



**UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE
LOJA**

La Universidad Católica de Loja

ÁREA SOCIO HUMANÍSTICA

**TITULACIÓN DE CIENCIAS DE LA EDUCACIÓN MENCIÓN
INGLÉS**

The difficulties children face when learning English as a foreign
language at a semi-private high school in the city of Loja.

TRABAJO DE FIN DE TITULACIÓN.

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Loja - Ecuador

2015

APROBACIÓN DE LA DIRECTORA DEL TRABAJO DE FIN DE TITULACIÓN

Magister.

Cabrera Solano Paola Alexandra

DOCENTE DE LA TITULACIÓN

De mi consideración:

El presente trabajo de fin de titulación: The difficulties children face when learning English as a foreign language at private high school in the city of Loja, realizado por Jiménez Balcázar José Geovanny ha sido orientado y revisado durante su ejecución, por cuanto se aprueba la presentación del mismo.

Loja, febrero de 2015

f:.....

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DECLARACIÓN DE AUTORÍA Y CESIÓN DE DERECHOS

“ Yo, Jiménez Balcázar José Geovanny, declaro ser autor del presente trabajo de fin de titulación: The difficulties children face when learning English as a foreign language at a private high school in the city of Loja, de la Titulación Ciencias de la Educación Mención Inglés, siendo Paola Cabrera Solano directora del presente trabajo; y eximo expresamente a la Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja y a sus representantes legales de posibles reclamos o acciones legales. Además certifico que las ideas, conceptos, procedimientos y resultados vertidos en el presente trabajo investigativo, son de mi exclusiva responsabilidad.

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DEDICATION

This research work is dedicated to Rosa, my mother, who has been my support and example. She has encouraged me to continue learning and has taught me that everything is possible when we are sure of what we want in life even through difficulties. I would also want to thank my father who from heaven will be proud of my accomplishments.

In addition, I dedicate this thesis to my brother and sisters who have been a clear example of overcoming. They have been the better guides in my educational process.

With all my love and from the heart, Thanks for being part of my life you all.

Geovanny

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the help of many people who were involved on it. First, I would like to thank Mg. Paola Cabrera, director of this research for her patience and generous dedication.

Second, this acknowledgement is for “Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja”, an important institution which offered me the opportunity to be a professional. Furthermore, I would like to thank to my teachers and classmates who have always been part of my education every day and in the right moment.

Finally, I would like to thank to the authorities, teachers and students from a private high school who gave me the opportunity to conduct this important research when they were observed and surveyed. Without their help, this research would not be possible.

Geovanny

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ABSTRACT

This research was conducted to identify the difficulties children face when learning English as a foreign language at a private high school in the city of Loja. The sample analyzed consisted of 257 students from the first to seventh year of Basic Education who were divided into two groups. The factors investigated were classified into internal, external and institutional which were identified, analyzed and contrasted.

The research combines both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative method was used to determine the most frequent factors that can affect the students' acquisition of the target language. The qualitative method was used to analyze the factors identified before and during the class observations. In addition, surveys were given to the students in order to obtain specific information about the aspects that make English as a foreign language learning difficult.

This research concluded that there are some difficulties that influence the acquisition of the target language such as: motivation, learning habits, memorization, materials, activities, class size and time. For that reason, teachers and authorities should consider these aspects to improve the way they teach.

Key words: children, learning, difficulties, EFL students, motivation, environment, activities and materials, learning habits.

RESUMEN

La presente investigación se llevó a cabo con la intención de identificar las dificultades que enfrentan los niños cuando aprenden Inglés como lengua extranjera, en un colegio privado de la ciudad de Loja. La muestra analizada fue de 257 estudiantes de primero a séptimo año de educación básica y se dividió en dos grupos. Los factores investigados fueron clasificados en internos, externos e institucionales los mismos que fueron identificados, analizados y contrastados.

La investigación combina los métodos cuantitativo y cualitativo. El método cuantitativo se utilizó para determinar los factores más frecuentes que pueden afectar la adquisición del lenguaje objetivo de los estudiantes. El método cualitativo se utilizó para analizar los factores identificados antes y durante las observaciones de clase. Además, las encuestas fueron contestadas por los estudiantes con el fin de obtener información específica sobre los aspectos que dificultan a los alumnos aprender Inglés como lengua extranjera.

Esta investigación concluyó que existen algunas dificultades que influyen en la adquisición de la lengua objeto de estudio, tales como: motivación, hábitos de aprendizaje, memorización, materiales, actividades, tamaño de la clase y el tiempo. Por esa razón, profesores y autoridades deben tener en cuenta estos aspectos para mejorar la adquisición de la lengua extranjera de los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: niños, aprendizaje, dificultades, estudiantes de EFL, la motivación, el entorno, actividades y materiales, los hábitos de aprendizaje.

INTRODUCTION

Learning English as a foreign language is a challenging activity for students from basic and middle education in public educational institutions, especially when the target language is not used as a main way of communication. There are some aspects that can influence the students' acquisition of the target language negatively, which can be considered fundamental when learning any subject but especially when learning a foreign language occurs under difficult conditions. Students have to deal with some aspects that they can manage and also with external aspects that cannot be controlled. The interaction of different factors can provide positive or negative conditions in which students interact during the learning process.

In order to understand the factors that affect the students learning process, a private high school in the city of Loja was selected. This study attempts to examine the internal, external and institutional factors that lead to children's difficulties in acquiring a foreign language, it also aims to analyze how different factors affect children in learning English as a foreign language so as to provide alternative solutions to solve problems focused on the difficulties children face when learning English as a foreign language.

Likewise, there are no specific studies conducted in Ecuador about the factors that directly influence the students' learning process. However, there are studies such as the "Factors that affect the English language teaching-learning process in Ecuadorian public high schools" conducted by Portero (2013) who affirms that student's basic level of knowledge, use few teaching resources and a high percentage of Spanish use in class, the overcrowded classrooms and inappropriate physical conditions negatively affected students' progress. In the same field of education, other research studies have been conducted in order to identify factors that affect students learning acquisition as a second language. Kannan (2009, p. 2) conducted a study about difficulties in learning English as a second language, which showed that in schools, students are being taught that English is an international language which requires constant practice and patience and it is not possible to achieve fluency or mastery in the English language if it is not practiced. In addition, Kannan claims that "students learn basic grammar at school level for the sole purpose of passing tests or examinations and not to face any real life situations".

In addition, other studies related with this research work have been conducted. Banks (2008) in her study named "Foreign Language Difficulties and Teaching Strategies" determines that there are some aspects that make the students learning process difficult. The reasons why students experience difficulties in foreign language classes are:

Students may be unable to identify their learning styles and/or self-determine what strategies to employ in order to be successful, students who perceive themselves as less capable, possessing fewer skills, and having a negative attitude may produce low output as a result of giving up. Furthermore, the researcher asserts that students may have low motivation due to past failures if they don't see the connection between their lives and class lessons. High anxiety about the class may cause students to raise an affective filter, which blocks FL input, and impairs memory, organization, and spontaneous oral production. Finally, students may have inabilities to convert input into intake, because they are unclear about class norms, procedures, grading, or other expectations (Banks, 2008, p. 62).

Some of the identified factors that make the students' acquisition of the foreign language difficult, found in the research conducted by Banks (2008), contrast with the aspects part of the present research.

A similar study conducted by Al-khatib; Malak; Sleiman; and Zadorian. (2013, p.22) establishes that "students need to understand the essence of what is being said or presented to them and the input presented in the syllabus should be appropriate to the learner's stage of linguistic competence". In addition, they mention that other fundamental factors affect students' acquisition of the target language such as interaction or fluency in class participation, environment, limited vocabulary, and conditions for acquisition of the language. These previous studies contrast with the current research which identifies the most important factors that can make the students' acquisition of the target language difficult in a different stance.

This investigation will benefit the Ecuadorian educational community, because it will show the factors that affect students' learning acquisition of a foreign language and how parents, teachers and authorities can overcome those difficulties. This research

will also set off the interest for subsequent researchers to delve deeper into the present topic, which will help to identify other factors that children face when learning English as a foreign language, both in basic and middle education in public institutions.

In contrast, although the topic is interesting and seems to be easy to investigate, some limitations were present in the process such as students with limited knowledge of the target language (children). For this reason, the researcher designed the surveys considering students' mother tongue and divided the target sample into two groups considering age and knowledge of the language. Another limitation found was the limited amount of previous research on the topic, which made it difficult to collect bibliographical material related to the topic investigated. Moreover, the information gathered from the surveys was different to the results obtained during the observation process, which provided genuine information.

Finally, based on the results, this research study allowed the investigator to draw conclusions and provide specific recommendations to the authorities and teachers who are part of the teaching-learning process in which students are involved. These recommendations will help students to overcome the difficulties that they have to face when learning English as a foreign language. Additionally, this research will set a precedent for future researchers who are interested in continuing investigating this topic.

METHOD

Setting and participants

The current investigation about “The difficulties children face when learning English as a foreign language at a semi-private high school in the city of Loja, was held in a semi-private high school. The participants were two hundred fifty-seven students from twenty-two classes, from the first to seventh year of General Basic Education. There were boys and girls from five to twelve years old who were chosen randomly in order to answer a survey. Additionally, two teachers were interviewed and seven English classes were observed in order to gather important information.

Procedures

In order to start developing this research study, bibliographical sources were reviewed and analyzed related to the difficulties children face when learning English as a foreign language. The main difficulties were divided into internal, external, and institutional factors. To do that, it was necessary to obtain information from several sources such as journals, e-books, books, and didactic material provided by the University.

After that, the qualitative and quantitative methods were chosen in order to analyze, describe and interpret the information gathered from surveys and observations, and to design the instruments used for this study which were surveys, observation sheets, interviews and note-taking. To collect data, it was necessary to ask for permission from the authorities and teachers where the investigation took place. Then, two questionnaires were administered to students from the first to fourth and fifth to seventh year of General Basic Education, and interviews were conducted to the English teachers. To contrast the information gathered from surveys, observations from seven different grades were conducted to give the researcher a clearer idea about the factors that affect the children’s learning process.

When data was collected, charts and graphs were designed based on the answers provided by the students. The graphs were analyzed and compared with the information compiled when observing each class. Finally, the results showed the

internal, external and institutional factors that affect students when learning English as a foreign language.

DISCUSSION

Literature Review

English as a foreign language

According to the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (2011), the practice of teaching and learning English language by non-native speakers in different countries where English is not the first medium of communication is known as English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In other words, English as a Foreign Language involves teaching English to students whose first language is not English. According to Nordqist (2013) “EFL is usually learned in environments where the main language of the community and the school is not English. EFL teachers have the difficult task of finding access to and providing English models for their students”. Considering this definition, in most South American countries we can observe this reality in which the students’ mother tongue is Spanish although some are multicultural countries. In Ecuador, the reality is not different, the students (children and adults) can be at varying levels of ability and the techniques and strategies of teaching English have to be focused on the fact that English is not the mother tongue of the country.

In Ecuador, teaching English as a foreign language is considered in the curriculum of the public and private educational institutions, but this policy does not apply to the students of elementary schools from the first to seventh grade where officials define it as mandatory for students from eighth to tenth year of general basic education (Ecuadorian Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013).

The Ecuadorian Ministry of Education (2013, p. 3) states that “current education has the challenge of contributing toward the development of students’ skills such as: to live together in their local communities and to take a more proactive role as world citizens”. Based on this, it recognizes that the main objective of the actual English curriculum design based on EFL “is

To help students develop their communicative language skills by considering the following principles:

- Language is a system for the expression and conveyance of meaning.
- The primary function of language is interaction and communication.
- The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses. (Ecuadorian Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 3).

Language learning in early childhood

According to Lightbown and Spada (2011, p. 1) “language acquisition is one of the most impressive and fascinating aspects of human development”. It is amazing how children learn the language during each stage of their childhood and of course, they accomplish it. As a result, many linguists and psychologists are interested in studying how children learn a language. In addition, it is important to discover the cause that pushes children to go on developing complex grammatical languages, and the most important is to discover how children can learn more than one language.

Regarding the first language acquisition during the first three years of a child’s life, Lightbown and Spada (2011) explain that some researchers have described developmental sequences for many aspects of language acquisition. Indeed, it starts with early vocalizations that are simply the involuntary crying that babies do when they are hungry or uncomfortable. During the first year, they are able to understand some repeated words. Then, in the second year children can produce at least fifteen words and some of them can produce more. Finally, children can combine those words to make simple sentences but leaving out some articles, prepositions, and auxiliary verbs.

Context for language learning

There is a big difference between a second language and a first language learner due to the characteristics that they own and the environment in which they learn the language. As an example, we can imagine how the characteristics and learning conditions differ between them: a child learning a first language at home, a child learning a second language at school, an adolescent taking a foreign language class in his country, and an immigrant with no opportunities to go to a language class but living in a second language environment. The four conditions in which the students learn are different and the researcher has to think deeply about these aspects: the amount of

time, the learning environment, the metalinguistic awareness, knowledge of the world, psychological conditions, etc.

Learner characteristics

Different characteristics can effectively or appropriately influence the methods used in language learning acquisition. In addition, those characteristics can affect their success in learning a foreign language. Researchers of the Center for advanced research for language acquisition (CARLA) of the University of Minnesota (2013) consider that factors that may or may not make a difference include: learner's aims and purposes in learning the language, exposure to the language, age, motivation, personality, language aptitude, learning styles and strategies. On the other hand, Lightbown and Spada (2011) mention that the learner characteristics include: another language, cognitive maturity, metalinguistic awareness, world knowledge, anxiety about speaking.

In summary, learners may want to learn the language to communicate with others in different situations; depending on the necessities they might have. It could depend on the exposure of the learner to the language (formal or informal). Moreover, the age of the learner is an important factor. As Dunn (2013, p.) mentions, "young children are natural language acquirers; they are self-motivated to pick up language without conscious learning, unlike adolescents and adults. They have the ability to imitate pronunciation and work out the rules for themselves". Moreover, it is evident that our ability to learn a second language gradually declines as we get older. Additionally, we have to consider the attitude that the learner shows when learning a foreign language, since she/he need to be motivated and predisposed to learn the target language.

Learning conditions

Lightbown and Spada (2011, p. 32) mention that "younger learners in an informal second language-learning environment are usually allowed to be silent until they are ready to speak". In addition, they mention that "some learners may also have certain opportunities to practice their target language 'voice' in different activities such as songs and games". These activities allow learners to blend their voices with those of

other children. On the other hand, older learners are often forced to speak. In this case, they have to meet the requirements of a classroom and they have to work on multiple tasks such as shopping, medical visits and job interviews.

Furthermore, Lightbown and Spada (2011, p. 32) explain that “young children in informal settings are usually exposed to the second language for many hours every day. Older learners, especially students in language classrooms, are more likely to receive only limited exposure to the second language”. Students that learn the language in a classroom tend to spend less time in contact with the language, and of course are exposed to a far smaller range of discourse types. In this instance, the learning conditions are different between children in informal settings and students learning the language in the classroom. The students that learn the language in the classroom are usually taught language that is somewhat formal in comparison to the language used in most social settings. In addition, they affirm that “in many foreign language classes, teachers switch to their students’ first language for discipline or classroom management, thus depriving learners opportunities to experience uses of the language in real communication” (p. 32). In other words, foreign language learners are facing a different learning condition in which they are not able to use the target language in all situations. They are not deeply involved with the language because teachers use their mother tongue in some activities within the classroom.

On the other hand, Litherland (2013) considers that it is important to remember that learning takes place constantly and that different students will learn in different ways depending on what works best for them. Under these conditions, he considers four basic learning conditions for children such as: feedback, social interaction, positive environment and personal motivation. Without feedback students have nothing to judge. Moreover, learning comes through social interaction between students and teachers in different situations. It will be effective if this interaction takes place in a good and relaxed environment. Eventually, students will focus on learning the content and will absorb knowledge. Finally, Litherland (2013, p. 1) mentions that “people enjoy learning when they're motivated or interested in a subject matter. If students are greatly interested in painting for instance, it will be much easier for them to absorb and ingest learning about how to paint...”.

Current psychological theories in language learning

Lightbown and Spada (2011) explain that there are some current psychological theories that explain how students acquire the language such as: the cognitivist/developmental perspective in which the information processing model plays an important role. Within this theory, we can also find the connectionism perspective that is closely related to the competition model. Ellis (2002, p 88) affirms that “learners gradually build up their knowledge of language through exposure to the language”. On the other hand, the same author states that the sociocultural perspective views speaking and thinking as tightly interwoven.

The cognitivist/developmental perspective

Lightbown and Spada (2011) mention that during the 1990's, many psychologists were very interested in the idea of researching second language development using the computer as a metaphor for the mind. In this way, those psychologists sustain that there is no need to assume that humans have a language-specific module in the brain or maybe ‘acquisition’ and ‘learning’ are distinct mental processes as happens in first language acquisition.

The cognitive perspective on social interaction begins with the assumption that humans are intelligent creatures. We do not behave merely by reflex, taxis, instinct, and conditioned response. Rather, our behavior is a response to the meaning of the stimulus, and reflects active cognitive processes of perceiving, learning, remembering, thinking, and communicating through language. But humans are also social creatures (Kihlstrom, 2010, p. 1)

On the other hand, Tompkins and Lawley (2013, p. 1) claim that “a developmental perspective is certainly not a requirement for the successful application of Symbolic Modelling”. In this perspective, the subjects base their model of the information acquired during the few short hours they spend with a client because it is more a way of thinking than a way of doing.

a) *Information processing*

According to Lightbown and Spada (2011, p. 40) the information processing theory is “a cognitive approach that helps us to understand how the human mind transforms specific sensory information”. In other words, this model takes for granted that information which comes from the environment is subject to mental processes beyond a simple stimulus-response pattern. Input from the environment goes through the cognitive systems which are then measured by the output.

According to some cognitive psychologists that were working on an information processing model, second language acquisition is seen as the building up of language that can be called on automatically for speaking and understanding. Lightbown and Spada (2011, p. 39) mention that “learners have to pay attention at first to any aspect of the language that they are trying to understand or produce”. When we talk about “paying attention”, it means to use cognitive resources to process the information. It is important to mention that learners at first do not pay attention to the grammatical morphemes attached to some words. Of course, learners use more of their resources to understand the main words in a message.

In addition, the information processing model suggests that there is a limit to the amount of focused mental activity we can engage in at any one time. Gatbonton and Segalowitz (2005, p. 473) declare that “knowledge that is acquired mainly in rule learning and drill activities may be easier to access on tests that resemble the learning activities than in communicative situations”. Finally, Lightbown and Spada (2011, p. 39) mention that some researchers such as Drawing, Dekeyser and others have investigated second language acquisition as a learning skill. To them, “most learning, including language learning, starts with declarative knowledge, also referred to as Knowledge ‘that’”. In this case, through practice, declarative knowledge may change into procedural knowledge (how), similar to those learners of other skills such as driving a car or skiing.

b) *Connectionism.*

Elman (2013) defines certain characteristics of connectionism that are similar in multiple definitions in which:

Processing is carried out by a (usually large) number of (usually very simple) processing elements. These elements, called nodes or units, have a dynamic that is roughly analogous to simple neurons. Each node receives input (which may be excitatory or inhibitory) from some number of other nodes, responds to that input according to a simple activation function, and in turn excites or inhibits other nodes to which it is connected. Details vary across models, but most adhere to this general scheme (Elman, 2013, p. 3-4)

Contrary, Lightbown and Spada (2011, p.41) talk about connections instead of processing. They argue that “learners gradually build up their knowledge of language through exposure to the thousands of instances of the linguistic features they eventually hear”. They mention that after gradually hearing language features in different situations, learners develop a very strong network of connections between those elements (specific situational and linguistic context).

c) *The competition model*

Lightbown and Spada (2011, p. 42) affirm that the “competition model language acquisition occurs without the necessity of a learner’s focused attention or the need of any innate brain module that is especially for language”. In concordance, Bates and MacWhinney (1981, p. 197) define the competition model as “an explanation for language acquisition that takes into account, not only, language form but also language meaning and language use”.

It is necessary to mention that the competition model was first formulated as an approach to crosslinguistic developmental research; however, Swartz and Yasdani (1992, p. 1) mention that “the basic idea underlying the competition model is simple and rather traditional. The model takes as its starting point the Saussurean vision of the linguistic sign as a set of mappings between cues and functions”. This means that during the process of comprehension it is possible to detect the cues that are external, phonological and of course, the word order patterns. On the other hand, as Swartz and Yasdani (1992, p. 1) explain, “functions are underlying communicative intentions of meaning”. In addition, they mention that “the interaction of cues such as preverbal positioning, animacy, case-marking and subject-verb agreement have been modeled

mathematically in the Competition Model using minimum likelihood techniques". Finally, children notice those relationships between words in a sentence that follow an order and we can identify them as cues.

d) *Second language applications: Interacting, noticing, and processing.*

Different hypotheses, theories, and models have emerged in order to explain second language acquisition on the basis of the cognitivist/developmental perspective. Such hypotheses, theories, and models are the interaction hypothesis, the noticing hypothesis, the input processing and finally the processability theory.

First, the noticing hypothesis as Schmidt (2001, p. 3-32) suggests is that "nothing is learned unless it has been noticed. Noticing does not itself result in acquisition, but it is an essential starting point". In this point, learners could not start to acquire a language feature if they are aware of it in the input process. Additionally, Lightbown and Spada (2011) mention that Gass described a learning process that begins when learners notice something they hear or see in the second language that is different from what they had expected or that fills a gap in the knowledge of the language that the student is acquiring.

Second, in the input hypothesis, learners need to be mindful about the real function of the elements of a statement instead of the word order alone because it could become a serious problem when they try to translate their mother tongue into the target language. This happens because learners of the target language have limited processing capacity and, of course, they are not able to pay attention to both form and meaning at the same time.

Finally, referring to focusing on the processability theory, Keßler (2008, p. 9) explains that "the incorporation of the language processor in the study of second language acquisition therefore brings to bear a set of human psychological constraints that are crucial for the processing of languages". In addition, Keßler asserts that the notion 'developmental trajectory' implies the staged development which is a developmental dimension aside from a variational dimension considering individual differences among developmental trajectories. In concordance with this, Pienemann argues that

Learners do not simply transfer features from their first language at early stages of acquisition. Instead, they have to develop certain levels of processing capacity in the second language before they can use their knowledge of the features that already exist in their first language (Pienemann, 1998, p. 13)

These results were part of a study carried out by Pienemann with learners of different languages within a variety of settings (instructional and informal) in order to develop his processability theory.

The sociocultural perspective

Lightbown and Spada (2011, p. 47) state that the “sociocultural theory views speaking and thinking as tightly interwoven”. According to these authors, speaking mediates thinking, in other words, people have to internalize what others say to them and vice versa. Through this process people can gain control over their mental process. Furthermore, when an individual interacts with an interlocutor within his/her zone of proximal development, then the learning process occurs. Finally, it is necessary to mention that the sociocultural theory maintains the idea that people gain control of, and recognize their cognitive process during mediation as knowledge is internalized during social activity.

Second language application: Learning by talking

Some people have been interested in discovering how second language learners acquire the language when they collaborate and, of course, interact with other speakers. Lantolf (2000) and Donato (2005) think that this collaboration and interaction includes novice/novice or learner/learner interlocutors rather than expert and novice as zone of proximal development considers. According to Swain (2000, p. 97) “a more recent work on output hypothesis has been motivated by sociocultural theory”. Through the use of the term ‘collaborative dialogue’ many authors, including Swain, have carried out a series of studies to determine how second language learners co-construct linguistic knowledge while engaging in production tasks (speaking and writing) that simultaneously draw their attention to form and meaning. Finally, it is important to mention that interaction is really important in second language acquisition because the

cognitive process begins as an external socially mediated activity that then it becomes internalized.

Language learner

According to Naiman, Fröhlich, Stern and Tadesco (1996, p. 8) “most language teachers and indeed language learners are no doubt aware that a student’s personal characteristics have a bearing on how and what he/she learns”. Certain variables need to be considered when talking about learner language. As an example, the students’ sex, educational background and previous language learning experience are all important factors that can benefit or affect learner language. Talking about a more cognitive characteristic, it is necessary to mention the aptitude of the learner. Moreover, factors like attitude and motivation need to be touched on.

On the other hand, a research conducted by CARLA Center of advanced Research on Language Acquisition (2013) affirms that “learners’ language is produced by a built-in syllabus, which differs from the syllabus the teacher uses”. Additionally, to acquire communicative competence in a language they declare that students must master four components of that language: First, “the grammatical competence which consists on sentence-level grammar with a level of accuracy and complexity”. Then, discourse competence which involves text, or groups of sentences with coherence”. Next, sociolinguistic competence implies politeness, pragmatics and social register with appropriateness. Finally, strategic competence which entails getting messages across considering the effectiveness. Finally, Lu asserts that:

In California, for example, English-language learners spend part of the day focused on learning English. The rest of the day, teachers help them learn the same material as native English speakers, with some modifications. For example, they might be divided into smaller groups with other limited English speakers, or receive a preview or review of the lesson in their native tongue (Lu, 2013, p. 1).

Under these conditions it is necessary to define certain concepts that will help us to identify and recognize some characteristics of the learners such as the learning process, learning styles and the learning methods.

Learning process

According to Iqbal, Iqbal and Majeed (2007, p. 14) learning means “to acquire knowledge or skill”. In addition, they claim that “learning also may involve a change in learners’ attitude or behavior”. Following these concepts, children first learn to identify objects at an early age; then, teenagers may learn to improve their study habits; and adults can learn to solve complex problems. This is a process that implies a level of complexity as the time goes by.

According to Hill (2011, p. 1) “learning takes time and patience. It is a process — a journey. A self-directed learning process is arguably the most powerful model for facilitating and inspiring individual, group and organizational learning and development”. Moreover, Gilman (1997) affirms that learning is more than a multitude of processes, it is far more complex. As if this weren’t enough, we each bring an individual pattern of skills and propensities to the learning process”. In addition, Gilman mentions that there do seem to be some general patterns and principles that apply to the learning process. These steps could be motivation, immersion, integration, use and refinement.

Gilman (2007) declares that motivation involves each level in the brain to have its own goals and motivation. As a consequence, each level can support or inhibit students’ ability to learn depending on its motivational state. Thus, immersion will offer students or learners far more information than they can immediately internalize, in this case students won’t be overwhelmed as long as they are free to pick what to attend to. In the next step, Gilman (2007) mentions that immersion becomes less exciting and more tiring. Obviously, a certain amount of integration has been going on all along, but for major new learning, a time usually comes when the emphasis shifts. After that, for self-motivated learners, using the new knowledge or skills comes spontaneously in so long as some initial level of integration is achieved.

Finally, he refers to refinement as “the use that leads to feedback. In this case, more information needs to be integrated and put to use again”. (p. 2) This means that the cycle goes around and will do so as long as the motivation continues to the longest stage.

Learning styles

According to Felder (2002, p. 674) “students learn in many ways— by seeing and hearing; reflecting and acting; reasoning logically and intuitively; memorizing and visualizing; and drawing analogies and building mathematical models; steadily and in fits and starts”. Similarly, Cassidy (2010, p. 420) claims that “there is a general acceptance that the manner in which individuals choose to, or are inclined to, approach a learning situation has an impact on performance and achievement of learning outcomes”. For this reason, students learn different subjects, including English, in different ways. Moreover, Lefever (2004, p. 1) affirms that “when teachers understand students’ learning styles and adjust their teaching to those styles, students will learn”. In addition, she mentions four learning styles that were identified by Bernice McCarthy which are imaginative, analytic, common sense and dynamic, but none of these styles will fit a student perfectly.

Lefever (2004) states that imaginative learners learn best in settings that allow interpersonal relationships to develop. In this case, learners acquire the knowledge by listening and sharing ideas. On the other hand, “analytical learners learn by watching and listening”. They expect teachers to give them the information they need to learn. Under these conditions, learners carefully assess the value of the information presented by the teacher. Then, common sense learners enjoy playing with ideas in order to see if they are rational and workable. In this case, Kihlstrom (2013) says that learners are more experimental because they like to test theory in the real world in order to apply what they have learned before. Finally, Cook (n/d, p. 21) claims that “dynamic learners enjoy action as part of the learning process”. They do not like to think about projects until their rational conclusion. Dynamic learners excel in following hunches and sensing new directions and possibilities.

Contrary, other authors such as Lepi (2012) mention seven different learning styles: visual (spatial), aural (auditory-musical), verbal (linguistic), physical (kinesthetic), logical (mathematical), social (interpersonal) and solitary (intrapersonal).

Beyond listing the different learning styles presented by Lepi (2012) it is necessary to define each one of them. In this case, she affirms that the visual style learner prefers using pictures, images and spatial understanding. Then, the aural style

students prefer using sound and music. Next, the verbal style learners prefer using words, both in speech and writing. Additionally, the physical style implies using a learner's body, hands and sense of touch. In the next place, logical style considers using logic, reasoning and systems. Not last, social style students prefer to learn in groups or with other people. And finally, solitary learners have a preference of working alone and using self-study.

As a conclusion, learning styles are simply different ways of learning or approaches that help students learn better. Knowing students' learning styles will help them develop some strategies in order to make up for learners' weaknesses and profit on their strengths.

Learning methods

Hanson (2013) states that academic staff need to support students so as to achieve their goals by developing approaches to teaching that influence, motivate and inspire students to learn. With this support students will feel confident when they learn a foreign language which is sometimes difficult to learn. In order to describe the different learning methods that are helpful in students' learning, it is suitable to define some of them. Kharbach (2012) mentions seven learning methods that will be described as follows: inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, discovery learning, cooperative learning, authentic learning, project based learning and situated learning.

Kharbach (2012) states that inquiry-based learning is a process based on inquiry or simply asking questions. This process encourages students to continue asking deeper questions in order to find those answers that are a word that learners want to discover and explore. Moreover, inquiry-based learning is not just asking questions, but it is a way of converting data and information into useful knowledge. Then, he affirms that "the problem-based learning students are engaged in complex, challenging problems and work collaboratively toward their resolution". In this model, students need to connect the disciplinary knowledge previously acquired in order to solve real-world problems. Next, Kharbach (2012) states that discovery learning is a method based on the student finding things out for themselves, looking into problems

and asking questions. Students need to get their own conclusions about the elements that might not make sense. Through this process students will learn new things.

Another learning method mentioned by Kharbach (2012) is cooperative learning. This method involves students working in teams with the purpose of accomplishing a common goal. Students need not only to work in group, but they need to cooperate using different skills appropriately. Moreover, he stresses that the authentic learning method focuses on real-world, complex problems. In order to solve those problems, students will make use of different techniques such as role-play exercises, problem-based activities, case studies and participation in virtual communities of practice. Those techniques will help students to get the solution; in this case, they will be directly involved in the solution of the problem, acting and interacting, working alone or in groups, inferring and concluding on the elements previously gathered.

Then, the same author declares that “project-based learning is simply an instructional approach that was built upon authentic learning activities. With this method teachers will engage student interest and motivate them”. The main idea of designing these kind of projects is to answer some questions, solve problems, work in groups and connect previous knowledge with the everyday world (outside the classroom). Finally, he ensures that situated learning is associated with social learning in which students need to understand how learning relates to daily practices and social interactions. Students will work outside and will interact with others using knowledge and skills.

Difficulties Spanish speakers face when learning English as a foreign language

Native Spanish speakers learning English face some difficulties that tend to be complex for children, teens and adults whom want to learn English as a foreign language in institutions where the target language is only listened, spoken, written and read in classes. Students deal with specific difficulties related to pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, spelling and punctuation, word order and other aspects related to syntax. Additionally, Farmen (n/d, p. 1) states that “Spanish speakers learning English frequently have problems with pronunciation because of the differences between the two languages' sound systems”. Those differences are evident because

English has 12 vowels and eight diphthongs, while Spanish has only five of each. Additionally, the existence of many false cognates might confuse English learners. The words sound similar to Spanish words, but the meaning is different confusing learners when using those false cognates.

In addition, Farmen (n/d, p. 2) states that “English grammar is particularly confusing to Spanish speakers because Spanish has more verb endings than English and a complete sentence in Spanish does not always need a subject”. In the same way, Maxwell (1979, p. 1) affirms that “Spanish speakers often have problems distinguishing between the uses of simple past (“he worked”) and present perfect (“he has worked”) because the rules they use are different in Spanish”.

Another aspect that needs to be mentioned is word order. Erichsen (2013) claims that it is sometimes flexible in Spanish, but in English word order is different. Students try to translate direct and indirect sentences and questions literally. In this case English relies heavily on word order with the purpose of indicating grammatical relations. In this case the difficulties are challenging to learners that are accustomed to speak a different language.

Moreover, in a study focused on the English learning difficulties that go beyond the grammar rules, the syntax, the dialectic, etc., Kannan (2009, p. 2) affirms that “students learn basic grammar at school level for the sole purpose of passing tests and examinations and not to face any real life situations”. In this case, there are some factors that play an important role when students learn English as a foreign language. To put it simply, factors such as exposure, motivation, behavior, habits environment, materials, etc., become significant barriers that students have to deal with.

As an example, Kannan (2009, p. 3) states that “sitting and listening to a language class is somewhat an uphill task, while others listen to the class with rapt attention”. Additionally, when talking about exposure, students need to use English not only in class, but also in other situations such as at home, with friends, etc. Furthermore, Kannan mentions some problems which language teachers face. Teachers have to manage all students in a classroom (big classes are common in South America). The most challenging is when a student creates problems and the

teacher cannot punish him/her at that moment because it is an embarrassing situation for the student in front of others. As a conclusion, Kannan mentions that:

In schools students are being taught that English is an international language; to learn this language requires constant practice and patience. The kind of feeling that prevails among students is that it is not possible to achieve fluency or mastery over the English language. This kind of tendency prevents students from learning new languages such as English (Kannan, 2009, p. 2)

Teachers must change this point of view and make learning a foreign language an attractive task that motivates students to learn.

The factors that make the acquisition of a foreign language difficult

There are different difficulties influencing the acquisition of a foreign language that learners have to deal with. Those factors are grouped into internal, external and institutional factors. The internal factors involve students' motivation, emotional factors, behavior, habits and memorization. On the other hand, the external factors include some aspects that learners probably cannot control such as the classroom as a social setting, the activities that teachers implement in classes, the materials that teachers use to present the language, the environment, the class size, the time and the language contact. Finally institutional factors incorporate teacher's training, applied methodology, curriculum and policies.

Internal factors

Motivation

Motivation plays an important role in students learning English as a foreign language because all students are motivated in one way or another. In most cases, students would be interested in a class activity, participate actively in class discussions, interact with classmates, learn new vocabulary or simply earn high marks. As a consequence, Ormrod (2010) claims that "not all forms of motivation have exactly the same effects on human learning and performance".

There are two forms of motivation that contribute to learners' success. The two forms of motivation are intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In a study conducted by Liu (2007, p. 139), the author asserts that "both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation contribute to the learning of a second/foreign language". Under these conditions, it is imperative to describe these concepts. Noels et al (2001, p. 46) state that "extrinsic motivation refers to the desire to learn a second/foreign language because of some pressure or reward from the social environment, internalized reasons for learning an L2, and/or personal decisions to do so and its value for the chosen goals". Moreover, Ryan and Deci (2000, p. 56) explain that "intrinsic motivation means to do something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable". The students are moved to act because of the fun or challenge entailed when doing something. The absence of these two kinds of motivation in learners leads to the appearance of amotivation. This happens because students do not have goals which motivate them to learn a foreign language.

In addition, Ormrod (2010) explains that "motivation has several effects on students' learning and behavior such as the following: motivation directs behavior toward particular goals, leads to increased effort and energy, increases initiation of and persistence in activities, and also it enhances performance".

Emotional factors

Many people could affirm that emotions are not related to learning but Darling-Hammond et al (2002, p. 90) affirm that "emotions are often thought of as irrational or "nonintellectual" feelings that are beyond our control. However, emotions are complex states of mind and body, consisting of physiological, behavioral and cognitive reactions to situations that can be managed and directed". The existence of a relation or link between emotions, thoughts and actions is the key. Teachers, parents, society and authorities need to recognize that emotions can affect children's performance and achievement.

Emotions, after all, can interfere in students' success in two ways, positively and negatively. Darling-Hammond et al (2002) claim that if the students are calm, motivated or with a high level of confidence they can complete the tasks carefully, in order, methodologically, etc. Contrary, the effect of anxiety, sadness, anger, stress,

frustration, etc. in students lead them to work being careless, disordered and without effort.

Darling-Hammond et al (2002, p. 91) affirm that “students who are depressed or anxious about learning often do not feel competent academically”. In addition, they state that “when emotions interfere with competence beliefs, students might withdraw from classroom activities in order to avoid appearing incompetent in the classroom”. As a consequence, students will sometimes be frustrated or anxious when they try to learn a foreign language. Teachers need to manage these kinds of emotions that affect students in order to make learners process their emotions in productive ways when disputes or disagreements occur, encouraging students’ self-confidence and providing them with opportunities to take risks without punishment.

Additionally, Yiquan (2011, p. 465) asserts that “positive emotion will make the students study more effective”. Teachers need to offer them a good English studying atmosphere, within a good kind of environment. In this way, the students will study gaily in the English class. Also, Yiquan (2011, p. 465) asseverates that “when the teachers are giving English classes, they must be kind to the students, take care of them, respect them and trust them, so that, they get on well with the teachers”.

Behavior

According to the Commonwealth of Australia (2010, p. 1) “a child’s feelings and behaviors are influenced by temperament, culture, relationships, health, tiredness, family circumstances, experiences of early childhood care, education and a range of other factors”. Those factors of influence are varied and the examples of behavioral difficulties in children include tantrums, unfounded fears and overly anxious behavior, aggressive behavior such as hitting, fighting (other children or friends), kicking or biting, disruptive behavior, defiance and swearing. These kind of emotional or behavioral problems are temporary for most children. On the other hand, the Centre for Community Child Health affirms that

When a child’s behavioral difficulties are prolonged, extreme and potentially harmful or dangerous this may be a sign that the child is at risk of, or is displaying, a behavioral disorder. Behavioral disorders tend to

occur in at least two of the following scenarios: home, school (or preschool) or social situations (Centre for Community Child Health 2006, p. 12).

But why don't students just behave? Breaux and Whitaker (2010, pp. 5-15) state that the fact remains that we teach children, and children do child-like things. They do not make adult-like decisions; they do not do what is necessary right or best for them; they do like to push our buttons; and they are not, for the most part, self-motivated or self-disciplined.

Similarly, the Better Health Channel (2013, p. 1) mentions that "all young children can be naughty, defiant and impulsive from time to time, which is perfectly normal. However, some children have extremely difficult and challenging behaviors that are outside the norm for their age". These authors have described the most common behavioral disorders and grouped them into three categories: oppositional defiant disorders, conduct disorders and attention deficit hyperactivity disorders.

Within the attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, the Better Health channel (2013, p. 2) affirms that "around two to five percent of children are thought to have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. The characteristics can include: inattention, impulsivity and overactivity".

Regarding inattention, students have difficulties to concentrate, they forget instructions, or move from one task to another without completing anything. In addition, within impulsivity the Better Health Channel (2013) mentions that students are talking over the top of others, having a 'short fuse', being accident-prone, etc. Finally, children with overactivity are in constant restlessness and fidgeting.

Habits

According to Nagaraju (2004, p. 10) "the child begins to form habits very early on and his/her tendency gets firmly conditioned in the early years of childhood. Habit implies a fixed routine response to a specific situation". This aspect can be observed when a subject performs some actions such as walking, talking, dressing, writing, driving, etc., that are common activities known by the term habit. In fact, those habitual

actions are the result of many repetitions of the act in the same way, such as waking up at 6am every day, brushing teeth after every meal, etc. Actually, some habits are learned and others are just part of human instinct.

The importance of habits in the field of education has a strong impact. Nagaraju (2004, pp. 13-14) affirms that “habits of thinking regularity, proper reasoning, punctuality, etc., help children in their proper adjustment and in learning and achieving all essential knowledge and skills in a short time with great ease”. The student whom is habitual when concentrating on his/her studies for hours in school as well as at home is not easily overcome by fatigue. This author declares that “there are some habits that need to be cultivated in childhood and carried on through college and later on in life such as reading, writing, making analysis, etc”.

On the other hand, Nagaraju (2004, p. 16) states that the “study habits mean the ways of studying, whatever systematic or unsystematic, efficient or otherwise”. Also study habits are “habits that an individual might have formed with respect to learning activities”. In other words, the study habits serve as the vehicle of learning. These habits are taken from relatives, friends, teachers, classmates, etc.

In order to develop good study habits Nagaraju (2004) suggests that students prepare a plan of action and budget properly for a day or week study, create a favorable environment, develop proper reading conditions like lighting, reclining position, classroom furniture, ventilation, etc. considering the learning of English as a foreign language, students must practice the language through writing exercises, reading from easy and short paragraphs to more complex, listening to podcasts, speaking and asking questions in English, avoiding translations, writing notes, etc.

In the same way, Nagaraju (2004) states that there are some aspects that affect the study habits such as the home environment because parents are the child’s first teachers at home. If the home environment is good, automatically child’s nature in school is good. For this reason, the good or bad relationship with parents, brothers and sisters influence the children’s performance at school.

Memorization

The ability of retention and repeating is called memory or memorization. For instance, Pickering affirms that

psychological theories of memory are often expressed in terms of flow diagrams that might suggest a series of rigidly separate modules. Although the brain is somewhat modular in structure, there are multiple complex neural connections between the modules, making modularity a matter of degree rather than absolute (Pickering, 2006, p. 14).

In addition, Pickering (2006, p. 4) states that “information is assumed to come from the environment and pass through brief perceptual stores into a short-term memory system”. This is assumed to act as a working memory, necessary for feeding information into and out of the more durable long-term memory store”.

Based on this conception, it is necessary to differentiate between long-term memory and short-term memory. McLeod (2009) asserts that short-term memory has three key aspects: the limited capacity (only about 7 items can be stored at a time), limited duration (storage is very fragile and information can be lost with distraction or passage of time), and encoding (primarily acoustic, even translating visual information into sounds). On the other hand, Mastin states that

Long-term memory is, obviously enough, intended for storage of information over a long period of time. Despite our everyday impressions of forgetting, it seems likely that long-term memory actually decays very little over time, and can store a seemingly unlimited amount of information almost indefinitely. But short-term memory can become long-term memory through the process of consolidation involving rehearsal and meaningful association. (Mastin, 2010, p. 1)

According to Mastin (2010, p. 1) “it is important for effective learning to preserve our past experiences in order to make use of them whenever needed”. In this case, Nagaraju (2004, p. 12) asserts that “memory involves four factors namely learning,

retention, recall and recognition. Individuals are found to differ in the power of memorization”.

This author also considers that there are other memory types namely “immediate, permanent rote, logical, associative, active and passive, which are more related to the educational field of a foreign language. In order to understand these kinds of memory it is necessary to work with recitations, whole and part, spaced and massed methods”. Through this training students will improve their memory.

External factors

The classroom as a social setting

McDonough (1981, p. 86) claims that when talking about the classroom as a social setting there is a distinction of two elements: the emotional climate and the classroom language. According to this author, the “emotional climate is the complex nature of the learning atmosphere in the classroom, which is created by the teacher and the children and through the teaching/learning process operates”. Since groups are formed of people, it is necessary to clarify that classroom groups behave differently from each other and the same class may behave differently with different teachers. The importance that these two actors have in the learning process of learning and the way they interact within the classroom is a significant aspect to be considered.

In the same way, McDonough (1981, p. 89) affirms that “group cohesion refers to the forces (apart from the timetable) that bind a group together and give it a unity, a dynamic, which is different from the sum of characteristics of the individuals who comprise it”. In this case, cohesion will be increased if students perform the task designed for them successfully. In addition, it is necessary to create easy communication and eye contact with the members of the group and other activities such as competition with other groups.

Everything we learn takes place in a social context. As Darling-Hammond et al (2002, p. 26) states “teachers can build on the ways children learn from each other by creating a learning environment where there are ample opportunities for student-to-

student discussion, collaboration, and feedback”. The idea is to find strategies for fostering and managing communication in the classroom.

Activities implemented in the class

According to the Center for Teaching Excellence (n/d) “group work can be an effective method to motivate students, encourage active learning, develop key critical-thinking, communication, and decision-making skills”. But teachers need to be careful when planning and facilitating because group work can also frustrate students and instructors.

On the other hand, Davies and Davies (2012, p. 13) assert that “we live in a world where young people get most of their knowledge from screens, not pages”. For this reason the use of visuals in teaching English is important because it helps students to make sense of the language and of course to visualize complex vocabulary. In recent research, Davies and Davies (2012, p. 13) state that “the fact that for some learners a visual-spatial approach to learning is not just beneficial, but vital if optimum understanding is to take place”. In other words, the use of visual aids can be extremely helpful with lower-attaining students or with students of the initial levels. The different activities can be developed through the use of the following activities: advertisings, posters, charts and diagrams, introductory images, freeze frame, draw an idea, devise a board game.

As De Marzo (2010, p. 1) mentions “school age children undergo continual changes in every aspect of their lives. New experiences and unfamiliar routines are very often the primary sources of anxiety and stress”. The main idea is to manage stress of everyday life. In order to cope with these difficulties, teachers need to implement icebreakers, warm-up activities, games, songs, competitions, etc.

Other authors such as Herrell and Jordan (2012, p. 12) affirm that to achieve overarching goals such as social language, academic language, and sociocultural knowledge in order to get students become proficient English speakers, teachers can implement some of the following strategies: predictable routines and signals, preview/review, visual scaffolding, small groups and partners, cooperative learning, modeled talk, total physical response, language focus lesson, leveled questions, etc.

Materials

Bodrova and Leong (2007, p. 3) affirm that “the materials necessary to implement within the classroom are things that teachers can make on their own or can download from the computer and print out”. At the same time, it presents a challenge when teachers have little time to make materials or are not willing to do so”. On the other hand, Tamo (2009) explains that authentic materials involve the language that naturally occurs as communication in the native speaker contexts of use, or rather, in the selected contexts where standard English is the norm: real newspaper reports, real magazine articles, real advertisements, cooking recipes, horoscopes, etc. It is true that authentic materials are beneficial to the language learning process in EFL classrooms and should be introduced and used. These authentic materials are relevant because they increase students’ motivation to learn and obviously students are exposed to real language.

Based on this, Tamo (2009) ensures that the most commonly used materials are: newspapers, TV programs, menus, magazines, the internet, movies, songs, brochures, comics, literature (novels, poems and short stories), advertisements for events, course catalogues from schools and so forth. Moreover, Lin claims that:

Before finding suitable materials a school must have well-articulated curricula in place. Regardless of the entry point or ending point, an uninterrupted, sequential curriculum that connects from the lowest to the highest level of the program needs to be secured (Lin, 2009, p. 59).

The authorities have to consider articulation, alignment, authenticity, adoption and adaptation of the material.

On the other hand, Litz (2001, p. 5) affirms that “English language instructions have many important components but the essential constituents to many English Foreign Language classrooms and programs are the textbooks and instruction materials that are often used by language instructors”. The importance of the use of textbooks is that they are psychologically essential for students. The idea is that through the use of textbooks teachers can measure students’ progress and achievement. She also asserts that students expect published materials and they have

more credibility than materials generated by teachers. Textbooks also include extra materials such as workbook and audios related to the topics that are deeply connected. The textbooks must follow a sequence and must be appropriate to the age of the students both in content and in appearance.

Class size

The definition of class size stated by the OECD (2003, p. 1) claims that “class size is the average number of students per class”. Based on this definition, it is important to mention that this group of students represents the number of students that are going to work with one teacher during a period of time on one day or more.

The evidence based on the link between class size and attainment, taken as a whole, finds that a smaller class size has a positive impact on attainment and behavior in the early years of school, but this effect tends to be small and diminishes after a few years (Department of Education, 2011, p. 2)

When teachers work in large classes they have to spend more time taking the register and children are involved in non-teaching tasks. In addition, students do not pay attention due to the possibilities of distraction. Contrary, the idea of small classes is to get students focused on the teacher’s attention or interaction between them. Students will be engaged in the activities developed in classroom.

Based on a class size research conducted by the Australian Education Union (2010, p. 7), “smaller classes in the early grades (K-3) can boost student academic achievement”. In addition, they affirm that “a class size of no more than 18 students per teacher is required to produce the greatest benefits”. Regardless of these points of view, the experience and preparation of teachers is also a critical factor. These factors can represent an important aspect related to the success or failure of class size reduction programs. Finally, Miller and Cunningham affirm that

Some studies about class size have examined how class size influences student and teacher’s behaviors. In general, smaller classes are associated with students who are less stressed and are more frequently

on-task with fewer reported behavior problems than students in larger classes (Miller and Cunningham, 2011, p. 1).

Environment

Schools are considered as learning environments. According to Naiman et al (1996, p. 6) “schools are not alike because some are open and free whereas others are more traditional and structured. Teachers have different goals and use different techniques and materials”. These characteristics are crucial because they have to be well identified. Equally, it is necessary to identify the interaction that occurs between students and the teacher. In addition, Young (2002) asserts that teachers have to consider grade/age level appropriateness, the type of classroom activities teacher will be implementing and their particular style. Furthermore, she affirms that “the physical aspects of the teacher’s room include room arrangement, seating, bulletin boards and black/white board displays and physical climate”.

There are other traits that teachers need to pay attention to, such as: furniture and their location, lighting, seating arrangement, distracters, space, availability of materials, posters, pictures, wall color, etc. In this respect, Miller and Cunningham (2011) affirm that current studies of the physical environment have investigated aspects such as class composition, class size and classroom management. In other words, the classroom environment is related to the physical settings, the psychological environment that is created through a social context and finally instructional components related to the teachers characteristics and behavior.

Time

According to Goodman (1990, p. 2) time and learning are interrelated variables fundamental to the learning process, students must devote time to their studies if they are to be successful achievers. For this reason, time is an important key concern and its use needs to be efficient and productive with the purpose of enhancing learning outcomes.

It is important to bear in mind that the use of time in the learning process involves the allocated time, students engaged time and the academic learning time in

which learners work on appropriate tasks. For this purpose, the use of block scheduling could be necessary which Serrano (2007, p. 66) defines as 'block scheduling'. "This is a school/high school model which was generalized in some American high school in the early 90s". The idea was that learners studied for 4 hours a day, 5 days a week during 6 weeks in English and mathematics. But it can be negative when students have to make an extra effort to pay attention for a longer time span and of course they have to dedicate more time to homework assignments.

Anyway, the importance of time factor in English as a foreign language acquisition can be witnessed when students devote more time learning the language and they will obtain a higher level of proficiency. Within this assertion, students and teachers have to focus their use of time on the acquisition of basic skills such as reading, writing, listening, speaking and grammar.

Language contact

Regarding language contact, Taniguchi (2005, p. 80) affirms that "interactions in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom involve various types of human communications". Evidently, the interaction between teachers and students in the classroom is verbally or nonverbally for different purposes. Within this interaction students tend to use their native language in the classroom, but inside the classroom is where students experience the contact of their mother language and the target language. In addition, Taniguchi (2005, p. 84) explains that based on a previous study which analyzes interaction between mother tongue and target language "the scholars in these studies attempted to find out the ways to overcome possible difficulties that learners (and teachers) might face in pragmatic aspects of both the target language and the learner's native language". This happens when a certain affective factor is implicitly discussed.

On the other hand, Clyne (2003, p. 1) claims that "language contact is a multidimensional, multidisciplinary field in which interrelationships hold the key to the understanding of how and why people use the language the way they do". In addition, Thomason (2001, p. 2) states that "in the simplest definition, language contact is the use of more than one language in the same place at the same time". But the most important is that language contact is everywhere. Of course Thomason (2001, p. 19)

claims that “there is no evidence that any languages have developed in total isolation from other languages”. This language contact can be observed when students read a newspaper, a book, an article, listen to a song, watch movies, talk with other people in the classroom, at home or with friends.

Institutional factors

Teacher’s training

Darling-Hammond et al (2002, pp. 90-93) affirm that the teacher’s role is multifaceted: he/she is charged not only with creating and designing a learning environment that maximizes students’ opportunities to interact with each other and other experts, but also with the job of acting as an expert, model, guide and facilitator of these social interactions. Those interactions occur in a classroom in which students spend a long time learning different subjects. In the case of learning English as a foreign language, teachers need to be trained with specific skills. In addition, teachers need to apply different methodologies in order to teach and motivate students to acquire the target language.

In the same way, Bodrova and Leong (2007, p. 7) affirm that “the goal is to transform teacher’s practice and make teachers more reflective and intentional”. This is evident when many of the early childhood teachers have low levels of formal schooling and professional preparation. For instance, those students require a great deal of intensive teaching. In this case, Bodrova and Leong (2007, p 6) affirm that “teachers need the support to internalize the strategies and activities they need to know to be able to implement the program with fidelity”.

Finally, Bansal (2009, p. 8) asserts that “good teaching is not about good techniques”. In addition, Bansal affirms that “students can define very easily ‘bad teaching’. It occurs when a teacher is preserved as a cartoon character talking out into a bubble”. A teacher needs to be coherent with specific knowledge and the teacher training must enable the teacher to elaborate and manage the spontaneous and scientific process of knowledge.

Methodology applied

The methodology applied by the teachers to respond to the necessities of the students, depends on the level and contents. Vystavělová (2009, p. 10) states that “a method refers to a specific instructional design or system based on a particular theory of language and of language learning”. There are different theories or methods that investigators have designed in order to teach English as a second or foreign language. For instance, there are some methods such as audiolingualism, grammar translation method, the silent way or total physical response. Some of those methods have become old-fashioned but always contribute with some characteristic necessary to the teaching process.

The grammar translation method is one of the oldest methods, which was originally used to teach dead languages such Greek and Roman literature. For this reason, it focuses mainly on written form rather than oral form. Vystavělová (2009, p. 11) affirms that “it is the regular combination of grammar rules with the translation into the target language”. This method was focused on accuracy instead of fluency. On the other hand, as a response to the previous method the British Council (2014) states that the direct method sought to immerse the learner in the same way as when a first language is learnt. All teaching is done in the target language, grammar is taught inductively, there is a focus on speaking and listening, and only useful ‘everyday’ language is taught.

The audio-lingual or aural-oral approach as Richards and Rogers (1999, p. 44) affirm “advocates aural training first, then pronunciation training, followed by speaking, reading, and writing”. In this case, the language was identified with speech. Then, the total physical response based on Asher’s idea is more active. Regarding this approach, Vystavělová (2009, p. 12) asserts that “lessons are based on teachers’ instructions and students’ physical response”. This approach is based on imitations that are interpretative forms and used with limited language structures. In addition, the communicative language teaching as Richards and Rogers (1999, p. 48) affirm “pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language”. This approach develops the communicative competence and emphasizes on the ability to communicate and interact.

Finally, the silent way takes a structural approach to the organization of the language to be taught where the main premise is teacher should be silent as much as possible and the learners should be encouraged to produce language as much as possible. Richards and Rogers (1999, p. 104) affirm that “the general goal set for language learning is near-native fluency in the target language, and correct pronunciation and mastery of the prosodic elements of the target language are emphasized”. Teachers have to provide students with a basic practical knowledge of the grammar structures of the language.

Curriculum

Shawer, Gilmore, and Banks-Joseph (2009, p. 129) determined that “teachers’ curriculum development is grounded in social constructivism which assumes that “people learn through an interaction between thought and experience and the sequential development of more complex cognitive structures”. This argument drives us to think that instructors are driven by various motives to make different curricular decisions. On the other hand, Nation and Macalister (2010, p. 1) affirm that “curriculum design can be seen as a kind of writing activity and as such it can be usefully studied as a process”. It is a process that deals with teaching-learning and involves the plan of a unit, the lesson plan that focuses on students’ needs, lacks and wants. The process starts with the need analysis, application of principles, goals, contents and sequencing, format and presentation, monitoring, assessment and finally the evaluation of the curriculum.

Language Policies

Tolleson (2002, p. 5) affirms that “language policy has always been about far more than choosing which language to use in government, education or the law. Language policy involves the use of language for purposes of cultural governance or governmentality”. In addition, the language policy is an area that examines the role of governments and other powerful institutions in shaping language use and language acquisition. Within this framework, the educational institutions play an important role in policy designs. However, to the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education (2013), English as a foreign language is not mandatory in public basic education (school) until the seventh year. Furthermore, the Ministerial Agreement 0041-14 (2014) establishes that five

hours of English per week are mandatory since the eight year of General Basic Education.

On the other hand, private educational institutions offer the English subject to students from the first to the seventh year of general basic education in their curriculums because they are able to hire specialized staff to teach the language. In addition, the Ministry of Education authorizes private institutions to take some class time devoting it to educational clubs, such as: artistic, cultural, scientific, sports, social interaction and practical life in order to teach English. Furthermore, the Ministerial Agreement 0041-14 (2014, p. 3) establishes that by the year 2017, it will be mandatory to teach English to all students of general basic education and high school in both, public and private institutions.

Previous studies

As part of this investigation, theoretical support on previous studies conducted by different researchers about difficulties in learning English need to be described. The importance and relevance of these previous studies deserve to be analyzed before conducting this present research.

One of the studies was conducted by Portero (2013) and the purpose was to analyze the “Factors that affect the English language teaching learning process in Ecuadorian public high schools”. The main objective was to determine the classroom conditions in which English lessons take pace. In addition, it is important to mention that this research considered five high schools located in the rural area of Quito in order to gather important information through the use of different instruments.

As part of the process, a quantitative method was applied and information was analyzed. As a result the researcher identified that students’ basic level of knowledge, use few teaching resources, a high percentage of Spanish use in class, the overcrowded classroom and inappropriate physical conditions negatively affected students’ progress. Furthermore, the environment in which English lessons took place was inappropriate with an evident lack of ventilation, noise and lights distribution. Finally, the limited activities implemented by the teachers were not the most

appropriate; for this reason, it was difficult for students to have enough practice when they practiced the target language.

In other study conducted by Kannan (2009), the main purpose was to identify the factors that affect students learning acquisition as a second language in India. Students and teachers found it difficult to listen and to understand the English language. The main problems that the researcher identified were that twelve years of school study do not make students master the English language because they are not taught properly. This researcher affirms that in schools, students are taught that English is an international language which requires constant practice and patience, and it is not possible to achieve fluency or mastery in the target language if it is not practiced.

This author also affirms that students learn basic grammar at school level just for passing the tests. In addition, those examinations do not face any real life situations. Furthermore, Kannan claimed that grammar is not taught in class and exposure to the target language is not the most appropriate. Also, the English teacher has to deal with a big number of students per classroom where behavior is difficult to manage. As a result, an English teacher has to encourage the students to talk only in the target language. Their errors in a class should not be scolded or punished.

In a third study, Banks (2008) analyzed the foreign language learning difficulties and teaching strategies. The purpose of this study was to examine the difficulties of second language acquisition for at-risk students and those with learning disabilities. In addition, it was aimed to review the research on the methods and strategies that teachers can use to help these students learn the basic concepts in a high school foreign language course. Moreover, this research focused on cognitive and affective variables. The cognitive variables included brain function, foreign language aptitude, native language research, specific native language problems in foreign language classes, and alternative methodologies for language deficiencies. On the other hand, affective variables included in this study were: personality, self-perception, motivation, attitude, anxiety.

This study included the qualitative method that was used to analyze the information gathered from the literature review. With the information analyzed, the

researcher concluded that students' difficulties are unable to be identified. Also, students perceived themselves as less capable, possessing fewer skills, having a negative attitude and produce low output. In addition, Banks concluded that students have low motivation due to pass failures and high anxiety about the class, blocks the input, memory, organization and spontaneous participation.

Finally, a similar study conducted by Al-khatib, Malak, Sleiman, and Zadorian (2013) examined the "Difficulties that Arab Students Face in Learning English". The main focus of this study was to identify the main difficulties that second language learners from Arabic background faced. Additionally, the researchers proposed effective methods and strategies for developing English language acquisition. The data were compiled from the records of achievement and field notes that document oral and written performance of 169 participants completing tasks in comprehending or producing texts. With this data, a qualitative method was implemented and the gathered information was analyzed and contrasted.

To conclude, the researchers affirm that conditions for acquisition are specially good when learners are involved in negotiating meaning in two way interactions. Additionally, output plays an important role and interaction with classmates will help them to improve language skills. Finally, the use of virtual environments can help learners practice language in native contexts at their own pace. The use of language labs can improve the level of English for the learners.

RESULTS

Description, Analysis, and Interpretation of Results

In order to gather information about the factors that influence the learning process in the students from the first to seventh year of General Basic Education, two groups of surveys were designed considering the students' mother tongue and age. Then, 257 surveys were applied to the students and compared with the interviews conducted to the English teachers and with the class observations. With this information, the results were quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed.

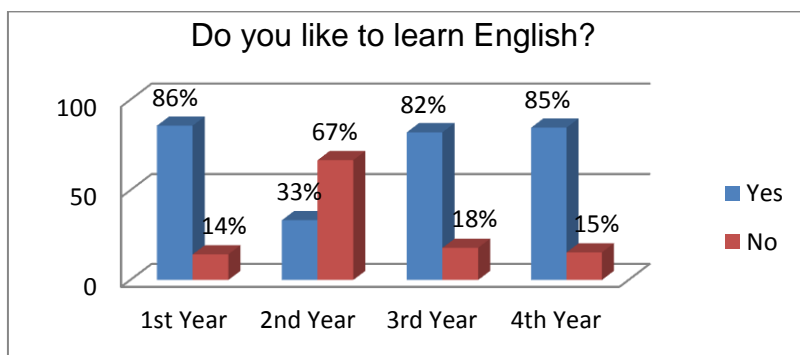
First to fourth year of General Basic Education

In this part of the research, a first group of 145 surveys were applied to the students from the first, second, third and fourth years of General Basic Education (GBE). The results were presented into statistical graphs that were qualitatively analyzed. Additionally, these results were supported and contrasted with information gathered through the teacher's questionnaire and observations applied to one class per year. In order to get better results, the surveys were conducted among 28 students from the first year of General Basic Education, 39 surveys to the students from the second, third and fourth year respectively. Moreover, it is necessary to mention that the questionnaires were designed considering the three factors that could lead to students' difficulties in English language learning.

Internal Factors

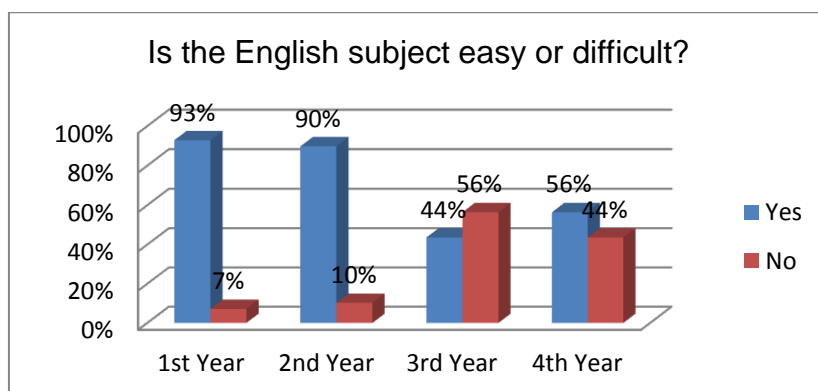
The internal factors are the aspects that students can manage because they are part of the learners. They can influence the students' acquisition of the language if they do not manage them appropriately. During this analysis, internal factors will be analyzed and the researcher will discover how they affect the students learning process. These factors involve students' motivation, emotional factors, behavior, habits and memorization.

Graph N° 1



Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

Graph N° 2



Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

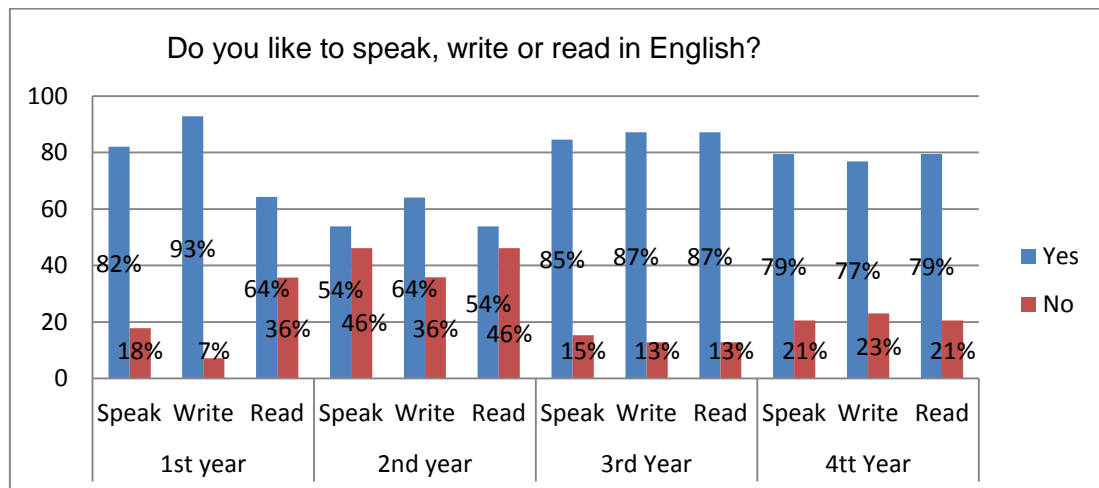
According to graph N°1, eighty-six percent of the students from the first year of General Basic Education like to learn English, while 14% of them do not like it. In the second year, thirty-three percent of the students like to learn the language, while 67% of them do not like it. Likewise, 82% of the students from the third year like to learn the language. Contrary, 18% of them do not enjoy doing it. In the fourth year of General Basic Education, 85% of the students like to learn the target language whereas 15% of them do not like it. These results were compared with the observation in which students enjoyed learning the English language and some of them felt happy with the teacher and the class despite of receiving two hours per week.

Similarly, graph N°2 shows that 93% of the students from the first year of General Basic Education think that learning English is easy while 7% of them assert

that English is difficult to learn. Equally, 90% of the students from the second year say that learning English is easy but 10% of them consider that it is difficult. On the other hand, 44% of the students from the third year think that it is not difficult to learn English, whereas 56% of the learners assert that English is a difficult subject to learn. Finally, in fourth year, 56% of surveyed students affirm that learning English is easy whilst 44% of them do not think that.

Based on these results, most of the students from the first and second year of General Basic Education who are between five to six years old are intrinsically motivated. In this respect, Ryan and Deci (2000, p. 65) confirm that “intrinsic motivation refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable”. This was evident during the observation because kids only learn basic vocabulary and the activities presented during the class are enjoyable. Contrary, in the third and fourth year, half of the students are extrinsically motivated and learn the Foreign Language because of the teacher or parents’ pressure.

Graph N° 3



Author: Geovanny Jiménez
 Source: Students’s survey

Graph N° 3 summarizes three important questions. “Do you like to speak in English?”, “Do you like to write in English?”, and “Do you like to read in English?” In this case, the graph depicts that 82% of the students from the first year of General Basic Education like to speak in English, while 18% of them do not like it. Similarly, 93% of the students like to write in English and just 7% do not like to develop this skill. Finally,

64% of the students like to read in English while 36% of the learners do not like this important receptive skill.

On the other hand, graph N° 3 depicts that 54% of the students from the second year of General Basic Education like to speak in English, while 46% of those students do not like it. With a similar percentage, 64% of the students like to write in English and 36% do not like to develop this skill. Finally, 54% of the students like to read in English, and 46% of them do not like this important skill.

In third year of general basic education, graph N° 3 shows that 85% of the students like to speak in English, while 15% of them do not like it. Similarly, 87% of the learners say that they like to write in English whereas 13% do not like to practice this skill. Equally, 87% of the students like to read in English while 13% of them do not like this receptive skill.

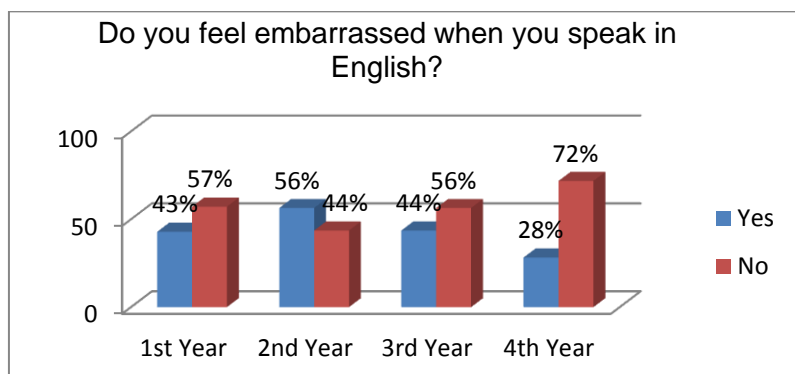
At the end, graph N° 3 depicts that 79% of the students from the fourth year of General Basic Education like to speak in English, and 21% of them do not like it. Likewise, 77% of the learners like to write in English, and 23% do not like to develop this productive skill. Finally, 79% of the surveyed students like to read in English, while 21% of them do not like this receptive skill.

This significant information shows that there is a similar preference for receptive and productive skills in first, third and fourth years of General Basic Education. This desire to learn constantly decreases while students go to upper levels. Contrary, in second year, there is a significant change because more than a half of students do not like the productive skills of speaking and writing or the receptive skills of listening and reading. Comparing this information with the observation, students felt more confident when they spoke and wrote in English (productive skills). At initial years, students might feel more attracted to these skills because they just write and say isolated words and use basic vocabulary. In addition, the teacher said that students from the initial year are always motivated to learn the target language. It is very important because at an early age students learn to build new habits of study when practicing these essential skills. The problem is that students do not like to practice receptive skills such as reading and listening. Similarly, Nagaraju (2004, p. 13) affirms that "habits of thinking regularity, proper reasoning, punctuality, etc., help children in their proper adjustment and in

learning and in achieving all essential knowledge and skills in a short time, with great ease”. In this case, students should practice the four skills (receptive and productive) in order to achieve the knowledge that will help them to use the language correctly in the future.

On the other hand, these questions allow us to analyze the students’ emotional factor when learning English as a foreign language. As Darling-Hammond et al (2002, p. 90) affirm “emotions are complex states of mind and body, consisting of physiological, behavioral and cognitive reactions to situations that can be managed and directed”. In other words, the cognitive reaction to the four skills that students have to develop. Students do not feel comfortable when learning the receptive skills (listening and reading), for that reason, their teacher should pay attention to the skills that students like the least and try to manage their feelings in order to make them enjoy learning those skills.

Graph N° 4



Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students’s survey

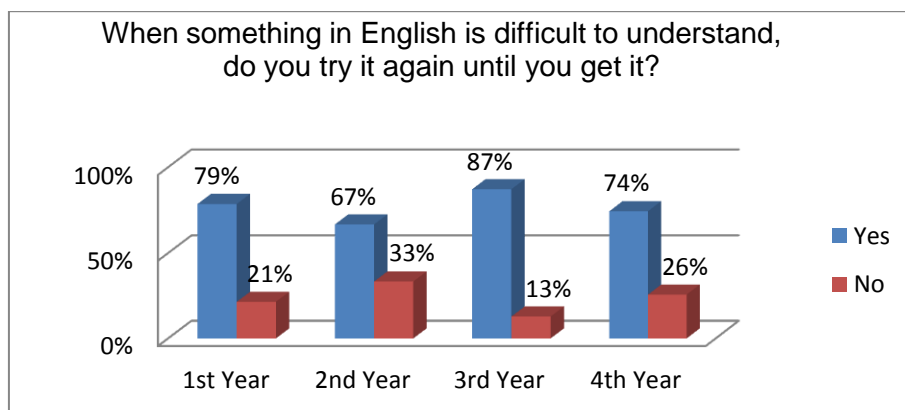
Graph N° 4 shows that an average of forty-seven percent of the students from the first to third year of General Basic Education feel embarrassed when they speak English in public. On the contrary, 53% of them do not feel embarrassed when doing it. Contrary, 28% of the surveyed students from the fourth year of General Basic Education say that they feel nervous when they speak English in public, and 72% of them do not feel this situation when they speak it in front of an audience.

These results show us that almost half of the students from the first to third year of General Basic Education feel comfortable or relaxed when speaking English in

public. Contrary, during the observation, almost all the students felt ashamed to speak in English because of the observer's presence in the classroom as it happened with students from the fourth year. In addition, the teacher said that most of the students do not like to practice this productive skill when there is someone different than the teacher in the classroom.

The aforementioned results have a direct relation with emotional factors in which Darling-Hammond et al (2002, p. 91) affirm that "students who are depressed or anxious about learning often do not feel academically competent". As a consequence of anxiety, students will not perform the ability of speaking using the target language in public. If they do not practice or perform this skill they will not be competent enough.

Graph N° 5



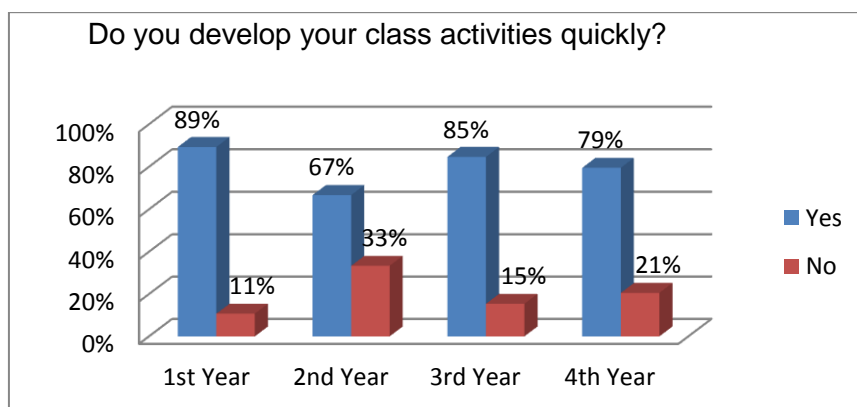
Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

Graph N° 5 depicts that an average of seventy-three percent of the students from the first, second and fourth year of General Basic Education repeat an activity when it is difficult to perform. Contrary, 27% of those students do not repeat something that is difficult. It is important to mention that 87% percent of the learners from the third year of General Basic Education repeat an activity that is difficult to perform, and a minimum, which corresponds to 13% of them do not repeat it again.

Based on the previous results, the group of students that answered negatively might not be really motivated or do not have good study habits. The teacher confirmed that there are few students who feel comfortable with the activities, so it is not necessary to ask them to work twice. Comparing this data with the observation, half of

the students did not repeat the exercises in each grade until the teacher gave them the answers. This means that the students' habits are not the best because they just wait for the teacher's answers. Of course, students have to do all the activities despite whether they are correct or not, and avoid waiting for the teacher to show the answers. For that reason, it is convenient to mention that according to Litherland (2013, p. 1) "people enjoy learning when they are motivated or interested in a subject matter. If students are greatly interested in painting for instance, it will be much easier for them to absorb and ingest learning about how to paint". The same happens when students learn a target language. If they are motivated, they will probably repeat an activity that is difficult to perform in order to get a better grasp of the task.

Graph N° 6



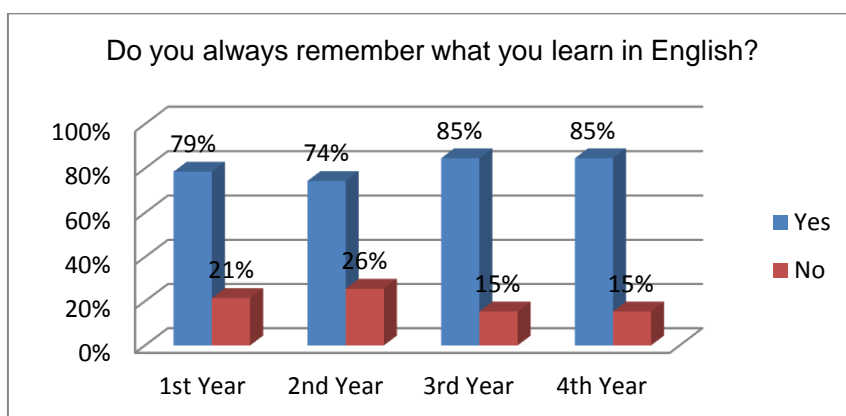
Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

Graph N°6 depicts that eighty-nine percent of the students from the first year of General Basic Education do the class activities quickly; contrary, 11% of the learners do not do them rapidly. In addition, 67% of the learners from the second year perform the activities quickly, while 33% of them do not do it. Similarly, 85% of the students from the third grade do the activities quickly, whereas 15% of them do not perform the tasks in the time assigned by the teacher. Finally, 79% of the students from the fourth year of General Basic Education mention that they do the activities rapidly, while 21% of them do not. Regarding these results, the teacher said that the students do not do all the activities quickly because the class takes only 45 minutes. In addition, the teacher affirmed that depending on the activities presented, students usually dedicate a lot of

time to each activity. This study habit will not help students to learn because they need to change the way they develop the different tasks.

It is necessary to bear in mind that habits are a powerful mechanism that we need to understand in order to become better language learners (Weiler, 2014, p. 1). The idea is that students make use of the time appropriately and choose the correct strategies to perform each activity. Additionally, teachers have to help students to build good study habits during the learning process in order to get better results.

Graph N° 7



:Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

According to graph N° 7, seventy-nine percent of the students from the first year of General Basic Education can remember what they learned in English. The remaining 21% of the learners affirm that they cannot remember what they have learned. Similarly, 74% of the surveyed students from the second year can remember what they learned previously in English, while 26% of them do not remember the content learned before. Furthermore, 85% of the students from the third year can remember the content learned in English, whereas 15% of them said that they cannot do it. Finally, almost the same results were obtained in the fourth year of General Basic Education where 85% percent of the students can remember what they learned in English, while the remaining 15% of them answered that they cannot remember what they have previously learned in English.

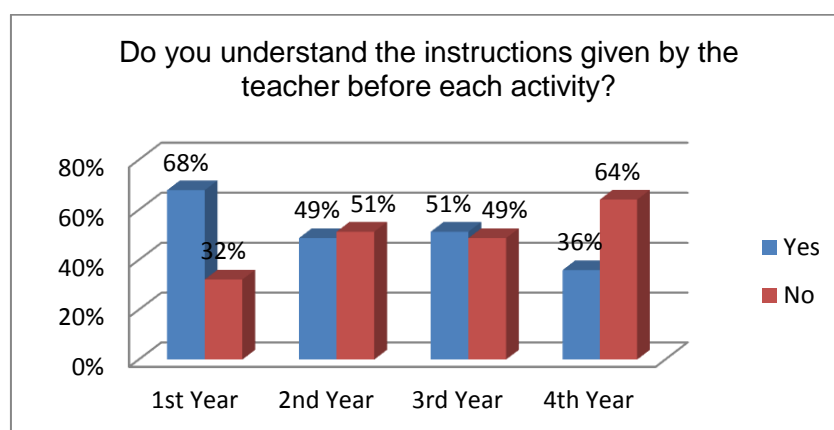
In this case, more than a quarter of the students do not easily remember what they have learned in previous classes. This is worrisome because students need to

always remember what they have learned in order to communicate effectively. Pursuant to memory concept, it is necessary to distinguish two types of memory; the long-term memory and the short-term memory. Short-term memory students cannot remember what they have learned during the English class. McLeond (2009) asserts that short term memory has three key aspects: the limited capacity, limited duration and encoding. Students can store only seven items in their minds and that information can be lost with distraction or the passing of time. This information was easy to verify during the observation because students were not able to answer short questions related to the content acquired in previous classes.

External Factors

The external factors include some aspects that learners probably cannot control such as the classroom as a social setting, the activities that teachers implement in classes, the materials that teachers use to present the language, the environment, the class size, time and language contact. Some of these factors are going to be analyzed based on the students' surveys. Other factors will be analyzed based on the teacher's questionnaire and the observation applied.

Graph N° 8



Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

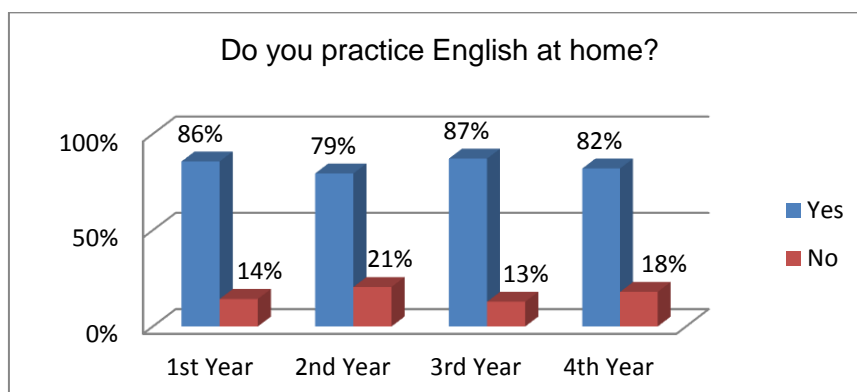
Graph N° 8 illustrates that sixty-eight percent of the students from the first year of General Basic Education understand the instructions given by the teacher before each activity. Contrary, 32% of them do not understand those instructions. On the other hand, graph N° 8 also shows that approximately 50% of the students from the second

to third year understand the instructions when their teacher speaks in English while the other 50% of them do not. On the contrary, 36% of the surveyed learners from the fourth year affirm that they can understand the instructions given by their teacher while 64% of them do not understand when he explains the lessons using the target language.

Based on these results, it is evident that the average of students that do not understand their teacher's instructions when he speaks in English increases when they go to upper years (third to fourth year). Otherwise, they cannot acquire the knowledge of the target language. According to the teacher, students always understand him when he explains a lesson; however, it was not evident because while the students were observed it is noticed that they did not understand the instructions given by the teacher when he explained the lesson using the target language. For this reason, the teacher sometimes had to repeat the content or explain the lesson using the mother tongue or by using body language.

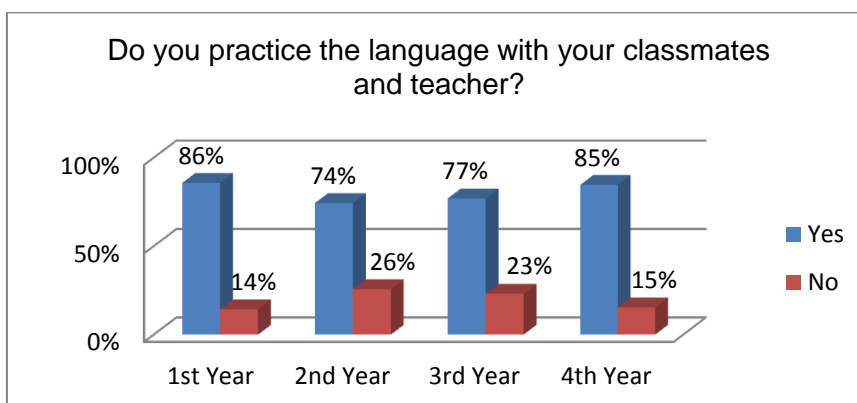
Language contact is important in the classroom because of the acquisition of the target language. The teacher has to interact with the students when he provides them academic instructions. Of course, the teacher always tried to give those instructions using English but sometimes the students did not understand them despite the teacher spoke slowly. According to Rhalmi (2010, p. 1) "the most important point that determines how successfully students will learn is the way instructions are formulated and sometimes it is this point which distinguishes good teachers from bad ones". For this reason, instructions must be kept as simple as possible, and they must be logical in order to avoid misunderstandings.

Graph N° 9



Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

Graph N° 10



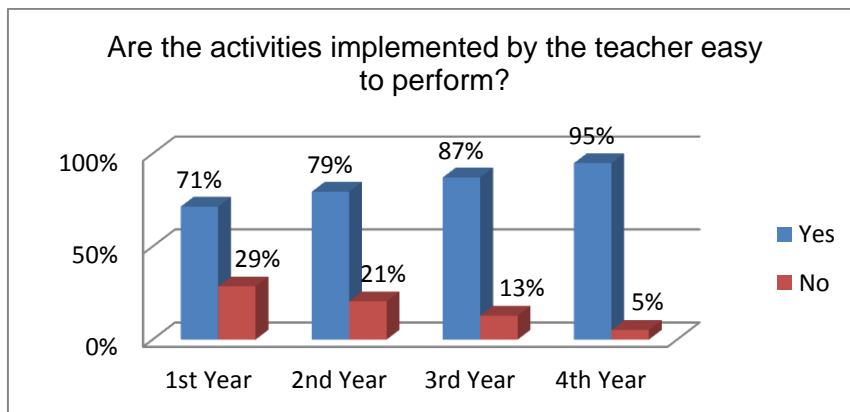
Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

Graph N° 9 depicts that an average of eighty-four percent of the students from the first to fourth year of General Basic Education practice what they have learned in the English classroom at home, especially while doing their homework. Contrary, 16% of them do not do it at home. According to the students that answered yes, practicing the target language at home is a normal fact, but it is not possible to confirm. Similarly, graph N° 10 explains that approximately 81% of the students from the first year of General Basic Education practice the target language with classmates and the teacher, while 19% of the surveyed students affirm that they do not practice the target language in the classroom with their classmates and teacher.

In contrast with the information presented in graphs 9 and 10, the teacher mentioned that students interact with him but not always between themselves. Language contact must not only be conducted between teacher-learner, but between teacher-students and students-students, using various types of materials in order to acquire the target language. In this case, the teacher probably misunderstood the concept of language contact where the interactions in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom involve various types of communications (Taniguchi, 2005, p. 84).

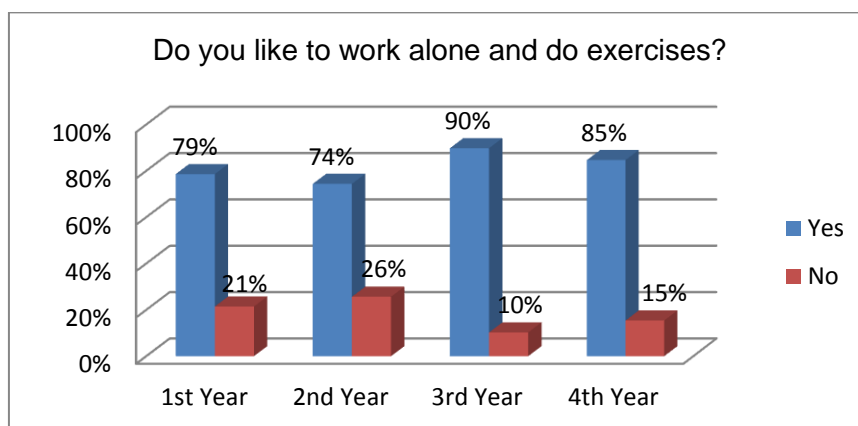
This language contact can be observed when students read a newspaper, a book, an article, listen to a song, watch movies, talk with other people in the classroom, home or with friends. In fact, in the classes observed students interacted between them using their mother tongue and avoiding the use of the target language. The same situation was observed when students asked the teacher something. They used Spanish as a way of communication.

Graph N° 11



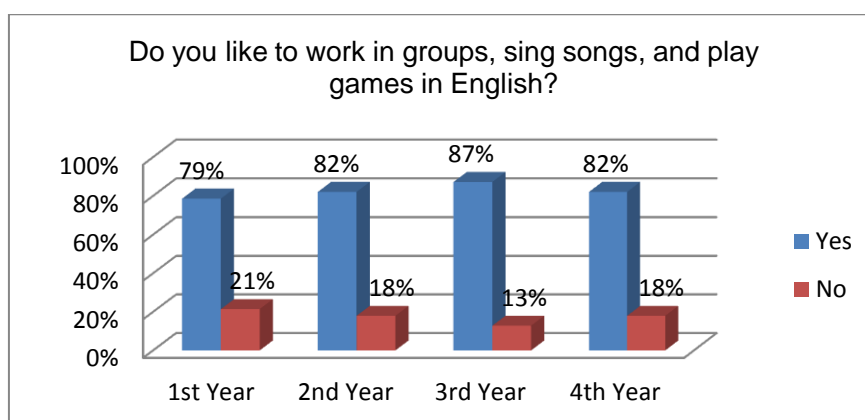
Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

Graph N° 12



Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

Graph N° 13



Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

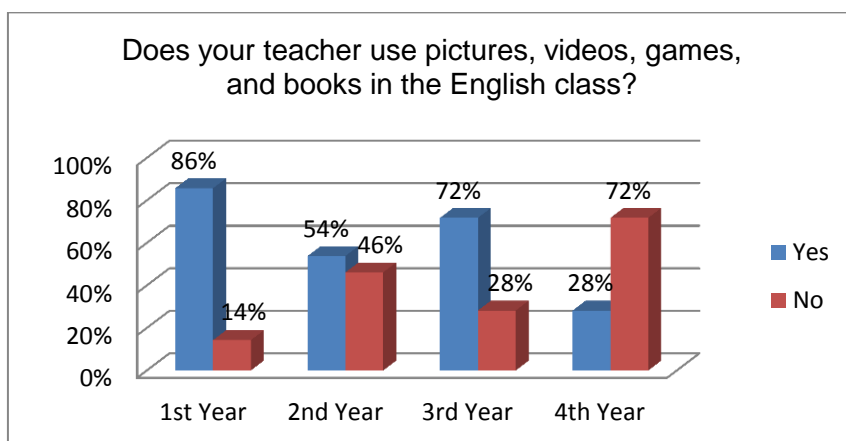
Graph N° 11 shows that seventy-one and seventy- nine percent of the students from the first and second year say that the activities presented by the teacher are easy to perform, while the remaining 21% and 29% think differently. Furthermore, 87% and 95% of the students from the third and fourth year of General Basic Education affirm that the tasks presented by the teacher are easy to perform and only a low percentage of them answered negatively. However, during the observation students could not develop the activities presented by the teacher easily because they needed more time and extra explanation. In other words, the activities were not easy to perform.

Furthermore, it is evident that students feel that the activities are easier while they are in upper years because they can read, write and speak in English better than the students from initial years who think that the activities are always difficult to perform.

Additionally, graph N° 12 depicts that an average of 82% of the students from the first to fourth year of General Basic Education prefer to work alone, do English exercises and wait for the teacher’s explanation of the topic, while 18% of them do not like to work in that way. Finally, graph N° 13 shows that approximately 83% of the students from the first to fourth year of General Basic Education like to work in groups, sing songs and play games in English. The remaining 17% of them do not like to practice those activities.

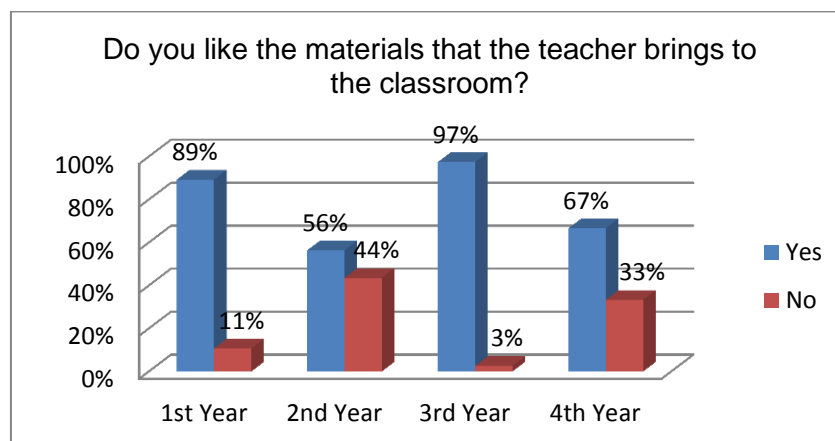
Based on these results, students like the activities that the teacher implements in the classroom such as group work, games, songs, exercises, and individual activities. During the observation, students felt happy with the activities presented by the teacher despite they are not as easy as the teacher affirmed because most of the students could not perform the activities completely within the allotted time or did it in a wrong way. This contrasts with the Center for Teaching Excellence (n/d) which affirms that group work can be an effective method to motivate students, encourage active learning, develop key critical-thinking, communication and decision-making skills.

Graph N° 14



Author: Geovanny Jiménez
 Source: Students’s survey

Graph N° 15



Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

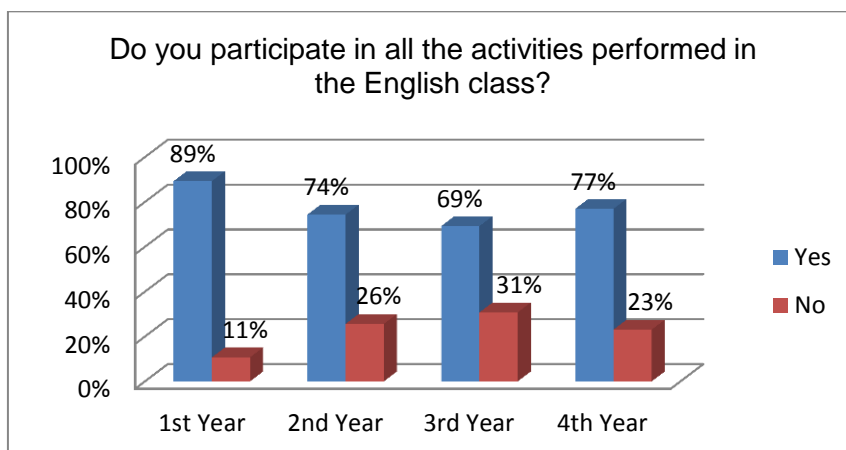
Graph N° 14 shows that eighty-six percent of the students from the first year said that the teacher uses pictures, videos, games and books in English. Contrary, 14% of the students affirm that the teacher does not use those kinds of materials. On the other hand, 54% of the learners from the second year said that the teacher uses the materials described above, while 46% of them answered differently. Moreover, 72% of the students from the third year say that the teacher uses different materials such as pictures, videos, games and books to teach the target language while 28% of them affirm that the teacher does not use those kinds of materials. Contrary to these results, 28% percent of students from the fourth year of General Basic Education affirm that the teacher uses extra materials that include printed, audio and videos in English, whereas a high 72% of the surveyed learners affirm that the teacher does not use the materials listed in the survey. According to the students that answered negatively, the teacher only used the students' book and whiteboard, which was confirmed by the observation. On the other hand, the teacher said that he makes use of different materials such as worksheets, flashcards, audio, videos and songs. Besides the materials that were mentioned below, the usage of extra material implemented in the classroom is sporadic and not usual.

Additionally, graph N° 15 shows that 89% of the students like the materials that the teacher brings to the classroom. Contrary, 11% of them do not like those materials. With a low average, 56% of the students from the second year like the materials implemented by the teacher in the classroom, and 44% do not like them. Otherwise,

97% of the students from the third year like the materials that the teacher brings to the classroom, and only a minimum of 3% of the learners do not like them. Finally, 67% of the students from the fourth year of GBE like the materials used by the teacher in the classroom, whereas the 33% do not like them. These results show that most of the students from the first and third year like the materials presented by the teacher. Contrary, almost half of the students from the second and fourth year do not like the mentioned materials. This was evident during the observation because in first and second year of General Basic Education the textbook was more attractive than the student's book that belongs to the third and fourth year of Basic Education. The same situation happened with the extra material that the teacher brings to the English classroom. These kinds of material are more attractive and catch the students' interest.

This information contrasts with Bodrova and Leong (2007, p. 3) whom affirm that "the materials necessary to implement in classroom are things that teachers can make on their own, or can download from the computer and print out. At the same time, it presents a challenge when the teachers have little time to make materials or are not willing to do so". It is important to mention that the materials implemented in the classroom have to be carefully selected. Kurdziolek (2011, p. 6) affirms that "in order for any resource to survive in the classroom, the teacher has to recognize its value and make it available for student use".

Graph N° 16

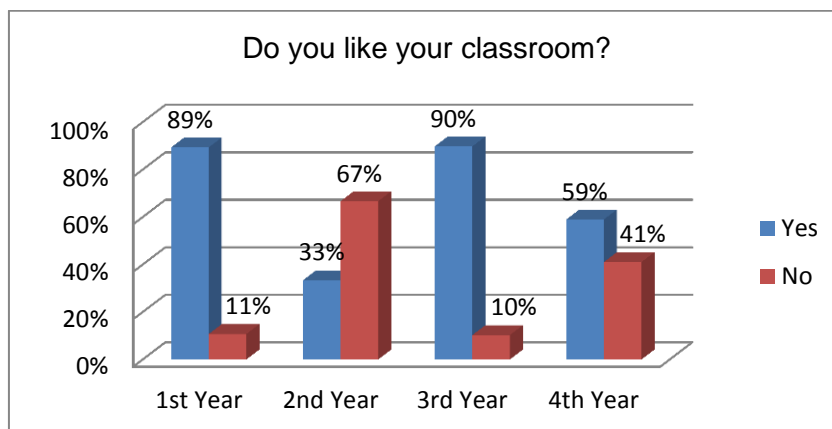


Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

According to graph N° 17, eighty-nine percent of the students from the first year participate in all the activities performed in the English classroom, while 11% of them do not participate in the mentioned activities. Additionally, 74% of the students from the second grade also participate in all the activities developed in the classroom, while 26% of the surveyed students do not like to participate in the mentioned activities. Furthermore, 69% of the learners from the third year of General Basic Education are part of all the activities that the teacher presents in the English classroom, while 31% of them answered negatively. Finally, this graph illustrates that 77% of the students from the fourth year say that they participate in the activities implemented by the teacher, and 23% of them do not do it. These results show that the participation in the activities presented in the classroom decreases constantly as the student goes to upper years.

Based on these answers, the students are motivated to participate actively. As a consequence, the classroom as a social setting is appropriate. In addition, in the classroom as a social setting there are two main factors which interact: the emotional climate and the classroom language. McDonough (1981, p. 86) states that “the emotional climate is the complex nature of the learning atmosphere in the classroom, which is created by the teacher and the children and through the teaching/learning operates”. Based on McDonough’s assertion and considering the information gathered from the student’s surveys, the emotional climate is beneficial for students, which was confirmed during the observation. Despite the fact that the students cannot perform the activities easily, a few of them participate actively in each one of them. Contrary, the teacher said that the majority of the students participate in all the activities presented by him, but it was not confirmed.

Graph N° 17



Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

Graph N° 17 depicts that eighty-nine percent of the students from the first year of General Basic Education like their classroom, while 11% of them do not like it. Conversely, 33% of the learners from the second year like how their classroom is designed whereas 67% of them do not think the same. Also, graph 18 shows that 90% of the surveyed students from the third year like their classroom, and 10% of them answered negatively. Finally, 59% of the learners from the fourth grade answered that they feel comfortable with their classroom, while 41% of them said no. It is clear that not all students like how their classroom is designed. During the observation, it was possible to verify that the environment in which students perform every activity is appropriate for them. The classroom itself was wide and spacious, and contained some pictures on the walls. In addition, the seating arrangement was in rows so that the teacher could change students according to their necessities.

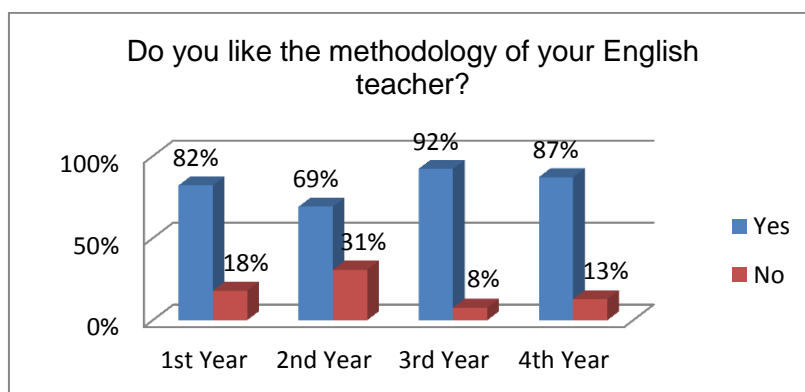
Finally, the teacher mentioned that there are some posters on the walls that help students to be in contact with the language, but comparing that information with the observation, that kind of material was related to other subjects different to the target language. In addition, the classroom's physical space, lighting, seating arrangement are appropriate, but the noise coming from the streets can contribute to the students' lack of attention and might probably difficult the acquisition of the target language.

In order to analyze the other factors that students can face when learning English as a foreign language, the observation and teacher's questionnaire provided

important information. Regarding class size, there were more than 20 students per classroom in the first year of Basic Education and more than 35 students in each classroom from the second to fourth year. The teacher mentioned that he prefers to work with small groups (20 to 25 students). When teachers work with large groups they have to spend more time checking the register of attendance and children do not receive personalized assistance as it happens with smaller groups. In addition, students do not pay attention due to the possibilities of distraction. Contrary, the idea of small classes is to get students focused on the teacher or to create interaction between them, in order to engage them in the activities developed in the classroom.

On the other hand, time is an important factor. The teacher mentioned that students devote two academic hours to learn the target language in a week, in concordance with the current policies that the Minister of Education has designed for General Basic Education, despite the fact that it is not mandatory to teach English to students from the first to seventh years of basic Education of public institutions. In the case of the private high school, the authorities have considered to include two hours of English per week within their curriculum.

Graph N° 18



Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

Graph N° 18 depicts that eighty-two percent of the students from the first year of General Basic Education like the methodology of the English teacher. Contrary, 18% of them do not like the way the teacher teaches the target language. On the contrary, 69% of the learners from the second year like how the English teacher manages the classroom, while 31% of them do not like it. Likewise, 92% of the students from the

third year said that they like the teacher's methodology of this subject, whereas 8% of them do not like their teacher's work. Finally, 87% of students like the teacher's methodology and 13% of them do not like it.

An important external factor includes the methodology applied by the teachers that respond to the necessities of the students. The teacher mentioned that he employs different methods to teach students the target language. The most common methods that the teacher includes in his classes are the audio-lingual method, communicative approach and total physical response. Each method is used depending on the necessities of the students as it was evident during the observation process. In addition, the teacher said that he does not employ the grammar translation method, but it was highly employed during the learning process.

Institutional factors

The institutional factors are outside forces or aspects that the institution itself can manage and affect the students learning process in which they are involved. It is important to mention that those factors are managed by authorities and teachers. The institutional factors incorporate teacher's training, curriculum and policies.

The teacher mentioned that the students feel comfortable with the way he teaches the language. This assertion was also evident during the observation process because students felt confident with the teacher's role. If students like the teacher's role, it means that the teacher is well prepared or offers students opportunities to participate and introduces the content adequately. Darling-Hammond et al (2002, p. 92) affirm that "the teacher's role is multifaceted: he/she is charged not only with creating and designing a learning environment that maximizes students' opportunities to interact with each other and other experts, but also with the job of acting as an expert, model, guide and facilitator of these social interactions".

In addition, there is not a curriculum designed to teach this subject to students from General Basic Education in this private high school. According to the teacher, this situation occurs because it is not mandatory to teach English to students from Basic Education. If it happens, the authorities and teachers have not considered students' needs, lacks and desires. Nation and Macalister (2010, p. 1) affirm that "curriculum

design can be seen as a kind of writing activity and as such it can be usefully studied as a process". It is a process that deals with teaching-learning and involves the plan of a unit, the lesson plan that focus on students' needs, lacks and wants. The teacher and authorities do not consider this conception and do it empirically because there is no a document that regulates it as happens with other subjects.

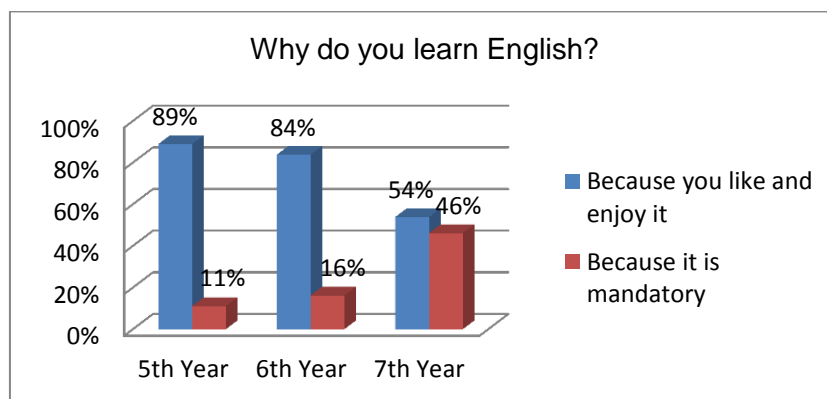
Fifth to seventh year of General Basic Education

In the second part of the analysis, a different group of surveys were applied to the students from the fifth, sixth and seventh years of General Basic Education (GBE). The results were presented into statistical graphs that were qualitatively analyzed, supported and contrasted with information gathered through the teacher's questionnaire and observations applied to three different classrooms. To get better results, 36 students from fifth, 37 from sixth, and 39 learners from the seventh year of General Basic Education were randomly selected to respond to the surveys. Furthermore, it is necessary to mention two important aspects. Firstly, that the questionnaires were designed considering the three factors (internal, external and institutional) that could lead to students' difficulties in English language learning. Secondly, the surveys were designed in Spanish and then they were translated into English in order to be analyzed.

Internal Factors

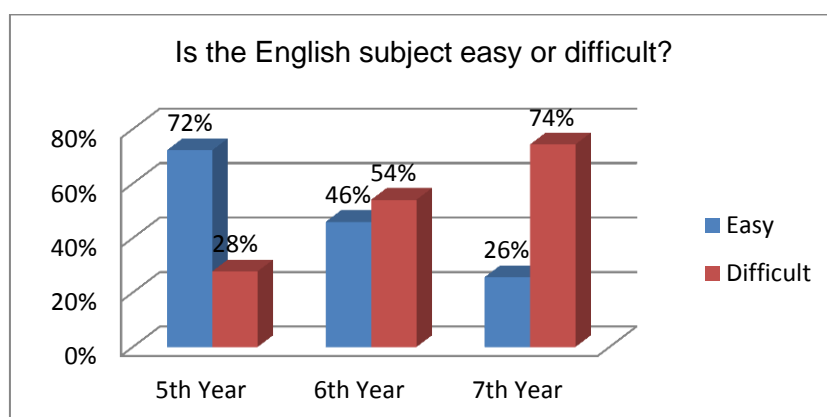
The internal factors are the aspects that learners can manage because they are part of the students and are directly involved in the language process. These internal factors can be beneficial or not and can influence students' acquisition of the language if learners do not manage them appropriately. In this section, internal factors will be analyzed and the researcher will determine how they affect the students learning process or acquisition of the foreign language. These factors involve students' motivation, emotional factors, behavior, habits and memorization.

Graph N° 19



Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

Graph N° 20



Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

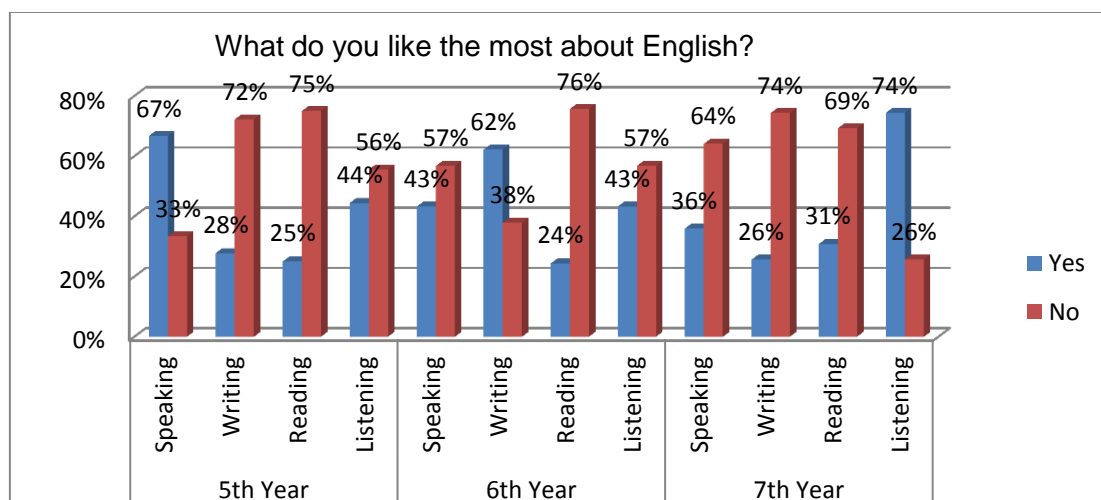
According to graph N°19 eighty-nine percent of the students from the fifth year of General Basic Education learn English because they like it, while 11% of them do it because learning English is mandatory. Equally, 84% percent of the students from the sixth year learn English because they like it whereas 16% of them do it because it is part of the curriculum. Finally, 54% percent of the students from the seventh year learn the target language because they like it, and 46% of them do not because it is mandatory. It is clear that students from the fifth and sixth year of General Basic Education like to learn the target language because they are intrinsically motivated. Contrary, almost half of the students from the seventh year learn the target language

because they are extrinsically motivated. In other words they learn English because it is mandatory.

On the other hand, graph N°20 shows that 28% of the students from the fifth year think that learning English is difficult, and 72% of them say that it is easy to learn English. Contrary, 54% of the learners from the sixth year of General Basic Education affirm that it is difficult to learn English, while 46% think differently. Finally, 74% of the surveyed students from the seventh year answer that learning English is difficult whereas 26% of them think that it is easy.

Based on these results, the number of students who think that learning English is difficult increases when they go to upper grades. It might be because the content learned at the last grades are quite difficult in contrast with the content learned in initial grades. As Dunn (2013, p. 1) mentions, “young children are natural language acquirers; they are self-motivated to pick up language without conscious learning, unlike adolescents and adults. They have the ability to imitate pronunciation and work out the rules for themselves”. This information contrasts with the observation process in which most of the students from the fifth and sixth year like to learn the language, but learners from the seventh year think that learning English is difficult and they could not successfully carry out all activities presented by the teacher. In other words, those students did not direct their effort to achieve English language learning process goals.

Graph N° 21



Author: Geovanny Jiménez
 Source: Students's survey

When asking students from the fifth year of General Basic Education about the skills that they like the most, graph N° 21 shows that 67% of them like to speak in English, while 33% do not. Contrary, 28% of learners like to write, and 72% do not like this important productive skill. Similarly, 25% of the students like to read, while 75% of them do not like this skill. Finally, 44% of the students like to listen to the language, while 56% do not like it.

In addition, graph N° 21 depicts that 43% of the students from the sixth year of General Basic Education like speaking, and 57% of them do not like it. Furthermore, 62% of them prefer writing, while 38% do not like this skill. Contrary, 24% of the learners like reading, whereas 76% of the surveyed students don't like it. Finally, 43% of the learners prefer listening skills and 57% do not.

Finally, this graph shows that 36% of the learners from the seventh year of General Basic Education like speaking, and 64% of them don't like it. Also, 26% of the learners like writing whereas 74% of them do not like this productive skill. Similarly, 31% of the students like reading, while 69% of them do not like it. On the contrary, 74% of the learners prefer listening, and the remaining 26% do not feel comfortable practicing this important skill.

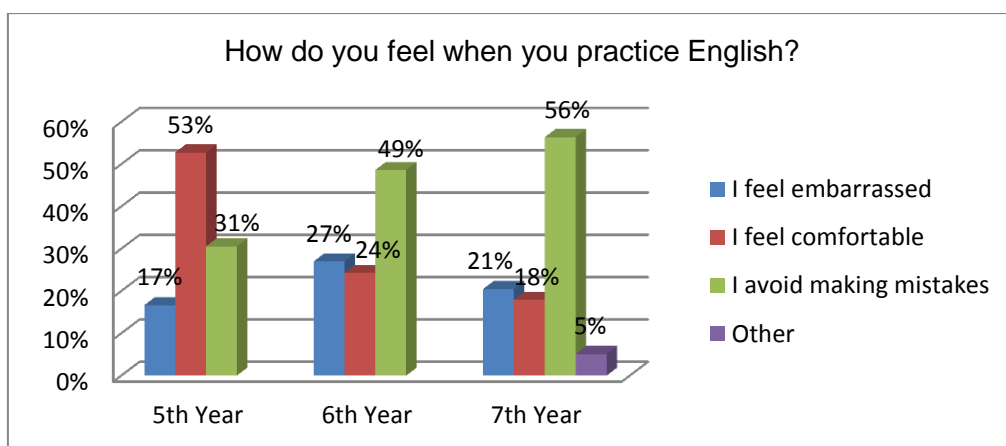
This graph shows that listening is the skill that students from the fifth to seventh year like the most; the same situation happens with speaking in fifth grade and writing in sixth year. On the other hand reading, writing and speaking are the skills that most of the surveyed students from the three grades like the least. It is evident that students do not feel comfortable practicing reading and productive skills (writing and speaking). Comparing this information with the observation, students really prefer listening instead of speaking or writing. They could not communicate effectively by writing neither by speaking in English. In addition, they did not like writing because some of them said that it is difficult to write in English. It is important to mention that during the interview, the teacher confirmed that students are more attracted toward receptive skills like listening.

In other words the study habits serve as the vehicle of learning. These habits are taken from relatives, friends, teachers, classmates, etc. According to the results, students from the fifth to seventh grades, have to create good study habits when

practicing the four skills (receptive and productive) in order to achieve the knowledge that will help them in the future to use the language correctly. Nagaraju (2004, p. 15) states that study habits are “habits that an individual might have formed with respect to learning activities”.

On the other hand, asking students about the four language skills, allow us to analyze their emotional factor when learning English as a foreign language. Yiquan (2011, 465) asserts that “the positive emotion will make the students study more effective”. If the activities related to speaking and writing are not attractive, students will not feel emotionally attracted to productive skills. For that reason, the teacher should pay attention to the skills that students like the least and try to manage students’ feelings in order to make them interesting.

Graph N° 22

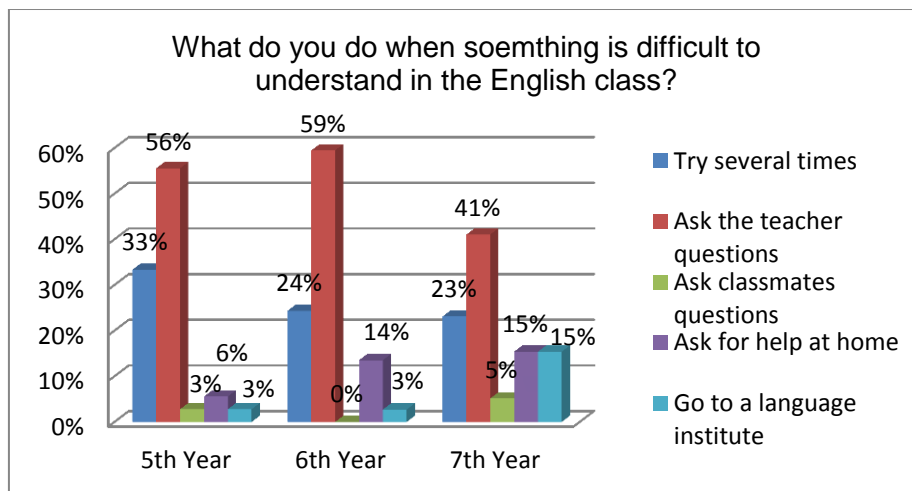


Author: Geovanny Jiménez
 Source: Students’ survey

Graph N° 22 shows that approximately twenty-one percent of the students from the fifth to seventh year of General Basic Education feel embarrassed to speak English in public. Contrary, 53% of the learners from the fifth grade feel comfortable practicing the target language as happens with 21% of the learners from the sixth and seventh grade. Finally, 31% of the students from the fifth year and 52% of the learners from the sixth and seventh year of General Basic Education avoid making mistakes when practicing English.

This information shows that a quarter of the surveyed students do not feel comfortable when speaking English in public while most of the students avoid making mistakes when they write English. Contrasting this information with the observation, most of the students did not want to speak in English when the observer was present. The teacher also affirmed that students do not speak in English when there is someone else in the classroom because they are not confident using the language with unfamiliar people in the classroom. According to Darling-Hammond et al (2002, p. 90) “emotions are complex states of mind and body, consisting of physiological, behavioral and cognitive reactions to situations that can be managed and directed” These emotional factors need to be managed correctly by the students and the teachers. If it happens, students will not feel embarrassed when speaking in public using the target language. For this reason, the teacher needs to encourage students to speak English in front of other people using different strategies and techniques.

Graph N° 22



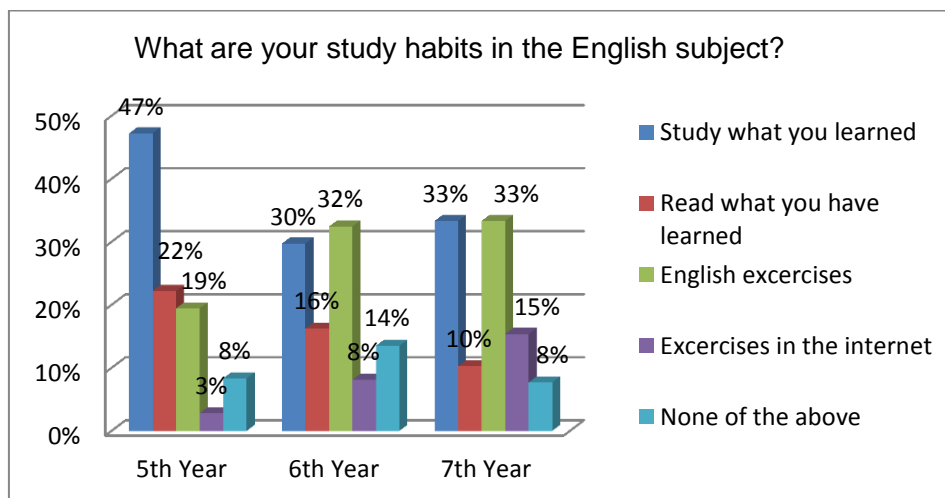
Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

Graph N° 22 shows that fifty-six to fifty-nine percent of the students from the fifth to sixth year of General Basic Education, and 41% of the learners from the seventh year ask the teacher questions when something is difficult to understand in English. Contrary, 23 to 33% of the learners from the fifth to seventh year of General Basic Education repeat an activity until it is correct. With minimum percentages other students mentioned that they ask for help at home or simply go to an English institute to reinforce their knowledge of the target language.

During the teacher's interview, he claimed that students always ask questions when there is something difficult to learn. Contrary, during the observation, few students asked questions to the teacher in Spanish. Maybe this happens because they still do not have an advanced knowledge of the target language. The rest of them got information from their classmates. This could be conceived as a disadvantage if those students who asked their classmates questions get wrong information that does not clarify any doubt.

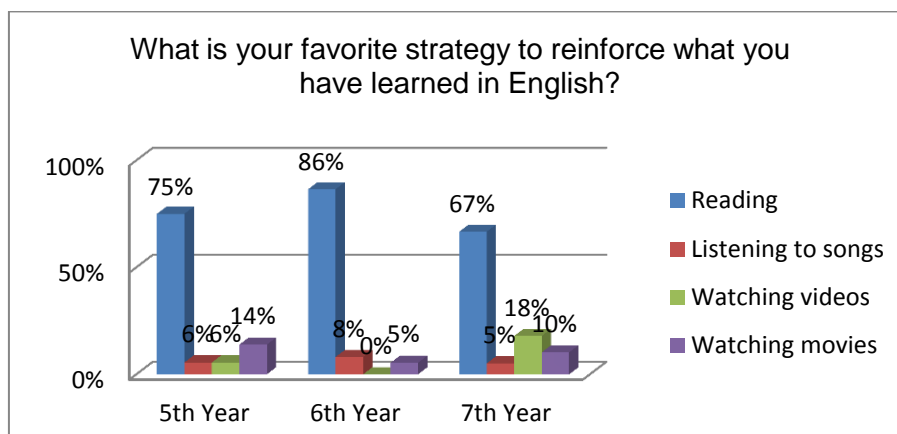
Additionally, motivation plays an important role when students learn English as a foreign language because all students need to be motivated in one way or another. In most of the cases, students would be interested in a class activity, participate actively in class discussions, interact with classmates, learn new vocabulary, ask questions, or simply earn high marks. As a consequence, Ormrod (2010, p. 1) claims that "not all forms of motivation have exactly the same effects on human learning and performance". Contrary, if students do not understand a topic or an activity and do nothing to clarify their doubts, they will not be confident practicing the target language because they are not enough motivated enough to do it.

Graph N° 23



:Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

Graph N° 24



:Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

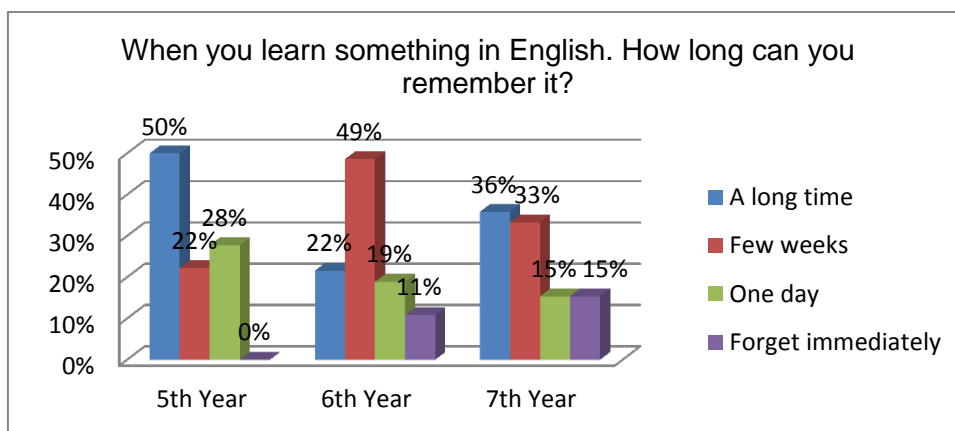
According to graph N° 23, thirty-six percent of the students from the fifth to seventh year of General Basic Education study what they have learned during the classes, while 16% of them read the notes that they have taken. In addition, 9% of the learners practice doing written exercises, equally 9% of them practice the content learned by doing exercises on the internet. Conversely, 10% of the students from the fifth to seventh year do not develop any of the above mentioned activities in order to practice the target language.

Additionally, graph N° 24 shows that seventy-five percent of the students from the fifth year of General Basic Education prefer to use readings in order to reinforce what they have learned during the English class. Similarly, 86% of the learners from the sixth year practice this strategy. Also, this graph shows that 67% of the students from the sixth year like to read in order to improve their knowledge of the language. On the other hand, other options were presented such as watching videos and movies, or listening to songs, but students chose them in minimum percentage.

It is evident that study habits are different as the teacher confirmed it during the interview. While most of the students prefer to read or study the content already learned, others want to do English exercises in their notebooks or use the Internet. According to Felder (2002, p. 674) "students learn in many ways— by seeing and hearing; reflecting and acting; reasoning logically and intuitively; memorizing and visualizing and drawing analogies and building mathematical models; steadily and in

fits and starts”. For this reason, students may prefer some different strategies to learn the target language as happens with students from the fifth, sixth and seventh year of General Basic Education. The most worrying is that there is a considerable percentage of students that do nothing to review what they learn in the English classroom. The teacher, in this case, has to encourage students to practice any strategy that helps them to change the way learners study the content learned at home or school.

Graph N° 25



:Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

Graph N° 25 shows that fifty percent of the students from the fifth year of General Basic Education can remember the content learned for a long time, whereas 22% of them keep that information in their minds for a few weeks. Contrary, 28% of the students can maintain that content in their minds for only one day. On the other hand, this graph shows that 22% of the learners from the sixth year can remember the content learned for a long period of time, while 49% of them can store that content for a few weeks. Moreover, 19% of the learners remember the content learned in the classroom for one day, and 11% of them forget it immediately. Finally, 36% of the students from the seventh year can remember what they have learned for a long time and a similar 33% do it for few a weeks. As happened in sixth year, 15% of the learners from the seventh year can memorize the content learned for only one day and the other 15% forget that content immediately.

There is a considerable percentage of students that cannot store what they have learned in English in their minds for a long period of time. This happens with

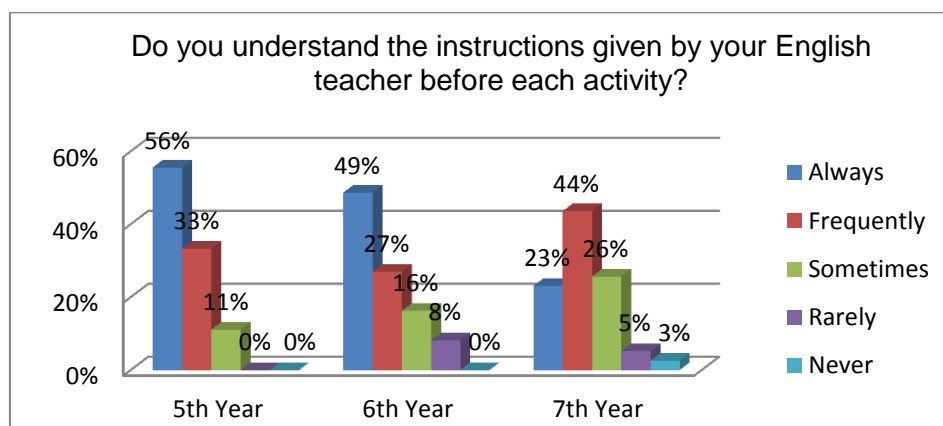
students from the sixth and seven years where most of them can remember the content learned in English for a few weeks or they forget the content immediately. This finding contrasts with the teacher's assertion about students' memory capacity. He claimed that most of the students cannot keep the content learned during the English class for a long period of time because they are only in contact with the language for about two hours per week. If the time that students are immersed or are in contact with the target language is too short, then, they will forget that content immediately. For this reason Pickering (2006, p. 4) states that "information is assumed to come from the environment and passes through brief perceptual stores into a short-term memory system". But it is important for feeding information into and out of the more durable long-term memory store. Comparing this information, if students do not store that content in their minds for a long period of time, then, they will not be able to communicate effectively because they cannot remember neither vocabulary nor grammatical structures.

In addition, Conte and Gurney (n/d, p. 1) mention that "new language items require practice and time to be processed. Students practice the same item first listening and repeating (choral, in open pairs and in two-by-two), then in other given situation to finally transfer in a situation of their own." Teachers should be careful not to saturate the student with the same subject for so long that it may lose their attention. Content must go in a spiral where once in a while it is reviewed in a new meaningful context.

External Factors

The external factors include some aspects that learners cannot control such as the classroom as a social setting, the activities that teachers implement in classes, the materials that teachers use to present the language, the environment, class size, time and language contact. Some of these factors are going to be analyzed considering the students' surveys and the teacher's interview. Additionally, those results will be compared with the researcher's observations in the classroom.

Graph N° 26



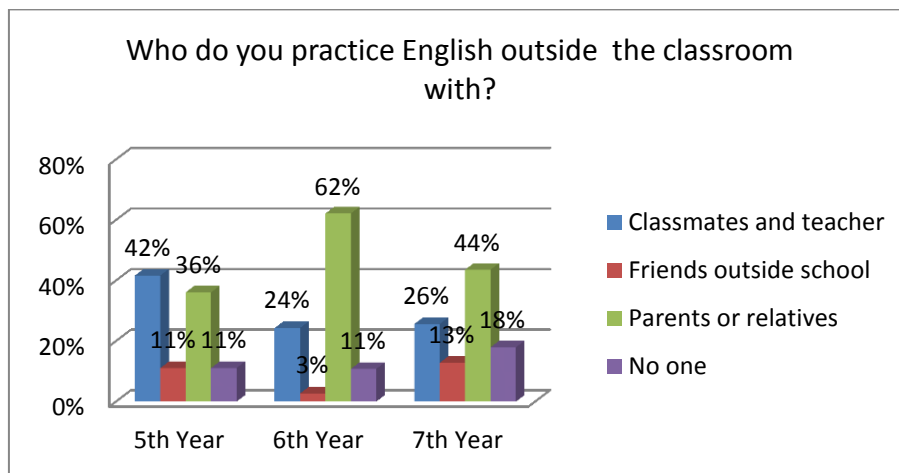
Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

Graph N° 26 illustrates that fifty-six percent of the students from the fifth year of General Basic Education always understand the instructions given by the teacher before an activity. Contrary, 33% of them can usually understand him and 11% of the learners can sometimes understand the instructions given by the teacher when he uses English as a way of communication. Besides, graph N° 8 depicts that 49% of the students from the sixth year always understand the teacher's instructions in English, while 27% of them frequently do it. On the other hand, 16% of the learners sometimes understand the instructions given by the teacher before an activity, and 8% of them rarely can understand him. To conclude, 23% of the students from the seventh year of General Basic Education always understand the instructions given in English, while 44% of them frequently comprehend those instructions. Only 26% of the surveyed students sometimes catch the instructions that the teacher gives when he speaks in English.

Comparing this information with the teacher's interview, he claimed that students always understand the instructions given by him, but it was not evident during the observation. When the teacher explained a task using the target language, most of the students from the three years did not understand those instructions despite the teacher speaking slowly. For this reason, students had to ask for extra information using their mother tongue. Huitt (2003, p. 1) mentions that "instructions (the purposeful

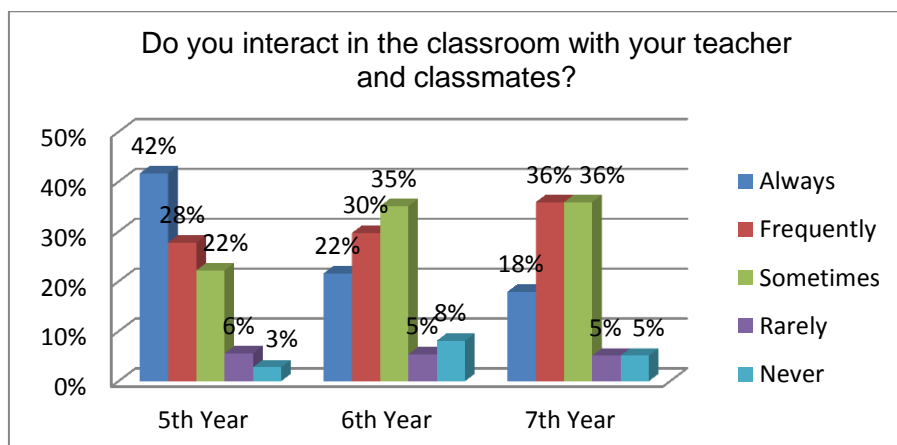
guidance of the learning process) are complex and can take many forms. It is a vitally important classroom activity, but must consider individual differences among students, and school processes and characteristics”. If students do not comprehend the instructions given in order to develop an assigned task they will not complete it correctly. The instructions given by the teacher are very important in the acquisition of the target language and students have to be aware of it when they learn English.

Graph N° 27



Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

Graph N° 28



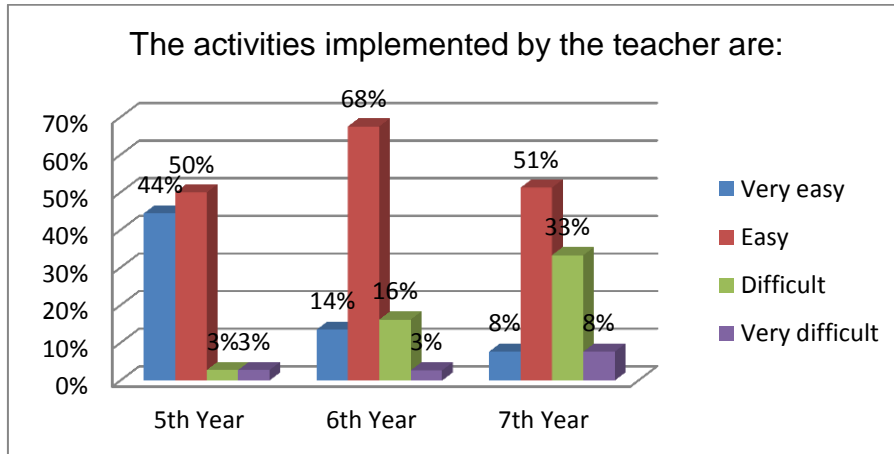
Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

Graph N° 27 shows that thirty percent of the students from the fifth to sixth year of General Basic Education practice the target language with their classmates and teacher, while 9% do it with friends outside school. In addition, 47% of the learners from the fifth to seventh year affirm that they practice the target language with parents and relatives and 13% of the learners do not practice English with anyone outside the classroom.

On the other hand, graph N° 28 explains that forty-two percent of the students from the fifth year of General Basic Education always interact in the classroom with their teacher and classmates, 28% of the students do it frequently and 22% of them sometimes interact using the target language. On the contrary, 22% of the students from the sixth year say that they always interact with their classmates and teacher in the classroom, while 30% of them do it frequently. Similarly, 35% of the learners sometimes use English in the classroom when they communicate. Finally, Graph No 28 shows that 18% of the students from the seventh year of General Basic Education always interact in English inside the classroom, whereas an equal 36% of the learners do it frequently, and the other 36% sometimes interact using English with classmates and the teacher.

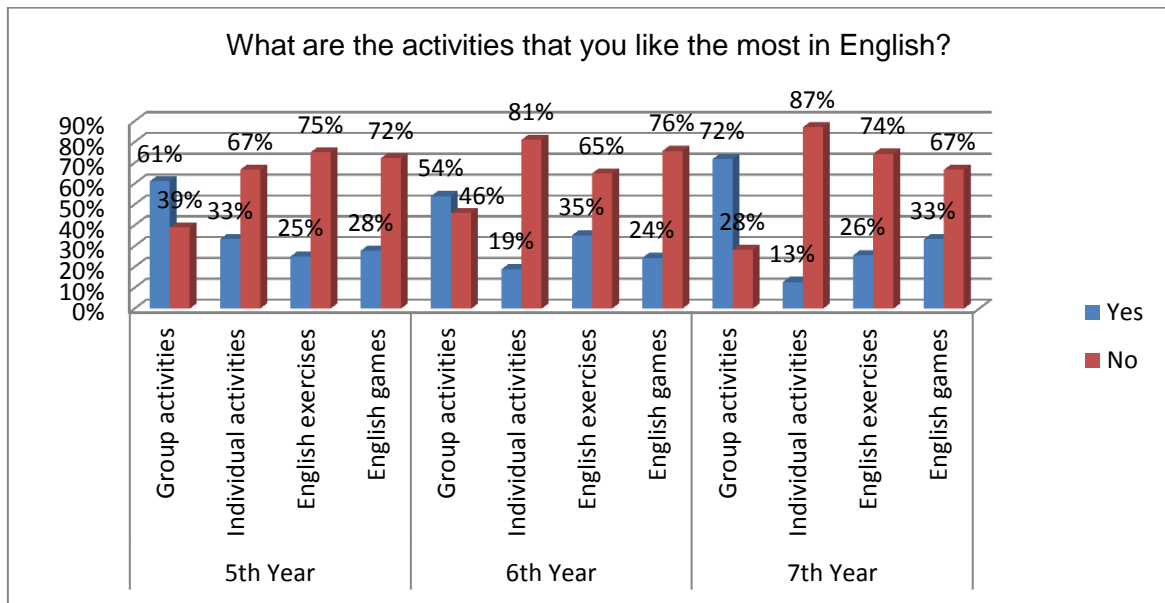
Regarding the information gathered from the surveys with the observation, the students rarely interact with their teacher and classmates using the target language. Similarly, students never communicate between them in English outside of the classroom. It is clear that we cannot verify if students interact with parents and relatives as a high number of students affirmed. Moreover, the language contact must be developed using different ways of communication. Darling-Hammond et al (2002, p. 26) state that “teachers can build on the ways children learn from each other by creating a learning environment where there are ample opportunities for student-to-student discussion, collaboration and feedback”. The idea is to find strategies for fostering and managing communication in the classroom. Communication using the target language is very important in the language process in which the teacher and students interact in order to increase communicative habits.

Graph N° 29



Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

Graph N° 30



Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

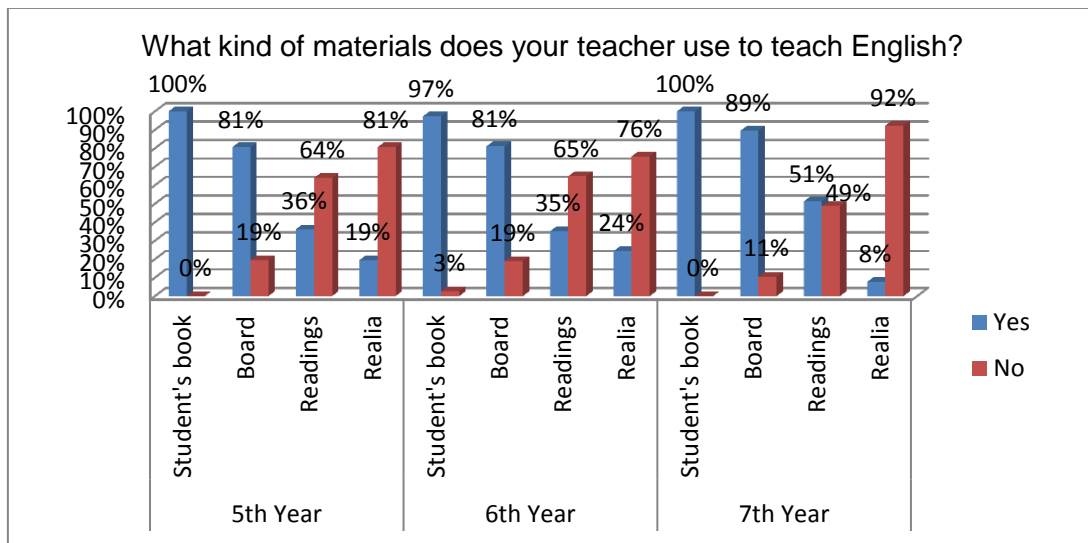
Graph N° 29 shows that forty-four percent of the students from the fifth year of General Basic Education think that the activities presented by the teacher are very easy, and 11% of the learners from the sixth to seventh year think equally. In addition, 56% of the learners from the first to seventh year say that the activities implemented in the classroom are easy. Contrary, 9% of the learners from the fifth to sixth year of

General Basic Education and 33% of the students from the seventh year say that the activities presented are difficult. Finally, 4% of the learners from the fifth to seventh year affirm that the activities are very difficult. Nevertheless, during the observation students could not complete the activities assigned by the teacher easily. Students needed extra time and additional explanation, despite the teacher saying that the tasks assigned during the class are easy to complete.

Additionally, Graph N° 30 shows that approximately sixty-two percent of the students from the fifth to seventh year of General Basic Education say that the activities which they like the most are group activities, while 21% say that individual activities are the ones that they prefer. In addition, 28% of the learners from the fifth to seventh year prefer doing English exercises and 28% of them like games in English. Furthermore, there are other activities that students prefer but in a low percentage such as listening to audio in English, singing songs or saying dialogues, etc.

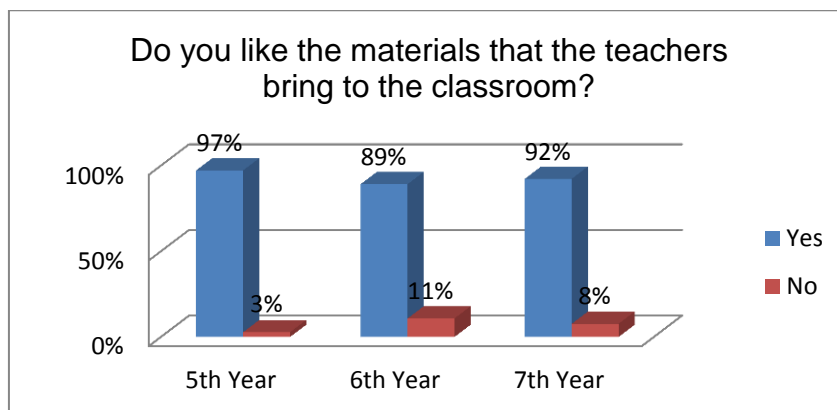
Regarding this information, it was observed that students really enjoyed group activities and playing games. Additionally, the teacher claimed that the students prefer to work in groups and sing songs. The activities that students do not like are working with dialogues, listening to audios and completing tasks related to audios or readings. In this respect, Herrell and Jordan (2012, p. 12) affirm that to achieve overarching goals such as social language, academic language and sociocultural knowledge in order to get students become proficient English speakers, writers and readers, teachers can implement many activities". Those activities should be very creative in order to motivate students to learn English as a foreign language.

Graph N° 31



Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey Colegio

Graph N° 32



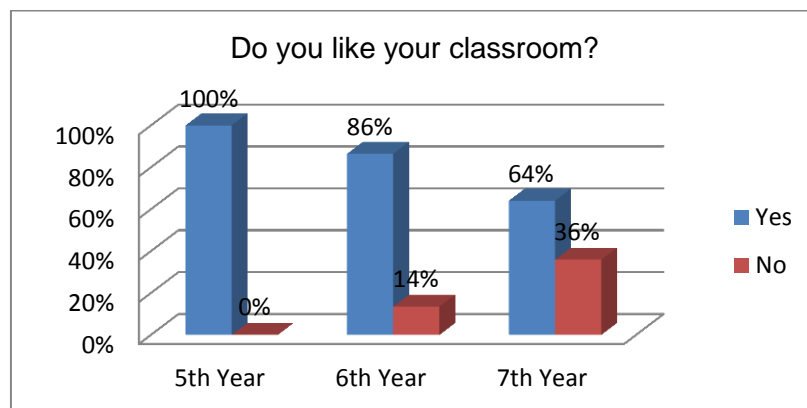
Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

Graph N° 31 shows that one hundred percent of the students from the fifth to seventh year of General Basic Education said that the teacher uses the student's book to teach English, and 83% of them affirm that the teacher uses the board. Additionally, 40% of the learners from the fifth to seventh grades claimed that readings are implemented in the classroom, and 17% of them selected realia as usual material implemented during the English classroom. Moreover, in the survey other materials were included but they obtained a low percentage. Those materials include pictures,

games, songs, crosswords and worksheets. On the other hand, graph N° 32 depicts that approximately ninety-two percent of the students from the fifth to seventh year of General Basic Education like the material that the teacher brings to the classroom, while 8% of them do not feel comfortable with those resources or materials.

These results show that most of the students feel comfortable with the materials that the teacher provides them in order to learn the target language. In contrast, during the observation, it was possible to verify that the teacher only used the textbook, notebook and board. There was no use of extra material that catches the students' attention. Contrary, the teacher claimed that he always brings extra material that is attractive and students enjoy working with them. Tamo (2009) ensures that the most commonly used materials are: newspapers, TV programs, menus, magazines, the internet, movies, songs, brochures, comics, literature (novels, poems and short stories), advertisements for events, course catalogues from schools and so forth. The English teacher is not implementing any of these authentic materials; as a consequence, students are restricted to work with material provided by the government that is limited in content.

Graph N° 33

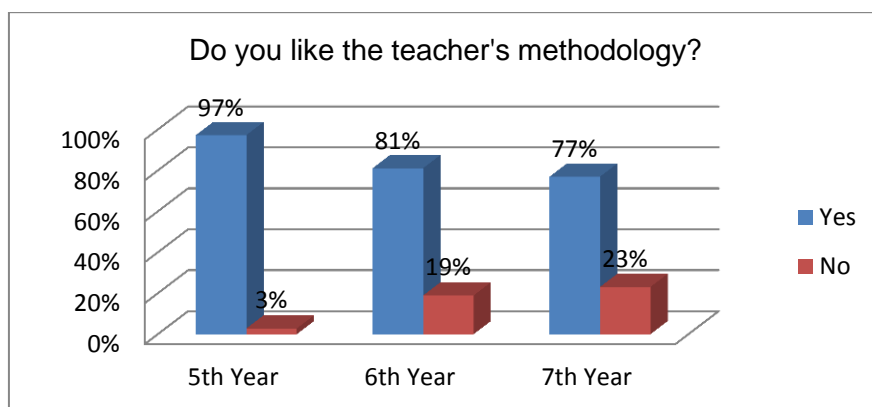


Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

Graph N° 33 displays that one hundred percent of the students from the fifth year of General Basic Education like their classroom. Similarly, 86% of the learners from the sixth year enjoy learning in their schoolroom, while 14% of them do not. Moreover, graph N° 19 illustrates that 64% of the children from the seventh year like how their English classroom is designed and 36% of them do not like it.

During the observation process, it was possible to confirm that the physical space in which students perform their educational activities is not spacious enough because there were more than 30 students per class and the teacher could not control students' progress. In addition, there were some pictures on the walls, but they were related to other subjects other than to English. Regarding this information with the teacher's interview, he confirmed that the classrooms are not spacious and appropriate to work in when trying to change the sitting arrangement. Teachers need to pay attention to aspects, such as: classroom furniture and their location, lighting, sitting arrangement, distractors, space, availability of materials, posters, pictures, wall color, etc. as suggests Miller and Cunningham (2011, p. 1)

Graph N° 34



Author: Geovanny Jiménez
Source: Students's survey

Graph N° 34 shows that ninety-seven percent of the students from the fifth year of General Basic Education like the way their teacher manages the English class, while 3% of them do not like it. Similarly, 81% of the students from the sixth year affirm that they like the methodology of their teacher, and 19% of the learners do not. Finally, 77% of the students from the seventh grade say that they like the methods used by the teacher in order to teach them, and 23% do not like them.

This information shows that students from the fifth year agree with their teacher's work, but some students from upper years do not agree with the method implemented by the teacher. Bansal (2009, p. 8) asserts that "good teaching is not about good techniques". It was confirmed during the observation where students felt happy with their English teacher. The teacher always gave them confidence, and

students always interacted with him despite the fact that they did it in Spanish. Nevertheless, the teacher has to continue working hard with the students that do not like how he teaches the target language.

Furthermore, the teacher mentioned that he applies different methods depending on the necessities of the class. But during the observation it was possible to notice that he used the grammar translation method, total physical response and audiolingual method. These methods are useful according to the students because they approve of the teacher's performance.

Institutional factors

Finally the institutional factors are outside forces or aspects that the students cannot control. These aspects can affect or benefit the students' learning process in which they are involved. Institutional factors are managed by authorities and teachers, and include teacher's training, curriculum and policies.

Additional information was gathered during the observation and the teacher's interview such as class size. The teacher affirmed that he prefers to work with no more than 25 students, but it is not possible because there where more than 34 students per classroom. For this reason, the teacher cannot control students' progress effectively. In addition, the policies implemented by the government affect the students desire to learn English. According to the Ministry of Education (2014) it is not mandatory to learn English in Elementary school. It is mandatory to start learning English from the eighth year of Medium Education to the third year of high school. Students from elementary school are allowed to take English two hours per week in public or private institutions if they cannot pay for it. Consequently, this time is not enough to learn a foreign language. Likewise, there is not a curriculum designed by the Ministry of Education to teach English in elementary school as happens with other subjects. For this reason, the teacher has to manage it differently.

CONCLUSIONS

- The influence of internal and external factors such as motivation, emotions, language contact, memory, habits, the activities and materials implemented in the classroom, time, environment, methodology applied and class size can make the students learning process difficult.
- The students from upper grades (sixth and seventh year) are not as motivated to learn English as students from the first to fourth years of General Basic Education. Students learn English because it is mandatory instead of learning it because they like it. In other words, interest of learning English decreases while students grow because the content learned is considered difficult for them.
- Students from the first to fourth year of General Basic Education (five to nine years old) do not like to practice receptive skills (listening and reading), while students from the fifth to seventh year (ten to twelve years old) do not feel confident when practicing productive skills (speaking and writing). Students cannot communicate effectively when they speak or write in English. For this reason, they feel embarrassed when they have to use the target language in public.
- Short term memory is an evident factor that makes English learning difficult because students from the first to fourth year remember the content learned for a few weeks, while students from the fifth to seventh year cannot store in their minds content previously learned in English for a long period of time. Due to short term memory, the students investigated cannot use the language correctly when they want to communicate through writing and speaking.
- Learning habits are not the most appropriate in students from the fifth to seventh year of GBE because they only study what they have learned in the classroom.
- Most of the students of General Basic Education do not understand the instructions given by the teacher adequately. The social setting in which students interact is not the most appropriate because actors (students-teacher and students-students) do not always use the target language as a way of communication between themselves, instead of that, there is an excessive use of the mother tongue inside and outside the classroom.

- There is a limited use of authentic materials to teach English despite students liking them. For this reason, students cannot increase their knowledge of the target language. The teacher prefers to work with the existing material that includes the students' book, audios, realia, readings and the board as the main resources. The use of extra material in the classroom is sporadic because students have to pay for it.
- The environment in which students perform their activities in some cases is not adequate because there is not enough space to work with a large number of students (30 or more students) per classroom. For this reason, students do not have the opportunity to interact between them using the target language, and the teacher needs more time to control the activities performed or verify if the students acquire the content previously planned.
- Most of the students like the methodology that the teacher uses to teach the target language because he gives them confidence and opportunities to socialize; however, the teacher uses methods that are old-fashioned such as the Grammar Translation Method, which is not helpful for the students because they always expect for the teacher to translate the instructions.
- The number of hours that students are in contact with the target language is not enough to learn a foreign language effectively. Students are only in contact with the target language two hours per week, and the limited time that they are in contact with the language is affected by the excessive number of students that is evident in each classroom.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After the conclusions, it is necessary to suggest some recommendations that teachers and authorities can consider when they teach or plan their lessons.

- In order to increase students' intrinsic motivation toward achieving English language learning, the teacher has to provide confidence to the students in all the activities performed. In addition, the teacher has to create an atmosphere that is open and positive where students interact between them and with the teacher.
- The teacher has to encourage students to practice productive skills (writing and speaking) through the use of attractive and simple dialogues, interacting with them in all activities inside and outside the classroom. Likewise, the teacher has to implement a variety of activities that encourage and ensure students engagement by writing simple sentences and more elaborated paragraphs using authentic vocabulary depending on the level of the learners. The activities can include group work, games, reading corners, storytelling, songs and videos, role plays, dialogues, tongue twisters, etc.
- To ensure students remember content learned in English, they have to use authentic material that help them to link their mother tongue with the foreign language. This kind of material has to be linked to the content learned during the class and the teacher can make, download or work cooperatively with students to create it with cheaper and recyclable materials and resources. This kind of authentic material can include songs, board games, table games, worksheets, videos (cartoons), pictures, flashcards, posters, realia, comics, brochures, foldables, newspapers, magazines, etc.
- In order to change students' learning habits the teacher has to provide strategies that students can follow with the purpose of learning English as a foreign language. Those habits can include the use of graphic organizers, creating an ideal study space in the classroom, teaching in a way that suits students learning styles, asking for help if students do not understand the content, organize notes in a notebook or folder, developing effective memorization techniques (use lists when having to memorize several things or use of flashcards), etc.

- The teacher has to use the language adequately using appropriate tone and pitch when speaking in English and giving instructions. In addition, the teacher has to always ask students' comprehension and provide feedback to clarify misunderstandings.
- The authorities have to consider the idea of dividing each classroom into two groups in order to make the classroom pedagogically appropriate to learn English. With this change, the teacher will be able to work effectively providing more personalized assistance to the students and activities.
- As the current policies consider English learning as not mandatory in elementary schools, the same policies empower authorities to make use of the hours designed to clubs in other activities such as English. The authorities should consider this as an opportunity to teach students English more than two hours per week in order to ensure students maximum exposure to the target language.
- Authorities and teachers have to design a curriculum that is in accordance with the students' needs, lacks and wants. Also the authorities have to review the text book used to learn English in order to provide students authentic tools that ensure students achievements of the proposed goals and requirements of the Common European Framework that the government has considered for public and private education.
- The teacher has to avoid using old-fashioned methodologies and approaches in order to teach English. It is necessary to implement different methods or approaches such as: communicative approaches, cooperative learning, project-based learning, audio-lingual or aural-oral approach, and others that will help students in the learning process.

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ANNEXES



Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja
La Universidad Católica de Loja



Titulación de Inglés Encuesta Alumnos

1. Datos informativos:

1.1 Edad 1) 5 a 6 años () 2) 7 a 8 años ()	1.2 Sexo 1) Niño () 2) Niña ()	1.3 Año que cursa: _____ año de educación básica	1.4 Paralelo: 1) A () 2) B () 3) C () 4) D ()
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INDICACIONES PARA CONTESTAR EL CUESTIONARIO

A continuación encontrarás preguntas que se refieren a los factores que influyen en el aprendizaje del idioma inglés en los niños y niñas de educación básica de la Unidad Educativa San Francisco de Asís.

Marca con una X según corresponda		 YES	 NO
1	¿Te gusta aprender Inglés?		
2	¿Aprender Inglés es difícil?		
3	¿Te gusta hablar en Inglés?		
4	¿Te gusta escribir en Inglés?		
5	¿Te gusta leer en Inglés?		
6	¿Te da vergüenza hablar en Inglés en público?		
7	¿Cuando algo en Inglés está difícil, lo vuelves a intentar hasta que salga bien?		
8	¿Haces rápido los trabajos de Inglés en clase?		
9	¿Te gusta como enseña Inglés profesor?		
10	¿Le entiendes a tu profesor cuando solo habla en Inglés?		
11	¿Las actividades que enseña el profesor de Inglés son fáciles?		
12	¿Te gusta como tu profesor controla la disciplina en clase?		
13	¿Siempre te acuerdas lo que aprendiste de Inglés?		
14	¿Participas en todas las actividades que se realizan en las clases de Inglés?		
15	¿Te gusta trabajar solo, hacer ejercicios y que el profesor indique la clase?		
16	¿Te gusta trabajar en grupos, cantar canciones, realizar juegos en		

	Inglés?		
17	¿Tu profesor utiliza imágenes, videos, juegos, libros en las clases de Inglés?		
18	¿Te gustan los materiales que trae el profesor a clases?		
19	¿Practicar en casa lo que aprendiste de Inglés?		
20	¿Practicar el Inglés con tus compañeros y profesor?		
21	¿Te gusta tu salón de clases?		



Gracias por tu colaboración



Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja
La Universidad Católica de Loja

Titulación de Inglés

Encuesta estudiantes

La presente encuesta tiene como objetivo determinar cuáles son las dificultades que enfrentan los niños cuando aprenden el idioma Inglés como lengua extranjera en la Unidad Educativa San Francisco de Asís durante los años 2013-2014

Te rogamos responder la siguiente encuesta de manera clara colocando una (x) según corresponda.

Datos informativos

1. Edad	2. Sexo:	3. Año que cursa:	4. Paralelo:
1) 9 a 10 años ()	1) Niño ()	_____ año de	1) A ()
2) 11 a 12 años ()	2) Niña ()	educación básica	2) B ()
3) 13 años o más ()			3) C ()

Factores internos:

1. ¿Por qué aprendes Inglés?

1) Porque te gusta y te diviertes ()	2) Porque es obligatorio()
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Otra razón: _____

2. Consideras que aprender Inglés es:

1) Fácil ()	2) Difícil ()
--------------	----------------

Por que: _____

3. ¿Qué es lo que más te gusta del idioma Inglés?

1) Hablarlo ()	3) Leerlo ()
2) Escribirlo ()	4) Escucharlo ()
Otros _____	

4. ¿Qué es lo que no te gusta del idioma Inglés?

5) Hablarlo ()	7) Leerlo ()
6) Escribirlo ()	8) Escucharlo ()
Otros _____	

5. ¿Cómo te sientes cuando practicas el idioma inglés? Escoge solo una opción.

1) Te da vergüenza hablar en inglés()	3) Te preocupas de escribirlo correctamente ()
2) Se te hace fácil hablar en inglés ()	Otros: _____

6. ¿Qué es lo primero que haces para resolverlo cuando algo te resulta difícil de aprender en Inglés? Escoge solo una (1) opción.

1) Lo intentas varias veces hasta que salga bien ()	4) Buscas ayuda en casa ()
2) Preguntas al profesor ()	5) Vas a una academia de Inglés ()
3) Preguntas a un compañero ()	

7. ¿Cuáles son los hábitos que tú tienes para estudiar? Escoge solo una opción.

1) Repasar lo aprendido ()	4) Realizas ejercicios en internet ()
2) Leer sobre el tema aprendido ()	5) Ninguna de las anteriores ()
3) Hacer ejercicios extraclase ()	

Especificar otros: _____

Factores Externos

8. ¿Te gusta cómo enseña tu profesor de Inglés?

1) Si ()	2) No ()
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Por que? _____

9. ¿Entiendes las instrucciones que te da tu profesor en Inglés antes de cada actividad?

Escoge solo una (1) opción.

1) Siempre ()	4) Casi nunca ()
2) Casi siempre ()	5) Nunca ()
3) Solo a veces ()	

10. Consideras que las actividades que el profesor presenta en clases son: Escoge solo una (1) opción.

1) Muy fáciles ()	2) Fáciles ()	3) Difíciles ()	4) Muy difíciles()
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11. ¿Tu profesor controla la disciplina en clases?

1) Si ()	2) No ()
-----------	-----------

12. ¿Te gusta como tu profesor controla la disciplina en clases?

1) Si ()	2) No ()
-----------	-----------

Por qué? _____

13. Cuando aprendes algo en Inglés, puedes recordarlo por: Escoge solo una (1) opción.

1) Largo tiempo ()	3) Por un día ()
2) Pocas semanas ()	4) Se te olvida enseguida ()

14. ¿Interactúas en clase con el profesor y compañeros? Escoge solo una (1) opción.

1) Siempre ()	4) Casi nunca ()
2) Casi siempre ()	5) Nunca ()
3) Solo a veces ()	

15. ¿Cuáles son las actividades que más te gustan en la clase de Inglés? Escoge solo dos (2) opciones.

1) Trabajos en grupo ()	6) Realizar juegos en Inglés ()
2) Trabajos individuales ()	7) Cantar canciones en Inglés ()
3) Trabajar con diálogos ()	8) Escuchar audios en Inglés ()
4) Que el maestro le explique la clase ()	Otras: _ _ _ _ _
5) Hacer ejercicios en clase ()	_____

16. ¿Qué materiales utiliza el profesor para enseñar la clase de Inglés? Escoge solo tres (3) opciones.

1) Libro de trabajo ()	9) Canciones ()
2) Hojas de Trabajo o folletos()	10) Pizarra ()
3) Posters ()	11) Lecturas ()
4) Fotos ()	12) Folletos ()
5) Imágenes ()	13) Objetos ()

6) Audios ()	14) Revistas/periódicos ()
7) Videos ()	15) Crucigramas ()
8) Juegos ()	

Otros: _____

17. ¿Te gustan los materiales que utiliza el profesor para enseñar la clase de Inglés?

1) Si ()	2) No ()
-----------	-----------

Por qué? _____

18. ¿Cuál es tu estrategia favorita para reforzar lo aprendido en la clase de Inglés?

Escoge solo una (1) opción.

1) Lecturas ()	3) Ver videos en Inglés ()
2) Escuchar canciones ()	4) Ver películas en inglés ()

Otros: _____

19. ¿Con quién practicas lo aprendido en Inglés fuera del aula? Escoge solo una (1) opción.

1) Tus compañeros y profesor ()	3) Con tus padres y/o familiares ()
2) Con amigos fuera de la escuela ()	4) Con nadie ()
Otros _____	

20. ¿Te gusta tu salón de clases?

1) Si ()	2) No ()
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Porque? _____



Gracias por tu colaboración



Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja
La Universidad Católica de Loja

Titulación de Inglés
Teachers' interview

The goal of this survey is to determine the main difficulties that children face when learning English as a foreign language in the "Unidad Educativa San Francisco de Asís" during the years 2013-2014

Informative data

Educational institution	
Date	
Year	

1. Which level of education do you have?

- 1) High school diploma ()
- 2) English bachelor degree ()
- 3) English master degree ()
- 4) Other: _____

2. Do you consider the student's needs to teach English successfully?

3. Do you motivate students to learn English?

Yes () No ()

3.1 If your answer was affirmative, in which way do you motivate your students:

4. How do you control the discipline in classroom?

5. Do you use English most of the time to teach English?

6. Do students understand your instructions?

Always () Sometimes () Never ()

Why? _____

7. When you interact with students in English. Do they participate actively?

8. Which of the following methods have you applied in your classes? Choose the most common (three options)

1) Grammar translation method ()	5) Communicative language teaching ()
2) The direct method ()	6) Audiolingualism method ()
3) Suggestopedia ()	7) Total physical response ()
4) The communicative approach ()	8) The audio-lingual ()

Others: _____

9. Which of the following activities do you use to teach your lessons? Choose 5 and rank them from the activity you most use (1) to the activity you least use (5)

1) Whole group activities ()	6) Freeze frame ()
2) Group activities ()	7) Language focus lesson ()
3) Individual activities ()	8) Modeled talk ()
4) Warm up activities ()	9) Role plays ()
5) Ice breakers ()	

Can you mention others activities : _____

10. What kind of resources do you use in your classes?

1) Printed ()	4) Technology ()
2) Visual ()	5) Board games ()
3) Auditory ()	

Can you mention others resources implemented in the classroom? _____

11. Do you consider appropriate the existent resources that do you have in the classroom?

12. _____

13. Do you consider class size an impediment to teach English successfully?

14. Do you feel comfortable working with the following groups of students:

1) Less than 10 ()	4) 26 to 33 students ()
2) 10 to 17 students ()	5) More than 34 students ()
3) 18 to 25 students ()	

Why? _____

15. Do you arrange students' seats in relation to the activities planned for your English classes?

16. Do you have enough space and time to work with the students in the classroom?

17. Do you consider appropriate the environment in which students learn English?

18. Does someone monitor your classes?

19. Does the institution review your lesson plans?

20. Do you provide feedback to the students at?

1) The end of the class ()	3) The end of the partial exam ()
2) The end of the unit ()	4) Before the final exam ()

Can you provide more details _____

21. Which of the following factors do you think can affect students in the process of learning English as a foreign language? Choose 5 and rank them from the factor that most affect students (1) to the factor that least affect them (5)

1) Motivation ()	9) Class size ()
2) Emotional factors ()	10) Environment ()
3) Behavior ()	11) Time ()
4) Habits of the students ()	12) Language contact ()
5) Memorization ()	13) Teacher's training ()
6) The classroom as a social setting ()	14) Methodology applied by the teacher ()
7) Activities implemented in the class ()	15) Curriculum designed ()
8) Materials used to teach English ()	16) Policies implemented by authorities()

Provide some reasons: _____



Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja
La Universidad Católica de Loja

Titulación de Inglés
Observation Sheet

1. Informative data:

Educational institution	
Date	
Year	

Internal factors:

No	Item	Yes	No
1	Students enjoy English classes		
2	Students are motivated to learn English		
3	Students do activities for pressure		
4	Students are stressed		
5	Students have fun when learning English		
6	Students feel comfortable in the English classes		
7	Students enjoy the activities presented in the classroom		
8	Students interact between themselves in English		
10	Students fight, kick, bit, other students or are disruptive, defiance, and swearing.		
11	Students are confident in the English classes		
12	Students feel frustrated when something is difficult		
13	Students are disordered when learning English		

14	Students are persistent when learning English		
15	Activities are easy for students		
16	Students pay attention to the instructions		
17			
18	Students are punctual		
19	Students remember words and phrases easily		
20	Students/teacher relationship is good		
21	Students/students relationship is good		
22	Students perform successfully the task designed to them		
23	There is an easy communication between students/teacher		
24	There are opportunities for student-student discussion, collaboration, and feedback		
25	Characteristics of the classroom Seats arranged Ventilation Illumination Spacious Distractors Furniture		
26	Students develop different tasks on time		
27	Teacher assign students specific periods of time to develop different activates		
28	Teacher develops all activities planned for a lesson		

29	Teacher's use of the language in the classroom							
30	Teacher translates instructions to students							
31	Teacher supports students in different activities							
32	Teacher is friendly and confident							
33	Teacher uses different strategies to teach the lessons							
34	Lessons are planned according to the Needs of the students Time							
35	Lessons goals are available							
36	Methods used by the teacher	Grammar translation method	The direct method	Communicative language teaching	Audiolingualism method	Total physical response	The audio-lingual	
			Suggestopedia	The communicative approach				
37	Activities implemented by the teacher	Whole group activities	Group activities	Individual activities	Warm up activities	Ice breakers	Freeze frames	
		Language focus lesson	Modeled talk	Role plays				
38	Materials used by the teacher	Textbook	Workbook	Worksheets	Handouts	Posters	Flashcards	
		Pictures	Songs	Audios	Videos	Movies	Games	

		Newspapers	Magazines	Realia	Crosswords	Board	Readings
39	Resources that teachers count in class	Printed	Visual	Auditory	Technology	Board games	