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Fostering English Vocabulary Learning Through Mnemonics

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Abstract

The present Action Research study explores the implementation of mnemonic strategies at Institución Educativa Gilberto Alzate Avendaño. The project was conducted with sixth-grade students. The aim of the project was to foster effective English vocabulary learning through visual and linguistic mnemonics. The data collection tools included pre and post-tests, a questionnaire, an individual interview with students, and an interview with the cooperating teacher. Data was analyzed, categorized, and validated by using a triangulation method. The results show how the implementation of visual mnemonics had a positive effect on students' vocabulary learning. On the contrary, the linguistic mnemonic implemented was not as effective for learning English vocabulary in this context.

Keywords: mnemonics, EFL vocabulary learning, vocabulary learning strategies, visual mnemonics, linguistic mnemonics.

Título en español: Fomentando el Aprendizaje de Vocabulario en Inglés a través de las Mnemónicas.

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 Medellin, Colombia.

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Preface

I decided to study the Bachelor of Education in Teaching Foreign Languages (English - French) because I have been interested in foreign languages for as long as I can remember. Although becoming a teacher was not the main reason to pursue this degree, during my years at the School of languages, I learned a lot about the education field. I still remember my first integrated seminar, where I learned about multiple intelligences and learning styles and I was thinking about the different and innovative strategies I would implement when I started teaching.

When I started the observations in the first semester of my practicum, I noticed that it was possible to implement a more effective strategy for learning English vocabulary without putting aside the teacher's proposal, which seemed interesting but poorly executed. For this reason, when I found mnemonic strategies, I did not doubt choosing it as the strategy that I would implement during my intervention at the institution, since it was in line with the premise of the course and, at the same time, it would allow me to create a more innovative learning space.

Completing the project allowed me to put into practice all the knowledge acquired throughout my degree and implement a learning strategy that I consider truly interesting to teach a foreign language, and which I would like to be able to implement again in the future.

Description of the Context

The Institución Educativa (I.E.) Gilberto Alzate Avendaño is a public school located in San Isidro neighborhood, Comuna 4, Aranjuez in Medellín. The institution has four educational centers, three of which offer preschool and elementary education, and the main center is the high school, where levels range from sixth to eleventh grade. This high school has three schedules, morning and afternoon for regular courses and evening, where Ciclos Lectivos Especiales Integrados (CLEI) operate.

In February, when I started the observations in the institution, each teacher had an assigned classroom, and the students moved between classrooms. At that time, the English classroom had an auditorium-style arrangement. The chairs were strategically organized so that from the front of the classroom the teacher had visibility of all the students and, in the same way, all the students could see the board without difficulty. The classroom was adequate, with a video beam and speakers. However, due to the interventions to the infrastructure, many changes occurred. The classroom that was set up for the English subject had to be modified, the technological devices were removed, the chairs were placed in traditional rows, in addition to the fact that currently, each group of students has a classroom assigned and teachers move between classrooms.

The mission of the school is to offer comprehensive training from the preschool level to the academic and technical level, attending to individualities and integrating into the social context (I.E. Gilberto Alzate Avendaño, 2023). The vision, in the document “*Manual para la Convivencia Escolar*”, despite having been updated in 2023, continues to have 2018 as the goal year for which the institution was expected to be recognized for its emphasis on the integral development of its students. In its philosophy (I.E. Gilberto Alzate Avendaño, 2023), the

institution proclaims respect for diversity and promotes the inclusion and permanence of the population in the educational system.

During the school year, the institution has only three terms; however, in the document “*Malla Grado Sexto Periodos 1,2,3 y 4*” (2023) where the curriculum map and the classroom project for the English area of the sixth grade are proposed, four terms are mentioned and four thematic axes are presented: democracy and peace, healthy physical routine, environment, and values of local cultures. Between 70% and 80% of the thematic content is vocabulary, such as family members, adjectives, clothing, nationalities, etc. In the institution, performance indicators are based on knowing, the conceptual aspect; know-how, the procedural aspect; and know-how to be, the attitudinal aspect. Additionally, the assessment scale is qualitative; the four levels of achievement are: below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced.

The Cooperating Teacher (CT), in charge of the group where this study was conducted, holds a Bachelor in Foreign Languages with an Emphasis in English from the Luis Amigó Catholic University. He has four years of teaching experience and is currently a provisional teacher, who has been covering a *plaza sindical* at the I.E. Gilberto Alzate Avendaño for two years. In addition, he completed a specialization at the University of Santander (UDES). Regarding his English teaching practice, the CT claims that he uses multimodal resources, combining two different means of receiving information, text with images, to represent and give meaning to vocabulary.

The students of the I.E Gilberto Alzate Avendaño come from socio-economic stratum 1 and 2 homes; the majority are low-income. In the group sixth-four, there are approximately 30 students, this number has varied because there have been students who dropped out and others who joined the institution late. The age range of the students in this group is between 10 and 14

years old, some of them are repeating this sixth grade. There is a small group of students who show a positive attitude towards learning English; however, most of the group is not interested in this subject or others, some have stated that they go to school only because it is obligatory, and this leads to discipline problems within the classroom.

Statement of Problem

The I.E Gilberto Alzate Avendaño sixth-grade students study English mainly through an activity that has been consistent in all classes observed during four months: writing in their notebooks the vocabulary assigned to this grade from the syllabus, usually in English but also in Spanish (their mother tongue), translating it by using their dictionaries, and adding the corresponding drawing or graphic/pictorial representation next to the word. However, the students have had problems retaining the vocabulary studied, which shows that for them these activities are not effective enough to learn the vocabulary.

During the four months of class observations, I could identify that even though the focus of the course throughout the first term was on vocabulary, the students continued to have a low lexical level. Not knowing the meaning of words that they have previously translated, not knowing how to write basic words that they have already studied, and even not correctly associating the word with its pictorial representation, are some of the examples suggesting that the strategy being used is not effective enough for them.

Building a strong vocabulary is a crucial aspect of learning a second or foreign language. An extensive vocabulary facilitates oral and written communication and allows learners to express their thoughts and understand other speakers. As previously presented, according to the English curriculum map for the sixth grade of the Gilberto Alzate Avendaño institution, around

80% of the content is lexical, meaning that vocabulary is the main subskill for learning the language in this grade.

Through informal conversations with my CT, he stated that, at the beginning of the school year, he realized that the students did not know the vocabulary that they should have learned in elementary school according to the curriculum map; for example, family members, of which they only knew the most basic ones like mom and dad. Seeing this lexical deficiency and knowing its importance for sixth grade, my CT decided to start the first term fully focused on building students' vocabulary. He taught vocabulary about school supplies, colors, mathematical symbols, numbers, geometric figures, family members, professions, domestic and wild animals, the senses, body and face parts, places in the city, and giving directions. However, in the final term assessment, a group presentation, the students were unable to demonstrate mastery of the vocabulary studied.

Additionally, as part of my first teaching actions with this group, as a student-teacher, I conducted a need-analysis questionnaire with the students, where they were asked what they needed to improve in English. There, 40% (10 students) selected vocabulary. This shows that the students themselves recognize their need to improve their lexical competence.

Considering the importance of vocabulary for learning a foreign language, and its relevance in the institutional curriculum map, it is necessary to address this problem so that students in group sixth-four have the necessary basic lexical skills for communicating in the English language and to account for effective learning.

Theoretical Background

After identifying the problem, it is my intention to focus this Action Research study on implementing strategies for vocabulary learning that have proven to be effective in similar

contexts. For this reason, the key concepts that guide this proposal and will be discussed in this section are English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Vocabulary Learning, Language Learning Strategies; and Mnemonics, the strategy on which this research study will be based.

EFL Vocabulary Learning

Learning a foreign language poses many challenges for students, and one of the most common concerns is learning and retaining large numbers of words. Recent studies (Goulden et al., 1990; Nation and Waring, 1997) revealed that native English speakers know approximately 20.000 word families, which suggests that, for both oral and written communication with other speakers, learners of English as a second or foreign language need to build a broad lexical knowledge. In the case of students of the sixth-four group, according to the English curriculum map proposed by the institution (I.E. Gilberto Alzate Avendaño, 2023), they should study vocabulary related to family members, animals, school supplies, daily routine, parts of the body, food, clothing, countries, nationalities, celebrations, adjectives, adverbs, present simple and wh questions, which means that students must retain a significant number of basic words to achieve the English learning expectations of the grade.

It is important to highlight that these contents correspond to those presented by the Ministry of National Education (MEN) in the Suggested Curriculum Structure (2016), where it is also established that sixth-grade students must achieve an A1 level of language proficiency in English. This goes in line with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) scale for level A1, which stated that a learner, at this level, “has a basic vocabulary repertoire of words/signs and phrases related to particular concrete situations” (2020, p. 131). That is, sixth-grade students need to know vocabulary to be able to communicate in short conversations about their personal and family information and their routines and family situations.

However, vocabulary learning is often mistakenly taught as a list of words to translate, as described in the observed problem. Many teachers fall into the mistake of teaching English vocabulary in an isolated way, without going deeper into the word and giving it a meaning, without creating connections between groups of words and bringing them into the real context of communication. Conversely, for Hu and Nassaji (2016), “L2 vocabulary learning is a complex process involving not only understanding the meanings of words but also being able to retain, retrieve, and use them in production” (p.28). That is, rather than learning isolated words, sixth-grade students need to connect the vocabulary to the real world, to their context and experiences to communicate with other English speakers.

For the students in this study to achieve lexical knowledge for communication, it is necessary that they retain the words taught in class. Schmitt suggested (2000) that vocabulary knowledge should focus on incidental and explicit learning. Incidental learning refers to the words that a person acquires seemingly naturally in the context of everyday life. On the contrary, explicit learning focuses on intentional learning of the vocabulary through learning strategies. Accordingly, this Action Research study will be emphasized in the learning of English vocabulary through a learning strategy that may facilitate the explicit learning of words.

Language Learning Strategies

To achieve effective English vocabulary learning in sixth-grade students, it is necessary to implement some learning strategies. For O’Malley and Chamot (1990) “Learning strategies are special ways of processing information that enhance comprehension, learning, or retention of the information.” (p.1). Additionally, Rubin (1987) stated that “Learning strategies are strategies which contribute to the development of the language system which the learner constructs and affect learning directly.” (p. 23). And Finally, Oxford (1990) said “Learning strategies are steps

taken by students to enhance their own learning.” (p.1). In summary, learning a foreign language requires the retention of new information and concepts of the target language; and learning strategies are techniques that facilitate this retention.

Considering the above, in order for the students of the sixth-four group to effectively learn the English vocabulary corresponding to the language level expected for their grade, it is necessary to implement language learning strategies. Many authors seeking to understand the different ways of learning have divided learning strategies into different categories. These categories typically address different aspects of learning, such as comprehension, retention, and retrieval of information. O’Malley and Chamot (1990) classified them into three types: cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective. Cognitive strategies refer to the steps or operations like repetition, grouping, imagery, among others that are related to individual tasks; metacognitive strategies, on the other hand, are more functional, involve thinking about the cognitive process for learning something. Socio-affective strategies have to do with cooperative learning and involve interaction with others.

Rubin (1987) shares the definitions proposed by O’Malley and Chamot. Although he mentioned that strategies are classified into learning, communication, and social strategies, he stated that learning strategies can be divided into two categories: metacognitive and cognitive. For this author “cognitive strategies contribute directly to language learning, meanwhile metacognitive strategies are used to oversee, regulate or self-direct language learning.” (p. 23 & p.25). For both authors, cognitive strategies have a greater relationship with the way we learn a foreign language and its components, that is, language learning strategies.

For her part, Oxford (1990) divides learning strategies into two main classes: direct and indirect. According to the author, they support each other. Direct strategies imply playing or

working with the language itself and are composed of memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies. The indirect strategies “for general management of the language” (p.15), are metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Oxford (2003) also stated that for more effective learning, one of the conditions that the learning strategy must meet is that it fits the student's learning style preferences. Therefore, learning strategies can be understood from different perspectives, and given that all people have different ways of assimilating and retaining information, the strategies need to be adapted to the different learners' needs and learning styles.

The problem raised in this action research is that students are not learning the vocabulary studied in English class, one of the main reasons is that they have failed to connect with the strategy used by the CT in the course so far. For sixth-grade students to learn vocabulary effectively, it is necessary to implement strategies that allow them to become involved in their own learning process and that help their brains to make connections between new information and their previous knowledge. That is why this study is going to delve into what Oxford (1990) presented as memory strategies.

Memory Strategies: Mnemonics

Memory strategies, also called mnemonics, “are techniques that exploit the flexibility of the memory system and are related to the different aspects of word knowledge, such as form, meaning and pronunciation” (Mergen & Mumford, 2014, p.26). Thanks to our memory, we retain the words and expressions learned; mnemonics use the brain's ability to associate new information with previously stored information. According to the institutional curriculum map, students in the sixth-four group must retain many new words of the foster language, so working with a strategy that connects memory with this learning can help expand their lexical knowledge.

Oxford (1990) divided memory strategies into four: creating mental linkages, applying images and sounds, reviewing well, and employing actions. However, Thompson (1987) presents another classification for the mnemonic strategies, she divided them into five categories: visual, verbal, linguistic, spatial, and physical response. Visual mnemonics refers to the association of information with graphic representations like pictures, or imagery. Verbal mnemonics refers to learning from verbally presented information, including grouping, list of words, the word chain, and the narrative chain. Linguistic mnemonics are those that use sounds of the language to help learners to retain new information. Spatial mnemonics are related to familiar locations and patterns. Finally, physical response strategies, the movements of the body and mimics. These categories are most in line with the four common types of learning styles: visual, auditory, read/writing and kinesthetic (Fleming, 2001).

In the sixth-four classroom, the CT has been using a strategy similar to what Thompson (1987) describes as visual mnemonics, only that in addition to the association of the word with the image, he asks them to translate it into Spanish, the students' mother tongue. However, in Thompson's visual mnemonic, students do not translate the word; instead, they make a direct connection of the English term with the image.

This study will address Thompson's mnemonics categorization because I consider that this corresponds to different learning styles, which will probably facilitate the vocabulary learning of sixth-grade students. Nevertheless, given the context and the length of this project, only the visual and linguistic mnemonics (Thompson, 1987) will be addressed. Visual strategies will continue helping students associate the word with the graphic representation (Arias, 2003), leaving aside the translation to Spanish. On their side, the linguistic strategies will

allow learning the vocabulary in written form as well as more complex processes such as working with word family's groups, addressing words from their roots, etc.

Research Question

How can the implementation of mnemonic strategies in the English class foster effective vocabulary learning in the sixth-grade students at Institución Educativa Gilberto Alzate Avendaño?

Objectives

General Objective

To determine how the implementation of mnemonic strategies can foster effective English vocabulary learning.

Specific Objectives

- To monitor students' vocabulary learning progress during the implementation of the mnemonic strategies.
- To assess the effectiveness of the implemented mnemonic strategies in students' vocabulary learning.
- To analyze students' perceptions about the effectiveness of the implemented mnemonic strategies for their vocabulary learning.
- To contrast students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the implemented mnemonic strategies with the results demonstrated by the assessment tasks.

Action Plan

In order to conduct this Action Research study and considering the problem stated and the above objectives, I will develop an action plan based on the implementation of two types of mnemonic strategies for vocabulary learning in the sixth-grade English class.

This action plan (see Table 1) is proposed to be developed in twelve weeks. During the first two weeks, I will introduce the intervention, students will be informed of the purpose of this Action Research, and the relevant role of each of them in this process. Then, there will be two cycles with the same procedure, each one will be developed over four weeks. During the first cycle the focus will be visual mnemonic strategies; for the second one, linguistic mnemonic strategies.

Table 1

Action Plan for the Development of the Action Research Study

Cycle	Time Frame	Participants
Introduction	From August 8 th to August 18 th . Two weeks.	Student-teacher. CT Sixth-grade students.
Implementation of mnemonic strategies Cycle 1: Visual mnemonics	From August 22 nd to September 15 th . Four weeks.	Student-teacher. CT Sixth-grade students.
Implementation of mnemonic strategies Cycle 2: Linguistic mnemonics	From September 18 th to October 20 th . Four weeks (The week of school recess is not considered).	Student-teacher. CT Sixth-grade students.
Closure	From October 23 rd to November 3 rd . Two weeks.	Student-teacher. CT Sixth-grade students.

During the first week of each cycle a vocabulary pre-test will be conducted to assess students' knowledge prior to the implementation of the mnemonic strategy. In both cycles, I will implement lesson plans and develop class activities based on the type of mnemonic strategy corresponding to each one. During the two cycles, I expect to be able to guide students to

identify the mnemonic strategies that work best for them. I will implement assessment instruments to monitor the students' progress in learning vocabulary and, at the end of each cycle, I will conduct a vocabulary post-test to evaluate the knowledge that students learned after the implementation of the mnemonic strategy.

Finally, in the last two weeks the intervention will close, collecting data through a students' interview and a questionnaire, to know the perceptions of the students about the effectiveness of the mnemonic strategies implemented, and to establish which were the most effective by triangulating the data collected, and contrasting the students' perceptions with the assessment data.

Development of Actions

For the purpose of determining how the implementation of mnemonic strategies can foster effective English vocabulary learning, I conducted some research and teaching actions. Concerning the research actions, I applied pre and post-tests in both cycles (see Appendix A), administered a questionnaire (see Appendix B), and conducted two interviews, one with the CT and the other one with two students (see Appendix C). In relation to the teaching actions, I designed a unit that I implemented over the two cycles, which included in-class activities incorporating visual and linguistic mnemonic strategies. While the initial action plan proposal covered twelve weeks, I had challenges with time due to the number of classes missed because of different institutional activities and the frequent schedule changes. As a result of this situation, I had to make some adaptations to the action plan.

On August 23rd, I administered a pre-test focused on vocabulary related to food and clothing, which were the learning topics of the first cycle. After this diagnostic assessment, I initiated the first visual mnemonic device: word association with pictures. I began by introducing

vocabulary related to food, and the learners studied this vocabulary by directly associating it with images, without resorting to the use of Spanish, their native language. The second topic of the first cycle was vocabulary related to clothing, a topic that was initially intended to be introduced using a second visual device. However, due to time constraints, I taught the clothing vocabulary in a single class using the same mnemonic device. The post-test was conducted on October 18th.

The second cycle took place over two weeks, during which I implemented the new mnemonic device, which was categorization/classification. On October 19th, I administered the pre-test focused on adjectives used to describe physical appearance and introduced the linguistic mnemonic device. The following week, students had the opportunity to practice the vocabulary using the strategy, although they only had three classes. The second post-test was conducted on October 31st.

The design of the pre and post-tests was based on the model used for the state tests, the Prueba Saber. The purpose of the pre-test was to diagnose the students' prior knowledge of vocabulary, and the post-test was conducted to assess the vocabulary learned by the students during the implementation of each mnemonic device. To ensure the quality of this tool, the pre and post-tests were piloted with an individual of approximately the same age as the students and with an English proficiency level of A1.

In the last week of the intervention, I conducted an interview with the CT, administered a questionnaire to the eleven learners who submitted and signed the consent form, and randomly selected two of these students for individual interviews. The intervention at the institution concluded in the early days of November.

I designed two interviews as data collection tools because they “aim at getting to know points of view, interpretations and meanings in order to gain greater understanding of a

situation.” (Altrichter et al., 1993, p. 100). To achieve the objectives that guided this study, it was necessary for the participants to express their opinions about the mnemonic devices implemented during the intervention. The students’ individual interview included questions about English vocabulary learning, attitudes towards the use of mnemonics in class, their perception of the effectiveness of the strategy, and their preference between the two types of mnemonics implemented. On the other hand, the interview questions directed to the CT were focused on eliciting his perception regarding the implementation of mnemonics for teaching English vocabulary. Both the interviews with the two students and with the CT were audio recorded to be able to repeat the information as many times as necessary to do the data analysis (Bell, 2005).

Finally, the structure and content of the questionnaire were adapted from Elsis’s study (2023), I used this study as a reference because the question style of the questionnaire was in line with the ones proposed by Anderson (1998) and was focused on understanding students’ perception of using mnemonics to learn vocabulary. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section included Likert scale-like questions in which students were required to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with a set of statements. The second section contained open-ended questions regarding the students’ perceptions and attitudes toward the mnemonics implemented in class.

Data Analysis

The method followed in this study is Action Research. The purpose of action research is to identify problems within educational contexts, aiming to develop meaningful solutions introduced by the teacher-researcher (Burns, 2005). After identifying a problem, carrying out an intervention, and gathering the data from pre and post-tests, two interviews and a questionnaire, I

organized and analyzed in both qualitative and quantitative ways the information provided by the tools used in the development of the actions. Then, I compared the results of the different sources by triangulation method (Bell, 2005).

The pre and post-tests were scored on a 0-100 grading scale, to analyze them, the results of both were compared in a bar graphic. Likewise, the Likert-scale responses were included in a graphic for a more comprehensive analysis. The audio of the interviews was transcribed for better understanding and to facilitate data analysis. On the other hand, to code the eleven participants, I used the alphabet in a sequence of two letters for each one: AB, BC, CD, DE...KL.

The deductive method (Altrichter et al., 1993) to analyze the data was used for the questionnaire and the interviews, considering the potential categories that would be expected from the students' answers in relation to the specific objectives of the study. This allowed me to establish the preconceived categories and identify, through the inductive method (Altrichter et al., 1993), the new categories that emerged from the students' responses. The categories will be presented in the following section.

Findings and Interpretations

The objective of this study is to determine how the implementation of mnemonic strategies can foster effective English vocabulary learning in sixth-grade students at Institución Educativa Gilberto Alzate Avendaño. Therefore, I present here the three categories that emerged from the data analysis: Mnemonics and Vocabulary Learning; Mnemonics and Learning Styles; and Students' Perceptions about Mnemonics.

Mnemonics and Vocabulary Learning

The analysis of the data showed that the implementation of the two mnemonic devices had both positive and negative results on the students' explicit vocabulary learning. During and

after the implementation of the first mnemonic device, I observed that the students were improving their retention of vocabulary: “*después de dos semanas sin clase, decidí realizar una actividad para repasar el vocabulario, y durante la actividad pude notar que los estudiantes si han aprendido las palabras que les he enseñando durante el primer ciclo*” (Journal, October 4th), and this is reflected in the results of the post-test conducted at the end of the first cycle (see Figure 1) where 63% (7) of the students in this study had a higher score compared to the pre-test results. This finding suggests that there was a positive effect of implemented visual mnemonic on the students' vocabulary learning. That is, the learning process was more effective when they see the picture of the concept (Arias, 2003). On the contrary, the results of the post-test in the second cycle (see Figure 2) reveal that the linguistic mnemonic implemented was not as effective for learning English vocabulary in this context. This time 72% (8) of the participants had a lower score compared to the pre-test.

Figure 1

First Cycle: Pre-test and Post-test scores

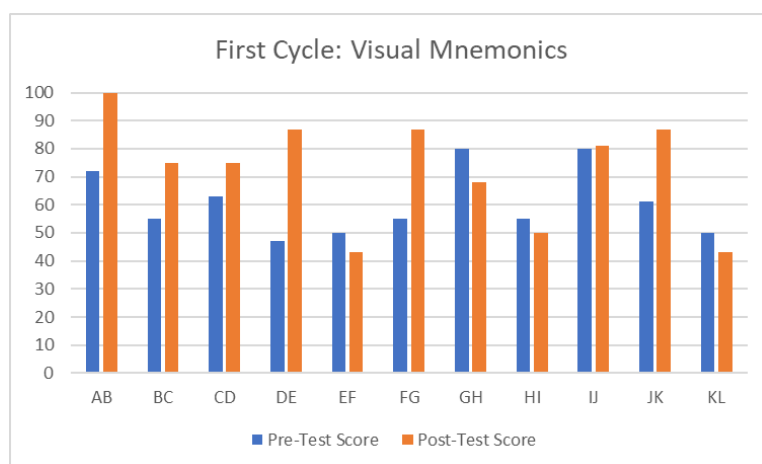
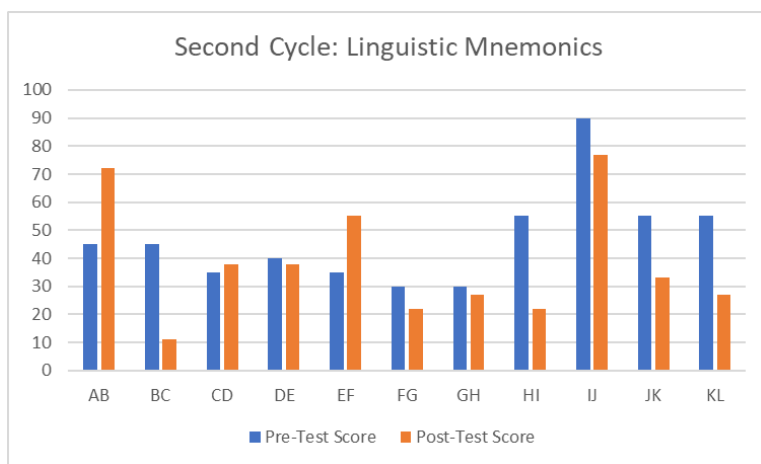


Figure 2

Second Cycle: Pre-test and Post-test scores



Regarding the questionnaire, 63% (7) of the students affirmed that the mnemonic strategies helped them improve their English vocabulary. The students wrote that the strategies helped them with English and learning vocabulary, in addition to highlighting that the visual mnemonic made the learning process easier for them. AB: "*Las estrategias me ayudaron mucho con el inglés*", CD: "*me sirvieron para aprender el vocabulario*", BC: "*se me hizo más fácil entender usando las imágenes*", FG: "*yo no sabía mucho vocabulario, pero gracias a las estrategias he aprendido mucho más*" (Students' Questionnaire, November 2nd, 2023). However, 36% (4) of the students recognized that the strategies did not help them learn the vocabulary since they did not perceive an improvement: KL: "*a mi no me ayudaron, yo no mejoré mucho el vocabulario*" (Students' Questionnaire, November 2nd, 2023).

The difference in the results from the visual and linguistic mnemonics may have been due to the limited time to carry out the second cycle. To implement the visual device, I spent the four weeks established in the initial action plan, the students had several classes to work using the device, and practice the vocabulary. In addition, they had an assessment task to apply what they had learned. While in the second cycle, due to some missed classes, it was only possible to have

three classes for the implementation of the linguistic mnemonic. This resulted in insufficient time for students to effectively apply the device; consequently, most of them did not learn the vocabulary. As Hu and Nassaji (2016) mentioned, the learning process is very complex and the vocabulary learning involves retaining words and using them, for which there was not enough time in the second cycle.

Finally, when I asked the CT about the effectiveness of mnemonics to learn the vocabulary, he commented that when the students study with the visual mnemonic, they have more possibilities of learning the vocabulary because this device favors the learning process “*al asociar la imagen, que tú hiciste, con el inglés, el chico tiene más posibilidades de absorción de vocabulario, gracias a que la imagen le va a dar más aprendizaje, un aprendizaje mucho más rápido, más efectivo, mucho más veloz*”. (CT’s Interview, October 31st, 2023). This allows me to interpret that for the CT, the implementation of the first mnemonic, the visual device, achieved positive effects on the students' vocabulary learning.

Mnemonics and Learning Styles

This category emerged from the deductive method, even though learning styles are directly connected to learning strategies. When I conducted the two individual interviews with the students, I noticed that there was a contrast between both statements about the most effective mnemonic device for learning the vocabulary taught in the classroom. The first student stated that the visual mnemonic helped her more, and she felt calmer when using this device “*a mí me ayudó más la de las imágenes, siento que con las imágenes, pues yo me sentía más tranquila y aprendía más*”. (Student DE, Students’ Interview, November 2nd, 2023). On the other hand, the second student commented that for her, the linguistic mnemonic was easier to understand than the visual “*organizándolo en los cuadritos, la de las imágenes si la entendía, pero para mí, me*

dio más fácil con los cuadritos”. (Student EF, Students’ Interview, November 2nd, 2023). To corroborate the category, I reviewed the results of both students in the pre and post-tests of both cycles (See Figures 1 and 2), and indeed, student DE showed better performance during the first cycle, while student EF stood out because in the second cycle, she achieved a higher score in the post-test compared to the pre-test.

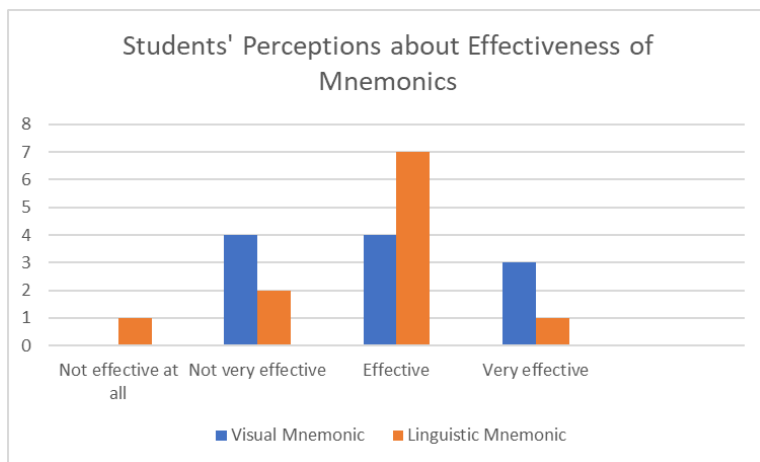
The previous result suggests that the two students who participated in the interview have different learning styles. While one learned vocabulary through the association of words with images, that is, a visual style (Fleming, 2001); for the other the process of organizing/categorizing the vocabulary was more effective, the read/writing style (Fleming, 2001). Learning strategies have been classified by different authors (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Rubin, 1987; Oxford, 1990) precisely to explain the different ways in which human beings learn new information. Likewise, the five categories of mnemonics presented by Thompson (1987) correspond to different learning styles. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the effectiveness of this learning strategy may vary based on the students’ different ways of learning, processing and retaining new information.

Students’ Perceptions about Mnemonics

In general, the data reveals that students had a good perception of the implemented mnemonic strategies, even those students who did not have effective vocabulary learning using mnemonics (according to the post-test results), gave positive comments about the strategy in the open-ended questions section of the questionnaire. For example, a student commented that even though it was complicated, the activities using mnemonics seemed good to him “*si me complicó un poco, pero todas las actividades me parecieron bien*” (Student GH answer, Students’ Questionnaire, November 2nd, 2023). Another wrote that despite having difficulties he considers

that mnemonics are good “*si tuve dificultades con algunas cosas, pero las estrategias son buenas*” (Student HI answer, Students’ Questionnaire, November 2nd, 2023). Also, one of the perceptions to highlight was that of student DE, who, in both the questionnaire and the interview, mentioned that she felt much calmer with learning through mnemonic strategies.

Finally, to analyze the students' perception of the effectiveness of the mnemonics implemented in the English class, in the questionnaire, the students had to assess the effectiveness of both visual and linguistic mnemonics on a scale from not effective at all to very effective (see Figure 3). Regarding visual mnemonic, for 36% (4) of the students, it was “not very effective”, 36% (4) selected “effective” and 27% (3) marked “very effective”, which agrees with the results of the post-test of the first cycle. Nevertheless, for mnemonic linguistics the answers are more varied and do not totally agree with the scores of the post-test of the second cycle, for 9% (1) of the students it was “not effective at all”, 18% (2) selected “not very effective”, 63% (7) marked “effective” and 9% (1) indicated it was “very effective”. It is likely that those answers correspond to individual preferences. Even if the post-test results were not high, each student was able to identify the mnemonic device that best worked for their learning style, which not only depends on cognitive factors but also on personality (Oxford, 2003).

Figure 3*Students' Perceptions about the Effectiveness of Mnemonics***Conclusions**

Findings demonstrate that the implementation of visual mnemonics in the English class generated positive effects on the vocabulary learning of sixth grade students. During the first cycle, in-class activities were developed introducing the visual mnemonic. Students practiced vocabulary by directly associating it with images and demonstrated vocabulary retention through an assessment task. Most of the students achieved the goal of retaining the vocabulary related to food and clothing; the results of the post-test indicated the effectiveness of the device in fostering English vocabulary learning. Besides, students' perceptions of mnemonics were generally positive, with most participants highlighting how beneficial they were for learning the vocabulary studied in the classroom.

However, due to time restrictions for the implementation of the second cycle, students did not have the same opportunity to practice the new vocabulary and, consequently, the results of this were negative compared to the first cycle and the first device. This means that, for this study, the implementation of the linguistic mnemonics did not have the same effectiveness to

foster English vocabulary learning. However, I consider that if I had had enough time to implement and practice the device correctly, the results may have been different.

As a suggestion for future researchers interested in mnemonics, this is a strategy that requires time to be implemented correctly to achieve effective results in student learning. Furthermore, since it is a strategy that considers different learning styles; therefore, dedication on the part of the teacher-researcher is necessary to help each student to find the technique that best works for their learning style, which also requires time.

Finally, I must say that despite the dual results of this study, I continue to consider that mnemonics are an effective strategy for English vocabulary learning and that I would like to implement them again in the future.

Reflections

Before starting the practicum, I had many doubts about my ability to teach, to prepare a class and to manage a group, due to my personality and the fact that the idea of being a teacher was not among my main interests. However, today I can see that although it was not an easy process, this experience helped me overcome personal and professional challenges, recognize my abilities and prove to myself that I can stand in front of a group of students in the role of a teacher. From the practicum I took everything I learned, and the possibility of teaching one day.

On the other hand, the entire research process meant a lot of frustration for me. It was not easy to face all the challenges that come with writing this work. The development of the theoretical background was the most overwhelming aspect, the search for relevant authors, synthesizing the information and trying to postulate my own voice in each paragraph was the hardest part of this entire process. However, although on many occasions I wanted to give up, at all times I tried to push myself a little more and it is finally over.

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Appendix A

Pre and Post-Tests

VOCABULARY PRE-TEST

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Write under each picture of the food the name that corresponds to it.

Bread – Ice cream – Fruits – Seafood – Desserts – Soup – Bacon – Cheese – Milk –
Roast chicken – Rice – Meat – Salad – Sushi – Vegetables – Hamburger – Juice –
Spaghetti – Kebab – Butter

VOCABULARY POST-TEST

PART 1

RESPONDA LAS PREGUNTAS 1 A 8 DE ACUERDO CON EL EJEMPLO.

> WHAT IS THIS INGREDIENT?

EXAMPLE:



- | | | | |
|---|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1.  | A. Rice
B. Sugar
C. Salt | 5.  | A. Carrot
B. Pepper
C. Tomato |
| 2.  | A. Tomato
B. Potato
C. Bean | 6.  | A. Corn
B. Onion
C. Garlic |
| 3.  | A. Vinegar
B. Oil
C. Honey | 7.  | A. Ginger
B. Carrot
C. Potato |
| 4.  | A. Broccoli
B. Cabbage
C. Lettuce | 8.  | A. Onion
B. Bean
C. Ginger |

See the rest of the tests here:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Ol6i23L5TEK2jiiMr1R8wj8gfTikXJd?usp=drive_link

Appendix B

Students' Questionnaire

Questionnaire

"Percepción de los estudiantes sobre la efectividad de las estrategias mnemotécnicas implementadas en clase"

Nota: No escriba su nombre en el cuestionario.

Primera sección:

A. Indique si está de acuerdo o no con las afirmaciones. Por favor marque la casilla más adecuada para cada afirmación.

¿En qué medida está de acuerdo con las siguientes afirmaciones?	Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo	De acuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Normalmente me resulta difícil aprender vocabulario en inglés.					
2. Me resulta más fácil recordar vocabulario utilizando mnemotécnicas.					
3. Usar mnemotécnicas me motiva a aprender nuevo vocabulario.					

* Adaptado de "AFL Students' Perception of Using Mnemonics as a Strategy to Enhance their Vocabulary Acquisition and Retention"

See the rest of the questionnaire here:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/130AQeleSEIHDmgPiZxn7MyFjoBLO1jdn?usp=sharing>

Appendix C

Student interview questions

1. ¿Normalmente se te dificulta aprender vocabulario en inglés?
2. ¿Para ti fue fácil aprender el vocabulario de la clase con estas estrategias?
3. Habla de tu experiencia aprendiendo vocabulario en inglés antes y después de usar las estrategias mnemotécnicas.
4. ¿En algún momento sentiste que las estrategias mnemotécnicas eran difíciles para aprender y usar vocabulario en inglés?
5. ¿Tú sentimiento hacia el uso de estrategias mnemotécnicas para aprender vocabulario en inglés es positivo o negativo? ¿por qué?
6. En tu opinión, de las dos técnicas implementadas en clase, ¿cuál es la más efectiva para aprender vocabulario en inglés?
7. ¿Planeas usar estrategias mnemotécnicas para seguir estudiando vocabulario en inglés? ¿por qué si o por qué no?