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Autora

Ana María Ramírez Rincón

Universidad de Antioquia

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Promoting Critical Thinking through Task-Based Instruction

Ana María Ramírez Rincón

Teaching Practicum and Research Advisor

Sandra Milena Álvarez Espinal

Magister in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

Thesis Advisor

Carolina Herrera Carvajal

Magister in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

El Carmen de Viboral

December 2022

Abstract

This paper reports the process and outcomes of an action research and teaching experience attempting to promote critical thinking through Task-Based Instruction in second-grade students. The project was developed with a group of 28 students in the EFL class at a public institution in La Ceja, Antioquia, Colombia. Data gathering instruments included students' survey, journal entries and students' artifacts. Findings referred to students' development of critical thinking and students were encouraged to become agents of change, the implementation of contextualized tasks provided positive learning experiences and fostered interaction among students, other language learning cognitive tools were developed and finally, students' behavioral and cognitive processes improved as well.

Keywords: Critical thinking, task-based learning, cognitive processes, contextualized tasks, interaction.

Degree requirement

This action research project is submitted as a requirement to obtain a bachelor's degree in foreign language education (English- French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, El Carmen de Viboral, Colombia.

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Moreover, I am highly thankful to the teachers that I worked with in my entire career, but primarily my teaching practicum and research advisor, Sandra Álvarez, and my thesis advisor, Carolina Herrera. Sandra was not only my advisor, but also, she became my additional bracket. She was always kind, patient and understanding, her support made the practicum stage easier. Also, Carolina's help was key in the process of writing my thesis. Her observations really contributed to delivering qualified work.

Finally, I want to fondly thank my classmates Laura Calle, Marisol López and Veronica Giraldo who accompanied me this year and shared experiences of their professional practicum, which nurtured the discussions at the university; I learned a lot from them.

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Preface

I am a student of foreign languages from Universidad de Antioquia, Colombia. I am a teacher interested in human cognitive development from the pedagogical perspective. I felt eager to conduct this research work because of the necessity of putting into practice the knowledge acquired during these years about critical pedagogy in language learning. Also, I saw the necessity of implementing this teaching method given that the school was applying the traditional one. This project was carried out in a public institution situated in La Ceja, Antioquia and I was assigned to implement it with a second-grade group. This paper is mainly addressed to language educators, who seek to improve their teaching outcomes by implementing a more current method that prompts critical thinking in EFL courses.

Ana María Ramírez Rincón.

La Ceja, Antioquia. December 14th, 2022.

Description of the Context

The school where I carried out this action research was a public institution located in the urban zone, southwest of the Municipality of La Ceja, Antioquia, Colombia. It offered education from preschool to high school, divided into two different shifts. The institution aimed at educating boys, girls, and teenagers from a humanistic perspective, developing a scientific, technological, cultural, ethical, and axiological life project based on coexistence and respect for difference.

Concerning the English subject, it had an intensity of two hours a week in grades from preschool to second. The topics of the subject were guided thanks to the syllabus proposed by the institution. Therefore, what the second grades' teachers did together was to select the topics that they considered were achievable for the students in each term according to level A1 and present them through the Grammar-Based Teaching (GBT) approach.

Regarding the participants of this study, the group of second grade had 30 students, 16 boys and 14 girls around 7 and 9 years old. Most of them belonged to social strata number 3, and their English level was A1, according to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference). Regarding the Cooperating Teacher (CT), she holds a bachelor's degree in Primary School Education and has 20 years of experience at the same institution teaching every subject, including English. According to her, the function of the teacher is to work as a facilitator who allows the students to creatively appropriate the culture and the methods to look for and use the knowledge by themselves.

There was a core issue that caught my attention most. I observed that students did not receive enough English input and the material used during the class was non-authentic. Hence,

the students were just focused on repeating instead of relating the topic with their immediate experiences. Consequently, I wanted to apply a more contextualized English teaching approach that help students to address the four skills (reading, listening, writing, and speaking) through meaningful topics linked to their characteristics and background.

Statement of the Problem

When critical awareness is not promoted in ESL classrooms through reflexive tasks, students acquire limited conceptions of how the process of learning contributes to their setting. In this regard, from the beginning of the research process, I noticed that the classes were focused on getting vocabulary in an isolated way and they did not address contextualized facts. Moreover, after six weeks of observations and reflections on the lessons guided by the CT, I grouped these key issues: the relevance of students' thoughts in class, students' engagement towards the English subject, and lack of spaces for reflection (Journal Entry, August, September, October, 2022).

From the first observations, I noticed that the English lessons did not have any space for discussion, even the class content or topics were not oriented towards students' daily situations, thoughts, and concerns. Accordingly, the class needed to change its method to one that matched the context needs; therefore, I looked for a different approach, one which enhanced the exchange of information between the teacher and the students in a way that learning became meaningful and open for discussion in class. This way, students could express their insights and became the only responsible for their process while addressing relevant topics through English language.

Besides, the class did not offer authentic experiences that allow sensitizing students through problem-solving tasks developed in the foreign language. I could see that the classes

were always structured in the same way, and they became monotonous (Journal Entry Observation # 5). First, the students were exposed to non-authentic material, a video, for example, that showed vocabulary related to a certain topic (for example: Farm animals). After that, they repeated the pronunciation and associated it with images or objects existing in the classroom. Finally, they did a practice activity that consisted of coloring, drawing, or pasting things with clear instructions of what they had to do, but without any comments or stimuli. Thus, at this point I realized that children did not feel encouraged and some of them who did were not praised or involved in class activities, in turn classes went dull sometimes.

Additionally, during some lessons, I could interact more with the students, and I realized that they were willing to negotiate, ask and cooperate when necessary. For example, in one class the students were unfocused at the beginning of the class, still, the CT and I tried to calm them down and talk about the disrespectfulness of their behavior and the possible consequences of it; they understood the comments and started to behave respectfully (Journal Entry, September 2022). However, I continued asking myself how to keep the class discipline without intimidating the students but encouraging them to reflect on their behavior.

Finally, I deeply believe that the efforts to provide suitable activities have not been in vain because students were exposed to GBT, which is valid. However, the ESL learning-teaching practice had to be changed through bringing thoughtful topics to class and easing thrilling tasks associated with second graders' background.

Theoretical Background

In this section I will highlight the theory of Task Based Instruction (TBI) from the critical perspective used in ESL classrooms with young learners. I first state the concept of children's critical thinking, Second, I present some advantages and challenges that have arisen from some

previous studies about critical thinking in ESL classes. Finally, I outline the earlier issues from the standpoint of the TBI with young learners and how this approach will facilitate the design of tasks oriented through the critical perspective.

Theorists have many conceptions regarding the promotion of critical awareness in children, but I highlight the viewpoints of three authors who directed important studies in this regard. First, Pham (2021) describes critical thinking as the skillfulness to find answers to problems wisely (p. 5). Additionally, according to Fisher (2005), not only elderly people can think wisely since it grows from childhood. Then, if children have the capacity to analyze situations intelligently, they must be motivated to solve tricky situations. Consequently, Herbert P. (2012) explains that it is possible mostly when adults “take the child seriously, engage them in meaningful conversations, inspire their imaginations, ask them questions that get them to think and so forth”. Along with that, both parents and teachers must contribute to sensitizing children because adult figures influence them a lot.

Critical thinking entails becoming agents of change, which means that students must be encouraged to think of manners to contribute positively to their society (Pineda B., 2004, p. 47). Thus, when children are taught how to apply thinking skills through bringing positive learning experiences to them, they will be convinced to assume more challenging tasks (Herbert, 2012, p. 6). In that sense, learners are not forced to act about something, instead, they must eventually be aware of their role as inhabitants of the world. Similarly, Fisher (2005) highlights the importance of considering the many ways that exist to teach students to think in class and learn; that is what we call learning styles or types of intelligence.

Moreover, Puchta (2012) proposes language and development of cognitive tools and combining the teaching of thinking with language teaching to foster critical thinking in young

learners. He establishes the eight multiple intelligences because “if you work on children’s thinking skills on a regular basis, the development of their thinking skills will also enhance cognitive resources that support the child’s language learning.” (p.15). On the other hand, language and development of cognitive tools include activities such as rhythm and rhyme, images and imaginative thinking, story thinking, humor, and small talk, a model developed by Egan (1997) based on Vygotsky’s work.

Regarding the advantages of including critical thinking in ESL classes with young learners, we can highlight the following: boosting of metacognitive processes, the increase of students’ engagement, and the stimulus of creativity. Meta-cognitive strategies are also included but are not limited to perception, critique, judgment, and decision-making that allow learners to orchestrate and self-regulate their own learning which, according to Pineda (2004), is called self-regulation in thinking what drives students to be autonomous in their learning process (p. 10). Additionally, Puchta (2012) says that questioning students when telling a story, for example, provokes reflections while they remain engaged in the reading (p. 10). One last advantage relates to self-expression and creativity in children; these can be achieved if children are exposed to meaningful language knowledge (Fisher, 2005, p. 90).

Nevertheless, this work entails some challenges that can arise when pursuing the use of previous structures. First, Carter (2020) states that critical thinking skills can be overlooked since teachers are more worried about the structure of the speech (p. 50). This grammar-based teaching method is oriented towards helping students with oral and written language features that do not provide deep understanding of how the language shapes the way one relates with the world. Besides, when teachers pretend to enhance critical mindset, they need parents to support them at home. However, Puchta (2012) explains that some kids do not count on a nurturing environment

that helps them develop their cognitive skills, still, both, students with brain-friendly families and others with none, can profit significantly from reflections discussed in class and move forward in the process of thinking thoughtfully.

Following the steps above, it is necessary to define what TBI is and what it has to do with enhancing critical awareness in kids. Akbulut (2014) describes this approach as a learner-centered approach that sees the language as a communicative tool. In this case, critical related-tasks are goal-oriented activities which involve students in their learning process and allow students to develop their language skills and critical thinking in English learning. That is possible because a TBI provides meaningful communication between students and teachers or between students and other students achieving specific critical-related results. Finally, task-based is also learner-centered in the teaching-learning process (Febianggriani, 2011), which means that what really matters is achieving progress in students and topics aim to contribute to students' lives and context.

In this sense, according to the studies and the theories that support the link between critical thinking and Task-Based Instruction, these are some of the available tasks which can be carried out in ESL classes. First, Puchta (2012) enumerates a variety of options that can be adapted according to the specific needs of students. Among those, we have the activities that suppose making comparisons, categorizing, sequencing, focusing attention, memorizing, exploring space, exploring time, exploring numbers, making associations, analyzing cause and effect, making decisions, solving problems, and creative thinking (p. 17). However, as was mentioned before, the content of these activities is always defined by students' background.

Furthermore, Fúquen and Jiménez (2013) affirm that in the process of teaching-learning a foreign language, "tasks must be interesting, easy, innovative, fun, enjoyable, and cool in order

to foster interaction and cooperative work” (p.148). Therefore, if teachers enable spaces for discussion in class, motivation and communicative skills are encouraged. As a result, students not only learn about language forms, but also, they have fun, socialize with others, and discuss issues close to them all.

In conclusion, TBI drives critical thinking in children throughout the ESL learning process. On the grounds of critical thinking and its features, this hypothesis comprises important advantages, but also challenges that vary according to the circumstances. Even so, what is important is that tasks must enable significant experiences in which the students learn English features implicitly while developing their critical thinking.

Research Question

How to promote critical thinking through Task Based Instruction in second-grade students?

General objective

To promote critical thinking through Task Based Instruction in second-grade students.

Specific objectives

1. To enhance critical thinking through the implementation of meaningful tasks in the English class.
2. To implement Task Based Instruction for the class to be goal-oriented and more related to the students’ school context and personal background.

Action Plan

The objectives of this action research led to accomplish one general action repeated five times working on topics that boosted critical thinking from the learner-centered approach. Each repetition was divided into three stages following the Task Based Instruction cycle. The pre-task stage was where questioning strategies and introduction of vocabulary took place. Later, during the main Task, the students were allowed to put into practice the concepts seen beforehand (individually or in groups) with the help of the teacher. Lastly, in the Post-Task stage, the learners finished with reflection, socialization or a freer activity to close the topic.

Furthermore, data was collected through, on one side, a students' survey which was applied in the eighth week to identify students' ideas and perceptions about the English class. On the other hand, journal reflections and students' artifacts were used during the whole TBI cycle aiming at evidencing what students did during the lessons to compare and to contrast progress, and for me to reflect on the experience as well.

Development of Actions

This section describes how actions, materials and activities were performed aiming at answering the research question. I implemented all the actions considering the topics already planned in syllabus and the suggestions made by the cooperating teacher. Also, I adapted the topics to match to critical-related activities under the parameters of TBI, making sure that every task was meaningful and fulfilled the requirements to be either pre-task, main task or post-task.

Pre-tasks was the first step applied every two weeks, these engaged students in the topics from the beginning. I always brought questions or images to class to raise awareness about the topic and connected the topic to their personal experiences by knowing their perceptions about it. For instance, one of the topics was about families' structures and I opened the discussion by

asking the class different questions, such as “Is there a single structure of family? How many people do you live with? How much do you love your family? Who do you have the best relationship with? and why?”. Another topic was about “Eating healthy food” I had a meaningful conversation with them where I brought two images of people eating well and some others who did not. After that, I asked what they saw in the pictures, what they thought and how they felt about them.

The second action related to the development of the main activity of the cycle, it was normally done with the whole group. The purpose was to straighten vocabulary related to the main topic. I profit from this section by doing different types of exercises, practicing pronunciation patterns, and enhancing writing skills. Also, it was a space where I was open to answer every question that might arise regarding what I had just explained. Some of the activities that we did during this stage were: discussions about families, these were based on a movie that most of them knew, also, they learned the song “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes”, working on jigsaw puzzles, fill in blanks and wordsearch exercises.

Finally, the last action implemented was the post-task stage. At this point, students were able to produce in a written way by doing different activities so they could demonstrate what they learned. Usually, these activities were done individually, on worksheets or in their notebooks to check whether they worked in class or not, as well as to complete the follow-up. The final product chosen to conclude the development of the topics were either handcrafts (creating a monster, follow instructions in English) or writing a short reflection.

During the implementation of these actions, English use was only required to practice the vocabulary worked on in class at specific moments. Spanish use was not penalized as I did not want to show English as a barrier, on the contrary, I wanted learners to feel confident enough to

express their ideas, about the topic in the class. Therefore, I attempted to create a warm atmosphere, so that they could have memorable and positive experiences.

Moreover, I brought to the school the materials needed for the implementation of all tasks. I designed or adapted the worksheets, I provided some others like cardboard, markers, tapes, drawings, images, posters, a computer, speakers, videos, and songs (already downloaded because there was no internet connection either), etc. Additionally, the cooperating teacher accompanied the process by printing every photocopy, hence the students' photocopies bank really helped to reduce costs.

The idea during the whole semester was to expose students to situations that made them think critically about their relationship with their peers inside the classroom and in the school. But, above everything, there were spaces for students to see themselves as citizens of the world and they had the opportunity to discuss issues that they would have to deal with outside the classroom. Also, TBI contributed to organize the sections better and how the data collection tools were connected to the purpose of the project that I did not have to separate different times for collecting data because the students' outcomes were the necessary information, and that made the process more manageable.

Data analysis

The analysis of the data was done both deductively and inductively based on Creswell's principles (1999) and qualitative and quantitative methods were applied. Firstly, some codes emerged from the collected data, and I used them to start the analysis (deductive approach). Then, I took those codes from the data itself to compare them with the theory obtained in advance which worked as the framework that shaped the entire study (inductive approach).

Findings and Interpretation

This study aimed at promoting critical thinking through Task Based Instruction in second-grade students. This section presents and illustrates findings obtained from data analysis which revealed four findings namely: Development of students' critical thinking, tasks that provide positive learning experiences, tasks that encourage the development of language learning cognitive tools, and students' behavioral and cognitive processes. In the following paragraphs I present an explanation of each of them.

Development of Students' Critical Thinking

Considering that critical-related tasks were not developed in this context before, I implemented some strategies to elicit students' critical thinking. I did it by using different questioning strategies, engaging students in meaningful conversations, and boosting questions from them. Additionally, I applied tasks that encouraged students to become agents of change by teaching children to self-regulate and get them to find answers to problems.

Engaging students in meaningful conversations by asking and answering questions.

The first aim of this study was to promote critical thinking through Task Based Instruction in second-grade students which guided questioning strategies as vital to engage students in meaningful conversations from the beginning of every class so that students' curiosity about the topics was also encouraged. However, not only was the teacher in charge of asking questions, but students also developed interest and critical awareness since they seemed engaged in sharing their insights and solving doubts about situations one faces daily.

Data showed that students were eager to ask and answer questions in classes, as reported

in the journal, I expressed that when talking about good and unhealthy food: “many of them raised their hands and said interesting reflections about the importance of valuing the food they have at home and the work that parents have to do to pay for the meal” (Journal Entry, October 4th, 2022). Later, in the survey applied, they reported the aspects that they learned thanks to the reflections done in class, which will help them most in life (Students’ Survey click [here](#)). They remembered every topic, but “the importance of eating healthy food because it is essential to have an accurate development of our body” was, surprisingly, highly repeated, which showed that the discussion about food that took place in class was meaningful and that is why they remembered it.

Encouraging students to become agents of change.

Classes were student-centered, therefore the tasks developed made learners recognize themselves as part of society and think of possible solutions to personal and collective problems. Children were allowed to speak about their life situations and share them with their peers. Consequently, they discussed issues they were already aware of, such as stereotypes about families and physical traits. Nevertheless, they not only expressed themselves but also heeded their classmates’ perspectives, making it possible to come to agreements, gain lifelong learnings and take advantage of this to address vocabulary in English related to the topic.

For instance, in a class, the topic was “I love me.” Therefore, I started the class by reading a story aloud about self-esteem called I Like Me by Nancy Carlson. Throughout the reading, “I told them to reflect about the actions they can do to demonstrate self-love and the positive effects it has in our lives because we can overcome everything in life this way” (Journal Entry, September 20th, 2022). Thus, it created spaces in the class to have conversations about the actions they could take to be more physically and emotionally careful with others and

themselves. Data showed that students learned to start caring for themselves (Narrative, October 25th, 2022), in a personal communication with students when asked to recall what they learned from the class activity they mentioned “*Cepillándose, oliendo bien, comiendo saludable, bañandonos, bañarse para no oler a pescado viejo, peinarnos...*”, “*Cuidar a los compañeros y no pegarles*” and that we should say to ourselves “*Me quiero, me amo*”¹

In addition, students became agents of change in their learning process. Pineda (2004) calls self-regulation in thinking what drives students to be autonomous in their learning process. Thanks to the self-evaluation tool applied in class, students assessed their attitude, discipline, work in class and learnings in class. Some of them were sincere and gave the grade they deserved, different from some others who were not able to or did not want to assign a grade. Finally, everybody got a grade based on what they wrote in their notebooks (see students’ self-evaluation [here](#)). Although, I gave the grade to the ones who did not grade themselves too.

Besides, pupils were encouraged to assume consequences for their actions. Therefore, excellent grades were accepted to cheer them up and bad grades made them reflect to improve discipline in coming events at school. For instance, there was a kid who recognized his good performance in class, and he was not afraid to provide a five to his self-evaluation in the English class. In his reflection he says: “*Yo me merezco un cinco porque le hago caso a la profe de inglés y no interrumpo clase, y porque hago todas las tareas y presto atención*”²

Tasks that Provide Positive Learning Experiences.

Connecting classes, topics and activities with students’ backgrounds and personal interests was paramount to have engaging lessons that were characterized by having interesting, easy,

¹ “Brushing our teeth, smelling good, eating healthy, taking baths, bathing so we don’t smell, brushing our hair...” with others “Take care of our classmate and do not hit them” and that we should say to ourselves “I love me, I love myself”

² “I deserve a five because I listen to the English teacher and I don't interrupt class, and because I do all my homework and pay attention”

enjoyable, innovative, and challenging tasks, as proposed by Fúquen and Jiménez (2013). Due to the execution of such characteristics, the learners were motivated to interact. By including these characteristics in the lessons, students paid more attention in class, resulting in involving, innovative and challenging tasks that provided them with significant knowledge about English close to their daily lives.

Contextualized tasks that foster interaction among students.

Given that Task-Based instruction is learner-centered, tasks were based on their context and personal interests. Consequently, data analysis revealed that contextualization increased motivation since students demonstrated their willingness to interact according to the topics proposed in class. They were excited and prone to work collaboratively on tasks, whether in groups or individually, because the content of both types was not foreign to them, which fostered communicative skills and provoked discussion.

In every class, there was a space to share experiences and thoughts. To exemplify, in one of the lessons when setting puzzles that contained healthy and unhealthy food “they said important expressions related to the food they had to set. For instance, they talked about how much they liked eating vegetables, fruits, soups... and others talked about the frequency in which they eat certain kinds of food” (Journal Entry, September 27th, 2022). They were amazed by the pictures in the puzzles and started sharing experiences, which worked positively because they remained interested in looking for ways to complete every puzzle.

Another day, the topic was “Family Members” and students had to bring a family picture and talk about their relatives to the class. The objective was to identify the different forms a family can have and then represent it in a family tree (see students’ family trees [here](#)). This was an opportunity for students to work collaboratively, given that some of them gave their spare

pieces of paper to other classmates, and they voluntarily helped each other. At the same time, they showed their classmates their work and their relatives.

Interesting, easy, enjoyable, innovative, and challenging tasks.

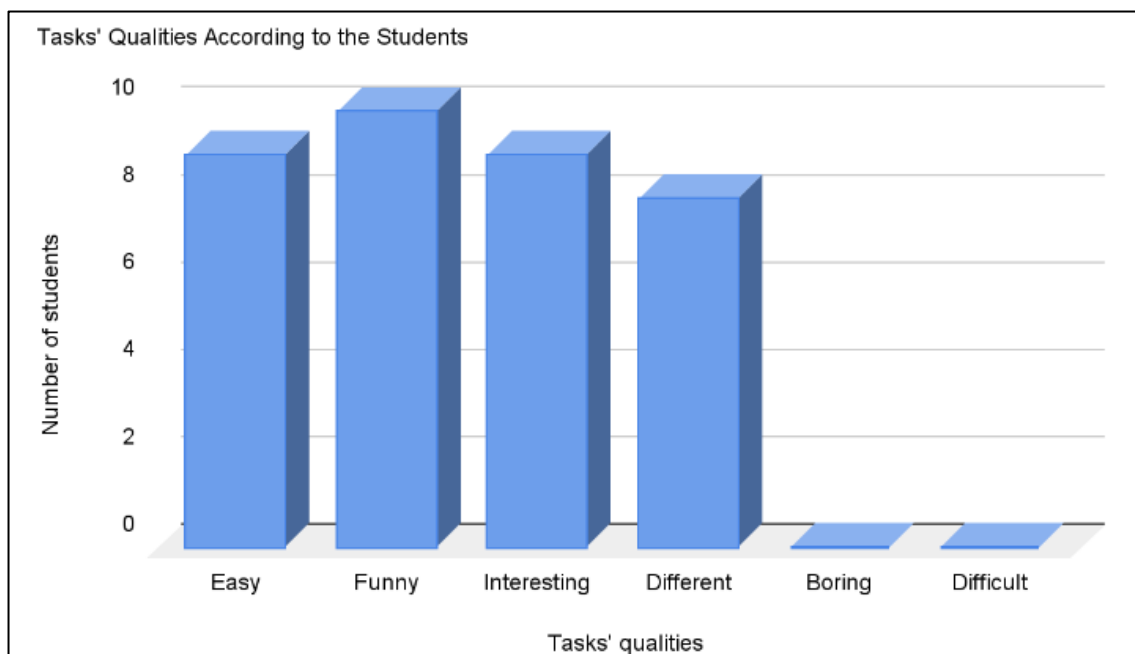
Learners not only learned about the language but also, I gave them opportunities to have fun in class. Data analysis demonstrated that the English class became free flowing ever since the beginning because, as time passed, students identified the three stages of TBL. Even though, at the beginning, some activities were new for them they liked to keep it like that because they asked to start the warm-up section with their preferred song, or they were curious about knowing what we would write in the agenda to get prepared.

Data analysis evidenced that they liked the English class as they responded positively in the questions posed in the survey. The reasons why they did so are due to two factors. First, many of them said that the class was enjoyable, and they learned a lot of English, and some others described the class as a space where they sing, dance, jump, laugh, and have fun. Second, they highlighted the teacher's strengths, such as being funny, friendly, respectful, patient, and affectionate. Meaning that not only tasks enabled enjoyable experiences, but also, the teacher's attitude towards the class provoked students' positive feelings (to see Students' Survey click [here](#)).

Moreover, Figure 1 shows students' characterization by giving their opinions about the tasks, their ideas referred to select the characteristic that best suited the class activities in terms of easy, funny, interesting, different, boring, or difficult. Nobody said they were boring or difficult. Instead, all of them found the class enjoyable and the majority, except one, answered that the tasks were easy and interesting. Finally, more than half of the students answered that tasks were different in terms of variety.

Figure 1

Students' responses to assessing tasks qualities



Tasks that Encourage the Development of Language Learning Cognitive Tools.

Data analysis revealed that the various activities applied to boost students' cognitive tools, such as imaginative thinking, small talk, listening to songs, reading stories and memorization, were successful to some extent. Some activities were better welcomed than others, so they needed to be adapted to make a nurturing but enjoyable environment possible when working on topics in class.

As for tasks that boosted imaginative thinking, one example referred to the way students created different representations of a body, by imagining a monster. This activity allowed students to use imaginative thinking about a topic close to their reality and this space in the class resulted in their unique creations (See students' monsters [here](#)), since they let their imagination blow, and almost everyone ended up pleased with their works.

Small talks arose in every class because the idea was to trigger students' curiosity towards the topics seen in class, thanks to meaningful conversations. That worked as expected because I could teach students to reflect based on their realities. In this respect, they did not know the meaning of the word "reflection", hence an explanation was needed. The last conversation I had with them was an excellent opportunity to teach them how it works. "I told them to say whatever they wanted about the class, the teacher, the activities, what they learned in the course" (Narrative, October 25th, 2022). Therefore, in this study students shared valuable contributions and exchanged ideas among them without the pressure of being judged or punished which allowed them to express themselves freely.

Concerning songs (rhythm and rhyme), we always sang three main songs at the beginning of every class to warm up students' bodies and minds by moving while singing. Once I presented the songs, they were receptive and interested in learning the choreography and the lyrics. The first TPR song consisted in doing what they said, like "stand-up, turn around...". The second one was used to open the classes and say hello. This song taught students to recognize and speak about their feelings of happiness, sadness, or hunger while they had lots of fun. Finally, there was a song that they loved so much. It was called "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes," and they expressed that it was their preferred song (Narrative, October 25th, 2022). In fact, it was proposed to learn body parts and was effective because as a post-task they colored a worksheet and did a gap-filling activity appropriately (See the activity about body parts [here](#)).

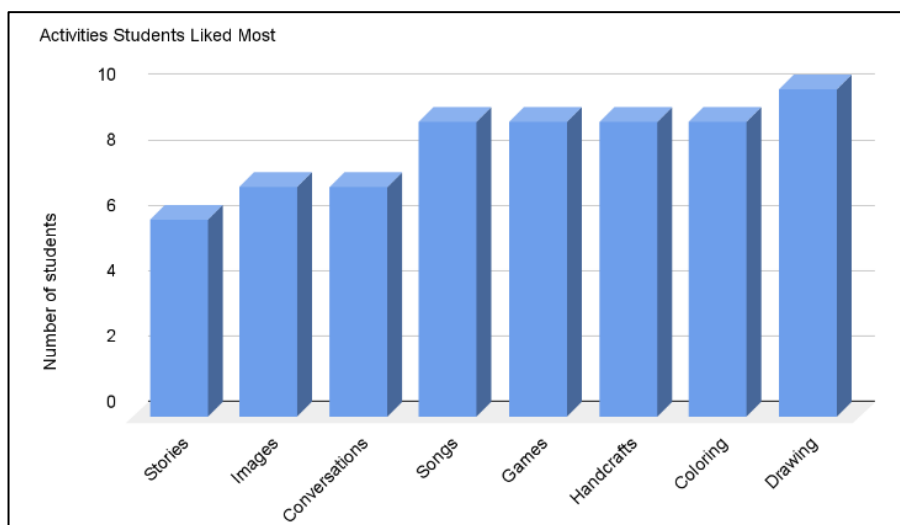
As for images, they were visual aids that helped learners to associate English sounds and to write with concepts they usually deal with in Spanish. I brought videos, photocopies, and illustrations related to students' backgrounds to work in class, so they felt involved and tempted to give opinions and participate. For example, to raise awareness about the importance of healthy

eating habits, I made drawings of good food on the board and told pupils to replicate them or be creative with their own (See students' drawings [here](#)). This activity made it possible for students to reflect and speak about the way they eat while drawing, coloring, and acquiring new vocabulary in English simultaneously, "they were talking about the ways to make food, for example potatoes, because baked potatoes are healthier than fried ones. Also, a girl clarified that there are cereals that contain lots of sugar and it is better to eat natural grains" (Journal Entry, October 4th, 2022).

Regarding reading stories, I read a story aloud, showed its pictures and we had a conversation regarding its morals, learning about self-esteem and self-care. "They liked the reading and compared the scenes shown in the pictures with their daily lives. I told them to reflect about the actions they can do to demonstrate self-love and the positive effects it has in our lives because we can overcome everything in life this way" (Journal Entry, September 20th, 2022). The data showed that even though most of the English class activities were welcome, less than half of the students expressed they liked the stories. As it is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Students' responses to the activities they liked the most in class. Survey



Finally, memorization was also included when making repetitions of vocabulary seen in class throughout the stages of TBI. This method helped students to recall the words more easily and still work with them in different formats. As an example, when treating vocabulary about toys, even though the pre-task consisted of reflecting on learners' most valuable possessions and committing to giving a toy to another kid, if possible, then as the main task, they related written vocabulary with images containing some toys. At the end, as a post-task, students carried out a worksheet consisting of selecting the correct options with the same vocabulary and then locating it in a word search (See the workshop about toys [here](#)). This activity was effective because students could accomplish the tasks and learn the vocabulary by heart without refraining from enhancing critical thinking related to the topic.

Students' Behavioral and Cognitive Processes

Finally, data revealed that most students achieved high progress in language acquisition due to different factors, such as, their good behavior along the classes, their willingness and engagement towards the lessons, and the teacher's positive reinforcement concerning students' behavior and task development.

Students' good behavior, willingness, and engagement in tasks.

Data analysis showed students' overall behavior and attitude toward tasks proposed in the course. It was evidenced that students were generally willing and focused on the English subject and the teacher's positive reinforcement concerning their good behavior and accurate task development helped them to become more interested in learning English.

For example, it was reported in the journal that "they looked very excited and answered all the questions I asked them, which proved that most of them paid attention" (Journal Entry,

October 4th, 2022), hence pupils' good disposition permitted classes to flow appropriately. Also, in critical-related tasks, "They remained concentrated on reflecting critically about the experiences, and then they just let it go. They behaved really well" (Journal Entry, October 25th, 2022). Afterward, in the Students' Survey, "they expressed they wanted to continue learning English because they enjoyed the classes and liked the lovely and cheerful teacher" (See the Students' Survey [here](#)).

Data analysis reiterated that learning was possible due to a warm environment by exposing learners to in-depth content that was well related to their background and, at the same time, prompted interest in learning English during and after this experience.

Students' progress in language acquisition. As every cycle proved what students acquired vocabulary from topics seen in class, it was possible to monitor their progress at the post-task level of every cycle. Thus, at this point, activities were addressed more to generate recollection in the short and long term, thanks to significant content and enjoyable worksheets, than to grade students' performance. All these strategies proved to have helped in the improvement in children's English language acquisition. This was evidenced in the last conversation I had with the whole class. As reported in the narrative, when asked about their learning of the language, "They recognized every word I told them to translate from Spanish into English such as *profesora, pasta, frutas, vegetales, cerdo*³, and vice versa, equally, from English into Spanish, they translated burgers, hotdogs, head, shoulders, knees, toes, happy, sad, hungry, English, family, food, good morning and fine thank you" (Narrative, October 25th, 2022). Surprisingly, there were concepts they learned by heart unconsciously because they didn't feel pressured by exams or grades. Instead, they learned because of being exposed to context-related situations that implicitly enabled English acquisition.

^{3 3} Teacher, pasta, fruits, vegetables, pig.

Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this research project was to promote critical thinking through Task-Based Instruction in second-grade students. Data revealed that students not only developed their critical thinking but also showed progress in language acquisition by virtue of contextualized, engaging, easy, enjoyable, innovative, and challenging tasks that provided them with positive learning experiences and their good behavior, willingness, and engagement when performing tasks.

Also, this research project entailed some implications for the student-teacher's practice in this context. First, collecting students' work helped to follow each pupil's process and gather artifacts for the data collection process simultaneously, as you can check students' work every week or two weeks to use as material to analyze. Second, it also allows you to know the students better and get closer to how they work in class according to their individual learning styles. The results were positive most of the time because it was possible to see how much tenacity most of them put into the tasks, and consequently, they got high grades at the end of the process.

Among the limitations to consider when dealing with this sort of work is the availability of means and facilities that a practicum worksite has. In this case, there was not a single technological device nor any other material to ease the display of sound and visuals in English classes. Considering the precarious situation, I had to bring my necessary personal equipment to enact activities prepared for every class, ensuring to look for diverse manners to do it. Fortunately, that did not hinder the expected outcomes.

Additionally, this project led to positive results of giving EFL classes to young learners focusing on meaningful and thoughtful content, committing students to accomplish tasks that enable them to improve their language skills and develop their cognition. This methodology does

not limit classes to repeating useless content distant from students' backgrounds. On the contrary, it eases a variety of topics that sensitize and encourage them to become better citizens of the world they live in.

Finally, although the outcomes were favorable, additional research in other contexts with no equipment constraints must offer an improved learning experience in a suitable EFL setting. In this sense, a contrast between private and public institutions also needs to be addressed for comparing different teaching experiences during and after the implementation of similar research.

Reflection

The experience of conducting this action research generated mixed feelings regarding my vocation as an educator and the benefits of researching. I got a close-up view of the role of a teacher as part of the whole educational field and society, as well as I overcame my shyness, considering that I did not have prior teaching experience. Besides, I got to appreciate teachers' labor more and trust the inner call one must have to do the job appropriately because, in educators' hands, lots of responsibility for modeling the future citizens of the world lie.

I also realized how underestimated teachers are by parents and society in general. It does not matter how much effort someone makes to educate almost thirty little children since some parents need to be aware of such hard work. Besides, many of them, because of different factors, are not committed to their complementary duty. Even though my cooperating teachers sidestepped that issue, they stayed devotedly in the classroom, and tried to transfer good values to students all the time.

Nevertheless, I happily had my first teaching experience. I did my best receiving advice from the advisor teacher, I listened to students' insights (stories, feelings, reactions), and that grew a pretty great sense of belonging to them. I cannot describe how comfortable they made me feel for some moments that made me forget my stage fright, nor the moment when I forgot it and felt engaged to the teaching labor

Finally, I must admit that some days were easier than others. Still, it was rewarding to have obtained positive outcomes, making this experience a worthwhile starting point of my professional career. In addition, I believe that theory has an essential role in professional performance. Still, research in practice seeks improvements in teaching and learning based on the particular context. I consider it a more substantial reason for (EFL) teachers to implement action research at their worksites.

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