



SELINUS UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCES AND LITERATURE

Teaching EFL to young learners: exploring the effects of motivation by means of playful and interactive approaches in class

By Carla Martins

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Department of
English Language Teaching
program at Selinus University

Faculty of Art & Humanities
in fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in English Language Teaching

2024

Abstract

The incessant search for techniques and approaches that would make learning a foreign language a pleasant, rewarding, and successful experience for learners is one of the matters that moves teachers in the direction of research and more in-depth studies in the Second Language Acquisition field.

This study aims to contribute to classroom practices by analyzing the relationship between playful and interactive activities, and the construct of motivation, considering young learners of English as a Foreign Language. By presenting a literature review on the theme and examining its relationship with classroom practices and experiences that belong to a group of teachers who deal with young learners in educational institutions in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the contents of this study, its results, discussion, and conclusion, focus on bringing light to how theory connects itself to practice in the classroom. In addition, several reflections are also offered regarding the role of educators, administrators, the educational environment, and the general goals and directions education is taking in Brazil in order to achieve or not successful outcomes in language learning.

It is believed that instruction and a strong wish to make students achieve their full potentials, through critical thinking and independent learning, are capable of giving learners the opportunity to profit from what is offered to them in school in order to change their realities and become successful adults in the future. By building a sense of ownership and responsibility towards learning a global language, such as English, teachers can surely help learners into achieving the desired outcomes in language learning, and the EFL classes for young learners are the starting point for all of these future discoveries to begin to blossom.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Table of Contents	3
List of Tables and Figures	6
Chapter 1 - Introduction and Aims of the Study	7
1.1 General Overview and Educational Scenario	7
1.2 Study's Aims and Structure	9
Chapter 2 – Literature Review and Suggested Activities	12
2.1 The construct of motivation and its importance on the SLA field	12
2.2 Considerations and reflections on the usage of different approaches and mixed methods to teach English as a foreign language	15
2.2.1 Different approaches and the 12 principles for language teaching	15
2.2.2 Young learners, the Participatory Approach and the Total Physical Response	18
2.2.3 The Multiple Intelligences and Different Learning Sources	21
2.3 Reflection on the importance of letting assessment measures play a role in motivating students	28
2.3.1 Self-assessment	29
2.3.2 Portfolios	32
2.4 How a topic-based syllabus can enhance young learners' motivation	37
2.4.1 Topic-based syllabuses' analysis and their main characteristics	38
2.4.1.1 Application of Principles	38
2.4.1.2 Goals	39
2.4.1.3 Content and Sequencing	39
2.4.1.4 Format and Presentation	39
2.4.1.5 Monitoring and Assessment	40
2.4.1.6 Evaluation	40
2.4.2 Needs analysis and Suggestions of activities	40
2.4.2.1 Suggestion 1	42

2.4.2.2 Suggestion 2	43
Chapter 3 – Data and Methodology	45
3.1 Data Collection	45
3.2 Participants	46
3.3 Methodology for conducting qualitative data analysis	47
3.4 Validity and Reliability	48
Chapter 4 – Contents and Results	50
4.1 Question 1	50
4.2 Question 2	52
4.3 Question 3	53
4.4 Question 4	56
4.5 Question 5	57
4.6 Final Considerations	61
Chapter 5 – Discussion	62
5.1 Theme 1: <i>The importance of motivation and activities which favor its emergence.</i>	62
5.1.1 Answers' overview and general analysis	62
5.1.2 Connections to literature	62
5.1.3 Final Comments	63
5.2 Theme 2: <i>Different approaches and activities acting as facilitators in the learning process.</i>	64
5.2.1 Answers' overview and general analysis	65
5.2.2 Connections to literature	65
5.2.3 Final Comments	66
5.3 Theme 3: <i>Topic-based and interactive activities and their relation to learners' development.</i>	67
5.3.1 Answers' overview and general analysis	67
5.3.2 Connections to literature	68
5.3.3 Final Comments	69
5.4 Theme 4: <i>How assessment (traditional x alternative) is viewed in the study's educational scenario.</i>	70

5.4.1 Answers' overview and general analysis	70
5.4.2 Connections to literature	70
5.4.3 Final Comments	72
5.5 Final Considerations	74
Chapter 6 – Conclusion	76
6.1 “Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.”	76
6.2 “The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery.”	77
6.3 “Education is not the filling of a bucket but lighting a fire.”	79
References	81
	Appendix 1 85
	Appendix 2 86
	Appendix 3 87
	Appendix 4 88
	Appendix 5 89
	Appendix 6 90

List of Tables and Figures

Table 1 - Assessment method: Self -evaluation	32
Table 2 - Assessment method: Portfolio	34
Table 3 – Portfolio Rubric	35
Table 4 – Participants of the study	46
Table 5 – Distribution of themes for qualitative analysis	48
Table 6 – Summary of the participants’ answers in question 5	60
Table 7 – Appendix 6: Participants’ Questionnaire	90
Figure 1 – The social turn	12
Figure 2 – The Multiple Intelligences	22
Figure 3 – Super Simple Songs	23
Figure 4 – Learn English Kids. Short stories (1)	24
Figure 5 – Learn English Kids. Short stories (2)	25
Figure 6 – Pearson English Kids Readers	26
Figure 7 – Reflection towards assessment	29
Figure 9 – Appendix 1: Lesson 1 – Warm-up activity: Matching game	85
Figure 10 – Appendix 2: Lesson 1 - Hands-on activity / Lesson 2 Warm-up followed by Further Practice	86
Figure 11 – Appendix 3: Lesson 2 - Checking the kids’ own toys	87
Figure 12 – Appendix 4: Lesson 2 – Group work	88
Figure 13 – Appendix 5: Lesson 2 – Homework	89

Chapter 1 – Introduction and Aims of the Study

1.1 General Overview and Educational Scenario

The present study explores the effects of motivation on young learners of English as a foreign language, once they are exposed to playful and interactive approaches in class. Such study brings to light a theme that has been debated, researched, and studied for a long time in the Second Language Acquisition field, but remains to be of interest: motivation.

According to the Online Etymology Dictionary (n.d.), the term motivation dates back from 1854; two main meanings are offered to define it: the act or process of furnishing with an incentive or inducement to action, and an inner or social stimulus for an action. In the SLA field, Dörnyei and Otto (1998, as in Lysonkova, 2013, p.11) provide a more complex definition which describe motivation as “[...] the dynamically changing cumulative arousal in a person that initiates, directs, coordinates, amplifies, determines and evaluates the cognitive and motor processes whereby initial wishes and desires are selected, prioritized, operationalized and (successfully or unsuccessfully) acted out”.

Teachers of English as a foreign language, mostly in developing countries, are often concerned to help students realize how important it is to learn and make use of a global language, such as English, in order to have better professional opportunities in the future. However, teaching English to young learners is mostly seen, considering the educational scenario being taken into account in this study, as something “extra”, or even as something that is not entirely part of what is important to the curriculum. It might not be the view of administrators or of the ones that are not directly involved in a school’s routine, but it is an idea shared by learners, parents, other members of the community, and even by teachers of other subjects. In order to try to work on such misconception, it is important that the classroom activities make students realize that the English language is already around them; it is, in fact, “everywhere”.

By promoting activities that make students realize that the English language is already part of their routines – in social media, in products they have at home, and in the kinds of entertainment they consume, for example – teachers can start working on such misconception in class, and in the long run, make people realize that learning a foreign language as English is not an extra activity, but an essential one. Creating such consciousness

in students should be prior to thinking about the contents to be taught, since establishing the reasons why we teach something in the classroom the way we do, tend to engage students in a more purposeful attitude, that will generate meaningful learning and increase motivational levels. Such attention to environmental factors is seen as a crucial issue, as explained by Ortega (2009, p.55) while mentioning the interactionist theory defended by Jean Piaget (1974) referring to: “[...] the position that multiple internal (cognitive) and external (environmental) factors reciprocally interact [...] and together affect the observed processes and outcomes of a phenomenon – in this case, additional language learning”.

According to Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011, p.222) and also aligned with Paulo Freire’s (1970) ideas about how education should enable people to take action to change their realities, language is seen as “[...] an instrument of power necessary for active and equal participation in society”. By acknowledging that such acquisition can make them choose and profit from a variety of new paths in their personal and professional lives in the future, students tend to take a more active role in their own learning processes, making the classroom environment become a starting point for new challenges and discoveries to come.

In order to achieve such main goal and generate in students a sense of curiosity, motivation and inclination to keep on seeking for new learning alternatives, classroom instruction must encourage learners not only to “sit and listen” to their teachers, but to be guided through the paths of critical thinking and self-regulation, built little by little while teachers attempt to support and lead learners to make their own discoveries, as advocated by Bruner (1961, as in Brown, 2007, p.26): “[...] less learning “by being told” and more learning by discovering for oneself”. When teachers refuse to “give answers” and are able to teach students meaningful strategies so that they can find the answers by themselves, instruction is really happening at its best form. This path is certainly a hard and challenging one, but it tends to result in learner independence, interaction through collaboration, and learning that transcends the classroom limits. Nation (2013, p.328) mentions such idea in relation to vocabulary learning: “Self-motivation, an essential component of autonomy, is central to continued effective vocabulary learning”.

Activities that promote collaboration, creativity, and participation, making the teaching-learning process something that is guided by the teacher and done by the learners

– who are the real protagonists of the classroom work - also help them feel part of a process that is made for them and by them. Sharing with students daily situations and allowing them to make choices – even small and simple ones – turns out to be stimulating and encouraging, since students become aware that their choices and attitudes are important and crucial elements that can make learning effective or not.

When dealing with young learners, it is important to realize that they aren't "mini adults" and that they have their own likes and dislikes, way of behaving, reduced concentration spans, and a variety of other peculiarities that are unique to their own developmental stages. If the teacher is able to work with activities that attract their attention, make them move, work on a variety of skills and different tasks, catering to their own needs, the results tend to be more than satisfactory. All in all, it is important that learners are able to visualize their own progress, and that teachers are able to praise their efforts more than pointing to their mistakes – which is something that might seem obvious, but is unfortunately not the most common classroom practice. Why do we insist on putting mistakes instead of achievements on the spotlight? By praising good behavior, attitudes that contribute to learning, and accomplishments in using the foreign language, teachers not only reinforce such efforts, but also encourage students to keep on working to achieve the same or superior goals in language learning.

1.2 Study's Aims and Structure

By means of presenting a literature review on the theme (chapter 2), as well as approaches and ideas that might enhance young learners' motivation, such as the importance of using activities inspired on different methods and mixed approaches, available online resources to teachers, suggestions of activities, working with topic-based syllabuses for young learners, and how assessment can act as a key to motivate students, this study aims to present a consistent overview of how teachers can introduce the English language to young learners in a way they might feel encouraged to make their own discoveries, and use the language as a tool to boost their future achievements in life.

This study intends to discuss if interactive and playful approaches and methods in SLA are understood and seen by teachers as the ones that enhance young learners' motivation in

learning English as a foreign language, considering their experience and practice: *Do interactive and playful approaches enhance young learners' motivation to learn English in real life?* As a way of doing such analysis and investigating the theme to support the effectiveness of the materials and ideas to be presented, qualitative data was collected from teachers who deal with young learners of English as a foreign language, in both public and private institutions in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Such teachers were asked to give their opinions about the use of playful and interactive techniques in class, and their results concerning the students' motivation and attitude towards learning a foreign language. The data was collected by means of a written questionnaire. More details on the participants of the study, as well as the employed methodology are given in chapter 3.

The questionnaire's contents and given answers are highlighted in chapter 4. The results are presented in connection to the materials and ideas exposed in the previous chapters, in order to compare how the available literature matches the reality described by the teachers. The opinions and experiences described by them serve as a link between the theoretical guidelines and suggested strategies to deal with young learners in class, and the practical results of the interactions that emerge from their applications in real life. By answering questions such as *What classroom activities, in general, do you consider to be the most motivational ones for young learners?*, and *Do you feel that the activities you just mentioned are also ones which favor vocabulary / language structures retention?*, teachers might provide valuable information on how the implementation of such activities are or are not related to students' success in foreign language learning.

In chapter 5, a more detailed discussion is presented, taking into account the collected data and each one of the contents explored in chapter 2: considerations on the construct of motivation into practice; reflections on the usage of different approaches and mixed methods to teach English as a foreign language; the importance of letting assessment measures play a role in motivating students; and how a topic-based syllabus can enhance young learners' motivation. Key questions proposed on the teachers' questionnaire might provide precious insights into this discussion, such as *According to your classroom experience, do you feel that activities that promote interaction between the students (e.g. pair work / groupwork) favor their learning development?*, and *What is your students'*

attitude towards assessment? Have you ever worked with alternative assessment measures (e.g. portfolios, self-assessment), other than the traditional ones (e.g. tests, exams)? If so, were the results positive? If not, would you like to work with such alternative instruments?

As a conclusion, in chapter 6, a discussion on how important it is to keep searching for the most favorable conditions for young learners in developing countries, such as Brazil, to get acquainted with English as a foreign language, and realize the benefits knowing a global language can bring them in the future, is presented. Establishing a connection between the available literature in the SLA field on how young learners better achieve positive learning results, considering the effects of motivational and playful approaches in class, and teachers' perspectives on how they see such matters in their classrooms' daily challenges in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, is the main objective of this study.

It is believed that when research is intended to analyze and understand how theory can help and support practical pedagogical matters, teachers and students might profit from such effort to make EFL teaching and learning more effective and headed in the direction of successful learning outcomes. This study, considering the above-mentioned reflection, intends to help in such discussion, by analyzing how teachers see and deal with interactive and playful approaches in class, in order to make such practice favor their students' development in acquiring a foreign language.

Finally, this study also aims to contribute to classroom practices, by analyzing aspects that might interfere in the learning process. In agreement with Dörnyei, (2007, p.16) "[...] research contributes to more effective teaching, not by offering definitive answers, but rather by providing new insights into the teaching and learning process". Although this kind of study, due to its qualitative nature and restricted educational scenario, might not present results that could be generalized, it aims to promote further understanding of issues that remain to be of interest in education, such as the effects of motivation in learning a foreign language. Following this idea, it can be said that this study's purposes align with the objectives of qualitative research, understood as "[...] uniquely capable of documenting and analyzing the situated contextual influences on language acquisition and use, as well as the subtle variations in learner and teacher identities that emerge during the language teaching / learning process" (Dörnyei, 2007, p.154).

Chapter 2 – Literature Review and Suggested Activities

In this chapter, a variety of arguments in favor of teaching English as a foreign language to young learners by means of an interactive and participative approach, resulting in higher motivational levels, will be presented considering the available literature and also tools that aim to facilitate the teaching and learning process in class.

By reflecting on the relationship between motivational issues and success in language learning, taking into account different approaches to teach, alternative versus traditional assessment measures as a way to enhance motivation, and how a content-based syllabus can help teachers throughout this process, a basis to support the idea that learning can be constructed in order to facilitate a more successful outcome in language learning aims to be established.

2.1 The construct of motivation and its importance on the SLA field

In a study that provides a historical overview of the paths the SLA field has taken over the years entitled *A short history of SLA: Where have we come from and where are we going?*, Rod Ellis (2021, p.194) offers a variety of tables in which the SLA field's interests are depicted, considering a large time span – from the 1960's up to the 2010's. On the fourth table presented by the author – *The Social Turn* – we can see the first movements the SLA field had taken in order to analyze and understand language acquisition as a process that is also influenced by social and psychological factors. The referred table is presented below:

Area of interest	Period	Key studies	Key findings	Theoretical influences
The Social Turn	Late 1990s onwards	Firth and Wagner (1997), Block (2003) and Norton (2000)	Learners have agency and actively construct their own learning contexts; social identity is crucial; learner-learner interactions are common; learners have local agendas.	Socialization theories e.g. Community of Practice Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991); Poststructuralist theories (Bourdieu, 1986).
Sociocultural SLA	1990s onwards	Lantolf (2000) and Swain (2006)	Learning commences externally WITHIN interaction. Key constructs – mediation; private speech; zone of proximal development; internalisation; collaborative dialogue; 'languaging'; dynamic assessment.	Sociocultural theory – (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). Sociocognitive theory (Atkinson, 2014).

Figure 1: The social turn.

A short history of SLA: Where have we come from and where are we going?, Ellis (2021, p.194).

Following the idea that learning is not only guided by neurological functions or the implementation of methods and fixed rules, but also influenced by the learners' agency on their own development, as well as how the external environment contributes or not to this development, personality traits are also considered to be important factors to be analyzed when studying motivation and its impacts in the classroom since "Extroverted learners are more likely to react to more input and practice opportunities, and they tend to pay less attention to language form; while introverted learners may be better at using their steadiness and calm personality to conduct a deeper situation analysis of limited inputs, especially in language form and language rules" (Cervatiuc, 2007, as in Fu et al., 2022, p.249).

Giving consideration to the types of motivation when it comes to learning a language - instrumental, integrative, intrinsic, and extrinsic motivation – that have been put into discussion by a variety of scholars, the instrumental motivation seems to be the leading one to be analyzed in this study. Snyder (2007) coins this kind of motivation to be a utilitarian one, and refers to the studies of McCain (2002) and Holt (2001) to define instrumental motivation as the one that "[...] is related to gaining a reward of some sort for learning the second language" (Snyder, 2007, p.59).

While discussing about the key factors of motivation, including positive attitude towards the L2 community, the enjoyment of learning, and external pressures, Alizadeh (2016, p.14, as cited in Liu, 2007) comments on the third factor, explaining that "There are external pressures that motivate learners to learn an L2 [...] [which] refer to the desire to learn a second/foreign language because of some pressures or rewards from the social environment, internalized reasons for learning an L2, and/or personal decisions to do so and their value for the selected goals".

Age-related issues also surround the theme of motivation in SLA, as the assumption that derives from a "common sense" that young learners, differently from adults, seem to display more motivation to learn. While citing a study in this regard conducted by Kormos and Csizér (2008), Stegmann (2013, p.12) refers to its findings: "This study proved the dependency of young learners on the teachers and learning (or classroom) environment. In

contrast, the motivational behavior of adult learners in this study was far less shaped by their teachers or learning environment”.

Aligned to the idea that teachers can have a direct influence on young learners’ success, as well as the classroom environment to which they are exposed to, the Global English TESOL Courses website (n.d.) states that: “To be motivated to learn, students need both opportunities to learn and steady encouragement and support of their learning efforts. Because such motivation is unlikely to develop in a chaotic classroom, it is important that the teacher organise and manage the classroom as an effective learning environment.” The teacher’s behavior in class is also praised: “In essence, we need to create a supportive classroom where students can feel comfortable. We need to demonstrate that we are in control and can run the classroom effectively, utilising appropriate discipline techniques. The nature of our own behaviour in the classroom is going to be crucial if we are to be: a) an effective role model for our students; b) able to establish an effective rapport and group dynamic; c) enthusiastic and able to generate enthusiasm in our students towards learning”.

As a final consideration, Zoltán Dörnyei (2005) states in the following piece one of the reasons why the construct of motivation in learning will keep on being of interest, while scholars and teachers try to find ways and answers that would help learners achieve their desired outcomes in language learning: “Motivation deals with the fundamental question of why people think and behave as they do, and we should never assume that we know the full answer” (Dörnyei, 2005, as in Noor and Khan, 2019, p.54).

Another valuable reflection comes from the research study conducted by David Nunan (2002), presented in *“Learner Strategy Training in the Classroom: An Action Research Study”*, in which he focused on learning strategies in order to help students with “a gap” he realized they struggled with when entering university, since they couldn’t get out of the “spoon-feeding systems” they were accustomed to being part at school. After conducting a series of activities that involved “incorporating a conscious focus on strategies into the curriculum and (by) encouraging learners themselves to develop skills in self-checking, monitoring and evaluation”, he concluded that “opportunities to reflect on the learning process, and to develop learning skills, helped learners to identify and articulate differences between their school experiences and those encountered at university” (Nunan, 2002,

p.143). The key point in bringing this article's findings is that this kind of study calls the reader's attention to the fact that some of the students' troubles to be faced in the future, can be avoided longer before, if teachers can provide these kinds of activities and monitor the classroom environment in an effective way since the early stages in instruction.

Contributing to the idea that teaching learning strategies might help students keep motivated to learn in a more independent way, Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011, p.233) conclude that such teaching of learning strategies "[...] can help learners to continue to learn after they have completed their formal study of the target language.", also helping in getting independent from the teacher's aid and generating a sense of self-confidence, once students generally learn the techniques by applying them right away, and most of the times can achieve good results very quickly if well instructed. This last discussion contributes to the notion that teachers are fundamental in providing a successful path in language learning through with students could be guided in order to achieve the desired outcomes in the long run.

2.2 Considerations and reflections on the usage of different approaches and mixed methods to teach English as a foreign language

2.2.1 Different approaches and the 12 principles for language teaching

The reason why we have such a variety of teaching methods in Second Language Acquisition may be explained through many perspectives. One of them points to the direction that teachers, researchers, and educators in general are never totally satisfied with the available approaches, and thus they are always trying to analyze the current classroom practice in order to improve it, as Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011, p.24) point out: "Teachers always want to know what is new. They know that teaching is difficult work, and they are always searching for ways to make it more successful".

Another explanation that inevitably comes to mind has to do with the relationship between learning and power, once knowledge enables people to probably go beyond and reach unexpected goals. Therefore, Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011, p.281) explain that "[...] there are sociopolitical reasons or demands on teachers which may take one method more acceptable than another in a given context".

A third explanation would share a similar reason with the first one presented, by the assumption that “[...] a particular method cannot, therefore, be a prescription for success for everyone” (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson 2011, p.280), since different methods and approaches arise from the need to “reach” more and more students through collective activities, that may also contribute to individual demands.

Finally, as it can’t just assumed that teaching is a simple task and that all classrooms are the same (Tudor, 2003), or that teaching is just based on “following” a method, the notion that teachers can also be “theory-builders” through practice and that this is part of a dynamic process suitable to constant change, seems to put together the ideas shown so far, since “[...] the work of teaching is simultaneously mental and social. It is also physical, emotional, practical, behavioral, political, experiential, historical, cultural, spiritual, and personal” (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011, p.9). By linking thought and action, in a continual movement that questions the “*whys and hows*” of their practice, teachers are also learners and creators of new theories and approaches to language learning.

In a lecture given by teacher Irene Schoenberg (2013, in press) in which she paraphrases another researcher, L.G. Kelly, referring to the “cyclical evolution of ideas about language teaching”, it is considered that throughout the teaching and learning process “we discard old ideas only to bring them back with modification”. It seems that each new method intends to bring “new formulas” to effective language teaching, but end up sharing many similarities, that can be spotted when one is able to take deeper looks into the processes and activities these methods propose.

In sum, effective learning might emerge from a combination of a given method added by the teacher’s and learners’ investment to make it work. A variety of learning styles is covered by the most well-known methods for second / foreign language acquisition, but if there isn’t a real intention to accomplish the challenge of teaching and learning another language, the results will rarely be successful. In addition to this consideration, Brown (2007, p.63) states that “By perceiving and internalizing connections between practice (choices you make in the classroom) and theory (principles derived from research), you are more likely to engage in ‘enlightened’ teaching.”. All in all, “enlightened teaching” seems to be really a

must in making choices based on methodological principles and not on “guessing”, enhancing the learner experience and having positive outcomes as the principal goal.

Another contribution from Brown (2007), describes 12 principles of language learning and teaching, that must be considered when planning classes and choosing appropriate teaching methods and approaches. They are summarized and commented below:

1. Meaningful learning – by creating links between L2 use and real life, strong retention is enabled. Such links also contribute in showing the learner that the challenge of learning another language is possible;
2. Intrinsic motivation – if a great deal of willpower doesn’t “come from” the student, teachers cannot really make learning happen on their own; thus, if the learner doesn’t realize that learning another language is what he wants and also its advantages, no method or approach will be successful;
3. Willingness to communicate – following the same idea, this principle brings the combination of two constructs that definitely have a major impact on learning: self-confidence and risk-taking behavior. As the author says, they provide “results in the generation of both output and input” being, therefore, fundamental for learning.
4. Language ego – this principle is undeniably linked to the previous one, since throughout the construction of the learner’s identity in the L2, a “sense of fragility, defensiveness and a raising of inhibitions” can interfere in language acquisition. Therefore, it’s also part of the teacher’s job to try to provide a learning environment that is comfortable enough for the students to overcome these obstacles.
5. Interlanguage – it represents the “systematic progression of acquisition of sounds, words, structures and discourse” in L2; it’s also the result of getting feedback to improve language skills in a low anxiety environment, which makes communication attempts possible.
6. Communicative competence – could be understood as the result of the interlanguage development when “attention to language use and not just usage, to fluency and not just accuracy” can start taking place because the language’s basic skills have been successfully internalized. The learner now can focus more on meaning and less on form, making generalizations attempting to achieve his objectives in L2 communication.

7. Autonomy – following the same idea, this principle has to “be around” and in teachers’ minds, since learners “continue their journey to success beyond the classroom and the teacher”. When teachers provide activities that stimulate autonomy, they are in fact, helping students in their task of using the language “out there” and not only under controlled environments.
8. Strategic investment – keeping in mind that it’s also one of the teacher’s goals in L2 instruction that students progressively take full responsibility for their learning process and “be in charge” of it, taking into account the learners’ strategies to attainment can also help when planning lessons which will individually help them.
9. The anticipation of reward – the more a student can “see” his progression and understand that his goals are closer to be reached, the reward becomes his development in itself.
10. The language-culture connection – showing and discussing features of students’ lives, habits and cultural aspects in comparison to those of the L2’s native speakers is an important feature to be considered.
11. The native language effect –L1 can sometimes work as a facilitator in SLA, when its similarities help the learner develop his abilities in a L2 in a faster pace.
12. Automaticity – “automatic processing with peripheral attention to language forms” and “absorbing language through meaningful use” are both goals that can be achieved if the application of the previous principles had worked out in a combination of internal and external aspects that could empower the learners to get to their communicative objectives.

2.2.2 Young learners, the Participatory Approach and the Total Physical Response

Regarding young learners, the main goal of the foreign language classes is to introduce them to the English language by means of activities that help in the development of autonomy and creativity, and motivate them to seek for more knowledge on the language outside the classroom. Such activities are based on features that are part of the “children’s world”, and aim to make classes follow a natural and collaborative path.

The main initial focus is to present not only the language in itself, but cultural aspects that must be considered in language learning, as well as differences and similarities between

students' L1 and the L2, establishing the English language's importance as a global language, and making some room for future discoveries to come. Since students would not be able to visualize, at least in these first meetings with the language, opportunities for true communicative language use outside the classroom – because the target audience of this study lives in a non-English speaking country - the classes must help broaden their perspectives into making use of the language for other purposes (such as observing how the English language is already part in their lives), and visualizing its benefits in the long run.

It is important to consider opportunities for reviewing the content and making it possible for students to make the most of the classes that are offered, providing them with repeated opportunities to practice and revisit vocabulary and structures that were previously presented. Teachers might deal with the need of encouraging participation and motivating students not to think about language learning as something difficult, or something that they are not capable of achieving, profiting from simple - yet effective - ways to enhance motivation, as for example, exhibiting learners' productions and achievements.

The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, whose ideas are part of most of the thinking that is made by the educational leaders about the role of education and its impacts on society in Brazil, introduced the general notions of the Participatory Approach, considering the idea that “what happens in the classroom should be connected with what happens outside” (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011, p.219). It is believed that there should be a real concern in teaching and encouraging learners from a very young age to be responsible for actively participating and changing their communities into better living conditions. As the majority of the kids enrolled at public schools in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, face social problems related to poverty, violence and precarious living conditions, introducing foreign language teaching by means of activities that aim to make such a connection between the usage of language and the power of education, in a more general sense, and a change in their realities, would be an example of making students reflect on their present and their power to change the future.

In addition, the Participatory Approach brings to light serious issues to be “put on the table” by English teachers and educators in general, since we are all responsible for engaging learners not only to learn about the language, but also to use knowledge to make their lives

better, although teaching may also be sometimes trapped into following rules and legislations that attempt to guide the teaching-learning process in a determined way, which might be one of the most challenging features of a teacher's job in the classroom.

Another approach to be considered, especially when dealing with young learners, is the Total Physical Response. The TPR central assumption relies on the belief that "the fastest, least stressful way to achieve understanding of any target language is to follow directions uttered by the instructor (without native language translation)" (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011, p.138). Based on this premise, more importance is given to listening comprehension in connection to movement, prior to working with speaking skills. In *Learning Another Language Through Actions*, first published in 1977, the Total Physical Response teaching technique creator, James Asher, guides the reader through his journey into developing the method. Asher provides the reader with a background on the method accompanied by 150 hours of TPR classroom lessons. References to research in an attempt to prove the method's efficacy and results are also offered considering a variety of ages and developmental stages in language learning. The material aims to be of reference to both teachers who already use the method, and the ones who are new to it, also offering a section that displays letters and emails from teachers from all over the world who have asked the author questions about the method and made important considerations in an attempt to familiarize with it, and get guidelines about the method's implementation in class.

One of the activities derived from this approach is the *action sequence activity*, which can easily be used with language learners in order to convey meaning using a series of commands to achieve an objective. Three examples are described below. The students are to follow these commands to produce the "desired result":

1)- Get ready for school: wake up / brush your teeth / have some breakfast / put on your shirt / put on your shorts / put on your sneakers / comb your hair / get your backpack / say bye to your mom / wait for the bus.

2)- Clean your bedroom: open the window / get the books from the shelf / wipe the shelf / put the books back / put clean bedsheets / vacuum the floor / spray some air freshener.

3)- Make some soup: open de fridge / take some vegetables / peel the vegetables / chop the vegetables / boil some water / put everything in a pot / cook them all / put the soup in a bowl / blow it / taste it.

The combination and connection between “listening and doing” prior to listening and speaking helps promoting a low anxiety environment that enables young learners, in this study’s case, to somehow use the language without even being totally aware of it, as they assume they are playing some kind of game, by acting as the instructor uses a variety of commands and combined structures. Some of these advantages are also enumerated in the article *Engaging language learners with Total Physical Response (TPR)*, published by the Sanako blog (2023), which brings a variety of different strategies in language teaching around the world:

- TPR engages multiple senses by combining physical movement with language learning. This multi-modal approach improves memory retention, making it easier for students to recall vocabulary and grammar structures.
- Students are physically involved in the lessons, which keeps them engaged and motivated throughout the class.
- It can be easily adapted for a wide range of language learning contexts and situations.
- TPR simulates the way children acquired their first language. It immerses learners in a context where language is used for communication, helping them develop their language skills organically.
- The interactive nature of TPR makes language learning enjoyable. Students often see TPR activities as games, which contributes to a positive classroom atmosphere.

2.2.3 The Multiple Intelligences and Different Learning Sources

Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011, p.239) point out that “Teachers have always known that their students have different strengths. In the language teaching field, some of the differences among students have been attributed to students’ having different learning or cognitive styles [...] it has been estimated that for up to 25 percent of the population, the mode of instruction does make a difference in their success as learners”. Such idea

reinforces not only the assumption that applying diverse and mixed methods and approaches in class are beneficial for learners, but also the belief that teachers should provide learners with as many different tools as possible to cater for different learning styles.

The image below presents *The Multiple Intelligences*, theory developed by Dr. Howard Gardner (1983). Armstrong (2023), explains that such theory “[...] suggests that the traditional notion of intelligence, based on I.Q. testing, is far too limited. Instead, Dr. Gardner proposes eight (or possibly nine [including the existential intelligence]) different intelligences to account for a broader range of human potential in children and adults.”



Figure 2: *The Multiple Intelligences*. Retrieved May 14, 2024, from <https://www.institute4learning.com/resources/articles/multiple-intelligences/>

Based on the assumption that different activities would cater to different students’ learning styles, as mentioned before, Christison (1996, 2005) and Armstrong (1994) as in Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011, p.240), provide examples of classroom activities that would be connected to each one of the multiple intelligence’s development:

- 1 Logical/mathematical—puzzles and games, logical, sequential presentations, classifications and categorizations;
- 2 Visual/spatial—charts and grids, videos, drawing;

- 3 Body/kinesthetic—hands-on activities, field trips, pantomime;
- 4 Musical/rhythmic—singing, playing music, jazz chants;
- 5 Interpersonal—pair-work, project work, group problem solving;
- 6 Intrapersonal—self-evaluation, journal keeping, options for homework;
- 7 Verbal/linguistic—note-taking, storytelling, debates;
- 8 Naturalist—collecting objects from the natural world; learning their names and about them.

Thinking about resources, that are nowadays made available to most of the educators and that would also explore and encourage students to learn a foreign language by means of different approaches, three examples of different tools that could enhance the teaching-learning process providing more a playful, interactive, and motivational environment in class are offered below. Along with each one's outline and target audience, an evaluation of the tool is presented, considering the twenty principles of language teaching described by Nation and Macalister (2009): frequency; strategies and autonomy; spaced retrieval; language system; keep moving forward; teachability; learning burden; interference; motivation; four strands; comprehensible input; fluency; output; deliberate learning; time on task; depth of processing; integrative motivation; learning style; ongoing needs and environment analysis; and feedback.

Super Simple Songs

Super Simple Songs - Theme
 265 thousand subscribers · 1 thousand videos
 Find out more about this channel >
support.google.com/youtube/answer/2579942
 Sign up

Start

Albums and singles see it all

Album/Single	Number of Songs	Updated
ABC Hop	2 songs	Updated 6 days ago
Caitie's Countdown to Christmas	10 songs	Updated 3 days ago
Hello Hello! And More Noodle & Pals Songs!	10 songs	Updated today
Milk & Cookies & More Kids Christmas Songs	16 songs	Updated 4 days ago
Classroom Songs	20 songs	Updated yesterday

Figure 3: Super Simple Songs(n.d.). Home [YouTube channel]. YouTube. Retrieved February 27, 2024, from <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgqUCJPPT8X37-CealQB6gQ>

Outline: This YouTube channel offers more than a thousand videos with songs that can be used for pedagogical purposes in EFL/ESL classrooms. Due to its varied contents, teachers can take advantage of such videos to present or make students practice vocabulary and simple structures. In addition to songs featuring specific vocabulary, there are also videos that bring traditional kids' songs and videos that can be used in special dates, such as Christmas or Halloween, for example

Target audience: Young learners – elementary stages.

Structure: The songs/videos are categorized by theme.

Evaluation: The songs presented in the videos offered by this channel generally attract young learners' attention not only because of their bright colors and carefully designed characters, but also because their simple vocabulary and use of the English language act as motivators, once learners can generally understand "what is going on" in an easy way, that is, comprehensible input is offered, and the learning burden is reduced. In addition, most of the songs ask for some kind of movement or dance that also allow kids to move and enjoy the songs' contents while having fun, and of course learning/practicing the English language. Most learners nowadays can also look for the songs used in class at home, and extend the classroom work by engaging in the same or other songs that will also develop their language skills in a fun and playful way, favoring autonomy and spaced retrieval.

British Council – Learn English kids

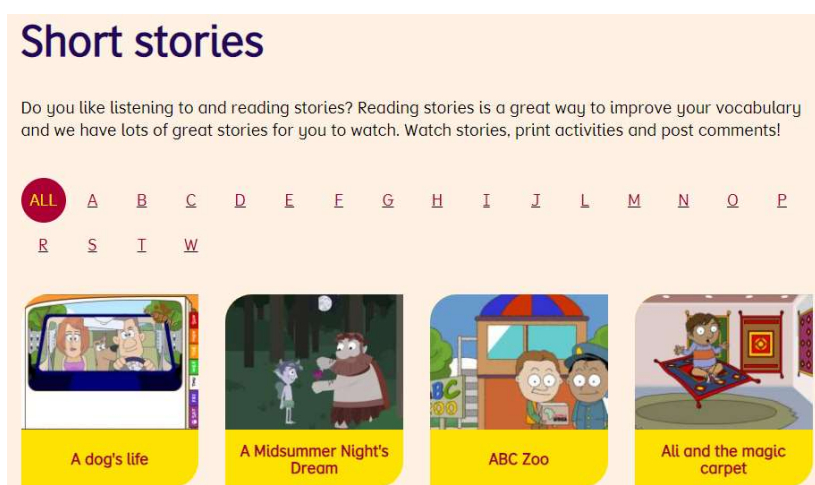


Figure 4 : Learn English Kids. (n.d). Short stories(1). British Council: The United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. Retrieved February 27, 2024, from learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/listen-watch/short-stories

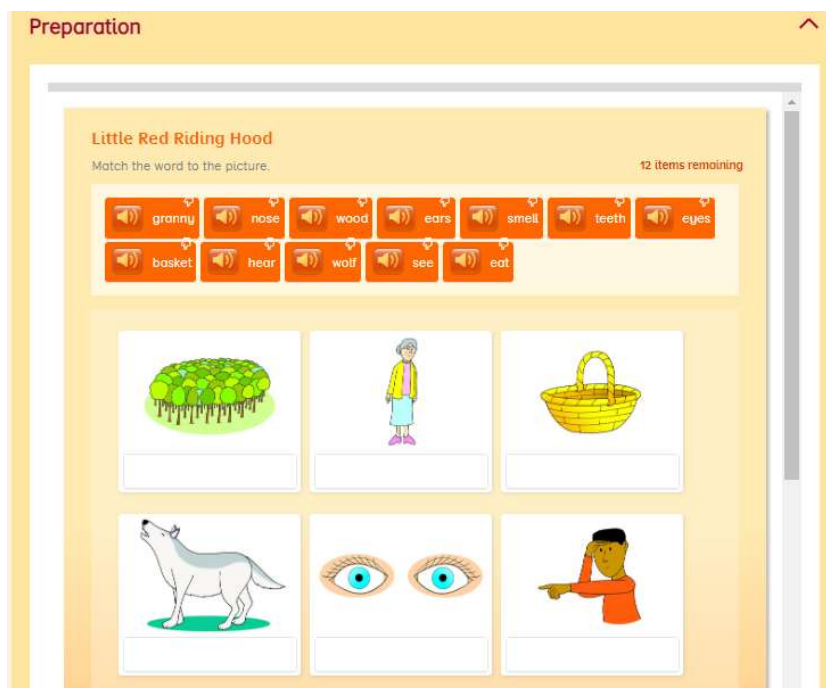


Figure 5: Learn English Kids. (n.d). Short stories(2). British Council: The United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. Retrieved February 27, 2024, from learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/listen-watch/short-stories

Outline: This website, offered for free by the British Council, aims to make available online games, songs, stories, and activities for children that can be used to foster learning at school or at home. There are also articles targeted for parents regarding learning English that serve as a tool for teachers as well, once they are written by specialists in the field of education, teachers, and trainers affiliated to the British Council. In addition to the already mentioned materials, there are also activities categorized by specific skills (listen and watch; read and write; speak and spell), as well as printable flashcards and activities. A selection of “how to...videos” is also offered; such videos can be used in classroom projects and also help in the learning process in a fun way. In the figures above, the short stories’ page is shown, as well as an example of a preparation activity that accompanies each one of the stories, aiming to make the reader familiar with the main words that will be fundamental to understanding the selected story. Furthermore, after each story, other activities (online and also printable ones) are offered in order to assess comprehension.

Target audience: Young learners – all levels

Structure: The materials are categorized by skill; the website also offers a search tool that facilitates its usage.

Evaluation: The teachability principle (as in Nation, 2019) might be the one that most teachers would spot while analyzing the activities presented by this resource. The short stories, for example, are accompanied by pre and post tasks with immediate feedback, which favors depth of processing, thoughtful learning, and integrative motivation. Tags are presented at the end of each activity bringing a possibility for the searcher to look for activities that are indicated to learners within a certain level of proficiency, or that are part of a main category, as for example: “animals” or “school”. The website can be explored in a very easy and intuitive way, facilitating that students also take advantage of it independently, as an additional resource, working on their perceived weak skills. The activities favor diverse learning styles, once they are varied and could suit individualities and preferences regarding language learning.

Working with storytelling



Figure 6: Williams, M. (2012). *Pearson English Kids Readers. Level 1. Pearson Education.* ISBN: 9781408288535

Outline: This series of published stories for kids brings an opportunity for teachers and students to profit from stories presented with simple vocabulary that are likely to attract the kids’ attention in an immersive activity. Each one of the books also bring some activities for comprehension in the end of each story that could be photocopied, providing practice and vocabulary fixation. One of the titles presented above – *Nemo goes to school* – not only brings a character that is already known by the kids, but also brings a scenario that is part of the learners’ routines, as well as related vocabulary and structures that can be practiced while the story is being told.

Target audience: Young learners – elementary stages.

Structure: The books bring stories with colorful scenes and simple phrases, followed by comprehension activities that involve, for example, word identification, and matching pictures and words.

Evaluation: When storytelling is chosen as an activity that can enhance language learning, teachers must have in mind that their skill at conducting such activity is going to be decisive for its success or failure. For this reason, as such series was designed for pedagogical purposes, teachers would probably profit from some tips to conduct the storytelling “moment” in class and strategies on how learners are more likely to take advantage of such moments. Considering such activity’s potential while using the above-mentioned materials, the four strands in language learning - meaning-focused input; language-focused learning; meaning-focused output; fluency activities (as in Nation, 2019), can be accomplished by taking advantage of the simple, but at the same time rich vocabulary and structures that are presented in the stories, and provide an array of possibilities and activities that could be derived from their content.

Finally, some tips for motivational activities are offered by the Global English TESOL Courses website (n.d., adapted), focusing on the importance of planning and considering the specificities of young learners:

- Plan for the learners' activities, not for the teacher's activities;
- Plan for an average of 5 minutes for each activity;
- Remember that children can't sit still being passive for a long time;
- Activities where children are actively involved can be longer;
- Be careful to sequence the activities so children do not become overexcited or excessively bored, balancing *stirrers* (activities that excite children: singing or moving around the classroom, for example) and *settlers* (activities that calm children down: “paper and pencil” activities such as writing, copying, coloring, and drawing);
- Don't imagine you can have a quiet and productive classroom by using only settlers. The children will quickly become frustrated and demotivated;

- Remember to balance *head-up activities* (children look at the teacher, the board or at other children), and *head-down activities* (children have their eyes on a book or a piece of paper);
- Remember to balance individual, pair, small group and whole class activities. Children need to learn to operate in many different social situations;
- Plan for time. Remember that in a large class, distributing papers, cards, colored pencils or books takes time. Think carefully about how you will organize these administrative things because they can turn a good plan into an unsuccessful lesson;
- Share your plans with the children. Tell them what they are going to do during each lesson. You will get better cooperation.

2.3 Reflection on the importance of letting assessment measures play a role in motivating students

In an attempt to define assessment, Brown and Abeywickrama (2010, p.3) state that: “In educational practice, assessment is an ongoing process that encompasses a wide range of methodological techniques [...] A good teacher never ceases to assess students, whether those assessments are incidental or intended”.

The instruments to be considered in assessment must take into account not only students’ end-of-the-course outcomes, but also their development throughout the classes, as well as making them aware of their responsibilities as learners and active contributors to their own success.

Brown and Abeywickrama (2010, p.131) also advise teachers that “Multiple measures will always give you [the teacher] a more reliable and valid assessment than a single measure”. In agreement with such notion, two alternative assessment measures for young learners are presented below. By providing students not only with the traditional but also with such alternative assessment instruments, teachers might be contributing to students’ more conscious attitude towards assessment.

2.3.1 Self-assessment

The illustration that follows might bring to light various reflections towards assessment, as well as different points of view when such idea is taken into account. One of such points of view will be detailed below.

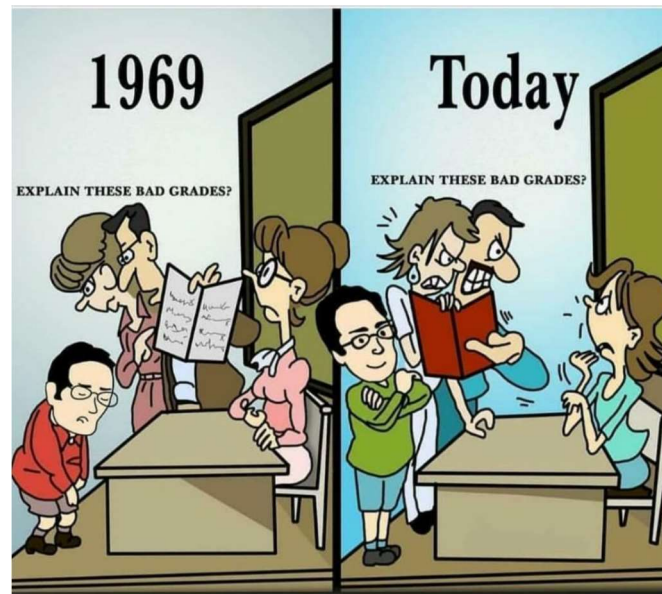


Figure 7: Reflection towards assessment. Retrieved December 5, 2023, from https://www.reddit.com/r/Teachers/comments/qhq6ag/parents_are_the_biggest_issue_with_education_today/

The illustration tries to convey an idea that might be true for most of the current educational scenarios, implying that a shift in the roles of parents, teachers, and learners towards instruction and the way in which they deal with the students' results, have changed or have been changing over the years. It may seem that the "authority" role teachers once played is now owned by learners. This is just one of the ways through which this illustration could be interpreted, once its implications may derive an array of other reflections.

The starting point of this study's aim in bringing such discussion does not deal with finding "who to blame" for students' lack of success or interest in learning, but with the idea that formal instruction presupposes shared responsibility. From this point of view, neither of the scenarios portrayed by the picture would convey an ideal representation of the situation being explored, once parents, teachers, and learners are all part of the teaching/learning process.

Considering the ideas exposed up to this point, this section intends to present and discuss ways of increasing students' participation in assessment, providing them with

opportunities of growth based on individual strengths and weaknesses that could be spotted by considering self-assessment as an additional measure to a student's global evaluation. Bourke and Mentis (2013, as in Bailey & Curtis, 2015, p.331), support this idea by stating that "Self-assessment, as a component of a variety of assessment practices, can foster students' involvement and inclusion in choices about their own learning".

The notion of working on students' agency regarding their own learning processes, aligned with the advantages of self-regulation in learning, understood as "[...] people's ability to make choices, take control, self-regulate, and thereby pursue their goals as individuals, leading potentially to personal or social transformations" (Brown, 2007, p.531), might represent one of the most striking benefits and arguments in favor of self-assessment, once it provides students not only with opportunities of growth in language learning, but also in learning strategies in a general way. However, Brown (2007, p.74) also poses an important question in this regard: "Is the principle of self-regulation a culturally loaded principle?"

Although non-conventional forms of assessment might not be so well-accepted depending on the educational scenario one is inserted in, using them as tools to triangulate data about students (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010) in an effort to compose an "evaluation package" – term coined by Short (1993, as in Bailey & Curtis, 2015, p.225) – that aims to provide students with tools to develop their skills and promote growth, seems to make such effort worth it. Andrade & Valtcheva (2009), contribute to this discussion by evidencing the formative role of alternative assessment and specifically pointing in the direction of self-assessment, that is considered "[...] a key element in formative assessment because it involves students in thinking about the quality of their own work, rather than relying on the teacher as the sole source of evaluative judgements".

The literature in self-assessment seems to point out to one major principle, that might be favored to a greater extent when this assessment tool is considered: autonomy. Brown & Abeywickrama (2010, p.313-314) explain that "Self-assessment derives its theoretical justification from a number of well-established principles of second language acquisition. The principle of autonomy stands out as part of the foundation of successful learning".

In *Techniques and Principles in Language Learning*, Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011, p.130), analyze the role of integrative tests, considering the self-assessment notion, as a way that encourages students “[...] to look at their own learning and to become aware of their own progress”. The authors also mention and include self-assessment as a tool to enhance the intrapersonal intelligence, since such tool deals with one’s ability to use strategies to support learning that, in a general way, also boosts the development of multiple intelligences. The authors explain the process and its expected outcome: “The students evaluate their own success in learning the strategy. They modify the strategy to meet their own learning needs. They share their innovations with their classmates [...] Students need to become independent, self-regulated learners. Self-assessment contributes to learner autonomy” Larsen-Freeman & Anderson (2011, p.233).

Furthermore, self-assessment might also have a role in affecting students’ behavior, not only regarding learning strategies but also their attitude towards the learning process as a whole, and how such features influence their achievements. In *Behavior Self-Assessment for Elementary Students*, Stearns (2017), focuses on how self-assessment can support students’ in acknowledging the results of their behavior: “[...] students who understand what they are doing right and wrong will be less reluctant to accept consequences when they arise”. Still considering the formative role of self-assessment, the “consequences” mentioned by the author might act as triggers to boost change, that will result in greater learning achievements.

Butler and Lee (2010, as in Bailey & Curtis, 2015, p.331), point to another advantage of self-assessment, by implying that the results provided by this tool help teachers understand unrevealed features of the learning process, that could be decisive when planning and putting tasks into practice: “[...] self-assessment may allow teachers to gain information on the students’ affective states which are not usually available using other types of assessment”.

Finally, Brown & Abeywickrama (2010, p.319-320) set some guidelines that might maximize the use of self-assessment measures:

- Tell students the purpose of the assessment;
- Define the task(s) clearly;

- Encourage impartial evaluation of performance or ability;
- Ensure beneficial washback through follow-up tasks.

Below, a suggestion of implementation of self-assessment measures as contributors to young learners' evaluation process in a language course:

Assessment method: **Self -evaluation**

Objective: It intends to check if the course's learning goals are not only being achieved by the teacher's and administrators' points of view, but also by the students' perspectives. It also intends to lead learners to some critical thinking about how their attitudes and behavior strongly influence their success or failure in the acquisition of a new language.

Frequency: Beginning – Middle – End of the course / semester.

Description: Teachers and students should come together to discuss about the course, its goals and how they are expected to be achieved. By setting everybody's roles and responsibilities throughout the process, a course is likely to make students and teachers involved and committed to the most positive outcomes possible. Following the group discussion, each student should be given some time to write or draw (considering very young learners) the most important task or attitude that must be put into practice, considering what he or she thinks that needs to be done for (more) successful results in language learning. Such activity might provide valuable insights and reflections about how the teaching/learning process is being conducted. Considering more mature learners, reflexive questionnaires can also serve as tools to achieve similar results.

2.3.2 Portfolios

As another example of an alternative assessment instrument, portfolios are defined by Genesee and Upshur (1996, as in Brown and Abeywickrama, 2010, p.321) as “a purposeful collection of students' work that demonstrates [...] their efforts, progress, and achievements in given areas”.

Gottlieb (1995, as in Brown and Abeywickrama, 2010, p.322) defines six attributes of portfolios: collecting, reflecting, assessing, documenting, linking, and evaluating. Each one of these attributes is described below:

- Collecting – portfolios should be seen as a demonstration and expression of students’ identities as learners;
- Reflecting – portfolios should provide opportunities for self-assessment and reflection on students’ own achievements and outcomes in language learning;
- Assessing – students are given an opportunity of assessing the paths that were taken during a course and their results;
- Documenting – portfolios bring a series of activities that document and demonstrate students’ acquired skills and abilities in language learning;
- Linking – portfolios are a unique opportunity for providing a tangible product of students’ achievements that can be shared with parents, peers, and the community in general;
- Evaluating – as a final goal in using such assessment measure, students participate on a process that results in shared accountability and thoughtful appraisal of the learning process.

Taking into account the six items described above, portfolios can be understood and seen as authentic and student-centered forms of assessment, since “[...] they provide students with a tool to be more involved in their learning, and give them a better sense of control for their own learning” (Richards and Renandya, 2002, p.335). As a last consideration aligned with the idea just stated, Peñaflores (n.d.), explains the positive outcomes that result from using portfolios as an alternative assessment measure: “[...] when students actively participate in the selection and discussion of their work, they gain a true sense of ownership, which results in personal satisfaction and feelings of self-worth” (Peñaflores, n.d., as in Richards and Renandya, 2002, p.348).

Reinforcing the advantages of using the portfolio as an assessment instrument for young learners, the British Council’s teacher Malisa Iturain (2007, in press) sets some guidelines for teachers in order to make it a successful experience, based on her own practice:

- Whenever working on portfolios, I have sent a letter to parents at the start of term, briefly explaining what a Language Portfolio is and the reasons for working with it;
- I have asked parents to look for any 'realia' that their children could bring into class which would help them talk about a language / cultural experience. Children have brought in photos, leaflets to interactive museums, theatre tickets and magazines and comics in English;
- Obviously not all children get so involved and by the end of the course there can be quite a difference in the contents of Language Portfolios. However, I always make time in portfolio sessions to help individuals who have been absent or fallen behind in their work so that each Language Portfolio is reflective of the level of its owner. Other learners can finish off pieces of work or start on new topics;
- Throughout the course, learners have personalised their Language Portfolios by including photos, decorating the front cover and preparing an individual passport page. In this way the notion of 'ownership' has been a motivating force;
- Finally, at the end of term students take their LP home where they can be kept intact or used the following year to build on and update.

Finally, she also states several advantages of working with portfolios that involve motivation, the opportunity of self-assessment, and also the development of autonomy, as in: "They [portfolios] enhance learners' motivation by providing something personal and tangible which they can build up and develop over the course. [...] From a teacher's point of view, portfolios lead to greater learner autonomy since they involve self-assessment, learner responsibility and parent involvement" (Iturain, 2007, in press).

Below, a suggestion of implementation of the portfolio as an assessment instrument to young learners' evaluation process in a language course:




Assessment method: **Portfolio**

Objective: It intends to compile activities and tasks' written materials, being a source to be used to show students, parents, and supervisors the learners' development throughout the course.

Frequency: By the end of each unit of content.

Description: At the end of each unit, each student must choose activities to be part of his or her portfolio. By choosing the activities that will be part of the material, students may also have a chance to talk about the reasons of their choices. This instrument should not only serve to its initial and main purpose, but it should also work on students' motivation to keep on doing their best in each one of the activities.

In addition, the following form demonstrates how the notions already described could fit into a portfolio rubric for EFL young learners:

Portfolio Rubric			
<u>Assessment Ratings</u>			
	Excellent!	Very good!	You can do better!
	(Exceeds Expectations)	(Meets Expectations)	(Partially Meets Expectations)
	<i>Score: 3</i>	<i>Score: 2</i>	<i>Score: 1</i>
<u>Sources of Learning</u>	The student was able to collect / document <u>one or more activities</u> from each unit of content that was part of the course, documenting his learning experience in an <u>excellent</u> sample, that shows his identity as an English language learner.	The student was able to collect / document <u>at least one activity</u> from each unit of content that was part of the course, documenting his learning experience in an <u>appropriate</u> sample, that shows his identity as an English language learner.	The student was able to collect / document <u>at least one activity</u> from <u>almost all</u> of the units of content that were part of the course, documenting his learning experience in a <u>partially complete</u> sample, that attempts to show his identity as an English language learner.
Score:			
<u>Demonstration of Learning</u>	The portfolio's chosen materials are <u>entirely connected</u> to the course's learning outcomes, displaying activities that demonstrate the learner's achievements throughout the course, as for example, in	The portfolio's chosen materials are <u>connected</u> to the course's learning outcomes, displaying activities that demonstrate the learner's achievements throughout the course, as for example, in identifying the English	The portfolio's chosen materials are <u>partially connected</u> to the course's learning outcomes, displaying activities that demonstrate the learner's achievements throughout the course, as for example, in identifying the English language's usage
Score:			

	identifying the English language's usage in different contexts and environments, that are part of the student's routine / culture.	language's usage in different contexts and environments, that are part of the student's routine / culture.	in different contexts and environments, that are part of the student's routine / culture.
Evidence of learning Score:	The student <u>was able to entirely</u> show evidence of learning through the portfolio's activities with examples of his acquired competencies in English as, for instance, identifying words in <u>listening</u> and / or <u>writing</u> activities.	The student <u>was able to</u> show evidence of learning through the portfolio's activities with examples of <u>some of</u> his acquired competencies in English as, for instance, identifying words in <u>listening</u> and / or <u>writing</u> activities.	The student <u>was partially able</u> to show evidence of learning through the portfolio's activities with <u>incomplete</u> examples of his acquired competencies in English as, for instance, identifying words in <u>listening</u> and / or <u>writing</u> activities.
Mastering Knowledge and Skills Score:	The student <u>was able to</u> show his acquired knowledge into practice, by providing <u>four or more</u> homework activities that display his ability to use what was learned in class in other situations, prompted by these homework tasks.	The student <u>was able to</u> show his acquired knowledge into practice, by providing at <u>least four</u> homework activities that <u>display or partially display</u> his ability to use what was learned in class in other situations, prompted by these homework tasks.	The student <u>was partially able</u> to show his acquired knowledge into practice, by providing <u>three or less</u> homework activities that <u>partially display</u> his ability to use what was learned in class in other situations, prompted by these homework tasks.
Reflection on Learning Score:	The student <u>was able to</u> make thoughtful reflections about his development throughout the course. Such reflections can be seen in his self-assessment activities, that were included in the portfolio, and represent his ability to reset goals and apply new strategies to more successful learning outcomes.	The student <u>was able to</u> make thoughtful reflections about his development throughout the course, <u>although more effort could have been put into the tasks</u> . Such reflections can be seen in his self-assessment activities, that were included in the portfolio, and represent his ability to reset goals and apply new strategies to more successful learning outcomes.	The student <u>was partially able</u> to make thoughtful reflections about his development throughout the course, <u>although a lot more could have been done in this regard</u> . Such reflections can be seen in his self-assessment activities, that were included in the portfolio, and represent his ability to reset goals and apply new strategies to more successful learning outcomes.
Presentation Score:	The student <u>was able to</u> profit from the opportunity of building a portfolio to develop his skills in foreign language learning. It includes <u>even more</u> than the	The student <u>was able to</u> profit from the opportunity of building a portfolio to develop his skills in foreign language learning. It includes the expected activities: <u>one</u>	The student <u>was partially able</u> to profit from the opportunity of building a portfolio to develop his skills in foreign language learning. It <u>partially includes</u> the expected

	<p>expected activities: <u>one or more activities</u> from each unit of content; <u>four or more</u> homework activities; and the self-assessment activities that were part of the course. <u>If the student keeps doing such a great job, his results will continue to be awesome!</u></p>	<p><u>activity</u> from each unit of content; <u>four</u> homework activities; and the self-assessment activities that were part of the course. <u>The student can perfect his job a little more in order to achieve better results.</u></p>	<p>activities: <u>one activity</u> from almost each unit of content; <u>three or less</u> homework activities; and all or almost all of the self-assessment activities that were part of the course. <u>Much more could have been done by the student in order to achieve greater results.</u></p>
<p><u>Overall Assessment</u></p> <p>Final Score:</p>	<p>A successful portfolio is expected to achieve <u>at least twelve points</u>, considering the total score derived from each one of the six assessment criteria.</p>		

Note: The rubric presented above was adapted from https://www.cameron.edu/storage/academic-advising-center/CU_Rubric_for_Portfolio_Based_Credit_Portfolio_.pdf, Retrieved March 11, 2024.

2.4 How a topic-based syllabus can enhance young learners’ motivation

When thinking about syllabus design, it is important to underline the need of analyzing the group of learner’s social backgrounds, curricular experiences, their own needs and wants (Nation, 2009). Considering young learners, it is acknowledged that some goals and principles in teaching English as a foreign language to such an audience might be the same; however, Bourke (2006), also highlights this “personalized” need, stating that syllabus design is an “inexact science”.

Still considering young learners, the activities and tasks proposed in class should account for a latent need of letting them assume more active and decisive roles in their learning processes. It is safe to assume that most of the learning nowadays relies on the need that teachers lead and conduct all the process, with no or little space for students’ leadership and recognition of their own roles in learning. Based on the autonomy and meaning-focused learning principles in language instruction, it is important that we emphasize that students are also capable of being responsible for their language development, contributing to more student-centered and interactive classes, that would result in more efficient learning. Nation (2010, p.38) mentions such notion by explaining that “A language course should train learners in how to learn a language and how to monitor and

be aware of their learning, so that they can become effective and independent language learners”.

2.4.1 Topic-based syllabuses’ analysis and their main characteristics

Based on the considerations previously exposed, the analysis that follows on topic-based syllabuses had as its source the case study *Designing a topic-based syllabus for young learners*, by James Bourke (2006).

As a primary consideration and argument in favor of the usage of a topic-based syllabus for young learners, the author defends that they might want their lessons to be about the “child’s world”: “[...] It is necessary to re-discover and inhabit the world of the child. Children live in a world of fantasy and make-believe, a world of dragons and monsters, talking animals, and alien beings. In their world there are no tenses, nouns, or adjectives; there are no schemas labelled ‘grammar’, ‘lexis’, ‘phonology’, or ‘discourse’” (Bourke, 2006, p.280).

2.4.1.1 Application of Principles

Below, some of the principles that underlie and explain the choices the author claims are the most effective ones when teaching young learners, are listed (Bourke, 2006, adapted):

- A second language syllabus should reflect the world of the child and facilitate the bringing of acquisition into the classroom;
- Children will acquire the language as a byproduct of the activities in which they are engaged;
- Learning is mutually constructed as a collaborative experience between teachers and learners;
- Topics provide a natural context for the integration of language input and skills development;
- Learners’ attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form. It resembles activities which students carry out in everyday life and it may involve all four skills.

2.4.1.2 Goals

The principal goal, from which others derive, is helping children develop their skills in language acquisition from the earliest stages as it is “[...] one of the things that young children are particularly good at” (Bourke, 2006, p.279).

An initial contact with the new language in order to foster young learner’s desire to independently keep on going for new discoveries is also praised: “The aim is not so much to teach them the new language, but rather to provide the necessary conditions and motivating experiences for the target language to be acquired by the pupils themselves” (Bourke, 2006, p.280).

2.4.1.3 Content and Sequencing

In an attempt to show how a new language should be presented to young learners, how the content and sequencing of the lessons might be planned is highlighted below, so that learners experience the implementation of an effective program. Some central ideas surrounding this implementation follow:

- Comprehensible input must be an optimal condition;
- The needs and experiences of the learner are paramount;
- An experientially appropriate syllabus for young learners should be built up;
- The language has to be packaged in a way that makes sense to children.

2.4.1.4 Format and Presentation

It is defended that language should be within the context of appropriate topics which can be talked about, read about, and written about. Bourke (2006) details his explanation about how the topics are the root for the work to be conducted in every lesson: “It is the topic that ‘selects’ the new language items, structures, language functions, or vocabulary topic-related units of work derived from the syllabus. The topics provide the scaffolding around which the language grows and develops. They also provide the motivation for personal and group writing tasks” (Bourke, 2006, p.282).

The activities that must be provided considering the ideas just exposed include: stories of all kinds, games and fun activities, doing and making activities, songs, chants and

rhymes, pair work and groupwork tasks, big books, materials from the web, children's literature, word bank activities, making predictions prior to reading, responding to the text, cued dialogues, role-play, information gap exercises, communicative tasks, among others. The author indicates that any activity that brings acquisition into the classroom would be appropriate, focusing on building sight vocabulary, phonics, word families, and word and phrase recognition.

2.4.1.5 Monitoring and Assessment

When considering monitoring and assessment in relation to the implementation of a topic-based syllabus, the main idea teachers need to have in mind is that "Learners must be free to make errors so they can re-structure their emerging language system" and that "Learners have to figure out how the language works" (Bourke, 2006, p.282). Such ideas might be part of the course's assessment plan, taking into account that "Research also indicates that language learning is a complex, non-linear, and rather chaotic process" (Bourke, 2006, p.281). This last consideration suggests that a language course that makes use of this type of syllabus might be adapted to meet its final desirable outcomes, taking into account the students' progress- or the lack of it - when performing the activities proposed.

2.4.1.6 Evaluation

One of the key points that explain a topic-basic syllabus' success, that could be used as an evaluation measure, deals with the correspondence between topics and tasks. Therefore, if these two items are aligned, the implementation of the activities that would also be used as evaluation measures might be successful and effective.

2.4.2 Needs analysis and Suggestions of activities

Below, two suggestions of activities considering the analysis previously exposed are presented, as well as a brief needs analysis that specifically considers young learners that study English as a foreign language in public schools at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Some of these learners' main characteristics follow, as well as considerations about the teaching-learning scenario. Such analysis is understood as "[...] an important part of

curriculum design because at its most basic level it ensures that the course will be usable” (Nation and Macalister, 2009, p.14):

- Learners age range makes it possible to work with a variety of strategies and activities dedicated to young learners, but limits the teaching-learning process to working with a restricted number of skills, since some of these students cannot read or write yet;
- Learners are all L1 Brazilian Portuguese speakers and this is their very first contact with the English language, at least in instruction;
- The learners are expected to see that language learning can provide them better opportunities in the future, since they come from violent and poor communities in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil;
- Students are accustomed to seeing the classroom environment as a place for sitting, copying, and repeating expected behaviors, where most of the times there isn't room for sharing opinions and discussing real life issues;
- Due to some schools' poor structural conditions, some classrooms might limit the teachers' job if the activities depend on students moving around the room. Most of the rooms need to accommodate thirty to forty children;
- Classes are constantly cancelled or interrupted by factors that limit the presence of the staff and students inside the schools, such as violent conflicts in the schools' neighborhood that make it unsafe for people to go around the areas that surround them.

Some general needs, according to the considerations previously mentioned include:

- Main focus on vocabulary, formulaic expressions and key structures. At first, fluency must be the goal, rather than accuracy;
- Activities that provide meaningful and practical use of simple structures, and work on the development of the English language's creative use;
- Learners must be working with songs, chants, stories, cartoons, and objects that could be found in any classroom;
- Language use is initially restricted to listening and speaking, and then includes reading and writing;
- Learners might be presented with familiar materials as, for example, classic stories that are also part of their known repertoire in their first language.

2.4.2.1 Suggestion 1

In the suggested activities that follow, *toys in English* are being presented in connection to students' realities and experiences. The use of the Total Physical Response approach (previously discussed in this chapter) is also being put into practice. Interaction between students is praised, as well as responsibility and autonomy.

Objectives:

- 1) After the proposed activities, students will be able to match pictures of toys and games to their written forms in English, and identify some colors and commands using the language;
- 2) Students will also be able to apply gestures / body language to commands in English.

Interaction Pattern(s): Full-class interaction; Open-ended teacher questioning; Individual work; Choral responses.

Evaluation measures: Class observation; Students' progress during the activities.

Lesson1

Warm-up: Matching game – students are asked to check some pictures and match them with their English correspondent words (previously written by the teacher on the board). Five students who volunteer will participate, the others will observe and give hints to their friends. (See Appendix 1)

Classroom discussion: students are guided by the teacher to realize that many words they see in their games and toys are, in fact, words from the English language. Students are also asked to provide some other examples they can think of; the teacher writes these examples on the board. For the next class, the teacher asks students to bring toys of their own that are included in the list built in class.

Hands-on activity: Speaking and coloring – students get a picture that represents a video game's remote control. The teacher leads the class to color and understand the function of each button. Students are asked to say the commands and colors as they do the activity. (See Appendix 2)

Lesson 2

Warm-up followed by Further Practice: Speaking and using TPR – the teacher leads students to remember about the last lesson’s content about games and toys, by encouraging that they say some of the words that were on the board’s list. Using the video game’s remote control from the last class, the teacher reviews with the students each command; now, students are asked to stand up and perform as the teacher says the commands and “presses the buttons”; then, students who volunteer (one at a time) can also be the players by pressing the buttons and having their friends perform the commands. (See Appendix 2)

Checking the kids’ own toys: the kids who brought toys (as suggested in the previous class) present their toys to their classmates; the kids are given some minutes to play together sharing their toys. (See Appendix 3)

2.4.2.2 Suggestion 2

In the suggested activities that follow, *ads in English* are being presented in order to make students already realize some differences between the Portuguese and English languages’ sound systems, as well as their written forms. Interaction between students is praised again, enhancing collaborative and meaningful learning, once students might see the application of how learning a foreign language is already advantageous in their real lives. Numbers, verbs and fixed expressions in the target language are also worked on, as tools to complete the tasks proposed.

Objectives:

- 1) After the proposed activities, students will be able to differentiate some sounds in English words that are not familiar to their L1, and combine letters to form such words;
- 2) Students will also be able to identify and arrange letters to form words in connection to their sounds in the English language;
- 3) Students will be able to compare the written form of words in Portuguese and in English, and use the phrase “how many” to express the quantity of something.

Interaction Pattern(s): Full-class interaction; Closed-ended teacher questioning; Group work; Choral responses.

Evaluation measures: Class observation; Students' performances; Students' productions.

Lesson 1

Warm-up / Presentation: the teacher brings two commercials that are currently on TV and shows them to the class. The students are going to play the "stop" game: each time a word is not spoken in Portuguese in the commercials, the kids should say "stop", and the teacher writes the word on the board.

Example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6chQNAPC97s> (vision / air fryer / Ichef / QR code)

Joining letters and discovering sounds: in groups, the kids are asked to choose two words from the list on the board (built from the words in the TV commercials), and look for their letters in magazines and newspapers. Each group will form the chosen words and glue the letters on a sheet of paper. Then, they will be asked to pronounce the words with the teacher's help, and present them to the class. As homework, the kids are asked to bring more words to add to the initial list, from the commercials they watch on TV.

Lesson 2

Warm-up: the teacher elicits from the students the vocabulary in English they have brought to class from the TV commercials they could watch at home. The teacher leads the discussion to make the students realize that such vocabulary can also be found in written ads, flyers, and brochures.

Group work: divided in groups, the kids must cut and glue the highest number of words in English from newspapers, supermarket brochures or flyers, and magazines they are able to find out, using the given time limit. (See Appendix 4)

Checking the results: each group presents – with the teacher's help – the words they could find. The results are discussed in English, by working with "how many" and numbers.

Homework: the teacher asks students to bring objects or labels from products they have in their houses in which they can find words written in English, in order to build a collective board. (See Appendix 5)

Chapter 3 – Data and Methodology

This chapter aims to present several specificities of the study, such as the procedures for data collection, characteristics of the selected participants, methodology employed for analysis, as well as special concerns to be taken into account when conducting qualitative research. Such concerns will be presented aligned with the measures taken in order to avoid, for example, problems with validity and reliability that are considered to be very common in this kind of research.

3.1 – Data collection

The chosen instrument for this study's data collection was the questionnaire (See Appendix 6). Such collection measure, in this case, was composed by five questions to be freely answered in English by the participants; neither a minimum nor a maximum number of words to be written for each answer was defined by the questionnaire's instructions. However, there was a special concern regarding such instructions in asking for the participants' sincere and practical opinions about the matters being discussed, with a special focus on their classroom practices and experience as educators. In addition, it was also stated that the study wasn't looking for "right" or "wrong" answers, but for a description of their realities as EFL teachers for young learners. The beliefs that surround the chosen way to collect qualitative data are based on the "[...] recognition that almost every aspect of language acquisition and use is determined or significantly shaped by social, cultural, and situational factors [...]" (Dörnyei, 2007, p.36).

Online tools were used by the researcher and the participants to get in touch and exchange materials; they were asked to return the answered version of the study's questionnaire within one week. No issues regarding difficulties due to the use of technology to answer the questionnaire were reported. It was highlighted to the participants that no personal names would be used in the study. Following this idea, the received data was organized under numbers that would facilitate the recognition of the participants' contributions throughout the analysis, from Teacher 1 to Teacher 15 (See table on the next section).

3.2 – Participants

Initially, nineteen participants were contacted and invited to answer the questionnaire; from this group, fifteen people agreed to participate and contribute to the research by giving their opinions on the issues to be analyzed. The participants were selected considering the researcher's network, including former and current co-workers in the educational field. Participants from different educational scenarios answered the questionnaire, including teachers from public and private regular schools, as well as educators who teach at a private language institute, and teachers who teach from home using virtual devices. Following the same idea, in order to have as contributions opinions and perspectives from diverse professionals, novice and experienced teachers were selected to add their points of view to the study's main topics. The sampling method just described agrees with the notions underlined by Dörnyei (2007, p.126), while enumerating the characteristics of qualitative research in this regard: "[...] the main goal of sampling is to find individuals who can provide rich and varied insights into the phenomenon under investigation so as to maximize what we can learn".

Below, a table is offered as a way to describe the participants' experience with young learners, as well as the educational scenarios they teach. When referring to the participants' opinions and insights in the chapters to be presented, the numbers in the first column will be used as references to expose and analyze some of the given contributions to the different aspects of the teaching / learning process that were depicted.

Teacher	Years of experience teaching young learners	Institution where they teach EFL young learners
01	07	Private classes / Private Language Institute
02	09	Private regular school / Private Language Institute
03	02	Private Language Institute
04	10	Private Language Institute
05	01	Private Language Institute
06	02	Private Language Institute
07	04	Private Language Institute
08	05	Private classes / Private Language Institute

09	01	Private Language Institute
10	19	Private regular school / Public regular school
11	03	Private Language Institute
12	03	Private Language Institute
13	03	Private Language Institute
14	04	Private Language Institute
15	05	Private Language Institute

3.3 – Methodology for conducting qualitative data analysis

The main ideas to be kept in mind when qualitative research data analysis is implemented deal with a method that counts on no prefigured aspects, and that includes subjectiveness to the research process, that is, the “insiders’ perspective”, as Punch (2005, as in Dörnyei, 2007, p.38), explains: “[...] human behavior is based upon meaning which people attribute to or bring to situations”.

Based on this premise, the researcher’s job when conducting such analysis is described by Dörnyei (2007, p.257) who states the “overlapping” characteristic of the job: “[...] researchers start tentative interpreting as early as the initial coding stage [...] the whole process of qualitative data analysis is geared to our becoming more and more familiar with the data and developing increasingly abstract analytical insights into the underlying meanings [...] selecting a limited number of main themes or storylines to elaborate on”.

Following this idea, the analysis was divided into two stages: in Chapter 4, the participants’ responses were analyzed considering their relationships between each other, and also in relation to each one of the proposed questions, based on theoretical concerns applied into practice; in Chapter 5, four main themes to be developed on the interpretative analysis of the participants’ responses to the written questionnaire were chosen and are detailed below, based on the aspects already brought to light on the first two chapters of this study, and also on its intention to establish a parallel between the theoretical information previously exposed and the teachers’ perspectives on such specific issues.

Theme 1 – The importance of motivation and activities which favor its emergence.	Questions 1 and 2
Theme 2 – Different approaches and activities acting as facilitators in the learning process.	Question 3
Theme 3 – Topic-based and interactive activities and how they relate to young learners' development.	Question 4
Theme 4 – How assessment (traditional x alternative) is viewed in the study's educational scenario.	Question 5

After the data collection, the participants' responses were organized in a way that would facilitate and favor the theme / question distribution presented above, in order to cater to the needs of descriptive research, which "[...] will attempt to portray an accurate profile of people, events, or situations" (Porte, 2010, p.17). Such concern is also important since it establishes that each educational scenario or experience described by a participant is fundamental to understand how the themes to be explored align or not with a given reality. In agreement with such concern, Dörnyei (2007, p.153) highlights that "[...] qualitative research is not overly concerned with generalizability as long as the researcher believes that the specific individual meaning obtained from the sample is insightful and enlightening".

3.4 Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability issues are considered to be crucial in qualitative research, since it is not guided by numerical or statistical data. Brink (1993, p.35) explains that such aspects are "[...] particularly vital in qualitative work, where the researcher's subjectivity can so readily cloud the interpretation of the data".

Considering validity matters, this study's questionnaire was carefully designed – considering appropriate and clear wording, as well as instructions and examples within the questions that aimed to facilitate the participants' understanding of the subjects at matter favoring, as a consequence, a greater chance of the production of answers that would be really related to the issues to be analyzed; in other words, the present study was concerned with the accuracy and truthfulness of scientific findings (Le Comple and Goetz 1982, as in Brink, 1993, p.35).

Still regarding validity, by trying to make the participants understand that their answers would not be considered “right” or “wrong”, as previously mentioned in this chapter, by letting them be concerned with the description of their own realities instead of being trapped into presenting answers that would cater to a specific point of view or direction, this study intended to gather and present valid information, that is, special consideration was given to *internal validity*.

As a way of offering an unbiased interpretation and analysis of the study’s results, the teachers’ names were not considered and were substituted by numbers – as previously mentioned – as soon as the responses were gathered, since the participants are part of the researcher’s network in the educational community. Brink (1993, p.36) develops this idea by stating that “The truth of responses is a key concern when data are obtained through questionnaires and interviews. Bias may be introduced because of particular responses or characteristics of the informants”.

Considering reliability measures, two of them can be mentioned in relation to this study: the responses’ organization divided by themes in tables, which allows the researcher “[...] to quickly interpret the results as per the record of every individual respondent and realize the progress of the research” (Chetty and Thakur, 2020), and the theoretical triangulation of data, which aims to be supported by the contents brought by the literature review presented in the previous chapter.

Another final aspect was taken into account and is presented by Dörnyei (2007, p.49) as *quality criteria*, which is also explained by the author as the “[...] real world significance and practical values to the benefits to the research participants”. While the participants of this study seemed to already feel appreciated by being contacted to participate in educational research, the most important intended result regarding the participants deal with the opportunity of reflecting about their own pedagogical practices in order to answer the proposed questions. In addition, questions which bring to light issues that perhaps weren’t part of a teacher’s daily practice might boost at least some curiosity in extending their knowledge on such issue, contributing to their development as professionals in the educational field.

Chapter 4 – Contents and Results

In this chapter, the given answers to the written questionnaire used as an instrument to collect data for this study's purposes will be depicted. Some passages from the participants' answers will be highlighted as a way to show their connection to the available literature in the SLA field, commented throughout the initial chapters of this study.

The questions that were part of the participants' questionnaire are presented in each subsection along with a general idea of the teachers' contributions, followed by specific passages that aim to enlighten not only the contents to be presented in this chapter, but also the discussion that follows this section of the study.

4.1 Question 1

What classroom activities, in general, do you consider to be the most motivational ones for young learners?

The activities enumerated by the teachers follow:

- Story creation;
- Music integration;
- Games;
- Videos;
- Songs;
- Daily routine in circle;
- Questions with flashcards;
- Quick and playful activities;
- Manual crafts;
- Creating cards;
- Activities that include movement;
- Activities that make students stand, move, and play;
- Acting out daily situations;
- Activities that make students use their bodies;
- Activities that promote communication;

- Activities based on what students already know and like in their first language;
- Talking about sports, cartoons, singers, and movie characters;
- Activities which stimulate competition;
- Activities based on the communicative approach;
- Visual commands and gestures;
- Drilling with flashcards;
- Finding “hidden treasures”;
- Talking about real life examples;
- Making up sentences and dialogues.

Not only have the teachers mentioned the activities above as examples of motivational ones, but they have also stated that such activities make their students become more committed to the classroom work. Such notion deals with the idea of making students aware and responsible for their own learning progress. The passage below highlights this idea:

Teacher 11: *“[...] students become very stimulated and truly committed when performing these activities.”*

Another idea brought by several teachers deal with using “real life” situations in the classroom practice, as acting out activities, or simply talking about personal examples, experiences, and stories related to what is being taught. Bringing aspects of the students’ L1 that can be connected to the L2 was also mentioned as an effective strategy, as well as bringing characters and well-known aspects from students’ cultural and daily routines into foreign language acquisition. The following excerpt underlines this simple, yet powerful strategy:

Teacher 08: *“The most motivational classroom activities for young learners are the ones based on what they already know and like in their first language, also relating to something like soccer, cartoons, singers or movie characters.”*

Several teachers have also elicited activities which stimulate creativity in class, either by asking students to create simple sentences, or by asking them to create dialogues or use the language in daily situations. Such activities' implementation helps students in building a true relationship with the foreign language being taught, by making it their "own", and being able to truly visualize their learning development, once they are asked to *create*, and not to *repeat* pre-formatted sentences or structures.

Another consideration highlighted by teachers deals with catering to what is really considered to be part of the "children's world", favoring making movements and aligning young learners' needs and likes with the classroom practice. The following response illustrates this idea:

Teacher 14: *"From what I have seen and applied with my students, they feel more motivated when the activities have something they love like: singing, jumping, running, finding hidden 'treasures', teaming up and competing against another team, dancing, mimics. Musical and physical activities are the most motivational ones in my experience!"*

4.2 Question 2

Do you feel that the activities you just mentioned are also ones which favor vocabulary / language structures retention?

All of the study's participants answered this question in an affirmative way. Some additional comments offered by them in relation to this issue are worth of mentioning:

- Teacher 01: *"Story creation lets students use **new words in context**, making them easier to remember."*
- Teacher 02: *"Students [...] **associate the words to the imagens** they see in videos or flashcards. During the activities I always **mime** and it **helps them learn and memorize and recognize the words.**"*
- Teacher 04: *"They usually end up **internalizing** the songs, vocabulary and structures used in these activities."*
- Teacher 06: *"[...] students **understand** more about what is being said."*

- Teacher 08: “[Most of the activities] create **challenges** that help them **memorize and practice** the structures in a more **relaxed way** that makes students remember them easier.”
- Teacher 10: “[...] with these activities, I try to make them **independent of me**. In other words, I **guide** them, but the idea is for them to realize that they have already internalized the content and are thus **capable of performing the tasks**.
- Teacher 12: “It’s the moment they can practice the vocabulary in an **automatic way** and it brings them the **capacity of automatism**.”

Many reflections that derive from the teachers’ contributions could be explored at this point, mainly including: the importance of meaningful learning; the multiple intelligences being prompted through a variety of stimuli; body movements as facilitators for understanding, learning, and internalizing vocabulary and structures; students being challenged to use the language and produce meaning by themselves; the importance of creating a low-anxiety environment for learning, so that young learners feel that sometimes they are “just playing”; fostering learners’ independence from the teacher through task-based activities, leading them to feel a sense of achievement by having the teacher as a guide throughout the process; and finally, the development of automatism as one of the final products of the motivational activities being described so far.

In a certain way, it can be said that the teachers’ comments “speak for themselves”, once they clearly show the advantageous outcomes of implementing playful and interactive activities in class, as tools to enhance learning, autonomy, and more student-centered lessons. Such considerations advocate for the importance of planning lessons and activities that would favor these results, using them as resources that would help students achieve their full potentials in learning a foreign language.

4.3 Question 3

Do you generally see positive learning results in your students when activities that use listening / speaking in connection to movements are implemented?

Some contributions offered by the teachers in this regard follow, observing the positive results of connecting movements to listening / speaking activities:

- Teacher 01: *“These activities use **different senses**, which makes learning more fun and easier to remember [...] it **helps them remember the words and stay focused.**”*
- Teacher 02: *“Movements make **learning easier.**”*
- Teacher 03: *“With younger students, I find that **movements and gestures are essential to maintaining students’ attention.**”*
- Teacher 04: *“As they are young students, sometimes they might feel bored to be sitting, listening to their teachers. So, **promoting this connection is an assertive idea.**”*
- Teacher 05: *“**They have a lot of energy**, so doing these activities make them more interested on what is being taught.”*
- Teacher 06: *“[...] it [movement] **awakens** their interest.”*
- Teacher 07: *“[...] students usually **pay more attention** when they need to **use their bodies to express themselves** and at the same time, they **learn faster** doing it.”*
- Teacher 08: *“If young learners only have to listen and pay attention to a video, for example, they will **probably get distracted by something else.**”*
- Teacher 10: *“By varying stimuli, whether visual, auditory, or kinesthetic, **the reach of learning becomes greater.**”*
- Teacher 12: *“[...] especially with songs because they **associate lyrics with choreographies.**”*
- Teacher 13: *“[...] we can physically have the student as an example and **bring him/her to a scene we create** [...] Movements are also very important to make comparisons about the structures they already know: big and small, tall and short [...]”*

From the excerpts just presented, two main aspects could be highlighted here: firstly, teachers who deal with young learners are aware of their short concentration spans, and thus are worried about working with a variety of activities that would increase their students interest in learning a new language, which include working with movements

complementing more traditional activities; secondly, teachers feel that such activities that deal with the combination of movements and other learning skills, act as facilitators to maintain students' attention and focus, since they tend to "awaken" students, promoting faster learning results, and working with young learners' "full energy".

On the other hand, two participants had brought comments about the use of movements that go into another direction:

Teacher 11: *"It depends on the student. In the case of neurotypical students, the response is always positive. However, for neurodivergent students, the responses aren't always positive because some don't feel comfortable performing two actions at the same time."*

Teacher 09: *"Most of the time yes, but sometimes some have a little difficulty, depending on their age, you can see the difference between the level of difficulty."*

These contributions underline the importance of knowing his or her audience before a teacher plans and implements any kind of activity in class. By making a careful needs analysis and investigating the specificities, likes, dislikes and wants of a group, the teacher will be able to make more assertive decisions about the learning process, also considering to which extent students are already able and ready to perform the activities we propose. When teachers balance the amounts of activities through which students feel safe and comfortable to perform, and the amounts of activities that represent real challenges for them – which cannot be taken for granted – the outcomes tend to be more than satisfactory.

As a final consideration in this regard, it is important to realize how planning and preparing classes to cater to a specific audience's needs is fundamental at any developmental stage in language learning. By preparing activities that are intended to help and develop students' abilities and special demands, teachers tend to make the learning experience a pleasant and rewarding one.

4.4 Question 4

According to your classroom experience, do you feel that activities that promote interaction between the students (e.g. pair work / groupwork) favor their learning development?

Several teachers highlighted the importance of peer interaction as a way to favor a better learning environment in class. It is believed that the learning burden of communicating in another language is reduced through this intrapersonal interaction, often in small groups. All of the participants had considered such activities to be of help in the learning process; some teachers also called attention to another feature that can be spotted as an advantage of peering: students learn skills that will be valuable not only for the classroom daily routine – as cooperation and conflict solving – but for life in general, dealing with their families and communities. The following extracts bring the above-mentioned ideas:

Teacher 01: *“In my experience, activities that encourage students to interact with each other really help their learning. They get to practice using the language with their peers, which improves their understanding and memory. Interacting also builds their speaking and listening skills. Plus, it teaches them how to work together and communicate effectively, which are important skills for life. It also develops social skills like empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution.”*

Teacher 05: *“[...] groupwork is very important for their [the students] development during class and for their lives. It helps to develop empathy and make the class environment better.”*

Another advantage of interactive activities, that has special value to teachers, concerns the opportunity students have to share knowledge their “own ways” – as it was highlighted by one of the participants: *students become their own teachers for some time*. Such comment brings to light the importance of peer-to-peer correction as a valuable tool for feedback and learning strategies based on negotiation of meaning. Furthermore, students seem to feel more comfortable and encouraged to use the foreign language among

each other, also favoring their process of becoming more independent from their teachers. The following excerpts illustrate these ideas:

Teacher 02: *“They exchange knowledge, correcting their classmates and helping each other.”*

Teacher 04: *“It's undeniable that promoting interaction between students has many advantages, like having the opportunity to help each other, tightening up friendship, and encouraging them to practice the new vocabulary and structures.”*

As an example of how important it is to consider the educational scenario a given teacher and his or her students are inserted in, the following contribution raises again the issue of reflecting on the impact of any kind of activity in relation to the audience one works with. Even a carefully planned activity, which fails to take into account the reality of the learners who should profit from it, is rarely going to have successful outcomes. In addition, it is important to establish how the effectiveness of such activity is going to be measured, or even if the teacher will be able to measure it. The comment below shows a teacher's special concern about promoting peer work in large groups:

Teacher 10: *“The practices of pair work, groupwork are more difficult to monitor in public schools due to the large number of students, averaging 30,40 students per class. However, they are undeniably effective practices in the language acquisition process.”*

4.5 Question 5

What is your students' attitude towards assessment? Have you ever worked with alternative assessment measures (e.g. portfolios, self-assessment),

other than the traditional ones (e.g. tests, exams)?

If so, were the results positive?

If not, would you like to work with such alternative instruments?

The following contributions illustrate how the participants feel their students deal with traditional assessment:

- Teacher 01: *“My students often **feel pressured** by traditional assessments like tests and exams.”*
- Teacher 03: *“I’ve noticed that students are typically **very apprehensive** about assessments.”*
- Teacher 04: *“Regular evaluation system is **not well-accepted** by some students, but the majority of them is used to it.”*
- Teacher 14: *“My students usually get **nervous** about the assessments, especially if it is the first time they take one.”*
- Teacher 15: *“In common assessments, as in tests and exams, they tend to be **nervous and worried**.”*

The contributions that follow illustrate how some teachers deal with the negative aspects of traditional assessment measures that were just exposed:

- Teacher 03: *“[...] I usually try to maintain a positive view of evaluations, but it seems that the negative outlook is still very much present in our day-to-day lives.”*
- Teacher 07: *“Students feel motivated with most kinds of assessment when they receive something in return, especially young ones. Getting golden stars or stickers when they achieve a good result usually increases their want to improve in class.”*
- Teacher 11: *“[...] I give lollipops as a reward to those who succeed.”*
- Teacher 13: *“I always tell them that their grade does not reflect on what they are, but it is a reflection of their dedication and how seriously they take classes and exercises.”*

Some teachers mentioned that traditional assessment works properly considering their realities, mainly because their students were prepared to take tests and written exams because of the activities they were exposed to during the regular classes:

- Teacher 12: *“The results of the most recent ones [exams] were quite positive, so I believe the activities I have been doing with my students (specially the mimics, games and songs) have a positive impact on how they learn and remember vocabulary and grammar.”*
- Teacher 14: *“[...] but I personally think they deal with it [exams] in a very calm and mature way during the evaluation.”*
- Teacher 05: *“I have never worked with alternative assessment measures, only traditional ones, and the results were positive.”*

Considering alternative assessment measures, two teachers shared their experiences with such instruments and their impact on students’ development:

- Teacher 02: *“My students are too young to take exams, so I build portfolios with their activities, and it’s good because they can show their families what they have learned at school. They also show me all the things we did explaining each activity and talking about their experiences.”*
- Teacher 08: *“They love it. I only work with alternative assessment measures and I do it by asking them to prepare presentations about something they have experienced. [...] They love to talk about their lives and make beautiful and sometimes touching presentations that teach me a lot.”*

Regarding the participants’ wish to work with alternative assessment measures as a new tool to contribute to their students’ global development, the following comments summarize the majority’s opinion on the subject:

- Teacher 01: *“I believe these methods could provide a more comprehensive understanding of their abilities and help reduce the pressure they feel.”*
- Teacher 07: *“[...] I think it would be an interesting idea to consider.”*
- Teacher 10: *“[...] If well implemented, I would quite like to work with other types of assessment.”*

- Teacher 11: “[...] I think it would be interesting because I see that they [the students] are very open to new activities, besides innovating the class’s dynamics.
- Teacher 15: “I believe that these types of evaluation [alternative ones] encourage their [the students’] creativity and make them think about what they have learned in a non-traditional way.”

The table that follows summarizes the main aspects of the answers that were given regarding working with traditional and alternative assessment measures:

Total number of participants	15
Participants who have experienced working with alternative assessment measures	02
From the remaining 13 participants:	
Participants who showed interest in working with alternative assessment measures	09
Participants who haven’t showed interest in working with alternative assessment measures	04

Two participants shared their views on alternative assessment through other perspectives. The first one illustrated below believes such instruments should be used as alternatives to students who have some kind of learning disorder and, because of that, do not feel comfortable with traditional instruments; the second one shares her concern about the real applicability of alternative instruments, considering the educational scenario of public schools and the deeply-rooted view that the idea of assessment implies the usage of the traditional and well-known instruments students, teachers, and the educational community in general are accustomed to categorize as the “normal ones”.

- Teacher 04: “I’ve never worked with alternative assessment measures, and I think they should be used with students who have some kind of learning disorder.”
- Teacher 10: “In the case of most Brazilian schools, self-assessment or portfolios would need to be a practice to be cultivated and improved as they are not part of our culture when it comes to final grades.”

4.6 Final Considerations

In a general way, throughout the answers' analysis and interpretation, it could be seen that the teachers were able to share their experiences and opinions on the issues that were under discussion, favoring the study's main concerns on portraying the classroom routine in a practical and realistic way. The participants did not report difficulties in comprehension, or any lack of ability or knowledge to answer the questions that compose this study's questionnaire.

Some of the answers given by the participants also make further considerations possible, once they raise issues that are derived from the main themes that this study aims to bring to light, and are important aspects that should be reflected on when EFL young learners are being considered as the target audience.

The researcher considers the contents and results exposed in this chapter to be aligned with the theoretical information and guidelines presented in the initial chapters of this study. No answers were considered to be unexpected or were disregarded because of any reason, taking into account the educational scenarios the participants are inserted in. The chapter that follows offers a more detailed analysis of this study's data, supported by literature, and followed by the researcher's interpretation of the teachers' answers, based on the four-theme chart presented in Chapter 3.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

The discussion section that follows considers four main themes to be depicted in each subsection, aiming to make a more in-depth analysis on the answers given by the study's participants and the theoretical content presented so far.

In each one of the subsections, three aspects will be considered: answers' overview and general analysis, connections to literature, and final comments.

5.1 Theme 1: The importance of motivation and activities which favor its emergence.

The following discussion examines the participants' answers to questions **one** and **two** of this study's written questionnaire.

5.1.1 Answers' overview and general analysis

All of the participants' answers regarding activities which promote motivation to learn among young ELF students showed positive connections to effective learning, students' engagement in class, and commitment to truly succeeding in completing the proposed tasks. When such learners are challenged to use the English language in tasks that simulate daily activities that are part of their routines, competing among themselves, and/or moving their bodies somehow, the effects on learning tend to be more appealing and rewarding.

The sense of responsibility and commitment that the task-based activities mentioned by the teachers promote also foster learners' independence, and help to create an environment that facilitates autonomy and a wish to learn that tends to transcend the classroom barriers.

5.1.2 Connections to literature

The motivational activities that were elicited by the teachers (see Chapter 4) generate in the learners what Ortega (2009, p.83) calls "goal-directed motivation in the individual's mind", that is, such feelings of excitement and engagement that seem to be generated by motivational activities implemented in lessons, specially designed for young

learners, act directly in their minds, making them engaged and focused on the tasks they are supposed to perform and on the objectives they are supposed to accomplish.

Aligned with the kinds of activities mentioned by the teachers and their positive effects in the EFL classroom, Ortega (2009, p.168-169) also mentions studies that were conducted in the SLA field in an attempt to investigate the construct of motivation in learning a foreign language, especially the AMTB (Attitude/Motivation Test Battery; Gardner, 1985). It suggests that the learning process is directly affected by the amount of motivation that is generated from being part of such activities. This amount of motivation could be measured in three different dimensions: motivational intensity (people's effort to learn a language); enjoyment (attitudes and feelings towards learning a language); and personal investment (personal desire to learn).

Considering the opportunities of practice that activities that involve communication in another language can promote, Ellis (1997, p.83), reinforces that "[...] long lasting effects occur only when learners have subsequent opportunities to hear and use the target structure in communication". The author's contribution shares the same ideas exposed by the teachers when asked about the relationship between motivational activities and language retention: all of the participants' answers point to positive results in relation to the effect of motivational activities on students' ability to internalize and use the new vocabulary and structures of the English language, that are consequently involved in the activities, as tools to complete a task.

5.1.3 Final Comments

While analyzing the participants' answers regarding the relationship between high motivation levels and retention, followed by references from the SLA literature, it is hard not to conclude that implementing activities that foster young learners' motivation, such as games, songs, group work, and storytelling, among many others, has a positive and effective impact in learning a foreign language.

Considering this scenario, it is important discuss two important issues: firstly, how our own beliefs as teachers influence on the application and implementation of activities in class, as well as in our current practice, in a more general way. Based on this premise, it is

extremely desirable that teachers keep on searching for new ideas and activities that will promote such high motivational effects on students, aligned with technological advancements and current research in the SLA field. Such attitude towards the learning process also needs to be encouraged by administrators and supervisors through teacher training sessions and workshops, as working with languages includes challenges that regard the transformations and evolutions that such languages suffer through time, as well as novelties that can really help our classroom practice; secondly, as a consequence of the first issue, teachers should be aware that playful and interactive activities are usually the ones that take more time in pre-class preparation, monitoring during the class, and also in providing adequate feedback, in opposition to traditional activities that are mostly implemented in regular schools during which students “sit and listen” or “sit and copy”. Such concern should also be kept in mind by those who supervise the classroom practice, once teachers have to be able to work on class preparation, as well as to profit from classroom physical resources that can be made available by institutions, in order to make the teaching / learning process move into the desired and effective directions we seek for.

In brief, it is important to highlight that most of the teachers “know what to do” regarding improving their students’ motivation to learn, but a great deal of willpower from them and also from the institutions they work for is necessary for such a beneficial learning environment. When talking about classroom research, Dörnyei (2007, p.185) brings to light the urgency of checking what teachers *really do* in class and not “what they *say* they do”, and I would include “what they *think* they do”, in an attempt to help and direct the EFL teaching and learning to the usage of strategies that would really help students and foster their interlanguage development.

5.2 Theme 2: Different approaches and activities acting as facilitators in the learning process.

The following discussion examines the participants’ answers to question **three** of this study’s written questionnaire.

5.2.1 Answers' overview and general analysis

The question under analysis in this section regards the use of body movement as an ally in helping students “experience” the language when listening and speaking activities are being implemented. Most of the participants acknowledged that the kinesthetic stimulus favors young learners’ development in learning a foreign language, aligned to the fact that this specific audience’s interests are also favored by activities that make them move and feel like they are “just playing”, connected to their likes and wants during these initial developmental stages in instruction.

Participants also underlined the importance of such activities that include movement in opposition to the traditional classroom activities that usually lead students to feel bored if exposed to them for long periods of time, that is, the importance of balancing *stirrers* and *settlers* (as mentioned in Chapter 2).

Overall, teachers seem to recognize and acknowledge that such connections between speaking and moving, or listening and moving, have beneficial results in classes especially designed for young learners.

5.2.2 Connections to literature

The connection between mind and body as a way to favor learning, as well as its benefits, is mentioned by Brown (2007, p.51) that explains it “[...] emphasizes the psychomotor aspects of language learning by involving learners in physical actions into which language is subsumed and reinforced. Through action, students are drawn into a utilization of multiple skills. The educational foundations of experiential learning lie in the advantages of ‘learning by doing’, discovery learning, and inductive learning.”

Such benefits for learning are also shared by the principles of the Total Physical Response Approach (Chapter 2), mostly favoring young learners, in the sense that it could help in the development of learning skills and strategies from the very first stages of maturation. This notion is developed by Lighbown & Spada (1993, p.21-22): “Young second language learners begin the task of language learning without the benefit of some of the skills and knowledge which adolescent and adult learners have [like] cognitive maturity, metalinguistic awareness, or world knowledge [...] Nor, on the other hand, most learners

feel nervous about attempting to use the language – even when their proficiency is quite limited”.

The second part of the above-mentioned contribution deserves further development, once it underlines the importance of letting young learners profit from some more time to feel confident and secure to use the foreign language in speaking activities, for example. Considering this notion, also pointed out by the study’s participants, the kinesthetic activities may allow such students to build confidence to use the language in the near future, by first experiencing it by means of these alternative activities that do not praise for immediate responses in speaking, and let students start manipulating the language using other skills before they feel ready to move on.

Another advantage spotted by the participants that is worth of mentioning regards the development of the Multiple Intelligences (Chapter 2), by giving young learners the opportunity of putting language into practice by means of diverse activities, that would also favor different learning styles. Therefore, the body/kinesthetic intelligence can have its development favored by such activities, leading students to improve their skills at other important domains of language usage.

5.2.3 Final Comments

An important matter that cannot be left apart from the discussion of implementing or not activities that deal with body movement in class regards its relationship with “noisy lessons”. The same way activities that deal with group work and songs, for example, may turn the classroom into an environment that might not seem like one that favors learning – in the view of more conservative educators – activities which ask for the students to move around or stand could be seen as disadvantages to the learning process, once they contradict the traditional notion that learning is only achieved when one is sitting and in silence. This view can lead teachers to the same “trap” elicited in theme 1, since they know the benefits of such activities but choose not to include them in their lessons because they fear a negative reaction that might come from administrators, supervisors, other teachers, and also parents.

In order to deal with such matter, it is important that we underline the importance of acquiring knowledge that comes not only from classroom practice experience, but from the related literature available in our field, as well as studies and research that can support our wish to implement and make our students profit from these activities in class. In the long run, the benefits from such practice will be visible and somewhat tangible if one analyses the development of a group of young learners; however, it is a good start to support our classroom practice with the SLA literature as a convincing way to claim for the need of such “noise” in class.

In addition to the above-mentioned suggestion, another need that should be highlighted involves class preparation and appropriate guidance throughout these “non-traditional” activities, once the teacher’s skill in conducting such activities will certainly determine their success or failure. Young learners need clear and simple instructions in order to cope with activities that might make them feel like they are just playing, as well as the need of setting classroom rules and appropriate time limits for each activity that will be implemented in a lesson. By joining their practical experience, literature support, and appropriate classroom management, teachers will be able to offer their students learning experiences that will be later converted to long-term memory knowledge, making room for the emergence of skills that will enable them to achieve higher stages in learning a foreign language.

5.3 Theme 3: Topic-based and interactive activities and their relation to learners’ development.

The following discussion examines the participants’ answers to question **four** of this study’s written questionnaire.

5.3.1 Answers’ overview and general analysis

The most interesting and valuable contributions this study’s participants have displayed in their answers regarding this theme, consider the need of providing students with comfortable and safe environments to learn and use a foreign language, fostered by interactive activities and topic-based lessons.

In order to minimize a possible sense of frustration in young learners that would come from inappropriate exposure in class – in speaking activities, for example – and lead to lack of confidence or even to giving up learning a foreign language, teachers report that in their experience peer-to-peer activities truly favor collaboration and sharing knowledge in low-anxiety environments, that are able to provide learners with learning experiences that will help them in using the target language to solve the proposed tasks in a lesson.

Another interesting perspective brought by the participants regards the relationship between such interactive activities and the acquisition of skills that are indispensable for life in society, as knowing how to collaborate with others, respect divergent opinions, reach common ground, and deal with conflicts, culminating in the resolution of a problem or matter that is important for the whole group.

5.3.2 Connections to literature

The “learn by doing” approach is highlighted by Brown (2007, p.50) as *Experiential learning*, or as *Project-based Learning*. The author paraphrases Eyring (1991) and Stoller (2006) making it clear that such experiences aim “[...] giving students concrete experiences in which they must use language in order to fulfill the objectives of a lesson. Both models include activities that contextualize language, integrate skills, and point toward authentic, real-world purposes”.

In relation to the advantages such approach brings to students’ confidence in profiting from a more friendly environment in class, the SLA literature states that “Content-based classrooms have the potential of yielding an increase in intrinsic motivation and empowerment, because students are focused on subject matter that is important to their lives. And as they center their interest on mastery of subject matter, they are concurrently acquiring linguistic ability” (Brown, 2007, p.57).

Focusing specifically on how peer-to-peer interaction favors the development of learning strategies and the acquisition of knowledge, Ellis (1997, p.49) mentions the Vygotskian sociocultural theory (1920’s) by which it is believed that “[...] development manifests itself first in social interaction and only later inside the learner [...] socially constructed knowledge is a necessary condition for interlanguage development”. In a recent

article on this subject, Koblin (2020) explains that such theory bases its premises in functions that one is born with, but are only activated through interaction: “Vygotsky claimed that we are born with four ‘elementary mental functions’: Attention, Sensation, Perception, and Memory. It is our social and cultural environment that allows us to use these elementary skills to develop and finally gain ‘higher’ mental functions”.

Finally, reinforcing the idea that human aptitude is boosted and developed by interactions with others and an environment that makes it possible for such aptitudes to blossom, Ortega (2009, p.162) mentions Robinson’s (2002) work, that also considers the relationship between the construction of this appropriate environment in the classroom, and its implications on motivation. The mentioned author considers the work of the educational psychologist Richard Snow by proposing the Aptitude Complex Hypothesis, in which three principles are taken into account: “(a) human aptitude is made up of a complex of abilities, interrelated in a hierarchical fashion rather than a simple or direct fashion; (b) differential cognitive processing abilities are intertwined with the contexts and affordances of the environment; and (c) differential aptitude cannot be fully explained unless motivational and affective influences are taken into account as well”.

5.3.3 Final Comments

Considering the contributions that were gathered for this reflection, from both practical and theoretical directions, it is important that teachers take into consideration that environmental factors, in general, undoubtedly have a great impact on the learning process, specially regarding young learners. Learners’ initial years in instruction constitute a basis that needs to remain solid for their future in both academic and professional areas. By helping learners achieve higher levels of confidence and gradual independence in learning, teachers also have some influence on how such learners will continue to profit from what they have learned at school in diverse opportunities to come.

Furthermore, it is essential to consider how the “outside environment” to which the learners are exposed to impacts the learning process as well, observing what can be done to have their families participate in this process in a way that could give them extra support and motivation to keep on pursuing their learning objectives.

All in all, it remains to be of great importance to think about the whole teaching-learning process as a student-centered one, carefully assessing how the classroom daily routine impacts the learners' journey inside and outside school.

5.4 Theme 4: How assessment (traditional x alternative) is viewed in the study's educational scenario.

The following discussion examines the participants' answers to question **five** of this study's written questionnaire.

5.4.1 Answers' overview and general analysis

In sum, the participants' answers regarding this theme showed that traditional assessment is the dominant approach when evaluation matters are taken into account. On the other hand, it could also be spotted that most of the teachers who exposed their opinions on this subject are open to new experiences in the assessment area, and would be interested in working with alternative instruments.

Among a variety of other issues that could derive from discussing traditional and alternative assessment measures, two will be underlined in this analysis: the uncomfortable feelings traditional assessment measures make students experience, and some of the teachers' strategies to deal with this matter; and the cultural notion that traditional instruments of assessment are the only ones that seem to be approved or understood as effective in the educational scenario the participants are inserted in.

In a certain way, the issues presented above complement themselves, once teachers started creating strategies to help students deal with traditional assessment measures instead of looking for or finding a way out, aiming to make a students' evaluation mean more than a number or a letter that represents one's performance, but a chance to reflect on one's strengths and weaknesses, contributing to better results.

5.4.2 Connections to literature

Brown and Abeywickrama (2010, p.1) comment on the unpleasant feelings tests and exams provoke on students by mentioning that "The fear of failure is perhaps one of the

strongest negative emotions a student can experience, and the most common instrument inflicting such fear is the test". As a way to offer a path that would lead students into visualizing assessment as a constructive process, in another work, Brown (2007, p.51) elaborates on how assessment can achieve this position that puts it as contributor to the learning process, instead of just being a way of labelling students' performances, as mentioned in the last sub-section above. The author mentions the work of Paulo Freire (1970) as one that, among others, "[...] introduced the concept of student responsibility for their own achievement of outcomes". He emphasizes the idea and urgent need that students have to "learn how to learn", explaining that "[...] learners become autonomous through becoming aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and taking action in the form of strategic involvement in learning." Such process of becoming aware of what skills one needs to improve in order to be more successful in learning, is directly related to the idea of how assessment can be proposed as something that goes in the direction of this purpose, and not as something to be feared that, as a consequence, doesn't measure what is supposed to measure, once students are not able to appropriately show what they have truly learned and what needs improvement.

When talking about how languages are learned and the teachability hypothesis, that is, to a very summarized extent, what one is able to learn considering his or her developmental stage, Ellis (1997, p.83) mentions that "Long lasting effects occur only when learners have subsequent opportunities to hear and use the target structure in communication". This notion - already presented in subsection 5.1.2 - also applies here and can support the idea of using evaluation to expose the students to more learning opportunities through activities that would engage them in the purposes of language learning. In other words, exams and the evaluation process in general, might be more well-accepted if students could visualize them as ways of discovering and checking their acquired abilities in real use, having an opportunity to reflect on what needs to be improved, and not as a process that has an end in itself. These ideas would characterize a formative view of assessment, instead of a purely summative one. Formative assessment, in this sense, involves "[...] evaluating students in the process of 'forming' their competencies and skills with the goal of helping them to continue that growth process" (Brown and Abeywickrama,

2010, p.8). As a result, the summative assessment “moment”, understood as the evaluation of the final outcomes of a course, would profit from the previous adopted measures, leading students and teachers to this final moment as a natural consequence and need of the learning process.

Despite of the fact that the arguments that were presented up to now favor the implementation of alternative assessment measures that would help students feel responsible for and active participants in the whole teaching-learning process, the question posed by Brown (2007, p.74) and mentioned on the second chapter of this study seems to bring us back to the reality we face in most educational scenarios: “Is the principle of self-regulation a culturally loaded principle?” By proposing this reflection, the author highlights how challenging implementing the notion of self-regulation as an ally in evaluation and in the whole learning process is seen, considering the majority of the educational scenarios, and also the ones that are being put under observation throughout this study.

5.4.3 Final Comments

The last discussion, brought by the idea that the ability of self-regulation helps the learning process, understood as a journey that presupposes shared responsibility, including students, educators and parents, can be seen by a variety of different perspectives; two of them will be presented in this final commentary. Firstly, the feeling that some of the participants have decided to adopt a conformist position when talking about assessment is an interesting one to be analyzed. Secondly, the fact that the majority of the participants feel ready to try new assessment measures, even acknowledging that traditional assessment works for their students and educational scenarios, is a puzzling one to be discussed.

An array of different aspects can explain the conformist position teachers had taken when talking about assessment and its instruments, so deeply-rooted and traditionally instituted as the “normal” ones, such as tests and exams. Implementing alternative instruments in a student’s course evaluation means, most of the times, convincing the whole community that is involved in the learning process – administrators, coordinators, supervisors, parents, among others - that such strategies will be beneficial and worth it. Most of the times the constraints of the “systems” people are inserted in make teachers give

up from new strategies before even trying to implement them. Others also advocate for the notion that students will face hard exams and tests throughout their academic and professional lives, and that such alternative measures do not reflect the reality they will face in the future; therefore, they seem to “soften” the seriousness of the evaluation process. Although it is undeniable that the traditional assessment measures are the ones that rule the academic field, it is important to acknowledge that combining such instruments and alternative ones would surely bring advantageous consequences to the learning process, once students would be exposed to a variety of different approaches and, most importantly, to constructive feedback, favoring the achievement of better learning results, that should be seen as the ultimate and most important aim of evaluation.

Taking into consideration the fact that most of the participants feel ready to try new assessment tools, and that most of them reported that make use of different strategies to help students feel less nervous or anxious because of exams, that go from talking to them and calming them down, to offering rewards and prizes for the best performances, the feeling that teachers recognize somehow that something is not going in the right direction, or that something could be done to make evaluation be a process that brings less negative consequences, is evident. Naturally, the feeling that comes from fearing something new, aligned with the challenges teachers daily face in the classroom, do not make the implementation of alternative assessment measures an easy or immediately rewarding task, once teachers might be able to overcome not only their own traditional beliefs on assessment to make room for something unknown, but also to make students understand new objectives and expected outcomes. The “promise” and hope to profit from such implementation in the long run, represents a journey that one might or might not be willing to go through. Fortunately, teachers can rely on other teachers’ experience in implementing alternative assessment – as the ones we could spot in this study – and also on the available literature on the subject, which, once more, constitute an important ally in providing theoretical support to classroom practice.

5.5 Final Considerations

It can be said that the teachers' answers to this study's questionnaire were, in a general sense, connected to the presented aspects of the SLA literature regarding learning a foreign language, and specifically regarding young learners.

It could be spotted that the teaching / learning environment and the educational scenario the participants are inserted in play a decisive role in how learning a foreign language is seen by students and teachers, considering that even working at different institutions, the participants' answers presented many similarities and relationships among each other. On the other hand, it could also be spotted that the participants' own beliefs regarding some issues – like assessment measures, for example – greatly influenced how they see this process and their own attitudes towards this subject into practice.

As for the main and most important issue this study wished to zoom in – motivation and its relationship with interactive and playful activities – the collected data points to a positive correlation between these two aspects when effectively put together in the classroom. Several issues that could affect such effectiveness must be considered like teacher training, lesson planning, institutional and administrative constraints, the educational community's view on the implementation of alternative approaches, as well as the specificities of a given audience and learning environment. As a result, it can be said that other factors directly influence this relationship between motivation and the implementation of activities that favor the learners' development in foreign language learning, that can act positively or negatively in class.

The analysis of the participants' answers also pointed to their huge commitment to their students' growth and progress in language learning, regardless of their years of classroom experience, since most of the teachers shared strategies and personal experiences that show how much they seem to be involved in the teaching / learning process as facilitators, aiming to provide their students with the appropriate tools to succeed.

The ideas and notions that were conveyed by some teachers through their answers showed a somewhat surprising direction when it comes to acknowledging that students might be taught strategies and learn how to be independent from the teacher. The reason

why such notions were surprising deal with the fact that most of the real classroom practice in Brazil, in a general sense, do not aim or wish to make students think critically or foster a cultural belief that education can change people's lives in a positive way. Even acknowledging that maybe there is some effort in changing this reality coming from scholars and teachers, and that this effort is not something new in our field – as it dates way back to Freire's (1970) ideas and beliefs that led to the emergence of the Participatory Approach in language learning (Chapter 2), the average daily classroom practice in our country does not account for such needs. For this reason, while reading that teachers are concerned with somehow making their students independent true learners results in feeling that we might be heading in the direction of making more assertive decisions about what paths we want education to take in our country.

Finally, a quote from William Arthur Ward (n.d.) summarizes the idea just stated: "Teaching is more than imparting knowledge; it is inspiring change. Learning is more than absorbing facts; it is acquiring understanding". It is our hope that we can provide our students with a learning environment that boosts their understanding not only of a foreign language, but of how such knowledge can have a great and positive impact in their future, inspiring them to change their lives and seek for better personal and professional opportunities.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

This final chapter aims to present several comments regarding the study's results in relation to its major area of interest – teaching EFL young learners – by means of answering the question: *Do interactive and playful approaches enhance young learners' motivation to learn English in real life?*

6.1 “Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.” (Benjamin Franklin)

The participants' answers to this study's questionnaire, in a general view, highlighted a clear relationship between interactive activities and young learners' high motivational levels, assuring that commitment and responsibility towards the learning process can be cultivated since the earliest stages in instruction, fostering a sense of involvement and ownership in learners in relation to their own development of linguistic skills, that might lead them to positive and rewarding experiences in learning a foreign language.

When teachers report that the best activities for young learners are the ones that seem like they are “just playing”, they are in fact reporting that they can clearly see learning results that come from engagement and involvement in the activities they carefully plan and propose, built and adapted to cater to their learners' needs, wants, and likes. Larsen-Freeman & Anderson (2011, p.219), support this notion by stating that “Education is most effective when it is experience-centered—when it relates to students' real needs. Students are motivated by their personal involvement”.

Involving students in the learning process, instead of just being committed to teaching them an extensive program or content list, is a challenging task that also includes specific pedagogical skills from the ones that lead and guide the teaching process. With such idea in mind, it is crucial not to take for granted the fact that teachers need constant support and training, in order to be able to create an environment in class that is safe enough to stimulate not only that students perform activities, but also that they feel encouraged to make mistakes, to deal with the ups and downs of a learning process, and to recognize that, in the end, they are the only ones who can advocate for their rights to use the power of knowledge to transform their futures.

Considering young learners and their need of constant support in class and at home, underlining the role parents should be invited to play in their children's educational lives, also getting involved in what happens inside the classroom, becomes an issue to be valued and discussed, once learners that feel they have support to keep on studying and trying their best in class tend to show even greater levels of involvement and passion for learning. Such parental involvement is also a challenge for teachers and for the educational teams at schools, since a notion that schools are responsible for "taking care of the children" in all of this expression's senses is, unfortunately, surrounding the educational scenario in Brazil.

Even acknowledging that all of these challenges are part of what teachers daily face in the classroom, we must also recognize that much has been already done to mitigate the consequences of being part of a teaching and learning scenario that does not promote critical thinking, encouragement to keep on learning, and the development of minds that would be able to fight against social problems that also involve lack of access to education. Such efforts come from educators, several administrators, and members of the community who see the educational path as the only one that could provoke positive changes in the way people live, and consequently in their attitude towards the world we live in.

All in all, involvement seems to be the key to overcome the barriers we still have to confront on a daily basis; involvement that starts inside the classroom, promoted by a routine that praises interaction, shared responsibility, engagement to achieve better results, constant methodological update, and aims to reach the ones that surround the classroom's walls, who should be dedicated to make the teaching and learning process one that generates positive results now and also in the long run.

6.2 "The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery." (Mark Van Doren)

The word *help* and some of its derivations can be spotted twenty-one times in the lines written by the participants of this study, considering their answers to the five questions proposed by the questionnaire. This is a fact that cannot be taken for granted, since it shows that teachers recognize their roles as the ones who guide and support learners throughout their journey in learning a foreign language. Many consider such position as the one that would make young students, little by little and at their own paces, become confident to be

more independent from the teacher, relying on the learning strategies and knowledge acquired over time.

Another reason why the fact that teachers recognize themselves as “helpers” cannot be taken for granted deals with the notion previously mentioned in the first subsection, that places teachers as part of the group of people who are true believers that the changes we want our society to go through should have their starting point inside the classroom. When teachers identify themselves as the ones that should assist and make it possible for their students’ discoveries to assume a central and decisive role in class, they also recognize the importance of letting them interact with each other, using technological devices as learning supporters, and guiding students to get to know a foreign language through their own curious eyes and minds, and not through other people’s beliefs and impositions.

By interacting with each other and with the available tools in the classroom, students will be capable to understand that they can also be part of a world that is bigger than the one they seem to live in, full of possibilities that could be enhanced by knowledge. The following notion add to this belief: “When knowledge is jointly constructed, it becomes a tool to help students find a voice; and by finding their voices, students can act in the world. Students learn to see themselves as social and political beings” (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p.219).

Another advantage that can be spotted by learning through interaction, having the teacher as a mediator and facilitator of such process, deals with providing the learners with affordances, that is, giving them opportunities for learning, instead of just linguistic input (Larsen-Freeman, 2011, in press). Therefore, when teachers report in their answers that through interaction students also help each other learn, try to solve their own learning weaknesses by means of collaborating with their friends, and become more active in order to reach a task’s objective, they are in fact fostering this environment that provides affordances, and not only directs students into “absorbing” contents.

In connection to the same idea, aligned with teachers’ contributions on how providing learning assistance in a safe and friendly environment contributes to young learners’ development of language skills, Ortega (2009, p.78) highlights that “[...] what matters in the linguistic environment is not simply ‘what’s out there’ physically or even

socially surrounding learners, but rather what learners make of it, how they process (or not) the linguistic data and how they live and experience that environment”.

Finally, it is safe to assume that this study not only shows evidence that by acting as facilitators teachers recognize the beneficial aspects of learning through interaction and collaboration, but it also brings to light the fact that teachers seem to be really engaged in providing students with opportunities for learning in an environment that indirectly communicates the idea that individuals grow and establish themselves by recognizing each other as part of a community that supports and assists the development of their skills.

6.3 “Education is not the filling of a bucket but lighting a fire.” (William Butler Yeats)

In a study conducted by the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) in 2022 and published this year, entitled *Creative Minds, Creative Schools*, students from 64 countries were assessed, considering the ability to use their creative abilities to solve daily problems. The organization’s Secretary-General explains the skills that were under the study’s observation focus: “This assessment measures the capacity of students to generate, evaluate and improve ideas in four different areas - creative writing, visual expression, scientific problem solving and social problem solving - providing governments with data to help students and young people reach their full potential in our changing economies and societies” (Cormann, 2024, in press). This is the third volume of a collection of studies called PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), which examines students’ abilities around the world. Considering the study’s results, Brazil appears in place 44 in a ranking that lists the 64 countries that participated in the study, achieving a below-average score, in which almost 55% of the assessed students failed the test.

Creativity is considered to be a fundamental ability, used to create new solutions to old problems, to innovate, and to make a difference regarding being able to assume a central position in problem-solving. Cormann (2024, in press) underlines the importance of creative thinking in today’s world: “[...] Equipping younger generations with the right skills for creativity, innovation, and digital technology adoption will be key to address the impacts and seize the opportunities of ongoing transformations – from population ageing and lagging productivity growth to the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI)”.

The above-mentioned study's results, unfortunately, do not bring any sort of news to the ones who are truly involved in the Brazilian educational system; yet, they reinforce our point in the present study regarding the need of creating favorable conditions to let students develop their creative abilities in class, by means of promoting activities that praise and encourage problem-solving through collaboration and interaction. The need of providing students with indispensable tools to take part in a world that is in constant change and claims for people who are able to find solutions to make it a better place, starts in the earliest years of instruction, being facilitated by the opportunity of learning a foreign global language, such as English.

In connection with such needs, Larsen-Freeman (2011, in press) advocates for the idea that a student should be seen and understood as a "whole-person", that is, someone who should and must be prepared to deal with matters that are not restricted to the classroom boundaries, and also as someone that brings experiences and issues from his or her own environment that might contribute or not to the learning process. By enumerating the attributes of learners, the author's thoughts and final conclusions align with the ones this study brings, by seeing students as multi-intelligent, cooperative, and strategist political beings, as people who collaborate and make meaning out of language. Therefore, one of the many goals educators might have in class is to empower students to reach the expected outcomes in language learning, and consequently, in many more areas and domains that are indispensable for life in society.

In conclusion, by presenting this study I have two hopes: firstly, that it helps teachers and people who are dedicated to the educational field to reflect and act on the implementation of activities and approaches that favor students' comprehension not only of the English language, but also of their role as active participants of their own learning processes, participating and making decisions on the future paths the society that surrounds them take because "To learn a language is to have one more window from which to look at the world" (Chinese proverb); secondly, that teachers keep on making their most in class in order to lighten this *fire* and passion for learning that will make students refuse to conform to their realities, a *fire* that could illuminate their paths in the direction of greater opportunities fostered by the acquisition of a foreign language.

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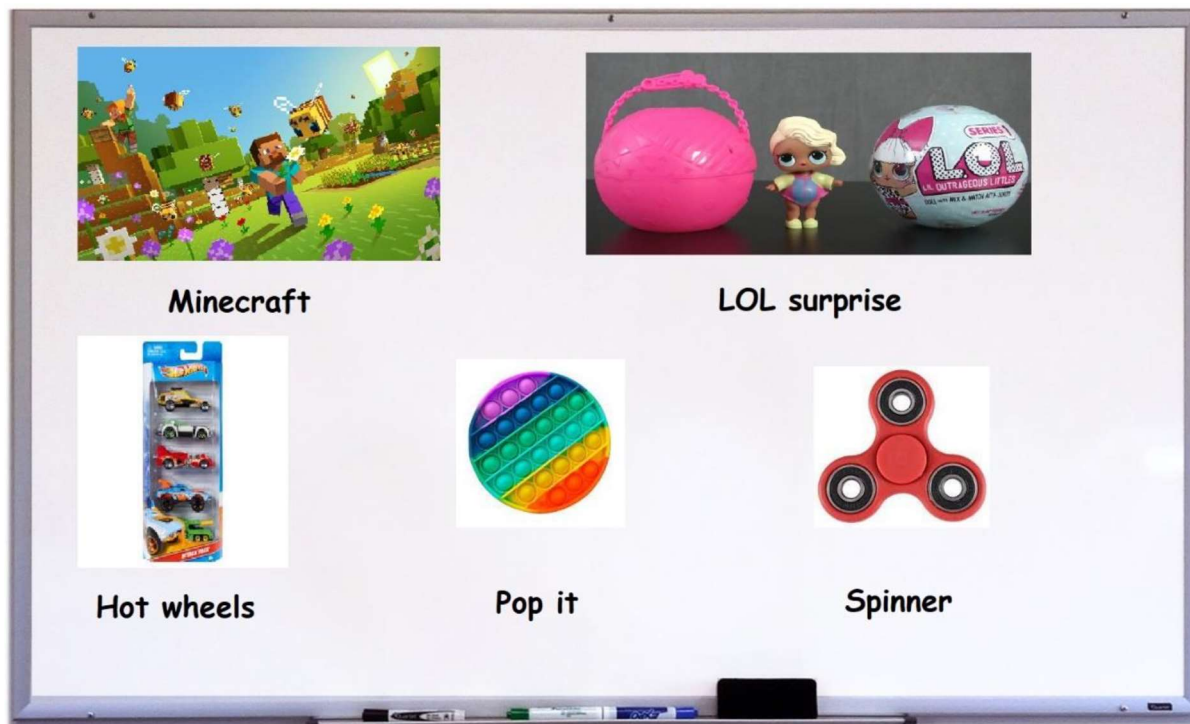


Figure 9: Lesson 1 – Warm-up activity: Matching game.

How the classroom board might look like after the kids match the pictures and words previously written on the board by the teacher.

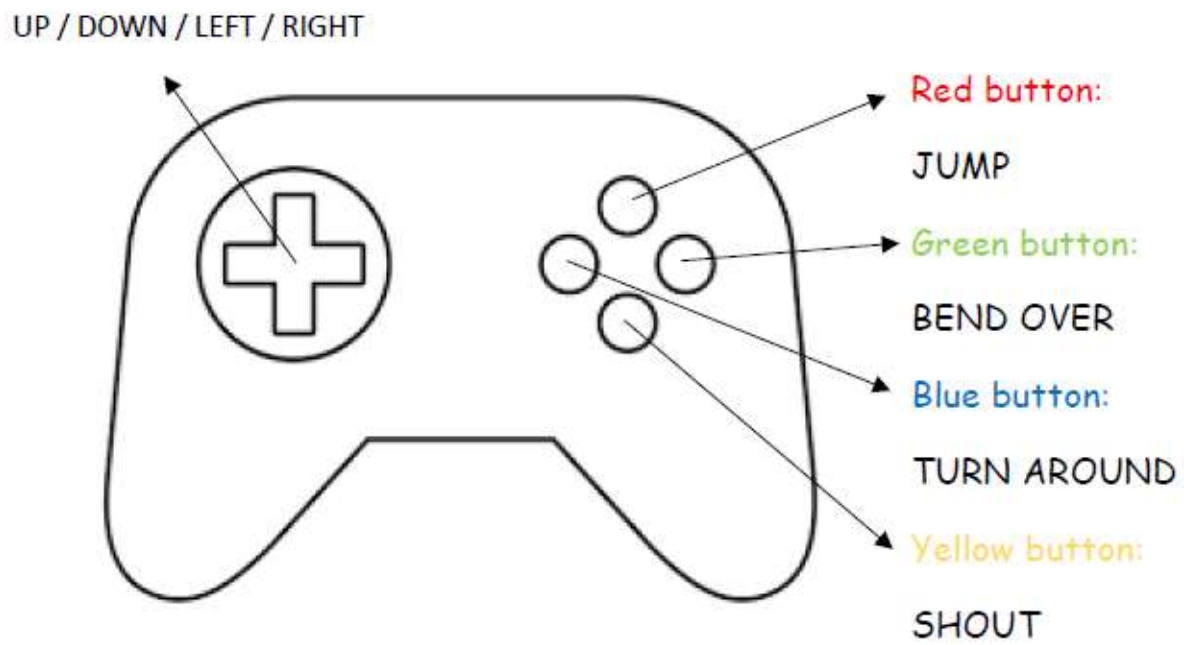


Figure 10: Lesson 1 - Hands-on activity / Lesson 2 Warm-up followed by Further Practice.
Meanings for each of the video game remote control's buttons that should be colored and explored in class.



Figure 11: Lesson 2 - Checking the kids' own toys.

Kids sharing and playing with their own toys.



Figure 12: Lesson 2 – Group work

Identifying words written in English from pictures in supermarket flyers and others.



Figure 13: Lesson 2 – Homework

School's English board notice presenting students' activities and contributions while being built collaboratively.

Appendix 6

<u>Institution:</u>
<u>Years of experience with EFL young learners:</u>
<i>Please, answer the questions according to your experience and classroom practice, considering how you see your students' development according to the implementation of the activities being described below. There are no right or wrong answers, feel free to share your honest and practical opinion on the issues being discussed. Thank you!</i>
What classroom activities, in general, do you consider to be the most motivational ones for young learners?
Do you feel that the activities you just mentioned are also ones which favor vocabulary / language structures retention?
Do you generally see positive learning results in your students when activities that use listening / speaking in connection to movements are implemented?
According to your classroom experience, do you feel that activities that promote interaction between the students (e.g. pair work / groupwork) favor their learning development?
What is your students' attitude towards assessment? Have you ever worked with alternative assessment measures (e.g. portfolios, self-assessment), other than the traditional ones (e.g. tests, exams)? If so, were the results positive? If not, would you like to work with such alternative instruments?