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Impact of positive feedback, based on a humanistic approach, on the learning process of a 10th grade EFL course at a public high school in the East of Antioquia

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### **Abstract**

This project aimed at identifying the impact of positive feedback, implemented through a humanistic approach, on the learning process of 10<sup>th</sup> graders. I carried out the study in a public urban institution from El Carmen de Viboral – Antioquia with 46 students. The project included two stages: The first stage consisted of observations to the CT to explore and know the context of the classes. The second stage was the implementation itself, in which I carried out a project for several weeks consisting of providing positive feedback. The data collection instruments comprised the teacher's journal, a questionnaire to the students, an interview with the CT, and a focus group. Findings revealed that students tend to feel more motivated after encouraging comments. Besides, students appreciated the constant accompaniment from the teacher and the intention to include them all in the learning process. Nevertheless, a challenge of the project was the number of students, which could hinder the inclusion of each student's way of being and learning.

*Keywords:* Positive feedback, humanistic approach, learning process, EFL, CT (Cooperating Teacher).

### **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 El Carmen de Viboral, Colombia.

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### **Preface**

During my time as a student, I have always been concerned about the ways of assessment that teachers use. I have often seen how some teachers only use grades to assess their students and do not care about the whole process. On top of that, I have noticed that teachers often use negative comments and ignore the importance of encouraging and motivating the students. That was the reason why I decided to implement this project. During the observation stage, I noticed how the CT valued learners at every moment of the class, and she was always aware of her students' necessities. At that time, and inspired by my CT, I decided to explore those strategies by myself and check, in a more formal way, its impact on the students.

The project's structure consisted of a stage of observations in which I was exploring the context of the class. At that stage, I came up with the main objective of this project. Then, I held the implementation after the observation stage. In this section, the CT and I met and decided which content we would teach. After the planning, I designed an action plan to cover the grammar content and, at the same time, provide feedback. I developed a project about ecotourism with the students. Additionally, in some specific spaces of the implementation, I conducted a series of research actions in order to gather data. Finally, I analyzed and categorized the data.

It was rewarding to evidence, in the findings, how students felt more relaxed and willing to participate. Moreover, they appreciated my efforts to include them in the process. In general terms, I really value how my comments, accompaniment, attitude, and relationship with the students helped them feel more comfortable and more open to the learning process.

### **Context**

The “Institución Educativa Fray Julio Tobón B.” is a public institution located in the municipality of El Carmen de Viboral. It has three branches located in the urban area of the town. Branch B is the place where I developed this project. In this branch, there are students from seventh to eleventh grade. They attend school from Monday to Friday on a schedule from 7:30 am to 11:00 am. The Institutional mission focuses on forming an integral person with a high human and academic quality and with high respect for their social and natural environment. Concerning its vision, the institution aims to form its students according to the "SER PERSONA" project. It emphasizes the human formation of the students with values such as: knowing the consequences of their acts, being conscious about their actions, respecting the differences, and building a life project. (Prospecto institucional, I.E Fray Julio Tobon B, 2021)

Due to the pandemic situation, the institution is currently under an "alternancia" model. This model covers the students from the tenth and eleventh grades of the institution. The students have to wear masks all the time. Moreover, each group is divided into two halves. The first half attends one week while the rest of the students work from home doing worksheets and activities and sending them via email. The institution offers virtual classes after the regular schedule for the students with the virus or who cannot attend the classes.

The institution operates in three terms of fourteen weeks. The teachers evaluate the students' academic and personal/social performance achievements during the sixth week. In the case of students with low performance, the teachers share that information with the student's parents to find a solution. Additionally, in week thirteenth, the institution offers remedial and reinforcement activities for those students. Furthermore, each term proposes a problematic question, a conceptual scope, learning objectives, and three performance indicators: "SER,



SABER Y HACER" focused on reflecting, learning, and practicing, respectively. It is essential to mention that the institution uses a qualitative system for evaluating because it is more focused on the process of an integral formation rather than numbers.

Concerning the subject of English in the institution, it has an intensity of four hours a week. The English teachers are always attentive to any training program to keep their linguistic competencies and update their methodologies. The training programs are always fostered and supported by the institution. The curriculum follows the standards of "Instruimos" which consists of preparing the students for the "ICFES" and the guidelines of the "CEFRL" (Common European Framework of References for Languages) in which students must acquire a B1 level in the English language. However, the students are trained in the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), with activities that vary from drills and fill in the gaps to presentations and discussions. The institution always focuses on didactic activities that make English more appealing. Besides, the teachers are very respectful toward the students' learning processes; they prioritize the support of each student's pace.

Finally, concerning the teacher, the group, and the classroom. My cooperating teacher graduated from the "Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana" languages program. She has specializations in didactics of foreign languages and pedagogy. Moreover, she has been teaching for twenty-seven years, and she has been working in the institution for eleven years. The group consists of forty-six students, thirty women and sixteen men. Their ages vary from fifteen to sixteen; they belong to middle-class strata. Lastly, the classroom has four windows, and the door should be opened during the class in concordance with the biosafety norms. The chairs are arranged in lines with enough space among them. The classroom has one chalkboard and one

board for markers, several chairs for the students, and a desk with a teacher's chair. Nevertheless, it does not have TV devices or an internet connection.

In conclusion, the institution has a good strategy for facing the pandemic. It also contains positive aspects regarding the students' formation and the teachers' training. Moreover, the institution has suitable materials for the teaching of English. However, they can improve the teaching-learning process by investing in more updated equipment.

### **Statement of the problem**

Teachers use more formative than summative assessment in the classroom. The only feedback that students receive is summarized into a grade. From my observation experience, I could identify that the cooperating teacher usually utilized another type of feedback. She constantly used positive feedback to encourage her students and make them feel more comfortable. In relation to this, a study made by Arifi from the AAB College in Kosovo concluded that the importance of using a humanistic approach in the teaching process of a foreign language relies on the recognition of students' emotions and the inclusion of such feelings into the learning process (Arifi, 2017). I could identify that when the cooperating teacher successfully included her students' feelings in her classes by encouraging them to participate, the flow of the lesson improved, and the participation was richer. In addition, "...evidence shows that students benefit the most from comments of instructors since they serve as a guide for students to follow the path that best suits their learning process" (Torres, 2019, p. 6). That is why I decided to explore and implement a humanistic approach alongside positive feedback to see its impact on my students' learning process.

From the beginning of the observation process, I identified how the teacher's discourse encouraged the students to participate and how she used formative assessment to make her students feel more comfortable (Observation 1, 2021). It caught my attention because that kind of approach is not very common in our context. Teachers usually mention what you should improve, giving you a grade. This strategy is not entirely negative; however, Torres (2019) explains that teachers should use a mix of formative and summative assessment and feedback to improve the learning process. Moreover, I perceived that the classes were richer in terms of participation due to the fact that the teacher used a mix of positive and encouraging comments alongside grades (Observation 3, 2021). It is essential to mention that the institution does not use numbers for grading. Instead, they use terms such as: "*superior, basic, low*". These features were interesting because it was evident that the students reacted better to a kind comment and worked in a stress-free environment.

Moreover, it is imperative to mention that feedback must happen at every possible moment of the class and not only after a workshop or exam. For instance, the cooperating teacher constantly moved from one group to another, checking her students' progress and solving doubts simultaneously. Furthermore, she was always attentive to her students' comments and tried to listen to them (Observation 3, 2021). I have seen that these aspects positively impact the students' learning process. As Arifi states: "When they (teachers) have confidence in their students, they accept them as worthy individuals and help them to build a positive image of the seas, thus creating a community in which the ocean of subsistence develops" (Arifi, 2017, p. 204).

In summary, the positive aspects that I could identify in the cooperating teacher's practice led me to consider exploring and implementing positive feedback and a humanistic

approach. It is essential to start mixing summative and formative feedback in our EFL learning context to improve our students' responses and attitudes to the activities. It can help our students be more relaxed and less anxious about acquiring and using a foreign language.

### **Theoretical Framework**

I first present some definitions of the humanistic approach in education from a general perspective on this theoretical framework. Then, I provide some insights about using a humanistic approach in education. After this, I present the definition of formative assessment parallel with summative assessment. Next, I acquaint the interpretation of positive feedback and how the students react to it and its impact on the learning process. Finally, I present the possible implications of the study to the field.

Firstly, it is essential to mention that the term "*humanistic*" derives from humanism. Humanism refers to "a system of thinking in which man, his interest and development are made central and dominant, tending to exalt the cultural and practical rather than the scientific and speculative" Trident Promotional Corporation, 1996 (as cited in Firdaus & Mariyat, 2017, p. 30). Therefore, the concept "*humanistic*" refers to the theory that states that "...each individual is influenced and guided by the purposes of the person they connect to their own experiences" Rochem, 2017 (as cited in Firdaus & Mariyat, 2017, p. 30).

With the definition of humanistic stated, it is now essential to address its definition in education. The scholars Firdaus and Mariyat from the University of Darussalam Gontor, in their paper "*Humanistic Approach in Education According to Paulo Freire*" (2017), develop a study of the educator's approach towards education. They refer to that approach as a system in which the learner's formation is a goal. Moreover, the students should be aware of their surroundings

and be critical of them. In addition, the teachers and students must be active learners in education. Thus, the "*Freirean*" method emphasizes a non-teacher-centered education and one in which the students understand their surroundings and have the power to change their immediate reality. Another definition of the humanistic approach is the one proposed by Moskowitz as cited in Stevick (1990), in which the humanistic approach possesses two emphases. The first one is to recognize in education the role that the students' feelings have and how they affect the learning process. The second one is to value the uniqueness of each person. From these definitions, I can conclude that the humanistic approach in education is vital in recognizing each person's values and feelings. Furthermore, they consider the students as active participants in the learning process and individuals who can understand and change their surroundings.

Secondly, regarding the use of the humanistic approach in education, Jane Arnold, in her paper "*Towards more humanistic English teaching*" (1998), defines the importance of using a humanistic approach in the current times. She explains that:

In a troubled world calling out for balm for its wounds, it should certainly not be seen as irresponsible for educators, whatever their subject area, to dedicate a little attention to contributing to the development of emotionally intelligent people who are better equipped to deal with the problems of modern society. (p. 238,239)

Furthermore, Khatib, Sarem, and Hamidi (2013), explain the implications of the use of a humanistic approach in education as follows: "Humanistic education giving priority to learners' psychological states can prepare optimal learning conditions and, as a result, foster critical thinking in the learners" (p. 47). From these definitions, I can infer that a more humanistic education is becoming more necessary since it allows students to develop themselves and become more critical. It considers them as active agents in the process of learning: "The basic

tenets determined in the humanistic learning process are that much important learning is gained by doing, and learning is eased when the student focuses on responsibly in the learning process" (Khatib, Sarem & Hamidi, 2013, p. 47).

Thirdly, concerning the impact of the humanistic approach on the learning process, different authors explain the approach's benefits. Jane Arnold explains the link of the affective side of the learner with cognitive development. She cites a neurobiologist who asserts that "our emotional life is an integral component of the machinery of reason (p. xii), and he explains that feelings, along with the emotions they come from, are not a luxury... (they) are just as cognitive as other percepts (p. xv)" Damasio, 1995 (as cited in Arnold, 1998, p. 239). In addition to this neurobiological impact of a humanistic approach on the learning process, it is mandatory to mention how it works in the classroom itself. From a language learning perspective, "class participation and sociability are the possible major determinants of language proficiency" Ely 1986 (as cited in Khatib, Sarem & Hamidi, 2013, p. 48). From this perspective, it is essential to mention that according to Khatib, Sarem, and Hamidi, citing Ghaith and Diab (2008), the importance of the use of a humanistic approach on education relies on the fact that it permits the interaction among the students and it can improve the students' motivation and sociability. For these particular reasons, it is vital to highlight that different authors tend to take a humanistic approach to enhance language acquisition, which is one of the objectives of this project.

Fourthly and for the interest of this project, it is essential to mention the definition of formative assessment and how it differs from summative assessment. According to Boston (2002), "assessments become formative when the information is used to adapt teaching and learning to meet student needs" (p. 1). Moreover, Boston (2002) explains that formative assessment is helpful because it provides activities that can enhance the students' performance. It

allows teachers to check the students' progress and difficulties. We can use this knowledge to implement changes in the practice leading to more opportunities to improve our teaching. On the contrary, summative assessment is defined as: "a means to gauge, at a particular point in time, student learning relative to content standards," and it is used "to help evaluate the effectiveness of programs, school improvement goals, alignment of curriculum, or student placement in specific programs" (Garrison & Ehringhaus, 2007, p. 1). These definitions are important because an essential part of formative assessment is to consider the students' needs, and one way of getting that information is by using and receiving feedback.

Feedback is a type of formative assessment. It is primarily used to help the learners "...become aware of any gaps that exist between their desired goal and their current knowledge, understanding, or skill and (it) guides them through actions necessary to obtain the goal" Ramaprasad, 1983 and Sadler, 1989 (as cited in Boston, 2002, p. 1). Boston (2002) also explains that this type of assessment may be helpful for low-proficiency students because it gives them the possibility to overcome their difficulties through additional effort. Feedback can be provided in many ways, such as peer assessment or self-assessment. For instance, "two experimental research studies have shown that students who understand the learning objectives and assessment criteria and have opportunities to reflect on their work show greater improvement than those who do not" Fontana & Fernandes, 1994; Frederikson & White, 1997 (as cited in Boston, 2002, p. 1). Another way of providing feedback is positive, that is to say, positive feedback.

Positive feedback is a strategy educationally oriented that has the purpose of "providing information to improve or maintain performance, and increasing student motivation, engagement, and independence" McLeskey et al. 2017, (as cited in Whitney & Ackerman, 2020, p.87). Moreover, as Whitney and Ackerman (2020) say, this type of feedback can occur when

the teacher praises a student's behavior with motivating expressions (great job! very good!), when the teacher confirms the correct response and provides additional information or when the teacher corrects a problematic behavior and provides guidance and assistance.

Fifthly, regarding the students' reactions and the impact of using positive feedback, a study carried out by Whitney and Ackerman, about strategies and uses of constructive and positive feedback with a particular focus on students with emotional and behavioral disorders, concludes that "a teacher's acknowledgment of a student behavior can, have not only a significant impact on the student's academic and behavioral outcomes but also the development of the student-teacher relationship" (Whitney & Ackerman, 2020, p. 92, 93). In addition, a study developed by Reigel about the relation between positive oral feedback and student language proficiency demonstrates "a statistically significant effect of positive feedback rate on L2 learning" (Reigel, 2008, p. 96). Furthermore, Reigel (2008) describes that a positive feedback mechanism alongside second language acquisition activities can enhance the students' performance. Therefore, from the definitions of these authors, I can conclude that there is evidence suggesting that positive feedback can enhance the classroom environment. Besides, it can improve the learning process of the students.

Finally, I consider it is worth it exploring the impact of positive feedback within a humanistic approach since both concepts can enhance the learning process and lead to more integral education. On the one hand, positive feedback may foster the students' response to classroom activities and improve the teacher-student relationship. On the other hand, a humanistic approach can help include the students' voices and feelings and consider them active agents of the learning process to change their realities. From these perspectives, I believe it essential to identify the possible impacts of these approaches in the context previously mentioned



to have a more inclusive and integral education through which the students can have better opportunities to perform and their considerations are heard and respected.

### **Research Question**

How can positive feedback, based on a humanistic approach, have an impact on the learning process of a 10<sup>th</sup> grade EFL course at a public high school in the East of Antioquia?

### **General objective**

To identify the impact of a humanistic approach implemented through positive feedback on the learning process of a 10<sup>th</sup> grade EFL course at a public high school in the East of Antioquia.

### **Specific objectives**

- To implement a humanistic approach through positive feedback for teaching English to tenth-grade students.

To explore the impact of positive feedback based on a humanistic perspective on the students' learning process.

- To determine the possible improvements in the teaching practice derived from using a humanistic approach.

### **Action plan**

To implement this project, I planned a series of activities with a duration of ten weeks. I divided the project into two halves of five weeks each. I planned to carry out various activities involving mini-projects and fostering the different language skills. The project also aimed to

have diverse research techniques to gather information from my practice, the students, and the CT.

To gather information about the impact of my practice on the students' learning process, I planned different instruments: (a) Teacher's journal after every implementation to reflect upon my own practice and register the students' reactions to my proposals and accompaniment. (b) Two questionnaires to the students at the beginning and the end of my implementation process. They were meant to help me know the students' perceptions of positive feedback and a positive class environment before and after my implementation. (c) A focus group in the middle of the implementation (week 5) to identify students' opinions about the process and make necessary adaptations or changes. (d) Interviews with the CT at the beginning and the end of the implementation process to know her experience and advice when implementing positive feedback and to evaluate my practice and know further recommendations.

### **Development of actions**

Due to the pandemic situation in Colombia, I had to make some adaptations and changes to the original action plan. The intended time for its development changed from ten to five weeks because the group was divided in two. For this reason, I had to make a lesson plan for two sessions to cover both halves. This situation led to a time adaptation because, otherwise, it would have been impossible to work with both groups with an intended plan for ten weeks. The project aimed to have two mini-projects covering globalization and ecotourism. Due to the schedule changes, I had to implement only one (ecotourism) and adapt or omit specific research actions, which I will explain later.

The nature of the study implied a constant accompaniment to the students, in which I mixed positive and encouraging comments alongside activities that tried to cover as many learning styles as possible. I did not have a specific activity to implement positive feedback on that account. In all the teaching actions that I will explain, I always tried to encourage my students to feel free to participate, leave the fear of being judged, and create a positive and stress-free atmosphere. Moreover, in my lesson plans, I included different activities to fit my students' learning styles, paces, and academic levels in the classroom.

Regarding the teaching actions, they took place in the second semester of 2021. Before I started the implementations, the CT and I met to decide the topics for the sessions. We checked the syllabus to have a clearer picture, and we decided to include ecotourism with some grammar topics. For the first week, I started to link a previous topic (present perfect) with a warm-up activity about ecotourism (Appendix A). Moreover, I explained some modal verbs for using them in the following sessions to give advice, recommendations, or express rules and prohibitions. In the second week, I implemented a reading comprehension activity about a touristic place in Colombia that used modal verbs (Appendix B).

Furthermore, I presented the students two videos about ecotourism in general and ecotourism in Colombia to develop a listening comprehension activity. In the third week, I conducted an evaluative task about the modal verbs to check the students' understanding of the topic (Appendix C). In addition to this, I explained the project's final activity consisting of a presentation of a tourist place in Colombia. The objective was to practice the topic of ecotourism, providing general information about the place and recommendations for tourists. For this activity, I gave the students the possibility to present the final outcome in the format they wished to make them feel more comfortable and address their own style for presenting a topic. I

also gave the students the rubric format to let them know what aspects I would focus on. The forms included an individual and a collective rubric (Appendixes D and E). The fourth week consisted of the preparation for the final presentation. The students brought materials, and they started to investigate their corresponding places. I went group by group, checking their advances and ideas for the presentations. Finally, in the fifth week, the students carried out their presentations, and I used the rubric to assess them and write comments for feedback.

It is essential to mention that the presentations took one additional week. In addition, I held short meetings with the students after the presentations to hand them in the graded rubrics and give them the pertinent comments from the presentations. Furthermore, it is mandatory to mention that I was always available to solve doubts, provide translations and give clarifications in each teaching activity. Moreover, I gave the students positive comments during the process to motivate them and create a more positive environment.

Regarding the research actions, I also had to make some changes. I could only conduct a questionnaire to the students and one interview with the CT at the beginning of the implementation. To gather students' perspectives of my practice, I ran a focus group with four volunteers. Besides, after every class, I wrote a journal in which I reflected upon my practice and analyzed the students' reactions to my proposals. The students' questionnaire was developed in the first week and gathered information about the students' perspectives about positive feedback and the class environment. The interview with the CT took place in the second week, and it collected information about the CT's opinions and experiences about positive feedback. Finally, the focus group served to know some students' views about my implementation process and accompaniment in general.

### Findings and Interpretations

I conducted a series of research actions that aroused some findings related to my research project. I collected the data through a questionnaire to the students, an interview with the CT, a focus group to the students, and a teacher's journal. I gathered and organized all the data in Google Docs files, in which I developed an analysis and a categorization. I defined codes and categories that I discussed later with my classmates and research advisor. The results of the process of categorization are the following: *1. Implications of positive feedback: the importance of valuing the students' efforts in every moment of the class; 2. A stress-free environment is key for the development of a lesson; 3. Each student is unique in their way of being, learning styles, preferences, and those differences should be respected and praised and 4. The importance of being empathetic with the students.* In the following paragraphs, I will present and explain each one.

#### **Implications of positive feedback: the importance of valuing the students' efforts in every moment of the class.**

Results indicated that the students liked the teachers who focused not only on grades but on their efforts in class. In addition to this, the students' perceptions towards positive feedback showed that they liked the positive and encouraging comments. Moreover, in an interview with the CT, I could conclude that positive feedback plays an essential role in education.

**The importance of positive feedback and positive and encouraging comments in education.** Data revealed that the students possessed a favorable opinion towards the positive and encouraging words. In the graphic (Figure 1), we can observe that all of the students consider that the good comments from their teachers improve their learning process.

Additionally, according to some notable answers from the questionnaire in which I asked them

about their recommendations for teachers when they report the grades, a student said: "de manera positiva corregir lo que ya nos hace falta, reforzar con más actividades los temas y animar a los estudiantes a mejorar su proceso académico" (Questionnaire to the students, September 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021). The perceptions of the CT were also valuable for this section. When I asked her about her process of implementing this type of feedback, she explained that: "...al estudiante a medida que vos le hablás así sea de las cosas que hay que mejorar de manera positiva, las cosas fluyen distinto porque no se generan bloqueos..." and "entonces así sean cosas muy sencillas, muy básicas (regarding English teaching), pero se van tranquilos y que uno les genera tranquilidad y paz y no como esas angustias" (Interview to the CT, September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

¿Considera que los comentarios positivos por parte de los profesores colaboran con su aprendizaje?



Figure 1, questionnaire to the students, September 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

**Constant accompaniment in the classrooms implies a better communication and understanding of the students' process.** Data determined that continuous accompaniment in the classroom improves the communication with the students. In my teacher's journal, I started to perceive this situation:

I was always going around the classroom, and apart from solving doubts and giving clarifications, I was always trying to encourage them and give them positive comments. I perceived that when I told them that they were very intelligent or that they were doing great work, they worked even better. (Teacher's Journal, September 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

Data from the focus group reinforced this previous perception. Some student argued that: “Por ejemplo también al usted ser una persona como que siempre está pendiente de todos, pues, o sea, que en cualquier momento que uno lo necesite, usted va a estar ahí. Entonces uno aprecia mucho eso” and “todo el tiempo en las clases nos estuvo ayudando, asesorando para hacer las cosas mejor y aprender” (Focus group, November 4th, 2021).

**Students' motivation may increase by positive comments and not only by quantitative results.** Findings showed that students appreciated the teachers' remarks and preferred teachers that valued their efforts at every moment of the class and not only grades. Some notable answers were: “Que no solo se queden con notas, sino con lo que se ve en el aula, porque muchas veces no se valora la disposición” and “mi recomendación sería que los profesores fueran más conscientes al calificar y valoren cada esfuerzo nuestro” (Questionnaire to the students, September 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021). In addition to this, the CT explained the importance of positive feedback for students' motivation. She claimed that:

La intención principal, creo yo, es motivar a los muchachos. Porque lastimosamente de nuestras instituciones ellos bilingües no salen por nuestro sistema de trabajo, no hay posibilidad; pero que al menos se vayan motivados y viendo el inglés como un área divertida, rica. (Interview to the CT, September 28th, 2021).

She also explained that: “si lo hacemos de forma constante ellos, sobretodo, mantienen motivaditos y que participen y que le hagan y que lo disfruten. Que la clase se les vuelva algo rico y no tortuoso, que eso es muy horrible” (Interview to the CT, September 28th, 2021).

From the teacher's journal, I could conclude that whenever I encouraged the students with positive comments, the flow of the class was richer. "I liked how some students that were very

shy with me are starting to feel more open. When I approach them with a smile or with a good attitude, they reply with a smile or laugh" (Teacher's Journal, September 9th, 10th, 2021).

These actions are in concordance with the definitions of positive feedback by Whitney and Ackerman (2020). They say this type of feedback can occur when the teacher praises a student's behavior with motivating expressions (great job! very good!), when the teacher confirms the correct response and provides additional information or when the teacher corrects a problematic behavior and provides guidance and assistance.

**A stress-free environment is key for the development of a lesson.**

Data showed that the students preferred a class where the classroom atmosphere was favorable. In addition, data revealed that a positive teacher-student relationship might improve the class atmosphere. Moreover, data showed that a good relationship between students and teacher combined with a pleasant atmosphere makes the lesson flow better.

**A good teacher-student relationship helps to create a better class atmosphere.**

Results revealed that most students agree that a stress-free environment facilitates learning (Figure 2). Moreover, in my teacher's journal, I perceived that my comments were helping to build up a positive atmosphere in the classroom: "I perceived that my comments and attitude helped the atmosphere of the class. I think that my relationship with the students helps to create a class in which they all feel listened to and taken into account" (Teacher's Journal, September 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021). In addition, in the focus group, students claimed that a cordial student-teacher relationship is vital for the development of the class. We can see this in the following evidence:

¿Creen que mi proceso de enseñanza ha favorecido un ambiente más relajado o libre de estrés en el salón? ¿Por qué?



R: S: Sí, yo creo que principalmente se debe a que estamos acostumbrados al estereotipo de un profesor mandón y tenerlo a usted como que, explicándonos, de cierto modo, una persona con la que podemos conectar muy fácil, tal vez no está la presión de que “ay me va a juzgar por tal cosa” yo creo que principalmente se le amerita a usted que con usted es una persona con la cual se puede aprender fácilmente sin estrés, que si tiene una duda uno puede ir directamente hacia usted sin ningún problema. (Focus group, November 4th, 2021).

¿Considera que un ambiente libre de estrés puede facilitar el aprendizaje?



Figure 2, questionnaire to the students, September 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021

**A positive atmosphere helps to improve the flow of the class.** Data indicated that students' understanding and disposition improved when they perceived a positive atmosphere. I started to notice these behaviors in my teacher's journal: "I need to highlight again the fact that my relationship with the students helps to create a good atmosphere in which they can feel a little more comfortable participating" (Teachers Journal, September 21<sup>st</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021). These perceptions were reinforced after analyzing some notable answers in the questionnaire to the students. Some students claimed: “Cuando tenemos estrés o mucha presión es muy difícil que aprendamos, pero si por el contrario es un ambiente sereno, nos entrará a la mente más rápido” and “cuando estamos en un ambiente libre de estrés logramos tener una buena concentración y

además sentirnos cómodos realizando los trabajos” (Questionnaire to the students, September 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

This category is related to the statement provided by Wilson-Fleming and Wilson-Younger. They assert that: "positive classroom environments help to enhance, promote, and encourage students' learning in all academic settings" (Wilson-Fleming & Wilson-Younger, 2012, p. 2).

**Each student is unique in their way of being, learning styles, and preferences, and those differences should be respected and praised.**

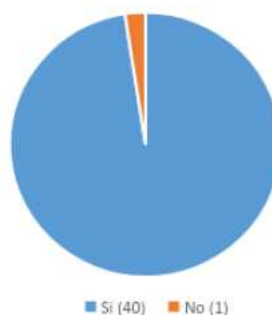
Data showed that the students perform better when they feel included in the learning process. In consequence, that inclusion could determine their performance. Moreover, the planning of activities is relevant for that inclusion. Data revealed that the students liked to have plenty of options to present the activities. Finally, data indicated some drawbacks when including each student in the process.

**Importance of including students' needs, voices, and opinions in the classroom.** From the questionnaire to the students, I perceived that the students liked to be listened to and included. In the graphics (Figures 3 and 4), it can be seen that the students were feeling included and that they considered that inclusion important. In addition, a notable answer from a student regarding the inclusion of their opinions was: “que hayan actividades en donde cada estudiante pueda dar sus opiniones y así de alguna manera expresarse y desahogarse” (Questionnaire to the students, September 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021). In the teacher's journal, I expressed that I was always trying to involve students in the process: "I am always trying to make them feel part of the process and that their opinions and beliefs are important" (Teacher's Journal, September 9<sup>th</sup>,

10th, 2021). At the end of the implementation, the students claimed they liked how I was always aware of them and gave them the space to participate. They said that “Por ejemplo también al usted ser una persona como que siempre está pendiente de todos, pues, o sea, que en cualquier momento que uno lo necesite, usted va a estar ahí. Entonces uno aprecia mucho eso”, “como que está pendiente de todo el grupo en general...” and “que esté pendiente de todos es algo muy bueno... (regarding a recommendation for me)” (Focus group, November 4th, 2021).

Figure 3, questionnaire to the students, September 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

¿Considera que la inclusión de los estudiantes en las decisiones y acciones que se llevan a cabo en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje es importante?



¿Cree usted que sus opiniones son tomadas en cuenta en el aula de clase por sus profesores?

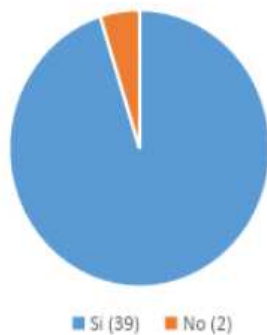


Figure 4, questionnaire to the students, September 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

**The inclusion of the students' feelings could determine their performance.** Results indicated that most of the students considered feelings an essential component in education and that their emotions affected their performance (Figures 5 and 6). Moreover, a student explained the importance of the welfare of the students in the classroom: “personalmente considero que es FUNDAMENTAL el bienestar del estudiante y todo lo que este término incluye, si un alumno se

siente inseguro, probablemente no pueda responder de la mejor manera (Academically speaking) ...” (Questionnaire to the students, September 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021). In addition, a student claimed something related to their feelings in my process, the student said: “nos sentimos más cómodos en las clases, como que la presión de todos los días en las clases, en inglés, con usted como que nos sentimos más cómodos” (Focus group, November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021). This opinion confirms what I wrote in my teacher's journal about my students' behavior when I addressed feelings in the classroom. "I perceived that when I told them that they were very intelligent or that they were doing great work, they worked even better" (Teacher's Journal, September 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021). This type of positive feedback is similar to Whitney and Ackerman's assertion. They affirm that positive feedback has the purpose of "providing information to improve or maintain performance, and increasing student motivation, engagement, and independence" (McLeskey et al., 2017, as cited in Whitney & Ackerman, 2020, p.87).

¿Cree usted que los sentimientos son relevantes (importantes) para el proceso de aprendizaje?



Figure 5, questionnaire to the students, September 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

¿Considera que su estado emocional afecta su desempeño escolar?



Figure 6, questionnaire to the students, September 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

**The relevance of planning the activities to cover as many styles and preferences as possible.** Data showed that the students liked how I designed the classes. From the beginning, in the questionnaire, I perceived that the students needed different types of activities to cover their necessities. A notable answer exemplifies this:

No todos tenemos la misma capacidad para comprender los temas, hay que tener muy en cuenta también la timidez e inseguridad de ciertos alumnos, por ende, recomiendo continuar con la forma en que hasta ahora nos han brindado tanto apoyo y seguridad. (Questionnaire to the students, September 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

Moreover, The CT explained very well the importance of having different options for different students:

Entonces es tratar siempre de ofrecerle a los estudiantes esas cositas que en todos puedan funcionar bien y que el que va muy bien pueda avanzar, el que esté aprendiendo que siga y el que no, que podamos sacarlo como de esa total oscuridad frente al área. Fácil no es, pero hay que intentarlo. (Interview to the CT, September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

The proposed activities possessed the characteristics of including students' differences and allowing them to choose what they liked the most.

I consider that providing students the opportunities to work as they find it better could lead to a better outcome. I allowed them to work in groups, pairs, or individually. Besides, they can present the place they are investigating as they want. (Teacher's Journal, October 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

The students gave me their opinions about those activities in the focus group. They said: “Por ejemplo en las exposiciones, fue muy chévere porque aprendimos palabras, a pronunciarlas

mejor, todo lo que nos sugirió. Fue una forma de aprender más lúdica” and “también aprendimos de cultura con las exposiciones, o sea, no solo como de inglés o nuestra disposición, sino que también lo pudimos ampliar a otros aspectos como la cultura, la geografía” (Focus group, November 4th, 2021). These actions were in accordance with what Moskowitz (cited in Stevick, 1990) proposes regarding the importance of recognizing each person's uniqueness.

**Benefits and problematics of including each student in the classroom.** Data showed all the advantages mentioned above. Nevertheless, it is necessary to state that including each student's characteristics in the learning process can be very difficult. The CT explained this situation as follows: “Uno estar en un grupo con 48 estudiantes, todos con necesidades diferentes, gustos distintos, personalidades tan variadas, no es fácil” (Interview to the CT, September 28th, 2021). Moreover, she said that:

Sería maravilloso (talking about including each student in the process), pero la cantidad de estudiantes limita mucho a veces eso. Porque hay colegios donde el número máximo de estudiantes es 20, es maravilloso, se da la oportunidad de hacer esa parte (The inclusion). Pero en nuestras instituciones públicas es bien difícil. (Interview to the CT, September 28th, 2021).

### **The importance of being empathetic with the students.**

Data showed that it is crucial to be empathetic with the students and respect their backgrounds, contexts, and environment. Furthermore, the experience and love for the profession mark a difference in the quality of education.

**Teachers should respect students' backgrounds, contexts and environment.** Results indicated that it is very important to respect students' different contexts and backgrounds. In the

interview with the CT, she explained that: “Los muchachos son de momentos, los chicos son de experiencias muy lindas, también traumáticas y difíciles, entonces es darse la oportunidad de conocer un poquito los contextos, las historias, esas formas de aprender” (Interview to the CT, September 28th, 2021). After I implemented my practicum project, in the focus group I could see that the students perceived that I respected their ways of being and behaving: “tenerlo a usted como que explicándonos, de cierto modo, una persona con la que podemos conectar muy fácil”, “se le amerita a usted que con usted es una persona con la cual se puede aprender fácilmente sin estrés, que si tiene una duda uno puede ir directamente hacia usted sin ningún problema” and “nos sentimos más cómodos en las clases, como que la presión de todos los días en las clases, en inglés, con usted como que nos sentimos más cómodos” (Focus group, November 4th, 2021). This situation reinforced a perception that I wrote on my teacher’s journal: “the fact of allowing the students to present the final product as they want promotes the respect to their differences and preferences in terms of learning” (Teacher’s Journal, October 19th, 20th, 2021).

**The experience and love for the profession mark a difference in the quality of education.** The final category is more a piece of advice from the CT to the novice teachers in terms of implementing this type of feedback. Firstly, she said off the record that the implementation of this type of feedback and inclusion of the students in the classroom depends on the teacher's personality. Secondly, in the interview she explained the importance of the experience: “a uno la experiencia lo hace muchísimo y eso aplica para todas las profesiones. Uno se va puliendo, uno mira que hay que corregir un montón de cosas que de pronto al principio no tenía presentes” (Interview to the CT, September 28th, 2021). Finally, she ended with this appreciation: “esto realmente, para uno que lo quiere, no es maluco, ni es tortuoso, ni es hartoso, pero para el que no, esto es una tortura total (talking about implementing positive feedback and

trying to include the students in the teaching/learning process)” and “en la medida de que uno quiere la profesión y que los chicos sienten que uno quiere esto, todo se vuelve más armonioso” (Interview to the CT, September 28th, 2021).

In summary, data revealed that the students appreciate when the class atmosphere is positive and when the teacher helps to create it. Furthermore, the students valued the positive comments provided by the teacher and tended to be more motivated after encouraging words. They also appreciated the constant accompaniment and availability. In addition to this, the inclusion of the differences of the students in terms of feelings, ways of learning, contexts, etc., had a good acceptance among the students, and they learned not only English but other relevant things such as culture and places of Colombia. Finally, it is essential to mention that experience is a crucial factor in polishing the positive feedback and the inclusion of each person in the process. Last but not least, the love for the profession is also significant for the success when implementing a humanistic approach with our students.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

This project aimed to identify the possible impact of a humanistic approach to teaching English, through positive feedback, on 10<sup>th</sup> graders from a public school. In this regard, data showed that providing positive feedback both intentionally and naturally positively affected students. Besides, data determined that a constant accompaniment to the students is well perceived and accepted by them. Moreover, students demonstrated they like teachers to assess them in every moment of the class and consider their disposition. Moreover, whenever I provided a positive and encouraging comment, it seemed to help students increase their participation rate and, at the same time, enrich the flow of the lesson. In addition, data revealed



that the students valued a good class atmosphere and that a good teacher-student relationship could improve that ambiance.

Similarly, data showed that the students appreciated being included and feeling that their voices were heard. Furthermore, they liked it when the teacher made them feel comfortable. Students enjoyed the activities that tried to include their different rhythms and preferences. In addition, data also revealed the importance of being empathetic with the students, and it demonstrated the importance of loving the profession and experience in the field.

A possible implication of the study was the problem of including each student in the learning process. As mentioned above, students appreciated feeling included and seeing their preferences respected. However, it becomes challenging to know and recognize each learner's likes and preferences when the number of students is higher. Even though I did not face any specific problem when implementing this project due to the pandemic situation in which the group was divided, I am very aware that this is a common problem in most public institutions of Colombia.

It would be a good idea for further research to investigate the impact of a humanistic approach in a crowded classroom to find strategies to include most of the students' necessities and differences in the classroom and provide a constant accompaniment to a large number of students. Moreover, I recommend exploring its impact on adult and children learners.

Finally, I would like to provide a piece of advice to any teacher that considers exploring this type of feedback and a humanistic approach in their classes. The idea is to polish this practice by experience. At the beginning, it is a bit complicated to be aware of all of the students and to start individualizing them. It takes time and is even more complex and more extended

when you face a lot of students. Still, it is possible. My recommendation is to stay focused on your goals and keep the efforts. Eventually, you will realize that you know a lot from your students and cherish your accompaniment and good comments; they reflect it in their performance and disposition.

### **Reflection**

Implementing this project and the practicum process has been very enriching to my personal and professional development. I have gained many insights and learnings, for example, the importance of planning a lesson and having various activities to cover as many learning styles as possible; the relevance of your attitude as a teacher and your relationship with students; and the necessity of discussing your ideas with colleagues or, in this case, research and practicum advisor.

Firstly, I gained substantial knowledge about the process of planning the classes. It is imperative to have a plan that you can follow and have backup activities in case of need. It is also essential to plan various activities with different difficulty levels and styles to give your students plenty of opportunities to work with.

Secondly, it was very relevant for me to acknowledge the importance of the teacher's attitude and how it affects the relationship with the students and, at the same time, the flow of the classroom. Even though I consider myself a person who can talk very easily to people, it is essential to say that, in the classroom, it takes time to master and can be frustrating sometimes. Anyways, when the teacher is friendly and willing to cooperate with students, the relationship with the students could be improved the same as the flow of the class.

Last but not least, this project and practicum process was very enriching in terms of investigation and academic writing. During this implementation, I reinforced previous ideas about the research process. I learned a lot about investigation and polished many aspects of academic writing that were rusty. Furthermore, it was enriching to discuss my ideas and insights with my classmates, research and practicum advisor, and with the CT. It was helpful because, in that way, I perceived mistakes, corrected them, and gained other points of view about my concepts.

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### Appendix A

Excerpt from a lesson plan. Activity about present perfect and ecotourism.

**Warm-up activity**

I will ask the students to get in pairs. Then, I will ask them to write in their notebooks 6 phrases using the present perfect tense: 2 affirmatives, two interrogatives, and two negatives using tourism as a topic. The students will write something they have done and have not done in terms of tourism and ask their partner about something they have done.

**Example:** I have gone to the beach. I have not been to Europe, have you visited Brazil?

After some minutes, I will ask each pair to stand up and write one sentence on the board.

### Appendix B

Excerpt from reading comprehension activity.

**Bucaramanga, Beautiful City**  
(What you should do and what you should not do)

**1st Place:**

-Parque Nacional del Chicamocha:

The Chicamocha National Park is a recently created theme park, it is one of the few natural parks in Colombia dedicated to ecotourism, being therefore one of the most important tourist sites in the country.

**Recommendations:**

- 1.You can visit several attractions paying only once.
- 2.You have to be responsible with the care of the park.
- 3.You must litter at attractions.

### Appendix C

Excerpt from the evaluative activity of modal verbs.

**1 Choose the correct modals: have to, must, need to, should**

- a. You .....be fit to run a marathon
- b. She.....touch anyone because there is a high risk of infection
- c. Mary.....eat a balanced diet to feel healthier, it's my opinion
- d. My head has stopped hurting, so, I .....go to hospital
- e. You .....drink alcohol while taking pills!!
- f. We are really fat, we.....lose weight
- g. You .....get a driving license before driving a van.
- h. If your tooth hurts, you .....go to the dentist, it's the best advice.

**Appendix D**

**Collective rubric.**

Integrantes: \_\_\_\_\_

Grupo: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Crterios	Bajo	Básico	Alto	Superior
Palabras claves, localización y cómo llegar al lugar.				
Actividades que se pueden realizar allí.				
Historia del lugar.				
Por qué es importante para el ecoturismo y por qué recomiendan el lugar.				
Materiales, ayudas audiovisuales, etc.				
Comentarios:				

**Appendix E**

**Individual rubric.**

Estudiante: \_\_\_\_\_

Grupo: \_\_\_\_\_

Crterios	Bajo	Básico	Alto	Superior
Participación del estudiante.				
Capacidad para expresarse sin leer todo el tiempo.				
Buena pronunciación.				
Contacto con el público.				
Comentarios:				