Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Acquisition in the EFL Classroom

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Flashcards: Building Up New Words

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Abstract

This project is focused on how the use of flashcards build up vocabulary in fifth graders at a public institution in Monteria making the teaching process easier and thus, creating a better learning environment. The use of flashcards in the classroom makes instructions meaningful for learners. Flashcards help learners to reach their objectives by providing emphasis in a different way. They can multiply the learners' understanding of the topic presented in class, they can increase learner's motivation towards the classes, foster them to participate more actively during the development of the classes. Flashcards can be used to present the topic, reinforce it, clarify points, evaluate and create a communicative class with more interest to every learner.

This project was implemented using qualitative and quantitative research methods. At the moment of collecting data, the research group used instruments such as classroom observations and interviews which after being analysed, showed that vocabulary acquisition was not the main issue to be learnt during English class or the techniques for doing it were not meaningful for the learners.

After collecting all data and applying the technique based on flashcards, a questionnaire was administered which was helpful to concluded that flashcards enabled learners to acquire new vocabulary and promoted their active participation and motivation since they were a meaningful technique that facilitated the learning of a second language.

Key words

Resumen

El aprendizaje de vocabulario es un aspecto importante para desarrollar un proceso significativo del aprendizaje del idioma inglés; este requiere más prácticas intensas y más tiempo ya que este permite desarrollar las otras habilidades. Aprender palabras nuevas en un segundo idioma, en este caso "Inglés" se ha convertido en una de las prioridades principales para los niños, jóvenes y adultos alrededor del mundo debido a su uso en áreas tales como ciencia, tecnología, negocios, comunicación y otros aun cuando ellos tienen diferentes razones para aprender; ellos todos aprenden vocabulario nuevo usando diferentes métodos y enfoques aplicados por profesores o facilitadores dentro del salón de clases. Un método efectivo es el uso de imágenes para enseñar vocabulario ayudando a los profesores a mejorar su proceso de enseñanza y facilitar la adquisición de un segundo idioma permitiendo a los estudiantes ser exitosos al momento de adquirir palabras nuevas y usarlas con otras personas.

Este proyecto está enfocado en cómo el uso de imágenes contribuye a incrementar el nivel de vocabulario en estudiantes de quinto grado en una institución educativa de Montería haciendo el proceso de enseñanza más fácil y así crear un ambiente de aprendizaje mejor. El uso de imágenes en el salón de clases hace que las instrucciones sean más significativas para los estudiantes. Las imágenes les ayudan a los estudiantes a alcanzar sus objetivos proveyendo énfasis de una forma diferente. Las imágenes pueden multiplicar en los estudiantes el nivel de entendimiento del tema presentado en clase, ellos pueden incrementar su motivación hacia las clases, promoverlos a participar más activamente durante el desarrollo de las clases. Las imágenes pueden ser usadas para presentar el tema, reforzarlo, clarificar puntos no bien entendidos, evaluar y crear una clase comunicativa con mayor interés por parte de cada estudiante.

Esta investigación presenta los resultados de una investigación cualitativa y cuantitativa en la cual al momento de recoger datos, se utilizó los siguientes instrumentos: observaciones de aula, y entrevistas que luego de ser analizados, demostró que la adquisición de vocabulario no era un aspecto fundamental durante la clase de inglés o las técnicas para hacerlo

no resultaban significativas para los estudiantes. De igual forma, después de recoger todos los datos y de la aplicación de la estrategia, se realizó un cuestionario a los estudiantes, en el cual se observó, que las imágenes permiten a los estudiantes adquirir nuevo vocabulario y promueven su participación activa y motivación, ya que esta técnica fue más significativa y por lo tanto facilitó el aprendizaje de una segunda lengua.

Palabras clave

Aprendizaje del vocabulario, técnicas de aprendizaje del vocabulario, imágenes, motivación, participación y rendimiento.

1. Introduction

English is considered as one of the most important spoken language around the world due to its importance in the economic, political, social and educational field. Once you learn English as a foreign language, you modify your conceptions of the world and its reality through the continuous interaction with other people in which language works as a means to exchange experiences, information, and knowledge. Thanks to English, you can be exposed to a new way of thinking, feeling and acting, you can be involved in a total commitment to use the language almost all the time, you can build relationships, become member of a learning community in order to share opinions about any topic in common.

Learning English improves your quality of life and brings a lot of benefits such as better working opportunities, ability to communicate with foreigners, you can help other people to learn the language, instructions, guidance, you can learn any other languages, you can be competitive in the market, get confident, get a better social recognition in the society, travel to an English speaking country, meet and interact with native speakers, learn about new cultures, be capable of understanding movies, music, articles in newspapers, magazines, internet and understand the instructions of electronic devices to be used in a correct way.

In Colombia, the National Government has established in the article 23rd of the General Law of Education that "Every school must teach English language as a fundamental subject and it has created the National Bilingual Program which has as main goal to develop English communicative skills (reading, listening, speaking, and writing) in primary and secondary level". That is the reason, teaching English as a foreign language has been growing with great interest among schools, technical institutions and universities. Therefore, they have adapted their curriculums and teaching programs in order for learners to have success on developing English skills and abilities which let them communicate and maintain social relationships with others in this target language "English".

Vocabulary learning is a continuous process in which learners are exposed to the knowledge of new words. Learners are constantly in an

environment where they modify their conceptions of reality in which language works as a mean to exchange learners' and teachers' experiences, information, knowledge and values. Learning new words in a second language, in this case "English" has become one of the main priorities for children, young people and adults around the world due to its use in areas such as science, technology, business, communication and others even when they have different reasons to learn. They all learn new vocabulary by using different methods and approaches applied for teachers or facilitators inside the classroom. One of these methods and approaches is the use of flashcards to teach vocabulary which helps teachers to improve their teaching process and facilitate second language acquisition, allowing learners to be successful at the moment of acquiring new words and use them with other people.

This paper is focused on how the use of flashcards build up vocabulary in fifth graders at a public institution in Monteria making the teaching process easier and thus creating a better learning environment. The use of flashcards in the classroom makes instructions meaningful for learners. Flashcards help learners to reach their objectives by providing emphasis in a different way. Flashcards can multiply the learner's level of understanding of the topic presented in class, they can increase learner's motivation towards the classes, foster them to participate more actively during the development of the classes and they can be used to present the topic, reinforce it, clarify points, evaluate and create a communicative class with more interest to every learner.

In this paper, you can find information related to the statement of the problem, the significance of the problem, the research questions, the general and specific objectives to be reached through this research paper, the theoretical framework and literature review that support this paper, the methodology applied, the results and discussion got during the application of the instruments, conclusions and pedagogical implications.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In Colombia, learning English has become an important part of the educational field. That is the reason, why every boy and girl has to attain a certain level of communicative English skills when they graduate

from high schools. However, in primary, learners face some problems to get this personal improvement such as lack of well trained teachers and enough time to teach this subject "English". In terms of staff, there is one teacher to teach all subjects and some of them do not have any knowledge about English or how to teach it; besides, there are some cases where primary teachers leave English subject out of curriculum or teach it by using approaches and methods that are not appropriate or meaningful for learners' ages. Another issue is the lack of time, English is taught just 2 hours per week but sometimes the teachers use this time to teach other subjects instead of English.

The above mentioned situation is clearly reflected in Monteria's schools. It was identified by the research group after some observations carried out in a fifth grade public institution in the city. The research group could observe that learners are learning vocabulary by translating meaning or rewriting words. They do not practice pronouncing the words that they transcribe from the board and they do not use those words in any communicative activity. As a consequence of this aspect, learners are starting their secondary level of education without enough English vocabulary which is so hard because this particular school teaches English 6 hours a week in the secondary level. In other words, when learners of this school start 6th grade they are learning English from scratch and it is one of the reason why the research group chose this problem to deal with.

1.2 Significance of the Problem

Learning a second language is relevant for people who want to have a better quality of life. That is the reason why the educational institutions are in charge of giving an integral education in order to create competitiveness, security, social improvement, and the most important thing, labour opportunities. According to this above information, the research group claimed the significance of building up vocabulary in learners who are starting their educational process (primary level) since it is necessary to develop all the aspects that a second language requires in order to get a significant communicative process. To reach this goal the research group put forward a strategy based on the use of flashcards to build up fifth graders' vocabulary. It allowed the teacher to create several activities inside the classroom in a pleasant environment

in which the language was useful and meaningful, also developed the learner's communicative skills. Apart from that, this research project is looking for answering the following research questions:

1.3 Research Questions

To what extend could flashcards impact fifth graders' vocabulary learning?

What effects do flashcards have on fifth graders' vocabulary learning in the English language classroom?

Taking into account the research questions, this research paper has established the following general and specific objectives:

1.4 Objectives

1.4.1 General Objective

To build up learners' vocabulary by using flash cards to improve English learning process in secondary level in a public institution in Monteria.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

› To use colourful flashcards to foster learners' vocabulary acquisition.
› To increase learner's motivation through the use of flashcard to teach vocabulary.

To raise learner's performance and participation to acquire new vocabulary through the use of flashcards.

2. Theoretical Framework

Teaching a foreign language is a complex task for any teacher because the teaching process requires having a high theoretical and practical vision about abilities, methodology and strategies which help to build up vocabulary acquisition. In this section, there is the literature review and

the theory related to second language acquisition in children, aspects to develop a second language, vocabulary acquisition in children and vocabulary teaching techniques mainly visual aids.

2.1 Literature review

In a previous study related to this paper, *"The Research behind the Importance of Teaching Vocabulary",* Several researchers and vocabulary experts agree vocabulary learning is really a special case of reading comprehension. There are very strong reasons for implementing a systematic and principled approach to teaching and subsequent learning of vocabulary as a corner-stone for developing comprehension. (Blachowicz and Ogle, 2001; Cunningham and Stanovich, 1998, Nagy and Anderson, 1984, McKeown, et al., 1983). In addition, by implementing a systematic and principled approach to teaching and learning vocabulary, in this case the use of flashcards, learners see vocabulary as a very important element in language learning and reading (Beck, McKeown, and Kucan, 2002, Bormuth, 1969, Davis 1968).

Most researchers and vocabulary experts believe that the best methodology employs both direct and indirect teaching and provides opportunities for both receptive and productive learning to occur. In direct vocabulary instruction, learners do many specific exercises and activities that focus their attention directly on certain words in the lists, learning word parts, and vocabulary games. (Vacca, Vacca and Gove, 2000; Allen, 1999; Marzano and Marzano, 1988). Flashcards can multiply the learner's level of understanding of the topic presented in class, they can increase learner's motivation towards the classes, foster them to participate more actively during the development of the classes.

One important thing to keep in mind is that the effort given to the learning of new words can be wasted if it is not followed up with later interactions with the words through what are often called indirect instructional techniques such as practice with the use of context for guessing the meaning of unknown words; paraphrasing, using word parts, dictionary use, and mnemonic techniques. Guided practice with these strategies encourages learners to use the strategies effectively and leads to permanent knowledge and establishment of vocabulary. (Beck, McKeown, and Kucan, 2002; Beck, Perfetti, and Mckeown,

1982; Crist, 1981; Eeds and Cockrum, 1985; Nation, 1990; Stahl, 1983). One effective method to get the aforementioned is the use of flashcards to teach vocabulary because they help teachers to improve their teaching process and facilitate second language acquisition, allow learners to be successful at the moment of acquiring new words and use them with other people. The use of flashcards in the classroom makes instructions meaningful for learners, they can increase learner's motivation towards the classes, foster them to participate more actively during the development of the classes.

Mentioning another study carried out in the U.S. *"Studies Find Vocabulary Instruction Lacking"* to support this research paper, Susan B. Neuman, a professor in educational studies at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and Tanya S. Wright, an assistant professor of teacher education at Michigan State University in East Lansing, analyzed observations of 55 kindergarten teachers' instruction in a variety of school districts. They found limited instruction in vocabulary in most settings, but low-income children were least likely to be taught the kind of sophisticated, academic words that will help them succeed in school. "Vocabulary is a deceptively simple literacy skill that researchers and educators agree is critical to students' academic success, but which has proved frustratingly difficult to address," *Education Week Report*. Ms. Neuman said. 'Generally, children come into school with vocabulary at one point and leave with vocabulary at the same point…. We're not teaching very many words, and we're not teaching in a way that children will retain the words.' This research paper is focused on how the use of flashcards build up vocabulary in fifth graders at a public institution in Monteria by doing the teaching process easier and thus, creating a better learning environment.

"By age 3, when many children enter early preschool, youngsters from well-to-do families have a working vocabulary of 1,116 words, compared to 749 words for children in working-class families and 525 words for children on welfare, according to a seminal 2003 longitudinal study by Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley, authors of the 1995 book "*Meaningful differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children*". Much of the vocabulary instruction Neuman and Wright observed came in isolated "teachable moments," such as pointing out the meaning of words in books read aloud. They noted that he

number of words to which children were exposed varied widely. The researchers also found little effort to reinforce the learning and place words in a broader context, all of which is necessary for children to integrate new words into their vocabulary. For instance, "A student hears the word 'transportation' in a book about trains," another expert — Rebecca Silverman, an assistant professor in special education at the University of Maryland — tells Ed Week. "If the teacher doesn't explain it in a general context the student might not get the full sense of the word, and might think it's just related to trains." Flashcards can be used to present the topic, reinforce it, clarify points, evaluate and create a communicative class with more interest to every learner.

2.2 Second Language Acquisition in Children

Second language acquisition refers to the subconscious or conscious processes by which a language other than the mother tongue is learnt in a natural or tutored setting. It covers the development of phonology, lexis, grammar, and pragmatic knowledge (Ellis, R. 1985:6). Language acquisition can occur in different stages but childhood is the best stage to develop it since at this age children are beginning to come into contact with social, cultural, educational, recreational environments which enable them to provide knowledge and abilities in order to create their own ideology of the world. In line with this thought, language acquisition is part of the overall development of the children physically, socially, and cognitively. Cole and Cole claim that there is strong evidence that children may never acquire a language if they have not been exposed to a language before they reach the age of 6 or 7 years old (1993, p.42). Second language acquisition occurs after children learn how to use their first language in an original and unique way. For this reason, if children are introduced to a second language they have more opportunities to become truly proficient in both languages since in childhood a child learns some language components such as phonology, semantics and syntax and if these components are taught in both languages children can develop a high level of pronunciation in their mother tongue and second language.

2.3 Aspects to Develop a Second Language

Cohen (1998, p.36) states, there are several factors which play an important role when applying learning strategies and when a foreign language is being taught. It will be suitable to analyse the factors that may influence when you choose the adequate learning strategies taking into account the students' needs such as cultural background, gender, age and stage, motivation, and learning styles.

› **Cultural background**: Students usually memorize in any way that seems to be more relevant and interesting among them with respect to a foreign language.
› **Gender:** Here, girls show greater overall strategy in the put in practice of a particular strategy than boys.
› **Age and stage**: Students of different ages and stages of foreign language learning use different strategies depending on their level.
› **Motivation**: When there are more motivated students in the classroom tend to use more strategies than when there are less motivated students.
› **Learning styles**: It often determines the choice of second language learning strategies. For instance, analytic-style, students prefer strategies such as contrastive analysis, words and phrases. While global-style, students use strategies to find meaning and to converse without knowing all the words.

2.4. Vocabulary learning

Vocabulary learning is an important aspect to develop a significant learning process; it requires more intense practice and time since it enables to develop the other skills. According to Pikulski & Templeton "Perhaps the greatest tools we can give students for succeeding, not only in their education but more generally in life, is a large, rich vocabulary and the skills for using those words". (2004, p.1) It shows that the amount of words that a learner knows about any language which he or she is learning, it is what let her/him be successful at the moment of communicating with others because of the length of vocabulary used in everyday communication, it is what makes that interaction richer and more significant. Locke states, "The acquisition of word meanings take much longer than the acquisition of the spoken form of the

words, and children use words in their speech long before they have a full understanding of them (Quoted in Cameron, 2001, p.73). That is to say, vocabulary is an essential component in communication so it is what learners have to study more often in order to reach fluency and accuracy at the moment of using the language orally or written.

Cameron expresses, "children need to meet words again and again in new contexts that help increase what they know about words" (2001, p. 81). It –.shows that learners need to use words many times, in many different contexts in order to get a better understanding of the words and learn to use them correctly because in English or any language, words can change their meaning according to the setting or context in which they are being used. Besides, learning vocabulary is a crucial component since it allows learners to understand and communicate with others. Wilkins wrote that ". . . while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (Quoted in Clement, 2013, p. 2). It shows that knowing about grammar rules is not enough if people do not have the words to use them correctly, because in real settings the most important thing is the message (what) to be communicated and not the grammar rules to communicate it (how).

In regard with this, there are two well – known ways to learn vocabulary: direct and indirect. The first one refers to those types of activities in which information about the meaning of words is made directly available to students… such as looking up words in a dictionary (Beck & McKeown, in Cooper, 1993, p.195). Besides, direct instructions can promote a better reading comprehension if words are taught in a real context taking into account the learners' prior knowledge (Cooper, 1993, p. 198). That is to say, through direct instructions learners can learn difficult words which represent complex concepts that are not part of the students' everyday experiences and direct instruction of vocabulary relevant to a given text leads to a better reading comprehension. The second one refers to the capacity to learn words by hearing, seeing and using them in many different contexts. For example, through conversations with adults, being read to, and reading extensively on their own (Beck & McKeown cited in Cooper, 1993, p.195). It means, when learners want to learn vocabulary the best way to do it is by coming into contact with activities that require the use

of different and new words which are being used in a communicative way during the daily life and taking into account their real meanings.

In the same line, Schmitt proposed two approaches to vocabulary acquisition: explicit and incidental learning. Explicit learning focuses attention directly on the information to be learned, which gives the greatest chance for its acquisition. But it is also time-consuming, and for all but the most diligent student, it would be too laborious to learn an adequately sized lexicon. Incidental learning can occur when one is using language for communicative purposes, and so gives a double benefit for time expended. But it is slower and more gradual, lacking the focused attention of explicit learning (2000, p.100).

In addition to this, some authors have discussed about the importance of vocabulary learning strategies and proposed some taxonomies or classification. Schmitt (1997) reclassified Oxford's strategies (determination, social, and memory, cognitive and metacognitive strategies) in two main categories: **1.** discovery strategies: are individual strategies that learners used to learn a word and **2.** consolidation strategies: are strategies that allow learners to memorize, practice and retain the word after it has been introduced Visnaja, (2008). Nation (2001) classified vocabulary learning strategies in Planning, choosing what to focus on and when to focus on it; Sources finding information about words in different sources, using context or parallels in L1 and L2 and Processes establishing knowledge (Visnaja, 2008).

2.5 Vocabulary Teaching Techniques

Learning words is a hard task that can take a long or short time since its development depends on several external and internal factors that every person must overcome in order to be successful in second language learning process. Gairns and Redman (1986, p.54) suggest the following types of vocabulary teaching techniques:

› **Visual techniques**: They lend themselves well to presenting concrete items of vocabulary–nouns; many are also helpful in conveying meanings of verbs and adjectives. They help students associate presented material in a meaningful way and incorporate it into their system of language values. Among visual techniques

are flashcards, photographs and pictures, wall charts, blackboard drawings, word pictures, incongruous visuals, mime, and gesture.

› **Verbal explanation**: this is used to ensure that students understand or to illustrate the meaning. For this, teachers often use more than one situation or context to check that learners have grasped the concept.

› **Use of dictionaries**: Using a dictionary is another technique of finding out meanings of unfamiliar words and expressions. Students can make use of a variety of dictionaries: bilingual, monolingual, pictorial, thesauri, and the likes. As French Allen (1983, p. 11) perceives them, dictionaries are "passports to independence," and using them is one of the student–centered learning activities.

2.6 Flashcards

A flashcard represents a particular vocabulary item that you want to introduce which can be an object, an animal, an adjective, a character, a place, an action, etc. Later on, they can be used to practice vocabulary; they will be useful for vocabulary review and consolidation, as it is important to reinforce words pupils have learned. According to Oxford and Crookall (1990)

> Flashcards are among the most widely used vocabulary learning technique... The flashcard technique involves at least three components: writing down (copying) the L2 word on the front of a card, writing the word's L1 meaning on the back, and then using the card to become familiar with the new word and its meaning... With creativity and thought on the part of the learner, flashcards can indeed be employed to provide greater context.

In regard with their type, Bowen (1991) divided flash cards into: *Picture flash cards* are teacher's accompanying guide. The picture collections are built up and used by number of teachers. Picture flashcards are most suitable for representation of a single concept, such as an object or an action. *Word flash cards* are on which words have been printed can be held up rapidly, or 'flashed' by teacher before the class. They are easy for the teacher and the students to handle and use at the appropriate moment. Work cards can include visuals as well as texts. Magazine pictures, drawings, maps and diagrams can be important parts of

work cards at all levels, used for variety purposes. According to their size, David A. Hill (1990) classified them into three 'key' categories: "Large (20x30 cm): useful for whole-class work" "Medium (10x15 cm): useful for group-work" and "Small (5x5 cm): useful for games and other group-work activities".

According to Wright (1990) "Pictures are not just an aspect or method but through their representation of places, object and people they are an essential part of the overall experiences… they contribute to: interest and motivation, a sense of the context of the language and a specific references point or stimulus". It means that pictures in flashcards are an excellent tool to present words for learners since they create a mental representation of words which facilitate vocabulary knowledge and help learners to remember words at the moment of using them with communicative purpose because the use of pictures at the moment of introducing the language help learners to assimilate meaning faster (Wright, 1990).

3. Methodology

This section will be focused on research design, the context and population and the instruments applied to collect data such as observations, interviews and questionnaires.

3.1 Research Design

Vocabulary learning is an important aspect to develop a significant English learning process, it requires more intense practice and time since it enables to develop the others skills. Due to this fact, the research group designed a proposal in which flashcards were the most effective and interest way to build up vocabulary. This proposal is defined clearly as a qualitative and quantitative research. According to Seliger and Schohamy (1989) "qualitative research is concerned with providing descriptions of phenomena that occur naturally, without the intervention of an experiment or an artificially contrived treatment". While "quantitative research is explaining phenomena by collecting numeral data that are analysed using mathematical based methods"

Following the authors' words, this research is qualitative and quantitative because the research group worked with human beings with the purpose of getting linguistic and numerical results like thoughts, ideas, and feelings about a specific fact and those results are interpreted by using mathematical methods or statistics. In this case, mixed-methods research is used as a flexible approach, where qualitative or quantitative components predominate, and have equal status.

3.2 The Context and Population

This research paper took place in a public school in Monteria which is located on the east of the city in a low socio-economic neighbourhoods where most of the learners live. The participants were ten fifth grader students whose average age was nine years old. In this research, five girls and five boys were chosen at random from a group of thirty-eight learners. It consisted on choosing two learners from each row (five rows) in the classroom since the research group considered it is important to work with learners of different performance levels. In regard with the learners' vocabulary level, most of the time they learn English language by using their mother tongue or the translation method.

3.3 Data Sources and Data Collection Procedures

To accomplish this research we used three different data collection techniques such as: four class observations, two open-ended informal Interviews; one for the teacher and one for the learners, one questionnaire for the participants. The instruments were chosen taking into account the qualitative-descriptive nature of this research paper.

3.3.1 Classroom Observations

In second language acquisition research, observations are most often used to collect data on how learners use language in a variety of settings, to study language learning and teaching processes in the classroom, and to study teachers' and students' behaviour (Seliger and Schohamy, 1989).

In the same line, the research group chose this instrument because it helped to obtain useful information at the moment of having a real

contact with the observed group. Besides, there were children's and teachers' attitudes and feelings perceived and not seen by the observers (the research group) which were useful to understand better the necessities and preferences that the teacher and children had towards English language.

In regard to the use of this instrument, the research group accomplished four observations at the beginning of this proposal in order to know the current learners' vocabulary proficiency. During these observations, a checklist was used which helped the observers to check whether a specific behaviour is present or absent (Seliger and Schohamy, 1989). This instrument had as objective: to identify the English teacher and learners' behaviour inside the classroom in regard to vocabulary acquisition. It was also divided into two parts; the first part was focused on learners' roles, behaviour and performances while the second part was focused on teacher' roles, methodology, strategies and approach. (See annex A)

3.3.2 Interviews

According to Seliger and Schohamy (1989):

> Interviews are used to collect data on covert variables such as attitudes and motivation for learning the second language... for obtaining information about learners' language proficiency... for obtaining information about strategies which language learners used in the process of producing and acquiring language in a variety of contexts.

The research group decided to use this type of instrument since it was the best way to understand what the learners wanted and needed in relation to the English language and to collect information that could not be observed such as motivation and background.

Two interviews were conducted; one for the learners and the other for the teacher. The former one had as objective: To identify learners' preferences at the moment of learning new English words. It was applied to ten children who were chosen by simple random sampling from a group of thirty-eight. The latter one was applied to the teacher in order to know about the methodology used in class and to teach

new words, and his thoughts about the implementation of flashcards in vocabulary acquisition. (See annex B and C)

3.3.3 Questionnaire

According to Nunan (1992), "the questionnaire is a relatively popular means of collecting data. It enables the research to collect data in field settings, and the data themselves are more amenable to quantification than discourse data". The questionnaire was applied to the learners in order to realize the impact about the use of flashcards to foster vocabulary acquisition. (See annex D).

This project was applied following the line of a qualitative and quantitative research since this type of research has as purpose to describe and measure a phenomenon in the educational field. The topics taught during this project, were the ones that the learners chose in the interview; these were professions, places and clothes. To develop these topics two sessions of two hours for each topic was necessary. (See annex E). In the first section, a topic related to profession was taken up. The learners did activities like puzzles, drawings and matching. In the second section, the learners learnt about places and they did activities like using their imagination to say what places they can find in a city, linking professions with work places in an oral way and play a game called "find my word place" Finally, in the last two sections, the topic clothes was dealt with. During these two sections the learners did two listening activities and like assessment, they could practice the three topics together since they received a flashcard and they had to say some sentences using the following structures. She/he is a _____, she/he works in _____, she/he is wearing a _____.

In regard to the flashcards, they were taken from two web sites and printed. They were classified into medium and large ones. The large ones were used to present the new words about the topics chosen by participants in this project. The medium ones were used to do the activities related to matching, puzzle and the game. It is important to mention that the main idea was to let learners interact in a communicative way by using the flashcards to teach them new words.

4. Results and Discussions

After applying this proposal the research group wanted to analyse the collected results along this paper. At the same time, discuss them in a critical way in order to know whether or not the use of flashcards contributed to the learners' vocabulary acquisition.

"Data analysis refers to sifting, organizing, summarizing, and synthesizing the data so as to arrive at the results and conclusions of the research. Thus, data analysis becomes the product of all the considerations involved in the design and planning of the research". (Seliger and Schohamy, 1989).In other words, data analysis is valuable to the extent that there is a valid relationship between it and the components of research such as the research problem, the research design, the data collected, and finally the data analysis technique.

For collecting and analysing data were necessary the implementation of some instruments taking into account the qualitative-quantitative nature of this research such as observations, interviews and questionnaires which were applied to the teacher and ten fourth graders.

At the beginning, an interview was applied to ten fifth graders in order to recognize what and how they would like to learn vocabulary. In this interview, the children had six topics to choose (greetings, animals, fruits and vegetables, places, professions, clothes) and they could choose at least 3 of them. It showed that children wanted to learn about professions, places and clothes. Furthermore, this interview let children to choose the way how they preferred to learn the topics mentioned above. In relation to the two highest results were that children would like to see flashcards and to learn about the topics. (See annex C)

The results were interpreted in terms of some categories such as: vocabulary acquisition, motivation, and performance and participation.

4.1 Vocabulary Acquisition

In the observation done at the beginning of this project, it could be noticed that the learners' vocabulary level was low since the methodology applied by the teacher was not the best. First, the class was taught

in Spanish so the learners were not in an English learning environment. Second, the resources used by the teacher were not the most appropriate since he only used the board and the marker. And third, the pedagogical strategies applied inside the class were just limited to translate from Spanish to English and vice versa.

In the interview applied to the teachers, it could be noticed that his pedagogical strategies related to vocabulary teaching are based on translation method. He also understands that learning new words is relevant to develop a good communication process in English and it could be reflected in the following answer. "Well, I try to teach the words to my students with the purpose they can recognize them and use them in class" (See transcription A, question N° 8). Regarding to the resources, he thinks that flashcards could facilitate the process and the students could feel more interested to learn since they could see different pictures to associate the image and the word in classes.

In the interview applied to the sample group at the beginning. They answered that they would like new words in English, 90% of them responded "yes" and only the 10% of them responded "no" (See graph N° 1).

Graph 1

Do you like to learn new words in your english class?
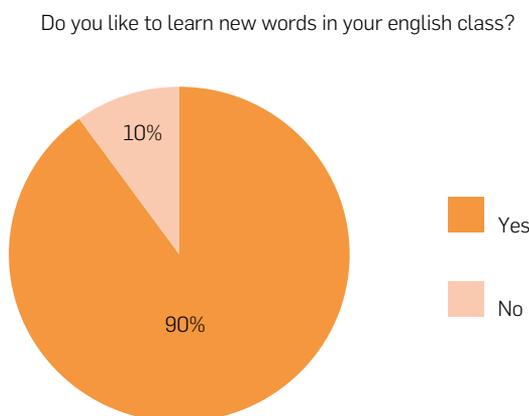
Keeping in mind this fact, the learners had the opportunity to choose from a list of six topics what words they wanted to learn and how they would like to learn vocabulary. It helped the research group to know what kind of topics children would like to learn at the moment of learning vocabulary, and taking into account the three highest percentages, these were adapted to the flashcards. The interview showed that 26% of children wanted to learn about places, 21% about clothes, and 31% about professions. (See graph N° 2).
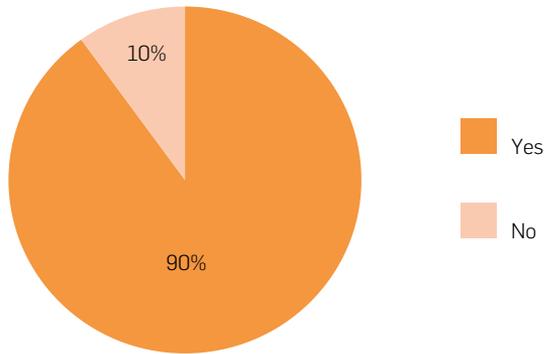
Graph 2

Which of these topics would you like to learn the most?
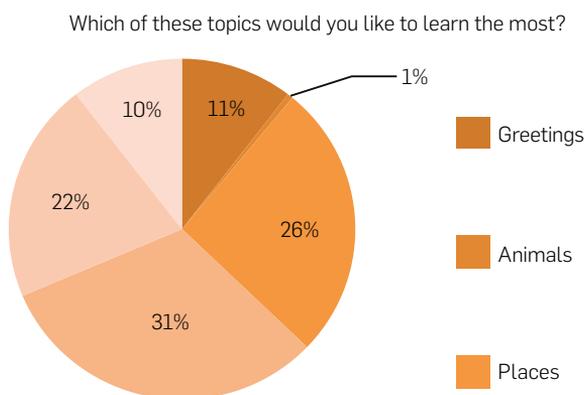
In regard with the flashcards, 90% of learners chose them as means to learn new words and only 10% of them did not agreed with the use of flashcards to learn new English vocabulary. (See graph N° 3). This interview also asked the learners about the features (size and colour) of flashcards and taking into account their answers, the research group adapted them. The three highest percentages showed that the 60% of learners preferred colourful flashcards; 30% wanted flash cards to be large in size while 10 % preferred them to be medium. (See graph N° 4).
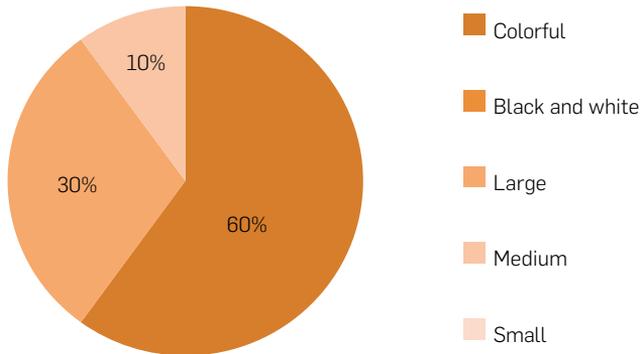
Graph 3

Would you like to learn new words through flashcards? Why?

- Yes
- No

10%
90%

Graph 4

How would you like the flashcards?

- Colorful
- Black and white
- Large
- Medium
- Small

10%
30%
60%

At the end, a questionnaire was administered to the children after the flashcards, to notice to what extent the use of flashcards helped to acquire new vocabulary. The research group observed that 80% of children acquired between eight to twelve words of places while 20% of them learned between four to seven words. (See graph N° 5).
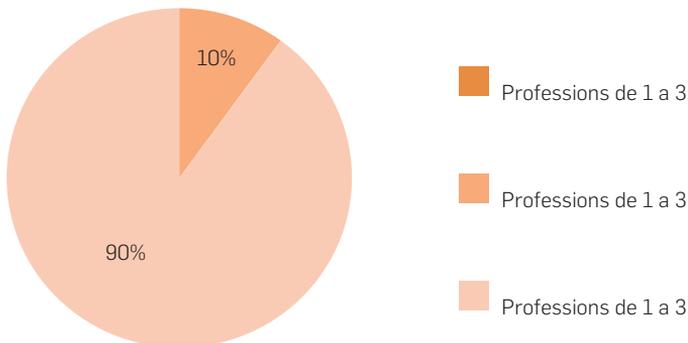
Graph 5

How many words did you learn in English class of each topic?

20%

80%

- Place de 1 a 3
- Place de 4 a 7
- Place de 8 a 12
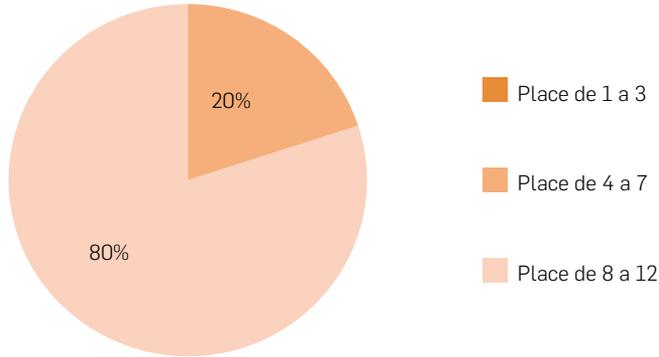
90% of children acquired between eight to twelve words related to professions while 10% of them learned between four to seven words. Finally, 10% of children learned between four to seven words related to clothes while the 90% of them acquired between eight to twelve words. (See graphs N° 6 and 7).
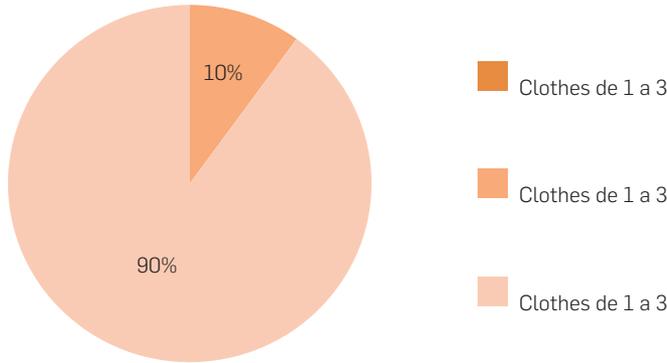
Graph 6

How many words did you learn in English class of each topic?

10%

90%

- Professions de 1 a 3
- Professions de 1 a 3
- Professions de 1 a 3

Graph 7

How many words did you learn in English class of each topic?

Clothes de 1 a 3

Clothes de 1 a 3

Clothes de 1 a 3

Summing up, flashcards were a useful strategy to promote vocabulary acquisition because they helped to break up the monotony of the English classes, and they were involved with new words which were used in a natural and significant way. The flashcards let learners to communicate among them in an oral way by using different images presented in class. The latter though is supported by Oxford and Crookall who state that "Flashcards are among the most widely used vocabulary learning technique… The flashcard technique involves at least three components: writing down (copying) the L2 word on the front of a card, writing the word's L1 meaning on the back, and then using the card to become familiar with the new word and its meaning" (1990, p. 12). Also Gairns and Redman (1986, p. 54) claims that "visual techniques as flashcards lend themselves well to presenting concrete items of vocabulary-nouns; many are also helpful in conveying meanings of verbs and adjectives. They help students associate presented material in a meaningful way and incorporate it into their system of language values".
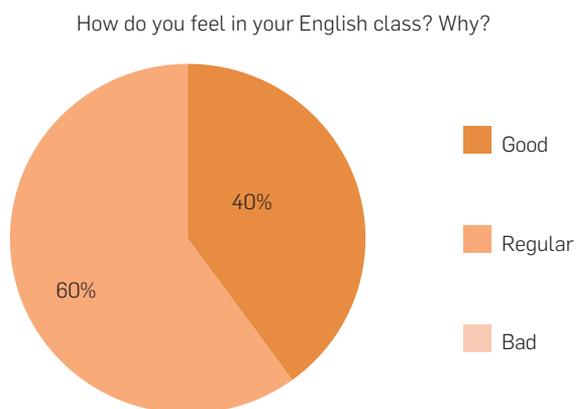
4.2 Motivation

In regard with this category, the research group noticed different children's attitude towards English classes since flashcards were a useful tool at the moment of teaching vocabulary taking into account that they were adapted to the children's context, preferences, age, and level of proficiency.

In the observation done at the beginning of this project, it could be notice that the learners' motivation was not right. The learners got bored during the English class easily because they had to do the same over and over again. The only activity that they did in class was writing down from the board to their notebook. So, the learners' attitude was passive without any interest towards the subject. In the same time, the interview applied to the teacher showed that he believes that flashcards can help to increase motivation and interest in the English class because learners can associate words and pictures.

In the interview applied to the learners. 60% of them answered that they felt regular in the English class (See graph N° 8). It was noticed from the students'attitude towards the class: "la clase es aburrida" "es aburrida por q nosotros solo copiamos de tablero" "la clase es mala" and "las palabras son difíciles de aprender"

Graph 8

How do you feel in your English class? Why?

During the application of this strategy the learners were motivated and active giving spontaneous answers in specific moments of the class. Also, they were sharing with their partners and increased their relationship among them. After finishing each class with the flashcards, the research group encouraged the children with expressions like: "friend's good job"; "excellent girls"; "well-done" in order to foster them to work in class. (See photo gallery). Moreover, the research group

realized that children's motivation increased due to the fact that they used vocabulary in an easier and natural way and they answered with enthusiasm to the different activities proposed.

In the questionnaire applied to the learners at the end, the research group checked that learners liked to use flashcards because they considered it was enjoyable and easier while they were acquiring the new words. (See Graph N° 9). They had the opportunity to see colourful flashcards which helped them to understand and learn the topics. Besides, this proposal was successful because children had the chance to work with other materials which contributed to enrich their vocabulary acquisition.

In this line and supporting all those evidences, it could be found in Wright' theory that states that "Pictures are not just an aspect or method but through their representation of places, object and people they are an essential part of the overall experiences" … they contribute to: interest and motivation, a sense of the context of the language and a specific references points or stimulus" (1990, p. 2).

Graph 9

How did you feel when the teacher used flashcards to teach you English words?

- Excellent
- Good
- Bad

30%

70%
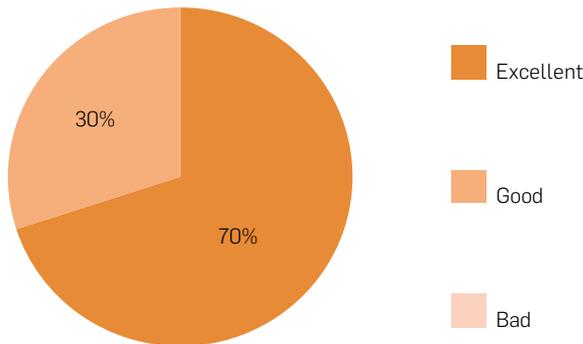
4.3 Performance and Participation

The observations showed that the learners did not interact among them or with the teacher. Also, it was noticed that the teacher did not foster

the learners' participation in class and as a result their performance was quite low and did not develop communicative skills at all. While in the interview applied to the learners, it showed that the 90% of learners would participate more in class if the teacher uses flashcards as a new resource. (See graph N°10).

Graph 10

Will you participate more in yor English class
if your teacher uses flashcards
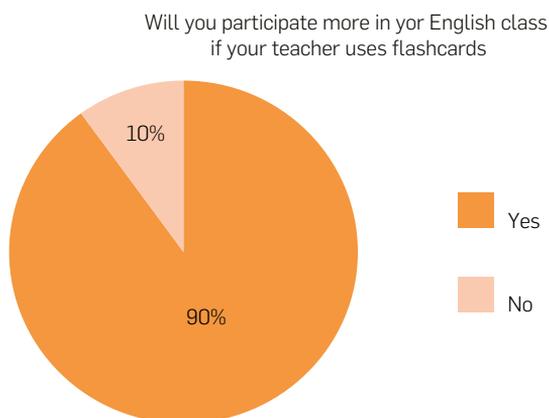
The questionnaire applied to learners, revealed that they increased their participation by 80% (See graph N° 11) as they were more involved in the learning process in contrast to the traditional way in which they said they felt bored because they only rewrote words from the board.

Graph 11

How was your participation in class when
your teacher used flashcards?
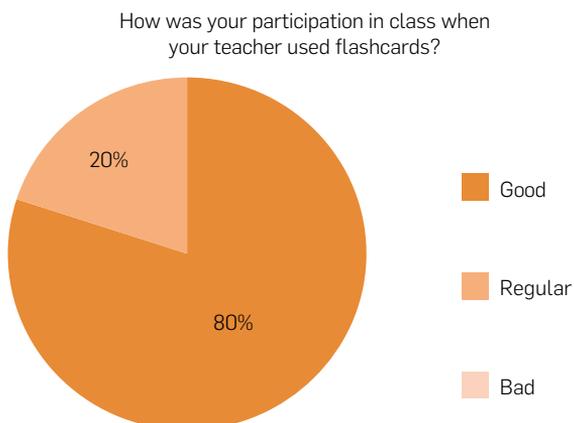
Moreover, 100% of them would like to continue using flashcards because it is a different technique for learning vocabulary in a non-traditional way. (See Graph N° 12). All children agreed with this point because flashcards gave them the opportunity to change the way how they were learning English subject.

Graph 12

Would you like continue learning words with flascards
to increse your participation in class? Why?

100%

■ Yes

■ No
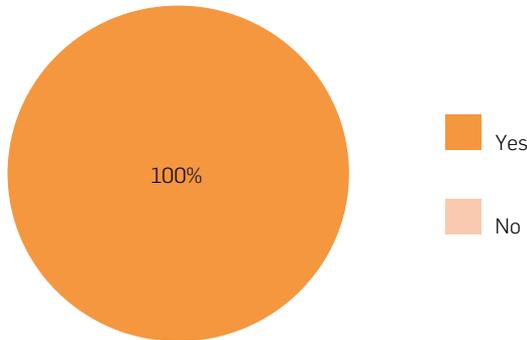
Summing up, the research group noticed that the use of flashcards provided the class a space where children felt comfortable and confident at the moment of participating in front of their partners and they had the opportunity of interacting in class and learning in new words in a didactic way. According to Fiorito (2005), people learn languages when they have opportunities to understand and work with language in a context that they comprehend and find interesting.

5. Conclusions

After finishing this study the research group drew some conclusions:

Flashcards were a useful strategy to acquire vocabulary because they could provide an environment where children could experiment a different use of the English language. Besides, Flashcards were an enjoyable and significant tool to know the children's attitudes and behaviours in a particular context and to realize that if the teacher

changes the classroom atmosphere and methodology he/she can obtain better results from the children.

The use of visual aid was relevant at the moment of applying this study because it was an innovative way to encourage children's relationship because they needed and wanted to learn in English class. Furthermore, this relationship among children facilitated the learning process of those new words taught along this proposal and to achieve the aim of this research paper.

Children's performance and participation increased at the moment of applying each one of the topics through the use of flashcards, they were learning in a pleasant and different way where they were the most important and active participants.

6. Pedagogical Implications

The research group would like to propose some recommendations for further research. Some of the most important recommendations are the following:

Teachers have to be aware about the responsibility of working with children since it is necessary to keep in mind some aspects such as likes, preferences, age, cultural background, level of proficiency.

Vocabulary acquisition is one of the main issues that teachers have to think of when they are teaching a foreign language since it provides learners the tools to develop any skills and in order to reach this goal teachers have to know about which vocabulary strategies or techniques are more useful and meaningful for their classroom.

At the moment of creating flashcards or using any visual techniques, it is important to know which topics children would like to learn for getting good result in the final assessment and design colourful flashcards that can catch children's attention during the classes.

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