

STRATEGIES THAT IMPROVE THE LANGUAGE LEARNING EXPERIENCE  
OF SEVENTH GRADERS WITH DEFICIT AND LACK OF ATTENTION IN  
THE ENGLISH CLASS.

What kind of strategies can be implemented to improve the language learning  
experience of students with deficit and lack of attention in the English class?

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# STRATEGIES THAT IMPROVE THE LANGUAGE LEARNING EXPERIENCE OF SEVENTH GRADERS WITH DEFICIT AND LACK OF ATTENTION IN THE ENGLISH CLASS.

## **Abstract**

This action research project reports the implementation of strategies that increase the motivation and the level of attention of a group of students who present difficulties to stay attentive in the English class; including students with an ADHD diagnosis. This project was carried out with seventh graders of the Gimnasio Cantabria School. The data was collected through class observations, voice recordings, analysis of students' log and surveys. The results show that the students increased their attentiveness, motivation and performance in at least one of the language skills.

*Key words:* ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), attention, motivation, language skills, teaching strategies.

## **Resumen**

Este proyecto de investigación acción da cuenta de la implementación de estrategias que aumentan la motivación y atención de un grupo de estudiantes a quienes se les dificulta mantenerse atentos en la clase de inglés, esto incluye estudiantes con diagnóstico de TDAH. El proyecto se llevó a cabo con estudiantes de séptimo grado del Colegio Gimnasio Cantabria. Los datos se recolectaron por medio de observaciones de clase, grabaciones de audio, análisis del trabajo realizado por los estudiantes y encuestas aplicadas a los mismos. Los resultados muestran que los estudiantes aumentaron su nivel de atención, motivación y desempeño en al menos una de las habilidades del lenguaje.

*Palabras clave:* TDAH (Trastorno de déficit de atención e hiperactividad), atención, motivación, habilidades del lenguaje, estrategias de enseñanza.

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## **Degree requirement**

This action research project was carried out during my teaching practicum at Gimnasio Cantabria School (2017-2018) as a requirement for getting my Bachelor education degree in foreign language teaching (English and French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellín, Colombia.

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## **Acknowledgements**

I dedicate this achievement to my parents for making a great effort to give me a good education, and to my husband for his encouragement and support during this journey. I would like to thank my students for allowing me to guide them while I also learn from them. I also want to thank the Gimnasio Cantabria School for giving me the opportunity to be part of their family and for offering me a space to learn so much as a teacher. To my practicum, research, and thesis advisor, Sergio Escudero, for his patience and guidance towards my professional development. And to my CT Alejandro Castaño for letting me be part of his class, and giving all his guidance and support during this process.

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## Preface

The main goal of a teacher is that all his/her students actually be part of the class, that is, to be motivated, to participate in all the activities and to demonstrate a consistent and progressive learning; however, the reality of a classroom is far different from that. Teachers face several obstacles in order to accomplish that goal, for instance, they find classrooms filled with children of different personalities, learning styles, and conditions, so keeping them all motivated and participative becomes a challenge. Among those conditions, there is the increasing number of children with special educational needs such as Asperger, dyslexia, ODD, working memory, and among many others, ADHD which will be the focus for the purpose this work.

ADHD stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and refers to a behavioral disorder characterized by little concentration, and great distractibility or hyperactivity. According to Pascual-Castroviejo, (2008) the prevalence of ADHD has increased in the last years going from 4%-6% up to 20%. In the same way, as reported by Vélez & Vidarte, (2012) Colombia has a high prevalence of ADHD in comparison with some other countries although there are many of those children who do not get a further diagnosis or a proper treatment. Consequently, the number of children with this condition has raised in schools as well. This action research project aimed to design and implement teaching strategies that would offer these kind of students the possibility to practice and improve their language performance through activities that would motivate them and consequently encourage them to stay focused in class, as well as improving their language performance. This action research project began in the middle of the academic year 2017 with a class of sixth graders and finished in the first semester of the academic year 2018 with the same group of students in their 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

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## **Context Gimnasio Cantabria School**

The school Gimnasio Cantabria is located in Pueblo Viejo La Estrella at the south of Medellín. Among the school's facilities are: three independent blocks (pre-school, primary and high school); an administrative block that gathers the offices, cafeteria, library, infirmary, and science laboratory; a block that brings together a computer room, a projection room, a teachers' lounge, an art workshop, and coordination offices; a large coliseum for sports and cultural events; a music room; and a warehouse for materials. It has an independent house for the butler, parking for visitors and wide green areas with trees and gardens for resting and recreation.

The school has about 450 students. Although the school is a mixed school, classrooms usually have more boys than girls. Most of the students live in the south of the Area Metropolitana, that is, they come from Envigado, Sabaneta, Itaguí, La Estrella, Caldas, and only a few come from Medellín. In general, teachers at Gimnasio Cantabria have a teaching degree on their discipline although there are some teachers who have a degree different from the discipline they teach. Some teachers have a master's degree and some others are finishing their careers. The most important teacher traits for the school are that teachers be highly competent in their disciplines as well as loving and open to dialogue with students.

At Gimnasio Cantabria the pedagogical approach is based on early and/or precocious teaching, personalized education, bilingualism and high academy based on a competency approach. The school offers five education cycles: infants, preschool, elementary school, middle school and high school. Infants learn language and literacy while preschoolers also learn natural and social sciences, arts, English, mathematics and sports. In elementary school children are

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taught Spanish and literature, natural and social sciences, arts, English, mathematics, sports, ethics, religion, and technology. In preschool and elementary school mathematics and both sciences are taught in English. On the other hand, in middle school students study biology, Spanish and literature, social sciences, arts, English, mathematics, sports, ethics, religion, and technology while in high school they learn Spanish and literature, social sciences, arts, English, mathematics, sports, ethics, religion, technology, chemistry from 9th grade on, and philosophy, physics, IELTS, and political sciences in 10th and 11th grade. In these two cycles, subjects such as biology, social, and political sciences, and arts are taught in English. Moreover, students receive 8 hours of English class a week including 1 hour of English literature.

The school adopts English as a foreign language approach. The school's intention is to overcome the goals proposed by the National Bilingualism Plan. The activities implemented by the school to fulfill this purpose are: presentation of an international exam (IELTS); annual song festival; spelling bee contest; educational trips for all grades to different places of interest in the city; summer camps; cultural exchange to English-speaking countries, which takes place from the eighth grade on. For the English class students use a textbook called Prime Time and its workbook. The classroom's computer contains a digital and interactive version of the book which contains videos and games.

The students in this class are among the ages of 10 and 11. They keep a very good relationship among them and are characterized for being respectful and enthusiastic. At the beginning of the project, the group had 17 students: 8 boys and 9 girls.



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## **Statement of the problem**

Gimnasio Cantabria School characterizes for offering a personalized education, which makes it a very appropriate school for children with ADHD. Therefore, the number of students with ADHD diagnosis or traits has increased in recent years and continues to do so. In fact, around 10% of students in the school have been diagnosed with ADHD. These setting has brought about the whole school community to study and find strategies to teach these children, so that they can actually learn and feel motivated at school.

As an English teacher, I believe we find ourselves uncertain in the process of teaching these children. Certainly, we take some measures such as making curricular adjustments, reducing the amount of work, or giving them more time to finish an activity, among others. However, it does not feel enough since we continue observing learning difficulties not only on those children that have a diagnosis, but also on those that without having one exhibit some lack of attention. Therefore, I always ask myself the following questions: How can I help them enjoy learning English? How can I make their learning process fair and productive? How can we take advantage of the skills they are better at? How can their language learning experience be improved? It is there where the need for strategies to teach these kids emerges.

In response to that problem, this project aims to explore, design, and implement diverse teaching strategies that would allow seventh graders at Gimnasio Cantabria with deficit and lack of attention to achieve a meaningful EFL learning process. Consequently, to achieve this goal, it will be necessary to take into account important aspects of the process such as finding strategies

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that motivate students to stay focused, creating and adapting materials that will benefit them, and strengthening the students' essential language skills.

Furthermore, it is important to carry out this research project because the problem not only affects the children but the entire school community. Children are affected because sometimes they do not feel motivated enough during the English class, they feel anxious and sometimes they get low grades. In fact, the group in which the project will be carried out has 2 girls that have been diagnosed with ADHD, and one more boy that does not have a diagnosis, but often exhibits lack of attention. Therefore, for the purpose of this work, the analysis of the implementation of the activities will be centered in these students who we will refer to as target students and will be named students A, B, and C respectively. Besides, teachers are being affected because we do not know what to do, how to work with these students, or what strategies to implement to get the best of them during our classes. The issue also affects parents since they have to compliment the learning with private lessons at home. Lastly, the school itself is affected because, based on their teaching approach, they have offered parents and students a different type of education that can only be fulfilled by making changes in the way we are teaching these kind of students.

Finally, by addressing this problem, students will be given an opportunity to have an English class that would actually motivate them to learn, so that in the future they are better prepared for higher grades or even for college. In fact, this issue needs to be improved now because it is something that has been happening at the school for a while and every time becomes more notorious and more difficult to address, while undoubtedly, the school will continue to get each time more students of these characteristics.

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## **Theoretical Framework**

ADHD is a condition that causes an alteration in the neurological development, which consists of the inappropriate functioning of the mechanisms that are in charge of attention control, cognitive flexibility and the establishments of goals, as stated by Tapia Pérez, Veliz de Vos, & Reyes Reyes, (2017) citing López, Boehme, Forster, Troncoso, Mesa & García, (2006). They additionally explain, based on Barkley, (1997) that the origin of this condition lies on a weak mechanism of conduct inhibition; therefore, affecting the working memory as the center of the executive functions.

According to Amador, Fornis, & Martorell, (2001) ADHD is characterized by a behavior of inattention, hyperactivity and/or impulsivity, which is greater or more frequent than it would be normal at a certain age. They say the condition can be identified because these children show difficulty to focus, follow rules or instructions, and stay attentive during a game or school activity. In addition, their work is usually disorganized and they often forget things. Pascual-Castroviejo, (2008) claims that ADHD can be subdivided into 3 types: one in which deficit of attention dominates, another one in which hyperactivity and/or impulsivity dominates and the third one which is combined. That is, a child that has the first type gets easily distracted by external stimulus, forgets things that are necessary for an activity, does not listen when someone is speaking to him/her and fails at paying attention to details. Meanwhile, a child with the second type will be either anxious and talkative, or will have difficulty to wait for a turn or to listen to others. The third type will have characteristics of the two types previously mentioned.

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Rodriguez, Navas, Gonzalez, Forminaya, & Duelo, (2006) point out that among those children who present the inattentive type of ADHD, 70% have academic difficulties while 30% have behavioral ones, while for those of the hyperactive-impulsive type, the academic difficulties take place in 25% of the cases while the behavioral ones do in about 75%. Furthermore, they remark that between 25% and 35% of children with ADHD have difficulties in school, especially in reading, writing, mathematics and motor coordination. This is due to the difficulties they find in planning their activities, organizing their time, and the slow pace when performing a task. Pascual-Castroviejo, (2008) and Tapia Pérez, Veliz de Vos, & Reyes Reyes, (2017) coincide that the subjects in which these students have more difficulties are those that imply reasoning such as mathematics and languages. The second one emphasizes that about 50% of students with ADHD have difficulties in reading and writing, especially those of the inattentive type considering that the speed to process the information is essential for reading comprehension.

Consequently, taking into account the executive functions affected by this condition such as goal setting, programming, initiation, control, fluency, speed, timing, sequencing, comparison, classification and categorization (Gonçalves-Guedim, Capelatto, Salgado-Azoni, Ciasca, & Pinheiro, 2017) the number of difficulties they present in learning a second language are related to reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar use, spelling, and writing in general. Alves, Casella, & Ferraro's, (2015) findings confirm that students with ADHD make more mistakes than those without the condition, particularly they make mistakes of addition, substitution, transposition, and omission of letters which is related to the difficulties in the executive function, specifically the operational memory. Gonçalves-Guedim, Capelatto, Salgado-Azoni, Ciasca, & Pinheiro, (2017) suggest there is a link between ADHD and learning disorders in written

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language. Indicating that out of the total of children with ADHD, 8-39% have difficulties in reading and 60% in writing.

Furthermore, we need to consider that in our classrooms we find children that although they are not diagnosed with ADHD, they often get distracted easily during lessons, find it difficult, or do not feel motivated to finish an activity or to stay in their seats. In order to deal with these difficulties in language learning, there emerges the necessity to take some measures that can help these students in their learning process; therefore, different teaching strategies that would motivate them, and the use of resources and materials for this group of students will also be analyzed in this project.

Motivation is generally understood as the reasons why humans behave and think as they do, as for language learning, it refers to what causes success or failure in learning (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). These authors state that a good curriculum, great teaching, and outstanding abilities cannot ensure the student's achievement if there is no motivation. In addition, Creager, (1976) claims, citing Bigge (1971), that motivation is intrinsic and influenced by the desires of the learner; however, he adds, teachers must provide students with extrinsic motivation, so that students become actively involved in their learning process.

Therefore, it becomes necessary for English teachers to design and implement motivational strategies that would keep their students focused and interested in the class. Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, (2008) define motivational strategies as teaching interventions that stimulate students' learning desire. They explain, citing Dörnyei, (2001), that such motivational strategies have 4 stages. The first is *creating basic motivational conditions*, that is, a student-

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teacher bond, classroom atmosphere, and group rules. The second one is *generating initial motivation*, which means, raising students' expectancy of success and positive attitudes towards the language. The third stage *maintaining and protecting motivation*, deals with the use of stimulating, enjoyable and relevant tasks. And the last stage, *encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation* by giving effective and encouraging feedback, learner satisfaction, and grades in a motivational manner. Furthermore, they explain that students' motivation can be measured in terms of attention, participation and volunteering for activities. That means when students are following the teacher with their eyes, looking at their classmates when they participate, following the readings, making contributions, working on assigned activities, raising their hands or saying "me, me" to participate, we can say they are motivated.

Meanwhile, Creager, (1976) presents "motivational devices" as those that give students the opportunity to experience success, including extra points, praise, recognition, privileges; also the opportunity to set personal and meaningful goals, variety of activities to choose from, active involvement, self-evaluation, and deciding the amount of time they need to acquire a new concept.

Teaching strategies, Santana-Quintana, (2017) defines the word strategy, citing the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages CEFRL (2002), as the organized, intentional, and regulated action chosen by an individual to perform a task and achieve a goal. She adds that those strategies need to be adapted to the context and the capacities of the student, so that different strategies can be used by different people. Moreover, in terms of language teaching strategies she explains they would be the actions and techniques intentionally used to improve the performance in a second or foreign language. Therefore, for students with ADHD,

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she says, the methodologies need to be changeable, so that students feel integrated and motivated to become an active role of the class. She concludes that the methodology required for students with ADHD is one that can reduce anxiety and stress of failure.

On the other hand, keeping in mind that the greatest difficulties these students find are the ones related to reading and writing, Mena, Nicolau, Salat, Tort, & Romero, (2006) introduce some specific strategies to improve these two skills in students with ADHD. To motivate reading, the teacher must give the student different choices of short texts that are attractive to them and offer appealing options of answering such as drawing, multiple choice questions, title creation among others. Also, reading in group or sharing with the teacher as well as giving the student the text in advance, so the student can have a previous try, are activities that enhance the desire and confidence of reading, and lower the number of mistakes.

Furthermore, to improve writing performance, Mena, Nicolau, Salat, Tort, & Romero, (2006) advise to work on vocabulary, they suggest encouraging the use of visual memory instead of hearing memory, that is, associating words with drawings, using games such as hanged man, creating a personal dictionary, and spelling words over surfaces with texture like sand or flour, besides, the teacher must make greater emphasis on the most commonly used words.

Tomlinson, (2001) defines materials as anything, either visual, linguistic, auditory, or kinesthetic that can be used to facilitate the learning of a language. He adds that materials can fulfill different functions such as informing the students about the language, providing exposure to it or seeking discoveries about the language use. In addition, he presents materials adaptation as the process of making changes to certain materials such as reducing, adding, omitting,

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modifying and supplementing, in order to make them more suitable for a particular learner.

Furthermore, Cruz Rondón & Velasco Vera, (2016) state that EFL teachers need to implement a great amount of materials such as video blogs, educational platforms, apps for digital devices, and textbooks, to help their students learn the language. Moreover, they claim, citing (Kelly, Kelly, Offner, & Vorland, 2002; Kilickaya, 2004; Tamo, 2009) that the use of authentic materials has a positive effect in students' motivation exposing them to the real language and cultural information; while the use of course books offers an organized sequence, clear objectives and language skills integration. They also highlight that materials should be chosen or adapted based on students' needs.

Language skills are classified as receptive and productive. The first ones include reading, that is the ability to understand text of various complexity levels in a foreign language; and listening, which means the ability to understand spoken language. Meanwhile, the second ones include speaking or the ability to communicate with spoken language in the foreign tongue; and writing or the ability to communicate in written language in the foreign tongue (Davies, 1976). Nevertheless, integrating the four skills during the EFL learning process is key to achieve the goal of communication. In fact, Hinkel, (2006) points out that in meaningful communication, the use of these skills does not take place in isolation, that is, when we speak, we are also listening to others. Besides, teaching reading involves instruction in writing and vocabulary. It then, becomes imperative to integrate language skills during our teaching practices, so that students arrive to successfully communicate in real situations.



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## **Research Question:**

What kind of strategies can be implemented to improve the language learning experience of students with deficit and lack of attention in the English class?

## **General objective:**

To design and implement teaching strategies that would allow seventh graders at Gimnasio Cantabria with deficit and lack of attention to achieve a meaningful EFL learning process.

## **Specific objectives:**

- To implement teaching strategies that would help students with deficit and lack of attention to stay focused and interested on different class activities.
- To create and adapt resources and materials that would encourage students to engage in and benefit from different class activities.
- To strengthen the students' four essential language skills through the implementation of different teaching strategies.

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## **Action Strategy Plan**

The set of strategies that for this project will aim to improve the language learning experience of students with deficit and lack of attention in the English class involve: reducing students' anxiety and stress of failure; enhancing students reading comprehension; and improving students' writing performance.

The first strategy, reducing students' anxiety and stress of failure, will take place through the implementation of motivational strategies and devices, that is, for this strategy students' interests and likes were taken into account to design the activities that will be developed in class. I have been teaching this group for more than a year, which allows me to have some understanding of the things they enjoy doing in class and the kind of activities that motivate them to learn. Those activities include watching series, especially fantasy, and taking part in role-plays; therefore, these type of activities were included in the strategy.

During three lessons, students will watch segments from the series they have expressed enjoyment, Once upon a time, Stranger things, The walking dead. They will receive a worksheet with the adapted script of the scene to fill in gaps while they listen. Once the students have filled in the gaps, there will be a short discussion about the segment. The last part of this strategy includes the preparation and presentations of a role-play. For the implementation of this strategy, the materials and resources needed will be Netflix, internet, video-beam, worksheets of series episodes with gaps to fill in, scripts for students to practice and present. Four instruments will be used to analyze the results and data for this strategy, a students' survey, student's log, teacher's journal and video recording.

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The second strategy, enhancing students' reading comprehension, aims to awaken student's interest in reading and reinforce their comprehension skills through the integration of other language skills such as speaking, writing and listening, which is why the activities for this strategy were planned around these language skills. The first activity consists on the entire group reading aloud the first chapter of Alice in Wonderland. Then, students will individually create a drawing based on their understanding of the reading which will later be orally explained to their classmates. For the second activity of this strategy, the entire class reads aloud the second chapter of Alice in Wonderland. Then, in pairs students create a comic based on the reading. To conclude this strategy, the class watches the movie Alice in Wonderland to finally have a class discussion about the movie. The resources and materials needed to implement these activities will be the book of Alice in Wonderland chapter 1 and 2, drawing paper, color pencils, movie: Alice in Wonderland, questionnaire from the movie. To analyze the data of the results three instruments will be necessary: the students' log, the teacher's journal and voice/video recordings.

The third strategy, improving students' writing performance, focuses on the use of visual memory as a tool for vocabulary learning, and writing performance. This strategy involves three activities, the creation of a dictionary, the understanding of the necessity and the correct use of punctuation, and the writing of a story. The resources and materials needed to apply these activities will be recycled material for handcrafting the dictionary, board, markers and internet. To analyze the results for this strategy three instruments will be used, the students' log, the teacher's journal and voice recording.

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**Action Strategy Chart**

ACTION STRATEGY	METHODOLOGY	ACTIVITY	MATERIALS & RESOURCES	INSTRUMENTS	TIME	FINDINGS
<p><b>Reducing students' anxiety and stress of failure.</b></p>	<p>Through the implementation of motivational strategies and devices.</p>	<p>Students watch segments from the series they have expressed to enjoy, Stranger things, The walking dead, Once upon a time. They fill in gaps on the adapted scripts of the scene. This activity will take place in three different classes, using one of the three series in every class.</p> <p>The entire group participates in discussions about the series previously watched. The students discuss some questions proposed by the teacher. This activity will take place in every class in which they watch a scene, that is, three classes.</p> <p>Role-plays: In groups of two or three (depending on the scene selected) students practice the script of the other scenes from the same episode and present them for the rest of the group. This activity will take place only once after the three series have been watched by them. It would probably take two classes for the students to present their corresponding scenes.</p>	<p>Netflix</p> <p>Internet</p> <p>Video-beam</p> <p>Worksheets of series episodes with gaps to fill in.</p> <p>Scripts for students to practice and present.</p>	<p>Students' Survey</p> <p>Student's log</p> <p>Teacher's journals</p> <p>Video recording</p>	<p>April 4<sup>th</sup></p> <p>April 11<sup>th</sup></p> <p>April 18<sup>th</sup></p> <p>April 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup></p>	<p>Anxiety and stress of failure was reduced because of the kind of activities, their interests and not having a grade.</p> <p>Students gradually improved their listening performance.</p> <p>They felt more motivated and interested in the activities: they expressed feeling happy, relaxed and enjoying the activities.</p> <p>They volunteered and were eager to participate in the activities and discussions.</p> <p>Students prefer listening activities that have something to do with music and TV series.</p> <p>They feel more motivated with the use of authentic materials and have a positive attitude towards the language.</p>

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<p><b>Enhancing students reading comprehension</b></p>	<p>Reading comprehension takes place through the integration of language skills.</p>	<p>The entire class reads aloud the first chapter of Alice in Wonderland.</p> <p>Students create a drawing for the assigned reading, and orally present it and explain it to the class.</p> <p>The entire class reads aloud the second chapter of Alice in Wonderland. Then, in pairs students create a comic based on the reading.</p> <p>The class watches the movie Alice in Wonderland. Then, students work individually on answering some questions from the movie. Finally, the entire class discusses the questions and the movie.</p>	<p>Book: Alice in Wonderland.</p> <p>Drawing paper, color pencils.</p> <p>Movie: Alice in Wonderland.</p> <p>Questionnaire from the movie.</p>	<p>Students' log.</p> <p>Teacher's journal.</p> <p>Video/voice recording.</p>	<p>April 9<sup>th</sup></p> <p>April 10<sup>th</sup></p> <p>April 16<sup>th</sup></p> <p>April 17<sup>th</sup></p> <p>April 20<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup></p>	<p>Good speaking ability and a clear understanding of the chapter read.</p> <p>Great interest in the possibility of drawing and speaking as a reading comprehension activity.</p> <p>Student A showed great interest in the activity, expressed to love drawing, focused on doing a good, creative and pretty work, besides, her presentation was very impressive, organized and coherent</p> <p>Student B focused on drawing well and her work was also very organized; however, she was not interested in the speaking part.</p> <p>Student C was very distracted during the reading and did not show any interest on drawing.</p> <p>Students A and B felt motivated by the activity and accomplished integrating their reading comprehension with their writing performance as well as the capacity to follow instructions and complete their works.</p> <p>Student C appears not to have felt motivated by the activity which lead to not finish the activity or follow the instructions.</p>
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<b>Improving students' writing performance</b>	The use of visual memory as a tool for vocabulary learning, spelling practice and writing performance.	Students and teacher make and constantly update a personal dictionary that will contain the vocabulary that is new for them. That is, a small notebook will be handcrafted in class, then all the new vocabulary that is introduced in each class will gradually be added to that notebook including definitions and drawings.	Recycled material for hand crafting the dictionary.	Teacher's journal.  Students' log.  Voice recording.	April 6 <sup>th</sup> to 27 <sup>th</sup>	Students loved the idea of handcrafting the dictionary as well as updating it in the computer room.
		Students are presented with a text without punctuation to read aloud. Once they have noticed the necessity for punctuation they will be explained the use of apostrophes, commas, colon, semicolon, question, exclamation and quotation marks, and capitalization. Then, the entire group will correct the text with the help of the teacher. Finally, in pairs, they will be given a story without punctuation or capitalization, so that they can complete it.	Board, markers and internet.		April 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Students responded better to the instructions that used videos than the ones done by the teacher on the board.  Student A and B showed interest in writing the story; however, student A still has difficulties with punctuation, spelling and grammar.
		At the end of the semester, the students will write a story in which they include the words from their personal dictionary and the knowledge they have acquired about punctuation. (it will be checked with a rubric)	Students' dictionaries.		April 30 <sup>th</sup> to May 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Student B feels very motivated by writing activities.  Student C did not show any interest in writing activities.

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## **Development of actions**

The first strategy: reducing students' anxiety and stress of failure aims to help students feel more relaxed, comfortable and secure during the listening activities, so that their nervousness does not affect their performance and results in these type of activities.

On April 4<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and May 2<sup>nd</sup> students watched segments of the TV series: Once Upon a Time, Stranger Things and The Walking dead. After watching, they completed a worksheet with some gaps, and participated in a discussion about the episode.

During these activities, the students were all focused on completing the gaps, even those kids who usually have difficulties to stay attentive. In the discussion moments, they all participated actively answering the questions asked by the teacher, and giving their opinions about the situations presented in the episodes. Those kids who had never watched the series wanted to know more about them, while those who are fans were always trying to explain their classmates the plot. Those kids that often get distracted were very engaged in the discussion moments raising their hands to give their opinions and to argue others' opinions.

To wrap up these activities, students participated in role-plays of the episodes. They were presented with the scripts, and had the opportunity to rehearse their parts during some lessons. Finally, on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, they presented their scenes to the class. They showed great engagement with this activity and expressed to have enjoyed it a lot.

The second strategy: enhancing students reading comprehension aims to improve the students' understanding of what they read through the integration of all the language skills, that

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is, students would have the opportunity to exhibit their reading comprehension skills by the use of speaking, listening, and writing skills as well as their artistic abilities.

On April 9th, the entire class read aloud the first chapter of Alice in wonderland. Most students seemed to be focused on the reading, we discussed the things that were more difficult to understand or the moments of the story that were not so clear for the students. After reading, we looked up the new vocabulary and added it to their personal dictionaries. Then, they were asked to draw something they liked about the reading to later explain their drawing to the class. For the presentations of the drawing they were given some guiding questions that allowed them to speak about the chapter, their drawing and their understanding of the story.

On April 20<sup>th</sup> the entire class read aloud the second chapter of Alice in Wonderland. After finishing the reading, they were taken to the computer lab to search the definition of the words they had highlighted to be added to their dictionaries and then draw an example. The following class, they were asked in pairs to create a comic that would contain what they had understood from the reading, what they had liked and the dialogues that they remembered.

On April 23<sup>rd</sup> students watched the movie Alice in Wonderland, on April 25<sup>th</sup> they individually answered a few questions about the movie and its connection to the book. Then, the group participated in a discussion about those questions. They were actively involved in the discussion and were very analytic in their answers.

The third strategy: improving students' writing performance aims to enhance the students' capacity of writing by the use of visual memory, that is, students will learn and practice writing rules and techniques in a very visual way, using videos, charts, pictures among others.



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On April 3rd, students had an introduction to the use and rules of punctuation and capitalization. The class started with the reading of a paragraph which had no punctuation. Next, they were explained the different punctuation marks, their names, usage, and some examples. During the presentation some students started losing interest and seemed a little distracted or sleepy; some others were very interested asking questions and suggesting examples. To address those distracted students, the teacher asked them to paraphrase the use of some marks. The presentation also included 2 videos during which they seemed to be more interested. When the presentation was over, the initial text was shown again for the class to correct it all together. Finally, students were arranged in pairs, and they were given a short story: (Little Red Riding Hood) without punctuation or capitalization, so that they could complete it. In this part of the exercise, students worked really well, and asked lots of questions.

On April 6th, the students had previously been told to bring materials for creating a dictionary. During this activity, even from the moment they were told to bring the materials, most students expressed to love doing these kind of crafts. When I arrived to the classroom, they all wanted to show me what they had brought to decorate their books. One student said “teacher: this is the most expected moment of the day”. During the activity, others expressed: “teacher I love this class” “teacher this is the kind of English class I like.”

In Several lessons we added entries to the dictionaries. Each of these times students were encouraged to use definitions, examples, and even drawing to clarify the meaning.

On May 7<sup>th</sup>, students were introduced to the structure of the short story by the use of the 8-point short story arc. After watching a video, we drew the arc on the board, defined all the steps

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and added an example for each step, this was completed with the help of the entire class. Next, I read a short story to the group and showed them a video of the same story, we discussed the story and its ending and then the students were asked to individually analyze each of the parts of the story in this tale. After 10 minutes, each of the students came to the board to share the analysis of one of the parts.

On May 9<sup>th</sup>, we had a short review on the parts of the story, the 8-point story arc, and the punctuation marks. Then, the students were given the instructions to write a plan for their own story taking into account the parts of the story and the arc studied in class. They were also asked to include at least 10 words from their dictionaries in the story. Once they finished the plan, they could start writing their own story. During both the writing of the plan and of the story, the students were focused on their work and often asked questions to guide their work.

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## **Findings and Interpretations**

The analysis of the journals, students' log, voice/video recording, and surveys led to reporting several findings around the implementation of the selected teaching strategies: Students motivation, attentiveness, and language performance had a significant improvement, although each of the target students responded differently to the strategies.

Motivation is key for students to stay attentive and achieve the learning that is expected from them Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, (2008). Students engaged in listening activities by paying close attention to both the teacher and the videos. Besides, they participated and volunteered to take part in the discussions with their opinion, and contributions as well as listening to, and respecting their classmates' opinions. Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, (2008) explain how motivation can be measured in terms of attention and participation, which shows that these listening activities led to an important increase in the students' motivation. Besides, they showed a gradual improvement in their performance, obtaining better results each time than the ones they used to get in listening activities. Students A, B and C showed an important change in their attitude towards listening activities, they seemed more concentrated and always paying more attention to both the audios and the discussion moments.

The three target students became more interested in listening activities as well as less nervous and stressed about them; their anxiety was reduced because of two facts: the activities had no grade, and they were based on something they actually liked. Listening activities tend to make these students nervous and stressed because they focus more on not failing than on listening and understanding the audios. In fact, they had expressed before they do not know what

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happens to them in these activities, and that they feel their minds go blank in those exercises (Journal #10 February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2018).

Furthermore, the survey shows that most students in the classroom including students A, B and C almost always feel nervous and stressed during listening activities (figure 1). Besides, they often feel in blank during these exercises because they worry about the grade, as opposed to feeling more relaxed, motivated, and enjoying more the activity when they know it does not have a grade (figures 2 and 3). The three of them also coincide that they prefer when the listening activities are from music and TV series (figures 4). They state these kind of activities motivate them to learn English because they learn better, they feel more secure, and they enjoy the activities more (figure 5). This raising of students' expectancy of success and positive attitudes towards the language is prove of what Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, (2008) call initial motivation, and corresponds to the ideas of Cruz Rondón & Velasco Vera, (2016) who state that the use of authentic materials has a positive effect in students' motivation.

Los ejercicios de listening me hacen sentir nervioso o estresado

14 responses

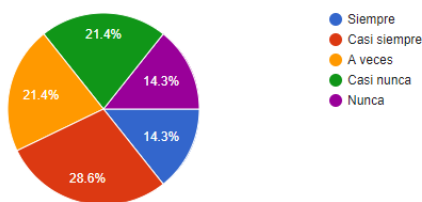


Figure 1

En los ejercicios de listening me bloqueo porque me preocupa la nota

14 responses

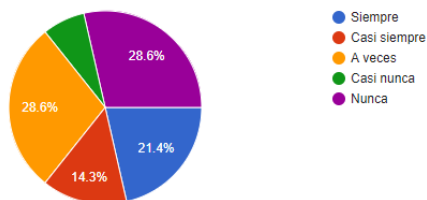


Figure 2

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Cuando la profesora dice que la actividad no tiene nota:

14 responses

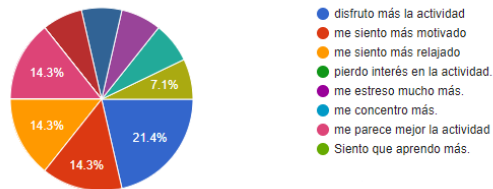


Figure 3

En las actividades de listening prefiero que los audios sean de (puedes escoger más de una opción):

14 responses

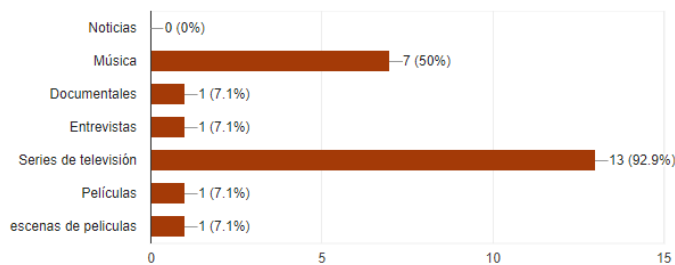


Figure 4

¿Sientes que este tipo de actividades te motivan a aprender inglés?

14 responses

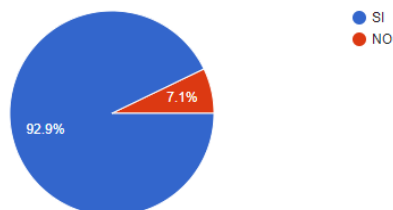


Figure 5

On the other hand, the strategies dealing with reading and writing offered very different results for each of the target students. Student A showed an important increase in terms of attention and motivation as well as her reading and speaking performance. However, she continues to show difficulty in her writing performance. Meanwhile, although student B also increased her attention and showed great interest in written activities as well as in drawing, she showed difficulty expressing the content of the story not due to a lack of understanding but to a lack of motivation, since she also expressed she did not like to read. In other words, she was

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probably motivated by the opportunity of drawing, and writing but not by the reading itself (appendix 1).

Mena, Nicolau, Salat, Tort, & Romero, (2006) state that a good way to motivate reading is to give students appealing options of answering such as drawing, multiple choice questions, title creation among others. This strategy was appropriate for students A and B because they showed interest and self-confidence in their reading comprehension (Journal entry 9 and 14 April 9<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>); however, it did not have an effect on student C, whose drawing, presentation and comic were very poor due to his lack of interest in the story. (appendix 2). This student's reluctance to participate in writing activities, as opposed to his willingness and excitement to participate in spoken activities leads to understand that student C only feels motivated by the activities that involve speaking and not the ones that involve writing.

The different results for each student, and how they assume the work proposed for each language skill shows they have different abilities and strengths that they take advantage of in order to clarify their ideas, express their understanding and improve their expectations of succeeding in every activity.

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## **Conclusions and Suggestions**

In conclusion, the strategies that improve the language learning experience of students with deficit and lack of attention in the English class, are those that boost their motivation and confidence through the exploration and use of contents and activities that are related to their interests and contexts and not only to the academic environment, as well as those that offer them the possibility to participate and make mistakes without having consequences in their academic performance. Moreover, integrating language skills becomes a necessity at the time of working with this kind of students because it gives each of them the possibility to succeed and to raise their expectations in the language class since they can take advantage of their language strengths to participate in different activities.

Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that the results and the students' reaction will not be the same for each strategy. In fact, their personal interests and language strengths play a very important role in their reaction and attitude towards the activities proposed.

Therefore, I suggest for future research of this kind, to have a survey or diagnosis about students learning styles, personal interests and language strengths before planning the activities, so that when they are presented to the students, we can have a greater possibility of getting a positive reaction from them as well as an improvement in their performance. As for the school, I suggest to continue making a great effort in finding strategies that will improve the language learning experience of students with deficit and lack of attention, not only in English class, but in all the other subjects since this project is evidence that although it demands more time from the teacher, the changes in the students' attitudes and performance are worth it.

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## **Reflection**

In the few years I have been teaching English, I have always found it frustrating when I see my students looking at somewhere else while I try to explain something, falling asleep, or distracted with any object or classmate that is at their reach. Only when I started working at Gimnasio Cantabria School, I realized it was not always a problem of students' attitude, or me teaching the most boring classes. Here, I realized it was a real difficulty which was not always in the students' hands to control. Ever since this moment, I had wondered what could be done in order to help students with attention difficulties to have a better leaning experience, to enjoy the English class, to feel included and motivated, and to improve their performance.

This practicum year and the possibility of applying this action-research project gave me the opportunity to answer that question and obtain more tools at the moment of working with this type of students. It also gave me the opportunity to go deeper in my reflection as a language teacher, so that when I encounter a difficulty in my classroom, I will be able to create a plan that will allow me to improve the situation. Therefore, I consider this experience as a very important step towards becoming a language teacher and to keep looking for ways to improve my teaching practices in the benefit of my students.



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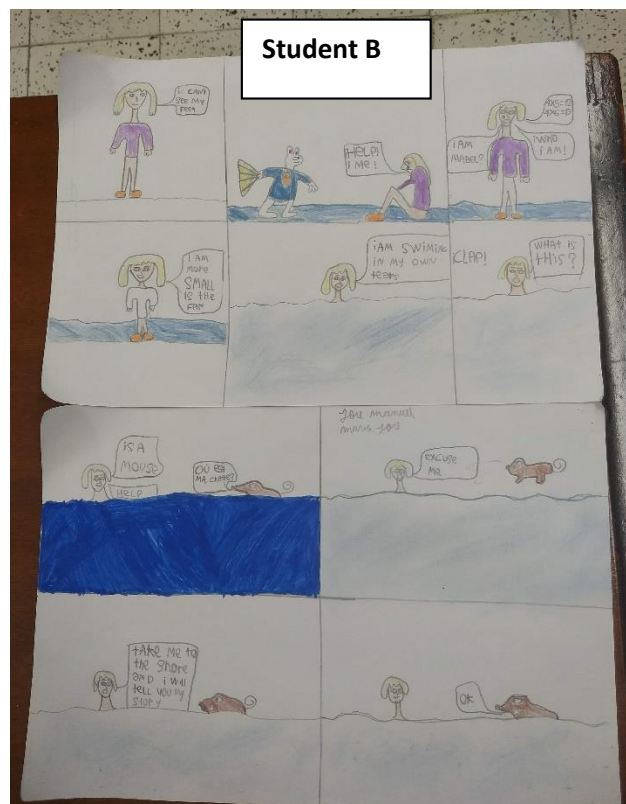
# STRATEGIES THAT IMPROVE THE LANGUAGE LEARNING EXPERIENCE OF SEVENTH GRADERS WITH DEFICIT AND LACK OF ATTENTION IN THE ENGLISH CLASS.

## Appendixes

### Appendix 1



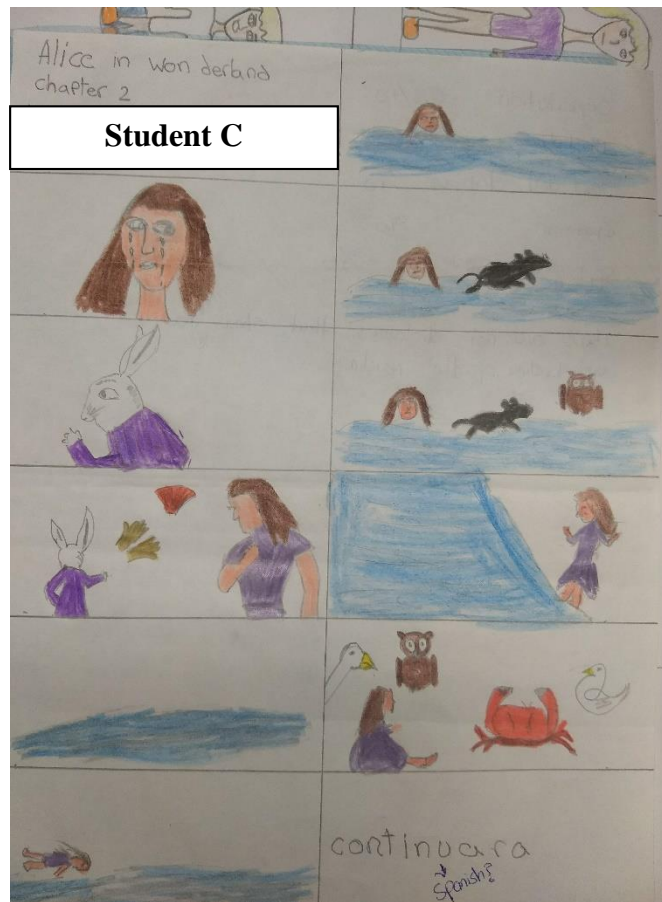
Student A



Student B

# STRATEGIES THAT IMPROVE THE LANGUAGE LEARNING EXPERIENCE OF SEVENTH GRADERS WITH DEFICIT AND LACK OF ATTENTION IN THE ENGLISH CLASS.

## Appendix 2



### Transcription from audio recording

**Teacher:** what did you like about the story?

**Student C:** I didn't like the story because I... well only some parts.

**Teacher:** What do you like about your drawing?

**Student C:** I liked... hmm, nothing, nothing because I did that drawing in a fast form, so I don't like it.