POWERPOINT EFFECTS AS DIDACTIC MATERIAL FOR TEACHING VOCABULARY IN ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract

Nowadays, English as a second or foreign language is being taught in many countries with the objective of improving educational, labor, social and touristic development and the relationship between nations. In consequence, several methods, approaches, techniques and didactic material had been created to make the language learning process more efficient, enjoyable and less stressful for students. Moreover, the Information and Communication Technologies were seen as powerful tools for educative purposes regarding to their characteristics of access, production, processing and spread of information and, the fact that the amount of schools with a technological infrastructure is constantly increasing.

By the other hand, for several young learners studying English makes no sense as they do not have an instrumental motivation and, being asked to produce English can be awful when making mistakes. Then, in order to avoid a negative attitude towards the language it is needed to create a peaceful atmosphere that makes them feel comfortable and that promotes interaction as in their first language. Doing activities using smart boards is a good option as children are used and attracted to technology. Unfortunately, not all public schools in Mexico have those boards or they do not work properly. Also many teachers do not feel confident about their computer competences and avoid their use. As an alternative to the use of interactive boards and complex programs for teaching English, this qualitative research looked for the effects that using PowerPoint could have with a group of twenty-four second grader students in an elementary public school in Colima.

Action research was chosen after seen that students presented difficulties during first classes in activities like reading, matching, and answering questions and following instructions of worksheets because most of them were still learning to read and write in their first language.

Vocabulary was considered important because:

1. it can activate the schemata of students,
2. it promotes pronunciation practice,
3. it is needed for different tasks of the class.

The use of PowerPoint for presenting vocabulary, practice structures and for projecting worksheets demonstrated that students lost their inhibitions for pronouncing English; they participated voluntarily and were more focused in different tasks along to other positive effects.

Keywords: PowerPoint, Didactic Material, Vocabulary, Second Language, Young Learners.

1 INTRODUCTION

Since fifth semester, in the University of Colima, teacher trainees are exposed for a year to an English teaching program called PROMETE (Programa para el Mejoramiento en Teaching English in Spanglish) to improve their teaching practice in public elementary schools. Many of them face difficulties during their performance and look for strategies and materials for cope with them in order to accomplish with the progress required in the syllabus of each grade.

1.1 State of the art

Nowadays, as a result of globalization, teaching English as a second language is part of the educative programs around the world. There are many reasons for it, such as, the importance of good relationships and understanding between different cultures, as well as educative and labor competition that aim social and intellectual development [1]. Therefore, global education is a reality that promotes
knowledge, attitudes and relevant competences for living responsibly within a multicultural and interdependent world [2].

1.1.1 Introduction of Information and Communication Technologies in education

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are defined as the group of technologies that allow the access, production, processing and informative communication presented in different codes; such as text, image, sound and others [3]. It had been showed that ICT resources had many advantages over traditional material, its use favors the engagement and enjoyment of lecture skills, comprehension and production of the language due to their characteristics such as being original, attractive, varied, focused on the necessities of students, promoter of abilities of autonomous learning and facilitator for memorizing and correcting mistakes that make learning more efficient and effective [4]. In addition, several researches have showed the necessity of new options for improving teaching and learning. In Pahang, Malaysia a study revealed a positive attitude from indigenous students towards ICT for teaching English [5]; in Guanajuato, Mexico, teachers revealed they need to adapt and create material because they do not have English books on time [6].

1.1.2 PowerPoint works also in schools

PowerPoint (PPT) has been seen kind of unpopular due to the bad use of teachers, some of the mistakes are the use of bad colors and too many bullets or text in one slice, also PPT is related to business and some teachers think it can be boring or unattractive for students. However, the author mentions the advantages about the use of PPT in classroom such as the increasing use of computer and projector; the basic needed skills for using PPT; the facility to prepare a dynamic presentation in a low cost; its clickability that allows teacher to manipulate slides very quickly [7]. It is suggests that PPT has potential benefits, such as, increasing visual impact, spontaneity, interactivity and wonder, improving audience focus particularly in large groups and the strength of memory. , thus learning vocabulary has an important role as it helps people express their ideas using the correct words and promoting fluent conversations [8].

1.1.3 The importance of vocabulary when learning a language

According to Nagy, vocabulary knowledge is fundamental to reading comprehension as it is the predictor of how well the reader will understand a text [9]. Furthermore, Folse emphasizes the importance of vocabulary and its effect. Moreover, one of the main purposes of learning a language is communication on learners’ skills and states that a lack of grammar knowledge can limit conversation but a lack of vocabulary knowledge can stop conversation [10]. Unfortunately vocabulary teaching was being seen for many years not as important as grammar but also a time consuming activity because it was thought that students can learn it indirectly [11].

1.2 Research problem

In regard of the investigations about the use of ICT in teaching and learning English, it was found that other researches had been carried out about vocabulary learning and its importance. However, for us it is necessary to look for more information, and apply the learned knowledge from the earlier seen projects in order to solve an empirical problem from our own context. We are interested in knowing, in depth, the effects that the application of PPT in teaching English vocabulary has in children. We found indispensable to look for the more suitable materials that can improve the acquisition and use of English language in young learners that practice English just in their English class, without internet access, English books or strong ICT skills.

2 METHODOLOGY

As it was mentioned previously, this research was realized for knowing more about the use of ICT in teaching, specifically PPT. However, as ICT and PPT are wide topics, it was necessary to create some questions that could delimit the main aspects to talk about. Therefore, it was established that this research would focus on what are the effects of using PPT to teach vocabulary in a second language environment, how it motivates students to participate and how it works as scaffolding in different activities.

Furthermore, the Qualitative Approach was chosen as it allows researchers to create new questions and modify the selected ones according to the obtained data at any moment of the research. According to experts, qualitative researchers observe and describe what they see for a future theoric
perspectives; the observations can be related to the theory found before the field research, but in most of the cases the hypothesis or theory is created from the observations of the researcher through the process [12]. These hypothesis are being improved as the researcher gets more information and then compared to the results of previous investigations. Moreover, the qualitative research more than be based on previous investigations, is focused in the research that is being carried out; and it is created from the personal experiences of the participants. In addition, it is claim that there is not possible for researchers to have no idea about the intentions, thoughts or feelings of the participants, as 1) the interaction with the participants influences the researcher and 2) the researcher has some clarity about what the actions of the participants when they belong to the same cultural context [13].

Action research was the more appropriated method to implement as there was a problem identified for me as the English teacher. Moreover as Sagor suggest that action research is conducted by and for those that want to improve and/ or refine their actions [14]. The author mentions that action research helps educators to care about their teaching and the development of their students. Action research can be adapted to fit different social contexts. Several situations can have similar factors with different social contexts; one enquiry can be helpful for future investigations [15]. Additionally, for getting data there was applied a complete participative observation technique as one of the researchers was immerse in the context as the English teacher; as well as different instruments such as field diary, a semi-structured interview with the principal of the school and grade charts in order to have different perspectives and complementary information.

3 RESULTS

According to the main question What are the effects that PowerPoint as didactic material produce on students when is used to teach vocabulary in a second language environment; sixteen documents were analyzed, obtaining fifty codes and, six final categories which are 1) Peace of the lesson, 2) PowerPoint adaptability, 3) Increase in participation of students and English practice, 4) PowerPoint engagement characteristics, 5) Positive factors observed through lessons, and 6) External factors that affect learning.

3.1 Assertions

As a result of the reflection of the data obtained and the proper analysis, now it is possible to talk about the six categories previously mentioned.

3.1.1 Peace of the lesson

It is observed that students are quiet as a result of the use of projections on the board. However once students identify that vocabulary is related to a subject they know in their mother language they start to participate. This can be seen as a bad effect because noise hamper students to listen properly to the teacher for the vocabulary they have to repeat; causing that students copy the answers just for completing the task. When students are used to the vocabulary and get recognition from the teacher when they answer in English seeing participation as part of a game, they looked for more opportunities to show they know. As it is seen as a game they want to play and get more “points” than their classmates, this leads to interruptions when one student is asked to answer but other students do it. In order to avoid this students lose a point for each interruption.

(...)As some students were very excited to participate and gain points, they started to say the answers and did not let others to participate. I advised them to stop or they would lose their points (...) I applied the new rule and the first girl showed kind of angry but at the same time kind of sorry. She accepted it and waited for her turn to participate (...) Some students were distracted while their classmates were participating. Some of them waited until their classmates answered and then they just copied the answers (...) as students noticed I was asking those students that were distracted; they started to pay attention (...) The use of the projector simplified the task as students could see the worksheet projected on all the board. Following instructions and working in the correct activity was more fluent. Students asking about what they had to do decreased considerably (…)

Transcripts of field diaries

(...) I liked the fact of respecting turns to participate (...) some students improved their behavior and performance (...) I also notice they participated more and helped their classmates (…)

Transcript of the interview with the principal. June 18th 2018
I notice that it is possible and recommended to take advantage of the enthusiasm of students to participate and get recognition for their effort by establishing, adapting and applying rules that promote the participation of all the class and not only of some students. By letting know students that it is necessary to raise their hands and wait for their turn they become more patient and it becomes easier to identify which students are not participating and give them the opportunity to say a correct answer that will motivate them to participate in the future. In addition, when those students became more active in classes, their classmates started to interact more with them and support one another. Therefore, interpersonal intelligence also becomes stronger inside the classroom during teamwork activities because students learn to collaborate in order to achieve something in common and outside when children play at the break.

3.1.2 PowerPoint adaptability

Using PPT has the advantage of the use of full color photographs that help students to recognize the vocabulary better and in less time. Projecting photographs in the slides is also a good way to save money and paper at reducing printing those photographs, especially when there are large groups. In addition it is not necessary to have great or special competences for working with PPT. Slides can be as creative as the teacher decides but, good PPT slides aimed to young learners need only four principal characteristics; an attractive base color, clear images, a font size big enough that can be seen from the back and, transitions that allow the interaction with students.

(…) students are becoming more participative, the slides were not enough for the participation of all of them(…) Proposal: Prepare more slides or repeat the activity, also modify it in order to practice the content with all the class (…) It was necessary to ensure that all the students feel part of the class in order to motivate them to participate and give them the opportunity to demonstrate they know (…) I designed and add new slides for this class in order to have a review of the unit (…) 

Transcripts of field diaries

(…) They need to learn simple vocabulary and phrases that they can apply in their real context (…) 

Transcript of the interview with the principal. June 18th 2018

Teachers can add sound effects, music, videos and gifs. PPT presentations are easy to create and adapt in order to cover the syllabus and class or specific needs of students. It is possible to add more slides or elements to them. Also the same elements as pictures and words can be used in different activities. Students can match them, complete words or sentences, identify specific vocabulary, thus they can practice the four language skills in a more attractive way.

3.1.3 Increase in participation of students and English practice

Students participate more when they lose their inhibitions to speak in English. With young learners it starts when they recognize some of the vocabulary. It could be recycled vocabulary from the previous classes or something they internalized long time ago maybe with another teacher or from another resource. What it is interesting to mention is that once one student participates and is recognized by the teacher, there is a dominoes effect that promotes the participation of most of their classmates. PPT increase this effect because students feel more comfortable participating when they have knowledge about what they see, in this case pictures of people wearing different clothes.

(…) once students started to participate and being recognized for it, they wanted to demonstrate to their classmates they knew (…) students recognized the vocabulary and said it aloud as they were asked for (…) Students that felt more comfortable wanted to participate first. Others lost their inhibitions once they saw the participation of their classmates. Some of them mentioned they also knew the answers but were not sure (…) each time it was a new word they had to pronounce it aloud (…) after a student answer correctly, I asked the class to repeat the answer (…) 

Transcripts of field diaries

(…) students looked comfortable at participating. As they participate more, they practice more the language (…) 

Transcript of the interview with the principal. June 18th 2018

It is evident that students participate more, but the meaningful finding is that students participate voluntarily and become more active in class. During the presentation of the vocabulary students
reproduce the vocabulary and, if they already know some words they do not hesitate to say it. In some cases, students produce their own sentences by saying what they were wearing or, thinking out loud at differentiating what people wears or not before answering questions. Moreover, students can review the content of previous classes without finding it a boring activity.

### 3.1.4 PowerPoint engagement characteristics

The first response of students to ICT begins when students see that the teacher brings a laptop to the classroom and the projector is turned on. Students are always curious about new objects, activities and the behavior of their teacher. Thus, if they notice something that breaks the monotony inside the classroom it is almost a fact that students will try to guess what is going on and in consequence participate to discover it. Once students see PPT slides, and how images and words appear after they reproduce the vocabulary; students can practice the four skills as they play, win in teams or individually and being recognized for their effort. Students get engaged when they play and see a positive reinforcement.

(…) students reacted positively as they were attentive to what picture will be showed (…) students recognized them easily and paid attention in order to listen the name in English for those objects. They repeated the vocabulary aloud and, if they already knew the names they said them (…) The projection of the worksheets maintained students focused on the activity and willing to participate. They wrote on the board and answer the worksheet (…)  

Transcripts of field diaries

(…) students around eight to nine years old are attracted to colorful and original material (…) students were able to interact with the material (…) I enjoyed watching how students were engaged to the activities. They participated and seemed having fun at the same time they worked in different tasks (…) they were more attentive (…) students get bored doing the same activities in their books (…) I would like to see more teachers using their laptops and the projectors and speakers we have in the classrooms (…)  

Transcript of the interview with the principal. June 18th 2018

It is important to mention that PPT works also as scaffolding for worksheet activities in which students usually tend to get bored or lost when answering them, consequently leading to distractions. An efficient alternative to promote the participation and attention spans of young students in writing activities is the projection of the worksheet. It is a simple strategy that has notable results such as providing clearer instructions; move on in exercises; oral practice if students are asked to say what they write; active participation if students have the possibility of writing on the board; cooperative work when students help one another to complete tasks and time saving as there are less interruptions for repeating instructions or asking students to pay attention.

### 3.1.5 Positive factors observed through lessons

The transitions in PPT can be used for making games that keep the attention and interest of students to the activities. Young students are enthusiastic when they can interact with the board. They look much more comfortable when participating in PPT activities than being asked and answering directly to the teacher. As students are playing a game they make mistakes that then they try to correct without showing shame or shyness. Even when students do not get a tangible prize they get motivation once the teacher recognized by the teacher or their classmates.

(…) I noticed they looked happy at saying the names before I asked them to repeat after me (…)  

(…) I think that students are attracted at first place because of the pictures and colors but then they keep their attention because students are playing. They are very competitive and as the slides cover all the board, everyone can know when someone gets a correct answer (…) Also students help and motivate others to participate (…)  

Transcripts of field diaries

(…) The use of PPT and videos made them feel comfortable and enjoy their classes (…) for me, it is important that they begin studying English when children so they can become comfortable with the language (…)  

Transcript of the interview with the principal. June 18th 2018

In some cases students can be isolated by their classmates which generates different negative effects such as bad behavior, conflicts between students, lack of cooperation in team working activities, lack
of participation and more isolation. However, when those students labeled as disruptive or dumb participate and demonstrate that they also know, their classmates start to see them positively and invite them to work together. It is important to give opportunities to all students to discover their own capabilities in order to motivate them to participate more and practice the language.

3.1.6 External factors that affect learning

Each student has different needs, strengths and weeks while learning, for this group in specific there is an underdevelopment in writing and reading compared to other students at the same age. Moreover, the background of students has an effect on their daily performance within the classroom. As I mentioned before in the previous assertion, some students are used to be isolated from the activities which directly affects their self-esteem and motivation to participate in activities or to establish positive relationships with their classmates. In some cases, students have difficulties at home and it becomes a challenge to talk with parents about what is happening in classes. It is evident with this focal group that a little percentage of parents is actually aware of what their children do or learn in the English class. In consequence it is not possible to count with the support of all parents for a better development of students. Therefore, it is common to see that students look for attention by misbehaving.

*Transcripts of field diaries*

(...As students need to listen to the sentences for recognizing words, if they get distracted they do not know what to write (...) if they got lost at any moment they could look at the board and find which part of the worksheet was the teacher reading (...) I noticed that the lack of material affected the way that classes gone on (...) students were more patient at sharing with their classmates (...)*

*Transcript of the interview with the principal. June 18th 2018*

(...) Some students have difficulties at their homes that can make them feel unmotivated or distracted (...) students are labeled as problematic without having chances to improve (...) I can say that there is a progress in their learning and attitude to English but also to their regular classes. Some of them started to participate more and improve their behavior (...)

English class has not only the purpose of teaching a second language to students but also to offer another opportunity to students to express themselves and to let them know they are in a safe environment in which they can show their abilities, help one another and trust in themselves. Knowing a second language increases their chances to have a better education and further job and life style. Students can get intellectual and social skills, as well as confidence and a good attitude to learning when learning English that can be applied in their regular classes and outside the classroom and school.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The results demonstrate that PPT combined with other ICT have great characteristics that can help teachers to make their classes more attractive for young learners, which trigger their interest for being part of what is happening in the classroom. Furthermore, teachers can use PPT to develop any topic of the syllabus and for the practice and/ or reinforcement of specific language skills. Very simple activities like projecting the worksheets on the board promote the participation of even those students that actually do not like writing and filling worksheets. PPT also helps teachers to save time and money with extensive groups as it can catch the attention of more students and allows the use of full color pictures and videos.

One important finding for us is the role of the teacher as a change maker and guide. Although a PPT presentation can be well designed it does not guarantee a successful class without a suitable classroom management plan and the guidance of the teacher that makes the activity an enjoyable challenge for students. Without the teacher, a PPT presentation is just another didactic material. We found that this study has met its objective as it demonstrates that students can be opened to learn English once they are exposed to the technology along with proper guidance.
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