

How Can the Use of Authentic Materials Foster Second Graders' Communicative Competence in
an EFL Course at a Public Elementary School?

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Abstract

This action research was intended to foster second graders' communicative competence using authentic materials in an EFL context at a public school in Itagüí. Data were collected through a journal, oral presentations, listening activities, and an interview to the teacher. Data analysis revealed that the use of authentic materials had a positive impact on students' communicative competence as there was significant improvement of students' oral production and listening comprehension. Additionally, the exposure to the second language positively influenced the students' confidence to use English in the classroom and increased their motivation. However, some limitations such as time constraints and lack of materials had some negative influence on the results. It would be interesting to explore the benefits of authentic materials in other EFL contexts.

Key words: communicative competence, oral production, listening comprehension, authentic materials

Degree Requirement

This action research project is submitted as a requirement of the Bachelor of Education in Teaching Foreign Languages (English-French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellín, Colombia.

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Preface

After having studied English for four years, I must recognize that I still have some limitations to communicate in the second language. However, the exposure to the language in the United States of America was the best way to improve my communicative competence, especially listening and speaking skills. Consequently, in this action research, I wanted to demonstrate how beneficial the real exposure to the language is to foster students' communicative competence in a context where English is not usually spoken. Thus, taking into account that most of the students in public institutions do not have the opportunity to use and listen to the foreign language every day, I considered that the implementation of authentic materials would be the best strategy to expose the students to English. Additionally, I wanted to create spaces where they could use English as naturally as possible and implement teaching-learning activities with realia to make this experience useful for future situations in which English may be used. Moreover, this research was also intended to demonstrate that the second language teachers have other alternatives, such as authentic materials, to improve their teaching practice and generate a positive impact on students' learning.

Description of the Context

The Institución Educativa San José is an all-girls school located in Itagüí, Antioquia. This public institution serves 1.934 girls from preschool to eleventh grade in two sites. The principal site is currently located in La Independencia neighborhood and the second site is placed in San José neighborhood where the elementary school works. The elementary school has three preschools, three first grades, three second grades, and three third grades. The school mission is to educate people with values and democratic principles in an appropriate environment to strengthen cognitive, investigative, ecological, bilingual, and technological competencies to improve their quality of life.

Additionally, the vision of this school aims to be in 2019, one of the public institutions in Colombia with educational excellence to project development and professionalization in students. Its philosophy is based on the beliefs that the being and the doing are keys for competitiveness. Discipline is also viewed as the basic competence to gain learning, and the main school values are responsibility, respect, love, autonomy, and abundance.

The school population's ages range from five to eight years old. They come from a low-middle class family background. Moreover, one of the main characteristics of the students is that they are city-widely recognized for their ethical behavior and discipline at school. They have also had excellent results in school competitions and the national standardized test, ICFES. The course in which the action research was implemented has forty-two well-behaved and organized girls from six to seven years old. They like the English class and are always motivated to learn; they also enjoy drawing and using audio-visual materials.

The homeroom teacher of second grade is a normal-school teacher with a lot of experience in elementary and secondary school. She holds a bachelor's degree in elementary and special education. In addition, she did a specialization in Latino American literature and she has a master's degree in education and communicative development from Universidad de Medellín. However, she has not been trained to teach English; she uses a book called *Bonny Bonita*, which is a program that the Itagüí administration is implementing to improve English teaching in elementary schools.

Regarding the English class, students have three hours of English per week, and the grammar-translation method is implemented. The school syllabus is also based on three different competences: communicative, organizational, and pragmatic. The main goal is to provide students with the opportunity to use the language; that is why they focus on the communicative approach. Furthermore, the class is supposed to be taught in English to give students the opportunity to be exposed to the real language, which is also considered an instrument of progress and education for life.

Based on national educational policies, the school implements the English teaching in the elementary school to enable the students to interact in different national and international sociocultural contexts, to promote cultural diversity and teamwork, and to understand the world reality. The national policies also suggest using different platforms as *Duolingo*, *My ABC* and *Bunny Bonita* to work with different grades, and the school tries to follow these guidelines to achieve the main objective of English teaching. Finally, based on those objectives, the Ministerio de Educación Nacional suggests implementing task-based learning, project-based learning and problem-based learning to achieve those goals.

Statement of the Problem

Although the English syllabus of the school is framed on the *communicative approach* and the main objective is to allow students to use the language inside and outside the classroom, the reality in this school is different. Based on my observations to these second graders, I noticed that the cooperating teacher implemented some strategies of the *grammar-translation method* in their classes. Considering that the teacher is not trained in English, the whole class was taught in Spanish and translation was the main strategy used to teach English. In order to show evidence of this issue, I collected information from my personal journal, students' exams, activities and homework; instructional material, "*Bonny Bonita*", and online videos used in class.

In the first place, by bearing in mind that the classroom teacher does not have a degree in English teaching, the class was taught in Spanish. The teacher always tried to give her best to provide students with a significant input, but since she does not have the language knowledge to teach the whole class in English, she translated everything into Spanish. As I registered on my journal on July 19th, even though the girls had already understood what the teacher had said, they were asked to translate everything into Spanish: "Good afternoon", in Spanish is "Buenas tardes", "How are you today?", "¿Cómo estás hoy?". Therefore, the students did not make any effort to understand the language.

In the second place, another important aspect to mention is the fact that besides being learning to write in Spanish, students are being encouraged to learn to write in another language. I could analyze some students' exams, activities and homework where all the instructions to complete the tasks were in Spanish, and the students had to translate the content. I could also

notice that when the students were exposed to written activities their frustration was evident. For instance, in the grammar exam done on August 14th, I observed that two or three students wrote their answers in Spanish with some spelling mistakes. In addition, one student was so frustrated that she was not able to do the exam; she started to cry and said that English was extremely difficult. After many explanations, she calmed down and started to do the exam, but she could not finish due to lack of time. I do not think students should be taught grammar rules at this stage, as they are in the process of learning this component of the language in Spanish, too.

Additionally, the school suggests the teacher using a book called *Bonny Bonita*. This material includes videos, books, flashcards and workbooks for each student, but this material uses translation to teach vocabulary and rules in English. The teacher used this book almost all the classes to do different written exercises and assigned those exercises as homework to promote independent work in students. The book presents the vocabulary using pictures, but also the words in Spanish. For instance, the first video shows some phrases in English, and then in Spanish: “Good morning”: “Buenos días”, “How are you?”: “¿Cómo estás?”. I am concerned about the effectiveness of this methodology because I have noticed that the use of translation in class is hindering the opportunity for students to be exposed to real language and to use the language inside and outside the classroom as the syllabus of the school establishes.

It is also important to highlight that although listening and speaking skills are not worked frequently in this class, the teacher showed a video about the animal habitats on September 4th. The video did not have any kind of sound, just pictures and many sentences that students were supposed to read. I observed that students could not understand the video because of the complexity of the sentences. I consider that videos are a good tool to teach English because they supply the students with audiovisual opportunities to be exposed to the language, but I also think

that videos should be carefully chosen considering the students' age and level to provide them with enriching input to understand and learn the language. I believe that if students do not understand what they are listening to, they are not learning because what is not understood, it is not learned.

Finally, I would like to explore more deeply the idea that in the learning process, the first abilities that children should develop from the very beginning are speaking and listening. Students should have the opportunity to be exposed to the language using English the whole class and focusing only on speaking and listening skills that develop their communicative competences in a fun and stress-free way.

Theoretical Background

Based on my background knowledge, to become a competent speaker of a language, it is essential to develop the ability to understand the information that we are being transmitted as well as the ability to respond to what we are being asked. By bearing in mind that the use of instructional materials plays a crucial role in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, for the implementation of my action research, I will use authentic materials to foster oral communicative competences. In the following lines, I will refer to the theoretical concepts that underlie my action research. First, I will define the concept of communicative competence to subsequently finish with the concept of authentic materials.

Communicative competence

Communicative competence is a concept that has been widely studied by several theoreticians. In Canale and Swain's work (as cited in Bagarić and Mihaljević, 2007, p. 96), communicative competence is the combination of an underlying system of knowledge and skills

which allows users to communicate. Although this concept is known as communicative competence, Bachman (1990) introduced a new model to refine it: communicative language ability (CLA), and he described it as the knowledge and ability to use language in an appropriate way for communication. According to this author, CLA includes three different components: language competence, strategic competence, and psychophysiological mechanisms. In this line, this author also defines language competence as the process of comprising a set of specific knowledge components that are used to communicate information through language (p. 84-85).

On the other hand, through the virtue of defining communicative language competence, the Common European Framework of Reference for Language defines communicative competence as the synthesis of all knowledge, characteristics and skills that allow a person to act using the specific linguistic means that are available: this competence comprises several components as linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic. Linguistic competence is defined as the knowledge of the lexical, phonological and syntactic features of the language, and the ability to use them to formulate well-formed and meaningful messages (CEFR, 2001). Two important components of this competence are grammatical and phonological competences.

Grammatical competence was also developed in Canale and Swain's work (as cited in Bagarić and Mihaljević, 2007, p. 97) who defined it as the process of mastering verbal or non-verbal linguistic codes such as lexical and morphological knowledge, as well as syntactic, semantic, phonetic and orthographic rules. Considering that this study was intended to foster oral communicative competences, this grammatical component is essential to teach accurate forms of simple sentences, particularly in this context. It is important to clarify, however, that this action research did not explicitly focus on teaching specific phonetic, phonological, grammatical or orthographic features of the language, but they were implied because the students were exposed

to real language through authentic materials. Additionally, taking into consideration that most of the public institutions have the CEFR as a reference to design their English syllabi, it is very important to know the definition that this source gives to grammatical competence:

“Grammatical competence is the ability to understand and express meaning by producing and recognizing well-formed phrases and sentences in accordance with these principles” (CERF, 2001, p. 113).

As mentioned above, to be a competent speaker of the language, it is essential to develop a phonological competence as well. Several authors have studied the main components of this competence: phonetics and phonology. For example, Yule (2010) defines phonetics as the study of the characteristics of speech sounds such as articulatory phonetics, acoustic phonetic and auditory phonetics (p. 26). According to the CEFR (2001), the phonological competence is the ability to comprehend and produce the distinctive sounds of the language such as the sound-units, the phonetic composition of words, the sentence phonetics, the sentence stress and rhythm, and the intonation and phonetic reduction (p. 116). In relation to phonological competence, it is important to highlight that during the implementation of this action research, the learners were asked to focus on specific phonetic aspects such as sounds, words and sentences to enhance their listening comprehension from the beginning in order to approach them to a new sound system. However, they were not asked to learn phonetics explicitly such as symbols or articulation features.

Authentic materials

Authentic materials is a concept used by second language teachers whose aim is to improve learners' English performance using appropriate materials in the classroom. Although this concept is currently well-known in different educational fields, several professionals do not

know its real meaning. Thus, keeping in mind that this action research used authentic materials to foster oral communicative competence, it is critical to know how this term is defined by different researchers.

According to Harmer (2001), authentic material is language that was not designed for foreign students. It is the natural and “real” language used by native speakers that learners will be exposed to and will encounter in real life situations. These materials are not created for pedagogical purposes; they use real life language, fluency, slang and other language characteristics used by native speakers, every day; these materials differ from others because they do not use only specific vocabulary, grammar or structures, they use the language they need to communicate something using different structures or vocabulary (p. 205). Similarly, Benavent and Peñamaría (2011) state that these authentic materials are essential for communicative purposes considering that they provide learners with an immersion environment and a realistic context related to their needs (p. 89).

Additionally, several researchers have referred to the different benefits of using authentic materials in foreign language teaching. According to Al Azri and Al-Rashdi (2014), authentic materials support students’ learning of a foreign language by allowing them to use the language they are learning in similar situations they will face in real-life circumstances (p. 252). Moreover, Philips and Shettlesworth (1978), Clarke (1989), and Peacock (1997) (as cited in Richards, 2001) assert that using those materials in our classrooms offers some advantages: the positive effect they have on students’ motivation, the information about the target language that the students obtain, the exposure that students have to the real language, and the connection that they have with students’ real needs (p. 253).

Although the advantages of using authentic materials in the foreign language classrooms outnumber the disadvantages, Richards (2001) states that those materials could also contain difficult language and unnecessary vocabulary, and if they are beyond students' level, they could generate misunderstandings among students and teachers. Likewise, Al Azri and Al-Rashdi (2014) affirm that it is crucial that teachers select the materials according to the students' real level or abilities; otherwise, they could demotivate them to learn the foreign language due to their complexity.

Realia.

Although the term "authentic material" was previously defined, it is important to define the term *realia* in this action research. Different professionals have studied authentic materials, and they have concluded that realia is a type of authentic material. According to Berwald (1987), realia alludes to real objects, specimens, and artifacts from a specific culture. Even though this kind of authentic material was not created as instructional and pedagogical tool, they can be used in foreign language teaching. For example, realia as maps, schedules, notices, and photos does not contain much language, and could be useful to teach vocabulary and reinforce grammatical structures. In addition to this, it can reduce potential frustration and facilitate the simulation of real situations that expose students to real life (p.3-5).

In the same line, Harmer (2001) elaborated on the positive impact that the use of realia has on teaching practice. He argued that realia or "real" items are useful for teaching the meaning of words to beginners or children, they are intrinsically motivating, and provide opportunities to use the language in communicative activities inside and outside the classrooms (p. 140). Furthermore, there are several studies related to the use of authentic materials to foster or enhance language communicative competences. Castillo, Insuasty, and Jaime (2017)

conducted a quasi-experimental and descriptive-qualitative research study focused on the impact of authentic materials and tasks on students' communicative competence at a Colombian university. The participants were part of an A2 level English course and belonged to different socioeconomic backgrounds; they were divided into two groups: the control group A and the experimental group B. The authors intended to evaluate the effectiveness of using authentic materials and tasks to improve students' development of communicative competence. They also aimed at providing the English language teaching community with further understanding about communicative English language learning experiences in foreign contexts (p. 90).

The authors found that the use of authentic materials in both groups had a positive impact in terms of their proficiency enrichment, and the complexity of the language learning process that goes beyond the use of a single method or variable (p. 102). However, the impact was not only on the students' communicative competence, the experimental group teacher expressed that this type of material had a positive impact on her teaching practice as well. She highlighted the variety of authentic input that allowed her to implement authentic tasks and activities to promote the use of the language in the classroom. She finally stated that these activities also promoted the participation of the learner in activities as oral reports, oral presentations and social activities. Thus, this empirical research showed that the use of authentic materials has a positive impact on both students and teacher's performance.

Research Question

How can the use of authentic materials foster second graders' communicative competence in an EFL context at a public elementary school?

General objective

To foster communicative competence through the use of authentic materials.

Specific objectives

To examine the impact of using English only to expose learners to the foreign language and develop communicative competence.

To evaluate the usefulness of real-life videos to develop learners' oral comprehension.

To explore the effectiveness of real-life pictures as a strategy to develop oral production.

Action Plan

As mentioned above, the communicative competence is one of the goals of the institution, but the instructional approaches that are being used are hindering the opportunity for learners to have a real contact with the language that they are learning, and the possibility to use and practice the language inside and outside the classroom. In order to reach this objective, I will implement some actions during the development of my research.

On the first week, I will socialize the research proposal with the learners, their parents, and the cooperating teacher (CT) to inform the purpose of the research, the main characteristics of the implementation, and the activities and materials that we might need and use to carry out the project, satisfactorily. After that, an informed consent will be signed by parents, the cooperating teacher, and the school principal on the second week to ask for permission to develop those informed strategies in the English class. In addition, another important strategy that will be developed throughout the semester is the class observations and reflections on my personal journal. This journal will be used to have evidence of the impact that the strategies have on the learners, and how those strategies contribute to achieve the research objectives.

On the third and fourth week, I will review the "Plan de Area" in order to start planning the classes. It is very important to examine the content that the English syllabus establishes to have an appropriate sequence of topics. Thus, after selecting topics and having explained the first

topic, three different activities will be done from the eighth to the fourteenth week. Firstly, the learners will bring some real pictures of them to design a poster to make a presentation. This creation stage will be done on the eighth week, and we will make the presentations from the eighth to the fourteenth week. Two learners will be in front of the class, and they will describe the pictures in a freeway using the vocabulary learned in class. At the same time, I will record some learners' presentations to collect and analyze data to examine the result of the activity. After that activity, the learners will bring some pictures of their families the twelfth week and they will design another big poster using the pictures. Those posters will be used to make another oral presentation, which will be carried out on the thirteenth and fourteenth week. The learners will describe their family members using the vocabulary such as clothes and body parts, and I will record some learners' presentations again to collect and analyze data. The learners for these recordings will be two learners with a good performance in the English class, two learners who have difficulties with the language, and two learners with a low performance in the class. The purpose of these activities is to use real-life pictures to motivate learners to speak about their real family and to use the content taught in class.

Additionally, I will use real-life videos about personal description, which contain vocabulary as the clothes, the body parts, colors and personal information for listening practice in the classroom. The first listening activity will be carried out on the seventeenth week and the class will have a pre-listening activity as a strategy to facilitate understanding of learners. After that, the learners will listen to the video twice and they will answer some general questions related to the vocabulary taught. In addition, I will do two more activities to practice listening skills, so two videos will be used to complete two worksheets with different activities according to the level of the learners. These activities will be carefully chosen to achieve the main goal,

which is to foster learners' listening abilities. Moreover, I will take six of those learners' worksheets to analyze results and verify whether the listening objectives were achieved. These worksheets will belong to the same learners previously selected.

Finally, I will interview the cooperating teacher on the seventeenth week to know her perspective about the actions taken during the semester, and to analyze their answers to compare them with my perspective about the results. Thus, from the sixteenth week to the nineteenth week, I will analyze all the data collected to report the results on my final writing project, and also to make the final presentation on the last week of the semester.

Development of Actions

In the following lines, I will describe the actions that I implemented to foster second graders' oral communicative competence. First, it is important to highlight that some adjustments were necessary because of curriculum changes at the institution. However, most of the strategies planned were carried out: the socialization of the action research, the writing of the teaching journal, the oral presentations, the listening activities, and the interview to the CT.

In order to start the implementation of the action research, I socialized the proposal with the students' parents and the cooperating teacher to inform the purpose of the research, the main characteristics of the implementation, and the activities and materials that we could use. This socialization was done on February 2nd, and 22 parents attended. They all expressed their expectations about this project, and we had some agreements about materials, the use of English, the use of Spanish in general, and finally, they signed the consent form. At the same time, on February 5th, I started to write some relevant descriptions of the classes and my own insights about them on my teaching journal.

Additionally, on January 24th, I organized the language content into topics and started planning the classes. Based on the content, two oral presentations were made in order to explore the effectiveness of using real-life pictures to develop students' oral production. The first presentation was done on March 21st, and it was about their favorite animals on the farm, which was a change as I mentioned above. They brought some pictures of real animals to describe them, and the six participants selected as focal cases presented their favorite animal in front of the class. Even though only six students were recorded, all the students did the activity in pairs, and I monitored the process. Additionally, the second oral presentation was done on April 4th, and the same students presented their favorite sea creature. I brought the pictures of the real sea animals this time, and the students had to choose one to describe it. This activity took part in excellent conditions and the other students paid attention to their classmates' presentations.

On the other hand, in order to evaluate the usefulness of real-life videos to develop oral comprehension, I did two listening comprehension activities in which all the students in which were involved. However, only the activities of the focal cases were selected to be analyzed. The first activity was done on April 11th, and I used a real-life video called: *Miley Cyrus how many pets do I have?* which was played seven times. The students had to highlight the name of the animals they listened to on the list they had already done on their notebooks. Although there were some interventions of the CT to ask for some notebooks, the activity was carried out successfully and all the students did a great job. The second listening activity was carried out on May 16th, and I used a real video called: *Comfortable: 50 People 1 Question*, and it was played three times. The students had a worksheet where they had to match the right answers with the right images of the people from the video. Additionally, I would like to mention that this time the environment was not appropriate to apply a listening exercise, considering that the CT allowed

another second grade to be in the classroom at that time. Thus, eighty students were in the classroom, and the six participants selected as focal cases were in the middle of all those students.

Finally, I conducted an interview to the CT as additional evidence to include a different perspective of the implementation of my action research in this grade. This interview was conducted on April 30th, and it was recorded on a cellphone to be transcribed and later analyzed. The CT was direct and clear, and she answered only the questions that I asked for. She also seemed to be comfortable and sure of her answers and perceptions about all this process. Thus, I closed the process of data collection and implementation of my action research in this grade.

Findings and Interpretations

Data analysis is an essential step in the action research process to present the results in a clear and organized way. According to Burns (1999), it is the moment to show the assertions and statements that emerge from the data (p. 153). In this section, all the process of data analysis obtained from the teaching journal, the interview to the cooperating teacher, two videos of the students' oral presentations, and two listening activities will be described.

To begin with this process, I organized the information obtained in different folders on Drive. In this respect, Saldaña (2009) states that the data to be analyzed can consist of interview transcripts, journals, and authentic materials such as photographs and websites (p. 3). Thus, I started analyzing my teaching journal and the CT interview. First of all, I started reading and coding my teaching journal, simultaneously. This author also affirms that the coding process can range from a single word to a full sentence (p. 3); therefore, I wrote a variety of codes from short phrases to simple sentences. Similarly, I transcribed, read and coded the CT interview, taking into account the most important aspects to answer my research question. Afterwards, I classified

all the codes in a different document, and I divided them using different colors according to their similarities or related characteristics.

According to Saldaña (2009), “Coding is thus a method that enables you to organize and group similarly coded data into categories or “families” because they share some characteristics (...)” (p. 9). In this manner, I selected all the codes with the same color and analyzed all the similar characteristics. After the analysis, five categories and two subcategories emerged from the data. To continue this process, I transcribed the two videos to compare them and facilitate the analysis. Then, I analyzed the transcriptions of the videos to observe how many times Spanish was used in the two presentations, and with those results, I designed a comparative graphic in Excel. After observing the use of Spanish and noticing evidence of improvement, I read the transcriptions again and coded them. This coding process was similar to the one I followed with the teaching journal and the interview, and the same categories were used.

Finally, the two listening activities were analyzed using a quantitative method, and two graphics were designed in Excel as well. By taking into account that these listening activities were designed to identify specific words using real videos, the graphics were focused on the numbers of the right answers that the students had in both activities. In the first listening activity six students were involved, and in the second one only five students did the exercise because one of the girls was sick. In the following lines, I will present the main findings obtained after analyzing the data collected for my action research.

Positive Impact of Authentic Materials on Students’ Communicative Competence

According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (2001), communicative competence is the ensemble of all knowledge and skills that allow people to communicate accurately using the linguistic resources they can find. In addition, Harmer (2001)

defines authentic materials as the language used by native speakers in which the students will find real situations they may face in the future. These materials were not designed for pedagogical purposes and they do not contain specific language structures (p. 205). Based on this information and the evidence that I obtained after the implementation of my action research, I can affirm that the use of authentic materials had a positive impact on second graders' communicative competence. Evidence of this is what I registered in my teaching journal on March 26th when the students showed significant improvement in their communicative competence by participating in class using English. After a listening activity, using a real video, I wrote that the students were motivated, and their oral communicative competence and listening skills had improved. This impressive improvement was revealed in many ways also registered in my teaching journal. For instance, on April 2nd, after another listening activity in which the students had to comprehend vocabulary of animals from a real video, I also wrote that they even understood the quantity of animals and they pronounced them well.

Although I could refer to many examples to support my assertion, I would like to mention one specific event in which realia was implemented and its positive impact on students' communicative competence was evident. On May 2nd, I wrote that even though I had not used any real-life video to teach the vocabulary, and I had to use my own body as a resource, the impact on students' learning was positive as well (Journal). In addition to this, the cooperating teacher's perspective was considered. She could also observe the positive effect that the use of those materials had on the students' communicative competence because in the interview¹, she

¹ The information obtained through the interview was in Spanish. In this paper, it is translated into English.

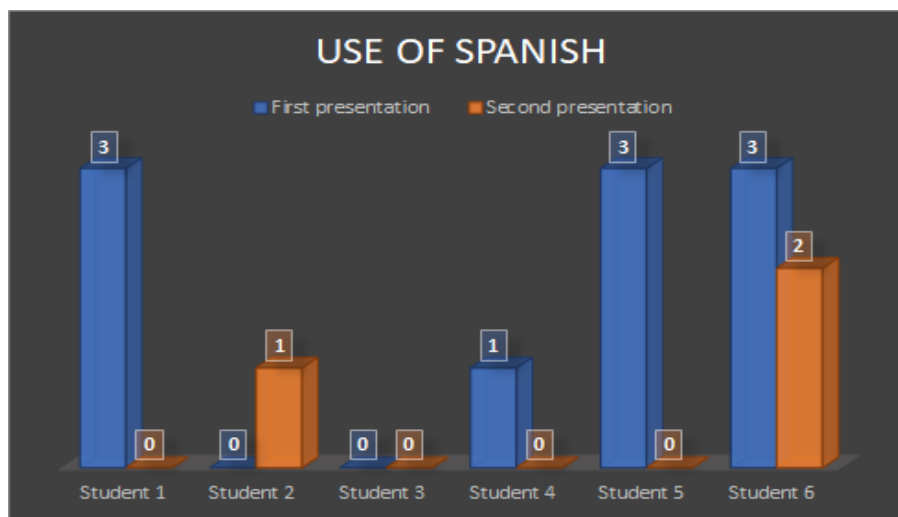
affirmed that the students' oral production improved considerably because they could speak more confidently, and they could also understand the meaning of words used in context.

Improvement of students' oral production through real pictures.

As mentioned above, data analysis showed a positive impact of authentic materials on students' communicative competence. Now, it is important to specifically refer to the improvement of students' oral production through real pictures: realia. Berward (1987) affirms that realia refers to real objects such as maps, notices, and photos that were not created for pedagogical purposes. Although these materials do not have much language they can be used to teach vocabulary, grammar and to expose students to real situations (p. 3-5).

Considering that realia was used several times during the classes, its positive effect on students' oral production could be observed. An example of this was the improvement of students' oral production using real pictures of animals in the two oral presentations made at the beginning and at the end of the term. After analyzing the videos, the most relevant evidence was the significant reduction of Spanish use to describe their favorite animals. As it can be observed in Figure 1, in the first presentation, most of the students used Spanish to describe their favorite animal. However, something important to highlight is that the students did not use Spanish to say the vocabulary learned in class. For example, on March 23rd, I wrote in my teaching journal that the students had not used Spanish to say something that they had learned in the course. Additionally, in the second presentation, it could be observed that most of the students reduced the use of Spanish completely. This is evidence of improvement of students' oral production using these pictures as a pedagogical instrument.

Figure 1. Use of Spanish



Improvement of students' listening comprehension through real videos.

In the same line, this action research also showed some improvement of students' listening comprehension using real videos. This improvement can be observed in Figures 2 and 3. For instance, both listening activities were carried out in similar conditions; although they were applied in the same classroom and with the same resources, the environment was completely different. In the first activity, there were a few interruptions, the video contained complex language structures, and the activity was designed taking into account the students' level. Considering that the students had different levels, the results of this first activity were positive to support the students' improvement in their listening skills. As for the second listening activity, the conditions were totally different: there were more students, more interruptions, and fewer opportunities to listen to the audio. As figure 3 shows, the results of this activity were not better, as expected. However, I considered that the results were positive considering the negative conditions already mentioned.

Figure 2. First listening activity

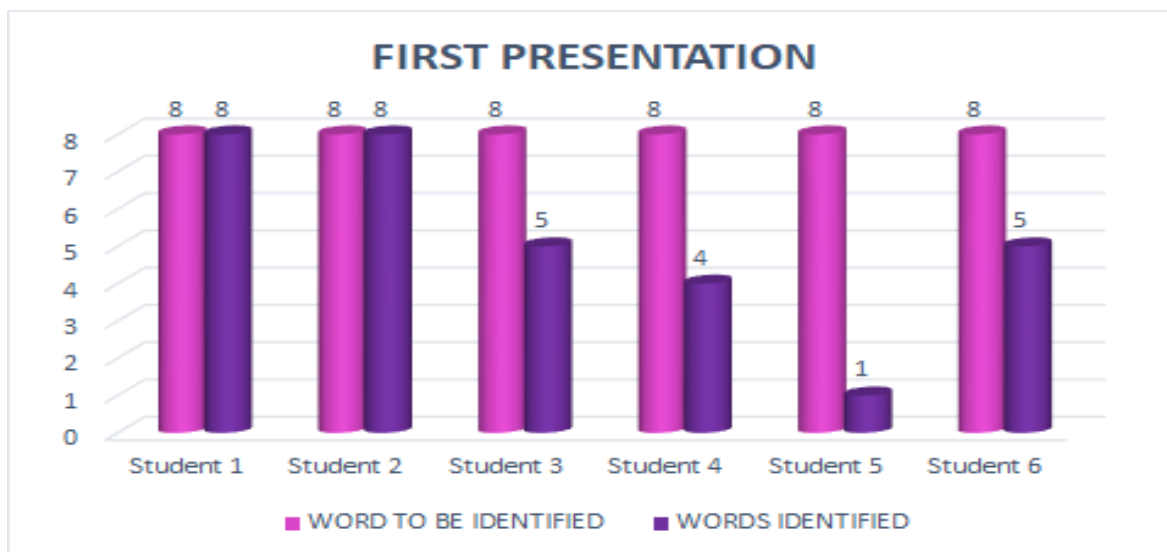
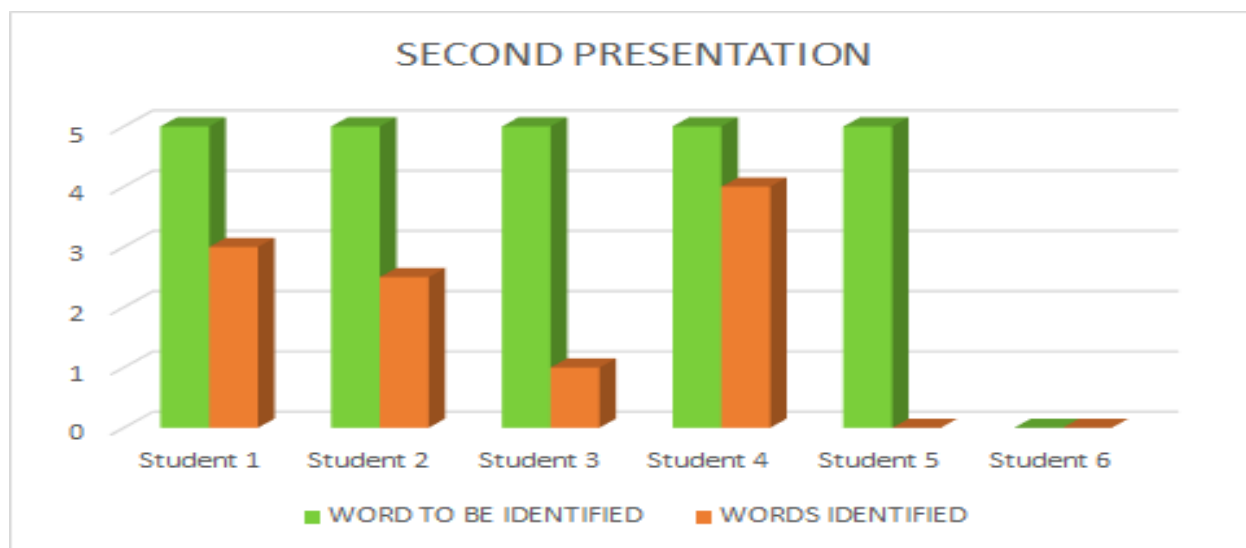


Figure 3. Second listening activity



Positive Impact of using English only in the classroom

Bearing in mind that one of the characteristics of the authentic materials is the opportunity to expose students to real-life situations (Hammer, 2001), English was used in the classroom all the time. Along the term, the students were exposed to the second language in

every session through videos, books, pictures, and games. However, the most relevant exposure the students had to the target language was the use of only English by the teacher.

I must admit that I underestimated the students at the beginning, and I was concerned about the use of only English in the classroom; surprisingly, the results were very positive. The students showed an impressive positive attitude towards English use along all the sessions, and that produced a positive impact on students' confidence to use English. For example, on February 12th, after explaining the topic using the language all the time and showing a real-life video, I wrote in my teaching journal that the students used more English in that activity and asked for the meaning of unknown words. I consider that the use of English in the classroom encouraged the students to use it and increased their confidence to say phrases or simple sentences in the second language frequently. Furthermore, this exposure to English created a space where the students could have contact with the real language they were learning, which had a significant impact on students' proficiency. As evidence of that, on March 26th, I wrote that they students did not have any negative attitude to the use of English and real-life videos in the last sessions (Journal).

Additionally, in the interview, the CT expressed her opinion about the use of only English in the classroom. She said that the idea to use only English in the classroom was positive because the students had the opportunity to listen to it all the time. Considering that the teacher knew the language and could use it with accuracy, they could also get familiarized with the second language and have better opportunities to learn it (CT interview).

Positive effect of authentic materials on students' motivation.

Considering that this action research did not intend to observe the impact that the use of authentic materials had on the students' motivation, this aspect could be considered as a relevant

finding. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, Philips and Shuttlesworth (1978), Clarke (1989), and Peacock (1997) state that one of the advantages of using authentic materials in the second language classrooms is the positive effect that those materials have on students' motivation (p. 253). In this action research, it was revealed that the students' motivation increased using those materials in the classroom. This positive impact could be evidenced in different scenarios.

Based on the data analysis, it can be affirmed that the use of authentic materials such as videos, pictures, and realia significantly increased students' motivation to learn English. Evidence of this is that at the beginning of the year, the students were very shy and their participation in the class was very low. However, after some sessions, I could observe how engaged they were in the class dynamics. On February 5th, I wrote on my teaching journal that using a video, I observed how encouraging it was for the students because they wanted to watch it again and again, and they even asked if they could bring vegetables to make their own salad in the classroom (Journal). Bearing in mind that this video was carefully selected and had a specific purpose, the students understood the main idea. They could observe from the video an example of what they could achieve using English. On February 7th, I highlighted how successful this activity -make their own salad- had been because they were really motivated (Journal).

To conclude, I consider important to mention some limitations that I found in the implementation of this action research. Although all the students had an excellent performance and a respectful and positive attitude to the class along the term, the lack of resources and time constraints influenced negatively on the results. For example, the time that I was supposed to teach English in the institution was 3 hours; however, I had just 2 hours or less because of the CT's constant interventions. Additionally, considering the importance of the resources such as a

computer, a video beam, and a speaker to carry out this proposal, the lack of those materials in some sessions was a real limitation. In some classes, I was not allowed to use those resources, and I had to look for other materials to do the activities planned. Nevertheless, I could observe how authentic materials can be used to foster students' communicative competence in the second language classrooms.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of this action research evinced the positive impact of using authentic materials on the students' communicative competence. The girls improved their English level by using realia, real videos and real pictures. That improvement was observed during all the sessions when they used English to participate in class activities and communicate each other using everyday commands. Additionally, the use of realia, specifically real pictures, produced a noticeable improvement of students' oral production. Those pictures were used to motivate students to talk about something real and encourage them to use English as much as possible. They had a positive reaction and reduced the use of Spanish not only in the presentations, but also in the classroom dynamics.

In addition, the use of real videos as a pedagogical strategy also improved students' listening comprehension; that improvement was also evinced during all the sessions when the students responded to all the questions and showed understanding of what they teacher was asking in the classroom. Furthermore, although the results of the listening activities were not the expected because of different external factors, the students showed very positive advances. They understood the main words, and they recognized the vocabulary learned. Moreover, the use of English in the classroom was another strategy implemented, which had a positive and important impact on students' self-confidence to use English. In addition, this exposure allowed the

students to have contact with the real language, which helped to foster their communicative competence. Finally, the use of authentic materials also increased the students' motivation to use and learn English. They were always motivated to use the language as much they could, and they were excited about the next activity because they could use English. The students' participation was always active and enthusiastic in all the sessions.

Reflections

Considering that this research process has concluded, I would like to express my last insights in relation to this experience in which I could grow up as a person and as a professional. In this process, I could learn to manage the time to achieve all the research objectives, and I made a better effort to work responsibly on the teaching journal and lesson planning. Additionally, I was more committed to reflecting on my teaching practice, and I learned to be more patient to deal with all the challenges that I found during this process. Moreover, as a pre-service teacher, I learned that teaching is a dynamic process, and some situations are only learned through experience. Another learning was in relation to students' backgrounds. As a teacher, I could know most of the students' life history; some of them were going through hard times, but I could not interfere because those were family issues. I also dealt with different situations I had never expected, and I had to find a way to solve them in the classroom. This taught me that you are never prepared to face most of the situations that happen in the classroom, but as teachers, we will always find the right way to overcome them.

Furthermore, although I had never considered teaching English to children, this experience was the best decision. I discovered that the best way to leave an important mark in students' lives, as I always wanted to, was to be open to experience different scenarios, take risks, and love what you do. Even though I gained plenty of learning from this experience, some

challenging stages were also found. One of the most challenging stages was when the cooperating teacher interfered in my teaching practice because that affected some processes; I felt frustrated, and I even considered giving up. However, I could overcome this situation and finished it with positive and satisfactory results. In addition, another challenge that I faced was the idea to sacrifice time to spend with my friends and family to be responsible and committed to this action research. For that reason, for those who are going to start this process, I suggest working committedly on their action research and be responsible and patient to face all the challenges that they are going to find in this enriching process. Finally, they must count on their research advisors because they are an important support to do an excellent job; moreover, I recommend them to enjoy and learn from every experience.

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