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Increasing Fourth Grade Students' Engagement through Multimodal Resources in a Public
EFL Classroom.

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Abstract

This action research study presents the incorporation of multimodal resources into the flow of an EFL classroom as a means to increase students' engagement. Research teacher's journal and students' self-reports on behavioral, emotional, agentic, and cognitive components of engagement construct were analyzed. Results show that multimodal resources, especially those related to sounds and rhythm, contributed to increased engagement. Also, emotional disengagement was associated with low levels of behavioral and cognitive disengagement. Finally, a learning environment was characterized as enabling students' understanding and learning; where a teacher knows how to teach, explain, and listen; and which have fun activities, good class relationships and group work.

Key words: Multimodal resources; agentic, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement; learning environment, primary school students.

Título del proyecto en español: Aumentando el compromiso de los estudiantes de cuarto grado de primaria a través de recursos multimodales en un aula de clase de inglés como lengua extranjera.

Degree Requirements

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

As the final requisite of our bachelor's degree, we are called on to carry out an action research study on a chosen topic. This is what we call practicum and is divided into two main sections. The first one consists of class observations in an effort to identify something we want to improve or change, and the proposed strategies that will work as the means to accomplish it. The second part covers the methodological and didactic implementation of those strategies. This is the review of how this project was planned, implemented, and analyzed; and the impact it has had on the students and in my own professional development and growth.

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Description of the Context

Located in Aranjuez neighborhood, north-east region of Medellín's municipality, this Institution welcomes k-11 students. As the first school for blind and deaf people in the city and the country (Manual de Convivencia 2020-2021, p. 8), it was founded in 1925 by Francisco Hernández Betancur. Since, it has been considered a benchmark of inclusion and based on this model similar institutions were founded in Venezuela, Ecuador, and Costa Rica (ibid, p. 8).

In 2002 it ceased to be an institution only for the deaf and the blind, and students with no type of disability were accepted, and in 2013 students' population with different cognitive or intellectual disabilities arrived. Today, the institution is known as "Institución Educativa Francisco Luis Hernández Betancur (CIESOR)", whose transformations have required the challenge of erasing social representations of a school for special children, and the establishment of an Educational Institution of high quality (Manual de Convivencia, 2020-2021, p. 9).

Hence, children from different areas of the city and municipalities of the Metropolitan Area, with physical or mental disabilities, welcome regular students, making this environment one in which children with hearing disabilities (Colombian Sign Language and Spanish users), visual disabilities (with low vision or total blindness), intellectual disabilities, mental-psychosocial disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, physical mobility, deaf-blindness and multiple disabilities coexist and study together.

Considering the characterization of such a large population, I. E. FLHB promotes formal education towards "respect, appreciation and acceptance of differences in diversity" (Manual de Convivencia 2020-2021, p. 13), guaranteeing the development of cognitive, physical, sensory, psychological, and cultural skills necessary to actively participate in society. Disability is not assumed as a limitation, but as a different way of apprehending the world, therefore, education is

about considering the communicative, social, and cultural particularities of each population in pursuit of the development of strong, autonomous citizens, trained in critical thinking (Manual de Convivencia 2020-2021, pp. 13-14).

The institution proposes an intercultural-bilingual education that seeks the acquisition and usage of Colombian Sign Language as the second language for hearing students, and Spanish as a second language to the non-hearing students. Nonetheless, according to the “Acuerdo de Consejo Directivo N°8 de Noviembre 08 del 2017” (Fernando Vargas Rojas, Rector, 2017, p. 5), the educational component of humanities stipulates English as the second language required for hearing, with intellectual and/or visual disabilities and non-disabled students.

In this sense, this intercultural-bilingual education entails the learning of Colombian Sign Language and is necessary to enable communication with all the institution’s population. For non-hearing students, learning Spanish as their second language is necessary as it is the language of the country they live in, they are not taught English and there won't be further reference to this specific population in this action research.

Concerning English language teaching at the school, this action research study is conducted with a 4th grade group comprising 26 students, 7 girls and 19 boys. Students' ages range between 8 to 10, one of them being a blind child. Most of them live in the same neighborhood (Aranjuez, 11 students), some others come from several other neighborhoods of the city and the “Area Metropolitana” (Campo Valdes, Manrique, Santa Cruz, Popular 1, and Envigado) (Survey, students, March 16, 2022).

In primary grades there is not an English department, so each Home Group Teacher oversees the teaching of the English subject to its group. My Cooperative Teacher (CT), graduated from a Normal Superior, has a bachelor’s degree in “Lengua Castellana” and has been

working in the institution for seven (7) years. They are given two (2) hours of English classes per week and the English program is based on the Basic Learning Rights (BLR) and the English guide teachers plan for each term.

Statement of the problem

Efforts have been made by the Colombian government and administrations to address the demands of a globalized world (Spring, 2008) through a series of policies and programs intending citizens to communicate in English. These language reforms and policies appear in school practices through the “Estándares de Competencia en Lengua Extranjera: Inglés” that stipulate the standards of quality, which all children in the country should be driven to achieve, having the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001) as the guiding framework of competence.

However, these standards are not the equivalent of better results in language proficiency, they can favor processes of inclusion, exclusion, and stratification, and it was needed a more organized work alongside with educational actors, English teachers, administrators of educational institutions and secretaries of education (Correa, D., et al, 2014; Usma, 2009). Among the legislative needs here identified (Correa, et al, 2014, p. 111), is that primary school teachers often do not have any or sufficient pedagogical and disciplinary training and/or education in English, yet, they have to oversee the teaching of this subject.

Particularly to this context, since the CT does not have a formal education in English, this factor reduces the possibilities of teaching the language and acts as a barrier that impedes the English academic achievement of students (Interview, CT, March 31, 2022), since it affects aspects such as pronunciation, accurate grammar, vocabulary, and varied didactic transpositions for teaching the language.

Class observations allowed me to identify that it was not problematic to have a blind student in the same classroom with sighted students. The latter were continually offering themselves as volunteers to help the former with the activities that required it, and he actively participated in the classroom dynamics. What is highly important is that activities have to be always modified and depending on the teacher's and institutional budget, tools and aids have to be implemented.

What has been observed as a problematic situation is that it is challenging for most of the students to be engaged in simple tasks in the class (Journal entry, March 9, 2022), most of them did not take the materials required to class, forgot the assignments at home, and did not make much effort to participate in English. Moreover, one could usually hear excuses for not working, even sometimes they seemed not to enjoy the proposed activities (Journal entry, March 20, 2022).

Students have different literacy levels (in their L1) and English proficiency levels (most students have trouble moving beyond the use of specific words, e.g., green, Wednesday, hello), so there is not a rich classroom dynamic (Journal entry, February 23, 2022). Questions arose as to whether they do not enjoy learning English because they do not like it, or do not need it; and whether learning it or not would affect their performance in today's globalized world.

Consequently, a survey was implemented that we may know students' interests. Based on a teacher's interview, students' survey, and classroom observation, the purpose of this study is to improve students' engagement through the incorporation of multimodal resources in a context of teaching English as a foreign language (henceforth EFL). It is well known that FL acquisition is important for a variety of intellectual and pragmatic reasons, of paramount importance to this study is the understanding of engagement in students' progress and achievement, and the

importance of promoting classroom environments where students can invest effort, focus on accomplishing activities and drawing upon learning strategies while working cooperatively. In research, this has been recognized as “behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and agentic acts of engagement” (Reeve & Woogul, 2014, p. 228).

Accordingly, in teaching and learning environments, the use of various representational resources, of which language is but one (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001), allows students’ active participation and involvement in the learning activity (Wellborn, 1991). That is, broadening traditional instruction to include multimodal resources as an alternative to young learners’ education in today’s world of powerful images, words, and sounds (UNESCO, 1982).

Theoretical background

Organized in two major sections on engagement and multimodal resources, I will highlight key aspects of two extensive and broad fields of classroom research. On the one hand, differences in terms of students’ interest and involvement in classroom activities as external, observable clues frequently connected to engagement. On the other hand, what is to be learned and how it is to be learned in today’s world of increased digital technology and globalized development that has imposed the challenge of rethinking teaching, learning and education in contemporary contexts and the world (Magnusson & Godhe, 2019).

Engagement

Research on engagement is broad and long; conversely, researchers have not reached a consensus on its conceptual definition, or its components or types (Dincer et al, 2019; Lester, 2013). Reschly and Christenson (2012) traced three schools of thought on students’ engagement: the first one on dropout prevention theory; the second one from a school reform perspective aiming to school completion; and the third one coming out of the motivational literature

(research on how to enhance students' learning across academic, social, behavioral, and emotional domains).

All in all, there is a common recognition of engagement as “optimal for learning” (Philp & Duchesne, 2016, p. 50); as having a significant role in effective learning and implications for institutions (Dincer et al, 2017; Lester, 2013), and associated with student achievement, positive behaviors, a sense of belonging to an intended topic, and life-long learning (Parsons & Taylor, 2011). Students' participation in classroom activities also interest researchers on the “interactions with activities and materials that should produce (or interfere with) actual learning” (Skinner et al, 2009, p. 494).

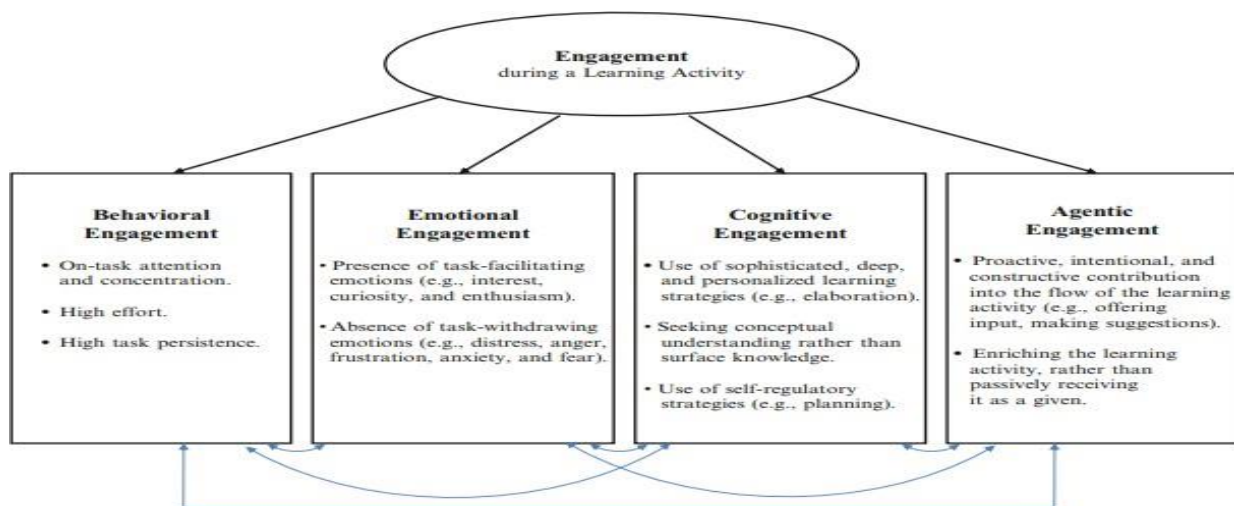
Under this view, engagement “refers to the quality of a student's connection or involvement with the endeavor of schooling and hence with the people, activities, goals, values, and place that compose it” (ibid p. 494). It is a 'multifaceted' or 'multidimensional' construct that includes, two-, three- or four dimensions (Christenson, 2012), the most recent research divides it into four sub-dimensions: behavioral, emotional, agentic, and cognitive, as shown in figure 1. Each of these components are just one part of the whole construct, that is, they are not products of one another, instead, “they play a cumulative role in the learners' learning process” (Dincer, 2017, p. 93).

“Behavioral engagement refers to how effortfully involved the student is in the learning activity in terms of attention, effort, and persistence (Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2009). Emotional involvement refers to the presence of positive emotions during task involvement, such as interest, and to the absence of negative emotions, such as anxiety (Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2009). Cognitive engagement refers to how strategically the student attempts to learn in terms of using sophisticated rather than

superficial learning strategies, such as elaboration rather than memorization (C. O. Walker, Greene, & Mansell, 2006). Agentic engagement is a fourth and newly proposed aspect of student engagement that refers to the extent of the student’s constructive contribution into the flow of the instruction they receive in terms of asking questions, expressing preferences, and letting the teacher know what one wants and needs (Reeve, 2013) (Reeve & Woogul, 2014, pp. 528-529).

Figure 1.

Four interrelated aspects of students’ engagement during a learning activity, (Reeve, 2012).



According to Taylor and Parsons (2011), student engagement “has become both a strategic process for learning and an accountability outcome unto itself” (p. 4) since research on pedagogy and curriculum should aim for not only helping learners to learn actively, but to foster their capacity to learn how to learn to become life-long learners.

In this context, even though students are presented with activities according to their ages (wordsearch, drawings, YouTube videos), and that one may think that are appealing to them, from classroom observations it was repetitive that they were not paying attention to the

explanations, were constantly playing and talking among them when supposed to do an activity, and even stated that some activities like drawing were very boring to do. Enhancing student engagement then becomes mandatory.

Multimodal resources

In language education theory, multimodality “refers to the coordination of multiple different systems of signification to communicate a single, or at least a unified, message or meaning” (Dressman, 2019, p. 29). In the field of education and language curriculum, it has been a response to changes in the contemporary communication environment and what the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) tools has meant in the literacy practices of students (Farías et al, 2007; Lim et al, 2021). New modes of “cognitive involvement and social interaction” (Farías et al, 2007, p. 176) have raised questions as to how young people experience learning processes of meaning-making (Magnusson & Godhe, 2019).

By and large, English standards for each scholarly grade are built around word, phrase, sentence, and discourse level proficiency; promoting an underlying idea that communication and meaning making can only be accomplished through language. As a particular approach, a multimodal pedagogy seeks to go beyond written and spoken language to value different modes through multimodal assessment practices. The term “multimodal”, then, refers to the encounter of several modes (Apriani et al, 2021), as the presentation of information in multiple sensory modes for supporting learning (Nguyen et al, 2022). Language is not more considered the main and sole mode for making meaning, rather there are many ways in which meaning can be expressed (Lim et al, 2021).

According to a multimodal approach, semiotic resources (signs used to communicate), or modes, are defined as the different kinds of mediums through which information can be

delivered (Kress, 2010). Print, speech, gestures, media (video and audio), charts, graphs, pictures, etc.; can be used in communicative interaction; and each of those has its own range of potentials for meaning, that is, affordances (Early et al, 2015; Kress, 2000). Research has shown that, for instance, the arrangement of visual elements and sound allows the interpretation of a given message, they are mutually interpreted and none of them makes sense on their own, but each gives relevant information to the whole message (Bucher, 2017, pp. 115-116).

Particularly to this context, it is important to recognize the multiple language practices of this community and the implications of such a diverse environment for educational practice. By drawing attention to multiple modes of communication (e.g., audio, visual, linguistic, spatial, performative) students could be more engaged in their learning process. In other words, multimodal resources are a strategy for students not only to be able to communicate, but also for communication to be presented through different modes, having as the goal to cultivate students' capacity for understanding, constructing, and learning.

Research Question

To what extent fourth graders' engagement increases when exposed to different multimodal resources in a public EFL classroom?

Objectives

General Objective

To monitor how fourth graders' engagement in the EFL classroom may increase or decrease by the means of multimodal resources.

Specific objectives

- To monitor students' engagement in the class by the implementation of diverse multimodal resources.

- To identify and analyze what kind of learning environments may enable engagement in the EFL classroom.
- To improve students' engagement in the EFL classroom.

Action Plan

The present section reflects on the research question to pursue two goals: to explore different modes of representation and its potentials in the learning and teaching environment of an EFL classroom, and the extent to which those modes can foster students' engagement. After the observation period, I first divided the mandatory content for the second term into five main subcategories (numbers from 200 to 300, vocabulary related to the environment, cause-consequence expressions, expressions to promote actions and expressions to propose solutions), each topic was to be implemented in two weeks' time. Later, aiming at collecting the data in a more organized way, I changed that design into a unit that integrated the syllabus and various multimodal resources.

For the design of the unit, I first identified the goals and standards that were going to guide the development of the work. The "Malla Curricular" stipulated the five aforementioned core topics for the second semester of the school year, in this first unit two of those are going to be covered: vocabulary related to environment and causes and consequences. I also searched the goals and standards required for fourth graders in Colombia, I selected the "Expedición Currículo, Plan de Área de Humanidades Idioma Extranjero –Inglés" (2014), and the Basic Learning Rights (2016) that went in alliance with the "Malla Curricular" goals for the second term of the school year.

From that selection I went on to search for different multimodal resources, such as audios, moving images (gifs), PowerPoint presentations, videos, sounds, and hands-on activities;

that I was going to take into the classroom; and the assessment activities, like questions, small group competitions, group works, etc., through which I might be able to identify students' engagement in the class. A "Planet Earth Mobile " was the name of the final assessment task to evaluate progress and understanding, consisting of creatively designing a mobile that integrated all themes covered in the unit.

Development of Actions

In this section I will provide a description of the actions implemented to accomplish the objectives here proposed:

At first, I was devising the planning and implementation of single classes for all mandatory topics from the "Malla Curricular". Nonetheless, since there was the possibility to unify topics, I designed and implemented one unit that dealt with the topics of environment and causes and effects. Since I did not know how and what to select for teaching about environment, for each class I first did a little research of environment, ecosystems, and habitat dynamics as the basis for later talking about causes and consequences of pollution. After having identified the main topics, and placed them in a logical progression, I started planning each lesson.

For doing so, I had to take into consideration students' preferences and the incorporation of several resources and modalities aiming at raising their sense of engagement and involvement in the class. I also had to foresee not having an internet connection and students' discipline outbreaks and how to overcome those in order to be able to teach the content matter.

The unit was carried out during seven weeks, a couple of times having one (1) hour sessions, but most of the time two (2) hour sessions per week. The action plan was set to start from the first week of September, but, due to institution and extracurricular activities planned for the children, the unit and the implementation of student's questionnaires began only until the

third week of September and the last class of it was carried out in November. I had planned to record students' performance, but this was not possible due to time constraints.

For the planning of my lessons, I always started with warm up activities that would serve as an introduction and anticipation of the intended content by means of questions derived from sounds, images, or videos. Then, I attempted to establish connections between the English topics and students' previous knowledge and/or context through activities such as puzzles, team competitions, and small group discussions; being challenged and exercised proved to be an excellent strategy for them to acknowledge their capabilities and engage themselves in the tasks proposed for the class.

The name of the unit was "My Planet Earth", which started from the broader aspects of the subject such as "recognizing my planet" and "the main ecosystems", narrowing down to some specific ones such as "who lives there" and the "relations" that exist among the living and nonliving components. Each class was intended to show a new section of the whole theme. The main topics and headers were also set in paper and pasted at the back of the classroom as a graphic reminder and organizer of the activities performed.

As mentioned before, there were some complex situations due to discipline outbreaks and school changes in the schedule. To manage the former, I had to implement some attention getters that involved singing and moving at the beginning of the class and at the times when students were losing focus of the activity. In addition to this, I identified that when doing a whole group activity that needed to be solved in an individual way, three (3) students struggled and almost did not manage to cope with their peers. Sometimes, I reached them and asked specific questions, provided feedback, and gave needed clues. This close relationship allowed me to notice students' improvement since they were more engaged in their learning processes.

Finally, as part of their final task, children had to create a “Planet Earth Mobile” implementing all things learned throughout the unit. As part of the final outcome, it was also an oral presentation of their makings which had a peer-assessment component. Groups of five students gathered, each of whom was responsible for providing each other with things that he/she had liked, and suggestions for improvement.

Additionally, to cope with institutional requirements, a final exam was designed including all topics of the second term. Unfortunately, students’ comments on their peers’ presentations could not be shared, since there were some Christmas activities planned for them. Moreover, the final exam was not applied due to time constraints. Instead, students’ grades on the final task and of activities developed during the term were weighted to give them a final English grade.

Data Analysis

This research is framed within a qualitative paradigm since the data collection and analysis are going to be used to refine the research question or to reveal new questions in the interpretation process (Hernández et al, 2014, p. 7). Action research is the selected approach in accordance with the purpose of ‘[arriving] at recommendations for good practice that will tackle a problem or enhance the performance of the organization and individuals through changes to the rules and procedures within which they operate’ (Denscombe, 2002, p. 27, as cited in Bell, 2005, p. 8).

To comply with legal and ethical aspects of the study, I asked for the filling out of a consent to participate and analyze the data collected, nonetheless, I was informed parents sign a permission at the beginning of each school year for children to participate in all curricular activities and projects carried out in the institution, so it was not required to do it again. Students,

however, were told about the action research and agreed on participating and providing their perspectives.

As the means of data collection, the techniques selected were notes on the research journal; a questionnaire that measured students' engagement (in its four components: behavioral, emotional, agentic, and cognitive); and finally, four (4) focus groups at the end of the unit, each focused in one of the four (4) components of student's engagement construct. Students self-reported through the questionnaire three classes, twice at the beginning of the unit and one last time at the end of it.

A pilot paper-and-pencil survey was administered to ten (10) students before the beginning of the unit for checking the understanding of the items and to see if corrections needed to be made before implementing it. This questionnaire contained seventeen (17) closed questions discriminated as four (4) questions for each of the four components of the construct and one (1) final open question. Items included three Likert-scale response anchors, ranging from 1 to 3. Students' responses to the questionnaire were analyzed using Microsoft Excel. and focal group discussions were transcribed and analyzed by colors. Each method was first analyzed separately and then triangulated for comparison and contrasting.

Findings and Interpretation

Students' engagement

Data shows that most students reported positively to agentic, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement.

Considering agentic engagement, at the beginning of the unit most of them reported highly on asking questions to learn and expressing their preferences, likes and dislikes; yet at the

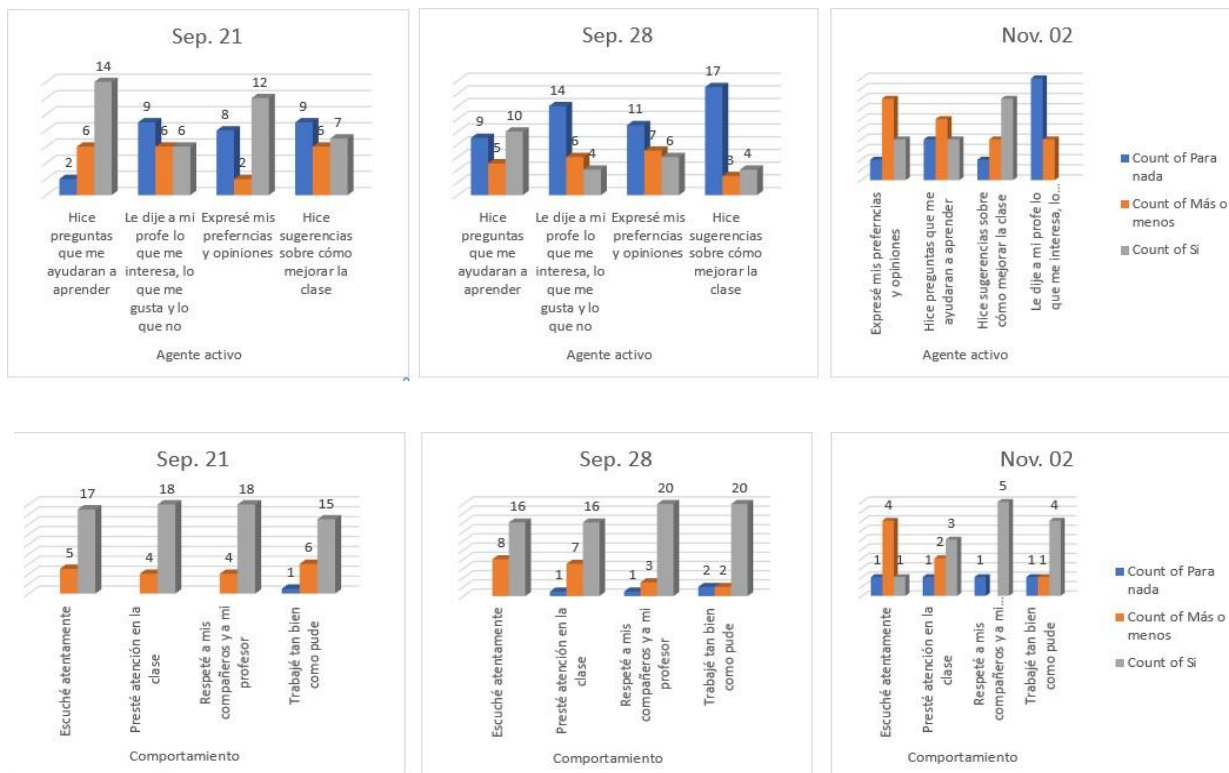
end of it not so much. On the one hand, the progression of the topics was intended to take them step by step to the final product. Also, from field notes and classroom observations it could be seen they "remembered the topic and the words we had learned" (Journal notes, October 5, 2022). It is possible that a gained understanding of English and the topics has reduced the need for students to ask as many questions as before. This correlates with students' reports in not thinking about grades but understanding each class what they did (Reports on cognitive engagement).

Conversely, a factor that may have negatively influenced this tendency is that some weeks we did not have classes and, although students had a very good attitude, when we met again sometimes, they seemed disconnected (Journal notes, October 26, 2022). That is, the loss of earned attention may have reduced the opportunities for students' constructive contributions into the class. Now, this loss of attention was made visible by their "expressions on-task attention, lesson involvement, and effort" (Reeve, 2011, p. 260), that is, through students' behaviors.

The data shows that there appears to be a relationship between students' contributions to the on-going flow of the class (agentic engagement) and their actions (behavior engagement). While the graphics on agentic engagement show a tendency in answers of "no" (blue rows), reports on behavioral engagement that show a tendency in "yes" answers (gray rows), as shown in figure 2:

Figure 2

Agentic and Behavioral engagement reports



At the beginning of the unit students wanted to play all the time with their peers. Also, they would stop an activity just to complain about each other's words, attitudes, and behaviors. On the one hand, students were not used to having English classes and only doing activities for fun; and on the other hand, discipline outbreaks were one of the main challenges many teachers had to face with this group (Personal communications, October 2022).

What was interesting is that it seems that altogether with an increased comprehension of the topics, students went from very little contact with the English language, to playing games and just doing what they were interested in for fun, to doing more academic activities that required a higher level of listening, attention, and concentration in the classroom. This led them, during class time, to talk less about going out to play, and to hear more calls for attention due to their misbehavior.

From my perspective as a teacher, this has meant a conscious reflection on my beliefs and style. In relation to the former, students need to keep expressing their likes and preferences if we want the school to be a place where they want to be, learn, and grow. Then, it is not about simply “behaving”, rather than how to incorporate the academic and disciplinary component that is also necessary in their cognitive, physical, emotional, and relational development. In a practical view, it was not possible to teach a class where students were only expressing their disposition to play without the attention and order required for communication and academic learning. As stated in Parsons & Taylor (2011)

“Creating an engaging learning environment includes ensuring students feel able and safe to challenge teachers as part of the learning process. It also means students will need to learn interpersonal skills to engage in dialogue respectfully and constructively, as well as learn the subject content” (p.19).

As for my style, investigation has shown that “teachers become more controlling when students show behavioral disengagement” (Jang et al., 2016, p. 2). Being aware that there exists this teacher-student reciprocal relation of engagement, support, disengagement, and control allowed me to think of my students and myself as active learners. At times, it forced me to understand the situation and try to create new opportunities for learning.

At the beginning of the unit students reported actively listening and paying attention, which conflicted with my journal notes about the times classes stopped because of students’ playing and shouting. By the end of the unit, in a more conscious manner students reported they did not listen or pay attention as much as they could. This shows that by the end of the unit, students were able to reflect on their behaviors and be aware of their actions. In the focal group,

when asked whether it was important or not to ask questions to the teacher, one student answered that it was, but also it was necessary to listen to understand the activities (Focus group, November 2, 2022). This shows a gained level of responsibility and student engagement in their role as active agents in the classroom.

Students expressed that they considered it important to be part of the class by telling the teacher their questions and preferences for three main reasons: to learn, to better understand the topics, and to receive explanations from the teacher (Focus group, November 2, 2022). Moreover, students reported feeling interested in what they did (Focus group, November 2, 2022).

In relation to emotional engagement, most of them reported positive course-related feelings. Based on their answers three components made them experience happiness, joy, and excitement: they like to learn; the teacher is good and teaches new things; and classes are fun (Focus group, November 2, 2022). The use of multimedia and technology in the classes was particularly identified as a fun way to learn (ibid). This corresponds to Parsons and Taylor's (2011) assertion that those tools "have proven helpful in engaging students in learning about subjects, in exploring ways to present their learning, and in helping students control their learning" (p. 14).

Although most students reported experiences of satisfaction with their own performance and with the class, particularly one student reported experiencing stress. She did not like the course (in general all courses) because "siempre nos quedamos aquí encerrados (...) O sea que no salimos, me estresa que no salgamos" (Focus group, November 2, 2022). Based on classroom observations, her performance was very low in comparison to their peers, their behavior was constantly driven towards playing, sleeping, and distracting their closest friends. This emotional

disengagement in the form of boredom and anxiousness undermined her “behavioral participation in academic activities” (Skinner et al, 2008, p. 767).

Students reported using few cognitive strategies for learning, even though they reported on thinking on what they were doing before doing it, in the focus group their answers showed “surface cognitive strategies” (Dincer, 2019, p. 9) such as asking for help, just practicing, and memorizing (Focus group, November 2, 2022). Questions such as what the meaning of a word was, how they said a word in English, etc.; helped them to understand and better concentrate on the tasks. In fact, asking questions was identified as a great strategy (Journal entry, September 21, 2022) for students to think about the content, and to actively participate.

Even though most of the students reported positive to being active in the classroom, it is interesting to notice that those students who reported not enjoying the class were also those that struggled doing the activities and concentrating, their low level of emotional engagement prevented them from using cognitive strategies to coping with the learning and therefore only doing what they were told without worrying for learning but for the grading (low cognitive and behavioral engagement).

Multimodal resources

Today’s globalized world permeates every aspect of life and young students become users of texts that are often a combination of images, sounds, writing, etc., mostly in informal settings through computers and mobile phones (Magnusson & Godhe, 2019). Particularly in this context it was an objective to monitor whether the use of diverse modes and resources would affect students’ engagement in a formal setting such as the school.

The following is a synthesis of the modes that were usually used throughout the unit:

Table 1.*Activities and modes*

Activity	Modes (resources for making meaning)
Warm up-review/ Questions	Images, words, gestures, written texts, speech, Sound, moving images (gifs),
Anticipation or introduction/ Whole group discussions, group work puzzles, readings, game challenges	Written texts, movements, speech, posture in interaction, images
Modeling and practice/ Videos, spatiality activities, group work presentations	Video with sound off, video with sound on, teacher's questions and gestures (speech), spatiality, written words
Production/ Hands-on work	Images, written texts, movements, speech, gestures

Classroom activities reported to engage students are predominantly related to sounds and rhythm. One student once shouted: “profe, ponga más sonidos, esta actividad está muy buena!” (Journal notes, November 28, 2022). Moreover, one strategy implemented to gather students' attention was the implementation of “Attention getters” that would include songs, music, movement, or my voice varying the pitch and intonation of the singing. The tone and stress of words was also very important when emphasizing on something. Music, then, was used both as a source of teaching vocabulary and listening, and as a way of attracting students' engagement.

Body language was also very important in the way of pointing to objects, colors and mimicking abstract things. Students were very attentive to what they could guess from mimics and questions proving that this is a technical function that serves when mere explanations cannot fully provide the intended meaning (Apriani et al, 2021). Verbal input was also always needed for the blind student, and at times he was taken by his hands to show and touch things so I could model things for him as well. Particularly in his case, verbal input is the main source of

information, but all activities were transcribed into the braille system for him to receive the content through more than one mode.

At the beginning of it most students did not make suggestions on how to improve the lessons, but from class to class they started to make comments on how to improve them. Since they reported being satisfied with the English course, it could be that the activities and modes were more attractive to them. They all were asked on the efficacy of including different modes and multimodal resources in the teaching of the course and whether its implementation helped them learn or not. All their answers were affirmative because of five reasons: those resources represent a joyful way of learning, they are good for not having always the same, those are seen as a valid way of teaching, they help them interact with the topic they are studying, and they help them better understand and grasp the meaning of the topics (Focus groups, November 2, 2022).

One student mentioned he did not even know how to say hello in English before, and throughout the unit he was so involved that even volunteered himself to help make posters of the ecosystems to paste them on the graphic organizer. Another student mentioned that by using YouTube, English learning Apps and technological devices they also could learn. In sum, the use of multimodal sources has proved to help both the teacher and the students in the process of teaching and learning (Apriani et al, 2021). YouTube, and video documentaries are only two of the listed technological methods that helped learners “engage, explore, and construct new knowledge” (Parsons & Taylor, 2011, p. 14).

Learning environment

Students were asked what their ideal class would look like and what learning environment increases engagement. Their responses are listed in three criteria: that they were able to understand and learn; a good teacher that knows how to teach, explain, and listen; and a

learning environment which contains fun activities, a good class relations and well-being, and group work (Focus group, November 2, 2022), That is, data shows that their willingness to learn (engagement), and the teacher and the activities proposed (multimodal resources) combined in a certain type of classroom.

They are already familiar with multiple modes of learning; they also are literate in the use of technological devices. One particular student would always stand next to my computer and help me connect it, pass the PowerPoint slides, or hit pause and play, or just see what the content for the course was. Unfortunately, students were not allowed to take their cellphones (if they had) to the school, since the school is not held responsible for the loss of any device. Moreover, we did not have access to internet connection, which decreases the possibilities of utilizing many online resources that give “learners accessible and relevant subject matter and experts and is a tool for engaged learning” (Parsons & Taylor 2011, p. 14).

In sum, multimodal resources increase students' engagement that, in its turn, allows them “to experience increased learning and improved outcomes from an educational institution” (Lester, 2013, p.3). Learning environments are those that provide multiple ways of approaching the meaning of the content and offer opportunities for interaction and enjoyment, in other words, “they want to turn the thing on, get in there, muck around, and see what works” (Brown 2000, as cited in Parsons & Taylor, 2011, p.12). Research shows that “students want more autonomy to engage in and design their own learning, they want to learn and utilize their learning preferences and styles and want support to do so” (ibid, p. 19). And one way to change our classrooms into engaging learning environments is by incorporating multimodal resources that would allow students to design and be able to learn.

Conclusions

Every day a special inclusion took place in this classroom, where a blind student among sighted students met, helped each other, and learned. I investigated their self-reports on engagement as a multidimensional construct, in its four dimensions (behavioral, emotional, agentic, and cognitive), and how it could be improved through multimodal resources.

Consistent with my hypothesis about the importance of multimodal resources, the results confirmed that its implementation contributes to the increment of engagement in the EFL classroom. Students themselves stated that those constituted a joyful way of learning and varying the classroom dynamics. Moreover, different multimodal resources helped them interact with the topic they are studying and helped them better understand and grasp the meaning of the topics. Within this context I found that students were more engaged and concentrated on the tasks with resources related to sounds and rhythm.

Regarding student's engagement, data shows that most of them were highly engaged in all four aspects. Agentic and behavioral components were linked together in the form of students' transition from just playing and not having an English class, to being challenged through academic activities that required higher levels of concentration and active listening. In this sense, students started to be aware of misbehaviors, and reported listening, paying attention, and respecting each other and their teacher as the components needed to enable learning in the classroom.

Also, it was found that when students were emotionally disengaged, they also reported low levels of behavioral and cognitive engagement. In contrast, when highly motivated and feeling satisfied with their own performance and with the class, their performance on the tasks was excellent and they searched for strategies to understand and cope with the content, that is, "increased effort with the content increases cognitive growth (Lester, 2013, p. 4). Higher

emotional engagement was associated with their willingness to learn; the teacher was a good teacher that taught new things; and classes were fun.

In sum, it was noticeable that they actively participated in the activities by raising their hands to answer questions, volunteering to write on the board, daring to speak in English, and asking questions. Students drove their own learning by asking questions to the teacher and considered it important to be part of the class. However, there remains a variability to be explained. That is, learning is an undeniably complex process composed of the intertwining of students, teachers, classrooms and schools' effort, students' inner motivations and struggles. All dynamics inside and outside the classroom are the experiences that influence students' "outcomes in a way that is generally described as "engagement" (Lester, 2013, p. 2).

Finally, teachers can do more than just help students to learn, and that is helping them learn how to learn. Increasing this capacity requires a degree of cognitive engagement that goes hand in hand with behavioral, emotional, and agentic engagement. Even though disengagement is not so much a big problem in primary school as in middle school or high school, the quality of education we provide and the effective learning children need, must be a focus of our attention.

Reflection

This experience has enriched me in two main ways, first, a gained understanding of the school dynamics; second, a more experienced view of myself as a teacher, and of students and their learning processes. This experience has shown me the importance of processes and how enriching it is when little efforts are made one by one. It also has challenged me to better prepare myself and be creative with the resources I have at hand.

I think now I hold a closer look at the complexity of learning and schooling, and the enormous capacity, intelligence, and liveliness of children. Especially in this context I was

amazed with so many brave and strong kids that, against all odds, manage to keep on learning and smiling.

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