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Running Head: STUDENT-CENTERED CLASS THROUGH MATERIAL DESIGN

Fostering a Student-Centered Class Through the Design and Use of Materials

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### **Abstract**

This action research paper reports the outcomes of a project which intended to explore the promotion of a Student-centered Class through the use of materials under characteristics of variety, novelty, appealing content and achievable challenge. This research involves 27-sixth graders of a rural public institution in Rionegro, Antioquia, Colombia. Data for this project derives from teacher' class journals, students' reflections, checklist for assessing materials and participants' focus group. After analyzing the data, findings report that implementing materials enhanced student-centered aspects like encouraging students' participation in the decision making process; facilitating variety in activities by making language learning comprehensible, amusing and feasible; permitting to work from students' choice and interest; and promoting group work as a strategy to share with one another and easily getting a mutual result.

*Key words:* student-centered class, materials, variety, novelty, appealing content, achievable challenge, decision making process.

### **Degree Requirement**

This action research is submitted as a requirement of the Bachelor of Education Degree in Foreign Languages Teaching at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, Eastern branch in El Carmen de Viboral, Colombia.

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## **Preface**

From high school, I had contact with teaching as support staff for primary teachers. Then, I became a Normalista and took a closer look on how the Colombian education system works, especially in rural areas. During my practicum as English teacher, I also had the chance to work in a rural context, but this time in high school, these experiences have shown me the importance of doing research in our specific context in order to build knowledge and improve teaching and learning practices for both students and teachers.

Conducting a research project can be an exhaustive, complex but rewarding experience. As Colombian teachers, we could face some misadventures in this process, like the institutional schedule, extracurricular activities, few hours per week for teaching, level of students' proficiency or institution facilities and resources. That is why, when I started this action research as part of my practicum, I decided to find a research issue not only connected to my interests but also to my students' interests. In that sense, I could implement lessons that responded to my concern, to my students' interests, and at the same time permitted my students to improve their performance in the foreign language.



### **Description of the Context**

The site where my practicum took place was the public educational institution Baltazar Salazar Herrera located in Pontezuela, a rural area of the municipality of Rionegro. It offered education from preschool to eleventh grade, aiming at students' development in relation with their socio-cultural, economic and geographic environment through a warm, integrative and inclusive atmosphere in order to educate a holistic individual. The institution desired to be an educational community centered on human integrity and committed to social transformation, respect for diversity, training for peace and democracy, and environmental sustainability through dynamic academic processes linked to the local demands and the current world.

Concerning the English department, the institution had a macro syllabus called Sabana de Contenidos. It was connected with the Estándares Básicos de Competencias en Lengua Extranjera and Basic Learning Rights (Derechos Básicos de Aprendizaje) issued by the Ministry of Education for each grade. This syllabus provided the objectives, contents, competences, sub-competences, and units with their corresponding topics for the whole school year. Based on those documents, teachers designed Guías de Aprendizaje for each grade and for each term; the Guías contained the same aspects mentioned above, but in a more specific form adding activities, strategies and assessment. To address those contents, English teachers had at their disposition some textbooks and workbooks, posters, flashcards, board games, interactive exercises, and books, and it is important to mention that the institution had a bilingualism room, but it had problems such as malfunctioning of some computers, limited access to internet and lack of video beam.

The participants of this action research were sixth grade students. English was studied three hours a week, the class counted on a small classroom with enough space and chairs for students, a blackboard and a teacher's desk. The group was composed of 28 students: 13 boys and 15 girls. Students' ages ranged between 11 and 12 years old. Most of the students belonged to lower-middle strata and lived in the surrounding areas of the school. Few of them came from the urban area and only one student came from a different municipality. They had as common preferences activities using the internet, practicing a sport, playing video games and watching TV. The majority of them found important to learn English because knowing it could facilitate speaking with people from different countries, traveling and, a limited group of students, expressed that English was an opportunity for getting better opportunities for their future professional lives. In addition, they showed an attentive attitude, felt comfortable in English classes and enjoyed them more when games, videos, songs, and pronunciation exercises were implemented. It is important to mention that they manifested to have difficulty in skills such as writing and speaking.

In relation to the cooperating teacher (CT), she had a bachelor degree in English/Spanish Teaching from UPB university, and at the moment of the study, she was studying for a master's degree in Spanish as a Foreign Language. She had been working along 17 years teaching kids, adolescents and adults in public and private institutions, and for three years she had been teaching not only English but also Spanish in the Baltazar institution as well as in Politécnico Jaime Isaza Cadavid.

### **Statement of the Problem**

English teaching involves a set of aspects and actors such as lesson plans, materials, teacher and students. Into the classroom, teachers and students assume different roles during the development of the lesson. Based on the observation in the English course of 6-A grade, I noticed classes were teacher-centered because of a lack of use of different materials, classes were developed from the board to notebook and activities were given by lots of repetition and translation, individual work, and students' participation was allocated by the teacher.

Tomlinson (2011) stated that materials “can be anything which is deliberately used to increase the learners’ knowledge and/or experience of the language” (p.24). Although the institution has different materials such as flashcards, posters, games, and textbooks; they did not take part in the classes. For 6-A graders, most of the lessons were developed completely on the board. Students had to transcribe information from the board to their notebooks, without a previous context or even without a clear purpose for learning short sentences and vocabulary with Spanish translation (Journal entries 1,2,4,6, 2019). In that sense the board and students’ notebooks became the only materials for addressing and providing English input when “materials should also stimulate learner interaction with the input rather than just passive reception of it” (Tomlinson, 2011, p.36). Students in this class were prevented from interacting with each other neglecting opportunities to learn from one another and use the language they were learning.

In addition to the lack of use of materials in the class, I also noticed that activities were based on repetition and translation strategies. Students were asked to listen to a sentence and to repeat it; in other cases, they reproduced the information that was said and immediately translate it; for instance, I am in Rionegro/ La Ceja, yo estoy en Rionegro/La Ceja (Journal entries

1,2,3,4,5,6, 2019). The above described situation does not mean that repetition is an insignificant practice in classrooms. Willis (2011) said that repetition “helps learners to recognize typical patterns and memorize them” (p.89). However, this practice should be linked to different kinds of materials as well as activities; as happened in my second observation where students after doing a repetition exercise participated by groups in a writing game. It allowed students to put English into practice, enhanced teamwork, and evoked interest in the English content. The problem was that that activity only took place in one class.

The last reason why English classes were teacher-centered was related to the way participation was addressed. Most of the time students were pointed and asked to read or pronounce; for instance, all the greetings from their notebooks or short sentences like I AM, SHE IS (Journal entries 1, 2, 4,5,6, 2019). When “Teaching/learning activities are also likely to suggest modes of classroom participation– for example, whether the learners are to work alone or in groups– and, from this, the roles that teachers and learners are to adopt” (Littlejohn, 2011, p.206). In the case of my practicum context and regarding the materials and activities above mentioned, participation had only a direction in which students are randomly chosen to answer or complete an exercise; as an illustration, read all greetings, give the meaning of... repeat after me, translate from Spanish to English, write on your notebooks (Journal entries 1, 2, 4,5,6, 2019); making of participation a unilateral moment in which students only participated when the teacher demanded it and only expressed what the teacher asked them to express.

In brief, it was evident a lack of use of materials in the English class and students limited participation which characterizes a teacher-centered class. That is why I propose materials development with the characteristics suggested by Tomlinson: novelty, variety, appealing

content, and achievable challenge (2011, p.30), with the purpose to go from a teacher-centered towards a student-centered class.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Considering that I propose to move from a teacher-centered class to a student-centered class, the theoretical background for this research includes the exploration of the concepts materials design and student-centered class. I am going to define them, provide some characteristics as well as advantages suggested by different authors. And finally, I am going to mention the biggest challenge of promoting a student-centered class and the connection between the main concepts.

### **Materials Design**

Tomlinson states that materials “can be anything which is deliberately used to increase the learners’ knowledge and/or experience of the language” (2011, p.2). In that sense, teachers count with a massive spectrum of resources to use day by day in the classroom. Nonetheless, materials have to be chosen under certain characteristics in order to provide a clear purpose for students. That is why “in the materials designed, language teachers need to lead their students to have materials interact appropriately with their needs and interests in order to facilitate learning” (Nuñez&Télliez, 2009, p.184). In that order of ideas, Tomlinson (2011, p.8) proposes the following as features for materials to generate an impact in learning/teaching process:

**Novelty.** Uncommon subjects, images, and exercises. Regarding this, “many experimenters have demonstrated arousal effects of novelty and have stressed its reinforcing properties for curiosity and exploratory behavior” (Bradbury & Nelson, 1974, p.58).

**Variety.** Avoiding repetitiveness by providing as many different resources as possible. what Maley calls branching “teachers may decide to add options to the existing activity or to suggest alternative pathways through the activities, for example, an experiential route or an analytical route or a narrative route” (Tomlinson, 2011, p.382).

**Appealing content.** From students’ interests, what provides new information or current topics. “Develop a course with a central core component which it would be essential for all teachers/learners to follow. [...] Teachers/learners would then be able to select modules appropriate to their interests, learning needs and level at any particular point” (Maley, 2011, p.392).

**Achievable challenge.** Exercises that encourage students’ thinking skills or “activities which try to ‘push’ learners slightly beyond their existing proficiency by engaging them in tasks which are stimulating, which are problematic, but which are achievable too” (Tomlinson 2011, p.10).

Regarding the characteristics mentioned above, Nuñez and Téllez affirm that “effective materials make learners feel comfortable and confident because both the content and type of activities are perceived by them as significant and practical to their lives” (2009, p.184). Additionally, Tomlinson (2011) argues that “materials could be considered effective if they facilitate the learning of a language by increasing learners’ knowledge, experience and understanding of it and, simultaneously, helping learners learn what they want and need to learn” (as cited in Nuñez & Téllez, 2009, p.173).

### **Student-Centered Class**

Brown defines student-centered as “a form of active learning where students are engaged and involved in what they are studying” (2008, p. 30). Whereby the classroom has to permit a negotiation process in which students are heard, and their ideas are raw to plan and develop lessons. That is why, she also states that in the learning process, “students are given choices and are included in the decision-making processes of the classroom” (2008, p. 31) in which teachers have the responsibility of combining their ideas and students’ thoughts, and they are called “to take their students’ individual and developmental characteristics into account when planning lessons” (Meece, 2003, p. 112). In addition, it is an “instructional approach in which students influence the content, activities, materials, and pace of learning. The teacher is not a provider of knowledge, but a provider of opportunities from which learners can learn independently and from one another” (Collins & O’Brien as cited in Kassem, 2018 p. 140). It means both, students and teacher are in charge of classes planning, development, and assessment.

Brown affirms that “through student-centered learning, students become self-sufficient, creative thinkers and people who appreciate and value the subject being taught” (2008, p.33) because “students see a greater relevance for and a stronger connection to the subject at hand, [...] students can achieve independent minds and the capacity to make educated decisions and value judgments” (Brown, 2008, p.35). Consequently, “learner-centeredness creates a learning environment that promotes the highest levels of motivation and achievement for all learners” (McCombs & Whistler as cited in Kassem, 2018 p.140).

Nevertheless, a mental adjustment from both students and teacher has to take place. Consider this, the teacher would have to “change their role as professionals, to develop competence programs, to adapt their lectures to include interactions with the class, to consider

students' prior knowledge and background (impact of cultures), as well as orient and guide students in their learning process" (de la Sablonnière, Taylor & Sadykova, 2009, p.630). And in the case of students, they "will be required to participate in their own learning process; that is to become active learners, and focus on transferring information and knowledge to other disciplines and to real life situations" (de la Sablonnière et al, 2009, p.30). In that sense, a student-centered class opens the possibilities to argue with coworkers, administrators and students' parents because it goes against the traditional manner of teaching/learning process, and at the beginning could be conflictive for students.

### **Material Design and Student-Centered Class**

"In student-centered classes, teaching and learning takes place on both plans: instruction and practice. Teachers may use the already given material-textbook, or other additional materials [...] to adopt them for teaching/learning purposes" (Harizaj & Hajrulla, 2018, p.65). The way teachers use materials in the language classroom depends on the reasons, the stage and learner's needs. "Some teachers may use them as an additional teaching resource, while some others may use them since at the beginning. The materials are used to help learners acquire the basic skills" (Harizaj & Hajrulla, 2018, p.61).

On this basis, "experience of adopting well crafted, student-centered teaching materials can be an effective professional development experience [...] and can promote change toward a more student-centered teaching beliefs and practices" (Czajka & McConnell, 2019, p.708).

### **Research Question**

How can material design foster an EFL student-centered class at a public institution in Rionegro, Antioquia?



**General Objective**

To explore how can material designed under characteristics of novelty, variety, appealing content, and achievable challenge level foster an EFL student-centered class.

**Specific Objectives**

- To design materials with novelty, variety, appealing content, and achievable challenge.
- To monitor how students interact with the materials.
- To analyze the impact of materials in promoting student-centered class from both, students' and teacher' perspectives.

**Action Plan**

In order to reach the objectives in this research project, I planned on developing an action plan composed by two parts.

The first involved the implementation of actions regarding the characteristics of materials design. On one side, with the aim to negotiate the content that would be included in the development of lesson plans bearing in mind students interest and needs, and on the other side, to explore students' ideas concerning their opinions or positions to the attributes of material design proposed in this research. The second part included the actions for student-centered aspects that students would be exposed to, it means addressing characteristics proposed by theory which rendered account that English classes are becoming into a student-centered class.

In addition to the research and teaching actions, and for guaranteeing to collect information, I worked on the following data collection plan. First, Teacher's journal for

registering the lessons development and reflecting how activities provide data to answer my research issue. Second, students' reflections with guiding questions<sup>1</sup> for revealing students' voices regarding material design to be used in the process as well as their perceptions in terms of student-centered characteristics discussed in class. Third, checklists<sup>2</sup> after the use of each material in order to students assess the four aspects for materials proposed in this project. And finally, one participants' focus group to register students' interpretation, usefulness, improvements, difficulties, doubts, about the impact of materials, and the pros and cons working with a student-centered approach.

### **Development of Actions**

The aforementioned actions were developed throughout the second semester 2019 and were aimed at accomplishing the objectives of this research. After beginning with the actions, I informed students what the project was about and asked them to sign a consent form so long as they wanted. For the first week, I proposed students to create a poster with the content and topics they would want to address during the following lessons. Then, I presented additional topics for making a general agreement and decide the final topics to be addressed. In the second week, I implemented the voting wall activity in which students were distributed in corners in order to explore their ideas regarding the following aspects: (a) variety, types of activities they would like to have (b) appealing content, current topics and interest they have (c) novelty, different ways they would like to develop the activities (d) achievable challenge, activities that pose some kind of difficulties for them. With the information collected during those two weeks, I chose the materials to be used and planned the lessons for the following four weeks not only with students' ideas but also with the content proposed by the institution in its *guía de aprendizaje*.

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<sup>1</sup> The guiding questions are in the appendix C

<sup>2</sup> The checklist is in the appendix C

As I mentioned above, the following weeks I implemented a set of lesson plans taking into account students thoughts, and lessons which they were exposed to four student-centered principles. In each week, I developed a lesson with the aim at addressing a specific student-centered characteristic by using a material<sup>3</sup> or set of materials/activities, during the lesson, and the grammatical content in those lessons were taken from the official syllabus of the institution. As aspects of student-centered class, I took from theory characteristics such as providing students with different choices, recognizing students as influencers within materials, offering students the chance to work in groups, and demonstrating students' influence on the content and activities for the class. At the end of each lesson, students reflected about the class answering some questions related to the student-centered aspect discussed, and evaluated the materials by completing a checklist that contained some statements connected to the four characteristics given to the materials.

### **Findings and Interpretations**

The findings of this action research, which main objective was to foster a student-centered class through the design and use of materials, were encompassed in terms of the student-centered characteristics promoted during this process and the role acted by the materials. In the following lines, I provide further explanations of each of these findings.

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<sup>3</sup> The samples of materials used are in the appendix D

## The Negotiation Process Encouraged Students and Teacher's Engagement in the English Class

Data revealed that involving students in a negotiation process promoted beneficial outcomes in terms of participation in decision making about content. Moreover, this process was beneficial for the teacher's skills in terms of planning contextualized lessons.

**Promoting students' participation in decision making process.** Data reported that students took negotiation as an opportunity to express their opinions through which they could propose better ideas for future lessons. Besides, they could predict how those lessons would be based on their likes and interests which became a motivational issue for students to attend English classes; as it is illustrated in the following excerpts from students' reflections (August 14, 2019).

-Muy bien porque así sabremos como serán las demás clases y así yo no faltare a estudiar. 4

para saber lo que nos puede gustar en las clases. 5

The excerpts above show how students were involved into class development, made decisions about content and increased their intrinsic motivation since “negotiation is the idea of making hidden views of students explicit and hearing their voices to create a democratic and more proficient and effective classroom environment” (Azarnoosh & Kargozari, 2018, p.138). Additionally, during the focus group one student mentioned that “English classes have to be planned for both students and the teacher, because we as students can give a lot of ideas to the teacher for planning from our interests” (Focus Group, November 12, 2019). In brief, this

<sup>4</sup> Very good because we could know how would be the classes, and we won't miss them.

<sup>5</sup> To know what kind of things we would like to do in classes.

negotiation process became important in the promotion of student-centered class in as much as this last one is an “instructional approach in which students influence the content, activities, materials, and pace of learning” (Collins & O’Brien as cited in Kassem, 2018 p.140).

**Improving teacher skills in terms of planning contextualized lessons.** Data exposed that negotiating with students permitted the teacher to know students’ interests in a profound level, and in that sense to prepare lessons in an enjoyable manner in which students could feel comfortable. Thus, negotiation “can influence how they feel about their lessons, and the way they think about learning in general” (Azarnoosh & Kargozari, 2018, p.144) as it is mentioned in the following excerpts from students’ reflections (August 14, 2019).

Si porque así puede saber como nos gustaria las clases de él y aprenderiamas mucho mejor haciendo cosas que si nos gusta. <sup>6</sup>

Collecting students’ point of view facilitated planning and committed with students’ expectation about the class. All that interaction an interchange of ideas with students became in a motivating factor for becoming a better teacher which can work as balance between the institution’ demands and students’ desires, as happened in the negotiation class,

During the voting walls students felt excited by talking among them, proposing each other what they really wanted to have in English classes and discussing about the best options among those proposed by me. To see them that active made me think in all the possibilities that I could include in each lesson, I felt responsible of planning in a way I

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<sup>6</sup>...because he can know how we prefer classes, and we learn better by doing things that we like to do.

could involve the institutional syllabus and my students' likes in order to not disappoint them with the future activities and show them how their opinions and ideas appear during the lessons. (Class journal, August 14, 2019)

### **The Use of a Variety of Activities through Materials Enhanced Students' Comprehension and Confidence**

Data revealed that presenting multiple choices in activities improved the general understanding of the target language, and the way students perceived learning as enjoyable and achievable.

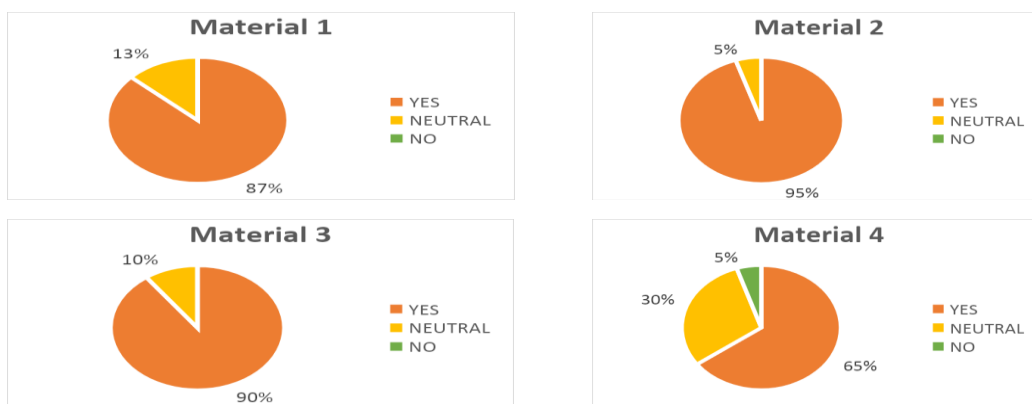
**Making language understandable.** Data affirmed that driving a lesson with different activities enriched understanding over the topic. With that in mind, students learned new things of the language and through the language, for instance "I proposed them to create a recipe for practicing countable and uncountable nouns, students immediately thought in their favorite food or menu saying aloud: burger, salad fruit, pizza, ramen among others (Class journal, September 18, 2019). Consequently, students increased vocabulary, improved their pronunciation and validated how to write some words in English as well as the way the recipe was presented and elaborated, as it is demonstrated in students' reflection (September, 19, 2019).

7 Me ayudo recordando todo lo que he aprendido durante el periodo y me gustaron las tres actividades porque esto tambien me ayudo a aprender palabras que no conocia

8 di nuevas cosas como hacer recetas

9 Mejore la pronunciasion

As a result of that variety and after assessing the materials through the checklist, data showed that students considered that materials avoided repetitiveness providing diversity from one lesson to another, as it is presented in the following graphics.



(Students checklist, September 5, 11, 26, October 3, 2019)

Complementing the data above exposed, a student said that “we learned more because the classes were not monotonous” one of their classmate added that “there was more learning because materials made easier to develop the task” (Focus group, November 12, 2019), and

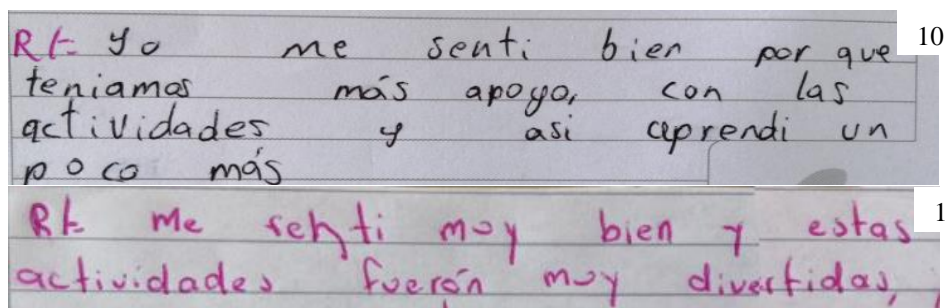
<sup>7</sup> It helped me reminding me everything that I learned during this term, I like the 3 activities because them helped to learn unknown words

<sup>8</sup> I learned new things like doing a recipe

<sup>9</sup> I improved my pronunciation

another mentioned “teacher where do you find those activities? Do you spent a lot time doing the material? You bring many activities, are we going to continue doing games and playing during the classes” (Class journal, October 2, 2019). The students’ positions support what Tomlinson referred as variety “breaking up the monotony of a unit routine with an unexpected activity; using many different text-types taken from many different types of sources” (2011, p.8).

**Making learning enjoyable and achievable.** Data revealed students had more pleasure in English classes because of the variety of activities proposed during the lesson even when those had a certain level of complexity. That fact permitted students to use materials as a tool for supporting their performance in each lesson, additionally the variety made easier and faster the development of the task, and learning could be possible thanks to fun activities which became in motivational issues for students, as illustrated in the following excerpts from students’ reflections (September, 19, 2019).

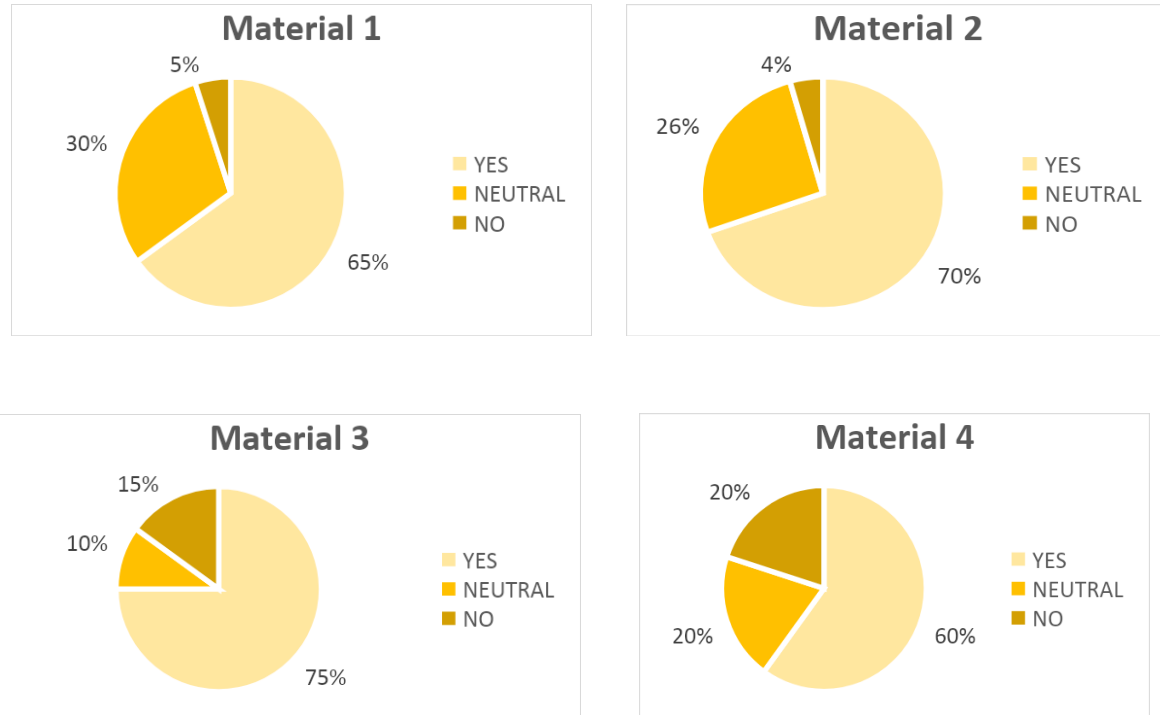


In addition, data evinced that the task proposed through materials was feasible for the most part, however a minority of students manifested to have difficulties to finish the activity, as illustrated in the next graphics.

<sup>10</sup> I felt good because we had more support with the activities, and I learned a little more

<sup>11</sup> I felt really good, and the activities were so fun





(Students checklist, September 5, 11, 26, October 3, 2019)

Promoting achievable tasks enhanced students to use their current abilities and take those to challenge themselves in order to complete the outcomes proposed in each lesson, it means “build confidence through activities which try to ‘push’ learners slightly beyond their existing proficiency” (Tomlinson, 2011, p.10).

### **Students Selection of Different Materials Allowed Students to Follow Their Interests and Gain Positive Attitude**

Data from this study revealed that selecting different materials provided options to students to select the activity that better matched their abilities and fulfilled interests. In addition, that possibility to choose favored positive thoughts in relation of the development of activities. That is why, “teacher is not a provider of knowledge, but a provider of opportunities from which

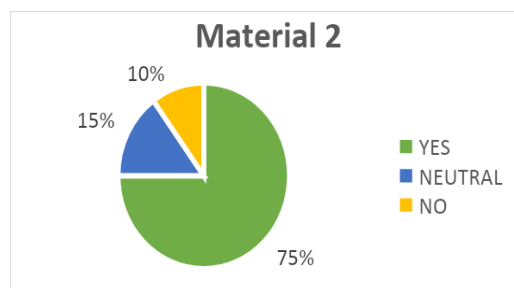
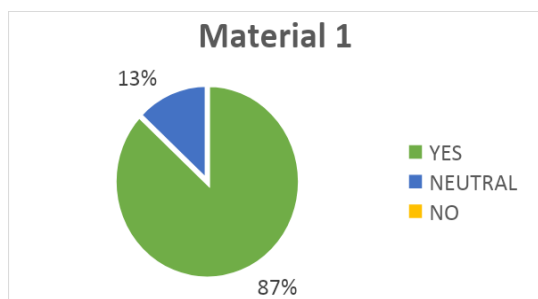
learners can learn independently and from one another” (Collins & O’Brien as cited in Kassem, 2018 p.140).

**Choosing the activity that better works with themselves.** Data showed that students choices, among different options I presented to students, corresponded to the activities that made them feel more comfortable, or to the activity that challenged them the most, as illustrated in the following excerpt from students’ reflections (September, 16, 2019).

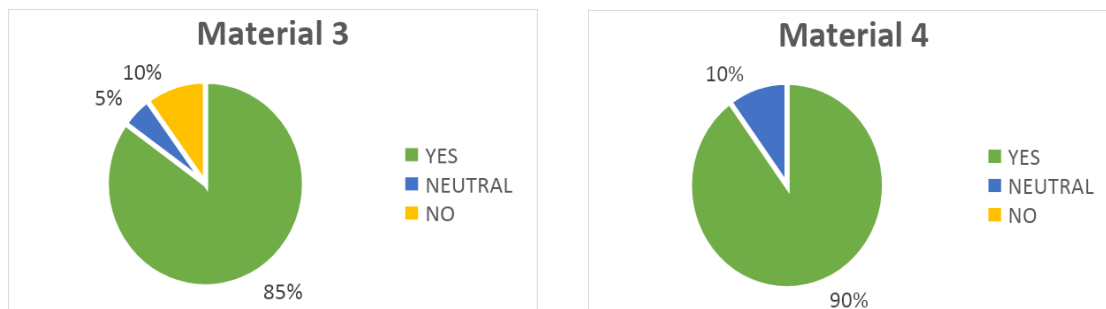
Porque me parecia una forma mucho mas divertida,  
me senti bien por que era algo de mi agrado,  
me senti bien por que me gustaba y  
ademas aprendi.

12

This process to select the activity was successfully because the content proposed through materials included appealing content. Data reported that the content of the materials responded to students’ interest as they proposed during the negotiation, as shown in the following graphics.



<sup>12</sup> Because it looked funnier, I felt good because it was something of my interest and it liked and helped to learn



(Students checklist, September 5, 11, 26, October 3, 2019)

Regarding appealing content, it refers to “topics of interest to the target learners; topics which offer the possibility of learning something new; engaging stories; universal themes; local references” (Tomlinson, 2011, p.8). This was evident when students reported during the focus group that “it was easier to understand the content because of the way you presented it” and that “all the materials were connected with the topic, and until we did not finish the topic you did not pass to the other”, “because the materials corresponded to the topic it was easier to finish each task proposed” (Focus Group, November 12, 2019).

**Evoking feelings during the process to choose.** Data reported that allowing students to select the activity raised students’ awareness about the role they could assume into the classes. The selection of activities made students felt heard because they made worth their opinions by making the teacher work in what they wanted or liked with the aim to improve their learning, as presented in the following excerpts from students’ reflections (September, 16, 2019).

13 *... y me pareció muy interesante de parte del profe por que busca como mejorar nuestros aprendizajes.*

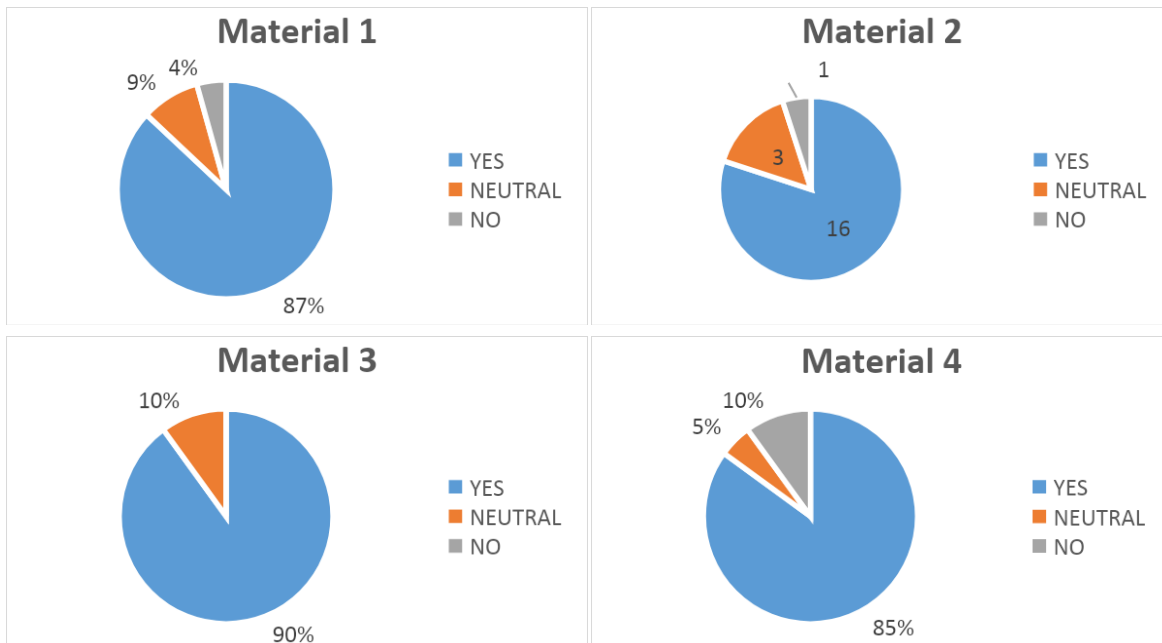
14 *... me senti alegre, por que jamas ubieran hecho eso*

<sup>13</sup> It seemed me very interesting that the teacher to find the way to improve our learning

<sup>14</sup> I felt happy because we never have done something like that

This kind of student involvement promoted more participation from them, because “students see a greater relevance for and a stronger connection to the subject at hand” (Brown, 2008, p.35). Moreover, a student mentioned that “I felt more involved in each class, so that permitted us to participate more and more because you were taking into account our decisions [...] we can easily make connections from one class to another” (Focus Group, November 12, 2019).

The above mentioned could happen because students saw novelty in the materials they used during the lessons. Data evinced that the majority of students found materials as novel resources after using them in the development of each lesson, as illustrated in the followings graphics from the checklist done by students.



(Students checklist, September 5, 11, 26, October 3, 2019).

Furthermore, one student confirmed what the above graphics revealed by saying “I consider materials were excellent, they were different for each class and it was weird to see them when we were accustomed only to work from the notebook” (Focus group, November 12, 2019).

### **The Use of Materials Enabled Students to Work in Group Facing Usefulness in the Development of English activities**

Data revealed that the use of different materials promoted spaces in the classroom for students to work in group. That kind of work helped students to take advantages from their classmates for completing the tasks or activities, likewise for them to identify the challenges they faced completing the activity.

**Helping each other during the elaboration of activities.** Data from this study showed that students found relevant working in groups. First, team work permitted them to help each other with the aim at getting a common benefit into the class, in that sense classmates became a guide for doing better and complete the activities proposed., Second, they could create a space in which everyone gave their opinions being respectful among them. Those positive aspects for group work had as a consequence improvement in their English performance, as illustrated in the following students’ reflections (September, 5, 2019).

mediante los trabajos donde todos  
aparrabamos para en bien comun 15

me apoyo mucho no comunicandome si no que lo pienso que  
las juegos en grupo nos une a todos al aprendizaje con el  
apoyo de todos 16

<sup>15</sup> Through the activities where all of us could contribute for a mutual benefit

<sup>16</sup> ...because the games in group join us for learning with the all’ support

The excerpts above show how students through “cooperative small-group work can enhance learning outcomes, communication skills, learning motivation” (Fushino, 2010, p.701). Students manifested that it was much better to work in groups, for instance, one student said “Teacher! Today we are going to work in groups, please teacher, it is better because if I do not know my partners can help me” (Class journal, September 12, 2019). In addition, another student mentioned “the most enjoyable for our English classes was to work in groups not only because I could share with my friends, but also learn the topic easier” (Focus Group, November 12, 2019). The group work could be possible because in this kind of work, “pupils have to learn to trust and respect each other (Galton, 1990). Students also need skills in how to plan and organize their group work, make considered group decisions, reach a compromise and avoid petty disputes” (Baines, Blatchford, & Chowne, 2007, p.666).

### **Conclusions and Implications**

This research had the purpose of exploring how the implementation of material designed under characteristics of novelty, variety, appealing content, and achievable challenge foster an EFL student-centered class. Based on the findings obtained, I can conclude that carrying out materials under the characteristics mentioned above enhanced student-centered attributes like promoting students’ participation in the decision making process, facilitating variety in activities by making language learning understandable, enjoyable and feasible, permitting to work in activities from students’ choice and their interest, and encouraging group work as a strategy to share with one another and easily getting a mutual result.

In addition, this action research entailed some implications for teachers’ practice in this specific type of context. A first implication is that teachers should involve students’ interest and

likes in the lessons by creating a space into the classroom for making a negotiation in order to find a way for both institutional and students demands. In that sense, teachers are going to have a solid basis for planning their classes which would be amusing and connected to the needs of students.

Another implication to bear in mind is the possibility of giving students the opportunity to interact with different materials designed from their interests because this avoids repetitiveness and enriches understanding over the topic. Additionally, the materials included an amount of activities that permitted students to choose among those and promoted an active role of students in relation to their learning process. Finally, student-centered class permit students to work in groups as a meaningful strategy for obtaining mutual benefits during the development of activities. Nonetheless, these implications should be seen in a contextualized way, considering the reality of the students who participated in this study and the fact that this was the first time they worked under student-centered approach as well as the teacher availability for designing the materials. In other contexts, where students are provided with other approaches and exposed to contextualized lessons and materials findings might be different.

This action research project provides rationale between the use of materials under certain characteristics and the promotion of a student-centered class. It also contributes to identifying relevant factors related to the students and teacher' role into this kind of classes in which students can feel free in expressing their opinions, ideas, interests during the progress of each lesson. Nevertheless, further research on using materials into the classroom needs to be conducted involving students in the creation of materials in order to know to what extend students, as materials designers, may improve their English performance.

### Reflection

From my high school, I had some experiences teaching, but they were just as a support staff only for replacing primary teachers when they had an extra activity or meeting. Thereupon, I had the opportunity to do a practicum as Normalista, this teaching encounter permitted me to have a real contact with the Colombian educational system, and to see that all the issues portrayed in its official documents were far away of school reality, even more so for rural contexts, because of the lack of resources, inadequate infrastructure, the distance between students' houses and the school, and the most important fact; social problems like large and dysfunctional families, poverty, sexual abuse, and malnutrition. I was there as a teacher obviously, however, I had to find a way to link my lesson to all those students' difficulties, I faced the necessity to become a father the ones who needed love, also a nutritionist, counselor, cooker and caseworker. To me was more important to work on those multiples aspects than teaching, because anything would not be learned by the students if they had their minds focused on issues that worried them more than learning about each subject.

Regarding my current practicum, I could say that my previous experiences made it easier, at least in the teaching part. I noticed that, as teacher we need to deal with other aspects as I mentioned above, maybe not the same facts, but events around the students or the institution which affect the normal flow of classes, and which make our job purely a social work. For these reasons, I have reiterated the idea of contextualized teaching, because whatever or wherever I teach, students, facilities, syllabus, purposes are not the same and that is why, as teacher, it is my duty to work on my students' interests and needs and make the content achievable and relevant for them, since it would permit them to identify gaps in learning to fill and would make more interesting the learning process. It is also my responsibility to have a real vision of the things that



I can do taking into account the amount of extracurricular activities that each institution has, in that sense I need to analyze, plan and develop my lesson with a rigorous managing of time if I really want to address some kind of progress with my students.

Concerning the research part, I would say that it has been tremendously frustrating to me as well as positive. First, because I have had a mental barrier that does not allow me to use the foreign language with proficiency and makes me doubt about everything and inhibits me from expressing ideas and positions which made me procrastinate the writing part of my research report. Second, the university schedule or demands most of the time do not coincide with the institution agenda, that is why it becomes difficult to implement actions and collect data, thus his research part was challenging and time consuming, Despite that frustration, the positive part is bigger in this process, I learned to be more organized in order to plan every single aspect like having clear objectives, preparing material in advance, using outlines, all those for guaranteeing be focused in my initial purpose, additionally I learned to codify information with details to find clear categories and a well-structured narrative of findings. I also improved abilities such as analysis, observation, searching and writing which are fundamental not only as a researcher but also as a teacher and in our daily life. Despite doing research is an exhausting task, it becomes essential in our field because it permits to build knowledge, question ourselves about what is happening and how to provide possible solutions to that, and improve our performance as English teachers.

Finally, both teaching and research experience gave me tools to become a better teacher. I found a way to self-reflect about my role as a teacher, and wonder about the future of English teaching in our context, which is important if I really hope to bring a social transformation from my daily activity as a teacher.

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