TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF VERBAL COMMUNICATION IN ENGLISH INTHIRD GRADERS AT INSTITUTO CHAMPAGNAT IN PASTO.

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Abstract

eing competent in the 21st century demands quality education that prepares children and young people as global citizens capable of responding to challenges of life, in different areas.

Instituto Champagnat in Pasto, aware of the need to learn English, consistent with the directions of the Ministry of National Education, has begun a path towards a bilingual school.

Learning a language is based on oral communication so it is important to recreate communicative situations where students listen and speak in English to foster an authentic and meaningful environment. To maximize class time in conversational activities, the present research oriented by the mixed research paradigm guidelines and the action participatory research carried out with third graders does not only propose the selection and use of efficient teaching strategies that contribute to the development of communication skills, according to their level and age gradually, but also to design and implement educational activities and materials that promote their development according to students' needs and characteristics and subsequently, evaluate their effectiveness. The international Starters exam was used in the diagnosis and videos, recordings, photos and interviews were used for the gathering information process.

What are the teaching strategies that enhance the development of verbal communication skills in English? These are strategies related to dialogues, videos, creation use and presentation of mini-books about different communicative situations, song festival, prayer of the morning and activities to care for the planet like water campaigns, protest messages, training and presentations in the school and in a congress about reducing, reusing, recycling and garbage classification, promoting interdisciplinarity in English teaching, motivating the Project-Based Learning work "EcoMarists, protectors of our common home."

Keywords: verbal communication, teaching strategies, materials and activities, learning.

Resumen

Ser competente en el siglo XXI exige una educación de calidad que prepare a niños y jóvenes como ciudadanos globales capaces de responder a los desafíos de la vida en diferentes ámbitos.

ESTRATEGIAS DIDACTICAS PARA EL DESARROLLO DE LA COMUNICACIÓN VERBAL EN INGLES EN LOS ESTUDIANTES DE GRADO TERCERO DEL INSTITUTO CHAMPAGNAT DE PASTO.

El Instituto Champagnat de Pasto, consciente de la necesidad del aprendizaje del inglés, en consonancia con las indicaciones del Ministerio de Educación Nacional, ha iniciado un camino hacia un colegio bilingüe.

El aprendizaje de un idioma se basa en la comunicación oral, entonces es importante recrear situaciones comunicativas donde los estudiantes escuchen y hablen en inglés para propiciar un entorno auténtico y significativo. Para maximizar el tiempo de clase en actividades conversacionales, la presente investigación orientada por los lineamientos del paradigma mixto y la investigación acción participativa, realizada con estudiantes de grado tercero, no solamente propone la selección y uso de estrategias de enseñanza eficientes que contribuyan al desarrollo de habilidades comunicativas, según su nivel y edad, de manera gradual, sino también diseñar e implementar actividades y materiales educativos que fomenten su desarrollo según las necesidades y características de los estudiantes y posteriormente, evaluar su efectividad. En el diagnóstico se empleó el examen internacional Starters y para el proceso de recolección de información, se utilizó videos, grabaciones, fotos y entrevistas.

¿Cuáles son las estrategias didácticas que potencian el desarrollo de habilidades de comunicación verbal en inglés? Son estrategias relacionadas con diálogos, videos, elaboración, uso y presentación de minibooks sobre diferentes situaciones comunicativas, festival de la canción, oración de la mañana y actividades para el cuidado del planeta, como campañas del agua, mensajes de protesta, capacitaciones y exposiciones en el colegio y en un congreso sobre reducir, reusar, reciclar y la clasificación de basuras, potenciando la interdisciplinariedad en la enseñanza del inglés, dinamizando el trabajo de aprendizaje basado en proyectos "EcoMaristas, protectores de nuestra casa común".

Palabras Claves: comunicación verbal, estrategias didácticas, materiales y actividades, aprendizaje.

I. INTRODUCTION

Being competent in the 21st century demands a quality education that must start from childhood, youth and continue in different areas throughout life. Our country, every day more aware of the usefulness of the English language, through the Ministry of National Education, MEN (2014), has implemented the National English Program 2015-2025 in order to strengthen the communicative skills of speaking, reading, listening, and writing in English so that at the end of eleventh grade, students achieve the pre-intermediate level (B1) as basic users.

Instituto Champagnat in Pasto, one of the outstanding schools in the city, assumed the challenge of the MEN mentioned in the previous paragraph; for this purpose, since 2023 it undertook a path towards bilingualism through the diligent work of school directors, group tutors and specialist teachers. The weekly hour intensity was increased, especially in elementary school; there was a greater teachers' commitment to the subject to improve their English level and the methodology and didactics of teaching this language for communicative purposes. There was a greater teachers' commitment to the area to improve their level of English, the teaching methodology and didactics of this language for communicative purposes.

To deal with this purpose in a playful, meaningful, and functional way, this research attempts that third-grade children develop the communicative competence with a practical English that helps them enhance their verbal communication skills. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen listening, reading, and writing in order to educate citizens capable of communicating in English. MEN (2020) considers that the English standards are fundamental guides that lead teachers, parents, and school directors on the development of the communicative competence and the achievement of basic and intermediate level of the foreign language, English.

In this order of ideas, it is urgent to select the most appropriate strategies to enhance the ability to speak English in students, providing them with solid foundations that contribute to strengthen their global and intercultural communication, as well as their cognitive, instrumental, individual, and social development based on critical thinking development, problem-solving, creativity, cooperation, negotiation, decision-making, self-management, resilience, respect for diversity, empathy, communication, and participation. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2022).

Learning a new language involves developing the four essential communicative skills: reading, speaking, writing, and listening in English, which play a fundamental role to achieve effective communication in any language (Cronquist and Fiszbein, 2017). According to Vergara et al. (2019), this learning must be done in a gradual way, and considering the age of students, children have an innate ability to absorb and acquire new languages.

The development of communicative skills in a foreign language follows a natural sequence similar to that of the mother tongue. Writing develops in parallel with reading since children start to write letters, then words, and subsequently simple sentences, and as they advance, they learn to construct more complex texts and express their ideas in writing (Franco et al., 2016).

According to Chapelton (2017), it is important that children listen and speak in English because language learning is based on oral communication in authentic and meaningful environments where they can use English in real communicative situations, such as dialogues, descriptions, reports, role plays, reading and stories interpretation, debates, conversations, recordings, and other spaces that familiarize the student with the language rhythm, the sounds, and their intonation and develop a deeper listening comprehension, which is essential to achieve effective communication.

From this perspective, it is necessary to implement appropriate didactic strategies for English teaching that help transform the educational process into a more effective and enriching experience. These strategies do not only allow the development of essential communicative skills but also awaken interest and promote children's participation in language learning (Vergara et al., 2019). When classes focus on oral communication and provide frequent opportunities to practice in authentic situations, students gain confidence in themselves in expressing in English (Chapelton, 2017). Moreover, the adaptation of strategies to the students' age and level ensures a gradual and effective progression in language acquisition and creates solid foundations for the long term.

Based on the foregoing, this research formulated the following problem: How to strengthen the verbal communication skills in English of third graders at Instituto Champagnat in Pasto in 2023? The general objective of this study is to strengthen the development of verbal communication skills in English in third graders at Instituto Champagnat in Pasto in 2023.

To this purpose, three specific objectives were proposed:

- To diagnose the level of verbal communication skills in English possessed by third graders at Instituto Champagnat in Pasto.

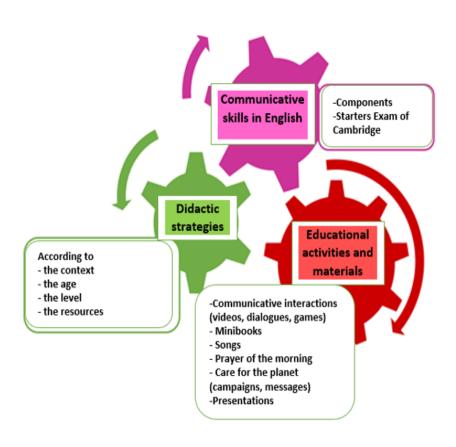
- To implement educational strategies that promote the practice and development of verbal communication skills in English of third graders at Instituto Champagnat in Pasto.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of the didactic strategies implemented for the level improvement of verbal communication skills by comparing the level of verbal communication skills in English of students of group 3.1 of Instituto Champagnat in Pasto through the before and after comparison of the intervention.

The academic exploration and selection of the foundations for the theoretical framework, result from a rigorous and conscious analysis to address the problem in question, focused on two main axes: first, didactic strategies; second, communicative skills in English; and as an interrelated component, educational activities and materials, as shown below.

Figure 1

Axes and components of the Theoretical Framework



Source: This Research

Among the topics that are part of the theoretical framework, it is worth mentioning the communicative approach, the linguistic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic competences, the Common European Framework, communicative skills, international tests, Cambridge exams, didactic strategies according to the context, age, resources, activities, and educational materials, active methodologies, and the Marist Innova Proposal 3.0 which consists of Happy children Project for preschool (following the Regio Emilia pedagogy), Project-based learning (PBL) in elementary school from first to third grade, and Cooperative learning (CL) from fourth to eleventh grade.

With regard to the context of the classroom, this research was carried out with the four groups of third grade at Instituto Champagnat in Pasto with an intensity in English of six hours a week. The number of students per group ranges between 31 and 32. The classes and activities follow the guidelines of the student's book Kid's Box 3 which can be projected on the board and the work on the Cambridge platform. Several visual and audiovisual resources were used in the classroom, such as videos, songs, audios, slides, photos, images, and flash cards, in the different activities developed each week according to the planning and also contributing from English to the development of the PBL project chosen by third graders: Eco Marists, protectors of our common home.

In addition to the above, this year in third grade there are two students, children of Colombian parents who have lived in Australia (girl in group 3.1) and in the United States (boy in group 3.2) since they were three years old; they will only be in Colombia for one or two years, and then the children, along with their parents and siblings, will go back to these foreign countries. The children collaborated and participated in class, a situation that favored the development of communicative English.

Although the research work was developed equally in the four groups of third grade and in general, the children of this grade participated actively; they are responsible, feel encouraged and enjoy English; for the samples of videos, recordings, photos, observations, and interviews, among others, this research was especially focused on group 3.1, where, besides working with children, it was possible to count on the tutor group's collaboration, the representative parent of the group, and the authorization of all students' parents in this group to be part of this research process. With regard to this grade characterization in particular, it is necessary to note that group 3.1 consists of 31 students: 14 girls and 17 boys.

Figure 2 Context of the classroom and English Festival



Note. Above, it is indicated: 3Rs class (3.1), creation of minibooks (3.1). Below: Water Campaign (3.1), English Festival (third grade).

Source: This research

II. METHODOLOGY

To characterize third graders and evaluate the effectiveness of the implemented didactic strategy, the mixed paradigm and the participatory action research (PAR) were chosen because they allow involving third graders, the main protagonists, in the development and implementation of activities and educational materials in order to ensure that these activities are relevant and meaningful to them. According to Hernández et al. (2014):

- Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a social research approach that seeks to generate changes and improvements in a specific community or context through the active and collaborative participation of the actors involved.

- PRA focuses on problem-solving and the search of practical and sustainable solutions to the challenges facing a community. Rather than being a mere spectator or outside observer, the PRA researcher involves actively in the process, working hand in hand with community members to identify problems, define objectives and develop intervention strategies.

- A PRA structural element is the participant's meaningful participation in all the stages of this research process. This involves listening and giving voice to the people affected by the problem, involving them in the research planning and design and working in team to implement the actions that emerge from the findings.

PRA is also characterized by its reflexive and critical approach. PRA researchers do not only seek to generate practical changes in the community but also seek to understand the social structures and dynamics underlying the problems identified. This critical reflection allows a deeper understanding of the factors that influence on the situation, and the effectiveness of the proposed interventions. This type of research has a flexible and adaptive approach; that is, intervention strategies can be modified and adjusted during the research development.

Martínez (2000) complements the above, stating that this type of research requires taking the world and science with a new outlook and committed to the human being's development and emancipation, since its execution process turns all actors into co-researchers. Finally, it adds that the researcher becomes a discussion organizer, a process facilitator and a problem catalyst.

According to Hernández et al. (2014), the main actions that were executed in this research development were:

Phase 1: Diagnosis. To determine the level of development of verbal communicative skills in English, contextual factors and barriers.

Phase 2: Strategy Design: After identifying student's specific needs, to select and design effective didactic strategies in the development of these skills.

Phase 3: Adaptation and Implementation. To record implementation details.

Phase 4: Relevance Evaluation. In order to analyze the effects of the chosen strategies, comparing the achieved results with the objectives set in the previous phases and to analyze the aspects that influence on the achievement or not of the expected results.

The DIAGNOSIS was performed to each student individually. The guide to procedures was taken into

account to adapt them in 4 moments: "Let's get ready! (¡Alistémonos!) Let's walk! (¡Caminemos!) Let's run! (¡Corramos!) Let's climb! (¡Trepemos!)" In practice, according to the way the students developed the test and once their needs were detected, more questions were asked, examples were presented, and in the same way priority was given to the aspect that required it. At the evaluation time, it was taken into account whether or not there was a need to guide the student in some aspects.

Moment 1: Let's get ready! (¡Alistémonos!) After greeting the child, the child's name was asked: "What's your name?", the scene picture was indicated, and questions about a specific place, people, or objects were asked.

Moment 2: Let's walk! Then, the child was asked to point out what was requested in the image through a question or as an order (command).

Moment 3: Let's run! The object cards were indicated and asked for the objects of 3 or 4 cards: "What is it?" If necessary, it was said: It's a... and, if necessary, it was pronounced the initial sound of the word. Then, the child was asked to place these object cards in the positions: on (sobre, encima de), in (dentro de), under (debajo de), or next to (junto a). For example, put the hat under the table, put the crocodile on the table, and put the t-shirt next to the window, among others.

Moment 4: Let's climb! They were asked about the food in their kitchen, in their house: What do you eat in your kitchen? What do you eat in your house?

III. RESULTS

DIAGNOSIS. As an approach to the diagnosis test, the descriptor scales of the communicative competence mentioned in the Companion Volume to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2020) were taken into account, with which the following results can be determined:

The General Linguistic Range descriptor: can use isolated words/signs and basic expressions in order to give simple information about him/herself: Yes, in the diagnosis test it was possible to appreciate that children answered with words related to the questions that were asked; for example, saying: yes, no, colors, names of objects, family members. In the Starters exam, children are not asked to produce sentences. The Grammatical Accuracy descriptor: can employ very simple principles of word/sign order in short statements. In the Starters exam, children took into account word order when saying their name because it is a sentence they know. My name is _____. They do not do this grammatically but by usage.

The Propositional Precision descriptor: can communicate very basic information about personal details in a simple way. It could be seen in Part 4 of the test when children talked about the food they eat at home.

The Spoken Fluency descriptor: can manage very short, isolated, rehearsed utterances using gesture and signalled requests for help when necessary. It was not applied in this exam because, by being a diagnosis test, children had not rehearsed or studied for this test.

DIDACTIC STRATEGIES. The application of the PBL strategy from the English class and the interrelation with the different study areas, in addition to promoting children's responsibility in role management and their functions and supporting teamwork, contributed significantly to the development of the project "Eco Marists, protectors of our common home" in relation to the different study areas, awareness and care for nature, animals, the application of the 3 R's (reduce, reuse, recycle), the voice for water and the planet and garbage classification. It allowed to do a practical use of English that do not only contributed to third graders' life but also to their families, preschool and elementary school children and to the participants of the VII International Congress on Education for Children organized by CESMAG University in November 2023, where the results of this research were shared through a presentation and supported by the participation of third-grade Eco Marists children.

Likewise, the participation in the awareness campaign on water care was also highlighted. From the English area, in the four groups of third grade, children made posters and participated with messages in English to announce them to the whole elementary school students. The students of group 3.1 were selected to participate in English with their claim voice for water support.

As verbal communication examples, following Drew (2023), it was also worked on dialogues produced in communicative situations, face-to-face conversations, oral presentations, interviews (Starters oral exam), public presentations as in the PBL Meeting with Parents held in October and in the VII International Congress in November, as well as stories were told and ideas were shared among team members.

Figure 3

PBL Project: Eco Marists, protectors of our common home



Note: Above, it shows: Water campaign (3.1), Eco Marist logo, 3 Rs speakers (3.1), and Eco Marist prayer (3.3). Below: Presentation at Instituto Champagnat in Pasto (3.1), Garbage Collection Campaign (3.1), and Presentation at CESMAG University (3.1 and 3.3).

Source: this study.

Through this research, effective didactic strategies were applied according to the age of third graders; their tastes, proposals, and interests were taken into account, for example, in the use of songs; In this manner, music motivated the interest in English (Torres, 2019). In this school year, the third-grade children prepared 4 songs to participate in the English Fest program that was developed at Instituto Champagnat Pasto during the institutional festivities of Saint Marcellin that took place in June. Out of the 4 possible songs: "Flowers," "Don't You Worry", "Believer", and "As It Was", the chosen song for the event was "Flowers" by Miley Cyrus. Children from all grades participated; most of the chosen students were from group 3.1.

RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES.

With regard to the use of materials and activities to improve verbal comprehension, it is relevant to highlight the success of the application of minibooks, since they did not only help in the children's step-bystep development and confidence to speak English, but also they counted on parents' support, who, along with their children, after finishing the development of one minibook, waited anxiously to develop the next one. Through these materials, different topics were worked on: Personal presentation, pets, food (Topic 1), Favorite things (Topic 2), Family, home (Topic 3), and Routines (Topic 4).

With images, letters, or initials of words, children became familiar with the topic and felt good presenting their work. Moreover, their minibooks reflect a creative work, motivation, and love for English. The success of minibooks has also been recognized by English teachers from other grades, who have also used them to tell stories, travels, and past actions, among others.





Source: this research

Figure 5 Example of Minibook – Topic 1

	HOJA	DIBUJO / NÚMERO / PALABRA(S) / O FRASE	SE EXPONE
	1	Palabra: <u>Ana Belen</u> (nombre del estudiante)	(Hi). My name is <u>Ana Belen.</u>
	2	Número: 8 (edad)	I'm eight.
and and	3	Palabra: cat (mascota) y/o dibujo: gato	I've got a cat.
Para	4	Frase: She's	She's Lulu. She's called Lulu.
food	5	Dibujo: Pizza (fruta o comida favorita)	I like pizza.
1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1	6	Palabra: Food	This is my favorite food.

Note. Sheets of paper of Minibook for topic 1 (Personal information, pets, food) and orientations to perform it.

Source: This research

IV. DISCUSSION

It is necessary to enhance the verbal communication skills in English of the youngest students, from preschool and elementary school levels, by adjusting effective didactic strategies to their particularities and preferences, to their learning style and rhythm, to their level of English, to the context and to the communicative purposes. The implementation of pedagogical strategies allows for motivation and effective learning in the classroom. The knowledge and choice of the strategies that best suit the students will allow for a more personalized and effective education (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science, and Culture, 2020).

Information coming from research on teaching – learning strategies of English language with emphasis on students' oral production, according to Figueroa, R and Intriago, Jose (2022) has shown that meaningful achievements in oral production in this language involve to carry out activities and strategies that promote speaking practice. The foregoing is extremely valuable, fundamental, and at the same time it constitutes an inspiring source to guide the creation and use of minibooks, which in the present study became a motivating tool in the development of presentations on varied topics. This strategy provided security, support, and confidence for students to approach English in a dynamic way and to express themselves effectively. This strategy constitutes an integrating and creative tool that promises to enhance students' verbal communicative competence significantly.

In this research context, the opportunity to work with images and words related to specific topics with elementary school children is highlighted since it allows a playful and effective immersion in the vocabulary associated with different topics, which is essential to achieve a more effective and enriching oral communication (Alcedo and Chacón, 2011).

In the Marist Educational Model: "Marist Innova 3.0", English learning was not only limited to the classroom but it was sought to integrate it in a transversal way in different subjects of the curriculum, thus promoting a communicative and practical approach. This research did not only benefit third graders of Instituto Champagnat in Pasto but also it provided knowledge, findings, and evidence that will contribute to the educational field in general, since, by identifying effective teaching strategies for the development of the oral skill in English, new ideas and approaches that can be applied in other educational contexts will be generated and thereby more students would be benefited.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The main difficulties in third graders' verbal expression of Instituto Champagnat are related to anxiety, restlessness, and fear of making mistakes and speaking in public, as confirmed by Stevick (1980) when he states that more than the materials, techniques, and linguistic analyses that are used in the foreign language teaching, what happens inside the learners and in the classroom determines this process's success or failure.

The English teachers at Instituto Champagnat use updated methodologies as a result of the permanent qualification that the institution provides them; nevertheless, although most of them are emerging from the communicative approach and the vision of this approach focuses on the development of all communicative competences, however due to various situations, teachers are still limited to explicit grammar teaching through the production and understanding of written texts, leaving aside the solution of communicative tasks specific of oral communicative competence.

Among the wide variety offered by foreign language teaching, the didactic alternative that emerged from this research was based on the communicative approach and the tools it offers, such as the task-based approach. For Ellis (2003), these are activities that require students to use language, paying attention not on the form but on the meaning to obtain the communicative objective (p. 10). The project-based approach, teamwork, collaborative learning, dialogues, minibooks, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary in English allowed a practical use of English and energized work on environmental topics through and from English, according to the goals drawn up in the Eco Marist project. In the end, in addition to the confidence to speak in English, values, feelings, attitudes, self-esteem, social relationships, and teamwork were promoted.

Thanks to the variety of activities adapted to the students' contexts and interests, such as songs, videos, and environmental protection campaigns, presentations on environmental topics, dialogues, minibooks, and constant interaction in English that are part of the strategy, students learned to create meaningful conversations and

messages through verbal communication. The students, parents, and teachers' voices in unison recognized the success of this didactic proposal, which was evident in the familiarity, empathy, increase in vocabulary and conversations that were woven around the production of minibooks and conversations about their content. Likewise, in the confidence and security of children before an international speaking exam. It was a success!

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