



**UNIVERSIDAD  
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Facultad de Educación

English Pedagogy

*How can I design a class routine which improves the classroom atmosphere and motivates 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students in República de Francia School to get involved with the English lesson?*

This research was done to obtain the university degree as an English teacher  
by

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### Abstract

This piece of work is an action research performed in the third grade at República de Francia School located in Ñuñoa, Santiago. This research deals with the place of established routines regarding the classroom atmosphere in English lessons. Following, it is possible to find the characteristics of the school in which this research was held, the specific features of the third grade class, and the motivation for doing this research. Plus, it is included the theoretical framework that supports the methodology proposed in order to improve the English classroom atmosphere, involving the Language Acquisition Device, the Affective Filter Hypothesis, and some theories around the benefits of having established routines in the classroom. Afterwards, an action plan is suggested that follows this framework. Finally, the data collected and their analysis are included, and some conclusions about them.

Keywords: Language Acquisition Device, Affective Filter, routines, young learners, classroom atmosphere, students' feelings, teacher's feeling.

## Resumen

Este trabajo es una investigación realizada en el tercero básico del colegio República de Francia ubicado en Ñuñoa, Santiago. Esta investigación tiene que ver con el lugar que tiene el establecimiento de rutinas en el ambiente de la sala de clases de inglés. A continuación, es posible encontrar las características de la escuela en la cual esta investigación se llevó a cabo, los rasgos específicos que la clase del tercero básico tiene, y la motivación para realizar dicha investigación. Además, se incluye el marco teórico que apoya la metodología propuesta para mejorar el ambiente de la sala de inglés, involucrando el Dispositivo de Adquisición del Lenguaje, la Hipótesis del Filtro Afectivo, y algunas teorías entorno a los beneficios de tener rutinas establecidas en la sala de clases. A continuación, se sugiere un plan de acción siguiendo dicho marco. Finalmente, se incluyen los datos recolectados y su análisis, junto a algunas conclusiones.

**Keywords:** Dispositivo de Adquisición del Lenguaje, Hipótesis del Filtro Afectivo, rutinas, estudiantes jóvenes, ambiente de la sala de clases, sentimientos de los estudiantes, sentimientos de los profesores.

## CHAPTER I

### Context

This research was held at República de Francia School in Ñuñoa during the second semester of the year 2013. República de Francia is a public school which has only one class per course. The school offers some tools that can be useful to have in hand when teaching a foreign language. For example, they have a computer lab available for both teachers and students, a couple of classrooms are equipped with a projector and a computer with Internet access, and almost every classroom has an interactive board. Nevertheless, there were several inconvenient situations regarding the use of these resources: the couple of projectors in the classrooms were broken, so in order to use this tool, it was necessary to ask the secretary for the one that worked with at least a day of anticipation, and carry your own laptop. In consequence, the use of the interactive board was almost inexistent. In addition, each class had a prefixed time to use the computer lab, which meant that if a teacher wanted to take the class to the lab, it was necessary to talk to a couple of people and ask for the permission of others, so they could grant it.

In order to do this research, the chosen class was the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. There were 38 students; which meant a quite loud and crowded classroom. Most of these students come from families with low income, and plenty of them have problems of violence and drugs at their homes. Regarding the classroom, these students were very enthusiastic and active. At the same time, most of the class was talkative and loud, which made it difficult to get their attention when it was time for work. Additionally, the class did not have a syllabus available from the beginning of the year: the teacher took the objectives from the corresponding MINEDUC's *Propuesta Curricular (optativo)* for English, and later she selected some objectives and skills according to what she

thought it was best suited for the class and taught them. Students worked with the MINEDUC's English book when the content matched. If not, the teacher made her own material.

From pre-K to 4<sup>th</sup> grade, students have two pedagogical hours of English per week; while from 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, they have three. 3<sup>rd</sup> grade had the two hours together as their first class on Wednesday mornings. Besides the little time students have weekly in order to learn a foreign language, most of the English lessons were not taught in English, meaning that the teacher spoke in Spanish most of the time, and the little use of English in the classroom took place when repeating a pronunciation or when translating.

When it was my turn to teach the 3<sup>rd</sup> graders, I realized that I did not have an established routine to build my lessons on, making both my students and myself easily get lost during the lesson. In consequence, a quite chaotic classroom was created: there was a large group of students being loud and unfocused, and myself, as a teacher, was getting louder, as well. As a result, I ended up with an unfocused and anxious English classroom with both students and teacher speaking Spanish very loudly.

### Question and Hypothesis

At this point, my research question came from the need of having a class routine that could improve the atmosphere in the classroom, which motivates students to get involved with the English lessons. If not, it would not make a difference which kind of activities I had had planned for the lesson, the participation of students was going to be poor; besides, any objective I had planned to achieve was not going to be possible to accomplish, most probably.

Thus, this work was built on the following research question:

*How can I design a class routine which improves the classroom atmosphere and motivates students to get involved with the English lesson?*

Once this question is answered, both students' and the teacher's attitude in the classroom during the lesson will be a better one, making the lesson more effective.

## Objectives.

### General objective

- Design a classroom routine which improves the classroom atmosphere and motivates students to get involved with the English lesson.

### Specific objectives

- Implement an established routine, which allows students to decrease their uneasiness and increase their confidence in the English class.
- Help students to be more aware of the contents of the lesson in order to get them more involved with it.
- Increase teacher's confidence with the aid of the routines.

## CHAPTER II

### Theoretical Framework

#### Language Acquisition Device

One of the most important theories on foreign language acquisition is the nativist theory. The nativist theory is founded upon the belief that language acquisition is determined innately, and people are born with a build-in device that, somehow, predisposes us to language acquisition. Probably, the most influential theorist of the nativist theory is Noam Chomsky. In 1965, the linguist Noam Chomsky proposed the theory that every person has something called Language Acquisition Device. This Language Acquisition Device was an innate, biological ability to acquire language, a kind of neurological wiring that allows a child to listen to a language, decipher the rules of that language, and begin to create with the language. The Language Acquisition Device makes children able to understand and reproduce utterances that they have never heard before. Therefore, this is why first language is acquired with no apparent difficulty by children. In addition, and regarding foreign language acquisition, Chomsky suggested that if a correct input is provided, the Language Acquisition Device predisposes all human beings to the acquisition of a foreign language. Moreover, this acquisition occurs, fundamentally, in the same way (Escamilla & Grassi, 2000).

The Language Acquisition Device theory regards this research because it is where another theory is based on: the Affective Filter Hypothesis. Basically, Chomsky's theory has given other theorists the necessary founding for new claims, such as the following.

## Affective Filter Hypothesis

Stephen Krashen develops the Affective Filter Hypothesis basing his work on Chomsky's concept of a Language Acquisition Device.

Krashen states that when learning foreign language, there are some factors that affect acquisition; specifically, affective factors. The latest factors work as a filter that sieve the amount of input in learners' brains. The concept works as it follows: when people have low filter, they allow more input to reach their brains; while having high filter will reduce the amount of input that the brain notices. In other words, "people acquire second language only if they obtain comprehensible input and if their affective filters are low enough to allow the input 'in'" (Du, 2009, pág. 162), which means that high filter could prevent the input of reaching the Language Acquisition Device.

There are four affective factors that can influence second language acquisition (Du, 2009):

- Motivation: motivations is placed as one of the most important factors when learning second language. Motivation has been characterized as the desire and incentive of learners while going through second language acquisition.
- Attitude: when learning second language, attitude is defined as the way the learner thinks and feels about the target language. Thus, attitude influences the commitment and class participation. Equally, learners with positive attitude have a tendency to learn the target language more easily.
- Anxiety: language anxiety is explained as apprehension experienced when learners who are not very proficient, face a situation which requires the use of the target language.

Meaning that if there are high levels of anxiety, there will be high affective filters, as well.

- Self-confidence: second language learner's personality is quite relevant regarding the learning process. Krashen says that those learners with enough self-confidence and positive personal image are more successful in second language acquisition.

Regarding this research, and in order to improve the classroom atmosphere in the 3rd grade, it is important to pay attention to the level of students' affective filter, and to come up with strategies in order to lower it as much as possible.

### Young Learners

Brown (Brown, 2000) states that children are capable of acquiring a foreign language quickly, but there are cases when children manifest different levels of difficulties for plenty of reasons: personal, social, cultural and political, to name a few. In this sense, the author mentions five different steps to consider when teaching second language to young learners:

1. Children's intellectual development: children's thoughts, feelings and attitude are quite associated with the intellectual development they have reached.
2. Children's attention span: it may vary, however, it is usually quite short. Thus, all activities have to capture students' interest immediately. Moreover, there must be plenty of quite varied activities in the lessons.
3. Sensory input: all activities must stimulate all senses. Then, the lesson should not include only one kind of activity.

4. Authentic meaningful learning: children should be able to see that they can actually use what they study during lessons. If not, they will not feel motivated, thus they will not engage the lesson.
5. Affective factors: it becomes important to teach children self-confidence in order to make it easier for them to understand that making mistakes is part of learning experience.

## Routines

In relation to routines, Stronge (Stronge, Tucker, & Hindman, 2004) defines them as specific ways of doing things that vary little during the course of the year or semester. He adds that classrooms typically require many routines to work efficiently and effectively, and points that routines shape the classroom climate. For instances, common used routines include how to enter and leave the classroom, secure materials, dispose trash, and review work.

In addition, in order to make routines as clear for students as possible, it is important that the teacher invests time at the start of the school year to teach routines. In consequence, the practice of the routines will require less monitoring, making sure that, through time, the focus of the classroom will be on the instruction rather than on the routines.

Furthermore, the establishment of routines empowers students to be more responsible for both their behavior and learning in the classroom. Accordingly, if a classroom management issue arises, the teacher will have at hand procedures to address the problem, which are known already for all students in the classroom. Although, it becomes appropriate that these routines are applied in an efficient, fair, and consistent way. In consequence, the result of well-known established routines will be more time for teaching and learning.

In relation to second language acquisition, studying a second language becomes quite interesting, or quite stressful (or both). Having classes in an unknown language could get children curious; however, curiousness is not enough in order to get and to keep students involved with the English lesson. In this point, the establishment of early simple routines is rather important, considering that “routines provide simple opportunities to build learners’ confidence in using English, and helping it to become more natural” (Wilson, 2006). Having a defined routine would help students feel more relaxed when facing the English class. For example, if we want to set a certain routine to go to the bathroom, which would be that every time a student wants to go to the bathroom has to get up, reach for a card, and ask the teacher “May I go to the bathroom?” As they are not used to this setting, at the beginning students will probably feel lost and uncomfortable with the idea of asking permission to go to the bathroom following this. Probably, some of the students will ask the teacher over and over again what the question to go to the bathroom is, and fewer will practice it. Eventually, students will hear (and repeat) the question several times until they are capable of asking “May I go to the bathroom?” Consequently, by following this routine, students will achieve asking permission to go to the bathroom in English, which is the target language. In addition, this achievement will make them feel more comfortable with the use of the target language.

Nevertheless, it is relevant to take into consideration that routines will not help students by themselves just by establishing them. Once a routine is settled in the classroom, it has to be clear for students how to be part of it. Similarly, they should get to feel comfortable with it; in consequence, it will become more probable that students would use the routine more often and more effortlessly. Eventually, once they are used to the routine, they will try to modify it in order to make it more challenging. Once a routine is set in the classroom, the ultimate goal is for

students to make it theirs; which makes possible to identify two positive effects of this. First, students' confidence increases, since they realized they can actually communicate using the target language. And second, students begin to listen to each other more cautiously in the classroom, because they would become concerned whether their classmates perform the routine correctly or not.

## CHAPTER III

### Action Plan

There are a couple of instruments that helped to measure the impact of the routine in both students and the teacher.

1. Students' surveys: a survey for students was designed, in which they were asked about how they feel in the English class, and what they think about it. This survey was given to students twice: at the beginning of the process, and at the end (see appendix).
2. Teacher's log: the teacher kept a weekly log, writing about how she felt during the lessons, and about students' performance.
3. Routine checklist: for all routines established in the class, a checklist had been designed in order to evaluate the implementation of it (see appendix).

There were plenty of things to consider when applying all of these into the classroom. One of the factors that affected me the most was the short time I had with the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. I worked with them only seven classes. Then, establishing certain routines was harder than expected. Plus, during lessons, I had to work with my mentor teacher in the classroom, as well. This made things more difficult some times, because some students asked her, for example, for permission to go to the bathroom, skipping the corresponding routine.

To start with, the students' survey was the first procedure put into practice. This survey was applied twice during the process: at the beginning and at the end of it. The survey was applied twice in order to collect and compare how students felt about English class, and the teacher. Additionally, in order to obtain results as trustworthy as possible, the survey was designed in Spanish.

To continue, there was a teacher's log. The idea of this practice was to collect the impressions and feelings of the practitioner regarding the classroom and the changes about it. Also, the log worked as a quite useful tool for the practitioner to assess herself after a lesson, allowing her to review how students were responding to routines, and if there were any changes in the classroom atmosphere. In order to systematize the results of the log, a table has been designed, in which the main feelings identified and the lessons have been combined (see appendix).

Finally, a checklist was made in order to review whether the routine was being effective or not in the classroom. The idea was to determine if the routines were appropriate for the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, if they were using it, and so on. Specifically, three routines were established in the classroom:

1. The "Getting ready for the class" routine: students came inside the classroom in the morning, and they had to put their chairs behind their desks, take their notebooks out from their bags, and get their pencils ready (either to ask for one to their classmates, or sharpen them). Consequently, the lesson was not going to be slowed down because students could not see the board or the teacher because of the chairs, or if they did not have the materials ready to work.
2. The "Ask permission to go to the bathroom" routine: a card was placed in the teacher's desk, and students were asked to pick it up, approach to the teacher and ask her "May I go to the bathroom?" and show her the card. Then, if any student wanted to go to the bathroom, s/he could do so only if the card was available. This way, if the card was not there, the student did not interrupt the class.

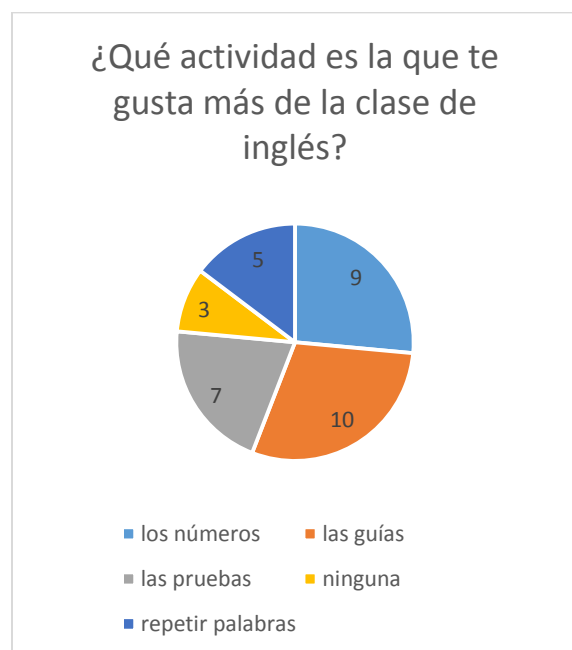
3. The “Finishing things up” routine: five minutes before the end of the lesson, students were asked to return the materials they could have borrowed from their classmates, and to tidy their desks and classroom up (especially the floor). Also, they were allowed to take their snacks out of the bag, and go to the playground after.

## CHAPTER IV

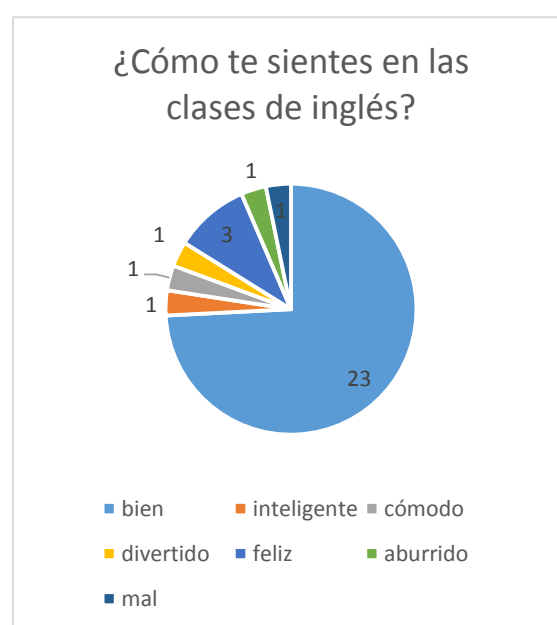
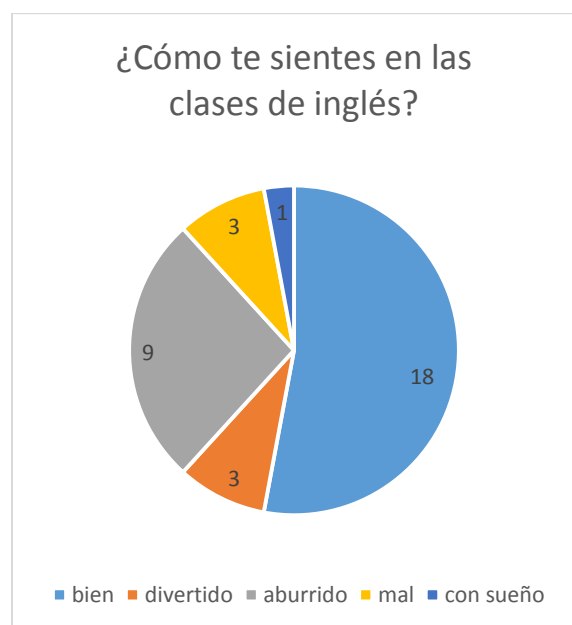
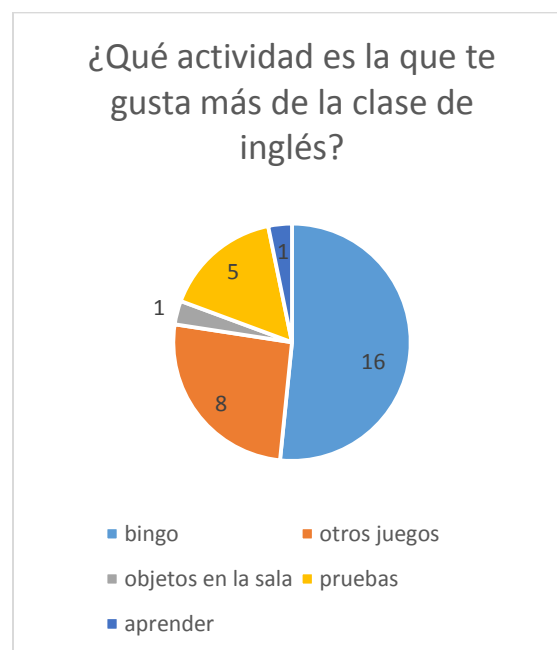
### Data Collection

#### Students' survey

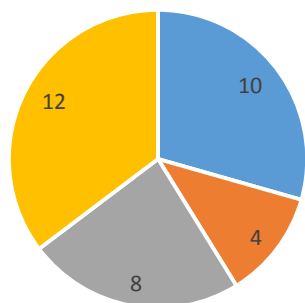
##### First time



##### Second time

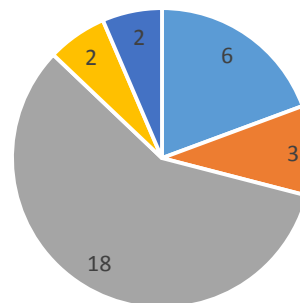


Al final de la clase, ¿crees que has aprendido algo?



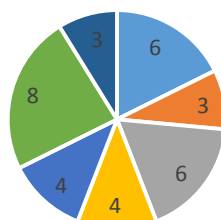
■ sí ■ no ■ un poco ■ más o menos

Al final de la clase, ¿crees que has aprendido algo?



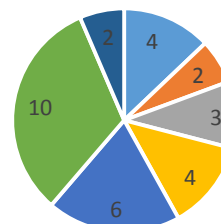
■ mucho ■ nada ■ sí ■ no ■ más o menos

¿Qué sugerencia le darías a la profesora para que mejore?



■ clases más divertidas ■ pruebas más cortas  
■ no gritar tanto ■ más premios  
■ está bien así ■ ninguna  
■ otras

¿Qué sugerencia le darías a la profesora para que mejore?



■ más juegos ■ pruebas más cortas  
■ no gritar tanto ■ clases más divertidas  
■ está bien así ■ ninguna  
■ otras

## Teacher's Log

| Feeling<br>Lesson | Frustration | Uneasiness | Tiredness | Calmness | Satisfaction | Comfort        |
|-------------------|-------------|------------|-----------|----------|--------------|----------------|
| 1                 | 1           | 2          | 1         | 3        | 3            | 2              |
| 2                 | 1           | 2          | 4         | 2        | 2            | 2              |
| 3                 | 2           | 2          | 4         | 2        | 2            | 1              |
| 4                 | 2           | 2          | 3         | 2        | 2            | 2              |
| 5                 | 2           | 3          | 4         | 2        | 2            | 1              |
| 6                 | 1           | 2          | 3         | 2        | 3            | 2              |
| 7                 | -           | -          | -         | -        | -            | - <sup>1</sup> |
| 8                 | 4           | 4          | 4         | 1        | 1            | 1              |
| 9                 | 1           | 2          | 2         | 2        | 3            | 3              |
| 10                | 2           | 1          | 2         | 3        | 2            | 2              |
| 11                | 1           | 1          | 1         | 4        | 2            | 4              |

1: not felt  
 2: slightly felt  
 3: regularly felt  
 4: strongly felt

## Routine Checklist

## 1. The "Getting ready for the class" routine

|               | Well Accomplished | Fairly Accomplished | Poorly Accomplished |
|---------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Explained why |                   |                     | X                   |
| Model         |                   | X                   |                     |
| Practice      | X                 |                     |                     |
| Reteach       |                   | X                   |                     |

<sup>1</sup> It was not possible to do this lesson, since a special SIMCE was applied to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. I did not know about this until 5 minutes after the lesson started.

## 2. The “Ask permission to go to the bathroom” routine

|               | Well Accomplished | Fairly Accomplished | Poorly Accomplished |
|---------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Explained why |                   | X                   |                     |
| Model         | X                 |                     |                     |
| Practice      |                   | X                   |                     |
| Reteach       |                   | X                   |                     |

## 3. The “Finishing things up” routine

|               | Well Accomplished | Fairly Accomplished | Poorly Accomplished |
|---------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Explained why |                   |                     | X                   |
| Model         |                   | X                   |                     |
| Practice      |                   |                     | X                   |
| Reteach       |                   |                     | X                   |

### Data Analysis

To begin with, the students' surveys show that students prefer work with worksheets and games, especially the ones related to numbers, such as the lottery. We can notice, as well, how there were 3 students during the first time the survey was applied that said there were no activity they like to do in the classroom. However, the second time, every student chose an activity, which is an improvement.

Equally, students said they feel good in the English lesson, both times the survey was applied. Nevertheless, on one hand, in the first application, a significant number of students said they feel bored during the lesson, placing this preference in the second place. On the other hand, in the second application, the students' second preference was feeling happy in English lesson; while feeling bored was chosen only by one student. This proves to be a quite important improvement in the classroom, since one of the objectives of this research was to help them be more involved with the English lesson. If students feel good, it is more probable they will engage the lesson; while feeling bored will make it more improbable. Additionally, during the first survey 3 students said they felt "bad" in English lesson; and this number was reduced to only one during the second application, which is important, as well.

In this sense, when students were asked if they feel they have learnt something at the end of the lesson, the first application shows that "more less" and "yes" are the top two preferences, and more of the half of the class feel chose one of these alternatives. In contrast, the second application shows that "yes" and "a lot" are the top two, and "more less" was the fourth preference. This suggests that students who believed they did not learnt much during the lesson in the first application, at the end of the process they did learn.

Regarding the possible suggestions students could give the teacher in order to make a better lesson, in both applications, the most popular preference was “none”. This could mean more than one thing: for example, it could mean that students like the class how it was and everything was alright. It could also mean that they are not really engaged with the lesson, and that they do not believe that their opinion would make any difference in the development of the English lesson. In the same question, the first survey shows a draw in the second preference: “not to yell that much” and “more entertaining lessons” as suggestions for the teacher. While the second survey shows that “it is ok like it is now” as the second preference.

As a general conclusion of the surveys, then, it is possible to say that students’ attitude regarding the English lesson improved during the period of time this research was held.

Continuing with the analysis, from the teacher’s log it is possible to say that at the beginning of the process, the teacher felt negative feelings more intensively than positive ones – such as frustration and tiredness-. However, as lessons went by, these feelings were partially reduced –with an exception during the lesson number 8-. Similarly, positive feeling –such as calmness and comfort- were felt by the practitioner.

Regarding the routine checklist, it is possible to observe that routines were not fully explained to students. However, the practitioner did model them in front of the class, so they knew how there were supposed to perform them. Considering the progress of the semester, the routines were not practiced completely, especially the “Finishing things up” routine. This could be so because the time was not well managed during the lessons; in consequence, the bell rang announcing the break and some children just run outside the classroom, without completing the routine. Finally, the reteach part was not put into practice regularly.

## Conclusion

After considering the whole process involved during this research, it is possible to say that both students and the practitioner felt more comfortable in the English lessons. In consequence, the classroom atmosphere improved significantly. Improving the classroom atmosphere is an issue to take into account when facing a classroom, especially with a big class as the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade was with its 38 students. If there is a negative classroom atmosphere it is quite probable that learning will not take place, producing negative feeling both in students and teachers.

Nevertheless, if this improvement was made by the incorporation of established routines in the classroom it is uncertain. There could be several reasons for this. One of them is that the routines were not fully practiced during the lesson. Then, considering different techniques and methodologies in order to incorporate them into the classroom should be a main concern for teachers. However, teachers do not always count with the enough time to do so, especially when they have several classes of varied levels. One action that could help with this is peer collaboration; nevertheless, this factor was not taken into consideration for this research.

After doing this research, and considering the results, it would be appropriate to re-do the research, looking for other factors different from the established routines that can actually improve the classroom atmosphere, such as types of activities, instructions delivery, to name but two.

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## Appendix

### Students' survey

1. ¿Qué actividad es la que más te gusta de la clase de inglés?
2. ¿Cómo te sientes en las clases de inglés?
3. Al final de la clase, ¿crees que has aprendido algo?
4. ¿Qué sugerencia le darías a la profesora para que mejore?

### Routine Checklist

|               | Well Accomplished | Fairly Accomplished | Poorly Accomplished |
|---------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Explained why |                   |                     |                     |
| Model         |                   |                     |                     |
| Practice      |                   |                     |                     |
| Reteach       |                   |                     |                     |

### Teacher's Log

| Feeling<br>Lesson | Frustration | Uneasiness | Tiredness | Calmness | Satisfaction | Comfort |
|-------------------|-------------|------------|-----------|----------|--------------|---------|
| 1                 |             |            |           |          |              |         |
| 2                 |             |            |           |          |              |         |
| 3                 |             |            |           |          |              |         |
| 4                 |             |            |           |          |              |         |
| 5                 |             |            |           |          |              |         |
| 6                 |             |            |           |          |              |         |
| 7                 |             |            |           |          |              |         |
| 8                 |             |            |           |          |              |         |
| 9                 |             |            |           |          |              |         |
| 10                |             |            |           |          |              |         |
| 11                |             |            |           |          |              |         |

1: not felt  
 2: slightly felt  
 3: regularly felt  
 4: strongly felt