



**UNIVERSIDAD
DE ANTIOQUIA**

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

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Medellín, Colombia
2023



**Implementing Game-Based Learning (GBL) and Ludic Activities as a Teaching Strategy to
Increase Young Learners' Exposure to and Use of the English Language.**

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November 2023

Abstract

This action research project explores the effectiveness of implementing Game-Based Learning (GBL) and Ludic Activities to increase the English language exposure and usage among a group of second graders from a public institution in Medellin, Colombia. Initially the terms were defined, then the activities were described and finally, the data collected was analyzed. The tools to collect data were interviews, surveys, students work, students' English diaries and a teacher's journal. Findings suggest that the use of GBL and Ludic Activities notably increase students' exposure to and use of the L2 at the same time they turn the classes student-centered. Moreover, these approaches contribute to a significant boost in motivations and students' development of social skills. However, challenges emerged in the realm of classroom management, highlighting the need for the research and implementation of different strategies to address this issue.

Keywords: game-based learning, ludic activities, language education, motivation, student-centered learning

Título del Proyecto en español: Implementación del Aprendizaje Basado en Juego (ABJ) y las Actividades Lúdicas como Estrategia de Enseñanza para Aumentar la Exposición y el Uso del Idioma Inglés en Niños.

Degree Requirement

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

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest appreciation and gratitude to my family, who have always been my biggest support. Especially my mom and my grandma who are my sunshine.

My aunt deserves a heartfelt recognition for her company and motivation during all these years.

To my partner of life, Carlos, his wisdom, patience, and love made a significant impact on me during the development of this project. I'm profoundly grateful for his presence in my life.

To my friends, Nubia and Valentina for their unconditional love and support.

To the friends I found at University, who not only helped me and taught me but also became the best company and support during this journey.

To my extraordinary teachers who have been an inspiration and guide in this process of becoming a teacher.

To my research advisor Lina, and my classmates for their trust and encouragement.

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Preface

After completing my bachelor's degree requirements, I was assigned to conduct an action research project at the public school INEM José Félix de Restrepo, in its primary school site Guillermo Echavarría Misas, where I observed and implemented the English class since the very beginning of the process.

During the first semester, I observed a lack of interaction among students due to the little exposure to the target language they were receiving. Then, I designed and implemented a research proposal where I included Game-Based Learning and Ludic activities as a teaching strategy to overcome this issue.

This document encompasses various sections, beginning with an overview of the context, followed by the statement of the problem, the actions taken, and their development. Additionally, it includes the presentation of findings, conclusions, reflections, and recommendations drawn from this project.

Context description

INEM José Félix De Restrepo is a public school from Medellín that has been offering its education services for 53 years now. It is of mixed character, trained for formal education services at the pre-school, primary, and secondary levels, technical and academic modality.

The institution has more than 3,300 students from different regions of the city of Medellín, as well as from different socio-economic levels, primarily strata 1, 2, and 3. It has two sites: the main site hosts students from 5th to 11th grade, this one is a big site with more than 10 buildings; the second site hosts around 300 students from preschool to 4th grade and is a small building with six classrooms only, a restaurant, toilets, a store, and a small schoolyard.

As mentioned in their Manual de Convivencia, the institution's mission is focused on educating students using a diverse and flexible curriculum that emphasizes values such as environmental conservation, collaborative work, and democratic participation. Concerning the vision, the institution aims to become a high-quality and innovative school from the Aburrá Valley, including research and active methodologies in all the school processes up to 2030. Furthermore, the school curriculum proposes *play* as a means of enhancing human development processes, marking that its function is linked to everyday life as a cultural experience, placing the student as the center of the education process.

The class observed during this action research is a second-grade class consisting of 25 students aged between 7 and 9 years old, including 9 girls and 16 boys. They come from different parts of the city, and most of them are Colombian. However, it is a quite diverse group, including a Venezuelan child and three indigenous students. In terms of neurodiversity, there are three diagnosed students, one with Asperger's Syndrome and two with ADHD.

Students are enthusiastic about learning English and actively participate in class. They particularly enjoy videos and coloring worksheets. In their free time, they enjoy playing video games, reading books, listening to music, and playing sports.

It is important to note that the practicum student has been responsible for leading classes since the fourth week of observations. Based on these observations and the classes taught by the pre-service teacher, it is evident that the students have a similar English proficiency level: they possess a limited vocabulary, struggle to comprehend long sentences, and usually rephrase the instructions they are given in English into Spanish in order to make sure they understood. To address these challenges, the teacher uses simple language when giving instructions, repeats them two or three times, and provides examples to help students understand what they need to do during activities. Additionally, the teacher incorporates games into the classes as an essential part of the learning process. This is in order to achieve two objectives: first, it captures students' attention and motivates them to learn English, and second, it demonstrates that learning can be fun.

The cooperating teacher (CT) holds a degree in "Pedagogía Infantil" from Universidad de Antioquia, and a specialization in ICTs. Regarding her experience, she has worked at INEM for seven years and worked at "Buen Comienzo" for five years. Although she has no formal training in English, she uses books, videos, and online activities to help students practice correct pronunciation. She incorporates audiovisual and ludic resources to motivate students and considers their context when planning classes. The teacher keeps them engaged with online games, videos, and music because she believes that using ICTs helps students develop different abilities. Finally, she expresses that she mixes different methodologies for her classes instead of one. (Interview #1)

Statement of the Problem

After a couple of months of teaching English to these students, a lack of vocabulary was noticed, resulting in limited use of words in the target language. Through careful observation and reflection, it became evident that these students were not receiving enough exposure to the English language (L2) in class, but rather the class was mainly carried out in Spanish (L1). Debreli (2016) found that English teachers could use the L1 in class to give instructions, explain difficult topics, or define vocabulary. This shows that the L1 should not be perceived as a negative aspect but as a helpful resource in specific circumstances; however, in this research context the usage of L1 was not related to the mentioned situations, the teacher spoke the L1 most of the time because she is not an English teacher. Therefore, the input students received was not sufficient to develop communication skills, not even a basic vocabulary.

Adding to the low exposure to the target language, the time scheduled for the English class was not sufficient, it was scheduled for 2 hours per week, but in reality, they received a 40-minute English class, as it was noted in journal entry #3. Sampeiro (2023, p.7) stated that the time invested in learning inside or outside the classroom is essential in the language learning process because if there is insufficient time dedicated to learning, it will not occur effectively, and acknowledges that “Learning English as a foreign language has limited hours per week; therefore, exposure and opportunities to use the language in the classroom are very limited.”

On the other hand, the School Curriculum proposes role-play as a way of diversifying the curriculum: *“At the Preschool and Basic levels, primary school, diversification is offered through role-playing, respecting the pedagogical characteristics that play has in child development.”*, and the English Syllabus promotes the use of ludic activities: *“we seek the achievement of objectives such as motivating students against learning and love towards English*

as an effective means of communication, through ludic activities.” Nonetheless, classes were actually focused on translating words, singing songs, and coloring worksheets, but little evidence was shown concerning the implementation of games or ludic activities to promote the use of the language. Even if some of the activities planned were fun for students, I considered that they needed more dynamic activities that could help them, first to feel curious about the topics and second to make meaningful connections to what they were learning, which would lead to real vocabulary building. “Having experiences that are joyful, help children find meaning in what they are doing or learning, and involve active engagement, iterative thinking, and social interaction can provide children with the foundations for lifelong learning.” (Liu et al, 2017, p. 21)

It is important to mention that at the beginning of the school year, the class was composed of 38 students which presented challenges to keep them focused during long activities and their behavior was not proper in different situations as observed in journal entry #2. The number of students was reduced to 25 and this issue improved; however, the students are very energetic and need activities carefully planned to keep their attention. In the Book *Psychology Applied to Teaching*, Snowman, McCown, & Biehler, (2014), present the characteristics of children’s behavior divided into Age Levels, each level considers 4 characteristics: physical, social, emotional, and cognitive. Focusing on the Second Level which talks about Primary grades (six, seven, and eight years) that is the level of the students being observed, the authors highlight the importance of fun in kids’ development, taking into account that their attention span is shorter than older children. They suggested: “assign primary grade children relatively short tasks and switch periodically from cognitively demanding activities to less demanding ones” (p. 83). If we consider these characteristics in the language class, students will be more engaged and

focused, which will help them to make meaningful connections, since we can incorporate cognitively stimulating activities and fun classes at the same time thanks to games and ludic activities, thus getting kids to use the language during class.

Theoretical Background

This study originated intending to increase young learners' exposure to the English Language and its use through the implementation of Game-Based Learning and Ludic Activities. For this reason, this theoretical framework presents the following concepts: Games, Game-Based Learning, Ludic Activities, and Exposure.

Games

Games are typically associated with entertainment activities, as defined by the WordReference dictionary, which defines a game as “an amusement or pastime” (WordReference, n.d.). For this reason, some people might find it challenging to connect games with learning; however, others may consider games as a useful tool to engage students in their learning process, as Gonzalez (2022, p. 31) noted “Games are an effective teaching strategy because they can be adapted to the students' needs and preferences.” This underlines the potential of games as a means of enhancing the students' learning process.

On the other hand, the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines games as “a contest carried on following set rules for amusement, exercise, or reward” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) underlying that rules are something present in order to play a game and that the game has an objective that can be amusement, exercise, or reward. Understanding the definition of games is crucial for their implementation in education since we must consider the specific objective we aim to achieve. As Dewey (cited by Mooney, 2000) stated, to include games in the classroom, it is essential to

recognize that “fun is not enough”. It means that the learning process should be fun but also it should make the experience educational.

Game-Based Learning

According to Ghazal and Singh (2016), Game-Based Learning (GBL) is "one of the ways in which learner-centered pedagogy can be implemented in the classroom to engage and motivate learners" (p. 2). They referred to the definition provided by EdTech Review (2013), which describes GBL as an approach that combines gameplay with subject content in a learning context, with well-defined learning outcomes.

Similar to what Dewey said about games, Pho & Dinscore (2015), also recognized the importance of implementing activities that are not just fun but also seek to achieve a learning objective. They explained that “Game-based learning is not just creating games for students to play, it is designing learning activities that can incrementally introduce concepts, and guide users towards an end goal."

In recent years, the implementation of GBL has gained prominence due to its numerous benefits. According to Deesri (2002), games have “the ability to capture students’ attention; lower students’ stress; and give students the chance for real communication”. Building on this idea, Rios (2022), further emphasized that “games have a very important role in arousing the motivation of learners to participate in class” (Rios, 2022/translated 2023, p. 27). In conclusion, GBL places the students at the center of the learning process as they become active participants (Ghazal & Singh, 2016).

To explore GBL widely, it is necessary to consider not only its benefits but also its challenges, as it sometimes can be time-consuming and demands special class management (I. Zsoldos-Marchis, T.H. Hari, 2020). Besides, Aguilar et al (2023) pointed out that to achieve the

learning goals, these games must be “contextualized and focused on students’ needs” (p. 2). Finally, as all types of games involve rules, it is essential to keep in mind the rules of the games to be connected with the class objective. Deesri (2002) highlighted the importance of clearly explaining the rules of games in class in order to avoid students misunderstanding the purpose of the specific game and not getting its educational benefits.

Ludic Activities

Ludic Activities are similar to Games with a slight difference, for ludic activities there are no rules or defined objectives, it is all about fun. The Oxford Dictionary defines “Ludic” as “tending to play and have fun, make jokes, etc., especially when there is no particular reason for doing this” (Oxford University Press, n.d.). Regarding ludic activities in education, Miletic (2017), concluded that some ludic activities such as pair work, songs, role-plays, flashcards, and stories “give students opportunities to practice the language in a more relaxed and enjoyable way, promote indirect learning, and are a more natural way to learn” (pp. 2-3) considering that those are fun activities that let students interact without thinking of rules, where they are just participating and enjoying.

The implementation of ludic activities in the learning acquisition process has shown several benefits, in students’ motivation, participation, and language acquisition. According to Vásquez (2017, p. 121), “Students tend to participate more in their classes when ludic activities take place since they have a better predisposition to learn the target language which they consider fun and interesting.” Miletic also concluded that “Through ludic activities students can learn new concepts, bond with their colleagues, stimulate their reasoning and feel more at ease and motivated. As a result, students will improve their performance.” (2017, p. 3).

Although ludic activities do not need rules, compared to games, it remains crucial to establish an educational objective when incorporating them into the classroom, Silveira (2017, p.19), stated that these objectives must be “the learning, social interaction, and language development”.

Exposure

In the context of language learning, exposure plays an important role, representing the direct contact a learner has with the target language either generally or with specific language points (British Council, n.d.) Exposure serves as the foundation upon which language acquisition is built, providing learners with the opportunity to internalize language structures, expand vocabulary, and refine their communicative skills. As Al Zoubi, (2018, p. 160) stated, "The higher the exposure, the better the learner performs in the target language", GBL and ludic activities offer learners engaging opportunities to increase their exposure to the target language through interactive gameplay, communication, and immersion. By incorporating exposure-rich elements into GBL and ludic activities, educators can take advantage of the benefits of both approaches to enhance language acquisition.

Research Question

What is the young learners’ response towards a higher exposure to the English language through GBL and ludic activities?

Objectives

General Objective

To provide learners with higher exposure to English through GBL and ludic activities that allow them to increase the use of the L2 in class.

Specific Objectives

- Implementing GBL and ludic activities with 2nd-grade learners in order to increase their exposure to the English Language.
- Using GBL and ludic activities to foster the use of the L2 in the English class with young learners.
- Describing the effectiveness of using GBL and ludic activities in the English class with a group of 2nd-grade learners.

Action plan

To conduct this Action research, Game-based learning (GBL) and ludic activities will be implemented as a teaching strategy in order to increase second graders' exposure and use of the English language. These actions will have an estimated time of three months from August to the end of October 2023.

The first step will be to present the project proposal to students in order to help them understand the activities to be developed during the process and also to consider important concepts such as rules for playing games and creative imagination for the ludic activities. Besides, students will receive a consent form which parents will have to sign allowing them to participate in the action research.

During the first and second weeks of classes, we will reinforce vocabulary related to places in the city and community helpers seen during the previous semester. Students will participate in games such as Bingo and Memory to enhance their vocabulary retention, encourage the use of the foreign language, and improve pronunciation. Following these

activities, students will be evaluated through a listening assessment to determine their understanding of where people work.

Over the next two weeks, we will introduce action-related vocabulary using games like Charades. This activity will be carried out in groups, with one student performing an action while others guess the corresponding word. This interactive game enhances vocabulary retention by linking words to actions.

To close the topic about actions and places of the city, by pairs students must create a poster with drawings illustrating activities that can be done at certain places of the city. They will then present their posters to the whole class during the fifth week of classes.

In the sixth week, we will introduce a new topic through a scavenger hunt. Students will search for flashcards around the school and complete a chart with the names of fruits, vegetables, and food items as they find them. During the same week, we will engage in the “Pass the ball” ludic activity, where students will pass a ball to a friend and state the name of one of the items they have learned. This activity also provides an opportunity to practice “I like,” “I don’t like” and “my favorite... is...” in an interactive, oral manner, promoting English language interaction among the students.

In the seventh week, we will conduct a running dictation activity using food vocabulary. Students will view sequences of fruit and vegetable images, describe them to their classmates, and then draw the items based on the descriptions. Additionally, this week a discussion about healthy vs. unhealthy food will be implemented, engaging students in conversations about their food choices.

During weeks 8, 9, and 10, we will read the book “The Very Hungry Caterpillar” which tells the story of a newborn caterpillar who ate a lot of food each day. This big book will help us

practice read-aloud as a group, fruits, vegetables, healthy and unhealthy food, numbers, and days of the week.

To conclude the course, weeks 11 and 12 will be devoted to preparing and conducting a “store” activity in which students must buy and sell products; ludic activities will be implemented for students to draw, color, and create their stores and images of the products. Finally, they will be able to ask and answer simple questions such as “How can I help you?” “I want...” “Thank you”, and “You’re welcome” ([SEE APPENDIX A](#)).

To collect information, a journal entry will be written for each class where the lesson plan will be described and then a reflection will be developed at the end. Also, students will keep an “English diary”, recording what they learned after each class, and I will administer two surveys to students: one in the 5th week and another in the 10th week. Besides, during the research process, I will conduct one interview with select students, as well as two interviews with the cooperating teacher. The first teacher interview will be at the beginning of the project, to understand her perspective on the use of games and ludic activities, and the second one will be at the end to observe any changes she noticed throughout the process. Moreover, the advisor for this project will conduct a visit to observe and provide feedback on the pre-service teacher performance, her notes on this visit will be considered in the triangulation process. Finally, students’ class work will be analyzed as a data collection method intended to find other phenomena.

Development of Actions

As previously mentioned, the actions were planned for 12 weeks, however, due to certain institutional events like a teachers’ strike and a week-long break, the project’s scheduled time

was reduced to 10 weeks. Therefore, most of the activities were developed successfully, some were not possible to develop, and others were changed.

In the first week of classes, I introduced the project to students, helping them better understand the English class objectives. We reiterated the rules established at the beginning of the school year and emphasized the importance of having rules for each game. Additionally, students were encouraged to embrace their creative imagination in every activity.

The activities for weeks 1, 2, and 3, were carried out as planned. Students practiced vocabulary related to city places and community helpers. We also introduced actions with the game “Charades” and students started using the verb “can” to talk about the activities they could or couldn’t do in each place. During this period, students recognized the need to use English actively in class to participate and interact with their peers, and they made significant efforts. Flashcards were introduced to help students connect actions with English words which aided them in avoiding translation and allowed them to confidently create sentences, as they genuinely understood English ([SEE APPENDIX B](#)).

The time during the first weeks was efficient enough that we completed what was originally planned for 4 weeks in just 3. Consequently, the activities intended for the 5th week were shifted to the 4th week. Originally, the plan involved pairs of students creating a poster. Nonetheless, upon reflection, I realized this activity was not closely aligned with the project’s objectives. Therefore, I shifted the focus to encourage student interaction in English. A “Find Someone Who” ludic activity was carried out where students asked each other questions using the structures: “Can you...?”, “Yes, I can”, and “No, I can’t”. Following this activity, students created sentences about their classmates, expressing what they could or could not do ([SEE APPENDIX C](#)). This experience was not only impressive for me and the cooperating teacher but

also for the students. They realized they were using English to communicate real information and were writing sentences in a foreign language, which was very satisfying. Some entries in the English Diary included: “Today I learned to speak English” and “Today I learned about my friends”.

The following week, a running dictation was implemented, making students practice their oral skills. At the same time, they had to be attentive to the sentence they heard from their classmates and write it properly, using the correct structure. This activity encouraged interaction in English and involved students working with classmates they were not familiar with. Comments in the diaries included: “I learned to work with a classmate that is not my friend” and “I learned to be patient” since some of them were slower than others.

The activities planned for the 6th and 7th weeks were covered successfully. During the scavenger hunt, students found it interesting to look for clues around the school in order to complete an information chart, and this activity encouraged cooperation among them. Besides, a running dictation was implemented again, this time students already knew how to develop it, were faster, and they used English to communicate with each other.

During week 8th, we read the story “The Very Hungry Caterpillar”. This activity allowed students to make hypotheses about the story and reflect on the importance of healthy eating. It also served as a comprehensive review, covering vocabulary related to food and healthy habits, as well as practice in counting in English and Days of the Week.

To conclude this project, during week 9, we watched a Peppa Pig episode about “Fruit Day”, introducing students to the concept of fruit smoothies. This led to a pretend game where students used toy blenders with fruit attachments, simulating smoothie making. This game empowered students to communicate in English, engage in service requests, exchange

“smoothies”, and express gratitude ([SEE APPENDIX D](#)). Besides, the exercise prepared them for our culminating activity for week 10, this preparation involved creating images of fruits and vegetables, which students cut and colored themselves. During the final week, students participated in the “Farmer’s Market” pretend game, practicing vocabulary related to the fruits and vegetables they wanted to “purchase” These activities were crucial in achieving our project’s primary goal: to provide learners with higher exposure to English through Game-Based Learning (GBL) and ludic activities.

Finally, all the data collection instruments were successfully gathered. In each class, students diligently recorded in their English Diary what they had learned ([SEE APPENDIX E](#)), some wrote sentences or vocabulary words, while others documented their progress in developing metacognitive skills, such as “I learned to be quiet when necessary” or “I learned to work as a group with my classmates”. Two surveys were also implemented to know students’ perspectives at the beginning and the end of the process ([SEE APPENDIX F](#)). Additionally, interviews were conducted with the students and the cooperating teacher at the project’s conclusion. ([SEE APPENDIX G](#))

Data Analysis

According to Johnson (2005), “Three essential parts of establishing accuracy and credibility in any research project are validity, reliability, and triangulation” (p.82). However, he specifies that in action research, these three parts take a different form from the traditional research method. He suggests that validity is the stage that ensures that the data collection method accurately measures what is intended to be measured. Triangulation involves collecting

different data sources at different times in order to gain multiple perspectives on the research topic. Finally, Johnson defines reliability as the consistency of the results under repetition.

Based on the above mentioned, for this project, I started gathering information from different sources and at different times including my journal entries, students' surveys, teacher's interviews, and students' interviews, as well as students' class work pieces of evidence. Then, I made an inductive analysis, organizing what was observed into groups and coding them; as it was made while collecting data, I was able to repeat some methods in order to find information for the same group. This process aligns with Johnson's emphasis on the importance of reliability, as repeating methods allowed for the acquisition of consistent and comparable results. Following this procedure, I finally categorized *Students' Exposure to English, Students' Motivation toward English Learning, Students' Use of L2, Students as Active Participants, Social Skills, and Classroom Management*.

Findings and Interpretations

Students' Exposure to English

As mentioned in the problem statement of this project, these students were not receiving enough exposure to the English language, first because of the short time devoted to the class and second because the input was not sufficient to develop communication skills. Therefore, an immersion setting in English was planned to allow students to listen and speak as much English as they could by means of games and ludic activities.

At the beginning of the classes, students seemed shy or uncertain when they were exposed to some expressions or instructions and responded only to some greetings. However, this started to change fast thanks to the methodologies implemented.

The first tools for increasing the exposure of students to the L2 were lively songs and videos played in every class, these transmitted to students a feeling of joy for learning; besides, these songs were carefully selected in order to be catchy and repetitive to make students learn them easily. Students followed an agenda and at the beginning of the class, there was always a greeting song, so they already knew that they were starting their day with a fun English song (which was changed every 3 or 4 weeks) and also videos or songs related to the topics were part of every class agenda.

This tool served as the first significant immersion into English for the children, resulting in a broader vocabulary acquisition that they began to use during classes. As noted in the journal entry of August 23rd, 2023, it was observed that after being asked how they were feeling that day, the children responded with expressions from the welcome song, such as “I’m great”, “I’m hungry,” and “I’m not so good”.

In addition to songs and videos, games and ludic activities were used to introduce new vocabulary to the children. For these games, flashcards were the most used materials in order to avoid the use of the mother language and to help children connect images with words in English and in this way, improve their vocabulary acquisition, as well as their ability to make connections. For example, to make sentences about actions and city places, students were given a happy and a sad face flashcard indicating can or can’t, flashcards about different actions, and finally flashcards about places in the city. The teacher modeled a “sentence” in which she pasted a happy face followed by a flashcard showing kids playing, and finally a flashcard of a playground; the teacher “read” the images creating a sentence orally “I can play at the playground” with this example, students continued participating creating sentence by pasting the flashcards then writing the sentence on the board. At the end of the class, a running dictation was

carried out where one of the students saw the images and ran to tell his/her classmate what the sentence was, this last one had to write the sentence. This joyful activity gave kids the opportunity to be exposed to English during the class and had an effect on them to interact with others using the L2. Their experience was expressed in their diaries, where we could read sentences like “Today I learned to say and write sentences in English” This supports the Theoretical Framework of this project, evidencing what was cited by Al Zoubi, (2018) where he expresses that as bigger the exposure, better the performance of students in the L2.

Students’ Motivation towards English Learning

The integration of games and ludic activities in the English class has motivated students to participate more in class, this was observed in all the data collection tools implemented. This positive impact was expressed in some journal entries, for example: “Kids enjoyed a lot standing in front of the class and creating sentences, they felt happy because they understood what they were doing.” (August 23rd, 2023). Besides, during the class observed by the research advisor, she noted that “kids felt it safe to participate and enjoy at the same time.” (Class Observation Report Practicum Advisor, October 25th, 2023) which points out that when kids feel enjoyment while learning, the English class becomes a safe place for them, instead of a fearful environment.

Also, students were evaluated while they played; however, this did not make them nervous, on the contrary, their performance was evident in a more relaxed way, as it was seen during a Pretend Play where they had to ask and answer questions in order to get a “smoothie”, “Pretend play reduces students’ stress about being evaluated, they continue interacting naturally with their friends while playing in English, even if I was there observing them very close” (Journal entry extract, October 18th, 2023)

Kids themselves expressed their excitement to participate in the English class since it had games and fun activities. For example, in the last survey, all students expressed a positive inclination towards the games and activities used in the English class, indicating that they believed these implementations helped them to learn more English. Besides, a majority agreed that they felt more motivated to speak in English during the games, even if a small percentage expressed somewhat agreement on this point. (Student's second survey)

Nonetheless, during the interviews, where students expressed spontaneously, some answers included evidence of students' increase in motivation to participate in the class. One of the students said: "I liked to do the activities because I felt safe participating", another student added: "I liked to participate in the English classes because they were fun", and a third one said: "I liked these English classes because I learned faster and in a more fun way".

Finally, the cooperating teacher also noticed that the implementation of "games and ludic activities allow children to enjoy learning. They become more motivated to complete the activities, and it's clear that they have fun". She also expressed that "while playing students become freer, more expressive, and spontaneous, in this way, the teacher can constantly diagnose progress and determine what needs to be reinforced." This perspective aligns with the insights provided by Gonzalez (2022), as discussed in the theoretical framework, where he emphasizes that games are so powerful since they can be adapted according to students' needs.

Students' Use of the L2

The use of English in the class became part of our "class rules" since the beginning of this project, students were always invited to use English as much as they could, and they took it seriously since the rules were set by all the members of the group rather than imposed by the teacher.

As mentioned before, songs and videos gave students vocabulary on greetings and expressions that they were using in each class. Also, games and ludic activities were spaces for students' interaction where English was the means of communication allowing them to use the learned expressions while playing and interacting with others. However, I saw that sometimes they avoided answering questions when they did not know a word in English, for that reason I introduced a useful question for them to use when needed, as written by one student in his English diary "Today I learned: Teacher, how do you say..." (August 23rd, 2023). This question was written on colorful cardboard and pasted in a visible place in the classroom for them to read it and use it in every class. This simple action was a practical strategy that encouraged students to actively use English in class, contributing to both language development and vocabulary expansion.

The planned activities and games effectively facilitated the use of expressions among the students during interactions with their friends. The interconnectedness of these activities across classes resulted in a noticeable improvement in the students' proficiency in L2 throughout the learning process. For instance, in the middle of this project, one of the activities was so successful that even the cooperating teacher (CT) congratulated students on their performance as it was found in my journal entry of August 30th, 2023.

"Seeing them speak in English and evidencing that they were being understood by each other while asking and answering real questions was amazing; they could even write short sentences about what they heard orally. At the moment that everybody was talking, the CT looked at me with a surprised face. She raised her voice to recognize and congratulate the kids for what she was experiencing."

Of course, as these students were young learners experimenting with this high exposure to English for the first time, they were not communicating 100% in English, but code-switching was used most of the time in order to allow them to switch when they needed to express long sentences or give comments but were not able to do it in English. This possibility made children feel secure using their mother language when needed, as evidenced by the research advisor during her visit “Since code-switching is not penalized, students are able to participate without fearing a bad grade or criticism by the teacher or other students.” (Class Observation Report Practicum Advisor, October the 25th, 2023).

Students as Active Participants

As established in the literature review, the dual purpose of games—being both enjoyable and educationally beneficial—is crucial. The observed results affirm this notion, illustrating that games and ludic activities offer students indirect learning opportunities. My journal entries serve as a noteworthy tool, providing relevant evidence of this connection. For instance, on August 30th, 2023, I wrote:

The first guessing activity helped students remember vocabulary, they enjoyed picking a card with their eyes closed and guessing what the action was because my drawings were so funny for them; with this activity, they started using “Yes, I can” and “No, I can’t” consciously even without knowing how it was written. For the next activity, when they were writing in their notebooks, those words got more sense as they had already used them orally. Also, the two video songs that were presented were very catchy and students sang happily which helped them also with the learning of the pronunciation.

In essence, these engaging activities not only enhanced vocabulary retention and pronunciation skills but also fostered a joyful and interactive learning environment. The

combination of creative guessing games, lively video songs, and subsequent written exercises allowed students to indirectly integrate new language concepts, making the learning process both effective and enjoyable.

During the same class, a “Find Someone Who” activity was conducted where students had to use English to ask and answer questions related to their classmates’ abilities to do some activities. They had questions following the structure they already knew, for example: “Can you swim” and they also recognized those actions. Thus, they only had to ask the questions to different students and find someone who said “Yes, I can” and write their name on a column, and then find someone who said “No, I can” to write their name on the corresponding column. The majority of students were actually using English to ask and answer the questions, and it was evident that they were understood because they were able to correctly answer with Yes, I can, or No, I can’t. This activity facilitated the development of strategic competencies among students while they were making connections, asking for information, and responding with short answers. Furthermore, they expressed in their diaries that during that activity they “learned” to speak English, as shown in the following extracts: “Today I learned about my friends” while not properly saying “I learned about my friends’ abilities” it is clear that this student was able to communicate actively with her peers. Similarly, another student wrote: “Today I learned to ask the others what they do” They were actually asking about what they were able or not to do, nonetheless they were conscious about what they were asking, about actions. Finally, other students expressed “Today I learned to speak English.”

At the end of the project, an interview was conducted with the cooperating teacher with the aim of listening to her perceptions of the process, considering that she was there observing every class. She commented that based on the classes she observed, it seemed to facilitate

learning. “Through games, students remember the terms and concepts more easily and apply them with greater fluency in the foreign language.” Concerning the implementation of ludic activities, she had a positive stance and expressed that “it is more meaningful if children themselves construct the concepts, apply them, and remember them, leading to long-term learning, not just for the moment.” This refers to some ludic activities that were hands-on; for example, the “Farmer’s Market” in which students were in charge of cutting, coloring, and decorating all the materials for finally having different stands to buy and sell “Fruits and Vegetables”. The cooperating teacher concluded the interview by highlighting the benefits of learning a foreign language while having fun, saying that “it is a more natural approach, not like the traditional method of lecturing and expecting the child to passively listen.” The teacher’s remarks validate the findings of the literature review, supporting Ghazal and Singh, (2016) assertion that GBL transforms classes into student-centered environments, turning the students into active participants.

Social Skills

This particular category was evident in all the data collection methods and was the most remarkable result. At the beginning of the implementation of group games, I noticed that students had difficulties in decision-making and that sometimes they were not all taken into account by some classmates; for example, “When the kids were playing charades I realized that they were struggling to make decisions as a group, I gave them some recommendations and more time to select a leader, after that, they discussed and were able to make a consensus decision” (Journal entry extract August 16th, 2023). Giving students the opportunity to play in group games helps them to reflect on other alternatives to make decisions, allowing them to develop social skills such as cooperation, respect, and empathy. This was also evidenced in students’ notes on

their diaries where the sentence “Today I learned to work in a team” was repeated several times (Student’s diary entries extracts from August 16th, 23rd, September 6th, 20th, and October 25th).

Respect in the English class became a foundational element, shaping not only social interactions but also the quality of language use. An environment of respect ensured that students felt comfortable expressing themselves in the target language. This, allowed students to give and receive respectful feedback on their performance every time they made a mistake when participating or when they did not know the answer, as evidenced in different situations such as: “while playing Hot Potato students had to answer a question, when they didn’t know it a friend helped them to remember the correct answer” (Journal entry extract, October 4th, 2023) and “they made corrections when others misspelled a word.” (Journal entry extract, September 6th, 2023). Furthermore, after making a mistake in a Pictionary game, a student wrote in her diary “Today I learned the difference between play and pray” (August 23rd, 2023) demonstrating her ability to receive constructive feedback from her classmates.

While interviewing students, they expressed their improvement in group work and interaction with classmates who were not their friends “I improved teamwork because I learned to share more with other classmates that I did not share before” and “I found it cool to have games and ludic activities in class because I shared with my friends and learned English” (Students’ interview).

Classroom Management

This category was identified in my journal entries. They helped me reflect on the classroom management strategies implemented during each class, assess their effectiveness, and identify my weaknesses and strengths.

In the literature review, Zsoldos-Marchis and Hari (2020) suggested that implementing games in class could be challenging in terms of time consumption and classroom management. For this reason, I was conscious of potential challenges during the implementation of these activities. Even with careful planning, issues unexpectedly arose. It was challenging to maintain order in some classes, leading me to constantly seek new strategies. As noted in a journal entry (August 9th, 2023), "Sometimes it is hard to keep order in the classroom, especially when students have to move around to find things and work in pairs or small groups because they start shouting, running, and sometimes even fighting."

After implementing different strategies as needed, these difficulties were reduced, and by the end of each week, improvements were noticeable. This was particularly evident during the last activity, the "Farmer's Market," where all students were moving, interacting, laughing, buying, and selling. In my journal, I noted, "Although achieving classroom management was difficult, all the strategies suggested by my practicum advisor, my cooperating teacher (CT), and those found through research really helped me to improve. Now, I can manage the class in a better way, evident to everyone." (Journal entry extract, October 25th, 2023)

Conclusions and Suggestions

This action research project intended to determine the effectiveness of providing learners with higher exposure to English through GBL and ludic activities that allow them to increase the use of the L2 in class. Findings suggest that these implementations clearly serve as a means of higher language exposure to kids, leading not only to an increase in the use of L2 but also to an increase in students' motivation to participate in the English class, reducing their fear of being exposed to a new language and giving them feelings of security and enjoyment. It was evident

that kids participated in class in a freer and more spontaneous manner, allowing the teacher to better diagnose their progress.

Moreover, the connection between GBL and Ludic Activities offers opportunities for indirect learning, since while students played and interacted with others, their vocabulary acquisition significantly increased allowing them to become more active participants who could engage in different activities while making connections, asking and answering questions to the teacher and their classmates, and learning in a more meaningful way.

Finally, this project demonstrated that games and ludic activities play a multifaceted role in education. They improve students' language proficiency but are also significant in the development of social skills among them. While playing pair or group games, students improved their teamwork, decision-making, and communication skills. They started to give respectful feedback to each other and strengthen their empathy. Thus, cultivating a positive and supportive classroom environment.

In conclusion, the evidence from this action research project strongly supports that when GBL and ludic activities are strategically implemented in the L2 classroom with young learners, serve as a powerful instrument to augment the exposure of students to the second language, fostering its use and in the same way turning the students into active participants. Reducing stress levels and increasing their motivation to participate in classroom activities, nurturing not only the linguistic aspect but also the social dimensions. Making the classroom a safe and joyful environment for children.

Reflection

This action research project has been an incredibly insightful experience in my role as an educator. Although I had previous teaching experiences, transitioning to a public institution

surpassed my initial expectations. From the project's initiation, the students showed remarkable receptiveness, what allowed us to establish a meaningful connection. Their gratitude and eagerness to receive everything I shared with them, underscored the inherent value of pedagogy, reinforcing my love for teaching children.

Collaborating with my cooperating teacher, an experienced professional, proved to be exceptionally enriching. Her guidance provided valuable insights on strategies for managing student behavior. Despite the initial challenges, the ultimate success of the methodologies employed, validates the efficacy of her approach, for which I am truly grateful.

Reflecting on this project, it not only reaffirmed my passion for teaching but also emphasized the critical importance of collaborative efforts and the continuous refinement of pedagogical methodologies. I am eager to integrate these insights into my future educational pursuits, confident that this experience has significantly enhanced my skills and understanding as an educator.

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