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**CONTEXTUALIZED MATERIALS TO
CHANGE ATTITUDES TOWARDS ENGLISH
LEARNING**

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Abstract

The current action-research study conducted with sixth graders at a public school was aimed at exploring students' attitudes towards English, after being exposed to context-specific materials in their classes. Data were collected through a research journal, an interview with the cooperating teacher, a focus group, and some survey attitudes. The analysis showed that using context-specific materials may be a good strategy to modify students' negative attitudes towards English learning, in the three dimensions of attitudes: behavioral, affective, and cognitive. It also evinced the importance of the teacher's role regarding cognitive processes, participation, and confidence. However, time constraints emerged as a considerable limitation in this study, an institutional issue that was out of my direct control.

Key words: Context-specific materials, Attitudes, English as a Foreign Language Learning (EFL).

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 Medellin, Colombia.

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Preface

I became interested in materials development at the beginning of my major at the university. There was a certain passion for designing catchy and interesting elements to call my students' attention, and keep them on task. Subsequently, several teaching experiences helped me identify that materials not only needed to be appealing, but they should also represent students' interests and identity. This way, I felt the need to explore my students' perceptions of the world, preferences, and cosmovision to present the language in a more meaningful way for them.

In this study, I decided to explore my students' world and tried to understand what their interests were through a needs analysis and careful observations of what they said and did. During these observation activities, I noticed that students' attitudes changed when I brought certain elements familiar to them to class. This experience encouraged me to explore this topic more deeply in light of the theory related to attitudes and their dimensions. With the results obtained, my interest in the topic was strengthened, and it will probably be the topic of further research studies throughout my career.

Description of the Context

El Playón is an official education institution that offers quality education in preschool, elementary, middle, and technical levels. The vision of the institution is educating respectful, responsible, and creative individuals with the ability to address significant challenges and transform their social realities. By 2025, El Playón School will be recognized for its contribution to the social transformation of the sector, based on the development of life projects that teach values, promote respect, improve school coexistence, academic processes of all students, and favor the formation of labor skills.

In terms of facilities, the school is a three-story building with twelve classrooms in total. One of the main limitations the institution has is internet access; the connection is very unstable in the classrooms, so it cannot be used during the class time. The institution has two teachers in charge of the foreign language area. My cooperating teacher holds a degree in translation, and she is in charge of grades 6th and 7th. The other teacher holds a teaching degree, and she is in charge of the rest of the grades. My cooperating teacher is a translator who graduated from Universidad de Antioquia and has been working at the institution for the last four years. The teachers of the institution are provided with a room equipped with two desktop computers with internet access for academic purposes.

After a document analysis, I found that the institution implemented a survey in 2018 in which they learned that the students of this institution come from low social strata and have a prevailing need to finish high school to get a job, quitting their professional goals. According to the cooperating teacher, many of them come from dysfunctional families, and face complex social realities permeated by violence, drug consumption and distribution. A high level of absences without an apparent excuse is common at the institution. The teacher says that teaching

English in such a complex context is difficult because students have a bad memory and do not retain information.

Teaching in times of Covid-19 was challenging to students, teachers, and institutions in 2020. In El Playón, at the beginning of 2021, classes were under virtual modality, and were reduced to half an hour each. In the second semester of the year, they returned to face-to-face classes, but the groups were divided into two to avoid the contact and spread of the virus. In relation to the syllabus, English is part of the Humanities section. An important feature of the syllabus is the components of the Common European Framework of Reference that are included in it –general and communicative competencies–. In the Humanities syllabus context, they recognize there is a lack of contextualized materials and students show a low literacy level. Regarding English, they also refer to a total lack of interest and improvement in the students' learning processes. It is also mentioned that the approaches used in the syllabus are based on projects, problems, and literature. Each grade is divided into three periods, and the contents are the ones suggested in “Derechos Básicos de Aprendizaje” by the Ministry of National Education.

Statement of the Problem

Materials play an important role when learning a foreign language because students interact with them; that is, students judge whether the content and the resources used are meaningful for their learning process. Additionally, materials cause a first impression on students, and they may be appealing or discouraging to them. At El Playón, students do not seem to be engaged or motivated to learn English during the class time; this might be connected to the apparent lack of contextualization and consideration of students' needs and interests in the materials used in class. In order to have a more content-based class, conducting a needs analysis that considers the students' interests may draw valid conclusions for re-designing the materials

proposed and implemented in class. Moreover, these materials may catch the students' attention and generate positive attitudes towards the English class.

In order to provide evidence of this lack of interest and negative attitudes towards English learning, I took some screenshots of the virtual sessions that took place in the first semester, to demonstrate the grammar-oriented approach used, and the lack of context in the materials. Initially, the screenshots were related to the material presented on the screen and the guides that students must complete to comply with the government's guidelines for pandemic times.

Regarding the cooperating teacher's practices, I observed that the dynamics of the class was mainly teacher centered. In the class of April 6th, as registered in the research journal, the teacher proposed a presentation based on nouns and their types; the students were asked to read some slides and listen to the teacher's lecture about the topic. Subsequently, some students started using the chat for having an informal conversation out of the class context. That behaviour reflected the low level of students' interest in the topic proposed.

Moreover, I had an informal interview with the cooperating teacher to find out first-hand about the process of her students, and some important topics emerged. According to the teacher, teaching values turns into something more important than English. She states that there is an intrinsic lack of interest in this language coming from students; English seems to be something far away from them. Additionally, they do not have the same learning habits that students in the past used to have, such as listening to music and watching television in the foreign language. Regarding materials, the teacher believes that they represent 70% of the students' learning process. Her materials are mostly based on power point presentations and texts retrieved from the internet.

Although the screenshots and the observations registered in the journal and the teacher's perceptions provided good evidence of the problem, I considered it was necessary to ask students about this. I carried out a survey, answered by thirty students, to gather information about the students' perceptions towards English and the materials they usually used in class. One of the questions was about the importance of English in their lives. Surprisingly, 90% of the students think that English is important. Regarding the second question, students were asked about the reasons why English is important for them. Ten students stated that it is important to travel abroad with different purposes, five students stated that it is important to increase their life opportunities, four students think that it is important in terms of better job opportunities, two students consider English important for their academic development, and the rest mentioned other different reasons. The last question was intended to inquire about the topics they would like the teacher to include as part of further classes, some of these topics were considered in classes.

Theoretical Background

I strongly believe that students' attitudes can be a very reliable source to observe how successful the materials and dynamics are in class. If a student does not show positive attitudes towards these aspects, they should be evaluated and re-thought. Next, I will develop the theoretical concepts that guide this action research: attitudes and materials.

Attitudes

Attitudes have been observed widely by authors, but observing them seems to be more practical for research purposes than defining them. In this paper, I will mention several authors, attempting to find a clear common definition of the concept and its possible components. Koballa and Crawley (1985) define attitude as a generally positive or negative feeling towards a subject (p. 2). Brown (2001) (as cited in Getie, 2020) considers that attitudes involve feelings

and emotions directly related to social dynamics and self-relationships in the community (p. 61). Similarly, Ajzen (2005) considers attitudes as a disposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to an object, person, institution, or event. This author states that attitudes are not accessible to direct observation, thus they must be deduced from results that can be measured (p. 3). In this respect, Baker (1992) refers to attitudes as a “convenient and efficient way of explaining consistent patterns in behavior”. In other words, attitudes explain and predict a person’s behavior towards something specific (p. 10).

Attitudes are traditionally considered by Plato (as cited in Baker, 1992) to be composed of three elements: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. The cognitive component is made of

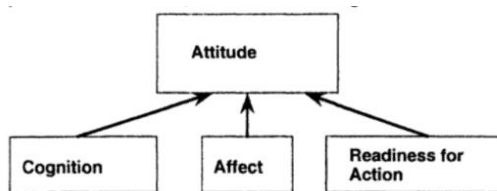


Figure 1.1

thoughts and beliefs that the student has towards the object; in second place, we have the affective component which refers to the feelings towards the object, such as love, hate, passion, and anxiety. Finally, the readiness for action component, which refers to an intended behavior under specific circumstances (pp. 12-13). In this regard, Rosenberg and Hovland (1960) and Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) (as cited in Baker, 1992) organize these components into a hierarchical form that sets them as the foundation of attitudes as a “single construct of attitude at a higher level of abstraction” (p. 13). Ajzen (1988) (as cited in Baker, 1992) reinforces this idea by stating that the presence of an attitude object leads the individual to have a favorable or an unfavorable reaction towards the object. This attitude generates cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses to the object. (p. 13). Figure 1.1 represents the direct relationship between cognition, affection, and behavior.

Regarding the importance of attitudes for learning a language, Koballa and Crawley (1985) state that attitudes have a profound influence on behaviors, while Schibeci and Riley (1986) (as cited in Weinburgh, 2000) state that there is a relationship between attitudes and achievement, and describe that attitudes may influence achievement, rather than achievement influences attitudes. Schibeci and Riley also expand this idea by stating that attitudes influence people's behaviors, mood, and learning, which evidences a clear interaction between language learning and the context where the student grows up. As a consequence, negative and positive attitudes affect language learning.

In the same vein, Baker (1992) states that attitudes are part of a set of variables that help the prediction of bilingual proficiency (p. 3). The same author affirms that attitudes are relevant for language restoration, preservation, decay, or death (p. 9). Likewise, he states that attitudes can be identified either as input or outcome when learning a language, which means that a student can have a positive or negative predisposition to language acquisition, and may also acquire a similar attitude towards the language at the end of the learning process (p. 12).

As a paramount aspect and for research purposes we must consider the correlation between attitudes and achievement. In this respect, Gardner (1985) states that "(...) in comparison with those individuals with negative attitudes, those with positive ones would be more attentive in the learning situation, would take assessments more seriously, would find it more rewarding to simply experience the language, and thus achieve more" (p. 41). This correlation between attitudes and achievement is relevant for my research purposes because it will allow me to observe the effect of materials on my students' attitudes and achievement of academic goals. To wrap up, attitudes will be the core of the data analysis during this research since they will show evidence of students' stances towards the language. Such evidence will be

obtained through the inquiry about their behaviors, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings towards the foreign language, after implementing contextualized materials in class. Observing and analyzing how students' attitudes change along the process will also be important to this research, to determine the extent and influence of materials in students' conception of English as a foreign language.

Regarding attitudes, a study was conducted by Getie in 2020 at Debre Markos, Ethiopia. The context in which this study took place is similar to the one of the current study. The objective of the project was to state possible factors that affect students' attitudes towards English learning in tenth grade, at a public school. The context is described as one in which English is infrequently used, and students have the abilities neither to use it nor to understand it. In addition, various bad attitudes are described as part of the problem, such as lack of willingness, no compliance with homework justified with different excuses, and preference for the native language. Regarding the data collection tools and methods, an interview with several foreign language teachers at the institution, a questionnaire, and a focus group for students were implemented through the sampling technique. The interview inquired about the students' possible interests, teachers' beliefs towards the language, students' attitudes, and students' skills. Besides, the questionnaire was composed of several statements to which students should answer using an agreement rating scale.

This study drew contrastive findings in which students expressed interest in learning English, but a lack of motivation towards the class, and the materials implemented. For instance, around 80% of students agreed and strongly agreed on English as their favorite school subject, while students also manifested the perception of teachers as incompetent. Evidence of this perception is that around 26% of students agreed and strongly agreed on being discouraged and

disregarded by the teachers' practices and methodologies. In contrast, pupils highlighted the good features of the textbooks implemented; they also considered them as a factor that influenced their attitude towards English in a positive manner. Regarding textbooks, around 70% of students thought that they were interesting, and 44% of them thought that they were easy to understand.

Materials

I believe that *materials* are fundamental not only for this research purpose but also for any foreign language learning process. Before going deeper into the characteristics of materials and aspects considered for this research, I will define what materials are and their types. According to Tomlinson (2012) materials are any resource used to facilitate language learning such as course books, videos, graded readers, flashcards, and games. These materials can be *informative* because they inform the student about the target language, *instructional* since they guide the learner through independent practice, *experiential* as they provide the learner with experience of the language in use, *eliciting* because they stimulate the learner to use the language, and *exploratory* because it helps the learner to discover things about the language (p. 143).

According to Tomlinson (2012), developing materials involve the production, evaluation, adaptation, and exploitation of resources aimed at facilitating language learning. He also highlights the number of language courses around the world that are still based on instructional materials (p. 2). For this reason, materials are considered a fundamental component of language teaching and learning processes. Supporting this idea, Richards (2001) (as cited in Tomlinson, 2012) states that instructional materials are useful as language input for students to practice in classrooms (p. 251).

I think that in the dynamics of a foreign language classroom, teachers play a fundamental role when selecting, using, and adapting materials. According to the English Language Centre (1997) (as cited in Tomlinson, 2012) teachers are material developers who are constantly evaluating, adapting, replacing, and finding effective ways to implement them in class. Likewise, a teacher needs to consider the materials as part of a whole. In this respect, Maley (2016) affirms that materials are part of the context in which language learning takes place, which also includes beliefs and policies. Consequently, any material designed, or adapted must go further than the language itself, the approaches we consider more suitable to teach, and the role of the student and the teacher (p. 1). I strongly agree with this author's idea, and that was something that I took into consideration when analyzing, adapting, selecting, and designing the materials proposed for this study.

As a final consideration regarding the materials design, it is necessary to take into consideration a set of principles based on the literature. Tomlinson (2011) (as cited in Maley, 2016) lists a set of principles for this design that are relevant in second language acquisition. Some of these principles state that materials should achieve impact, help learners feel at ease, help learners develop confidence, should be perceived as relevant and useful by learners, expose learners to language in authentic use, provide learners with opportunities to use the target language to achieve communicative purposes, take into account that learners differ in learning styles, should not rely on too much-controlled practice, and should provide opportunities for outcome feedback (pp. 8–23).

Regarding the importance of materials in EFL, Jimenez (2015) conducted a case study in a university in Tunja, Colombia, after identifying the lack of responsibility and engagement of students from undergraduate and extension programs. The action implemented to understand

these attitudes was the use of some materials based on the students' interests and the observation of what reactions could emerge in the classroom. Data were collected through classroom observations, the teacher's diary, surveys, and students' instruments condensed in a portfolio, which encompasses all the classroom work and evidence produced during the research process.

The results of the data analysis showed positive reactions from students towards the materials proposed, and the students' answers pointed out their satisfaction and awareness of the importance of materials in class for their process. They also reflected on their weaknesses and asked for activities to address them; students with positive attitudes and intrinsic motivation remained in the course until the end. In addition, some other feelings were detected among students such as gratitude towards the teacher-researcher, enthusiasm towards the class activities, and value of their own culture.

Research Question

To what extent can context-specific materials change sixth graders' attitudes towards English learning in a Colombian public institution?

General objective

To analyze the influence of context-specific materials on sixth graders' attitudes towards English learning in a Colombian public institution.

Specific objectives

To implement materials based on content related to students' daily basis, interests, and likes.

To observe students' behavioral changes towards English along the research process.

To monitor students' thoughts about English, as reflected on what they express.

To record information about students' feelings towards English after being exposed to context-specific materials.

Action Plan

In order to explore the effect of using context-specific materials to change attitudes, I planned some action strategies. It was important to socialize the proposal with the cooperating teacher, the students, and parents, in order to let them know about the objectives of the research, activities to be held during the process, and the benefits they would obtain out of this implementation, so we planned this activity for the first week. Along with this socialization, and to comply with legal and ethical aspects of the study, I would ask for their consent to participate and analyze the data collected. For this purpose, I asked them to sign a consent form.

Subsequently, I would carry out a needs analysis through a survey during the second week to identify the needs and interests of students regarding the English class. This needs analysis would be used to confirm my previous assumptions regarding students' needs and interests or modify them if necessary. For this survey, I would take into consideration the content proposed by the institution for the third and fourth periods of the academic year. The conclusions drawn out of this survey would serve as a basis for the materials design and adaptation. From the third week and onwards, I would continue with the selection and construction of the materials.

From the very beginning, I would start writing my research journal. This journal was expected to contain descriptions of situations, attitudes, students' responses, and behaviors, in order to do a follow-up of the research process. Along with the descriptions, I would write some reflections focused on answering the research question. This data collection tool would be used for analysis and for triangulation purposes at the end of the semester.

Throughout the semester, the materials previously designed would be implemented in class in order to expose the students to more contextualized and appealing topics and lessons; simultaneously, I would do observations during the lessons that allowed me to describe any students' change of attitudes along the process, based on the materials I was using for the development of the language content. In the third week, I planned a structured interview with the cooperating teacher, intended to inquire about the importance of materials in the learning process, and how materials affect students' attitudes, from her perspective. At the end, I would have another interview with the teacher addressing the same questions of the first interview, but this time I would compare the answers after ten weeks of observation of the research process.

Data collection related to the students' attitudes would go from the third week of the action research to the thirteenth week. I would gather these data through surveys focused on the three dimensions of attitudes: cognitive, affective, and behavioral (see Appendix A). These surveys would continue to be proposed every other week, to complete six. I would consider these surveys as the closure of each cycle, and also as a basis to make changes and adjustments to the materials to be proposed. As another source of data, I planned a focus group to be held at the end, with ten students previously selected, considering attitudes observed during the observations and out of the surveys' results. This focus group was intended to provide students with a space to freely express their perceptions on the project implementation.

Development of Actions

The first activity I did to start the implementation of this research project was the socialization of the proposal. This action was carried out with students and the cooperating teacher, during the first session of the semester. I presented detailed information such as the problem previously identified, the research questions and objectives of the study, the strategies to

be implemented along the semester, and their respective timetable. The students and the teacher seemed to be attentive, although there were no questions or comments after the presentation. Along with this presentation, I handed out 38 consent forms to be signed by the students' parents; nevertheless, I only received some of them signed.

Regarding data collection sources, I implemented a needs analysis survey to identify students' general interests, perceptions, and thoughts towards English learning, towards the class, and their expectations related to English learning. This survey was crucial for the design of the materials proposed along the research process and included questions regarding the three components of attitudes. Through this survey, I found that most of the students think that English is necessary for passing the subject at school, getting a good job, and being accepted at the university. I also found that among their interests in the language, there were video games, movies and series, and surfing the internet.

Additionally, I wrote a research journal from the very beginning, which included a descriptive and a reflective component for every entry. In this journal, I registered some situations of the class related to the research process. This journal was a paramount tool to keep track not only of the students' attitudes towards the materials proposed, but also of my thoughts as a teacher-researcher, and draw important conclusions. This source was reliable since it was solid, and the information was recorded constantly and regularly in a detailed manner.

Subsequently, I implemented one of the most important actions of this study: surveys about attitudes. These surveys were handed out at the end of some classes to have a record of the students' possible changes of attitudes towards English, after being exposed to contextualized materials. They were asked about what they believed about English, how they felt when they had to use English in class, and how much they participated in class. Due to time constraints and

schedule modifications, four surveys were implemented, differing from the initial plan of implementing six surveys as presented in the proposal.

Moreover, the focus group was carried at the end of the semester with one of the subgroups. This action was aimed at examining whether the materials proposed along the semester had some effect on the students' attitudes. They were asked about the materials implemented in light of the principles proposed by Tomlinson (2012), their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors towards English learning

Finally, I conducted a structured interview with the cooperating teacher. I wanted to know her perceptions about the materials implemented, in relation to the students' attitudes. This time, the questions were more open-ended, and the tools were not as structured as the surveys. Regarding the interview, this was carried out virtually and it lasted around 40 minutes; it was implemented during the last week of the semester, as planned in the initial timetable. After their implementation, both the focus group and interview were transcribed to further analysis.

Data Analysis

Data were collected through a research journal, a needs analysis survey, an attitudes survey, an interview with the CT, and a focus group, and analyzed considering the five stages proposed by Burns (2009). First, I assembled the data in order to identify broad patterns, and then begin a more detailed analysis. Then, to reduce the amount of data collected, I coded it to obtain more specific categories and concepts. After that, I compared the data between the different sources in order to identify repeated patterns and provide evidence of validity. Subsequently, I started to build interpretations in order to make sense of the findings by going back to the core concepts. Finally, I wrote the report of the findings along with interpretations, and further research proposals (pp. 157-160).

The responses to the needs analysis survey were organized and analyzed through google forms, which drew tables and average of answers. To analyze the data obtained through the attitudes survey, I created a chart in which I organized the most relevant comments written by students when responding to the open-ended questions; these responses were coded and categorized comparing them with categories previously created, and some others that emerged in the analysis process. Regarding the journal, which contained reflective and descriptive entries, I also coded them, categorized them, and compared them with the other sources. The interview and the focus group were transcribed and analyzed following the same procedures.

Findings and Interpretations

The data analysis of this study showed how effective context-specific materials may become to change students' attitudes towards learning English, considering their three dimensions proposed by Ajzen (1988) and Plato: behavioral, cognitive, and affective. Data were also useful to examine the relevance of the teacher's role in changing the students' attitudes in class, which involved their feelings, beliefs, and thoughts. Finally, limitations, mostly related to institutional factors, were also considered relevant findings in this study. In the next lines, I will elaborate on these findings.

Effectiveness of Context-specific Materials to Change Attitudes towards Learning

After implementing context-specific materials in class following the principles proposed by Tomlinson (2012), I could identify how effective those materials were to modify students' attitudes towards their learning process of EFL, and also towards the language itself. One of those materials was implemented during a class session; I gave them two texts based on two famous Colombian influencers —La Jesuu and La Majo (see Appendix B). In designing this material, I took into account some of those principles: *achievement of impact on students, the*

capability of making students feel at ease and confident, use of the target language with meaningful purposes, and exposure of students to the language in an authentic use. According to the descriptions and reflections of class number 10 recorded in the journal, both characters from the reading were immediately recognized by the students, and their attitudes regarding their feelings, and behaviors, changed towards the class. Most of them were engaged because of the familiarity with both celebrities through social networks, and mentioned several characteristics and aspects of these figures' lives. This change of attitude was confirmed in the focus group, where I asked students about the most relevant and memorable material used in class. Some of them chose this handout and argued that it was their favorite because it was about people they saw on their cell phones.

Another example of how materials can modify students' attitudes was evinced in class 12, in which I proposed a game to start the class. The game was a random wheel in which they had to complete sentences about familiar topics and characters for them. They were expected to use possessive adjectives, a topic included in the course syllabus of the institution. In my research journal, I recorded this moment as follows: "students were engaged and actively participative, apparently because of the characters they saw there, but also because most of the pictures depicted similar contexts to theirs". This game was also designed considering Jimenez' study (2015) in which class materials were selected and adapted after inquiring for students' interests and preferences in real life. The game included famous Colombian and Latin-American singers, YouTubers, amongst others.

Another source that drew relevant information regarding the same material was the surveys about attitudes which was implemented the same day once the class was over. Some answers in the survey about thoughts on the use of English in their daily basis changed in

contrast with the previous surveys. For example, one student said that it was possible to use English because they were learning in class, a second pupil mentioned how the learning process was showing some progress, and a third student said that the topics covered in class were part of their life. Subsequently, during the focus group, students corroborated this by saying how much they enjoyed the moments in which we played games together, and how encouraged and engaged they felt when they did it. For instance, one of the students said that “I loved it when the TV screen was on, and we played together with it”¹. This is evidently a change in students’ attitudes towards their learning process, evinced as part of the affective dimension, and favored by the context-specific materials proposed.

Impact of context-specific materials on students’ behaviors. Apart from the effectiveness of materials, I could not disregard the impact those materials had on students’ behaviors in class. It is important to bear in mind that this is one of the dimensions of attitudes developed by Ajzen (1988) and reinforced by Baker (1992). Changes in behaviors were more evident than in the other two dimensions, and they were constantly registered in my research journal. Such behaviors comprised the willingness to work in class, discipline, attention, and engagement in the activities proposed. In addition, students were asked in both, the survey on attitudes and the focus group, about their behaviors regarding their learning process, and they stated that the moments in which they were exposed to contextualized materials, they were willing to participate because they were familiarized with the personages included there.

Based on the information I registered in my journal, I could identify that students were showing some progress by improving their behavior towards the English class and the language itself. Reflections on the first classes showed how students were reluctant to use English in class,

¹ The data in this study were gathered in Spanish but translated into English by the author.

to repeat, participate, and put into practice the concepts reviewed during the grammar-based moments of class. For instance, class number one implied a brainstorm to create a list of classroom rules. Students were allowed to say the rule in Spanish, then repeat the teacher's translation, and finally take note of them. Students expressed that English was a difficult language, and that they could not even repeat a word because it was almost impossible, as well as taking notes which was also a difficult task for them.

In contrast, in my reflections of class 12, I registered a totally different attitude towards two pictures of two famous celebrities in Colombia by stating that, “students were actively participative. The pictures were familiar to them, not only because of the people there, but also because of the elements included such as cellphones, sneakers, glasses, among other things”. The change was evident not only because of the students’ engagement with the activity, but also because they stopped complaining about the use of the target language in class and started to look for ways to participate in class. Comparing this study with the one carried out by Getie (2020), similarities such as negative attitudes towards the class were evident at the beginning of both studies. In addition, the evolution in terms of behaviors was similar in the two cases; students showed positive attitudes after being exposed to more contextualized materials.

Impact of context-specific materials on students’ feelings. In this regard, the surveys were also paramount for determining students’ feelings towards the language after being exposed to the materials. Some questions in the survey were devoted to the exploration of students’ feelings —shame, confidence, and frustration— when they had to use English in class. In the first survey, regarding shame, 50% of the students answered that they had felt ashamed, or they felt they could be mocked by their partners. Around 30% of the surveyed students said that they felt ashamed because of their lack of confidence and the possibility of making mistakes. Another

20% of the surveyed students said that they were worried about pronunciation issues; they were mostly worried about giving the wrong answer, and not pronouncing well. In relation to confidence, around 72% of students stated that they felt confident whenever the context-specific materials were proposed in class, mainly because of reasons such as knowing about the topics, having watched the characters on TV, and being easier to understand; the other 28% of pupils said that they felt unconfident because of shyness, and not feeling comfortable with the topics. As for frustration, around half of the group said that they felt frustrated when they had to use English in class due to their linguistic limitations (See Table 1).

In the last survey carried out, almost 56% of students answered that they did not feel shame or the risk of being mocked in class. Some of their answers were stated, “Because my classmates do not know how to speak English”, “Because if I make a mistake, the teacher would correct me”; “Now I know more or less how to use English”. The other 44% of students said that they had felt ashamed of the risk of being embarrassed because of reasons such as “I don’t know much about the language”, “I’m afraid of my classmates laughing at me”². Regarding confidence, 89% of students expressed that they felt sure when the materials proposed in class were familiar for them. Some of the reasons provided were as follows: “One doesn’t feel ashamed anymore”, “I feel I will be able to answer correctly”, “This way I do not make so many mistakes”, “I know what I am going to say about them”, “I know about what we are doing, and it is easier for me”, “At least, I know what they are talking about”. The other 11% of students said that they did not feel anything, or they did not like those materials. Finally, in relation to frustration in the last survey, around 67% of students denied feeling frustrated when using English in class, while 33% of them stated the opposite (See Table 2).

Table 1. Affective dimensions of Attitudes

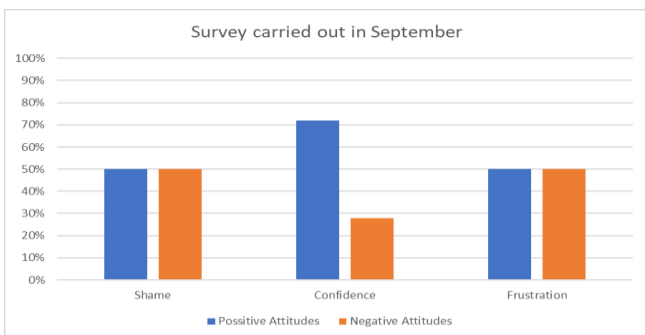
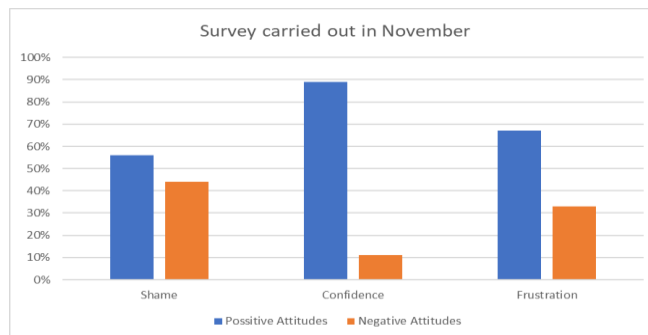


Table 2. Affective dimensions of Attitudes



Similarly, in the focus group, students mentioned how their feelings changed in a positive manner through the use of context-specific materials. One student, for example, stated that she liked the class better because of the new elements proposed there such as famous characters she knew about, another student stated, “I feel that I know all the answers when I see familiar content for me in class”; a third student stated that he felt “identification” with the materials proposed in class because they were familiar.

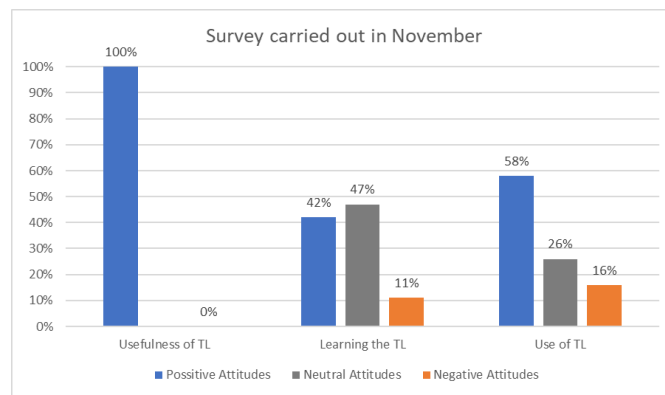
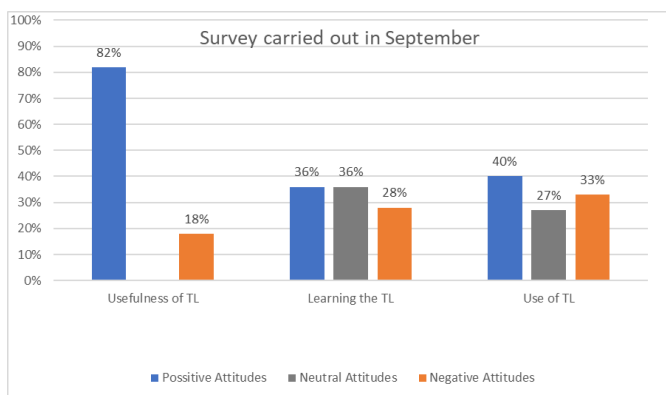
In the aforementioned study by Jimenez (2015), a set of specific feelings were found as well in students after implementing materials based on their interests. In connection to the current study, Jimenez’ also found a feeling of identification on students’ side. For example, one student mentioned how a space they had to interact with two foreigners allowed her to feel that her identity was valued and recognized. In addition, students also felt satisfaction after materials were implemented, enthusiasm mostly when they had speaking activities, and gratitude towards the teacher researcher.

Impact of context-specific materials on students’ beliefs. Regarding students’ beliefs or thoughts about the language and their learning, the impact was evidently positive regarding the usefulness of the target language, and its use in students’ daily basis. To expand on this matter, it was necessary to compare some results from the first and the last attitudes surveys. At an initial stage, 82% of students believed that English could be used by people apart from

foreigners in different contexts, while the other 18% did not agree. In the last survey, 100% of the students believed that many people apart from foreigners could communicate by using English. Regarding the possibility of learning English in the future, 36% of students answered positively in the first survey by stating that they might be able to speak English one day with the help of “those who know”, and with effort, while some other students considered English as something important to communicate in their future lives. 36% of students regarded it as a possibility, and 28% believed they could never learn English. In contrast, in the last survey, 42% of students said that they believed they could learn English someday, while the percentage of students with a neutral standpoint increased to 47%; students with negative beliefs towards learning the language decreased to 11% in the last survey.

In relation to the use of the target language in students' daily basis, the first survey showed that 40% believed that they could, while 27% were uncertain, and 33% had negative beliefs about it. In the last survey, the percentage of students with positive beliefs towards the use of English in their contexts increased to 58%, and students said that it could be used to communicate with others, to travel abroad, to understand video games plots, and improve their grades and social status. Neutral students' beliefs remained the same in terms of percentages with a decrease to 26%, while students with negative beliefs decreased to 16%. In the following tables you can see how this dimension of attitudes changed along the study implementation. It is important to notice that in two of the three categories, a third label was created to represent those students who were neutral towards beliefs about English learning and use (See Tables 3 and 4).

Regarding the focus group, students expressed that it was difficult to say that they would speak the language one day, but at least, they could read and understand. Students said that their further proficiency with English depended on paying more attention to classes and being responsible. One student said that understanding song lyrics would be a good experience for him. In contrast, the cooperating teacher expressed negative beliefs towards her students during the interview, by stating that they are not interested in the language, and it is difficult to find students with such interest in the context where they live. She also referred to the easiness students expect from everything, and certain indifference that students show towards the language arguing a generalized lack of interest on students' side.



The Teacher's Role in Changing Students' Attitudes

The students showed negative attitudes towards other components of the context, and even their daily basis and realities. In these situations, the role of the teacher resulted to be paramount to facilitate the class development. Some of the most relevant attitudes evinced in the research journal were connected to students' cognitive processes, and participation. In relation to the cognitive processes, during the early stages of this study, the cooperating teacher refers to the lack of memory students have regarding the topics learned in class. Paradoxically, this behavior was contrasted several times with the findings recorded in the research journal, where some students showed not only remembering the topics, but also retaining relevant aspects of them

such as their use, application, and simple grammar and linguistic rules. For instance, in class number 9 students showed a good memory while playing a warm-up based on their favorite things in life. Students were participative and remembered concepts and vocabulary from the previous class carried out the previous week. In a class warm-up students had to review a grammar topic addressed three weeks before, and they remembered everything about it.

Regarding changes in attitudes in the behavioral dimension, group work, which did not work as well as individual guidance, was significantly reinforced by some teacher's decisions during class. According to the research journal reflections, students were reluctant to work collaboratively during several sessions due to personal issues between them, differences, shyness, and lack of familiarity with this modality of work. To face these attitudes, I fostered collaborative practices, made jokes, and tried to make my students feel at ease during the sessions.

Participation in class was carefully monitored and fostered by the teacher; students were addressed in a very homogenous way so that everybody had the opportunity to contribute to the class discussions. Regarding this aspect of the classes, students were not reluctant to participate, but reluctant to do it by using the target language. For this study purposes, it is not that relevant to consider the target language as an indicator of a positive attitude since the real aim of the research was to change students' attitudes instead of making them use the language more often in class. However, it is pertinent to mention how students' participation augmented while they were being exposed to the contextualized materials proposed by the study. These attitudes are evident in almost every class registered in the journal, and the focus group showed how encouraged students felt when they knew about the characters and topics proposed.

These situations seemed to be similar to the study carried out by Getie (2020) in which students' attitudes towards the class were mainly negative. Another paramount aspect in which the teacher played an important role was the students' engagement and commitment along with the class activities, mostly the ones that implied reading, writing, and higher level of concentration. Strategies such as the use of rewards, constant revision, feedback, and guidance provided by the teacher were fundamental to improve and maintain students' motivation.

The implementation of this study had several limitations related to several factors involving the institution, the students' initial and circumstantial attitudes along the process. Due to these limitations, some classes were not taught as expected, and others were not taught at all. The institution made some changes to the regular schedule due to restrictions inherent to the pandemic. When those types of constraints emerged, I tried to make up the sessions the following week so that students did not miss any content previously planned and adapted for them.

Conclusions

The aim of this study was to find to what extent context-specific materials could change students' attitudes towards English and the class. After analyzing the data collected and drawing the correspondent findings, I have enough evidence to demonstrate that students' attitudes can be modified in the three dimensions initially proposed by Plato. The change in these attitudes vary from one dimension to the other. Regarding the behavioral dimension, students seemed to be more engaged and were evidently more participative at the end of the implementation. In terms of the affective dimension, students' negative feelings decreased significantly after being exposed to contextualized materials. In terms of beliefs, students were briefly more reluctant to change their minds, but many of them started to change their stands from a negative perspective

to a neutral one. One aspect that could be subject for further research is the connection between students' attitudes and achievement.

Finally, an emergent category along the research process and data analysis drew a very important conclusion considering the role of the teacher during the whole process. Taking into account three of the sources from which data were gathered, I have strong evidence to demonstrate that the role of the teacher is paramount to reduce students' lack of confidence, increase participation, and guarantee a proper flow of the class as expected.

Reflections

This study represented several challenges for me, starting by the restrictions I had at the beginning due to my medical conditions towards the current pandemic situation. Starting this study was an uncertain process, not only because of not knowing if we could implement my study, but also because we did not know when a lockdown was going to emerge. Another challenge was having students so reluctant to the use of English in class, mostly because of their beliefs towards the language. Their social context and realities were shocking at a first moment, and it was difficult to deal with them and have students participate in class. Nevertheless, in the end every experience was enriching and helped me learn many things about teaching, about young students, their thoughts on life, and how much they have to teach us.

To other student- teachers researchers, the only piece of advice I have for you is staying optimistic and always find the positive side of things. The public institutions of our country represent very big challenges in many dimensions, and we as teachers must face them with bravery and determination. Changing realities is part of our role in society, and we cannot forget about it, no matter the context we teach in, the students we have, and the difficulties we have to face.

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Appendix A

Actitudes frente a Materiales contextualizados

Seleccione la opción con la que más identificadx se sienta.

RESEARCH QUESTION: To What Extent Can Context-specific Materials Change Sixth Graders' Attitudes towards the English Class in a Colombian Public Institution?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES: To explore the attitudes that the implementation of context-specific materials can generate in sixth graders of an EFL class in a Colombian public institution.

Teniendo en cuenta los materiales (presentaciones, juegos, textos, imágenes) usados por el profesor en clase, y habiendo participado de las actividades propuestas hasta ahora...

1. Creo que el Inglés es solo para para las personas que quieren viajar al extranjero
Sí
No
2. Creo que algún día podré comunicar ideas simples en inglés
Sí
Tal vez
No
¿Por qué? _____
3. Creo que el Inglés puede ser usado para hablar de temas que tienen que ver con mi vida cotidiana (Lo que me gusta, lo que hago, mi barrio, mi país, costumbres, entre otros)
Sí
Tal vez
No
¿Por qué? _____
4. Participo en clase cuando veo que los temas son familiares para mí (los conozco y puedo hablar de ellos)
Siempre
A veces
Nunca
5. Trato de usar expresiones o palabras que he aprendido en clase, sobre todo cuando son familiares para mí o tienen que ver con mi diario vivir.
Siempre
A veces
Nunca
6. Me muestro atentx a la clase y los materiales que el profesor me propone
Siempre
A veces
Nunca
7. Siento seguridad cuando los materiales presentados en clase son familiares para mí
Sí
No
¿Por qué? _____
8. Siento Frustración cuando debo usar Inglés en la clase o con mis compañeros.
Sí
No
9. Me siento avergonzado o siento la posibilidad de ser avergonzado cuando debo usar Inglés en la clase.
Sí
No
¿Por qué? _____

Appendix B

This is my favorite influencer, her name is la Majo. She and _____ friend are the cardachians. In real life _____ name is Camilo Pulgarín. He is from Medellín, and _____ favorite type of music is electronic music. He lives with _____ dog.



She is La Jesuu. I love _____ channel on Instagram. _____ videos are funny and she records sometimes with _____ brother.

She and _____ family are from Cali.

