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What strategies should I use in order to make my fourth grade students speak English
in SGLS School?

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

by

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Abstract

This action research was made based on observation and subsequent intervention in a class of fourth grader students at Colegio San Gregorio de La Salle during the second semester of my final practicum. The problem I had to face in the class already mentioned relates to oral participation in English classes by students, who despite being participative and enthusiastic, most of the time they did not use the target language in oral activities.

To do this, at the beginning of my interventions, I had students answer a questionnaire which would allow me to know students' skills and difficulties in relation to English class and themselves. Based on the questionnaire, I conducted activities that promote English language use principally in oral communication activities.

Taking everything into account, this action research will benefit teachers who want to apply strategies and activities that improve and develop the oral communication of English principally in elementary students.

Keywords: oral activities, young students, oral communication, strategies.

Resumen

El presente trabajo de investigación-acción, fue hecho en base a la observación y posterior intervención en un curso de cuarto básico en el colegio San Gregorio de La Salle durante el segundo semestre de mi práctica final. El problema que tuve que enfrentar en el curso ya mencionado se relaciona con la participación oral en las clases de inglés por parte de los estudiantes, los cuales a pesar de ser participativos y entusiastas, no utilizaban el idioma Inglés la mayor parte del tiempo.

Para ello, al comienzo de mis intervenciones, hice que los estudiantes contestaran un cuestionario el cual me permitiría conocer las habilidades y dificultades de los estudiantes en relación a la clase de inglés y con ellos mismos. En base al cuestionario, realicé actividades que promovieran el uso del idioma en actividades principalmente orales.

Tomando en cuenta lo anterior, éste trabajo de investigación-acción beneficiará a profesores que deseen implementar actividades y estrategias orales que mejoren el uso del idioma inglés en cursos principalmente de nivel básico.

Palabras claves: actividades orales, jóvenes estudiantes, comunicación oral, estrategias.

Introduction

Nowadays, English has become a universal language and in our Chilean reality schools are more interested into integrate EFL contexts. For that reason, it is very important how students are approaching to the second language through methodologies and strategies that teachers apply in their lessons, in order to effectively facilitate students' learning of the target language. Considering what is mentioned before, I supposed that every teacher knows the importance of developing and improving the four skills which are listening, reading, writing and speaking when teaching English as a second language; however in our context it is a bit difficult to develop all of them at a same level. In the majority of schools, English lessons are based on grammar or just vocabulary memorization which hinders an effective and successful students' language learning.

Bearing that in mind, this research proposal will cover an important issue in English language teaching which is related to speaking, since it seems to be the skill which has more difficulties to be taught by teachers. As a practitioner in San Gregorio School, I could have the experience of being in a class of fourth grade students who in spite of being active participants in English classes, they were reluctant to communicate orally on the target language. For that reason, I will focus on that important issue with the support of some authors' theories about English oral communication that also will be research and explained through this paper.

The aim of this research proposal is intended to find out different strategies and activities to make fourth grade students communicate orally in English, considering and taking advantage of their inner motivation to participate and learn the new language. The first part of this work provides readers the context to the problem stated; the second part gives a theoretical framework with different authors' theories about speaking in English, the third part of this research provides the methodology used and finally the action plan with different activities proposals and their analysis.

Chapter I

I.1 Context

I.1.1 School Context

San Gregorio de La Salle School is located in La Granja, Santiago. It is a public subsidize school, and in general the curriculum is based on the Ministry of Education requirements which also provides the materials the school uses. In relation to the students who enter to this school, they are immersed in different social contexts and realities. The majority of students have limited resources and they come from unconventional families. However, the school community tries to integrate and admit all students giving them the possibility to receive an adequate and a good quality education.

San Gregorio de la Salle School welcomes students who want to receive a Catholic instruction, since the school belongs to a Catholic association directed by “Hermanos De La Salle”, which focuses teaching on the beliefs and values of San Juan Bautista de la Salle. Nevertheless, students with other religious tendencies have not any impediment to enter to this school, as long as they show respect and commitment to the school requirements and rules which are, based on observations, quite strict. Besides, next to the school is located San Gregorio Parish church, which is the place where some school ceremonies are held and students can participate during class schedule.

In terms of personal relationships, students and teachers have a very good rapport; students show respect and kindness. There are, of course, some cases which are exceptions to the rule, but in general students are well behaved and disciplined. Also, there is good affiliation among teachers, inspectors, the school principal, UTP department and other members of the school community. Each member has the duty to be role models for students, and they have made great changes in some students’ attitudes towards life.

The school is huge, it has enough classrooms for each level from kindergarten to high school, and almost each one is equipped with data projector, speakers,

whiteboard, shelves, and even some of them have televisions installed. Also, the school has a big patio mainly for students from fourth grade to high school, two smaller patios for young students, and apart from that, the school has a patio for kindergarten students only, with its own girls' and boys' bathrooms respectively. Besides, in order to protect the physical integrity, there are separated bathrooms for children and adolescent students. The school also has a library, an audio visual room, a cafeteria, a computer lab, a laboratory, a stage and different classrooms for extracurricular activities. Teachers also have their own spaces in the school where they can work and rest. In general, the school has a lot of resources and the infrastructure is well maintained by each member of the school community.

I.1.2 Fourth Graders Context

The students I am working with are fourth grader students from 9 to 10 years old, and they are 36 students in a classroom. Approximately 90% of students have been together since kindergarten, and they have been learnt English from that level on, however grades from English classes are not taken into account for the final grade point average until they pass to fifth grade. Nevertheless, based on my experience, students give a great effort to learn English, even if their grades are not considered in their GPA. That is something that I really want to remark and praise. In the classroom there a lot of resources for the English classes (data, speakers, posters, whiteboard, etc.). The teacher also makes students use their Bounce books and dictionaries. At the beginning they were seated in groups of four facing each other faces, but due to the problems that this situation caused, the head teacher decided to change the sitting arrangement into the traditional scheme: two children per desk divided in four rows. The problem seemed to cease a little bit.

An important issue to consider is that these students are really talkative during class. Sometimes, it is difficult to keep them focused on the tasks and activities we are doing, and make them speak in English, they use Spanish most of the time instead.

These students are eager to learn new things, they participate when they are asked for it and the activities are interesting for them, since almost everyone is participating, they seem very self-confident and extrovert. Also, they can recognize and follow simple classroom commands, instructions and a variety of common words in English. They can write short sentences and recognize information in short oral and written texts. The only skill they are not developing well is speaking, for that reason this research proposal will take communicative approach to solve the stated problem.

I.2 Research Question and Hypothesis

Considering their English learning context, it is important for those students to develop four skills in an equivalent way, and also I think these students have the necessary abilities to do it because they are active participants and they are not afraid of make mistakes. I have to take advantage of my students' capabilities, and I have countless expectations about them. I want to help those students through my own learning as a teacher, trying to recognize and improve the problem itself.

Taking into account what I mentioned above, I decided to formulate the following question:

- What strategies should I use in order to make my fourth grade students speak English in San Gregorio de La Salle School?

This question is not considering only students' needs but my own needs as well, since I am a novice teacher, this research can be a powerful tool for my professional development. For that reason, the hypothesis that came up to my mind is that students could speak more in English by means of appropriate/specific activities and techniques that will be analyzed in this study. To achieve that goal, I need to improve the way these students interact in a spoken way in the classroom, applying different activities based on authors' theories that will provide strategic methods to apply in the classroom, which eventually improve the way students can communicate orally in the target language.

I.3 Objectives

I.3.1 General Objective:

- To encourage students to speak English during activities in the classroom.

I.3.2 Specific Objectives:

- To look for methodologies that could improve the way students communicate orally in English.
- To create an appropriate classroom environment in which all students can actively participate in classes.
- To strengthen students English learning skills through speaking.
- To reflect about my own practice in the classroom.

I.4 Rationale

The reason I want to take this problem into consideration is because as it is a common characteristic of children to be talkative and full of energy, we as teachers have to be aware of this and take advantage of young learners' abilities.

It is also important for students because it will help them to improve their personal development and their future as professionals. I want students to feel comfortable to participate in classes, using the target language, and respecting other classmates' participation. I also want them to feel free to participate and avoid their hesitation when they have to speak in English, because it is important for them, as children, to be listened to.

Additionally, it will benefit the school, since students could not only improve language knowledge, but values as well such as respecting other people's opinions, taking turns when necessary, and listening to others. Those values mentioned are important for the school due to the mission it has, which is basically to promote integral development of social, affective, artistic, spiritual and cognitive abilities.

For those reasons, this research proposal will not only contribute to the benefit of students' learning but also contribute to the improvement of students' school profile. Moreover, this proposal will contribute to improve my own practice as a teacher and the practices of the ones who need some help to cope with this important issue in the context of teaching English as a second language.

Chapter II

II.1 Theoretical Framework

When we talk about learning English as a second language inside the classroom, we cannot make a blind eye to the importance of the oral communication in the target language to enhance and reinforce the language acquisition. For that reason, in this research proposal I want to emphasize the relevance of practicing productive skills, specially speaking, when learning a second language, through some authors' theories.

To begin with, as a general rule people have different ways to learn, and these differences are also present during all stages in their lives. For instance, children have a very different learning style from teenagers and adults, and that is why we as English teachers have to bear in mind different strategies and methodologies to teach students at different stages in life. Moreover, there are some factors that can increase and decrease the way they acquire the language related to the personality of each person that could be a crucial issue to take into account when teaching specially speaking. According to this, in the following paragraphs some authors refer to the situations mentioned before, giving support to what I want to spot on this research proposal.

II.1.1 Learners' Characteristics

Knowing our students is something really important when teaching, because it gives us a hand to understand the diversity of our students' learning styles and interests. We have to take into account a lot of factors such as age, aptitudes, multiple intelligences, English level, and the motivation students have in order to come up with appropriate activities and methodologies which facilitate students understanding of the different topics referred to English, and encourage them to practice and use the target language.

It is a fact that young learners can acquire knowledge easily because of their brain plasticity, also because most of times they "learn by doing" since their

comprehension of the world is more concrete than abstract, which allows them to learn by the experience as well. According to Harmer (2007: 38), children learn differently from adolescents and adults in the following ways:

- ▶ They respond to meaning even if they do not understand individual words.
- ▶ They often learn indirectly rather than directly – that is the key take in information from all sides, learning from everything around them rather only focusing on the precise topic they are being taught.
- ▶ Their understanding comes not just from explanation, but also from what they see and hear and, crucially, have a chance to touch and interact with.
- ▶ They generally display an enthusiasm for learning and a curiosity about the world around them.
- ▶ They have a need for individual attention and approval from the teacher.
- ▶ They are keen on talk about themselves, and respond well to learning that uses themselves and their own lives as main topics in the classroom.
- ▶ They have a limited attention span; unless activities are extremely engaging they can easily get bored, losing interest after ten minutes or so.

These young learners' characteristics, demand a teacher who can fulfill all these needs giving students the possibility to get information from a variety of sources such as realia, ICT's, authentic materials, and so on, but over all, this teacher has to be committed with her/his students' learning because it can be a hard work keeping them engaged with the class. For that reason, teachers have to plan a wide range of activities in a short period of time, at the same time they have to work with students individually and in groups, giving all of them attention to their own needs. Moreover, students have different personalities and aptitudes apart from their general characteristics, and those features are going to be described in the next section.

II.1.1a Students' Differences

Each student in our classroom is a whole new world. Understanding our students' aptitudes helps us as teachers to make our lessons easier for them, avoiding frustration and lack of interest in the subject. Jeremy Harmer (2007) suggests that

some students are better at learning languages than others because of their differences in analytical aptitudes. That is to say, some students who have a more general view of the world are more disadvantaged than the ones who analyze specific topics.

However, it does not mean that one type of student is better than the other, and there is not an impediment for anyone to learn English. What is more, there are different learner styles which can give us a clue in what kind of activities and tasks are more suitable for each one of them. The list provided below shows four learner styles and their characteristics, which are mentioned in the book *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, Jeremy Harmer (2007: 43):

- ▶ **Convergers:** these are students who are by nature solitary, prefer to avoid groups, and who are independent and confident in their own abilities.
- ▶ **Conformists:** these are students who prefer to emphasize learning “about language” over learning to use it.
- ▶ **Concrete learners:** though they are like conformists, they also enjoy the social aspects of learning and like to learn from direct experience.
- ▶ **Communicative learners:** these are language oriented. They are comfortable out of class and show a degree of confidence and willingness to take risks which their colleagues may lack.

Certainly, we have students who belong to the four mentioned learner styles above, and it might be almost impossible to create different activities for all of them in one class, for that reason, I will be focused on the last learner style i.e. the communicative learner, who is not afraid of make mistakes and participate using the target language as the best she/he can, since the majority of the students I have been working with share many of the features mentioned above.

II.1.1b Motivating Students

As I mentioned before, young learners have an intrinsic motivation to learn new things around them, but that is not enough. Emily R. Lai (2011: 34, 35) mentions that “motivation in children predicts motivation later in life, and the stability of this relationship strengthens with age. [...] educators consider intrinsic motivation to be

more desirable and to result in better learning outcomes than extrinsic motivation”. Regarding that, students at a young age enter to school with high levels of intrinsic motivation; that is to say, they have an inner desire to learn and comprehend the world, and through aging their motivation declines due to many factors such as lack of interest in the topics, biological processes, and social environment to name just a few. For that reason, teachers should create supportive classroom environment by teaching students values such as respect and solidarity, engage students with creative, meaningful and motivating activities and tasks, and needless to say, being a reflective teacher who can improve and adapt new strategies to teach young learners.

II.1.2 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

The communicative approach or Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is centered on the theoretical concept of “communicative competence”, which is defined by Chomsky as the ability to use language in a social context. According to Savignon (2002), communicative language teaching is focused on the elaboration and implementation of programs and methodologies that promote the development of functional language ability through learners’ participation in communicative events, she also mentions that “communicative competence” is the description of the ability of classroom language learners to interact among other speakers, to make meaning, as distinct from their ability to recite dialogues or perform tests of grammar knowledge.

In addition, Jeremy Harmer (2007: 86) mentions that “CLT has now become generalized “umbrella” terms to describe learning sequences which aim to improve the students’ ability to communicate, in stark contrast to teaching which is aimed more at learning bits of language just because they exist and without focusing on their use in communication”. Regarding that, the idea of Communication Language Teaching is to encourage language learners to communicate orally in the target language, giving them the appropriate circumstances to do it. For instance, we as teachers can encourage students to ask for information using linguistic resources, leading them to take risks to negotiate meaning. For that reason, the use of games, role-playing exercises, group works and other communicative classroom activities are

highly recommended from my own point of view to introduce students to this approach.

II.1.2a CLT Focus

The communicative approach puts the focus on the learners, and their communicative needs provide frameworks for elaborating qualitative evaluation with regard to functional competence (Savignon, 2002). According to that, teachers have to assess students' "communicative competence" through a variety of tasks that are not only focused on oral communication. For instance, some holistic assessments include learners' poems, stories, television programme simulation, videotapes, and as Harmer (2007) suggests, typically activities which involve students in real or realistic communication, where the accuracy of the language they use is less important than successful achievement of the communicative task they are performing.

The importance of these activities is that students should have a desire, a purpose to communicate something to fill in a gap, for example asking for information, to give an opinion, to buy something, to write a letter, and so on. On those cases, students are allowed to use a variety of language structures, and the teacher as Larsen (2004) mentions "facilitates communication in the classroom. In this role, one of his/her major responsibilities is to establish situations likely to promote communication. During the activities she/he acts as an adviser, answering students' questions monitoring their performance".

Moreover, Harmer (2007: 85) provides opposite characteristics of communicative and non-communicative activities, which he called "communication continuum" (see Figure 1).

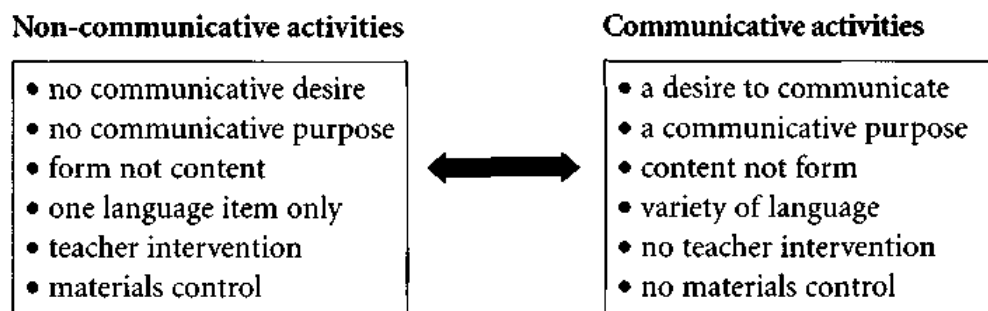


Figure 1: The communication continuum.

Nonetheless, it does not mean that all activities belong to each extreme of the continuum; some of them use both characteristics instead. For instance, an activity in which students have to create a dialogue which has a communicative purpose but with some language restrictions, we can say in this case that it mixes both communicative and non-communicative characteristics. Moreover, something important to take into consideration when giving students communicative activities is the selection of suitable methodologies to the attainment of communicative competence, through the understanding of the learning styles' differences. For that reason, learners' expectations and teachers' attitudes towards them are crucial factors to success on this approach.

II.1.2b CLT Components

Taking into account that the communicative approach focuses on meaning, it seems that grammar is not important at all. However, Savignon (2002: 7) remarks that “communication cannot take place in the absence of structure, or grammar, a set of shared assumptions about how language works, along with a willingness of participants to cooperate in the negotiation of meaning”. For that reason, even though CLT encourages meaning-focused activities for learners, it is important to combine form-focused classroom activities as well, for the development of communicative competence.

Furthermore, Savignon (2002) proposed the “inverted pyramid” classroom model to show a range of communicative contexts and events in which students gradually expand their communicative competence. This model comprehends grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociocultural competence, and strategic competence (see Figure 2). All these components are interrelated and cannot be developed or measured in isolation.

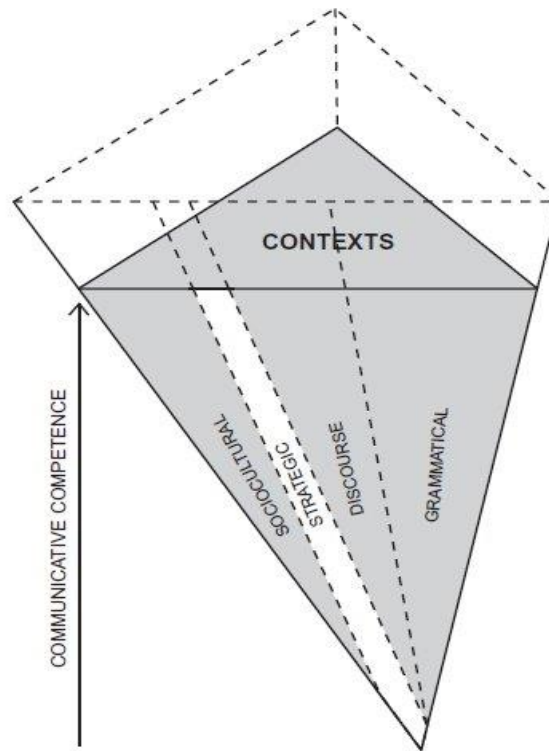


Figure 2: Components of communicative competence.

- ▶ Grammatical competence refers to sentence-level grammatical forms, the ability to recognize the lexical, morphological, syntactical and phonological features of a language and to make use of those features to interpret and form words and sentences.
- ▶ Discourse competence is concerned not with isolated words or phrases but with the interconnectedness of a series of utterances or written words or phrases to form a text, a meaningful whole. The text might be a poem, an e-mail message, a telephone conversation, or a novel.
- ▶ Sociocultural competence requires an understanding of the social context in which language is used: the role of participants, the information they share, and the function of the interaction. Learners cannot be expected to anticipate the sociocultural dimension of every situation.
- ▶ Strategic competence is how students cope with unfamiliar context, with constraints arising from imperfect knowledge of rules, or such impediments to their application as fatigue or distraction.

Regarding the components of communicative competence described above, this action research it is intended to develop if it is possible some of the areas with the students of fourth grade through activities proposals.

II.1.2c Communicative Curriculum

Today, the communicative approach has been very famous to ESL teachers, however there is still confusion in the curriculum regarding what strategies and activities should they use to promote and apply. Savignon (2002) through her experience categorized five components as thematic activities related to language use. The first one is called Language Arts, and it includes the school programs to help learners focus on formal accuracy in their mother tongue. For example, spelling tests, dictation, translation and rote memorization are used. The second concept is Language for a Purpose, which language experience is essential through real and immediate goals. Not all the learners are taking a new language for the same reason, and it is important for teacher to bear in mind this, in order to pay special attention to the activities given. The third concept is My Language is Me, which is related to the learners' emerging identity in the new language. Students' attitude through the language is the most important factor in learners' success. In this concept, teachers should know that not everyone is comfortable in the same role. Groups activities are essential to this concept due to we can involve all students. For that reason, respect and self-expression are key words. The fourth concept is called You be...I'll be..., where learners are allowed to experiment and be part of their knowledge acquisition. Role-playing activities can be used to provide students with the tools they need to express, interpret, and negotiate meaning in a new language. Finally, the fifth concept Language use Beyond the Classroom is related to the variety of communicative activities in the classroom, which its purpose is to prepare students for the real world. The classroom is but a rehearsal. The real challenge of this concept is to encourage students to practice the target language outside the classroom, for instance encourage them to listen to and watch radio and television programs, songs, newspapers, and the internet, which it has been more and more used nowadays in classroom teaching.

II.1.3 Teaching Speaking

Students who are learning English as a second language need to be able to speak in different situations using a range of conversational repair strategies (Harmer, 2007, 4th ed.). Therefore, there are six different speaking events in which students can interact in real or simulated conversations in order to practice orally the target language. For instance, some speaking events that Jeremy Harmer (2007, 4th ed.: 343) mentions are:

- ▶ Transactional: the main purpose is conveying information and facilitating the exchange of goods and services.
- ▶ Interpersonal: is all about maintaining and sustaining good relations between people.
- ▶ Interactive: for example a conversation that takes place when we buy a newspaper at a kiosk.
- ▶ Non-interactive: for example leaving a message on an answer phone.
- ▶ Planned: a speaking activity that is planned could be a lecture, a wedding speech or an exposition.
- ▶ Unplanned: an unplanned conversation can take place spontaneously when we bump into someone on the street.

Additionally, there are also conversation strategies which are used in a spoken situation that students have to be aware of. For instance, turn-taking conversations use conversational openings (*How are you? That's a nice dog!*), interrupting (*Sorry to interrupt, but...*), topic shift (*Oh, by the way...*) and closings (*It's been nice talking to you*) (Harmer, 2007, 4th ed.: 344).

However, Jeremy Harmer (2007, 4th ed.) suggests that we would not expect students to be able to use these various conversation strategies at all levels. On the contrary, we have to encourage them to develop their speaking skills as their English level improves. For that reason, students need to know what a real conversation is, taking part of it using potentially more and more phrases. Additionally, they have to pay attention to simple classroom events such as asking questions, answers, chunks, in which the role the teacher is quite important. A good strategy to help students

speaking more phrases is to write some fixed phrases or lexical chunks on the board and ask them to use those phrases in the class, and next classes we can add more and more phrases, so students can follow a set pattern. An example of a set pattern is the adjacency pair in which if someone initiates a conversation we expect a paired response, For instance: *Nice day, isn't it?* The paired response should be *Yes, it is.* (Harmer, 2007, 4th ed.).

II.1.3a Students and Teachers

Students who are comfortable in the classroom and very self-confident can easily take risks when speaking in another language; on the contrary, some other students are reluctant to speak. For that reason, it is important for teachers to create an appropriate atmosphere of respect and companionship where everyone is involved in speaking activities in the classroom.

In relation to reluctant students, Jeremy Harmer (2007, 4th ed.: 346, 347) proposes the following situation to help students and teachers to face this issue:

- ▮ Preparation: planning and rehearsal for speaking success will allow students to perform much better if they have the chance to think what they are going to say and how to say it.
- ▮ The value of repetition: repetition allows students to improve on what they did before. They can think about how to re-word things or just get a feel for how it sounds.
- ▮ Mandatory participation: when groups do a task there are “social loafers”, that is students who sit at the back and let everyone else do the work. Teachers in this case have to make everyone participate to avoid these situations by giving all of them the chance to speak in the discussion.

Furthermore, the roles of the teacher are different during speaking activities, Harmer (2007, 4th ed.: 347) suggests that three roles have particular relevance if we are trying to get students to speak fluently:

- ▶ Prompter: we as teachers may be able to help students when they get lost and the activity to progress by offering discrete suggestions.
- ▶ Participants: teachers should be good animators when asking students to produce language. Sometimes this can be achieved by setting up an activity clearly and with enthusiasm. At other times, however, teachers may want to participate in discussions and role-plays themselves. In such circumstances, they have to be careful that they do not participate too much.
- ▶ Feedback provider: when students are in the middle of a speaking task, over-correction may inhibit them and take the communicativeness out of the activity. On the contrary, helpful and gentle correction may get students out of difficult misunderstandings and hesitations.

Taking everything into account, even though students have to be the main focus of speaking activities, the role of the teacher is as important as the role of students because teachers are their guides, and facilitators of the speaking events. Besides, they are responsible for creating the proper classroom environment which makes oral communication occurs.

II.1.4 Self- Confidence and Anxiety

In general, most of the people feel uncomfortable speaking in front of an audience because they are afraid to make a fool of themselves. That is a feeling called *anxiety*, which usually makes you feel overwhelmed by all new material you have to learn, for example a new language. For that reason, if giving speeches in your mother tongue is not an easy task for the majority of people, talking in a new language will be even more difficult to accomplish.

According to Brown (2002: 24) “learning a new language involves many things: learning a whole new system of words, remembering thousands of new words, learning many rules of grammar - and their exceptions, talking with people in different situations (friends, teachers, etc.) and understanding a new culture”. In consequence, language learners could not feel confident enough to acquire the target

language because they do not feel good about their abilities, due to their low self-confidence, which keeps them from doing their best. However, it is important to take into account that everyone can learn a new language, and we as teachers have to encourage students to give their best and not to give up learning.

Furthermore, there are students who are very self-confident and have an active participation in classes, but they are not that confident in English class. This is what Brown (2002) calls “English-Specific Self-Confidence”, and he mentions that most people feel foolish when they make mistakes in a foreign language, but they have to remember that their classmates will support them because they also make mistakes (Brown, 2002: 26). So, if a student feels bad about his/her English, it is because his/her English-specific self-confidence might be low, and the best solution is to practice with a partner listening and speaking activities. Besides, Douglas Brown in his book *Teaching by Principles* (2006) mentions that the activities that teachers should do in the classroom, in order to develop their self-confidence, would logically start with simpler techniques and simpler concepts, in that sense students can establish a sense of accomplishment that catapults them to the next step.

Taking everything into account, it is equally important for teachers to guide students when teaching speaking and make students feel comfortable with themselves and the classroom environment, in order to improve their speaking skills in classroom activities.

II.1.5 Speaking Strategies

Nowadays, we have a lot of resources to make speaking activities in the classroom, we can use traditional strategies which have had a great impact when teaching speaking, and we can take advantage of the use of technology as well. The list provided below is a compilation of speaking activities which I extracted from different books.

- ▮ Acting out dialogues: we need to work to create the right kind of supportive atmosphere in the class. We need to give students time to rehearse their

dialogues before they are asked to perform them. If we can give students time to work on their dialogues, they will gain much more from the whole experience.

- Information-gap games: many games depend on an information gap: one student has to talk to a partner in order to solve a puzzle, draw a picture, put things in the right order or find similarities and differences between pictures.
- Formal debates: in a formal debate, students prepare arguments in favor or against various propositions. In order for debates to be successful, students need to be given time to plan their arguments, often in groups.
- Simulation and role-play: many students derive great benefit from simulation and role-play. Students simulate a life encounter as if they are doing in the real world. They can act out the simulation as themselves or take the role of a completely different character and express thoughts and feelings they do not necessarily share.
- Cards games: there are many card game possibilities in language learning as there are in real life. We can turn the card selection into a game by introducing a competitive element or questions – having students in pairs.
- Drills: with lower-level students, an appropriate use of pictures – especially flashcards – is in cue – response to drills. We hold up a flashcard (the cue) before nominating a student and getting response. Flashcards are particularly useful for drilling grammatical items, for cueing different sentences and practicing vocabulary.
- Note pad: teachers frequently write things up on the board as these come up during the lesson. They might be words that they want students to remember, phrases which students have not understood or seen before.

(Jeremy Harmer, 2007, 4th ed.: 177, 178, 183, 349, 350, 352)

- Partner interviews: Students like to talk. Let's use this strategy to find out more about our students and what interests them. In this strategy, students are asked to interview a partner who is unfamiliar. As the interviews are carried out, students take notes about each other.

- ▶ Student search: the student search is a strategy used by many teachers to help identify students' common interests or areas of strength. To create a student search, the teacher and students develop any number of statements required, e.g. *find someone who likes to run, who likes to sing, etc.*
(Unesco, 2004: 26, 28)

- ▶ Scrambled sentences: the students are given a passage (a text) in which the sentences are in a scrambled order. They are told to unscramble the sentences so that the sentences are restored to their original order. This type of exercises teaches students about the cohesion and coherence properties of language.
- ▶ Picture strip story: one student in a small group is given a strip story. This student shows the first picture of the story to the other members and asks them to predict what the second picture would look like.
- ▶ Authentic materials: to overcome the typical problem that students cannot transfer what they learn in the classroom to the outside world and to expose students to natural language in a variety of situations, adherents of CLT advocate the use of language materials authentic to native speakers to the target language.
(Diane Larsen, 2004:132, 133, 134)

Chapter III

III.1 Methodology

Taking into account what I could observe during the English classes, I have planned some speaking activities which can be helpful for these particular students. These activities were based on authors' suggestions which were researched on this paper. In order to assess each activity, I decided to use checklists which provide the percentage of the students who were working on the activity. Those checklists will demonstrate if the activities were suitable for these students or if they needed to be improved. Also, through the process of teaching in class I will assess students by course observation.

The idea of this research proposal is neither to change the way students have been learning the target language, nor changing the activities they have been doing during English classes, but improving the way students are using English in a way that they can use the target language not only in writing, reading or listening activities; areas where they do not seem to have great difficulties, but also the language in speaking activities.

Chapter IV

IV.1 Action Plan

Before starting with the activities I prepared for students, while I was observing them I had planned in advanced to give students a questionnaire (see Appendix 1) to gather information about them. The main objective of this questionnaire was to get useful information about students' reactions to the English class, how they feel about themselves about learning English, and how they feel participating within their classmates inside the classroom. It is important to mention that the questionnaire was given to students during the second week of September and it was intended to be anonymous so everyone can feel free to express their feelings without regrets and it was answered by 35 out of 36 students in total.

According to the questionnaire previously mentioned, I decided to create different activities class by class which encourage students to participate in oral communication activities during the English classes, which were based on their answers given on the questionnaire. These activities were short in comparison with the rest of the regular activities that I had to create per classes, however they were significant to this research proposal, to my own reflective practice and needless to say, to students as well.

The list provided bellow, describe the activities and strategies applied to fourth grade students during English classes in the same order which were presented to them:

• Note- Pad

The teacher wrote on the board some expressions which could be used by students if they wanted to ask something. These expressions had to be used by students during all English classes in order to widen the range of phrases they were using and encouraged them to speak in the target language.

Expressions: *"Can you come, please?" / "Can you help me, please?"*

"How do you say _____ in English?"

"What is the meaning of _____ in Spanish?"

Drills: Flash Cards Prepositions of place

(see Appendix 2) Students activated previous knowledge of prepositions of place by looking at a set of images. The teacher asked them for the location of a certain character (in this case a cat) in a place (bedroom). The idea was to get students' responses using a simple fixed expression and students' language knowledge orally.

Teacher's question: "*Where is the cat?*"

Students' response: "*The cat is* - *behind* *the bed.*"
 - *in front of*
 - *next to* *the dog.*"
 - *on*

Video: Ordinal Numbers

Using technological devices, students watched a video related to ordinal numbers, they had to pay attention to the characters that were appearing in a certain order in the video. The teacher asked them some questions about the video and students had to answer using fixed expressions and the information given on the video.

Teacher's questions: "*Where is the girl with the pink bag?*"

"*Where is the boy with the red bag?*"

"*What color is the bag of the girl in the fourth position?*"

Students' response: "*The girl with the pink bag is on the fifth position.*"

"*The boy with the red bag is on the tenth position.*"

"*The color of bag is brown.*"

Go to Appendix 3 to see the link and images of the video.

Card Games: Conversation Cards

(see Appendix 4) During a lesson, we talked about habits and routines to introduce Present Simple tense. I gave students a set of cards in groups of four, the idea was that every member had to pick one card and taking turns they had to tell the answer of the questions written on the card to the rest of the group members. This activity was planned to make students work with classmates that they were not used to work with.

To facilitate students' answers, the teacher wrote on the board some possible answers related to house chores:

- *Clean the house.*
- *Watch TV*
- *Wash the dishes*
- *Brush my/her teeth*
- *Take a bath*
- *Go shopping*
- *Play video games*

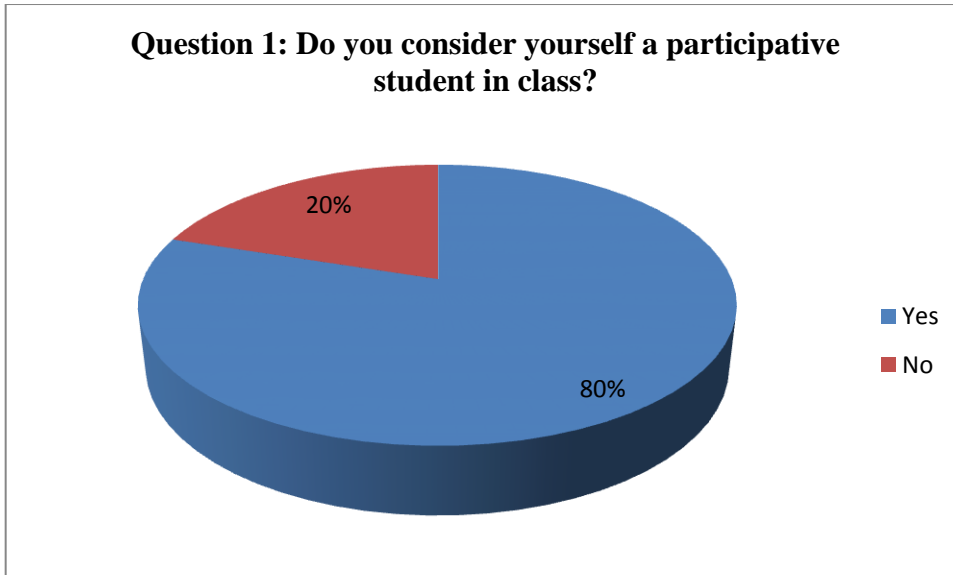
Pair Work: Guess who?

(see Appendix 5) Students in pairs received a board game and a set of cards. Students had to pick one card per member without seeing each other's cards. The idea of this game was that students made questions to their partners trying to guess the name of the character that their partners picked, using questions and phrases written on the board game. The member that guessed the name of his/her partner's character first was the winner.

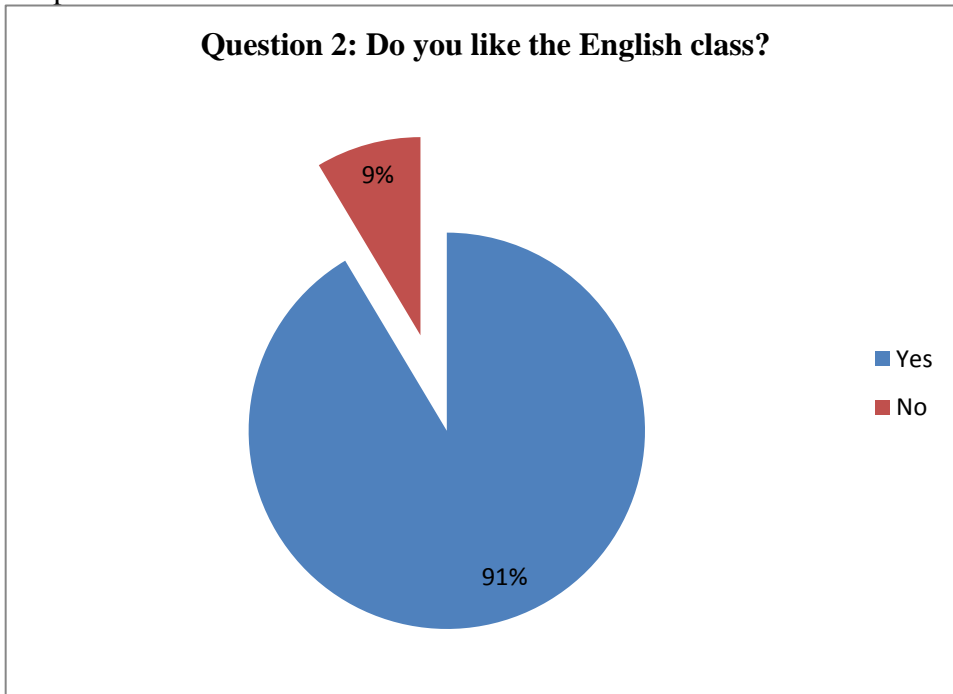
VI.1.1 Data Collection

The graphics provided below are based on the questions of the questionnaire given to students:

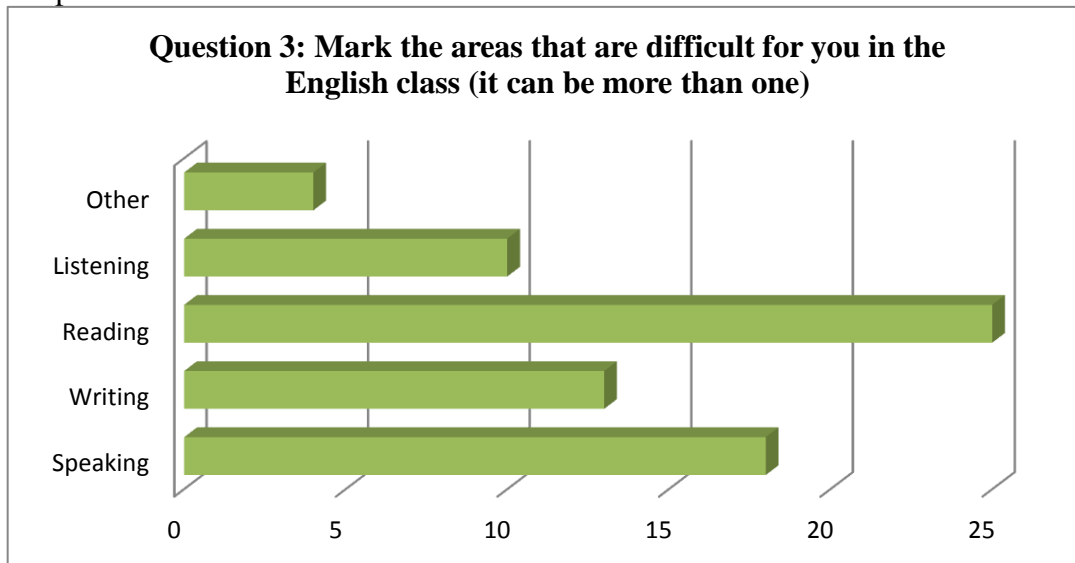
Graphic 1:



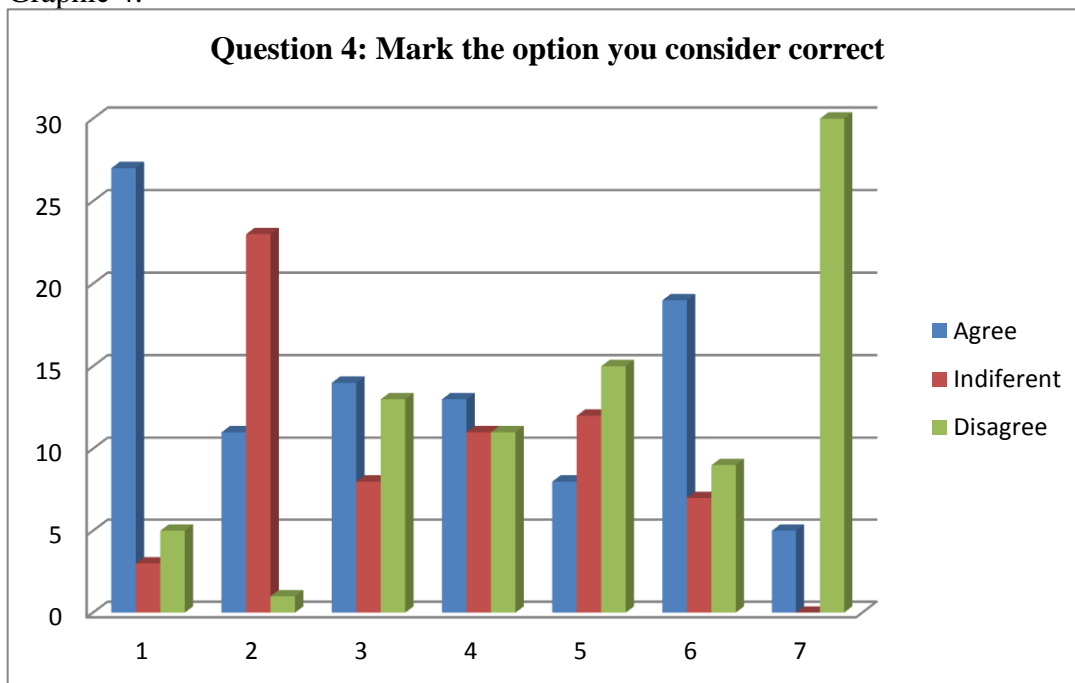
Graphic 2:



Graphic 3:



Graphic 4:

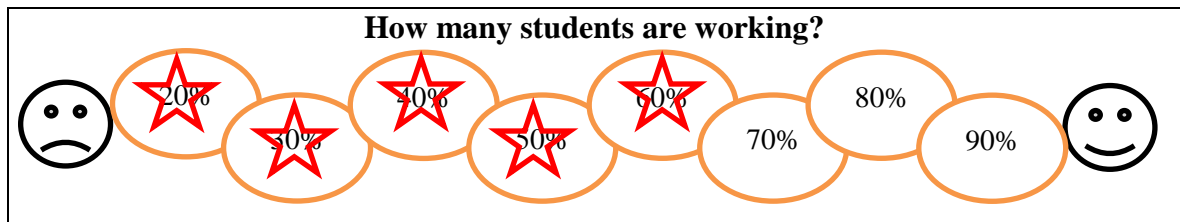


- 1.-I like to participate in the English class.
- 2.-I understand everything the teacher says.
- 3.-I am ashamed to speak in public.

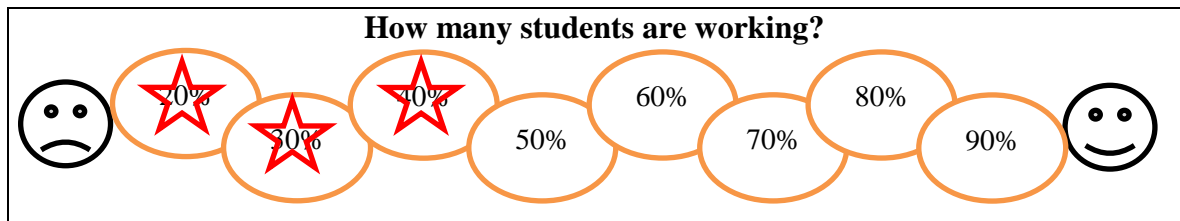
- 4.-I usually speak in class.
- 5.-I have trouble paying attention in class.
- 6.-I prefer written activities in English.
- 7.-I do not like working with peers.

The following list provides the checklists based on the results obtained of each activity planned to fourth graders. While students were working, I was monitoring them to check if they were effectively doing the proposed activity. Regarding that, the purpose of these checklists is to measure the percentage of students who were working on the activities.

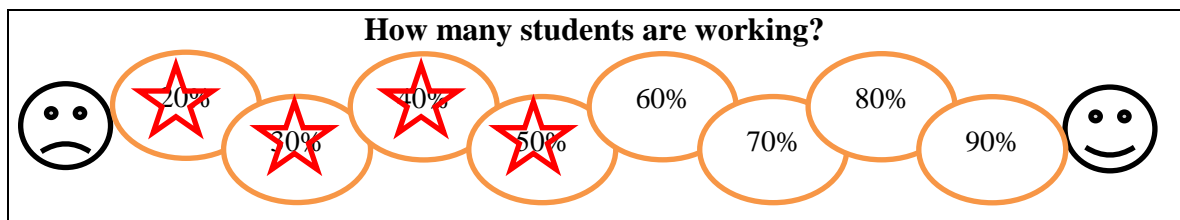
▮ Note- Pad



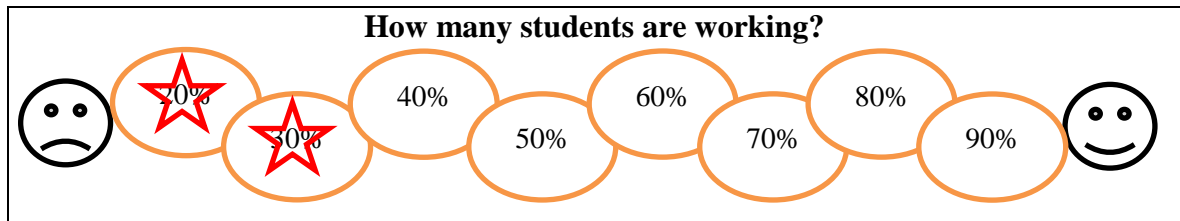
▮ Drills: Flash Cards Prepositions of place



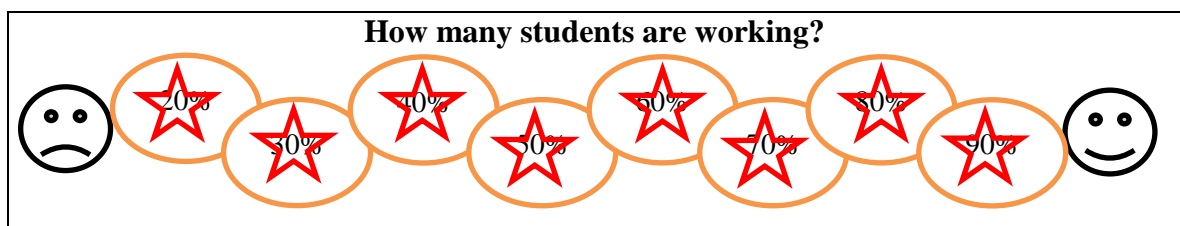
▮ Video: Ordinal Numbers



Card Games: Conversation Cards



Pair Work: Guess who?



VI.1.2 Data Analysis

To begin with, it is very important to state that the questions were discussed before the students answered the questionnaire; that is to say to establish the meaning that each option intended to explain. For example, in question 4 the three options agree, indifferent and disagree were explained and discussed before answering and it was set that agree meant that the student was a hundred percent sure about the statement, indifferent meant that the student did not care or was not really assured about the statement, and finally disagree meant that student was totally against the statement.

According to graphic N°1 corresponding to the first question of the questionnaire, the majority of students (28 students out of 35) consider themselves as active participants during classes in general. In graphic N°2, the results show that 91% of the students like English. In this question the students had to write their reasons of their answers, and the majority of the ones who answered YES wrote that they like English because they admit that is fun to learn a new language, and they enjoy the activities carried out by the teacher. Only 3 students answered that they do

not like English and wrote that it was difficult for them to understand the new language. As I have mentioned through this paper, and based on my observations the students really enjoy the English classes, and the results shown by these two graphics demonstrate that participation and motivation to learn English are not a problem for these students. For that reason, the purpose of questions 1 and 2 of the questionnaire was to confirm my suppositions related to students' constant participation and willingness to learn a new language.

Graphic N°3 shows the difficulties that the students have in relation to the four skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking. I also included one last category called "other" in case of someone may have another difficulty that was not mentioned. The results show how a great amount of students 25 out of 35 recognized to have difficulties reading in English; then it is followed by speaking with 18 students, writing, 13 students; and listening 10 students. The category "other" was marked by 4 students who did not specify the difficulty. According to the results, students do not have a major difficulty listening to English, which could be the reason why they participate even when they cannot speak in English. However, the major difficulties are in relation to speaking and reading; and the difficulty regarding reading is something that I did not notice when observing at the beginning of the semester. Perhaps, the difficulties students have with this receptive skill prevent them from speaking in English. Reading provides you a wide range of new vocabulary, expressions, chunks and structures that can be used when it comes to speak, for example answer questions, giving opinions, thoughts, expressing ideas, describing pictures, etc. Additionally, reading helps with modelling which can give students a hint when speaking in the target language.

Graphic N°4 shows the results of specific aspects such as the interactions between the teacher and the students, among the students, and how the students feel inside the classroom. Statement 1 shows that the majority of students like to participate in English classes. Statement 2 relates to the understanding of oral instructions made by the teachers, taking into consideration that here indifferent means they do not care whether they understand or not, or they are not a hundred

percent sure of understanding everything, 23 students answered to be indifferent, 1 student disagree and 11 students agree on the statement. The result shows a contradictory behavior in relation with Graphic 3, where students consider listening as the least difficult skill they have in English. Thus, it might be that the students who chose the option indifferent do not understand every single word, but may be they catch some ideas, and follow the instructions they understand. Statement 3 shows that the number of students who are ashamed to speak in public is quite similar (14 – 13 respectively). It is curious, because the majority of them give opinions and answers during classes. Based on the observation I may say that they are ashamed when it comes to speak in front of the class because they are more willing to speak when they are sitting. Also, they avoid speaking when they have problems with pronunciation.

In statement 4, the students were told that to speak in class did not mean to participate specifically during activities, it meant that they talk about other topics that were not related to the class, and as a result there are 13 students who consider themselves talkative during classes, 11 students marked indifference and disagreement on the statement, but still most of students declare to talk. This information is relevant because I can take advantage of this positive characteristic, since students are used to talk I can encourage them to do it in another language which is the aim of this research. Statement 5 indicated that students do not have difficulties paying attention, however there is still a significant portion of students who are paying attention partly. This information is relevant because it encourages me to design focused activities to involve all the students, in order to make them pay attention during activities in class.

On statement 6, students stated they prefer to do written activities in English, even when the majority of them recognized to have difficulties on writing as it was seen in Graphic 3. This is again a contradictory behavior. Maybe the students are used to work doing written activities on their books and notebooks, for example filling the blanks, answering guided questions, and multiple choice among others; that is to say, activities with a model to follow. According to the latter, it may be inferred that doing written activities may be easier since they can follow a model or

just cheat from someone else. Nonetheless, to come up with something new such as: writing sentences, short stories, or paragraphs without having a model become into a hard task to fulfill due to the training they receive and the little time to exposure to the target language (90 minutes per week). That could be a reason of their contradictory answers in Graphic 3 and the statement in Graphic 4.

Finally, the last statement relates to team work, and it shows that 30 students out of 35 like to work with their classmates. The information is really useful and relevant because it provides a hint on how to plan and apply activities both in pairs and groups than individual ones. Also, I can take advantage of this by planning activities focused on students' interaction which is a crucial element of speaking.

■ Note- Pad Checklist

Based on the checklist, on this strategy 60% of students used the phrases that I displayed on the board. I asked students to use the phrases when they had doubts or questions, but only two of them were more used by them: *Can you come, please?* and *Can you help me, please?* When students raised their hands and said the phrases mentioned, and I went to their places, they asked me mainly about the meaning of a word, so I told them that there was a specific phrase to do that. Nevertheless, they continued to use those phrases mentioned. The reason why this happened was because they preferred to have a more personal interaction with the teacher, at that age they want attention only for them, as the researched authors mention. The idea of note pads was good, because I encouraged students to use more phrases in order to make them speak in English, even though they did not use all of the them, it was a big step to make students use new vocabulary little by little. An idea to improve this strategy should be including more phrases each class, so they can acquire a wide range of new vocabulary, and students can be praised each time they use a new phrase.

Drills: Flash Cards Prepositions of place Checklist

The checklist shows that only 40% of students worked on this activity. We were working with prepositions of place so I designed this activity to check if they can identify them in context. What I obtained was that students could recognize the position of the cat in different places of the bedroom, but they still said the word in Spanish, so I had to repeat the answers they gave in English until they could say it by themselves. The other result I obtained was related to the difficulties they had to use a complete response, when I asked students: *Where is the cat?* I told them to give a complete answer using: *the cat is...the bed*, but the responses I got were only prepositions and some of them in Spanish. It is important to mention that students were only exposed to the images and oral instructions; it could have been a better idea writing fixed expressions to use as a response on the board, so it would be easily for students to answer, and it could have lowered their anxiety when responding as well. Something to take into consideration was that at the end the goal was achieved by using minimal responses. Nevertheless, the expectations were not achieved because they were too high. This activity helped me to understand how important is to model to meet the objectives I expected.

Video: Ordinal Numbers Checklist

This activity was similar to flashcards with prepositions, but this time I wanted to take a risk and see how students reacted to this. I could notice that videos were more interesting for students than flashcards because almost all of them were paying attention. In this activity half of the class participated, which was good but not enough. This time they used fixed expressions to answer in English, and they could recognize simple vocabulary such as colors, ordinal numbers, and nouns. This time, students used more English when answering, and sometimes when a student wanted to answer and he/she did it in Spanish, he/she corrected him/herself using the corresponding expression. One thing that could improve this activity is the variation of questions that we can make to students. For instance, if the video was related to

ordinal numbers we can make questions related to students' position in the classroom, or real situations linked to their own realities, not just what was happening in the video.

▮ Card Games: Conversation Cards Checklist

This activity was not successful at all. Only 20% of students worked on the activity, the rest preferred to do another different activity instead. As I could observe in the results of the questionnaire, students had difficulties reading in English. For that reason, I wanted to encourage them to do an activity in which reading and speaking were used, but it was not as good as I expected. I created conversation cards with simple questions, but students did not know how to answer because they did not know how to say the words they wanted to express. I could notice then that they lack of basic vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, trying to help them with the activity, I wrote some of the phrases they could possible answer on the board, and they started to talk with their groups. For that reason, to improve this activity it could be a better idea to brainstorm students' answers of a certain concept and write them on the board, so everyone can have a hint when doing this kind of activity.

▮ Pair Work: Guess who? Checklist

This activity was made at the end of a simple present lesson, so students had to apply what they learnt. As I could notice in previous activities, it was necessary for them to have a list of expressions to do oral activities, for that reason I gave them hints in their board game. This pair work activity was successful because based on the checklist 90% of students were working. Students were using questions and answers in English, so it shows an effective improvement of their speaking skills. While I was monitoring them, I could hear them using more and more English in this activity. Apart from that, students were really motivated and manifested enjoyment while doing the activity. At the end, the only problematic issue was time; students admitted that they would have liked to have more time doing the activity.

Conclusion

To conclude this research proposal, it is important to reflect on the process of the investigation and the data analysis. The main objective of this research proposal was to encourage students to speak English during activities in the classroom, and through the process of this investigation it can be said that the objective was achieved. Ideally, the purpose of this research was to make students speak in English using most of the time the target language, but due to certain factors it did not happen as I expected.

First of all, the interpretations of the results from the questionnaire, specifically in number 4, were sometimes very contradictory and hard to understand. Thus, the activities I planned did not fulfill my expectations and goals because the interpretations were ambiguous and imprecise. Nevertheless, the specific objectives such as developing the way students communicate orally in English and participation in oral activities were indeed successful. For that reason, I am quite sure that these students showed improvement on their English oral communication, and at the end I could accomplish what I wanted to find out on this research proposal. What I should improve is the way I present activities, maybe I should use more modeling and visual aids in order to facilitate students comprehension on the topics and activities.

A second factor that affected this research was the expectations that I had perhaps were too high, and I was blind with the idea of making a big change on the way students were using English in oral communication, and it prevented me from observing with more details which were the lacks and needs these students had. In some way, I was paying more attention to what I wanted to achieve with students, and I did not observe the small achievements they made through each activity that were not considered within my expectations. Even though it is important to have expectations on students' learning, it is even more important to take into consideration students' expectations on their own learning process. This situation will help me enormously in my future career as an English teacher, since I can reflect on my own practice bearing in mind always my students' needs.

Finally, a third factor that affected my investigation is related to external issues such as students' previous knowledge and sitting arrangement. I realized that students lacked vocabulary which often prevented them from interacting orally in the activities carried out. The students' lack of vocabulary made oral activities difficult to come to an end. However, this issue is the subject of other research that I was not intended to investigate. Furthermore, the way they were arranged in the classroom was detrimental to the flow of the class and significant accomplishment of the activities planned, due to students could be distracted easily and it was easier for them to disrupt the class. On one opportunity, students were placed in the traditional way in four rows with two students per table, and it was the only time in which they could perform all activities in a very comfortable way for them and for me as the teacher. I was neither allowed to change their places not taking them somewhere else. These factors can certainly be improved, and are important elements that have to be taken into consideration in my future practice; in order to keep my goals in relation to the students' learning process.

To sum up, after applying some suggested activities to encourage students to speak in English during classroom activities, it can be concluded that it is possible to make a change on teachers' practices regarding the improvement of oral communication on the target language through simple strategies and activities for students, specifically at a young age. When a teacher applies the correct methods, activities and strategies in their English lessons, students' possibilities to learn a new language effectively increase. I propose that we as teachers have to take into account what our students' needs and lacks are, in order to plan and apply different activities in the classroom which involve all of them making language learning successful. That was what I wanted to find out through this paper, and I could realize myself that it is possible to encourage students to participate especially orally during English classes.

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Appendix 1

Cuestionario 4ºB

1.- ¿Te consideras un estudiante participativo en clases? ____ Si ____ No

2.- ¿Te gusta el ramo de Ingles? ____ Si ____ No

¿Por qué?

3.- Marca las áreas que se te hacen difíciles en el ramo de inglés (puede ser más de una)

____ Pronunciación

____ Escritura

____ Lectura

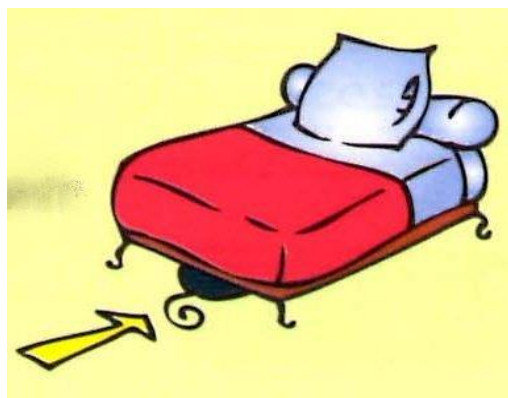
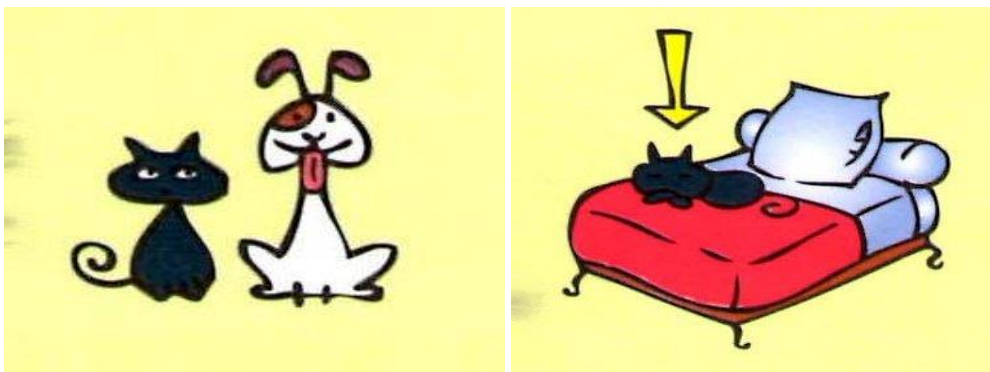
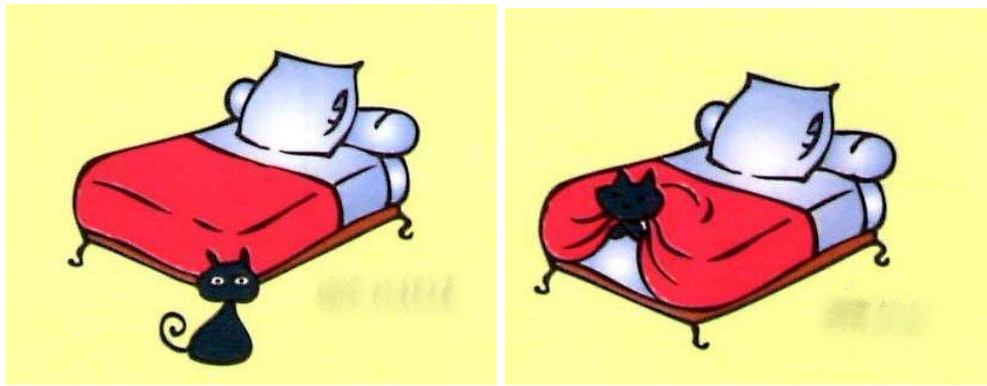
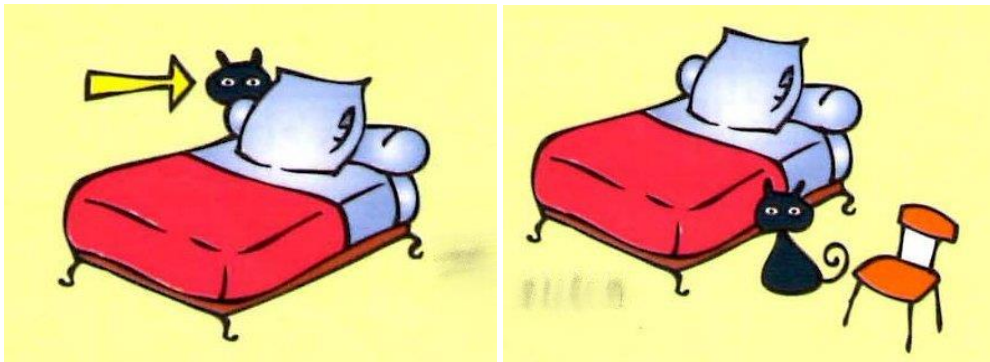
____ Audición

____ Otra ¿Cuál? _____

4.- Escoge la opción que creas correcta

	Muy de acuerdo	Indiferente	Desacuerdo
1.-Me gusta participar en la clase de inglés.			
2.-Entiendo todo lo que la profesora dice.			
3.-Me da vergüenza hablar en público.			
4.-Generalmente hablo en clases.			
5.-Me cuesta poner atención en clases.			
6.-Prefiero realizar actividades escritas en inglés.			
7.-No me gusta trabajar con compañeros.			

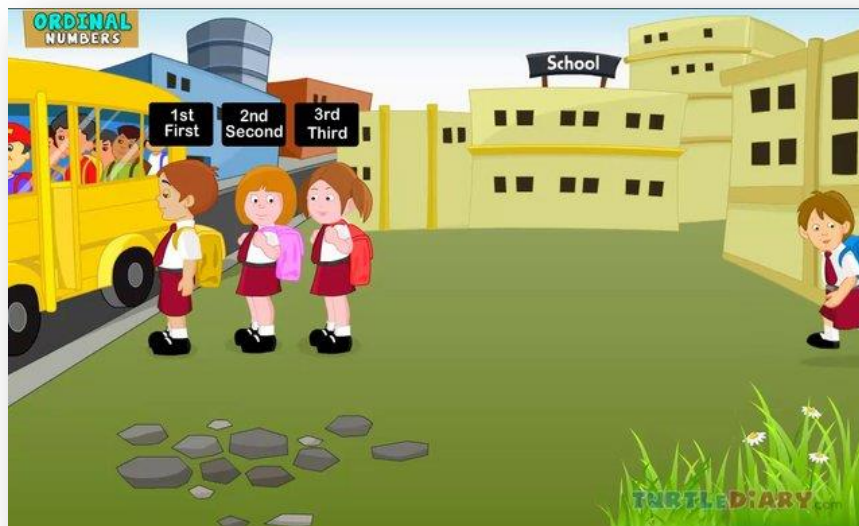
Appendix 2



Appendix 3

Link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_3AI-qNBIE

Images:



Appendix 4

<p>TELL YOUR PARTNERS 4 THINGS YOU DO IN YOUR HOUSE</p>	<p>TELL YOUR PARTNERS 4 THINGS YOU DON'T DO IN YOUR HOUSE</p>
<p>TELL YOUR PARTNERS 4 THINGS YOUR MOTHER DOES IN YOUR HOUSE</p>	<p>TELL YOUR PARTNERS 4 THINGS YOUR MOTHER DOESN'T DO IN YOUR HOUSE</p>
<p>TELL YOUR PARTNERS 4 THINGS YOU LIKE</p>	<p>TELL YOUR PARTNERS 4 THINGS YOU DON'T LIKE</p>

Appendix 5

Sophie Fred Bianca Carl



Robert Anna Harry Katy



Your character is.....!

YES, IT DOES!

NO, IT DOESN'T!

- big lips?
- dark hair?
- a big nose?
- glasses?
- curly hair?
- long hair?
- short hair?

Does your character have...



Robert Anna Harry Katy



Sophie Fred Bianca Carl

Does your character have....

- short hair?
- long hair?
- curly hair?
- glasses?
- a big nose?
- dark hair?
- big lips?

YES, IT DOES!

NO, IT DOESN'T!

Your character is.....!