



## Encouraging young learners to learn English through readings

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### **Abstract**

Reading is an area of language learning which is frequently rejected by many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Reading at an early age is essential if students are to develop it as a habit; whether they do it in their mother tongue or in the target language. When we read to our children, we do not confine them to academic excellence but also extend into their emotional and behavioral learning Ai Lian Lim (2008). Because of this, we decided to try out several reading activities in order to know if they could change students' attitude and motivation towards reading in English. The purpose of this thesis was to find out if the activities we used helped to increase students' motivation and interest towards reading in English through some stories in which they could identify themselves with the plot and the characters.

This thesis was carried out with 4 graders from a public elementary school in Colima City. We selected this population because we were teaching them at that time. We chose some readings and designed pre, while, and post-reading activities for each one of them. These activities were carried out for four weeks. The data collection instruments were surveys, interviews and classroom observations and the qualitative data collected was triangulated to validate it and conclusions were reached.

## **1. Research Project**

### **1.1 Type of research**

This research is qualitative because it will be based on the descriptions of the environment, of the participants, of the place, and of our own thoughts and feelings. Moreover, this research is flexible for the reason that the activities that we are going to apply in the classroom could be changed during all the process, according to the students' reactions. Qualitative is used to describe data which are not amenable to being counted or measured in an objective way, and therefore subjective Wallace (1998). During our investigation we are going to take the role of



a teacher and of a researcher at the same time.

## 1.2 Type of research method

As professional people, most teachers would accept that our expertise should progressively develop as we continue in our chosen occupation. Action research is basically a way of reflecting on your teaching (or teacher-training, or management of an English department, or whatever it is you do in ELT). It is done by systematically collecting data on your everyday practice and analyzing it in order to come to some decisions about what your future practice should be Wallace (1998). During the process of this investigation we will apply action research for the reason that it is the one that best fits to our area and interests, because we are looking for solutions and alternatives in order to solve a problem that we have noticed in our teaching. Our problem is that our students are uninterested in learning English and we are going to try to encourage them to learn and enjoy the language through readings. This research will be in our own classroom with our own students.

## 1.3 Design and its description

The design of this research is going to be Pre- experiment (one- group Pretest – Posttest design) because it is going to have pre- and post treatment test which are surveys and reading activities that talk about the American Culture. Moreover, Pre – experiment focuses in only one group and we are going to test a single group.

## 1.4 Variables

The variables in our research will be both, dependent and independent. The dependent ones will be the students' changes and responses because their improvement or failure will depend on the treatment (readings). On the other hand, the independent variables will be the treatments (readings) because they will not depend on the students' motivation to be applied.



## **2. Population and description**

The population for this research is the elementary school José Amador García which is located at Roberto Suárez Olvera s-n in Villa de Álvarez, Colima. It is a public school with students from first to sixth grade. They are between 6 and 12 years old. Most of them live around the school, and their economic level tends to be from low to medium. They are about 300 and all of them are Mexicans, so that their first language is Spanish.

So far, all the students from first to fourth grade have taken English classes thanks to PROMETE ( Programa de Mejoramiento de la Enseñanza del Inglés) from the university of Colima. With this program the students have mainly learned basic vocabulary and simple phrases. Just a few part of the population has taken private English classes; most of them are not involved with the language. Because of their background and social context they are people who generally do not respect their classmates and some of their teachers.

### **2.1 Sample and its selection**

The tested sample for our investigation is the fourth grade students from group A. they are between 9 and 10 years old. This single classroom counts with 23 students, 10 boys and 13 girls and their language level is basic. All of them are Mexicans and only 3 individuals have studied in a private English course. This sample of the population was selected by non random.

## **3. Aim**

To increase the students motivation to learn English through readings that talk about the American Culture.

## **4. Research question**

Can we increase the students' motivation to learn English as a foreign language by being read some texts that talk about the American Culture?



## 5. Hypothesis

Students will increase their motivation to learn English as a foreign language by being read some texts that talk about the American culture.

## 6. Justification

One of the reasons why we selected this research is that we noticed that our students did not have a positive attitude towards learning English; they saw the language as something isolated and far away from their real life, because when we tried to give the whole class in English, the students got frustrated and rejected all the possibilities to understand the language. They used to say: “No entiendo”, “¿Como quiere que aprenda si no entiendo nada?”, No me gusta porque no me sirve. That is why we want the students to be motivated. Another reason is that we want the students to learn the language and to use what they already know. We are sure that our students know some vocabulary but we want to test if through the readings they will be able to reinforce and integrate their knowledge in order to see the language as something easy, interesting and fun. Finally, we are interested on this investigation because we want the students to get involved with the culture so that they can get attracted to the language and interested in learning it, not only in the classroom but also by themselves.

## 7. Data collection

The type of data which we are going to collect during this whole systematic process is qualitative. This data is going to be collected by interviewing students' parents and teachers, and we are going to take some photos of the sample while they are reading (treatment). Moreover, we are going to need the individual files of students' work, and finally we will need to use a portfolio which will contain a collection of documents for analysis.

### 7.1 Materials

The materials which we are going to use are texts, articles, magazines,



dialogues, and stories, which include some aspects of the American culture that are relevant and meaningful for the students.

## **8. Researcher Statement**

During this investigation we are going to take two important and contrasting roles, the teacher and the researcher, therefore, we are going to be focused on finding positive results; this may cause that we ignore some negative factors which could be important for other teachers and researchers. That is why we will try to be as objective as possible during the collection and analysis of the data, moreover every time we collect some data; it will be reviewed by some expert teachers in the field who will provide us with feedbacks, different points of view as well as perspectives in order to offer reliable results.

## **9. Treatment**

Some readings were selected according to the students' likes and taking into account that the readings have something about the American culture, like vocabulary, pictures, customs, etc. Six readings were applied during three weeks and the techniques used for a better understanding of the students were: storytelling, mimics, pictures, games and pre- while and after reading activities such as brainstorming, true/false questions, vocabulary boxes, warm up, Storytelling etc. The researchers took dictionaries to the class in order to be used by the students in case they did not know a word. Another technique for helping the students to understand a word was to draw on the whiteboard a representative picture of that word. In the first class, the instructions for the activities were given in Spanish most of the time. The first reading was called "the two brothers" and before starting to read, the participants were asked to do a pre- reading activity that consisted on a brainstorming in which the participants had to say what they thought the story was about according to the title. After that, the students were asked to read the story and while they were reading they had to underline every word they recognize from the story. Subsequently, the participants wrote what they had understood from the reading on their notebooks. After a few minutes, some



students who wanted to participate read what they had written about the story and then, the teachers read the story aloud in order for the students to listen the pronunciation of the words. To finish the class, the students were asked to draw a picture of what they wanted to be (profession) when they grew up.

The techniques for this class were to represent with mimic or pictures any word the students did not understand.

In the second class, the students read a story called the 3 wishes. The researchers showed to the students the name of the story, and they encouraged them to infer what was going on in the story. All the students' ideas were written on the whiteboard in English. The researcher translated them from Spanish to English. After that, the students were asked to read the story individually. Moreover, they were asked to underline all the words that they already know or the ones that were easily to translate because they were similar in Spanish.

Then, the teachers read the students' ideas that she wrote on the whiteboard, in order to review and correct them, and to get the students to practice all the information that they understood of the reading. Finally, they were given a worksheet in which they wrote all the new words that they learned with their respective translation. For the third class, the students were asked to read a Disney story called "Toy story". First the participants were asked to say their favorite toys' names and then, the teacher used the projector to show some pictures of toys. The teacher said the name of the toys and the students repeated with her. After that, the students said their favorite Disney movie and subsequently they were asked to read the story. This time, the participants had to underline all the words which they knew their meaning in Spanish and write them on a box in which the students had to write the words in English in one side, and on the other side their meaning in Spanish.

When the students finished, they were asked to read a sentence of the story aloud, one by one until all the students had participated. Once the activity was done, the students were asked some questions about the story which they had to



answer in English. To end the class, the students were asked to draw a picture of their favorite character of the story. The techniques for this class were to talk in English all the time, as well as to explain words meanings and doubts using mimics and pictures.

In the fourth class, *The Pirate's treasure* was read by the students. The first activity was a warm up, in which the students sang a song called: *The three in the hole*. The vocabulary of the song was related to the Topic of the lesson. After that the researchers applied a Pre-reading activity in which the teachers showed on power point the title of the reading and a significant picture about it. The teachers encouraged the students to infer what the reading was about according to the title and the picture. The teacher drew a mind map on the board, and the students completed it with their own inferences.

During reading the students were asked to make a circle around the classroom in order for them listen the story which was read by the teacher.

After the reading the teacher showed an activity of true or false on power point. She read the sentences and the students said if the questions were true or false, according to what they understood. Then, the teacher showed the reading on power point and asked to the students to describe the pictures.

Talking in English all the time in the class, Storytelling, mimics, movements, gestures and brainstorming were the techniques used by the researchers in this class.

In the fifth class, the participants read the story "*Malcolm's Saturday Morning*". To begin with the activity, the students were asked to say what they do on a Saturday morning, and then they were taught some chores that people do in their houses in order for the students to get familiar with the reading. Subsequently, the participants were asked what kind of chores they do in their houses while the teacher was writing what they said on the whiteboard. After doing this, the students were asked to read the story and to underline every word that they had already



learnt. Once the participants finished, the teacher asked some students randomly reading the words they had underlined; then, she read the story aloud to the students. Subsequently, the teacher asked true/false questions about the reading. After, every student read a sentence of the story. To end the activity, the students were asked to write down what they do on a Saturday morning.

The techniques for this class were to talk in English most of the time and to represent the vocabulary seen in this lesson with mimic and drawing some pictures on the white board.

The name of the applied reading in the sixth class was Play sports. First the teacher showed the title and a representative picture of the reading. Then, she asked the students to draw something that they imagined would pass in the story, after that the students describe their picture in Spanish and posted them on the wall. Afterwards, they had 15 minutes to read the story individually, and then, each one of them compared what she/he understood with 2 partners. The last activity was that they were asked by the teacher to act out in teams of 3 students the most significant part of the story for them.

## **10. Data collection**

During this research project, there were used different instruments for gathering information. Through the pre- surveys for the students, their reading habits, the kind of stories they like to read, as well as their attitudes towards reading, were collected. Changes on students' attitudes towards reading, on students' motivation to learn the language and the improvement/failure on their English language are the information gathered through the post- surveys for the students. Through the survey for the teacher in charge of the participants, it was collected her point of view towards the project, the reactions of the students while reading, since she knows the subjects better and spends more time with them in the classroom, as well as some advices according to her own teaching experience. The information obtained from the students' parents' survey was: the reading habits the students show in their homes and their motivation to learn English.



Moreover, how important the parents consider the English language, as well as their points of view about this project.

On the other hand, throughout the class observation formats, the students' reactions, behavior and attitudes while the reading activities were being applied (treatment) were obtained as well as some notes were taken about the students improvement or failure pre-while and post reading activities.

All this information was transferred into a word document in order to be analyzed later on.

## **11. Results**

### **11.1 Students' beliefs, habits and preferences towards reading in English**

On the whole, students like reading in English and most of them have read a story at least once. The following are the reasons why students like reading:

- They would like to learn English.
- They think it is fun and it will help them to learn vocabulary.
- Reading will help them to understand their teachers' directions during the class.
- On the other hand, five students out of 23 mentioned that they do not like reading in English for the following reasons:
  - They are afraid of making mistakes while reading.
  - They do not understand any word.
  - They get confused with words that they do not understand.
  - They think it is very difficult.

### **11.2 Students' parents' support**

On the whole, the interviewed parents said that they would be willing to support or motivate their children during the English learning through readings and the reasons are the following:

- They think the readings will help the students to learn English because the stories are fun.



- The students will be really prepared to learn English in middle- School.
- The readings will help the students to face their fears to learn English.
- The reading would facilitate their learning process.

On the other hand, 4 out of 7 parents said that they do not foment the reading habit because they do not have enough time. These parents said that they hardly buy books to their children for some reasons:

- Their children do not read the books.
- They throw the books away.

### **11.3 Students' positive attitudes after reading**

1. The students seemed to be really surprised because they had read and understood the story.
2. Most of the students showed to have understood at least the general ideas of the reading as they answered correctly the teachers' questions about the stories.
3. Some of them mentioned that the readings were easy and that they wanted to read more.
4. They got their own conclusions and they were truly active during the post – activities.
5. Most of the students wanted to say what they understood about the readings.
6. Sometimes the students, who did not read all the reading, because they were not really interesting, seemed to be attracted by the after reading activities.
7. They were motivated to share opinions about the readings.

### **11.4 Students' negative attitudes after reading**

1. They were tired of reading and started making noise and playing.
2. While some students were participating in the post reading activities a few students showed to be bored and confused about what their partners were talking about so that they started playing.
3. The students mentioned that the readings were very difficult.



4. Some of them were whining because they did not understand the readings.

## 12. Conclusions

After the students read some stories in English, we found out that they really increased their motivation towards the language for the reason that most of the students showed interest on understanding the readings and on learning the unknown words. Furthermore, knowing how to read in English was their most important reason why they want to continue learning English. We also realized that the students' parents' support has a very strong impact on the students' improvement or failure since we noticed that the students who have their parents' support were more interested and participative during the classes than those who do not have that support. However, we observed that even when some students had their parents' support they did not show interest in the reading activities so we deduced that more than any extrinsic motivation what is really paramount for the students to learn is their intrinsic motivation.

For all that, we affirm definitely that as teachers we can increase the students' motivation to learn English as a foreign language by being read some texts that talk about the American Culture. In closing, it seems of great importance to state that English teachers are capable of increasing their students' motivation towards the language by applying meaningful stories and involving the students in the reading activities.

## References

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### **Biodata**

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