situation. By doing this, an initial subjective observation or perception is fleshed out and given a degree of authenticity." In other words, triangulation involves gathering accounts of a teaching situation from three different points of view, namely those of the teacher, his pupils, and a participant observer.

> "Each point of the triangle stands in a unique epistemological position with respect to access to relevant data about a teaching situation. The teacher is in the best position to gain data access via introspection to his own intentions and aims in the situation. The students explain how the teacher's actions influence the way they respond in the situation, whereas the participant observer is in the best position to collect data about the observable features of the interaction between teachers and pupils. By comparing his own accounts with accounts from the other two standpoints a person at a one point of the triangle has the opportunity to test and perhaps revise it on the basis of more sufficient data"
>
> (Elliott and Adelman 1976:74 as cited in Hopkins, 2002)

According to Hopkins, (2002) interviews can occur between teacher and observer. Individual interviews are often very productive sources of information for a participant observer who wants to verify observation he/she had previously made. Burns (2010) describes them as conversation with a purpose. She mentions that the three types for action research are structured interview, guided or semi-structured interviews and finally open interviews. Nonetheless, for the purposes of this investigation, I only focused on guided or semi-structured interviews. They are organized but also more open. This kind of interview allows some flexibility according to the interviewee's responses. For instance, if there seems to appear a relevant answer the researcher may want to ask more follow-up questions that may lead you to new discoveries. These interviews also allow you

for diversity and flexibility. Another advantage is that you are likely to find out about some things in more depth and get richer information.

By taking into account the triangulation technique and the advantages of interviews, an interview was administered to the teacher who helped to carry out this research project with his students. He observed all the ongoing process with his group. His perspective and insights were contrasted and compared to those of all the participants. The purpose of the interview was explained to him. Then, he was audio-recorded in order to transcribe and analyze his answers. His data was compared with previous sets of data from the journal and questionnaires in order look for similarities or contradictions. Thus, more abstract concepts were looked for by identifying connections and developing explanations about if Facebook can be considered as teaching and learning tool. After having coded and categorized the emerging data from each of the three data collection methods employed, all the data was read several times. First of all, the main units of meanings that seemed to be relevant, surprising or unexpected were highlighted. Then, labels to the main ideas were given. After that, more information appeared in later sections of the data which could also go under the first labels. The same dynamic in order to develop a number of different labels was repeated several times. Some information did not fit into any of the previous labels so a miscellaneous category emerged. After finishing with the first round of categorizing some of the miscellaneous information was placed in other categories.

4. Findings

Results present the seven categories that emerged in the data analysis. The first category was related to the teacher's roles. In here, the most relevant roles of a teacher who would like to set up a Facebook group are a) Be a participant, b) Be a feedback provider, and c) Be motivational, active and creative. Regarding the first role expected by participants, at the beginning of the project I just focused on sending them activities, but I did not interact with them. After having changed my dynamic, students began to contribute more in the secret group. Secondly, the teacher is expected to be a feedback provider. Apart from participating and expressing an opinion, teachers should comment on students' opinions in order to develop longer conversations. In my journal, I observed that when I did this, they were more willing to express their opinions. The last role expected from participants is regarding the need of a motivational, active and creative teacher. This will help him/her to look for appealing material for group members.

Students also agreed that when the teacher posts creative material they feel more invited to take part in conversations. Below there are some quotations from students, whose names were changed in order to protect their identities.

Ana: "*Yes but I would like some comments to be a bit different which can be interesting.*"
Maria: "Yes, I really like when the teacher posts interesting or creative material."
Susana: "When the teacher and my classmates comment or answer my opinions I like participating more."

According to my triangulation technique, my students, colleague and I agreed on the advantages that Facebook provides. Several participants said that Facebook was a way to practise English. They also said that they could interact more with their classmates. Although I did not see much interaction in my group, my colleague's students were interacting and discussing among themselves which made practicing English more real. It also helped students to be friendlier inside the class as some students who did not talk to each other started to talk after interacting in Facebook. Facebook also proved to be a tool to put into practice what was studied in class. In several of my journal entries, I emphasized the fact that students were using some of the language studied in my class and Santiago, my colleague, also said that he had observed this as well in his students. Santiago said: "*I feel happy when I see them using new structures and vocabulary studied in class*" Finally, Facebook may be very advantageous for students who are keen on English. Those students who are exceptional at English and had expressed that they love this language were extremely participative from the first moment that they took part in this activity.

Interestingly enough, another emerging category was Facebook fondness. Most of the students interviewed had an extremely positive opinion about using Facebook as a learning tool. They said they found this activity appealing because it was something different as they have never used Facebook in this way. Some others mentioned that they liked the fact they were offered other learning alternatives. They said that it was handy and convenient as every time they logged in they could stay posted and access to the comments no matter where they were. Additionally, Hugo mentioned that he found more relevant to express his opinion by this means than in a notebook.

Another category was Facebook disadvantages. Not all the participants were fond of this social network or even worse not everyone was a digital native. One student told me that he did not like computers, but that he would try to participate. However, he never did. Even though students said that they had found the material appealing they were not always in the mood to think very deeply. Some students said that they would have liked the post, but were tired to express their opinion at that moment and then they just forgot to write something. Others said that they did not have time to answer something because they were in exam periods. Therefore, since Facebook is considered an entertainment activity, they had to close it in order to study and not waste their time.

Consequently, Facebook is not very recommendable in exam periods. Roman, a student from group B, mentioned that he liked to participate on Facebook but only for relaxing purposes so I should post funny things because he did not want to worry about complex topics. Lack of internet or connection problems were major issues in this project. Barbara said that she did not participate several times because her family had stopped paying the internet service and Sandra told me that she had intended several times to post something but her internet connection was too slow. Finally Facebook can become operant conditioning. In group B2 students did not receive any point for their participation so their response was slower, whereas group B1 made more contributions and received and extra point so as a result participation was a little higher. This makes me think that if there is no any kind of reward there is no participation unless students count with other characteristics.

Mary: ¨*It's a really innovating idea because FB is a popular place*¨

Susana: ¨*It's ok for me. It's a good option to change the books*¨

Silvia: ¨ *I think it's very useful because it allows me to keep in English and nowadays topics*¨

Samantha: ¨*I think it's a good idea because that proves that FB is not only to lose time or something like that. You can have a good use for it*¨

Hugo*: ¨ Yes, because is better than write in a boring notebook*¨

Vane: "I don't really like Facebook. I don't have time for this.

Juan: "I prefer interact books than internet"

Another emerging category from the raw data was Facebook language benefits. Through the questionnaires administered students said that maybe Facebook could help them to improve in different language skills and subskills, such as vocabulary, grammar, and spelling. Students tried harder to write long responses and also to think of more complicated words to express their ideas. This resulted very surprising as there was a limit of ten words per comment. However, they exceeded that number. They also made some spelling mistakes but when they became aware of them, some of their classmates corrected them indirectly by writing their comments without mistakes. This action helped them in the sense that later on they did not make that same mistake again. Below there are some quotations from students' responses:

Mary: ¨*In the way that I can think about my opinion and then post it, compare with my partners´opinions and discuss something about the topic*¨

Susana: ¨*I can express myself*¨

Silvia: ¨*It gives me the opportunity to express myself easier and more fluent.*¨

Samantha: ¨*It can help us maybe because we are practicing English in something we like so we pay more attention and look more interested.*¨

Juan: ¨*In the way that I can think about my opinion and then post it, compare with my classmates' opinions and discuss something about the topic.*¨

Hugo: ¨*In the spelling.*¨

Diego: ¨In writing¨

Esteban: ¨It helps in my written and my vocabulary¨

Mateo: ¨In the spelling¨

Informants mentioned that what encouraged them the most to participate were Facebook activities. At the beginning, classroom style activities were posted and there was very little response from students, but after having studied their opinions the material contents were changed. Hence, I started posting funny and interesting images with messages, videos, funny and controversial articles about teenagers and current topics. After doing this, the rate of participation increased and students seemed to be more pleased with the activities which at the same time promoted a little bit of interaction among themselves.

Simon: *¨Maybe more visual content¨*

Delia: *¨ it's ok but I'd like articles with sports or art.¨*

Samantha: *¨Activities maybe funny, and comment things funny.¨*

Diego: *I don't know maybe more funny things.¨*

Facebook tips was another emerging category. Through this project I discovered that it is important not to lose the sense of leisure and entertainment in Facebook as my colleague suggested and my students mentioned. Students said that they did not wish to have a formal Facebook so I really had to keep up with Facebook standard entertainment in order not to lose my students. I also found out that we had to understand what our students like and hate. My colleague also told me that it would be a helpful to have students answer a questionnaire. This would give me crucial information on my students' likes, and I could be able to encourage them to participate more.

Key ingredients for participation emerged as the last category. Some students were not autonomous. They said that when the teacher did not push them more they tended to forget about the project. Therefore, if there is lack of learning autonomy on the students' side, their teacher has to be reminding them constantly to participate which sometimes can be a bit annoying for students and for teachers as well.

Simon: *¨I only remember to post when the teacher reminds me¨*

Diego: *¨I don't like studying much English but I participate if the teacher gives me points¨*

5. Discussion

After having analyzed my emerging data and classified it into categories, I proceeded to compare the outcomes to the views of the scholars. Most of my results matched very accurately with the experts´ beliefs about using Facebook as for teaching and learning. However, there were some discrepancies that will be discussed later on in this chapter. Additionally, the contextual, pedagogic and methodology variables that may have caused the final findings will be considered. Finally this chapter will offer a proposal related to Facebook that could improve my teaching context.

Firstly, when setting up a secret group in Facebook in order to promote teaching and learning, teacher's roles are crucial. According to my findings, the teacher should be a feedback provider, a motivator, and he/she also needs to be an active participant in this activity. Most of the students agreed with those characteristics including my colleague Santiago and myself. Wu & Shu (2012) mention that instructors should pay close attention to motivation and positive attitude while applying SNS to their instruction and encourage participants´ engagement. Participants also said that they found it useful to receive feedback from their teacher as this caused them more interest in participating, and this finding can also be supporting with Norton & Toohey (2002 as cited in Wu & Hsu, 2012) statement that language learning engage identities of learners and it is a complex social practice. For this reason, when a language learner interacts with the group he is asking to what extent she will impose reception and be recognized by his/her interlocutors. I noticed that when students did not receive my feedback at the beginning of the research they did not give long answers. However, when I replied back the conversations had a greater length and students were more willing to participate.

Facebook has some advantages inside the classroom according to my findings. It promotes interaction, overcomes shyness and sets up a friendlier atmosphere in class. During this process, I could notice that Santiago's students were very interactive among themselves, they did not only comment on my links but they also replied to their classmates which made conversations more interactive. This may be due to the potential of Facebook increase communication as VanDoor & Eklund (2013) argue. Nevertheless, my students were a bit reluctant to interact with their classmates as they only replied to my links. Factors that could have caused this are students´ personalities or the fact that they did not receive any kind of award for their participation. Nonetheless, Facebook helped some students to become less shy as they were able to express their opinion in an alternative way without the pressure of being in front of their classmates. What is more, some students who did not talk much before the project, became friendlier.

Facebook is also appealing for most students. Several participants in this project enjoyed working with this tool because it is innovative, different and more real. I consider that teachers need to bear in mind these characteristics and employ this tool with our students. Schlager et al. (2009, p. 86 as cited in Pilgrim & Bledsoe 2011) state that "the popularity of social networking among youth and teachers of the net generation is undeniable". Almost all students were keen on

using Facebook, which is a good reason to use this appealing tool in the curriculum and practise their English outside the English classroom.

Facebook may be an aid for language improvement. Boulard (2012) affirms that Facebook can help language learners to improve language skills and creativity on the whole. Most students´ responses agreed with this statement since all students in this research mentioned that Facebook could help them to improve their grammar, vocabulary, and spelling. Nevertheless, it may take more than three months to help students improve in these areas. Additionally, students would have to be very participative by making several contributions per week, and receiving feedback from teachers and classmates in order to demonstrate real improvement. Facebook may also help to improve creativity and critical thinking. It is essential to post material that can boost our students thinking so students really feel invited and interested to write an opinion. I noticed that when I posted controversial topics they tended to reply soon and with thoughtful answers. They went beyond saying I agree or I disagree. (See appendix 6) This action was rewarding as sometimes inside class students tended to be very brief in their insights.

For this reason one of the main tips to follow in order to have a good management of a Facebook secret group are the activities to be posted so as to keep students motivated. Apart from being current and controversial, topics have to be funny, fun and quite appealing for students. According to Wu & Su (2012) it is necessary to seek interesting topics which and most importantly it should never be forgotten that Facebook is a leisure activity. At the beginning of this project my postings were much related to school activities. Nevertheless, when I changed school material or mixed it with humoristic issues, students began to be frequent participants and their answers much more extended.

Unfortunately, there have been some disadvantages while setting this social networking in my TEFL context. Students cannot be fully engaged due to several reasons. It is essential to keep in mind that students will not be participating because of their homework, exams, or because they just did not have time to think of a good opinion to post on Facebook. Wu & Su (2012) also argue that when mid-term or final exam is coming students 'engagement might be temporarily lower. Most of my students said that although they wanted to participate it was not possible for them to do so because if they logged into Facebook they could get distracted very easily and waste lots of time. It is advisable not to forget about these factors and try to be patient when these events take place. Another strong disadvantage is that students tend to operate under condition: if

they know they will be given an extra point for their marks, they will definitely work more. At least this happened during the research period. This emerging data is proving that Facebook does not promote autonomy as has been suggested by Promnitz-Hayash, (2011) when she mentions that Facebook encourages autonomous learning within a social environment for students. Therefore, it does not matter how popular Facebook is if there exists lack of autonomy in the TEFL context.

Finally, commitment and willingness are key factors for using this social network as a teaching and learning tool on both sides. Willingness and commitment must be present on both sides. My colleague Santiago told me that it was sometimes time consuming for him to be checking his students´ activity on Facebook and to look for the right material for the secret group and this also happened to me. I consider that if there are teachers with little patience, this could not work either. For this reason if autonomy, willingness and commitment are not present, it will be hard to set up a project like this in our learning context.

The results already discussed may have emerged in this way because of different factors such as contextual, pedagogical and methodological factors. First of all, most of the students may have accepted this technological tool due to their context as all of them have internet, smart phones and computers at home. They are all teenagers and young adults who are part of the Net Generation and most of them are keen on this technological age. Regarding the pedagogical aspect, as a teacher I like to include new and alternative ways of teaching inside my classroom because I also belong to this technological age. I am always looking for interesting and appealing ways to transmit my knowledge of English, so that is why I decided to work with Facebook. Finally, I believe that the methodology I used was enough to discover helpful findings that will help me to carry on this project with different groups of students. Nevertheless, I would have to design more interviews and questionnaires to make a more effective use of Facebook.

6. Pedagogical Implications and Conclusions

Before ending this report, it is crucial to remark that adding Facebook to the curriculum has several limitations. First of all, people need to be technology friendly; otherwise they may be reluctant to participate. Additionally, school policies play an important role, many private schools or public schools do not authorize their teachers to have their students as Facebook friends in order to ensure students´, teachers' and school safety. Apart from this, students do not want to

have teachers as their friends. Students´ trust towards teachers needs also to be present so students feel comfortable participating. Moreover, Facebook tool may not be practical in school contexts in which students lack of technological resources, mostly at home, since if teachers ask students to participate , students may want to go out and look for the resources which it would mean to make them spend money and as a consequence parents' annoyance. There might also be students who do not like Facebook due to bad experiences with it. For this reason I advise any person interested in working with this social network in this way to keep these aspects in mind before launching it.

Nevertheless, if this project is carried out in a similar context to mine, it could be successful. I consider that I had many advantages since the beginning of this study. Most of my students were willing to take part in it. What is more, the majority was digital geners and spent some part of their time during the day logged on Facebook. Besides, they trusted me and I totally respected their private life. This could have helped me to have more participation from them. Maybe if they had not liked me, the secret group could not have flowed as the way it did. Another point to remark is the economical status of students; most of them were able to afford mobile phones, computers, an internet connection at home. Despite of all these advantages, students worked on this when they were reminded to do so and they did not show to be very autonomous. However, their participation in this project was creative and well-thought when they wrote their entries, only the people who received an extra point contributed more. For this reason in the near future I would like to do a follow-up with the second cycle of action research in which I would work with Facebook as an optional activity in order to discover if the students who decide to participate may do it often without me remanding them to write comments on the links I post.

Finally, I found it very rewarding to do this research on Facebook because it taught me that leisure sense Web 2.0 applications such as social networks can be turned into educational tools and we as teachers can help students learn or practice their English through different tools that may be closer to their likes. I also believe that teachers should always be looking for different alternatives to teach English and see what works best with our students as this will give us the opportunity to experiment and at the same time enhance and improve our professional development.

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APPENDIX 1: Facebook secret group regulations

- Any kind of post must be in English
- Students are not allowed to write swear words
- Students can post images, videos, articles or links in English as long as they are not offensive.
- Participants are not allowed to offend their classmates' links or posts.
- Students must at least make one comment about their teacher´s links.
- Teacher will post two links, videos or articles per week. Teacher will start making the first comments or food for thoughts questions.
- Students will receive a point in the writing section.
- When students type a comment, they should write sentences of more than 10 words. Students are not allowed to post the same comments than their classmates. In case students have the same opinion they must paraphrase.

APPENDIX 2: Facebook lesson plan: Group B2

Goal: By the end of the class students will have had a small practice of how they will be working with Facebook in the future weeks. They will also have become part of a secret group in order to practise their English outside the class through a social network.

Material: The Rosswell UFO accident article, stripes of colour paper: 4 per student, tape, computers, internet.

1. Teacher will give students an article about a HOAX and will have students read it. Later on, she will give students a food for thought question. She will paste the question on the board.

2. After that she will give each student slips of paper (each student will receive a different color that can distinguish him from other classmates) and they will have to write an opinion about it, they have to use ten words minimum.

3. Once they finish, she will ask them to paste them below the food for thought question. Then, she'll have students to read their classmates comments. After that, teacher will ask them to reply to one of their classmates comments on another slip of paper. Student will paste this next to the comment.

4. Again, teacher will ask students to read their comments or replies and will have them write a second reply. It does not have to be necessarily to the same person. They can reply to another comment they find interesting.

5. After that the teacher will ask them to sit down and will inform of the purpose of this activity and the regulations. Teacher will tell them that they will use Facebook in order to practise their English outside the class and develop their critical thinking.

6. After that, students will go to the computer lab in order to become part of the secret group or to open a new account.

7. Once they have done this, teacher will have post the first activity as homework. If there are not questions they will come back to the classroom.

APPENDIX 3: Facebook lesson plan
Group B1: Lesson plan for introducing Facebook inside the classroom.
Goal: By the end of the class students will have had some practice of how they will be working with Facebook in the future weeks. They will also have become part of a secret group in order to practice their English outside the class through a social network.

Material: A fable, slips of color paper: three per student, tape, computers, internet.

1. The teacher will give students a copy of a fable called Belling the Cat. Then, students will read the fable together and in pairs will discuss what the moral is.

2. After that, the teacher will give each pair three slips of paper of the same colour   and will ask students to write a similar situation on one slip of paper where they think this fable can be applied. The teacher can give an example.

3. Once they finish, T will ask them to paste them on the wall in a vertical line. Once, everyone has pasted their color stripes will ask everyone to stand up and read their classmates comments.

4. Afterwards, teacher will ask them to choose the most interesting comment and write a reply to it by expressing their opinions. Then, they have to paste the comment next to the one they are replying. Finally have them read what their other classmates wrote and ask them to stand up again and write a final comment. Encourage them to develop their imagination.

5. After that, the teacher will have them sit down and will inform of the purpose of this activity and the regulations. T will let them know that they will use Facebook in order to practise their English outside the class and develop their critical thinking.

6. After that, students will go to the computer lab in order to become part of the secret group or to open a new account.

7. Once they have done this, the teacher will have post the first activity as homework. If there are not questions they will come back to the classroom.

8. Later,   teacher will inform students that the postings will be on Mondays and Fridays so they have a period to reply.

APPENDIX 4: Questionnaire

1. What's your opinion about practicing your English through Facebook?

2. In what ways do you think Facebook may help you improve your English?

3. Do you like practicing your English by this mean? Why?

4. How often do you post your opinions on your teacher's comments? Do you consider yourself a frequent participant?

5. If your answer in the previous question was No, mention what are the reasons of your lack of participation in the Facebook secret group.

6. Do you like the articles, videos or comments that your teacher posts twice a week?

7. If you do not find the material posted interesting or relevant, what kind of activities would you suggest uploading?

8. Would you like to continue being part of the Facebook secret group? Why?

APPENDIX 5: Interview

1. What's your opinion about using Facebook as learning tool in your TEFL context?
2. How have your students reacted to this new teaching and learning tool?
3. Has the participation of your students been frequent? Why do you think so?
4. In what ways has Facebook been helpful for your teaching and your students' learning?
5. How do you feel using this tool in your TEFL context?
6. Would you use this tool in your future groups? Why?
7. What would you suggest doing in order to exploit Facebook in a more efficient and effective way?
8. Can you mention any negative aspects you may have encountered when working with this project?
9. Is there anything else you want to add towards Facebook as a teaching and learning tool?

APPENDIX 6

Mi VaHu

Do you know why some Mexicans celebrate St Patrick´s day? Should we celebrate foreigner customs?

Me gusta · · Dejar de seguir la publicación · 20 de Marzo a la(s) 15:43cerca de Xalapa-Enríquez

- Visto por 5

Samantha Firstly, they commemorate that day because of a kings anniversary of death, but in Mexico we don't tend to celebrate that, he was from Irland, maybe people who are from there an live here in Mexico do that.

20 de Marzo a la(s) 15:48 a través de celular · Ya no me gusta · 1

-

teacher I agree with you Samantha, maybe people who have lived or travelled over there tend to celebrate it but I´ve seem people who have zero connection with Ireland or Irish people and they wear green colour on the 17th of March, plus go to Irish restaurants. So my questions is should we celebrate a festival which history is unknown to us?

20 de Marzo a la(s) 15:57 · Me gusta

Ana: In my mind we shouldn't, also we have lots of history that we don't even know and we do not celebrate, we must pay attention in Mexican traditions and history

20 de Marzo a la(s) 16:15 a través de celular · Me gusta

Hugo, Do Mexicans really celebrate St. Patrick Day?... I think we only use it as a excuse for drinking beer and party. Anyway, we should not take foreign celebrations because that's the first step to lose your culture

20 de Marzo a la(s) 23:05 · Me gusta

Simon I agree with Hugo, maybe the people that are not connected with Ireland and celebrate it are the ones that like to party for a minimum reason and like to get drunk.

30 de Marzo a la(s) 20:55 a través de celular · Me gusta

TRIGGERING REFLECTION

After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:

- Do you think that the pedagogical tool suggested in this chapter might be relevant in your own context? Justify your answer.
- Mention some advantages and disadvantages of using a social network as a pedagogical tool.
- Reflect on external factors that need to be taken into account when working on a social network such as educational policies, or parental advisory.
- What roles would the teachers need to be aware of when using a social network as a pedagogical tool? What roles are not mentioned on the text?
- If you find a social network useful, but you do not necessarily agree with the use of Facebook, what online social network would you suggest? Develop your reason and explain your choice.
- Identify a problem you can sort out with the use of a network of your preference. Design an action plan and implement it.

CHAPTER TWO

Low-cost Interactive Whiteboard and Interactive Activities to Motivate
Teenage Secondary Language Learners

Rolando Blas Sánchez

Barbara Scholes Gillings

Paula Busseniers Elsen

Abstract

This paper reports on a four-week intervention to motivate thirty teenage learners of English at a suburban *telesecundaria* school in the East of Mexico using a low-cost interactive white board with interactive activities. Observation notes, semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews were used to collect data. Findings suggest that using this device along with the activities had a positive effect on some learners who previously had barely participated in class, while some others remained passive. A conclusion derived from this study is that the low-cost interactive white board does not guarantee *per se* that learners become motivated and engaged in the class.

Resumen

Este trabajo reporta los hallazgos de una investigación realizada con treinta estudiantes de telesecundaria en el Este de México durante una intervención de cuatro semanas. Para ello, se construyó un pizarrón interactivo casero y se crearon actividades interactivas. Se usaron dos tipos de entrevistas y observación para recolectar datos. Los hallazgos sugieren que este dispositivo y las actividades tuvieron un efecto positivo en algunos aprendices que previamente participaban poco; sin embargo, otros continuaron pasivos. Una conclusión que se deriva de este estudio es que el uso del pizarrón interactivo no garantiza por sí mismo que los aprendices se motiven e involucren en clases de inglés.

1. Introduction

It is evident that we are witnessing a constant evolution in the teaching and learning of languages around the world. Changes are noticeable in teaching methodologies, learning philosophies, teachers and students' roles and even in the beliefs about language teaching and learning. The complexity of these changes is even greater if we consider that there are also differences between teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). One of these developments is the inclusion of technology in language classrooms to assist and improve language teaching and learning. It is of particular interest that interactive white boards (IWB) are currently being used all over the world, which has motivated a number of studies to evaluate their impact in English Language Teaching. Examples of these are Al-Saleem, 2012; Benmansour & Meziane, 2013; Březinová, 2009; Fatih, 2008; Ishtaiwa & Shana, 2011; Javidi et al. 2014; López & Ramírez-Romero, 2010; Yáñez & Coyle, 2011.

Having detected the lack of motivation among my EFL teenage language learners, a study in which innovation in English language teaching was planned. This paper presents the findings of using a low-cost interactive white board and interactive activities with the objective of motivating thirty teenage *telesecundaria* learners in a public institution in the East of Mexico. Although investigations have evaluated the impact of the interactive white board in interactions between teacher and students as well as the way the IWB contributes to motivate students to learn English, little is known about this in the Mexican context. Moreover, most of the studies have focused on evaluating commercial versions of interactive white boards, unlike this study, which evaluated the impact on motivation of a low-cost version of this device in English classes.

2. Literature review

2.1 On motivation

Learning a language is determined by different factors but the one that has received special attention from scholars is motivation. From the extensive body of literature, motivation seems to play an important, if not determinant role, in learners' success or failure. The most cited studies include Gardner's theory on motivation and Dörnyei's motivational framework. Dörnyei (2001) considers that motivation "is related to one of the most basic aspects of the human mind, and most teachers and researchers would agree that it has a very important role in determining success or failure in any learning situation" (p. 2). A similar view is shared by Richards and

Schmidt (2010), who point out that "Motivation is generally considered to be one of the primary causes of success and failure in second language learning" (p. 378).

Scholars have tried to understand motivation from different perspectives. There are two that appear to be the most relevant ones and which were the ones considered in this study: the cognitive and constructivist. The former encompasses three theories: Drive theory, Hierarchy of needs theory and Self-control theory (Brown, 2007a), all of which seem to consider the inner desires of an individual. In the latter, the constructivist, there is an emphasis on the social context and individual personal choices (Brown, 2007a, 2007b). Motivation also seems to have an impact on the success or failure of language learning. A number of studies (for example, Bahous et al. 2011; Kitjaroonchai, 2012; Mattarima and Hamdan, 2011; Pahlavannejad, 2013; Rehma, et al., 2014; Tahaineh and Danna, 2013; Topalov, 2012; Walker, 2011) have explored this topic by focusing on the learner's most common types of motivation (integrative, instrumental, extrinsic, intrinsic) and on which of these types has had the greatest impact on the learners' language acquisition.

2.2 Interactive white boards in the classroom

The use of interactive white boards to assist teaching is becoming a common practice at all levels of education (Bosetti, Pilolli, Ruffoni, & Ronchetti, 2011). In Mexico, the Ministry of Education is aware of the innovations in education and has considered the inclusion of interactive white boards (IWB) in junior high schools. This implementation seeks to assist teachers by using multimedia resources to enrich their teaching practice and focus the attention of the students at this level (Martínez & Martínez, 2007).

An interactive white board can be defined as a board on which users can work with multimedia content. As some researchers have noticed, most IWBs use the same principle; they "comprise a computer linked to a projector and a large touch-sensitive electronic board displaying the projected image" (Lin, 2012, p.4). However, IWBs are not necessarily white boards, but any flat surface. As Bosetti et al. (2011) have pointed out "the computer screen is shown on a large surface which is touch-enabled: by touching the surface users can interact with the computer (move the cursor, click etc.)" (p. 269). The most popular IWB is the Smartboard developed by SMART technologies which has been used in different contexts to assist language teaching and learning (Březinová, 2009; Ghaffarzadeh & Ghaffarzadeh, 2013; Morgan, 2008).

2.3 The low-cost interactive white board

Some institutions have the means to afford a commercial IWB; however, in some institutions the budget is insufficient to buy one of these IWBs. A cheaper alternative is for the teacher to construct a home-made one at a low cost. The alternative that was used in this project was a $700 MXN home-made IWB. This white board was built following Lee's (2008) procedure and consisted of two sets of components. The hardware set was a Wii remote or Wiimote of the Nintendo© Wii© videogame console, which is the most expensive material of the device (around $650 MXN); and an infra-red (IR) pen, which is built by using some wire, a marker case, an IR led, an AAA battery and a push button (the total cost is around $50 MXN). The software set was provided by Lee (2008); it is cost-free and can be downloaded from his website http://johnnylee.net/projects/wii/. As with the other IWBs, a computer and a projector were needed but they were already available at the school.

The procedure to make the low-cost IWB work consists of connecting the Wiimote to the laptop using the Bluetooth connection of the computer and one of the pieces of software provided by Lee (2008). Once it is connected, the Wiimote tracks the IR emissions of the pen through another piece of software any time it points to the image projected on a flat surface (in this case a normal classroom white board, see figure 1)

Figure 1: Interactive white board set-up,
adapted from: www.smoothboard.net
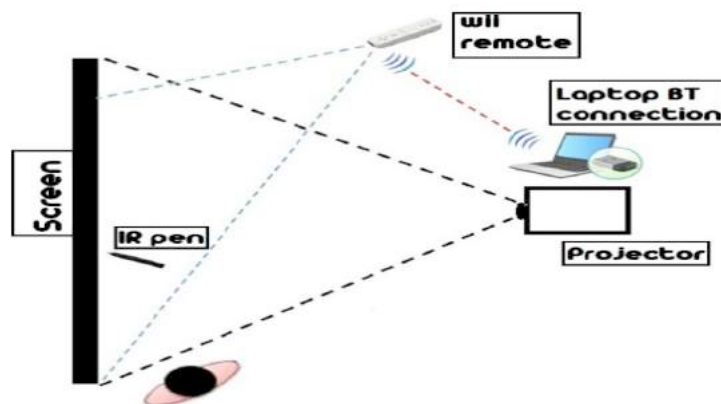
This technology has already been used with positive results to assist teaching and learning in different areas including English language teaching (Bosetti, et al., 2011; Lin, 2012; Lin, Jen,

Wang, Lin & Chang 2011; Lin et. al 2011; López & Ramírez-Romero, 2010). Nonetheless, there may be a number of limitations due to possible minor technical issues such as calibrating the screen, syncing the Wiimote with the laptop and finding the right place to set the Wiimote so that it tracks the IR emissions of the IR-pen Eventually, these issues are solved with repeated practice.

2.4 The interactive activities

Besides the construction of the IWB, some interactive activities were especially created to practice and learn English, while some others were taken from published resources available on the web. The newly-created activities were an adaptation from paper to multimedia of activities in the students' book. To do this, the teacher/researcher used software such as PowerPoint© and Genmagic©. The activities included exercises in which the students unscrambled words to create sentences, ordered sentences to create texts, used audio recordings to practice the listening skill, matched words with their opposites, and matched vocabulary items with pictures to label images. Students were in charge of doing the activities on their own, following the instructions given by the teacher.

The interactive activities taken from the web included learning activities in the form of games in which learners practiced mainly vocabulary. Some examples were memory games, word search puzzles and the reveal-the-image game. These activities were selected and used because they suited the students' learning objectives and were closely related to the contents of the students' book. In these activities, the teacher mediated between the two competing teams and prevented the students from breaking the rules of the games. All the interactive activities were used with the low-cost IWB. In some cases, students used them to review the vocabulary studied in previous lessons and, in other cases, students had to complete modified exercises from the book.

3. Methodology

3.1 Context and participants

The context in which this investigation was carried out was a suburban *telesecundaria* school in the eastern part of Mexico. In *telesecundaria* schools one teacher is responsible for instructing learners in ten subjects, including English. Like other subjects in the curriculum of this school,

English is taught three times a week. Each session lasts fifty minutes and classes are taught using a methodology that consists in watching fifteen-minute instructional videos followed by the use of a book in which students do exercises. However, the principal and the teacher in charge of the group of this particular school agreed that I, as a teacher/researcher, would be responsible for the English class and would be allowed to conduct action research. As a result of this agreement, some adjustments were made: classes would last ninety minutes and the methodology would be different from the traditional one in the *telesecundaria* system. This allowed the teacher/researcher to introduce and implement the low-cost IWB along with the planned interactive activities. The school facilities included classrooms equipped with some technological devices such as a LED screen, a projector, and a computer.

In regard to the participants, the sixteen male and fourteen female teenage learners were monolingual speakers of Spanish, with ages ranging from 13 to 15. They all came from a low-class socio-economic level. Almost all of them started learning English when they were in elementary school. Nevertheless, some of them were more proficient than others, but in general they held a beginner level of proficiency based on what the teacher in charge commented.

3.2 Objective and research question

This research had two objectives. The first one was to identify and verify a problem in the teacher/researcher's current teaching practice by using different methods of data collection. Once the problem had been verified, the second objective was to design and implement an action plan to solve this problem by using a low cost interactive white board (IWB). The research question central in this work was to investigate to what extent does the use of a low-cost interactive white board motivate learners to learn English?

3.3 Data collection methods and procedure

This study was based on action research and consisted of two stages. The first one sought to identify a problem in this teaching context by administering three data collecting techniques. First, I interviewed the teacher in charge of the group with the aim of exploring and identifying possible problems in the English class (what students did, whether they liked the English class or not, how they behaved, among others). Then, when I began teaching at in this institution, a focus group interview was held with the learners to discover their opinions in regard to their English

class. Finally, notes were taken about what was observed during the English lessons. Data from these three sources were analyzed and verified using the triangulation technique. This technique consists in combining data collection methods (Griffee, 2012; Richards, 2003) and helps to strengthen the collected data resulting in more objective conclusions (Burns, 2010). Moreover, triangulation also allows avoiding any bias (Burns, 2010; Griffee, 2012; Mackey & Gass, 2006). The conclusion drawn from the analysis was the students' lack of motivation.

After the identification of the problem, a second stage of the investigation consisted in designing an action plan (see table 1) comprising the construction of a low-cost interactive white board and the creation of interactive activities. This aimed to provide a solution to the above-mentioned problem. Furthermore, the implementation of the plan was evaluated by means of a focus group interview and observation notes. To do this, the teacher organized a focus group interview with the students in order to discover their perceptions of having used the low-cost IWB at the end of the intervention; he additionally made notes of the events that occurred during every class while the IWB was used. The data was analyzed and verified using the same technique as in the first stage.

Construction of the interactive white board		
Week	**Topics**	**Activities**
1	Daily routines	Ordering a text Unscrambling sentences Matching listening activity Memory game: verbs
2	Describing physical appearance	Ordering words Matching exercises Matching opposites Memory game
3	Describing animals	Matching pictures with words Word search puzzle Game: reveal the image
4	Health and body	Matching exercise Word search puzzle Ordering letters Game: hangman

Table 1: The action plan

4. Findings and discussion

4.1 Findings

The most important findings in this study can be summarized in three main themes: motivation, participation and interaction/cooperation. Each of these is presented in the subsequent sections.

4.1.1 Motivation

The central problem that this action research aimed at solving was the lack of motivation of thirty teenage students at one suburban *telesecundaria* school in the East of Mexico. When contrasting the data obtained in the first stage of the action research (the identification of the problem) with the data after the implementation of the action plan, students seemed to have become more motivated by the use of the IWB and the interactive activities. One of the teams[1] reported that learning and understanding English was easier with the use of the IWB, which suggests that it contributed to increasing their motivation to learn the language.

> Yes because the exercises helped very much and it was easier to learn, [it helped] to explain better the words that we did not understand
>
> (Team 2, FGI)

Similarly, another team considered that the use of the IWB was amusing as well as entertaining while they were learning, which again seems to reinforce the increase of motivation.

> Yes because it was amusing and using the IWB was easy. Because we learned in an entertaining way
>
> (Team 4, FGI)

A final source of evidence that also supported the students' perception was the teacher/researcher's notes. It was observed that there was an eagerness to participate more to complete the activities, particularly, activities of the game type.

> …learners played hangman using the category of professions. They enjoyed playing [hangman] and were eager to participate
>
> (ON-1)

---

[1] All students' comments have been translated from Spanish to English

Finally, although learners faced technical problems while using the device, this did not seem to be an impediment to continue learning, leading to the belief that they were motivated.

> Even though it was hard for them to manipulate the IR pen, they were interested in completing the activity despite their failures.
>
> (ON-2)

As may be observed from these examples, there seems to be a shared perception that students were motivated by the use of the IWB. This finding is similar to what other investigators reported after implementing the use of this type of technology in the classroom (Al-Saleem, 2012; Benmansour & Meziane, 2013; Březinová, 2009; Fatih, 2008; Ishtaiwa & Shana, 2011; Javidi et al. 2014; López & Ramírez-Romero, 2010; Yáñez & Coyle, 2011). For example, Yáñez and Coyle (2011) suggested the following about the use of the IWB to motivate learners in their study:

> The way in which information is presented, through colorful and interactive game-like activities, is seen by the pupils as motivating and makes learning fun for them. That is probably why all of them agreed they would like to use the IWB more frequently.
>
> (p. 454)

From this quotation and the findings in this study mentioned above, there seems to be an interrelationship between the design of the activities and the IWB. Thus, using the IWB does not guarantee *per se* that learners will become motivated. This has to be taken into account when decisions are made about the use of this device in the classroom.

4.1.2 Participation

Besides an apparent increase in learners' motivation, the data obtained during the implementation of the action plan suggest that the use of the IWB and the interactive activities enhanced student participation in the class. The type of participation was either individual or in groups. For activities where students had to complete exercises, the participation was mostly individual. When there was a game such as Hangman, Reveal the image, or in the listening activity, students

worked in groups and often collaborated while doing the activity. Team one expressed the following about their increased participation.

> [the activities that we liked were:] parts of the body and ordering words to make descriptions, reveal the image, match words with images in the routines and the use of antonyms because they made us participate
>
> (Team 1, FGI)

This comment is reinforced by one of the remarks in the observation notes:

> In this activity (matching parts of the body), I could notice that they were still excited about participating in the activity but what struck me the most was that one of the girls who never participated asked to correct some of the parts of the body that her classmates had matched incorrectly
>
> (ON-5)

Based on the information displayed above, there seems to be a positive influence of the IWB not only to increase the participation of the learners, but also their collaboration. In a previous study conducted by Březinová (2009) in a primary school context, a difference was noticed in the participation between pupils who used a normal white board and those who used an IWB: "The pupils who usually do not interact were eager to come to the IWB and partake." (p. 117). Moreover, in his investigation about teachers and students' attitudes towards the use of IWBs, Fatih (2008) concluded that "In IWB-based lessons, students are more motivated and participate in the activities more" (p. 100). However, the activities also seem to be of great importance and seem to influence students' participation as well, as was confirmed by the comments made by the learners in this study.

4.1.3 Interaction and Cooperation

In studies using IWBs in classrooms, such as Coyle, Yáñez, and Verdú, 2010; Fatih, 2008; Morgan, 2008, it has been reported that this tool promotes interaction between teacher and students or students and students. In other studies (for example, Toscu, 2013), research has been conducted about the effect of IWBs on interaction. Although interaction was not a central topic to the identified problem in this AR study, it was observed that when the students used the IWB, they interacted to a lesser degree with the teacher and more among themselves. This interaction seemed to contribute positively to the correct completion of the activities through peer assistance.

In some cases, however, working in teams also caused some conflict; for example, there were cases in which students became annoyed because their classmates were cheating, either because they broke the rules of the games or because only one person dominated the participation. Some activities had to be stopped until a fair agreement about this was reached. This meant subtracting points from the team that had cheated. This can be illustrated by the teacher/researcher's comment:

> …there was a point at which some of them began to argue because they said that it was unfair that the other team was cheating. But the problems were solved after some talking with the two teams
>
> (ON-4)

As can be observed, during the implementation of the IWB cooperation and interaction among the students occurred more, which is a positive effect of its implementation. Moreover, it is worth noting that conflict was also part of this interaction but that same interaction and cooperation among students allowed them to reach fair agreements to continue working with the activities in the classroom.

4.2 Discussion

The data suggest that the use of a low-cost IWB motivates learners, but only to a certain extent. At least six students who had never participated before showed interest in and enthusiasm for the classes and increased their participation during the study. The group of students who were already participative before the implementation continued doing so throughout the period of time that the low-cost IWB was used. However, at least a third of the group did not show much interest in using the device. The causes are unknown, but a shared characteristic among these students is that they were mainly girls. This does not mean that all girls did not like using this device. These girls were usually quiet and withdrawn and may have felt embarrassed to participate and make mistakes, especially because they were young teenagers in a mixed group. It should be noted that they were not encouraged to participate. In fact, the teacher/researcher did not encourage any student to participate because this could have negatively affected the results of the implementation.

Based on the students' responses and the observation notes, it seems that the participants liked most of the activities; however, they showed preference for the matching activities, possibly

because they were the easiest to do and did not require higher thinking processes. A second type of activities that attracted their attention was games. What is striking is that interactive activities in which they had to process information to reach the correct answer were the least favored. These least favored activities were the activity of listening and one in which they had to describe a person.

A possible explanation for these preferences may be given by what Willis (1996) has suggested. According to her, there are specific tasks that learners can do at their level. In her proposal for a task-based framework, the tasks are classified into listing, ordering and sorting, comparing, problem solving, sharing experiences and creative tasks. For beginner learners, she suggests that tasks begin with the first four types. She warns, however, that problem solving activities are challenging tasks which demand more intellectual and reasoning powers. The cognitive processes involved in the four types of tasks are brainstorming, fact finding, sequencing, ranking, categorizing, classifying, matching, finding similarities, finding differences, analysis, reasoning and decision-making. Bearing in mind these ideas, further learning activities for the interactive whiteboard should be created not only considering the game-like feature, but also the above-mentioned cognitive processes of learners.

5. Conclusion

This paper has presented some evidence to show that using a low-cost IWB and interactive activities may contribute to motivating teenage students although it was not possible to motivate all learners using this device. In addition, as it was pointed out, the IWB does not guarantee *per se* that learners will be motivated. There is a need to accompany the use of the device with appropriate interactive activities that encourage students to be more participative. A final consideration is that, since we are at present living a moment when the fast growth of technology is reaching our classrooms and when students are becoming more acquainted with it, the use of technology should not be underestimated and teachers should not hesitate to use it. In contexts that have limited access to the whole variety of technology, one solution can be economical options such as the home-made IWB utilized in this research.

As in any piece of research, there were some limitations during the process. These limitations were sharing the group with another teacher, lacking an exclusive space to set up the low-cost IWB, technical problems using the low-cost IWB, and using of software to create the activities.

Derived from the above-mentioned limitations, some recommendations for further researchers are suggested. The first one is that it seems fundamental to have a group of one's own and to be able to choose a special place where the IWB can be set up. Second, it is vital that both the students and their teacher become used to this device before it is actually used for activities in the classroom. Third, it seems important that the teacher should be trained to use the specialized software. In addition, the teacher should have more available options of software to design activities.

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TRIGGERING REFLECTION

After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:

- Do you feel that the interactive whiteboard is pertinent for the situation in which it has been employed? What constrains do you observe and how could they be overcome?
- To what extent may the use of an interactive whiteboard promote interactive activities in addition to the ones shown in this chapter?
- Discuss the relevance of creativity to visualize pedagogical alternatives in unfavourable environments.
- Consider recent situations in which you have used your own classroom tools. Have you ever taken advantage of technology?
- What would be the best way to evaluate this research experience?
- Identify a problem which might be sorted out through the use of a technological tool. Devise and implement a small scale study.

CHAPTER THREE

Providing After-School Assistance Using the WEB Conferencing Tool
Adobe® Connect™

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Abstract

This is a report of a teacher-initiated action research project, which investigates how a number of students perceived the implementation of after-school reinforcement sessions using a Web Conferencing tool: Adobe© Connect™. This tool allows synchronous, as well as asynchronous interaction. Pupil's perspectives on their own performance and behavior, as well as on the benefits they experienced in the reinforcement sessions were categorized and analyzed. One of the most salient benefits participants mentioned was error correction. However, due to the students' limited attendance, teachers interested in implementing a similar project should proceed cautiously.

Resumen

El proyecto de investigación-acción, objeto de este reporte, investiga cómo un grupo de estudiantes percibió la implementación de sesiones de refuerzo extra-clase, en las que se utilizó la herramienta de Conferencias Web: Adobe© Connect™, la cual permite interactuar tanto sincrónicamente como asincrónicamente. Se analizaron y categorizaron las perspectivas de los estudiantes concernientes con su desempeño y comportamiento, así como a los beneficios que percibieron de estas sesiones de refuerzo. Uno de los mayores beneficios, según los participantes, fue *la corrección de errores*. No obstante, debido a la inasistencia de los estudiantes a las sesiones, se recomienda que los maestros, interesados en implementar un proyecto similar, procedan con cautela.

1. Introduction

Since it seems evident that an important part of preparing students to work in a globalized world means helping them learn a second or even a third language, English has become a compulsory subject in universities across Mexico. UVM, The private university where the present project took place, has adopted a relatively new work plan after absorbing a local university with over 40 years of history. Under the new administration, English is not only mandatory in any undergraduate program, but also fundamental in providing students with the chance to study abroad. Therefore, students are facing the immediate need to succeed academically within the institution's English program.

As a teacher there, I identified a number of factors that seemed to hinder students' performance and placed them at risk of academic failure. These factors ranged from absenteeism to students' concentration during the class. Consequently, an innovative solution was designed to provide students with additional support in a way that the effects of the hindering factors mentioned before could diminish. This solution consisted in holding after-school sessions in which students reinforced the topics and content already covered in class.

The present report is divided in an introduction and six sections that intend to present the different stages of this Action Research project, from its inception to the implications and consequences of its implementation. The first section deals with the general, institutional context of the project, followed by a description of the problematic situation as well as the project's main objectives. The second section presents a review of the existent literature about both the area of study, and the methods that were implemented. The third section deals with the methodology followed during the design, implementation of the innovative strategy, and the data collection. The fourth section presents a description of the findings, whereas the fifth section presents a deeper analysis and interpretation of the data obtained. The sixth and last section, conclusions and implications, presents reminders of the salient points, deductions made on the basis of what is discussed in the different chapters, as well as the limitations throughout the work.

2. Context & Focus

Using web conferencing as an after-school assistance tool was implemented in a private university in Veracruz, which is now affiliated to the Laureate international network. The programs, as well as the materials to be used are provided by a central office in Mexico City and

are aligned to the Laureate International Universities' requirements. This allows students to take part of exchange programs to any of the universities within the network.

Courses are distributed as follows; students must take five levels of English, each of which is 80 hours long. In the first four levels of the English program, we use the book Touchstone by Cambridge, whose target audience is young adults. The scope and sequence of the book is aligned to the Common European Framework. This is a program based on a communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, which is centered in student-student interaction. Unfortunately, each English group now holds 20 to 50 students. According to Richards (2006) the ultimate purpose of CLT methods is for students to achieve communicative competence, which is understood as the ability to know when and how to use language, for different purposes and functions.

The communicative CLT goals are hard to be achieved in large groups where not only spatial, but also time constraints make student-student interaction difficult. Other issues include the fact that students at this institution are usually engaged in communication via portable devices, as there are no clear rules to regulate their use in class. Secondly, since they are allowed to be absent a total of 15 times per semester, absenteeism rates are really high.

Another major constraint is time; holding a daily 50-minute-session is barely enough for teachers and students to reach the goals of the different Touchstone levels they teach/learn, considering that each level is constituted by 12 units. Even when it is possible for students with previous knowledge to take a placement test before they start the first semester of any given program, the real challenge is for those students who need to start from level 1 or 2.

As mentioned before, all students need to complete the fifth level by the time they enter the sixth semester. If they fail to do so, the right to re-enroll to their respective undergraduate programs is denied to them; thus, falling behind holds serious implications. Since the institution's goal is to achieve an international status, they need their students to be able to communicate in English so that they can take advantage of exchange programs, and even job opportunities abroad, once they obtain their degree.

In sum, aspects such as absenteeism, a tight calendar and ambitious course objectives may render an in-class implementation impractical. However, students are still in need of an alternative that helps them fulfill the demands of the English language program. In my view, this alternative might be using a video or web conferencing platform after school so as to provide

students with reinforcement sessions, at least once a week, as well as observing its functioning, which was the aim of this project. The present research helps answer the following questions:

- How can a web conferencing platform such as Adobe® Connect[TM] help students reinforce what was seen in class?
- How do students perceive these Adobe® Connect[TM] sessions?

3. Literature Review

Having learners work on a web conferencing platform can serve different purposes. As mentioned before, the purpose of this project is to use web conferencing as a media to help students reinforce what they have already seen in class. Under this latter view, learners need to reflect on the information they have previously received in class. On this basis, it could be said that learners would be able to construct knowledge, practice, and reinforce topics seen in class, by interacting with the teacher and/or classmates. Gilbert (2010) explains that learning under a constructivist approach results not only from a cognitive processing of information within an individual, but also from a social aspect where the learner interacts with the context.

Interaction sets the scene for learning, whether this learning is implicit or explicit. Ellis (2008) also points out that implicit learning is typically defined as learning that takes place without either intentionality or awareness, whereas explicit learning is a conscious process and is likely to be intentional. I think that asking learners to join 'after-school sessions' can increase the level of awareness they have of their own learning process, consequently making their learning more explicit. DeKeyser (2003) adds that explicit learning takes place via teaching, and that it can be either deductive and explicit, or inductive and explicit. The former is found when learners are provided with rules to form syntactic structures; the latter encourages students to find the rules by carefully studying examples and models, which constitute input.

Social interaction is not only a means of obtaining input learners can imitate, it can also lead to error correction. Errors are a natural part of the learning process, and correcting them is essential in helping learners improve and continue developing language. Ellis (2008) points out that errors are corrected through a negotiation of meaning that can go from a simple request for clarification, to explicit correction from a second speaker. On the other hand, Lightbown & Spada (2006) assert that teachers have a responsibility to help learners improve, and that includes the provision of explicit feedback on error. I would go even further and add the fact that feedback not

necessarily needs to be provided by teachers for it to be helpful, but it may also come from the students. Thus, collaborative work may be an adequate strategy to promote social interaction, peer correction and learning.

One of the main advantages of collaborative work is its flexibility, since learners are not always expected to work within fixed groups. According to Coelho (1992), this kind of strategy is especially effective in situations where the composition of the group is unstable, as would be for online sessions where attendance is not compulsory. Thanks to technology, collaborative interaction does not necessarily need to take place in a face-to-face class; interaction can be fostered in virtual spaces as well, whether synchronously or asynchronously.

In addition, Rodríguez (1999) describes synchronous interaction as that of a group of individuals working together at the same time, as they would if they were face to face. From this, we can learn that asynchronous interaction, on the other hand, takes place among individuals who work at different times and are geographically scattered. It is important to keep in mind that all of the different educational technologies available nowadays have advantages and disadvantages. Bates (2005) warns that the real issue is not what the better technology is, but how to combine it in order to exploit the learners' and teachers' potential.

In this particular project that involves online synchronous sessions, we need to provide students with relevant information that is presented in an attractive way so as to keep them from getting distracted. We will focus on web conferencing technologies because they seem to be more versatile than other technologies. For instance, Cabero (2007) acknowledges the many advantages and future potential of web conferencing describing it as the tool to be used for collaborative work. Fortunately, on the new web conferencing platforms, such as Adobe© Connect™ and Elluminate®, it is possible for teachers and learners to interact visually, graphically and verbally. As a result, blended learning, which is commonly understood as a mixture of e-learning and face-to-face instruction (Vignare, 2007), was carried out in this project.

As it can be observed, the information included in this section intends to acknowledge the validity of this project. In addition, the structure and implementation of the web conferencing sessions that are part of this intervention are based on the topics explained above as well as on the work of the authors here cited.

4. Methodology

4.1 Design

This study followed what several authors describe as an Action Research paradigm, which is a self-reflective cycle. Chiang (2004), for instance, mentions there are at least four main stages in the cycle: identifying a situation or problem, planning a change, acting and observing the processes and consequences, and re-planning before the cycle begins again. The results of a previous action research project called "Portable Device Usage in Class to Reinforce Language Production" emphasized students' interest in working with technology.

The intervention consisted in offering reinforcement after-school sessions, which intended to provide interested students with additional assistance on the contents seen in class. I studied different platforms that would allow me to interact with learners remotely. Finally, I chose Adobe© Connect™ because it allows different kinds of real time interaction via chat, microphone and screen sharing.

I decided to implement the reinforcement sessions once or twice a week. Attendance was optional and the reinforcement would imply covering the same topics seen in class under different approaches, providing additional practice and clarifying doubts. Even though the main focus was reinforcement, this design also pretended to tackle absenteeism, that is, students who had been absent would be given a chance to receive information and feedback on the topics they had missed.

4.2 Specific Context

As it has previously been established, the learners involved in the implementation study at Universidad del Valle de México Campus Veracruz. They were a group of 24 students from different majors who took a 50-minute-English 1 class, five times a week. Being in level 1 implies they had either obtained a very low score in the English placement test the school offers at enrollment, or declined the chance to take such test. Consequently, most of them seemed to lack confidence when taking part of the class activities or tests. Out of the 24 learners in the group, only 11 were taking the course for the first time, while the other 12 were taking it for the second time, and 1 was taking the course for the fourth time.

4.3 Data Collection

Information was basically collected through two qualitative research methods: survey and interview. For the first one, the instrument to collect the data was two sets of surveys; the first of which focused on determining whether students would be both, able and willing to take part of the after-school reinforcement sessions carried out using an online tool (See Appendix A). On the other hand, the focus of the second set of surveys was the perceptions learners had about the web conferencing sessions carried out (See Appendix B).

For the second data collection method, a set of structured interviews was given to a number of participants at the completion of the implementation. During these face-to-face interviews, learners were asked open-ended questions so as to have them reflect on the utility and appeal of the sessions, as suggested by Taylor and Bodgan (2010) (See Appendix C). I used the first set of interviews with students who never attended a session, a second set with students who attended sporadically and a third one with students who regularly attended the sessions.

The interviews, consisting of open-ended questions, were carried out in Spanish so as to make participants feel more confident and at ease. Besides, complex terms or situations could be discussed with the interviewee, and clarification could be provided to the respondents. During their corresponding interviews, respondents were encouraged to talk freely and to mention as much detail as possible.

My decision of using these two methods was based on Jansen's (2010) assertion that the main difference between interviews and surveys is that in interviews (also called inductive surveys) relevant topics and categories need to be identified through the interpretation of raw data. Contrastingly, in surveys (also called deductive surveys) the diversity to be studied is defined beforehand and the aim of descriptive analysis is only to see which of the predefined characteristics exists empirically in the population under study. In the current study, the population changed from the first set of surveys to the second.

Additional to the instruments described above, in order to collect more data, screen captures and recordings of the Adobe© Connect™ sessions were used during the actual implementation of the activities and strategies. Screen captures were constantly taken while students were engaged in different activities. The objective was to provide evidence of learners' performance and demeanor while doing their tasks. Besides, screen captures also show the different uses and interactions the web conferencing platform supports (See Appendix D).

5. Findings

5.1 Preliminary Analysis

5.1.1 Availability and Technical requirements.

Based on the first set of surveys, I found that all of the students from group A owned either a laptop or a tablet. They also had Internet access at home, which were the two main technical requirements to work on a Web conferencing platform for reinforcement. Additional to that, the learners indicated they were usually online between 6 pm and 1 am. They pointed out that they only worked on the school's Learning Management System, from 6 to 9 pm; based on their answers, the time slot with the most activity was from 7 to 8 pm.

5.1.2 Perception of own behaviour and performance

The next six items in the survey were intended to gather students' perceptions of their own behavior during the English class (See Chart 1).
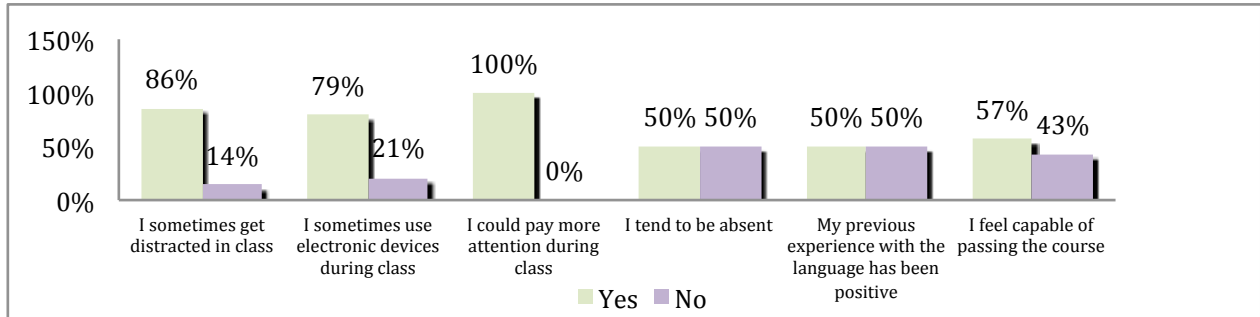
Chart 1. Students' perceptions of their own behaviour and performance

5.1.3 Perception of after school reinforcement sessions

Fifteen of the students said they might find reinforcement sessions beneficial and six others claimed it would be really beneficial. However, three learners pointed out that they did not think it would benefit them at all, as one of them mentioned:

Student A: "I think classes are more than enough".

Based on this, at least twenty-one learners were expected to attend the reinforcement sessions.

5.2 Implementation

5.2.1 Attendance

The group showed irregular attendance throughout the two months of implementation. Yet, there were four participants who attended most of the sessions (See Chart 2).
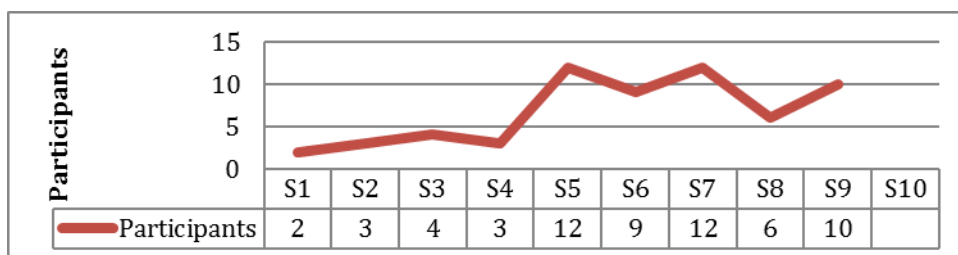
Chart 2. Students' attendance to Adobe Connect sessions

5.2.2 Results of the observation carried out during the implementation

Learners engaged in different kinds of interaction during the different sessions. All of them made use of the chat section to ask for support or provide answers to exercises. Yet, even when all of them opened their microphones to interact if asked to do so, only some of them chose this kind of interaction over choosing the chat voluntarily. By the time attendance increased, the four participants who had attended previous sessions became the ones who volunteered to open their microphones during every remaining session. All forms of written interaction usually led to peer-correction.

5.3 Students' perceptions

Both, the second set of surveys and the interviews, gathered information on students' perceptions of the Adobe® Connect™ sessions. This involved different aspects: from the materials and interaction to the feedback being provided.

5.3.1. Perception of their performance during and after the implementation

According to the second set of surveys, learners had no problems accessing the Web conferencing platform. There also seemed to be an increase in students' confidence to pass the course. Most of the learners seemed to feel that besides helping them reinforce what they had learnt in class, the sessions also helped them review any contents they had missed (See Chart 3).
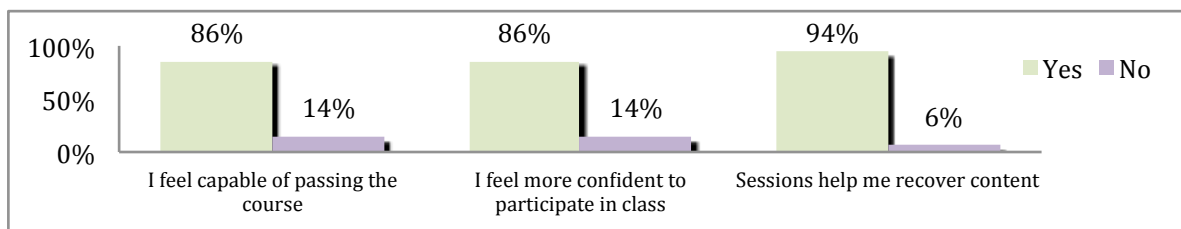
Chart 3. Students' perceptions of their performance

The extracts below exemplify this perception:

Student B: "The sessions had an effect on my quiz results because … the first quizzes I got low grades and when I accessed the platform, when I accessed the sessions I improved. I practiced and so"

Student D: "The sessions helped us because we could practice. It had an impact on quizzes. We could see, not what was going to be in the quiz, but you could see the topic and you could study"

Learners were also asked to contrast face-to-face lessons and the video conferencing sessions. Most learners stated that they had been able to focus more during the video conferencing sessions and that they had understood the content better (See Chart 4).
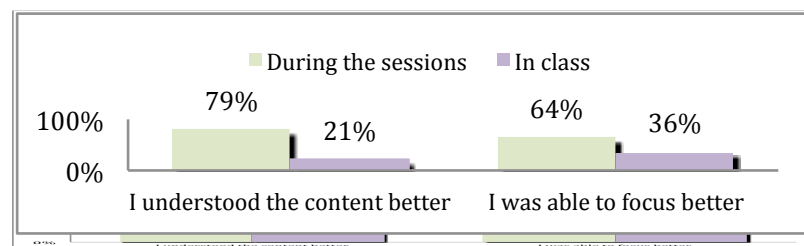
Chart 4. Contrast between Platform sessions and Classes

Those participants who felt they had focused better during the video conferencing sessions than in the face-to-face ones, mentioned, at least, a couple of reasons, as shown in the extracts below:

Student E: "I felt at ease and it was easier to understand things because there were no distractions"

Student F: "I liked the sessions because I wasn't as nervous as in class, and if I made a mistake the teacher would correct it. I really liked it"

5.3.2 Materials

All the participants evaluated the materials presented in the online sessions as useful, appropriate and attractive; as it can be confirmed in the following interview extracts:

Student A: "I checked the materials again when I had doubts or questions. I checked the information, I could find everything there"

Student C: "I liked the presentations that contained the topic and keywords. It was easy to follow because it was visual. I downloaded the documents, then I answered them, and

then I took them to class the next day. I checked the materials before the quizzes because they had examples I could study. It was useful"

Student D: "I sometimes downloaded the material, well when I was using my computer I always downloaded it. I couldn't download it when I was working from my cellphone. The material was good"

5.3.3 Interaction

Participants perceived that the tool helped them interact in different forms. They seemed aware of the different means of interaction and activities used during the implementation, which is demonstrated in the following extracts:

Student B: "We had to check videos and answer questions. We completed exercises"

Student C: "We reviewed things we had seen in class presentations, we completed activities in Word, we worked together, and we talked on the microphone. That's it"

Student F: "We could use the microphone. There was a hand you had to raise when you had a doubt and notes"

All of the learners claimed these different kinds of interaction helped them learn from their partners' mistakes. They also stated they had received feedback from the presenter.

Student B: "I would take my notebook and check what we had seen in class and what we were checking in the session"

Student A: "Our partners made corrections, or answered and you could see what was wrong. I think this is important"

Student D: "We were pointed out when we made a mistake, or sometimes other partners answered correctly and we got an explanation from the teacher"

5.4 Learners who never attended the sessions

Since only 50% of the members of the group attended the reinforcement sessions, I asked some of the ones who did not attend, as well as a few who only attended a couple of times, about the reasons that kept them from doing so. Their answers were varied, as we can see in the examples below:

> Student F: "I was aware of the sessions but sometimes I was not able to join the session. […] I had too much homework or I had to study for exams"
>
> Student G: "I was aware of the sessions but I wasn't able to attend any of them. I didn't have the time, because I work in the afternoons"
>
> Student K: "I didn't feel I needed the sessions"

It is important to note that Student F attended the sessions a few times, whereas Students G and K never did.

As it has been shown, the students, having participated or not in the reinforcement sessions on Adobe© Connect™, realized the usefulness of the web conferencing sessions the teacher had offered as extra help.

6. Discussion and Reflection

Considering the fact that the members of the group were either repeating the course or showing little confidence while taking it for the first time, additional support seemed pertinent and necessary. Surveys suggested learners had favorable conditions to receive support through reinforcement sessions after school. This particular group of learners was expected to perform well on a web conferencing platform due to their keenness and skills for working with technology. Moreover, survey's results seemed to indicate that not only were they able, but also interested in receiving that additional support on Adobe© Connect™.

The schedule for the reinforcement sessions was based on the times learners indicated to be the most convenient for them. Consequently, sessions were usually held between 7 and 9 pm on days previously agreed with students. The fact that most learners indicated they saw reinforcement sessions as something positive and beneficial, made me think that attendance

would be numerous. Paradoxically, attendance never surpassed 50% of the members of the group.

Attendance rates became one of the first setbacks in the study. So as to deal with this issue, I modified the way of making session links available to students. Emailing the access links to each of the learners seemed to have a positive effect on attendance for it increased significantly after I made this adjustment. Another factor that might have increased attendance was the proximity of the midterm exam; however, attendance did not remain constant in the weeks after the exam. Nevertheless, I think it is important to note that certain participants, mostly students taking the course for the first time, attended sessions regularly.

In addition, at least a couple of the participants used the resources provided through Adobe© Connect™ asynchronously. This use of resources still fits a definition of blended learning, specially the one provided by Vignare (2007), who sees blended learning as the combination of asynchronous online interaction and face-to-face instruction.

As it has been demonstrated in section 5.3, interviews and the second set of surveys showed participants were left with positive impressions of the intervention. This section dealt with a general description of the results obtained from the aforementioned methods. I will now try to dissect those results regarding interaction during the sessions, the materials used, and the feedback they obtained from both the teacher and their peers, and contrast them with my own perceptions of the actual reinforcement sessions.

Most of the participants interviewed had positive comments regarding the materials made available to them; they mentioned they would consult presentations shown during the sessions when they needed to study for a test, this could mean they found teacher-produced materials to be more reliable than class notes. It is important to notice that the notes provided to learners during class were mainly written on the board, and that all electronic materials were designed to resemble class notes.

It seems that students found presentations adequate, attractive and useful, therefore we might think that students preferred presentations to traditional notes because they were available on the different devices they commonly use. Most of the students who accessed the presentations in order to study had attended the sessions and this could mean they remembered the explanations provided while the material was being displayed.

Adobe© Connect™ records showed that participants actually downloaded the worksheets available in each of the sessions, furthermore, they solved and printed out the exercises with the intention of showing them to me after class. From my perspective, this is one of the most promising attitudes in terms of commitment, interest and independence. It could also mean that these materials helped them make their learning explicit, in at least one of the forms mentioned by DeKeyser (2003): deductive and explicit, or inductive and explicit.

Since most students pointed out that they focused better during the sessions than they did during the class, we could conclude that they were likely to find web conferencing interaction more meaningful than face-to-face class instruction and interaction. I indeed observed that students would participate more actively during the reinforcement sessions that they did during the class. In class, it seemed easy for them to get distracted and start chatting in Spanish, while during the web conferencing sessions, even if they used Spanish, their comments were topic centered.

Considering the different forms of error correction mentioned by Ellis (2008), I knew that I wanted feedback to play an important role in teacher-student and student-student interaction during the sessions. However, I did not foresee participants would be aware of the value of observing and correcting each other's mistakes. According to the interviews, some participants regarded feedback as one of the most relevant aspects of the reinforcement sessions. Some participants seemed particularly appealed by the collaborative strategy of error correction that involved correcting others as well as learning from others' mistakes, which seems to have allowed them to construct and reinforce knowledge through social interaction.

I consider that low attendance rates could possibly be overcome by constantly motivating students to take part in the sessions. Regular sessions could prove to engage students more into attending, as they would be likely to notice changes in their own performance sooner. If sessions were held once a week through the whole semester, students would be provided with reinforcement for each of the 12 thematic units of the program. Another important adjustment would be to include the attendance to after-school web conferencing sessions as part of the grading criteria, thus making these sessions compulsory. This, of course, would require support from the language department coordination.

7. Conclusions and Implications

The objective of the present Action Research intervention was to address the potential of implementing reinforcement sessions that are not held face-to-face but in a virtual environment. Such sessions took place after school, and the schedule was the second major change in the way students, within the specific community of the study, were used to receiving additional support. Those students, who decided to take part in the project, easily understood the use of the web conferencing tool Adobe© Connect™, apparently thanks to their familiarity with the use of technology and the Internet. Even though attendance was not as high as expected, there were some participants who showed commitment and interest in reviewing class content online.

I also found that those students who showed commitment were particularly appealed by the inclusion of visual materials that could be accessed asynchronously; that is, after the session had ended. It must be said that producing this material required a certain level of commitment from the teacher, as it proved to be time consuming. Therefore, teachers, who might be interested in holding similar sessions, need to be aware of the time investment that online work represents.

I can now say that the present study suggests that learners, who participated in after-school sessions, perceived the work done on Adobe® Connect™ sessions as meaningful and beneficial. However, I believe the quality of the sessions can be improved if more importance is given to communicative tasks, rather than to the sub skills, grammar, and vocabulary. Adobe© Connect™ is a very comprehensive platform that makes a wide range of tools available for web conferencing, yet several of them remained unexploited.

One of the most salient findings of the study, which pleasantly surprised me, was the importance that students granted to working in collaboration with others by observing and correcting each other's mistakes. Although participants of the sessions claimed to have perceived that a web conferencing platform helped them review contents, correct mistakes and improve their unit quiz grades, further research is needed to investigate the possible influence of after-school reinforcement sessions using a web conferencing tool in students' performance in graded tasks.

It is important to keep in mind that the findings presented here represent a relatively small population, which was constituted by nearly one half of the target population sample. I believe that more teacher encouragement could have led to a greater attendance and engagement from

participants. Finally, I hope the present project provides other teachers with ideas they can use in aiding their students become more confident and ultimately succeed academically.

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Appendix A: First survey format

Answer the questions.

1. Do you have Internet connection at home?   YES   NO
2. Do you own a PC, laptop, or tablet?   YES   NO
3. If yes, does it have a microphone and webcam?   YES   NO
4. Do you work on the online platform at home?   YES   NO
5. Do you work on the (Cambridge LMS) platform in the
   afternoon or night?   YES   NO

   Around what time? _____

6. If you had extra help, do you think it would be beneficial?

   _____

7. Sometimes I get distracted in English class   YES   NO

8. I sometimes use my cellphone, laptop or tablet   YES   NO
   while in class

9. I feel I could pay more attention in English class YES   NO

10. I tend tos kip English class   YES   NO

11. My previous experience with the language
       has been positive   YES   NO

12. I feel capable of passing the course   YES   NO

Thanks ☺

Appendix B: Second survey format

1. En este momento me siento capaz de aprobar el curso   Si   No

2. Pude accesar a las sesiones de ayuda extra

   sin problemas   Si   No

3. Las sesiones me ayudan a lograr un mejor

   entendimiento de los temas   Si   No

4. Me siento más seguro para participar en clase

   después de entrar a una sesión   Si   No

5. Las sesiones me ayudaron a recuperar el contenido   de

    clases a las que falté   Si   No

6. Me concentro mejor cuando trabajo en: las sesiones   clase

7. Entendí más en: las sesiones   clase

8. Aprendí de los errores de mis compañeros

   durante la session   Si   No

9. El material presentado fue adecuado   Si   No

10. Las presentaciones fueron atractivas   Si   No

11. El profesor aclaró mis dudas   Si   No

12. La herramienta me permitió interactuar de

   diferentes formas   Si   No

13. Mi tipo de interacción preferida fue: Chat   Micrófono   Notas

Gracias ☺

Appendix C: Interview questions

1. ¿Estabas al tanto de las sesiones de asesoría extra?
2. ¿Sabes en qué horario se realizaban?
3. ¿Tuviste conflictos de horario?
4. ¿Qué ocurría en una sesión?
5. ¿Te gusto el tipo de interacción que se dio en las sesiones?
6. ¿Qué fue lo que más te agradó de las sesiones?
7. ¿Dirías que las sesiones tuvieron un efecto en tu desempeño en los quizzes?
8. ¿Las sesiones te permitieron participar y obtener retroalimentación?
9. ¿El professor aclaró tus dudas?
10. ¿Corrigió mis errores?
11. ¿Descargabas el material dispobible a tu computadora?
12. ¿Lo respondías?
13. ¿Utilizabas el material posteriormente?

Appendix D: Screen capture samples
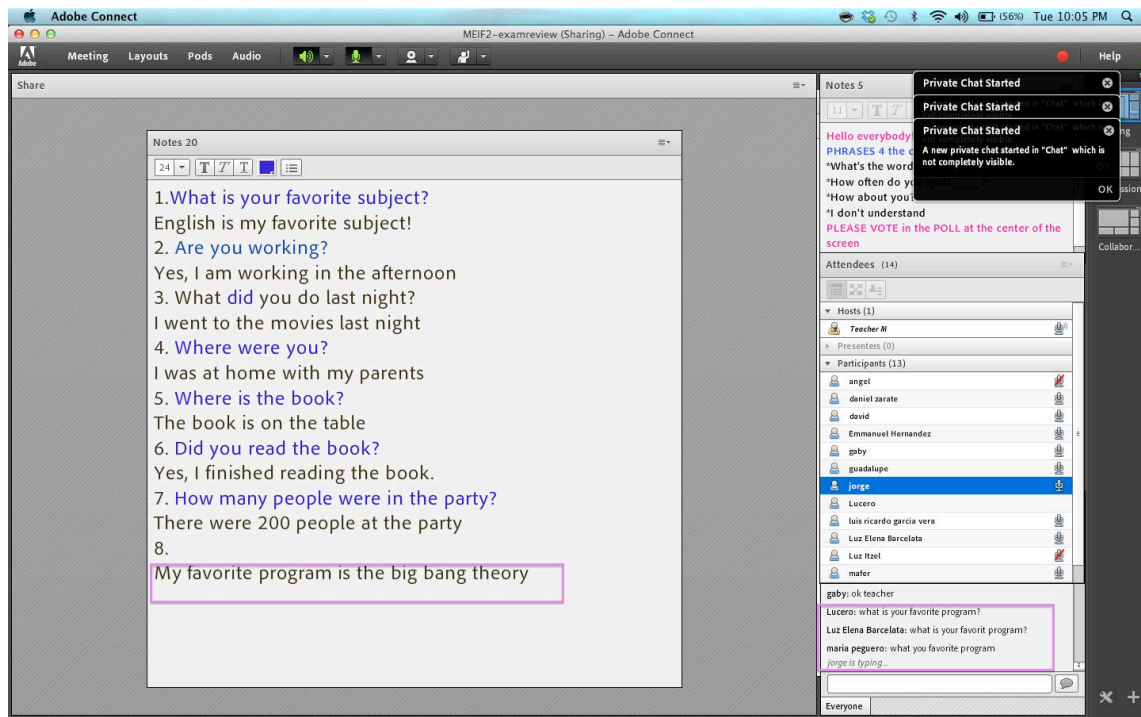
Multiple students completing a task using the chat section (pod).
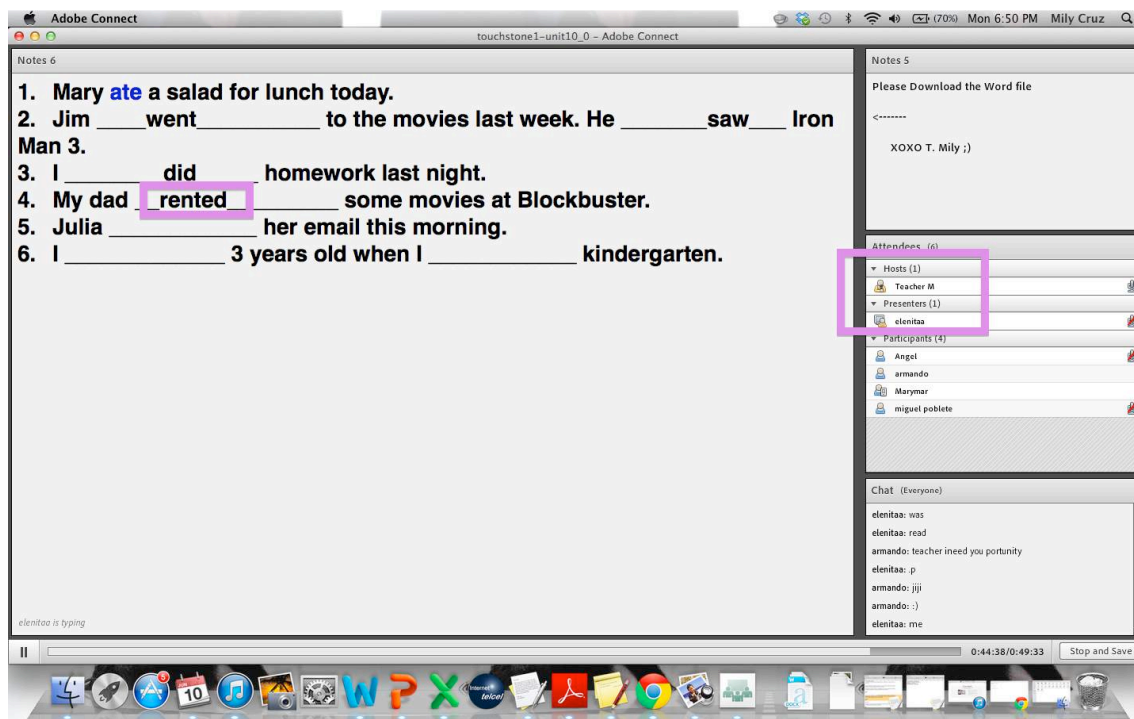
A student volunteering to become the 'presenter' in order to modify the notes shown on the screen

TRIGGERING REFLECTION

After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:

- To what extent do you consider collaborative work helped students to gain confidence? Why?
- How effective may reinforcing activities be to enhance students' confidence?
- Could the activities based on the WEB Conferencing Tool Adobe® Connect™ be designed with another purpose apart from reinforcing learning? Devise a couple of alternatives and back up your ideas.
- Would you implement the suggested research procedure in your own context? If so, would you use it in the same way as it was conducted in this chapter, or would you adapt it? Justify your choice.
- List the benefits stated for using the above-mentioned tool. What other benefits could you obtain from the implementation of this project? List them.
- How could you reduce the risk of having limited attendance? What strategies would you design in advance? Justify your preferences.
- What new plans of action could you design in order to help your students to gain confidence?

CHAPTER FOUR

Web Conferencing as a Teaching Aid for Reinforcement

Mario Alberto Sandoval Sánchez

Gloria del Rocío Ibargüen Ramón

Abstract

This report appertains to an Action Research intervention. The thematic concern arose in a private university. After preliminary research, it was established that students needed to recover, reinforce and practice what was seen in class in order to obtain better grades. Adobe Connect, a video conferencing tool, was used so as to help students receive extra help. Students were able to use the tool sans any complications and interacted openly. Interaction among students led to peer correction, which did not occur as often as in class. After the intervention, students were interviewed and they made favourable comments about using the tool and its effectiveness.

Resumen

Este reporte tiene relación con una intervención de Investigación-acción. El tema de interés tiene lugar en una Universidad privada. Después de la investigación preliminar, se decidió que los estudiantes necesitaban recuperar, reforzar y practicar lo que se había instruido en clase, con el propósito de obtener mejores calificaciones. Adobe Connect, el cual es un recurso didáctico de video conferencia, fue utilizado para auxiliar a los estudiantes como ayuda extra clase. Los estudiantes pudieron utilizar dicho recurso sin complicaciones e interactuaron abiertamente. Esta interacción entre estudiantes dio pauta a corrección entre pares, la cual no ocurría con tanta frecuencia en clase. Después de la intervención, los estudiantes fueron entrevistados y expresaron comentarios favorables con respecto al uso y efectividad de este recurso didáctico.

1. Introduction

In Mexico, education is mandatory by law. Educational institutions can be divided in two sectors: public and private. In private schools a monthly tuition is charged. In addition, private schools offer subjects that would not be traditionally found in public institutions, as well as longer school

hours. In many cases, private schools are bilingual, which means they offer some subjects, for example History, in English.

From my experience, I have seen that many learners at some private institutions can be considered "independent users" of the English language, or B_1 or B_2 users according to the Common European Framework by the time students finish high school. I have noticed that compulsory English classes can be tedious to some "independent users". This may cause students to be unmotivated and get distracted in class by using their mobile devices, or to have low involvement during English classes.

While I was working in a private university where I instructed advanced groups from various majors, I noticed a recurring matter: students' constant use of mobile devices distracted them from the contents and activities of the lessons. After intervening and facilitating the productive use of such devices, I could not find a solution to absenteeism or an unstable Wi-Fi connection, which interrupted the intervention.

This becomes a major concern when we take into account that students need to complete five mandatory levels of English before they commence the sixth semester of their respective major programs. Since the students displayed an ability to use technology without any type of training, using an online tool could be of great help to them. Adobe Connect is a synchronous online tool that can provide the teaching-learning process just as a face-to-face session. The reason why I chose to use this tool was to find an immediate solution to absenteeism and bad Wi-Fi connection at the University. By having after school sessions, students may be able to recover missed lessons caused by distractions in class or by being absent. Also, taken from a preliminary survey, I found out that 100 percent of the students had stable Internet access at home as well as both tablets and laptops to access the web conference.

2. Context and Focus

In this project's inception, I assumed that students would benefit from extra help or reinforcement and those students who needed to be absent could recover from what was missed in class. The sessions were not made to justify absences, but to help students get a review lecture summarizing the week's lessons. It could also help learners clear any doubts. It is important to understand that students get distracted in class by others or on their own, in certain occasions the facilitator cannot clear every doubt due to the amount of students in each group.

The main purpose of the project was to give students an opportunity to practice, clear doubts, and recover from missing the topics seen in class due to being absent. Adobe Connect was used to eliminate distractors and the synchronous interaction could foster students to ask questions and clear any doubts as well as reinforce what was learned in class. The research questions were: How can a webinar tool like Adobe Connect help students reinforce a face to face class? What are the students' perceptions to the use of a webinar tool like Adobe Connect?

3. Literature Review

This project's main purpose was to use a tool that would help students reinforce overall in a face to face class. According to a preliminary survey, every student had access to Internet and had a computer with the proper hardware such as webcam, speakers and microphone. The web conferencing tool Adobe Connect would help support these sessions; in each session, students may be able to interact and be shown material containing the same topics covered in class.

Gilbert (2010) affirms that a shift from traditional teaching methods, also known as teacher-centered learning to student-centered, permits both cognitive and social learning process. He also claims that the emerging technology, as new forms of implementation has shifted the learning dynamic. As seen in Ellis (2008), the data students receive must be culturally rich, or material has to be authentic. Interaction is also a key component; the synchronous sessions can permit students to interact freely. According to Flanigan (1991) when second language learners obtain input from other L_2 learners this interlanguage talk may be the primary source of input.

According to Pica and Doughty (1985) and Porter (1986) Interlanguage talk inevitably occurs in group-talk and it is less grammatical than teacher talk; thus, it is possible that exposure to incorrect peer input may lead to Fossilization. This process can take place in a digital form as well. Bates (2005) says that there are three generations of distance education: the third being considered two-way communications media like the use of Internet or video conferencing to enable interaction between teacher and student. Bates adds that communication is facilitated among students either individually, or in groups with the use of new technologies. This results in a much more equal distribution of communication between student and teacher and also among students.

The sessions were synchronous; nevertheless face-to-face sessions were the primary source of teaching. As mentioned by Dziuban, Hartman, and Moskal (2004) the novelty of

online learning is apparent in the diversity of names given to the phenomenon: Web-based learning, e-learning, and asynchronous learning networks among others. With the most recent on-campus emphasis, another set of labels has appeared, including hybrid learning, blended learning, and mixed-mode instruction.

Web-conferencing would help us create a blended learning atmosphere. According to Bates (2005) "with Web-conferencing, teacher and student can interact visually, graphically, and verbally. Students can step out of a synchronous session without disrupting the lesson, but still notify participants that they have left the session. Students can hold conversations on the side, using text chat or attract the attention of the presenter without having to interrupt. A student can have a private conversation with the presenter/instructor without disrupting the class" (p.181).

Bates (2005) also describes that students and teachers can share documents, whether a lesson or worksheet, websites can be accessed individually or as a group. Sessions can be recorded or saved in case revision is necessary. Students can answer questions or surveys and receive immediate feedback. I believe interaction is unavoidable and as a working environment, students will be able to help each other out.

The thematic concern in this project can be defined as how students use the web conferencing called Adobe Connect so as to reinforce in a face to face class. As the literature mentions, this intervention is latent due to the type of student and their economic background. The literature also solidifies a proper learning theory in Constructivism dealt in a social environment. Another key concept that was undertaken was Blended Learning; as it was mentioned, it is a concept that has not been clearly defined. It is important in this process because face-to-face and distant learning is used correspondingly.

The implementation of the project takes place through a web conferencing tool named Adobe Connect. This tool can sustain interaction through microphone or chat pods. This permits the professor to create a presentation and explain what was seen in class. The information presented in this section supports the use of technology in a blended environment.

4. Methodology

I decided to engage in a new project so as to find a solution to the aforementioned problem. The type of investigation undertaken is Action Research. Wallace (1998) states "Action Research is different from others in that it nearly always arises from some specific problem or issue rising out of our professional practice. It is therefore very problem-focused in its approach and very practical in its intended outcomes" (p.15). This approach permits us to permeate the core of our immediate environment.

A semester was sixteen weeks long, and the course textbook has twelve units, which means a unit had to be covered in a week. The school uses Touchstone by Cambridge University Press (cite in references) for English levels one through four. In my case, level five uses Viewpoint also by Cambridge. The particular group I decided to implement with, was my 11am group. The group consisted of eighteen students with a mixture of Engineering, Law and Architecture majors. There was a total of nineteen students, seven were female and twelve were male. Their ages ranged from 18 to 21, and all of them had taken English courses and/or studied at bilingual schools.

That time I did not want to depend on the schools Wi-Fi connection, as well as learners' commitment to arrive to class and work without getting distracted or distracting others. Subsequently, I acknowledged the use of a new tool named Adobe Connect could help learners through the use of web conferencing.

5. Data Collection

As part of a preliminary analysis, students were surveyed. I had already considered how I would use the tool, the core of the intervention was to help students obtain proper reinforcement, especially for those who attended classes, and whose input process was interfered due to common distractors in class. Nevertheless, reinforcement could also be considered a support for those students who were absent, tardy, sick, attended mandatory conferences or trips. The survey consisted of 12 questions.

The second phase of the project was the implementation. There, field notes would be key for proper analysis. Kothari (2006), describes observation as a specific tool of data collection which is subjected to checks and controls on validity and reliability, without asking from the respondent. Despite not implementing in class or not actually having the group face-to-face, field

notes would help me analyze students' interaction during the web conferencing session. The sessions had a lot of peer correction and it was necessary for me to keep track of students who were being helped as well as for students who were helping other classmates.

Richards (2003) points out that a qualitative perspective allows the researcher to access and see what is occurring in spaces such as learning centres and schools. Apart from the qualitative factor, I wanted to know if students found the presentations and material useful. Observations were also in place; however, they were more useful the day after the implementation. Students would describe their perceptions the following day. I would also notice improvements or general performance in class. Student's attitude towards the class would also be observed on a daily base.

After the implementation, I focused on qualitative data, so I could interview my students, before the semester was over. The interview was semi-structured and it involved six students. Burns (2010) claims that the purpose of a semi-structured interview is to allow the interviewer to make a comparison across the interviewees ´responses, empowering diversity and flexibility. They were divided into three categories: students who never attended, students who attended sporadically, and students who attended the majority of the sessions.

In addition, Kothari (2006) points out that a questionnaire consists of a number of questions typed or printed in a specific order and it is expected to be understood and answered by the respondents on their own. The main goal of the questionnaire was to obtain qualitative data about the sessions. The questionnaire for those who did attend, consisted of what they thought about the sessions, if they cleared all their doubts, and if they found the session supportive and reinforcing. Due to time constraints, it was not possible to interview the entire group; still a questionnaire was applied to the students who did attend the sessions. This second questionnaire was mainly yes or no questions. It consisted of affirmative and negative statements that covered both face-to-face sessions and the webinar sessions. Other instruments used during the project were recordings of the interviews and transcripts.

6. Findings

This section contains the data obtained from the tools mentioned in the previous section. The data is divided in sub-sections beginning with Pre-intervention Data, which consisted of a survey. This survey gathered data regarding distractors, absences, requirements, availability, and a

diagnostic questionnaire. The next sections show the different data collected during the intervention. The main evidence was screen captures, those images helped understand the function of the actual web conferencing sessions. Finally, the post-intervention section consists of the tools used to gather data, for example, informal interview, field notes, and personal diary.

In order to obtain necessary information about the group as part of the construction of the thematic concern, a survey was given to the students. Based on this survey, it was important to confirm that students got distracted in class. It could be said that they were not able to obtain all input necessary for the proper learning process. Chart 1.0 presents the results of the first survey given to the students; it shows the yes/no question asked. The results are shown and contrasted with colors. It can be said that students were aware of their lack of interest due to distractors and absences.
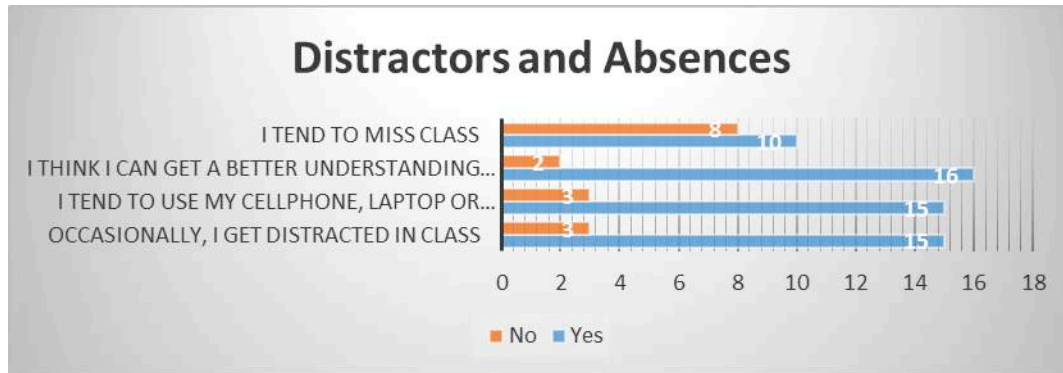
Chart 1.0

Technical Requirements

In order to carry out this research I needed to know if students had Internet access and a computer with speakers, webcam and microphone for the web conferences. It was necessary to gather data, which would validate this research project. As seen in chart 2.0 the group of 18 students was surveyed, as a result, it was clear that 100% of the students had Internet access as well as computer ownership. Yet, it was necessary to know if their computers were equipped. As the results show, all of the computers owned by the students were equipped with a microphone and webcam.
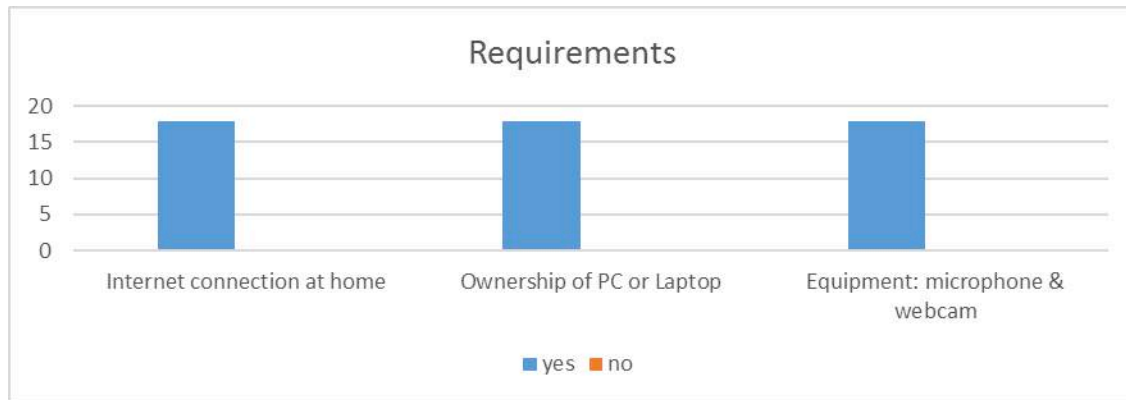
Chart 2.0

Availability

Students were then surveyed to see and set a schedule for the after school web conference. Another situation that I knew could cause a problem was scheduling, I figured that it was in the best interest of the students to survey what schedule fit best each week. Taking into consideration the students' busy schedule I wanted to know if they could all synchronize around the same hour. So I asked students when they worked on their online workbook, which was 20% of their total grade and must have been done on a weekly base.

As seen in pie chart 3.0, students were asked if they worked on the online workbook at home in the afternoon or at night. Moreover, they were asked specifically at what time. Considering both variables, 100% of the students work at home on the platform in the evening or afternoon. The next question asked was at what hour students worked on the platform, the results show that all the students worked between the hours of 8 to 9.
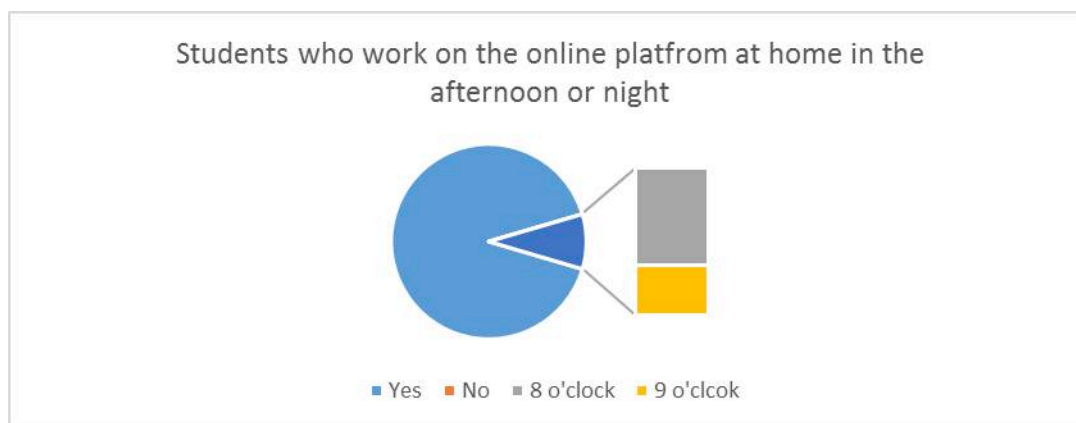
Chart 3.0

Intervention

The data collected were mostly images of how the intervention was imparted. The Adobe Connect sessions were similar to face-to-face classes, the main purpose of these sessions was to

help students recover, practice or reinforce what was seen in class. Screen captures were taken so as to demonstrate the interface of how the web conferencing tool helped students, for instance, peer correction and interaction.

Screen capture 1.0 shows three pods chat, attendees and share screen. A pod is a tool that gives the web conference different functions. For example the Share Screen pod permits the hosts (teacher) to share presentations, documents or even Mirroring my computer. Students also have their microphones on and are interacting with their classmates or me. The presentation was being shared from my laptop and I am explaining the topic. As seen in screen capture 1.0 the topic was passive voice. In the chat pod students are interacting with each other. They were responding to the questions given to them as well as commenting on each other's posts. This is the type of blended face-to-face interaction seen in most of the sessions.
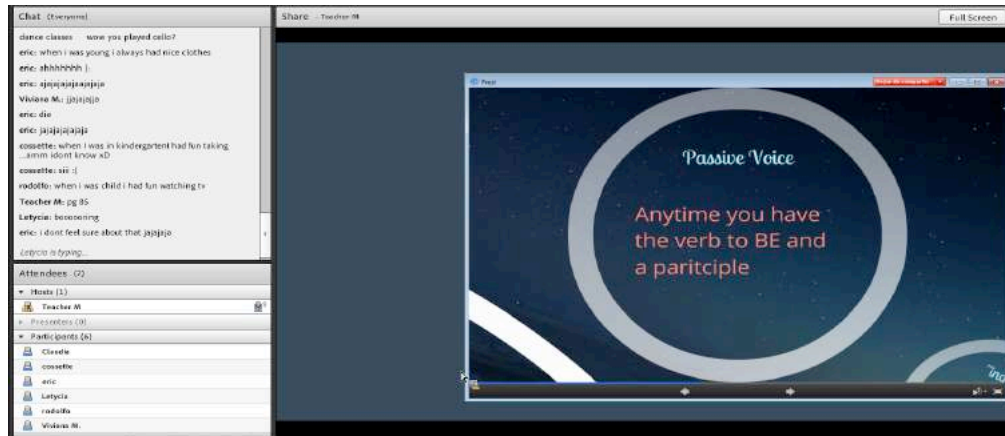
Screen Capture 1.0

Post-intervention data

One of the main concerns was to know how the students felt after each session. Students were asked a number of questions during the class. The questions were mostly yes or no and short answer. None of the questions would have a direct effect on the session itself; they were just to know if they felt satisfied with the session.
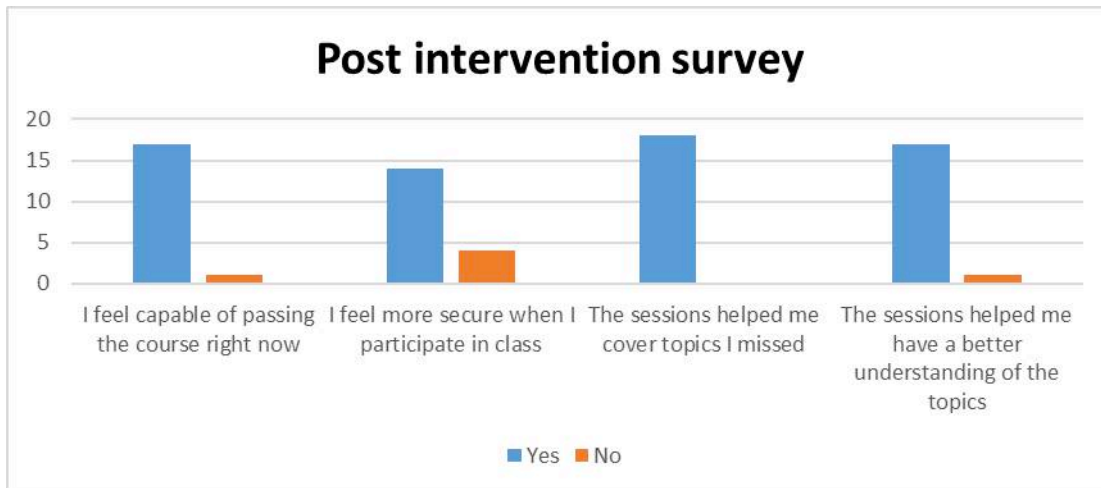
Chart 4.0

As seen on chart 4.0 students were asked if they felt capable of passing the course. 17 of the 18 students said they felt capable of passing the course. Another point considered in the survey was if the session maintained the purpose of helping them understand to have a better view of the topics and only 1 of the 18 students did not understand the topics any better. The overall results of the survey solidified the purpose of the sessions. The overall positive results of the post intervention survey helped confirm the objective of the intervention.

7. Interviews

Semi-guided interviews were necessary to solidify the survey given to the students. The interviews had similar ideas as the survey, but also adding more sense to what the students actually felt. A segment of one of the interviews shows the beginning of the interview; the student is asked if she uses her cell phone while in class. Her response as to why she uses her mobile is unexpected.

> *Teacher-researcher*: you took a survey, yesterday in class, would you say you get distracted in class?
> *Student C*: yeah!
> *Teacher-researcher*: you're not the type of person who has a tendency to use their cell phone, like other people, but do you get distracted with your cellphone?
> *Student C*: yeah
> *Teacher-researcher*: what factors or what causes you to get distracted?
> *Student C:* the noise in the classroom
> *Teacher-researcher:* okay, when you mean by noise, ah, what do you mean by noise?
> *Student C*: other people talking, other people start talking and I get distracted and I start using my phone
> *Teacher-researcher*: do you think this habitual talking disrupts the class?

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Student C: among other things

As seen in the segment the student mentioned and was not noted that in her case the cellphone usage was because of the noise in the class. That meant the student did not deliberately use her mobile device rather, did it because of the disruption and her lack of tolerance to the noise.

Interaction

A major finding was how the students felt when it came to interacting in the web conferences. As analyzed in the screen captures and part of my field notes I noticed that student had a lot of interaction through the chat pod and they helped each other a lot by having peer correction. As seen in the segment, student C felt like there was more interaction on his behalf in the web conference than in the face-to-face class.

> Teacher-researcher: another question, the session you attended, just in general. Did you like the session?
>
> *Student C*: "yeah, I think I participated a little bit more than in class."
> *Teacher-researcher*: so you were able to interact?
> *Student C*: yeah
> *Teacher-researcher*: obviously, it was difficult to speak because the microphones weren't on but through the chat were you able to interact with your classmates?
> *Student C*: yeah

8. Discussion and Reflections

As seen in the literature review, technology has helped how students and teacher interact and shape how a class can be given. Students are capable of assimilating, without many difficulties, and embracing any form of technology. One of the limitations of this project was length of time; it was very difficult to gather enough information that could lead us to believe this tool could be used for more than reinforcement.

As was seen in class, students had tendencies to get distracted since they are known for multi-tasking they do not pay attention to the teacher, yet they are capable of answering any questions dealing with the topic. The point here is that most teachers should have the students' undivided attention, and this will help the student become aware of any homework assignment as well as things due at that moment.

It was quite clear what they were going to respond; nevertheless it was a necessary procedure. To me it would have made more sense to ask if they had some headphones with an integrated microphone, this really isolates a student and helps them be more focused. Students chose the hour for the weekly session, they seemed to find it interesting and in an informal interview a student told me she felt shy or a least skeptical about what was going to be done. She thought it was similar to a Skype videoconference session.

During the sessions, it was very difficult to obtain a good pace. As the presenter, it was difficult to know if students were paying attention. Throughout the first sessions, my presentations were prolonged with exercises and supplementary materials, for example, links to webpages and videos. I decided to minimize my role as the presenter and let them have a more active role. In latter sessions, students took control of the sessions, there was more interaction and they took control of the input.

I thought the tool could help students to practice fluency so students had to read poems aloud as well as dialogues. In one session I showed a video and asked their opinion about the people involved; they reacted and expressed themselves correctly. Students were given control as presenters, Adobe connect permits the host (presenter) to disable microphone or webcams as well as make attendee hosts. So I would randomly choose students to complete worksheets with the help of the classmates.

For the length of the sessions I noticed how involved students were, at some point students had difficulties using their microphone. It did not discourage them from participating in the chat pod, and as the session continued they tried to fix the problem. Their intentions were clear, they wanted to participate, it was very difficult to establish what motived them more, but it was clear for those who joined the session had an active involvement. Taken from the interviews, students felt as they paid attention in class, yet they paid a little more attention in the sessions.

It was found that once students were in an area where they felt comfortable with a tool that seemed to be familiar to them, they were bound to focus and participate more actively. Students felt free to engage through the chat pod, they did not feel worried about participating with their classmates in a face-to-face environment. When they used the chat pod they were very expressive as if they were sharing on a social network.

Students interacted thoroughly; they did not seem to get bored or frustrated with the topics, they actively expressed their doubts or seem to react positively to when they finally

understood the topic. Students did not have to express their doubts because their classmates would say them first, as they were paying attention I did not have to answer the same question repetitively. I had to only give instruction once, and for those who arrived late could scroll up and down the chat to have a clear idea of what page we were on or topic being discussed.

After the session concluded, students were given surveys and a few were interviewed to get a deeper idea of what they thought about the sessions. As the surveys had dictated, students felt comfortable using the tool to practice, recover or reinforce the topics seen in class. The biggest fear I had was if students would lose interest in the sessions. Nevertheless, students felt they were learning or practicing. As the semester was close to concluding, the overall behavior of the face-to-face classes became more fluent and productive as well.

The students who attended the sessions became more riveted with the new topics. According to the survey, students felt capable of passing the course as well as more secure in class. I think upon further research, these sessions can be a clear indication of Blended Learning. In spite of not being distance learning, it was relieving for 7am students not to be in class.

9. Conclusions and Implications

A week after completing the implementation, I believed that this Action Research intervention credited its expectations and was untapped to its full potential. I can say that I, as a teacher, tried my best to help the attendees reach the full of their potential. I wanted students to feel comfortable and responsible at the same time. I wanted them to realize that the English class was as important as any other class equally.

As the intervention progressed, I was able to interact better with the group. They followed instruction and worked better than any other group that I have had; however, I was not able to make them increase their oral production. This was due to the purpose of the course, which dictated what needed to be covered in the sessions. The students were not afraid to interact freely in class, rarely did I have to control them because they worked well and if they finished early they would work on other exercises from the book.

Additionally, students felt the material was adequate to their needs and useful. At some point, students manifested that they were able to concentrate more during the sessions than in class. Something that was not expected was the students' proposal to hold weekend sessions, and

their actual attendance on either Saturday or Sunday. This represents a level of commitment and interest that seemed promising.

It is clear technology is and will be a dominant catalyst to our society and bear economic stability and human behaviour. Private educational institutions in Mexico have sold the idea of using technology in class for pedagogical purposes. We have not noticed that technology teaches itself. I believe that the emotions and reactions presented in class can be projected as well in this type of platform.

Students laughed when I made jokes and expressed themselves more responsibly than in a face to face class. They never resisted or complained about what needed to be done contrary to what was seen in class; students complained about what had to be done on a daily bases. Anyone who would like to practice the use of blended learning for reinforcement should consider some of the following observations:

First, make sure students use headsets. Second, if students are in midterms, they will access the conference even if they are extremely occupied. Third, verify you, as a presenter/teacher, have a broadband connection at home. Fourth, do not be afraid of trying something new, there are manuals and online assistance if needed. Fifth, let the students interact and express themselves freely; it seems that they do not feel uncomfortable while using a variety of technological tools. Lastly, anything you can imagine can be done in the sessions.

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TRIGGERING REFLECTION

After reading the chapter, answer the following questions:

- How often do you carry out activities to reinforce what you have covered in class?
- What are some possible constraints of using web conferencing as a teaching tool to reinforce students' learning process?
- List some of the benefits of using web conferencing as a teaching tool to reinforce students' learning process.
- Could the oral skill be promoted through the use of web conferencing? Justify your answer.
- What other values in addition to responsibility can be promoted through the use of web conferencing and how?
- Isolate a specific issue you would like to reinforce in your teaching situation? Design an action plan and implement it.

PART 2

Encouraging oral production

CHAPTER FIVE

Creating Awareness of Communication Strategies

Amongst Upper Intermediate Students

Efrén Reyes Muñíz

Barbara Scholes Gillings

Abstract

This paper reports an action research study in which a four-week training course, focused on creating awareness of communication strategies amongst Mexican EFL upper intermediate students, was designed and implemented. In order to evaluate this course, data was collected by means of observations, oral tasks, and a semi-structured interview. The findings reveal that courses of this nature may enhance students' abilities to maintain an uninterrupted interaction. However, this awareness may be limited by students' limited repertoire of communication strategies in their mother tongue, as well as their ability to transfer these to the target language.

Resumen

El trabajo que a continuación se presenta describe un estudio el cual fue llevado a cabo en un lapso de cuatro semanas. Dicha investigación se enfoco en la concientización de la existencia e importancia de las estrategias de comunicación en el aprendizaje del idioma inglés para estudiantes intermedios de origen mexicano. Diversas técnicas de recopilación de datos fueron utilizadas; tales como: hojas de observación, actividades orales y una entrevista semi-estructurada. Los resultados de la investigación sugieren que cursos de esta naturaleza incrementan las habilidades de los alumnos para hablar interrumpidamente en el idioma meta; sin embargo, este éxito está sujeto en gran parte a el conocimiento de los alumnos de las estrategias de comunicación y de como transferirlas de la L1 a la L2.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, English is used as a common linguistic code in the global world to interact with others from a different language community (Aguilar & Moreno, 2009) for diverse purposes and objectives (Davies & Pearse, 2000). People share advances in their field, and create different kinds of speech communities where they are able to interact with others and express their ideas

around the world. Consequently, there is a constant demand for EFL courses to enable people to achieve this.

Students have diverse reasons to learn EFL; however, Davies and Pearse (2000) claim that students' main objective is to learn how to communicate in the target language. Nevertheless, although academic institutions know the relevance of learning English, it seems that teachers are not equipping students adequately with the tools that may help them become fluent speakers. According to Jones (2007), fluency does not mean speaking quickly without hesitating. It means having the ability to express oneself despite the gaps in knowledge, errors, and all the necessary vocabulary. That is, fluency means being a 'smart speaker'; someone who knows how to lead a conversation for the sake of communication.

To become a 'smart speaker', an EFL student requires guidance in the art of communication. This art includes the awareness and use of communication strategies (CSs) (Mendez, 2007). However, it has been observed that although most academic institutions recognize the need to enable learners to become communicatively competent, the learners' exposure to CSs in the EFL classroom is often limited (Şenel, 2012) which often leads to breakdowns in the learner's ability to communicate successfully. With this in mind, I decided to examine my own teaching practice in a private EFL school, to discover if this were the case.

I discovered that although my students seemed to be grammatically competent, in most of the cases, they had difficulties when conversing. When they interacted with other students from the same or more advanced levels, they did not manage to indicate that they intended to continue speaking, and/or they did not know how to express certain words. As a result, the other learners constantly interrupted them or corrected them. This appeared to hinder their ability to speak fluently and develop conversational skills. As a result, I designed, implemented, and then evaluated a four week training course in order to facilitate my intermediate students' speaking ability, following the below objective and research questions.

To carry out an initial research phase in order to verify that the problem existed, and to identify, as well as to understand, the characteristics and nature of this problem in my teaching practice. The following objective included reflecting and discovering the methods in order to design, and implement an action plan in an attempt to solve this problem. The research questions explored the way I may help my students to speak fluently and the way fostering my students' awareness of CSs may help them to become more fluent.

2.   Literature review

Previously, competence in EFL appears to have referred to merely possession of sufficient grammatical knowledge. Students were provided with few opportunities to put into practice their linguistic repertoire, and therefore, had difficulties when speaking. However, in the 1970s, experts began to realize that there are some other factors, apart from grammar, that need to be taken into consideration for learners to become competent. For examples, Hymes (1971) emphasizes that:

> Being grammatically correct is not enough. Learners need to be aware of what is usually said in a given situation. In other words, they need to know "when to speak, when not, what to talk about with whom, when, where, and in what manner
>
> (Cited in Davies & Fraenkl, 2004:143)

In other words, Hymes (1971, Cited in Davies & Fraenkl, 2004:143) suggests that the term communicative competence is an umbrella term that covers four other competences: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). Canale and Swain (1980) also highlight that a proficient speaker is able to emit utterances which are well-structured, cohesive and coherent. In addition, these utterances are politically correct, and as such they are intelligible to the hearer(s). As a result, the message that the speaker sends is effective and the verbal interaction between the people is successful.

Nevertheless, it seems that instruction on strategic competence in the EFL classroom has been neglected (Aliakbari, 2009). Therefore, it appears to be important to create more meaningful awareness of the relevance of strategies when learning a language and the vast benefits that these can provide learners. Moreover, it also seems significant to differentiate the type of strategies that exist in order to understand them and their function.

According to Bachman (1990:107), strategic competence "is seen as the capacity that relates language competence [...] to the language user's knowledge structures and the features of the context in which communication takes place".

Based on this view, the use of strategies permits speakers to relate their linguistic repertoire to both grammar and sociolinguistic competence. In addition, Canale and Swain (1980: 30) provide another definition of this strategic skill. They highlight that this competence refers to the "verbal

and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence".

That is to say, CSs are the joints of a speech corpus, as such without the use of these devices the speaker might find some difficulties to get his/her message through. What is more, Aliakbari, (2009: 1) claims that:

> It is a solid fact that no second language learner's, or even native speaker's linguistic repertoire or control of language is perfect. Native as well as non-native speakers of a particular language sometimes struggle to find the appropriate expression or grammatical structure when they intend to get their meaning across.

Thus, all speakers need to constantly make use of CSs when speaking. In addition, recent research points out that instruction of CSs may also facilitate English learning (Faucette, 2001). Therefore, CSs should not be ignored, since the research that has taken place in EFL contexts has discovered that students who were exposed to CSs managed to do much better when speaking, and that they used more CSs than before taking the course (Maleki, 2007; Méndez, 2007; Nakatani, 2005; Naughton, 2006; Teng, 2012).

Nevertheless, it still seems that the idea of CSs is quite a "Cinderella" term (Aliakbari, 2009: 2) given that it has not been given appropriate consideration in the EFL field. This lack of attention may be owing to the probable lack of knowledge and awareness of their existence and benefits. However, it may be owing to the fact that some researchers argue that these strategies may be transferred from L1 to L2. There are some, for instance, Kellerman (1991), who state that there is no need to teach CSs to students. Yet, studies comparing L1 and L2 oral performance have found many differences and, as a result, the outcomes of their research has lead to advocating the teaching of CSs in EFL classrooms (Dörnyei 1995; Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1991, 1994; Tarone, 1984). Although learners may already use CSs in the L1, they may not use them, appropriately, effectively, frequently or spontaneously in the L2 (Faucette, 2001; Fernandez, 2002). Using CSs in L1, does not guarantee that they will be able to transfer these strategies to their L2 (Faucette, 2001).

It appears to be the case therefore, that as Oxford (1990) claims, teachers should teach CSs explicitly to students, as well as how to transfer such strategies to their L2 learning. In addition, researchers should discuss the teachability of some strategies and how to create

awareness of CSs amongst learners, as, apart from helping students become communicatively competent, these strategies may assist them to achieve autonomy. Emphasis must be placed on self-direction; students need to take the responsibility for their progress in the learning process (Oxford, 1990). However, this may prove to be a difficult task as it has been observed that many students are not congruent in their actions and expectations. Although they constantly express the desire to become fluent speakers of the language, they often continue to turn to Spanish whenever they face a breakdown in communication as the result of unknown vocabulary or, even, when the teacher pretends not to pay attention to their conversations in the classroom. This results in an overuse of Spanish that provides little opportunity for students to develop genuine conversational skills in the target language.

In sum, the benefits of the use of CSs have been evidenced by various studies carried out worldwide. Some of these benefits include becoming a more fluent speaker and the ability to develop communicative competence. However, although CSs have proved their efficacy, they still remain a Cinderella term, given that not many people recognize them as meaningful linguistic devices in the speaking area or pay them the attention they deserve.

3. The study

This study employed action research. Mills (2003, Cited in Donato 2003:1) provides the following definition of this kind of research:

> Action research is any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers to gather information about the ways that their particular school operates, how they teach, and how well their students learn. The information is gathered with the goals of gaining insight, developing reflective practice, effecting positive changes in the school environment and on educational practices in general, and improving student outcomes.
>
> (Mills, 2003: 4, Cited in Donato 2003)

This type of research is developed by teachers for teachers, and it is aimed at localizing, developing and monitoring changes in teaching practice (Donaldo, 2003). Carrying out action research permits the teacher/researcher a systematic understanding of a problem in the classroom. However, this knowledge must be verifiable and based on genuine outcomes in order for the teacher to concretely establish the basis for new knowledge, which may be the base for future action plans and research.

The study was carried out in two phases. The first phase consisted in applying a first cycle of research to verify that the problem existed. Once the problem was verified, the second phase took place. It included the planning, designing, implementing and evaluating an action plan as an attempt to solve the problem. Following, the action plan is summarized.

Stages	Activities

Pre-training	1) Presenting communication strategies 2) Commenting on the two strategies that the course was based on
While-training	1) Showing CSs at work 2) Similes 3) Polite expressions 4) Modeling how to use CSs
Post-training	5) Practicing CSs 6) Using CSs in real tasks
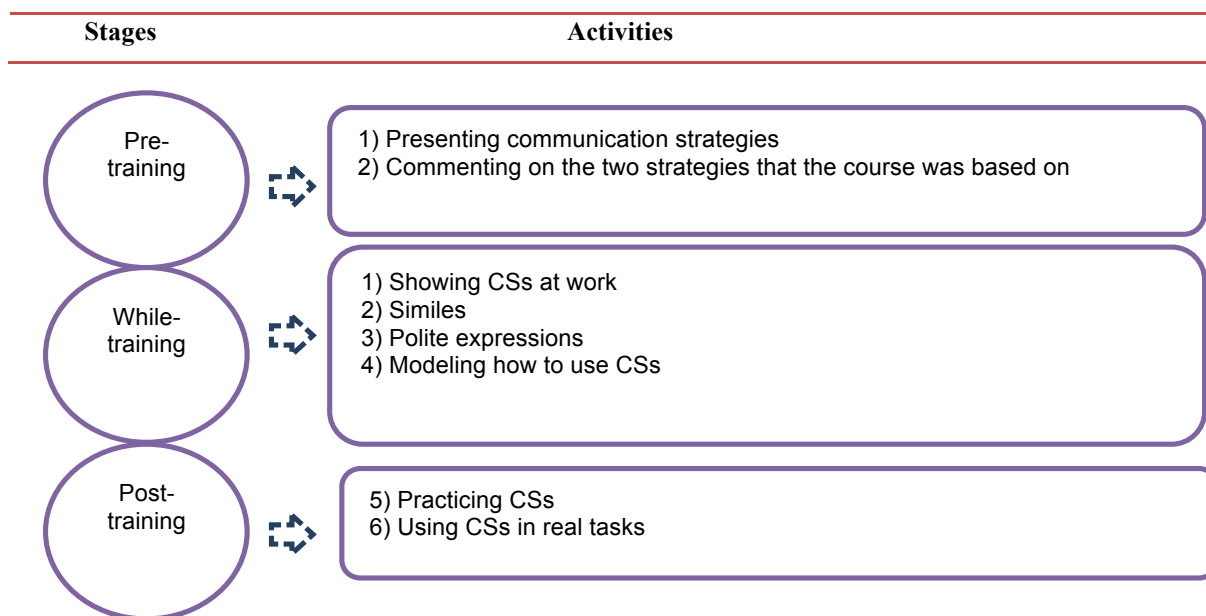
Pre-Training Stage

In this stage the participants were informed about some of the CSs that exist and their employed in EFL conversations to speak fluently. This phase was intended to raise awareness of CSs use. In conjunction, the two CSs (*circumlocutions and appeal for assistance*) that the training was based on were introduced at this stage.

While-Training Stage

This phase consisted of four sessions. During this time, the following routine was followed.

Session	Activity
One	¬ Input of materials that showed some use of the CSs
Two	¬ Discussion about the material presented
Three	¬ Modeling of the CSs and exemplification of their function
Four	¬ Practice of CSs

To see the material, refer to Appendix E.

Post-Training Stage

This last stage consisted of three sessions. In these lessons, the learners were required to develop oral tasks and record them by using a recording device in all of the sessions. The objective was to

obtain genuine information that revealed the extent of the students' use of CSs after the training. The oral tasks were the following:

Sessions	Tasks
One	¬ Picture descriptions
Two	¬ A presentation on the learners' interests
Three	¬ Spotting the difference and a conversation

3.1 Context and participants

This investigation was carried out at a private English school located in Xalapa, Veracruz. In this academic institution, students are required to study six levels of the language ranking from basic, intermediate, pre-advanced, advanced, and a preparation course for the TOEFL test to obtain a certification diploma. Each level lasts four months. Thus, the total time that learners are expected to spend at this school is two years.

The participants in this investigation were 9 upper intermediate students who had been studying English for twelve months in the aforementioned school. They met four days a week for one hour. The group was integrated by two males and seven females. All of them were adults, who were from 18 to 44 years of age.

3.2 Methods of data collection

In order to collect information about the successfulness of the training, four techniques were employed: observations, a conversational task, a picture description task and a semi-structured interview.

3.2.1 Observations

An observation sheet (Appendix One) was used to collect data during five lessons, given that, "observational techniques are an important aspect of many action research studies whether undertaken by participants or outsiders" (Hannan, 2006:2). This observation sheet was adapted from Tarone's (1977) taxonomy of CSs, since this taxonomy offered a more thorough and accessible classification of CSs. The objective of this observation grid was to identify which CSs students used, and with what frequency they used them, during the lessons. Apart from the

teacher/researcher, another teacher was asked to observe the class also and fill in the observation sheet in order to eliminate possible bias (Hannan, 2006).

3.2.2 A conversational task

Apart from the observations, a conversational task (Appendix Two) was also used to gather data regarding the participants' performance and use of the CSs, given that it is a strong means of finding information and understanding a phenomenon (Hannan:2007). This instrument was adapted from a similar investigation by Fernandez (2002) to discover the relationship between different-level students and how they use CSs. However, these tasks were modified and adapted to match the needs of this learning context. Thus a conversational task with six questions was designed that aimed at obtaining a sample of oral interaction from learners in their L2. Students working in groups of three were recorded with the hope that they could construct genuine communication in English. Similarly, another objective of this activity was to engage the learners in a conversation with the researcher, leading to real conversations in which we could discuss diverse topics as in authentic social interactions (Fernandez, 2002).

3.2.3 A picture description task

A picture description was used as a third method to elicit information from the participants, regarding the students' use of CSs. This activity was selected due to its efficacy to identify a speaker's use of CSs, and because it is the most well-known instrument to assess the use of these strategies (Hyde, 1982; Poulisse, 1990; Tarone, 1977). The image (Appendix Three) that learners were required to describe was obtained from Nunan's (1997). It was decided to use this picture because Nunan (1997) offers an image where the students are invited to make guesses about it. After that, the learners need to explain these guesses by using some information provided in the image. Therefore, the interviewees were required to make use of their cognitive and oral abilities to develop this task. In short, valuable information was obtained from the students.

3.2.4   A semi-structured interview

A semi-structured interview (Appendix Four) was carried out between the researcher and each participant. The object of this interview was to elicit from the interviewees their problems when speaking and how, and if, they managed to solve them after the implementation of CSs.

According to Hannan (2007:2) interviews "seek to elicit information about attitudes and opinions, perspectives and meanings". When using a semi-structured interview:

> The researcher designs a set of key questions to be raised before the interview takes place, but builds in considerable flexibility about how and when these issues are raised and allows for a considerable amount of additional topics to be built in, in response to the dynamics of conversational exchange
>
> (Hannan, 2007:3)

In other words, the teacher-researcher moved from question to question depending on the interviewee's reaction in order not to make the participant feel anxious or under threat. In this way, the learner was able to express his/her comments about the training with the freedom that a casual conversation has, since "semi-structured interviews have some pre-set questions, but allow more scope for open-ended answers" (Hannan, 2007:12).

3.3   Data analysis

The data gathered from the ***above applied instruments*** was both qualitative and quantitative. To analyze and classify the CSs that were used by the interviewees in the oral tasks and during the observations, Tarone's (1977) taxonomy of CSs (Appendix Five) was used. This taxonomy was employed because it is the most widely used taxonomy in the CSs area (Fernandez, 2002). In Tarone's (1977) taxonomy she identifies five clusters of CSs. She classifies them in: "topic avoidance, message abandonment, paraphrase, conscious transfer, appeal for assistance, and mime" (Tarone, 1977 in Fernandez, 2002: 10-12).

In the final step of the analysis, the data from the semi-structured interviews, the observations, and from the oral and "spotting the difference" tasks was triangulated the data. The information was compared and contrasted amongst the different data collection techniques. This was carried out to verify that the data collected was systematically coherent with the observed phenomenon (Shenton, 2004).

4.   Findings

The findings in this study reveal that training of this nature has a positive impact on EFL students regarding the development of communicative competence. This view is supported by the

following categories that emerged: emotions about the training, awareness of CSs, enhancement of listening skills, effectiveness of the course and CSs transfer.

4.1 Emotions about the training

In this category, 7 out of the 9 participants stated that they felt happy and satisfied with the training regarding CSs because it helped them become more fluent speakers. They also claimed to feel "good" (S2) because they had more opportunity to practice with a focus on fluency, as the following interview extract illustrates:

> "…*well I felt really happy because I really love English and I really had the opportunity to practice my speaking skills much more than before*"
>
> (S4)

The observations also provided a general panorama of the training impact on the learners. It was observed that at the beginning of the training most of the students seemed to be motivated to take part in the course. However, it was observed also that towards the end of the training, a couple of participants gave the impression of having lost interest. Nevertheless, 7 out of the trainees seemed to be encouraged and happy to learn how to employ the two CSs to enhance their fluency.

4.2 Awareness of CSs

During the semi-structured interview, students mentioned to have increased their awareness of CSs after the training. Now, they are aware of the fact that being fluent involves the use of CSs in order to speak continuously. The chart below contains some of the extracts from the participants' original words:

> "*I think it was very good for me because in the past, I speak much Spanish in the classes, but now I speak more English and when I don't know a word, I can use a circumlocution or I can ask for…. erm….. I can ask for…. my classmates to help*".
>
> (S5)

> "*Now when I don't know a word, I use a synonym that replaces it or I can describe it or use another word. And:::: I don't' use Spanish very much now. Because I know the strategy that can help me when I don't know how to express*".
>
> (S5)

> "*I understood that speaking fluently didn't mean to speak fast. I always thought*

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that speaking in a fluent way meant speaking fast. It really means erm…. making appropriate pauses when speaking erm….and also being able to communicate with other person without interrupting the communication".

(S4)

"There are more communication strategies but in this course we only practiced circumlocutions and asking for help".

(S5)

It is relevant to mention that the participants' awareness of CSs apparently increased significantly during the tasks that were used in the training. This represents a positive impact on the learners' fluency and perspective of CSs.

4.3 Development of listening skills

When categorizing the data, it was noticed that 2 out of the 9 participants mentioned having developed another skill, apart from speaking. They claimed to have improved their listening skills as the next table illustrates:

"I can speak and understand more the people that speak in English now".

(S2)

Before this course, I didn't understand that….some movies or some TV programs very well because I didn't understand because I used to translate the words they express. For example, I used to translate the fillers, for example, when the actors or the actress said you what I mean, or you know?? Or similar expressions I usually thought that they were speaking in a literal way, and I didn't understand what they really meant because it was difficult for me to know that they were just using those phrases to make a pauses in communication. Now I'm able to understand better.

(S4)

Apparently, the input of CSs allowed these students to realize that sometimes speakers use some phrases and/or fillers for gaining time to think while speaking. They also noticed that that these fillers are not literally translatable to their mother tongue. In general, the learners claimed to have increased their ability to comprehend conversations or dialogues. This is related to the increase of awareness of CSs and how they function in real conversations.

4.4 Effectiveness of CSs to increase fluency:

Prior to the training, 6 out of the 9 students **were observed speaking** in Spanish during their tasks. In contrast, after the training in the use of CSs, only 1 student spoke in Spanish, on one

single occasion: "*… Like popcorn, **nachos, sodas, and 'crepas??'***(S3). This suggests a significant enhancement in the participants' use of English, since they now appear to use CSs to cover the gap between the words that they know and do not know. Thus, it means that **raising the learners' awareness of** CSs helped them, indeed, to speak English continuously without switching codes from L2 to L1.

4.5 Possible CSs transfer:

During the course, it was observed that the participants did not only use the 2 CSs that were highlighted (circumlocutions and asking for assistance), but they were also employing other CSs. These strategies were classified and ranked depending on how frequently they were used by the participants, as the table below shows:

Communication Strategy	
1. *Appeal for help*	4. Topic avoidance
2. Fillers	5. Word coinage
3. *Circumlocutions*	6. Code switching

Considering the information presented in the previous table, it is noticeable that the participants used the two CSs that the training was based on, which were: ***appeal for help and circumlocutions***. In addition, the participants also employed four other untaught CSs. This may represent a possible CS transfer from the students' L1 to their L2. However, it is relevant to mention that these CSs were usually employed by the same students. That is to say, each learner seems to have a preference for a particular strategy. This possibly indicates that the learners still require further guidance to discover new and possibly more meaningful CSs that may match their learning skills with a wider repertoire of strategies. In the same spirit, it gives the impression that these students might need training on how to transfer the CSs that they use in their L1 to their L2.

5. Conclusion

From the analysis of the data, it is possible to infer that the training on communicative strategies helps facilitate EFL students' communicative competence. Four major changes were discovered: 1) increase in awareness of CSs, 2); improvement in the participants' fluency; 3) development of students' understanding; and 4) limited CSs transfer from L1 to L2. These four changes in the

learners' speaking behavior may imply that courses of this nature might be a viable solution to the students' speaking problems in general. The fact that the learners were guided to pay attention to the use and existence of CSs appears to have had a domino effect on their learning process. This suggests that the training on these strategies might not only help them employ these strategies in the course, but also create their awareness regarding the variety of available CSs that students can use in relation to their learning styles and interests.

The fact that the participants enhanced their fluency during the training, advocates for a continuous training of CSs throughout EFL courses. If teachers include these CSs strategies in their lesson plans, they may enable learners to become communicatively competent, which is the goal that most schools have. Nonetheless, it is necessary to mention that being fluent does not mean that the students are competent in the language, but that they are on their way to becoming so.

Finally, I hope that the findings reported here help to know a little bit more about the nature of communicative strategies and how to deal with them. The outcomes of this research have definitively had an impact on my teaching practice, as well as on my students' learning process.

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TRIGGERING REFLECTION

After reading the chapter, answer the following questions:

- How do the authors state the importance of understanding the meaning of what others communicate in terms of values and freedom?
- What are some of the positive uses of communicative strategies?
- In what way do communication strategies improved the ability to speak fluently?
- In case you follow an imposed course-book/program, do the communication strategies suggested there respond to your students' needs? If they do, why are they beneficial? If they do not, how could they be adapted? Would you be able to include new communication strategies?
- With a colleague who is teaching in a similar situation to yours, select and implement a few communication strategies in order to raise awareness of particular benefits of this type of tasks in your context-situation.

CHAPTER SIX

Impact of Scaffolding on Oral Tasks Development of a Mixed-ability Group

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Abstract

This paper reports how an enriched model of scaffolding can provide a mixed-ability group with the high challenge and support needed to modify their initial opinions, attitudes and behaviours related to interaction with their classmates. Changes occurred through participants' experience of the benefits that working with peers in pairs, trios and small groups with the support of a semiotic system assembled with graphic materials and text-mediated activities, meant for their understanding of the target language and for fostering their engagement in the co-construction of meaning within collaborative tasks to develop their oral skills.

Resumen

El presente trabajo es un informe sobre cómo un modelo enriquecido de Scaffolding puede proporcionar a un grupo de habilidades mixtas los altos niveles de desafío y apoyo necesarios para modificar sus opiniones, actitudes y conductas iniciales relacionadas con la interacción con sus compañeros. Los cambios ocurrieron cuando los participantes experimentaron los beneficios que trabajar en parejas, tríos y pequeños grupos con el apoyo de un sistema semiótico integrado por materiales gráficos y actividades mediadas por textos, representaba para su comprensión del idioma meta y su interés en la co-construcción de significado en tareas colaborativas para desarrollar sus habilidades orales.

1. Introduction

Speaking skills are often regarded as the measure for the command of a language (Nazara, 2011) and successful language learning. This is usually associated to the ability of the learner for maintaining a conversation with a partner, much more than to the ability to read or write the language (National Capital Language Resource Center). Even when most learners expect to develop their speaking skills in the language courses they take, there is still a strong perception

that speaking is "the most complex and difficult skill to master" (Hinkel, 2005: 485), which makes the development of oral tasks an area of opportunity for teaching the language more effectively.

Within the public institutions teaching English in the Mexican state of Veracruz, the Universidad Veracruzana (UV) has Language Centers that offer two types of English courses at basic, intermediate and advanced levels: courses for UV students as a compulsory subject within their major program, and courses open to the public. A characteristic of learners attending basic level English courses at this center is that they often show the characteristics of mixed-ability groups, which leads to a classroom situation where the more advanced ones may find that oral tasks are not challenging enough while the weaker ones may find it difficult to keep the pace with the stronger students.

This study aimed at implementing a strategy model that can help the members of a mixed-ability group not only to overcome their differences in language knowledge and skills, but rather to base the development of their speaking skills on taking advantage of these differences. This purpose is at the core of our research question:

- How can an enriched model of scaffolding facilitate participants' interaction and co-construction of meaning in oral tasks?

2. Literature Review

In order to provide this study with a theoretical framework, the following concepts were reviewed:

2.1 Mixed ability groups

A class is deemed a mixed-ability group when its members have different strengths and weaknesses, develop at different rates, and have different preferences for learning and displaying their work (Ireson & Hallam, 2001).

2.2. Oral Tasks

According to Byrne (1991), oral tasks involve the development of two types of language skills: the productive skill of speaking, and the receptive skill of understanding, which implies that responses to what is spoken are expected. This involves four main features in tasks:

First of all, the interaction in oral tasks is highlighted. For Swain (1995: 125-126), both input and output, occur through a constant language-awareness process during interaction and Walsh (2011: 166) explains that interactional competence develops through a constant process where participants try "to make sense of each other, negotiate meaning, assist and query, support, clarify and so on". Secondly, the participant structures in oral tasks need to be taken into account. In this regard, Brumfit (1984: 78) suggests that pair work and group work promote natural interaction and communication learning. According to Harmer (1991: 245), when students work together in pairs or small groups, "there is a greater chance that at least one member of the group will be able to solve a problem when it arises".

Thirdly, Walqui (2006: 163) stresses that within Vygotsky's conception of pedagogy "all knowledge and ability arises in social activity, all learning is co-constructed". This would refer to the construction of meaning in oral tasks. She explains that when learners work together, they organize their thoughts to improve the clarity of expression while talking with other partners, to construct meaning together. Finally, the role of challenge and support in oral tasks is shown. Based on Mariani's (1997) teaching style framework (Appendix A), Hammond and Gibbons (2005:9) assume that oral tasks often take learners to an area of high challenge and low support where they may feel anxious and frustrated. Therefore, scaffolding in oral tasks should be oriented to provide high challenge and high support.

2.3 Sociocultural perspective for learning and language

From a sociocultural perspective for learning (Vygotsky, 1978) and language (Halliday, 1979), learning is a collaborative activity driven by interaction and language mediates the construction of knowledge through the classroom interactions between the teacher and the learners and between learners. This involves two main features: scaffolding as a teaching strategy and the zone of proximal development.

One of the teaching strategies commonly used to support learners' interaction is scaffolding. Scaffolding within a sociocultural approach is a metaphor that assumes that learning is a social process that takes place when learners interact with teacher or peers within their zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD was defined by Vygotsky (1978:86) as "…the distance between a child's actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under

adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers." However, scaffolding requires a deeper discussion as it leads us back to the concept of interactional competence.

2.4 Enriched model of scaffolding

Hammond & Gibbons' (2005:25) enriched model of scaffolding provides participants with support for comprehension of language elements and multiple opportunities to interact within their ZPD. They suggest that with the implementation of this model, the ZPD can be co-constructed and expanded through collaborative participation of learners. In this respect, it can be added what Halliday defines a semiotic system (1978:192). He views language as a semiotic resource for making meaning. A semiotic system is a set of signs and symbols that refer to objects in the real world and can support the construction and interpretation of meanings and concepts, as well as the contextualization, classification, comparison, contrasting, linking and appropriate use of these meanings and concepts.

In spite of the fact that the concept of scaffolding permeates every stage of this research, the concept of interactional competence in the sense posed by Walsh, which implies negotiation and collaborative construction of meaning, is in its core. Before the development of interaction in oral tasks, the aim of this study was to create the conditions in which participants could overcome the difficulties to interact presented by the uneven classroom situation generated by their different background in linguistic and communicative skills at the beginning of the course.

The main need identified in this context was to provide participants with a referential framework that could allow them to arrive to agreements about language, by using a common code that could be deciphered and interpreted by all of them. A second need was to design a type of activities that could allow participants to take advantage of their differences by learning from each other. The strategies to provide this framework and these activities were found in the enriched model of scaffolding which had been used by Hammond and Gibbons (2005) in a different context and for a different purpose, but which could be adapted and oriented during this intervention to foster classroom interaction between members of this mixed-ability group and thus, facilitate their engagement in oral tasks.

3. Methodology

The present study was carried out at UV Language Center in Orizaba (CIO) with 20 learners, aged between 18 and 24, in a Basic English Level 1 course (IBAS 100) open to the public. The course was held at the Language Center facilities for a semester, with a schedule of five hours a week on the same day. The strategy implementation took place during a period of six weeks.

3.1 Action Research

This study is an Action Research project which attempts to link theoretical concepts to their practical implications. Action research pertains to the domain of qualitative research which may include some descriptive statistics to organize qualitative findings (Burns, 2005).

3.2 Data Collection

The data on which this action research was mainly focused were participants' points of view, feelings, beliefs, interests and values regarding interaction with their peers. These data were collected before, during and after the strategy.

3.3 Description of Implementation

The teaching methodology designed to overcome the problem of low participation in oral tasks was implemented during the course, for a period of six weeks. It is relevant to take into account that the plan for the implementation implied a gradual withdrawal of support as the members of the group developed the skills that allowed them to carry out the tasks unassisted. This involves three main parts: the adapted strategies, the semiotic system and a series of activities.

The strategies were adapted from Hammond and Gibbons' (2005) enriched model of scaffolding, which includes support that is pre-planned and support that occurs as the lesson unfolds. For the first type of scaffolding, both, the semiotic system and the text-mediated activities were in line with the content and level of the course syllabus. The semiotic system was assembled with graphic materials in which redundant and overlapping messages offered clues to facilitate understanding of language elements, functions and norms. These messages were also used as symbols to help learners predict the kind of conversation they were expected to develop, and to support their communication within the group.

In a similar way, the written and aural texts used to mediate activities were selected from different sources. These texts, in which the emphasis is placed upon the functions of the language, offered models that allowed learners to make appropriate choices and provided participants with a focal point for analysis of topics, situations and grammar patterns. For the second type of scaffolding, shifts of participant structures, from whole class to pair work between different partners, and to small group work, allowed participants to interact with weaker and stronger peers to activate the group resources and to take advantage of their different language knowledge and social abilities.

There were a series of activities. First, the semiotic system made up of wall charts, posters, flash cards, slides and videos according to the topic of the lesson (See Appendix B), was presented to participants. After that, they sat in pairs or trios to complete handouts by reviewing, classifying, ordering, matching, comparing and/or contrasting the information presented. Next, they carried out activities aided by written texts with examples of new structures, and by aural texts with models of language use that included pronunciation of new vocabulary, structures and intonation of useful sentences. In these activities, participants had to transform language according to new functions and adapt it to new situations.

Later, participants used conversation models to talk with partners about the lesson topic. After a while, they shifted partners to continue talking in a gradually freer way while the teacher monitored and provided guidance that included explicit instruction aimed at helping learners improve pronunciation, word order and intonation. Finally, participants worked in small groups and developed tasks that required organization of their ideas in order to express them through descriptions, stories, or further conversations to consolidate their command of the spoken forms of the language learned.

3.4 Instruments used to collect data

The design of instruments to collect the data in this study was guided by the research question. The instruments used were an exploratory questionnaire, a reflection paper written by the participants and a final questionnaire. The language used in the three instruments was the participants' mother tongue, Spanish.

The exploratory questionnaire (See Appendix C.1.) was designed to obtain data about participants' previous experiences regarding interaction, in order to identify some clues to explain

their low interest in participation during the first lessons, and to orient the search of the strategies needed to improve that situation. It had nine closed-ended items within a five-point rating scale. After five weeks of strategy implementation, participants were asked to write their reflections (See Appendix D.1) on the learning process they were undergoing. The purpose was to collect their free comments about what and how they were learning with the new teaching methodology.

After the six-week strategy implementation period had ended, participants answered a questionnaire of ten yes/no closed-ended items (See Appendix E.1). The purpose was to identify how participants' initial points of view, feelings, beliefs, interests and values regarding interaction had modified after they had gone through the strategy implementation.

3.5 Data analysis

The data collected through the three instruments described above was analyzed to generate categories and themes in order to identify the emerging patterns. The data from the exploratory questionnaire was analyzed by calculating the overall quantities of participants' answers for each question within the five point rating scale, and assigning them to a category or subcategory. In their written reflections, participants were more explicit about the ways in which the components of the enriched model of scaffolding had impacted their language learning. They also commented how these components had contributed to facilitate their engagement in the oral tasks.

The qualitative data mentioned above were coded and relevant samples of quotes regarding participants' attitudes toward this strategy were extracted. The data collected in the confirming questionnaire was analyzed by calculating the overall quantities of "Yes" and "No" answers for each question, and assigning each question to a category or subcategory regarding compliance of participants' language learning with their needs and expectations.

4. Findings

In this section, the results drawn from the data collected in the three instruments used in this study are presented. These results were organized in two subsections: Participants' previous experiences with classroom interaction and participants opinion related to the new teaching methodology

4.1 Participants' previous experiences with classroom interaction

The highest scores obtained in participants' answers to the exploratory questionnaire (See Appendix C. 2.) revealed that, before the strategy implementation, about 50% percent of the participants did not expect that their classroom interaction could contribute to the development of their language learning. Five main categories are shown in this subsection: Interaction with partners, interaction with the teacher, participation in class, teachers' reactions to participants' questions and participants' expressions of opinions and suggestions.

4.1.1 Interaction with partners

- 50% of participants said that they almost always worked well with other partners (Question 1).
- 50% of participants said that they sometimes helped other partners to solve problems with classroom work (Question 2).
- 35% of participants said that other partners often helped them to solve problems with classroom work (Question 3).

4.1.2 Interaction with the teacher

- 50% of participants said that the teacher was almost always interested in his/her problems in class (Question 4).
- 55% of participants said that the teacher almost always helped them when they had problems in class (Question 5).
- 45% of participants said that the questions made by the teacher almost always helped them to understand the class (Question 6).

4.1.3 Participation in class

- 35% of participants said that they seldom made questions during the class (Question 7).

4.1.4 Teacher's reactions to participants' questions

- 60% of participants said that the teacher almost always answered his/her questions (Question 8).

4.1.5 Participants expressions of opinions and suggestions

- 45% of participants said that they sometimes gave their opinion and made suggestions about class work (Question 9).

The beliefs of participants regarding interaction that were identified through this questionnaire were used to explain some of the causes of the low interest of some members in the group for participating in oral tasks. This data suggested that a strategy that could change these beliefs and lead participants' interaction into a zone of engagement and development should be found.

4.2 Participants opinion related to the new teaching methodology

Regarding the research question of this study "How can an enriched model of scaffolding facilitate participants' interaction and co-construction of meaning in oral tasks?" the data collected through participants' reflections and the final questionnaire showed that the strategies used in the intervention were useful to produce changes in the following aspects:

4.2.1 Semiotic system

In their written reflections, some participants commented that the graphic materials in the semiotic system contributed to their learning of the new language and facilitated their interaction with peers.

1) The semiotic system fostered participants' understanding of concepts:
   Participant 2: *"….el material se me hace muy expresivo".*
   Participant 3: *"Me funcionó de mejor manera mirar las imágenes y de esta forma identificar la idea que denotaba el texto con la imagen…".*
   Participant 10: *"A mi manera de pensar se me hace más atractivo aprender los temas con ejemplos, dibujos, imágenes. Se me hace más didáctico y más fácil de aprender".*

2) The semiotic system fostered participants' memorization of new language
   Participant 7: *"Me agrada aprender los temas con dibujos, imágenes, didácticas, etc., porque se me quedan más".*
   Participant 14: *"….me sirve para aprendérmelos mejor y que no se me olvide tan fácilmente…."*

3) The semiotic system contextualized the use of the new language:

Participant 14: *"Los materiales sí me ayudaron un poco a observar más los detalles y conversar con mis compañeros…"*

4) The semiotic system facilitated participants' interaction

Participant 14: *".....me sirve [....] como una ayuda para socializar más con los compañeros".*

Answers to the final questionnaire confirmed the support that the semiotic system provided to participants for their understanding of the course contents.

5) The graphic materials in the semiotic system helped participants to understand course contents:

The majority of participants (95%) answered 'Yes' to question 5. ¿Los materiales visuales (dibujos, pósters, diagramas, ilustraciones del libro) te ayudaron a entender mejor los contenidos del curso (gramática, vocabulario, estructuras, etc.)?

4.2.2 Text-mediated activities

Participants mentioned in their written reflections that texts used for activities also supported their understanding of course contents.

6) The written text-mediated activities reinforced the language taught:

Participant 17: *"...y también las copias que nos dio sirvieron para reforzar los contenidos antes vistos..."*

Answers to the final questionnaire confirmed that text-based activities provided support to participants for their learning and interaction.

7) The written texts used for the activities helped participants to clarify doubts:

In the final questionnaire, the majority of participants (95%) answered 'Yes' to question 6. ¿Los textos con los que trabajaste en clase te ayudaron para aclarar tus dudas?

8) The aural text used for activities facilitated interaction in oral tasks:
   Many participants (85%) answered 'Yes' to question 7. ¿Los audios que escuchaste te sirvieron de apoyo para participar en las conversaciones?

4.2.3 Interaction between peers

Participants' written reflections suggested that shifts in participant structures also contributed to their learning in interaction.

9) Shifts of partners and participant structures facilitated interaction between weaker and stronger peers:
   Participant 7: *"Algunas dudas que tenía sobre el tema se resolvieron durante la clase al intercambiar opiniones con mis compañeros"*.
   Participant 10: *"Las dudas que tuve al momento se las pregunté a mis compañeros. Ellos me las supieron explicar más entendibles para mí"*.
   Participant 14: *"Alguna que otra duda la resolví platicando y preguntándole a mis compañeros"*.

Answers to the final questionnaire confirmed that shifts in participant structures provided support for their learning in interaction.

10) Shifts of partners and shifts in participant structures facilitated interaction in oral tasks:
    Most participants (90%) answered 'Yes' to question 8. ¿Encontraste útil para tu aprendizaje participar en conversaciones con diversos compañeros en parejas, pequeños grupos y con toda la clase?

4.2.4 Interaction between participants and language teacher

Participants commented in their written reflections that the redundant materials and activities helped them to practice language in interaction with peers and teacher.

11) Semiotic system and text-mediated activities provided a background for interaction between participants and teacher:

Participant 5: *"La maestra no sólo lo explica una vez sino que lo explica muchas veces pero en distintas formas y hace que nosotros lo practiquemos mucho, que interactuemos con los demás, así aprendemos a [...] hablar y escuchar".*

Participant 8: *"...nuestra profesora utilizó varios materiales de apoyo para poder entender mejor y si teníamos una duda la profesora completaba mayor información y aclarábamos las dudas entre todo el grupo".*

Answers to the final questionnaire confirmed participants' feelings of self-confidence when interacting with the teacher.

12) Participants were self-confident to ask questions to the teacher when they had doubts:

In the final questionnaire, the majority of participants (95%) answered 'Yes' to question 9. ¿Te sentiste con confianza para hacerle preguntas a la maestra cuando tuviste dudas?

13) Participants felt that the teacher had solved their doubts when they made questions to her:

100% of participants answered 'Yes' to question 10. ¿La maestra resolvió tus dudas cuando le hiciste preguntas?

4.2.5 Relevance of interaction in oral tasks

Participants acknowledged in their written reflections that they learned better during interaction in oral tasks.

14) Participants noticed that their language learning increased through their interaction in oral tasks:

Participant 2: *"Aprendo más hablando".*

Participant 7: *"... al platicar con otros compañeros se me hace más divertida la clase porque los conoces un poco más y aprendes a comunicarte con otras personas".*

4.2.6 Oral tasks as challenging opportunities

Answers to the final questionnaire showed the way participant observe oral tasks.

15) Participants perceived oral tasks as opportunities to practice the language taught:

Participant 4: *"Los ejercicios de conversación entre compañeros me parecen muy útiles para poner en práctica lo aprendido en clase"*.

Participant 13: *"...conversamos con algunos compañeros intercambiando así y practicando el conocimiento aprendido. En lo personal, me ha servido mucho todo"*.

Participant 19: *"En la clase anterior me gustó platicar con mis compañeros, fue muy divertido y me ayudó a practicar"*.

4.2.7 Participants' awareness of own progress in language learning

Participants perceived that their language knowledge because of the strategies implemented by the teacher.

16) Participants recognized that their language knowledge increased due to teacher-led scaffolding strategies:

Participant 6: *"Veo un avance en mi aprendizaje […] los temas han sido nutridos y cada uno especial…"*

4.2.8 Motivation and engagement in oral tasks

Answers to the final questionnaire showed oral tasks enhanced motivation and engagement.

17) Interaction became a motivation that facilitated engagement in oral tasks:

Participant 9: *"El levantarnos a interactuar con mis compañeros nos anima a poner entusiasmo a la clase…"*

Participant 15: *"La dinámica de la clase me gusta mucho, en general todas las clases tienen diferentes actividades que me motivan y estimulan a practicar el idioma"*.

4.2.9 Increased interest in language learning

Participants expressed to be more interested in their learning of a language.

18) Participants developed further interest in language learning.

Participant 7: *"Y espero seguir aprendiendo más cosas porque me ha interesado seguir aprendiendo".*

4.2.10 Impact of scaffolding on participants oral tasks development

Participants acknowledged to have been positively influenced by the implemented activities…

19) Strategies influenced participants' interest in further development of their oral skills:

Participant 10: *"...había muchas cosas que yo desconocía, ya que el haberlas aprendido me sirvió de mucho para poder conversar con mis compañeros".*

"...sé que poco a poco iré aprendiendo y a poder platicar más a fondo con mis compañeros…."

Answers to the final questionnaire confirmed that the strategy used during this intervention was appropriate to overcome participants' initial difficulties to interact and to lead them to the language learning they expected from the course.

20) Participants felt that the IBAS Level 1 course fulfilled their expectations about acquisition of knowledge and skills:

Most participants (90%) answered 'Yes' to question 1. ¿Obtuviste del curso los conocimientos y habilidades que esperabas?

21) Participants found the way the learned language with the enriched model of scaffolding was appropriate.

The majority of participants (95%) answered 'Yes' to question 2. ¿Fue adecuada la forma en que aprendiste?

22) Participants thought that their speaking skills had improved during the IBAS Level 1 course:

The majority of participants (95%) answered 'Yes' to question 3. ¿Mejoró tu capacidad para conversar en inglés durante el curso?

23) Participants believed that they had learned how to solve communication problems in English:

Many participants (80%) answered 'Yes' to question 4. ¿Consideras que aprendiste a resolver dificultades para comunicarte en inglés?

We can say that the data obtained in this study provided evidence that the enriched model of scaffolding, adapted from Hammond and Gibbons (2005) helped participants in this mixed-ability group overcome their different levels of knowledge and skills and achieve the language learning expected from the IBAS 100 course.

5. Discussion

Along the strategy implementation in this study, it was observed how approximately half of the participants gradually changed their initial reluctance to participate in oral tasks and started to enjoy interaction with different partners. However, not all of them improved their speaking skills at the same rate. Some learners expressed that it was difficult for them to adapt to frequent shifts of partners during the oral tasks. A few of them said that they felt more comfortable when talking with particular partners, and wanted to carry out all the tasks with them. The main reason seemed to be that in some cases, strategies were not enough to level differences in proficiency at that stage.

Some participants complained that it was difficult for them to understand some of their partners' talk since their pronunciation was not good. However, it could also be observed that some participants provided explicit advice to their partners if they noticed that they could not understand meanings or structures well. However, it should be emphasized that the teacher's support is crucial for the creation of a classroom environment with a proper balance of high challenge and high support to allow students take risks and channel their attention, effort and creativity to new zones of their ZPD.

6. Conclusions

As a consequence of the high challenge and support provided by the enriched model of scaffolding, participants were not only more engaged in their oral tasks, but also moved beyond their current level of proficiency to gradually expand vocabulary, improve pronunciation and correct language forms while becoming more self-confident about their speaking skills. Enhancement of interaction during oral tasks definitely took place during the strategy implementation, and for some learners this interaction became an opportunity to socialize and know more about their partners, which motivated them to hold longer conversations with them using the vocabulary taught and expanding it within the models of conversation they had learned.

The support from scaffolding was gradually withdrawn in an almost natural manner, as participants became more interested in their language learning and developed their own strategies to internalize the new language and use it. At the end of the course, participants generated their own semiotic systems to provide support to their stories, descriptions and dialogs. Undoubtedly, oral tasks in this study were also opportunities for participants to be critical about their different partners' speech and to self-correct their language errors through the shifts of partners and participant structures.

It can be said that the usefulness of the strategy model is subordinated to the ability to plan, select and sequence tasks in ways that take into account the different levels and skills of participants, and to give participants new learning challenges while providing them with the appropriate support for meeting those challenges. Since groups of language learners often share features of a mixed-ability group, the information obtained from this intervention may help English language teachers to deepen their understanding of the role of interaction in oral tasks and contribute to the design of strategies for fostering a type of interaction that leads to co-construction of meaning.

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APPENDIX A: Mariani's teaching/learning framework

High Challenge

Development/ Engagement	Anxiety/ Frustration
Comfort /cruising	Boredom/ Apathy

High Support   Low Support

Low Challenge
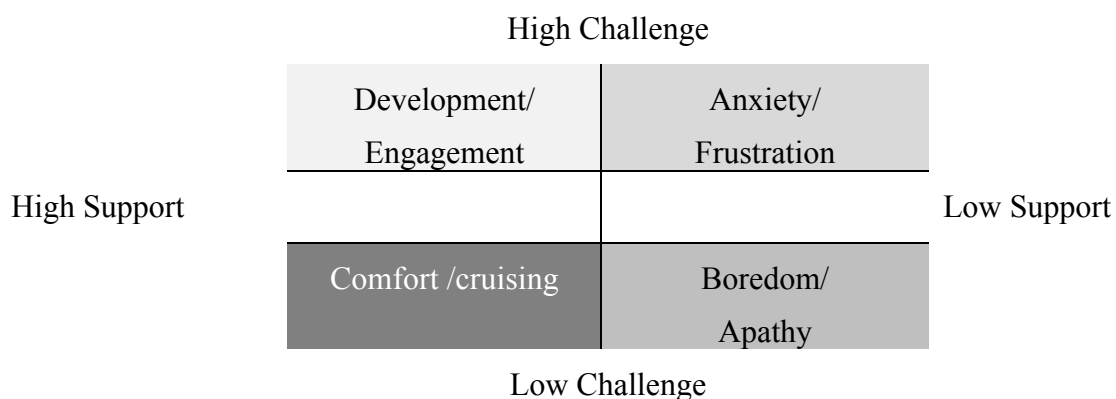
APPENDIX B: Activities for Strategy Implementation

Week	Activities	Materials for Semiotic System and Texts	Learners talk about:
1	Description of physical appearance of people.	Wall charts of physical traits	Height, build, hair, eyes and general

		Posters of famous people. Text: What is he/she like?	appearance of their favorite stars, family members and friends.
2	Interview about abilities and talents.	Pictures and video regarding abilities and talents Text: What can you do?	Things they can do, like playing the piano, playing a sport, driving a car or cooking a dish.
3	Comments about daily routines	Pictures and book illustrations about daily activities. Cardboard clocks. Cards with different times. Text: What do you do every day?	Their activities on weekdays and weekends, schedules and frequency.
4	Description of houses or apartments.	Pictures of parts of the house Cards with furniture and appliances Floor plans Text: Does it have a view?	People they live with. Rooms, furniture, appliances and accessories in their Dream House.
5	Dialogs for shopping clothes.	Slides about clothes for hot and cold weather. Pictures of weather, seasons and people wearing a variety of clothes. Text: What is he/she wearing?	Favorite season and type of weather. Clothes people wear. Sizes and prices of clothes and accessories.
6	Description of towns and cities	Pictures of landscape, places, transportation, typical food and leisure activities. Text: Vancouver	Location and best time to visit it, where to go, how to get there, what to do, what to eat and where to stay.

Appendix C1: Exploratory Questionnaire on Interaction

CUESTIONARIO SOBRE LA CLASE DE INGLES		Fecha _____		
1. Trabajo bien con otros compañeros.				
CASI SIEMPRE	SEGUIDO	A VECES	RARA VEZ	CASI NUNCA

2. Ayudo a otros compañeros a resolver problemas con el trabajo en clase.				
CASI SIEMPRE	SEGUIDO	A VECES	RARA VEZ	CASI NUNCA

3. Otros compañeros me ayudan a resolver problemas con el trabajo en clase.				
CASI SIEMPRE	SEGUIDO	A VECES	RARA VEZ	CASI NUNCA

4. La maestra está interesada en mis problemas con la clase.				
CASI SIEMPRE	SEGUIDO	A VECES	RARA VEZ	CASI NUNCA

5. La maestra me ayuda cuando tengo problemas con la clase.				
CASI SIEMPRE	SEGUIDO	A VECES	RARA VEZ	CASI NUNCA

6. Las preguntas que me hace la maestra me ayudan a entender la clase.				
CASI SIEMPRE	SEGUIDO	A VECES	RARA VEZ	CASI NUNCA

7. Hago preguntas durante la clase.				
CASI SIEMPRE	SEGUIDO	A VECES	RARA VEZ	CASI NUNCA

8. La maestra responde a mis preguntas.				
CASI SIEMPRE	SEGUIDO	A VECES	RARA VEZ	CASI NUNCA

9. Doy mi opinión y hago sugerencias acerca del trabajo en clase.				
CASI SIEMPRE	SEGUIDO	A VECES	RARA VEZ	CASI NUNCA

Appendix C.2: Participants' Answers to Exploratory Questionnaire with Percentages for each Question

Question 1	Casi siempre	Seguido	A veces	Rara vez	Casi nunca
	10	6	4	0	0
%	50	30	20	0	0

Question 2	Casi siempre	Seguido	A veces	Rara vez	Casi nunca
	1	8	10	1	0
%	5	40	50	5	0
Question 3	Casi siempre	Seguido	A veces	Rara vez	Casi nunca
	5	7	6	1	1
%	25	35	30	5	5
Question 4	Casi siempre	Seguido	A veces	Rara vez	Casi nunca
	10	4	3	3	0
%	50	20	15	15	0
Question 5	Casi siempre	Seguido	A veces	Rara vez	Casi nunca
	11	6	2	1	0
%	55	30	10	5	0
Question 6	Casi siempre	Seguido	A veces	Rara vez	Casi nunca
	9	5	6	0	0
%	45	25	30	0	0
Question 7	Casi siempre	Seguido	A veces	Rara vez	Casi nunca
	1	4	5	7	3
%	5	20	25	35	15
Question 8	Casi siempre	Seguido	A veces	Rara vez	Casi nunca
	12	7	1	0	0
%	60	35	5	0	0
Question 9	Casi siempre	Seguido	A veces	Rara vez	Casi nunca
	0	2	9	6	3
%	0	10	45	30	15

D. Participants' Written Reflections

Appendix D.1: Prompt

Escribe tus comentarios sobre la forma en que estás aprendiendo a platicar en inglés.

Appendix D.2: Transcript of Samples of Written Reflections

"....el material se me hace muy expresivo".

"Me funcionó de mejor manera mirar las imágenes y de esta forma identificar la idea que denotaba el texto con la imagen, en la descripción de una tercera persona".

"...cuando nos muestra pósters de artistas, se nos viene a la mente cómo es su personalidad, ojos, cabello, etc."

"A mi manera de pensar se me hace más atractivo aprender los temas con ejemplos, dibujos, imágenes. Se me hace más didáctico y más fácil de aprender".

"....me sirve para aprendérmelos mejor y que no se me olvide tan fácilmente...."

"Los materiales sí me ayudaron un poco a observar más los detalles y conversar con mis compañeros..."

".....me sirve [....] como una ayuda para socializar más con los compañeros".

"...y también las copias que nos dio sirvieron para reforzar los contenidos antes vistos..."

"Algunas dudas que tenía sobre el tema se resolvieron durante la clase al intercambiar opiniones con mis compañeros".

"Las dudas que tuve al momento se las pregunté a mis compañeros. Ellos me las supieron explicar más entendibles para mí".

"La maestra no sólo lo explica una vez sino que lo explica muchas veces pero en distintas formas y hace que nosotros lo practiquemos mucho, que interactuemos con los demás, así aprendemos a [...] hablar y escuchar".

"...nuestra profesora utilizó varios materiales de apoyo para poder entender mejor y si teníamos una duda la profesora completaba mayor información y aclarábamos las dudas entre todo el grupo".

"Aprendo más hablando".

"... al platicar con otros compañeros se me hace más divertida la clase porque los conoces un poco más y aprendes a comunicarte con otras personas".

"Los ejercicios de conversación entre compañeros me parecen muy útiles para poner en práctica lo aprendido en clase".

"En la clase anterior me gustó platicar con mis compañeros, fue muy divertido y me ayudó a practicar".

"La clase fue un reto para mí, enfrentar mis miedos y timidez para trabajar en clase".

"Veo un avance en mi aprendizaje [...] los temas han sido nutridos y cada uno especial por la aportación extra que usted siempre pone..."

"El levantarnos a interactuar con mis compañeros nos anima a poner entusiasmo a la clase..."

"La dinámica de la clase me gusta mucho, en general todas las clases tienen diferentes actividades que me motivan y estimulan a practicar el idioma".

"Y espero seguir aprendiendo más cosas porque me ha interesado seguir aprendiendo".

"...había muchas cosas que yo desconocía, ya que el haberlas aprendido me sirvió de mucho para poder conversar con mis compañeros".

"...sé que poco a poco iré aprendiendo y a poder platicar más a fondo con mis compañeros...."

"Los temas que hemos visto se me han hecho muy interesantes, y que vaya conociendo nuevas preguntas para poder dialogar más a fondo".

Appendix E.1: Final Questionnaire

CUESTIONARIO

Grupo _____   Fecha _____

Instrucciones. Por favor, lee atentamente cada pregunta y marca con una X tu respuesta.

1) ¿Obtuviste del curso los conocimientos y habilidades que esperabas?

Sí ○   No ○

2) ¿Fue adecuada la forma en que aprendiste?

Sí ○   No ○

3) ¿Mejoró tu capacidad para conversar en inglés durante el curso?

Sí ○   No ○

4) ¿Consideras que aprendiste a resolver dificultades para comunicarte en inglés?

Sí ○   No ○

5) ¿Los materiales visuales (dibujos, posters, diagramas, ilustraciones del libro) te ayudaron a entender mejor los contenidos del curso (gramática, vocabulario, estructuras, etc.)?

Sí ○   No ○

6) ¿Los textos con los que trabajaste en clase te ayudaron para aclarar tus dudas?

Sí ○   No ○

7) ¿Los audios que escuchaste te sirvieron de apoyo para participar en las
conversaciones?

Sí ○   No ○

8) ¿Encontraste útil para tu aprendizaje participar en conversaciones con diversos
compañeros en parejas, pequeños grupos y con toda la clase?

Sí ○   No ○

9) ¿Te sentiste con confianza para hacerle preguntas a la maestra cuando tuviste dudas?

Sí ○   No ○

10) ¿La maestra resolvió tus dudas cuando le hiciste preguntas?

Sí ○   No ○

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Appendix: E.2. Participants' Answers to Final Questionnaire with Percentages for each Question

Questions	Sí	No
1	18	2
	90%	10%
2	19	1
	95%	5%
3	19	1
	95%	5%
4	16	4
	80%	20%
5	19	1
	95%	5%
6	19	1
	95%	5%
7	17	3
	85%	15%

8	18	2
	90%	10%
9	19	1
	95%	5%
10	20	0
	100%	0%
Totals:	184	16
	92%	8%

TRIGGERING REFLECTION

After reading the chapter, answer the following questions:

- Observe you own context and identify your students' attitudes towards working in groups when trying to enhance the speaking skill.
- Revise the data collected and underlined those aspects expressed by students, which were not mentioned in the chapter. Enlist those that you consider relevant to take into account. Write your reasons.
- State some of the benefits of group work to enhance and improve students' oral proficiency.
- Enlist the tasks suggested in the chapter to improve the oral interaction between students. Suggest tasks according to your own context. How much scaffolding do you prepare?
- Design an action plan based on the procedure suggested in this chapter to promote the collaborative construction of meaning in order to develop the oral skill. Implement it.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Integrating Speaking Practice through Aural Texts and Self-Recording in an EFL Virtual Environment

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Abstract

This paper reports on an intervention carried out at the Orizaba Language Center (CIO) of Universidad Veracruzana (UV) with a virtual English II group in order to integrate speaking practice through asynchronous communication. The study examines the use of aural texts to provide learners with models for self-recording and ensure their oral practice. The findings suggest suitability to implement the proposed strategy in this virtual learning environment for languages. The practicalities and implications throughout this intervention are also presented in this work.

Resumen

Este documento informa acerca de una intervención llevada a cabo en el Centro de Idiomas de Orizaba (CIO) de la Universidad Veracruzana (UV) con un grupo Inglés II virtual con el fin de integrar la práctica de expresión oral a través de comunicación asíncrona. El estudio examina el uso de textos orales para proporcionar a los estudiantes modelos para grabarse y garantizar su práctica. Los resultados sugieren la idoneidad de la aplicación de la estrategia propuesta en este ambiente de aprendizaje virtual de idiomas. La practicidad y las implicaciones a lo largo de esta intervención también se presentan en este trabajo.

1. Introduction

With technological resources added to the field of education, new ways of course delivery are being structured. In language learning, Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) has become one of the new pedagogical practices which offer the possibility of learning to those who would not find it possible to participate in a traditional face-to-face (F2F) experience. However, the use of VLE has several implications regarding the teaching-learning process as well as language course design that include the four skills.

In Universidad Veracruzana students must cover a collection of common core subjects which are called Formative Basic Area Courses. Amongst these there are English I and English II, which are taught at Language Centers along the different regions of Veracruz. The level of these subjects is anchored to level A1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. These courses are commonly offered in face-to-face mode or in an autonomous environment.

To provide another option for students of English I and II, UV has offered virtual English courses since 2008. Through the use of the institutional e-platform, Eminus, many students have been benefited; however, there is still room for improvement on these online courses regarding the integration of the four skills. The lack of materials and activities to promote the oral skill practice for e-learners at UV is one of the major areas of opportunity for the online courses. Individual attempts to deal with this issue have been made trying to set up F2F sessions or videoconferencing; however, no formal research has been developed in this area, nor have decisions been made to approach this hardship. As a consequence, it has been on the discretion of e-tutors how to support e-learners to practice speaking skills in this modality.

This situation made the teacher-researcher look for ways to promote speaking practice in an online course; this does not mean assuming that students do not practice the speaking skill independently; however, given the fact that the syllabus includes speaking as a skill to be promoted and tested in any of the modalities offered, it is necessary to make sure that students are given the same opportunities to be exposed to the target language and to be provided with a means to practice it. In order to do this it was considered advisable to implement the use of aural texts in the course. Therefore, two objectives were derived from these identified needs; the first objective of this study was to provide students with aural input in order to present models for their speaking practice; and the second objective was to help students in their speaking practice in such VLE.

From the aforementioned objectives, two research questions were addressed:

RQ1**:** How effective can it be to provide online students with selected aural texts as language models?

RQ2**:** How can the models selected help in the use of self-recording activities to practice speaking in such VLE?

This paper reports on an Action Research (AR) intervention carried out in an English II online group during ten weeks of the term. In the intervention, recordings were a means to approach students and establish oral communication between teacher and students. In this regard, asynchronous communication mainly through forums on the platform was considered a feasible way to provide students with a means to produce speech through the development of guided self-recording activities. This paper presents information on the methodology, instruments for data collection, students' participation as well as their perceptions, and discussion of the results. It ends with a set of considerations and suggestions for future interventions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Speaking and listening in ELT

Speaking may be defined, in general terms, as the ability to convey our thoughts, ideas, feelings, requirements and opinions through the oral medium. Another way to look at speaking is as an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information (Brown, 1994, Burns & Joyce, 1997 in Cunningham, 1999: para.4)

As it has been mentioned, learning this skill results relevant to the learner and many times success in language learning is measured in terms of spoken language improvement (Richards, 2008: 19). However, developing oral skills becomes especially difficult when the learner has little exposure to the target language and culture (Shumin, 2002, cited in Kawai, 2008:218). Therefore, regarding VLE it is evident the need to provide learners with specific conditions to develop oral skills.

Apart from specific conditions, it is necessary to provide students with input that best help them be exposed to the target language. Listening can work as a good source of input, for it is defined as "a complex and active process of interpretation in which listeners match what they hear with what they already know" (Vandergrift, 2002), ergo making new associations and negotiations of meaning in spoken interaction. Bearing this in mind and considering speaking as its complement, we could say that we all learn to speak by listening. There is no output without input. That is to say, without listening there is no speaking.

2.2. Speaking in Virtual Learning Environment

How to approach the teaching of oral skills has long been a controversial issue in ELT methodology (Richards, 2008, p.2). In regards to providing students with the best possible educational experiences in a flexible and stimulating environment, it is important to find alternative ways to support them in their speaking practice (Pulist, 2001, p. 38). This is especially important in the case of language teaching and learning speaking skills through VLE, where oral communication does not occur unless we supply specific conditions. In F2F settings the use of self-recording has been proposed by several authors (Linge, 2012, para. 2; Méndez, 2010, p. 11; Kelly, 2004, para. 10) as an alternative to offer students an opportunity to produce the target language with the advantages of lowering anxiety, pacing their time and rehearsing.

2.3. Speaking in asynchronous communication

In asynchronous communication, students contribute their ideas at a different time to other students and the tutor (Coady, Gilhooly, McManus, & O'Connell M, 2003). Unlike in spontaneous speaking in F2F or synchronous communication settings, it is evident that self-recording has its own characteristics and spoken language does not occur naturally; however, this can be of certain benefit since planning is allowed, the recordings may be stored making speaking permanent, and audio feedback can be later offered. The scope of this study is then, to consider asynchronous communication as an advantageous way for learners to ensure oral practice.

2.4. Technology in online instruction

Technology can provide us with different tools to approach language learning and teaching. There are different ways in which technological resources can be present, from aural text to video. Aural texts involve the transmission of information through the auditory sensory system—the system of speaking and hearing. Recordings made by the e-tutor can be used as a way to approach learners since the very beginning of the course. Besides, they may also be useful to provide feedback.

Video is at best defined as the selection and sequence of messages in an audio-visual context. Different applied surveys suggest that students like learning a language through the use of videos (Canning-Wilson, 2000: para. 1). In a study by Mittered & McQueen (2009) it was showed that paying attention to subtitles (in the language spoken in the film or video) can boost

language acquisition. Hearing and reading foreign words and expressions simultaneously helps incorporate what you hear into your phonetic understanding of the language, so we can understand future words as they come up — and familiarize ourselves with the sounds of new language.

Varied applications of videos in the classroom can be expanded to online courses. Video offers the learner an opportunity to improve their ability to understand comprehensible input. In the literature reviewed, much of the information is related to the use of videos for teaching listening; however, this can be adapted in order to design activities applicable for both, listening as well as speaking, taking advantage of the material.

2.5. Self-recording in language learning.

In regards to providing students with "the best possible educational experiences in a flexible and stimulating environment" (Pulist, 2001:38), it is important to find alternative ways to support students in their speaking practice. This is especially important in the case of language teaching and learning speaking skills through VLE where, as it has been mentioned before, oral communication does not occur unless we supply specific conditions. In F2F settings the use of self-recording has been proposed as an alternative to offer students higher exposure to the target language. Some proposals and advantages of self-recording use are reviewed in this section.

If pupils record themselves, they can listen to what they have said afterwards, fully concentrating on their language production, trying to find things to improve (Linge, 2012: para. 2); ergo, self-recording can be considered as a valuable resource to improve one's speaking ability. While we are speaking, it is difficult to monitor the produced language. We sometimes self-correct and this could be helpful. However, being too critical or overcorrected may result counterproductive and leave us tongue tied.

Mimicking native speakers is suggested as a way of learning pronunciation. For example, beginners can use their textbook as a source of texts to be recorded; they may also record themselves and progress in their learning by listening to their mistakes. Even scripted language can be taken as a resource model for self-recording. "When students read aloud, they do at least two things: they listen to themselves and they improve their reading skills. When reading aloud, you cannot skip words the way you do when reading silently. Every word, particularly the collocations, must be spoken. Students learn to correct themselves because they can hear the way

they say things aloud and can compare that to the way a native speaker reads" (Kelly 2004: para. 10). In this point we need to remember that "reading out loud is multi-sensory. People tend to remember more about a subject—and engage with it more deeply—when they involve more of their senses. When students see and hear their words, those words resonate more loudly with them" (UTM University's Writing Center, 2011:3). This is consistent with one cognitive strategy: practicing (Oxford, 1990:45). This strategy is based on helping students by providing them with examples of target language speech to imitate aloud intonation patterns, words or phrases. This can be used by learners as a means to improve pronunciation, use of vocabulary, and using language formulas and patterns.

Reading out loud and recording speaking have been proposed in some studies as "before speaking strategies" (Oxford, 2013). Self-recording can be used as a strategy dispensed to learners by which they become motivated to practice speaking.

There have been different studies on self-recording as a way for students to be exposed to the language outside the classroom. It has been also conceptualized as oral homework by Mendez (2010:1); but in the end both concepts are oriented to providing students with means to practice speaking outside the classroom (Antoni, 2011: Description and rationale, para 1). Self-recording has been employed as a mechanism to give "more attention to a critical skill that demands a lot of exposure and serious practice to master" (Mendez, 2010:10). It is important to mention that at the time of that study there was not enough technology as today. Nowadays we can use online platforms to provide learners with tips for their oral homework as well as different ways to upload their files.

In addition, self-recording can motivate students by helping them to discover the way they sound, the way they speak, and the mistakes they make. By doing this, "learners will better know where to go with their learning" (Antoni 2011: Lit. review, para: 2) according to their own revising.

3. Methodology

This study employs action research as an approach in favor of a flexible way to intervene in a problematic situation in an e-learning environment. One characteristic of Action Research, according to Burns (2010, p. 2), is that self-reflective practice plays an essential role in a teachers' life, whose everyday practice leads to situations worth researching.

Having observed the lack of materials for students to practice speaking, it became paramount to find out what my students did in this regard and then, devise a plan to support learners in this area.

3.1.   Participants

The intervention was carried out in the group INGLÉS II CIOR 001 (Feb-Ago 2014) as it was identified on the EMINUS platform. The group was initially formed by 20 students registered at the Language Center of Orizaba (CIO); eleven of which agreed to take part in the project; and nine, out of the eleven, participated in most of the activities planned, as well as supplied information throughout the study. The participants were enrolled in one of eight B.A. programs at the UV at the time of the intervention, and six of them reported to be working. Three of the participants were students from other UV regions.

3.2.   Instruments and Data collection

Observational and non-observational methods were used in order to collect data. The following instruments helped in the development of this intervention.

- *Questionnaires.-* Three initial questionnaires made with Google Docs were delivered online and were used to determine the following information:
    - Students' general background and previous experience on speaking skills.
    - Students' expectations towards oral expression.
    - Students' needs related to specific topics in the English II syllabus.
- *Students' Self-recordings.-* Self-recordings were sent by two means:
    - WhatsApp: An initial voice message, via WhatsApp was sent by the participants as a means to start oral communication as well as to explore their oral performance on a specific topic.
    - Attached audio files: Throughout six forums on the platform Eminus, students attached an audio file to their posts. This enabled the students to show an evidence of their oral practice and allowed the practitioner to obtain information regarding their performance.

- *Guided reflections. -* Three questions were given for each speaking activity along the six forums on Eminus. Information about students' perceptions on their learning and performance was obtained from this source.
- *Speaking Assessment. -* A mid-term face to face oral exam, designed by the researcher, was administered at the CIO with the help of a member of the academic staff as an examiner.
- *Teacher's observations on students' oral production. -* These observations were mainly taken from two sources: students' recordings and students' performance during the mid-term exam. It is worth saying that even when measuring improvement was not the purpose of this intervention, it was important to take notes on learners' performance in the mid-term oral exam, to observe possible progress and to provide learners with feedback.
- *Final Survey Questionnaire. -* A 9-item final survey questionnaire was designed with the help of Google Docs and delivered online. For each of the RQ four items were designed, and a question addressed technology use. Learners were required to rate the questionnaire items on a four-point rating scale and then, explain their responses. This enabled the teacher-researcher to wrap up students' perceptions.

Appendix 1 shows when the instruments were administered.

3.3. Intervention description

Based on the English II subject syllabus and students' responses from the initial questionnaires, a selection of aural material was made in order to provide students with models. Educational videos as well as audio files recorded by the teacher-researcher were used as input and self-recording activities were planned to be developed in six forums. The forums mainly covered four of the units included in the syllabus and responded to students' needs-based on their responses-. Topics in the forums were related to the unit topics in the syllabus. From the teacher-researcher experience and the literature reviewed, the following characteristics were taken into account when selecting links to video clips from the Internet, and specifically, from YouTube:

- Spoken language used: English
- Some of them had captions or part of the videos displayed captions

- Clarity
- Length: 2-4 minutes
- structures, vocabulary and speed according to the level

It is worth mentioning that being this a "section" group, six special additional forums for the intervention were opened. This was necessary because the pre-established forums in the online course are not intended for this kind of speaking practice. For each of the forums, a description of the activity was provided along with the links, audio files and material necessary to be used as models. Appendix 2 shows how activities were distributed along the forums and how the units of the syllabus were approached.

It is worth highlighting that forums were firstly scheduled according to the curse calendar, however, as participation did not occur in those terms, it was decided to leave forums opened so learners were able to perform the activities at their pace. Besides, during the intervention the teacher-researcher recorded comments and suggestions for the students and posted them as feedback in the forums. Leaving the forums opened then, was also important to give students the opportunity to review their participations and / or feedback offered.

During the intervention, Guidelines on how to convert the audio if needed were provided in the forum and shared by the students. The students posted ideas on what and how to handle technology and what resulted best for their recordings. The teacher-researcher suggested using Audacity, a free audio editor and recorder. The main technological devices used by students to record their activities were their cell phones and their laptop computers.

3.4. Data Analysis

Students' reflections along the implementation as well as learners' responses to the final questionnaire were analyzed to look for possible subcategories. Students' recordings and oral production in the exam were inspected in order to identify patterns and lexical elements which provided evidence of the use of the material.

The recordings made by the participants were subject to lexical, syntactic and content analysis. Students' oral production in the mid-term exam was assessed with the help of the institutional scale used for the end of term speaking test. Extracts were written down during the examination for their analysis with the aim of providing learners with feedback. Students' responses of the final questionnaire supplied students' perceptions towards their oral production

and the possible benefits achieved through the activities promoted in the study. The responses were analyzed in order to obtain subcategories.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Impact of Selected Aural Texts as Language Models

As stated before, the first research question aimed at finding out the contribution of the selected aural texts as input material for the online students. In order to answer this, information in two main aspects was obtained from participants' reflections along the activities performed in the forums and the final survey questionnaire: usefulness of aural materials and their acceptance.

In regards of usefulness of aural materials students responded positively to the input which was provided as models for speaking: 50% of students thought the materials were very useful and the rest selected "rather useful" as their response (See Appendix 3). According to some students, the materials helped them to understand concepts better and raised their interest: "…they helped me to review and understand concepts better" (S1); "… as I got my attention to specific language" (S6). No student reported disagreement regarding the materials. Most participants considered the materials were adequate and relevant: "…because (unlike the usual material on the platform) a tool like this (videos and audio files) is necessary "(S4); "… the audios and videos were appropriate to the level" (S6); well selected in the sense that they met their needs: "… in this environment you need to listen to audios" (S4); "…as this is not a F2F class, the only way to listen is by means of videos and audios" (S7) and pointed out clarity and easiness to understand them as two main factors to regard the materials as appropriate:"…regarding the audio, the material was clear…" (S1); "…they were clear and easy to understand…" (S3); "… and some of them were subtitled in case I needed the new words…"; besides, they considered the material was a good reference model: "The material gives you good examples…" (S1) and "it makes me think about how to ask my own questions." (S2); "… they are didactic" (S4); "… listening to someone else helps me a lot… and they were useful as a model to record myself" (S5).

As for the part of the aural texts acceptance, all of students liked the audio or video selected as input (See Appendix 4). Some participants mentioned that they found the input suitable for their everyday context: "…because they included practical things to express…" (S1), "…they have everyday situations, situations you commonly face" (S7); they considered the

materials were graspable and practical: "…they were easy to understand" (S7); "…opening the links was practical…" (S8). Some of them regarded the audio and video samples as dynamic, specific, entertaining and convenient: "…the videos were dynamic…" (S4); "…they were dynamic and matched the topics" (S5); "...they were fun, entertaining…" (S3); "…because I needed something to listen…they got my attention" (S7).

It was also relevant for the teacher researcher to receive students' feedback and they were asked for possible adjustments or suggestions about the input material. Participants agreed that they would not modify what was selected. Reasons matched previous categories such as adequacy, clarity, required level and entertainment. One student mentioned that the material was helpful and raised interest: "…good for people who are not familiar with English …you get used to it and it becomes interesting…" (S3); "…with the project UV online learning will improve" (S5). On the other hand, some needs, such as increasing the number of videos and a better organization, were pointed out: "…more videos were necessary to increase interest" (S2); "… I would like the material to be better organized … include them in the course material…" (S5).

From the comments learners made it is revealed that the models helped them to raise awareness toward their needs for improvement, correction and production. This is strongly related to what students produced in the activities along the project and it is presented with the findings in the following section.

4.2.   Impact of Selected Models in VLE Self-Recording Oral Practice

The answer to the second research question comprises students' perceptions towards the self-recording activities and their acceptance, participation, and lexical and linguistic aspects observed. Students' reflections showed different perspectives towards self-recording activities as a means to promote speaking practice. Concerning the usefulness of self-recording activities, participants gave their opinion related to the usefulness of this strategy and favorable responses (very or rather useful) were obtained. Only one participant indicated that the activities were of little help (See Appendix 5). Learners considered pronunciation as one of the aspects on which this strategy had an impact: "When you listen to your pronunciation, you improve your diction" (S1); "It was useful as I was able to practice the pronunciation of many words" (S2); "…over time it helped me to improve my pronunciation" (S3). Particularly, several comments were related with promoting practice: "I had never recorded myself…now I recorded and practiced."

(S1); "By practicing I can remember…" (S3); "In a way I was forced to practice my oral expression several times." (S4), "because I practiced oral expression" (S5); "I rehearsed several times until there was an improvement ..." (S6). It helped students to raise self- awareness: "I noticed some mistakes when expressing my ideas"(S1); "… recordings from classmates who speak correctly were also of help, as I could compare (my performance)" (S4); "because I hear what I say so I can see what pronunciation I need" (S5); "… we noticed mistakes…for example when I talk too fast and it makes me not to understand what I say" (S7); "...you continue reviewing and noticing mistakes in your diction." (S8). Another aspect mentioned was that of improvement: "I had to start it all over (when it went not the way I wanted)" (S6).

As for the opportunity to listen to their own self-recorded material, the participants agreed that their recordings would be useful for further practice, as a means of preparation for their final oral exam, and to remember "concepts", this is to say, structures: "… I listen to and practice what I recorded." (S1); "It is a way to keep on practicing."(S5); "I keep on using (self-recordings) to study… and for the exam. So this shows the importance of this kind of activities." (S8); "…it gives me the chance to improve my pronunciation" (S7). A participant included portability as an advantage: "You can travel peacefully on public transport, listening to your English with headphones."(S6).

Regarding how pleasant it was to record themselves, some students considered self-recording enjoyable while others felt embarrassed at the beginning of the project. A student felt free to upload videos and suggested that other students do the same in order to practice and share their performance. However, the rest of the participants preferred to upload audio files only. On the other hand, most of the participants found it rather or very useful. It helped some participants to build confidence: "I had to deal with embarrassment" (S1); "…I overcame this (embarrassment) throughout the project." (S7). Other students found the activities entertaining: "Listening to my own voice was pleasant, even fun…" (S4); "because listening to your voice is fun … it (self-recording) makes it interesting. I liked the practice…I laughed at mistakes I made." (S6). On the other hand, two students did not find it pleasant to record themselves, being the reasons: "… not that I did not like it… because I did most of the activities in a row" (S2); "…because I know I'm not good at it, but somehow I had to start" (S8).

With respect to suggestions for the teacher in order to improve the activities, students' responses are divided into those which did not suggest any changes, and those which provided

some information to be taken into account. Suggestions made by participants were: "…to have this kind of activities for other units…" (S1); "…only to have this as part of the assessment… not optional …" (S2),

As the intervention had to do with offering students the means to practice their oral expression on the platform, it was important to observe students' response to the activities in terms of participation. The graphic below shows the number of participations for each of the self-recording activities distributed along the opened forums in the project.
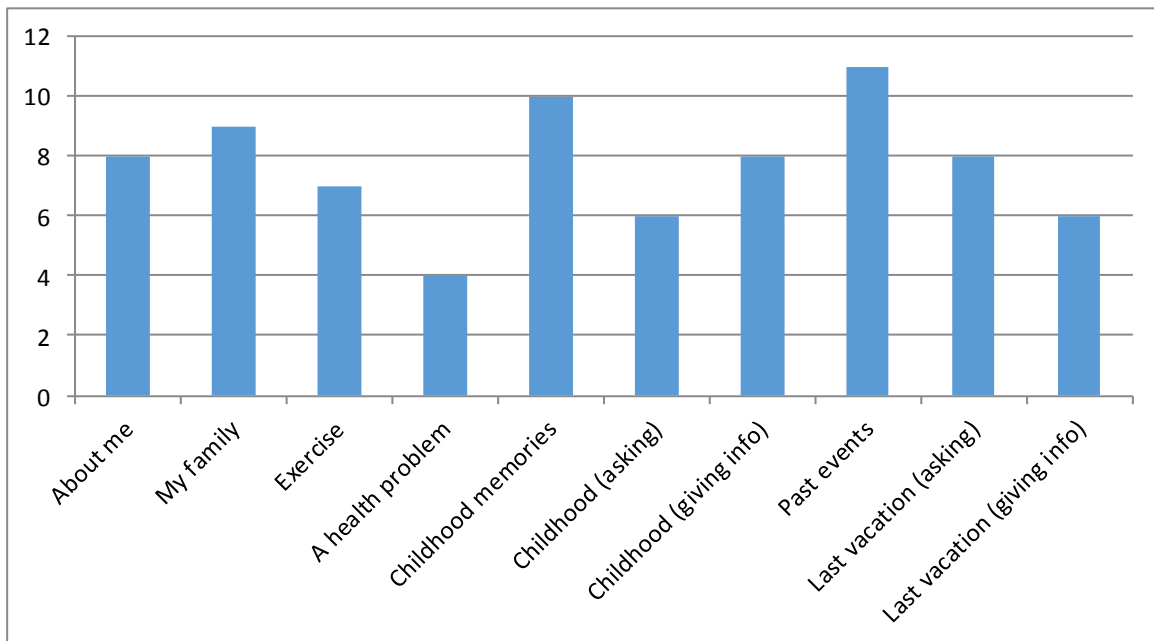
Graphic: **Students' Participation along the Forums**

It should be emphasized that this was a first attempt to explore how activities intended to promote speaking through the VLE EMINUS, could be carried out. A crucial issue is that of designing activities which help students engage and develop learning skills. It is well known that classroom activities many a time involve two or more language skills, for example: listening and speaking, listening and writing. Supported by recent trends towards skill integration (Brown, 2007, p. 284), it is worthwhile approaching the syllabus in question taking advantage of self-recording and asynchronous communication. An activity from the current online course design which focuses only on writing was adapted and optimized in order to promote at least two other skills. The same spaces, in this case, the discussion forums, were used to attach audio files as well as written

work. In fact, files recorded by the teacher were used to pose questions which students, instead of reading, could listen to and then answer to them. This seems to have worked well when interaction among students did not work (See Appendix 6).

As for the participation via WhatsApp only four students sent their message. This was done over two weeks as two of them thought they had to send it to the WhatsApp group and felt shy to do it. They finally agreed to send a private message. With respect to lexical and grammatical aspects produced along the self-recording activities, they may be divided into those obtained before, during and at the end of the implementation.

Before the implementation

From their voice message (WhatsApp) "Talk about your last vacation.", it was observed that two students confused the use of simple past with past progressive forms producing the last one instead: " I was eating …", " "I was swimming …" Another student did not produce the past form of verbs at all; "I meet…", "I buy…", and "I take." One of the participants conveyed his ideas even though he lacked linking words and had some difficulties to pronounce the past form of regular verbs such as: played, walked, travelled, and reached.

During the implementation

Students were able to identify and produce different structures and chunks of language to express the same information: "**We are** four people **in** my family" (S1), "**There are** five people **in** my family."(S6); "**In my family there are** four people."(S7); "**As a child** I liked to play with my sister..." (S5); and "**When I was a child** I played with my cousins."

Some students were able to connect ideas: "The best day of the week was Sunday **because** I went out with my family."(S4); and some used new vocabulary and formulae in a proper way: "I'm not feeling well. I have a headache… I'm sorry to hear that."(S1), "I hope you feel better."(S5), Participants made use of phrases: "I'd like to tell you about ... "; "**I remember that my best friend was** my cousin…"; "**As a child I** liked to…"; "When I was a child…", and new vocabulary such as: extended family, passed away, trim, weightlifting, lie down, awful, which was included in the input. They also used adjectives of personality and vocabulary related to health problems. Some of them used linking words, for instance, but, so, later, then: "The best day of the week was Saturday **because** I went out with my family…" (S2) and arranged ideas in

sequence: "Last weekend I wrote a recipe from my grandmother. I made a cake and later I talked to my parents and had a piece of cake. I read an article, wrote a summary and sent it to the teacher."(S4).

Throughout the intervention students talked about past events. They used different time expressions for this, like: yesterday, last week, last weekend, as well as verbs. These different elements were part of the material provided. It may be said that students responded well to the semi-controlled activity "Talking about past events" as they made use of the material in order to build their own audio texts.

Different levels of performance and overall regarding language aspects such as pronunciation, vocabulary, and use of language structures were observed. With the exception of one participant who went to a private high school, the rest of the participants group showed difficulty for question formation in past. One of the videos used as input in the project provided a useful model to form questions in past for specific topics. However, some students still struggled when recording their questions. This had been previously noted in the written activities assigned as part of the course; therefore, they were given feedback and some remedial work was assigned. When asked about it two students accepted not having watched the videos for different reasons, and going directly to their recording activity. It was also common for the others to find it difficult to deal with questions although they had started to clarify this aspect through their practice, and the material and feedback provided.

As for the midterm oral exam, there were constraints which impeded to administer it to all the participants, one of them being that three of them studied out of town. However, with respect to the five students who took the exam, some improvement was observed regarding the production of some verbs in past and their pronunciation. Some phrases and words used in the audio material were incorporated by some students, for example: "I remember my best friend was...", "When I was a child...", "school subject..." and so forth. Some students were able to structure questions correctly and some others still had difficulty to use them.

After the implementation

On the other hand, some observations were made in the end-of-term speaking test, in which most of the students showed to be familiar with the structure of questions in past and were able to carry out the tasks in some way with confidence. Students' reflections and production revealed, in first

place, that the use of selected materials might result of benefit since the material provided them with models for speaking; another benefit was that students were able to be exposed to the target language. Secondly, from students' perceptions, the teacher-researcher's observations along the implementation, and the results obtained in the end-of-term speaking test, it seems that self-recording may offer an advisable way to approach speaking practice for the virtual English course on EMINUS.

4.3. Technology

Being this a VLE environment, it was imperative to find out about the use of technology. Suggestions from students ranged among increasing the number of file formats accepted on Eminus: "… there should be more formats accepted on the platform Eminus…" (S1); having a means (on Eminus) to record online (online voice recorder): "… it would be very useful to have a means to record on line, on Eminus itself…" (S4); and homogenizing the format of files: "…having the same format, mp3, would be better, as it opens faster… " (S3). Participants agreed that they do have the necessary tools in order to put these kinds of projects into practice: "… we have the technological tools to carry out projects like this…" (S5); but accepted that others may have needs: "… but it would be a good idea to provide participants with a recording and uploading guide for those who are not familiar with this…" (S6).

Availability of equipment when incorporating technology in class projects is critical; however, in this study lack of equipment was no reported by students and it could be assumed, as two students commented, that they are prepared for these kinds of projects. Regarding alternative communication, from a previous group and the group under study, only one student reported not having a smartphone and then, it was not possible for him to join the WhatsApp group. Nonetheless, this did not represent a real problem, since communication was kept through EMINUS and when necessary we used text messaging to be in touch. It seems that even when students are not interviewed before registering for the online course to find out about technology skills they possess, they can find the way to handle them. Some students reported having asked a friend or a family member for technological help in order to work on their recordings. This does not mean that we should leave out information regarding technology when running projects of this nature. On the contrary, we must make sure that technology will be an ally to improve learning and not a constraint for its happenstance.

5. Limitations

Some of the limitations for this research were the time taken for students to read the messages to be well informed about the research project, and their time to respond to those messages. It is important to point out that other limitations that are not responsibility of the students nor of the facilitator were: first, at the time this intervention was carried out, the section courses were uploaded after the regular classes had begun, resulting in a delay in the development of the activities planned; second, when students accessed EMINUS they only found the default course listed and saw there were no materials, which made some of them anxious; these limitations made the process of integrating the group not to occur until two or three weeks after the term began; third, students are not always aware of how virtual courses are managed and the motivation required to take part in this learning environment.

Those factors made it difficult to run the activities smoothly. It had been planned to set deadlines for each of the forums considering a week to develop the activities. However, after observing students' limited participation within that period, it was necessary to leave the forums open and allow them to participate at their own pace. Consequently, in the forums where interaction among students had been planned, the activities took longer and, even when interaction among some students took place, some students preferred to answer the questions that the teacher-researcher had posted or decided to make their own dialogue, as it was suggested.

Another aspect which must be taken into account is the workload students have at school, which means they registered in this modality because they considered it would be a way to save time to devote to other school duties and avoid commuting to the language center. Some students were enrolled in upper semesters in their faculties and they were doing internships or working in their thesis at the time of this study. This means that they could not devote adequate time to English activities and, even when they responded positively to most of the activities planned in the forums, it was observed that they did not do it on a regular basis. As a result of this, the oral mid-term exam had to be postponed, as I had not seen much participation from students in the forums. Although they had accepted to take part in the intervention study, by the time I had planned to administer the exam they said they did not feel prepared and they asked me for time to participate in the forums more actively. I must say that at a certain point during the implementation this situation had caused some discouragement on the teacher researcher. The situation changed once the teacher researcher met with the group to give them the mid-term

written test and exchange ideas and feelings. They expressed their interests in trying the self-recording strategy and desire to participate.

On the other hand, the comments regarding improvement on organization of the implementation, as suggested by one of the students, was closely related to the long list of assignments to be developed along the forums which are part of the activities to be assessed. The assessment of those activities represented only 5% of the total grade for students and this student found it difficult and tiring to take part in all of them. He clarified that it was difficult at the beginning to take part of the project, for there was too much information included in the course itself. All this must be considered to make decisions regarding the planning of the activities as students can feel demotivated due to the load of information they have to handle.

6. Conclusions

As the information reveals, it could be reasoned that the utilization of asynchronous communication through self-recording can help to promote speaking practice among e-learners. Generally speaking, the implementation of the plan suggests that self-recording to promote speaking in an asynchronous session is feasible and may result motivating for students. The positive feedback from students in the present study on the use of self-recording for practicing their speaking skills help to confirm what studies consulted in the literature review claim about the benefits of its use. On the other hand, the results may encourage other teachers to develop this idea in their group or other students to get involved in future projects like this including other language skills.

An aspect which must be highly considered is that of ensuring students-facilitator communication from the very beginning of the course. Approaching students and helping them become familiar with the VLE as well as taking care of time management is important in order to accomplish and take advantage of the planned activities along the term.

One of the implications from this study is related to a reflection made by the UNESCO (2009, p. 219), which states that "to effectively harness the potential of new technologies, teaching staff require support, training, and guidance, to learn new skills and determine how best to incorporate technology into teaching strategies that make sense for individual teaching styles and student' learning needs." In this case, we must make sure, as e-tutors, that we are familiar with the platform features in order to take advantage of them and then be able to explain to e-

learners the benefits of this strategy for their speaking skill practice. As Hall (2001) says: "for language learners and teachers, the task becomes one of reshaping the classroom as a place that fosters the co-construction of knowledge, understanding, and practice with technology serving as a fully integrated tool used to achieve these pedagogical objectives" (Hall, 2001, cited in van Compernolle &Williams, 2009:16). This is strongly related to VLE. Therefore, we should not leave aside the fact that still in VLE; our duty as teachers is providing students with opportunities to learn, and take advantage of the tools offered by any e-learning platform to accomplish specific pedagogical objectives.

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APPENDIX 1: Data collection instruments as planned

Instruments	Online communication	Consent letter	Initial Questionnaire	Background Questionnaire	Questionnaire oral awareness	Diagnostic recording	Guided reflections	Self-recordings	Mid-term oral exam	Final questionnaire
Term begins Feb 4										
Week 1 Feb 10	√	√								
Week 2 Feb 17			√	√	√	√				
Week 3 Feb 24							√	√		
Week 4 Feb							√	√		
Week 5 March							√	√		
Week 6 March							√	√		
Week 7 March							√	√		
Week 8 March							√	√		
Week 9 April							√	√		
Week 10 April									√	√

Appendix 2: Sample of the activities developed in the forums

Forum Opening date	Language type/function	Input Aural material	Learning Strategies promoted *	Syllabus Unit (as planned for the online course)
About me February 24	Monologue Small talk introducing themselves; talking about family. Familiarize learners with the use of tools and way of working on the project.	Links to educational videos Homework (optional)	Recognizing new vocabulary and language patterns	**Let's review!** Imperative, personal pronouns, possessive and demonstrative adj. To be, present simple, daily routine, frequency adverbs, yes-no questions, Wh-questions. Exchange personal information: name, origin, age, occupation, address, likes hobbies. Write a biography about a family member.
Health and advice Exercise March 3	Dialogue: Asking for and giving advice Monologue: Small reading about exercising.	Links to educational videos Scripted text	Imitation Reading aloud Repetition Adapted 4-3-2-fluency activity Reading to learn vocabulary items	**How are you feeling today?** Verbs have, feel, hurt for health problems; Imperative; should. Exchange information about common ailments and remedies. Exchange advice about habits for a healthy lifestyle.

Appendix 3: Students' responses towards usefulness of aural materials

Acerca de los materiales de audio y video seleccionados para el proyecto.

1. ¿Qué tan útil te resultó el material de audio y video que seleccionó la maestra para las actividades del proyecto?

Bastante [4]
Poco [0]
Nada [0]
Mucho [4]
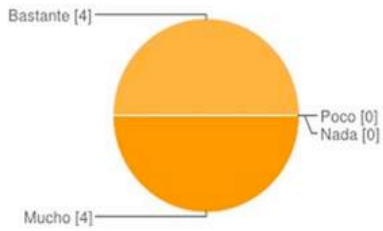
Mucho	4	50%
Bastante	4	50%
Poco	0	0%
Nada	0	0%

Appendix 4: Students acceptance towards aural materials

2. ¿Qué tanto te agradaron los materiales de audio y video utilizados en los foros del proyecto?

Bastante [2]
Poco [0]
Nada [0]
Mucho [6]
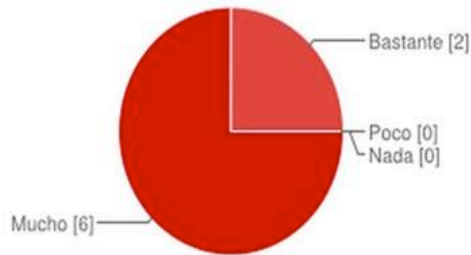
Mucho	6	75%
Bastante	2	25%
Poco	0	0%
Nada	0	0%

Appendix 5: Graphic of students' opinions self-recording activities and some simple responses

Acerca de las grabaciones para practicar la expresión oral

A) ¿Qué tan útil te resultó grabarte en las diferentes actividades del proyecto?

Mucho	5	63%
Bastante	2	25%
Poco	1	13%
Nada	0	0%
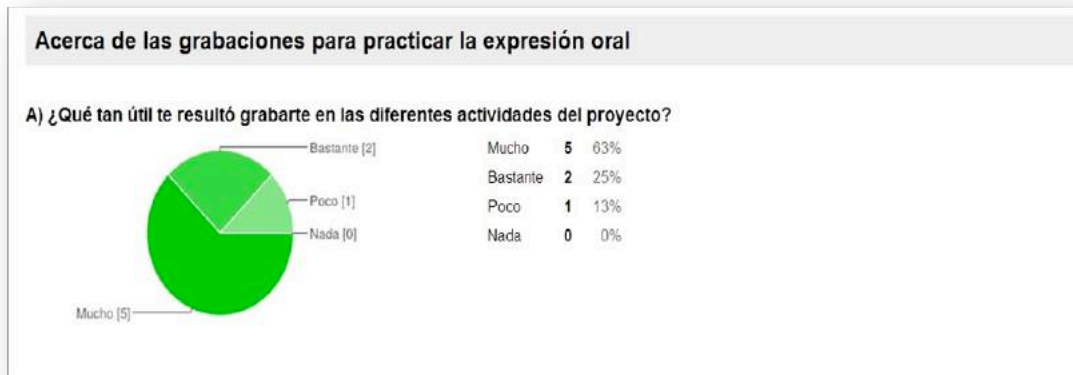
Appendix 6: **Sample of students' audio files for interaction and answers**

Appendix 7: **Students' responses toward technology and some categories emerged**

Appendix 8: Some students' comments samples

"…porque (a diferencia del material (en la plataforma) se necesita una herramienta como esta (videos y audios)…"

"… los audios y videos eran adecuados para el nivel…"

"… bien seleccionados en sentido a que era lo que necesitábamos…"

"… en este ambiente necesitas escuchar audios…"

"…como no es una clase presencial, la única manera es escuchar aquí audios y ver videos…"

"…eran claros y fácil de entender …"

"… y algunos de ellos estaban subtitulados y eran útiles para ver nuevas palabras…";

"El material te da buenos ejemplos…"

"…me hace pensar acerca de cómo hacer mis propias preguntas…"

"…tenían situaciones cotidianas, situaciones que puedes encontrar comúnmente…"

"…era muy práctico tener los links y abrirlos…"

"…eran dinámicos y estaban de acuerdo a los temas…"

"…son buenos para gente como yo que no está familiarizada con el Inglés… te acostumbras y resulta interesante…"

"…era necesario tener más videos para interesarnos más…"

"… me gustaría que el material estuviera mejor organizado… incluirlos en el material del curso como el de las diapositivas por tema…"

"Practicando puedo recordar…"

"…y ensayé y ensayé varias veces hasta lograr una mejora ..."

"Noté algunos errores cuando quería expresar mis ideas---"

"… escuchar las grabaciones de compañeros que hablan correctamente también me ayudó porque podía comprar lo que yo decía…"

"… escucho y practico lo que grabé …"

"Puedes viajar tranquilamente en el transporte público escuchando tu Inglés con tus audífonos…"

"… tuve que manejar la pena y los nervios…"

"…fue agradable escuchar mi voz, hasta divertido…"

"… solo que esto fuera parte de la evaluación…que no sea opcional… "

"…sería muy útil si en la plataforma (en los foros) hubiera una herramienta para grabar "online"…"

"… creo que ya tenemos todas las herramientas para llevar a cabo proyectos como así, incluso es mejor……"

TRIGGERING REFLECTION

After reading the chapter, answer the following questions:

- To what extent can students assess their oral performance and proficiency?
- State benefits and constraints to self-record as a strategy to enhance awareness and understanding of speaking patterns.
- In what way can students be guided from an artificial environment into a more realistic one? Can real speaking experiences be carried out in a virtual environment?
- List some pros and cons of using models to promote confidence and understanding when developing the speaking skill.
- Design and implement a plan of action in which you provide your students with speaking models that may help them feel confident to speak.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Enhancing Oral Production in an English class through Authentic Materials

Apolinar Quino Toto

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Abstract

This paper looks at the use of authentic materials as a means of improving learners' speaking skills in an EFL class, and the results after using them in a real teaching context. We describe an action research (AR) project, which involved the implementation of speaking activities based on authentic materials and used to enhance students' oral production. The problem tackled was the poor and limited oral production presented in teenage students taking a pre-intermediate course. Thus, the purpose of this research was to find out how using authentic materials affected oral production and how students reacted to working with this kind of resources. It was found that authentic materials helped learners to improve their fluency, intonation, as well as to increase vocabulary; besides, students reacted positively and found working with this type of materials interesting and useful.

Resumen

En este artículo se analiza el uso de materiales auténticos como medio para mejorar la habilidad oral de alumnos de inglés como lengua extranjera (TEFL), y los resultados después de usarlos en un contexto real de enseñanza. Se describen un proyecto de investigación-acción (I-A) que implicó la implementación de actividades basadas en materiales auténticos con el fin de mejorar la producción oral de los estudiantes de inglés. El problema abordado fue la pobre y limitada producción oral que presentaban los adolescentes estudiantes de un curso pre-intermedio. Así, el propósito de esta investigación fue hallar cómo el uso de materiales auténticos afectó la producción oral y cómo los estudiantes reaccionaron a este tipo de materiales en el aula de inglés. Se encontró que los materiales auténticos ayudaron a los estudiantes a mejorar su fluidez y entonación, así como a incrementar el vocabulario; además, los estudiantes reaccionaron positivamente y les resultó interesante y útil trabajar con este tipo de materiales.

1. Introduction

Speaking is one of the four language skills, and as well as writing it is a productive one. These skills involve using speech and written text to communicate meanings to other people. That is, when we speak, we constantly have in mind the person we are speaking to and the wish to successfully communicate our meaning to them (Spratt, M. & Pulverness, A. 2011). The speaking skill cannot be learned just by studying books, it requires much practice, and the most important aspect to remember is that 'practice makes perfect'. It takes practice and feedback from others to improve one's use of English at a spoken level.

But why is teaching speaking one of the subjects that teachers find difficult to teach? Why do students often highlight speaking as one of their biggest problems? Why do students say that course book-based speaking practice does not prepare them for the real world? In many cases, students do not have enough exposure to the target language, or the oral practice is basically reduced to drilling activities, or the courses are focused on listening and reading, or teachers do not give enough importance to speaking. As a result, students may show to have limited or poor oral production, despite the fact that students' priority when learning the language is the mastery of speaking (Richards, 2006; 2008).

This research is related to teaching English as a foreign language, and it is of particular relevance to EFL (English as foreign language) teachers or students. It looked at how integrating activities based on authentic materials in an English class affects students' Oral Production Skills. Thus, the research questions were:

1. How does working with authentic materials affect oral production?
2. How do students react to working with authentic materials?

And the objectives of this Action Research were:

1. To find out how using authentic materials affects oral production in my class.
2. To find out how students-participants react to this kind of materials.

Therefore, in this paper, we discuss about this issue and show the findings that emerged after conducting an action research related to the use of authentic materials to enhance oral production. Based on how students reacted to activities adapted from authentic materials, and what materials they considered useful to develop their speaking skill, we explain what teachers could do in order to help students improve this skill.

2. Context & Focus

This Action Research was carried out in a private language school incorporated to the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP for its acronym in Spanish), located in San Andres Tuxtla, Ver. The participants were 2 male students and 4 female students, all of them aged 15 to 19 years, studying high school, with similar cultural and socioeconomic background; and studying the pre-intermediate level.

The implementation focused on increasing vocabulary and developing speaking activities by using authentic materials, chosen according to the students' comments on the type of topics they wanted to know. Activities were adapted from different sources (magazines, journals, diaries, videos, songs, and books). Vocabulary, functions, grammar and pronunciation-intonation features were presented in context. Sessions were student centered in order to give them enough time to familiarize with the different topics, get involved in the activities, and to help learners to get ready for the speaking sessions. During the speaking sessions, learners were given the time they needed for expressing their ideas and making use of the vocabulary presented; consequently, student-talking time (STT) increased and teaching talking time (TTT) decreased.

3. Literature Review

In this section, we briefly describe the nature of speaking and what speaking skills involve, the current trends on teaching speaking and the importance of teaching it, and what is considered to be authentic materials, their sources and types and their use in the language classroom.

3.1 Nature of speaking and importance of teaching speaking

Learning a new language involves developing language skills. Speaking is considered as a productive skill, since it involves producing language rather than receiving it (Spratt, et al. 2011). As Richards (2003, 2006, and 2008) mentioned, the mastery of speaking skills in English is a priority for many foreign language learners who often evaluate their success in language learning on the basis of how well they feel they have improved in their spoken language proficiency.

Spoken English is constructed on the basis of four main features of spoken language: "a) Spoken language occurs in real time and it is typically unplanned, it is spontaneous and there is normally very little time for advance planning, b) It is most typically face to face or voice-to-

voice, c) It foregrounds choices which reflect the immediate social and interpersonal situation, and d) It exists on a continuum" (Carter & McCarthy, 2006).

It is clear that speaking is an important part of second language learning and teaching. Therefore, according to Harmer (2007) there are three reasons for teaching speaking: 1) speaking activities provide rehearsal opportunities to practice real life speaking in the safety of classroom, 2) speaking tasks provide feedback for the teacher and the students, and 3) the more students have opportunities to activate the various elements of language they have stored in their brain, the more automatic the use of these elements becomes; as a result, students gradually become autonomous language users. Thus, teaching speaking aims at improving the students' communicative skills and developing communicative competence, because, only in that way, students can express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rules fitting each communicative circumstance.

3.2 Current Trends in teaching speaking

In the 1990s, the communicative language teaching approach appeared; having as a goal the teaching of communicative competence. Within this approach, learners regularly work in pairs and groups; authentic materials and tasks are used, and skills are integrated in order to develop fluency in language use (Wong, & Waring, 2010, Richards, 2006). However, the most recent approach to teaching speaking is the holistic approach which addresses to acquiring good speaking competence, taking into account language learners' cognitive, affective and/or emotional, and social needs. In this approach, materials must provide speaking practice, promote language and skill learning and facilitate metacognitive development (Goh & Burns, 2012.).

3.3 Authentic materials, sources and types

Materials may be considered authentic because they are designed by native speakers for native speakers (Scarino & Liddicoat, 2009), to fulfill some social purpose in the language community (Peacock, 1997) rather than for second language learning. In this research I used the definition provided by Tomlinson (2011), which states that the 'authentic materials' are the ones that were not created for language teaching or learning purposes and they include both spoken and written language samples. According to Gebhard (1996), authentic materials can be classified into three categories: a) Authentic Listening-Viewing Materials (news clips, movies, and documentaries), b)

Authentic Visual Materials: (photographs, posters), and c) Authentic Printed Materials (newspaper articles, lyrics to songs, etc.)

3.4 Use of authentic materials in the language classroom

Teachers have usually used authentic materials in their classrooms; the difficulty is selecting the right type of material and adapting the right type of activities that are useful for their students (Tungesh, 2012; Tomlinson, 2011; Harwood, 2010; Hughes, 2010). For using authentic materials for language teaching, the communicative approach seems ideal since it opens up wider perspectives on language teaching. It considers language not only in terms of structures but also in terms of the communicative functions that it performs (Tungesh, 2012).

Since not all the authentic materials can completely meet the teachers' and learners' needs, and as they were not designed for language teaching and learning, they require to be adapted and graded for their use with particular groups of students (Littlejohn, 1998). Based on the learners' characteristics (age, language proficiency level, needs, preferences and cultural background), these materials have to be challenging for students, and extend their intercultural and linguistic development (Scarino & Liddicoat, 2009).

It seems that adapting resources allows teachers to maximize their value for particular learners; however, their successful adaptation requires careful attention to the semantic, lexical, syntactic, and discursive elements of the original text, and it is sometimes necessary to provide additional information to understand the resource; for example, the use of glossaries to provide explanations of unknown vocabulary. In other words, these types of materials have to be carefully selected, controlled, and they need well-thought-out teaching activities to be used in the class.

3.5 Advantages and disadvantages of using authentic materials

The major advantage of using authentic materials in the language classroom is that they contain current language on varied topics and provide constant reinforcement of grammatical forms learned in the classroom (Berwalt, 1987). Furthermore, as Scarino & Liddicoat (2009) stated, this type of materials expose learners to actual contemporary language use and bring learners into closer contact with the real world of the target language and culture since they are developed or

created within the cultural context of native-speakers and are imbued with the assumptions, values and ways of communicating of a particular culture.

On the other hand, the biggest disadvantage of using authentic materials is that they contain unknown and uncommon vocabulary and grammatical structures than learners can possibly handle, and they are often long texts, complicated or complex (Lansford, 2014; Tomlinson, 2011). Other disadvantages are related more to the instructor rather than to the learner; for instance, preparing lessons from authentic materials may be time consuming (Peacock, 1997). Nevertheless, the efficient, pertinent and relevant use that you may give to these materials depends on the teacher.

4. Methodology

This research took form of an Action Research (AR), which is part of a movement in education and related to the ideas of 'reflective practice' and 'the teacher as researcher'. It is defined as an enquiry that has as a main aim to facilitate practitioners to study aspects of practice (Koshy, 2005) and to identify a problematic situation or issue that the teachers consider worth looking into deeply and systematically (Burns, 2009; Cohen, et al., 2007). It involves taking a self-reflective, critical, and systematic approach to exploring our own teaching contexts (Cohen, et al., 2007; Burns, 2009; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). It is also presented as a cyclical, repetitive process of inquiry: Look (Gathering information), Think (Reflecting on or analyzing the information) and Act (Planning, implementing, and assessing students' learning) (Stringer, et al., 2010; Sagor, 2000).

4.1 Data collection methods

In this Action Research, the methods used for data collection were: interview, focus group and observation; each of these was used in order to obtain and gather information from different sources, so that the findings became more reliable and the validity strengthened. The interviews and focus group discussion were recorded or videotaped having assured the participants' anonymity and the authorization from students-participants and from the principal of the school where this action research took place (see Appendix 1). As mentioned before, the data was gathered (during the implementation stage) by using observational instruments (checklists,

anecdotal records, charts or grids) (see Appendix 2 & 3) and non-observational instruments (surveys and audio-video recordings) over a period of two months.

4.1.1 Interviews

Interviews are defined as communications aiming to know different points of view, interpretations and meanings to gain understanding of a particular situation (Altrichter, et al., 1993). These were done face-to-face, and took place out of the classroom at the beginning and at the end of the research period, in order to obtain information from students about their learning experiences and interests.

4.1.2 Observation

According to McKechnie (2008), observation involves collecting impressions of the world using our senses in a systematic and purposeful way in order to learn about a phenomenon of interest. In this research, observations were carried out during the implementation stage and were focused on gaining insight on what was going on in the class; interactions among students, students' performance while speaking, students' reactions while working on activities designed with authentic materials and their reactions after the sessions, the language they used and how they used it. Data was recorded by videotaping the teaching sessions, taking field notes and photographs (see Appendix 4)

4.1.3 Focus Group

A focus group is a group discussion on a particular topic, organized for research purposes. It is used for generating information on collective views and the meanings that lie behind those views and for generating a rich understanding of participants' experiences and beliefs as well (Gill, et al. 2008; Morgan, 2008).

In this research, a focus group session was carried out at the end of the implementation in order to know about and contrast students' impressions on the different activities done during the implementation and if they found there was any impact on their learning, especially on their oral production, which was the focus of this action research. This was carried out, during an hour, in the classroom, since it was the only way all participants could meet in the same place, at the same time, and talk about their experiences before, during and after the implementation.

4.2 Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis (QDA) is the process of transforming written data such as interview transcripts and field notes into findings (Seidel, 1998). In this research, data analysis involved making sense out of texts (observation field notes, interviews and scripts of recordings) and image data (photographs). Following Creswell's recommendations (2009), the data was analyzed as follows: 1) Organizing and preparing the data for analysis, 2) Reading all the data gathered, 3) Coding - Data reduction, 4) Identifying and summarizing themes, 5) Interpreting findings, assessing contributions and summarizing, and 6) Making conclusions and recommendations.

5. Findings

After collecting and analyzing the data these were the finding that emerged and were classified into three main categories: a) Advantages of using Authentic Materials, b) Disadvantages of Using Authentic Materials, and c) Students' reactions.

For presenting the evidences taken from the data, that is, the extracts from interviews, field notes, and/or focus group, the following *Codes are used: FN= Field Note; FG= Focus Group; S= Student, Ss= Students; Q= Question; AW= Answer Week #*

5.1 Advantages of using authentic materials

This category embraces three subcategories: improvement in students' spoken production; improvement in students' self-confidence, and students' motivation.

5.1.1 Speaking improvements

These improvements are related to producing and using the target language, for instance: self-correction while speaking, better fluency and intonation, and more vocabulary. This can be observed in the following extracts from the data collected.

> *FN: Ss are **speaking more** and when they make a mistake they **self-correct.***
>
> *FG: [...] the most important thing is that they help to improve our **fluency** [...]*
>
> *They helped us to go into the real **rhythm** of English in more depth.*
>
> *It helped me a lot **increasing vocabulary** besides [...] I learned expressions that I didn't know how to say before… [Author's translation]*

In order to measure the improvement and progress of students, they were assessed with two presentations and two oral tests; one at the beginning and one at the end of the implementation stage. The presentations were individual and the oral test was carried out in pairs but their participation was graded individually. The test was based on the speaking test level A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (see Appendix 1), and the areas that were taken into account were grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation, and interactive communication. Table 1 shows the results (the average) students obtained in the three sections of the test. If we compare the results from the first test with the results obtained in the second one, we can clearly see that students had an improvement (see Chart 1).

Students	oral test	
	1	2
S1	7	8
S2	6	7
S3	6	8
S4	6	7
S5	4	6
S6	6	8

Table 1. Oral Tests 1 & 2 Grades
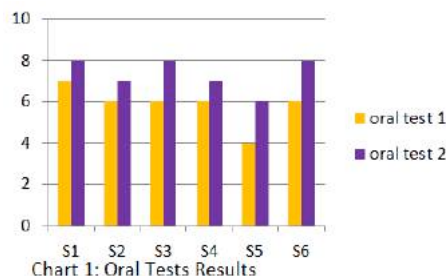
Chart 1: Oral Tests Results

The second action carried out in order to observe the learners' improvements was their individual presentations (see Appendix 5). In table and chart 2, the results obtained in the first presentation are contrasted with the results obtained in the second presentation, and we can see that there was an improvement of 1.5 points in average.

	presentation 1	presentation 2
S1	6	7.5
S2	6	7
S3	6	8
S4	6	7.5
S5	5	6
S6	6	8

Table 2. Presentation 1 & 2 Grades
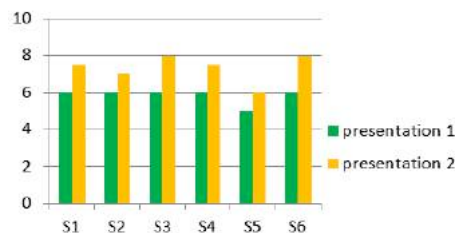
Chart 2. Bar Graph: Presentations 1 & 2 Results

5.1.2   Self-confidence

Based on the teacher-researcher's observations, students seemed to be more confident and relaxed while doing oral activities, as shown in these excerpts:

*FN: ... some students especially (S3, S5, and S6) look more relaxed and **confident** when speaking, even if they don't know a word, that doesn't make them stop speaking...·*

From the Students' perspective, they mentioned to be more confident while speaking.

*FG: Now I'm **confident**, as I know more things I can speak better and my mistakes are less and less when I'm speaking. [Author's translation]*

They reported to feel more confident to speak after having carried out speaking activities and knowing how native people speak. Comparing students' answers given in the questionnaires, we can see that students, at the beginning of the implementation, did not feel confident to speak, but at the end, students mentioned they felt confident enough to do speaking activities once again.

Q2. Do you feel **confident** that you can do the same thing again another time?

*AW3: S6: **Yes, a little***

*AW9: S6: **Yes, a lot**. I'm not embarrassed about speaking [Author's translation]*

5.1.3   Motivation

Students mentioned to be motivated due to the fact that they felt they were capable of speaking. Some students changed from being quiet to being more talkative and take the floor voluntarily; and as result of this, the interaction among students increased, as shown below:

*FN: Ss seem to be more **motivated**, S5 who used to keep silent now he's taking the floor voluntarily and he's interacting more with his peers.*

*FG-S4: I feel **motivated** [...] I know that I am capable of doing it. [Author's translation]*

5.2 Disadvantages of Using Authentic Materials

The second category has to do with the disadvantages of using authentic materials. This category is subdivided in two subcategories: Vocabulary and Length of the texts (spoken and written).

5.2.1 Vocabulary

This subcategory has to do with the students' not knowing enough vocabulary, which can be observed in the following quotations.

> FN: *working with articles – **there are several words students don't know**, more than the expected…*

> FG: *To me, a **disadvantage** I found was that there were some **words** that we didn't know…*

5.2.2 Length of the texts (spoken and written)

The second subcategory has to do with the problems using authentic materials had in my real teaching context. That is to say, the main problem was focused on the length of the texts both written and oral; we did not have enough time in class, as written on the following field notes.

> *FN: working with the article – the **text is too long**. I think we're not going to finish reading the whole text. …. Note: I had to skip some activities.*

> *FN: working with videos – the **video was too long** for listening the times I had planned to.*

Although I noticed the planning of the activities was not accurate, this problem was not reported by learners; for them, the activities were well planned:

> *FG-S1: the activities, the videos, the texts … **everything was well planned***

> *Q3. Was there enough time for working on each activity?*

> *S4: to me – yes! We had enough time for working on each activity, listening, and reading and for the conversation.*

5.3 Students' reactions

The third category has to do with the reactions students had after working on speaking activities based on authentic materials. There are two subcategories in this category: positive reactions and negative reactions.

5.3.1 Positive Reactions

This subcategory is related to the positive reactions students mentioned to have had, and the reactions the teacher-researcher observed on students after using authentic materials. Students said they found the activities designed with authentic materials interesting, enjoyable, and useful.

They also mentioned that the language used on these materials was closer to the real language and the usefulness they had for future applications, as it may be explained in the following extracts:

> FN: *Students said **they liked** the activities and the materials used… **they asked for more** activities like these.*
>
> FG S6: *To me, they were more **interesting** [...] with expressions from **real life** [...] that **I will use later**.*
>
> S3: *To me, it was more interesting and **enjoyable** [...] they look more alike to the **real life**…*

As shown in the following chart, students reported that authentic listening-viewing materials were more useful in comparison to printed and visual materials (see Fig. 3).
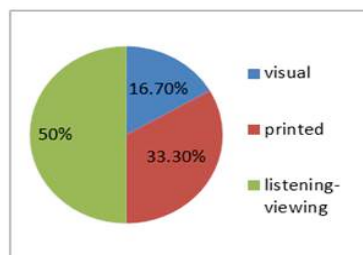
Figure 3. Pie Chart: Authentic Materials Usefulness

5.3.2 Negative reactions

Although some negative reactions were observed by the teacher-researcher, these were denied and refuted by learners. They mentioned that the possible negative reactions, such as being quiet or indifferent, were not caused by the materials but by external factors such as their mood, tiredness and sleepiness:

> FN: *…as the activity was based on long texts I could see S2 and S6 kind of **bored**, S6 in the discussion session **wasn't** as **active** as in other activities…*
>
> FG S2: ***I wasn't in the mood**, I was tired and sleepy and reading that long text made me feel sleepier but it was interesting.*
>
> FG S1: *In my opinion **our mood may affect our performance but that doesn't mean we didn't like the materials or the activities**… not in my case.*

Once we have presented the categories obtained from the analysis of the data gathered throughout this action research, I now proceed to intertwine them with the concepts related to the topic in question.

6. Discussion and reflections

Based on the research questions (see section 2.1), the following categories emerged: Advantages of using Authentic Materials; Disadvantages of Using Authentic Materials and Students' reactions, we here discuss and reflect on topics such as: the use of authentic materials and their impact on enhancing the learners' oral production; the reactions that students and the teacher had when working with such authentic materials; as well as the assumptions students generated around them. Also, other issues such as the impact of these materials on motivation and self-confidence, and the pre-conceptions students have about learning a foreign language and the importance they give to developing and improving speaking skills are dealt with.

To begin with, students' interest was specially focused on improving their speaking skills, since they considered that the mastery of speaking skills was their priority in learning English as a foreign language. They added that they usually measure their progress in learning the language on the basis of how well they feel they produce spoken language, which corresponds to what Richards (2006, 2008) mentions about learners' conceptions on how they measure their learning progress.

As it was mentioned in the context and focus section, taking into account that students reported that their poor or limited oral production was due to the lack of speaking activities and their getting bored by only working on the course books, this implementation was focused on developing and working with authentic materials. Thus, one of the findings in this research was that learners considered that authentic materials were significantly more interesting than non-authentic materials (especially course books). This is contrary to what Peacock (1997) reported in his research when he mentioned that learners found authentic materials less interesting than non-authentic materials. It is important to mention that the students' age is a factor that may affect the results; in Peacock's research, he worked with university students taking a beginners course, whereas in this research, students were teenagers taking a pre-intermediate course. Therefore, not only the age but the level of language proficiency may be factors that affect the students' reactions towards authentic materials.

In the focus group sessions, students mentioned that speaking activities, based on authentic materials, provided them with opportunities to use 'real language', or *real English*, as they called it, coinciding with one of the three reasons for teaching speaking mentioned by Harmer (2007). In other words, these authentic materials seemed to help prepare learners for the 'real' world communication, since they exposed learners to actual contemporary language in context, as Scarino & Liddicoat (2009) suggest. For students, having closer contact with the real English was of great value. This feeling of using *real English* arose from the use of authentic materials, since, according to the students, they include aspects of how the language is used in daily life.

Students also mentioned that one of the advantages they found after working with authentic materials was the increase of their vocabulary. This coincides with what Berwalt (1987) mentioned about authentic materials containing current language, extensive vocabulary, neologism and vocabulary from different fields of knowledge. As well, they seem to widely appreciate the use of expressions and words that are used in daily speech, and the improvement of their intonation and fluency, since they could hear how spoken English is executed in real contexts, especially in activities based on video-audio materials (documentaries, short-films and songs). Despite the fact that students liked songs better, they found written authentic materials more useful.

Authentic materials may be interesting for students and they may enrich the lessons making them varied; they may also be effective in introducing examples of real life communication to the students. However, choosing and adapting authentic materials for classroom use can be a time consuming affair. In this sense, we may say that some disadvantages of using authentic materials are more related to the facilitator's rather than to the learner's work, as Scarino & Liddicoat (2009) reported. It must be said that during the implementation, I had to skip some activities because of time availability. According to the students, the activities were well designed and the time dedicated to them was the ideal; however, making changes in the real context of teaching was challenging to me, the teacher-researcher.

Authentic materials to be used in the classroom have to be carefully chosen, taking into account students' level, age, interests, preferences and learning styles. According to Heitler (2005); Hughes (2010), and Tomlinson (2010), as a guideline for choosing authentic materials for working in class, we have to take into account: a) interest according to age group, b) point of the lesson, c) usable language style, and d) good quality of picture and sound. Therefore, choosing

authentic materials may be time consuming and expensive if teachers have to print several pictures or hand-outs. I found working with short articles and short stories (especially fables) useful, since they can be read several times focusing on specific vocabulary, which may be easily learnt in a contextualized way. Being flexible and creative when choosing and adapting teaching materials enables the coverage of the students' learning styles. As well, the way a teacher presents and uses the materials should be taken into account, since it has different effects on the students' learning and performance.

Working with authentic materials in this study had a plus; students not only reacted positively to these, improved their intonation and fluency, and increased their vocabulary, but also felt motivated to communicate. They felt these brought them closer to real communication and at the same time, they helped them make communication 'real' in the classroom. In other words, working with authentic materials is a convenient way of improving not only students' general skills, but also their self-confidence in a real situation.

7. Conclusions and implications

As it has been previously established, the aims of this study were to find out how authentic materials affected oral production in my class and to observe how students reacted to this kind of materials. Aiming to answer the research questions: a) how do authentic materials affect oral production? b) How do students react to working with authentic materials? The findings show that:

a) Authentic materials help learners to improve their fluency and intonation, as well as to increase their vocabulary.
b) Students reacted positively and found working with this type of materials interesting and useful.

In the light of the findings and the categories that emerged: Advantages of using Authentic Materials, Disadvantages of Using Authentic Materials and Students' reactions, and the conclusions achieved, we can say that implementing the use of authentic materials in language classes had relevant pedagogical implications. It seemed to be of benefit; learners improved their speaking skills, intonation, fluency and vocabulary knowledge, since they had contact with the various features of authentic language. Furthermore, it was clear that this type of materials may

break the routine and give variety to the classes. However, they have to be carefully selected, controlled and need well-thought-out teaching activities to be fully exploited.

7.1 Limitations

As in most studies, there are usually factors, which may hinder or change the sequence of the research; thus, the limitations in the research design and methods of data analysis, and technical problems that arose in the implementation were:

a) Data Collection: As this research took form of an action research, being the teacher-researcher was challenging since one of the restrictions we found was related to collecting data, specially 'taking notes' while making observations in the real teaching environment. One possible solution to this problem might be videotaping the sessions, although, it is necessary to have the students-participants' and the authorities' consent.

b) Electronic devises selection: technical problems may arise when using electronic devises for presenting audiovisual materials, whose quality, when they are recorded or changed to another format, may not be the same as the original ones.

c) Materials and Adaptation of Activities: Selecting the materials may be time consuming for a teacher-researcher, as extensive texts have to be modified or shortened according to the real teaching context in order to meet the students' level and time requirements.

7.2 Further research

Based on the experience and findings from this study, we suggest the following topics for further research: a) Motivation and Authentic Materials, since authentic materials may also work as a motivating factor and as a link between students' language knowledge and their professional needs, that is, the relation between using authentic materials and extrinsic motivation, and b) Use of Authentic Materials at different ages and learning levels not only with pre-intermediate or teenage learners.

7.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, we can assert that authentic materials in language teaching and learning may be useful because they are interesting to students, they use real language, they can be chosen

according to individual interest, they illustrate accurate use of language in the target culture and they can help students learn how to get as much information as possible, even if they cannot understand everything. They have proven to be a valuable part of the teacher's resources and can produce positive results that other materials (non-authentic materials) are not capable of. However, it is important to consider that they have to be carefully selected, adapted and organized; they need well-thought teaching activities and their use should be dosed in order to be fully exploited.

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CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO

Consentimiento Informado para participar en el proceso de investigación-acción denominada: Mejoramiento de la Producción Oral en mi Clase de Inglés Usando Materiales auténticos. (Enhancing Oral Production in my English Class through Authentic Materials)

Investigador Responsable: Apolinar Quino Toto
Participante: _____
Lugar de realización: Instituto América, San Andrés Tuxtla, Ver.

PROYECTO DE INTERVENCIÓN EDUCATIVA

A continuación se le presenta un breve resumen del proyecto de Intervención Educativa que se pretende realizar y al cual se le está invitando a participar.

Objetivos:
1. Investigar/averiguar cómo los materiales auténticos afectan la producción oral de los alumnos en la clase de inglés.
2. Investigar cómo los estudiantes-participantes reaccionan a este tipo de material.

Metodología:
La investigación seguirá los lineamientos de la Investigación-Acción- (Action Research) el cual involucra la implementación en contexto real (implementación de clase)

Beneficios esperados:
Ayudar a los alumnos a mejorar su producción oral usando material auténtico.

Control de resultados:
Se realizarán observaciones y grabaciones en audio y video de las clases, entrevistas y discusiones de grupo además de llevar a cabo encuestas y cuestionarios.

ACLARACIONES

• Su decisión de participar en el desarrollo de este proyecto de Intervención Educativa es completamente voluntaria.
• No habrá ninguna consecuencia desfavorable para usted, en caso de no aceptar la invitación.
• Si decide participar en el desarrollo de este proyecto de Intervención Educativa puede retirarse en el momento que lo desee informando las razones de su decisión, la cual será respetada en su integridad.
• No tendrá que hacer gasto alguno durante el trabajo a desarrollar.
• No recibirá pago por su participación.
• En el transcurso del desarrollo del proyecto de Intervención Educativa usted podrá solicitar información actualizada sobre el mismo al interventor responsable.
• Los datos personales del participante y la institución serán manejados con absoluta confidencialidad.

CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO

Yo, _____ he leído y comprendido la información anterior y mis preguntas han sido respondidas de manera satisfactoria. He sido informado y entiendo que los datos obtenidos en el desarrollo del proyecto de Intervención Educativa pueden ser publicados o difundidos con fines académicos una vez que sea construido el Proyecto de Intervención Educativa. Convengo en participar en este proyecto de Intervención Educativa. Recibiré una copia firmada y fechada de esta forma de consentimiento.

He explicado al/ a la joven _____ la naturaleza y los propósitos del proyecto de Intervención Educativa; le he explicado acerca de los riesgos y beneficios que implica su participación. He contestado a sus preguntas respecto al proyecto de intervención en la medida de lo posible y he preguntado si tiene alguna duda.

Una vez concluida la sesión de preguntas y respuestas, se procedió a firmar el presente documento.

_____   _____
Firma del Participante   Firma del Interventor

Fecha: _____

APPENDIX 2: Instruments & Tools: Survey & Grids

Student Survey on Authentic Materials

1. after learning new vocabulary viewing authentic materials (photos, videos, etc.), do you feel you can recall most of the vocabulary words?

a) Better
b) Worse
c) Same

2. Has using authentic materials when learning the new vocabulary changed the way you feel about learning vocabulary?

Yes   No

3. Has working with authentic materials (texts) change the way you feel about reading in English?

Yes   No

4. What activities have been most helpful to you to develop speaking skills?

a) Activities based on texts (articles, fables, etc.)
b) Activities based on videos (listening for specific information, answering to questions)
c) Activities based on spoken texts (songs)

5. Do you think that the way teacher is presenting the information in class is helping you to improve your language skills?

a) Very helpful
b) Somewhat helpful
c) Not very helpful

Evaluating speaking materials

	Strongly agree	Neutral	Strongly disagree
The materials are motivating	✓		
The materials appeal to students' interests	✓		
The materials meet students' learning needs	✓		
The materials allow for success in practicing speaking	✓		
The materials are at the appropriate level of difficulty		✓	
The materials contain sequences of activities that scaffold learning appropriately	✓		
The materials allow for a focus on accuracy as well as fluency		✓	

APPENDIX 3: Instruments & Tools: Self-assessment Monologic Task

②

Self –assessment of a monologic task

Part 1: my performance

Put a check (∨) in the box that best shows what you think. Write any thoughts you have.

		Agree	Not sure	Disagree	My thoughts
1.	I prepared well for the task		✓		
2.	I am happy with my performance today.	✓			Creo puedo dar más de mi capacidad cada día.
3.	My classmates showed that they enjoyed listening to me.	✓			
4.	I felt nervous.	✓			
5.	I made few grammatical mistakes			✓	Necesito mejorar mi gramática para poder hablar mejor el inglés
6.	I used the right formulaic expressions.		✓		
7.	My pronunciation was clear.		✓		
8.	I used suitable words and phrases to help my audience notice what I wanted to say.		✓		En algunas ocasiones confundía algunas palabras con otras.
9.	I feel my pace was just right			✓	Necesito mejorar mi uso de las palabras
10.	I spoke too fast throughout	✓	✓		
11.	I had too many pauses and hesitations.	✓			
12.	I spoke confidently.		✓		Aun necesito estudiar más para poder sentirme seguro

Part 2: My plan

List two to three things you would like to improve on before you do another similar task. Write your thoughts in the box.

Things I would like to improve on:

Me gustaría mejorar los tres aspectos del ingles, cuales son el habla, el escucha y el escrito en base a diferentes actividades, que sean dinamicas y menos rutinarias como son los libros en los que he cursado.

APPENDIX 4: Observational tools: Field notes and videos-photographs

Jun 3   Sniff - Reading

Martin seems to have changed his shy way for one more talkative, and expressive. He's now making jokes or saying funny things

Armando is more active and he's more open to say what he thinks what his comments included his personal experiences, not only what he thought about the reading. He wanted to read and did A

Ani started to participate more, but she still makes a lot of mistakes and when she realizes she is having problems with the structure and Vocabulary She stops using L2 and continue in L1 or just keep silent.

Sarahi
Flor   didn't attend

Toni hasn't stop taking the floor, however now she's adding more complex structures when speaking. She's all the time asking for new words and includes them when speaking. She re-state /or repeat what she wanted to say using the new word or phrase

Jaequi She takes the floor when she wants to say something even when she is talking to a particular peer she frees to do it in English

One thing she mentioned is that the reading had many many words She didn't know

Luis 1 - he looks - at times not paying attention and but when he start speaking - and it's time for him to say sth he speaks a lot. he makes comments, and add interesting comments and humor to conversation

Luis 2 - He still remains quiet it seems he doesn't like this kind of activities he participate more when we are checking answers or grammar activities

Working with texts that are long can be time consuming. We have read it as fast as we can. Specially if you want you speak more and feel free to do it with no interruption.

Captions of the videos

APPENDIX 5: Rubric for Assessing Oral Presentations

Criteria	Excellent	Very good	Good	Poor
	5 marks	4 marks	3 marks	1 mark
1. **Preparation and Organization**	You clearly put Exceptional effort into the preparation and design. ------------------ Your presentation was exceptionally logical and superbly organized.	You demonstrated very good preparation and design. ------------------ Your work had a clear introduction, body and conclusion	Your work showed some evidence of preparation. ------------------ Your presentation was generally organized, but lacked some clarity.	Your work appeared to have been done at the last minute. ------------------ The work was poorly organized or ideas were presented randomly
2. **Articulation**	Excellent and clear verbal articulation of major and minor points.	Explained ideas well.	Ideas were stated, but lacked some clarity	Ideas were difficult to understand
3. **Use of Examples and Visual aids**	Abstract ideas were fully supported with clear examples that others understood. ------------------ Your visual aids added greatly to the presentation.	Most abstract ideas were supported with examples ------------------ Your visual aids were clear and helpful.	Some examples were used. ------------------ Visual aids were used, but were very wordy or could have been more helpful.	Examples either were not used or were not helpful. ------------------ Your visual aids were not particularly helpful or were not used.
4. **Precision and time management**	Your presentation was laser-focused on the assigned topic. ------------------ Your showed exceptional time management skills	Your presentation covered all the main points of the topic. ------------------ Finished within the allotted time.	Your presentation covered the topic, but occasionally took detours. ------------------ You went over the time limit a little.	Your presentation strayed from the main topic significantly ------------------ You seemed unaware of the time or how to manage it.
5. **Overall quality**	Outstanding overall quality. A powerful and memorable presentation.	A good presentation, clear and specific with nice design. The topic was understood.	Could have put more effort during the preparation and design stages to increase overall quality.	Generally sloppy. Weak presentation skills. You have the ability to do much better.

Adapted from Dr Sarah Elaine Eaton

TRIGGERING REFLECTION

After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:

- Reflect on the importance of using authentic materials in order to develop speaking tasks. Taking into account factors such as students' interests and time constraint when using authentic materials in order to develop speaking tasks, what other factors would you take into account in your own context?
- Identify the problem stated in this chapter and observe whether you experience the same issue in your context. If so, describe it.
- Contrast the way in which students responded to the speaking activities in the chapter, with the way your students respond to the speaking activities you design for them.
- List some of the advantages and disadvantages of using authentic materials to promote the speaking skills.
- List some of the benefits of using authentic materials to enhance oral production.
- Observe an aspect related to your students' oral production you would like to improve. Design an action plan and implement it.

PART 3

Implementing the lexical approach

<div align="center">

CHAPTER NINE

The Use of Learning Strategies to Improve Vocabulary Acquisition

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Célida Maura Robledo Cortés

Gabriela Guadalupe Estrada Sánchez

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Abstract

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The purpose of this chapter is to report the results of a study carried out with Beginner students of English of a private elementary school in Xalapa, Veracruz whom seem not to have a wide range of vocabulary. The main objective of this study was to explore the effectiveness of three different vocabulary learning strategies to improve vocabulary acquisition through implementing an action plan. The results obtained were compared with the answers provided through a focus group interview. The outcomes are reported to show the positive effect on students' vocabulary acquisition but at the same time to show other problems in need of further investigation.

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Resumen

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El presente capitulo muestra los resultados de una investigación que se realizó con un grupo de estudiantes de inglés de nivel principiante en Xalapa, Veracruz quienes parecen tener falta de conocimiento de vocabulario en inglés. El objetivo principal de esta investigación fue identificar si se mejoraba el nivel de vocabulario de los estudiantes a partir de la implementación de un plan acción que incluía el uso de tres estrategias para aprender vocabulario. Los resultados obtenidos mostraron un impacto positivo en los estudiantes; sin embargo, surgieron otros problemas que necesitan ser investigados en próximos estudios.

1. Introduction

English is the most learned foreign language in Mexico. Despite this, most EFL learners have some difficulties to achieve the acquisition of the language. According to Farhady (2002: 275) "in any teaching situation, factors such as curriculum development, syllabus design, teacher training, material development, methodology, and testing the achievement of the learner are involved."

The process of learning a new language has different implications. Learners should have access to the meaning of the words, as well as the different grammar structures that they need to

communicate. However, in Mexico, ''the enduring effects of the vocabulary limitations of students with diverse learning needs is becoming increasingly apparent'' (Baker, Simmons & Kameenui, 2011:1). This may be because one of the drawbacks of learning English as a foreign language is that EFL learners are not immersed in a rich-input learning context. EFL teachers, therefore, need to create environments, similar to real life, in their classrooms where students can practice the English language. However, in most cases, their attempts to do so are not enough (Baker, Simmons & Kameenui, 2011).

Vocabulary learning has been considered as an integral and significant area of language teaching as Casco (2011:31) mentions "words are the basic building blocks of language, the units of meaning from which larger structures such as sentences, paragraphs and whole texts are formed." Nam, (2005) states that nowadays English has an important role in the economical and educational development of different countries. That is an important reason why non-English speakers are motivated to learn English as a foreign language. Nam (2005:125) remarks "Learners of EFL study English for different purposes: passing the examination, career development, pursuing their education and others. In most countries, English as a Foreign Language is part of the educational curriculum, particularly in state schools."

The presentation of new words to students can be an issue for discussion among teachers. Research on vocabulary instruction (Prandika, 2012; Cheng, 2007) indicates that children learn most of their vocabulary indirectly by engaging daily in oral language listening to adult conversations. Furthermore, vocabulary may be taught directly; this can be done by introducing specific words according to the topic of the lesson, and by providing opportunities for active engagement with new words.

Vocabulary development involves children's understanding of the meaning of new words and being able to use them in context. It also involves teachers' guidance of how to use a variety of strategies to learn new vocabulary. Vocabulary learning strategies are a subcategory of language learning strategies and constitute knowledge about what students do to find out the meaning of new words, retain them in long-term memory, recall them when needed in comprehension, and use them in language production (Mcmillan, 2007)

Given the fact that EFL learners have some limitations to learn and practice the language in context, extra emphasis needs to be placed on learning strategies inside the classroom. Finch (2002:15) states that "…learning new vocabulary is a challenge to foreign language students, but

they can overcome this by having access to a variety of vocabulary learning strategies." The present report attempts to describe the information obtained during an action research process. That study was aimed at getting detailed information about the effect of using vocabulary learning strategies to improve vocabulary acquisition. The study was focused on analysing the information obtained after the implementation of the plan and the students' opinions about the use of strategies to learn vocabulary.

2. Literature review: vocabulary acquisition

In this section, the issue of lack of vocabulary in young English students implies the analysis of the different element which impact that process. This review of the literature on the factors involved provides a framework for the discussion of the results of this study.

2.1 Young Learners of English

There are different factors related to young learners which involve knowledge regarding how they learn, as well as their characteristics in the teaching and learning process. Teachers need to review whether or not their practices have been in accordance with the principles of teaching English to young learners.

According to Key (2004: 56), to support young learners of English in the classroom teachers should:

A) Try to establish a sense of community in their classrooms as well as to create a positive classroom environment where students feel comfortable.

B) To identify students' learning styles and then take them into account during the lesson planning to encourage students during their language learning process.

C) Modify their speech according to their specific context for example: to speak slowly, to complement an instruction using body language and others.

D) Provide opportunities for interactions such as role plays, team work, short pair conversations and others.

E) Take advantage of the flexibility of young minds by complementing activities with visuals, realia and movement. Also, to involve students in making visuals as well as to move from activity to activity to catch children's' attention.

Considering the information about how children learn, English teachers can plan their lessons and design their activities in order to provide their young students with enough ways to learn English. Children cannot learn English without opportunities to practice English. Providing students with opportunities to interact with other students will naturally enhance English language development.

2.2 Learning strategies and styles

Chamot, Foster and Keatley (2011: 6) mention that "by using metacognitive strategies students begin to think about their own learning, they can then begin to notice how they learn, how others learn, and how they might adjust how they learn to learn more efficiently." In this way, students will take more responsibility for their knowledge and their vocabulary acquisition and eventually their language skills may be improved. The main goal of cognitive strategies is to involve "mental engagement with language in materials or tasks in order to develop understanding and hence learning" as Finch (2002:25) mentions in his study about Japanese students' vocabulary learning strategies, where he found that up to 76% of Japanese learners reported they used verbal and written repetition as consolidation strategies, making them the second and third most-used strategies separately.

Although some teachers disagree with the fact that repetition is useful to learn vocabulary, other teachers believe that through repetition students can improve their level of proficiency. Moreover, social/affective strategies such as the learners' cooperation, their asking for clarification or their control over the emotion and affection necessarily implicated in learning a foreign language are important during the language learning process. Social strategies involve learners using interaction with other people to facilitate their learning. Students interact with people in order to learn and practice their knowledge and it is through this interaction that learners can improve their language acquisition.

Therefore, teachers should be sensitive to students' affective needs, such as a positive learning environment and good relationships, provide cooperative learning activities and help students learn strategies that strengthen their ability to be more independent (Iverson, 2005:28)The implementation of affective strategies in the classroom, therefore, may have a positive effect on students' ability to learn a new language.

Other aspects to take into account are the learning styles. There are a variety of types of learners in a classroom. Therefore, it is important to incorporate multiple activities in the lesson planning. It is also important to know what the predominant learning style is, to avoid favouring one single learning style and short-changing other types of learners in the classroom. This leads to the main topic in this research project: vocabulary learning strategies.

2.3 Vocabulary learning strategies: Pictionaries, Mind maps and Peg method

To communicate effectively, learners need strategies to achieve their language goals. According to the Oxford dictionary (1990) strategies are "…operations employed by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval and use of information, specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations". The need to improve language learners' vocabulary has motivated some teachers to find different ways to elicit useful information about the process of their learners' language acquisition.

2.3.1 Pictionaries

Thornbury (2002: 104) states that "pictionary game is a game that involves the students guessing word or phrases from drawings''. Moreover, Iverson (2005: 54) explains that "Pictionary game is an effective and appropriate technique to make interesting atmosphere in teaching and learning new vocabulary". Participants seem to show preference for visual material, that is why the use of pictionaries as a way to present new vocabulary was used. ''Learning activities will be more effective if the material, technique and media for teaching English to the students is based on situation, condition and environment" (Iverson, 2005: 13).

2.3.2 Mind maps

 "A 'Mind Map' is a graphic tool which contains a central key word or image and secondary ideas that radiate from the central idea as branches" (Casco, 2011: 1). The implementation of mind maps in the EFL classrooms is a strategy that many teachers have used in order to teach vocabulary to their students. Through the use of mind maps ''the key idea crystallizes the subject of attention while the branches represent the connections established with the central idea, forming a connected nodal structure'' (Casco: 2011:1).

According to Prandika (2012) mind maps activities have a positive impact on students. It engages the learners' attention to the topic because of the use of graphics, colors and images. Furthermore, the use of a set of images helps students to connect the words with previous knowledge, and the way in which the mind map is displayed helps students to identify what they know and what they do not. Also, the mind map is a tool that helps students to organize their ideas in their writing or speaking activities because the different elements of a mind map can be easily linked. Using maps empowers the learner because it allows him to decide where to start and what to leave out. The possibility of making decisions develops a sense of self-efficacy and fosters autonomy (Casco, 2011)

Although in some studies the use of mind maps has not had a significant impact on learners' vocabulary acquisition, (D'Antoni et al., 2010); there are other studies in which the use of mind maps as a strategy to learn vocabulary has had an important influence on students' vocabulary learning process (Prandika, 2012; Cheng, 2007). In these studies there was a significant difference in language achievement between the students who were taught by using the Mind Mapping strategy and those who did not.

2.3.3 Peg method

According to Spackman (2002:12), the peg method has as a main objective to associate each number, zero to nine or a letter of the alphabet with different words. People may remember different vocabulary by associating each word with a specific number or letter. The peg method has been used by many teachers in order to help students to learn vocabulary (Spackman, 2002). However, although this method is considered a suitable option for presenting vocabulary to children, unfortunately it is not widely used outside the classrooms. That is why this cognitive method is just a way to familiarize students with new vocabulary and teachers should find different ways to help students to practice vocabulary in different contexts.

These three strategies were a guide for the teacher working with young students to help them acquire vocabulary. However, there are some other aspects that should be taken into account such as cooperative learning and constructivism which may help understand how to cope with children's learning-teaching process.

2.4 Cooperative learning between young students

There are different drawbacks and benefits of using cooperative learning activities with young students. According to Felder and Brent (2007) placing students in groups does not mean that they will work together. They argued that during team activities some students tend to leave the work to others and what is more, others take the important roles to benefit themselves at the expense of the members of the group. In contrast, Putnam et al. (1996:46) affirms that "…in the affective area, co-operative learning influences the development of positive attitudes towards peers, including children from diverse cultural and social backgrounds, and children with diverse learning needs." In this study, through the use of cooperative activities the teacher tried to promote the interaction between students as well as to save time because of the length of the English class.

3. Methodology

Taking into account the nature of the problem identified, the method used to carry out this investigation was action research; this consisted in identifying a particular problem, in a specific context, and then thinking about different possible solutions to solve this problem. The data collection instruments are described as well as the description of the implementation of the action plan.

3.1 Participants

This study was carried out with 19 beginner students in the 5th grade of elementary school. They are around 10 to 11 years old. Some of them have studied English since preschool grades but they seem not to have developed a wide vocabulary; the rest of the students are newcomers who seem to have lack of vocabulary to communicate efficiently.

3.2 Context

This study was carried out in a private elementary school in Xalapa, Veracruz where English is considered an important subject because at the end of the course students are asked to take Cambridge exams to certify their level of English. Students take classes from Monday to Friday, one hour and a half everyday, during the classes, teachers encourage their students to learn by using different activities to develop their four language skills.

3.3 Data collection techniques

In each kind of research approach, one or many data collection techniques may be used. Most of the time, researchers will decide for one or more data collection techniques while considering their particular situation. The method to investigate that specific was an action research with the general objective of knowing how three vocabulary learning strategies could improve the vocabulary of a group of beginner students. To explore the nature of the problem three data collection techniques were used: observation, classwork activities and focus group interview.

During the first sessions of the classes the researcher observed their participants and identified the problem to investigate in their research project and later designed an action plan to solve that problem. Then, during the implementation of the action plan the researcher asked her participants to write three different pieces of writing: text message, comic and short story, at the end of each week to know if students have learned or not the vocabulary presented during the week. Finally, the researcher used a focus group interview to know if their participants had found useful the strategies seen in classes and their preferences for each of them.

4. Findings

The findings obtained in this study were related to the way children felt when learning vocabulary and how they could take advantage of the strategies suggested. In general terms, the results showed that children may feel comfortable by doing some activities that include drawing rather than writing. Students participated more when they were working in teams than when they worked individually. Also, there was an increase in the vocabulary that participants learned after the implementation of the action plan although other students did not show that increase their vocabulary. After the analysis of data, different categories emerged as a result of this analysis.

4.1 Visual learners

During the implementation of the vocabulary strategies, some students showed preference for the strategies which used images or pictures. This has to do with what Edwards (2002) proposes about the different students' learning styles because students showed preference for certain activities according to their particular learning style and it can be corroborated in the following extracts. "A mí me gusta dibujar y con los dibujitos me acuerdo más de las palabras en inglés, dibujar es genial."(Student 1). However, other participants mentioned that they do not like to

draw because they do not know how. "No me gusta dibujar es muy difícil me gusta más escribir las palabras y ya nada más." (Student 2)

It can be seen that students may differ in their learning styles, so it is essential to take into consideration such styles so as to design, adopt or adapt the necessary materials and activities to fulfill most of the students' preferences. Along with these features, there is another important aspect to take into account: motivation.

4.2 Motivation

When teachers are able to identify and design activities according to the multiple intelligences of their students, as Gardner and Hatch (1989) suggests, students are interested and motivated to participate and ask questions about the topic seen in class. As can be observed in the next extract: "…cuando no me acuerdo de la palabra, cierro mis ojos y me acuerdo de la actividad y entonces me acuerdo y es más fácil." (Student 3)

In contrast, other participants mentioned that they did not remember the meaning of some words even with the use of the three previous vocabulary strategies, "…no me gustó lo que hicimos en las clases, ni me aprendí las palabras esas" (Student 4).This means the researcher should analyze their context carefully and then take into account, as much as possible, her students multiple intelligences.

It can be seen that taking into consideration students' multiple intelligences during the presentation and practice of new vocabulary in the classroom, students can learn vocabulary easily but on the other hand if teachers do not consider their students' intelligences, they can find difficulty in learning or even get bored during the classes.

4.3 Usefulness of the strategies

Some of the participants found the use of the three strategies to learn new vocabulary interesting, "…me pareció divertido como aprender las palabras nuevas porque con las listas me da mucho sueño."(Student 5).

In contrast, other students said that they did not like the activities that the teacher asked them to do. In addition, some of them mentioned that they did not like the English classes. "… no me gustaron los dibujitos que hizo la maestra en la clase, ni le entendí ni me gusta la clase de inglés…" (Student 6). Therefore, this indicated another problem that had emerged to investigate

at a later date to solve the weaknesses of the action plan implemented. Taking into account Skytt's (2000) model, the teacher could analyze her students' comments deeply to find alternative ways to help her students to learn vocabulary.

It can be said that when teacherS familiarize students with the benefits and drawbacks of the different vocabulary learning strategies, students have a new variety of tools to learn English although the decision to use them or not has to do with the usefulness students find the strategies according to their perceptions during the presentation of the strategies in the classroom.

4.4 Cooperative learning

During the implementation of the strategies, students were asked to work in teams and little by little they began to see the advantage of this "…me gusto hacer equipos porque así nos ayudábamos entre todos y dábamos ideas de lo que se nos ocurría…" (Student 7)

For some students to work in teams was a good experience. Also, the previous extract supports the 78.9% of students who mentioned that by sharing their ideas during the activities, they could enrich their work as Putnam et al. (1996) mentioned in their work. However, other students mentioned that they preferred to do work individually to avoid discussions with their classmates. "… me gusta mejor trabajar solito porque luego solo quieren poner lo que ellos dicen." (Student 8)

This extract shows how some students adopt some negative roles in the team as Felder and Brent (2007) mention in their work. Through the analysis of this opinion, it can be said that although there are different advantages of working in teams, it could be possible to ask students to work individually to avoid misunderstandings and conflict between students.

The multiple categories identified from the data collected showed that although most of the activities were designed considering the four learning styles, some participants had limitations to learn the vocabulary presented. Likewise, there are different theories such as collaborative learning and constructivism in the teaching and learning process which seem to be suitable to complement the implementation of the vocabulary learning strategies in the end, there were some implications.

The findings have several significant implications for both teaching vocabulary to young learners, and the way in which these learners perceive the usefulness of the vocabulary learning strategies. The findings suggest that participants benefit most from the first two strategies

implemented during the month: pictionaries and mind maps. Through the analysis of the participants' writing, an improvement could be noticed in the vocabulary seen using the previous strategies and it can be corroborated in the following figure where the information obtained during the focus group interview is shown.
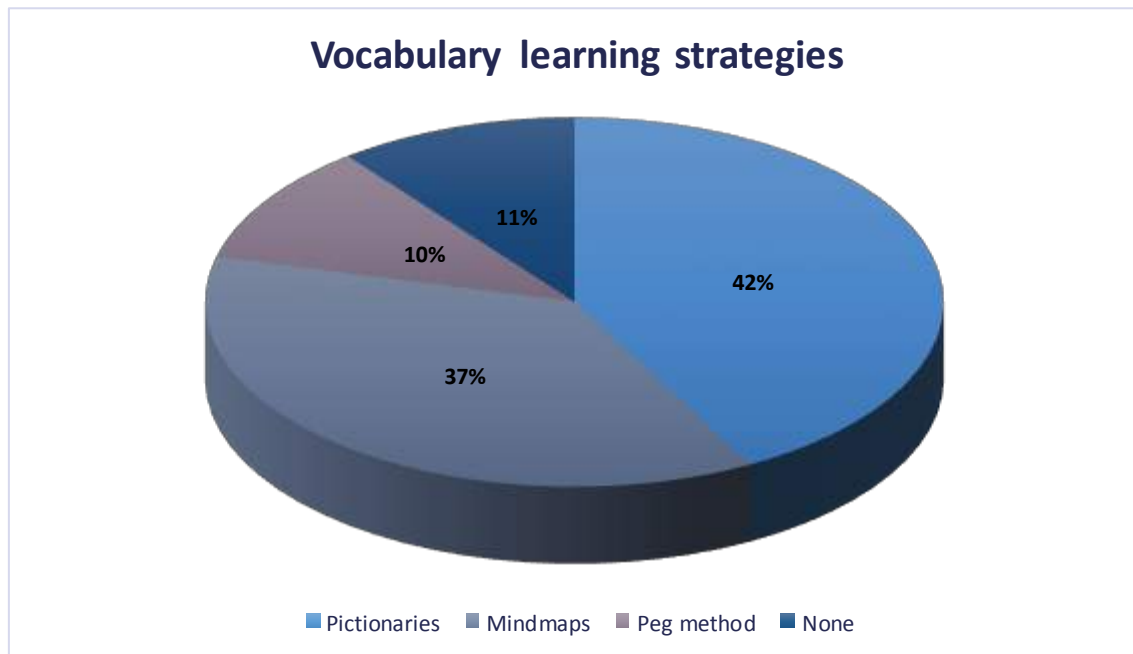
Figure 1

In contrast, the vocabulary presented using the peg method, was not significant for them because when I asked them to write a short story using the food vocabulary, they used the vocabulary seen during the previous weeks: cooking items and countries and nationalities. Nevertheless, it appeared that the participants had improved their vocabulary about specific topics because during the following exams the majority of them wrote full sentences in English. This small improvement may motivate other English teachers in this institution to use different strategies to teach vocabulary because the lack of vocabulary is a general problem in this context. Teachers should be aware of the variety of the strategies that they can use to present new vocabulary to students and to facilitate their students' vocabulary learning process.

The implementation of new strategies should take into account the level of the students, as well as their multiple intelligences. During the implementation of the strategies chosen, the majority of the students showed interest for them because in the three strategies the students were

asked to draw. Drawing was an interest that most of the participants shared. This was noticed in the observations during my focus group interview in the initial research. Taking into account their preferences, teachers can encourage students to learn (Dörnyei, 2001).

Something important to take into account is to help students be aware of the benefits and drawbacks of the multiple strategies that they can use to learn English. Teachers could organize an English workshop every month to familiarize students with the strategies and help students to use them and take advantage of them especially when studying for their exams.

5. Conclusions

By means of the implementation of action research projects in teaching practice, teachers can improve their teaching practice, but there are other factors such as students' goals, parents and school authorities' expectations and school rules that have a strong influence on the teachers' performance. This is why school authorities and English teachers should work together to achieve the students' goals. This is because it precisely is through research that teachers can identify their students' strengths and weaknesses, and then, find the most suitable strategies to help them in their learning process.

The findings presented in this research seem to indicate that students can improve the way they learn vocabulary if they are aware of the benefits and drawbacks of the different vocabulary learning strategies. Nevertheless, there are other factors that have a strong influence during the process of learning vocabulary such as motivation and autonomy. Teachers need to take these elements into account in order to provide their students with the most suitable strategies to learn English.

Taking into account the findings, I will make some changes in my teaching practice in order to help my students learn English vocabulary. This is because sometimes teachers take it for granted that students do not want to learn, but sometimes it is because they do not know how to learn. Therefore, I will continue implementing different strategies to guide them during my practice.

Taking into consideration the information obtained from this 1st Action Research cycle, possible issues emerged for a possible 2nd AR cycle. Further research using a 2nd AR cycle could investigate other vocabulary learning strategies that take into account, as much as possible, students' different learning styles. In addition, the use of different activities to practice

vocabulary such as role-plays, brochures, collages, trivia games and others could be considered in order to engage the majority of the students to participate during the review of vocabulary learned in the classroom.

Moreover, there is a possibility to adapt this investigation to other contexts, on the condition that the researcher corroborates the similarities between the context where this investigation was carried out and his/ her context. If there are no similarities, future researchers could take some of the ideas from this investigation to complement their work.

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TRIGGERING REFLECTION

After reading the chapter, answer the following questions:

- To what extent is learning vocabulary important in the process of learning a foreign language?
- Why may the lack of vocabulary be a drawback when learning English as a foreign language?
- Describe the following strategies to teach vocabulary: pictionaries, mind-maps and Peg method. How could they be implemented in your own context-situation?
- List some of the advantages and disadvantages of using the above-mentioned strategies to learn vocabulary. Are you aware of your students' strengths and weaknesses to learn vocabulary?
- Observe your class and identify whether your students need to improve their vocabulary learning process, their lexis and/ or experience new vocabulary learning strategies. Design an action plan and implement it.

CHAPTER TEN

The Use of Songs to Increase Vocabulary at Secondary Level

Elizabet Gonzalez García

Paula Busseniers Elsen

Graciela Yolanda Olivera y Arce

Abstract

This article highlights the importance of using songs in the English as a Foreign Language class as a tool to improve vocabulary. In order to know to what extent songs are useful in teaching English, Action Research was used. An action plan was designed and implemented with teenagers in a *Telesecundaria* during four weeks. Three data collection techniques were used during the implementation of the action plan. The data shows that songs are worthwhile not only for increasing vocabulary, but also for developing other language skills.

Resumen

Este artículo hace hincapié en la importancia del uso de canciones en la clase de inglés como lengua extranjera para incrementar el vocabulario. Para saber hasta qué punto las canciones son útiles en la enseñanza del inglés se utilizó investigación acción. Se diseñó un plan de acción que fue implementado con adolescentes en una escuela telesecundaria durante cuatro semanas. Se usaron tres técnicas de recolección de datos durante la implementación del plan de acción. La información recolectada demuestra que las canciones son útiles no sólo para incrementar el vocabulario sino para desarrollar otras habilidades lingüísticas.

1.   Introduction

In Mexico, English has been a subject at the basic educational level (Educación Básica) for many years. For a long time, plans and programs only aimed at grammar and translation, it was not until 1993 when their objectives changed to more communicative purposes (Guía de trabajo SEP, 2006). However, even though efforts have been made to design syllabi that improve teaching practice in Educación Básica, not much progress has been made. According to Davies (2009), some factors have contributed to the failure of English classes, such as "low student socio-economic status, large group size, poor classroom facilities, and low teacher competence" (p. 8-

9). He continues to mention that although this is the case for the majority of the students, some have managed to succeed.

Although the teaching/learning of English in different educational levels in Mexico has received some attention, researchers have focused more on higher education. It seems that basic education does not deserve to be investigated. Ramírez (2007, 2010, 2013), points out that there are few studies concerning teaching English in *telesecundarias* in Mexico. This area deserves more attention to understand what is happening in the classroom in this specific context. Moreover, according to Ramírez (2013) very little attention has been devoted to the acquisition of vocabulary which means that this is a subject that needs to be more explored.

Taking into consideration the issues above mentioned; this study aims at implementing the use of songs in the English class, group "D" to increase students' vocabulary in a *Telesecundaria* school. The objective is to know to what extent songs are useful to accomplish this goal.

2. Literature Review

The first section of this chapter deals with the importance of learning vocabulary and how it is related to the linguistic skills. Moreover, it points out the relevance of knowing sufficient vocabulary when learning a language. Furthermore, the second section provides the reader with numerous reasons to use songs in the classroom as well as some techniques that could be implemented when working with songs.

2.1 Vocabulary

When teaching English, teachers have to take into consideration the four skills to achieve the goal of communication. These skills are listening, reading, speaking and writing. People usually think of skills in isolation; however, they should be taken as a whole (Kurniasih, 2011). Nevertheless, there are also three linguistic skills, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. All of them are very important since they are the building blocks of the language. None of them should be disregarded; otherwise, the learning of the language would be incomplete. However, it could be said that the most important is vocabulary, because it is the basis of the language; without vocabulary nothing can be communicated. This is very similar to what Wilkins (2002) claims: "Without grammar, very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed" (p.2).

Vocabulary is needed in order to develop all the four skills. According to Beck et al (2002; Schmitt, 2004) vocabulary is important when reading so as to reach a deep understanding of the text. Moreover, the lack of vocabulary may lead students to failure when writing. Vocabulary is one of the most important features that determine the quality of writing (Lee, 2003). Furthermore, there is no point in listening to something without understanding it. When language students fail to understand the input given to them, it will be hard to produce appropriate output. As a result, a number of students may feel frustrated and anxious (Jones, 2003).

Additionally, students who learn English usually want to speak the language. Nunan (2000 cited in Juhana, 2012) states that the most important skill when learning a foreign language is speaking. However, speaking is one of the most difficult skills to develop along with writing. One of the reasons why students fail to speak is their limited knowledge of vocabulary. Smith (2011 cited in Juhana, 2012) argues that "vocabulary is the basis for speaking or conversational skill" (p. 65). The more words students know, the more they will be able to say and understand, both orally and in writing.

As it can be seen, there are numerous reasons to teach and acquire sufficient vocabulary in a foreign language so as not to cause or feel frustration. Furthermore, vocabulary is necessary all the time when learning English; one can put aside anything else, but not vocabulary. The more students increase their vocabulary, the greater their achievement will be in the following levels of English. This is similar to what Pikulski and Templeton (N/D) state:

> …the greatest tools we can give students for succeeding, not only in their education but more generally in life, is a large, rich vocabulary and the skills for using those words. Our ability to function in today's complex social and economic worlds is mightily affected by our language skills and word knowledge.
>
> (p. 1)

In sum, vocabulary is the most important element that learners of English or any other language have to handle in order to achieve their learning. When students lack vocabulary, they can do

very little. Even though all linguistic skills are essential for communicating, I would dare to say that vocabulary is the most important since it is the basis of a language (Smith, 2011).

2.2 Teaching with songs in the classroom

The use of songs in the classroom may have different focuses. According to Lynch (2004), the use of songs in the classroom may create a relaxing environment. This is really helpful because students do not get stressed when they are learning. Furthermore, Saricoban and Metin (2000) claim that the use of songs helps students develop listening skills, speaking skills, cultural aspects and grammar structures that can ease the process of learning. Furthermore, Stanowski (2002) claims that songs are a means of introducing cultural aspects in an effective way. Songs are a way to introduce vocabulary because of the significant context. Songs provide students with a natural situation in which students can practice vocabulary (Salah, 2001). Regarding the activities that can be used when using songs, Bahasa (2008) suggests some techniques, for instance:

a. Gap fills

b. Focus questions

c. True-false statements

d. Put these lines into the correct sequence

e. Dictation

f. Add a final verse

g. Circle the antonyms/synonyms of the given words

h. Discuss

In sum, the use of songs in the classroom may seem to be a simple issue, but it is not. There are many factors that have to be taken into account when a teacher has decided to use songs as a tool in their teaching practice. The goals have to be well established from the beginning.

3. Methodology

This chapter first describes how the *Telesecundaria* system works in Mexico. It then describes the context where this research was carried out as well as the participants. Moreover, it explains the methodology that was followed in order to carry out this study. Furthermore, it describes the techniques that were used to gather the data, followed by the explanation of the action plan that was implemented in order to try to solve the problem identified in the initial research.

3.1 Telesecundarias

In Mexico, when students finish primary school, they have to continue with secondary school. There is a special system which is *Telesecundaria*. It aims at students of rural areas or of the low socio-economic class. In this system, there is one teacher who teaches all the subjects. Teachers use, as a main tool, a television set to watch TV programs designed and broadcasted by the *Scretaría de Educación Pública (SEP)* for the teaching/learning of each of the subjects.

3.2 Context and participants

This study was carried out in a *Telesecundaria* in the outskirts of a city in the east of Mexico. In this public school, there were ten groups in total. Each group had around thirty students and each group had a teacher who taught all the subjects, about ten in all. Students were provided with a course book which is delivered by the *SEP* at the beginning of the academic year. For each of the subjects, students have to watch a TV program that lasts about 15 minutes. The school, in which this research was carried out, was located in a neighborhood which is not very far from downtown. However, many people who lived there were of low socio-economic status. Moreover, many families were dysfunctional. As a result, most of the students who attended this school faced a lot of economical and family problems.

The participants were teenage students between 12 and 14 years old. They were in first grade: group D. The group was made up of 28 students, 18 boys and 10 girls. They were beginner learners of English. Another very important participant was the teacher in charge of all the other subjects in the group.

3.3 Action research and data collection techniques

In order to carry out this research project, action research was used. According to Burns (2010), action research is a critical and systematic reflection on one's practice as a teacher in one's context. Burns (1999) claims that, "the major focus of action research is on concrete and practical issues of immediate concern to particular social groups or communities" (p. 24). This type of research was considered due to the fact that the improvement of the teaching practice is the goal of all teachers.

Three different techniques were used to collect data: participant observation, semi-structured interview, and focus group interview. Regarding participant observation, it was carried out all along the implementation of the project, some notes were taken. The teacher in charge of the group was interviewed at the end of the project in order to know her viewpoint regarding the implementation of the project, an interview guide was used. Finally, focus group interview was carried out with the whole class. Students worked in teams with some guidance from the researcher who tried to be as friendly as possible so that the participants would feel at ease. All these data collection techniques made triangulation possible. According to Burns (1999), the data collection techniques used by the researcher may be triangulated. In doing so, reliability and validity increase.

3.4 Implementation of the action plan

The action plan lasted for four weeks and students worked with one song activity each week. It was implemented as a first stage that lasted four weeks with the intention of implementing a second stage later on. The implementation of the second stage would take into account the observations and reflections made in the first one to improve the new stage. Moreover, it was only one song per week since the lessons lasted one hour and the contents of the course had to be covered.

During the first week, the song employed was called "Just the way you are" by Bruno Mars. In the first part of the activity, the students first had to listen to the song and then write down some of the words they had been able to identify in the song. Next, they compared their own list of words with that of a peer, and finally, all the students' words were listed and compared. In the second part of the activity, students were given the incomplete lyrics of the song for them to complete while the song was being played again. Then all the missing words were written on the board so that the students who found this problematic would have options to choose from. In the last part of the activity, the missing words were identified. Then, the students were asked to identify the part of speech of the new words. When they had figured this out, they were asked to write sentences with some of the words from the song.

The song used in the second week was "Can't take my eyes off you" by Diana Ross. This time, the students were given a list of words taken from the lyrics to identify the part of speech

and the meaning. The students were then asked to identify the words while listening to the song. When they had finished doing this individually, they were asked to form teams of three students and were given slips of paper with separate sentences of the lyrics of the song. Students read all the sentences first and then accommodated the lines in the correct order while the song was being played twice. The correct order was checked before the teacher inquired about the meaning of the lyrics. The activity ended with "the hot potato" game to check the new words.

The song-related activities of the third week focused on adjectives. Students were told that they were going to listen to the song "California gurls" by Katy Perry while reading the lyrics. They were told to pay special attention to the title and the lyrics, before discussing in pairs what they thought the song was about. Then, their attention was drawn to the fact that in some lines of the lyrics on the handout, there were numbers followed by two words to choose from. Students were explained that they would listen to the song again and that they had to circle the word they heard in the song. They compared their answers with those of their partner and as a whole class. Next, with a different peer, they identified the words that came before and after each adjective and identified the part of speech of these words. Finally, some students were randomly asked to say a sentence, using one of the adjectives just learned in the song.

In the final week of the action plan, the activity focused on nouns in the song "Everything" by Michael Bublé. First of all, students were asked to work with two classmates. They were given ten pictures that corresponded to ten nouns taken from the lyrics. They had to observe the pictures and give the names of the pictures in English. Some words were easy for them, but not all of them. The teacher helped them with the words that they did not know and with their pronunciation. Then the students ordered the pictures as they appeared in the song. At the end, the pictures were shown to them and they had to say the corresponding names. Moreover, the words were written on the board so that students also learned the correct spelling.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1 Findings

Some categories emerged from the data in response to the research question. In the first place, the researcher observed that students showed a positive response to the activities. Secondly, the participants stated that they became familiar with the language in a fun way. Thirdly, students claimed that they found the song-related activities useful in order to increase their vocabulary. In

the fourth place, the participants reported their belief that the use of songs not only helped them increase their vocabulary, but also to practice other language skills. Despite these positive results, some negative issues, such as lack of time, also became visible.

4.1.1 Positive response to activities

The participants claimed that the activities were appealing to them as students. The researcher also observed that the students liked the activities because of their reactions. Students tapped their feet and/or fingers to the rhythm of the music. This is similar to the findings of Shaheen (2009), who claims that songs are a good tool to learn vocabulary because learners enjoy the song-related activities due to the rhythm. Moreover, one student, Rodrigo, expressed that he liked the activities, "teacher, we like this kind of activity, you should bring activities like this more often". What is more, the teacher also said that students seemed to like the activities, and that she "was surprised when some of the students were trying to sing the songs, even days after they had listened to them".

4.1.2 Become familiar with the language in a different way

Part of students' positive response appears to be because the activities had given them the opportunity to learn the language in a different way. Previously, according to the teacher, the English class had included basically translation, and answering the course book. The students had little practice in speaking. In contrast, some students claimed that the action plan was "a different activity with no theory and it is easier to learn". This is in line with Lynch (2004) who claims that the use of songs provides the teachers and students with a relaxing environment to learn. What is more, students affirmed that "it is a dynamic way to learn and practice what we learn"; and that "the activities made us become familiar with the language in a dynamic way".

4.1.3 Activities useful to increase vocabulary

The activities were not only appreciated by the students, but they also seemed to "have been very useful" for them. In particular, some students- participants claimed that songs had helped them to learn new words. This coincides with what Salah (2001) claims when he states that songs are helpful to learn vocabulary in a natural environment, and with Griffe (1992) who claims that songs are a useful tool to acquire vocabulary. Furthermore, the teacher mentioned that the

activities had enabled students to learn new words: "students had learned some of the words that had been introduced by means of the songs".

4.1.4 Practice of different skills

The activities had been planned to increase the learners' vocabulary, but other aspects of the language had not been taken into consideration. Therefore, it was surprising that when students were asked about what they had learned with the activities, they mentioned other factors that had not been expected. In one of the focus group interviews, students said that the "activities helped us develop listening skills; it makes learning, listening and writing easier". These students stated that they practiced their listening, as well as their writing skill while performing song-related activities. Moreover, another group of students said that one of the activities was complete because "we watched the images, listened to the pronunciation and also we learned the spelling of the words". These students also considered the use of the images important; for them it is not enough to listen to the words and see the spelling. They considered the images a useful tool to learn a word. Likewise, I observed that some students made an effort to pronounce the words correctly both before and after they had been introduced. Saricoban and Metin (2000) claim that, the use of songs in the classroom, allows the teacher to practice vocabulary, grammar, speaking, listening, writing, and more. This was clearly observed during the implementation of the activities.

4.1.5 Insufficient vocabulary and time

Even though most of the findings were positive, some negative aspects were identified. The teacher believed that the activities were good, but they did not include enough vocabulary. She claimed that "students needed even more vocabulary. They need to learn much more than that". According to her, more activities were necessary because introducing ten words every week was not a very efficient way, given the amount of vocabulary that the students were supposed to learn.

Another negative aspect identified was the lack of time. The classes lasted less than an hour and sometimes, the last parts of the activities were done in a hurry. Furthermore, some students' negative attitudes were identified. For instance, while carrying out the activities, two students and participants commented regarding the activities. Alan said: "I don't understand anything, it is really difficult, the singer sings very fast". Additionally, Francisco said, "the

singer's pronunciation is difficult to understand". This led me to the conclusion that not all activities have positive results even when they are well planned.

5. Discussion

The results of this research demonstrated that the use of songs in the classroom has several advantages to teach/learn English. The use of songs can be an effective way not only to increase students' vocabulary, but to develop other skills such as writing, listening and spelling; that is, the use of songs can help develop more than one aspect of the language at a time. Additionally, students see this practice as fun, as a dynamic and different way to acquire the language. Furthermore, by carrying out these activities, students memorize the words more easily. Memorization is a strategy that is mentioned by Schmitt (1997) as useful for vocabulary learning.

Songs provide students with a way to be in touch with native pronunciation. Salah (2001) affirms likewise that students who are taught another language with songs feel part of the natural setting of that language. Moreover, students are able to hear the correct pronunciation which is sometimes difficult to achieve by non-native teachers.

From all the above, it can be concluded that songs are useful in the teaching of English. Smith (2002) seems to support this idea in a similar research project where she found that the use of songs in the classroom is an effective way to teach the language. Furthermore, Jolly (1975) states that songs are in the "middle ground between linguistics and musicology, possessing both the communicative aspects of language coupled with the entertainment aspect of music" (p. 11).

6. Conclusions

From the findings of this action research carried out in a *Telesecundaria* in the east of Mexico, it can be concluded that the use of songs in the classroom has many advantages and that it enables students to develop more than one skill at a time. Even though students enjoyed the activities at times, some students claimed that the songs were too difficult for them; the teacher should try to help the students feel at ease. Furthermore, having songs in the classroom is not only a way to have fun, but also to learn. Unfortunately, as teachers we do not always take into account that there are some other ways to work in order to achieve the goals of a course book or a program. At the same time, this experience has enabled me to realize that I have to plan different types of

activities so as to avoid routine and boredom. Nevertheless, the limitations previously mentioned should be taken into consideration in case the action plan is implemented again.

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TRIGGERING REFLECTION

After reading the chapter, answer the following questions:

- Reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of using songs to increase students' lexis in the target language.
- List some benefits regarding the use of songs in the EFL classroom, are mentioned in this chapter?
- Which of the following factors are taken into account in this chapter: Level of difficulty, music preferences, or learning styles? Reflect on the way these are related to the use of songs as a tool to increase students' vocabulary range.
- How would you stick to the use of songs to increase student's vocabulary collection
- Reflect on the way extracts or complete songs can be used in the EFL classroom.
- Taking into account factors such as motivation and autonomy, design an action plan to use songs to improve your students' language proficiency. Implement it.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Using High Frequency Words in the First Grade of a Mexican Private School

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Abstract

This chapter describes an investigation conducted at an elementary private school in Veracruz. This project aimed at helping first graders in their reading process in English as a foreign language (EFL). The use of high frequency words emerges as an appropriate alternative to help young reading learners to improve their reading skills in the target language. During the initial research, it was found out that the research participants were at different stages of the reading process which led to divide them into smaller groups. The findings revealed important information related to young learners' reading learning development in the EFL context as well as the limitations of certain factors such as English level differences and time.

Resumen

Este trabajo describe una investigación realizada en una escuela primaria particular en Veracruz. Este proyecto tiene como finalidad ayudar a los alumnos de primer año en su proceso de lectura en inglés como lengua extranjera. El uso de palabras de alta frecuencia surge como una alternativa apropiada para ayudar a estos alumnos a mejorar sus habilidades de lectura en inglés. Durante el inicio de la investigación se detectó que los participantes estaban en diferentes etapas de adquisición de la lectura, lo cual motivó a dividirlos en grupos pequeños. Los hallazgos revelaron información importante relacionada al contexto del aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera en niños, así como limitaciones de ciertos factores, tales como diferencias por el nivel de inglés y tiempo.

1. Introduction

The increasing demand for learning English all over the world is also perceived in Mexico. Currently, the government requires English to be taught as a compulsory subject in middle and senior school. At the elementary level, English is taught in its private school system. The Secretariat of Public Education (SEP: Secretaría de Educación Pública) does not control English

as a Foreign Language (EFL) in elementary schools. Therefore, private schools set their goals as well as their assessments according to their own curricula. Despite the fact that elementary private schools set their own goals in learning English, they agree that teaching English effectively involves the development of the four skills. Even if the new tendencies in learning English are focused on communicative activities, the integration of the four skills is widely used.

In the specific context of first grade children, reading is a complex issue; on the one hand, reading is not a prerequisite for 1st graders even in the mother tongue, while, in the elementary private system where the English language is included in the curriculum, teachers are required to develop learners' language skills, including reading. As a consequence, EFL teachers find themselves trying to teach demanding achieving-purpose programs that lead them to insist on students' arduous effort. Therefore, helping them read in English is a challenging task. Understanding the process of learning to read and the multiple factors involved, whether they facilitate or impede this process, requires a laborious work of reflection, observation and investigation.

1. 1 Context

This research was carried out in the state of Veracruz. The focal point was a group of twenty-one first graders in a bilingual elementary private school. The school has about 300 children. There are two groups in each grade from 1st to 6th with a maximum of 25 students per classroom. The school requires that students have some knowledge of English or at least some basic notions before entering first grade; however, children who do not know any English at all are accepted too. The school's methodology is based on communicative activities, but children's skills development in reading, listening and writing, are also important elements in learning English at school.

The research participants in this investigation were, as mentioned above, twenty-one 1st grade children from five to seven years old. Nine of the students were females and eight are males. Ten children had already learnt to read, seven were in the process and four cannot read at all. This study was focused on first grade learners and their reading progress with the intention of finding out ways to help them in this process. It explored the nature of first graders' reading problem and the way in which teaching high frequency words may facilitate children's reading process in the EFL context.

As a first grade teacher, I have observed that students, who are not able to develop the reading skill as well as the others, are negatively affected. Reading has a strong influence on learners from preschool to their adult lives. Regarding young children, not being able to read may have an impact in many ways. This is evident in the school where this study was carried out, children, who struggled to read in English when they were in first grade, are the same ones who show low accomplishment in English in the subsequent grades. They not only obtain low grades on tests and consequently on their report cards, but also their whole English learning process seems to be affected.

Children have a natural eagerness to discover and know about stories. However, a practice that should be gratifying becomes a displeasing experience for struggling readers. Considering that the process of learning to read is complex and difficult for many children, and the negative effects of lacking reading skills that have been manifested at this school, it is significant to focus this action research on helping children to improve their reading.

2. Literature Review

Literature about early reading development and significant concepts related to the topic were examined to understand the nature of the problem in order to design an action plan.

2.1 Oral reading fluency and reading comprehension achievement

Analysts and researchers emphasize the importance on developing oral reading fluency; for instance, Pikulski and Chard (2005) refer to fluency as a bridge from decoding to reading comprehension. Moreover, Cunningham & Stanovich (2001) mention that fluency not only involves reading accurately, but also implies the use of cognitive sub skills. Consequently, the lack of fluency interferes with automatic word identification. Therefore, struggling readers tend to read in an effortful and disconnected way focusing on decoding words that make comprehension of the text quite difficult.

Furthermore, The National Reading Panel in the USA defines fluency as "the ability to read text quickly, accurately and with proper expression" (NICHD, 2000:3-5 cited by (Pikulsky & Chard, 2005: 510). On the other hand, The Literacy Dictionary: The Vocabulary of Reading and Writing defines fluency as "freedom from word identification problems that might hinder comprehension" (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 85 cited by Pikulsky & Chard, 2005: 510). The last

definition emphasizes the implication of cognitive aspects involved in reading fluency and not merely an oral skill. Moreover, Stecker, Roser and Martínez (1995) cited by (Pikulsky & Chard, 2005) in their review of fluency research, conclude that there is a "reciprocal relationship" between fluency and comprehension, with each fostering the other. Furthermore, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS/Common Core State Standard) (cited by Shinn, 2012:8) observe the following foundational skills standards, as fundamental to develop reading proficiency.

Common Core State Standards

Foundational Skills Standards
1. Print Concepts
2. Phonological Awareness
3. Phonics and Word Recognition
4. Fluency

2.2 Early reading acquisition and its relation to reading experience

Recent research displays that there is a reciprocal influence between the exposure to print material and the development of cognitive processes (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2011). They state that interest focused on this influence, is derived from the impact that reading experience has on academic development. They also add that in the early stage of reading acquisition, poor readers who experience difficulty in reading, tend to be less exposed to reading activities.

2.3 Automaticity and Working Memory

Laberge and Samuels (1975) cited by (Hudson, Lane & Pullen, 2011) state that there is a limitation in the capacity of attention and memory working in the cognitive processes. They explain that two important aspects in reading are word identification and comprehension. They add that word identification may become automatic so that it could "free the processing space for higher order thinking (comprehension)" (2011:703) If words can be identified "quick and effortless" (2011:703), then cognitive resources can be used for comprehension.

2.4 Word Recognition, Fluency and High Frequency Words

According to Hudson, Lane and Pullen (2011) word reading accuracy relate to the ability to identify or decode words correctly, the ability to blend sounds together and the knowledge of an

extent bank of high frequency words is necessary for "word reading accuracy" (2011:703). Pikulski and Chard (2005) include both The Report of the National Reading Pannel (NICHD, 2000) and the Literacy Dictionary (Harris & Hodges, 1995) which define reading fluency as "efficient and effective word recognition skills that allow building meaning of a text". Furthermore, Pikulski and Chard explain that high frequency words are the words found most frequently in the language, they state that the instant recognition of these words contribute to develop reading fluency.

2.5 Instrumental Teaching

The main purpose of the action plan intends to help learners to recognize high frequency words automatically and consequently develop and/or improve oral reading fluency. Due to the characteristics of this action plan which implies the developing of activities to reach a specific purpose, the instrumental teaching approach encompasses the elements required to achieve this goal. According to Jarvis, Holford and Griffin (2003) instrumental teaching is a common form of learning in schools and colleges, where learners are expected to reach specific objectives. Although the "learning outcomes are specified in behavioral terms" (2003:29) as they can be measured; this method is very useful to achieve specific goals due to the high degree of precision, and are used not as a method for teaching practice, but only as a tool to obtain the expected results without "taking away the learners freedom" (2003:30).

3. Methodology

This study was carried out by means of action research (AR). During the initial stage of this research, a range of instruments were utilized with the intention of finding out the probable nature of the problem. Such instruments were selected according to the children's age, level and purpose. It is essential to mention the importance of choosing appropriate instruments and the correct application of them. The findings were included in this section as they emerged before the intervention. Besides, the results induced to design and formerly carry out the action plan.

3.1 Data collection techniques and verification of data

The data collection techniques used for this study were the following: observation, introspective measures (think aloud), closed multiple choice questionnaire (see appendix 1) and oral reading

assessment. After analyzing the instruments previously mentioned; they showed the following results emerged during the initial research.

a) The think-aloud as well as the assessments revealed that participants have difficulty in recognizing the words, because they were trying to decode the words trying to figure out the pronunciation.

b) The observation checklists revealed that reading practice in the classroom is quite low (3 minutes a day, most of the days) and they revealed also that learners' who still struggle with reading do not get involved in the daily reading activities.

c) The multiple choice questionnaire showed that participants have developed some basic reading strategies, but they still lack others.

d) The oral reading assessments revealed that learners struggle at recognizing words and consequently, their reading sounds fragmented. The teacher/researcher compared the correct words read with the high frequency word list, and the results revealed that most of the correct words were in the 1st level list which confirmed that word familiarization may help learners improve their reading skills.

3.2 Action plan

The literature review served as a basis to design the following action plan which was focused on teaching high frequency words in order to facilitate students' word recognition. As previously mentioned, word recognition might help learners in decoding words so that they can focus on comprehending the text. High frequency words are listed in frequency order (Fry's word list, 2001) and sorted alphabetically by grade level (Dolch's word list, 1948). These lists of words have been used in ESL contexts in the USA in order to help young children learn how to read. These words are also known as sight words, wall words and high frequency words, although they are arranged following different patterns and purposes, they are used to improve reading skills. Regarding the EFL context in Mexico, there is little information about the use of these words; in this event, this implementation might contribute to find out if the use of these words can help young learners in the reading process in the EFL context.

After analyzing both, Fry's (2001) and Dolch's (1948) lists, it was decided to use Fry's word list (2001). This decision was based on the fact that the reading texts used in first grade follow a certain pattern of words and difficulty, appropriate for first-graders, but they do not

repeat words and/or have the same sound pattern. Thus, most of the words used in the reading book (Open Court Reading) are found in the high frequency word list. On the other hand, Dolch's list (1948) is ordered by levels, first, second grade and so on; and the continuity of this method cannot be assured in the subsequent levels.

Figure 1: Fry Word's List 1 (2001a)

First 100 High Frequency Words
in frequency order reading down the columns

the	that	not	look	put
and	with	then	don't	could
a	all	were	come	house
to	we	go	will	old
said	can	little	into	too
in	are	as	back	by
he	up	no	from	day
I	had	mum	children	made
of	my	one	him	time
it	her	them	Mr	I'm
was	what	do	get	if
you	there	me	just	help
they	out	down	now	Mrs
on	this	dad	came	called
she	have	big	oh	here
is	went	when	about	off
for	be	it's	got	asked
at	like	see	their	saw
his	some	looked	people	make
but	so	very	your	an

3.2.1 Implementation

Due to time limitations, the list of 100 high frequency words was divided into four parts, twenty-five words per week. The words were practiced using different strategies as it is shown in the table below, the activities will be explained carefully in the following sections.

Table 1: High Frequency Words (HFW): Reading Foundational Skills Standards

HFW	**High Frequency Words** Introduce the list of 100 words during a period of 4 weeks; 25 words per week, 5 words a day.
OP	**Oral Practice** ✓ Choral repetition (exercises from YouTube); ✓ Spelling the words: Teacher points to the words and students spell them.
MSP	**Motor Skills Practice** ✓ Tracing, copying and reading aloud the words ✓ Worksheets from www.sightwordsgame.com. Teacher selects the most difficult words or the long ones to do this activity.
WR	**Word Recognition** ✓ Matching. Teacher says the word and children point to it, teacher's help may be necessary. ✓ Game: Detective work. Children find the words in written texts.
WIC	**Words in Context** Teacher helps or models oral reading of the 25 words in context to participants. Reading aloud words in context may imply the use of more than the 25 words, but the activity will be focused on the 25 words of the week. 1st week children will try to read the 25 words from the list. 2nd week children will try to read the 50 words at random. 3rd and 4th week they will try to read a paragraph of 4 sentences. (Readings either printed or digital)

3.2.2 Strategies description

Oral practice: The oral practice consisted of three activities.

✓ Oral repetition, the words were printed on flashcards, they were posted on the wall, the teacher said the word and students repeated.

✓ In order to avoid repetitive and boring practice, e-material was retrieved from you tube to review the words (a song). Children were allowed to go to the front to point to the words while the rest of the group sang (Activity 1[2]).

✓ Oral repetition exercise also retrieved from YouTube, the list of the 100 high frequency words is displayed and words are said one by one with audio. (Activity 2 [3])

Picture 1

Motor skills practice: In order to reinforce the practice of the words, participants were given worksheets (from www.sightwordsgame.com) which consisted of tracing, copying and writing a sentence using the specified word. Since this practice involved more motor than oral skills it was decided that worksheets would be given to the participants only three days a week: Mondays Wednesdays and Fridays (see lesson plan pp: 13,14).

Sight words worksheet   **Picture**

[2] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpVWGhuckcQ
[3] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-f1zT3ZYd0

Word recognition: To develop word recognition children practiced the following activities:

✓ Words were printed on flash cards; teacher said the words and children pointed to the word and they listened.

✓ Detective work, children were given a hand lens; they listened to a word and they had to find it on the wall. (See picture 3)

✓ Listen and find activity retrieved from you tube. (Activity 3[4]).The activity consists of listening to the word and pointing to the image (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HhWKD2SW994).

Picture 3: A participant is playing the "detective game".

Words in context: During the first weeks, learners tried to read the words in isolation, then the words were introduced in a sentence (through power point presentations) and gradually the words were presented in a short paragraph from our reading course book.

Picture 4 Participants during the reading activity

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[4] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HhWKD2SW994

Four week Action Plan Design. Lesson Plan.

Abbreviations key:	OP: oral practice	MSP: motor skill practice	WR: word recognition	WIC: words in context

Week 1

Time:	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Evaluation
(minutes)	5 new words	5 new words	5 new words	5 new words	5 new words	-Observation - Journal - Game: - Oral reading assessment
3- 5'	OP 5 words	OP 5 new words plus the 5 previous ones	OP 5 new words plus the 10 previous ones	OP 5 new words plus the 15 previous ones	OP 5 new words plus the 20 previous ones	
5'	MSP		MSP		MSP	
	WR	WR	WR	WR	WR	**Total words introduced 25**
5'						
7'					WIC	

Week 2

Time:	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Evaluation
	5 new words	5 new words	5 new words	5 new words	5 new words	-Observation - Journal - Game: - Oral reading assessment
3- 5'	OP 5 new words plus the previous ones at random.	OP 5 new words plus the 25 previous ones at random.	OP 5 new words plus the previous ones at random	OP 5 new words plus the previous ones at random	OP 5 new words plus the previous ones at random	
			MSP			
5'			WR	WR		
5'	MSP	WR			MSP	**Total words introduced 50**
7'	WR				WR	
					WIC	

Week 3

Time:	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Evaluation
3- 5'	5 new words	5 new words	5 new words	5 new words	5 new words	-Observation
						-Journal
	OP 5 new words plus the previous ones at random	OP 5 new words plus the 25 previous ones at random.	OP 5 new words plus the previous ones at random	OP 5 new words plus the previous ones at random	OP 5 new words plus the previous ones at random	- Game:
5'						- Oral reading assessment
5'						
	MSP	WR	MSP	WR	MSP	
7'	WR		WR		WR	**Total words introduced 75**
					WIC	

Week 4

Time:	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Evaluation
3- 5'	5 new words	5 new words	5 new words	5 new words	5 new words	-Observation
						-Journal
	OP 5 new words plus the previous ones at random.	OP 5 new words plus the 25 previous ones at random.	OP 5 new words plus the previous ones at random	OP 5 new words plus the previous ones at random	OP 5 new words plus the previous ones at random	- Game:
5'						- Oral reading assessment
5'			MSP		MSP	
	MSP	WR	WR	WR	WR	
10 – 30'	WR				WIC	**Total words Introduced 100**

4. Findings

The findings reported during the implementation of this action plan were obtained through several evaluation techniques. These activities were used to assess reading skills and evaluate the efficacy of the action plan. It was also observed that some factors influenced significantly the results. The term of the course where the action was implemented, the different participants' reading stages and the length of the intervention had an impact on the findings obtained. According to the SEP calendar, the elementary and middle-school courses started on

August 21st 2014 and ends on July 10th 2015. The four-week action plan started on August 25th and ended on September 19th 2014. In this event, the action plan was implemented in the initial term of the course. Participants were new comers and adapting to first grade, they have different English levels and are at different stages of the reading process. The findings were organized and analyzed based on the following evaluation activities and it was necessary to divide the participants into groups according to their reading skill level.

Table 6: Participants' reading skill level

	Participants' Reading Skill Level	Number of participants
Group 1	Students who have completed the 3 first foundational reading skills[5], phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition. Thye are beginner readers in their mother tongue and read in English with some mother tongue interference.	8
Group 2	Students who are in the process; they have acknowledged phonological awareness, and phonics both in their mother tongue and English. They can blend sounds and are able to read words in English that have a similar Spanish sound pattern.	9
Group 3	Students who have not acquired the basic skills, they do not know the letters and their sounds; even in their mother tongue.	4

4.1 Evaluation of action

 Two types of evaluation were used summative, to register the number of words read and formative to keep a record of the children's behaviour to adapt or modify the strategies and or activities used. The instruments chosen to evaluate the action plan were the following, an observation checklist (see appendix 2), a journal, a game and an informal oral reading assessment. These instruments were used to evaluate if the use of high frequency words would help improve oral reading fluency and to what extent. In the following sections, a brief description of each instrument is included**.**

---

[5] See the CCSS table 1 :p6

4.1.1 Observation checklist

Since the purpose of the evaluation was to measure participants' oral progress, observation seem to be the most appropriate instrument to gather evidence and keep a record of learners' behaviour and participation and evaluate whether or not these factors affect the learners' development.

This check list includes the observation of participants' involvement, attention and performance (participation when repeating the words). The following is a sample of these lists, adapted from Mendoza López, (2005:36) cited by Burns, (2006:64) (see appendix 2)

Observation checklist (1st week)

4.1.2 Journal

A weekly journal was selected to keep a record of the learners' progress and any other kind of information that would be difficult to notice in regular circumstances. Keeping a journal was an important instrument to reflect on the activities and their effect on participants' development.

4.1.3 Game

A game was used to evaluate participants' oral reading. The game consisted in showing one word to two participants. Then, they looked at it and found the word among the 100 words cards. Next, the first who picked up the word read the word aloud and got a point.

4.1.4 Oral reading assessment

Assessing is an evaluation technique chosen to measure learners' progress since it provides important and specific information and at the same time an overview of what has actually been achieved.

4.1.5 Verification

The verification of data was carried out through the comparison of the results (triangulation). They were organized according to the instrument used. Then, each group was examined and summarized to obtain initial conclusions. Finally, the conclusions emerged from each group were compared to draw a final conclusion.

4.2 Findings and analysis

During the first week of the implementation twenty-five words were introduced. These words were presented in the initial term of the course which represented some complications in carrying out the activity. The first week was challenging to get participants' attention. They showed difficulty in listening and following directions as they were not used to these kinds of activities. They improved gradually when they became used to the new routine, they seemed to be better adapted to the new schedule, new rules, and a different way of working. After the third day, most of the children seemed more involved in the activities, they knew what to do and they followed instructions more easily. Therefore, it appears that children response better when they know what to do and what they are expected to do.

In the following sessions it was not necessary to ask the participants to do anything, as soon as the teacher placed the list of words on the board or played the video with the oral exercise they started repeating the words. That reaction was very significant because it showed how easy it is to condition children's behaviour, children reacted this way because that is the way they are used to doing it. They are told what to do and they do it. The idea of a teacher-controlled practice emerged; at the same time the necessity of being careful to avoid excessive controlling teaching practice. Although this aspect of teaching is not well accepted as it limits the learners' autonomy and free learning (Jarvis, Holdford & Griffin, 2003). These researchers also admit that this method, which they refer to as instrumental teaching, is useful in some particular situations. Teachers can use this method to achieve specific purposes as explained in chapter two, though teachers should be careful of using these techniques excessively. This argument supported the use of these techniques, but the habitual activities were changed constantly to avoid routine and predictability. In order to include activities according to the new standards in EFL, different activities were retrieved from the web. All participants showed enthusiasm in performing these activities, this attitude confirms that learners enjoy and feel motivated when there is diversity in the learning context.

Furthermore, the length of practice was another important factor. Research about the time learners should be exposed to information suggests that learners should accomplish a

great deal of practice in order to acquire expertise in an area. This research also shows that "small differences in the amount of time of practice can result in large differences in the information they have acquired" (Vosniadou, 2001:23). This aspect influenced the participants' learning process, as they were able to recognize the words when they had practiced for longer periods. Consequently, participants appeared to struggle at recognizing the words in the third and fourth week; this result is explained in the following section.

4.2.1 Oral practice and word recognition (practice and read aloud words isolated)

As it was mentioned previously, students' oral practice and word recognition outcomes were registered according to the three reading-skill level groups. In the first group, the learners showed progress at recognizing the words introduced in the first week, after they had practiced them for two weeks. Participants repeated the second group of twenty-five words, they read the words, but only when these words were modelled. If they were asked to read the words they did it, but with mother tongue interference. During the third week, they were able to read the first and the second group of words. The outcomes did not vary in the following and last week. In the fourth week, participants were able to read the words introduced during the three weeks, seventy-five words in total. By the end of the fourth week, participants were able to read between eighty to ninety-five words with a little mother tongue interference as it is showed in the following picture. (See appendix 3)

**Picture 5: Reading measurement method results from group 1**
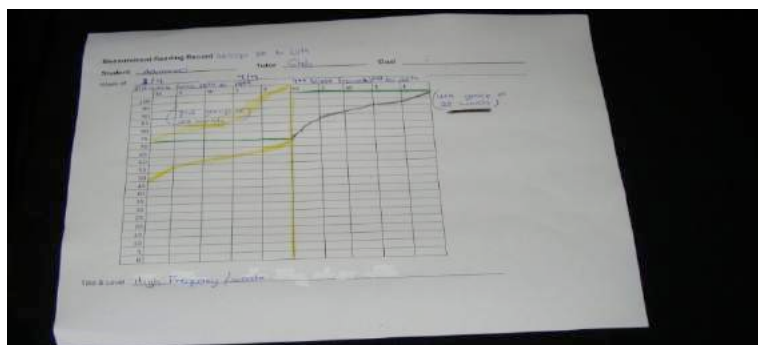
After two weeks of practicing, the second group of learners showed progress at recognizing the words introduced in the first week. In the third week, participants recognized the words, but not all of them, some words were mispronounced, some words were pronounced with mother tongue interference and some of them could not be read at all.

Picture 6: Reading measurement method results from group 2 (sample)
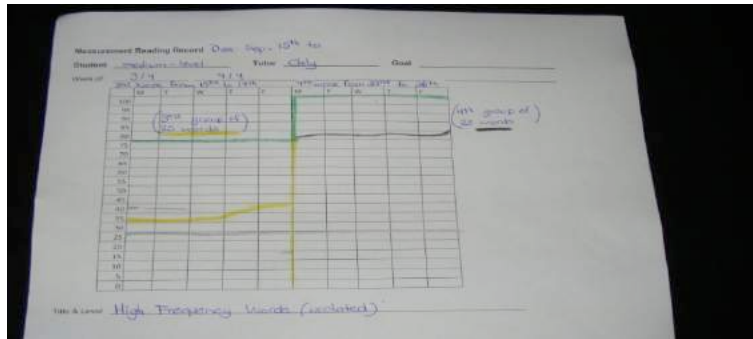
In the third group, learners did not show a considerable progress during the four weeks. Only two children were able to recognize one word, and they did it because they had memorized the word, since it was the highest frequent word found in our reading book; while the others were not able to recognize any words. They needed assistance to read the words so they did not read them, they only repeated.

Picture 7: Reading measurement method results from group 3
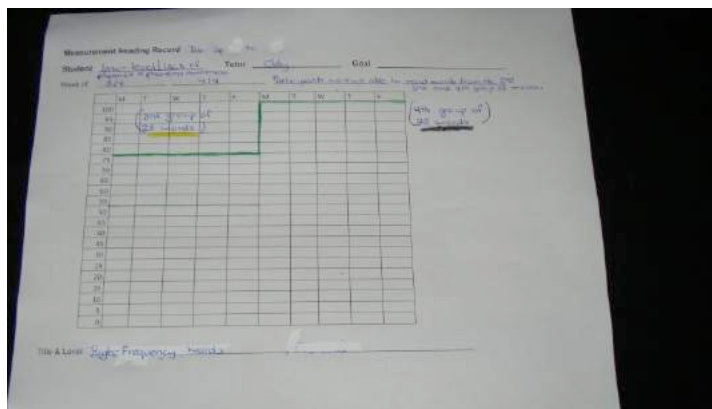
4.2.2 Motor skill practice

The motor skill practice was a favorite activity for them. Participants were given the worksheets three days a week, at the end of the oral practice. In the journal on August 26th one of the participants claimed "Miss Chely, no nos has dado la hojita, se te olvidó". Then, I explained to them that the worksheets were given only Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Then on August 28th another girl asked "¿Hoy sí nos vas a dar la hojita? It can be observed that students were motivated enough to carry out all the activities to enhance their motor skill. After, on September 1, when I was giving them the worksheets, children reacted enthusiastically.

One of the children exclaimed "Ayy, las hojitas que me gustan!" based on this expression it can be assumed that the reason why children enjoyed this activity is because the exercise is very similar to the exercises done in kinder garden. In fact, these worksheets were taken from a web page and they mentioned that these were kinder garden exercises, but used in ESL contexts. Based on this outcome, it can be deduced that children seem to feel more comfortable when doing exercises according to their level and when they know what to do.

4.2.3 Words in context

Once again, the differences in the participants' reading stages influenced the results. Based on the information analyzed in the observation checklist, the outcomes indicated that group one was more involved when we read words in context. Learners' reactions and attitudes when performing this activity demonstrated that they were following the reading. They were looking at the words while reading aloud. During this activity, participants were asked to point at the sentences while reading and all of them were in the correct part of the paragraph.

Group number two varied in their attitude during the activity. Some of the participants followed the reading, while some others pretended they were reading, but they were only repeating because they were looking somewhere else. Group 3 was not involved in the reading at all. They were not able to follow the reading and after a few minutes, they were playing with their school items. They only showed interest when the teacher talked about the story in their mother tongue.

Similarities were found from the analysis of the evaluation techniques outcomes. Group 1 showed the best results in all the activities; group 2 showed a significant progress although they seemed to need a little more practice. In contrast, group 3 did not show any progress. Based on these results it can be concluded that basic reading knowledge is necessary to reach the following stage in the reading process. Children who have acquired this basis, as well as the ones who are already engaged in the process, were able to recognize the words; while the ones who have not acquired this basis were not able to accomplish the task.

5. Discussion and Reflection

This segment encompasses an overview of the project as well as the importance of an opportune intervention in the teaching practice. The implications of an action plan at early stages of reading acquisition are mentioned in the following segments. Some limited factors that affected the effectiveness are also specified in this chapter. The limited factors led this

project to consider some changes next time around. Moreover, new ideas emerged and pointed to a possible second cycle.

5.1 Review

The first area of this project establishes the research context and the participants. The initial research explores different and fundamental aspects of the project. During the process of data-collecting, several techniques were used to find out the nature of the problem. These techniques contributed to reveal that learners even at a young age develop their own strategies at reading. Furthermore, they were able to express what they need to improve in reading. On the other hand, the fact that the teacher asked and listened to participants' answers developed a close relationship between them. Participants felt they had a "voice" and a more participating role in their learning process. It was also interesting to see how assumptions, beliefs and ideas at the beginning of the project changed progressively until it became the final project. In other words, this reflects the growth, development, and learning from both parts, the teacher researcher and the participants.

The analysis demonstrated that the use of high frequency words might be an effective method to learn words and develop reading fluency if the limitations enumerated below had been anticipated to reduce their negative impact. The results also showed that time is an important factor that affects this development since significant progress was observed when the participants read the words they had practiced for a longer period of time. It is important to take into consideration that this implementation was carried out at the beginning of first grade.

5.2 Implications

The results revealed that the needs of children at the early stages of reading are different. The method to develop word recognition and fluency is helpful when children have acquired or are in the process of acquiring the basic skills to read. Children who have acquired these skills showed a very important progress. Taking into consideration that they are at the beginning of first grade, it could be predicted that they would be able to develop fluency and achieve comprehension skills earlier than learners on previous courses. The implication of this improvement is that the teacher may focus her practice in developing comprehension reading skills and learners would be better readers in later grades.

5.3 Limitations

Various aspects are considered as limitations in developing reading fluency. After analyzing the findings, it was observed that time was an important constraint. It was demonstrated that participants were able to recognize more words when they had practiced them for a longer period of time. Introducing 100 hundred words was an effective method when the participants had already acquired the reading skill (group 1). They were able to read the words with a short margin of error. For participants (group 2), who were in the process of acquiring the reading skill, they were able to recognize the words, but only after a certain time of practice. They appeared to struggle at recognizing long or less frequent words. Regarding the children who have a low-level, lack of phonics and phonological awareness, they did not show a considerable improvement. This result could be interpreted as participants need first to acquire the missing skills, so that they can achieve the following stage: word recognition, fluency and reading comprehension.

5.4 Changes next time around

The first change that seems fundamental is the number of words introduced in the week. The words would be reduced to five or ten words per week so that there would be enough time to work with the meaning of the words. Word walls is another strategy to be included, words can be arranged in family patterns based on sound similarities, phonics, or language patterns. In this way, the participants could practice the words during more time and they could also work on the meaning. In this way, it may be assured that participants have learnt the words and not only memorized them.

5.2 Conclusions

As it was previously mentioned in this paper, reading has an important role in academic achievement. Research has demonstrated that poor reading skills will negatively affect academic development (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2011). Moreover, researchers suggest that there is strong evidence of the connection between fluency and comprehension of texts (Pikulski & Chard, 2005). Therefore, a lack of fluency on reading may obviously affect reading comprehension skills and consequently the development of reading skills will be affected. Furthermore, reading fluency is not only a characteristic of good readers, but it is also an important element in comprehension achievement (Hudson, Lane & Pullen, 2005).

The findings revealed a strong correlation between participants' views and the words read correctly from the oral reading assessment; participants indicated that to improve their

oral reading they need to know most of the words from the text. The teacher/researcher compared and confirmed that the words read correctly by most of the children were included in the First 100 High Frequency Word (wwwhighfrequencywords.org). This coincidence reveals that familiarization or word recognition helps learners read the words. A hypothesis that arose from this finding is that if participants are able to read and understand the high frequency words, it would facilitate decoding of words and consequently learners may improve in fluency, accuracy and intonation. Subsequently, learners may focus less on decoding and more on comprehension.

5.3 Reflection

As a first grade teacher, one of my main concerns is helping my students in their learning process. In México, English is a subject in most middle school curriculum in public schools. This means that the Department of Public Education (SEP) designs and does research on EFL in the specific Mexican context. On the contrary, at the elementary level, English is taught at the private system; in other words, the responsibility of designing an effective teaching program relies on the school, and frequently on the teachers. While it is true that the teaching of English at the private system allows certain flexibility, it also demands a lot of research, work, methodology and strategies in English teaching. In the specific context of first graders, teachers face some factors that might affect EFL learning. For example, according to the SEP, reading in L1 is not a prerequisite to enrol in 1st grade, so first grade students usually have different reading skill levels. Moreover, some children have not even accomplished basic phonemic awareness in their mother tongue. As a result, helping children to read is a laborious task.

For this reason, the development of this project was helpful in many ways. Understanding the reading process in the early stages was one of the most important aspects learned. The awareness of this process allowed me to develop new teaching strategies. In addition, this project helped me to validate strategies used during years of practice. While developing this study, I could relate theory and practice and understand the importance of creating and following a system for teaching reading. As it was previously mentioned, helping young learners read in English is a challenging task. For this reason, it is fundamental to organize, follow an order and keep a record of the different activities used to accomplish this task. In this way, it would be easier to monitor participants' progress and the efficacy of each strategy. As a consequence, teachers would be able to design or plan strategies more efficiently. In that event, an adequate and opportune intervention may be undertaken.

5.4 Ways forward

The results obtained from the implementation were successful to a certain extent, the results were not the expected, but due to the limitation factors mentioned in the previous sections. Most participants were able to read a significant number of words; however, it cannot be assumed that they learnt the words. It is possible that they can recognize the words and read them easily, but it cannot be affirmed that they understand them. The four weeks of intervention helped participants to recognize the words, but not learn the meaning and consequently use them in context. In this event, a second action research cycle seems to be the most advisable. In a probable second cycle, words would be introduced, reducing the number of words per week so that learners could learn their meaning and use them in context.

Based on the conclusion drew by Stecker, Roser and Martínez (1998), that suggests that reading fluency and comprehension have a reciprocal relationship and one fosters the other. It is fundamental to mention the existence of a possible further action research to find out if there are children who might develop reading comprehension skills earlier than the rest of their classmates. This would specifically apply to those students (group 1) who were able to read and for whom the learning of the words was much easier. If they were able to develop their oral skill, they may also be able to develop their comprehension reading skills more easily than the others.

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APPENDIX 1: Sample Instrument # 4: Closed Questionnaire Multiple Choice

Student directions: Indicate how often you do the following when reading in a foreign language:

Never   Rarely   Sometimes   Usually   Almost Always

Student directions: Indicate how often you do the following when reading in a foreign language:

1.   *Before you read do you think about what it will be about?*

Almost Never   Rarely   Sometimes   Usually   Almost Always

2.   *While you read, do you imagine pictures in your head or imagine you are part of the story?*

Almost Never   Rarely   Sometimes   Usually   Almost Always

3.   *When you read a word you don't know, do you try to figure out its meaning by looking at the rest of the story?*

Almost Never   Rarely   Sometimes   Usually   Almost Always

4.   *After you read, do you think about how well you understood it?*

Almost Never   Rarely   Sometimes   Usually   Almost Always

APPENDIX 2: Sample from Participants' Attitudes Observation Checklist:
Participants' attitudes checklist

Date: _____

Key

Activity	Oral Practice	Motor Skills Practice	Word Recognition	Words In Context
PR				
PIA				
PA				
POR				

PR	Participants repeat the words (performance and attitude)
PIA	Participants' involvement in the activity
PA	Participants' attention during the activities
POR	Participants oral repetition

(Adapted from Mendoza López, 2005, p.36, cited by Anne Burns, 2006:64)

APPENDIX 3: Sample from Measurement Reading Record

Student _____ **Tutor** _____ **Goal** _____

Week of _____ _____

	M	T	W	T	F	M	T	W	T	F
100										
95										
10										
5										
0										

Title & Level _____

Adapted from Hudson, Lane and Pullen (2005)

TRIGGERING REFLECTION

After reading the chapter, answer the following questions:

- To what extent do the authors ease the development of the students' reading skills in the target language through the use of frequency words?
- Reflect on the belief that working with children increase the difficulty to promote their reading skills. What is usually expected from a young EFL learner regarding the reading skill?
- Do you agree with the use of high frequency words to facilitate your students reading process? Justify your answer.
- List some possible benefits of using high frequency words to facilitate EFL learners' reading process.
- After observing your own context situation, would you adapt and replicate the research process stated in this chapter? Justify your answer.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Vocabulary Learning Strategies to Overcome Students' Vocabulary Limitations with Uno System Readings

Alhelí Cortés Cosme

Antonio Iván Sánchez Huerta

Abstract

This paper describes a research project done in an English classroom regarding junior high school learners' vocabulary limitations when reading texts found in the method called "UNO system". Six vocabulary learning strategies were applied in order to promote the necessary comprehension of those UNO readings. The data obtained from both qualitative and quantitative research demonstrated that some students did not understand the UNO texts due to a lack of vocabulary which may affect their motivation. The results revealed that the promotion of the six vocabulary learning strategies helped students' to understand UNO readings, promoted willingness to participate and motivation.

Resumen

Este artículo describe un proyecto de investigación realizado en un aula de Inglés atendiendo las limitaciones de vocabulario en estudiantes de secundaria para leer textos encontrados en el sistema UNO. Se implementaron seis estrategias para aprender vocabulario con el objetivo de promover la comprensión necesaria de los textos de UNO. Los información obtenida de una investigación cualitativa y cuantitativa demostraron que algunos alumnos no entendían los textos de UNO por falta de vocabulario; consecuentemente, esto también afectó su motivación. Los resultados revelaron que las seis estrategias ayudaron a los alumnos a entender las lecturas, además de promover participación y motivación.

1. Introduction

Technology in education has been present since teachers started to use tape-recorders, projectors, speakers, intelligent boards and currently computers and other modern items. Bearing in mind the possible advantages that this can offer to teachers and students, different schools have implemented new technological resources within their classrooms. It can be considered that the use of technology facilitates the learning and teaching process in a more active way, promoting encouragement and motivation as well. However, as language teachers

we should be aware not only of the advantages that using technology can bring about, but also of the problems that may arise with the excessive use of it within the language classroom.

One evident problem when using technology in classrooms is that teachers need to be trained so that they can use it properly. So, the use of technology requires teachers to invest time to create activities that they can implement along with the technological resources in their daily teaching practice (Muir-Herzig, 2004). In one private and bilingual junior high school in Orizaba a modern and innovate system has been implemented, the UNO system. This is an innovative educational program which aims at motivating students in their language classes by relating students' knowledge of what has been seen in the classroom to their real environment, so that they can learn the target language in a more meaningful and realistic way.

Nevertheless, at this school, it has been observed that technology is not really a support but a must because all the language lessons need to be given under the guidance of the UNO program, using an Ipad to control all the activities performed during the classes. Teachers are not allowed to work with anything else or to introduce different activities. This means that a teacher, working with this platform, should be bold and willing enough to work the different resources in the UNO system in the English classes. According to Muir-Herzig (2004), the "teacher support must encompass more than training; it must include time to experiment, permission to change the way they do things, and to make mistakes" (p.6); however, this is not the case in this context. Among other resources, the UNO System works with a book of readings that includes short novels, fables and tales. Every two months, students have to do a different reading. These readings are compulsory as students are evaluated on them as part of their bimestrial grade. However, it was noticed when evaluating them, that they have neither the language level nor the vocabulary to cope with the readings.

Having observed that the excessive use of the UNO program and the students' lack of vocabulary to understand the readings decimated students' motivation, participation, and low grades in the language classes, six vocabulary learning strategies were implemented. These strategies were aimed at promoting reading comprehension and at the same time motivation for students to read.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Role of Motivation when Teaching Children and Teenagers

Motivation is paramount to succeed at something, and when referring to language learning this is not the exception. Motivation is considered as an important factor that enhances students' learning process. According to Harmer (2006) motivation can be influenced and affected by the attitude and responses of different people and feelings. Therefore, all the language teachers should be aware of how to promote and enhance motivation among students, especially when these learners are young. Hence, one important aspect to promote motivation in language students is that the teachers need to vary the activities, tasks and materials that are used as tools during the English classes. This can also help to avoid boredom and increase students' interest (Lightbown and Spada, 2006).

Another aspect to be taken into account when teaching young learners, such as in this study, is the differences among them; for example, the knowledge of the second language, learning styles, attitudes, and age. Students' characteristics are key factors for teachers to plan and teach their classes (Moon, 2000).

2.2. Reading and Vocabulary Development

When a student is learning a second language, the reading skill is considered essential in order to increase their language knowledge and competence, for through their practice a student can develop and learn grammar and vocabulary at the same time (Horwitz, 2013). Reading also implies the process of learning new vocabulary, helping associating and constructing meaning.

At the same time, reading is divided into two categories. According to Harmer (2006) and Horwitz (2013) the two categories are: intensive and extensive reading. In intensive reading, students need to understand grammar and vocabulary in more detail for a specific purpose. It requires learners to read in detail with specific learning aims and tasks. On the other hand, extensive reading involves students reading texts as a means to develop general reading skills and enjoyment. In order to feel that pleasure at the moment of reading in a foreign language it is necessary to master the language at a certain level.

Having revised the aforementioned points, the orientation of this project was directed towards intensive reading, since students were asked to read the UNO platform texts in detail with the purpose of developing vocabulary, grammar structures, and practice of the language throughout specific tasks and activities in class. To fulfill this work, the practitioner started to

design some strategies to promote students' vocabulary development and get them actively involved so that they could cope with the target readings.

2.3. Language Learning Strategies

Williams and Burden (1997) indicate that "what makes learners be successful at learning something, and all the reasons why some students are more prospered and effective than others when learning a language can be possibly answered by detecting the language learning strategies which those people apply" (p. 56). From this claim, it can be inferred that the promotion of language learning strategies should be a teacher's must among their students in order to support them with their learning process and make it easier for them.

Oxford (1990) defines learning strategies as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferrable to new situations" (p. 8). According to this definition, learning strategies can be applied not only in the language learning area but also, in other areas of study like history, chemistry, biology, etc.

2.3.1. Language Learning Strategies Classification of O'Malley and Chamot

For the purpose of this action research project, I took O'Malley and Chamot's classification of learning strategies into account because they were considered the most suitable strategies to promote development of new vocabulary, and also because they offered several options for learning strategies (Moir and Nation, 2008). In this manner, I implemented six learning vocabulary strategies based on the aforementioned classification (See Figure 2.1). This was done to help students learn the vocabulary needed for the UNO platform readings and engage them in productive tasks to develop their vocabulary and promote at the same time more interaction in the seventh grade high junior students.

Figure 2.1: O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) Classification of Language Learning Strategies

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Action Research

According to the characteristics of this intervention study, this can be considered as an action research project. This type of study is the most adequate for this study due to the working conditions faced by the practitioner. Action research is part of the teaching practice because the facilitators are normally observing their students' reactions, emotions, changing and creating new strategies and practices in order to improve classroom environment, students' learning and their own professional development (Koshy, 2005).

3.2. Research Site and Participants

This project was done in an English classroom of a Junior High School private and bilingual institution; specifically on 7th grade. The participants were 20 children, whose age ranged from 11 to 12 years old. Eight students from this class had formerly studied in public schools, and they had not taken English language instruction before. This situation brought some disadvantages for them in terms of oral interaction with the rest of the class, which had already received such instruction. These facts affected the first eight described students' self-esteem and motivation within the classes. The other twelve students were able to use the language and comprehend partially the UNO texts, in contrast with the affected eight students, which were motivated to be more active within the classes.

3.3. Instruments and Data Collection

Due to institutional constrains, it was difficult for the researcher to obtain initial data. The researcher could neither make a survey nor interview students, as the school did not approve using them. In order to analyze and identify what was exactly happening with the 7th Junior High School grade, the practitioner had to reconsider the instruments for collecting data to avoid going against the Institution rules and restrictions. The instruments selected were mainly observational. These instruments included: journal, constructive maps, students' participation charts, and pre-test as well as post-test results.

3.4. Data Analysis Procedure

- The Journal: This instrument (See Appendix 1) helped the researcher to detect and to some extent confirm previous observations when teaching the addressed grade of junior high school. This content analysis was helpful to start planning the strategies to be implemented.

- Constructive Maps: The constructive maps (See Appendix 2) helped to identify all the external factors affecting students' behavior. The practitioner looked very carefully at these drawings to analyze the aspects previously mentioned.

- Students' Participation Charts: The number of stamps given to each student for participating was counted and they were given a grade. These grades were represented graphically.

- Pre-Test and Post-Test: the pre-test and the post-test were also graded. Each student was given a grade from zero to ten. The grades were also graphically represented and it was possible to have the percentage of the students getting a given grade. Besides this, a comparison was made between the pre-test and the post-test.

3.5. Intervention Description.

After having confirmed the researcher's observations on the events happening in and affecting the seventh grade class, this practitioner designed a set of activities to carry out the intervention. One very first decision was to change the classroom sitting arrangement considering that "the physical arrangement of the classroom has the potential to encourage desirable behavior or contribute to students' misbehavior" (Wannarka and Ruhl, 2008, p. 79). Hence, based on this claim, the researcher changed the classic classroom seating into the horseshoe arrangement. This new orientation of the classroom was useful in order to promote and carry out the activities and exercises focused on the lessons plans designed according to O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) classification of the language learning strategies.

The selected six vocabulary strategies chosen from O'Malley and Chamot (1990) promoted several skills and were divided into three categories according to their own classification: 1) Cognitive Strategies (summarizing, organizing new vocabulary, using pictures and movement for memorizing); 2) Metacognitive strategies (critical thinking, elaboration of tasks and evidences, presentation, role-play games and presentations); and 3) Social Mediation Strategies (collaborative work, critical thinking and different tasks: See Appendix 3).

The implementations based on the previous classification were aimed at promoting motivation and students' participation in the class. Because of this, Moon (2000) also claims that "If pupils enjoy their English classes and are successful, this may in turn develop positive attitudes and increase motivation. If both you and your pupils have positive attitudes to learning English, this will help to create the kind of learning environment in which language

learning will flourish" (p. 17). This claim gave the practitioner another reason to plan the classes on the grounds of O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) classification.

4. Findings

In this section there is a brief description of the findings obtained from the instruments. It shows the confirmation of some negative factors and the results found throughout the accomplishment of this action research. The findings are derived from the Teacher's Journal, Tests Results, Students' Participation Charts, and Constructive Maps. These findings are described as follows.

4.1.1 Teacher's Journal

Using the notes and reflections written in the journal, the practitioner could become aware of what was happening in the classroom and to reflect about the changes she needed to implement. From her notes, she realized that the students seemed to become desperate every time she worked with the Ipad and when they started to discuss and solve the activities related to the UNO texts. This situation affected students' behavior and their level of motivation and interaction. Students were not willing to participate, especially those who were presenting serious problems with the vocabulary in the readings they had to do on the UNO platform (See Appendix 1).

4.1.2. Test Results

After having analyzed the entries in the journal, the researcher decided to construct a test. This would help her see how much vocabulary the learners knew for the grasping of the required UNO platform readings.

4.1.2.1. Pre-Test Results

This test was administered as a pre-test before implementing the six vocabulary strategies. The results obtained from the test were analyzed and classified into percentages.

Chart 4.1 shows that the learners presented serious problems with the vocabulary required for comprehending the UNO readings. According to the results, it can be seen that the only section in which students got the highest percentage of the correct answers were the sections related to adjectives, followed by categories of nouns, adverbs, and collocations. Each represented the 4% out of the 100% of the test. The 3% represents the category of verbs and the remaining 2% the category of phrasal verbs. As shown in the chart, the greatest

percentage of the exam represents almost the 75% of the test. This percentage is the total number of wrong answers the students had.
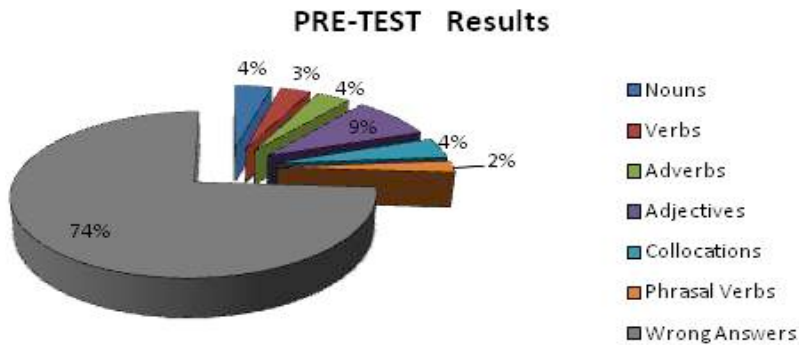
PRE-TEST Results

Chart 4.1: Results of the Pre-Test according to the categories.

Appendix 4 supports the information analyzed in the previous chart where it can also be seen in detail the right and wrong answers obtained by each student within each category of the test. In this Appendix, there is also a comparison between the percentage representing each category of the test with the one obtained by the students.

4.1.2.2. Post-Test Results

After having implemented the six vocabulary strategies (See Appendix 3), the same test was administered again. Thornbury (2002) claims that "without testing there is not reliable means of knowing how effective a teaching sequence has been. Testing provides a form of feedback, for both learners and teacher (p. 129)". The practitioner's purpose, giving the students the same test, was to know to what extent the proposed vocabulary learning strategies had worked on helping the students to learn the vocabulary needed for the UNO readings.

After grading the students' post-test, the practitioner studied the results according to the category division for its analysis. Results from the post-test showed there had been a remarkable change in the students' grades and mistakes in comparison to the pre- test results. In fact, the percentage of the students' mistakes decreased more than it was expected. As Chart 4.2 displays, students' answers improved in all the categories. Although the children still presented some vocabulary problems, for example in the category labeled as phrasal verbs, there is clear evidence that there is an improvement on this aspect. The percentages obtained by the learners in each category are shown in chart 4.2.
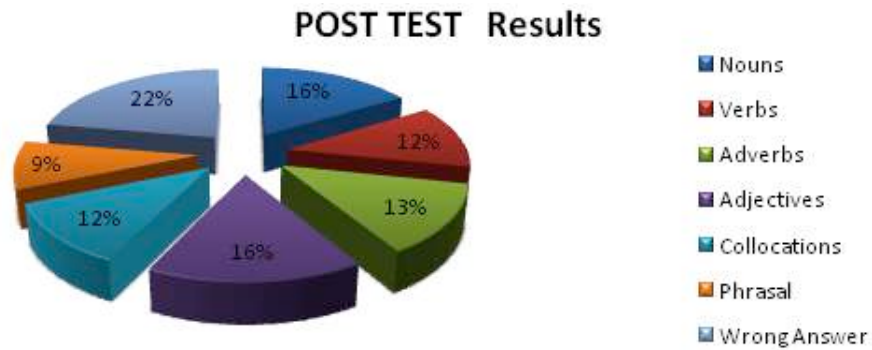
Chart 4.2: Results of the Post-test according to the Categories of the test

Further information of the analysis of this chart can be found in Appendix 5. The right and wrong answers obtained by each student within each category of the test can be seen in detail.

After analyzing the categories of the post-test, the practitioner continued with the analysis of the students' individual grades. These grades suggested that the implemented strategies for learning the required vocabulary for the UNO readings worked effectively; which was a great reward for the practitioner.

Chart 4.3, by comparing both the pre-test and the post-test results, shows objectively that all (100%) of the students participating in this intervention project had a remarkable vocabulary development of the words required for the UNO readings.
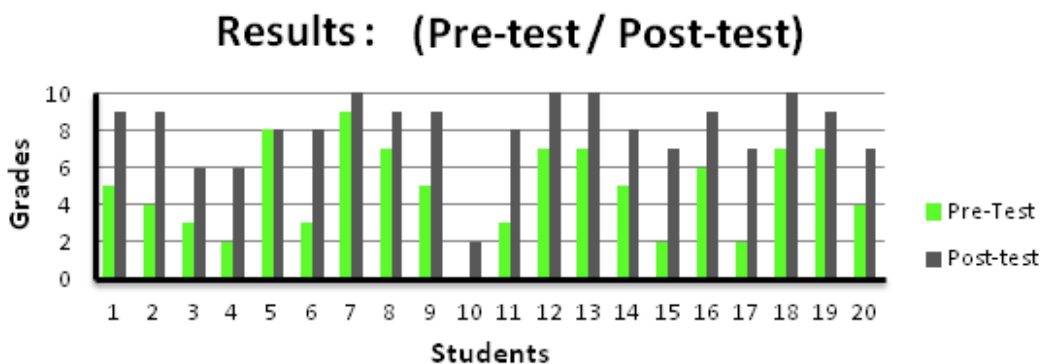
Chart 4.3: Comparison of the Students' Results before and after the Implementation.

In conclusion, it can be said that the implemented six vocabulary strategies worked on helping students to learn the vocabulary needed to cope with the UNO platform readings.

4.2. Journal

From the extracts in the journal, the practitioner could also identify that the students in the group organized themselves in different groups according to their level of English. To verify

these observations from her journal notes, she decided to start drawing constructive maps (See Appendices 6 and 7) to record the way the students sat during the class.

4.2.1. Constructive Maps and Seating Arrangement

Drawing constructive maps and taking photographs of the sitting arrangement in the class was very helpful for the practitioner, for she could identify the zones where there was no interaction among students (See Appendices 7 and 8). From the constructive map in Appendix 2, the teacher- researcher was able to identify that:

1) The sitting arrangement was not favorable for interaction among students.
2) The students were sitting in groups of friends and some others did not work properly with some partners.
3) The students who really needed to pay more attention to the class were sitting at the back of the classroom.

These observed situations affected not only the students' participation but also the practitioner's class management. Thus, when implementing the strategies, the teacher-researcher decided to change the sitting arrangement in the class.

4.2.2. New Sitting Arrangement

After analyzing different ways of class sitting arrangement and according to the size and the conditions of the classroom, the practitioner decided to change the traditional sitting arrangement in her classes. Chairs were moved to make a horseshoe shape. (See Appendix 8) This decision was made because this kind of arrangement "creates a more 'intimate' classroom environment that helps to provide students with the security they need to take risks with their talk. Everyone can see each other easily and this encourages peer cooperation and collaboration. Teachers can stand outside the horseshoe and guide the activity from there or they can join in and be an equal contributor (ORBIT, 2013)".

4.2.3. Students' Participation

To motivate students to participate, as previously mentioned, the teacher decided to implement a stamp system. Every time each student took part in the class, they were given a stamp. This system was implemented since the school year began, for participation is an aspect to be graded to integrate student's grade each bimester. Students' participation grade was given according to the number of stamps each student collected during the classes. The

number of stamps each student collected was registered and analyzed before and after the implementation.

At the very beginning of this intervention project, the practitioner made a chart to analyze students' participation. In Chart 4.4, it is evident that just 2 out of 20 students were participating frequently in the bimester before the implementation, obtaining a 10 in participation, that is, the highest grade for participating in classes. Two more students got a 9. Together, these four students only represented a 20% of the population in the group whereas 12 students, that represented the 60% of the class, had lower grade for not taking part in an active way in the class activities. As for the rest of the class, 4 out of the 20 students (20 %) never took place regarding participation during the English classes.

Chart 4.4 also shows an increase in the students' participation after implementing the strategies and the horseshoe rearrangement. Nineteen (99%) out of the 20 students participated more, being this participation more meaningful and related to the Uno readings, this, in turn, meant that they were using the vocabulary needed for the readings. Thus, it can be deduced that once the students overcome their lack of vocabulary, they were able to participate successfully in class and consequently that the implemented vocabulary strategies resulted practical and functional for the learners.
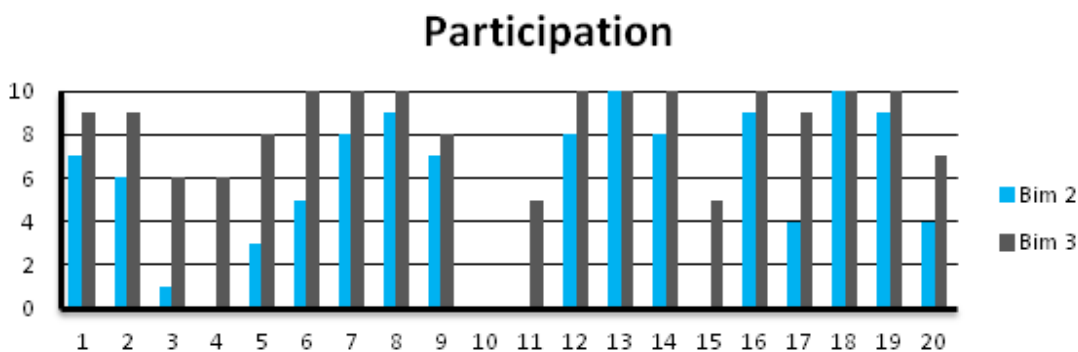
Participation

Chart 4.4: Comparison of Students' Participation before and after the Implementation

As shown in the chart, only one student (1%) did not demonstrate any achievement or improvement in their participation, because, s/he did not show any effort during the implementation. However, it is important to point out that after the intervention, this same student was reported by the psycho-pedagogical department as having behavior problems; this may explain why s/he did not participate at all during the intervention.

4.3. Discussion of Results and Reflections

At the beginning of this study, the practitioner and the 7th grade learners confronted several negative situations caused by the use of the UNO system and the different students' knowledge of the English language. Due to this, it was essential to find out solutions for these problematic situations. Several constraints affected the process of collecting data due to the policies and restrictions of the school. Nevertheless, the practitioner was able to find out the most suitable instruments in order to collect and support information in this intervention.

After the analysis of the data obtained from the instruments, the practitioner put into practice two implementations. Firstly, the researcher changed the sitting arrangement of the classroom, this facilitated students' interaction and different ways of grouping. Besides this, the practitioner could manage better the class and it promoted eye contact among teacher and students too. This promoted a nicer and friendlier atmosphere within the classroom (See Appendices 7 and 8).

Secondly, the researcher designed Six Vocabulary Learning Activities based on O' Malley and Chamot's learning strategies classification (See Appendix 3), which were addressed to enhance interaction, dynamism, participation among students, and also to facilitate their vocabulary learning process. After the implementations of these strategies, it is noticed that they were a key factor in order to foster interaction and participation among the students too.

Additionally, the students' participation was measured before and after the implementations. At the beginning of this project, it was seen that the 80% of the students were having problems when participating during classes. After the practice of the strategies, the increase in participation could be proved by the use of charts that demonstrated graphically the frequency of students' participation. Besides this, the use of the photographs (See Appendices 9 and 10), constructive maps and teacher's journal are pieces of evidence that could give a greater support to the achievement of this project.

Furthermore, it is important to mention that after carrying out the vocabulary learning strategies, the students could learn the words required for reading UNO texts. This can be supported by the results obtained from the pre and post – test results, where it was proved that there was an important increase in students' vocabulary knowledge.

Finally, it is important to point out that the students put some values into practice as well; for example, they began to respect students who had problems with the English language, by that time, and their solidarity helped them to understand some characteristics of the language. Comradeship and friendship were some of the values promoted during this

research. Students developed these values during the intervention and it is expected that they will still continue making use of them in their classes. (See Appendices 9 and 10)

5. Conclusions

After completing this intervention project, I realized the importance of doing action research. Action research can be perceived as a highly complex work to achieve, because it involves several processes such as observing, reflecting, planning and putting things into action. Doing action research requires making some decisions, such as planning and reorganizing every teaching practice and mainly, it represented a big challenge for her in order to change the way she was used to teaching under the UNO platform rules. This intervention project provoked an exhaustive reflection and commitment with my daily teaching practice, for it did not only imply to observe which problem existed, but it also meant to implement different strategies in my teaching practice in order to facilitate students' learning process.

Although the strategies implemented in this study were designed and planned for a specific context, these can be applied in different UNO classrooms because they contain, both, the content imposed by the system and the application of the vocabulary learning strategies to enhance students' vocabulary development, which can be required in a certain moment within the English classes. In this way, the educational context where this action research took place can be extended to the other groups of this private institution, working with UNO platform. By doing this, students may benefit a lot and, instead of complaining about the imposed UNO readings, they could enjoy them. Also, learners' grades can be improved as it was the case of the participants in this project.

To sum up, after carrying out this research project, it would be quite interesting to investigate if these 7th grade learners will continue using these vocabulary learning strategies in their future English classes, the frequency and how useful they have been for them. One more issue to point out is that as there is no way to avoid the use of the UNO system in junior high school levels, it would be interesting to conduct on some further research. This new research could focus on finding some other strategies or activities to cope with the use of Ipad as well as on searching for other innovative apps that could be used in language classroom. When focusing on this, teachers should remember that any implementation has to take into account the characteristics of the group and that creativity and dynamism is essential in classes with teenagers.

Finally, it is important to remember that it is teachers' responsibility to foster and enhance the students' learning process by means of different actions taken in the classrooms

so that their students are successful in learning the foreign language. It is the teachers' commitment with their students and their teaching practices that will ensure both, the students' benefits and the teachers' growth and improvement in their daily practices. Thus, there is no better way to achieve this than by doing action research.
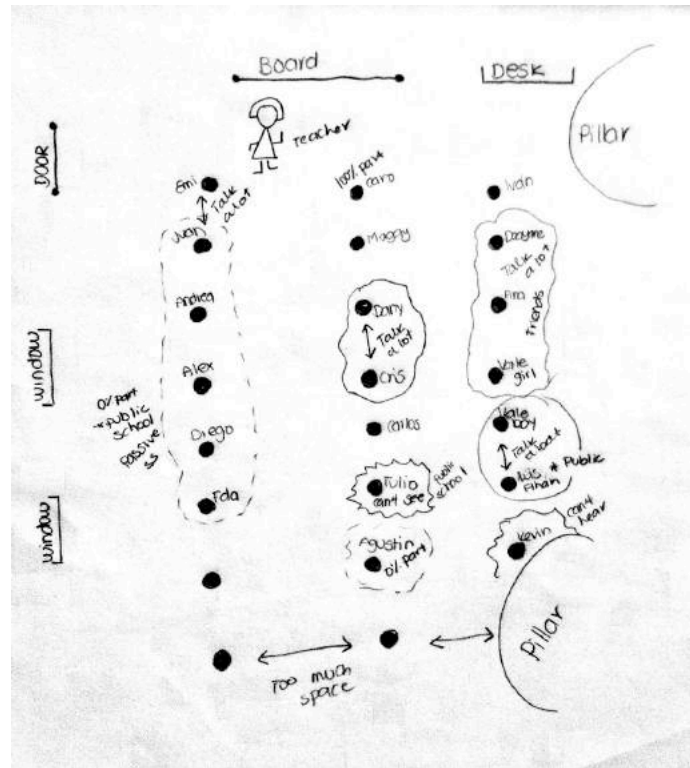
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APPENDIX 1: Extract taken from the Teachers' Journal

APPENDIX 2: First Constructive Map

APPENDIX 3: Lesson Plan Sample
Based on Metacognitive Strategies proposed by O'Malley and Chamot:
Vocabulary related to Fables
Topic: "The Tortoise and the Hare".
Group: 1-1
Time: 90 minutes
Date: January 21st, 2014

Procedure	Interaction	Materials	Time
-Teacher introduces a set of new vocabulary related to the fable "The Tortoise and the Hare". T needs to use the Ipad and use the ppp. -Teacher act out the meaning of the words in front of the group, so some of the students repeat the movements. - T does the same with the rest of the vocabulary.	t—s t—s	Ipad Internet Board Projector PPP	12'
- T asks students to make groups of 4 members. -T chooses a word from the list randomly, T ask one group to performance the meaning of that word. (If they do not know the meaning of that word, the other groups will have the opportunity to act out) - The other groups have to guess the word. If they are correct they get a stamp for participation. - The activity continues with the same dynamic.	ss ss-ss ss-ss	Ipad Internet Board	25'
-Teacher displays the fable on the screen. SS are asked to open their LA page 78. -Students in groups read aloud and they identify the words which were learned previously.	t-ss ss-ss	Ipad Internet Board Projector UNO system Language Artist	12'
- They discuss the moral of the fable in their groups. - Teacher gives a big piece of paper then students have to write on it the message of the fable and they have to relate it to one	ss-ss-t t-ss	Markers Paper	15'

experience of their real lives. After that they will image that they are coachers who try to change the negative people's behavior through the promotion of positive messages. They are asked to use at least 8 words from the list in the message.			
-The groups read their poster aloud and all the messages are discussed.	ss-ss-t		6'
-Teacher displays again the ppp and checks students' comprehension of the vocabulary. T gives stamps to students who participate properly.	t-ss	Ipad Internet Board Projector UNO system	8'
- Students go back to their seats and they solve alone the exercises on LA page 79, 80.	ss-t-ss	UNO Language Artist.	12'

Appendix 4: A more detailed Explanation of the Pre-Test Results

Students	Items related to Nouns	Items related to verbs	Items related to adverbs	Items related to Adjectives	Items related to collocations	Items related to phrasal verbs
1	2	0	1	3	2	0
2	1	2	1	2	0	0
3	0	0	2	3	1	1
4	1	2	1	4	1	0
5	1	1	3	2	0	2
6	0	2	1	2	2	0
7	4	3	2	5	3	1
8	2	1	0	3	2	2
9	0	1	1	3	0	0
10	1	0	0	4	1	1
11	3	2	0	0	0	2
12	1	0	1	3	3	0
13	1	1	1	3	0	0
14	2	2	1	5	1	0
15	5	4	2	2	4	3
16	2	0	1	2	2	2
17	1	1	3	4	3	1
18	0	0	1	2	1	0
19	0	2	1	3	2	0
20	1	0	2	3	1	0

Exam = 100%	Nouns	Verbs	Adverbs	Adjectives	Collocations	Phrasal Verbs	Σ
%	23%	14%	14%	20%	14%	14%	100%
Number of items	8	5	5	7	5	5	35

% obtained by students %	Nouns	Verbs	Adverbs	Adjectives	Collocations	Phrasal Verbs	Σ	Wrong Answers
	4%	3%	4%	9%	4%	2%	26%	74%
Average of right answers	1,4	1,15	1,25	3,05	1,45	0,8	9,1	25,9

Comparison

APPENDIX 5: Post-Test Results

students	Items related to Nouns	Items related to verbs	Items related to adverbs	Items related to Adjectives	Items related to collocations	Items related to phrasal verbs
1	5	5	5	5	3	3
2	6	4	4	7	5	2
3	6	5	5	6	4	4
4	7	4	4	7	5	4
5	8	4	5	6	4	4
6	7	4	5	6	3	3
7	8	5	5	6	4	4
8	6	3	5	4	2	4
9	4	3	3	4	4	4
10	2	2	5	5	3	5
11	5	5	5	5	2	1
12	3	3	4	5	4	3
13	2	4	5	4	4	2
14	6	5	5	6	3	5
15	7	5	5	6	5	5
16	8	4	5	6	5	2
17	6	4	5	7	5	1
18	5	5	5	7	5	3
19	7	5	5	4	5	1
20	6	5	5	4	3	5

Exam = 100%		Nouns	Verbs	Adverbs	Adjectives	Collocations	Phrasal	Σ
Reactivos		8	5	5	7	5	5	35
%		23%	14%	14%	20%	14%	14%	100%

Obtained by students		Nouns	Verbs	Adverbs	Adjectives	Collocations	Phrasal	Σ	Wrong Answer
%		16%	12%	13%	16%	11%	9%	78%	22%
Promedio		5,7	4,2	4,55	5,6	4	3,15	27,2	7,8

Comparison

Bar chart comparing % Category and % obtained by SS:
- Nouns: 23% / 16%
- Verbs: 14% / 12%
- Adverbs: 14% / 13%
- Adjectives: 20% / 16%
- Collocations: 14% / 11%
- Phrasal: 14% / 9%

APPENDIX 6: Extract taken from the teacher's journal
It is a piece of evidence that proves the truthfulness of this action research.

APPENDIX 7: Latest Version of the Constructive Map
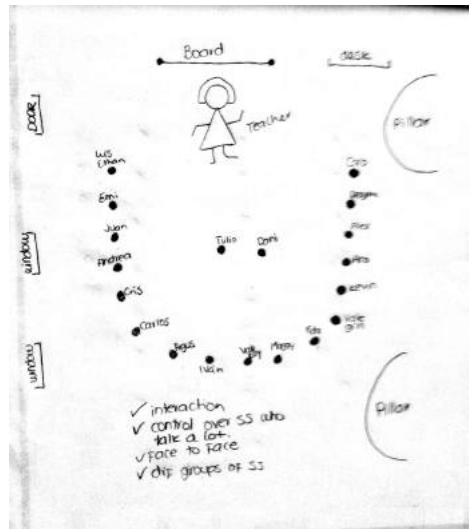
APPENDIX 8: Photos to Support the Information shown in the Previous Constructive Map

Appendix 9: Students were working collaboratively when designing material for some presentations related to the UNO texts.
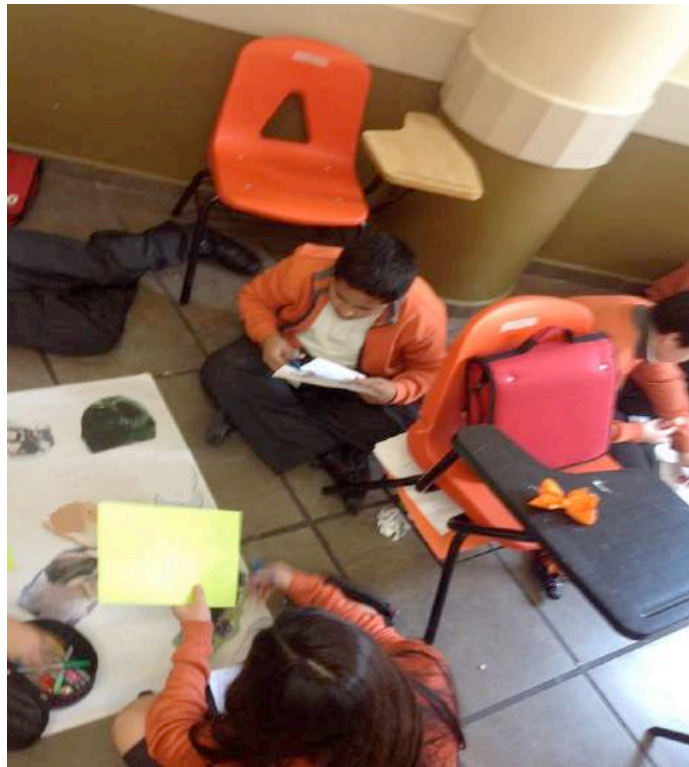
APPENDIX 10: Cooperative work when students presented in front of the class.

TRIGGERING REFLECTION

After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:

- Would you affirm that reading is a skill that only needs to be promoted based on the imposed course guidelines? Justify your answer.
- What is the relationship between vocabulary learning and fluent reading to reach understanding?
- Reflect on the process stated in the action research project conducted in this chapter, what vocabulary strategies would you choose in order to enhance the reading skill in your students? Justify the inclusion or omission of the vocabulary strategies mentioned in this chapter.
- After having selected appropriate vocabulary strategies for your own context, design an action research to help your students improve their reading skill.
- Compare your results with the results from the project shown in this chapter. What benefits, similarities and differences did you find?

PART 4

Inspiring personal development

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Factors Affecting Teachers' Commitment to their Teaching Practice

Margarito Jácome Martínez

Barbara Scholes Gillings

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Abstract

This study was based on the premise that teachers construct their sense of professional identity influenced by their interpretations of their continuing interactions within their context. The context of this qualitative research was three rural public preparatory schools that offer technical education in the South East of Mexico; although they belong to the same educational system, these schools differ in the quality of facilities, accessibility and resources. In order to generate data, a semi-structured interview was employed to a sample of three Mexican English teachers to identify the dimensions of ideology and practice associated with teachers' commitment within a Mexican perspective. The analysis of the data gave two main categories: the external and the internal factors. The External factors are usually those that are beyond the teachers' control as they come from the outside, that is, the teachers' context with which they interact constantly. The Internal factors which are related with all those internal elements that affect the teachers' perceptions of themselves, and their inter-relationship with the external factors.

Resumen

Esta investigación fue creada bajo la premisa de que el sentido de identidad profesional docente se construye a partir de la continua interacción de los maestros con su contexto. Esta investigación cualitativa se llevó a cabo en tres escuelas preparatorias técnicas en el Sureste de México. Aunque forman parte del mismo sistema, estas escuelas difieren en la calidad de su infraestructura, accesibilidad y recursos. La recolección de datos se llevó a cabo a través de una entrevista semiestructurada administrada a tres maestros de inglés como lengua extranjera con el objetivo de identificar las dimensiones ideológicas y de práctica asociadas con el compromiso de los maestros desde una perspectiva mexicana. El análisis de datos arrojó dos categorías principales: los factores externos y los factores internos. Los factores externos son aquellos que se encuentran fuera del control de los maestros ya que provienen del exterior, esto es, el contexto con el que los maestros interactúan constantemente. Los factores internos

están relacionados con todos aquellos elementos internos que afectan la percepción que los maestros tienen de sí mismos, y su inter-relación con los factores externos.

1. Introduction

There is currently a growing interest worldwide in exploring teachers' professional sense of identity. Canrinus (2011) claims that research into the professional identity of teachers can be conducted by focusing on teacher erosion, teachers' commitment, teachers' responses to educational reforms, and the relationship between professional identity and the teachers' education. The level of teachers' commitment is a key factor in the success of educational reform agendas as it heavily influences teachers' willingness to engage in cooperative, reflective and critical practice. Crosswell (2004) explains that teachers with a high level of commitment will be more loyal to the schools where they work; similarly, teachers with high level of commitment will contribute to students' achievement more effectively. Commitment is praised worthy because it facilitates learning. Teachers' commitment seems to be one of the most important and influencing factors affecting teaching practice.

Teachers' professional identity generally pertains to how teachers see themselves based on their interpretations of their continuing interaction with their context (Canrinus, 2001). To our knowledge, there is a lack of research into teachers' professional identity in the Mexican context. This may obscure the understanding of the issues that Mexican teachers experience in the present times, including their responses to educational reforms and, in particular, the factors that affect their commitment to their teaching practice.

This research aimed to contribute to the understanding of Mexican teachers' beliefs and response to the concrete situations affecting their practice by listening to the stories of three Mexican teachers of English working in a rural context about the factors that affect the construction of their professional identity. The study emerged in 2012 from the constant complaints of the authorities of a technical public preparatory school in the South East of Mexico about the English teachers' lack of commitment to teaching and its impact on their students' performance. Apparently, this issue was not an isolated case, as it was said to be a common situation affecting the majority of the schools belonging to this educational subsystem. Teachers were blamed for not achieving the goals established in the curriculum. It was claimed that the low performance of the students in terms of their acquisition of the English language was the result of the teachers' lack of commitment to their jobs and to their responsibilities in the classrooms. In the same way, the authorities blamed the English teachers for not attending "enthusiastically" all the policies and requirements that the school

established. It was argued that even when the majority of the teachers started their careers in this subsystem showing a very high level of commitment, they gradually showed disappointment over time. In sum, it appeared that to a certain extent, the English teachers at these technical preparatory schools in Mexico were not conforming to the authorities' expectations.

In other words, this study aimed to explain the possible impact of teachers' professional identity profiles on their commitment to their teaching practice in technical public preparatory schools in a rural context in the South East of Mexico. It was based on theories of job design in organisational psychology that assume that the environment plays a fundamental role in job motivation. The life history interviews carried out with the three English teachers suggest internal as well as external factors to have an impact on these teachers' commitment to teaching.

2. Related Literature

Four basic concepts were relevant to the interpretation of the data collected to answer the main research question: commitment, identity, self-efficacy and job satisfaction.

Teachers' commitment

Teaching requires three basic ingredients: passion, dedication, and commitment (Tuğrul, 2013). This author explains that teachers, as critical factors of any education system, play an important role in promoting education by improving the abilities of students through their work in schools. As a result, teacher commitment is one of the most important factors affecting teaching practices. Crosswell (2004) defines commitment as a high level of attachment to an organization. Tuğrul (2013) stipulates that commitment is the teachers' motivation to work. In short, the author explains that commitment refers to one's attitude, including affect, belief, and behavioural intention towards our work.

Identity

The concept of identity describes the roles that teachers play within the professional and personal contexts in which they interact. Furthermore, Oyserman (2012) claims that the teachers experience various types of identities. Such identities can be focused on the past: what was true about the teacher; the present: what is true about the teacher; or the future: what the teacher expects or wishes to become, what the teacher feels obliged to try to become or fears to become. In addition, the same author uses Erikson's (1951, 1968) theories to describe

a model of identity development that focuses on identity developing via exploration and commitment. According to Ericson (1951, 1968), identity can be identified as a type of self-concept and therefore self and identity are supposed to be grounded in social contexts (in Oyseman, 2012). In a way, the variations in the characteristics and nature of the context define both the self and the identity. Such contexts can be related to parenting, practices, schooling, culture, time and the place in which a subject lives or works and this, says Oyseman (2012), reflects the psychological aspect of the construction of identity.

In the same way, Beijaard (2004) believes that development of identity occurs in the process of self-recognition when we find ourselves in a given context. This idea refers to the fact that when interacting within a specific context one asks oneself: "who am I?" Teachers, in this sense, construct their professional identity in the process of the interaction within their working context. However, the author explains that this construction does not only occur because of external expectations, but that it is influenced also by the interaction of the teachers' current or past professional lives. In contrast, Goodson and Cole (in Beijaard, 2004) argue that the development of teacher identity is rooted both in the personal and the professional context. The authors perceive the teachers as persons and professionals whose lives and work are influenced by factors inside and outside the classrooms and the schools.

Self-efficacy

The concept of self-efficacy refers to the fact that a person usually deems that a given behaviour will lead to a certain outcome while an efficacy expectation is the conviction that one can successfully execute the behaviour required to produce the expected outcome (Bandura, 1977). Outcome and efficacy expectations can be differentiated because individuals can believe that an action will produce a certain outcome, but if that belief implies serious doubts about the capacity of performing such action, then it does not influence the behaviour.

In addition, Bandura (1977) claims that people choose activities and settings on the basis of their expectations of success. These efficacy expectations determine how much effort people will make and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles. In other words, teachers are influenced by their perceptions of self-efficacy. Efficacy beliefs influence how teachers feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave; as Bandura claims: "the stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the higher the goal challenges people set for themselves and the firmer is the commitment to them".

Job satisfaction

Moreover, Umme (1999) assumes that the teachers who are happy with their jobs play a crucial role in the development of a society and that happiness results from a state of satisfaction. According to this author, satisfied teachers contribute enormously to the "well-being" of their students. On the other hand, the author suggests that an unsatisfied teacher usually creates tensions and becomes irritable. He concludes by asserting that the teachers' attitude of negativity influences their students' learning processes, which may affect their own performance.

It is generally believed that job satisfaction implies the overall adjustment to a work situation. Attitude is the main factor that influences the reaction towards a situation, person, or thing in a particular context. For instance, the attitudes, ideas, feelings and interests of a child are influenced by the organization of his/her family, the thinking of parents and customs of the society (Umme, 1999). Many argue that teachers who have a favourable attitude towards their profession are, in general, successful, properly adjusted and well satisfied with their job.

Moreover, Canrinus (2011) affirms that salary satisfaction contributes to affective occupational commitment and that it contributes to the teachers' feeling of responsibility to remain in the teaching profession. The scholar claims that job satisfaction is also influenced by job relations and he defines what he calls *relationship satisfaction*. The more satisfied teachers are with their colleagues, school support, and autonomy, the less willing they are to leave the profession. Likewise, the more satisfied teachers are, the better their performance in the classroom.

3. Methodology

Considering the nature of this qualitative research, a life history method in the form of a semi-structured interview was implemented. The life history interview stimulates informants' introspection (Goodson & Sikes, 2001 in Lin, 2011) to obtain a general view of the issue to identify the possible factors affecting the perceptions of the interviewees. It was through the employment of this explorative method that the researchers were able to explore the complexity of internal and external factors that influence the teachers' sense of commitment and, as a result, the construction of their sense of professional identity. The purpose of the employment of a life history method was to explore the informants' subjective perceptions regarding their level of commitment to the emotional experiences in their career paths against

the changing social, educational, and workplace contexts (Goodson & Sikes, 2001 in Lin, 2011).

3.1 Context

The context of this inquiry was three different rural public preparatory schools that offer technical education in the South East of Mexico; all of them differed in facilities, accessibility, and resources. Public Mexican preparatory schools are supposed to achieve the standards established by the requirements of the 2009 National Education Reform, by implementing a system of teaching based on competences: generic, disciplinary and professional. They offer English as a foreign language from the first to the fifth semester following the governmental guidelines.

3.2 Participants

Three practising English teachers were selected to explore the issue presented in this research. The first criterion used for the selection of the participants was their geographical accessibility, considering the difficulties in access to certain schools as they are located in faraway rural and semi-rural areas of the country. A second selection was made because of their openness to participate in the study, their teaching experience, and the variety of their academic profiles, their ages and the number of hours they teach per week.

The three participants were tagged with artificial names to protect their identity: Hugo, Luis and Roxana. Hugo was, at that time, a thirty-seven year-old male teacher who taught forty-one hours per week. His academic profile included a BA in English language and he had about ten years of experience as an English teacher. He had no international certification in the English language. He had around twenty-five students per group.

Roxana was a 33 year-old female teacher. She had taught English for about nine years. Her academic profile included a BA in Pedagogy and a MA in Education, as well as a two-year English course. She did not have a certification in the English language. She had around twenty students per group.

Luis was a forty-one year-old male teacher with around twenty years of experience as an English teacher. His academic profile included a BA in Secondary teaching with specialization in English and an MA in Pedagogical Sciences. He had no language certification, either. He taught around thirty-six students per group.

3.3 Data collection tools

The research instrument used to collect the data was a life history interview based on Crosswell (2006). In her proposal, the author uses what is called phenomenographic interviews which imply an explorative character of the data collection and is defined by its purpose and focus. To make the appropriate adaptation of this instrument, the emotionalist method (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997) was implemented as a form of a "symbolic interaction" to create an exact communication. The teachers' emotions were explored deeply with this method in order to obtain their "truth" and thus contribute to the validity of the analysis.

A semi-structured interview was elaborated to explore the teachers' occupational commitment, motivation, and self-efficacy. The original questions were translated into Spanish for the teachers so they could express themselves in their own language. Two open questions were added to discover the reasons why they had become teachers and why they remained in the teaching career. In addition, the following direct questions were asked in order to enrich the data: "How committed were you when you started teaching?" and "How committed are you currently?

3.4 Data Analysis

The analytic tools and coding procedures of Strauss and Corbin (1998 in Ary, 2004) seemed appropriate for the analysis of the data of this study, as well as the use of the emotionalist method (Gubrium and Holstein,1997) for the interpretation of the emotional perceptions of the participants.

Coding of the data obtained from the three interviews began with open coding, that is, microanalysis coding procedures (Ary, 2004). This required the data to be broken into discrete parts before being closely examined and compared both within and between each set of the interview transcriptions. After this, all relevant data were broken into data bits and grouped into naturally emerging themes, which were analysed further. Eventually these themes led to concepts and two main categories or dimensions, which were the external and the internal factors that seemed to affect the teachers' sense of commitment. The teachers' exact words were filed within each category.

4. Findings and Discussion

The data analysis resulted in the identification of the main factors that affect the participants' commitment to teaching. These factors were divided into two general categories: Internal and External factors (see Figure 1). *The External factors* are usually those that are beyond the teachers' control as they come from the outside, that is, the teachers' context with which they interact constantly.
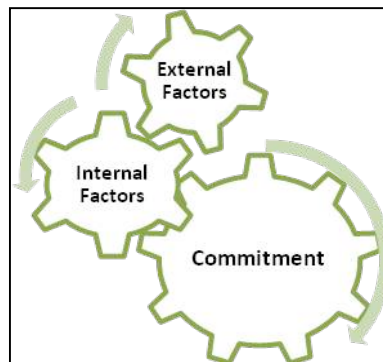
Figure 1: Internal and External factors
and their impact on commitment

The Internal factors which are related with all those internal elements that affect the teachers' perceptions of themselves, and their inter-relationship with the external factors. They are the result of the construction of the teachers' own construction of their identity, either in the past or in the present. External and internal factors influence each other (see Figure 2). It seems that the external factors directly affect the development of the internal self by affecting the teachers' perceptions, assumptions, feelings and emotions. The teachers seemed to perceive that the changes in their commitment were provoked by the external factors.
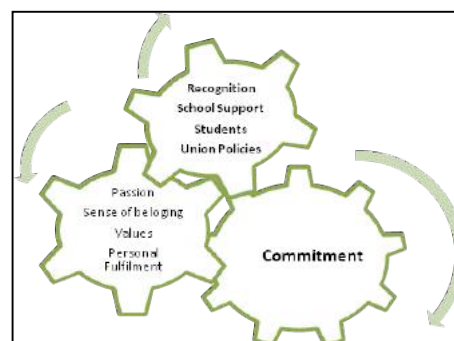
Figure 2: Categories affecting the teachers'
commitment

Within the external category, which deals with the circumstantial elements surrounding the teachers' practice, four categories emerged: recognition, school support, students as a driving force and union policies. A number of categories can be identified within the external and internal factors. Within the internal category, which refers to the teachers' inner self, four main categories were acknowledged: passion, sense of belonging, values and fulfilment.

4.1 External Factors

Recognition

Teachers had a need of recognition for their work as this reflects acceptance. The interviewed teachers seemed to seek such recognition from the school, their colleagues, society and students. Teachers, in this sense, construct their professional identity in the interaction within their working context (Beijaard, 2004).

Teachers' voices about their salaries, the system, the school and their colleagues:

> *...El problema viene de directores hacia arriba, a veces pareciera que traen la consigna de aplastarte. También tengo compañeros que no le dan absolutamente nada de importancia a lo que hacemos en la asignatura, consideran que la asignatura es de relleno y, gracias a eso, algunos alumnos también. (Roxana)*

> *...Te come el sistema. O sea, si te comprometes con venir intentas dar las clases pero ya no la das ni con entusiasmo, ni dando ese plus ni ese cien por ciento. Nada más lo das a lo que tú consideras que equivale a lo que te pagan de sueldo. Porque a veces no importa cuánto te esfuerces, pasan los años y sigues ganando exactamente lo mismo y no te lo reconocen. (Hugo)*

> *...alguien llega y me dice: "fíjate que encontré un texto muy bueno, pero está en inglés, ¿Me ayudas a traducirlo, para que pueda yo dar mi clase?". Me siento importante en ese lado. (Luis)*

Teachers seemed to need recognition from the educational system first, then the school, their colleagues and their students. However, they argued that the students' attitude towards their English class was the result of the lack of teacher recognition from the authorities. This lack of recognition may have affected directly their commitment. If we consider commitment as a high level of attachment to an organization, then how can teachers feel attached to a school which does not recognize the importance of their work?

School support

School support resulted to be one of the most important external factors, as the support that a school gives to their teachers may have had a direct effect on their professional development, as well as on their performance and job satisfaction. The teachers agreed that the lack of resources, as well as the lack of training affected directly their performance, and as a result, their commitment.

> Teachers' voices about their academic projects, their training and the school resources:
>
> *...Yo creo que hace falta mucha herramienta, mucho recurso y yo creo que el sistema también es culpable porque no dudo que nuestros directores no gestionen. Por ejemplo, te estoy hablando de recursos, de material didáctico o apoyos de enseñanza: proyectores. Pedimos un retroproyector para hacer nuestras conferencias o nuestras diapositivas, eso no lo teníamos. Llegamos a tener solamente un retroproyector en toda la escuela y somos quince grupos. Entonces imagínate, si tú preparas un buen tema y vienes motivado y lo está ocupando fulano, entonces ya tienes que improvisar y no era el caso. (Roxana)*
>
> *...se les critica mucho a los maestros que no hacen nada. Pero cuando tú propones un proyecto, hay veces que tampoco te toman en cuenta y dicen: "¡Los maestros son flojos!". Pero ahí estamos. Hay veces que no te apoyan pero lo haremos ya sea por parte de apoyo de aquí o externo, como asociación civil. (Hugo)*
>
> *...Una es que hay muchos maestros que están pidiendo programas de capacitación y no se los dan, otros que han tenido dificultades personales y no les han dado las licencias o los espacios para poder resolverlos. (Luis)*

The participants settled that the school was not promoting professional development, that it did not provide the necessary resources, and that they were not listening to their proposals for academic improvement. This had a negative impact on the teacher's sense of self-efficacy.

Students

Students' attitudes and performance within the classroom influenced the teachers' sense of self-efficacy as it was often believed that the students' performance was the result of what the teacher did in the classroom. The participants shared the idea that the students were one of the driving forces to continue their work as teachers.

Teachers' voices about students as a motivating force:

...viene directo de los alumnos, yo ya dejé de esperar que la Dirección General o el sindicato me den así como que el empuje o me echen la porra. Más bien son los alumnos los que me ayudan a seguir adelante y a seguir contenta con esto. (Hugo)

...Yo de manera personal y como representando aquí a mi escuela, me preocupo porque los muchachos aprendan por lo menos lo básico. A lo que ellos se van a enfrentar al siguiente nivel que es la universidad. (Luis)

Students were the most important elements of the teaching-learning process. These three teachers expressed that they cared about their students and that they reached a high level of job satisfaction when they were able to help their students to achieve their goals. They argued that teachers who had a favourable attitude towards their profession were, in general, successful, properly adjusted to and well satisfied with their job.

Union Policies

Teachers perceived that the union made them do what they did not want to do. Teachers shared the idea that union policies had a negative effect on their performance at school and therefore had a negative impact on their levels of commitment.

Teachers' voices about their perceptions of the union:

... realmente no hacemos un estudio profundo sobre lo que está pasando en las aulas, no se tiene una evaluación docente adecuada, no se meten a las aulas a evaluar a los maestros, aparte porque está en contra del sindicato hacerlo. (Roxana)

...Hay mucha presión por parte del sindicato. De pronto, la verdad es que antes nos presionaba mucho el colegio cuando no éramos sindicalizados... (Hugo)

... La verdad les interesa que cumplas con el sindicato y que entregues formatos en Dirección General. No les importa si das bien o das mal la clase. Entonces a quien sí le importa es a mí, por eso intento darla lo mejor posible. (Luis)

The data analysis revealed that the participants attributed to the union policies a negative impact on their performance. In spite of the fact that the participants were working in an

educational sub-system in which it was no longer possible to inherit a teaching post, long before the 2013 educational reform, the teachers nevertheless felt that they were subject to the complete control of the union.

4.2 Internal Factors

Passion

The description of the teachers' commitment as a passion, emotional involvement or a love of particular aspects of teaching was a significant theme throughout the interviews. Teacher commitment from this perspective is a phenomenon that requires a positive emotional attachment to the job.

Teachers' voices about their passion for their profession:

> *...Me comprometo también, digamos conmigo misma. Yo tenía una ilusión, una meta, un sueño que era ser maestra de inglés y eso no lo voy a traicionar y no lo voy a abandonar aunque los demás me pongan obstáculos. (Roxana)*
>
> *...amo lo que hago y moriré haciendo lo que estoy haciendo que es enseñar a los jóvenes. (Hugo)*
>
> *...yo tuve, yo digo que buenos maestros en nivel secundaria y en el bachillerato también, que te motivaban. Ya en la carrera, en la normal, también tuve maestros que se apasionaban por la asignatura y como que me inyectaron eso. (Luis)*

The study showed that these three teachers had different reasons for starting a career in the field. However, they had something in common: the three of them felt passionate about teaching English.

Sense of belonging

A sense of belonging is helpful for teachers to work for the community and not just for themselves. The participants agreed feeling excluded from the majority of the academic activities organized by the school. As a result, the teachers felt rejected and felt that their work was not recognised as relevant by the other members of the community.

Teachers' voices about their sense of belonging to the community:

> *...Llegan capacitaciones o cursos para las demás materias, pero para el de inglés no, entonces tienes que empezar a buscar por tu lado. ¿Dónde me actualizo, con quién platico, quién me presta un libro? (Roxana)*

*...quien tiene un efecto muy positivo son algunos de mis compañeros que dan
módulos profesionales porque luego me dicen: "oye fíjate que tengo un texto
que los muchachos necesitan leer, pero lo encontré en inglés, ¿pudieras
incluirlo en tu materia y que lo lean contigo?". Entonces me siento parte de,
o me dicen: ¿Sabes qué? vamos a hacer una práctica, así y así, y necesito
que sepan decir estos términos en inglés. (Hugo)*

The three teachers showed that they felt excluded from the school meetings and more importantly, they felt underestimated by the system that did not seem to give the English subject the importance that they (the English teachers) claimed it should have.

Values

Values represent the strongest internal structure supporting the attitudes and behaviours in a given context. They can affect the teachers in different ways. Every teacher has a specific background and so their values vary.

Teachers' voices about their personal values:

*...Cuesta un poquito conciliar el estudio con el trabajo y todavía la familia,
porque le estás quitando tiempo a tu familia y a tu trabajo para intentar
crecer profesionalmente. (Roxana)*

*...Mucho depende del maestro, de la convicción y de la ética que tenga uno.
Si estás comprometido tú con lo que haces, si estás convencido de lo que
realmente puedes llegar a hacer. Y pues no, yo siento que voy pa' rriba, no
hay que decaer. Desde nuestro lugar de trabajo podemos hacer mucho no
hay que desfallecer ahí. (Hugo)*

*...La verdad yo pensaba: "Qué bueno sería que el día de mañana mis hijos
u otras personas de la comunidad supieran hablar un idioma, va abrirles
otra puerta, más cuando vayan a trabajar". Pensando como hacia adelante.
Más que nada esa era mi intención. Ahora que aprendí, que ya lo sé, o que
lo voy a aprender, voy a tratar de que otros aprendan también de mí. Lo
poco o lo mucho que les pueda yo dar, que sea para bien. (Luis)*

In the interviews, the teachers established that personal values were the most important tool they had to defend their internal factors from all the negative impact of external factors on their sense of commitment.

Personal Fulfilment

When teachers develop a sense of self-efficacy, they find significance in their job. Personal fulfilment brings about a state of satisfaction and happiness.

The teachers' voices about their sense of satisfaction:

> *…¡llena!, me encanta ver cuando el alumno de pronto llega sin saber absolutamente ni una palabra y de pronto me dice: "maestra, esto se dice así, esto se dice asá". Cuando me dicen: "ya le entendí". ¡Es maravilloso! (Roxana)*

> *…En principio de cuentas porque me gustaba el idioma y ya después haciendo prácticas en la licenciatura te das cuenta de que hay satisfacciones… Desde chico me gustaba el idioma y enseñarlo pues es otra cosa. ¡Es muy satisfactorio! (Hugo)*

> *…La verdad yo me siento feliz. Me siento muy a gusto con lo que hago porque fue siempre lo que quise a partir de aquella curiosidad que te digo y le agarré como amor a ese idioma y me siento contento. Me ha dado muchas satisfacciones tanto a nivel profesional como personal. (Luis)*

The three teachers gave many reasons to leave school and move to a different educational system, a different career or even to stop teaching. However, they seemed to be attracted by one important factor; that was personal fulfilment, which results from the development of a sense of self-efficacy and accomplishment. A satisfied teacher is a happy teacher, and a happy teacher experiences, as Bandura (1977) mentions, a feeling of personal fulfilment.

5. Conclusions

This qualitative study reported an investigation on the factors that affect the commitment to teaching of three Mexican English teachers with similar teaching behaviours, practices and attitudes in a semi-rural, technological, public preparatory school. The interest of the researchers in the participants' voices allowed an emotional approach to the teachers' perceptions of the factors that affect their sense of commitment.

This study challenges the view that teachers' commitment to teaching is directly influenced by internal factors and shows that these internal dimensions (such as passion) are affected by external factors that provoke an impact on the teachers' commitment. The findings also support the idea that the teachers' view of students is an external factor which

has a positive influence on their commitment. There are, nevertheless, some other external factors that affect the teachers' values and beliefs in a negative way.

However small the contribution that this investigation may make to the field of professional development, it is important for the Mexican context due to the lack of studies developed in this area. Although the sample of the analysis was very limited, the findings of this research provide relevant foundations for future research in the field and have significant implications for both school authorities and this specific educational system in Mexico as they offer the bases for a better understanding of the Mexican teachers' perceptions of the issues that affect their attitudes towards their practice. It is deemed that the authorities of the Mexican educational system and the teachers unions should be aware of the teachers' beliefs and perceptions of the factors influencing their practice as they are the main connection between the new educational reforms and the teachers' ideological frameworks. The next step in this research would lead this investigation to widen the exploration of the issue and to expand the study. Then, the authorities of this specific context could be offered the foundations to help their teachers increase their levels of commitment to teaching by modifying the impact of some of the factors affecting their sense of commitment.

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TRIGGERING REFLECTION

After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:

- How important do you believe it is to know the way teachers feel about their professional practice? Justify your answer. In what way do you think these beliefs impact on their actual professional development?
- Enlist some of the factors mentioned in this chapter that have a strong impact on teachers' professional development
- Why do you think Hugo, a participant, regards his professional development as a shared guilt between teachers and those in charge of providing teachers with the necessary resources (School support category)?
- How important do you consider it is to be aware of the teachers' emotional dimension in order to improve or to ensure a satisfactory teachers' professional development? Explain your reasons.
- Observe your working situation and explore the need your colleagues may have of improving their professional development.
- Observe your working situation and explore the need your colleagues may have of being recognized as professional teachers.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Participation Problems in Overcrowded Classrooms: The Value of Project Based Learning

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Abstract

This article presents an Action Research carried out at a public high school in the late afternoon shift in Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico which looks at participation in a large classroom. It is believed that students should engage and participate in classroom activities in order to learn the foreign/second language. It would appear that classroom participation represents both a theoretical concern for researchers and a practical anxiety for teachers within foreign/second language pedagogy. This inquiry describes the implementation and results of an action plan based on a Project-Based Learning Approach in order to try and encourage forty six teenage students from a public high school to participate more during English lessons. The analysis shows several reasons why students do not participate during English lessons and the results highlight that these students feel more comfortable and more prone to participating when working in teams, and thus developing their cooperative skills while doing collaborative work.

Resumen

Este artículo presenta una investigación-acción llevada a cabo en una escuela secundaria pública en el turno de la tarde en Xalapa, Veracruz, México respecto a la participación en un salón numeroso. Se cree que los estudiantes deben comprometerse y participar en las actividades de clase con el fin de aprender el segundo idioma o idioma extranjero. Al parecer, la participación en clase representa tanto una preocupación teórica para los investigadores y una ansiedad práctica para profesores dentro de la pedagogía de una segunda lengua o lengua extranjera. La investigación describe la aplicación y los resultados de un plan de acción basado en un enfoque de aprendizaje basado en proyectos con el fin de tratar de fomentar, a cuarenta y seis estudiantes adolescentes de una escuela secundaria pública, a participar más en las clases de inglés. El análisis muestra razones por que los estudiantes no participan en las clases de inglés y los resultados resaltan que estos estudiantes se sienten más cómodos y más propensos a participar cuando se trabaja en equipo, desarrollando así sus habilidades de cooperación mientras se hace el trabajo colaborativo.

1. Introduction

The most formal setting where educational processes occur is the classroom. It is there where interaction by means of which teaching and learning issues are organized and achieved by teachers and students, needs to take place. The classroom for students and teachers therefore, is similar to a stage for actors. On this stage both teachers and students should perform a variety of types of actions in order to achieve classroom activities in the teaching/learning process. Thus, students' classroom participation is fundamental.

In this particular EFL context students are reluctant to participate perhaps because several are shy. However, they have showed interest in some kinds of activities that help them to feel self-confident in order to participate more during an English lesson. In an EFL context, teachers usually encourage their students to speak in the classroom, and their participation is often evaluated according to the amount and quality of their interaction. However, opportunities are not always available for everyone to participate orally especially in teacher-centered activities, in which students are only able to contribute the minimum amount of speech. Moreover, participation in such settings is often more difficult to elicit. Given the importance of student participation, this may result in a serious problem, especially when there are a large number of students in a classroom. It seems that students are even less likely to speak in this type of context without being prompted to participate during ongoing activities.

Some studies have indicated that student talk can be considered as a crucial factor in most language teaching methodologies even though they vary from one approach to another. For example, Celce-Murcia (2001) reviewed nine approaches and found that most, except for the grammar-translation and reading methods, required students to talk. More precisely, in the communicative approach, the most popular method for language teaching since the end of the 20th century, students' oral contributions have been regarded as essential. In his description of an 'interactive approach', Brown (2001: 63) suggests that

> …since teachers have some degree of control over student talk, they have to provide students with opportunities to talk and try the language out.

However, although it is clear that student interaction is encouraged by most language teaching approaches, opportunities, especially in large classrooms, are not necessarily equally available for all students. Therefore, a possible solution needed to be found for this problem.

The aims of this study were to identify and understand a specific problem in my teaching practice which was the lack of participation in my working context. The second aim was to design, implement and evaluate an action plan to try and encourage students to participate more during English lessons, by means of a Project-Based Learning approach. In alignment with my aims the following main research questions were: why do students not participate in the classroom? And how may a Project-Based Learning approach encourage students to participate in a large classroom?

2. The use of Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning (PBL) is a model that organizes learning around projects. According to the definitions found in PBL handbooks for teachers, projects are complex tasks based on challenging questions or problems that involve students in design, problem-solving, decision making, and/or investigative activities. They provide students with the opportunity to work relatively autonomously over extended periods; and culminate in realistic products or presentations (Jones, Rasmussen, & Moffitt, 1997; Thomas, Mergendoller, & Michaelson, 1999). Other defining features found in the literature include authentic content, authentic assessment, teacher facilitation, but not direction, explicit educational goals, (Moursund, 1999), cooperative learning, reflection, and incorporation of adult skills (Diehl, Grobe, Lopez, & Cabral, 1999). To these features, particular models of PBL add a number of unique features. Definitions of "project-based instruction" include features relating to the use of an authentic ("driving") question, a community of inquiry, and the use of cognitive (technology-based) tools (Krajcik, Blumenfeld, Marx, & Soloway, 1994; Marx, et. al., 1994); and "Expeditionary Learning" adds features of comprehensive school improvement, community service, and multidisciplinary themes.

In the relevant literature, a number of labels have been given to classroom approaches that make use of projects. For instance, Papandreou (1994) uses the label "project-based approach", while Fried-Booth (2002) and Philips, Burwood, and Dunford (1999) prefer the term "project work". Whatever the term used, however, project-based learning has the following characteristics:

- It involves multi-skill activities focusing on topics or themes, rather than on specific language targets. While students focus on solving a problem or achieving a goal, they have ample opportunities to "recycle known language and skills in a relatively natural context" (Haines, 1989:1);

- It does not have specific language aims, but what is important is the route to achieving the end product, since this promotes the development of student confidence and independence (Fried-Booth, 2002);
- It is an activity that "involves a variety of individual or cooperative tasks such as developing a research plan and questions, and implementing the plan through empirical or document research that includes collecting, analyzing, and reporting data orally and/or in writing" (Beckett, 2002:54);
- It is an approach "in which learners investigate a question, solve a problem, plan an event, or develop a product" (Weinstein, 2006:161);
- It emphasises content over form, promotes individualisation of activities, incorporates student input in goal setting and evaluation, and groupwork (Eyring, 2001)

According to Stoller (2006), for effective project-based learning to take place, educators need to make sure that project-based learning has a process and product orientation. It requires student involvement in topic selection in order to encourage active participation and a sense of ownership in the project, it extends over a period, it is structured in such a way that the integration of skills is natural, encourages students to work both in groups and on their own. It requires learners to assume responsibility for their own learning through the process of selecting, gathering, processing and reporting of information acquired from a number of sources (e.g. the World Wide Web, library), it results in a tangible end product (e.g. a theatrical performance or multimedia presentation), and concludes with an evaluation of the process and the end product.

2.1 The benefits of Project-Based Learning in Foreign Language settings

Many benefits of incorporating project-based learning in foreign language settings have been suggested. First, the process leading to the end-product of project-work provides opportunities for students to develop their confidence and independence (Fried-Booth, 2002). In addition, "students demonstrate increased self-esteem, and positive attitudes toward learning" (Stoller, 2006:27). Students' autonomy is enhanced (Skehan, 1998), especially when they are actively engaged in project planning. A further frequently mentioned benefit relates to students' increased social, cooperative skills, and group cohesiveness (Coleman, 1992).

Another reported benefit is improved language skills (Levine, 2004). Given that students engage in purposeful communication to complete authentic activities, they have the opportunity to use language in a relatively natural context (Haines, 1989) and participate in meaningful activities which require authentic language use. Authentic activities refer to activities designed to develop students' thinking and problem solving skills which are important in out-of-schools contexts, and to foster learning to learn (Brown et al, 1993). While activities are:

> Anything students are expected to do, beyond getting input
> through reading or listening, in order to learn, practice, apply,
> evaluate, or in any other way respond to curricular content.
> (Brophy & Alleman, 1991: 35)

Authentic activities are tasks with real world relevance and utility,

> …that integrate across the curriculum, that provide
> appropriate levels of complexity, and that allow students to
> select appropriate levels of difficulty or involvement
> (Jonassen, 1991 as quoted in Herrington et al, 2003: 24)

Among other characteristics, authentic activities have real-world relevance, provide the opportunity for students to examine the task from different perspectives, enhance collaboration and reflection, and allow competing solutions and diversity of outcome (Reeves et al, 2002). In addition, project-based learning provides opportunities for "the natural integration of language skills" (Stoller, 2006:33).

A further benefit is that because project work progresses according to the specific context and students' interests (Kriwas, 1999:149), students have enhanced motivation, engagement and enjoyment (Lee, 2002). From a motivational perspective, projects being authentic tasks are more meaningful to students, increase interest, motivation to participate, and can promote learning (Brophy, 2004). Enjoyment and motivation also stem from the fact that classroom language is not predetermined, but depends on the nature of the project (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:149).

Another set of reported benefits pertains to the development of problem-solving and higher order critical thinking skills (Allen, 2004). These skills are very important, since they

are life-long, transferable skills to settings outside the classroom. According to Dornyei (2001:100-101), among other potential benefits, project work encourages motivation, fosters group cohesiveness, increases expectancy of success in the target language, achieves "a rare synthesis of academic and social goals", reduces anxiety, increases the significance of effort relative to ability, and promotes effort-based attributions.

Finally, by integrating project work into content-based classrooms, educators create vibrant learning environments that require active student involvement, stimulate higher level thinking skills, and give students responsibility for their own learning (Stoller, 2002). When incorporating project work into content-based classrooms, instructors distance themselves from teacher-dominated instruction and move towards creating a student community of inquiry involving authentic communication, cooperative learning, collaboration, and problem-solving.

2.2 Teacher role in Project-Based Learning

Effective project-based learning requires the teacher to assume a different role (Levy, 1997). The teacher's role is not dominant, but he/she acts as a guide, advisor, coordinator (Papandreou, 1994) and facilitator. In implementing the project method, the focal point of the learning process moves from the teacher to the learners, from working alone to working in groups. In addition, in a large classroom such as my particular working context implementing project work the group could be divided into teams.

An effective approach of Project-Based learning could maximize its positive outcomes in the following ways (Stoller, 2006; Alan & Stoller, 2005):

- Projects should be devised taking into consideration the students' interests, preferences and language needs;
- Students should be provided with real choices in relation to all aspects of the project (e.g. selection of the project theme, presentation of the final outcome, group responsibilities);
- Students should be engaged in a number of tasks which are challenging and that give them the opportunity to practice language skills in a natural context;
- Students need to be provided with feedback, both while completing the project and at its conclusion.

3. Research Design

This study is based on Eileen Ferrance's (2000) model. This model depicts a cycle made up five phases of inquiry: identify the problem, gather data, interpret data, action based on data and reflection. The reason for choosing this model was due to its scientific validity and practicality. In addition, an AR is a process in which participants examine their own educational practice systematically and carefully, using the techniques of research. According to Watts (1985: 118 cited in Ferrance 2000: 1), it is based on the following assumptions:

- Teachers and principals work best on problems they have identified for themselves;
- Teachers and principals become more effective when encouraged to examine and assess their own work and then consider ways of working differently;
- Teachers and principals help each other by working collaboratively;
- Working with colleagues helps teachers and principals in their professional development.

In this study, one cycle has been completed. In the same way as Eileen Ferrance's model, the cycle is divided into five phases: identify the problem, gather data, and interpret data, action based on data and reflection (Figure 1):
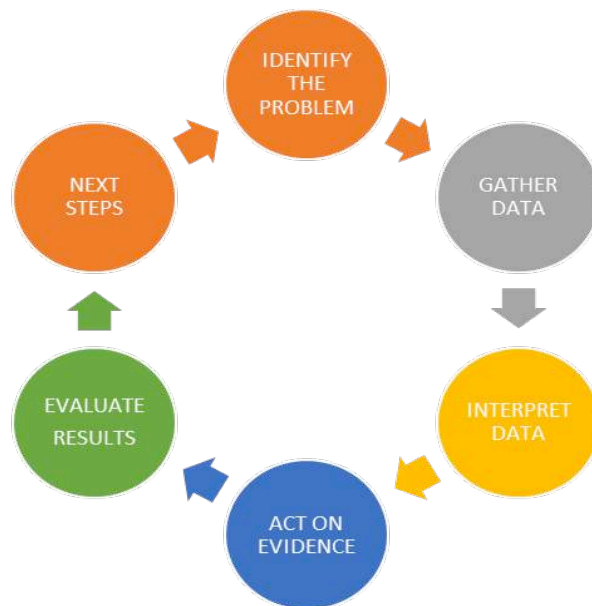

Figure 1: AR model adapted from Ferrance (2000: 9)

3.1 Data Collection Techniques

After giving several lessons to a group of forty-six high school students, a question emerged. That question was: why do only a few students out of forty-six participate? From my point of

view, this question is meaningful in the confines of my daily context because every single time I gave the English lesson only a few students were willing to participate.

In order to understand the nature of the problem I have used informal observation, a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire was written in Spanish and included only five questions. Four questions were related to the problem of lack of participation amongst students. The last question was to discover who was willing to participate thereafter in a brief semi-structured interview in order to verify what students had answered in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was used in order to obtain an overview of students' perceptions about learning English and their participation, in particular, why students do not participate during an English lesson. According to Koshy (2005), the use of questionnaires at the start of a project can often be very useful because it helps the researcher to collect a range of information with relative ease, which can be followed up as necessary. In this particular case, the use of a questionnaire provided a simple means to collect information regarding students' perceptions about participation before any intervention took place (Koshy, 2005). In addition, the analysis of the questionnaires helped shape the nature of the questions that were asked during the semi-structured interview stage.

The interview used to collect data was a semi-structured qualitative interview. Denzin and Lincoln (1998:36) state that an "interview is a conversation, the art of asking questions and listening." According to Denzin and Lincoln (1998) semi-structured interviews enrich the information more than other types given their qualitative nature. That is, in this case, to discover students' perceptions regarding why they do not participate and how they could be encouraged to do so.

From the questionnaire data, I discovered that thirty-one out of forty-six students told me that they do not participate during the English lesson mainly because they are afraid of making mistakes and because they do not know about the topic. Only fourteen out of these thirty-one students were willing to participate in an interview. However, in the end, I only interviewed eight students because they were willing to participate in the interview plus they also mentioned that they do not participate during the English lessons. These interviews were carried out in Spanish because students were more comfortable speaking in Spanish than in English. I recorded all the interviews. In order to do this, I used a smartphone and a guide I had designed for this purpose. The interviews took place at the public high school in the late afternoon shift, after the English lesson. The purpose of these interviews was to collect

information about perspectives, habits, difficulties and students' suggestions regarding what could encourage them to participate more.

Based on the data from the research methods used, twenty-eight out of forty-six students mentioned that they like English. However, I have found an inconsistency because only fifteen out of forty-six students said that they participate during their English lessons. The most common reasons why students participate are the following:

1. They want to learn more about English;
2. They want to know how to pronounce English;
3. They want to practice;
4. They know English;
5. They obtain extra points for their grade;
6. They like to participate;
7. They understand the topic;
8. They like the way teacher explains.

However, there are a number of reasons why students do not participate. These include the following:

1. They are afraid of making mistakes;
2. They are shy;
3. They do not understand the topic;
4. The rest of the group might laugh at him or her;
5. They cannot pronounce English;
6. They do not like to participate;
7. They do not know enough about English.

Another important outcome of the initial research that I discovered was that twenty-eight out of forty-six students like learning English because, to a certain extent, most of the students know the importance of learning English, but they also mentioned that English is difficult for them due to the pronunciation, vocabulary, understanding of some words and comprehension. Students told me that they would be encouraged to participate more during English lessons if:

1. The rest of the students did not laugh at him/her when he/she made a mistake;
2. The lessons were more dynamic with team work;

3. They obtained more extra points; and

4. The atmosphere promoted the formation of self-confidence

In answer to these students' voices, I decided to use a Project-Based Learning approach. This approach permits teachers to encourage students' participation in an atmosphere that promotes self-confidence by working on teams around a project. After a certain period of preparation, students present their results to the rest of the group by using images, posters, videos or any kind of material they find useful for their presentation.

3.2 Action Plan

The action plan was designed in order to attempt to solve the problem that I had identified in my current teaching practice, which is the lack of participation. The purpose of the action plan was to encourage students' participation by means of the PBL approach.

The main reasons why the action plan was based on the PBL approach were the following:

1. It suited students' needs, likes and interests in order to participate more;

2. It was based on students' answers to the questionnaire and interviews that were carried out during the stage of identifying and understanding the nature of the problem;

3. As there are numerous students in the classroom through working with the PBL approach, the group could be divided into teams in order to have access to solve and answer most of students doubts and questions;

4. Implementing the PBL approach in an EFL context provides opportunities for students to develop their self-confidence and independence (Fried-Booth, 2002);

5. Through the PBL approach "students demonstrate increased self-esteem, and positive attitudes toward learning" (Stoller, 2006: 27);

6. Students' autonomy is enhanced (Skehan, 1998), especially when they are actively engaged in project planning (e.g. choice of topic);

7. "Students' increased social, cooperative skills, and group cohesiveness" (Coleman, 1992);

8. Language skills are improved (Levine, 2004), because students engage in purposeful communication to complete authentic activities, they have the opportunity to use language in a relatively natural context (Haines, 1989) and participate in meaningful activities which require authentic language use;

9. The PBL approach provides opportunities for "the natural integration of language skills" (Stoller, 2006: 33);

10. The PBL approach progresses according to the specific context and students' interests (Kriwas, 1999);

11. Students have enhanced motivation, engagement and enjoyment (Lee, 2002);

12. The PBL approach implements authentic tasks which are more meaningful to students. It increases interest and motivation to participate as well as promoting learning (Brophy, 2004);

13. The PBL approach develops problem-solving and higher order critical thinking skills (Allen, 2004). These skills are very important, since they are life-long, transferable skills to settings outside the classroom;

14. According to Dornyei (2001: 100-101), "The PBL approach encourages motivation, fosters group cohesiveness, increases expectancy of success in target language, achieves a rare synthesis of academic and social goals, reduces anxiety, increases the significance of effort relative to ability, and promotes effort-based attributions".

3.3 Implementation

The implementation of the action plan consisted of four stages: pre-task, preparation, presentation and language focus. Each stage had its specific number of sessions each session lasted 50 minutes. For instance, pre-task was only one session, preparation was two sessions, presentation was three sessions and language focus was in all the stages because the teacher worked on specific language points which came up in the previous stages such as simple past, used to, simple present and vocabulary.

The pre-task stage encompassed the introduction of the main topic for PBL: comparing present and past activities, habits and routines related to nine topics:

1. Means of communication and transportation;
2. City;
3. Ways of dressing;
4. Types of music and dancing;
5. Health;
6. School;
7. Natural Environment;

8.   Holidays and

9.   Television Programmes

These nine topics were selected according to the content of the student's book block number two. To begin the lesson, the teacher gave examples of present and past activities such as "some time ago, people used to travel by train, now, people travel by plane". In addition, teacher asked students if they knew other examples. After that, the group was divided into nine teams of five students each; one team was of six students because there are forty-six. In each team, there was a student who participated more during the lessons, and who was in charge of his or her team. During some previous lessons, I had observed which students had participated more and I selected them because of their English level and participation. In order to assign the topics to each team, the topics were raffled. Students were asked to look for enough information related to their topic in order to work in class the following session and present their topic for approximately five minutes. Each team chose, as far as possible, what they would do and what information they would look for, doubts were clarified and questions were answered by the teacher.

During the preparation stage, first session students worked on teams preparing their presentation about changes through time according to their respective topic. First, students wrote a list about the differences related to their topic (past and present). Then, students were asked to write a glossary for their topic in order to help their classmates to understand the presentations. Students were helped by the teacher to prepare a short presentation, maximum five minutes, and every single team was checked, doubts were clarified and questions were answered. In the second session, students brought images, drawings and pictures that might help them to present their topic, and students had the opportunity to practice their presentation in each team in order for students to acquire the self-confidence they needed before they presented in front of the group.

The presentation stage lasted three sessions because only three teams presented per each session in order to avoid student boredom. Unfortunately, each presentation only lasted about one or two minutes. After every single presentation common mistakes and errors were explained tactfully, plus students' particular learning needs were met. In addition, during all the previous stages, the language focus was implemented when it was necessary. Specific language points were explained by the teacher such as simple past, used to, simple present and vocabulary. Students also reflected on the language needed to complete the task and how well they did.

4. Findings

From my own informal observation when asking students to perform different kinds of activities, I have noticed that students prefer team or group activities than working individually. From the questionnaire data, I discovered that only five out of forty-six students did not like to work in teams and present their project. They claimed this was because they do not understand English and/or because they were in charge of the team and the rest of the team did not pay attention to them.

This time, eighteen out of forty-six students were willing to participate in an interview. However, in the end, I only interviewed four students because they had provided more complete answers in the questionnaire. Based on the data from the research methods used, students mentioned that they participated actively during the preparation and presentation of their project. I noticed that also because students who normally never asked questions were willing, during these sessions, to clarify their doubts, and ask questions, and inquire how words were pronounced. According to students' perceptions, twenty-two out of forty-six students participated a lot, twenty out of forty-six participated so-so and only two students out of forty-six mentioned that they participated a little because they had not attended the lesson when their team presented their topic. Most of students liked to work in teams on a project. The most common reasons why they liked it are the following:

1. Because working in this way they know how to speak in English and how words are pronounced;
2. Because they like to work in teams, sharing ideas and helping each other;
3. Because they are obtaining self-confidence in order to speak in front of the group due to the fact that they work in a respectful atmosphere

In addition, students affirmed that they would like to continue working with the PBL approach. Only five students out of forty-six mentioned that they would not like to continue working in that way. The reasons why are the following: they do not like it, they did not understand what to do, they are shy, and they think English is difficult.

In contrast, the most common reasons why students want to continue working with the PBL approach are the following:

1. Because it is fun, dynamic, interesting, understandable and practical;
2. Because they learn more easily;

3. To improve pronunciation and to know how to speak in English;

4. Because it is a good technique and they like to work in that way;

5. Because they obtain self-confidence.

Another important finding that I have discovered is that most of the students thought that they had participated actively during the preparation and presentation of their project. They mentioned this because:

1. They understood, prepared and presented what they had to do;

2. They obtained self-confidence;

3. They supported their teams with ideas and material.

In addition, most of the students considered that their work and their presentations were well-done, they participated more and they organized themselves. However, students also pointed out that they needed to improve their pronunciation. What I could also notice was that most of the students read what they had to say, but considering this was the first time they had presented a topic in English, this was acceptable behavior.

Students also mentioned that the main difficulties they had to face were the correct pronunciation of the words, lack of vocabulary and their nervousness speaking in front of the group. However, they felt satisfied, happy and willing to participate more next time. Students also mentioned that what they learnt from the presentation was the following:

1. Speaking and pronunciation;

2. Vocabulary;

3. Grammar;

4. Team work and collaborative work;

5. Participation; and

6. Contents of the topic.

In conclusion, the findings indicated a positive attitude from students to participate more during English lessons in a large classroom owing to the implementation of a PBL approach. Students appear to have felt more comfortable to participate when working on teams on a project and presenting their results to the group. In this way, to some extent, they seem to have developed their cooperative skills.

5. Conclusions

The findings seem to confirm that teachers are able to encourage students' participation by means of a PBL Approach, although in different degrees for each participant. Some students felt satisfied, but others felt frustrated after presenting their project because of the lack of knowledge to communicate in English. However, if the teacher knows how to deal with the constraints and provide proper feedback, students may feel more satisfied. Students do not need to achieve a high level of proficiency in English in order to participate in an interactive project. Furthermore, the presentations seem to promote students positive attitudes towards their learning process and participation because they were willing to participate and collaborate with each other to accomplish the task.

From my point of view, apart from managing to encourage my students to participate more, I discovered that it is possible to work with a PBL approach without spending too long and without disregarding the objectives and contents of the book with which I have to work with. Some of the main constraints that I had to face during this Action Research (AR) and the implementation of the Action Plan were the following:

1. The English level of the students, because they did not understand as much as they were supposed to, they did not know how to pronounce some words and they did not speak enough;
2. Some students were not well organized perhaps because they were not close friends.

In addition to this, most of the students read their sentences when they presented their results of the projects because as it was mentioned in chapter one the participants seem to be beginners and false beginners. However, they did their best and lost their fear of speaking in front of the group. Some other problems that participants experienced when they prepared and presented their projects were related to vocabulary, pronunciation, accuracy and spelling.

In conclusion, regarding this research process, the two objectives were met to a certain extent. The first one was to identify and understand a specific problem in my teaching practice which was the lack of student participation in a large classroom. The second objective was to design, implement and evaluate an action plan to encourage students to participate more during English lessons, by means of a PBL approach. However, this action plan achieved far more than it was expected. The PBL approach encouraged motivation amongst students, fostered group cohesiveness, increased expectancy of success in the target

language, achieved social goals, developed cooperative skills and reduced anxiety. Language skills were also improved, because students were engaged in purposeful communication to complete authentic activities which promoted learning since they were more meaningful, motivating and interesting to students. Finally, despite the fact that most of students consider themselves to be shy, they were more willing to participate because they had enough time to prepare and practice what they presented thus obtaining self-confidence by working in teams and developing collaborative work.

It must be mentioned that during the implementation of this action plan, students seemed to be more concerned about their lack of vocabulary and their pronunciation during their presentations. They wanted to know and learn more vocabulary, as well as its correct pronunciation in order to speak more accurately and fluently when they present a topic in front of the group. Therefore, a possible second Action Research cycle could be carried out to help them find ways to use the vocabulary they need outside the classroom, perhaps with the aid of technology.

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TRIGGERING REFLECTION

After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:

- What learning theories are mentioned in this chapter related to the fact that students should be engaged and participate in classroom activities?
- How can someone's engagement in an activity be distinguished and recorded?
- How can a theoretical concern sort out a practical anxiety according to what has been discussed in this chapter? Explain 'theoretical concern' and 'practical anxiety'. Then, explain its relationship in a paragraph.
- Have you ever tried to use project work to organize your students' learning process? If so, explain the reason to do so. Have you tried to overcome a problem in your class? Explain.
- Do you think that PBL may encourage students to participate? Give your reasons.
- Mention some benefits of using PBL to enhance students' participation.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Writing with a Genre-content-process Approach to Raise Self-awareness

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Abstract

This action research describes the implementation and results of an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) writing instructional model designed to raise self-awareness of a life project among senior high school English students in a rural area. Participants exchanged letters among secret pen pals to share, analyze and provide advice about each other's plans for the future. The research examined students' self-regulation regarding their own life and learning acts. Results indicated that participants benefited raising self-awareness and scaffolding their language proficiency through 'learning communities' with a double autonomous-collaborative focus. This study challenged the ways of the 21st century instruction and those of utilitarian education, which sometimes relegates to a second place the humanistic and philosophical dimensions of education.

Resumen

La investigación-acción referida en este documento describe la implementación y resultados de un modelo de enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera basado en la escritura, cuyo objetivo fue promover la toma de conciencia del proyecto de vida entre estudiantes de preparatoria en una zona rural. Los participantes intercambiaron cartas de manera anónima, donde compartieron consejos y analizaron sus planes a futuro. La investigación llevada a cabo permitió examinar cambios en los aspectos tanto personal como académico de los participantes. Los resultados demostraron un efecto positivo tanto en la toma de de consciencia del proyecto de vida como en el aprendizaje de la lengua extranjera dentro comunidades de aprendizaje con una doble visión individual y colectiva. Este estudio pretende reafirmar la importancia de las dimensiones humanística y filosófica en la educación, por encima de las exigencias utilitaristas del siglo XXI.

1. Introduction

If it is true that in the 21st century we write more, we use text messaging and instant messaging; this technology-based form of communication and the cult of speed (Bauman,

2004, 2005; Honoré, 2004) are reshaping the writing process into an 'alienated-mechanized' act (Hyland, 2009) by means of resources such as slang and abbreviations, predictive text and editing software. One of the challenges of writing instruction in the 21st century is to provide students with the opportunity to practice this skill being aware of the language they produce and the participants involved, in a dialectic process of bringing thoughts to their graphic representation, activating schemata –information retrieved from experience- while new content emerges (Meredith & Steele, 2011). The present study sought to engage English students in a metacognitive process of self-regulation (Dunlosky, Graesser, & Hacker, 2009) regarding their life project and progress in their language learning, as well as to recover the genre of handwritten informal letters by setting a 'learning community' (Meredith & Steele, 2011) whose source of information was the participants themselves and their local context, rather than the virtual world.

1.1 Context

The present study took place in a public senior high school which is part of a federal labor-oriented schools that offer specializations in areas regarding business and engineering. These specializations upgrade the regular high school certificate to a technical-professional diploma. Unlike general high schools in Mexico, the English curriculum for these labour-oriented schools follows a five-course English Program instead of four. Moreover, although English instruction mainly focuses on business and technological topics, written communication and critical thinking are among the competences to develop along with vocabulary, grammar and language functions. The English III course focuses on reflecting and planning a 'life project' regarding the personal, vocational and social aspects of the students, so as to achieve a true realization of their potential contributions to the world in terms of society, science, and technology.

The study group consisted of twenty-six participants, ages ranging from sixteen to twenty years old, all of them enrolled in the third semester of the computer programming specialization, and in the low-intermediate English course. Before implementation, the study group presented partnership problems when asked to work in different teams, extrinsic motivation driven only by a final passing grade, and the habits of copying-pasting online information or using English translators without editing mistakenly generated results. In relation to planning a life project, students' answers to an exploratory talk revealed a strong influence of their local context. The high school is located in a city where the major economic activities are sugarcane agriculture and the refining industry carried out at a main local

factory. The majority of the students showed confidence that they would end up working in the sugarcane factory or on their inherited family land, while some female students expressed their dislike for school and their only desire to get married and have children.

1.2 Objectives

The aim of this study was to raise self-awareness of a life project -personal and academic- and awareness of significant others who play an important role at some point. The genre of informal letters was the method of communication among participants, used under a tripartite genre-content-process writing approach. In order to achieve these goals, specific epistemological and axiological considerations related to the language curriculum of the host school were taken into account, based on a model created by Leo van Lier (1996) to explain the joint principles, ethical values and knowledge considered in curriculum design (see *Figure 1*).

Principles	Epistemology	Axiology	Language knowledge
Self-awareness and awareness of significant others	• Focusing attention on defining a life project (personal and academic) • Assuming roles: as individuals and as community members • Language in use	• Self-regulation • Critical thinking	• Using the future tense to express predictions, plans and expectations • Using modal verbs to give advice or suggestions, and to express restrictions, obligations and possibilities • Using the first conditional form and the present perfect tense to express preferences, to refer to past events, and to describe causes and consequences
Autonomous and collaborative work	• Intrinsic motivation • Teacher independence • Communicative interaction • Peer assessment	• Accountability • Responsibility • Commitment • Respect	

Figure 1. Overview of relevant considerations for the aims of the study based on van Lier (1996:11)

Two research questions were posed: How can senior high school students become more self-aware of their life project through the development and practice of writing skills in an English classroom setting?, and to what extent can becoming aware of one's own life project help to be more sensitive towards other people around them?

2. Literature Review

The writing model implemented in this study was based on the concepts of 'self-awareness' (Dörnyei, 2009) and 'self-regulation' (Flavell, 1979), both related to the field of cognitive psychology and inserted within the framework of a humanistic approach. Students were expected to gradually build more practical and accessible knowledge with an academic but

also personal lifelong value (van Lier, 1996; Meredith & Steele, 2011). A suitable environment for the proposed writing model involved the development of the 'interactional-communicative competence' (Walsh, 2011) among the participants, as well as their integration in what Meredith & Steele (2011) call a 'learning community'.

2.1 'Writing with an attitude': cognition, metacognition and critical thinking

On the one hand, writing is a 'reflective', 'problem-solving' and 'sociocognitive' language skill (Brown, 2000; Horwitz, 2007; Meredith & Steele, 2011, Hyland, 2012) closely related to the mental processes of 'cognition', 'metacognition' and 'critical thinking'. The cognitive approach see students as active in developing strategies to transform selected information into knowledge (Shuell, 1986). 'Metacognition', or the ability to 'think about thinking', is the awareness of one's own knowledge, strengths and weaknesses, as well as the control or self-regulation gained over cognitive processes (Flavell, 1979). 'Critical thinking' is defined as the skill to observe, question, discuss, interpret, analyze and evaluate an issue from a number of sides (Raimes, 2005). It fosters reflection and encourages students to go beyond models of learning towards the application of knowledge in new situations (Meredith & Steele, 2011). On the other hand, writing 'with an attitude' (Cots, 2006) sees language as a cognitive and metacognitive tool to reflect upon itself and upon other linked social-ideological issues that allow the students to make their own 'linguistic choices' regarding context and objectives (Cots, 2006).

2.2 A tripartite genre-content-process approach

Due to its specific layout and objective, a genre helps in gaining awareness and control over the language and discourse (Wennerstrom, 2003). Moreover, genres are social instruments used to respond to situations. They involve the use of logos (how effective the message is conveyed in terms of persuading with logic and reason), ethos (how credible or genuine the message is), and pathos (how effectively the message causes sympathy in the readers appealing to their emotions) (Devitt, Reiff & Bawarshi, 2004). In other words, genres are key to understanding and becoming part of the community or society that created them and uses them (Wennerstrom, 2003; Hyland 2012). Consequently, genres require special attention in both content and process. 'Content' refers to the message and the ways to build the necessary language corpora, structures and functions that students need (Hyland, 2012); while the 'process' focuses on the steps, strategies and knowledge involved to achieve the final text (Brown, 2000). As Meredith & Steele's (2011) learning model points out, the main benefit of

including both process and content in writing instruction is lifelong learning.

2.3 Self-awareness and self-regulation with a humanistic approach

For the purpose of this research, 'self-awareness' and 'self-regulation' were considered intertwined concepts in two categories. The first one implying to notice and reaffirm one's own values, attitudes and abilities in order to set a future through 'self-regulation'. The second one, defined by Brown (1987) as the metacognitive strategy to plan, control, monitor and assess a cognitive goal. Both concepts are intended to impact in a raise of awareness of 'significant others' (Harmer, 2001) and the local community. Based on this, the writing task for this research aimed to become a search for one's own voice and for making meaning of life in an interaction that grants love and respect to other people around us (Seymour, 2004). Moreover, since "writing allows students to test hypotheses about how the language functions and to consolidate their internalized language proficiency" (Horwitz, 2007: 158), students would not only enhance their understanding of themselves and significant others, but also develop a way to analyze, select, monitor and evaluate both information and learning strategies (Flavell, 1979; Shuell, 1986).

2.4 Learning communities and the interactional-communicative competence

On a collaborative level, 'positive interdependence' and 'individual accountability' are necessary qualities to understand the functioning of a well-directed 'learning community' (Meredith & Steele, 2011). 'Positive interdependence' means that that students realize the benefits of working in groups and of the negotiation that follows (establishing mutual goals, sharing results and consequences, assigning and assuming roles, as well as peer evaluation) in order to establish a positive interaction (Meredith & Steele, 2011). 'Individual accountability' has to do with how a group is able to recognize each of its members as an individual with specific abilities and values, but also as part of a whole that is enriched by each individual. In that sense, including these principles as part of the writing task aimed to achieve a more prolific generation of ideas and sensible feedback, in what is defined as 'learning community', a dynamic social act "where responsibility for teaching and learning is shared" (Meredith & Steele, 2011: 11). According to Walsh (2011: 158), the "ability to use interaction […] for mediating and assisting learning" is called Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC). Brown (2000: 37, 38), referring to Vigotsky's work, emphasizes 'social interaction' as "a prerequisite to cognitive development"; the link between language and cognition. CIC in writing 'with an attitude' also involves a transformation in roles. The teacher-researcher

should assume the role of motivator, resource and monitor under the premise that writing is a long process that requires major attention and constant stimulation (Harmer, 2001). Meanwhile, students should seek to become more autonomous (teacher independent), trusting the writing-learning communities. Consequently, they are directed to develop what Harmer (2001) calls a 'sense of generativity', which means to become aware of one's own value to offer something that others may need.

3. Methodology

This action research (AR) was based on Kemmis and McTaggart's 'classic' model (Burns, 2010:9), as shown in the figure below. It followed a cycle made of four elementary phases: observe, reflect, plan and action; and a revised plan after each cycle. Using document analysis and case study methodologies focused investigation mainly on qualitative data, although quantitative information played a key role to support findings in some categories.
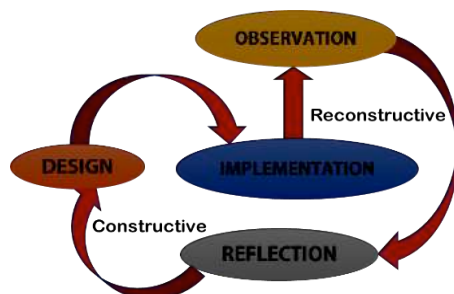
Figure 2. AR model adapted from Kemmis and McTaggart (Burns, 2010: 9).

The implementation period lasted the 16 weeks of the regular English III course, with a total of 48 hours divided into three units. During that time, three cycles were completed, each one corresponding to one unit. The first cycle was considered a constructive one and the other two reconstructive as they attempted to improve the previous one, based on the changes registered and built around the next unit with related but new specific objectives. Besides, in order to fulfill the expectations of the English III course while the study was performed, the content, vocabulary and grammar to be reviewed in each unit was taken into account in the design of the cycles (see *Figure 3*).

UNIT 1: A personal and an academic life project (weeks 1 – 5).

UNIT 2: Human relationships with others (weeks 6 to 10).

UNIT 3: A social project (weeks 11 – 16).

- Activities:

1. Exploratory general language review
2. **Brainstorming**
3. **Grammar presentation:** future tense ('will' and 'going to').
4. Collective and individual timelines
5. **Guided reflection**
6. Role-plays
7. **Reading:** Analyzing the sample of a letter
8. Pieces of advice on how to use online dictionaries and translators
9. Guidelines to write an informal letter
10. **Writing letter 1:** my personal and academic life project

- Activities:

11. **Brainstorming**
12. **Grammar presentation:** possessive and reflective pronouns and modal verbs.
13. **Reading:** situations
14. Oral presentations (role-plays)
15. Building scale models
16. **Guided reflection**
17. Rules for editing the letters (peers' feedback)
18. **Writing letter 2:** answering their pen-pals' letter reflecting, commenting and suggesting on similarities and/or differences about their life project

- Activities:

16. **Brainstorming**
17. Identifying and analyzing a social local problem
18. **Reading:** Analyzing samples of letters
19. **Grammar presentation:** zero and first conditional.
18. Movie (note taking)
19. **Guided reflection**
20. **Grammar presentation:** present perfect.
22. Interviews among classmates
23. **Writing letter 3:** sharing ideas and improving their design of a solution for a social-local issue
25. Presentations of the social projects

Figure 3. General theme per unit and summary of activities.

The writing model organized for this research was divided also into 3 stages -prewriting, creative and assessing- that were alternated after each revised plan, based on what Tribble (Harmer, 2001) calls the 'recursive' nature of writing (see *Figure 4* below).
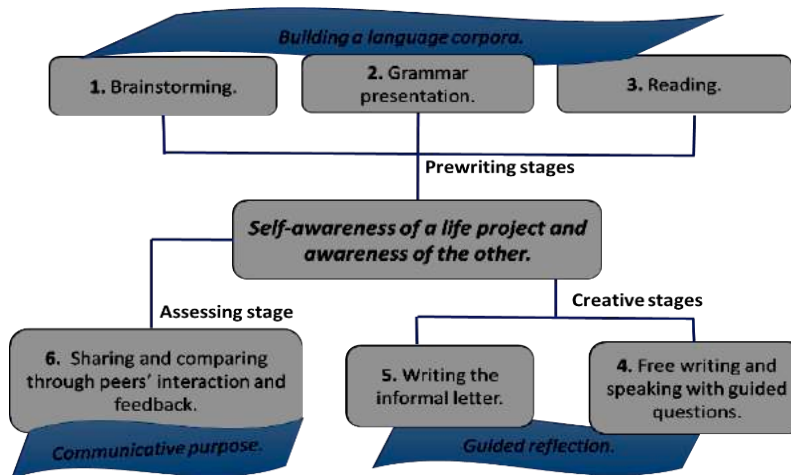
Figure 4. Writing model based on Brown, 2000, Horwitz, 2007 and Harmer, 2001.

3.1 The prewriting stage

This stage included brainstorming, grammar presentations and reading of samples of informal letters with related content and language features in order to assist the students in building useful language corpora, generating ideas and getting acquainted with the genre. Most of the samples were retrieved from the book *Reason to Write. Strategies for Success in Academic Writing* (Miller & Cohen, 2006). This material contained models of the genre with suitable grammar practice closely related to the contents and purpose of the present study, aiming to enable students in scaffolding their language proficiency and deeper critical reflection.

3.2 The creative stage

The activities in this stage were divided into preparation to write, and the completion of the actual writing task of informal letters. Preparation to write included free writing and speaking practice, as well as reflections centered on guiding questions. Both focused on providing the students with an organized and gradual process towards the final task. Among the free writing and speaking activities was the design for a collective and individual time line in the first cycle, an oral presentation with didactic-ludic material such as scale models in the second cycle, and finally, note-taking from a movie and from interviews among classmates. In all of them, students had the opportunity to express freely their ideas in chunks, which later could help them in the production of more complex thoughts and language structures. These writing and speaking activities were accomplished in English, whereas in the reflections, the participants expressed themselves mostly in Spanish, despite the fact that the questions were given in English.

Students practiced writing short-term and long-term goals followed by a guided reflection intended to partially reproduce the Johari window model (see *Figure 5* below). Afterwards, students performed a role-play entitled 'the fortune teller' where they exchanged predictions about their own and their classmates' futures. By means of this activity, students were expected to reflect critically on the connection between the present and their future goals, as well as to raise their awareness in planning a life project and obtaining some ideas from others' plans for the future. After laying the groundwork for writing, the teacher-researcher provided the students with an explanation of the main parts of a letter, as well as useful vocabulary to write one. Then, students were asked to write their first informal letter in English, in which they shared their reflections on a life project (personal and academic). Students were told to use a nickname to sign their letters, since they were not supposed to know who their pen pal was. At the same time, they were given a number they should write on the envelope as a code for the teacher-researcher.
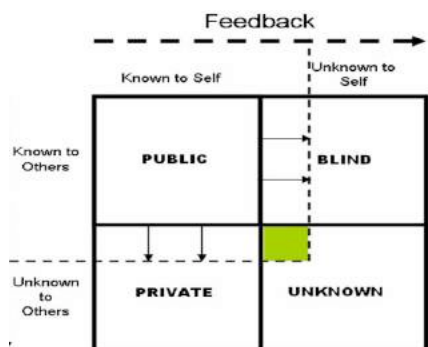

Figure 5. The Johari window model (Moskowitz, 1988: 17).

The writing process for the second cycle included an oral presentation. Students were asked to describe how their dream school looked like in comparison to the school they attended at present, as well as to imagine and describe their dream apartment in college in a near future and their dream house in a farther future. However, to justify each idea they must consider the point of view of others (parents, school staff, etc.). Students built scale models as a visual resource for their presentations. The purpose of this activity was to make students aware of significant others (family, friends, classmates, teachers, etc.), who play a crucial role in their path to achieve future goals. Based on their oral production, the teacher-researcher provided some guiding questions to prompt reflections on the students' significant others. Then, before explaining the instructions for the second informal letter, the teacher-researcher asked every student to take a letter randomly from a black plastic bag containing all the letters of the participants, read it carefully and try to identify the presence of significant others in their pen pal's writing. The instructions for writing the second letter were to comment on the life project of their pen pal, give some suggestions to improve it or ideas to achieve it, as well as point out similarities or differences between their own and their pen pal's goals and expectations for the future.

In the third and last cycle, students watched the movie "Pay It Forward" (2000), which is an American drama based on the homonym novel by Catherine Ryan Hyde. The story tells about an eleven-year-old kid who conceives and puts into practice a charitable movement in which a person does three favors for three other people, who should then pay the favors to three different people. The idea of the movement arises when his Social Science professor asks his class to work on a project to improve the world. The study group was asked to take notes on their opinion regarding the social project of the kid in the movie. Then, the teacher-researcher asked them to use those notes in reflecting about the connection between their life project and society. This activity intended to make students aware of the social responsibility that accompanies the construction of a self. Subsequently, the following activity was to interview their classmates about what a social project is, if they had participated in one, and what local-social problems they detected that could be solved with a relatively-easy social project. Students took notes on their classmates' answers, and then got in groups where they discussed their findings, chose a social problem and tried to plan possible solutions for it. The instruction for the third and final letter was to narrate to their pen pal the chosen social problem they worked with in their groups and its relevance to them. Moreover, they also had to explain the solution they proposed and ask for advice from their pen pals on how to improve the action plan.

3.3 The assessing stage

This stage was part of all three cycles, but in different forms and with different foci. At a content-level and with a driving communicative purpose, it was constant in the messages exchanged through the letters, by means of which pen pals compared their ideas and helped each other to scaffold in both knowledge of the general theme and in language proficiency. Students were requested to identify and correct some orthographic and grammar errors after reviewing Miller & Cohen, 2006: 35, 47 instructions on easy editing rules. Nevertheless, in the third cycle, students participated in a more complex assessing task that involved designing and implementing a social project. In it, students could demonstrate all the work completed in the study for writing but also in planning based on a deep reflection: their awareness of others, their understanding of the content-process approach, content and language proficiency gained, collaborative work and communicative interaction in their learning community. The last week of classes, the social projects were presented in a meeting with parents, the principal and other authorities from the school. The students prepared power point slides in English, with pictures and even video in some cases. Each team read their slides in English, and then explained them to the audience in Spanish.

4. Findings

Data collection included class documents (informal letters written by the participants), a checklist (Appendix 1) and a survey (Appendix 2) carried out in Spanish, as well as the teacher's diary with the descriptions of the focus groups. As depicted in *Figure 6* below, the analysis of the obtained qualitative data was organized into categories. The first two, "Self-awareness of a life project" and "Writing skills", are meant to answer the main research question: How can senior high school students become more self-aware of their life project through the development and practice of writing skills in an English classroom setting? Meanwhile, the third category, "Awareness of the other", refers to the secondary research question: To what extent can becoming aware of one's own life project help to be more sensitive towards other human beings who may play a significant role in this process? Critical thinking and self-regulation were fundamental concepts to link categories one to another. Moreover, a smaller partition of the categories into specific aims helped to demonstrate their degree of achievement more clearly. As well, some categories took advantage of a mixed methodology in which qualitative data was supported by quantitative results, but only as a means to compare and contrast relevant changes in the findings.
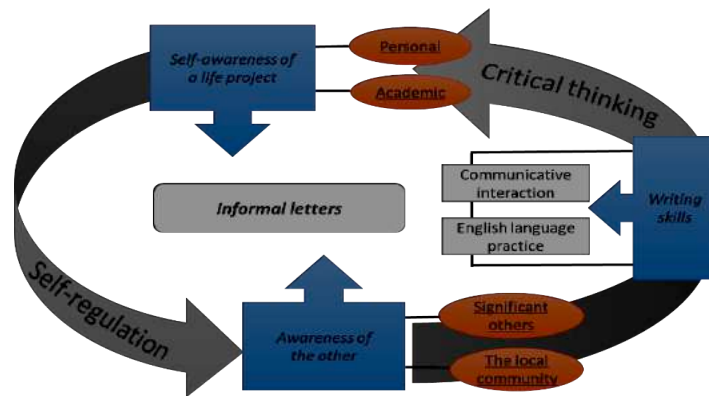
Figure 6. Content analysis based on White and Arndt's spidergram (Hyland, 2012: 15).

This study focused more on "what students [were] trying to say rather than on how they [said] it" (Horwitz, 2007: 158), since the choice of informal letters aimed to analyzed the use of 'real writing' (Brown, 2000), rather than 'display writing' with a mere academic cognitive interest. Therefore, the quotes of the participants are here presented *verbatim*, without any correction of language mistakes neither in English nor in Spanish.

4.1 Self-awareness of a life project

A comparison between the students' answers in the two prewriting-activities of a time line and a short-term/long-term goals analysis and the text of their first letters suggests an increase of awareness of a life project, denoted by a clearer organization of ideas and specific description of future goals in the last activity. Additionally, six students (S) expanded their reflections, attempting to explain even the means to achieve their goals, as these extracts illustrate:

(S1) Time line activity	"To learn to drive"
Short-term / Long-term goals list	"I will have car"
First letter	"I must buy me car. You could teach me to drive?"
(S4) Time line activity	(Nothing was mentioned about a house)
Short-term / Long-term goals list	"I'm going to have house"
First letter	"…I could have a good salary, and 24 years married. Live at least about 2 or 3 years with my husband, no children, and travel and see many places including England, as I have always wanted to visit this place."

Students made connections among their current lives, their expectations for the future and the content seen in class. This qualitative data was compared to question Q 2 of the survey, in which nineteen of the twenty-six participants explained that they were able to express fully their thoughts about their life project regarding two broad aspects: personal and academic.

This mirroring exercise of getting to know themselves through writing and reading about themselves and others partially reproduced the Johari Window. As a result, students seemed to have reinforced their self-confidence and recognition of their value as individuals by pointing out the convergences or divergences in hidden or manifested expectations, values and beliefs among individuals who shared a similar learning space (the classroom) every day, but still did not know each other very well before the implementation of this study. Furthermore, students' answers to Q 6 of the survey, which asked what they had learned about themselves and about English class during the writing task, displayed a significant reflection. Students drew connections to past experiences (schemata) in terms of learning, for example: **(S23)** "Recorde mis conocimientos basicos del ingles y los errores, me hizo un poco mas sociable.", as well as they mirrored how to attain future goals based on current events, for instance: **(S7)** "Pues me hace pensar y conscientizar sobre lo que quiero, y no perder el interés por lo que quiero para mi." and **(S26)** "me pude dar cuenta que puedo sacar como buenas calificaciones y que es lo que quiero en realidad para mi vida.".

In terms of academic goals, two general categories were common to the letters: university education and employment. Thirteen from the twenty-six participants stated in their letters the university education they would like to complete. Two from those thirteen participants asked their pen pals for advice to choose among different undergraduate programs they liked in nearby universities. Twelve out of the twenty-six also commented on the job they wanted to do after graduating from university. However, only seven from the twenty-six were specific enough as to mention the exact place where they would like to study and/or work.

Exploratory talk (Teacher's diary)	"Some students seem content with the idea of working at the local sugar cane factory after graduating from high school, as their major goal in life."

(S5) Time line activity
    Short-term / Long-term goals list
    First letter
	"I will study ingineer"
	 "I will be an ingeneer civil"
	 "After graduating in civil engineer. I want to play basketball in Xalapa Hawks to fins one work. I wantn't to live in Xalapa. I want to live in other country."

Exploratory talk (Teacher's diary)	"Despite the fact that some students have economic problems to finish high school, they are still eager to pursue a professional career, although some with not so clear vocational goals."
(S16) Time line activity **Short-term / Long-term goals list**	"I will study" "I gong to player vido gamos"

| **First letter** | "…what I want is to finish my realisar studies the creato videogames besides that large companies…" |

As can be seen in the previous quotes taken from different documents, students' notions of their academic life project seemed to have evolved positively throughout the activities implemented, from the very first thoughts expressed by the participants in an exploratory talk carried out before the implementation until the text in their first letter.

4.2 Awareness of significant others

Results obtained from Q 8, 9 and 10 of the checklist showed that the writing task of informal letters helped the participants to raise awareness of 'significant others' who might play a significant role in attaining their future hopes, dreams, goals and success. Participants marked parents, family and other people who support and inspire them as more important to them than classmates and teachers, in spite of the fact that they spend more time in school, sharing time and space with the academic community (see Appendix 3). Nevertheless, comments provided in the survey and in the checklist did not placed learning communities far away from family members in terms of purposeful interaction. For instance, in the survey, twenty-two participants provided brief comments similar to this one: **(S11)** "Mis papás son la mayor inspiración que tengo para ser una mejor estudiante." In the checklist, twenty-one participants expressed themselves thankful to the academic community **(S7)** "Agradezco a todas las personas que me apoyan" and **(S5)** "Mis maestros y compañeros de clase son una parte fundamental para lograr mis metas."

The reflection about 'significant others' in the letters was visible and even extended to a further future that included a probable partner and eventually children. Students expressed a concern to ensure the well-being of those 'significant others' around them as much as their own, which suggested that they became more sensitive towards others who they believe are important in the achievement of their future goals.

Family(S16)	"…not to give up is what life has taught me and my grandfather but my plans is what I want is to finish studies…have a good family like my father and grandfather were."
Classmates and teachers (S1)	"Our project of society is that may things are missing salons…our goal is for students to realize that parents and teachers need to care for and you to realize teachers who are in good classrooms and that we deserve."
Sentimental partner and children (S5)	"…after that marry with my ideal girl, someday I hope to find. After I want to form a beautiful family with my

wife. I want to have a son and a one daughter. I want to have a luxury car and a pool for my children. I work hard to give them life everything they need. I want to visit my parents whenever possible because, they are my role models. I want a happy with my family for a life time."

4.2.1 Social project

As it was noted in the literature review, writing genres are thought to empower the individual to participate in the community with a purpose (Wennerstrom, 2003; Fairclough, 1995). During the last assessing stage of the writing process, students accomplished to reflect about the consequences of their own actions, and the enjoyment or degree of satisfaction they could achieve by means of helping others. Students formed six teams, each one addressing a different social problem with a viable solution that was planned based on the exchange of thoughts among pen pals. In their letters, participants seem to have developed awareness of others and of their social responsibility, recognizing themselves as social actors with the power to change their context by working collaboratively. Moreover, the students' support and feedback expressed in the written samples illustrates the sense of community that was created among classmates, which made them trust one another enough to request advice.

Team 8 (S22)	"…we are doing with some colleagues in my classroom this project is about to go to teach children about our specialties at our school for the kids this empiesen to actually see that they liked when entering our educational level and call them attention we justaria llevarlo place in an amusement park ahy can discover as many children and show them to socialicar and so can we remember our childhood…"
Pen Pal	"Your social project could impact knowledge to little children on the technical specialties in which high school course, so that when they reach that level correctly choose what they want…"

4.3 Writing skills

General reactions to the writing task, measured in the first question of the survey, revealed that 98% of the study group thought it was 'interesting'. Among the most noteworthy reasons provided to explain positive opinions were: **(S2)** "Porque aprendí a redactor una carta en inglés de la manera correcta", **(S6)** "Porque fue una forma de enseñanza del inglés que no había tenido." and **(S15)** "Porque conoces nuevas ideas, las cuales también te hacen reflexionar.".

Students' comments seem to provide evidence of an increase in intrinsic motivation regarding the enjoyment of the writing task, especially noticeable in the way students voiced their thoughts and feelings referring to aspects such as exploration, new knowledge and ego

enhancement (Brown, 2000). Furthermore, participants seem to have found in the genre of informal letters a way to express an emotional response of encouragement, gratitude and acknowledgment among the intended audience. These quotes taken from the informal letters attempt to demonstrate sensitive feedback among pen pals:

(S4)   "I wish you fance very well in your future take care and try harder all dreams come true if you fight for them…take care and I hope my advice you serve…"

(S5)   "Thank you for remember me, for your advice and for your friendship."

(S16)   "I hope you achieve your success and achieve your goals, remember that with effort and dedication everything can be."

The level of engagement in translating knowledge of the foreign language into purposeful critical-communicative interaction was high, as the participants' answers to the survey and the exchange of ideas in the letters suggest regarding areas such as education and job opportunities in the future.

(S14)   "I have not decided exactly what do when I graduate. I like the idea of continuing my studies. And I do everything I can to finish high school and to continue."

Pen-pal's answer: "I like your idea of continuing your studies, you can study in Toronto, Canada."

(S5)   "I want to finish the CBTIs to go to university in Xalapa City… I want to live in other country."

Pen-pal's answer: "if you study outside of Paso del Macho, you have more posibilyties to work in an other country."

They continued to draw connections between their life experiences (schemata) and expectations for a life project through recognizing the relevance of collaboration in the writing-learning processes and acknowledging more consciously the fact that they shared a rich Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)[6].

Another positive outcome of the writing task was that students found in it an opportunity to practice English and to self-regulate new knowledge about the language. Here there are some extracts from Q 6 of the survey that refers directly to the advancement achieved in English proficiency. Some students remarked how the activities made learning easier for them: **(S14)** "…sobre el idioma, pues todo se logra con esfuerzo, pero con dinámicas, como las que se planearon son mucho más faciles.", as well as made them recuperate schemata: **(S23)** "Recorde mis conocimientos basicos del ingles...". Some others were honest to express they still presented problems acquiring the language, although they felt

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[6] Hyland, along with Brown and van Lier, cites from Vigotsky the term ZPD defined as "the area between what [Students] can do independently and what they can do with assistance" (Hyland, 2012: 21).

motivated to succeed: **(S25)** "…del idioma pues todavía tengo problemas pero ya sé que puedo con el inglés."

Moreover, working collaboratively in the feedback sessions and focus groups, students had extra practice of the foreign language, identifying and attempting to correct orthographic and grammar mistakes they found in the first and second letters they received from their pen pal, making use of their metacognitive skills in self-regulation. A positive influence on spelling, for instance, could be proved with the following extracts:

(S6)	"My goals are…and pay me a school of language"
Pen-pal	"I like ideas you have but I liked that much tourism…and helps you study languages for tourism"
(S6)	"…languages I like English and French…"

4.4 Discussion and reflections

This action research provided students with the opportunity to participate in a more active learning, as they were encouraged and guided to achieve the main goal of the writing task while scaffolding their English proficiency, as symbiotic accomplishments. The handwriting policy that was embraced helped students in achieving a more conscious and constant practice, appealing to the 'power law of practice and learning' (Dörnyei, 2009) that reinforced a positive recall effect of the English language in the participants' kinesthetic and long-term memory. Additionally, the findings suggest a gradual increase in intrinsic motivation along with the internalization of the work done in collaboration. This assumption finds support in the completion of the social projects, when participants demonstrated a well-structured autonomous-collaborative effort, a great sense of 'learning communities' as well as awareness of themselves (identifying real possibilities) and others (identifying real needs).

The tripartite writing model was meant to be purposeful rather than controlled, through a method of constant inquiry in which the students kept in mind the audience and the intended effect of the communicative act (Hillocks, 1995). This seems to have impacted the students' linguistic choices and reformulation of meanings. For instance, as discussed in the focus groups, 80% of the participants showed enough engagement and confidence with the writing task as to reduce the use of online translators. Yet, the teacher-researcher decided to share some reliable online sources for dictionaries and translators that students could consult. Together with this fact, it happened that writing mistakes did not stop flow in communication among pen pals. Nonetheless, the teacher-researcher noted that all the participants presented a strong tendency to express future ideas with the verb 'want' rather than with the forms 'will'

and 'going to' seen in class (see Appendix 4). The teacher-researcher reflected on this issue and came out with two possible reasons: 1) the participants already mastered the use of "want", therefore, they felt more comfortable using it instead of the new structures seen in class, or 2) the participants thought of their possible future in a distant-alien reality.

4.5 Limitations

A major constraint in the realization of this action research was lack of time. Answers to Q 2 of the survey, which asked them if they were able to express everything they wanted about their life project, let the participants express their complaints, for example: **(S1)** Aún me faltó mucho por decir, **(S16)** No se presta el tiempo para explicar todo, and **(S17)** Porque me apuren en hacerla. All of these refered to the same factor: time contraints.

Another relevant concern to point out is that, from the options proposed in the answer for Q 3 of the survey, participants expressed to have experienced problems when writing their letters in terms of language (grammar and vocabulary), writing (form and style) and organization of ideas, despite the help given to students, such as developing a language corpora and proper instruction of the grammar to be used. These choices may be linked again to the time factor, as well as to the comment that participants themselves made about how the writing task of informal letters as part of the English class was new for them.

5. Conclusions and Implications

The support of a humanistic pedagogical approach to writing in the English classroom attempted to demonstrate that a language class should involve meaningful life-long learning that ensures a more integral education, instead of empty non-authentic material that covers only one skill or competence at the time. Participants seem to have benefited significantly in terms of motivation to write since they considered the topic of 'themselves' and 'significant others' attractive. Moreover, they developed a sense of community in terms of the collaborative work; they additionally realized the importance of sharing similar concerns about the future with their classmates. The objective of raising awareness challenged the students to think critically before writing, not only about the ideas to be developed but also about the way to express them. They reflected on themselves and the others, analyzing their possibilities through reading about their classmates. In that sense, they did not only compare their ideas to enhance their own situation, but they also seemed to have become more sensible towards others about their current and future situations.

The findings suggest that writing and exchanging informal letters under a tripartite

genre-content-process approach met successfully the set goal of raising self-awareness of a life project and awareness of significant others, although in different degrees for each participant. Yet, despite the fact that it does not seem to be necessary to wait until students master the foreign language to let them take part in an interactive writing task like the one proposed here, it was difficult to manage the feelings of frustration conveyed by participants whose letters were less accurate than expected. In this study, such disadvantage was remedied by the participants' development of Classroom Interactional Competence with a real audience in the assessing stages where they provided feedback to each other through self-regulation of English learning. Moreover, after major constraints regarding technology and teacher dependence were overcome, the participants expressed in the focus groups their appreciation for the fact that the writing task did not demand expensive material or strenuous research of decontextualized information.

Finally, although the implementation of this action research benefited the students mostly in the humanistic aspect, it is also true that the participants felt overwhelmed and frustrated at some points in the writing process. Therefore, future projects in this same area of study could provide students with a more gradual written process, including more attentive drafting and more abundant feedback from the teacher-researcher. Further research might also consider extending the writing period, preparing and examining students' production in more detail concerning the three approaches used. Other related areas of study may include: measuring the level of motivation before and after each writing task, and case studies according to gender, age and/or background. Lastly, a more stimulating research goal, but one to be done within a longer period of time, would be to evaluate the real impact of the writing task in the participants' life to see if they truly achieved the goals set in their letters and within the time they had established.

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APPENDIX 1

Nombre: _____ Edad: _____ Grupo: _____

La siguiente lista es para conocer tu opinión acerca del proyecto cartas informales, llevado a cabo durante el curso de Inglés III (periodo Septiembre-Diciembre 2013).

- ***Marca con una palomita (P) <u>sólo una</u> de las 3 categorías disponibles para cada pregunta.***
  Agrega algún comentario si así lo crees necesario para complementar tu respuesta.

	A través de la redacción de cartas informales:	*Mucho*	*Más o menos*	*Muy poco*	*Nada*	*Comentarios (Explica tu respuesta brevemente)*
1.	Tuve la oportunidad de reflexionar sobre lo que quiero en mi proyecto de vida académica (qué carrera estudiar, a cuál universidad ir, buscar un trabajo de medio tiempo para ayudar a pagar mi colegiatura, etc.).					
2.	Mis compañeros me ayudaron a reflexionar y enfocar mejor mis ideas cuando leí acerca de sus proyectos de vida académica (porque sus ideas fueron muy similares o muy diferentes).					
3.	Ahora puedo valorar mejor mis habilidades y capacidades académicas.					
4.	Ahora puedo valorarme mejor como ser humano (creencias, valores, actitudes, etc.).					
5.	Ahora puedo valorar mejor mi rol como estudiante.					
6.	Ahora puedo valorar mejor mi rol como hijo.					
7.	Ahora puedo valorar mejor mi rol como ciudadano.					
8.	Ahora puedo valorar mejor el rol que tienen mis padres y familiares en mi futuro académico.					
9.	Ahora puedo valorar mejor el rol que tienen mis maestros y compañeros de clase en mi futuro académico.					
10.	Creo que ahora soy capaz de expresar mi agradecimiento a las personas que me apoyan e inspiran en mi proyecto de vida académico.					

APPENDIX 2

Nombre: _____ Edad: _____ Grupo: _____

La siguiente encuesta es para conocer tu opinión acerca del proyecto cartas informales, llevado a cabo durante el curso de Inglés III (periodo Septiembre-Diciembre 2013).

• Marca con una **(X)** la respuesta que corresponde a tu opinión.

1. El proyecto sobre la redacción de una carta informal me pareció:
   Muy interesante □   Interesante □   Poco Interesante □   Aburrido □
   ¿Por qué? Comenta brevemente algunas razones: _____
   _____

2. En la carta pude expresar todo acerca de mi reflexión sobre mi proyecto de vida: □Sí
   □No   ¿Por qué?
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. ¿Qué problemas enfrentaste para redactar tu carta informal? (Puedes marcar varias opciones).
   □ Problemas con el idioma (vocabulario, gramática, expresiones, etc.)
   □ Problemas con la redacción (estilo, formato, las partes de la carta)
   □ Problemas con las ideas (mi reflexión no me ayudó con ideas claras sobre mi proyecto de vida)
   □Otros. Menciona alguno(s): _____

4. ¿Crees que la redacción de la carta informal te hizo más consciente de quién eres:
   en tu rol de estudiante?   □Sí   □No   ¿Por qué?
   _____
   ¿En tu rol de hijo?   □Sí   □No   ¿Por qué?
   _____

5. ¿Crees que la redacción de la carta informal te hizo más consciente sobre quienes son las personas que te rodean e influencian en la planeación y decisiones de tu proyecto de vida?
   □Sí   □No ¿Por qué? Comenta brevemente algunas razones:
   _____
   _____
   _____

6. Comenta brevemente qué aprendiste de nuevo acerca de ti mismo como persona y como estudiante, y acerca del idioma inglés, gracias al proyecto de la redacción de cartas informales:
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

Gracias por contestar esta encuesta. J

APPENDIX 3

Increase of awareness of significant others
Checklist: Q 8, 9, 10
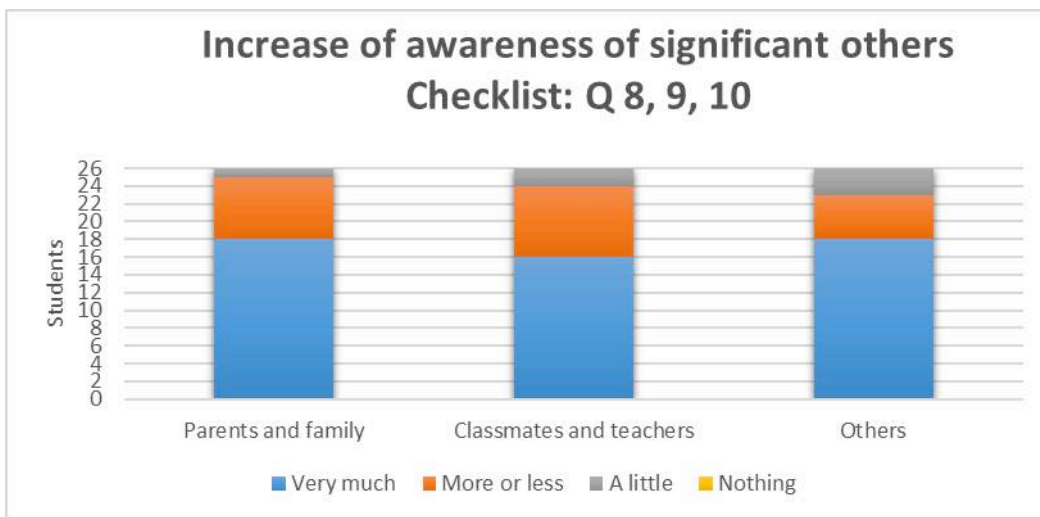
Awareness of significant others.

APPENDIX 4

Toso del Macho, Ver
27ᵗʰ October 2013

Dear Friend:

I am writing this letter to tell you my life project. I want to finish the Cbtis to go to university in Xalapa City and living with my sisters, to finish school. After graduating in civil engineer, I want to play basketball in Xalapa Hawks to find one work. I wantn't to live in Xalapa, I want to live in other country. Buy me a house and after that marry with my ideal girl, someday I hope to find. After I want forma a beautiful family with my wife. I want to have a one son and a one daughter. I work hard to give them life with everything they need. I want to visit my parents whenever possible because, they are my role models. I want to have a luxury car and a pool for my childrens. I want a happy with my family for a lifetime. With nothing more to say to you I say goodbye to my dear friend.

Sincerely
Racor

Use of expressions in future tense with the verb "want"

TRIGGERING REFLECTION

After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:

- How can students regulate their life development and their learning process?
- What are the two collaborative focus stated in this research?
- How are the following elements interrelated in the chapter: Raising awareness, scaffolding their learning proficiency and language communities?
- What research stage do you find more relevant in the implementation of this project? Justify your answer.
- How can a language class enhance meaningful life-long learning to ensure a whole student education?
- Describe in a short paragraph how the authors managed to raise self-awareness of a life project and awareness of significant others.

PART 5

Searching for appealing strategies

<div align="center">

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Songs in a Mexican Classroom

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<div align="right">

Guillermo Huerta Gutiérrez

Patricia Vargas

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Abstract

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This chapter describes a study developed in a public university in Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico. This study was an attempt to solve a problem that was identified in this particular context. By means of the use of songs, it was hoped that the language exposure and motivation that were perceived as lacking could be promoted. The data collected, during the month the plan was implemented, revealed that songs can be a useful tool in the classroom to expose and motivate learners to the learning of language. What is more, the findings suggest that students can also be benefited in other aspects of the language by means of using songs. As a result, this study may be broadened in a further second cycle.

<div align="center">

Resumen

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Este capítulo describe un estudio desarrollado en una Universidad pública en Xalapa, Veracruz, México. Este estudio intenta solucionar un problema identificado en este contexto particular. A través del uso de canciones, se buscó que tanto la insuficiente practica de la lengua como la anuncia de motivación fueran revertidas. Los datos obtenidos durante el mes que se puso en marcha el plan, se pudo comprobar que las canciones pueden ser herramientas útiles para exponer y motivar a los estudiantes hacia el aprendizaje de una lengua. Lo que es más, los resultados sugirieron que los estudiantes se pueden ver beneficiados en otros aspectos del lenguaje por medio del uso de una canción. Como resultado, este estudio puede ser ampliado en la puesta en marcha de un segundo ciclo.

1. Introduction

Songs are everywhere as representatives of daily life. They are catchy and popular. They can motivate people to exercise, remember things, fall in love, and even foster language learning. However, songs are often overlooked as a useful language-learning tool since teachers may think they require too much extra input. This is not necessarily the case and the study I have carried out consisted in using songs in order to ascertain how viable they might be in motivating foreign language learners.

The present study took place in a Language Centre run by a local University. This Language Centre offers different foreign language courses. The subject that I was in charge of

belongs to the Basic Area for those undergoing any BA at this public university. This is a 90 hour course divided into five hour face to face instruction per week, plus 1 hour a week of volunteering tutoring for those who need it. This represents 6 credits for students' learning careers and it is compulsory. At the end of this course, students are expected to reach the A1 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference.

The study group was composed of 21 learners who are studying different BAs at this local university. Most learners come from different areas around the State of Veracruz, although there are some who come from other states. Their ages range from eighteen to twenty six years old. They are not required to have a certain level of English when taking the subject. This sometimes makes it difficult for the teacher to work at the same pace with all students, since some students can have higher levels (according to what they are supposed to see in the course) and some others do not know anything about the English language. If a student has a high level, he may sometimes become bored or distract his/her peers.

I observed that in my EFL classroom, there was an apparent lack of exposure to the target language, with a consequent effect on students' understanding. This lack of language input was due to different reasons. For example, students said they did not like English because it was a compulsory subject. Furthermore, they saw no real connection between what they were studying and the language itself. Therefore, I decided to design and implement some listening activities in an attempt to discover to what extent songs could motivate beginner students to listen in English.

2. Literature Review

The concept of using songs in classrooms has been addressed by various authors. Inggris (2008 in Oann 2011: 6) asserts that "a song is a language package that bundles culture, vocabulary, listening, grammar and host of other language skills in just a few rhymes". Furthermore, Maess and Koelsch (2002 in KÖMÜR et al 2005: 2) make reference to neurological findings, which suggest that "musical and language processing occur in the same part of the brain and there appear to be parallels in how musical and linguistic syntax is processed".

Researchers have suggested other reasons why songs can be used as learning tools. Danavellos (1999) states that songs are highly motivating, personal, part of everyday life, are a natural opportunity for meaningful repetition, give examples of everyday language, are easy to find and fun. They also bring variety to the lesson, aid relaxation and group dynamics and can be used to deal with 'taboo' topics. They offer a wide range of emotions, including fun,

harmony and relaxation, both within oneself and within a group. Finally, students can be free to choose songs they want to work with and consequently the activities may be more motivating.

3. Methodology

I chose sixteen different songs to be played over sixteen classes, which fitted into the content students were supposed to cover during that time. It is important to mention that the activity was not only listening to the song, but learners also had to work with different tasks including ordering paragraphs and images, filling gaps, and finding mistakes. I should point out that my interest was not in having students answer the exercises correctly, but in exposing them indirectly to target language. While students were working on these activities, I kept a journal in which I recorded what occurred in the classroom. I also asked students to write a weekly journal of their own in which they had to answer four questions:

1. Did you complete all the activities based on songs this week? YES/NO Why?
2. Which activity did you like the most: ordering images, finding the mistakes[7], filling in the blanks, ordering the paragraphs, etc.? Why?
3. How did you feel?
4. Do you think these activities have helped you understand the English language better? YES/NO why?

At the end of each week I could read students' reactions to the activities and from the beginning, they liked the fact of having a song every day. Most of them could handle the activities and were inductively exposed to the foreign language. However, there were some students who still found English difficult and, to some extent, demotivating.

It was also noticed that even though students found some lyrics challenging, most of the activities were carried out effectively. I realized that both, my journal and those of the students, the songs were to some extent useful in exposing learners to the language. The nature of songs and the activities designed, helped learners to practice some aspects of the language. For instance, they remembered how to pronounce pronouns and some verbs. After having worked for 16 days, it was clear that students can do better if they are given enough practice. That is to say, listening to songs on a regular basis could have had an impact on their

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[7] Appendix 1

understanding of the language. Occasionally they did not complete an activity, but were able to show they identified some words or expressions.

4. Findings

I discovered that not all songs work per se. Teachers need to choose the most appropriate ones and adapt them to their contexts and their learners' needs. It is also the case that in the first lessons, students confronted different feelings. They were anxious, nervous and sometimes frustrated. However, as time progressed, they felt increasingly confident and comfortable. Despite certain difficulties, I observed that they were willing to take part in the activities, answer and ask questions. Most of them expressed positive feelings toward the songs such as willingness to listen to English, feeling relaxed, appreciative and comfortable. I realized that even if students did not like the activity they liked the song as they asked to play it again and sang along. Here I could see that songs can work and help students learn certain language features.

At the end of the first week, I realized that the kind of activities implemented in the classroom requires careful design, clear guidance when being carried out and, most importantly, an understanding of how they may engage students. Furthermore, teachers should be open to making any necessary adjustment in future classes, include songs in lesson plans so that classes can be interesting and helpful instead of being viewed negatively by students.

During this implementation, I noticed that exercises based on songs are often attractive and seen as less monotonous. There also appears to be a connection between my notes with Shen's study (2009: 1) when he states that songs can be "an impeccable tool for language learning". I would like to add, based on my study, that songs not only provide students with language exposure, but also practice of different aspects such as intonation, rhythm, stress, etc. This was evident when after the activity, students could recall some aspect of the language and its "correct" pronunciation. Another important issue arising from this study concerns the type of activity and its most appropriate song. I used a selection of songs and matched each one of them with the contents of the course. Frequency is also important when using songs, since the more students listen to the specific language, the more they will get used to it.

It is relevant to mention some of the problems I faced in this study. For example, the time devoted to implementation was not always long enough to prove conclusively that students obtained enough effective language exposure to improve their understanding of

English. Moreover, the study was limited since it was applied to a small number of students in one particular course. The activities were not evaluated or revised by other teachers, which also imposes a limit on the results gained.

Another issue I had little control of was the attitude of some students. Most of them reacted positively to the activities and became involved in them. However, some seemed to be uninterested. I could read in their journals that they found the activities irrelevant and sometimes hard to follow. Some others did not like the type of music since their tastes were very different.

5. Reflection

Certain adjustments are recommendable in order to deal with these limitations. I would suggest devoting more time to the implementation to obtain reliable data. If students have more days to write in their journals, the findings would be enriched by deeper information. I also believe it is necessary to include more data collection methods for the same purpose. In a possible second cycle, feedback from other teachers could be important in order to improve the activities. They could also suggest or share songs and activities which could reduce time spent investigating and designing appropriate material.

Concerning the students' attitude, I consider I should research more motivational activities. In future lessons, I could ask them to recommend songs to work with, although this must be handled carefully as the songs may be unsuitable and lead to disappointment and reduced enthusiasm. I would also research ways to make them feel relaxed and work more to involve them actively in the class.

6. Conclusion

This study was undertaken in an attempt to face an apparent lack of L2 listening exposure and motivation, and was carried out using activities based on songs. During the development of this study I observed that students were motivated to listen to English, asked me to play the songs again and sang along with them. There were also some learners who downloaded the songs to their mobile phones. This proved that the more creative the class and the more innovative teachers can be in the classroom, the better both teaching and learning become.

It is important to mention that this study was only carried out with one group of students, which opens the possibility to replicate it in other groups or continue with a second cycle after certain adjustments. There could also be other ways to use songs in English

classes: instead of using them only to expose students to language, they could also be employed to practice speaking, writing, and reading skills.

Now that this study has concluded, I can state that I achieved my goal of implementing activities and exposing my students to the target language. I would like to conclude by saying that the responsibility of being a teacher is sometimes quite demanding. Not only must we teach, but we must also design, plan, implement and evaluate activities, and start all over again. Here we can see that research and students' enjoyment are important parts of our teaching practice.

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APPENDIX 1: Sample Song Worksheets

Students were given worksheet 1 containing the lyrics of a song. They listened to the song once. After that, the teacher asked them to give him back that worksheet and he gave them worksheet 2. This time the lyrics had been modified and students had to find the mistakes and correct them while listening to the song again.

Worksheet 1

English I
[School's name]
Listening Practice
Name: _____ **Date:** _____

INSTRUCTIONS: Listen to the song. Pay particular attention to the words in bold.

Lemon tree
Fool's Garden

I'm **sitting** here in a boring room
It's just another
rainy Sunday afternoon
I'm **wasting** my time,
I got nothing to do
I'm **hanging** around,
I'm waiting for you
But nothing ever happens – and I wonder

I'm **driving** around in my car
I'm **driving** too fast,
I'm **driving** too far
I'd like to change my point of view
I feel so lonely, I'm waiting for you
But nothing ever happens,
and I wonder
Chorus
I wonder how, I wonder why
Yesterday you told me 'bout
the blue blue sky
And all that I can see
is just a yellow lemon tree
I'm **turning** my head up and down
I'm **turning**, **turning**, **turning**,
turning, **turning** around
And all that I can see
is just another lemon tree

(Sing: da, da, da, da, da, dee, da, da,
da, da ,da, da, dee, da, da, da, dee, ee, a)

I'm **sitting** here, I miss the power
I'd like to go out taking a shower
But there's a heavy cloud inside
my head
I feel so tired, put myself into bed
Where nothing ever happens –
and I wonder

Isolation is not good for me
Isolation -- I don't want to
sit on a lemon tree
I'm **stepping** around
in a dessert of joy
Baby anyhow I'll get another toy
And everything will happen –
and you'll wonder
Chorus
I wonder how, I wonder why
Yesterday you told me 'bout
the blue blue sky
And all that I can see
is just another lemon tree
I'm **turning** my head up and down
I'm **turning**, **turning**, **turning**, **turning**, **turning** around

And all that I can see is just a yellow lemon tree

And I wonder, wonder
I wonder how, I wonder why
Yesterday you told me 'bout
the blue, blue sky
And all that I can see (dit dit dit)
And all that I can see (dit dit dit)
And all that I can see
is just a yellow lemon tree.

Worksheet 2

English I
[School's name]
Listening Practice
Name: _____ **Date:** _____

INSTRUCTIONS: Listen to the song again. Correct the mistakes and write the correct words on the lines.

<div align="center">

Lemon tree
Fool's Garden

</div>

I'm **sit** here in a boring room   _____
It's just another rainy Sunday afternoon
I'm **waste** my time, I got nothing to do   _____
I'm **hang** around, I'm waiting for you   _____
But nothing ever happens -- and I wonder
I'm **drive** around in my car   _____
I'm **drive** too fast,   _____
I'm **drive** too far   _____
I'd like to change my point of view
I feel so lonely, I'm waiting for you
But nothing ever happens, and I wonder
Chorus
I wonder how, I wonder why
Yesterday you told me 'bout the blue blue sky
And all that I can see is just a yellow lemon tree
I'm **turn** my head up and down   _____
I'm **turn**, **turn**, **turn**, **turn**, **turn** around   _____
And all that I can see is just another lemon tree
(Sing: da, da, da, da, da, dee, da, da,
da, da ,da, da, dee, da, da, da, dee, ee, a)
I'm **sit** here, I miss the power   _____
I'd like to go out taking a shower
But there's a heavy cloud inside my head
I feel so tired, put myself into bed
Where nothing ever happens -- and I wonder
Isolation is not good for me
Isolation -- I don't want to sit on a lemon tree
I'm **step** around in a dessert of joy   _____
Baby anyhow I'll get another toy
And everything will happen -- and you'll wonder
Chorus
I wonder how, I wonder why
Yesterday you told me 'bout the blue blue sky
And all that I can see is just another lemon tree
I'm **turn** my head up and down   _____
I'm **turn**, **turn**, **turn**, **turn**, **turn** around   _____
And all that I can see is just a yellow lemon tree
And I wonder wonder
I wonder how, I wonder why
Yesterday you told me 'bout the blue, blue sky
And all that I can see (dit dit dit)
And all that I can see (dit dit dit)
And all that I can see is just a yellow lemon tree.

TRIGGERING REFLECTION

After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:

- According to this chapter, what is the risk of using songs in the language classroom?
- What aspects does a teacher need to take into account when choosing songs to teach English as a foreign language? Why?
- Songs can definitely enhance motivation and willingness to learn English as a foreign language; however, in what way should songs be adapted to be used as a teaching and learning tool?
- To what extend were the activities used in this project inspiring to learn English as a foreign language? How could they become more inspiring? What other activities would you suggest?
- Can songs only increase the auditory exposure of the target language? Justify your answer.
- Do you experience the same lack of exposure to the oral language and motivation in your teaching situation? If so, think about a specific issue you would like to sort out? Design an action plan and implement it.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The Use of Puppets to Enhance Motivation in Children

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Abstract

This inquiry presents a teacher-initiated action research study carried out in a private bilingual elementary school with fifth graders. In order to overcome the students' lack of motivation to learn English; using puppets emerged as the main option to possibly solve this problem. The objective of this inquiry, therefore, was to explore how puppets could offer some benefits in motivating, stimulating, and teaching speaking in an EFL classroom. The data collection included classroom observations, questionnaires, teacher's class notes, and interviews at the end of each class period. The findings revealed that the use of puppets can be an effective strategy in stimulating, motivating and improving speaking skills and oral presentations.

Resumen

Esta investigación presenta la intervención de un profesor en una investigación acción llevada a cabo en una escuela primaria bilingüe privada con niños de quinto grado. Con el propósito de remediar la falta de motivación en el aprendizaje del inglés; el uso de títeres surge como la opción principal para resolver este problema. El objetivo de esta investigación, por la tanto, era explorar de qué manera los títeres podían ofrecer algunos beneficios en la motivación, estimulación, y la enseñanza de la habilidad oral en el salón de clases de Inglés como lengua extranjera. La recolección de datos incluyó observaciones de clase, cuestionarios, notas del maestro y entrevistas al final de cada clase. Los resultados revelaron que el uso de los títeres puede ser un enfoque efectivo en la estimulación, motivación y mejoramiento en las habilidades orales y la exposición de las mismas.

1. Introduction

Teaching young students in general is not the same as teaching adults because they have different characteristics and motivations. Play is an important aspect of a young learners' development, and language is a part of that play. Speaking therefore is equally important in children's overall language development. Young learners are like sponges, they soak up everything we say and how we say it. Therefore clear and correct pronunciation is of vital importance, since young learners repeat exactly what they hear. Owing to this, the method of teaching must be different too. If the teachers cannot teach the young learners properly, the students may not enjoy their learning. Consequently the teaching learning process may fail. Therefore, the aim of this action research was to find out whether English speaking puppets would promote and stimulate students' oral engagement during classroom hours and in their group speaking activities.

2. Literature Review

This chapter describes some of the theories and opinions discussed in this study based on the review of related literature. This includes discussion of the main topics related to young speakers' difficulties when speaking EFL, such as learners' self-confidence, anxiety and motivation. Finally, the use of puppetry and its impact on young learner's development and motivation is argued, as well as its importance in the classroom.

The skill of speaking skill is as crucial as any other language skill. The four skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) naturally appear together in every English class, even in the EFL context. As Peregoy and Boyle (2001) state, "Listening, speaking, reading and writing also occur naturally together in learning events in school at all grade levels, even though traditionally they were taught separately" (p.107). In addition, Shumin (1997, p.8) states that "learning to speak a foreign language requires more than knowing its grammar and vocabulary. Learners should acquire the skill through interaction with each other.

Affective factors are the most important issues that may promote students' speaking. Three of these affective factors which are the focus of this inquiry include self confidence, anxiety, and motivation. Shumin believes that " L2 or foreign language learning is a complex task that is susceptible to human anxiety, which is associated with feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self doubt, and apprehension" (1997, p.2).

2.1. Self-confidence

Previous studies have shown that there is a direct relationship between students' self-confidence and their speaking behaviour in the FL. For example, Lai (1994) attempted to identify Hong Kong secondary students' level of confidence in using English and the factors leading to different confidence levels in oral participation in classrooms. The findings show that most of the students "felt a lack of motivation and or confidence in using English as a means of communication in the classroom" (Lai, 1994, p. 122). In another study, MacIntyre et al. (1998) suggest that self-confidence significantly contributes to the learner's willingness to communicate in a foreign language. They seem to agree with Krashen (1985) that affective factors such as motivation, personality, intergroup climate, and self-confidence lie beneath students' eagerness to communicate. They affirm that the factor of motivation including overall self-confidence in foreign language learning. Finally, situational motivation in communication is another decisive factor of paramount importance of students' readiness to speak.

Due to the negative effects, some researchers have attempted to propose solutions for students' lack of confidence and motivation in L2/FL classrooms. A study conducted by Burden (2004) reveals that "almost 70% of 289 students surveyed felt a lack of self-confidence when speaking English" (P.3). Burden (2004) thus suggests that teachers should use "*cooperative* as opposed to *competitive* goal structures as a means of creating interdependencies between learners to increase their self-confidence" (p.18)

2.2 Anxiety

Anxiety is another concept that needs to be taken into consideration. According to Lewis (1970), "anxiety is as an unpleasant emotion experience as dread, slam, fright, trepidation, horror or panic" (p.63). It is a general term for several disorders that cause nervousness, fear, apprehension, and worrying. These disorders affect how we feel and behave, and they can manifest real physical symptoms. There is positive and negative anxiety. Negative anxiety "may foster poor response and sometimes inhibit response" stated by Simpson, Parker and Harrison (1995: 29), and it may be an obstacle when learning L2/FL. In contrast, there may also be positive anxiety that "motivates learners to fight the new learning tasks and prompts them to make extra efforts to overcome their feelings of anxiety" (Simpson et al., 1995, p, 29). Furthermore, Krashen (1985) mentions that those whose attitudes are not optimal (optimal refers to the best or the most favorable for a given situation) for second language acquisition will not be interested in looking for input, instead,

they will have a high or strong "affective filter" (p.31). That is, if the learner feels negative anxiety, the affective filter will go up and block his/her mind from learning the language easily, and prevent the learner from speaking in the second or foreign language (Vygotsky, 1978).

2.3 Motivation – Motivating Students to Speak

Motivation related to learning English, could be defined as the purpose for doing things that will lead to learning a foreign language. According to Gardner (1985), to be motivated, the learner needs to have something to look forward to, a purpose related to a goal or an objective. This objective would be learning a foreign language. Therefore, motivation is a combination of effort, desire and positive attitudes towards the learning of the English as a foreign language. It contains favorable attitudes, effort, want and affect, and is also goal directed (Madrid et al., 1993: p.19). To motivate the students in EFL contexts, teachers should include activities and strategies that attract students' attention and make them interested in the lesson.

2.4 The Use of Puppets in the EFL Classroom

Puppets are a teaching media that may help teachers generate learning conversations among children. Puppets come to life as different characters, they can be used according to the teacher's needs, and they can be adapted to groups with different personalities and nationalities as well. When the teacher uses puppets, she knows they will bring joy to the group, they can be naughty or good, cheeky or shy (Vygotsky, 1978); the miracle happens when the child is engaged by the puppet, and then, learns without even realizing. In addition Piazza (1999) indicates that the use of puppets may encourage students to test new ideas and investigate children's imagination assign different function to their toys. These toys emerge as beings with soul in a world where the children-students create their own rules and look for alternative solutions to their problems. In this respect, Majaron agrees (2002) that all these kinds of games improve all steps in child's development.

Moreover, Majaron (2002) affirms that by introducing puppets in his/her classroom offers children the opportunity to learn easily and spontaneously. However, there are many more reasons for using puppets in the classroom. By using puppets, shy children have been encouraged to talk. Majaron (2002) has discovered that "by using a puppet in the lessons children might be more relaxed and motivated and so the *affective filter* (p.61) can, according to Krashen, block learning (Lightbown & Spada 1999, p.40).

Apart from motivating children to work, and reducing the "affective filter", puppets offer other benefits. For example, Majaron (2002) states that "Children who are accustomed to using puppets in their everyday conversations, have richer vocabulary, they are able to understand the semiotic-symbolic value of visual signs and the language of non-verbal communication" (p.61). Another benefit is that the use of puppets may also afford the student a sense of belonging to a group as Bennett (2001, p.153) mentions "The use of puppets provides an opportunity for student expression through the social aspects of communication". He also states that students who are working in a group to prepare and present a puppet play are learning to work cooperatively with others, where there is give and take and sharing of ideas. He adds that this class arrangement offers the students the advantage of establishing "group cohesion" (p.153).

2.5 Role Play

Another activity that has been considered by the researchers in promoting the EFL students' classroom participation and speaking skills is role play. Role play is a speaking activity which improves communicative competence and provides practice in contexts which simulate real-life experience. Livingstone (1986, p.6) defines role-play as "a classroom activity which gives the student the opportunity to practice the language, the aspects of role behavior, and the actual roles he may need outside the classroom."

To decide how to develop the dialogue further while mapping dialogues provides a kind of chart telling students the functions they must use while interacting. The most common situations for role plays are those in which the students may need to function in the target language (Richard-Amato, 1996, p.182). Richard-Amato states that "Appropriate situations include topics that students see or in which they participate in their own lives. Examples include shopping, interacting at school, talking on the telephone, asking for directions, and making appointments," (p.182). Therefore, according to her, the situations should also be familiar to the students.

3. Methodology

This study is an action research. This chapter describes the methodology employed in this research. In the first section, the research design is presented. In the second section, the problems and the outcome of initial research are identified and understood. In the third section, the Action Plan, the rationale and the implementation are explained.

3.1 Research Design

The research design for this inquiry is based on Action Research. Wallace (1998) defines action research as "the systematic collection and analysis of data relating to the improvement of some aspect of professional practice" (p.1). Kemmis (1991) has developed a simple model of the cyclical nature of the typical action research process. He asserts that each cycle of an action research has four steps: plan, act, observe and reflect. There are various models of action research to choose from, the one used in this inquiry was Kemmis' and McTaggart' (1988) action research model which consists of four phases. Kemmis and McTaggart claim that it is not a rigid structure and, in this respect, Koshy adds that this methodology is "more fluid, open and responsive" (Koshy, 2005, p.5). This model is still considered to be the most classic as it "summarizes very succinctly the essential phases of the AR process" (Burns, 2010). In McTaggart's models, the stages of the action research are represented in the diagram below:
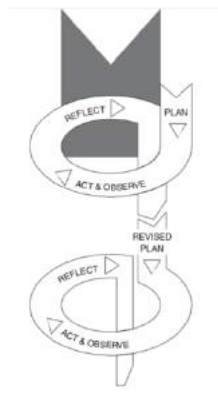
Kemmis and McTaggart's (2000-595) Action Research Spiral Model

3.2 Identifying and understanding the problem

In order to confirm that the problem identified (lack of motivation when speaking English in fifth graders) existed and discover its characteristics; initial research was carried out with the aid of three methods: observation, open ended questions and field notes.

3.3 Data collection Procedure, Tools and lesson Material

The data collection tools that were chosen to give the researcher information on the effectiveness of her teaching strategy were observations, questionnaires, interviews /surveys, and a research diary (Cohen et al, 2000; Patton, 1999; Kvale, 1996). The tools of the lesson/research was hand puppets, school supplies such as color pens, scissors, rulers and glue as well as household supplies (paper plates, color strings, decorative items). Regarding the

material given, some of the material was chosen that closely related to students daily life and the others were randomly selected. The material was also chosen based on the curriculum and syllabus in the school.

3.3.1 Classroom Observation

Classroom observations took place through a 4 week period during each classroom session (4 sessions). These observations were made during the month of August, 2014 while students were doing the puppets activities. Based on the records of observations from the journal, a lack of participation by 5 students was initially observed. These students typically hesitated to answer a simple question and they were struggling to complete one correct sentence.

3.3.2 Open Ended Questions

According to Kvale (1996) open-ended questions give the informant the opportunity to express herself/himself freely. Students get used to speaking and thinking about the subject and might give a one-word answer. However, an open-ended question also allows students speak more freely far beyond a simple 'yes' 'no'. The use of open-ended questions provided with the opportunity to gather more meaningful data to enrich the research.

3.3.3. Field Notes.

Field notes were used to observe and record the students' performance in the class during each class activity. There were three components that the writer observed. They were: the participation level each student during the class; the participation of the students and the oral presentation in the target language of the students.

3.3.4   Focus group interview

In this inquiry, interviews were aimed to collect the information about the students' opinions, feelings & thoughts, feedback and expectation about the use of puppets in their speaking and oral presentation activities. The group interview was conducted in this study to gain more insight from the students as a whole. Brown et al. (1989) suggests that "focus group interview gives a convenient situation to the students as well as to accumulate the individual knowledge" (p.40). In this inquiry eleven students were interviewed, the interviews were considered informal and were conducted individually with each student and later as a group.

3.3.5 Questionnaire

In order to gather useful and relevant information Burns (2010) suggested that "it is essential that careful consideration is given to the design of your questionnaire. Students were presented with questionnaire in Spanish so they could understand the questions easily and give the correct answers according to what they thought. The questions were written on the board, students were asked to copy and answer each question according to their own experience using the puppets.

3.4 Verification of Data: Triangulation

Data triangulation is used to establish the credibility of qualitative analysis form multiple sources of evidence (Cohen and Manion, 2000). In order to triangulate the data, the observations were analyzed for common themes and categories within the observations themselves. The findings from the observational notes were compared to the retellings and to the student work samples in order to identify common themes, and help develop the themes which were identified. Various comparisons between data sources were made to triangulate the data as much as possible.

3.4.1 Outcome of Initial Research

The findings from the initial research were summarized in three categories, the first one was children's lack of motivation, the second category was about the importance of increased self confidence to learn more vocabulary to enhance speaking, and finally the third one which was about the lack of speaking activities due to inadequate vocabulary.

3.4.2 Children's Lack of Motivation

According to the results from the focus group, the majority agreed they liked English and they enjoyed the class, but they just felt insecure when speaking. They felt shy when making mistakes in English. Many of the learners said they needed to pay more attention in class, they said English is important for their future lives, but they do not speak enough English because they do not know the words or they just do not feel enough motivation for doing it.

3.4.3 Confidence in Speaking

 Griffee (1997) designed *the Confidence in Speaking Questionnaire* (p.187). Griffee's (1997) confidence construct is the product of his in-depth inquiry into the self-confidence variables. Griffee (1997) hypothesized three aspects underlying confidence in speaking English: *ability*,

assurance, and *willing engagement*. He defined ability as "a command of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation," assurance as "a feeling of security and comfort in speaking English," and willing engagement as one who is "glad to speak English with native speakers of English" (p.187). As Griffiee´s questionnaire is based on these three aspects of confidence, It was used for this research as it fit well, and allowed me to broadly examine my students' sense of confidence.

3.4.4 Lack of Speaking Activities

This inquiry used puppets as tool in an effort to promote students' speaking activities. The instrument I used was the focus group, I wrote some questions on the board and they copied them and answered the questions. I confirmed that, the majority like English, but they either do not pay much attention, or feel motivated to use English during the class. Students also said that they tend to forget the words in English so they use Spanish to communicate with the teacher and peers instead. Results for this item indicate that at the end of the study students felt English was easier to speak when using puppets to communicate during the role play and drills.

3.5 Action Plan

The problem identified in my classroom was based on my observations and data collection that fifth grade elementary EFL students are often hesitant to participate in oral classroom activities. This may be due to their limited understanding of the English language and/or the lack of interactive speaking activities within the school curriculum. In order to combat both these issues, I designed an Action Plan based on the use of puppets.

3.5.1 Implementation

The Action Plan was implemented within the regular class schedule in the school during four weeks. Each week was devoted to a specific task: "Meeting each other", "How to make a paper plate puppet", "Students interact with each other" and a "Play", explained in more detail below. During the performance of these tasks, 20 minutes were allocated to introduce new vocabulary. The main aim of each of the tasks was to motivate students to speak more English. Students' interactions were monitored by the teacher and guidance was given to the students when necessary. The students were encouraged to speak English as much as they could. The activities implemented during the four weeks are explained in detail below.

Week 1: "Meeting each other"

The teacher started the class by greeting the students with the use of a puppet. She asked the students' names at random, and introduced the puppet. She walked around the classroom to call students attention to the puppet while "piglet" the puppet was asking them questions. The teacher wrote a short dialogue on the board as a guide to be followed. She gave another puppet to one of the students and modeled the dialogue in front of the class. The teacher then asked two students to come to the front and act out the dialogue using the puppets. She monitored the activity.

Week 2: "How to make a paper plate puppet"

The teacher provided the material for each student to make his or her own paper puppet (paper plates, stapler, yarn, buttons, scissors, markers and color sheets). She explained and wrote on the board the steps to be followed to make a puppet. She read the instructions aloud in English to make sure students understood what they had to do. The teacher gave the material to the students and they began working on their own puppet. Students interacted in English while they were making their own puppet, then the teacher monitored the activity and offered assistance if necessary.

Week 3: "Students interact among them"

After students finished making their own animal puppet, they interacted with each other, asking questions such as: Hi, who are you? Where do you live? What is your favorite food? Who is your best friend? Do you go to school? The teacher posted the questions on the wall so students could use them in case they forgot their drills.

Week 4: "Play"

The teacher brought a cardboard theater into the class so students could present a short animal play. Students came to the front in pairs and acted out the play in front of the class. The teacher acted as an observer and recorded her findings on an assessment sheet. The students' language performance or oral presentation was also recorded.

4. Findings

This chapter describes the findings of this research. There are four sections. The first one discusses how the Action Plan was evaluated. The second section presents the evaluation

techniques employed during the action plan**.** The third section deals with the verification of the data, and finally the fourth section examines and analyzes the findings.

4.1 Evaluation of Action Plan

There are two types of evaluation: Formative and Summative. Formative Evaluation takes place during the project to guide future development. Summative Evaluation takes place after the completion of a project to appraise its success. In this inquiry, a process-oriented formative evaluation including observing, detecting, and reporting the weaknesses and strengths of students was used. In support of the evaluation process, diary writing, learning logs, and self-assessment were used, since giving formal exams and grades would have spoiled the positive emotional atmosphere the teacher-researcher wanted to create.

4.2 Assessment Criteria Chart for Speaking

I used an assessment criteria chart (see appendix 2) during the AR to evaluate students' performance with the puppets. While students were working during the four tasks of the action plan, I observed how they interacted with their peers and how the puppets served as a motivational tool to help them express themselves in English. The students' abilities were documented in the assessment criteria chart.

4.3 Findings and Analysis

Three themes emerged as a result of my analysis of the data collected. First, it seems that the use of puppets in teaching resulted in more language being produced by students; that students' speaking actually improved; and that students were more motivated and responsive to participate in class as a result of the introduction of these activities.

4.3.1 Students' Attitude / Response towards the Use of Puppets

The study sessions during this Action Research project became more animated when the puppets join in the lesson. Students wanted to participate during the interaction with the puppets. They felt motivated to speak more in the target language. There were still a couple of shy students who acted as observers at first. Students' response to the questionnaire suggests that using a puppet may help to create a role which is separated from the learner and may therefore help to increase confidence. The data suggests that students may feel more confident when presenting role plays using their puppets. It also indicates that shy students might

particularly benefit from using puppets as the four very shy students in the class reported an improvement in confidence during this in cycle of AR.

Through the observations it was seen that the students became excited when they were able to use the puppets to learn. Over the course of the study, the students' who were less proficient participated more than usual. I observed students were more willing to participate when the puppet was working with them in class. The students adopted the puppet's character and acted as if they were the puppet. As a result, they felt less anxious to participate. There was an increase in participation especially from the shy and insecure students.

Considering the questionnaires and the interviews about each specific hand puppet that was provided for them, it might be concluded that students liked to work with the puppets (the one provided by the teacher, the one student made and the last one student were asked to bring from their homes). Students responded that they really tried to speak more English and that they believed the puppets helped them to learn more English. This was made evident through the expression shown on the children's faces. I could observe the happy faces of the less involved students in the previous classes and now they were ready to try out speaking with puppets. It can be said that the use of puppets in the classroom can bring many benefits for children.

4.3.2 Benefits of using puppets in the language classroom

In this respect, the findings regarding the main benefit of using puppets supports Lepley's (2001) conclusions and show that students participating in this study used English more often during the activities with the puppets. In the activities that had been performed before the first puppet was introduced to the class, the use of English was only about fifty per cent. This shows that the use of English by students increased gradually (Journal/001). Some students commented that puppets made them feel happy and willing to participate more, others said they did not care that much if they made a mistake since they did not feel alone with speaking with the puppet. At the end the majority agreed they enjoyed working with puppets. This also makes evident that students responded positively to the use of puppets.

As a result of this Action Research, it was found that students were more motivated and encouraged to speak in English when using puppets. They were more willing and excited to participate in conversational activities; they felt more confident; worked in groups, and had lots of fun. This AR demonstrated that shy and normally insecure students were more motivated to participate when using puppets. It was like being in a party or at play where the puppets attracted and encouraged them to speak.

5. Discussion and reflection

Based on the findings of this AR, puppets seem to have a positive impact on students' participation, self confidence, lowering anxiety and fear. Through the teacher's observations, responses from students, increase class participation and the more frequent use of the English Language. It was observed that students became excited, more confident and encouraged when they were able to use the puppets to learn and speak the target language. Over the course of the study, there was an increased participation and positive mood from students who were less proficient.
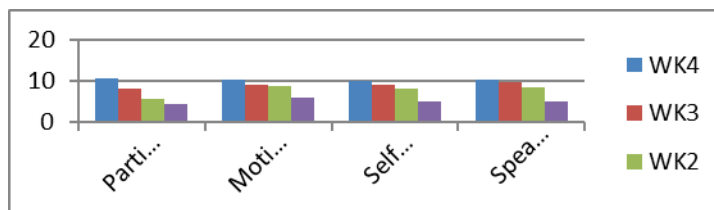
This study added to my knowledge about the positive role of action research in EFL / L2 teaching education. Based on my own personal experience gained through doing this action research and previous literature, it is my firm conviction that action research has a great potential to help EFL / L2 teachers. I feel that I am now better equipped to consciously reflect on the problems of my particular situation, and on the applicability of the theories I have learned. Questionnaires have been a particularly useful instrument in this respect; I became more aware of the students' needs and difficulties, and I was eager to seek solutions to meet their needs and resolve their problems. As a result, I am more confident about what to teach, how to teach, and why to teach in such a way. Through conducting this action research project, I had an opportunity to develop my professional autonomy, and to initiate a number of useful classroom activities and techniques which I would otherwise have been unlikely to attempt.

This research indicates that puppets can have a place in the classroom. Based on the previous discussions, the following suggestions are offered: First, the use of puppets should be maintained frequently and recommended to the English teachers, especially to teach elementary school students in order to encourage and motivate them in learning English. Second, a teacher should try to apply other teaching strategies so that the class becomes alive. Teaching aids like puppets can be an effective technique in promoting speaking skills, as they increase the students' attention in the teaching and learning process, improve the students' self-confidence to speak, establish better interaction between the teacher and students, and increase the students' creativity. Furthermore, the use of puppets may be beneficial for the student who prefers to learn kinesthetically. Puppet activities keep students actively engaged

with hands-on activities. Puppets can also help strengthen and promote social skills especially in younger students.

6. Conclusions

Carrying out this action research made me aware of the importance of using various tools or mediums for teaching speaking in the EFL context. Teachers of young learners should use a variety of strategies that encourage the students to speak in the classroom. Teaching English to a small group of fifth grade EFL students through role play and group activities using puppets, particularly focusing on oral presentation and speaking skills appears to be an effective method. The use of puppets in role plays and group activities, as demonstrated in this study, does encourage the EFL students to speak the target language more frequently during the class activity. This exercise also affords the student a sense of belonging to a group. The group work of puppetry has not only been to improve student social skills, but may allow the individual students to eventually attain success. Individual students felt motivated to work harder if there was a group goal. Students also felt more comfortable expressing themselves when using the puppet and the puppet helped them share their ideas.

6.1 Limitations

Within the class schedule, the time allowed to implement the strategies and the sample size of the participants were limited. It would be better if the strategies were implemented over a longer period of time. Time was also a limiting factor due to the fact that when data is collected over a longer time period, it produces results that can be considered to be more reliable and valid. The sample size of the students taking part in this research was also small (11 students). More participants may have provided a deeper insight and more information. However, a larger sample was not feasible during this study period.

The use of puppets in the classroom does not represent a problem, but preparing and presenting the course material using puppets can be time consuming. The activities need to be prepared in advance and presented in a short time during the class period. The classroom space can be a limiting factor, but can be addressed if the students' puppets are small. Finally, other two limitations were: some students' lack of vocabulary to participate in group activities and the lack of an observer to assist in data collection.

6.2 Ways forward (possible 2nd Action Research cycle)

This inquiry was conducted during a four-week period that included 4 meetings and a group of only eleven students focusing on speaking. Similar action research studies should be done using puppets to assess the reading and writing skills. Puppets may also be an effective tool to teach EFL to older and more diverse age groups. Participation of parents in such studies may also be beneficial for the students so that they could carry on their tasks at home.

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APPENDIX 1: Students' Checklist

	Activities	YES				NO			
FIRST ACTIVITY	The students were motivated and engaged in the activity	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
	The students participated actively in the activity.								
	The students were interested in the puppets and used the target language with ease								
SECOND ACTIVITY	The students understood the speaking instruction								
	The students faced some difficulties on accomplishing the task								
	The students were enthusiasm to the puppet in their speaking activity during the lesson.								
THIRD ACTIVITY	The students took roles in speaking activity by using puppet.								
	The students comprehended the material given								
	The students responded enthusiastically to the given task								
FINAL ACTIVITY	The students were able to express in English when performing the play								

APPENDIX 2

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale

1 = siempre verdad; **2** = usualmente verdad; **3** = algunas veces verdad
4 = casi nunca verdad; **5** = nunca es verdad[*]

	How do I feel in class? *Como te sientes en clase?*	1	2	3	4	5
1	I am nervous when the teacher speaks to me in class Me pongo nerviosa cuando el profesor me habla en clase.		X			
2	I am embarrassed when I answer the teacher in class. Me da verguenza cuando le respondo al profesor en clase.			X		
3	I worry about making mistakes in class Me preocupa hacer errores en clase.		X			
4	I get nervous when speaking in class. Me pongo nerviosa cuando hablo Ingles en clase.				X	
5	I worry that the teacher will ask me a question. Me preocupa que el profesor me haga una pregunta.		X			
6	I feel self-conscious when speaking in English with my classmates. Me siento cohibida cuando estoy hablando Ingles con mis companeros.		X			
7	I am afraid that others will laugh at me when I speak English. Temo que otros se rian cuando hablo Ingles.		X			
8	I get so nervous in class that I forget everything Me pongo tan nerviosa en clase que se me olvida todo.		X			
9	I get nervous if I haven't prepared for class. Me pongo nerviosa si no me he preparado para la clase.		X			
10	I feel anxious even if I have prepared for class Me da anciedad inclusive cuando me he preparado para la clase.		X			
11	I worry if the teacher corrects me in class. Me preocupa que el profesor me ira a corregir en clase.		X			
12	The more I study English, the more I get confused Entre mas estudio el Ingles, mas me confundo.				X	
13	I worry if I can't understand every word the teacher says. Me preocupa no entiendo todo lo que el profesor dice.		X			

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[*] 1=always; 2= usually; 3= sometimes; 4=almost never; 5= never

APPENDIX 2B: Confidence in Speaking Questionnaire - Griffee Model

Appendix B

Confidence in Speaking Questionnaire (Adopted from Griffee, 1997)

1. I can be interviewed in English.
   Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

2. I would like to study in an English speaking country.
   Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

3. I like speaking English.
   Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

4. I can discuss in English with native speakers.
   Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

5. When I speak English, I feel cheerful.
   Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

6. I can speak English easily.
   Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

7. I can show an English speaking visitor around the campus and answer questions.
   Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

8. I say something to other people in English every day.
   Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

9. I can give my opinion in English when talking to a native speaker.
   Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

10. I look for chances to speak English.
    Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

11. I will speak to a group of people in English.
    Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

12. I am relaxed when speaking English.
    Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX 2C: Sample Need Analysis Questionnaire - Griffee Model

Appendix A

A Sample of Needs Analysis Questionnaire
(Adapted from Nunan, 1998; and Griffee, 1997)

Age: Field of Study:

1. Do you like to learn English by: ☐Reading   ☐Writing   ☐Listening   ☐Speaking

2. Do you like to: ☐Study grammar   ☐Learn new words   ☐Practice conversation

3. Do you like to learn English by: ☐Cassettes   ☐Games   ☐Conversation   ☐Studying English   ☐Books   ☐Watching T.V.

4. Do you like to learn by talking to friends in English? ☐Yes   ☐No

5. Do you like to learn English words by: ☐Seeing them   ☐Using them

6. Do you like to learn English with the whole class? ☐Yes   ☐No

7. Do you like to learn English by talking in pairs? ☐Yes   ☐No

8. Do you speak English out of the class? ☐Yes   ☐No

9. Do you feel happy when you speak English? ☐Yes   ☐No

10. Do you look for chances to speak English? ☐Yes   ☐No

11. Do you have enough confidence to speak to a group of people in English? ☐Yes   ☐No

12. Do you feel relaxed when you speak in English? ☐Yes   ☐No

13. How do you learn best? ☐Alone   ☐Pairs   ☐Small group   ☐Class   ☐Outside class

14. What do you feel are the most important things for you to learn in:
    Short term:
    Long term:

TRIGGERING REFLECTION

After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:

- What authors give scientific support to the idea of using puppets to enhance children's motivation to learn a foreign language? What do they affirm? Write a short list.
- In this study, what skill is promoted through the use of puppets? Why? Could another skill be promoted with this tool?
- Reflect on the use of positive anxiety as a tool to promote the children's learning process. Write a paragraph.
- What other benefits may the teacher find with the use of puppets in the language classroom? Mention any other benefits apart from the ones stated in the chapter.
- What special skills are required from the part of the teacher to replicate this AR?
- What other media that brings to life characters would you use to sort out an issue in your particular context? Design an action plan and implement it.

The seventeen chapters comprising this book are concise reports of the research that students carried out during their MA in TEFL and supervised by their corresponding tutors. Most of them are the product of an intervention, that is, an action plan specifically designed and implemented aiming to solve or improve an issue identified in their own classes. At the end of each chapter, you will find a few questions and tasks that lead to reflection and self-assessment. We consider this book can be of great support to present and future EFL teachers who are willing to change, improve and innovate their daily teaching and learning practice.