TBL through music to foster students' lexical competence

Aprendizaje basado en tareas a través de la música para fomentar la competencia léxica de los estudiantes

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[1]1.Research Article

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Abstract

The topic of this qualitative action research was to evidence how Task Based Learning (TBL) through music could foster students' lexical competence in a multi grade school based on "Escuela Nueva". The population of the research was a primary school of a public institution that had difficulties in their lexical competence. The goal of this research was to explore the impact that Task Based Learning through music had on students' lexical competence in an environment of "Escuela Nueva". The instruments to gathered the data were field notes, videotape recordings, pictures, and questionnaires. Findings of this study evidenced that this type of musical tasks can foster lexical competence and engage students to participate actively in class. Likewise, results showed that students were able to relate and recognize words, thanks to the implementation of musical activities as well as the fact that practicing vocabulary with songs can become a good strategy to develop students' higher level of comprehension.

Keywords: Escuela Nueva, Lexical Competence, Task Based Learning through music.

Resumen

El tema de esta investigación acción cualitativa fue evidenciar cómo el aprendizaje basado en tareas a través de la música podría fomentar la competencia léxica de los estudiantes en una escuela multigrado cuyas clases están basadas en "Escuela Nueva". La población de la investigación fue una escuela primaria de una institución pública que tenían dificultades en su competencia léxica. El objetivo de esta investigación es explorar el impacto que el aprendizaje basado en tareas a través tiene

en la competencia léxica en un entorno de "Escuela Nueva". Los instrumentos para recopilar los datos fueron notas de campo, grabadora de vídeo cámara digital y cuestionarios. Los hallazgos de este estudio evidenciaron que este tipo de tareas musicales pueden fomentar la competencia léxica e involucrar a los estudiantes para participar activamente en clase. Del mismo modo, los resultados mostraron que los estudiantes fueron capaces de relacionar y reconocer palabras, gracias a la implementación de actividades musicales, así como practicar vocabulario con canciones puede convertirse en una buena estrategia para desarrollar en los estudiantes altos niveles de comprensión.

Palabras clave: Competencia léxica, Escuela nueva, Aprendizaje basado en tareas a través de la música.

Introduction

This study was developed under three main constructs which were task-based learning (TBL) through music, Lexical Competence, and Escuela Nueva/Escuela Activa; which were remarkable in order to support the theory of our document. Ellis (2013) claims that "Tasks are work plans that provide learners with the materials they need to achieve an outcome specified in communicative rather than linguistic terms" (p. 16) and music can bring variety to the everyday classroom routine (Millington, 2011). The second construct, lexical competence is explained as "all the words in a language, the entire vocabulary of a language. Lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language." (Schmitt, 2000, p. 55). The third element that is the model of Escuela Nueva/Escuela Activa, "consists of offering

the five degrees of the elementary school, with multigrade schools with one, two or up to three teachers in the rural areas of the country" (MEN, 2002).

This project was focused on students of primary school of a public institution in Saboyá, Boyacá to study the impact that musical tasks had on lexical competence in an environment of Escuela Nueva. This document is composed of five sections, and it is organized as follows: introduction and statement of the problem, literature review, research methodology, data analysis, and conclusions.

Statement of the problem

The population of our research study was focused on students' primary public school, which had weaknesses in their vocabulary acquisition. Due to their low English level, the learners were not able to develop activities without the support of their teacher. The students did not have total immersion English classes; that is why they did not have the suitable outcomes in their English learning process. As a result, the students seemed to be reluctant to develop tasks, and they tended to avoid activities related to expressing ideas, because of the lack of vocabulary. In brief, the learning development was being affected owing to there was not a constant English process in the classroom, so the learning was not significant enough.

The issue stated and described before was identified through a needs analysis that we applied in different sessions. We carried out different actions to corroborate that there was an issue with students' lexical competence in the English classes; hence, we employed preliminary observations, class activities, discussions, and diagnostic tests to address the main problem that would be the guide for this study. All of these

implementations showed us the weaknesses and strengths that our English students had at the moment to learn a foreign language.

We have considered three main articles that support our research study. In the first article, David Nunan (2006) points out that tasks are an important part of the classroom, since these involve students in a communicative way and also it helps to apply the language itself as well as adapting music to stimulate students' learning. In the second article Caro, and Rosado, (2017) explain that lexical competence supplies a sound of basis of vocabulary that is presented and practiced in context through listening and speaking activities; thusly, students can enhance the use of words. The third article is based on the Ministerio de Educación Nacional and claims that Escuela Nueva/Escuela Activa is a flexible model in which students are able to make a meaningful learning process while interacting with the didactic notebooks that offer different activities for both teachers and learners.

Research question and Objective

What is the impact of implementing TBL through music in a context of Escuela Nueva/Escuela Activa for third, fourth, and fifth graders of primary school?

To explore the impact that task-based learning through music has in third, fourth, and fifth graders in an environment of Escuela Nueva/Escuela Activa.

Literature Review

In this study, we have taken into consideration theoretical concepts and constructs that helped to support our research study. The three constructs that are

explained in this research article are: *Escuela Nueva/Escuela Activa, task-based learning through music, and lexical competence*. These constructs were the principal axes of our study, due to they were linked with the problematic that we found in the rural Elementary School.

Escuela Nueva / Escuela Activa.

Escuela nueva/Escuela activa is an educational model aimed primarily, to multigrade school of rural areas that have a diverse population. These kind of schools are well known thanks to the high dispersion of its population; that is the reason why learners just have one teacher that is in charge of all subjects (MEN, 2006, p. 5). On the other hand, Escuela nueva/Escuela activa functions under a participative work methodology among teachers and students in which teachers consider needs, interests, expectations, learning and cognitive styles, and predominant intelligences vary greatly from student to student. Escuela nueva stimulates students' individual and group environment by aiming at enhancing their self-confidence and self-worth so that they can learn at their own pace and with their own styles.

The learning process occurs within each student with their own individual characteristics. In Flores' (2010) words, learners build their own learning tools which involve the conceptual and moral components that allow them to support their internal development. In that sense, Escuela Nueva /Escuela Activa is a flexible model that focuses its pedagogical process on the student as principal axe of the teaching-learning growth. This in turn, presumes that learners were not only able to make important learning decisions while interacting with others in their progress and achievement.

Furthermore, team-guided experiences stimulated social constructions with all levels, and enhanced students' capacity to contribute to a more inclusive society.

This educational model offers curricular strategies, which promote the implementation of didactic notebooks for all subjects (math, Spanish, social science, natural science, Values, and English) that have been designed according to students' context. These didactic material offer meaningful activities for teachers and learners, which permit them a natural learning and teaching process; despite this, the material provided for English has a suitable articulation with the other didactic notebooks, as well as MEN (Ministry of National Education of Colombia) has not offered the pertinent teacher training to guide the English teaching process, that is why there is not a fruitful development in the foreign language.

To conclude, Escuela Nueva/ Escuela Activa has an effective methodology and important impact on students' lives, because the curricular proposal engages the community needs. Besides, MEN has supported the acquisition of a foreign language process giving the possibility to rural schools to break up the paradigms, even if there is not a specialized teacher in terms of learning a second language.

TBL through music: An approach to Musical Tasks

Task-based learning can promote in a significant way the communication inside the classroom in terms of language. As Richards and Rodgers (2004) state, "engaging learners in task work provides a better context for the activation of learning processes" (p. 223). Implementing task-based learning, students can have the ability to naturally acquire a second language, bearing in mind students' real context. In addition,

Task-Based Learning is aimed to increase independency and autonomy in students' language learning process. For these reasons, the integration of task-based learning to learn a second language is useful to have proper communication with both teachers and students.

Nowadays, songs are fruitful tools in a second language classroom and they contain many benefits such as creating a positive learning environment and increasing interests and motivation. As Shen (2009) claims: "motivation is vital in language learning and it can be triggered by internal causes such as the learner's interest, enthusiasm and desire or by external influences such as peer pressure" (p.90).

According to the definitions before, implementing task-based through music can activate students' knowledge and interests in their second language process. Paquette and Rieg (2008) affirm that songs have a magical power to transform the classroom into a positive learning environment where children thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Working with music and tasks expand the opportunities to memorize the linguistic details and this enables students to reinforce their knowledge acting frequently in different and real situations.

To summarize, teaching English implementing task-based learning through songs is worthwhile to increase communicative skills and subskills in order to have a natural process when learning a foreign language. Moreover, using music as a learning tool in the classroom with different and innovative tasks that involve language instruction, enhance the students' lexical competence in a meaningful way.

Lexical competence

Nowadays, the learning of a foreign language such as English has an important role in what society comprehends due to the opportunities to communicate with others and the possibilities to success in academic and professional fields. In this section, we are going to show how lexical competence and its components affect the acquisition of a second language, which is related with the main purpose of our project.

One important aspect to bear in mind in order to learn a foreign language is the lexical competence. As Calzavarin (2017) affirms, lexical competence "...involves the ability to recognize and produce the characteristic sounds of a natural language (phonological competence), or the ability to use words according to their formation rules (morphological competence), or to their combinational properties (syntactic competence" (p.164). Thus, lexical competence as a knowledge field comprehends several crucial components to consider at the moment of teaching and learning a new language.

In addition, it is important to mention the two main components of the lexical competence: *inferential and referential.* On the first hand, the inferential aspect is referred to as the ability to understand and identify the global definition of a concept or term and establish the corresponding differences towards other concepts. On the second hand, we understand the referential aspect as the ability to classify the concept or word in a particular perception of it, such as in a cognitive procedure in which people could make a personal but wise definition towards the concept in issue (Calzavarin, 2017). Taking the previous explanation in mind, we could affirm that children's learning

process could be influenced by the way in which they perceive and acquire the information.

All in all, lexical competence is an important aspect that comprehends a complexity grade for the teaching and learning process due to the different components that it contains such as inferential and referential components. Also, by understanding and considering those competencies, we as teachers could help students to make the corresponding nets through the concepts and definitions in a second language, achieving in that way a better learning and teaching process.

Research design

Our proposal was action research, this concept is defined as "a systematic process of solving educational problems and making improvements" (Tomal, 2010, p.10). Our inquiry was based on proving and supporting theory through different activities; for that reason, it was a qualitative approach due to it allows to create more theory and look for situations or possibilities in a specific environment to develop a theory and support it. According to Bengtsson (2016), qualitative research contributes to an understanding of the human condition in different contexts and of a perceived situation. By using action research, researchers can implement different methods to collect and analyse data in order to describe the educational problems, thus associate better activities to carry out into practice.

On the other hand, a qualitative research was chosen due to the steps to follow having in mind the tools and findings that we as researchers could achieve during the whole process of this inquiry. Qualitative research is generally used to address the

problems that occur in a specific educational environment (Tomal, 2010, p.9). The qualitative researcher tries to feel engaged in the inquiry to see the real word environment and to realize what is happening with the context.

Context and population

The context selected for the application of our project was a rural school located in Saboyá, Boyacá in which the learning process is based on the methodology known as Escuela nueva/Escuela activa. This is a multilevel school in which the teacher needs to manage six grades at the same time developing different skills such as autonomy and teamwork.

Our project was developed in a multigrade school with about 38 students who are among 4 and 12 years old. They are divided into 6 different groups (preschool, first, second, third, fourth, and fifth grade), those grades are separated into 2 classrooms, in each one of them there are 3 grades; in the first classroom they have preschool, 1°and 2° grades, in the other classroom there are 3°, 4°, and 5° grades, which were the participants for the study.

The main purpose of this research was to strengthen the students' lexical competence according to the English as a foreign language learning process. For this reason, we decided to work with this population due to the weaknesses noticed in the students. So, we considered that our research proposal could be useful in order to help students in terms of vocabulary, having in mind that musical tasks promote several benefits for students and their setting; thus, this project could show excellent results in

the acquisition of a second language.

Ethical considerations

Due to the agreement among the Escuela Normal Superior de Saboyá and El Bosque University, the institution was informed about a further investigation that had been carried out during the process. Besides, participants were informed about the investigation, they received a consent format to sign, they were underage and the participation for this inquiry was optional and this did not affect the grades and behavior of the students. Additionally, the law that protects our participants is called "Ley Nacional de Protección de Datos" (law number 25.326) and the data confidentiality was guaranteed; moreover, the investigation had not any price and participants' faces are not going to be publicated.

Instruments for data collection

A variety of methods of data collection is available but it is crucial to select appropriate methods for the research, which ensures the collection of accurate data. Tomal (2010, p. 36) suggests that four basic factors, namely who, what, where and how, should be emphasized during designing data collection instruments.

As for the characteristics of the participants, the methods of data collection could depend on the number of them, their ages or grade levels. There is only a classroom teacher, and he has the duty to supervise the researcher's teaching. According to our research and the problem that has been addressed, we selected three instruments that were suitable for data collection. These instruments allowed us to support and

validate the research project that we carried out.

1. ***Transcripts of video recordings:*** This instrument is to obtain visual material of the total teaching situation; acting as an aid to diagnose or evidence; and as means of examining in detail a specific teaching situation or episode (Hopkins, 2008, p.115-116).

2. ***Field notes***: This instrument is a way of reporting observations, reflections and to reactions to classroom problems. They can focus on a particular issue or teaching behavior over a period of time (Hopkins, 2008, p.104).

3. ***Questionnaires:*** This instrument is a quick and simple way to obtain broad and rich information providing feedback on attitudes, data is quantifiable (Hopkins, 2008, p.118).

Data Analysis and Findings

The principal aim of this research study was to explore the impact that task-based learning through music had in third, fourth, and fifth graders in an environment of Escuela Nueva/Escuela Activa. The researchers implemented this proposal due to students showed a lack of English vocabulary; that was the reason why they did not feel comfortable communicating their ideas in English. Furthermore, English classes were not a priority and schedule intensity did not help them to go further in their English learning process. Taking this into consideration, researchers implemented music to help the process of enrichment the lexical competence into EFL sessions.

Accordingly, through the information gathered, researchers identified two main categories that were the basis of the proper process for the research question; the first category is closely related to the importance of the music and the implications that it carries in the learner, the second category, called Cognates is a crucial point identified in children at the moment of expressing and developing their ideas. In terms of collecting data; transcripts of video recording, field notes, and questionnaires were analyzed through the use of grounded theory, which comprehends sampling, describes and generates theory by collecting, coding and analyzing data, (Noble & Mitchell, 2016). In the same way, we implemented the use of triangulation in order to guarantee the reliability of the conclusions, which is effective to triangulate the data collected systematically (Holly, Arhar & Kasten, 2005; Glesne, as cited in Mertler, 2013).

Effects of Music as a form of implicit Learning

When teachers involve activities that include music and body movements, students can understand faster what they are learning during the lesson, it is easier for them to keep information and to obtain a good learning process by associating physical movements with language instruction. As Pollatschek & Hagen (1996) state, "research has shown that students who are engaged in movement activities, show superior academic skills and have a more positive attitude towards school" (p. 45). From the researchers' perspective, it was quite apparent that the population at issue showed better results when they took into account the lexical competence and the use of music instruction as a join, in order to provide an interesting and comfortable environment for English learning process.

Besides, through the use of music, guided activities, and their own bodies, day by day learners seemed more engaged when they had to face English classes, demonstrating an improvement towards their process. Singing songs can also boost learners' self-confidence as it enables them to master certain English words and expressions contained in the lyrics, which they will be able to use in speaking later on. It is a pleasant experience for learners to simply listen to music or to sing in the chorus (Medina, 2002). Thereupon, the following examples demonstrate how the use of music helped students to learn and enrich lexical competence through gathered data by transcripts of video recordings, field notes, and questionnaires.

Example 1: (TVRBP3SSN2STN2)

Min 5:48 - 6:09

Teacher: Everybody give me the papers, please.

ST: Teacher mira! -y me lo aprendí gracias a las canciones!

Teacher: What did you learn with the help of the songs?

ST: Qué? ah, ummm, pues las partes del cuerpo Teacher, eso que acabamos de hacer en la hoja.

Teacher: GREAT!

Example 2: (FN2SSN2STN5)

word from the list. Students read or listen to the lyric to confirm what was predict during the 'pre' stage.	✓	The song helps students to active prior knowledge about the topic and at the same time create an interesting environment for them.
Students read or listen to the lyrics	✓	

The song helps students to active prior knowledge about the topic and at the same time create an interesting environment for them.

Example 3: (FN3SSN3STN13)

Students relate movement with the word.	✓	Students felt more motivated to participate in class

Students felt more motivated to participate in class

Example 4: (FN2SSN2STN8)

pre stage. Students read or listen to the lyrics and identify stress, rhythm and intonation patterns.	✓	environment for them. Students are able to follow the song by singing or uttering words, allowing them to learn in a funny way.

Students are able to follow the song by singing or uttering words allowing them to learn in a funny way.

The examples presented before, showed that music in a combination with body movements were effective and enjoyable educational tools to engage and motivate learners, particularly in learning vocabulary. The first example demonstrates an answer of a student who affirms that songs helped him to learn English vocabulary; with this, it

was notable that participants were enthusiastic and found it easier to learn English by the use of music in class. The second excerpt, shows a field note in which the teacher realized that implementing songs helped students to active prior knowledge about the topic and at the same time creating an interesting environment for them. The final sample illustrates the answer of the teacher confirming students were able to follow the song by singing or uttering words that helped them to learn in a funny way. All the excerpts evidence that the integration of music provided more opportunities to enhance the students' lexical competence and it act as a suitable tool for learning anytime and anywhere working as a form of implicit learning.

As a result, learners seemed to be reluctant to be exposed to the target language due to they did not have enough vocabulary to express themselves in English. In order to enable learners to use the language confidently, music was useful to provide a sound basis of vocabulary and to teaching aids that raised and maintained students' motivation, especially in cases when the rhythm was catchy and supported with body movements and colorful visuals. These supplements added additional sensory and visual input to increase their vocabulary and build their confidence in using the target language (Shin, J.K., 2006).

Cognates: relation between Spanish and English vocabulary

A cognate is "a word in one language which is similar in form and meaning to a word in another language because both languages are related" (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 829). Likewise, vocabulary is an important factor for the development of students' lexical competence, since for students it is difficult to memorize how words

are written in English. That is the case of the students in primary from a rural school in Saboyá, Boyacá who had difficulties at the moment of writing an English word and they did not have the sources to notice if the word was well written or not.

As a result, the aspects mentioned above did not allow students to have the appropriate English learning process and that they did not disclose their ideas; In fact, students got interested to find different possibilities to express themselves by making relations between two languages, which are known as cognates words. Frunza and Inkpen (2009), consider that "cognates as word pairs that are orthographically identical or have slightly different spellings" (p. 2). By the previous implementation of music as a learning tool, researchers identified that students used cognates which helped them in order to express themselves and pronounce the lyrics of the songs as they thought it was.

The following paragraphs supply specific cases when students were fostering their lexical competence through music. The data was collected through three instruments such as transcripts of video recordings, field notes, and questionnaires that allowed us to show the following results. In addition, researchers could identify that implementing music from the first class helped students to increase their vocabulary and they started to communicate easily by using cognates. By repeating, singing, and doing the movements of the songs, students felt interested to participate actively during the classes, trying equally to communicate with each other. In the same way, implementing music through task-based can activate students' knowledge and interests in their second language process, instead of the one that is given from the teacher (Nunan, 2006). In

order to better explain the case, the following examples provide specific situations of how students used cognates and music to enrich their vocabulary through transcripts of video recordings, field notes, and questionnaires.

Example 1: (TVRFWA5SN6STN4)

Min 6:18- 7:05

Teacher: I'm fluffy and warm in my furry coat, I'm not a goat. I eat a lot of grass, thanks to me you can get jackets, coats. What am I?

ST: ovech

Teacher: ¿Ovech? What is Ovech?

ST: Pues Oveja teacher.

Teacher: Mmmm Ok, te entiendo. Pero, oveja en Inglés es Sheep.

Example 2: (FN6SSN4STN11)

Students try to express their ideas in English by using the vocabulary worked during the session.	✓	Students express Some ideas in English, but those ideas are not quite right, due to most of times they combine or invent words between English and spanish (L1/L2) .EX: Carter to refer cartero o mensajero.
Students relate movement with the word.		

Students express some ideas in English, but those ideas are not quite right due to most of times they combine or invent words between English and Spanish (L1/L2).

EX: carter to refer cartero o mensajero

Example 3: (QTSSN1STN6)
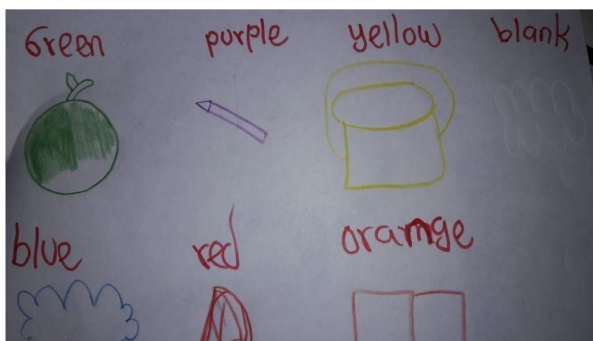
Here, the student had to draw an object related to the color that the teacher mentioned.

The examples presented before, demonstrate that learners realized that Spanish and English share a large number of orthographic and phonological features. The first example evidences an answer of a student who guessed during a video session what the animal was; however, he/she used a similar word in Spanish *"ovech",* instead of "sheep" that is the correct word in English. The second excerpt, exemplifies that students tried to express some ideas by combining English and Spanish words, such as *"carte*r" rather "postman" which is the correct English word. The final sample illustrates the answer of a student who related *"blank*" with "blanco" in Spanish, but in English the correct word is white.

Revising these examples, researchers analyzed that students made use of cognates unconsciously to express their ideas and to improve their English level, what was imperative during student's process; afterward, teachers helped students to understand the importance of establishing the difference between the codes of the mother tongue and the foreign language but, also taking into account the similarities in some cases.

Conclusions

To sum up, the present article explored the impact that task-based learning through music had on the participants in an environment of Escuela Nueva/Escuela Activa, bearing in mind two aspects: task-based learning through music and lexical competence. After analyzing and by the use of the instruments selected, researchers did identify positive findings as well as some other crucial aspects as results of the adaptation of the project.

On the first hand, talking about positive findings, students did reinforce and learn different new English words applied to their own context through the use of songs in order to express and put in practice their knowledge acquired. On the second hand, our students were interested to learn since they tried to link their Spanish prior knowledge with words that they considered were correct in English. The results identified were the use of Spanish as the basis of words in English, named by researchers as cognates; Students did not differ the words in a correct way due to the lack of exposure to the English language, and they used to be confused at the moment of learning simple words, especially when the group of words had a similar pronunciation in English as in Spanish. At this time, having in mind foster the lexical competence through the use of music, researchers conclude a successful project in which the students did remember in a better way the new vocabulary and showed more confidence at the moment of performance their ideas due to the increase of vocabulary.

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