



**UNIVERSIDAD  
DE ANTIOQUIA**

Trabajo de investigación presentado como requisito  
parcial para optar al título de:  
**Licenciada en Lenguas Extranjeras**

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Universidad de Antioquia  
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Medellín, Colombia  
2023



**Using Language Games to Teach Grammar and Engage Fourth-Grade Students in the English Class**

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Medellín  
June 20, 2023

### **Abstract**

This project was an action research developed in Institucion Educativa Dinamarca in Medellín that had the main purpose of exploring how language games can help fourth-grade students to engage with the English class and learn the grammar topics. In order to do this exploration, an action plan was designed and implemented and classes were guided by a methodology organized by stages of exploring language, practicing topics and playing language games. Students had to design and present at the end of the term an album project about themselves putting into practice and in context all the grammar topics and vocabulary learned during the classes. Data was collected through student-teacher journal entries, one students' diagnostic activity, two students' self- assessments, and the students' written final project. The data analysis showed that the methodology accompanied by language games was useful for promoting students' engagement in the class, increasing their interest in the English topics, facilitating students' interactions, and also expanding their lexical repertoire and correct use of adjectives and verbs when building sentences.

*Keywords:* Grammar, grammar in context, language games, linguistic games, communicative games.

Título del proyecto en español: Uso de juegos del lenguaje para la enseñanza de gramática y la promoción del compromiso de los estudiantes de cuarto grado en la clase de inglés.

### **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 Medellín, Colombia.

### **Acknowledgements**

First of all I want to thank God, the giver of all the opportunities and strength to carry out this project and my studies. Second, I want to thank my family for their support and encouragement in all my academic issues, especially my parents and husband for their understanding, love and sacrifice. I am also grateful for my classmates and teachers, who always had beautiful words about teaching and useful advice, mostly I want to thank my friend Erika who was with me in this process literally from the first to the last day. Finally, I would like to thank the persons involved in this research process, my cooperating teacher who was so willing to learn and enjoy this process, and my advisor teacher Sandra for sharing with us her experience and time, and being so patient and encouraging when we needed the most.

**Table of Contents**

<b>Preface</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Context Description</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Statement of the Problem</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Theoretical Framework</b>	<b>12</b>
Games in Children Lives and Class	12
Language Games	13
Games in Grammar and Benefits of Engagement	14
Challenges of Using Language Games in the Classroom	15
<b>Research Question</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Objectives</b>	<b>16</b>
General Objective	16
Specific Objectives	16
<b>Action Plan</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Development of Actions</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Data Analysis</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Findings and Interpretations</b>	<b>24</b>
Exploring, Practicing, and Playing to Engage Students in Class.	24
Building Grammar Meaningfully	29
Using Games in the English Classroom: Benefits and Challenges	35
<b>Conclusions and Suggestions</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Reflection</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>41</b>

## Preface

As a requisite of our bachelor's degree, we should carry out our academic practicum as an action research study on a chosen topic in a public school in Medellín, in the language of our preference English or French. The practicum was conducted from August 2022 to June 2023 and was divided into two parts. The first one consisted of observing classes to identify students' necessities, finding something to improve or change, and deciding on strategies to promote those changes. The second practicum had as its main purpose implementing strategies, collecting data, and defining results and conclusions of the whole intervention, that could be useful for future research and for the educational community.

## Context Description

The “Institución Educativa Dinamarca” is a public school situated in the northwestern part of the Aburra Valley , in the neighborhood Luis López de Mesa. The institution offers education in elementary school and high school, divided into two sessions: The first is scheduled to begin at 6:00 a.m. and to end at 12:00 p.m.; and the second starts at 12:30 and ends at 5:30 p. m. The students belong to the socio-economic strata one, two and three. The institution's facilities include the food service for the students that are registered; the school library equipped with books for children and teens and some guides for teachers; the natural sciences laboratory for subjects like physics, chemistry and biology; and the computers room for multiple classes like English, Technology or Mathematics. There are 1375 students organized from first grade to eleventh grade.

According to the mission, the institution states its intention of educating students integrally at each academic level, promoting values such as responsibility, respect, honesty, generosity, and tolerance as the basis. Also, it has a transverse pedagogical perspective named developmentalism with a social humanist approach<sup>1</sup>, standing up for a good interaction with the surroundings, technological

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<sup>1</sup> Desarrollista con enfoque social humanista

innovation and globalization in order to prepare its students for university education and work.

Regarding its vision, in 2023 the institution will be a school of quality, a promoter of peace as a fundamental part of progress, embracing scientific globalization, based on principles and on its motto “a place where you learn and you are happy”<sup>2</sup>.

Concerning the syllabus, English classes belong to the Humanity area which is composed of two subjects: Lectoescritura and English. The two subjects are given by the same teacher. According to the area plan, the institution is aware that English is now the *lingua franca*, the language of capitalism, but also considers that English has the potential to be a language for diversity and inclusion. For this, English and Lectoescritura classes aim to improve children's comprehension and communication abilities. The classes should be centered on the students and tasks are supposed to promote significant learning. The area plan for English also mentions that vocabulary acquisition of the surroundings is the core in the fourth grade. Descriptions of students themselves and their surroundings using short sentences, and comprehension of short stories are also goals in this level. The standards of achievement for the course are divided into three main aspects: Conceptual (know), procedural (do) and attitudinal (be).

The group I started working with in 2022 is a Fourth grade. It has 41 students whose age range is between 9 and 10 years and all of them are native Spanish speakers. The English classroom is fixed and the students have to move to it every time they have English class, while the teacher remains in it. It has individual students' chairs, a desk for the teacher, a marker board, a laptop, and a tv to project from the laptop, additionally, the school has wifi connection with a password. This group has English classes twice a week for 55 minutes. Moreover, the English teacher is also in charge of Lectoescritura lessons, so she can exchange the courses in a convenient way according to the group's necessities. For

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<sup>2</sup> “Un lugar donde se aprende y se es feliz”.



my practicum II in 2023 , the classroom and resources were the same, but the fourth grade that year had 37 children.

The cooperating teacher is a woman with 14 years of teaching experience. She has been teaching elementary school in the municipality of Medellín since 2014. She graduated from the Normal Superior Antioqueña in Buenos Aires with an emphasis on teaching. She studied Assistance and children's care at Sena Institution and she loves working with children. She tries to bring English native speakers to her classes for children to listen to them, and think about other cultures and the different types of English because for her it is important to teach them that the outside world is wide and full of variety. Then, in my practicum II, I worked with a different teacher who also graduated from Normal Superior in Cauca and studied a teaching program for elementary school at the Universidad Católica del Norte, and she has 23 years of experience working with children.

According to the students' performance, I can observe that they are not very interested in English class and it is one of the hardest subjects for them to understand. They do not complete their homework and only 8% of the students present them on time and complete. This can be evidenced in Journal 4, September 9th, 2022, "Only 7 from 40 students brought the workshop about recycling complete. Teacher graded a lot of 1". Additionally, the English class does not present a very structured order, given that there is no presentation of the agenda at the beginning of the classes or an appropriate closing.

Concerning students' interests and needs in the English class, useful information was collected in the survey applied to the students in November. Based on the question "What kind of activities would you like to be done in class?" Some of them expressed that they prefer a class taught in English where they can work with their classmates, they want to know how to introduce themselves to an English speaker, and also would love to have games included in the lessons.

In the following session, I will present the statement of the problem and the main issues that I

could intervene and implement in the English class.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Our country has launched a series of policies to straighten the teaching and learning of English since 2004. Nowadays, the National English Program is the current program until 2025. These policies involve public schools and establish language standards of achievement to be more competitive internationally. Despite all the efforts, primary levels in public schools do not have the resources and are not ready to achieve these international standards because time in class does not seem to be enough, methodologies do not take into account children's needs to learn better and faster, and contents are not delivered in an organized way.

In the 4th grade English class, there is a lack of coherence and sequence in the vocabulary and grammatical contents used for the teaching of English, the topics and objectives for each term are not clear. According to the institutional syllabus, students have to develop linguistic competencies and each term has thematic units to follow. However, there is no defined structure, methodology, or class routines due to the lack of organized class planning, the inappropriate use of classroom resources for the activities, and the passive attitude of the students.

Class planning is an important aspect of teaching routines because it is the basis of classroom life. Unfortunately, classes do not seem to have detailed planning either on the topics for the term, nor on the specific development of each class. Grammar topics are the core of each class; however, they do not have a coherent sequence or purpose. Grammar is explained out of context and topics change each week without a coherent relation among them.

This lack of coherence can be evidenced in a sequence of some of the classes I observed. One of those classes was focused on a topic related to environmental care: "The 3 Rs: Reduce, reuse and recycle". However, in the following class, the topic was completely different and did not have any connection with the previous one, it was the structure of "There is- there are". In the class of 3Rs, it

was also evident the use of the methodology of grammar translation since students had to translate a poem that was not explained or read to them. In the next class, the tutor changed the topic, according to my journal,

“she sat down and searched on the laptop a web page oriented to teaching English to children. She advanced to the topic “*there is, there are*” and said to the group that they were going to watch the video and take notes. The teacher stopped the video at strategic moments like the explanation of the structure, the examples and the translation of them. In those moments students had to take notes in both languages and do the drawings of the video as well.” (Journal 5, September 16th, 2022)

Additionally, the class structure is not clear for the children because there is no presentation of an agenda. Due to that, children do not see a clear purpose for the class, and do not feel engaged. Moreover, class time is not important for students, classes are unstructured and wrapping up does not exist. All these students’ attitudes toward the class can be evidenced in the following journal entries that describe the way in which students leave the classroom: “The bell rings and everybody runs out to their other classroom. Very few say goodbye, thanks or until the next class.” (Journal 1, August 16th, 2022). Another description is, “The bell rang and the class was finished. Students went out of the classroom, some of them said goodbye.” (Journal 3, September 9th, 2022). About the ending of the classes, they do not finish properly,, there is no closing: “I could not say that the class was officially over because there was not even an agenda.” (Journal 4, September 16th, 2022 )

About the activities and the inappropriate use of resources, I consider that there is a great opportunity to use the tv and the computer more efficiently as the projecting tool of the class. The school counts on an internet connection, which would permit the use of a great variety of resources in the classes such as videos, songs, games, and multimodal presentations that could also provide students with more interactive activities, and could provide real contexts and situations to illustrate the grammar

topics established for the term since grammar is a basis of the syllabus. For example, in one of the classes, the tutor was going to explain the topic “*there is, there are*”. For that, she entered a web page and started a video. However there was no previous exploration of the topic, or interaction with the video. This situation can be evidenced in my journal entry,

The teacher advanced to the topic “*there is, there are*” and said to the group that they were going to watch the video and take notes. The video started and she told them to write the title “*There is, there are*”. She played it and the video explained that *there is* is for singular and *there are* for plural... She asked them to write when she paused the video. (Journal 4, September 16th).

Students also had to take notes and do the drawings of the video based on each example.

Another common use of the computer and the content projected on the tv, as if it were a board, can be illustrated in the following journal excerpt: “The way in which the class was working was that the tutor wrote on a Word document and projected this on the tv for students to write in their notebooks.” (Journal 2, August 22th, 2022). These resources of the classroom can be used in a more propositive and dynamic way to vary note-taking activities during the classes and to promote interaction among students and the materials to facilitate meaningful learning.

Finally, as a consequence of the previous misuse of resources situation, the passive role of students in the class is common and can be evidenced in their attitudes. They do not feel engaged and motivated because of the lack of presentation of the agenda for the lesson, the tasks for the class, and the monotony in the activities during this. Children receive information about an English grammar topic and they are not invited to participate in the construction of the knowledge. They do not ask questions because they are not involved and do not feel a commitment to the class. Additionally, most of the time, the interaction promoted in the lessons is based on teacher-student routines, not student-student activities. All this is also reflected not only in their attitude but also in their grades. The

class was very undisciplined and the teacher assigned them an extra workshop for helping them with the bad grades and also as a strategy to promote better performance This issue is evidenced in my journal,

The tutor decided that she was going to send the students a workshop to help them have better grades because they were very undisciplined. She asked me to design it and send it to her. She told children to say to their parents that they had extra work in English because of their indiscipline. (Journal 3, September 9th, 2022).

As a result of that, some students seem to be unmotivated and bored, because the extra work and grades are used as a threat and they feel that they do not deserve it: “Children seem worried or bored. I guess that it was because of the teacher's humor and because, due to some classmates, they will have more homework.” (Journal 3, September 9th, 2022).

Teaching children implies planning classes carefully and purposefully, using resources that promote interaction among them and with the target content, while helping them to develop a more active role in the class and enjoy as well. Games could be an effective way of teaching a foreign language to children for their capacity to increase engagement by bringing context to the classroom, their adaptability to situations and topics, and the importance it has in children’s life.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Games in Children’s Lives and Class**

In Colombia, the learning of English starts from school, with children in early grades. For that, it is important to take into account their characteristics. According to Alpar (2013), playing is very important in children's physical and mental development and it even prepares them for life, because through them they imitate adults' attitudes, manage stress, and learn to work collaboratively while getting familiarized with social norms.

Hadfield (1999) defines that “a game is an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun” (p. 8). Therefore, it is crucial to keep this in mind when planning to use a game in class and do it well since they “comprise many factors such as rules, competition, relaxation, and learning. The main focus of using games in class is not only to help students to learn more effectively but also to have fun” (Tuan, 2010, p. 67) Additionally, games are widely useful in the learning process, as Hadfield (1999) expresses:

Games can be used at all stages of the progression from controlled to free practice, serving at one end of the range as a memory aid and repetition drill, at the other as a chance to use the language freely and as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. They can also serve as a diagnostic tool for the teacher, who can note areas of difficulty and take appropriate remedial action. (p. 8)

The use of games in teaching languages is not entirely new, as Anyaegbu (2012) expresses, “The use of games in traditional English language classroom has been in existence for some time now and is a practice that has been regarded as educationally sound despite the limited empirical evidence to validate this contention.” (p. 154). Games in the classroom have a good reputation because of their benefits, such as stimulating motivation and bringing authenticity and fun into the classroom (Anyaegbu, 2012), which are evident most of the time and are easily identifiable. Nevertheless, there is a lack of data about the topic and it is important to move from liking to awareness of the use of games in the classroom.

### **Language Games**

In agreement with the previous ideas, it is possible to affirm that playing is a priceless tool in the process of acquiring a foreign language since it permits students to use the language and fill their minds in a simple way while they also develop social skills (Alpar, 2013). Games with these purposes

can be called language games, which “in definition, (language games) are language learning through gameplay (Godwin-Jones, 2014 as cited in Yaccob, 2019, p. 210) which involves the communicative aspects of learning” (Willis & Willis, 2013; Adeng & Shah, 2012 cited in Yaccob, 2019, p. 210).

According to (Hadfiel, 1999), language games are divided into two types: Linguistic games focused on the accuracy of the language and communicative games centered on a successful exchange of information and ideas in conversations that can happen in the classroom

### **Games in Grammar and Benefits of Engagement**

Crystal (2004) states that “grammar is the structural foundation of our ability to express ourselves. The more we are aware of how it works, the more we can monitor the meaning and effectiveness of the way we and others use language.” (Crystal, 2004, as cited in Tuan, 2010, p. 61). The use of games when teaching grammar is highly recommended because it promotes active involvement and awakens a sensibility for the practice of grammar (Yaccob, 2019). Also, favors the practice, learning, and use of a foreign language in an independent and passionate way because of the students' interest, expanding the process outside the classroom (Chik, 2012).

Including language games in teaching grammar can bring multiple benefits for the learners through the learning process, as Yaccob (2019) affirms, “language games arouse ESL learners' interests to participate in the usually boring grammar lessons other than it can be applied in lessons even though the classroom is not equipped with modern technological tools.” (p. 212) Also, because it brings context into the class, “it can arouse interest, stimulate interaction and help them to understand places, people and events as well as simplify situations which would otherwise be abstract and difficult to explain in words” (Briewin et al., 2013, p. 250). Moreover, they can be used all along the learning process, some authors like Mubaslat (2012) affirm that “games ought to be at the heart of teaching foreign languages and that games should be used at all stages of lesson” (p.4).

### **Challenges of Using Language Games in the Classroom**

There are evident advantages of using games in the classroom, nevertheless, there are also some aspects to take into account when planning to use a language game in the classroom that could be considered as disadvantages as well. For example, as Stojković & Jerotijević (2011) paraphrased in Saleh (2022)

Some teachers think that games give rise to some problems. For example, some of them believe that games can be a waste of time sometimes. They also say that games make the class messy, and students usually do not achieve the required goals (p. 2)

For that reason, it is extremely important to take into account some of the suggested aspects by Ibrahim (2016) such as preparation, organization, expectations, and routine. Additionally, a game "should not be regarded as a marginal activity filling in odd moments when the teacher and class have nothing better to do" (Lee, 1979, as cited in Stojković, M. K., & Jerotijević, D. M., 2011, p.1)

Based on the previous information, it is possible to affirm that language games are a powerful and worthwhile tool when "learners are not cooperative or interested in grammar lessons because games create engagement, connection and in-context learning. It also saves more time as learners are directly exposed to using grammar in context and developing fluency in creating sentences." (Yacob, 2019, p. 215) Nevertheless, it should not be used carelessly and the previous planning, determination of objectives, and selection of materials is very important given that they are not only useful for filling time or when there are no more activities to do (Lee 1979 as cited in Stojković, M. K., & Jerotijević, D. M., 2011)

### **Research Question**

With the purpose of improving the class environment, giving good use of the resources, and favoring students' engagement, the question I want to answer is: How can language games help fourth-grade students engage in their English class while learning the grammar topics?



## **Objectives**

### **General Objective**

To explore how language games can help fourth-grade students to engage with the English class and learn the grammar topics.

### **Specific Objectives**

- To identify the influence of games in the learning process of a foreign language.
- To evaluate the impact of providing students with the necessary bases in vocabulary through language games.
- To monitor the influence of teaching and practice of grammar topics through language games in the learning process.
- To monitor student's role in the English class through their participation in the language games.

### **Action Plan**

After observing the fourth-grade students, the methodology and the dynamics in the classroom, I decided to keep attached to the grammar-based syllabus. I will develop it through language games with the objective of exploring how language games can help fourth-grade students engage with the English class and learn the grammar topics. In order to achieve this, I will implement a series of actions that will be developed and divided into weeks during the first term of the school year.

To start, during the first week I will Inform the students about the project that will be developed in that term called "This is me". This is with the purpose of introducing students to the project development, its characteristics and its components. The data collection instrument for this week will be my journal.

During the second and third weeks, I will implement the actions in three different moments: exploring language, practicing topics, and playing games. For the first one, I will be exploring vocabulary about physical appearance and personality traits using pictures in order to provide students

with the necessary bases of vocabulary about adjectives for describing people. Then, we will play a linguistic game called “be concentrated” to raise students’ interest in the vocabulary of adjectives for describing people. Finally, for the practice stage, we will develop a worksheet to practice the vocabulary of adjectives for describing people. I will collect the data from this action in my journal.

During the fourth and fifth week, I will start working on grammar topics, in three moments. I will explore the present simple to describe people, in order to provide students with examples of the use and conjugation of verbs in the simple present tense. The topics will be focused on the use of the verb “be” and the verb “have”. After that, for the playing stage, students will play a communicative game called Who am I? to practice people descriptions. Finally, for the practice stage, they will draw and describe their favorite person. These students' artifacts will be considered as data that will be analyzed with a rubric.

After the implementation of these actions, students will have the bases to start designing their album, so in the sixth week, I will move to the next action called “Describing myself” where children begin to design the final project writing their physical and personality description. With this activity, students will have the opportunity to practice the linguistics topics previously covered, and know themselves better and appreciate their own qualities. Afterwards, a self-assessment format will be filled by students in order to monitor students’ performance in the English class and their learning process in aspects like their participation, responsibility and assimilation of the topics up to that point of the term, while at the same time, collecting their opinions and suggestions.

In the next action, during the seventh and eighth weeks, I will work again on a grammar topic using the stages of exploring, practicing and playing. I will explore the topics of likes and dislikes and the structure of interrogative statements through songs to provide students with examples of the use and conjugation of the verb “like” in the simple present tense to express preferences. Later, I will propose a communicative game called “Find someone who...” (with likes and dislikes) in small groups, with the

idea of promoting student-student interaction in the group. Finally, in the moment of practice, I will work with a workshop about likes and dislikes and interrogative structure with a virtual linguistic roulette game. All this is to practice the structure of questions and answers about likes and dislikes. Students' workshops will be collected and analyzed with the purpose of checking their comprehension of the grammar topics and ability to use them in context.

After that week, students will design the second part of the album, composed by their descriptions of preferences and a word cloud with their qualities. For this part, the second self-assessment format will be filled by students in order to monitor their performance in the English class and their learning process in aspects like their participation, responsibility and assimilation of the topics close to the end of the term, and also collecting their opinions and suggestions specifically centered on language games.

In the last week, I will celebrate a classroom fair called "This is me" where students will do the presentation of their album in small groups. The objective of this activity is to share the album, promote student-student interaction, and help children appreciate themselves and their classmates. For this last part, I will apply a survey to the students, with the purpose of collecting in a more open way their insights of the methodology used during the term, how it contributed to their learning process and the possible problems they had with it.

### **Development of Actions**

In order to answer the research question, how can language games help fourth-grade students engage in their English class while learning grammar topics? A series of research and teaching actions were implemented during the practicum phase. From the ten weeks planned, it was possible to implement only eight of them. Due to that and to the low children's level of English, I had to make some adaptations to the action plan and some activities could not be done. In this section, I will

describe the actions that could be implemented in order to see the impact of language games on students' engagement and assimilation of grammar topics.

Regarding the research actions, a diagnostic activity to be compared with the final project and two self-assessments, also to be compared between them, were implemented. In the first place I will talk about the self-assessments; the first one was implemented in the fifth week with the purpose of monitoring students' performance and their learning process through aspects like participation, responsibility, attendance and assimilation of the topics in the English class up to that point of the term. Also, it intended to collect their suggestions and opinions from the class. 34 students handed it in, and I found that more than half of the children (23 students) have a self-image as participative and responsible students. For the part of attendance, they also grade themselves high, so it is possible to affirm that they had been in most of the classes and had their notes up to day. Finally, most of their opinions of the methodology suggest that they like it, enjoy it and that it increases their interest in the English classes.

The second self-assessment was implemented in the last class, on May 19th and was handed in by 37 students. It was very similar to the first one, but with additional open-ended questions oriented to the language games played in the English classes and the children's appreciations of them. The scores for the responsibility and participation criteria were higher than in the first one. The participation item was also higher, however, I consider that some students were not completely honest with their perceptions about responsibility and participation. Their perceptions of the language games showed that two kinds of games played (linguistic and communicative) were useful for children and adapted to their different preferences of interactions (group or individual) during their learning processes.

The two self-assessments were implemented one at the mid-term and the other at the end of the term with the purpose of comparing students' perceptions from the beginning and the end of the process.

Lastly, the diagnostic activity was analyzed in order to compare students' performance and progress in relation to the final project (the album). The first action was implemented on the first class, February 11th, and 34 written works were collected. Students had to write a text describing their physical appearance and their personality, also write about preferences, and make a drawing of them in correspondence with the descriptions. The objective was to see students' English previous knowledge and their capacity to describe themselves using the verbs *be*, *have* and *like* to give personal information, express preferences and the use adjectives for describing. Then, the penultimate action on May 12th, was the presentation and handing in of the albums. First, students presented their albums in small groups and I passed through them listening to their presentations and interactions. At the end of the class, I collected their works. 37 students handed in it, and the purpose was to present a writing work covering all the topics previously learned and promote student-student interaction and help children to know themselves and their classmates better. In this project, students had to build a personal album with pictures or drawings and write paragraphs describing their physical appearance, personality and their preferences. Students had to develop this activity in English, using the vocabulary of adjectives for descriptions and to express what they like or not, and the verbs that we learned to use (*be*, *have*, *like*, *hate*).

When comparing the two works, I found significant improvements in children's use of grammar and vocabulary. They were able to develop the project in English, building complete and meaningful sentences and giving enough information about themselves, and their daily life.

The teaching actions were organized following a methodology of three main stages: exploring language, practicing topics, and playing games. This methodology was used in the classes where students learned a grammar topic such as describing people, verbs *be* and *have* and expressing preferences (likes and dislikes).

The exploring stage had the purpose of introducing vocabulary and grammar structures, using examples provided by videos, images and short texts. Based on these resources, I interacted with students asking them to read the examples and to answer questions about the texts and their meanings. I also used some images as prompts for them to construct their own sentences or short text.

For the practicing topics stage, I planned to design three workshops for each topic worked in the term: describing people, verbs be and have and likes and dislikes. However, I could only design and implement the workshop corresponding to describing people. In the first item of this activity, children had to read a short physical description of two different characters in order to make a drawing following the characteristics mentioned in the text. In the second item, students had to color three illustrations of characters and wrote a short description including the physical appearance according to what they colored and the personality traits they wanted to assign to the drawing. This workshop was collected on February 25 and almost half of the group had a grade under 3. For that reason, I gave them the chance of bringing the workshop again with the corrections of suggestions made by me, in order to improve their grades. Only four students took advantage of that and their notes improved to 4,5 and 5,0.

Another activity implemented in the practice stage was a group activity to practice describing people with concrete examples of real-life corresponding to the fifth class. Students choose their groups of around 4 or 5 people. I found that this was hard for some children to find a group for working either because they did not like to work with other people or because they were rejected by the other classmates.

For the playing games stage, I implemented two types of games: linguistic games oriented to language structures and vocabulary, and communicative games which include exchange of information and conversations in class.

The first game implemented in the second class was “Simon Says” (communicative game) to practice body and face parts. Later, in the same class, we played a true or false game on the computer (linguistic game) to practice physical appearance. In the third session, I proposed another game on the computer about physical appearance and personality with the multiple selection dynamic (linguistic game) in order to review the previous topics. These games correspond to the topic *describing people*.

Then, for the topic of expressing preferences, I taught them to express their likes and dislikes, using vocabulary to express the things they love and enjoy and the things they dislike or are afraid of. In that session we played a communicative game called “Find someone who...” In this game, students had a chart composed of a list of things and had to fill it by asking and answering each other about their preferences about those things and writing their names in the item, and like that fill the chart with classmates’ names. I discovered that this activity liked students a lot, because they got to know their friends better and changed the dynamic of the class, but it was hard to keep them asking and talking in the target language, English.

### **Data Analysis**

For the purpose of collecting the data for this research project, different instruments were used: A diagnostic activity, two self-assessments, the analysis of students’ artifacts which was the album for the final project, and my research journal. In the next paragraphs, I will explain how they were used.

In the first place, a diagnostic activity was implemented to collect the first data from an activity about describing people. In this activity, students had to write a text describing their physical appearance and their personality, also describe their preferences, and make a drawing in correspondence with the descriptions. Students had to develop this activity in English, using the vocabulary that they knew. The objective was to analyze students’ English level and capacity to write descriptions using the verbs *be*, *have* and *like* to give personal information and express preferences, while at the same time checking their vocabulary of adjectives, food, and hobbies. This activity was

applied on February 11th, 2023 and 34 written works were collected. Students' performance was analyzed with a rubric divided into two main parts: use of language and vocabulary, and content and task completion.

Secondly, self assessment 1 had the purpose of monitoring students' performance and their learning process through aspects like participation, responsibility, attendance and assimilation of the topics in the English class. Also, it intended to collect their suggestions and opinions from the class. This instrument was collected on April 17th, 2023 and 33 students handed it. The analysis of this instrument was guided by the aspects previously mentioned in the rubric. This instrument was figured out by counting students' closed answers and also by grouping their open answers according to common characteristics to make an interpretation of them.

For the students' artifacts analysis, I collected their final project: an album that compiled all the topics that had been worked in the class. This personal album included pictures or drawings accompanied by paragraphs describing their physical appearance, personality and their preferences. Students had to develop this activity in English, using the vocabulary and grammatical structures to describe themselves and express their likes and dislikes using verbs like *be*, *have*, *like*, *hate*, *love* and the expressions like *I enjoy...* and *I am scared of...* Students shared their albums with their peers the last session of class. This activity was collected on May 12th 2023, and 37 written works were collected. Students' performance was analyzed with the same rubric as the diagnostic activity, it is divided into two main parts: use of language and vocabulary and task content and completion.

Self-assessment number two had the purpose of monitoring students' performance and their learning process through aspects like participation, responsibility, attendance and assimilation of the topics in the English class, but this time at the end of the practicum. Also, it intended to collect their suggestions and opinions from the class, especially in the language games aspects. This instrument was



collected on May 19th, 2023 and 37 students handed it. The analysis of this instrument was guided by the aspects previously mentioned in self-assessment 1.

Finally, journals had always been an important instrument during the practicum to register and reflect on my teaching methodology, children's attitudes or school ambience. The journal entries were carefully analyzed and categorized to find connections with the research question and objectives. After collecting, organizing and reading the information from each instrument, I analyzed them all and triangulated them by looking for themes and categories based on the patterns, coincidences or contradictions that emerged from the data. From the triangulation process, I obtained the final categories which will be presented in the findings sections.

### **Findings and Interpretations**

After triangulating and categorizing the data, it was found that students improved in their learning process of English in several aspects such as improving their attitude towards the class, participating in class activities, handing in works on time, using grammar in a more contextualized and situated way, and taking advantage of games as a way to learn English. I will present the findings in the following categories: first, exploring, practicing, and playing to engage students in class; second, building grammar meaningfully; and third, using games in the classroom: benefits and challenges.

#### **Exploring, Practicing, and Playing to Engage Students in Class.**

Implementing games in the classroom implied changing the class methodology. I decided to design the class methodology considering and following some stages that help students to be prepared for the games. It was divided into three different moments: exploring, practicing, and playing. Before playing any game, students were provided with activities that allowed them to explore the topics proposed for the term. For this exploratory stage, first, we went into the topics in different ways, like watching videos to introduce vocabulary, using slides with definitions and examples about the topics

we were working on, and checking students' comprehension by asking them questions about the meaning, and the use of the elements we were learning. After that, for the practicing stage, students were asked to work with worksheets to expand the knowledge they had acquired in the previous stage. Some of the activities were developed in groups or were handed in for grading. Finally, after those stages, we moved to the playing phase. Games were divided into two types, linguistic games and communicative games (Hadfiel, 1999). With games, students were able to experiment a different class dynamics at the same time they were reinforcing topics and learning English in a funny way.






Thanks to those changes included in the class methodology, students' engagement and motivation increased significantly in the English classes. It was reflected in some of the students' attitudes, such as their active participation during the activities and classes; their responsibility with class workshops and homework; and commitment to important classes like the presentation of the final project.

This impact on students' change of attitudes can be evidenced in the answers provided by them in self-assessments 1 and 2 both in the closed-ended and open-ended questions. For example, in the first self-assessment, handed in by 34 students, from the closed-ended questions section, focused on students' participation and responsibility, it is possible to conclude that more than half of them (23 students) have a self-image as participative and responsible students. On a scale from 1 to 5, most of them assigned themselves the highest scores (from 3 to 5) for this criterion, and only 11 from 34 children placed their scores under 2. On the other hand, in the second self-assessment, handed in by 37 students, the scores for the responsibility and participation criteria were higher. Only 4 students placed their score under 2, compared with the 11 students who did it in self-assessment 1. However, some students were not completely honest with their perceptions of responsibility and participation.

The following format represents the self-assessment handed in by students. The number next to each criterion and below the faces represents the total number of students who placed their score in that item.






**Figure 1**

*Self- assessment 1*

Yo como estudiante...					
<b>Participación y responsabilidad</b>	-	-	-	-	-
Participo activamente en la clase de inglés respondiendo o haciendo preguntas, prestando atención y tomando notas			8	16	10
He participado en los juegos de lenguaje propuestos por la practicante	3	2	2	8	18
En los trabajos en grupo he aportado para solucionar la actividad propuesta	2		7	9	15
He entregado los talleres y actividades a tiempo	1	3	2	5	22

**Figure 2**

*Self- assessment 2*

Yo como estudiante...					
<b>Participación y responsabilidad</b>	-	-	-	-	-
Participo activamente en la clase de inglés respondiendo o haciendo preguntas, prestando atención y tomando notas			4	12	21
He participado en los juegos de lenguaje propuestos por la practicante	3	1	5	7	21
En los trabajos en grupo he aportado para solucionar la actividad propuesta			3	12	22
He entregado los talleres y actividades a tiempo			3	7	27

Additionally, the positive impact of the methodology implemented in the class can be evidenced by students’ comments in the self-assessment 1. Most students answered that they liked the classes and the methodology. They expressed that their favorite thing was to play the games and to understand what the student-teacher said. Their favorite classes were the ones related to verbs be and have, and when they played games. They expressed the following: Yasmin Peña stated that “My favorite thing

has been understanding and improving the language”; Ana Maria Tamayo also mentioned “I enjoyed understanding what the teacher said.”, and Miguel Lara affirmed that “I have liked everything, I do not have a least favorite class.” Finally, as a suggestion that emphasizes the role of games, Gabriela Monsalve said “I wish we could play games more often.”

Similarly, students' answers to the questions “How have you felt during the English classes?” and “What was the best of the English classes?” evidenced that the whole group liked the classes and the methodology accompanied by the language games. They expressed that they felt really well in the classes and that they felt they learned and enjoyed them. For most of them, the final project of the album was the best activity of the term, because they enjoyed showing their lives and knowing their classmates a bit more. For example, Imanuel Arenas expressed “ I felt very well and with energy and enthusiasm in the classes. The album was the best because it talked about us and our personalities and I learned a lot”, likewise, Emanuel Ramirez wrote “I felt really good and willing to learn more”, and Laura Gómez said, “My favorite thing was the album because I enjoyed knowing more about my classmates.” On the other hand, for others, the album was the hardest part of the classes due to the big amount of information and work that it required. Some students mentioned that “We had to make many things on it (the album)” (Andrés Ariza) and “The album was a bit difficult to make” (Isaura Gomez.)

In general, they liked the games, but when they had to explain why or mention a specific game, they struggled and some of them recalled the activity of the album which was not a game. Nevertheless, they had positive opinions about games , they expressed for example: “I loved them all because they were fun and educative” (Erika Marín), also they considered that “They are a fun way to learn (the games).” (Andres Ariza) and also Simon Arias said “I had fun with games, they were for learning more.”

Students' participation was another important change in class, especially during the exploratory stage. Students paid attention in the class and took notes, even if it was hard for them to make relations

with their mother language and the topic they were learning in English, I wrote “I think that the exploratory part of the class engaged students since they wanted to read the examples and had to think about the meaning (Journal 11, March 10th, 2023). Even though for several classes the most enthusiastic students were the same, I was glad to see them and I consider that their energy could propagate to other children. I considered that:

Children were very willing to read the examples and say their meanings. Sometimes I wrote the structure of the sentence divided by pronoun, conjugated verb and complement, and other times they wrote it and showed it to me. There was a child who was especially participative. All the time he participated with the examples and told me the meaning and the structure, he looked very excited during the class. I was very happy to see that child participating so much. He was also very attentive in the last class and his perseverance could also motivate other children. (Journal 12, March 24th, 2023).

However, the only problem with the methodology according to the students’ comments was focused on group work. At the end of one class, for the practice stage, I asked children to make groups of 4 or 5 people in order to do an activity about the topics we had learned. I noticed that for some pupils it was hard to get in a group and a few refused to work in a big group. They expressed that working in groups was the least favorite way of interacting in class. Camilo Puerta commented, “My least favorite class was the activity in groups”. Sara Toledo also mentioned, “My least favorite class was when we made groups for an activity.” Definitely, they seemed to prefer to work individually or in smaller groups in order to choose their closest friends or avoid rejection.

In conclusion, the methodology designed for these classes based on the three stages of exploring and practicing and then playing was useful for promoting students’ engagement in the class, increasing their interest in the English topics, and facilitating students’ interactions when sharing their

final project. Although they were not very willing to work in groups, when they had to work with some peers, they took advantage of knowing their classmates better and learning together.

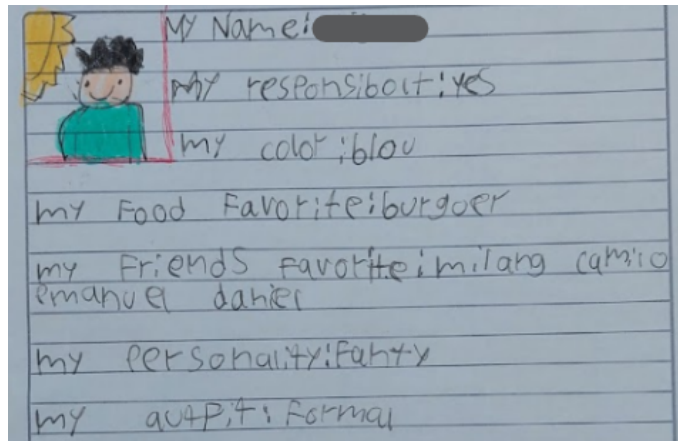
### **Building Grammar Meaningfully**

After developing the actions proposed for the study, it was evident that students improved their performance in English grammar. This was evidenced when comparing the written diagnostic activity, implemented at the beginning of the term, with the final written project (the album), handed in at the end of the term. At the beginning of the practicum, in the first class with the purpose of exploring students' previous knowledge, I asked them to write a descriptive text about themselves in English as a diagnostic activity. Some of them wrote complete sentences combining English and Spanish, some others wrote isolated words in English or Spanish, and others wrote only ideas in Spanish. However, at the end of the term, after implementing actions and providing instructions about how to write a descriptive text, children had to build an album about themselves, describing their physical appearance, their personality, and preferences. Pupils showed a significant advance in their writing performance. This significant improvement can be evidenced in some of the students' work:

For example, when writing the diagnostic activity, Manuel Estrada expressed his ideas in English, but used some isolated words to make the descriptions and give personal information as if he were answering questions instead of writing complete sentences, and in some cases, he wrote the words as they sounded. Additionally, because of presenting the information in that way, he did not use any of the expected verbs like *be*, *have*, *like* or *dislike*.

### **Figure 3**

*Diagnostic activity Manuel Estrada*

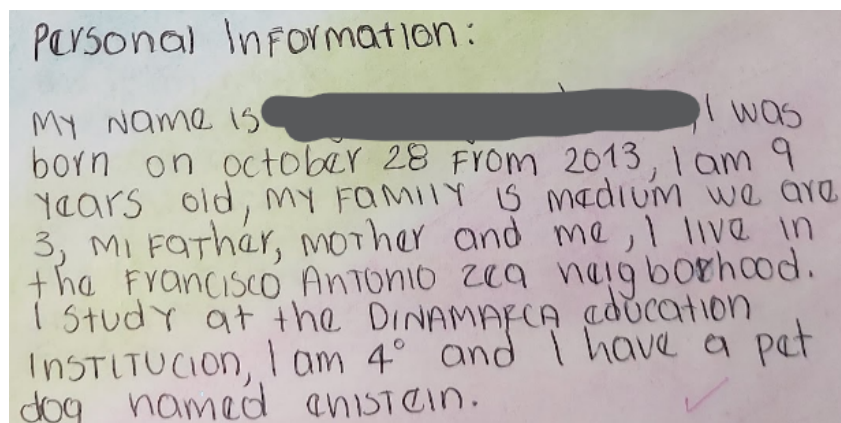


*Note:* This image is the written work made by Manuel in the diagnostic activity.

Then, in the final written activity, the album, it was possible to see an improvement in his writing practice. He also developed the task in English, but this time built complete sentences to give personal information, make descriptions and talk about preferences. Additionally, he gave much more information about himself, even including information about his daily life using the verb *be* and several adjectives. When he described his preferences, he also used different expressions like *I like*, *I love* or *I enjoy*, showing an improvement in the use of verbs and new vocabulary.

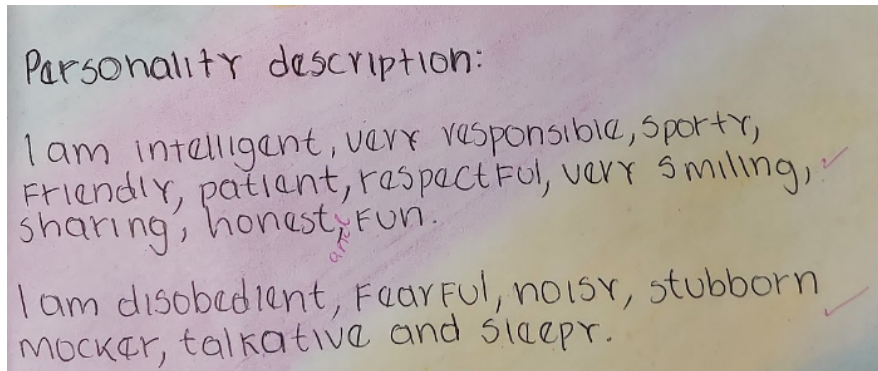
#### **Figure 4**

*Final Project Manuel Estrada*

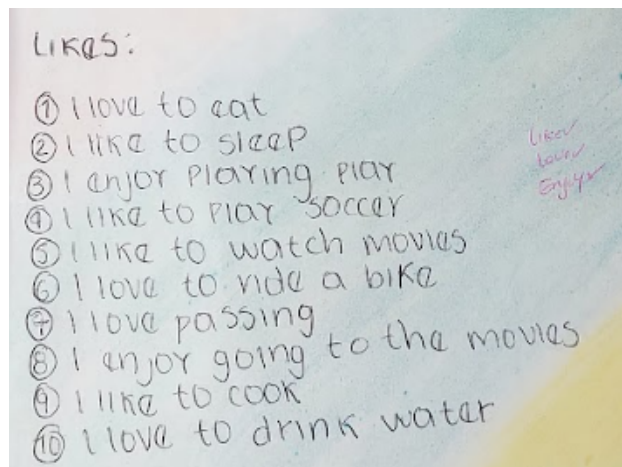


*Note:* This image is an excerpt of the personal information section.

#### **Figure 5**

*Final Project Manuel Estrada*

*Note:* This image is an excerpt of the personality description section.

**Figure 6***Final Project Manuel Estrada*

*Note:* This image is an excerpt of the preferences section.

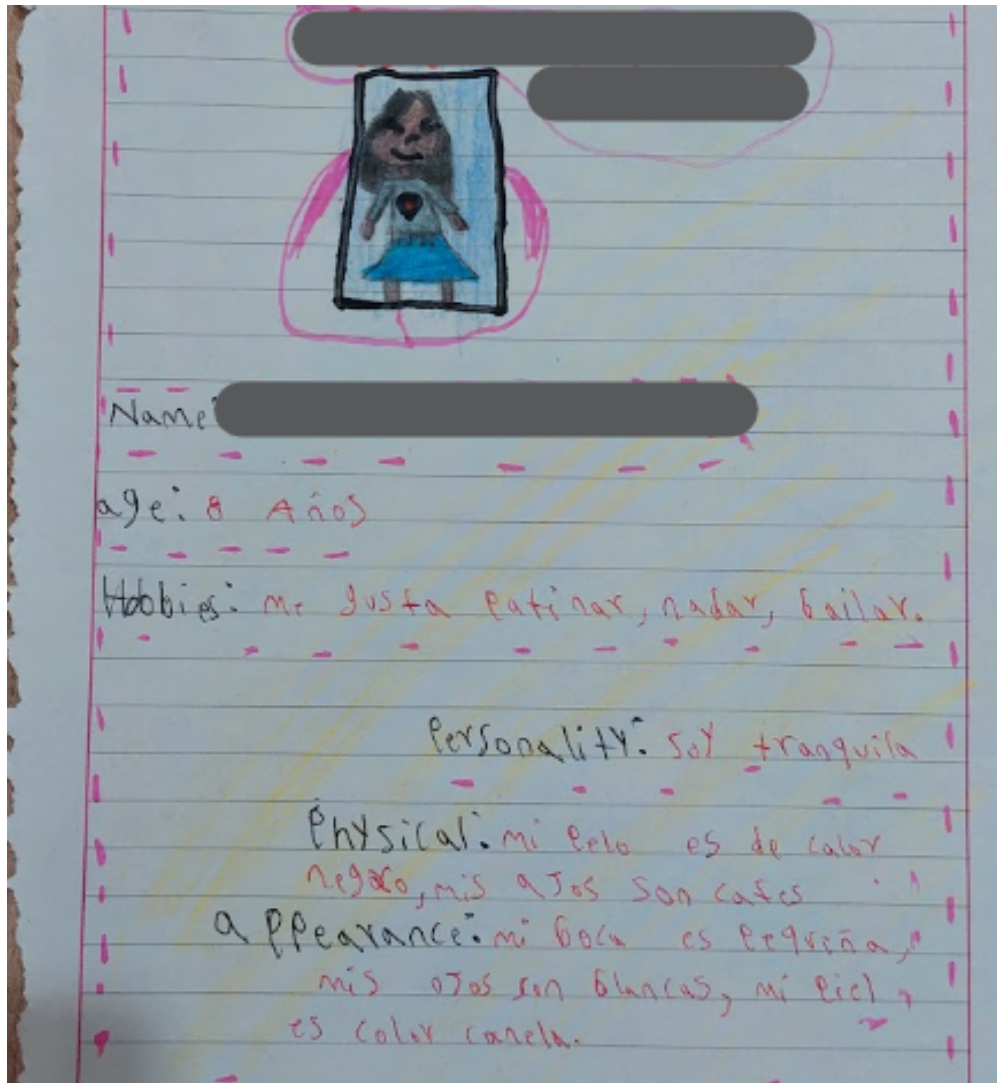
Another example of language improvement can be demonstrated in Sara Toledo's final work. In her diagnostic written activity, she only used English words to name the categories she had to write about, the rest of the information in the categories was written in Spanish. She did not build complete



sentences, it looked more like a list, and since she mainly used Spanish, it was not possible to check her previous knowledge of verbs and adjectives to talk about herself.

**Figure 7**

*Diagnostic Activity Sara Toledo*

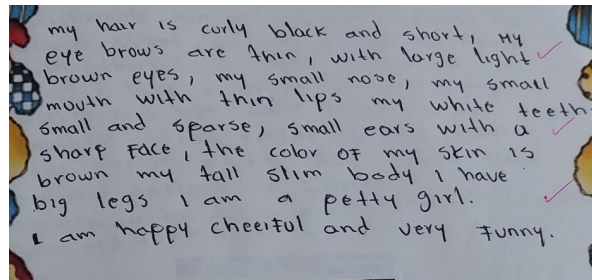


*Note:* This image is the written work made by Sara in the diagnostic activity.

On the other hand, when writing the project album, Sara built complete sentences in the simple present either in affirmative or negative form. She also organized the information by paragraphs developing complete topics about herself like physical appearance, personality and preferences. She did not use Spanish words to write a description of herself. Her lexical repertoire increased, and she made complete physical and personality descriptions using adjectives with correct syntax rules.

### **Figure 8**

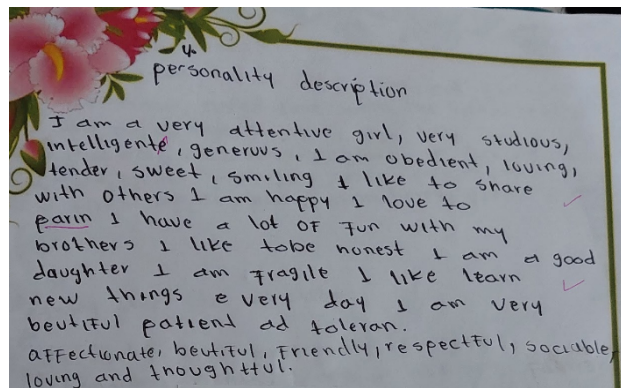
*Final Project Sara Toledo*



*Note:* This image is an excerpt of the physical description section.

**Figure 9**

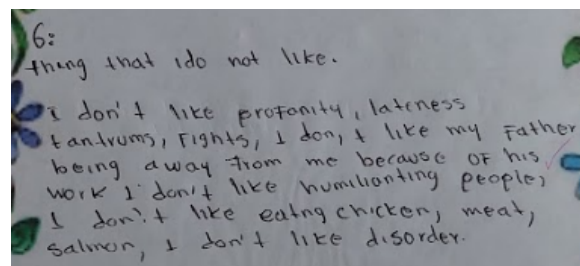
*Final Project Sara Toledo*



*Note:* This image is an excerpt of the personal description section.

**Figure 10**

*Final Project Sara Toledo*



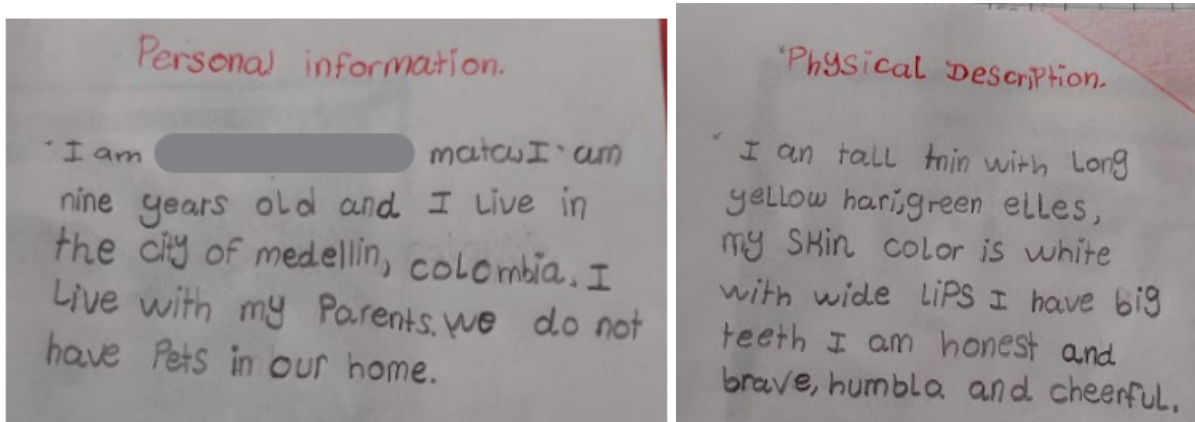
*Note:* This image is an excerpt of the preferences section.

I would like to mention that all the students' final written works improved significantly, they were more complete and organized compared with the first written diagnostic activity. Most of the students felt confident and willing to share their projects among themselves. However, when students

were sharing their work orally in class, few of them seemed not to be confident when reading and presenting their albums to their classmates. For example, Dana Rojas did a great job writing about herself, but she said that she did not feel able to share her work and expressed that she “did not know English”. I had to support her with the oral presentation by asking her questions and reading the album with her.

### Figure 11

#### *Final Project Dana Rojas*



*Note:* These images are excerpts of the personal information and physical descriptions.

To sum up, students did build more meaningful grammar constructions using it in context and connected to a specific task. Thanks to the explicit instruction about grammar and vocabulary topics, the practice activities they performed, and the models provided for developing the final project, students were able to increase their lexical repertoire, use adjectives and verbs following the appropriate grammar rules, and write complete and meaningful sentences.

### Using Games in the English Classroom: Benefits and Challenges

Using games in the English classroom to practice the grammar topics and see its impact was an important part of this project, and it was possible to observe that they had a positive impact in the English classes. Games were useful for provoking students' engagement, facilitating their learning

process and promoting different types of interactions.

In spite of the shortens I had to do in the action plan because of the class loss and the few time, I could implement in the practice stage, two types of language games according to Hadfiel's definitions: linguistic games which are focus on accuracy of the language, and communicative games centered on a successful exchange of information and ideas in conversations that can happen in the classroom (1999).

Language games are a great tool to use in classrooms because children really enjoyed them, it increased their interest in the English class and helped them to learn better. Additionally, it is possible to affirm that play is a priceless tool in the process of acquiring a foreign language since it permits students to use the language and fill their minds in a simple way, while they also develop social skills (Alpar, 2013). According to students' comments from self-assessment 2, it is possible to read several appreciations about language games and their positive impact on students' engagement in the class. Andres Ariza wrote "I felt good during the games, we all like it when we play. Games are a fun way to learn English." Gabriela Monsalve expressed "I felt good with games because I participated a lot and I liked how we solved them. They helped me because I learned to describe people". And Jerónimo Muñoz commented, "I felt great with the games because I participated in them. Also they taught me because they were in English."

Regarding the students' learning process, it is possible to affirm that both types of language games (linguistic and communicative) contributed to facilitating children's learning process since each type of game implied a different type of interaction. Communicative games required more group interaction, and linguistic games implied more individual work. Based on students' answers to the self-assessment 2 when children were asked to talk about their favorite games, they had trouble identifying a game and instead, some of them mentioned activities that were not games. Nevertheless, from the 21 children that mentioned a specific game, 11 expressed that their favorite game belonged to

the linguistic games category and the other 10 had a favorite game belonging to the communicative game category. This finding reveals that it is important to adapt each type of game to the group's preferences and ways of interacting when learning.

However, playing language games in the English class brings several challenges regarding classroom management, the use of English during the games, and the connection between the topics and the games. Classroom management is a challenge that teachers face when bringing games to the classroom. Each time when we started a game, children become very noisy due to the excitement and their wish of participating and winning. The following excerpt from my journal entries can illustrate those moments:

“Children were excited and I gave them turns to come to the front and give the right option. I gave the chance to children that usually don't participate. Constantly I had to tell them to calm down, to sit down and not to scream.” (Journal 9, February 24th, 2023).

And in another class:

Children were excited and I gave them turns to come to the front and give the right option. I gave the chance to children that usually don't participate. Constantly I had to tell them to calm down and not to scream. All the answers were right except for one, that girl seemed a bit scared and not very concentrated. (Journal 10, March 3rd, 2023)

According to Stojković & Jerotijević (2011) as cited in Saleh (2022)

Some teachers think that games give rise to some problems. For example, some of them believe that games can be a waste of time sometimes. They also say that games make the class messy, and students usually do not achieve the required goals (p. 2)

Even though I faced those problems of messy class and noise, I consider that games should not be disregarded in the classroom. Additionally, as teachers it is also our responsibility to help children be concentrated and follow instructions to be organized during the games.

The use of English during the games was one of the biggest challenges of the actions implementation considering that learning English was one of the goals of using games in class. During communicative games, students had to talk to others, give information, and build meaning together, however, they did not use English to exchange information with their classmates. The reasons were varied, ones because they were shy and the others because they did not understand well what they had to do.

I wrote in my diary and reflected about that, this is what I did in one of the classes:

I observed the dynamic of the game. Students were walking around or in small groups asking questions. Constantly I had to tell them to do it in English. I came close to some children to listen to them and told them to do it in English, but they were too shy. I read with them word by word and it took a bit for them to finally say it in English, because, according to them, they were scared or embarrassed. I consider that one big challenge of implementing communicative games is that students tend to talk in Spanish not in English, and that distracts from the real objective of interchange information and practice in English. (Journal 13, May 12th, 2023)

This point is very connected with the following challenge because it has to do with having a clear purpose of learning at the moment of using a game in the classroom.

Games have to be connected with a main goal of learning and be related with the topics of the term. Although it is possible to see the positive results during playing, I also noticed some contradictions at the beginning of the classes, before starting a game. When I presented the agenda and a game was mentioned, there was no reaction in the group, but later, when the moment of playing arrived, the children turned euphoric. I announced games in the agenda because as teachers it is necessary to be attentive to the objectives of the game and help students see the connection between what they are learning and what they are playing. As Lee (1979) states, it (the game) should not be used carelessly and the previous planning, determination of objectives, and selection of materials is

very important given that they are not only useful for filling time or when there are no more activities to do (cited in Stojković, M. K., & Jerotijević, D. M., 2011) .

I wrote in my journal about the announcement of the game in the agenda:

“The part of the game in the agenda brought just a bit of excitement, compared with last year's reactions to that item. It was curious to have a tranquil reaction for the part of the game. Maybe they were scared of something new.” (Journal 9, February 24th, 2023)

And when the game was about to start I reflected that “It is evident that the idea of playing is exciting for the children, because they wish to participate even without knowing what the game is about, but just for knowing that it is a game they seem more willing.” (Journal 10, March 3rd, 2023)”

The use of language games in the classroom brought several benefits for students, helping them to be more engaged and participative in the class while at the same time interacting with their classmates. Yaccob (2019) affirms, “language Language games arouse ESL learners’ interest to participate in the usually boring grammar lessons other than it can be applied in lessons even though the classroom is not equipped with modern technological tools.” (p. 212). However, it is important to be attentive to the challenges that games also represent in the English classroom such as classroom management, helping students keep using the target language, and having a clear connection between the topics and the objectives of the game.

### **Conclusions and Suggestions**

The main objective of this project was to explore how language games can help fourth-grade students to engage with the English class and learn the grammar topics. The categories above provide a wide view of the actions that could be implemented and the influence that they had, showing that there was a positive impact, similar to the expected, in students’ engagement and learning process with a methodology accompanied with games.



The findings section showed, regarding the methodology based on exploring and practicing and then playing stages, that it was useful for promoting students' engagement in the class, increasing their interest in the English topics, and facilitating students' interactions. Also, regarding grammar, students did build more meaningful grammar constructions by using them in context and connected to a specific task. Students were also able to increase their lexical repertoire, and use adjectives and verbs following the appropriate grammar rules, while writing complete and meaningful sentences. Finally, referring to the use of language games in the classroom, several benefits for students were observed. It helped them to be more engaged and participative in the class while at the same time interacting with their classmates.

The impact of the actions implemented in the practicum was positive to the students, they paid attention in the English class because their engagement increased and they had good experiences and positive memories from the class. Hopefully, they will also feel more open to learning not only English, but other languages.

For future research on this topic, it would be recommended to have more time to implement more games. This time, it was possible to play different types of games that were convenient to different participants of the group and satisfied their different necessities and likes, but they were not as many games as expected. Also, it would be beneficial to be attentive to the challenges of using games in the English class and ask questions oriented to how to promote the use of the target language while playing and keep the game connected to the main class objectives.

### **Reflection**

After my practicum stage, I can reflect on two areas, my experience in the classroom as a student teacher and my experience in the research process. I consider that having the chance of doing a practicum in a school with the support of a cooperating teacher is a great way to have an approach to what a teacher career is and face challenges, but in a controlled ambiance, not being completely alone.

The school was a very good institution to carry out the planned actions. It had great resources like tv and internet connection to project videos and games. I loved planning the classes, but a constant challenge I had was group management when students got very excited with an activity or tired from a long day, and my low level of voice did not help when organizing the group or calling their attention. I also enjoyed working with children because of their appreciation for my work, their good disposition to learn and their awe with everything they learned.

Regarding the research process, it was hard, but I feel grateful for it. The most complicated part for me was the text structure and the mandatory rules that I had to follow to write, and the fact that if there is not enough bibliography about my topic of interest, I cannot do my research about it. However, at the same time, I also feel that this hard process is something to be thankful for. It helped me to be more disciplined to do the things I had to do whether I wanted or not; to give order to my ideas, to plan and write the project and actions; and to be creative to solve problems, because the process was not perfect and there were unexpected situations that we had to weather in order to continue and finish the project.

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