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CIEX Journ@l, Año 5 No. 11. (2020), octubre 2020 – marzo 2021, es una publicación bianual editada por CIEX S.C. Calle Pedro Ascencio 12, Col. Centro, Chilpancingo, Guerrero, México. C. P. 39000, Tel. 7474947973, journal.ciex.edu.mx, Editor responsable: Dra. María del Carmen Castillo Salazar, journal@ciex.edu.mx. Reserva de Derechos al Uso Exclusivo No. 04-2016-081814195600-203, ISSN: 2395-9517, otorgado por el Instituto Nacional de Derechos de Autor. Responsable de la última actualización de este número: Coordinación Editorial de CIEX S.C, Mtro. Hugo Enrique Mayo Castrejón, Calle Pedro Ascencio, 12, Col. Centro, Chilpancingo, Guerrero, México. C. P. 39000. Fecha de última modificación: Octubre, 2020.

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BA Thesis Research Design: “Teaching Activities to Improve Speaking Skills in Children Adapting Mexican Traditional Games”

**Diseño de una Tesis de Licenciatura:
“Actividades de Enseñanza para Mejorar las Habilidades Orales en Niños
Adaptando Juegos Tradicionales Mexicanos”**

Recibido: Julio 2, 2020

Aceptado: Octubre 10, 2020

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SUMMARY

The current article is written to present the design of a bachelor thesis whose objective is to propose some teaching activities to improve speaking skills in children through the adaptation of Mexican traditional games. The teaching activities suggested are designed for (estimated) Pre A1 English learners of a public elementary school located in the south of Mexico. The qualitative research approach was applied in the study to explore the third-grade students' opinions, perspectives and attitudes. In addition, the classroom-centered research method was utilized to analyze the outcomes of the application of the proposed communicative activities. The present article includes only the research design. However, the suggested communicative teaching activities and main findings are attempted to be published in an upcoming article to illustrate how the teaching activities designed with the use of Mexican traditional games help to enhance the learners' speaking skills.

KEY WORDS:

Teaching children, Mexican traditional games, speaking skills, materials design, communicative approach.

RESUMEN

El presente artículo presenta el diseño de una tesis de licenciatura cuyo objetivo es proponer algunas actividades de enseñanza para mejorar las habilidades orales en los niños a través de la adaptación de los juegos tradicionales mexicanos. Las actividades de enseñanza sugeridas están diseñadas para estudiantes de inglés nivel Pre A1 (estimado) en una escuela primaria pública ubicada en el sur de México. El enfoque de investigación cualitativa se aplicó en el estudio para explorar las opiniones, perspectivas y actitudes de los estudiantes de tercer grado.

Además, se utilizó el método de investigación centrado en el aula para analizar los resultados de la aplicación de las actividades comunicativas propuestas. El presente artículo incluye solo el diseño de la investigación. Sin embargo, se pretenden publicar las actividades de enseñanza comunicativa sugeridas y los principales hallazgos del estudio en un próximo artículo para ilustrar cómo las actividades de enseñanza diseñadas con el uso de juegos tradicionales mexicanos ayudan a mejorar las habilidades de habla de los estudiantes.

PALABRAS CLAVE:

Enseñanza a niños, juegos tradicionales mexicanos, habilidades orales, diseño de materiales, enfoque comunicativo.

Presentation

Through the time different methods and approaches to language teaching have been created in order to meet the student's needs, facilitate the teaching-learning process as well as to satisfy the demands of a rapidly evolving society. Hence the great importance of the creation of new teaching approaches. For instance, each teaching method suggests specific techniques and materials that help teachers overcome a variety of teaching challenges such as different contexts, diverse ages, varied culture, distinct level of the target language, and particular learning objectives. A definition for language teaching method is given by Anthony (1963) as a set of procedures or an overall plan for the systematic presentation to teach a second or a foreign language. In relation to teaching ESL/EFL, Muhammad (2014) states that implementing a method is extremely important, because through the implementation of an appropriate method, the teacher will make the students feel comfortable, pleased, and confident. As a result, the goals of a lesson can be reached successfully.

As it was mentioned above, the language teaching methods and approaches have emerged and evolved through the years, changing the focus on the mastery of structures to a communicative proficiency.

According to Richards & Rodgers (2001), the grammar translation method greatly influenced the foreign language teaching early from 1840s to the 1940s due to the main purpose at that time was to understand literary texts for academic purposes. Nowadays, this teaching method is practiced to a lesser extent which gives priority to grammatical competence as the basis of language proficiency; briefly, in this regard, Richards (2006) explains that grammatical competence refers to the knowledge students have of a language e.g. parts of speech, tenses, phrases, clauses, sentences patterns. Consequently, reading and writing are the main teaching objective, no consideration is given to oral communication, it focuses in accuracy and grammar is taught deductively.

On the other hand, Richards and Rodgers (2001) explain that by the 1960s the interest of developing alternative language teaching methods increases due to the globalization of European markets (Interdependence of European markets). Richards (2006) states that this phenomenon caused a greater demand of English proficiency as means of spoken communication rather than a proficiency in learning grammar and structures. Consequently, the communicative language teaching approach was first proposed in 1970's being the purpose to develop communicative competence in the learners which is, according to Richards (2006), the knowledge on how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions; thus to achieve this objective of the communicative approach students must work on all four skills (listening, reading, writing

and speaking) from the beginning. Ever since, it can be seen that this communicative language teaching approach has influenced language teaching methods. This study intends to apply the principles of the communicative language teaching approach to develop the oral skill of the children in the Ruffo Figueroa elementary school.

Thanks to recent research it is well known that teaching children differs from teaching adults in different ways and it is because of their intellectual development. While learning a second language, Brown (2001) states that adults can learn and retain larger vocabulary while children's naturalness is something that adults struggle with. As Brown (2001) suggests children need to have all five senses stimulated, therefore when teaching children, activities that are interesting should be implemented lively and fun such as physical, hands-on and sensory aids activities. This purpose can be achieved, according to Brown (2001) by having the students using the language through attractive communicative activities providing the learners opportunities to use authentic and meaningful language. Brown (2001) also believes that because children are centered on the here and now, familiar situations and characters, real-life conversations, meaningful purposes in using language will establish a context within which language can be used meaningfully and it leads to improve attention and retention.

Even though challenges that are involved with teaching children are numerous. Today English language teachers have access to a great variety of approaches and methods to base their teaching performance, as well as resources such as didactic materials, internet, social networks, technological devices, realia, games, just to mention some of them, in order to get better results when teaching any level or age.

Statement of the problem

Rodriguez (2011) declares that the objective of the Secretariat of Basic Education is to raise the quality of education through the preparation of students to face the new challenges of a globalized world. In order to accomplish this goal, the National English Program (PRONI) has been created to develop the multilingual and multicultural competencies of the students.

Regarding to this, in the state of Guerrero, the coordinators of the English Program in Basic Education acknowledge the need of hiring English language teachers to implement the English subject in public preschool, elementary and secondary schools; in this respect, it is worth mentioning that this program begun as a project around 14 years ago with a few teachers, however, recently more teachers have been employed and, as a result, even more schools in the state of Guerrero now benefit from this program.

On the other hand, even though the coordinators of English Program in Basic Education in Guerrero have made a good effort in sponsoring teachers with certifications to validate their proficiency of the English language, there is a lack of support at offering teaching training workshops as well as didactic teaching materials to create innovative activities and facilitate the learning process. Furthermore, it is observed that most of public schools, lack technological devices such as projectors, computers or recorders.

Another aspect that teachers face in their daily routine is that they are not given any type of materials in the schools where they work. In relation to the time of exposure to the target language, children in elementary public schools have lessons from one to two hours a week only; in this respect some teachers believe that this situation could be the reason why children are afraid of or shy to speak English in daily life.

In most primary schools, children do not often use the target language for communication; they are mostly taught the grammar of the language rather than the use the language for communicative purposes. According to the communicative approach principles, it is important to provide the students with an appropriate environment where they can have a variety of opportunities to use the language in terms of communicating their ideas to interact with their classmates and other people outside the classroom.

Additionally, some teachers have stated that a situation is observed in which the students do not seem to be interested in learning the English language, they are not actively engaged in the lesson, or involved in the activities in the classroom.

Main research question

The main research question that guides the study and is related to the main research objective is the following:

Can communicative teaching activities adapting Mexican traditional games be helpful to improve third grade primary school students' speaking skills?

Subsidiary research questions

The subsidiary questions are developed to offer an answer to the main research question, and they are the following:

RQ1: What Mexican traditional games can be used to teach English?

RQ2: What are some of the speaking skills that students can improve by playing Mexican traditional games?

RQ3: What Mexican traditional games can be adapted to improve students' speaking skills and encourage them to communicate orally in the target language?

Main research objective

The central research objective is designed to provide direction to the study and defines the research purpose as follows:

To suggest some communicative teaching activities adapting and implementing Mexican traditional games in order to improve third grade primary school students' speaking skills.

Specific research objectives

These objectives are related to the subsidiary research questions and are the tasks to carry out during the investigation process. They are stated as follows:

- To identify and describe some of the Mexican traditional games that can be used to teach English.
- To investigate and describe some of the speaking skills that students can improve by playing Mexican traditional games.
- To select and adapt some Mexican traditional games to improve students' speaking skills and encourage them to communicate orally in the target language.

Justification

This study is important because it contributes to the achievement of the objective of The Secretariat of Basic Education which is to develop the multilingual and multicultural competencies of the students in a Mexican context. It will also bring important benefits to the north region of *Guerrero* since it will promote Mexican culture using Mexican traditional games at elementary level, especially at “*Ruffo Figueroa*” primary school.

The *Ruffo Figueroa* elementary school is an institution that prepares students to transit to middle school level, mainly in mathematics, science, geography, Mexican history, Spanish and at present, also the English subject is included within the basic education curricula because of the new educational system changes in Mexico. This project will permit the teachers implement some adapted Mexican traditional games that might enable the students to improve their speaking skills in a fun, efficient and systematic manner.

On the other hand, because today’s markets have globalized their transactions, well known corporations mostly employ graduates with a good domain of the English language. That is why it is crucial to apply a set of communicative language teaching activities that encourage the learners to use the language since the very beginning levels, especially in the oral skill not just to know about the language.

This project will make students participate actively in the lesson activities and enhance their confidence to speak the target language inside and outside the classroom. As a result, learners will see the language as means to communicate looking at it as something to use here and now in a meaningful manner.

Furthermore, creating didactic materials is sometimes expensive and a very time-consuming task. This project will help teachers with such situation, because games are going to be easy to apply, also it is not going to require much of paper supplies neither much time to elaborate didactic materials needed to play the games to ease the learning process and improve the oral skills in learners. Thus, with this project teachers will not have to deal with expensive didactic materials.

Last but not the least, this project will be a way to preserve Mexican traditional games and our culture. Nowadays, children or grown-ups do not play outdoor games, or in general games that require the participants to move around physically, they usually play x-box, play station, or use their tablets or smartphones. This project will remind the students the most traditional games, so they are able to teach and play them with their relatives and the next generations.

Because of the problems that are mentioned above and the lack of economic resources in this educational context, a study is suggested to investigate Mexican traditional games that can be adapted to facilitate the development of the oral production skill in third grade elementary students and create a communicative environment through the use of didactic games at a low cost.

Delimitations

The present research was carried out in a primary school named “*Ruffo Figueroa*” located in *Iguala*, *Guerrero* state. This school was selected since the researcher is also participant in this research study and has the facilities to develop the study in this institution. The participants are

going to be students of 8 years old in basic level of English and not more advanced levels. Only the students taking English classes in third grade will participate due to the facilities provided by their teachers.

There is only one English language teacher that provides one hour a week of English language teaching. The English teacher is the researcher and no other teachers from other subjects will participate in the study because of the main research goal. The teaching and learning process is developed using a textbook provided by the National English Program (PRONI) adapting its topics with worksheets and songs. These supplementary materials are used in this grade, but they are not used to promote the development of the oral skill.

Research strategy

The research strategy to be applied will have a qualitative approach in order to understand and interpret some academic issues observed in 3rd grade school children. Considering the qualitative methodology, this research will be carried out with the classroom research method to enhance a deeper understanding on the teaching-learning process when the suggested didactic treatment is applied (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

Part of the research strategy is the application of the different instruments that will be created with the purpose of reaching the main research objective such as interviews to teachers and learners, observation, and application of activities as models to prove the theory applied.

Conclusions

As our society rapidly evolves into a globalized world, the communicative approach has become very important and beneficial to the area of language teaching since it provides the students with opportunities to communicate in English focusing in the four language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking not only in the use of grammar. This article presents the research design that is intended to give an overview of the communicative approach, the problematic presented in a classroom, the research questions, the objectives, the justification of the study, delimitations and the research strategy in order to give the reader a general description of the research study. The literature review, research methodology, results and conclusions will be presented in subsequent articles.

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