



“What effects do strengthened language learning routines
have on the levels of language acquisition in younger
learners?”

Montserrat Fornells

Universidad Alberto Hurtado

Degree Seminar 1

Stephen Darwin

November 24th, 2017

Abstract

This classroom research project investigated the effects of strengthen language routines on the levels of language acquisition. This research was carried out on a 1st grade class with sixteen students. For the purposes of this research, data were collected through the use of four different tools. Firstly, observations and self-reflections, based on qualitative method, were used to collect data regarding students' attitudes and answers when facing language routines. Secondly, a chart and a quiz, framed by a quantitative method, were used to collect data in regards to students' level of change in the language acquisition. The research found that strengthen language routines had a positive impact on the levels of language acquisition in younger learners. Therefore, the data gathered from this research concluded that language routines are useful in the teaching of young learners as such routines can be important in the development of language acquisition.

Key words: Language routines, language acquisition, young learners.

In the EFL classroom, using routines, especially with young learners, could be beneficial for their learning process in many aspects. Some of those benefits potentially involve behavior; since students could know what to do during the class, they may not lose the focus, develop their self-esteem, the sense of community as well as the potential development of autonomy (Colvin & Lazar, 1995). In this classroom research project, it was intended to understand and analyze the effects that this routine might cause in the language acquisition process of young learners. In regards to concept of language learning routines, it is understood as contextualized expressions in the target language that are commonly used in the class (Daloiso, 2014).

This classroom research project was focused on a 1st grade class from the school Altamira, located in Peñalolén. There were sixteen students in the class that was subject of this investigation. English classes were primarily taught in the target language and students were very participative in any type of activity carried out. According to routines, every day the students were asked about how they felt and some students' replied "happy" and others answered with the same question that the teacher already asked. Students always seemed very confused; it appears to be that they did not understand what was asked. This is the main reason why this research project intended to study the possible repercussions of routines in terms of the acquisition of vocabulary.

Concerning the question of this research, it was formulated as it follows: *What effects do strengthened language learning routines have on the levels of language acquisition in younger learners?.*

Methodology

This research produced both quantitative and qualitative data by using four different instruments. Therefore, this research corresponded to a mixed method approach. A qualitative method was used since it allowed the researcher to gain a deep understanding of a specific environment or situation, which in this research was students' reaction when facing language routines (Mason, 2002).

On the other hand, a quantitative method was used since it allowed the researcher to make an objective measurement about students' language acquisition since the design was of an experimental one. That is to say that, its purpose is to measure the process of students' language acquisition through a period of time. (Siniscalco & Auriat, 2005).

In order to collect the appropriate data for this research and also for triangulation purposes, four different tools were used for collecting valid and trustworthy data. The first instrument used to collect data were self-reports, in which the researcher wrote on a weekly basis, throughout the process, about her own reflections on students' attitudes and answers when facing language routines in classes. In addition, this tool also intended to record reflections about students' processes in terms of language acquisition. In order to obtain useful data, reports were specifically focused on students' answers when facing language routines such as; How do you feel today? And, how is the weather like today?

The second tool used corresponded to observations that were also registered on a weekly basis by means of note-taking. The purpose of this method was to register information about what actually happened in the classroom in regards to language routines. Moreover, the researcher received notes from the host teacher at school about her observations in order to obtain a more valid data. Additionally, as self-reports, observations were focus on students' understanding in regards to language routines as a way of making the data collection process more focused to the question at hand.

The third tool used was a quiz (see appendix n° 1) that all students answered individually. This quiz consisted of a matching activity in which they accounted their knowledge about the weather (It's sunny, it's cloudy, it's windy and it's rainy) and feelings (I'm happy, I'm sad and I'm angry). Students were expected to match words with their corresponding picture. This quiz was conducted at the beginning of the research process and at the end as well since it could assess the levels of change in students' understanding in language acquisition when using language routines. Moreover, it is important to highlight that students did not receive help from the teacher, and therefore they answered only based on their own knowledge.

Finally, the last tool used corresponded to a chart in which I kept a record about students' understanding in regards to routines. In order to complete the chart, the researcher asked randomly three different students about their feelings and one student about the weather. This process was done every class for one month. This tool was helpful since TESS - India (Teacher Education through School-based Support) has used this strategy to know about the levels of change in students in relation to their language acquisition process through a period of time. Furthermore, through the use of this tool, the researcher could have evidence about students' use of the language when answering the questions previously mentioned. Therefore, it was possible to know if students were acquiring the language taught and seen in the routines.

In regards to the data gathered, it was analyzed using two different strategies. Firstly, the information gathered from the quiz and the chart was measured through a nominal data since the information did not have a logical order. Nevertheless, the data was classified into specific concepts related to feelings and the weather in regards to students' answers. Afterwards, the information was tabulated into different patterns in order to make a percentage distribution of the data (Pell Institute, n.d). The importance of this process was that it helped to have clear data about students' knowledge of a specific language routine.

Secondly, self-reports and observations, both qualitative data collection methods, were analyzed and categorized into different themes that emerged during the process of this research. Moreover, it was important to highlight that the process of analysis was cyclical; therefore, the data was analyzed several times and from the beginning of the data collection process. Finally, the data was interpreted accordingly in order to found out an answer to the research question.

Literature Review

In this part of the research, two different sources that have been studied about the use of routines in young learners were provided. At the same time, how these sources have

helped the researcher in the process of collecting and analyzing the data of this research were explained.

A first relevant study was conducted by Cabezas (2014). This research intended to “look at the interactions and strategies preschool teachers applied in kindergarten for enhancing and measuring the progress of language and vocabulary development.” (p.5). Although this research was not directly related to the question of this research, both aim at measuring the progress of students’ language acquisition. Cabezas used observations as a tool for measuring students’ level of change, therefore, to analyze the data obtained, he read it several times and looked for the common patterns in order to create categories that were linked to the research question. Thus, this process of data analysis was also carried out in this research as the researcher was using the same tool for the same purpose, which was language acquisition.

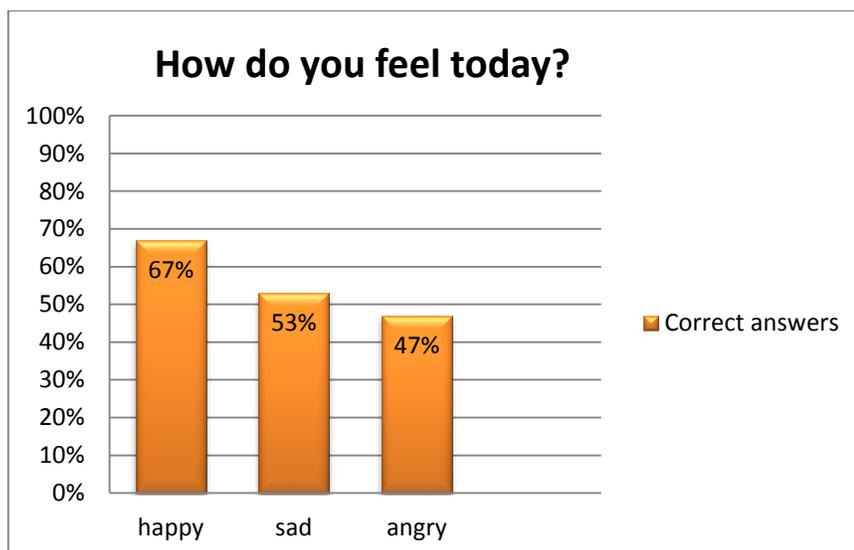
A second source identified was a study carried out by Guana (2012). This research focused at “studying and understanding the importance of the use of routines in the EFL classroom when teaching kindergarten and first grade students” (p.2). This research was helpful for this classroom study as observations were used as a tool for data collection about the class and student’s attitude when facing language routines. That is why, in this research, observations were carried out.

Findings

The purpose of this section was to gain insight about the effects that strengthen language routines may have in younger learner's language acquisition.

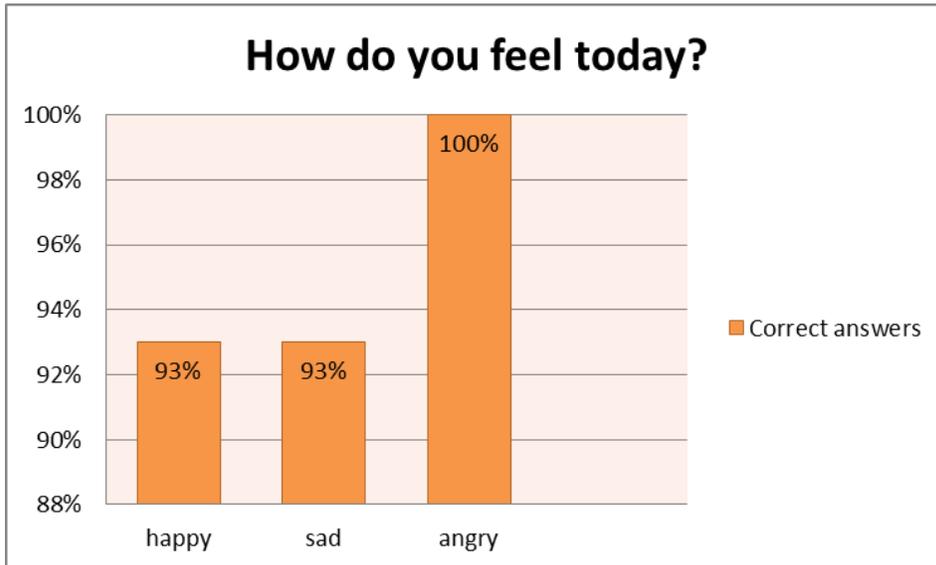
Firstly, it was presented the data gathered from the quiz. In order to present the findings, the information was shown in four different graphics which represented the process before and after the interventions were used. Likewise, the two questions were presented separately as to have clearer evidence from the findings.

In the following graphic, the information represented fifteen student's answers before the interventions were delivered, that is to say, before the using strengthen language routines.

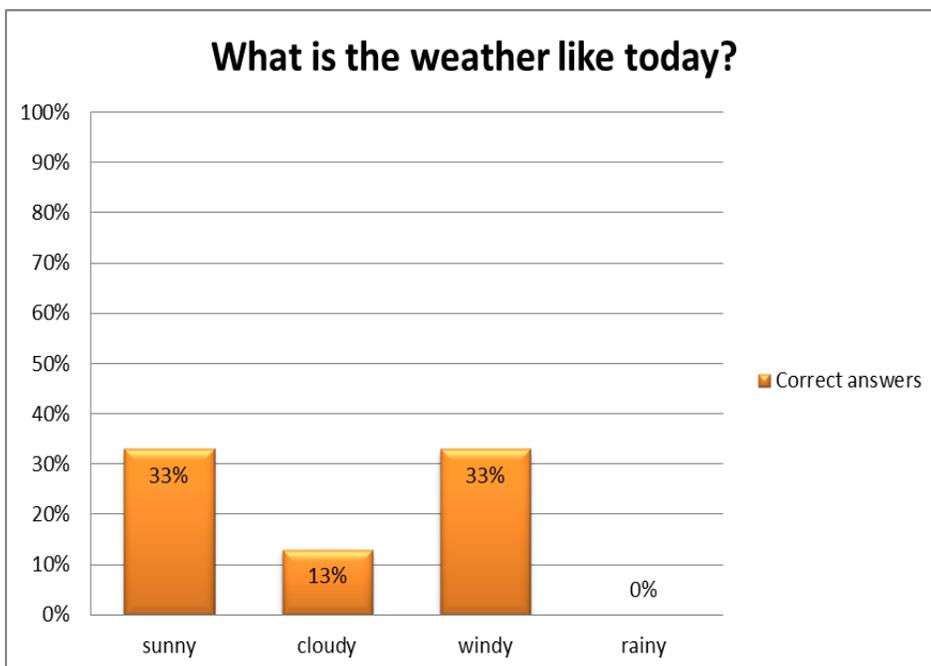


LANGUAGE LEARNING ROUTINES IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

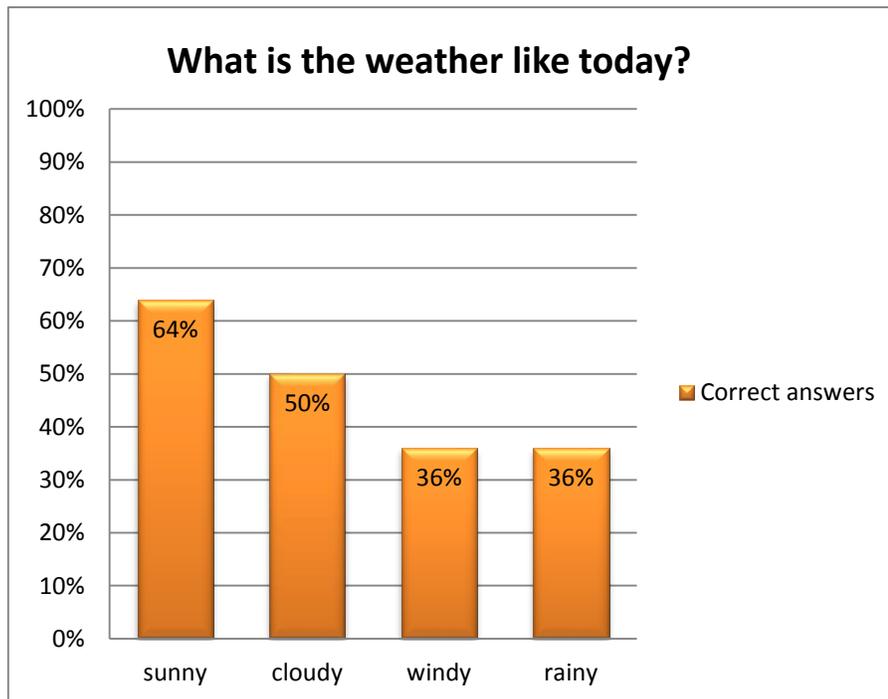
On the other hand, this second graphic represented fourteen student's answers after the interventions were delivered.



As regards to the second question, the first graphic represented fifteen student's answers before the interventions were taught and delivered in the class.



Finally, the last graphic represented fourteen young learner's answers after the interventions were delivered for a month in class.



In regards to the information shown in the four previous graphics, there was a clear evidence of improvement in the levels of younger learner's language acquisition as in both questions, from the second quiz; young learners increase the amount of correct answers in comparison to the ones obtained from the first quiz.

Secondly, it was presented data gathered from the observations and self-reports. The data was divided into five different themes as a way of getting a better overview of the

research question. The first theme that emerged from the data corresponded to time, which meant that language routines took time for young learners to understand routines, that is to say, to get familiar with them when answering to those routines. In this particular classroom context, language routines took three weeks for students to start answering by themselves and to start using different concepts taught for answering both language learning routines (Personal observations, October 9th, 2017).

Another finding from the study was about teacher's guidance, which referred that young learners needed help from the researcher in order to understand and internalized both questions from the language routines. It was possible to notice teacher's guidance in the researcher's observations when during the first week; students did not understand the question about the weather. "I asked in Spanish if they understood the question, and they said "no". But, when I said to students to look at the images, I asked them in Spanish: What are these pictures about? Few students replied: "El clima". I told students to look outside, drawing their attention to the climate, and then, to look at the images: sunny, cloudy, windy and rainy." (Personal observations, October 9th, 2017). Thus, through this situation, it was possible to notice that students needed teacher's guidance in order to understand the question about the weather.

A third finding from the study involved the use of visual aids, relating to the use of videos and images about feelings and weather when teaching and using language routines

with young learners. In this particular classroom context, the data suggested that the use of visual aids helped young learners to understand the routines as well as to motivate them to participate from them in the class. This situation was registered in the researcher's observations when students were faced to routines for the first time. "During the first week (...), students were confused, some of them asked me in Spanish: What does it mean?. The rest of the students, answered to daily routines with the same questions that were being asked. However, when I showed them the images in the PPT about feelings and weather, some students understood only the question" (Personal observations, October 9th, 2017). In this situation, there was evidence that the use of visual aids helped students to understand the question of the routine when students were faced to them for the first time.

Another situation in which it was possible to observe that the use of visual aids helped young learners to understand language learning routines was when during the second week students had to answer to the question about the weather. "As respect with the question about the weather, again students seemed a little bit confused. However, when I showed them the images, half of the class remembered what I taught in the previous class about the weather, so they could understand the question at hand" (Personal observations, October 9th, 2017). Hence, with this specific situation, it was possible to identify that through the use of visual aids; in this case, the use of images, students could remember that what the question about the weather was about.

The fourth theme involved student's participation. According to the data gathered from the observations and self-reflections, the use of the language learning routines facilitated and increased most of young learner's participation. There was evidence of this fact when the host teacher said that during the third week, students started to internalized routines, making the students to participate more from the questions used in the class. Moreover, as days went by, more students asked for participation when answering to the language learning routines (Host teacher, 2017).

The fifth and last theme corresponded to student's autonomy for their learning process, which referred to young learner's interest on asking for further language related to feelings when answering to the question how do you feel today. This fact was identified through the observations carried out by the researcher when students, despite of having three different feelings (happy, sad and angry), asked the teacher: How can I say "dormido" (sleepy), "cansado" (tired) or "sediento" (thirsty) in English? (Personal observations, 2017). Thence, through this situation, it was possible to noticed students' autonomy and interest for their learning process when asking the teacher for further concepts related to feelings.

Finally, the information gathered from the last tool of this research, which corresponded to the chart (see appendix n°2), was presented. The purpose of this chart was to keep a record about young learner's language use when answering to the language routines. According to the data obtained, it was possible to notice that in the third week in

which students were exposed to language routines, young learners started to use more vocabulary than the one they used during the two first weeks. Moreover, as it was previously mentioned, students also started to ask for further vocabulary related to the weather and feelings.

Implications

In the following section, implications about the use of routines will be explain in terms of the outcomes obtained from the collection process in relation to the research question of this study.

According to the results obtained by Gauna on her research about the importance of the use of routines in kindergarten and first grade students in an EFL classroom, she came out to the conclusion that “routines were of a paramount importance when working with young learners as it allowed teaching and learning to proceed in a more structured, predictable and efficient manner” (Guana, 2012, p. 9). Therefore, Guana’s research demonstrated that the use of language routines in young learners facilitated the processes of teaching and learning. Regarding to the findings gathered in the classroom research project, it was also possible to say that language routines brought benefits for young learners in terms of the levels of language acquisition.

Likewise, Guana also demonstrated that classroom routines were seemed to be taken by students as natural events in their classes. Actually, when routines were not delivered in Guana's context, students were expecting them to happen. Guana and the teachers that cooperated on her research, also concluded that routines were needed to be part of young learner's life as when they were not delivered, students seemed to be confused in the development of the class (Guana, 2012).

Furthermore, Daloiso (2014) in his paper on the role of linguistic routines in young learners, demonstrated that language routines were crucial for younger learners as such routines promoted the use of prefabricated language, allowing young learners to acquire the language in a form of automatism, that is to say that young learners acquire the language unconsciously and in a easiest manner (Daloiso, 2014).

Thus, language learning routines should be included in the future lesson plans of EFL teachers as there was evidence in Guana and Daloiso's research as well as in this classroom research project, that the use of language learning routines had a positive impact on the levels of language acquisition in younger learners and that its relevance to student's learning is fairly significant.

Conclusion

In this classroom research, the overall results gathered from the tools indicated that during the first two weeks, in which students were exposed to language learning routines, young learners seemed to be confused to the routines and they also demonstrated to need teacher's guidance in order to understand them. However, during the third and fourth week, students demonstrated to have internalized the questions from the routines as well as to the possible answers they could provide when answering to those routines.

Moreover, the results also indicated that the levels of language acquisition in younger learners, when being exposed to strengthen language learning routines through a period of time, increases. In addition, in relation to Daloiso and Guana's research, language routines did also demonstrated to have positive benefits on the levels of language acquisition in younger learners.

Finally, as there is evidence that strengthen language learning routines have positive impacts on the levels of language acquisition in younger learners, EFL teacher, when teaching young learners should consider the use of language routines in their classes since students could be benefited not only in their language acquisition process, but also their learning.

References:

Cabezas, L. (2014). *Child Language Acquisition Focusing on Bilingualism: A study among Norwegian – Spanish bilingual kindergartens in Oslo, Norway*. Master thesis from University of Oslo.

Retrieved October 20th from:

<https://www.duo.uio.no/bitstream/handle/10852/41078/20140512-Final-thesis-1.pdf?sequence=7>

Daloiso, M. (2014). *The Role of Linguistic Routines in Early Foreign Language Learning*.

Article from Saber & Educar Magazine, 1-7. Santa Fe. Retrieved September 3rd, 2017, from: <file:///C:/Users/Montserrat/Downloads/133-415-1-SM.pdf>

Guana, D. (2012). *Routines in the EFL classroom: its importance for Kindergarten and First-Grade students*. Investigation Article from Instituto Superior de Profesorado, n°8 publications.

Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative Researching*. Book 2nd Edition, Sage publications. Retrieved September 24th, 2017, from: http://www.sxf.uevora.pt/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Mason_2002.pdf

Tess India. (n.d). *Teacher Education through School-based Support in India: Classroom Routines*. Teachers' program from The Open University of India.

Retrieved September 23rd, 2017,
from: http://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/pluginfile.php/134584/mod_resource/content/9/EE01_AIE_Final.pdf

The Pell Institute and pathway to college network. (n.d). *Analyze Quantitative data*.

Retrieved September 23rd, 2017, from: <http://toolkit.pellinstitute.org/evaluation-guide/analyze/analyze-quantitative-data/>

Siniscalco, M & Auriat, N. (2005). *Questionnaire design*. Unesco. International Institute for Educational Planning.

Retrieved October 19th from:
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002145/214555E.pdf>

Appendix

1.- Appendix 1.

Quiz

I.- Match the images.

1.- What is the weather like today?



Sunny



Cloudy



Windy



Rainy

LANGUAGE LEARNING ROUTINES IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

2.- How do you feel today?



I'm sad



I'm angry



I'm happy

2.- Appendix 2.

How do you feel today?

Student's answers	1 st Week	2 nd Week	3 rd Week	4 th Week
Student 1	Happy	Happy	Happy and sad.	Sad
Student 2	Happy	Happy	Happy and sad.	Sad
Student 3	Happy	Happy	Happy.	Angry
Student 4	-----	-----	Hungry.	Happy
Student 5	-----	-----	Sleepy.	Happy

What is the weather like today?

	Student's answer
1 st Week	Cloudy.
2 nd Week	Cloudy.
3 rd Week	Cloudy.
4 th Week	Sunny