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The Inclusion of Graphic Arts in a Multi-Level EFL Classroom to Increase Ninth Graders' Motivation Toward the Language Learning Process and the English Class

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Abstract

The present Action Research report recounts the experience of a student-teacher from Universidad de Antioquia who implemented graphic arts activities in an English course to increase multi-level proficiency students' motivation toward the class and learning of the foreign language. This study was conducted in a 9th grade at the public institution INEM José Félix de Restrepo in Medellín. Data was collected through a personal journal, questionnaires, and interviews during three graphic arts cycles that were implemented in the class. These cycles comprehended the use of comic strips, illustrations, and poster design in the English class. The results of the data analysis provided information on how graphic arts activities improved students' motivation toward English class and the learning of English. Additionally, it evidences some hurdles that may have hindered the implementation of graphic arts activities in a Multi-level EFL classroom.

Keywords: Multi-level EFL classroom, students' motivation, graphic arts, comic strips, illustrations, poster design

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Preface

All I remember from my childhood is the music that my big brother used to listen to. Those memories are not in my mother tongue but in English. I did not understand even a bit of this language, but it was beautiful in my eyes, as it represented art, the thing that I enjoy the most and gives meaning to every day of my life.

I started to sing the songs just imitating the sounds, then I realized that I wanted to know English, and I was eager for this subject at school. Reality broke my heart. In a little town such as mine, English classes were very limited, and no one seemed to give them importance. Sometimes I felt that my English teachers did not care either, and then I found myself disliking English classes while longing to learn the language.

It is not as if after graduating from high school I considered becoming an English teacher to save English enjoyers from having a bad experience with learning the language at a public institution. I even started a different program whose name I will not dare to mention. I quitted. I still wanted to learn English, I had a brilliant idea, to study English in the Foreign Language Teaching program. There, I would learn English and I could just decide to work as a teacher. During the program, I started thinking about different tools I could use to teach English. One of those tools was graphic arts. I have always been a fan of comics and mangas, I learned a lot by reading on my own, so I wanted to share that with my students, but being there at their side while they had the experience. Who would have thought that I would end up sharing art with others while teaching them the same language that art showed me so long ago?

Description of the Context

INEM is a public institution located in the neighborhood El Poblado in Medellín. According to the institution's coexistence manual (Institución Educativa José Félix De Restrepo, 2020) INEM's mission is in the pursuit of diversified, flexible, and open pedagogical innovation, promoting values on environmental care, and in the competencies: know, knowing-how and knowing-how-to-be, inside a context of democratic and collaborative participation.

My Cooperating Teacher (CT) has a bachelor's degree in foreign languages from Universidad de Antioquia. Moreover, he has been teaching at INEM for about 30 years. His experience has led him to conclude that finding topics that are related to students' realities and the use of humor in the class is the bridge to connect students with the English class. Also, he encourages his students to participate in class activities by reminding them that taking the risk of making mistakes is what makes people able to learn a language.

INEM students are known for being a diversified population in terms of socio-economic and cultural background due to the renown of the institution that is appealing for parents and students, besides its easy physical access granted for its closeness to a Metro station. Specifically, the group of this study, 9th-grade section eight, has its own distinctive population, as all of them were new at the institution this year.

Statement of the Problem

The "National Program for Bilingualism" has established objectives regarding the level of proficiency of students according to their grades. However, challenges that emerge from the nature of the Colombian high school population, which is characterized by its multiplicity, varying from the ethnic, social, and economical background of the students, hinder this task.

After two months of observation in the 9th grade English class at INEM José Félix Restrepo, I have noticed how in some activities the students that showed a better understanding of the subject, participated more actively than those that were not so confident in their understanding and production. Furthermore, during one of the sessions that were assigned for me to teach, I found that when working in pairs or groups, students that “know more English” tend to work between them, or not including the less proficient in the activities’ development. In addition, after being asked in an informal talk, 15.7% of the students (3) manifested that English class was difficult for them, 21% (4 students) expressed they already know several of the topics that are being taught in this course. This is a problematic situation as it leads to a loss of motivation from students toward the English course. This specific classroom environment creates two situations: On one hand, those students that have superior knowledge regarding the foreign language get easily bored in the class, and those that are less proficient tend to get lost during the lessons. Although fundamentally different, both situations address the same problem, which is the loss of motivation toward the English course.

Aside from informal talks with students, information regarding this loss of motivation was also obtained through a survey that was implemented to get to know students, in which they were asked about their perception of the English class. It was answered by 57.8% of the students (11). In this one, 15.7% of the students (3 students) manifested that the English class was monotonous, and 5.2% (1 student) manifested dissatisfaction for the slow progress of the class. Contrarily, another 15.7% (3 students) manifested that the English class was difficult for them.

Adding to the previous sources mentioned my CT also acknowledges that some students in this class have a more advanced level of English compared to other classmates, pointing out that about a 57,9% of the students (11) from the group are currently in the advanced and

intermediate levels of English “*semillero*”, an extracurricular course for students that the institution offers. This confirms that in this class students' proficiency varies significantly among them. Although not all students' levels of proficiency have been measured through the diagnostics for applying to the “*semillero*”, with this information plus the CT's and my observations of the students' language learning process, the different English levels of students can be estimated among A1, A2, and B1 (CEFR). 8 students (42%) are at A1 level, 6 students (31.5%) at A2, and finally, 5 students (26,3%) at B1. This measuring allows us to have an objective perspective regarding this classroom context and nature.

Even though this situation is a common problem in Colombian public educational institutions, it is still very concerning, as all students are supposed to achieve certain goals in this subject at the end of the school year. Moreover, motivation's loss for regular English classes appears among both, the most and least proficient students in English. Thus, tackling this problem from an action research perspective is important as it might allow the CT, me, and other colleagues to consider appropriate ways to approach a situation that is likely to appear in our English classrooms despite the different contexts that public education in Colombia may offer.

Theoretical Background

The loss of motivation in students toward language learning and the English class due to different levels of proficiency orients this study toward finding a way of increasing students' motivation. To tackle this situation, looking for activities that allow students more varied and freer ways to express according to their corresponding levels of proficiency while allowing them to accomplish the course goals has been considered the path to follow. The discussion of the

concepts Multi-level EFL Classroom, Language Learning Motivation, and Graphic Arts in the EFL class will give clarity concerning the context, problem, and actions taken.

The Multi-Level EFL Classroom

The Multi-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom refers to classrooms formed by students with multiple levels of proficiency in the target language (Mahmoud, 2016), which aligns with this 9th grade's state. This type of classroom implies a challenging environment for teachers as we must consider ways to have students achieve the course objectives despite their different proficiency levels. As suggested by Ashton (2018), this classroom environment offers very particular situations created by their specific contexts, and the teacher is the person that knows his students best, hence, it is up to me as a student-teacher, to think of a creative way to have all students connected with my class. In this way, it is necessary to think of methods to prevent students' interests and motivations from being disturbed by the effects of a Multi-level EFL context. A proposed solution by Mahmoud (2016) is to empower students in the class, aiming for learner-centeredness. For the purposes of this research project, both concepts are vital for keeping students motivated through meaningful experiences.

Language Learning Motivation

It is important to understand that motivation is an intricate concept that cannot be defined by just an area of knowledge but requires cooperation on several fronts to define it. While reviewing the term motivation and how psychologists struggle to articulate the huge amount of motivation theories that exist, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) make a synthesis of a general definition of motivation: It deals on why people engage on a particular action, the persistence

they show during the process, and the effort they invested to do it. Although this definition gives clarity of the issue, it is still important to consider that EFL teaching has its own motivational framework as it needs to deal with the specificities of our field. Consequently, the theory that I will follow during the implementation of this project is the predominant one for the last years, the Second Language (L2) Motivation Self System (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). These authors claim that students' motivation toward the language learning process is directly associated with what they want to do as future language users, what they consider they are expected to be able to do, and their previous learning experiences. These three components are named ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and L2 learning experience accordingly (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, pp. 79-88).

Extending on these components, the ideal L2 self comprehends the different aspects that the learner imagines when envisioning him/herself as a future speaker of the language. The ought-to L2 self refers to what the learner considers is required of him/her regarding learning the language to avoid failure in his life project. The L2 learning experience alludes to all the different processes that the student has gone through during his/her life regarding learning the foreign language, how they have molded his/her perception toward the language itself, and its imparting (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). For this study, the purpose of using this motivational theory is to have the Ideal L2 self and ought-to self as references to understand the nature of students' motivation. Additionally, the L2 learning experience will allow me to have students compare previous learning experiences with the ones that they will have through this project. Nonetheless, having a well-stated theory does not simplify the difficult task of observing an abstract concept such as language learning motivation. Kikuchi (2019) manifests that because of the complex network of influences on students' motivation, it is difficult for teachers to be able to determine students' motivational fluctuations during the progress of an EFL course. For this

reason, I consider it important to establish a way in which this abstract concept of motivation can be broken down into observable features such as learner engagement.

Learner Engagement

One of the important aspects of making visible students' motivation toward their language learning process and the English class is the level of engagement they demonstrate during the course. Trowler (2010) states that engagement is a multidimensional concept that includes behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects, therefore referring to how students comply with rules, manifest their interests and emotions, have a sense of belonging, and show interest in learning. These dimensions show how engagement is not only restricted to participation and involvement. Therefore, for the implementation of this project, it is key to focus on the observable features of learner engagement mentioned by Dao et al. (2021): students' commitment and participation when it comes to interacting with classmates, and the display of their attitudes (positive or negative) throughout task performance. These elements are valuable as they will allow me to take notes regarding students' behaviors that manifest their engagement during class activities.

Graphic Arts in the EFL Class

The tool that will be used to attempt to increase the multilevel proficiency students' motivation toward the EFL class and their language learning process is Graphic arts, one of the main branches of visual arts that comprehends several diverse artistic expressions that form part of our daily life, as they are present in street walls, social media, etc. One well-delimited definition for graphic arts is proposed by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "the fine and applied

arts of representation, decoration, and writing or printing on flat surfaces together with the techniques and crafts associated with them” (“Graphic arts,” n.d.). Although this definition helps to understand the nature of graphic arts, it is better encircled by the definition of the Encyclopedia of Art’s (n.d.), which refers to it as the visual expressions that are determined by their design rather than color, having artistic expressions such as calligraphic arts, abstract designs, computer graphics, comic strips, graphic design, and comic strips. The last three arts will be implemented in this project.

The importance of the graphic arts implementation in the English class is connected to how some of its benefits line up with the student-centeredness required to work in a Multi-level EFL classroom. Jordan and DiCicco (2022) mention that among the benefits of including visual arts in the English class is the promotion of students’ critical thinking, as they consider that just the interpretation of a piece of art requires students’ life experiences and knowledge, therefore, giving meaning to these artistic expressions. This means that students can be given the power to make decisions about class activities, as well as being invested in the responsibility and ownership of their own work.

Learning Language Motivation Through Graphic Arts.

It is important to consider the interjection of the concepts discussed above for the implementation of this project. Applied artistic expressions are part of our daily life, and they represent a way of transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary through a set of aesthetic and symbolic decisions, which makes us creators and owners of a message that we want to convey to others, a purpose that is not far apart from linguistic purposes. According to Lingenfelter (2014), visual arts, to which graphic arts belong, boost students’ motivation to learn languages as it

allows them to explore and articulate their feelings safely through creative and autonomous expressions, creating a deep value for their work and production. Therefore, generating the opportunity for students to have graphic arts activities such as comic strips, illustrations, and poster design in the EFL classroom brings the opportunity to this project to tackle the motivation loss that the 9th graders are facing due to the challenge that their different levels of proficiency pose to the planning and execution of an engaging English class.

Research Question

After considering the situation and concepts beforementioned, I see the necessity of implementing actions that help to improve students' motivation toward their language learning process and the English classes, going beyond their respective levels of proficiency, and creating a common ground for their interests. Actions in which meaningful learning experiences are provided for students, allowing them to reach together the course language goals. As a course of action for confronting the problem, I have considered the use of graphic arts in the EFL classroom as a way of creating flexible and purposeful situations through which students can use English to create products orchestrated from their own creativity. Therefore, the research question to be addressed in this project is:

How can the inclusion of graphic arts in an English course for 9th graders, at the public institution INEM José Félix de Restrepo, increase multi-level proficiency students' motivation toward the course and their language learning process?

Objectives

- To explore how the implementation of graphic arts through the creation of artistic products can contribute to increasing multi-level proficiency students' motivation toward the English class and their language learning process.

Specific objectives

- To examine high and low-proficiency students' perceptions of their motivation toward the English class after the implementation of graphic arts activities.
- To analyze how the use and creation of graphic arts in-class activities can represent a meaningful experience for the student's language learning process.
- To monitor how students of all levels of proficiency participate in classroom activities through graphic arts as a common ground for all of them.

Action Plan

In this section, I will present a set of actions I consider need to be implemented to answer my research question and fulfill the different goals of this research.

Table 1 presents the description of actions to be implemented. This includes three cycles for comic strips, illustrations, and poster design respectively. These three arts were selected as I consider they can be implemented with inexpensive materials, and students are somewhat familiarized with them. Furthermore, for the data gathering process, I plan to have a student questionnaire and student interviews.

Table 1

Action Plan

Activity	Predicted outcomes	Time frame
Design and administration of initial questionnaire for students	To obtain information regarding students' general motivation for learning English.	August 26 th to August 29 th
First cycle: Planning and implementing comic strips in the EFL class.	To gradually introduce students to the use of graphic arts in English classes and alternative teaching and learning practices in the classroom to prepare students for the upcoming process, gradually giving more control to students during class activities and in their outcomes.	August 29 th to September 23 rd
Second Cycle: Planning and implementing illustrations in the EFL class.	To give students a wider sense of control in the activities in the English class. Allowing them to give meaning to the illustrations with their own words and capabilities, besides the guidance of the teacher.	September 26 th and October 7 th
Third Cycle: Planning and implementing poster design in the EFL class.	To create in students a sense of ownership of their work through the design of the posters of the topics they choose.	October 18 th to October 28 th
Design and administration of Final questionnaire for students	Check the impact of activities implemented during the last two months in their L2 motivational self-systems. Establishing candidates for the final Interviews, based on students' language levels and L2 motivational self-system evolution during the process.	October 31 st
Design and administration of students Interviews	Obtain specific information about students with different levels of proficiency regarding their reflections on the actions taken and the evolution of their motivation toward the English class.	November 1 st to October 4 th

Development of the Actions

After selecting and planning the different graphic arts in the proposed 9th-grade curriculum, I started the implementation of the project from the last days of August until the first

week of November of 2022; during this period the three different graphic arts cycles were implemented.

The implementation of the first cycle started with the purpose of creating the first interaction and introducing comic strips as a novelty in the classroom. After the first week of the implementation, students were given a creative role in the classroom to make the decisions that would give meaning to the comic strips. They would have to create the final panel of an incomplete comic strip, write the dialogue of another comic strip with empty clouds, and finally write a whole comic strip by themselves. Nevertheless, since some students were reluctant to draw, I provided them with paper clippings with different printed facial expressions that could be useful for those who did not want to draw. It helped to keep students completing their stories regardless of their preferences and to have different styles and identities in their comic strips.

The second cycle, for the implementation of illustrations, was the one that suffered more alterations compared to the plan (See Table 1). due to a request from the CT to teach a verb tense instead of the topic planned. During these changes, I decided to give students the role of interpreters to exercise their perceptions, using the assigned verb tense, and it helped as a way of taking a break from drawing. Therefore, students were asked to interpret several illustrations that could express different situations.

Lastly, the implementation of the 3rd cycle, contrary to the first two cycles, was constantly affected by a set of institutional events that reduced the number of classes from eight to three. Missing those classes led to having just one task in which students designed posters sharing the 5 most important aspects a horror story should contain, accompanied with illustrations that matched their statements. During the three cycles, I used an observation journal to gather information regarding students' engagement indicators in the class activities, recording

the information on the quick entrances during the class, and more in-depth notes after the class, as suggested by (Altrichter et al, 2005).

About the students' questionnaires, instead of two, they were fused into just one that was implemented during the final part of the poster design cycle, as it had to be rushed due to upcoming class cancellations. This decision was made due to time constraints; and I considered that just having one questionnaire at the end would be more practical. As the objective of the initial questionnaire was to know students' general motivation toward learning language, the English class, and their ideal L2, and ought-to L2 selves (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011), collecting the information at the end of the project would not have a big effect onto this data. Moreover, the other part of the questionnaire aimed at collecting students' perceptions after the implementation of the project, and its different cycles. The questionnaire distribution was through Google Forms, the time expectancy for completion was 10 minutes, and the questionnaires were fulfilled by seven students. For the questionnaires, see Appendix A.

Regarding the students' interviews (See Appendix B) they were successfully conducted by the end of the process with four students, two from B1 level, and two others with A1 and A2 levels respectively. The selection of these students was made according to their proficiency in English, as they served as a sample to represent the multi-level EFL classroom. The time expected for each interview was about 10 minutes, they were done during the time of one of the English classes, and it was recorded for later transcription. The aim was to get more specific answers regarding students' responses in the student questionnaire, as to have students compare their previous experiences learning English and this last experience using graphic arts in the English class, exposing students L2 learning experiences (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011).

Data Analysis

For this action research study, I made both a quantitative and qualitative analysis of data provided by the different tools used in the development of the actions. After gathering the data, I started the categorization process, highlighted as an important step in data analysis (Bell,2005), to organize data easily and make sense of it. I used a mixture of the deductive and inductive methods, as suggested by Altrichter et al (2005), to establish the categories and code the data. The deductive method was used while creating my personal journal, the questionnaire, and the Interviews, as they would provide possible categories that I would expect from the students' responses. After deciding on my preconceived categories and when organizing the data, I allowed new categories to arise from the students' responses as expected from the inductive method. To analyze and find a convergence from the different perspectives regarding the events occurring in the classroom, I implemented a triangulation method (Bell, 2005; Philips & Carr, 2010) to corroborate and give validity to the interpretation of the data collected. In this way, the students' questionnaire served to confirm and contrast the information in the researcher's journal, and with the students' interviews, I clarified and obtained deeper information from the questionnaire answers provided by students.

Finally, I followed the critical methods of data analysis (Altrichter et al, 2005) to check the reliability of the findings and to look for evidence that could contradict them. This process took place after having clearly defined the findings; they were tested by looking at the data gathered in all the tools that were used. Thus, each finding looked for data that supported it to give it more strength, as well as opposite data to delimit the boundaries of each finding. In addition, to not let my own perception misguide my interpretation of ambiguous or not well-

developed answers, I used the communicative validation method (Altrichter et al, 2005), to check, confirm or give a new meaning to some ideas stated by the students in their questionnaire, and during the interviews it was necessary.

Findings and Interpretations

After the process of data analysis, the following step was to interpret numeric and linguistic results. After coding and categorizing the data gathered from the different tools, the following categories, each with its own subcategories were established to lead the data analysis process: Students' Motivations, Students' Engagement in Graphic Art Activities, and the Significance of Graphic Art Activities in the English class. The findings were organized in terms of those categories.

Students' Motivations

In this category, we will discuss students' motivation for language learning and the EFL class in general terms, their motivation according to their level of proficiency, and the effects that graphic arts activities had on their motivation for learning the language and the English class.

According to the seven students' perceptions, by the end of the implementation of the three cycles, they felt motivated toward learning English regardless of their level of proficiency. When the students (Ss) were asked in the questionnaire about their motivation to learn the target language, most of them considered having a high (42,8%: 3 Ss) and very high (28,6%: 2 Ss) motivation. Even though a few students selected a neutral answer (28, 6%: 2 Ss), none of them expressed having low motivation, as shown in Table 2. This is different from what was observed

throughout the first semester, right before the implementation of this proposal: “When asked if the English class motivated them to learn the language, 20,9% (3 Ss) manifested that the class was monotonous as it was not challenging, while 15,7% (3 Ss) considered the class was too challenging for them and making them less motivated. (Personal journal, March 23, 2022). This finding shows that although having a Multi-level EFL classroom can be a challenging context, including different activities in which students have an active role seems to be an effective way to foster their motivation toward the subject matter. This is consistent with Lingenfelter’s (2014) theory when she claims that graphic arts activities in the English class create a safe space in which students, through their autonomous work, start giving a deep value to what they do in the class. Therefore, fostering their motivation to learn English.

Table 2

Students’ General Motivation for Learning English

English Level	Lowly motivated			Highly motivated	
	1	2	3	4	5
A1 (3 Ss)	0 Ss	0 Ss	2 Ss	0 Ss	1 Ss
A2 (2 Ss)	0 Ss	0 Ss	0 Ss	2 Ss	0 Ss
B1 (2 Ss)	0 Ss	0 Ss	0 Ss	1 Ss	1 Ss

From the data shown in Table 2, it was observed that students’ level of motivation was not exclusively linked to their language level and that students with different levels of proficiency had similar motivation levels that, not leaning toward both extremes of the scale.

To obtain information regarding how the activities with graphic arts motivated students to the English class a Likert-like scale was deployed in the questionnaire. From Table 3, we can interpret that the activities with graphic arts had positive effects on increasing students’

motivation for both the target language learning process and the English class. This positive effect was mostly homogeneous among all the different levels of English proficiency, considering that on average most of the students 78,6% (5.5 Ss) gave the same qualification and the few that differed 21,4% (1.5) Ss did not stray far from that level of motivation.

Table 3

Effects of Graphic Arts on Students Motivations

Students' Level of Motivation for the English Class				
Lowly motivated				Highly motivated
1	2	3	4	5
0 Ss	0 Ss	1 Ss	6 Ss	0 Ss

Students' Level of Motivation for learning English				
1	2	3	4	5
0 Ss	0 Ss	1 Ss	5 Ss	1 Ss

To corroborate this information during the interviews, the four students were asked to point out whether they perceived any difference between their previous experiences studying English and the current class that employed graphic arts activities. This was asked to discover how students with different levels of proficiency perceived graphic arts activities and how they affected their motivation. Student 2 (B1 level) commented that the use of images in graphic arts activities made him be more engaged than traditional lecturing teaching approach, “Sí, los gráficos me llaman la atención y me motivan a aprender y no que el profesor esté diciendo que esto es así, las reglas están así” (Students' Interviews). Student 3 (A2 level) reflected upon the influence of illustrations on his motivation and how those helped his language performance, “no entiendo mucho el inglés, y me motivaba más a aprender el inglés porque me ayudaba mucho con las imágenes, me hacía llegar a entender las historias más rápidamente” (Students'

Interviews), and similarly, Student 6 (A1 Level) mentioned how graphic arts activities sparked his curiosity for the English class given the variety of the activities and resources, “cada clase era diferente (...) entonces da la motivación de todos los días ir a esa clase porque uno no sabía que había que hacer y entonces da curiosidad de lo que vamos a hacer hoy” (Students' Interviewss).

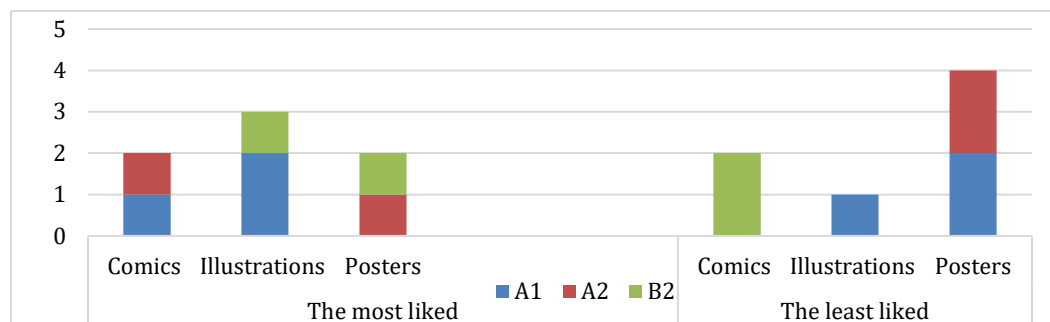
From the previous answers, it is possible to notice that graphic arts activities had different characteristics that increases students' motivation for English class and language learning. We can infer that the characteristics of graphic arts were 1. The capacity of illustrations to engage students. 2. The narrative nature of illustrations, as it helps them to establish connections between words and what they represent by requiring students' interpretations. 3. the varied possibilities offered by graphic arts activities. All these characteristics are aligned with the benefits that Lingenfelter (2014) considers to be part of including visual arts in English class. Furthermore, in this experience the students were able to compare their past experiences learning English and manifested that the graphic arts activities had a positive impact on their motivation for both learning English and the class, enriching their L2 learning experience (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

As a final piece of data to analyze students' motivation and how it is affected by graphic arts, students were asked in the questionnaire regarding which cycles were the ones that motivated them the most and the least (See Figure 1). These results pinpointed that on one hand there was a balance in the perceptions of students regarding which cycle was the most motivating, having the illustration one as the most common answer by a very close margin. On the other hand, the cycle of poster design was considered the least motivating cycle. In the same questionnaire, when students were asked to justify their answer, Student 4 mentioned that the cycle time was short for doing the poster, “Hubo como poquito tiempo para hacerlo y no me

gusto”, showing how the modifications in the implementation due to class cancellation had a negative effect in the implementation of this cycle.

Figure 1

Students' Perceptions of the Graphic Arts Cycles



Learner Engagement in Graphic Arts Activities

Supported by the definition of learner engagement made by Dao et al (2019) (See Theoretical Background), students' engagement was considered in this research study as the main observable feature of students' motivation, therefore, being the focus of observation in my personal journal. This section deals with students' positive and negative attitudes toward graphic arts activities in the English class, as well as students' interactions during graphic arts activities.

Students' Attitudes Toward Graphic Arts Activities

In this study, learners' attitudes toward graphic arts activities in the English class were registered and considered important data to be analyzed and deemed. These attitudes fluctuated and depended on each of the activities and its corresponding cycle, yet, considering what caused certain attitudes at a given moment provided information about how these activities engaged or not students.

During the implementation of the project, I observed that students' positive attitudes toward specific graphic arts activities were recurrent as it was observed how they would commit themselves to the activities and even go beyond what they were asked, showing a high degree of task completion. For instance, regarding the comic strip cycle:

Some of the groups did not just finish the missing panel, but created an extra one to continue their story, besides, all the groups took the initiative to color the comic strip even though they were never demanded to do it. (Personal journal, September 12, 2022).

I considered that this behavior represented students who were interested in not just what they had to do, but what they wanted to do with these activities. Hence, it coincides with what Trowler (2010) describes as the multidimensionality of engagement, as it is not just related to participation and involvement, but also to how students' emotions take over while they are performing in a task. In this case, a positive emotion led them to go beyond the task.

Even though positive attitudes were predominant in what was observed in the classes, it is still important to mention that there were also negative attitudes at some point during one of the graphic arts activities. This was as observed after asking students to complete the last task of the comic strips cycle: "Some students complained about having to draw an entire comic strip because they either thought of it as arduous or felt insecure regarding their drawing capabilities." (Personal journal, September 12, 2022). To expand on this idea, during the Interviews students that showed their reluctance for drawing were asked about this situation, Student 2 mentioned his dislike regarding drawing, "Es que a mí, la verdad, no me gusta dibujar, me hubiera gustado más si me hubiera tocado dibujar muñequitos pero con el computador", similarly, Student 3 commented that even though he is good at drawing, he prefers analyzing or interpreting them rather than creating them: "Soy bueno dibujando, pero no me apasiona dibujar, me gusta más

ver, interpretar, analizar, que plantar mi idea en un papel” (Students’ Interviews, November 2, 2022). These opinions on drawing, show how the implementation of graphic arts can also have a negative effect on how engaged the students are in an activity, as it may require them to do something that they do not enjoy in their daily life. Knowing these perceptions some students have about drawing leads to thinking of flexible options to offer students that don’t enjoy drawing to be engaged in the class.

Students Interactions in the Implementation of Graphic Arts Activities

One of the features to consider in students’ engagement is how students’ interactions occur, in this study, due to the graphic arts activities in the English class. These interactions were considered positive or negative depending on how they could affect students’ perception of the specific graphic arts activities, which may have led to increasing or decreasing students’ motivation toward the English class.

The main student-to-student interaction that I considered as positive implied students making a consensus regarding what and how to complete determined activities, as described in the observations from the cycle of comic strips “Some teams would spend some time before commencing to create their comic to discuss and brainstorm how the story of their comic strip should go” (Personal Journal, September 19, 2022). As mentioned by Student 7 during the Interviews when she expressed to plan the poster design task with her teammates: “Yo creo que lo que más me gustó fue la reunión, para hacer los ítems de eso, porque nos gustaba decidir, tipo: ah esta cuadra más, esta es más cliché, estas son más así, nos reímos haciendo eso.” (Students’ Interviews). This interaction allowed observing how some students considered it important to know what their classmates wanted to do, and to give a voice to each of them in order to find a result that would satisfy the group as much as possible. Besides showing the students’ sense of

ownership of their work, this situation displayed how students' participation took place, an important indicator of student engagement (Dao et al. (2021), through constant peer-interaction, showing at the same time, students' interest in the class activities.

However, even though most of the time the teams were able to distribute the roles and decide how they would proceed in the graphic arts activities, some teams recurrently would try to load the responsibilities onto one or two of their members, as described in my journal: "Some students are not cooperating with the activity, only one member of the team is working on it, they only worked together when I demanded them to do so, but when I was away, they would stop working again" (October 26, 2022). This situation is deemed as a negative interaction, as some students showed a lack of interest in completing some of the activities, while some other students end up working more than others, finding themselves in a stressful situation that affected their engagement and motivation toward the class, as manifested by Student 7, "En primera parte, solo éramos dos personas y por ejemplo a mí siempre era a la que me ponían a dibujar, siempre era la que tenía que poner ideas, la otra ahí haciendo nada, me estresaba". This discomfort shows how the distribution of group work roles for the graphic art activities is important to keep students engaged, and consequently motivated toward the class.

Significance of Graphic Art Activities in the English Class

Students' motivation is strongly linked to making them feel that the activities they are doing in class have a purpose, something that is useful for their lives, that is connected to their context, and that is related to their interests, a connection that can be established using arts in the classroom (Jordan & DiCicco 2022). In this category, findings regarding students' perceptions of how graphic arts activities are accomplished or not these characteristics will be shared,

contrasted, and interpreted. For this purpose, I will rely on data obtained from the students' questionnaires and interviews.

Some of the aspects in which students agreed the most regarding graphic arts activities were how they allowed them to express themselves freely and in a creative way, as well as considering the activities as fun to do. To illustrate this idea, the levels of agreement of students toward the three statements are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Students' Perceptions of Graphic Arts Activities

Statements	1	2	3	4	5
Las actividades permiten que me exprese con libertad	0 Ss	0 Ss	0 Ss	3 Ss	4 Ss
Las actividades son divertidas	0 Ss	0 Ss	0 Ss	2 Ss	5 Ss
Las actividades requieren de mi creatividad	0 Ss	0 Ss	0 Ss	3 Ss	4 Ss

Note. 1 = Totally disagree, 5 = Totally disagree

From these results we can infer that graphic arts make a connection with students at a personal level, giving them the most crucial role to complete the tasks successfully, and creating a learner-centered environment which Mahmoud (2016) considers of key importance to create an appropriate and motivating learning environment in a Multi-level EFL classroom. This empowerment given to the students is manifested in the following statement of Student 6. He mentioned that he was able to express freely and that he was the one choosing what to do: “Porque es donde me llevo a expresar mejor, porque yo improviso mucho, entonces creo que me puedo expandir más de lo que quería hacer y la imaginación.” (Students' Interviews). Furthermore, Student 3 established a connection between graphic arts activities and having fun while learning, therefore, creating a meaningful experience for the learner, “estás dando a entender a los niños de esta época que es importante el entretenimiento, pero que también el

entretenimiento conlleva a un conocimiento, así que a mí me pareció interesante esta enseñanza” (Students’ Interviews).

However, regarding the real-life connection characteristic mentioned by Jordan and DiCicco (2022), I found that 49% of the students (3 Ss) noticed a lack of connection between graphic arts activities and real-life when in the students’ questionnaire. The answers displayed in Table 5 show a divided perception regarding the connection between the class activities with graphic arts and real-life situations, having most of the students with a neutral stance. Nonetheless, none of the students considered that the activities did not have a connection with real-life situations. Regarding this neutral stance, Student 3 mentioned that had a stronger connection with imagination than with reality, “Yo siento que la conexión con la realidad no es tan fuerte, porque en estas historietas y estas cosas hay como mucha imaginación, entonces no es totalmente real” (Students’ Interviews). This perspective is valuable as it marks that even though I attempted to connect these activities with real-life situations, my planning was insufficient and diverted to some degree from the connection with the students’ reality expected when implementing arts in the English class. Therefore, it is important to consider what our aim as educators is and how we are the ones to connect class activities with reality.

Table 5

Activities Connection with Real-life Situations

Totally disagree				Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5
0 Ss	0 Ss	3 Ss	2 Ss	2 Ss

Conclusions

I consider that this research study partially reached its main goal. Findings support that the inclusion of graphic arts can increase the motivation of multi-level proficiency students toward the class and English learning. Among these main findings, we count the capacity of graphic arts to engage students in class activities in an avid way, to give students enough agency in the classroom to create a meaningful and valuable experience for them, and the adaptability of graphic arts activities to involve students in accordance with their capabilities. All these elements together make graphic arts an important asset for creating a meeting point for students' interests, linguistic abilities, and disposition for the class and language learning process.

However, this research also found some limitations. First, the sample of students was small compared to the whole group, making it difficult to have several students from the same level of proficiency, hence limiting variety in the information collected. This was due to students' lack of interest to participate in the project, even when they worked with graphic arts, they were not willing to share information. Additionally, the disconnection found between the graphic arts activities and real-life showed errors in my planification of the activities, affecting some students' perceptions of this specific cycle.

In addition, the implementation of graphic arts proved to be feasible in our context if appropriate decisions regarding the practicality of materials are made. Consequently, it is important to consider using recycled materials, teaching students about being resourceful, while taking care of the planet. Moreover, considering the inclusion of different and innovative ways in which students that do not like to draw can participate in graphic arts activities can save the teacher some future problems, and incite a collaborative environment. Also, from this experience, ideas emerged about where future studies concerning graphic arts in the English

class could aim. First, I consider graphic arts to be an incredible resource for fomenting a learner-centered course, as they require learners to take ownership of their work. Thus, going further on how graphic arts can promote learner-centered classes can lead to gathering information that might be useful for considering it as one tempting option that is aligned with modern English teaching approaches. Finally, since graphic arts are a wide area, it is interesting to think of other types of graphic arts that could be implemented in foreign language classes and with the use of software in public institutions.

Reflections

It is incredible to think that I already had in my practicum the experience of working in a public institution. In the first instance, I wondered if I was cut to do this. Although the process showed that being a teacher is not easy at all, it allowed me to face professional and personal challenges, to help younger generations to have a new perception regarding learning a language, as well as taking the risk to personalize my lessons with my own ideas, the risk of failing when trying to implement something innovative and feeling relief when it worked. Today I find a stronger version of myself, willing to face different situations, and always learning from them.

The other side of this process was the action research component, which was during all this time haunting me, a whole-year commitment. I would say that even the fear of facing students for the first time does not match all the problems, changes of heart, and the constant reconceptualization that required all of me to do it as best as possible. Yet, I am grateful, I think that research stimulates in me as a teacher the need to understand better the class situations, investigate, and then with my own conclusions, to act. Likewise, sharing my discoveries and failures with my future colleagues.

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Appendix A

Students' Questionnaire

<https://forms.gle/4WUcAYBwqFp81ptK9>

¿Las actividades están conectadas con situaciones de la vida real? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Casi nunca	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Casi siempre

¿Las actividades permiten que me exprese con libertad? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Casi nunca	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Casi siempre

¿Las actividades son divertidas? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Casi nunca	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Casi siempre

¿Las actividades requieren de mi creatividad. ? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Casi nunca	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Casi siempre

¿Qué tanto consideras que las actividades implementadas en estos dos meses te motivaron hacia la clase? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No me motivaron	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Me motivaron mucho

Por favor comparte las **razones** por las cuales consideras que estas actividades te **motivaron o no** hacia la clase de inglés.

Appendix B

Students' Interviews

Student A

- ¿Cuáles son las motivaciones tuyas para aprender inglés?
- ¿En este momento estás interesado en una carrera universitaria?
- ¿En general cuál es tu percepción de las diferentes actividades que se hicieron con artes gráficas?
- ¿Por qué crees que te logró motivar el ciclo de historietas cómicas?
- ¿Por qué te referiste al ciclo de ilustraciones como poco interactivo?
- ¿De qué manera solías trabajar en tu grupo?
- ¿Consideras que la manera en que tu grupo de trabajo cooperaba afectó tu motivación?
- ¿Consideras que trabajar con artes gráficas afectara tu interés por aprender inglés?
- Si comparas estas clases de inglés con artes gráficas que tuvimos, con tus experiencias previas ¿Consideras que hubo alguna diferencia?

Student B

- ¿Cuáles consideras que son tus motivaciones principales para aprender inglés?
- ¿Ves aprender inglés como un interés propio, o como un deber para tu futuro?
- ¿Qué influyó en que el ciclo de posters fuera el que más te gustara?
- Mencionas que en el ciclo de tiras cómicas no sentías motivación porque muchas veces tu compañera no quería hacer nada ¿Podrías ampliar esta idea?
- Si comparas estas clases de inglés con artes gráficas que tuvimos, con tus experiencias previas ¿Consideras que hubo alguna diferencia?
- ¿Consideras que trabajar con artes gráficas afectó tu interés por aprender inglés?

Student C

- Comentas que el ciclo que más te motivó fue el ciclo de ilustraciones ¿Podrías ampliar la idea de por qué ese ciclo fue el que te motivó?
- ¿Cuál fue el ciclo que menos te motivó? ¿Y podrías decirme el por qué?
- ¿Consideras que trabajar con artes gráficas afectó tu interés por aprender inglés? Ya sea positiva o negativamente
- Si comparas estas clases de inglés con artes gráficas que tuvimos, con tus experiencias previas ¿Consideras que hubo alguna diferencia?

Student D

- En la encuesta mencionas que aprender inglés es importante para una carrera futura. ¿En este momento estás interesado en una carrera universitaria?
- ¿En general cuál es tu percepción de las diferentes actividades que se hicieron con artes gráficas?
- Dijiste que no te motivó el ciclo de las tiras cómicas porque te da pereza dibujar ¿Podrías ampliar esa respuesta?
- Si ese ciclo no te gustó, ¿cómo te sentiste en las clases durante ese ciclo?
- Mencionaste que el último ciclo de posters fue el que más te gustó ¿Por qué?
- ¿Crees que la manera en la que tu grupo de compañeros trabajaba en las actividades de artes gráficas afectó tu motivación hacia la clase?
- ¿Consideras que trabajar con artes gráficas afectó tu interés por aprender inglés? Ya sea positiva o negativamente.
- Si comparas estas clases de inglés con artes gráficas que tuvimos, con tus experiencias previas ¿Consideras que hubo alguna diferencia?