



Universidad Alberto Hurtado
Teaching Communicative Lessons Using a Task-Based Learning Approach
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Index

1. Abstract.....	4
2. Resumen.....	5
3. Acknowledgements.....	6
4. Introduction.....	7
5. Context.....	9
6. Rationale.....	10
7. Problem Statement.....	12
7.1 Question.....	12
7.2 Hypothesis.....	13
8. Objectives.....	14
8.1 General Objectives.....	14
8.2 Specific Objectives.....	14
9. Theoretical Framework.....	15
9.1 Task-Based Teaching Approach.....	16
9.2 Grammar-oriented lessons.....	18
9.3 Communicative lessons.....	19
9.4 Young learners.....	21
9.5 Active participants.....	23
9.6 Learning process.....	24

10. Methodology.....	25
10.1 Instruments.....	25
10.2 Action Plan.....	31
11. Conclusions.....	34
12. Worked Cited.....	36
13. Appendix.....	38

1. Abstract

This action research is focused on sixth grade students from a school called República de Francia in Ñuñoa, Santiago. The purpose of this paper is to explain the problem I found in that particular grade during my practicum, which is related to find out if the Task-based learning approach can help me change a grammar centered class into a more communicative classroom in order to encourage students to become active participants in their learning process. In relation to this, the following paper will set general and specific objectives, provide a theoretical framework with the most important concepts, the methodology used in the classroom in order to discover if this method could contribute to solving the problem and finally I will come up with a conclusion.

2. Resumen

Esta investigación-acción está enfocada en los alumnos de sexto básico del colegio República de Francia ubicado en Ñuñoa, Santiago. El propósito de este trabajo es explicar el problema que encontré durante mi práctica en dicho curso, el cual está relacionado con investigar si el método de aprendizaje llamado “Task-based learning approach” puede ayudarme a convertir una sala de clases enfocada en la gramática en un aula más comunicativa para poder de esta manera fomentar que los estudiantes se transformen en participantes activos de sus propios procesos de aprendizaje. En relación a esto, el siguiente trabajo implementará objetivos generales y específicos, brindará un marco teórico con los conceptos más importantes, una metodología la cual usé en la sala de clases con el motivo de descubrir si dicho método fue efectivo o no y finalmente delinearé una conclusión sobre los resultados obtenidos.

3. Acknowledgements

I would like to express my greatest gratitude to the people who have helped and supported me during these five years at college. Thank you so much to all my teachers who always supported me and most importantly believed in me. You were my inspiration and my role model and I expect to be like you someday.

A special thank goes to Loreto Aliaga who gave me the opportunity to participate in the most inspiring project about inclusion. It definitely changed my life and my vision as a future teacher.

I wish to thank my mother who always encouraged me to follow my dreams no matter how hard it was. She is the most important person in my life and my best friend. I will never forget what you have done for me and without you I would have been unable to achieve my goals. Last but not least, I want to thank all my friends who supported me and helped me through this whole college experience.

4. Introduction

Nowadays, one important topic in teaching English as a foreign language is related to how teachers can promote real communication inside their classrooms in order not to limit students with grammar, but encourage them to use the language in different situations. Among the different methods used when teaching a language, the Grammar approach represents the most used. According to this method, “students learn the foreign language through grammatical rules and then apply those rules by translating sentences between the target language and their native language” (Ariza, Morales-Jones, Yahya & Zainuddin, 2011). However, this method does not provide students with enough tools to communicate their ideas by having a conversation or a discussion with other people using the target language. This is because the grammar-translation approach focuses more on developing reading and writing skills than listening and speaking. For this reason, classes are given in learners’ mother tongue and not in the target language. Besides, it does not allow teachers to take into consideration what learners have to say about a certain topic or what interests them the most. Therefore, as students are more focused on the structure of the sentences in order not to make mistakes with rules, they become unable to express an opinion or make comments on different real life situations. They are always thinking about the form of the sentences they want to say instead of the content of the message, which increases their anxiety and feeling of frustration if they cannot say something appropriately. As a consequence, there is an important necessity to foster communicative skills inside classrooms. This is due to the fact that, if students want to learn a language and be able to use it as much as possible, they need to be exposed to the four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. According to this, I strongly believe that a foreign language like

English (in the case of Chile) can be acquired and applied by students through communication and the exposure to the target language as children do when they are learning their first language. In this sense, when they are learning how to speak, they are constantly exposed to their mother tongue by listening to their parents and communicating with them and not by learning rules which dictate how language works. As children grow up and get in touch with other people, they become aware of the correct use of the language by themselves.

In relation to this, the following research proposal was designed for 6th graders in order to find out if the task-based teaching approach can modify the grammar-centered lessons they are used to and turns it into a more communicative classroom so that students become active participants in their learning process. In this sense, the first part of this paper contains the context in which the school and students were interacting as well as the problem that students from 6th grade were facing with the grammar-translation method. In the second part, the theoretical framework will mention the different points of view that experts have regarding the topic of this paper. In the third part, the methodology provides the instruments and action plan that were used with students in order to find out if the task-based approach contributed to the creation of a more communicative classroom. Finally, the conclusion contains the reflections of the methodologies used with sixth graders as well as the strengths and weaknesses of my teaching strategies before and after applying this approach.

5. Context

During this semester, I have been doing my practicum at República de Francia Elementary School. This is a small public school located in Exequiel Fernandez 1433, Ñuñoa and receives approximately five hundred students that go from kindergarten to eighth grade where most of them are considered part of the vulnerable sector in that community. Besides, this institution is perceived by the rest of the community as the place that welcomes “problem children” who are not received in any other school in Ñuñoa. In relation to the teachers’ staff, the school has about 20 educators who teach the different subjects to every level. Apart from teachers, there is a big group of students performing their pre-practicums in the English, Spanish and Mathematics departments. They come from several universities and backgrounds across the country such as public (UMCE) and private (UAH, U. Autónoma) universities.

6. Rationale

I decided to research about this topic because I consider that for several years many students have been exposed to the grammar-translation method in order to learn English as a foreign language, but most of them cannot even express their opinion using the target language. In relation to this, I do not believe that a language can be acquired by only knowing and remembering certain rules that afterwards can be used when translating. On the contrary, a language is always changing, evolving and therefore does not follow rules as mathematics and science do. The only way for a person to learn the language is by being exposed and communicating to other people, sharing ideas, thoughts, beliefs and experiences as children do when they are acquiring their mother tongue. In this sense, young learners start by listening to what others say and observe the interaction among them, and after that children say some words until they can formulate complete sentences. It is important that students learn the target language in a classroom full of opportunities where they can use the language without focusing only on form but on the content of the message. This is because while they learn how to use the language in order to express their opinion, they will figure out grammar and the order of words without being conscious of that.

Moreover, I really want my students at República de Francia to learn a new language and therefore get to know another culture. In relation to this, when I started my practicum, I realized that the teacher underestimated her students. She always said that even though she tried her best to teach them, learners were not going to understand anything because they were too lazy and unmotivated. However, during the two weeks of observation I realized that the teacher did not take into consideration students' interests and

experiences when planning classes. Instead of doing that, the teacher focused more on grammar, how the different sentences were structured and the names that each word received. The teacher was not interested in fostering communication and teaching learners that mistakes are part of the process of acquiring another language. For this reason, I think that if teachers want students to learn English, it is important to encourage them to use the language in the classroom so as to talk about topics that can be appealing for them.

Teachers have to stop blaming other people or situations and start looking at how they can improve their practices in the classroom. According to this, I recognize that it is extremely difficult to teach another language in a classroom where students do not consider its need since they are more worried about their context and problems at home. Nevertheless, I decided to research about this topic because I consider that part of being a teacher is related to the use of new methodologies, and theories so as to provide students with the best education.

7. Problem Statement.

In my 6th grade classroom at República de Francia, I noticed that students did not participate orally in the activities I prepared. In other words, every time I designed an activity, it was very difficult for students to participate, and even more difficult to speak English inside the classroom. This is due to the fact that learners were not used to listening to the language and using it in the activities, since the teacher underestimated them and tended to believe that children were never going to learn English. Besides, the teacher did not create activities or classes focusing on students, but focusing on grammar. Learners just had to sit on their seats and write down what the educator was saying about the topic. When I approached students individually, I realized that some of them knew everything or almost everything regarding the subject they were learning at school with me but they did not dare to say it so that everyone else could hear. They were absolutely afraid of making mistakes in grammar, vocabulary, etc. in front of the rest of the class because they were more worried about structures and their correct use than expressing an opinion, a feeling or a thought. As a consequence, every time I prepared an activity that required more oral participation from students than writing, students did not know what to do or how to face those exercises.

7.1 Question

Can the task-based teaching approach change a grammar-oriented lesson into a more communicative class so that every student from my 6th grade becomes an active participant in the learning process?

7.2 Hypothesis

After thinking about the problem of this action research paper, I came up with the following hypothesis: students from sixth grade who have studied English since kindergarten do not know how to communicate their ideas using the target language.

Some answers to this problem can be based on the following things:

- Students can start working in pairs or groups so that they share their ideas and negotiate meaning about the specific task they have to do in class.
- Classes could deal about topics that can be interesting and appealing for students so as to engage them in the learning process.
- By understanding the physical and psychological process in which students from sixth grade are, the teacher can put into practice new theories and methodologies that can be more challenging for them.
- The teacher should avoid classes where she is the most important and predominant participant. Instead of this, classes should be more centered in students and how they can share their ideas, thoughts and experiences with their classmates.
- The teacher should structure a lesson where learners can develop the four skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing).
- If the teacher wants to review grammar areas where students have problems, she should go seat by seat listening to what students are saying and writing those mistakes down. After she listens to most of her students, she can go to the board and explain some of the elements said by learners without saying the name of the person who made the mistake, and ask them what they think about those words or expressions. This will help students reflect on their own learning process and the

mistakes they are making. When people have the opportunity to discover things by themselves, it is more probable that they develop meaningful learning.

- Do not focus on the mistakes made by students but on the content of the message that they want to transmit or explain to their classmates and teacher.

8. Objectives

8.1 General Objectives

The general objective of this action research proposal is to plan lessons using the task-based approach as well as taking into consideration learners' previous knowledge and age appropriateness so as to encourage communicative classes.

8.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this action research proposal are related to:

- The creation of activities that encourage students to communicate their ideas, experiences, thoughts and beliefs;
- Foster an environment where students feel comfortable and welcomed to use the target language and
- Take into consideration their English level, age appropriateness, and interests when planning the lessons.

9. Theoretical Framework

Nowadays, there is lack of real communication inside English classrooms because most of the teachers believe that their students are never going to understand the target language. In relation to this, everyday more and more English teachers from vulnerable schools do not believe in delivering a class where the target language has the main role. Instead of doing this, they prefer to teach English using their mother tongue, Spanish, and use an approach that sees the target language as a set of rules that students must follow in order to translate what they are reading or produce short sentences. According to this, I think it is really sad to observe teachers who do not believe in their learners' abilities and limit them just because their backgrounds are not the best ones for a child to be raised. As educators, we do have to look at students' contexts not in order to discriminate them, but to use that information as a starting point when planning lessons. We have to know what interests our students the most, that is to say, topics that can engage and motivate them to participate by giving their opinion. In my view, it is important to take learners' experiences and interests into account in class because that can make their learning process easier. They are going to feel that their opinion is equally important and respected by others when acquiring the target language. Besides, when teachers foster a communicative classroom, students are not the ones who receive the new information but the ones who are responsible for their own learning process. They realize that the teacher is not the person who knows everything and that they are perfectly capable to contribute to their classmates' knowledge. As a consequence of this, communicative classes do not only help learners improve their English by using the target language when talking about different topics but also make

them understand that other people do not always have the same opinion or share the same interests.

For this reason, the following section will explain why communicative lessons can help students in a better way acquire a foreign language in comparison to grammar centered classes. In order to do this, I describe different concepts that, in my view, can help find the solution to the main problem that my sixth graders have in relation to their English classes. According to this, the elements are focused on the importance of looking at learners' age, their learning processes and the consequences of fostering a communicative classroom. Besides, I use a particular approach that I consider can be helpful to encourage students to express their opinion in class.

9.1 Task-based learning approach (TBL)

This concept is relevant for this action research paper because it offers a different perspective of how to teach English to foreign language learners. According to this, for many years most of the teachers in our country used the "Grammar-translation approach" as the perfect way of teaching learners another language. However, when time passed specialists in education realized that communication and exposure to the target language were absolutely important and that unfortunately the current approach did not provide students with that opportunity. For this reason, the Task-Based approach appeared as another tool to teach English in an EFL¹ classroom that encouraged interaction, exposure and natural language learning contexts. In relation to this, "in a task-based lesson the teacher does not pre-determine what language will be studied, the lesson is based around the completion of a central task and the language studied is determined by what happens as

¹ English as a foreign language.

the students complete it” (Frost, 2004). In other words, the teacher will introduce a topic, explain the instructions to students and then they will complete the task in pairs or groups with the language they have while the teacher helps them. After this, learners have to plan a short report that can be oral or written, practice with the group or in pairs and present it to the rest of the class. Finally, the teacher will give their feedback in terms of the content and pick certain areas from language that need to be practiced.

In this sense, the TBL² approach allows students to have more participation and exposure to the target language because learners have to interact with their classmates in order to complete each task. When they are speaking and discussing, they are also contributing to their own learning processes as well as their classmates’ knowledge. Besides, the fact that students do not have to give a quick response in front of the class, avoids the pressure of having the right answer, and the anxiety of saying something out loud produces. In addition to this, the tasks that students have to complete are based on their interests and topics that affect them and their families, therefore learners are going to be able to give their opinion and share ideas with their classmates. This is because they already have a background or certain knowledge about the topic they are going to discuss which will prevent them to feel that they cannot contribute in class or that they have to be in silence. All these factors generate a natural context where students and teachers are not going to be focused on the form or structure of what they want to say but on the content of the message. Here, it is more important that learners can be able to express their ideas instead of how accurate the paragraph is because the TBL approach understands that when students are sharing and communicating with other people, that is the moment where they

² Task-based learning.

realize how to use the language. “When teachers give learners tasks to transact, rather than items to learn, [it] provides an environment which best promotes the natural language learning process. By engaging in meaningful activities, such as problem-solving, discussions, or narratives, the learner's interlanguage system is stretched and encouraged to develop”. (Foster, 1999)

9.2 Grammar-oriented lessons

This concept is relevant because for several years teachers have been using grammar-oriented lessons in order to teach their students the target language. According to this approach, “the main emphasis is on the study of grammatical aspects of language and the use of translation as a means of ascertaining comprehension” (Ariza et al., 2011). In this sense, classes do not have as an objective that students can be able to use the language to communicate their ideas to other people. Instead of this, teachers are more worried about the way in which students structure sentences and if the translation from the target language to their mother tongue is accurate or not. For this reason, it is not really important that teachers speak English in the classroom or make efforts to teach pronunciation.

In my case, sixth graders have received lessons from kindergarten where grammar was the most important feature, but after six years most of them have a lot of problems understanding English. Moreover, it is very difficult for my students to participate in class because they are scared of making grammatical mistakes since they consider that the language they have to learn is a set of rules that they have to memorize so that they can produce a sentence or a paragraph. This is due to the fact that the teacher is always explaining to students the structure of present/past continuous, and present/past simple,

among others and if they make a mistake with the structures, she lets them know in front of the whole class. In relation to this, when I had to plan a lesson about present continuous, I decided to focus the lesson on a topic and let students perform the activity in pairs because I did not want to teach grammar as such. Nevertheless, when it was time for learners to work in the activity, they did not know what to do because they were used to working individually and focusing on structures and not on the content. They did not even know how to express their ideas about a topic that was related to them if the rule was not written on the board. It was incredible to see how teachers could let learners understand that a language is almost the same as a mathematical rule when both things cannot be compared to each other. A language and not a mathematical rule is constantly changing and evolving which means that a word used in a certain context during a particular year might not have the same meaning after a couple of years. Therefore, the only way I see students can acquire another language is through communicating their ideas and sharing that with other people without the pressure of grammar. I am not saying that students do not have to learn grammatical features from the target language but it cannot become the most essential thing in the lesson.

9.3 Communicative lessons

This concept is necessary in this paper because I consider that every classroom should try to foster communication in order to teach English as a foreign language. In relation to this, when people mention communicative lessons, they tend to think that the only important skill that must be developed is speaking and that grammar is forbidden. However, this approach considers that grammar is an important part of English but it does not allow students to learn a language by itself. “While grammatical competence is an

important dimension of language learning, it is clearly not all that is involved in learning a language since one can master the rules of sentence formation in a language and still not be very successful at being able to use the language for meaningful communication”

(Richards, 2005). In this sense, knowing the rules of the target language can be very helpful but English classes must not be only related to the application of grammar or how well a text can be translated into the mother tongue. In the classroom, students should be exposed to the language so that they can be able to understand it by listening to it and reading it and also by producing it through speaking and writing. “Communicative competence includes knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions, knowing how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants, knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts and knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one’s language knowledge” (Richards, 2005). For this reason, when a teacher teaches only grammar, he/she is building a barrier that does not let students know other aspects of the target language that are more important such as knowing different cultural backgrounds and how to use the language for communicative purposes. Besides, in communicative classrooms the roles of the participants change from the traditional grammar centered lessons because now learners are characterized as being responsible for their own learning and teachers as the facilitator of the language. Here, students do not have a passive role in the sense that they are not the ones who only listen to what the teacher has to say and repeat. This time, they have to participate in classroom activities by working with their peers rather than individually. Students have to learn how to respect and tolerate other people’s points of view and beliefs. In relation to teachers, they are not going to be the owners of the truth but the facilitators of the language. In addition to

this, they have to make students look at errors not as an obstacle that will not allow them to produce correct sentences but as the perfect opportunity to learn.

9.4 Young learners

It is important for teachers to take into consideration the age of their students because this can help educators understand learners' biological and psychological characteristics, their learning styles, what interests them the most and how to approach the contents to them. When teachers want to teach English to a particular group of students, the first thing that they have to do is to look at those students and their characteristics so that teachers can be able to take the language and find the best way in which it can be taught. In relation to this, if teachers ignore these characteristics, the learning process will be extremely difficult to achieve because students are going to feel that they are not part of the class. They can think that what matters in the classroom is how well learners perform and not their experiences, knowledge, likes and dislikes. As a consequence of this, students are not going to pay attention to what the teacher tries to explain to them because it is not relevant for their lives or that they get frustrated since they cannot understand anything.

Curtain and Pesola (2009) mention in the book *Languages and Children: Making the Match*, New Languages for Young Learners, Grades K-8, 4/E that:

The most important factor in teaching and learning in any setting is the learner.

Learners of any age differ from one another in significant ways: Individuals may learn best through listening or reading, they may learn more easily alone or within a small group, they may require heavy visual reinforcement or learn better through verbal explanations, or they may respond better to a sequential or to a random

organization of materials or experiences. An understanding of these general developmental characteristics is essential for the elementary and middle school language teacher. (p. 14)

According to my sixth graders, I realized that they were in a phase where they were experimenting physical and emotional changes that affected their behavior with their peers and with teachers. They did not want to be treated as children nor as adults so teachers had to be strict and demanding but at the same time, they had to be nice and treat them with respect, tolerance, and love as if it was a big family. Another aspect is related to the encouragement of a positive self-image and relationships. I mention this because these students needed to feel they were loved and respected by other people in order to build a positive identity. In this sense, as my students had some problems with their teachers which made those educators leave the school, they were predetermined to think that teachers did not like them and that educators were teaching them just because they were forced to and because of money reasons. Students were constantly saying that they were stupid and that they were never going to understand English because they were too lazy. This opinion came from what teachers always said about that class and did not contribute to students' learning processes, since they did not want to attend school anymore. For this reason, I tried to tell them that those arguments were not true and that they were able to learn as much as they wanted to. They needed someone to remind them how smart they were and how capable they were to do things such as learning another language.

9.5 Active participants

It is of the utmost importance to encourage students to become active participants in their learning processes because by doing this they will understand that they can contribute in class and that they also have an opinion about different topics. They will realize that teachers are not always right and that people learn when they talk to others and exchange their points of view. When students communicate their ideas, they can build their knowledge based on what they already know and on the things that others teach them. Besides, students start to take errors as something that allows them to grow up and improve their language learning instead of thinking that those elements are obstacles that avoid them to achieve perfection.

In addition to this, we live in a world that demands our students to know how to analyze information in order to solve different problems that they can face over the time rather than memorizing certain amount of knowledge. “Due to the ever-accelerating pace of a changing and uncertain world, to be successful today’s learners must be equipped with the appropriate skills and knowledge needed to master interconnected forces of speed, complexity and uncertainty. This means learning faster, analyzing situations logically and solving problems creatively” (Farrell, 2009). It is important to teach learners how relevant it is to question the information provided and not accepting everything that people say as the total and final truth. For this reason, if a student is not an active participant, it will be more difficult for him/her to feel part of the society or in this case part of the classroom because he/she will be waiting for others to tell him/her what to do instead of finding the solution by himself/herself. Those kinds of people are not going to develop their curiosity

in terms of knowledge and will not take the risk of making mistakes so as to learn more which will affect directly the development of learning the language in a meaningful way.

9.6 Learning process

The learning process is part of the key elements throughout this paper because in my personal opinion I think that teachers' main goal has to be focused on developing students' meaningful learning. When teachers plan their lessons, the most important factor to consider is if each activity or task allows students to learn what needs to be taught in class. As I said before, lessons must consider students' experiences, contexts and interests as well as their learning styles and multiple intelligences. Besides, the teacher should prepare material where learners can interact with other people in order to compare and contrast their knowledge, habits, routines and life in general. By doing this, students will not only learn the target language but also something that they ignored about their classmates. Otherwise, when teachers do not take into consideration their learners, it will be more difficult to motivate them and therefore the learning process will be affected. In relation to this, a teacher is never going to know if students really understood what he/she wanted to teach, but all the efforts must be focused on providing students with enough tools and opportunities to learn the target language. On the contrary, if teachers do not care about students' learning processes, it shows that they are not truly committed to teaching.

In relation to my students from sixth grade, I think that most of their classes did not contribute to their learning processes because those lessons were not looking at students' needs and experiences. Besides, these classes did not encourage students to use the language in order to express what they thought about a certain topic. Instead of doing this, students were used to listening to the teacher who was the center of the class and answering

everything that the teacher asked. Learners were not really seen as important in the process but as the empty vessels that had to be filled. When I tried to make them interact and ask each other for their routines, they were absolutely insecure about the activity because it was not part of the traditional classroom in which they were used to working. However, after a couple of minutes, they started to talk and discuss each routine and when I approached them; I realized that they understood the task.

10. Methodology

10.1 Instruments

This action research paper was based on literature and theory taken from different authors who encourage communicative classrooms and the TBL approach. According to this, the book “Communicative Language Teaching Today” (2005) by Jack Richards provides some information about the importance of fostering communication inside classrooms in order to learn a foreign language. Besides, the author suggests a variety of activities that can be useful for teachers when changing the grammar-centered method into a Task-based learning approach. In addition to this, this research paper also gathered some relevant information from the book called “Task-based Language Learning and Teaching” (2003) written by Rod Ellis and other books listed in the reference section of this paper. Nevertheless, this research also took into consideration the observation made by the teacher during the second semester of the current year of a 6th grade from República de Francia School. This observation helped me realize the several problems that the school was facing which affected directly my students’ learning processes. After reflecting on those issues, I came up with a possible solution that can make a change in the way in which English classes were designed and delivered, materials were selected and students were assessed.

In relation to this, this research did not want to promote the Task-based approach as the best method to teach English as a foreign language, but to offer an excellent way of bringing the language closer to students. According to this, the following section presents a set of methodological steps related to TBL that were implemented with my students, so as to encourage communication, real participation and therefore meaningful learning inside the classroom. This section contains materials, activities, and the results of different tasks used in order to identify if the Task-based approach is effective when teaching English through communication, where students' experiences and beliefs are a fundamental part in the class.

These are the steps proposed in order to implement the Task-based approach in my 6th grade class:

1. Observation of the class before and after implementing the Task-based approach so as to notice if the method applied was effective when delivering the lesson.
2. Checking through a survey (see appendix) how students felt regarding the class and if the lesson allowed them to participate by giving their opinion about different topic related to them or if the class was more focused on structures and isolated contents. Students answered this survey before and after the Task-based approach was implemented.
3. Choose appropriate tasks based on students' interests (see appendix), experiences and beliefs in which they could communicate their ideas, and therefore could help them engage more in the discussion of the different topics.

First of all, I decided to observe my sixth grade class before and after implementing the Task-based approach because I needed to know how effective the lesson was for students. In this sense, it was absolutely relevant for me to see how learners reacted when the teacher delivered the class using the grammar-centered method and if it contributed to their learning process. During the two weeks of observation at school, I realized that the teacher was more focused on teaching structures and the correct use of the words instead of delivering a class where students could have more opportunities of participation. In relation to this, the lesson was totally teacher-centered and it was all about presenting a particular structure that afterwards students had to practice for the rest of the class in order to master that content. Even though students practiced what the teacher was trying to teach, I realized that learners could not understand the objective of learning that part of the language because it was not connected with their reality and context. As the teacher did not involve students' experiences, opinions and beliefs, learners had difficulties understanding the language as well as using it for communicative purposes. In addition to this, as the class was delivered in Spanish and not in English, it made the learning process even more difficult because they did not have the opportunity to listen to the target language and realize how the language worked by themselves. When I interviewed some students about the class and what they thought about it, their responses were related to the idea that the lessons did not take into consideration their likes and that they could not give their opinion. Besides, learners did not find the activities interesting and engaging which affected their motivation towards the class. For this reason, most of them did not want to do the activities that the teacher had prepared.

Once I implemented the Task-based approach for the first time in the class, I noticed that students engaged and were motivated but they had a lot of problems understanding the tasks because they were not used to giving their opinion and discussing topics that were appealing for them. This time, the classes required learners to become active participants and responsible for their own learning process because they had to give their opinion and work as a group in order to come up with a reflection or a conclusion that could help them do the task. According to this, it was absolutely challenging for me, as a teacher, to complete the task in one class and give instructions using the target language because students were used to other types of lessons where they had to be in silence and just follow a rule dictated in their mother tongue. Therefore, when I asked them to perform a particular task in which grammar was not the most important part of the class, but students' opinions and their reflections, learners got confused and they were constantly asking what to do and how to do it. Students got frustrated at the beginning, since they thought that they could not complete the task and that they were never going to learn English. Moreover, as they always worked individually and not in groups, the first class in which they had to share with their peers, some of them started to talk to their classmates about other things or they just did not perform the activity. Nevertheless, when they got used to the TBL approach and its methodology, it was easier for them to work in groups in order to finish the task of the day. In this sense, when they did not understand the instructions or when they did not know how to write something, learners first shared with the group so as to find the solution to the problem, and then they asked me.

Secondly, the survey was conducted before and after the Task-based approach was implemented in the classroom in order to discover how students felt about three main

topics: their participation, the class and their learning process. In order to collect this information, I had to create the questions based on what authors and literature describe about communicative classrooms as well as the characteristics of grammar-centered classes. Most of the questions required students to think and reflect about the class, the materials, the way in which the teacher designed the lessons, and also they had to evaluate their own responsibility and commitment to the class. According to this, the questionnaire contained fifteen questions in which twelve of them needed students to answer with “totally agree”, “agree”, “indifferent”, “disagree” or “totally disagree”. The last three questions required young learners to give a brief explanation of how they felt about the class and suggestions for the teacher.

Thirdly, the lessons were designed according to the curriculum and what MINEDUC³ established as the content that students should learn by the end of the year. However, the materials that I created followed the ideas of the Task-based approach. In relation to this, the tasks intended to foster communication, participation and were based on students’ interests and previous experiences, but at the same time I tried to mould the task in order to achieve the requirements of the government. In this sense, the first part of the class included a presentation of what students were going to be doing throughout the lesson, such as discussing the most common music genres and their likes and dislikes in terms of the different genres and artists or bands. After this, the second part of the lesson required that students started to develop the task in pairs or in groups. Learners had to try to complete the task with the language they knew taking into consideration the topic and that their classmates could contribute to their learning process. For example, in the topic about

³ Ministerio de Educación.

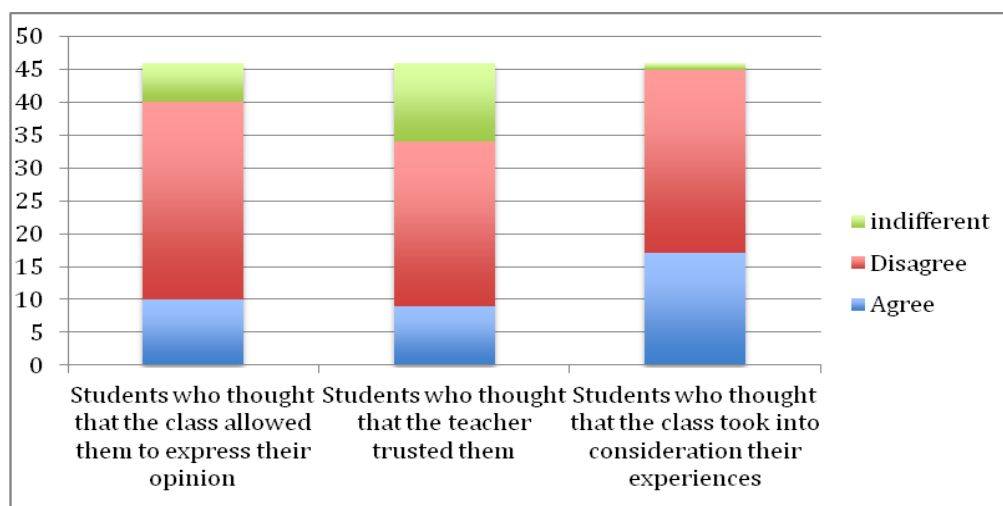
music, children had to interview their partners in order to know their favorite artists and bands, the genre of that particular artist, the songs that they liked the most and finally the reasons why they liked the artist or band. While students were performing this part, I was walking around in order to know if they had difficulties understanding the instructions or if they had any doubts regarding language. According to this, once I noticed that there was a misunderstanding, I decided to write it down on my notebook and then go in front of the class and ask them if there was something that called their attention in terms of the sentence or expression. The idea was that students reflected on it and gave their opinion. This section of the lesson was for students to realize how the language worked but after the misunderstanding, they could continue with the task. In relation to this, people can say that grammar cannot be part of a communicative classroom, but on the contrary students need to know grammatical aspects. The important thing is that the class cannot be based on grammar and how to structure a certain sentence, but that it is a complement that can help students complete the task.

In the third and last part of the class, students had to report their findings to the rest of their classmates. Before giving the report, students had some time to practice what they wanted to write or say so as to avoid the anxiety that speaking in front of the class could produce. This section also included the feedback of the teacher and their classmates who added more information about the topic or their personal experiences in relation to what the learner was saying.

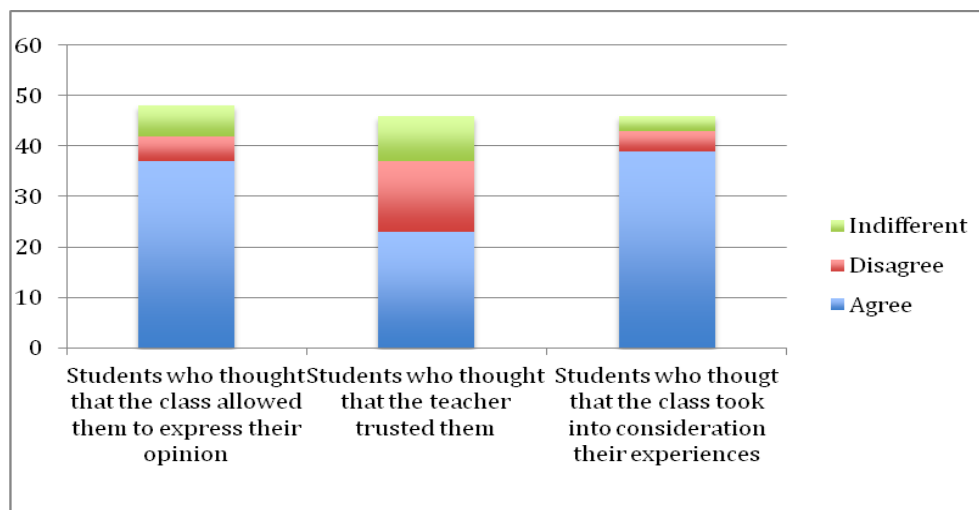
10.2 Action Plan

Data collection

1. First survey on what students thought about the class before implementing the task-based approach.



2. Second survey on what students thought about the class after implementing the task-based approach.



Data Analysis

Graphic N°1 provides information about the opinion that students had before implementing the Task-based approach in the class. Students were asked about three different categories related to if the class allowed them to express their opinion, if learners felt that the teacher trusted them and if the lesson took into consideration their experiences. In relation to the first question, thirty students believed that the class did not take into consideration their opinion regarding the different topics presented in the classroom whereas only ten students found that they had the opportunity to express their thoughts. In the second question, twenty-five students felt that their teacher did not trust them in terms of learning English as a foreign language, and only nine believed that the teacher trusted on their abilities. In the third question, seventeen children thought that classes were related to their contexts and experiences while twenty-eight said that they did not find a connection between the class and their lives. The results of this survey showed that the method used before implementing the task-based approach was not effective when promoting communication and real participation. This was due to the fact that students believed that classes were decontextualised and did not let them contribute by giving their opinion. Besides, an important element that seemed to affect students' performance and learning process was related to the teacher's beliefs towards them.

Graphic N°2 gives information about the opinion that students had after implementing the Task-based approach in the class. According to this, thirty-seven students believed that the class allowed them to express their opinion regarding the specific topic discussed, and only 5 learners found it difficult to participate. In terms of the second question, twenty-three said that they felt that the teacher trusted them and believed in their

abilities while fourteen mentioned the opposite. In the third question, thirty-nine of the total number of students considered that each task was absolutely related to their experiences and interests, and four disagreed with the statement. This showed that the task-based approach allowed the teacher to design lessons taking into consideration students' beliefs, previous experiences and interests so that learners could participate actively in the class. In relation to this, young learners had the possibility to learn the language in a classroom that encouraged them to participate and communicate what they thought about several topics that were familiar to them. Also, students felt that this time the teacher trusted in their abilities and supported them when learning the language.

11. Conclusions

After considering and applying the task-based approach in order to teach English as a foreign language, I could conclude that it had good results and therefore was effective for my students. This was because learners had the opportunity to use the language not only through written assignments or texts but also experimenting with listening, and speaking tasks. In addition to this, classes encouraged students' active participation through the design of different tasks that were related to what they experienced in their real lives. As the material was based on children's interests, it was easier to motivate them to participate and therefore learn the language.

However, if teachers want to apply this approach in their classes, they have to know that in the beginning it is going to be difficult to transform a traditional grammar-centered lesson into a more communicative class. This is because students already have internalized that their role in the activities is to memorize, repeat and follow what the teacher says. They know that the teacher is the main participant and that the target language is not really used during the lesson. For this reason, when this method is changed in order to make the class more communicative, students find almost impossible to understand that this time they are in charge of their learning process and that everyone has to participate in order to complete the task. As they have to discuss and talk to their partners, the first classes can be noisy and chaotic, especially if the teacher is used to having everything under control. However, once learners get used to these types of classes, they become more participative, and responsible, and they keep focused on the task instead of getting distracted. It takes a lot of time to let students understand that the teacher is not always right and that they can contribute to the

class with their experiences, but once they get the idea of this approach they participate more and bring a lot of suggestions regarding possible topics.

In relation to this, another aspect that can result hard for teachers to do when trying to implement this approach is related to how they can include what the Ministry of Education requires students to know by the end of each year into a Task-based lesson. This is due to the fact that people tend to think that the task-based approach allows students to experiment and use the language as much as they can without imposing the vocabulary. Nevertheless, the teacher should design the class in a way that the topic allows students to practice key vocabulary required by the government. According to this, it is important that the teacher plans his/her lessons in advance so as to be sure that classes fulfill those requirements and at the same time promote communication and participation among learners.

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13. Appendix

a) Sample of a task applied with sixth grade.



How often do you...?

The purpose of this assignment is for you to recognize and put into practice what we have learned from the unit “How often do you...?” through an interview as well as the creation and presentation of a graph about students’ routines.

Instructions:

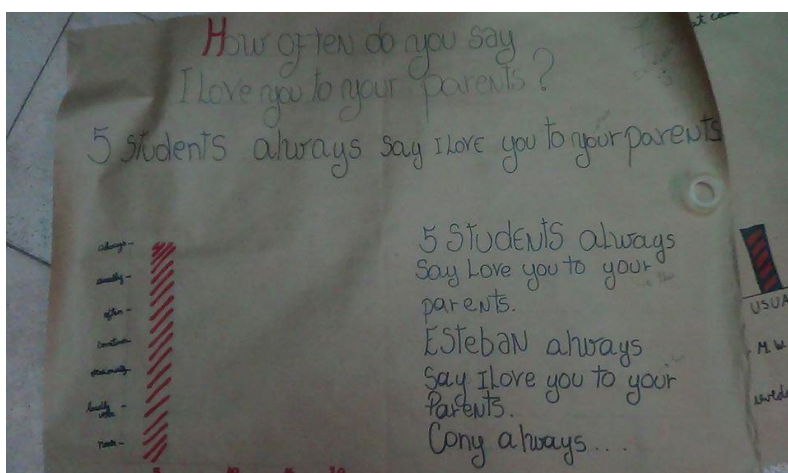
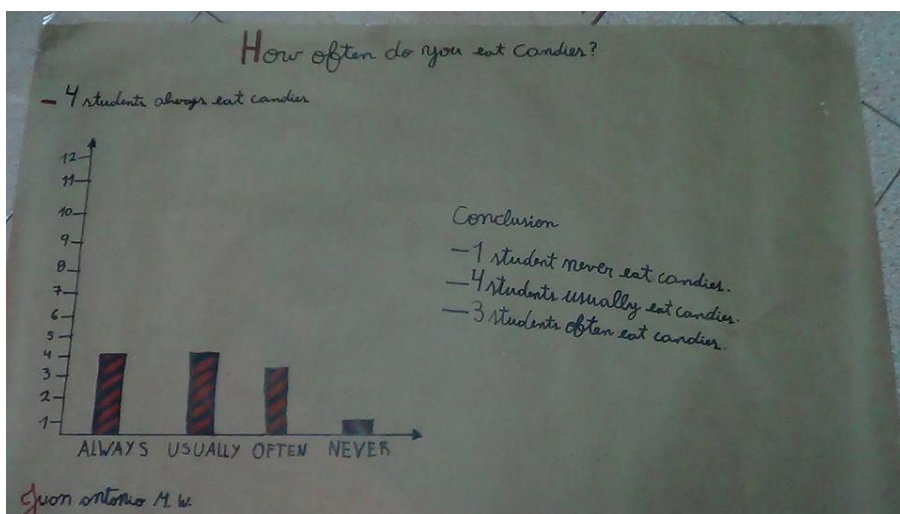
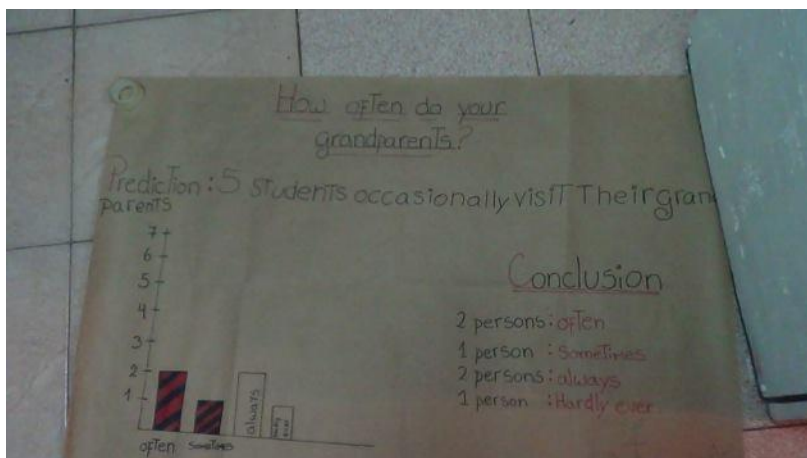
In pairs, you are going to receive a question about a different type of routine (for example, How often do you go to bed after 12?). After this, you will make a prediction about it. Then, you will have to interview/survey at least 10 people from the class, and create and present a graph with the answers of your classmates. This graph must have the following things:

- The question you received.
- A prediction about the question you received.
- The graph with the answers of your classmates (hint: remember you have to use the adverbs we learned in class)
- 3 conclusions about the graph and its results.

Things to keep in mind:

- The presentation should be 4-5 minutes long, allowing time for questions from the class.
- The poster and presentation must have a structure (title/name, the prediction, the graph and 3 conclusions)
- You must use the adverbs we studied in class.
- When you present, be careful with your posture and keep eye contact with classmates.
- Be careful with the pronunciation of words.
- Stay on topic. You must be focused and talk about the specific topic.

b) Samples of students' tasks



c) Survey

This is a sample from the survey I used in order to collect data about students' personal opinion regarding the class before and after implementing the Task-based approach.

¿Qué es lo que más te gusta de la clase?

¿Qué sugerencias puedes darle a la profesora para mejorar la clase?

¿Qué puedes hacer para mejorar como estudiante?

d) Samples of students' responses from the survey in the question, what is a good thing of the class?

R: cuando solo y multitud

⑬ me gusta todo que la profesora me ayude, me respeta y confie en mi.

13 Cuando opinamos

13) Cuando la Eia nos hace opinar