

PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

Problem-Based Learning: Enhancing Oral Communication in the EFL Classroom

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PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

Note of acceptance

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Abstract

The research study is focused on examining how the development and implementation of contextualized materials, focused on problem-based learning, enhance oral communication among tenth graders in an EFL classroom. This research was carried out with 21 tenth graders and conducted at a school located in Bogotá, Colombia. During the implementation of two workshops, students had the opportunity to provide alternative solutions to problems they were facing at school, working under the principles of problem-based learning to reach the learning goals. This was a qualitative action research study. The data was gathered through three different instruments: surveys (entry-survey and exit-survey), a teacher's journal, and the students' artifacts. Findings showed that developing and implementing contextualized materials, using new teaching approaches, is effective when enhancing oral communication in the EFL classroom. The results demonstrated that the students could achieve clear communication talking about real life issues and working in groups to come out with alternative solutions.

Keywords: materials development, contextualized materials, problem-based learning, cooperative learning, oral communication

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Resumen

Este estudio de investigación se centra en examinar cómo el desarrollo y la implementación de materiales contextualizados, enfocados en el aprendizaje basado en problemas, mejora la comunicación oral entre los estudiantes de décimo grado en un aula de inglés como lengua extranjera. Esta investigación se llevó a cabo con 21 estudiantes de décimo grado de un colegio privado ubicado en Bogotá, Colombia. Durante la implementación de dos talleres didácticos, los estudiantes tuvieron la oportunidad de proporcionar soluciones alternativas a los problemas que enfrentaban en la escuela, trabajando bajo los principios del aprendizaje basado en problemas para alcanzar los objetivos de aprendizaje. Este fue un estudio de investigación de acción cualitativa. La información se recopiló a través de tres instrumentos diferentes: encuestas (encuesta de entrada y encuesta de salida), un diario para el profesor y los artefactos de los estudiantes. Los resultados mostraron que desarrollar e implementar materiales contextualizados, utilizando nuevos enfoques de enseñanza, es efectivo cuando se mejoran los procesos de comunicación oral en el aula de EFL. También se halló que los estudiantes pueden lograr una comunicación clara hablando sobre temas de la vida real y trabajando en grupos para presentar soluciones alternativas.

Palabras claves: desarrollo de materiales, materiales contextualizados, aprendizaje basado en problemas, aprendizaje colaborativo, comunicación oral

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2. Descripción
<p>The research study is focused on examining how the development and implementation of contextualized materials, focused on problem-based learning, enhance oral communication among tenth graders in an EFL classroom. This research was carried out with 21 tenth graders and conducted at a school located in Bogotá, Colombia. During the implementation of two workshops, students had the opportunity to provide alternative solutions to problems they were facing at school, working under the principles of problem-based learning to reach the learning</p>

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4. Contenidos

This document has been organized in five chapters.

The first one contains the statement of the problem, the research question, the general and specific objectives, the setting and the rational, and the related studies that I reviewed as a guidance to shape this research study.

The second one presents a detailed description of the three constructs that support theoretically this investigation.

The third one, the reader will find the research approach and type of study, the description of the setting and the participants as well as the instruments used to gather the data.

The fourth chapter illustrates the data analysis and the findings of the study.

The fifth chapter the conclusions and pedagogical implications are set forth; furthermore, possible issues that can be part of future studies are stated as well.

5. Metodología

A qualitative approach was selected for this study because it starts by locating an observer in a specific setting with specific people aiming to interpret their reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The research methodology used in this investigation was Action Research because the researcher was in charge of observing to gather data that will allow the researcher to reflect and make a further plan to continue with the cycle. The study was carried out with the participation of 25 tenth grade students from Santa Clara school and myself as teacher-researcher and text developer. To gather the corresponding data, it was necessary to use three data gathering instruments: surveys, field notes and students' artifacts. Following the purpose of this investigation, I developed two workshops characterized by being focused on students' local problematic situations; that is to say, problems that they mainly face in their daily basis especially, at their school. Besides, all the activities planned for each workshop were totally framed within problem-based learning and the second language acquisition principles. The pedagogical intervention, because of its design, offers students a variety of engaging, relevant, and contextualized situations for them to enhance oral communication inside and outside the classroom. For the data analysis, a grounded approach was employed. In view of that, the data derived from the development of this intervention allowed me to understand and explain how problem-based learning principles included in the developed contextualized materials enhanced oral communication processes in the classroom. Following this further, the findings of the triangulation derived from the analysis of the data gathered with the three different data-collection instruments. Finally, conclusions and implications for further studies were described.

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6. Conclusiones

The main findings of this research are:

- The materials implemented in this study, were contextualized since they were created based upon the problems that students were facing at school; specifically related to homework which is an issue highly connected to the curriculum.
- Problem based learning is an accurate approach for teaching languages even when it was not primarily intended to teach foreign languages (Hung, Jonnassen and Liu, 2008b).
- The implementation of the pedagogical intervention benefited students since they not only improved their content knowledge but also improved their team work skills and developed their communicative and interactional skills in the language (Othman & Shah, 2013c).
- The materials developed for the pedagogical intervention of this study affected in a positive way the oral performances of the participants.
- The development and implementation of contextualized materials, designed following the principles of Problem Based Learning, ended up being an opportunity for my students to enhance their oral communication by the use of real and relevant situations that generated spaces for them to give and ask for opinions.
- In spite of the uncommon use of problem-based learning as an approach for teaching English, the findings revealed that it is an accurate approach for teaching languages even when it was not primarily intended to teach foreign languages (Hung, Jonnassen and Liu, 2008b).

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PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

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Introduction

This research study is a description of how the creation and implementation of contextualized materials focused on problem-based learning enhance students' oral communication. This study was carried out with tenth graders at Santa Clara School, a private school located in Bogotá, Colombia. One of the institutional projects is related to bilingualism that fosters the communicative skills among all the school members. Thus, this research study aimed to generating situations that allowed students to interact orally by using English as a foreign language. This study also contributes to the National Policies regarding Bilingualism in our country that prioritize the improvement of English communicative skills in all the educational fields (Ministerio de Educación, 2004). Problem-based learning was selected since it prioritizes problems as starting points in the integration and adaptation of new knowledge, and because it provides different types of instruction that help student develop their communicative skills (Barrows, 1996a).

As teacher researcher, since I taught my first lesson, I have realized that the students who were better English users were the ones that have learned it outside the school. This limitation may be caused by a lack of meaningful topics, activities, and materials provided by the EFL teachers. Considering this, I decided to conduct this research study to help my students find English classes more interesting and challenging so that they assume a participatory role where they can communicate in English more successfully. Besides, Naved (2015) states that "speaking English will help you communicate with people from countries all over the world" (par. 3); thus, in my role as teacher of English as a foreign language, I am interested in enhancing the communicative competence through oral interaction so that my students can become English users in this globalized world.

Finally, this document has been organized in five chapters. The first one contains the statement of the problem, the research question, the general and specific objectives, the setting and the rationale, and the related studies that I reviewed as a guidance to shape this research study. The second one presents a detailed description of the three constructs that support theoretically this investigation. In the third one, the reader will find the research approach and type of study, the description of the setting and the participants as well as the instruments used to gather the data. The fourth chapter illustrates the data analysis and the findings of the study, and in the fifth chapter the conclusions and pedagogical implications are set forth; furthermore, possible issues that can be part of future studies are stated as well.

Chapter I

Research Problem

Statement of the Problem

The main concern of this study is related to the lack of situations that allow foreign language learners to interact orally by using the English language in the classroom. The remarkable change of paradigm in teaching English as a foreign language has induced foreign language curricula to adopt communicative approaches (Yi Lin, 2008). This change has generated some new demands for foreign language learners and teachers, that is to say, that it is not sufficient to comprehend the language but to demonstrate proficiency by speaking with fluency and accuracy. That is why enhancing oral communication is important in the current language classrooms. Indeed, teaching English language for communicative purposes goes beyond preparing teachers and creating innovative educational policies; according to Brewster (2016), it requires the creation of spaces that ensure enough exposure to the language so that students can use it without hesitation.

As teacher, I decided to observe and evaluate some teaching practices to identify the way students feel when they communicate orally in the English foreign language class. These observations took place at Santa Clara school, a private school located in Bogotá, Colombia. The participants were 21 tenth graders who attended four classes a week. During the observations, I realized that the school has traditional classrooms that dissent from the different classroom arrangement possibilities that a communicative class may have. As a result, it shortens the opportunities to generate contextualized situations that grant students the possibility to interact orally by using the English language. Additionally, I detected that the students' oral performances were limited to repeating and reading sentences provided by the teacher. However, when they were

presented with situations they faced every day, they seemed interested in knowing how to speak English related to those specific topics.

On the other hand, taken into consideration what Brown (1995) (as cited in Núñez and Téllez, 2008) stated about the necessity and importance of systemizing the process of needs assessment, I decided to conduct a survey after the observations. The results showed that most of the students thought that they did not speak English in the classroom because they did not see the necessity to do so, and sometimes expressing themselves in another language made them feel nervous, fearful, and anxious. In addition, and after conducting the survey, I randomly selected some of the students to be part of an interview. They said that English was boring when the topics were uninteresting, that they wanted to be challenged and to have different types of classes. For these reasons, I proposed the following research question:

Research Question

How do the development and implementation of contextualized materials, focused on problem-based learning, enhance oral communication among tenth graders in an EFL classroom?

Research Objectives

General objective: To examine how contextualized material, focused on problem-based learning, enhances tenth graders oral communication.

Specific objectives: (a) to describe the effect that contextualized material, focused on problem-based learning, has on tenth graders' oral communicative performances in an EFL setting and (b) To assess how the principles of problem-based learning generate speaking spaces in the English classroom.

Related Studies

The following related studies were selected and examined because of their relevance in the field of English language teaching, and the way they informed me about the advances associated with this research study. In this section, I will explain six studies that contributed and guided me to focus on the theoretical constructs that frame this study.

Contextualized materials. This construct is framed within Materials Development which is an essential field of study for this investigation. In this regard, I found two local studies that helped me to understand the importance of using contextualized materials in the EFL classroom.

The first study was conducted by Castañeda (2012) with the aim of exploring how students make sense of culture-based material in the EFL class. It was a case study carried out at a high school located in the southeast of Bogotá with 51 eighth graders. The researcher used five different sources to collect data: video, audio recordings, surveys, field notes, and students' artifacts. In terms of materials development, she adapted a lesson from a book and designed tasks based on authentic materials. Finally, she concluded that culture must be included in any type of education, and that it is important for educators to use and design a wide diversity of materials that lead students not only to understand their own culture (context) but also others'. This study helped me to focus on creating materials based on contexts that are meaningful for my students. In addition, it guided me to look for materials that address students' realities and to implement contextualized materials to enhance language-learning processes such as oral communication.

The second local study is an action research conducted by Bedoya, Gordillo, Romero, and Campos (2015) in a school located in Chia, Colombia with high school students aged between 15 and 18 years old. The researchers used three instruments to gather data: surveys, interviews, and students' artifacts. The purpose of this study was to implement didactic units based on

Colombian cultural content so that students could expand their knowledge about the Colombian culture in the English class. Besides, the methodological approach used in the design and implementation of each didactic unit was topic-based teaching. The findings revealed that in spite of the different English levels of learners, they felt really motivated and encouraged to participate; also, cooperative learning took place since they worked in groups during the implementation. Furthermore, most of the students got to know facts about their own culture. Although this study did not mention exactly the terms contextualized materials, the design and implementation of materials related to culture made me consider this study as an important source for the development of my study. In other words, it led me to review the impact and success of developing materials in the local EFL field.

Problem-based learning. Jiriyasin (2014) carried out a study whose purpose was to investigate the effects of problem-based learning (PBL hereafter) on the English language performances of university students. This study was carried out in Bangkok, at the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce. For the development of this experimental study, a systematic PBL model for English classrooms was implemented using thematic contents about friendship and the environment as the base for the development of teaching materials and lesson plans. In order to gather data, four instruments were developed in this study: ill-structured or open-ended problems, English Oral Performance Test (EPT) and Band Scales, Questionnaire for Students' Opinions, and an Interview Questionnaire. The findings mainly showed that students' English oral performances improved in terms of fluency and accuracy. I consider this study relevant since it involves the three constructs presented in my study (contextualized materials, problem-based learning, and oral communication), and it also provides insights on developing and implementing material based on PBL.

In the local context, despite the lack of studies about PBL and EFL classrooms in Colombia, Mendieta (2009) conducted a small-scale research study with the aim of fostering students' inquiry process by developing an innovative pedagogical proposal primarily focused on PBL approach and then changed for curriculum as inquiry. It was carried out with seventh graders at a private female school located in Casa Blanca, Suba. The instruments used to collect data were students' artifacts, field notes, and video-taped sessions. By the end of the study, the author found that a foreign language is not a barrier to get students involved in social and problematic issues. In relation with my research study, it helped me to shape my study because it led me to understand that in order to implement PBL, it is necessary to study deeply its principles so they can be successfully implemented in a classroom, and not be changed for another approach during the development of the study. Furthermore, it is evident that this study guided me in the process of implementing materials based on PBL in a foreign language.

Oral communication. An action research study that aimed to enhance oral communication and interaction in the EFL classroom was carried out by Alvarez and Rojas (2014). In this research study, they made use of some activities based on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT here after) and Project-based Learning to help students interact and communicate in English. The study was implemented with 34 fourth graders from Luigi Pirandello School, located in Bogotá, Colombia. In order to gather data, they used field notes and interviews that were analyzed and as a result, depicted the following findings (a) EFL learning was enriched by implementing communicative practices in the classroom; (b) teacher encouragement is essential for students to realize the necessity to use English; (c) the use of CLT helped students in their language acquisition process. I found this study relevant since it made use of CLT which is the frame for my third construct, oral communication, and it implemented a similar approach:

project-based learning that as well as problem-based learning, adopt cooperative learning from Constructivism.

In the same line of thought, Adbulla (2007) focused her action research study on investigating the different ways to improve oral communication not only for classroom use but also outside the classroom. This study was carried out in a government primary school for girls in United Arab Emirates; the participants in this study were five students from fifth grade. Moreover, she used three different instruments for data collection: observations, surveys, and interviews. After examining the data, she concluded that most of the students were highly engaged; also, results showed that when students did not work cooperatively, the quality of work was lower than when they worked together. On the other hand, she suggested that any type of cooperative work must be introduced before the implementation of the task. In fact, this research study guided me to see the high probability that CLT approaches and practices have when enhancing oral communication skills in the EFL classroom. Moreover, the pair-work strategies used in this study are connected to problem based learning since they are part of cooperative learning strategies.

Setting and Rationale

This research study takes place at Santa Clara School, a private institution located in Teusaquillo, thirteenth district, in Bogotá, Colombia. The philosophy of the school is primarily based on imparting Christian catholic principles and values. Besides, the school mission is to form integral people that can apply their Christian values in any setting of their lives. There are approximately 450 students, yet five of them are boys because in 2015, the school started to implement mixed-mode education. Furthermore, the pedagogical approach adopted by the school is based on constructivist principles; however, until the second semester of 2015, the school started the implementation of a bilingual program.

This research study emerges from my reflection of the English foreign language classes that I have experienced as a student as well as taught as a teacher. The opportunities that I have had to participate in different English teaching and learning settings have helped me to observe and reflect on how much students struggle to communicate orally in English. From my point of view, I believe that there are two possible reasons why they have serious difficulties to express themselves and communicate effectively: First, Núñez and Téllez (2012) explain that there are few linguistic resources that help students in the development of oral situations in class; subsequently, students may take a role of just being active listeners but not language producers. Second, the limitations in terms of methodologies and teaching and learning strategies that are used in the classroom.

Despite the impact that the communicative approach has had on foreign language teaching in the last decades, Galboltan and Segelovic (as cited in Souza, 2014) argue that most EFL teachers that claim to be using a communicative approach focus their lesson plans and delivery on grammatical explanations and the teaching of rules. Hence, I believe that EFL Colombian teachers should prepare themselves to start teaching English including students' needs; that is to say, teaching students to communicate effectively in English which according to Amberg and Vause (2009) is one of the most important functions of the language. Thereupon, I am convinced that this research study is providing me with information about increasing my awareness concerning my teaching practices and expanding my view as teacher as well as visualizing the different roles I can be engaged in.

Similarly, I consider that this was an enriching experience for Santa Clara School since it was the first time that the students dealt with problem-based learning in an English class; of course, something new for them as well as for the school. Hence, I hope it was a valuable practice for the students because they had the opportunity to use English to solve real-life problems.

Moreover, as it was the first research study implemented at school, it will assuredly be a base for future investigations. Also, in 2015, Santa Clara School started to implement bilingual education, and this research study will be useful to open up the discussion about modifying the syllabus regarding English teaching practices.

Nevertheless, it is paramount to mention the contribution this study makes to the research line of the Master's programme as to its theoretical and methodological principles. First, this study responds to three theoretical principles labeled by Pardo, Téllez, & Castellanos (2013) as justice, equity and inclusion; empowerment and autonomy; and quality assurance together with professional development. In terms of justice, equity and inclusion, the contribution lays on the opportunity I had to make more inclusive materials that help the school meet the country's agenda regarding the bilingual proposal for education as well as developing my students' and my cultural-linguistic identity to respond to ill-structure problems that can be found in educational settings. What is more, the contribution regarding empowerment and autonomy is based on the way this investigation changed my students' and my perception towards the implementation of materials in the EFL classroom since the methodological approach, problem-based learning, allowed us to propose critical and alternative solutions to social issues.

Following this further, this study also gives insights on quality assurance together with professional development because I am updating my teaching knowledge and practice through the opportunity the Master's programme is giving me to design and implement innovative contextualized materials in specific teaching contexts. On the other hand, the methodological contribution consists of the inclusion of problem-based learning principles to the systematic stages proposed by Núñez, Téllez, & Castellanos (2017) as materials development framework since it responds to the socio-cultural necessities of the context of the school and the students.

Finally, I hope that my research study will provide local teachers in the field of ELT with one more alternative to enhance oral communication and interaction in the classrooms that will lead schools and English teaching institutes to use a different communicative approach to teach and learn English. Londoño (2013) affirmed that there is a prevailing competence among book publishing companies that offer books with a wide range of situations that are specially focused on the cultures of English speaking countries' and their linguistic patterns; as a consequence, this type of books seem to be distant from Colombian students' context and reality, making them feel less interested and encouraged in the EFL class. For this reason, the pedagogical intervention provided in this study focused on contextualized material that helped students value English as a functional language to survive in any situation that implies its use.

Chapter II

Literature Review

In this chapter, I will explain and comment about the main theoretical principles that underlie my research question. In order to do so, it was necessary to review the existing literature to fully understand this study; it included books, articles, and related studies regarding the three constructs of this study: contextualized materials framed within Materials Development which is the research line of the Master's program, Problem Based Learning, and oral communication.

Materials Development

Before I start with any further explanation on materials focused on PBL, it is relevant to go over the definition of Materials Development and its implications in EFL teaching. Some authors such as Brown (1995) and Tomlinson (1999a) define materials as a set of methods and activities that are used in the classroom by teachers and learners. Hence, materials assume an important role in the classroom so that they become crucial for the development of any class. For that reason, it is paramount to use the appropriate materials that fit the students and instructors' needs.

Following this further, I want to clarify, just as Núñez, Téllez, Castellanos and Ramos, (2009a) did, that materials development has some other different ways to be named. They are: instructional materials design (Small, 1997), course development (Graves, 1997), course books (Harmer, 2007), and instructional design strategies (Arnone, 2003). Even though, following the research line that is set in the master's program; in this research study, I am going to hold the term materials development proposed by Tomlinson (1999b). Taking this into account, Núñez and Téllez (2009) offer a description for materials development that, from my point of view, is accurate and valid. They describe it as "it includes adaption, creation of learning and teaching exercises, a task, an activity, a lesson, a unit, or a module composed of several units" (p. 4). From

this description, it must be highlighted that materials development is not only creation but also opportunities to adopt and adapt materials according to the different contexts that they are to be implemented.

Furthermore, Tomlinson (1998) argues that “materials development refers to all the processes made use of by practitioners who produce and/or use materials for learning including materials evaluation, their adaptation, design, production and research” (p. 144) This idea is supported by Moon (2000) as she states that “materials are an important resource for teachers in assisting pupils to learn English” (p. 86). The first definition, apart from providing an understanding on what materials development is, provides five individual processes that should be given consideration when developing learning material. In this regard, materials could be defined as all the diversity of elements that are brought to the classroom by teachers in order to maximize his/her students’ learning processes. In addition to this, Núñez and Téllez (2009) remark that developing materials are also beneficial for the instructors since they enroll a savored journey in which they can rejoice every single step all along the teaching and learning process.

The importance of materials in the EFL classroom. According to Martínez (2015), language learning materials are not only seen as a support for teachers and learners but also as agents that help to enrich class procedures. This is supported by Xiotang’s who claims: “materials are not just tools; they represent the aims, values, and methods in teaching a foreign language. Materials are the most powerful device in spreading new methodological ideas and in shaping language teaching and learning practice” (as cited in Núñez and Téllez, 2009, p. 58). Nevertheless, it is fundamental to understand that “developing materials for EFL classrooms should not be viewed as a task confined to textbook developers” (Núñez, Pineda, & Téllez, 2004, p. 129). This leads me to say that since English is not considered in Colombia as an official

language, it becomes a must for teachers to use well designed materials that display those situations that allow learners to see the importance of using this language

To support what I have just stated, Richards (1998) mentions that “materials are seen as an essential component of instructional design and are often viewed as a way of influencing the quality of classroom interaction and language use” (p. 128). In addition, Núñez, Téllez and Castellanos (2012) affirm that materials development offers advantages in teaching practices in terms of innovation, creativity, and satisfaction. Since materials are not only an impressive way of influencing learners towards language learning but also a source of different aids that maximize outcome opportunities, they need to be appealing for students as well as they need to offer them activities that are different from filling in the blanks and memorizing words with no sense. In other words, the importance of teaching materials relays on how interesting, innovative, and involving they are for the learners and that is what I, as teacher researcher and designer, seek in my study, to provide my students with materials that really match their needs and interests.

Contextualized Materials. Considering the necessity that foreign language teachers have in regards to finding appropriate material to support their English classes and teaching, it is important to raise awareness on developing contextualized ones to improve the quality of English teaching in Colombia. According to Howard and Major (2004), materials development should be more centered on teachers creating their own materials rather than teachers using and relying on course books. Furthermore, it is relevant to highlight what Núñez, Téllez, and Castellanos (2013) explained about the role of materials on letting knowledge flow, especially when materials are understood as socio-cultural resources that generate interaction among humans. Keeping in mind that this study was implemented in English language learning, it is paramount to define materials development in this field.

Tomlinson (2012) asserted that materials are “anything which can be used to facilitate the learning of a language, including coursebooks, videos, graded readers, flash cards, games, websites and mobile phone interactions” (p. 143). On the other hand, Núñez and Téllez (2015) added that “teachers should develop contextualized materials that respond to their students’ needs” (p.58). Thus, language-learning materials can be understood as those contextualized elements that facilitate the learning of a language contemplating the learners’ needs.

What is more, as the materials designed and implemented in this study were contextualized, it is necessary to mention how they are seen as to the perspective of authenticity. According to Harmer (1991), authentic materials are the ones designed by native speakers for native speakers using real situations. Similarly, Jordan (1997) refers to authentic texts as those that are not written for language or pedagogic purposes. These assertions helped me to classify the materials I designed and implemented as non-authentic materials because they were made for academic purposes, and they provided the students with real situations and tasks that made them use the language.

In addition, the workshops included tasks in which authentic materials such as magazine articles and videos were used as means to enrich the task performance. In brief, the characteristics of the materials I designed show that they were thought to teach foreign language learners (non-authentic) using authentic tasks and resources that made the implementation more interesting for the students. Along these coming lines, I will explain why designing materials were important to enhance oral communication in the EFL classroom.

The importance of contextualized materials. In order to have a general view of what contextualized materials are and why they are important in this field; first, it is basic to

understand what the process of contextualization is. In light of this, The British Council (n.d.) explains:

contextualization is putting language items into a meaningful and real context rather than being treated as isolated items of language for language manipulation practice only.

Contextualizing language tries to give real communicative value to the language that learners meet. The context can help learners remember the language and recall it at a later date (para.3).

The fact that contextualization gives a real communicative value to the language implies that students will find learning and communicating in English more appealing and meaningful. In relation to my study, Barron, Schwartz, Moore, Petroismo and Zech (1998) argues that PBL is a helpful way to adapt learning content through the use or contextualization of everyday situations that students can face. Following this further, Saleh (2013) suggests:

in foreign language contexts, it is better to develop a model of communicative competence that takes into account the specific contextual, social and linguistic factors of non-native speakers. Therefore, local experts need to be involved in the process of designing the language learning materials for their own contexts (p. 9).

It highlights the importance of learners' contexts in terms of including communicative tasks that are related to situations they can experience in their country, city, school or even at home. That is why there is growing necessity for language teachers to commit themselves to the design of materials that address their specific teaching and learning contexts.

Also, Crandall (1993) and Mak and Coniam (2008) state that teaching oral language to English language learners needs a process of contextualization where everyday situations and the focus of instruction have to go hand in hand. By the same token, Gómez (2010) concludes that “teachers need to supplement EFL textbooks with extra material that is compatible with the

particular situations found in language classrooms” (p. 339). As stated above, it is essential for language teachers to incorporate contextualization processes through the design of materials that can be compatible with the linguistic competences that a student can perform and understand because of the relation with his/her daily basis.

Similarly, Núñez and Téllez (2015) suggest that “teachers should develop contextualized materials that respond to their students’ needs” (p.58), as well as Gómez (2015) affirms that teachers can use elements of deep culture in the materials to generate interest and inquiry in the students and encourage them to express themselves in English. That is why, it is clear, that providing a meaningful context where learners can feel involved and being part of problems resolution is fundamental and has to be taken into account when creating and adapting real situations to their lives. After all, I define contextualized materials as the ones that are designed to be highly connected to the school philosophy and curriculum, and the experiences and realities of the teachers and students.

The roles of new technologies in language-learning materials. This is, of course, framed within contextualized materials. As I previously mentioned, making students get involved in the learning process requires teachers to develop the newest material or at least what it seems to be new for them. However, I want to clarify that the intention of this study is not to adopt a technology-based instructional approach, but to include some technological aids that will be important for the development of PBL in the pedagogical intervention. Following this further, it is pertinent to ask how technology can be used to support PBL in the classroom. To answer this question, Donnelly (2005) presents four different ways in which technology can support this approach; nonetheless, taking into consideration the purposes of this study, I will mention only two of them.

Firstly, technology definitely expands the opportunities that teachers and students have to communicate orally. Specifically, Internet offers a wide range of possibilities to talk and interact with other people without any concern about time and distance; in this way, learners and teachers can enrich learning through collaboration and discussion. Secondly, it also gives both students and teachers more opportunities to have feedback sessions, being these different from the traditional teaching approaches commonly characterized for being paper-based. In addition, Harmer (2007) supports technology use by saying that the involvement of Internet provides schools with different ways to compose materials rather than using pencils, pens, and papers. Thus, it only provides a general insight on what technology can do to support the development of PBL in the EFL class.

Problem-Based Learning

Problem-based learning is possibly one of the most groundbreaking approaches in Education in the 21st century. The spread of information and technology has spurred the creation of new situations that are, to a certain extent, new for past and current generations. Under these circumstances, it is worth mentioning that PBL challenges education to prepare students to become effective problem solvers (Barrel, 2010a). That is why I have decided, as teacher researcher, to use PBL as a methodology to challenge students to solve problems while using and enhancing their oral interaction in English as a foreign language. However, PBL is a term that needs to be explained from the perspective of this research study.

To begin with, it is necessary to state that PBL is a method that was not primarily intended to teach foreign languages. According to Hung, Jonnassen and Liu (2008a), PBL was implemented in order to confront the different methodologies that were used in medical education since they did not have any relation with real life cases. Later, it was eventually adapted and integrated into other disciplines in the field of education. Currently, PBL has been linked to new

pedagogies, or commonly known as active teaching methods; one of them is Constructivism, which as well as PBL gives priority to the cognitive processes in students' learning. Thus, it is quite important to define what features characterize PBL in the learning and teaching process.

What is PBL? As it was explained in the previous paragraph, PBL has not been implemented only for academic purposes; however, it has had a great impact on education, especially on language teaching. De Graaff and Kolmos (2003) define PBL as “an educational approach whereby the problem is the starting-point of the learning process” (p.658). Taking into consideration that the problem is seen as a starting point, it is important to mention that the teaching aim is not the problem itself but the learner. In light of this, Ansarian, (2016) argues that PBL is a method centered on students and that the teacher has to work as an intercessor between the teaching-learning experiences and the students, while they acquire abilities to become autonomous learners. Nonetheless, PBL claims to be an integral method that contains features from some other pedagogies, in this case, active/new pedagogies.

PBL features. A feature that stands out within this pedagogy is the fact that students apart from developing abilities and attitudes, they also acquire knowledge on the specific subject that is being taught at the moment (Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, n.d.). As it was stated above, this method contains principles that are established by other theories, models, and approaches. One of those is constructivism that as well as PBL, prioritizes the cognitive processes in students' learning. Moreover, there is also a significant relationship between PBL and meaningful learning. According to De Zubiría (2006), the active school must lean on the contents and learning processes that are performed by the learners to make them meaningful. If learning captivates the student, then a chain of events that enriches academic, personal, social and intellectual levels will come to light.

In view of that, PBL also contains specific aspects of meaningful learning; hence, it can be noted that this type of teaching formulated through problems allows the teacher to make observations based on situations that are truly important for students. As a result, students' motivation grows and encourages the necessity to acquire skills that help them find possible solutions for a problem. In other words, the closest relation that PBL has with meaningful learning is that both approaches get students involved in situations that they face in their day to day. PBL, undoubtedly, encourages students to interact, socialize, and become active participants of their learning because they are mainly focused on how to perform successfully in a society that demands solving problems every day.

Although PBL contains many features related to other approaches and methods, there are certain characteristics that make it functional as a teaching approach. Hung et al., (2008b) argue that PBL is a learning process that can be distinguished because:

learners begin learning by addressing simulations of an authentic, ill-structured problem.

The content and skills to be learned are organized around problems, rather than as a hierarchical list of topics, so a reciprocal relationship exists between knowledge and the problem. (p.488)

The word ill-structured is very significant in this description because it depicts the key aspect that features PBL. Ill- structures mean realistic problems that are tightly related to the students' lives. As a consequence, if there is not a problem that provides encounters between the learner and knowledge about themselves and their daily activities, it will not be possible to use PBL in a class.

Furthermore, after making some observations in a classroom, Barrel (2010b) came out with ten key elements of PBL. However, taking into consideration the purposes of my study, I will mention only five that most contribute to the development of this research study. The first

worth mentioning is that PBL must contain real-world problems that uphold inquiry and encourage students to develop teamwork abilities. Indeed, teamwork abilities acquired by the students, at the time of beginning the process, are the ones that guarantee students to be successful in problem resolution. Moreover, apart from having real-world problems with such characteristics that I mentioned above, PBL sets high intellectual challenges such as: posing questions, thinking critically, making decisions, and drawing reasonable conclusions to evidence learning.

Additionally, another key element essential for my study is the role of feedback during the problem-solving process. Dignen (2014) states that: “feedback is not criticism, it is a supportive act intended to deal with underperformance in a constructive way and to develop performance to a higher level” (para. 1). From this perspective, feedback must be present all the time during the pedagogical intervention since oral communication is what is going to be enhanced. Moreover, another key element is that PBL offers opportunities to revise, modify, and self-reflect on the work done to make new decisions to improve the performance of each individual. So, it demands teachers to create clear and easy-to-follow curricular structures centered on authentic problems. Finally, having described the relevant features and elements of PBL, it is necessary to explain how they can be applied in a language class, in this case, an EFL one.

PBL and the English classroom. There are plenty of different points of view about learning a language but most of them agree that learning any language is quite different from learning any other subject. For instance, Larsson (2001a) argues that when language is not a subject then it becomes a tool. On the other hand, Mardziah Hayati (2005) affirms that English language must not be considered as a content subject; it means, having most of the English curriculum based on contents may not lead learners to develop communicative skills, which are

the pillars of learning a foreign language. That is why talking about the English classroom and the relation with PBL becomes a necessity for the development of this study.

According to Othman and Shah (2013a), PBL is an approach with no lecture-based instruction by the teacher. This means that an important question that can be raised from this statement: can learning happen in an English class where there is no lecture-based instruction? To answer this inquiry, Gijsselaers explains that:

learning is “student-centered” because the students are given the freedom to study those topics that interest them the most and to determine how they want to study them. Students should identify their learning needs, help plan classes, lead class discussions, and assess their own work and their classmates’ work. (As cited in “Problem-Based learning,” 2001, p.1)

In other words, students will be so involved in trying to find possible solutions to the problems that they will not only improve their content knowledge and teamwork skills but also their communicative and interactional skills in the language (Othman & Shah, 2013b). Following this further, it is pertinent to state that the PBL classrooms look different from the lectured-based ones; as well, EFL learning needs inspire new spaces that make students see English as a useful tool for communication. For that reason, PBL, is considered in this research project, as an innovative and compelling approach to enhance oral communication in the EFL classroom. So far I have addressed the construct of contextualized materials and the issues involved in PBL In the following section, I will explain the third construct that informs this study, which is oral communication.

Oral Communication

Oral communication is one of the most important means in communication, it is not only basic for education (Alice & Weide, 1995) but for settings that require exchanging of messages through speaking and listening. Martin (1978) affirms that

oral communication in our society is ubiquitous. At school, at work, and at home, speaking and listening play central roles in our lives. English language arts curricula must reflect this reality and deliver unified instruction in communication skills at all grade levels (p. 3).

In this regard, oral communication becomes essential for the development of this research study since it intends to design and implement contextualized materials to enhance oral communication skills in the English foreign language classroom.

Oral communication skills. According to the Common European Framework for Languages (2001) there are four basic skills involved in learning languages: Speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Nonetheless, Tadesse and Raga (2013) insist that only speaking and listening skills are involved in oral communication. This statement is supported by Ontario Curriculum for Language that claims:

oral Communication skills are fundamental to the development of literacy and essential for thinking and learning. Through talk, students not only communicate information but also explore and come to understand ideas and concepts; identify and solve problems; organize their experience and knowledge; and express and clarify their thoughts, feelings, and opinions. Listening and speaking skills are essential for social interaction at home, at school, and in the community (As cited in Henderson, n.d., Para. 2).

In this order of ideas, speaking and listening skills are needed to cope with good communication patterns. In terms of speaking, there are two relevant elements that are essential at the moment of teaching oral communication: fluency and accuracy. Nunan (2003) defines fluency as speaking the language with few hesitations and pauses to reach confidence; on the other side, he also defines accuracy as not making so many common mistakes and the ability to cope, as far as possible, with what native users actually say in that language. Finally, teaching, practicing, and training both of them, provide the learners with more opportunities to communicate orally in EFL classroom.

Besides, it is appropriate to acknowledge the importance that listening skills have in the oral communication process. To do so, Richard (2000) points out: "listening is vital in the language classroom because it provides input for the learner. Without understanding input at the right level, any learning simply cannot begin. Listening is thus fundamental to speaking" (p. 239). That is to say, the development of contextualized material, based on PBL, must aim at the enhancement of these two basic communicative skills to obtain a more communicative classroom where students get involved and more interested in their language learning process.

The role of oral communication in EFL. Nowadays, it is common to identify the communication skills as the main factors that define whether a person is an effective or ineffective user of a language. To support this idea, Palmer (2016) argues:

the number one language art is oral communication. We speak way more than we write.

All of our important communication is verbal. A resume might get you in the door, but how you speak in the interview gets you the job. Teachers hand out all kinds of materials, but how they speak in the classroom controls the learning in the class. Oral communication is also way more important now than it was because of all the various

technologies that are out there to facilitate oral communication. (As cited in Educational World, 2016, para, 5)

Thus, the oral communication in the EFL class becomes an indispensable component that must be practiced, studied, and trained. It goes beyond than just making utterances in the classroom; it combines intellectual, psychological, and linguistic resources. Besides, speaking and listening, the skills worked in this study, are necessarily interrelated in order to convey meaning of whatever is said among learners and teachers (Harmer, 2017). Therefore, since oral communication is essential, it is necessary to know how to teach it in the EFL classroom.

Teaching oral communication in the EFL classroom. According to the Canadian Ministry of Education (n.d), most of the times students are assigned oral activities without clear objectives and not knowing what they are expected to do; additionally, I believe that sometimes students need more guidance and clear objectives before they are asked to talk about a topic. In light of this, Saleh (2013) suggests that to avoid that student get confused and anxious at the time of performing a communicative task; it is necessary to set the objectives of language learning based on the realities of the students. In like manner, Burden (2004) states that EFL teachers should play an active role in building strong relations between the students and the context so that they can minimized anxiety and communicate better. Indeed, teachers have a responsibility in creating appropriate contextualized spaces and materials that assist learners in the process of acquiring communicative abilities to speak fluently and accurately. Taking these suggestions into consideration, the following paragraphs deal with the oral communicative skills that have to be taught in the EFL classroom.

The communicative competence. The way past generations understood English language teaching has changed considerably in the last decades. The main goal of learning a language was primarily focused on obtaining mastery of grammar that allowed the learner to

know and apply a set of different rules in certain contexts (Richards, 2005). Nowadays, there are new ideas on teaching English that are tracing the way to leave the grammatical approach behind and start adopting communicative approaches. This idea is supported by Breen and Candlin (1979) who characterize the communicative language teaching approach as a process where knowledge is shared and can be modified. In other words, what these approaches intend is to develop the communicative competence in students so that they can negotiate meaning by using the language.

There have been several descriptions and definitions of the communicative competence; however, Canale and Swain (1980) and Bachman (1990) provide a simple and accurate definition that is pertinent for the purposes of this study. They state that the communicative competence consists of a set of skills that help learners use the language properly and reach any communicative purpose within a given context. Supporting this idea, Hymes (1972) describes a competent user of a language as: “the one who knows when, where and how to use language appropriately rather than merely knowing how to produce accurate grammatical structures” (as cited in Saleh, 2013, p. 2). Thus, the role of the communicative competence in oral communication is important for the development of this study since one of the instructional objectives is to provide students with contextualized situations that allow them to become competent users of English as a foreign language by enhancing their oral communication skills, speaking and listening.

Hence, in this chapter I described the main theoretical constructs that framed this study; also, I provided theoretical support to explain how these were understood for the pedagogical purposes of the design and implementation of the materials. The next chapter will describe the methodological design of the study.

Chapter III

Methodological Design

In this chapter, I will describe the methodological design that underlies the research process which is divided into the research and the instructional designs. They explain the theoretical assumptions and the design underpinning this research study.

Research Design

This section of the chapter covers a detailed description that introduces the overall research approach and the type of study that directs this investigation since it intends to enhance oral communication through the implementation of contextualized materials. Furthermore, it also explains the participants and the teacher's roles as teacher-researcher and text developer, as well as the sampling techniques used to select the target population. Finally, it includes a description of the instruments and how these were piloted and the procedure followed for the collection of the data.

Approach. A qualitative approach was selected for this study because it starts by locating an observer in a specific setting with specific people aiming to interpret their reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). It implies the identification of the population's needs and the collection of different data, using different elaborated instruments that help the researcher understand and explain the issue (Creswell, 2007). In addition, Snape and Spencer (2003) explained that "qualitative methods are used to address research questions that require explanation or understanding of social phenomena and their contexts" (p. 5). In view that the aim of this qualitative research is not the verification of a predetermined idea, but a discovery that leads to new insights for my teaching practice, I chose this approach to enhance students' oral communication by designing and implementing contextualized materials, focused on problem-based learning.

Type of study. The research methodology used in this investigation is Action Research (AR, hereafter). AR has been defined by many different authors; that is why, it is paramount to acknowledge how Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, and Maguire (2003) simply describe AR as “a work in progress” (p. 11) which, immediately leads to recognize this method as a process. Having this in mind, some authors such as Hensen, Johnson, and McTaggart (as cited in Hine, 2013) comply that it “can be defined as the process of studying a school situation to understand and improve the quality of the educative process” (p. 2). In the same line of thought, Mills defines AR as:

any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers to gather information about the ways that their particular school operates, how they teach, and how well their students learn. The information is gathered with the goals of gaining insight, developing reflective practice, effecting positive changes in the school environment and on educational practices in general, and improving student outcomes (as cited in Donato, 2003, p. 1).

According to what the author expresses in the above-mentioned cite, AR is a systematic process that must be led by a teacher researcher, and it is one of the reasons why this study falls into the category of AR. Moreover, it allowed me, as researcher, to take action on my teaching practices to improve them and reflect upon the social and educational phenomenon. Stringer (2007) supports what I previously stated, explaining that “action is taken to improve practice and the research generates new knowledge about how and why the improvements came about” (p. 1). Thus, the relationship between research and action specifically describes why his investigation is an AR study.

Taking into consideration that AR is a process, certain stages were set to be followed during the development of this investigation. Although many authors have described different stages in AR, I have selected the one proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (as cited in Burns,

2009). In this cycle, four main components guide the researcher during the investigation. First, a plan must be developed to improve the problem, and then it has to be implemented. During its implementation, the researcher is in charge of observing to gather data that will allow the researcher to reflect and make a further plan to continue with the cycle. Finally, it is worth mentioning that I followed the above mentioned stages since I created a plan, implemented the pedagogical intervention, which allowed me to gather and analyze data using data-collection instruments to reflect upon it and make decisions to improve future implementations.

Participants. This research study was carried out with the participation of 25 tenth grade students from Santa Clara school and myself as teacher-researcher and text developer. In the next paragraphs, I will explain the main characteristics of these participants.

Students. The students who participated in this research study were 25 tenth graders whose ages ranged between 13 and 15 years old. They are characterized by being committed and passionate learners. Most of them belong to a middle- high economic status. Besides, all the students belonged to the advanced English course in which they were placed according to the scores they obtained in a test applied by the English Department at the beginning of the year. The amount of class hours they attended per week were five classes that lasted 45 minutes each. However, only 15 were taken to be part of the sample. The criteria for selecting the participants is the convenient sampling technique, having in mind how Ross (1978) defines it as “a sample in which elements have been selected on the basis of their accessibility or convenience to the researcher from the target population” (p. 7). This implies the selection of participants that are easy to recruit or want to be part of the study. For the purposes of this research study, this sampling technique is important since, as a teacher-researcher, I had the chance to select the students that, apart from being willing to participate and improve their oral communication skills,

were authorized to participate in the study by means of the consent form (See Appendices D and E) signed by their parents.

Teacher-researcher and text developer. My role as a teacher-researcher is basically to be participant and observer at the same time. As a matter of fact, I am a participant since I am the teacher in charge of delivering the lessons and I assume all of the responsibilities that a teacher has inside and outside the classroom. In like manner, I have to perform as an observer, being aware of what is going on in the classroom while implementing the pedagogical intervention. On the other hand, from the text developer's role, I have to develop and implement materials that match the students' needs in terms of learning. Furthermore, it is also relevant to take into account students' opinions as to the design of the materials and the topics chosen so that these can be meaningful and appealing for them.

Data gathering instruments. To gather the corresponding data to answer the research question, it was necessary to use three data gathering instruments: surveys, field notes and students' artifacts.

Surveys. These are seen as functional instruments since they permit gathering much information and in an organized way. Fellegi (2010) defines surveys as "any activity that collects information in an organized and methodical manner about characteristics of interest from some or all units of a population using well-defined concepts, methods and procedures, and compiles such information into a useful summary form" (p. 1). In this case, the type of survey used were questionnaires that are characterized by being written or virtual documents that contain well organized questions that after being answered, provide insights about the issue or problem under study (Godfred, 2016). In that way, a pre-questionnaire was designed to collect information about the students' perceptions in terms of materials likes, oral communication, and collaborative

learning. In addition, it was implemented to obtain an idea of the students' state before the implementation of the pedagogical intervention. Finally, a post-questionnaire was developed to collect information about the same aspects, included in the pre-questionnaire, after the implementation of the workshops (See Appendices A and B).

Teacher's journal. Also known as observations or note taking, field notes are one of the most powerful data gathering techniques that a teacher researcher can have. It is a very important instrument where the researcher can compile moment a moment of concerning situation. According to Newbury (2001), taking notes on diary implies a very strict order and constancy. Plus, Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, and Namey (2005) affirm that they "may be written either discreetly during participant observation or following the activity, depending on where you go and how much you participate" (p. 21). Besides, it is useful for the researcher to verify if the results of the research are valid and significant since they are the researcher's own notes, own perspectives of the matter being observed (Muswazi & Nhamo, 2013). Thus, I decided to use a journal as one of my data gathering instruments since I am a participant observer of this study. Thus, it was easier for me to take notes and then have the sufficient time to analyze and reflect on the information gathered. (See Appendix C).

Students' artifacts. As one of the purposes of this research study is to enhance oral communication, it is necessary to collect information that evidences the students' work and progress. LeCompte and Preissle (1994) define artifacts as "products people use, objects people make, and records of what they do, say, produce, or write" (p. 1). Taking this definition into consideration, it is important to mention that apart from the tasks students have to develop within the workshops, video and audio recordings are going to be used as part of the artifacts as well. Hence, Muswazi and Nhamo (2013b) add that using videos and tapes help the researcher to make sure that the information directly targets the research topic since I collected data related to

oral communication, it was necessary to have more time to go over and listen to it more than once. Finally, it is worth mentioning that these instruments were piloted with eleventh graders from the same school before being implemented with the participants of the study.

Instructional Design

From my personal experience as an EFL teacher, I have realized that developing oral communication in EFL classrooms is challenging for both teachers and students. A current research study carried by the British Council (2015) appears to validate such a view finding that low proficiency is blamed on a lack of practice as to accomplishing communication purposes in the target language by means of the different teaching strategies, methodologies, and materials that EFL teachers use and bring to the classroom. That is why I considered it was quite relevant to develop a pedagogical intervention to provide situations in which students can enhance their oral communication in English. In this section, I define the pedagogical intervention that leads this investigation and its general and specific objectives. In like manner, there is a detailed description of the pedagogical dimensions, theory of nature of language, and language learning and the methodological approach that directs the pedagogical intervention. Then I describe the connection of the pedagogical strategy with the research question to end up with the explanation of each of the instructional phases and the criteria used for the selection of the topics included in the pedagogical intervention.

Pedagogical intervention. Following the purpose of this investigation, I developed two workshops characterized by being focused on students' local problematic situations; that is to say, problems that they mainly face in their daily basis especially, at their school. Besides, all the activities planned for each workshop were totally framed within Problem-based Learning and the second language acquisition principles. The pedagogical intervention, because of its design,

offers students a variety of engaging, relevant, and contextualized situations for them to enhance oral communication inside and outside the classroom.

As suggested by Mackey (1999), interaction in the classroom becomes more meaningful and useful for the learners when there is a focus on PBL approach. It is possible because, in PBL, it is a must for teachers to engage students' interest and practical independence (Newman, 2005). That is to say, it has to raise students' motivation up to the point that they can do research by themselves while the teachers facilitate all the possible resources that allow students to take an active role of exploration and self-discovery; in other words, students self-investment. Thus, it is essential for this pedagogical intervention to take into account students' interest at the time of identifying the problems so that they can feel engaged and highly encouraged in their learning process.

Moreover, the way the workshops were developed intends to guarantee a positive climate for teaching and learning. Krishnan, Gabb and Vale (2011) claim that group work is one of the strongest features in this approach and it helps students to feel comfortable towards the learning materials provided by the teacher. Likewise, Ng Chin Leong (2009) affirms that a theoretical principle of PBL is that learning happens in a social context since it is promoted through interactions in a team setting and it allows students to feel comfortable as well as relaxed. In light of this, it is fundamental that students feel at ease during the pedagogical intervention so that anxiety can be reduced to enhance oral communication.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning what Larsson (2001b) explains about PBL and its relation with the principle of providing opportunities for communicative purposes in L2. He states that PBL has an advantage over other teaching methods in terms of improving communicative skills. It is due to the fact that students must be provided with opportunities to exchange meaning, discuss, and make agreements about the problem. Watson (as cited in

Othman & Shah, 2013, p. 126) supports this idea by adding that using PBL in the classroom gives the students the opportunity to be absorbed by the tasks that enhance their communicative and thinking skills, when trying to find all the possible solutions for the specific situation. As oral communication enhancement is an important element for reaching the main objective of this study, it is meaningful to make sure that all the tasks included in the teaching materials have communicative purposes.

Besides, for students to be fully engaged in their learning process, it is necessary to include important elements such as feedback and assessment. With this in mind, the SLA principles used in this study were: (a) appealing content and presentation, (b) relaxing activities, (c) relevant and engaging activities, (d) self-investment, (e) language use, and (f) feedback along with the PBL's ones, giving a great importance to these two key elements. First, Tomlinson (as cited in Núñez et al., 2009b) included as one of the ESL principles, the opportunities that must be provided for outcome feedback. On the other hand, Barrel (2010) claims that it is a must for PBL users to provide opportunities to obtain pre-formative and summative assessment information; furthermore, he also affirms that the feedback that students receive from their peers and their teacher during the rehearsal is a factor that ensures enjoyment of the learning activities. In fact, it is one of the most important aspects that was taken into account when developing the material since learning with the PBL approach tends to be self-directed. To sum up, these two end up being the main sources that students had to know and control their process.

Instructional objectives. Implementing a pedagogical intervention implies setting objectives. The main instructional one was to design and implement contextualized material based on problem-based learning to enhance tenth graders' oral communicative performances in an EFL setting. In order to reach this objective, it was necessary to set two specific ones. The first specific objective was to familiarize students with Problem-based Learning principles which will

assist them in group interactions. The second specific objective was to assess how the principles of problem-based Learning help to generate speaking spaces in the English classroom.

Intervention as innovation. Innovation is a term that depends upon people's different perceptions. For this reason, in order to explain why the pedagogical intervention, developed for this research study is innovative, it is relevant to go over a definition that explains what innovation implies for the educational field. It says that innovation is a:

(One) set of ideas, processes and strategies, more or less systematized by which it is to introduce and bring about changes in current educational practices. The Innovation is not a specific activity but a process, a long trip or journey that stops to contemplate life in the classroom, organizing centers, dynamics educational community and the professional culture of teachers. Its purpose is to alter the current reality, changing conceptions and attitudes, altering methods and interventions and improving or transforming, as appropriate, the teaching and learning. Innovation, therefore, is associated with the change and has a component - explicit or ideological, cognitive, ethical and affective hidden. Because innovation appeals to subjectivity of the subject and the development of their individuality, as well as relations theory practice inherent in the educational act. (Cañal de León, as cited in Arias, 2002, p. 3)

According to what the author mentions in the previous quote about innovation and the possibility it offers to alter the current reality through a process of changes, it is possible to affirm that this pedagogical intervention was innovative taking into consideration that the main instructional objective targeted was to bring a new approach to the classroom to change students' conceptions and attitudes towards communicating orally in English. Plus, Nuñez et al. (2012) state that "innovation has a major role in MD and that teacher developed materials can be seen as an innovative practice in the EFL classroom"(p. 24). Thus, this materials development and

implementation intended to transform my teaching practice since I had never used Problem-based Learning as an approach for teaching language; as well, it has led me to reflect on my teaching practice and my students' way of learning which Núñez, Téllez and Castellanos (2017) consider essential for a teacher to start making changes and implementing innovations as to methodology and materials. What is more, it is significant to mention that in Colombia, there are not many studies about developed material, focused on Problem Based Learning that enhances oral communication in an EFL classroom. Besides, it is the first time that this approach is used at Santa Clara School.

Equally important, the intervention matched some characteristics of innovation given by Fraser (2007): (a) It has a strong moral purpose; and at the same time, it is focused on students' needs and aspirations because it permits them to look for possible solutions to problems that affect their lives at school; (b) As previously mentioned, it is part of a research study whose research design is focused on action research, which implies a process by which evidence must be taken and analyzed to ensure and guide decision making and improvement. Finally, it helped me to improve my teaching practice due to the change of methodology and the pedagogical materials used which were new for me and my students.

Theory of the nature of language and language learning. The theory of nature of language that best meets this pedagogical intervention is the functional perspective. According to Hymes (as cited in Tudor, 2001), this vision is based on students' ability to do something with the language. Besides, it focuses on the real use of language to attain functional purposes; in this case, problem solving. Under these underpinnings, the aim of the pedagogical intervention was to provide them with ill-structured problems to use English to propose possible solutions for social matters. In this specific instance, the process of decision making is demanding because language becomes crucial for reaching the objectives of each workshop.

Further, the vision that best meets my pedagogical intervention, in terms of language learning, is experiential learning. It meets this intervention since it highlights direct experience of the language for communicative purposes. It also advocates two important issues: (a) learning by doing and (b) experience in context that highly matches the language teaching and learning approach selected for the intervention (Tudor, 2001). Indeed, the fact that the pedagogical material developed for this intervention is based on contextualization makes this vision stronger all along the workshops.

Methodological approach underlying the pedagogical intervention. Problem-based Learning (PBL) is the approach that underlies this pedagogical intervention. Although this approach is not officially considered as one of the language teaching approaches, research in PBL in English language teaching has shown that this approach has its merits since it gets students ready for the real world and provides students with real situations where they can accomplish communicative purposes (Hung, Jonassen, & Liu, 2008).

In addition, cooperative learning is a teaching strategy that is framed within Problem-based Learning. Smith and Macgregor (1992) affirm that cooperative learning is an umbrella term for a variety of educational approaches involving joint intellectual effort by students, or students and teachers together. Usually, students are working in groups of two or more, mutually searching for understanding, solutions, or meanings, or creating a product. Collaborative learning activities vary widely, but most center on students' exploration or application of the course material, not simply the teacher's presentation or explication of it (p. 1).

This could be just summarized by saying that when there is a sense of community in the classroom, students feel more comfortable to work without hesitation, and with more possibilities

to perform better. After all, Problem-based Learning, as methodological approach, benefits oral communication in the classroom because of its features and flexibility as it benefits from teaching strategies such as cooperative learning.

Connection of the pedagogical intervention with the research question. The aim of this research study was to answer the research question. Thus, the pedagogical intervention included the theoretical principles regarding the PBL approach as well as oral communication to describe how it helped students enhance their communication in English. In addition, all the activities planned allowed students to speak to solve problematic situations related to their own realities. According to Richards (2005), there are different factors that need to be carefully taken into account when developing instructional materials. These factors are mainly about teachers and students' background plus the incidence of the context in which the teaching situation happens. In this way, the pedagogical intervention directly connects with the research questions due to the importance given to the context and its role in the materials developed.

Suggested instructional phases. The materials development framework that I used to develop the pedagogical intervention is based on the systematic stages proposed by Núñez, et al.,(2017b). These stages are (a) conducting the needs assessment, (b) identifying the method or approach, (c) stating the objectives of the lessons, (d) selecting and organizing the contents, (e) and assessing, reflecting and adjusting. Taking into consideration these stages provided above and the ones PBL provides for the development of the lessons. I used the instructional phases presented and described along the following lines.

Diagnosis. A survey was conducted to gather data about the problems student considered important and necessary to work out. Besides, students answered some questions about their feelings towards communicating orally in English. Also, students had to fill out a questionnaire developed in Google Forms in which problematic situations were depicted in order for them to

decide upon what extent they are problems. This was useful for the teacher researcher to establish the criteria for the selection of the problems. Thus, it grounded the work on knowing about the principles underlying PBL.

Meeting Problem Based Learning. In this stage, I adapted a workshop about how Problem Based Learning works in the classroom. During this phase, students made up the corresponding groups to start solving problems; also, they were involved in collaborative work and they needed to become familiar with the technological aids that were going to be used during the implementation of the workshops. Besides, they were asked to sign the consent form to have the authorization that allowed them be part of this study.

Inquiry within. In this phase, I explained how the workshops would be implemented in the classroom. In this part, it was important to clarify that students had plenty of opportunities to provide peer-assessment as well as being provided with teacher's feedback during each of the sub-stages stated below:

Meeting the problem. In this first sub-phase, students were introduced to the problem. In all the workshops, students had the opportunity to read and watch a video of the problem. Plus, they could work in some activities to make sure they understood what the problem was about.

Looking inside the problem. During this second sub-phase, students started identifying possible factors related to the problem. Especially, they needed to identify what they knew about the problem and what they needed to know to create a possible solution through the use of different learning strategies.

Working out the problem. This is the most impacting moment of the implementation because students, after collecting data, were involved in a decision making process to make agreements within the teams to start designing a formal proposal for solving the problem. It was

paramount to mention that some technological devices were used by students to present their final proposals for solving the problem.

Classroom assembly (assessment). During this assembly, students shared their possible solutions to generate a space for reflection, and lastly they decided on the best option.

Taste for change. In this stage, the final results of the work done during the sessions were socialized. The most important reason why this phase was included in this framework was to assess the effectiveness of the pedagogical intervention as well as providing feedback on strengths and specifics aspect that needed to be improved in future sessions.

Sample of workshop: The material I designed consisted of two workshops that showed the procedures students needed to go through during the pedagogical intervention in this study.

FIRST ALERT

**ARE YOU
DOWN OR DONE
WITH WITH
HOMEWORK**

WORKSHOP 2

At the end of this lesson, I will orally provide alternative solutions for the role of homework at Santa Clara School.

Developed by Alberto Barrero

1

Are you down or done with homework?

Meeting The Problem

1

Some students from Santa Clara school have been asked the following question: *what don't you like about school?* If you want to know their answers, pay close attention to the video:



Learning strategy: Imagery



Read the text below

Since some time ago, it is very common to hear in the teachers' meeting about the messages sent by the parents complaining about the amount of homework that is assigned daily in the school.

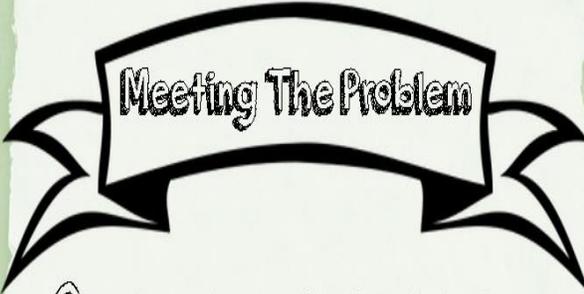
According to the messages of the parents, students are spending too much time developing tasks that are assigned by teachers of the different subjects. In addition, they argue that because of this, their children are losing the opportunity to develop activities, which according to their age, are essential for their physical and emotional growth.

Despite the solutions provided by teachers and the academic committee, parents and the students have continued to complain about this same affair. Thus, this is the opportunity for you as students to take part of the matter; investigating and proposing alternative solutions to improve your well-being and the educational quality of the school.

Do you accept the challenge?

I'M IN _____ I'M OUT _____

Are you down or done with homework?



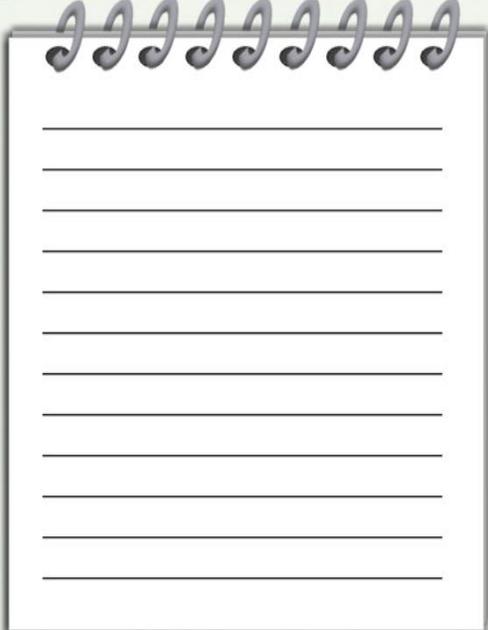
Meeting The Problem

2 It's time to write! Let's write a short reflection of your perspective about homework. Add your best and worst memories doing homework !



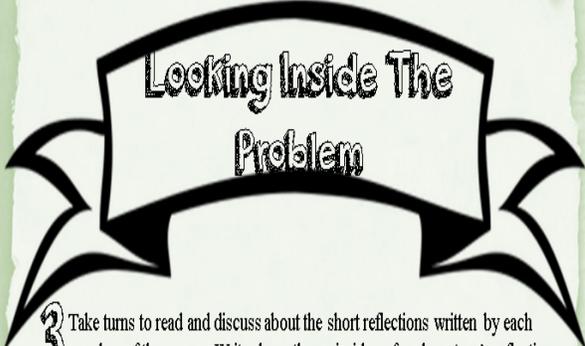


Learning strategy: Activate background knowledge



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Are you down or done with homework?



Looking Inside The Problem

3 Take turns to read and discuss about the short reflections written by each member of the group. Write down the main idea of each partner's reflection.



Learning Strategy: Becoming aware of others thoughts and feelings.

Name	Main idea

4 After listening to each of the reflections and identifying the main ideas, discuss about the opinions and the way you feel towards homework in every class. Don't forget to record your discussion in the Whatsapp group.



Language Key Box

Agreeing
I agree with you...
I think that's right
Well, maybe

Disagreeing
I don't agree with you...
I don't think that's right
I'm not sure

Giving your opinion
I think that...
It seems to me that...
In my experience...

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Are you down or done with homework?

Looking Inside The Problem

5 It is time to organize the information you know about the problem

What do we know about the problem?

- Discuss and complete the checklist with the information you **already know** about the problem

Checklist

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

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Are you down or done with homework?

Looking Inside The Problem

What do we need know about the problem?

- Discuss and fill each sticky note with the information you think you **need** to know about the problem.



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Are you down or done with homework?



Work plan

6 Making and following a plan are the most important steps to understand and get into the problem. As a team, answer the questions and assign specific tasks that will help you gather the information you need to work the problem out.



Learning strategy: Setting goals and objectives

Where can you get the information? Whom can you get information from?

What types of materials are you required to use?

List the main concepts you need to know to solve the problem. *Suggested concepts and topics (Homework, interview, how to make questions for an interview, tasks, assignments)*

7

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Are you down or done with homework?

Assigning tasks

Leader	Social Media Manager	English Supervisor

Reporter	Recorder

8

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Are you down or done with homework?

7 It's time to search for information on the Internet! Take a look at the useful Google search tips and use them to gather all what you need! Don't forget to register everything you found on your notebook.



Learning strategy: Searching for information



Specific Phrase : Use quotation marks to search for a specific phrase.
Example: *"advantages of doing homework"*

Specific Document Type : This is a great technique if you want to search for a particular document type.
Example: *"advantages of doing homework" filetype:PPT*

Word Definitions : If you want to find the meaning of a Word, you can use the define command.
Example: *Define: advantages of doing homework*

8 Work as a team and share all the information you gathered. Use the language key box to help you. Besides, create a mind map with the most important information you gathered and turn it in at the end of the session.

Language Key Box

Oral communication self-assessment checklist

✓ Check yes or no according to your performance.

- ♥ Did I orally communicate my ideas in English. Yes No
- ♥ Write a number from 1 to 5, being 5 the most satisfactory level about your oral communication in the group during this activity. _____

Expressing surprise
I had no idea.
That's amazing!
I didn't know it.
I don't believe it.
You really found that?

LET'S TALK

Are you down or done with homework?



Shared Reading!

9 Read the articles: Down with homework and Homework: why is it important? They will provide you with more information about the matter.



Learning strategy: Working as a team

Description of the activity:

A team member reads the first paragraph to the rest of the classmates, one of them must explain what his / her partner has just read and make a summary, the others must say if what the second has said is correct or not and complete in case it is not correct. The student who does the summary takes the reading turn and repeats the same sequence until the readings are finished.



Record the activity and send the audio through the WhatsApp Group!

Are you down or done with homework?

Time to interview!

10 Work as a team to create an interview. The objective of this task is to get to know the perceptions of the schoolmembers (coordinators, teachers, parents, and students). Video record the interviews.



Learning strategy: Cooperating with proficient users of new language.



Use the templates delivered by the teacher to develop your interviews

11 Share the information that every member of the group gathered during this phase in a round table. Make sure you have evidence to support your findings.



Learning strategy: Practicing naturalistically

LET'S TALK



11

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Are you down or done with homework?

Research Outline

Possible solution 1

Causes

Possible solution 2

Pros 1

Problem

Pros 2

Cons 1

Cons 2

Final solution: Reasons to choose it and conclusions

12

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Are you down or done with homework?

A documentary is a video based on facts used to talk about a certain topic.

12 Create a documentary to display your alternative proposal to solve the problem about homework at Santa Clara School.

All the members of the group should...

- ✓ Introduce themselves and describe their role during the lesson
- ✓ Participate actively during the documentary
- ✓ Follow the instructions of the rubric delivered by the teacher.

Oral communication self-assessment checklist

✓ Check yes or no according to your performance.

Yes No

♥ Did I orally communicate my ideas in English.

♥ Write a number from 1 to 5, being 5 the most satisfactory level about your oral communication in the group during this activity. _____

Attention!
The documentary must have subtitles in English!!

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Are you down or done with homework?

Learning strategy: Self-evaluating

Peer Assessment!!!

11 Watch each of the documentaries that include some of the possible solutions for the problem and fill the following rubric form according to what you see. After each group intervention, you have to provide some comments about the work done, use the language key box to help you.

Rubric instructions

✓ Read the item below and circle a number from 1 to 5, being 1 the least satisfactory and 5 the most satisfactory grade.

Item

Is it a good proposal for solving revising the sense of love and friendship day at Santa Clara school ?

Team	Score	Do you agree?		Comments
1.	1-2-3-4-5	👍	👎	
2.	1-2-3-4-5	👍	👎	
3.	1-2-3-4-5	👍	👎	
4.	1-2-3-4-5	👍	👎	
5.	1-2-3-4-5	👍	👎	

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Are you down or done with homework?

My worksheet... Mi guía...	It does	It can be better	Comments
Offers a variety of oral communication tasks. Ofrece una variedad de tareas de comunicación oral.			
Has an appealing design and looks interesting. Tiene un diseño atractivo y se ve interesante.			
Contains variety of activities that capture my attention and helps me stay focused at work. Contiene variedad de actividades que logran captar mi atención y me mantiene concentrado en el trabajo			
Contains relevant issues for me and my classmates. Contiene temas relevantes para mí y para mis compañeros de clase.			
Allows me to be responsible of my own learning. Me permite ser responsable de mi propio aprendizaje.			
Allows me to get formative/motivational feedback from my own and my classmates. Me permite obtener retroalimentación formativa/motivacional de mí mismo y mis compañeros de clase.			
Contextualized settings in the materials....	It does	It can be better	Comments
Give me opportunities to experience and use the language to interact in real situations. Me da oportunidades para experimentar usar el idioma e interactuar en situaciones reales.			
Help me to get more involved and committed in the activities. Me ayuda a estar más involucrado y comprometido en las actividades.			
To develop my oral communication... Para desarrollar mi comunicación oral...	It does	It can be better	Comments

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To develop my oral communication... Para desarrollar mi comunicación oral...	It does	It can be better	Comments
I accomplish the communicative functions according to the situation, participants, and goals. Logro funciones comunicativas acordes con la situación, participantes y metas.			
I use courteous language; respectfully agree or disagree. Uso lenguaje cortés; respetuosamente expreso cuando estoy de acuerdo o no.			
I use different sociolinguistic features in face to face conversations such as: interrupting and discourse markers. Utilizo diferentes características sociolingüísticas en conversaciones cara a cara tales como: la interrupción y los marcadores del discurso			
Problem based learning... El Aprendizaje basado en problemas....	It does	It can be better	Comments
Helps me to participate actively in each of the phases of the lesson. Me ayuda a participar activamente en cada una de las fases de la lección.			
Allows me to interact in English with the members of my group. Me permite interactuar en inglés con los miembros de mi grupo			
Helps me to share ideas that help the team improve its work. Me ayuda a compartir ideas que ayudan al equipo a mejorar su trabajo			
Allows me to find a possible solutions to problems related to my school and its students. Me ayuda a encontrar posibles soluciones a los problemas relacionados con mi escuela y sus estudiantes			

16

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This chapter described in detail the theoretical foundation of the research and instructional design of the pedagogical intervention that was proposed in the research question.

Chapter IV

Data Analysis

Data Analysis Procedure

In this chapter, I describe the process of data gathering during the implementation explained in the previous chapters as well as the stages for its analysis. Then, I present the research categories and subcategories that emerged from the data and how they are interrelated with the research question and the objectives of this study.

To begin with, it is imperative to recall how I gathered the data during the implementation. I designed two workshops framed within the principles of Problem-based Learning with the aim of enhancing oral communication in the EFL classroom. The intervention took about five months, working four hours a week and sometimes the sessions were interrupted by cultural events at school. As stated in Chapter III, I used three different instruments to collect the data: surveys, teacher's journal, and students' artifacts.

The data gathering started even before the implementation of the materials since I designed and applied an entry survey to obtain the perceptions of the students regarding information related to the three constructs that compose the research question which were contextualized materials, Problem-based Learning and oral communication. After that, I used the color-coding technique to organize the notes I took in my journal every session. Additionally, the workshops were collected at the end of every week as they contained specific tasks aiming at developing oral communication. Besides, these materials contained a self-assessment related to students' collaborative performances. Finally, I conducted an exit survey where students reflected on how the pedagogical intervention enhanced their oral communication in English.

After collecting the data, I started its analysis by doing two exercises known as first and second-cut analyses that are framed within the Grounded Theory. I considered the Grounded

Theory as the appropriate method to analyze the data of this research since Freeman (1998) describes it as “a way of seeing what is in the data” (p. 82), to generate theory that supports my research question and deciding upon the categories and subcategories. Besides, I chose the Grounded Theory because one of its components according to Glaser and Strauss (1967) is to construct analytic codes and categories from the data, not from preconceived logically deduced hypotheses. Indeed, this process helped me to review the information so that I could see what was in it to continue to identify patterns and group the information according to the research aims.

While reviewing the data, it is highly recommended to avoid imposing the researchers' ideas but letting the data show what is pertinent to address the research question and the objectives. Thus, the first-cut analysis helped me to organize the data, establish patterns, and identify possible categories. In the second phase of the analysis, I reduced the data and for doing so it was necessary to employ a triangulation method known as methodological triangulation that consists of using more than one source to gather the data so that they can be compared to obtain more reliability in the findings of the study (Denzin, 1970). Following this further, the findings of the triangulation derived from the analysis of the data gathered with the three different data-collection instruments, which helped me to come up with the research categories and subcategories further explained in the next sub-heading.

Research Categories

Having explained the process of analyzing the data gathered, I proceed to describe the categories and subcategories as shown in the following table:

Table 1. categories and subcategories

Research question	Research categories	Research subcategories
How do the development and implementation of contextualized materials, focused on problem-based learning, enhance oral communication among tenth graders in an EFL classroom?	Contextualized Materials: An Opportunity to Solve Real Life Issues.	Using English to talk about relevant situations
		Appealing design and tasks to foster language learning
	Oral Communication: A Collective Process to Provide Alternative Solutions to Problems Posed	Cooperative learning: enhancing oral communication and providing feedback.
		Giving and asking for opinions to make decisions.
		Achieving clear communication in English

Contextualized materials: an opportunity to solve real life issues. This category was established in relation to the research question and the first construct, materials development. This study is focused on contextualized materials and how they enhanced students’ oral communication focused on real life issues. In this regard, Núñez et al (2015) affirm that contextualized materials are valuable because they become effective resources in responding to the students’ needs. Also, the different learning experiences that these materials offer, allow the students to improve linguistic interaction that turns out to be cultural exchanges among humans (Nuñez et al, 2013). In view of that, this research category analyzes the interactions that students achieved through the different learning experiences offered in the materials I developed.

Thus, the first subcategory is related to the opportunities students had to discuss about real situations such as: the celebration of love and friendship day and how they felt in regards to the role of homework at school. In addition, it is worth mentioning that the Second Language Acquisition principles were the basis for the development of the materials. During the implementation, the students had the chance to interact with the workshops and discover class by class the activities, learning strategies and assessment these contained. The second subcategory is

based on the design of the workshops, the technological tools included, and the opportunities these offered for students to give and receive feedback.

Using English to talk about relevant situations. This subcategory helps answer the research question since it considers the methodological principles that framed the development and implementation of the workshops. These were designed using Problem Based Learning which allowed me to create activities centered on my students' interests; in this case, the problems they had previously identified which were relevant for them. In accordance with Duch, Groh, & Allen (2001), the problems that are rooted in real world situations are used to encourage students in the process of seeking the best motivation to share and interact with their peers while doing research: identifying the problem, proposing alternative hypothesis, collecting information, analyzing and reflecting on the data to find possible solutions. Undoubtedly, this is a set of opportunities that offer pupils to experience, get involved, and talk about real situations inside the classroom. Hence, I could observe in the data gathered that students found it really comforting to remember and express different feelings related to previous experiences in their lives, as it is shown in the following excerpts from the teacher's journal:

Two students, **S6** and **S10**, were really touched by the activity about friendship memories, when I approached the group and joined the discussion, one of them started to cry because she brought some memories of an old friend, the other one also cried because her best friend had died. [*sic*]
(**Teacher's journal, March 16th, 2017**)

As can be appreciated in the sample above, the students, talked about an experience they had had with their best friend. Through this activity they were encouraged to share important memories that had marked their lives. What caught my attention was that students were able to share their feelings even when they were using English, and this evidences that through linguistic interactions students can create cultural and social exchanges. What is more, during the activities

provided in the first workshop, they were committed and comfortable communicating their experiences in English as it is documented in the following sample:

Students seem to be happy of working in groups, they show confidence talking about friendship, they are speaking in English with ease. [*sic*] (**Teacher's journal, March 16th, 2017**)

According to Oldfather (1995), many studies have found that students may improve academically and socially interacting when their teachers structure the classes in ways in which their voices are important in the development of the curriculum. Thus, the excerpt shows how I could see the students being happy and confident talking in English about a topic chosen by themselves.

Following this further, a feature that stands out in this subcategory is that the students value their chance to be heard and be participants of relevant topics that concern their lives at school. This is evidenced in the excerpt below that shows how students considered important to let the teachers know what they thought about homework.

While discussing about experiences with homework S3 asked me: "what if other teachers hear what we say about homework, we will lose, right? I replied: "No, way" S3: "anyway, I have always hate homework and they have to know"[*sic*] (**Teacher's journal, August 10th, 2017**)

In line with these observations, students mentioned that they found the activities offered in the workshops suitable for their needs in class since they were different from the traditional English classes they had had before. For example, figure 1 shows that in the entry-survey (question number 8), when students were asked if their English classes could be more interesting, 10 of them answered usually and seven sometimes. This evidences the need that students have to receive more interesting classes.

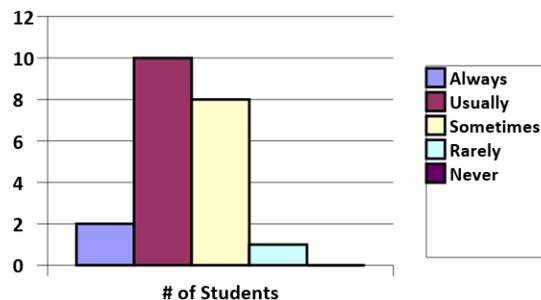


Figure 1. entry survey.

Besides, almost all of the students were engaged with the activities designed in the workshops since they had never done this in an English class, as shown in the following transcription:

S1 talking to S4: “¿por qué hacemos esto en la clase de inglés?” S4: “No sé, pero es más chévere” [sic] (Teacher’s journal, August 17th, 2017)

These type of perceptions at the beginning of each workshop made the rest of the intervention more interesting and challenging for the students due to the opportunities they had to share their thoughts and experiences about something they considered as a problem. Another evidence of how the content of the workshops provided them with spaces for talking about real situations is found in the exit survey:

To the question: How did Problem based learning principles in the workshops help you to communicate your ideas and opinions in English? S11 replied: “PBL help me to see me involved in a topic, thinking in English, and learning more vocabulary to now with that knowledge express the ideas of that” [sic] (Exit Survey, October 6th, 2017).

To the question: How did the workshops help you to give your opinions and make important decisions? S1 replied: “In every activity we needed to give an opinion, and it helps us to get better and more confident” and S2: “Con los esquemas que se planteaban se abría la posibilidad de expresar nuestras opiniones y escoger la información más relevante para solucionar el problema” [sic] (Exit Survey, October 6th, 2017)

The students expressed the usefulness of the materials content and tasks by mentioning that PBL allowed them to speak about the topics; also, the consistency of the tasks demanded

them to speak in English more frequently and be more confident. One more important aspect mentioned by S2 was that the materials offered graphic organizers that helped them to get involved with the tasks and to communicate using English as a foreign language. Moreover, the fact that every activity demanded them to think, give opinions, record their thoughts, and share in groups, definitely fostered oral communication inside the classroom. In this regard, Brumfit (n.d) (as cited in Johnson & Morrow, 1986, p.48) claims that pupils in the foreign language classroom should frequently be exposed to the target language and should be given many moments to use the language. In this study, these were provided through the contextualized materials created specifically for them. This is shown in the artifacts below:

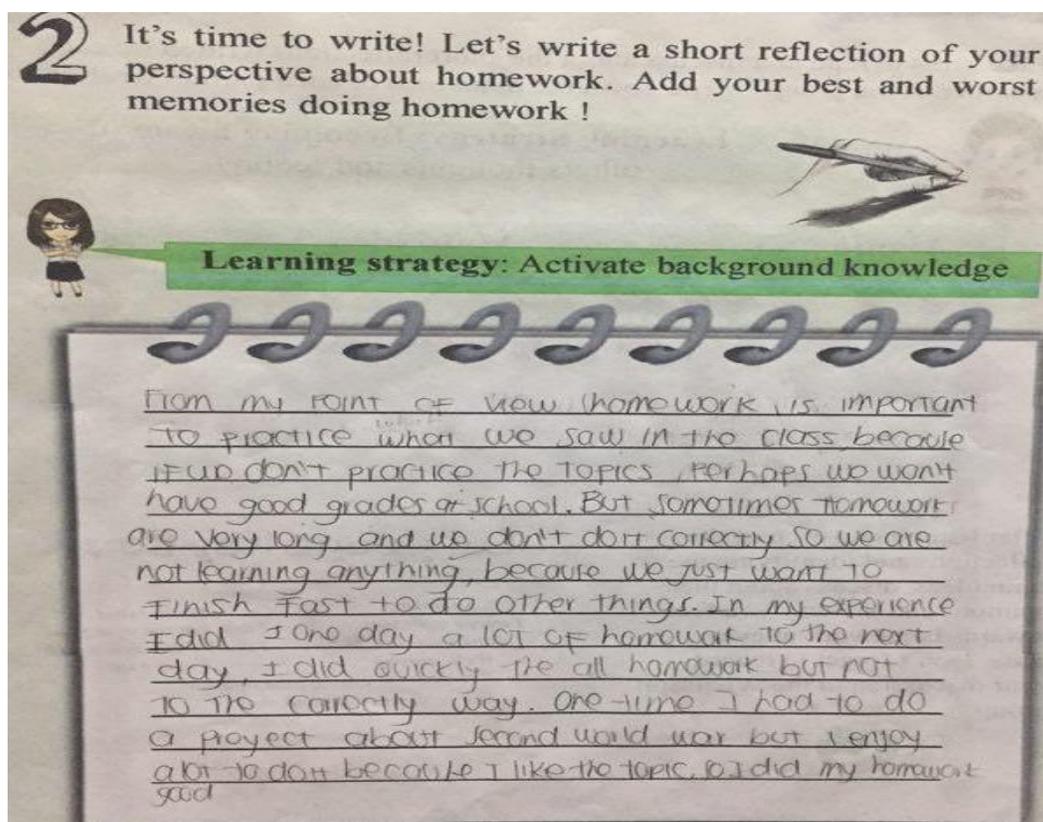


Figure 2. Artifact. workshop N° 2.

In figure 2, the task proposed in the material intended to activate students' background knowledge about homework, students had to write a reflection including anecdotes with it. The

artifact shows that the students considered homework as an important element in the classroom as long as it is based on interesting topics. Hence, the information depicted in the artifact demonstrates that exposing students to use the target language in scenarios that are familiar to them is beneficial for their language learning since the task in the sample required them to write in English about a familiar topic. Nevertheless, it is necessary to add that after writing the reflections, the students had a space for sharing and discussing about them to make learning more meaningful and enhance communication in English.

On the other hand, figure 3 shows a task that invited students to reflect about good and bad qualities of their friends and to remember the best experience celebrating the day of friendship and love. Drawing the picture that represented their best friends was an appropriate opening for the task because as the sample shows, the students shared their perceptions about friends; this student drew a heart divided into two parts representing the importance of that friendship. What is more, the students could recall the characteristics of good friends, and the student in the sample considered a good friend as a person who gives good pieces of advice that made me think of the importance of communication in friendships too. In this way, students could communicate with their classmates using English as the target language and to talk about their experiences and real situations.

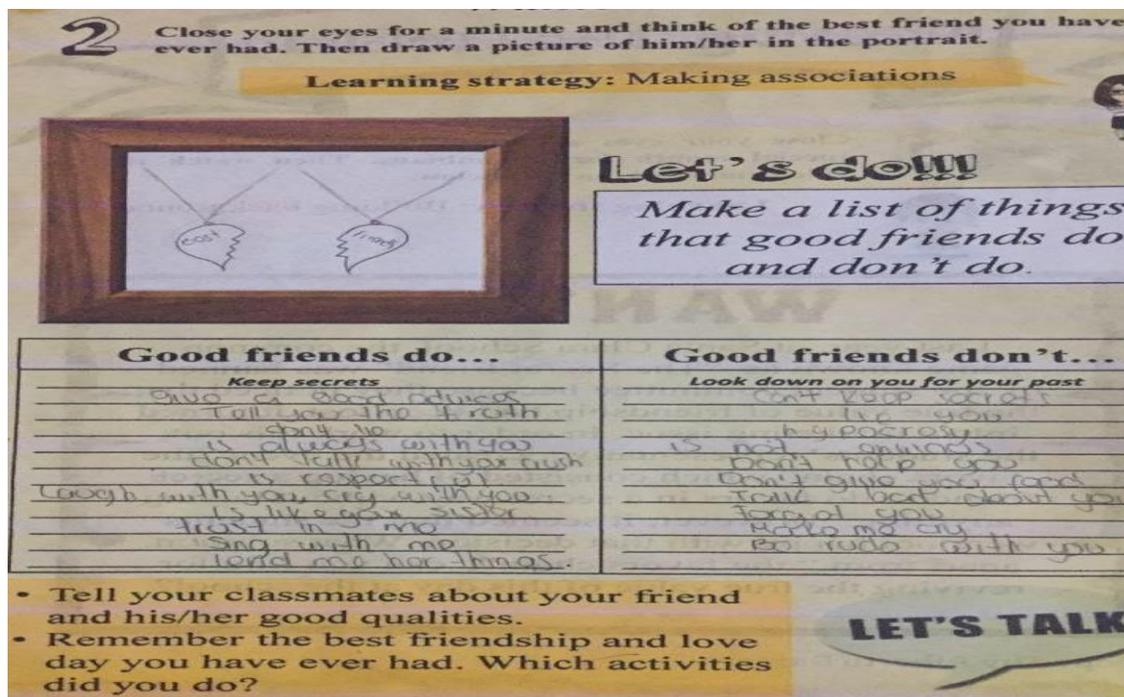


Figure 3. Artifact. workshop N° 1.

To sum up, this subcategory described some samples, retrieved from the instruments used in the data gathering, which evidenced the way in which the methodological principles of Problem Based Learning used in the design of the materials helped students find situations and tasks that demanded them to use English while being involved in different contextualized interesting topics.

Appealing design and tasks to foster language learning. This subcategory evidences the way in which the materials caught students' attention because of their design and well-structured tasks. Hasmiati, Harianto, Atmowardoyo, & Dollah (2015) affirm that the materials which are designed by teachers are more fitting to students' needs, and they also catch more students' attention than commercial resources. When achieving any communicative purpose in class, the design of the materials is paramount to promote participation and interaction; in addition, attractive resources end up having impact on students' attitude towards learning and

interacting (Tomlinson, 1998). This aspect is evidenced in the samples taken from the teacher's journal and the exit survey:

The first impression my students had when they saw the materials was really inspiring, I heard comments such as: "Profe, ¿tu hiciste esto?", "¿cómo los diseñaste?" When I replied to their questions that I was the one who made the workshops for them, they felt really committed and interested in knowing what they included within". [sic] (**Teacher's journal, March 6th, 2017**)

An important aspect to consider in the analysis of the previous sample is the economical context of the students. It refers to the capacity that their parents have to buy any type of textbooks, with amazing designs and contents. For this reason, the students were taken aback when they realized that the materials they were holding were made and designed by their teacher. Undoubtedly, they showed a lot of interest and took care of the materials given. As a result, it converges with the above mentioned affirmation by Hasmiati et al., (2015), who says that material made by teachers are more interesting and appealing for the students. In addition, the following sample, demonstrates the opinions of the student in regards to the materials:

To the question: What is your opinion about the design of the materials designed by your teacher? **S2** replied: "In my opinion the designs are great, and are interesting because not all the teachers spend time doing things like this. " **S6**: "In my opinion, the guide was very well designed and attractive to the eye because of the colors chosen." [sic] (**Exit Survey, October 6th, 2017**).

The students demonstrated their like for the materials designed by stating that not all the teachers spend time creating materials for the class and that the guides were attractive and appealing. The fact that students highlighted the work done by their teacher is grateful and inspires to continue making materials for them since teachers can address students learning needs due to the close relation teacher-student that is created every day in the classroom. On the other hand, including technological tools such as WhatsApp in the workshops seemed to be a great advantage for motivating students in their oral participation. Regarding WhatsApp use in the school, Bouhnik and Deshen (2014) concluded that "the dialogue between students, whether spontaneous or directed by the teachers, creates an atmosphere of cooperation, solidarity, and

coming together to solve problems and deal with challenges” (p. 229). The following excerpts from the three instruments indicate the way students described and used the different tasks provided in the workshops.

I could see the commitment in the first homework I assigned my students, it was about recording themselves explaining the role in the group, and all of them did the homework. They also loved the idea of bringing phones to class and looked very committed, involved and concentrated during the recording of the discussion in class. [sic] (**Teacher’s journal, March 15th, 2017**).

The excerpt above is related to the first homework assigned in the materials; specifically, workshop 1. The students were motivated by the use of WhatsApp to record their homework; they created a group and brought the phones to class. As they were not allowed, in all of the classes, to take out their phones, this time was an opportunity to demonstrate that they could use them for academic purposes. Indeed, they did it and were committed and involved during all the tasks with the resources suggested to achieve the learning objective.

Following this further, there were other resources included in the workshops that students highlighted as it is observed in the following excerpt:

To the question: What is your opinion about the activities proposed such as: Whatsapp groups, documentaries, graphic organizers, etc.? **S1** replied: “I like the idea of Whatsapp groups and graphic organizers, because one helps to communicate easily and the other to organize information in a way that we can understand it” **S2** added: “los esquemas y lecturas también me han gustado porque conocemos más información con respecto al tema y se organizan en ideas por medio de un esquema, muy útil” “I have also liked the diagrams and readings because we know more information about the subject and are organized into ideas through a scheme, very useful” [sic] (**Exit Survey, October 6th, 2017**).

They expressed their pleasantness towards the tasks where they had to use WhatsApp and the different graphic organizers stating that the first helped them to communicate easily and the second to organize the ideas. Regarding graphic organizers, Sommers (2015) assured that they: “help students to sort out ideas and facts, and in this they can be extremely useful as they make information visible and show the relationships and connections among pieces of information” (p.1). In other words, the graphic organizers provided in the workshops not only helped students

to organize their thinking but also their ideas to communicate orally during the class discussions.

Let us consider the next sample that is highly connected to what is being discussed so far:

I realized that the use of graphic organizers and thinking routines helped my students to clarify their thoughts to have a broader perspective of the problem they are solving. Seeing the way, they quickly and easily use the information made me think of using this kind of tasks and activities in my other classes. [*sic*] (Teacher’s journal, September 7th, 2017)

As teacher researcher, I was able to observe the effectiveness of using graphic organizers since they facilitated the way the students organized their ideas during the development of the tasks and as I wrote in the journal this experience motivated me to start thinking about using them more frequently in my classes. The following figures depict the design of some of the graphic organizers that were used by the students during the implementation of the workshops. As it can be seen, figure 4 shows the appealing design of the graphic organizers. The objective of these was to help the students to answer three basic questions: (a) what is the problem? (b) what do we know about the problem? and (c) what do we need to know to solve the problem? To answer these questions students had to discuss and take notes. Plus, the other organizer helped them organize their ideas and assign roles in the groups.

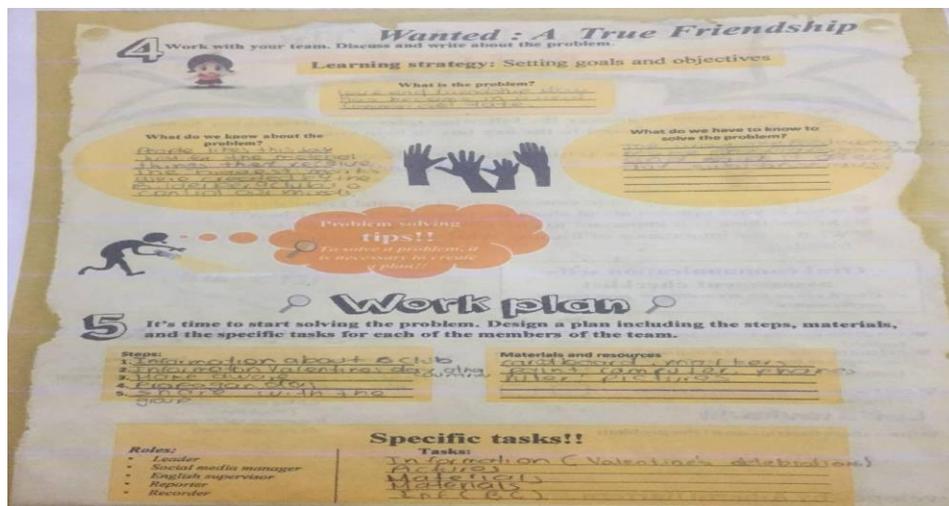


Figure 4. artifact. workshop N° 1

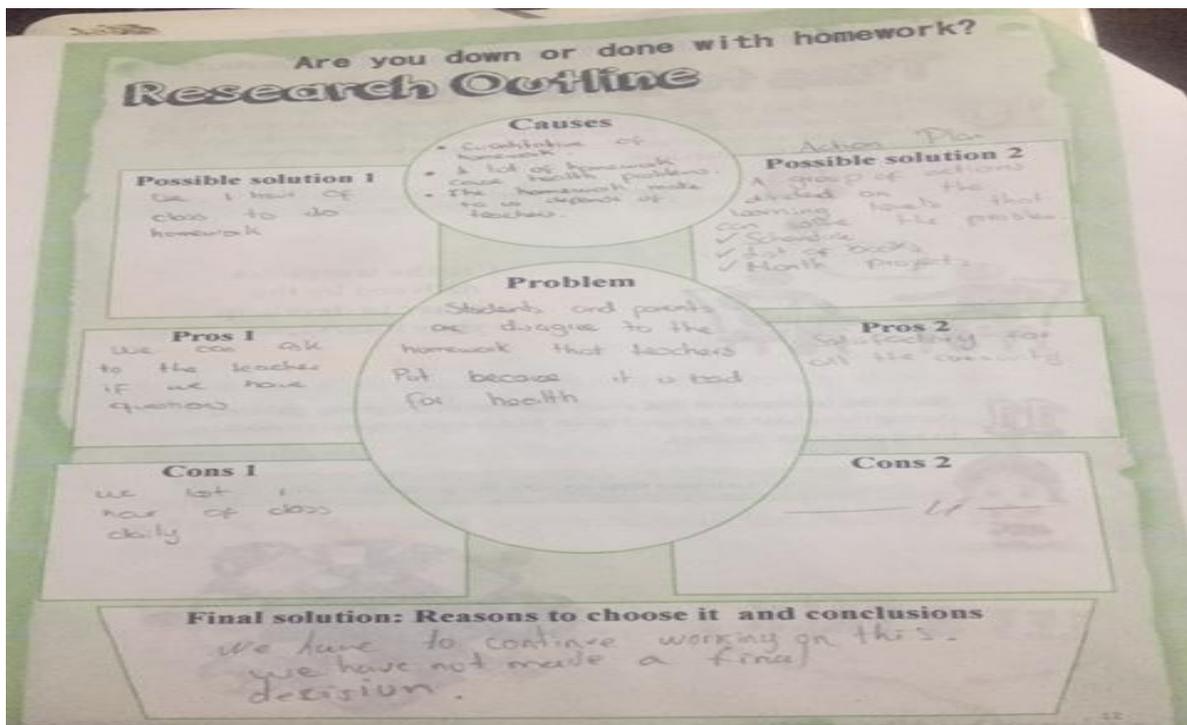


Figure 5. artifact. workshop N° 2.

Nonetheless, figure 5 exemplifies another graphic organizer in which students did a research outline while discussing, giving opinions, and making decisions to find a solution to fix the problem. It is interesting to see how these strategies benefited the students when working together and clarifying ideas that become essential when communicating orally.

As a matter of fact, when it refers to language learning and generating situations for enhancing oral communication in the target language, it is fundamental to provide students with materials characterized by their appealing design and the variety of learning strategies that make them think and perform easily. In sum, these two subcategories give account of how contextualized materials through its content, methodology, and design allowed students to solve problems related to their school life.

Oral communication: a collective process to provide alternative solutions to the problems posed. This category is related to the research question and its three constructs. However, it focuses more on the third construct since it is the main objective of the implementation of the materials, to enhance oral communication. According to Brower and Darrington (2012), expressing our perceptions orally helps to clarify our thoughts and the ones of others; this is essential in problem solving. Moreover, achieving oral communication as a means to understand and provide alternative solutions to the problems posed was of paramount importance in this category since the problems were identified by students, they were situations that affected almost all of them, so communication among them was a requirement to find the most suitable solutions. Thus, this category is divided into three subcategories: *Cooperative learning enhancing oral interactions and feedback, giving opinions and decision making in the classroom*, and *achieving clear communication in English*.

Cooperative learning: enhancing oral communication and feedback. This subcategory entails the way the teacher arranged the classroom to make oral communication more possible during the implementation of the workshops. Being cooperative learning a teaching/learning strategy used within the principles of problem-based learning, it has to be understood as a “successful teaching strategy in which small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject” (Kagan, 1994). Specifically, in this research cooperative learning was the base for assigning roles, developing communicative tasks, solving problems while giving and receiving feedback.

During the first sessions, students found it difficult to adapt to the new way of working in class versus the traditional one they were accustomed to. However, implementing cooperative learning as a means to organize the class seemed to be a great advantage in enhancing pupils’ oral communication. This can be observed in the following transcriptions:

Students loved the idea of working in group although I selected them using my own criteria. Besides, they had some troubles identifying and assigning roles because some said they did not know what they were good at. Nevertheless, some group members made their oral communicative skills effective for assisting the rest of the members to reach the objective of assigning roles and functions in their cooperative group. [*sic*] **(Teachers’ journal, March 6th, 2017)**

The comment remarks how important it was for the students to work in groups because they could correct one another, receive opinions, and ideas from others to reach their personal and collective goals. In addition, it evidences that the members of the groups had specific roles and although they had some problems adapting to working with people they probably had never worked in this way before, they finally could overcome the hindrances and started communicating with each other as it is evidenced in the following excerpt:

Most of the students are involved in putting a name to the group and recording their introductions and corresponding functions in the WhatsApp groups. [*sic*] **(Teacher’s journal, March 9th, 2016)**

This excerpt illustrates that even simple things such as putting a name to a team and going back to the basis in communication by introducing themselves, helped them to forget the possible difficulties they had when starting to work together. Also, these observations led me to think how getting close to others when working in class, involving talking, fosters opportunities to start communicating and expressing simple ideas in the target language. On the other hand, working together towards the same objectives, helped students to be more confident and to talk with less anxiety. This can be evidenced in the following excerpts taken from the entry and exit surveys:

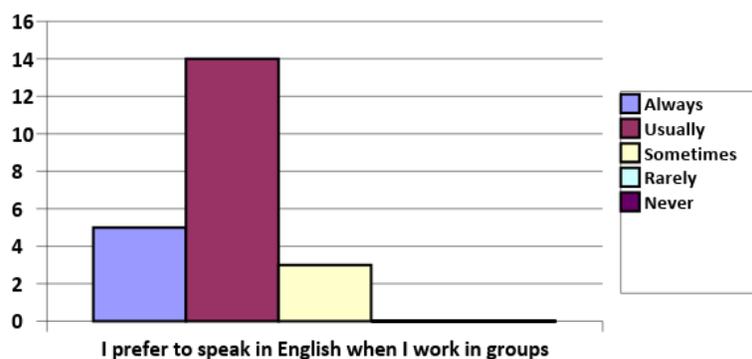


Figure 6. entry survey.

To the question: How does cooperative learning help me to interact with my classmates in English? S5 replied: “Al trabajar en grupo se mejora la relación y comunicación con los compañeros de clase para hacer más efectivo y fácil el trabajo a realizar.” S7 added: “I can speak more in English and I could learn from my classmates”[sic] (**Exit Survey, October 6th, 2017**).

Figure 6 (entry survey) demonstrates that even before the implementation, students thought that working cooperatively was going to help them communicate in English. In the excerpt related to the exit survey S5 mentioned that group work improved her relation and communication with her classmates and S7 said that she could use more English than she used to as well as she could learn from their classmates. In other words, the participants expressed that group work improves the climate of the classroom and highlighted the importance of learning from their peers. In addition, it also helped them to share learning experiences that they had never tried before, that is to say, opportunities to evaluate their own and others’ contributions while working together. In the same way, Lourdusamy and Divaharan (2000) explain that “students engaged in cooperative learning using peer assessment have indicated that they have been encouraged to participate actively and have found it an interesting experience” (p. 83); this is similar to what the participants of this research mentioned while working in class.

The chance of evaluating themselves is definitely a new experience for them, most of them asked me to check if their evaluation was correct. I had to reply: “It is your moment to evaluate your and your classmates’ work, mine will come soon”. I could see that they had some difficulties analyzing their actions in the group. [sic] (**Teacher’s journal, March 30th, 2017**)

Although the first times they did self and peer assessment were difficult, students finally could cope with it and made of it a great and enriching experience. This can be observed in the following excerpt taken from the exit survey:

To the question: What is your opinion about the opportunities to evaluate your and your classmates' work? S4 answered: “Pienso que es de gran importancia crear un hábito de auto críticas constructivas y que nos den la oportunidad de practicarlo es satisfactorio.” S12: “Son buenas oportunidades porque podemos resaltar nuestras habilidades, pero así mismo hacer correcciones entre nosotros para mejorar nuestros errores” "I think it is very important to create a habit of constructive self-criticism, and the fact that it gives us the opportunity to practice is satisfactory." S12: "These are good opportunities because we can highlight

our skills, but also make corrections among us to improve our mistakes.[sic]" (Exit Survey, October 6th, 2017)

In this case, S4 mentioned that it is important to have a space for self-assessment and S12 described them as good opportunities to learn from their own mistakes. In such a way, the participants valued the fact of creating spaces for self and peer-assessment because it helped them to recognize their mistakes and take action to improve; as well, it was a good opportunity to develop their discussion and achieving communication. According to Neiva (2016), "Corrective feedback also occurs when participants have more opportunities to interact; due to the fact that they start building social relationships and feel more confident when giving or receiving feedback" (p. 101). In sum, these answers provided by some participants revealed the way they understood self- assessment and peer-assessment which was essential for the development of the workshops and to keep a high and effective individual and cooperative performance. The opportunities the pupils had to assess their work were really functional since they could see, think, and take action on things that were not allowing them to succeed in the process of solving the problem.

The following artifacts display some of the different templates and opportunities students had to practice giving and receiving feedback:

friends?

Oral communication self-assessment checklist
 ✓ Check yes or no according to your team's performance.

Team	Yes	No
♥ Did all the members of the group talk in English?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
♥ Did the members of the group use the language key box for the answers?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Individual		
♥ Did I orally communicate my ideas in English	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Let's review!!!

Write a short description of the problem

The problem is that the people is thinking more in material things and they are forgetting real friendship

about

Developed by Alberto Barrero

Figure 7. artifact. workshop 1.

This artifact contains one of the blocks included specially, all along both workshops, to provide self-assessment opportunities. Furthermore, the aspects assessed in this checklist demanded the students to discuss and evaluate the group and individual work done so far; as well, there is a little block in the end of the page that permitted them to review and describe the problem with their own voices. Similarly, figure 8 depicts one of the rubrics the participants used to assess their peers' work and contributions while solving the problem. These rubrics were done individually; this implied that every member of the group had to think critically to evaluate him/herself and others.

①
ind

Quick Peer Evaluation Form

Name Time Savers Class Period 2 Date 23/08/17

Write the names of your group members in the numbered boxes. Then, assign yourself a value for each listed attribute. Finally, do the same for each of your group members and total all of the values.

Values: 5=Superior 4=Above Average 3=Average 2=Below Average 1=Weak

Attribute	Myself Juan David	1. Diana H. Munoztor	2. Valentin Ramirez	3. Julia Villanueva	4.
Participated in group discussions.	4	4	4	4	
Helped keep the group on task.	4	3	3	3	
Contributed useful ideas.	3	3	4	4	
How much work was done.	3	4	3	3	
Quality of completed work	4	4	4	4	
Totals	18	18	18	18	

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Figure 8. artifact, assessment rubrics package. Workshop 2.

Definitely, the advantages of using the principles of Problem Based Learning in the design and implementation of the workshops included cooperative learning as a collective process. This allowed addressing the problems in the learning scenarios with group discussions where students were demanded to think and interact with others while making decisions. In this part, the findings show that the result of working constantly in groups allowed students to learn how to support each other, overcoming cultural and personal differences to achieve a goal that concern everyone's interests.

Giving and asking for opinions to make decisions. This subcategory is fundamental since it considers the technique used to communicate inside the cooperative groups. That is, most of the tasks required the students to confront and give their opinions; the discussions that took place made the conversations more dynamic and fluid. In this regard, Prastuti and Novita (2013) argue that “asking opinion is used when someone wants to know about anyone's thought. Giving opinion is used when someone conveys about his thought to others” (p. 2); based on these two features, students achieved communication in their cooperative groups. All the discussions

implied that students had to be ready to express their feelings and opinions, agreeing and disagreeing to create a path for oral communication in the EFL classroom. The excerpts shown below, describe what the teacher-researcher observed regarding giving opinions during the pedagogical intervention.

The students of all the groups could give opinions in a very spontaneous way; however, there were some students that I noticed so quiet and did not want to participate. **(teacher’s journal, March 8, 2017)** 2 weeks later, I realized that the students who were always shy and quiet, now interact and communicate a few times in the group” [sic] **(Teacher’s journal, March 22nd, 2017)**

Seeing students sharing different opinions with ease, using the language key box provided in the workshop generates a propitious space for communication. Also, it made me feel in the right place since this is what EFL teachers dream: a communicative class. [sic] **(Teacher’s journal, August 10th, 2016)**

In the statements above, it is possible to infer that creating a communicative environment in the classroom helps the students with difficulties in oral communication to get accustomed to working in this way. Besides, when I got involved in a group and started being one member more, this allowed me to observe many of their feelings when giving opinions and how their view towards communicating changed all along the implementation, as it was observed in the entry survey, the exit survey and the students’ artifacts below.



Figure 9. entry survey.

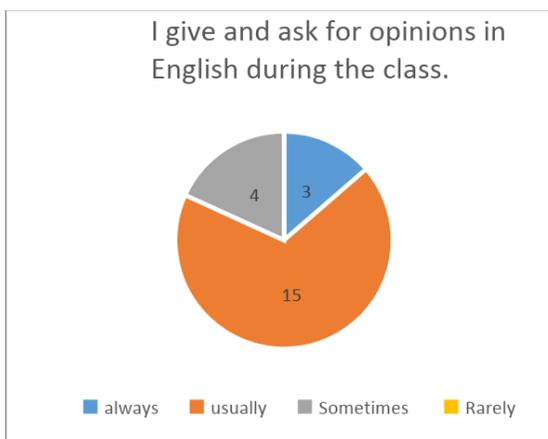


Figure 10. exit survey

For the analysis of figures 9 and 10, it is necessary to compare them based on the results obtained when the pedagogical implementation started until it was completed. Figure 9, portrayed

that most of the students only *sometimes* gave and asked for opinions during the English class; of course, before the implementation of the materials. In contrast, figure 10 evidences that after the implementation most of the students moved from *sometimes* to *usually* regarding and asking for opinions in English. This finding is relevant for the analysis because it confirms that the main objective of this research study was achieved in terms of enhancing oral communication among students.

Another piece of evidence that depicts the improvement is found in the recording stored in the WhatsApp group that every cooperative team had. The following excerpt illustrates the evidences of the conversations and recordings in the WhatsApp groups:

S8:” My opinion about homework is that it is not bad always, sometimes it helps very much, what do you think S9?” S9 replied: “I have always thought that homework is just a waste of time but after reading and thinking well, I think is useful but stressful.” S7 interrupted “ I disagree because homework are not a waste of time because you learn, the more you practice the more you know that is what I think.” [*sic*] (**Artifacts, WhatsApp recordings, Time Savers, April 26rd, 2017**).

The discussion the students were having shows the opinions that the students of the group had in regards to homework; as it is visible, they had different ways of thinking depending on their experiences with this issue. In this task, students could communicate effectively since the conversations were understandable and they kept them going.

In addition, students also expressed how the materials assisted them to enhance oral communication by giving and asking for opinions, and to improve their confidence when communicating with others in English and the excerpt below gives a comprehensive account of this:

To the question: How did the workshops help you to give your opinions and make important decisions? S3. Answered: “Aunque a veces es difícil comunicarse en inglés creo que el taller sirvió para poder expresar nuestras opiniones y generar más confianza a la hora de comunicarnos.” [*sic*] (**Exit Survey, October 6th, 2017**)

Oral communication self-assessment checklist
✓ Check yes or no according to your performance.

♥ Did I orally communicate my ideas in English. Yes No

♥ Write a number from 1 to 5, being 5 the most satisfactory level about your oral communication in the group during this activity. 4

Figure 11. student 3's artifact. workshop 2.

Besides, figure 11 elucidates that students could increase their self-confidence when talking. These findings demonstrate that the research was innovative since nowadays “there is an urgent need for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers to enhance their students’ confidence to help them take part more actively in classroom oral activities” (Nazarova and Umurova, 2016, p.1). In sum, to conclude, the excerpts above show data that reinforces the idea that the workshops and the way they were designed offered various situations for students to improve their communicative skills, especially by giving and asking for opinions.

Achieving clear communication in English. This subcategory highlights the importance of oral communication in the learning process. Many times one hears that the main objective of communication is to transmit and understand a message not keeping in mind the means used to achieve clarity. Nevertheless, Staab (1992) states, “I believe that oral language is important not only as a vital communication tool that empowers us in our daily lives but also as a valuable way to learn” (p. 14). That is to say, oral communication, as a fundamental tool for our daily lives, is developed when there is a learning process implied in achieving so.

Likewise, clear oral communication, in this case, lies on how effective the group discussions were and how they fostered the process of making decisions. It is not enough for a

speaker to make a message understandable, and for the listener to comprehend it; it is necessary to have a learning aim when communicating in an EFL classroom. For this reason, in this study, students were guided through tasks that required oral communication with the purpose of making important decisions that permitted them to enrich and achieve their learning goal. The following excerpts illustrate what I previously stated:

“Okay, girls, let’s say the part of the homework you are going to do so we can complete it for tomorrow [sic] ” (**Artifacts, WhatsApp recordings, Time Savers, April 23rd, 2017**).

The participant who recorded the voice note meant to decide how the homework was going to be divided so that they could do it correctly at home. This demonstrates that they had to make important decisions like how to do the homework, by talking and understanding the messages they conveyed through their recordings. As well, the following transcription states the importance of communicating and understanding each other’s opinions to achieve the learning goal of the assigned task:

“Classmates! Please I need your opinions about the questions for the interview, can you send them for today, thank you[sic] ” (**Artifacts, WhatsApp recording, Time Savers, May 16th, 2017**)

Also, the participants communicated messages among themselves sharing valuable information of the class. This shows that oral communication can empower language learning processes just as this transcription depicts:

“Hi! The teacher asked us to record our voices reporting about our group until this moment, so please” (**Artifacts, WhatsApp recording, August 24th, 2017**).

All these transcriptions of the recordings were important although they may seem simple, because they contributed in terms of oral communication, being the channels they had outside the classroom to communicate and do the teacher’s assignment, make decisions about homework, or simply talk about the topics and tasks included in the workshops. Thus, it is important to understand the role of oral communication in the learning processes as some participants expressed in the exit survey:

To the question: Keeping in mind all the remaining difficulties you have to communicate in English, do you think the implementation of the workshops helped you to communicate clearly in English? **S1** replied: “Yes definitely. It does not matter if we make mistakes when we speak, the important is that we could understand and do what the teacher proposed in the workshops”. Also, **S3** replied: “No pensé que podría hacer con el inglés lo que hice durante las actividades, hice mucho esfuerzo y finalmente pude entender a mis compañeros de grupo y también aportar para la solución de los problemas. Aunque me falta mucho vocabulario y no sé cómo decir muchas cosas, creo que son pasos adelante los que se dan con este tipo de actividades[*sic*] ” (**Exit survey, October 6th, 2017**)

These two students expressed important ideas to support this subcategory; for example, S1 said that the implementation of the workshops definitely helped to communicate better in English, and S3 showed amusement since she did not expect to use English as she did during the development of the workshop. The analysis of these answers received in the exit survey elucidate that oral communication exists even when making mistakes because it is a relation between the transmitter and the receptor of the message. That is to say, the goal in oral communication is understanding the message under the same cultural code that is present during the discussions. Identifying how successful oral communication is in the classroom, can be quite complex. However, the answers gathered in the exit survey, as shown above, evidence that the students were satisfied with the final results of their work, expressing that they could achieve meaningful communication. In this sense, Jamshidnejad (2010) explains:

for successful communication the message and meaning intended by the communicator should be correctly received and interpreted by the listener. Any shortage and interruption in any of three components of communication (communicators, meaning creation, and context) can result in ‘unsuccessful communication (p. 9).

Equally important, the observations were helpful to see how students reacted when they realized they were succeeding in oral communication. Although, I have to clarify that successful communication did not happen all the time because there were difficult moments in the groups when the members wanted to give up; nevertheless, they overcame the hindrances and ended up achieving the learning goals. This is evidenced in the following excerpts:

“Students were having trouble communicating ideas in English and Spanish too, I approached them and gave a couple of advice that seemed to work. At the end of the class, I called the group and explained that these kind of things usually happen when working in groups and congratulated them because they completed the task successfully” [*sic*] (**Teacher’s journal, March 23, 2017**)

This sample from the teacher’s journal reveals important information since it exemplifies the role of the teacher in oral communicative tasks. As it is shown, sometimes it is not possible to establish successful communication; however, the motivation that the teacher gives to the students is relevant to keep the students trying until succeeding. For instance, the following comments give account of how the students reacted after watching their final products and realizing that they succeeded in spite of the difficulties they found along the way.

“While presenting the final products, students were really happy, the comments made by the rest of the classmates were awe-inspiring. They felt the project was challenging and they got good results” [*sic*] (**teacher’s journal, September 21st, 2017**)

To conclude, the evidences presented above contributed in responding the research question as they illustrate how the designed material, focused on Problem-based Learning principles, enhanced in a very positive way the students’ oral communication in the EFL classroom.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

In this chapter, I explain the most relevant conclusions that I drew after analyzing the data gathered, and how it answers the research question posed at the beginning of this study. Also, I present the pedagogical implications in terms of my teaching practice, the bilingual context of the school in which this was implemented, and the EFL community at the local context. It is followed by mentioning some limitations that I had while carrying out the study and the suggestions for further research.

Conclusions

First of all, it is necessary to recall the aims of this study that lied on examining how contextualized materials, focused on problem-based learning, enhanced oral communication, as well as describing the effect these materials had on the oral communicative performances of the students, and assessing how the selected approach used to design the materials, generated spaces for oral communication.

Considering the above, the conclusions lie on two important aspects: The effect of the use of contextualized materials, focused on Problem-based Learning, on students' oral communication performances and the success students achieved by communicating orally in the EFL classroom.

In this regard, it is important to recall how I previously defined contextualized materials as the ones that are designed to be highly connected to the school's philosophy and curriculum, and to the experiences and realities of the teachers and students. The analysis of the data reflected that the materials implemented in this study, were contextualized since they were created based upon the problems that students were facing at school; specifically related to homework which is an issue highly connected to the curriculum. Besides, the materials included events and

situations such as the celebration of the love and friendship day that makes part of the school's philosophy. Furthermore, in spite of the uncommon use of problem-based learning as an approach for teaching English, the findings revealed that it is an accurate approach for teaching languages even when it was not primarily intended to teach foreign languages (Hung, Jonnassen and Liu, 2008b). It is accurate because, in first place, it offers material developers a pre-established and organized teaching pattern made up of stages that guarantee contextualizing the topics that are intended to be used in the lessons.

In second place, it benefited students since they not only improved their content knowledge but also improved their team work skills and developed their communicative and interactional skills in the language (Othman & Shah, 2013c). In this way, as Crandall (1993) and Mak and Coniam (2008) explained, teaching oral language to English language learners demands a process of contextualization to make instruction more effective, and that is what the materials developed in this study permitted tenth grade students at Santa Clara School.

Another important conclusion is that the materials developed for the pedagogical intervention of this study affected in a positive way the oral performances of the participants. Most of the students showed confidence communicating in English; they took advantage of the principles of problem-based learning principles such as collaborative learning, to create a pleasant space for communicating and receiving feedback from the teacher and peers. This avoided students getting confused and anxious when performing orally in class. In this regard, Saleh (2013) affirms the relevance of setting language objectives based on students' realities. Indeed, the results shown in the exit-survey demonstrated that students' oral communication was affected in a positive way when they assured that they could do things that they thought they were not able to do using English; all of this, thanks to the tasks provided in the workshops.

The comparison between the entry-survey and the exit-survey in the item: giving and asking for opinions, also revealed that the implementation affected positively the students' performance since they found more opportunities to do so during the lessons. On the other hand, the use of technology proved to be interesting and useful when contextualizing topics since teenagers are into it. Harmer (2007) argues that the use of technology brings to school innovative practices that students love. In this study the use of cellphones and WhatsApp ended up being a new useful element in the classroom, especially to maximize the students' language learning and team skills.

Finally, the data revealed that the development and implementation of contextualized materials, designed following the principles of Problem-based Learning, ended up being an opportunity for my students to enhance their oral communication by the use of real and relevant situations that generated spaces for them to give and ask for opinions. An appealing design with interesting and well planned tasks that allowed students to go step by step until reaching the learning goal became an asset; what is more, students counted on feedback sessions that helped them become aware of identifying their difficulties and plan accordingly to improve oral communication. In other words, the implementation enhanced students' oral communication as well as it also reinforced the English teaching practices in tenth grade and at school.

Pedagogical Implications

The first pedagogical implication that I considered worth mentioning is related to what Galbotan and Segelovic (as cited in Souza, 2014) affirmed by saying that most EFL teachers are wrong because they have the assumption that they use the communicative approach even when their classes are totally based on grammar lessons or task where students are just asked to repeat utterances. In fact, I might be probably one of them; however, after doing this research I am able to say that I used a communicate approach that allowed me to evidence my students success in

communicating opinions, asking high ordered questions, and solving problems in English. In addition, it also made me rethink my teaching practice since through this research I could try a different and new approach that fostered my students' use of the target language. In this sense, I renewed my teaching practice not only in my classes but it also had an incidence in my colleagues' classes because they witnessed the process.

Secondly, I learned that when students and in general human beings work in teams, the results are more successful, even in this context where the aim was communication. Moreover, the opportunity to create and design materials that responded to my students' needs was a great accomplishment because I strongly believe that the most satisfactory experience a teacher may ever have is seeing how the students' progress and succeed in what is being taught. In third place, the impact that the research study had at school was paramount since it contributed in important decisions the school made. For example, the first workshop was taught to propose a set of activities to celebrate the day of love and friendship at school and the student did research asking the whole community about it and investigating how it is celebrated in other countries. Finally, they did some proposals that were taken into account to celebrate this day and on September 22nd, 2017 all of the school members participated in the activities proposed by them.

On the other hand, the second workshop objective was to analyze the role of homework and the students came up with proposals in this regard that were shared with the academic council at school. As well as in the first workshop, the proposals were read and studied by the coordinators and they committed themselves to put some of their ideas into practice during the next academic year. The implication and impact that this research has had at school has been fundamental to motivate other teachers to do more research studies that favor the institution.

Limitations

There were few limitations I had to face while carrying out the research study. One of them was the lack of time because implementing lessons centered on problem-based learning demand a lot of time and I did not count on this; that is why, it took longer than it planned. At the beginning, it was thought to last just two academic periods, three months each; however, it lasted almost seven. Another limitation was the classroom arrangement; most of the classrooms at school have traditional desks and it was difficult to join them to have a comfortable arrangement as suggested in collaborative learning.

Further Research

Thanks to the experience I gained from this research study, I considered that there are some possible issues that should be part of future studies. Despite the positive outcomes of the study, I believe that the inclusion of assessment strategies for projects focused on Problem-based Learning can offer more possibilities to do further research. Besides, the selected approach offers more tools to work on many different aspects of language learning. That is why, I suggest EFL teachers to do research on inquiry-based learning applied to language learning since it also helps to shape the way students think and communicate their ideas.

These are some possible research questions that might be considered in further research studies: (a) How does the design of different types of assessment methods help improve students' performance in an EFL class focused on Problem-based Learning? (b) How does the implementation of materials, focused on inquiry and problem-based learning, enhance the thinking process of EFL students?

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Appendices

Appendix A: Survey (entry survey)

EFL ORAL COMMUNICATION SURVEY

Entry survey

Dear students, this survey is conducted to better understand the way you feel when you speak in English to communicate in the classroom. The results of this are going to be used only for research purposes, so I expect your honest answers. Thank you so much.

SIGUIENTE

ENTRY SURVEY

Circle the answer that best fits with each of the statements according to your English learning experience: Follow the pattern below:

- 1: Never
- 2: Seldom
- 3: Sometimes
- 4: Usually
- 5: Always

Seldom *

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
1. I felt confident speaking T	<input type="radio"/>				
2. In the English class, I speak in English all the time.	<input type="radio"/>				
3. I feel relaxed when I give opinions in English.	<input type="radio"/>				
4. I like to speak in English when the topics are interesting.	<input type="radio"/>				
5. I think speaking English in the class is important.	<input type="radio"/>				
6. I prefer to speak in English when I work in groups.	<input type="radio"/>				

8. I like to get involved in group discussions.	<input type="radio"/>				
9. I feel relaxed when I give opinions in English.	<input type="radio"/>				
10. I get frustrated because I can't express myself in English.	<input type="radio"/>				
11. My English class is so boring that I feel lazy.	<input type="radio"/>				
12. I like the materials we use in the English class.	<input type="radio"/>				
The materials demand me to speak in English.	<input type="radio"/>				
14. My English teacher provides me good opportunities to communicate in English.	<input type="radio"/>				
15. My English classes can be more interesting.	<input type="radio"/>				
16. I feel better when I speak in English with my classmates	<input type="radio"/>				
17. I like English when I feel involved in the topic.	<input type="radio"/>				
18. I feel bored when talking about English cultures I prefer my culture.	<input type="radio"/>				
19. I know how to ask for clarifications in English	<input type="radio"/>				
20. I know how to ask for opinions in English	<input type="radio"/>				
21. Speaking English can help me to solve problems related to my daily life.	<input type="radio"/>				
22. I speak in English when I work in group	<input type="radio"/>				

Appendix B: Survey (post/exit survey)

EFL ORAL COMMUNICATION SURVEY Post Survey

Dear students, this survey is conducted to better understand how the implementation of the material, focused on Problem Based Learning, enhanced English oral communication in the classroom. The results of this are going to be used only for research purposes, so I expect your honest answers. Thank you so much

Post Survey

Circle the answer that best fits with each of the statements according to your English learning experience during the implementation of the two workshops. Please Follow the pattern below

- 1: Never
- 2: Seldom
- 3: Sometimes
- 4: Usually
- 5: Always

*

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
1. It was easy for me to communicate in English.	<input type="radio"/>				
2. I spoke in English during the workshops	<input type="radio"/>				
3. I felt relaxed when I gave my opinions	<input type="radio"/>				
4. I liked to speak in English about the topics included in the workshops	<input type="radio"/>				
5. I think speaking in English is important to solve current problems	<input type="radio"/>				
6. I prefer to speak in English when I work cooperatively	<input type="radio"/>				

7. I felt confident speaking in English by Whatsapp	<input type="radio"/>				
8. I liked to get involved in group discussions.	<input type="radio"/>				
9. I felt frustration during the workshops.	<input type="radio"/>				
10. The English class was boring.	<input type="radio"/>				
11. The activities in the workshops made me speak in English.	<input type="radio"/>				
12. The classes were interesting.	<input type="radio"/>				
13. I felt better when I spoke in English with my classmates.	<input type="radio"/>				
14. The cooperative groups helped me to communicate better in English.	<input type="radio"/>				
15. The materials allowed me to give and receive feedback.	<input type="radio"/>				

Answer the following questions according to your experience working with contextualized materials and Problem Based Learning.

You may choose answering either in Spanish or English.

What is your opinion about the design of the materials designed by your teacher? *

Tu respuesta _____

What do you think about the idea of speaking in English about real situations? *

Tu respuesta _____

What is your opinion about the activities proposed such as: Whatsapp groups, documentaries, graphic organizers, etc..? *

Tu respuesta _____

When getting involved in the solutions of the problem, could you communicate better in English? *

Tu respuesta _____

What is your opinion about the opportunities to evaluate your and your classmates' work? *

Tu respuesta

How do Problem based learning principles help you to communicate my ideas and opinions in English?

Tu respuesta

How does cooperative learning help me to interact with my classmates in English? *

Tu respuesta

How did the workshops help you to give your opinions and make important decisions? *

Tu respuesta

Keeping in mind all the remaining difficulties you have to communicate in English, do you think the implementation of the workshops helped you to communicate clearly in English? *

Tu respuesta

Appendix C: Teacher's journal

- UD
- OC
- PBL

Date: March 9th |

Activity: Workshop → my team.

→ Ss are so involved in putting a name to the group and recording their introductions in the Whatsapp group.

→ Ss are so astounded with the design of the workshop. Some said = "Oh it's so cute" others said = "¿profe tu hiciste esto?" they take a look over the workshop and make good comments like = it's beautiful.

→ Ss have some difficulties on talking in English all the time. I realized that when I'm close to the group, they speak in English. but when I get far, they switch to Spanish (E).

Appendix D: School's Consent Form

Bogotá, 6 de febrero 2017

Señora Rectora

HNA. Nora María PIJ

Colegio Santa Clara

Cordial saludo,

Por medio de la presente quisiera poner a su conocimiento, que el año pasado inicié mis estudios de maestría en educación con énfasis en Didáctica del Inglés en la Universidad Externado de Colombia, en este momento curso tercer semestre. Dado que este estudio propende por la transformación pedagógica y metodológica, así como el crecimiento profesional y el fortalecimiento en el desarrollo de la investigación educativa a través del diseño e implementación de materiales, me permito muy comedidamente solicitarle me autorice la aplicación de mi proyecto de investigación titulado *Aprendizaje Basado en Problemas: Un enfoque para promover la comunicación oral en el aula de inglés*, particularmente con las estudiantes de grado décimo avanzado.

Este estudio tiene como propósito potenciar habilidades de comunicación oral en inglés, a través de la aplicación de talleres diseñados con material auténticos contextualizados, bajo el enfoque del Aprendizaje Basado en Problemas. La implementación se desarrollará en el salón y en las horas de clase durante un tiempo aproximado de tres meses. Para hacer su seguimiento, será necesaria la recolección de datos a través de la aplicación de encuestas, notas de campo, artefactos de muestras de talleres desarrollados por los estudiantes, entrevistas y videos. Cabe anotar que los estudiantes que participen lo harán de manera voluntaria y libre. De igual forma, podrán retirarse en el momento que lo deseen.

Además, es importante resaltar que se mantendrán en estricta confidencialidad los datos proporcionados por los y las estudiantes, así como de sus identidades y que los resultados obtenidos no representarán ningún detrimento en el desempeño académico de la asignatura.

Luego de analizar la información recolectada durante la implementación, la institución tendrá acceso a los resultados de la investigación a través del documento escrito (trabajo de tesis), y si lo desea a través de una socialización en reunión extraordinaria de docentes. Agradezco su atención y apoyo para el desarrollo de este proyecto.

Cordialmente

Luis Alberto Barrero Gómez

Docente de Inglés

Vbo _____

Hna. Nora María PIJ

Rectora

Autoriza SI _____ **NO** _____

Appendix E: Parents' Consent Letter

Bogotá, 6 de febrero de 2017

Señores

Padres de familia de estudiantes de décimo (inglés avanzado)

Colegio Santa Clara

Apreciado(a) Padre de Familia:

Muy comedidamente me dirijo a ustedes para solicitar su aprobación para que su hijo(a) _____ participe en la realización de mi proyecto de investigación: ***Aprendizaje Basado en Problemas: Un enfoque para promover la comunicación oral en el aula de inglés***, para optar al grado correspondiente a la Maestría en Educación con Énfasis en Didáctica del Inglés en la Universidad Externado de Colombia.

Su hijo(a) participará en la implementación de dos talleres que involucrarán el uso y apropiación de estrategias que permiten el desarrollo y fortalecimiento de la comunicación oral en inglés. Además, este trabajo pretende mejorar las habilidades comunicativas que serán de gran utilidad durante el resto de sus vidas profesionales. La aplicación de estos talleres se llevará a cabo durante las clases de inglés por un tiempo aproximado de 3 meses. Durante este periodo podré recolectar la información pertinente para su posterior análisis. Cabe aclarar, que los resultados obtenidos en la investigación no representarán ningún detrimento en el desempeño académico de la asignatura y el estudiante podrá abandonar en cualquier momento este estudio.

Yo como investigador y mi profesora tutora quien supervisa mi estudio tendremos acceso a los datos recolectados en este proceso y sólo serán empleados con fines académicos y harán parte del análisis y de los documentos de la investigación. Si usted desea conocer la información recolectada, los documentos o muestras que harán parte de este trabajo de investigación, o en el caso de algún requerimiento en especial puede ponerse en contacto conmigo al número de contacto del colegio que encontrará al final de este documento. En todos los casos, se tratará la información que provenga de su hijo de manera confidencial, para lo cual se usarán nombres ficticios a menos que usted indique lo contrario.

Atentamente, solicito su autorización para emplear la información, para lo cual le agradezco completar el formato que encuentra a continuación y entregarlo a la mayor brevedad.

Agradezco su gentil atención.

Investigador: Luis Alberto Barrero Gómez, contacto en Colegio Santa Clara, 3689610

Docente tutora: Dr(a). Claudia Torres Jaramillo contacto en la Facultad de Educación de la Universidad Externado de Colombia, teléfono 3420288 ext 1551-1552

AUTORIZACIÓN

Por la presente manifiesto mi autorización para que se emplee la siguiente información recolectada a través de:(favor marcar con un visto bueno o una equis):

Trabajos en clase ____ Fotografías durante las clases _____

Trabajos escritos ____ Conclusiones de grupos de discusión ____

Conversaciones _____

Además, por este medio autorizo al investigador de recolectar información a través de

Videos _____ y/o Entrevistas _____

Y doy mi consentimiento para permitir que el medio o los medios indicados arriba sean utilizados para el trabajo de investigación y entiendo que pueden ser transcritos en el documento final del trabajo o expuestos en presentaciones que tengan estricto carácter académico.

Manifiesto que conozco y comprendo el uso que se dará a la información por mí suministrada, con base en los principios éticos propios de las Ciencias Sociales.

Aclaro que tengo la libertad de retractarme, si así lo deseo, y que se me ha dado la oportunidad de preguntar acerca de los propósitos para los cuales se espera utilizar la información.

Manifiesto que he leído y comprendido perfectamente lo anterior y que todos los espacios en blanco han sido completados antes de mi firma y me encuentro en capacidad de expresar mi consentimiento.

Nombre del (la) estudiante: _____

Nombre del (la) padre (madre) (a): _____

CC. No _____ Expedida en _____

Firma del (la) padre (madre) (a): _____

Nombre del (la) padre (madre) (a): _____

CC. No _____ Expedida en _____

Teléfono: _____ Correo electrónico _____

Fecha: ____/____/____.

Mi hijo puede participar en la investigación ***“Aprendizaje Basado en Problemas: Un enfoque para promover la comunicación oral en el aula de inglés.”***