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THE LEARNING OF AN ENGLISH GRADED READER IN A CATALAN CONTEXT THROUGH THE NATURAL APPROACH ACTIVITIES

Final Dissertation

Noélia Zambrano Gruart

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Tutor: Núria Medina

Faculty of Education, Translation and Humanities

Universitat de Vic – Universitat Central de Catalunya

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Abstract: The importance of English is considerably growing in our schools. This research presents two different methodologies for teaching and improving it: The Natural Approach and The Audio Recording. The investigation was carried out with 9 years old boys and girls from “Els Estanys” school. Their contact into this language has been significantly elevated during their school attendance, so, they already had strategies for understanding and learning this foreign language. The aim of the study was to comprehend a reader through Natural Approach activities and improve English pronunciation using audio-recordings. In order to achieve that, two groups were created and compared: The group that worked with the help of audio and the group that only used the reader. The difference between them is that the first group was exposed to a reading along with an audio recording in each session while the other group just read the text. Also, an evaluation of the comprehension and the pronunciation before and after the investigation was developed. The results showed that both strategies helped participants to improve English vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation and comprehension. Even though, the difference between both groups was clearly visible and the audio-recording group obtained better results than the other one in terms of the mentioned aspects.

Key Words: English, reader, methodologies, Natural Approach, audio-recording

Resumen: La importancia del inglés está creciendo considerablemente en nuestros colegios. Esta investigación presenta dos metodologías diferentes para enseñarlo y mejorarlo: El Aprendizaje Natural y la grabación de audio. La investigación fue llevada a cabo con niños y niñas de 9 años del colegio “Els Estanys”. Su contacto con este idioma ha sido significativamente elevado durante su escolarización, así pues, ya tenían estrategias para entender i aprender esta lengua extranjera. El objetivo de este estudio era comprender un libro de texto a través de actividades de Aprendizaje Natural y mejorar la pronunciación usando grabaciones de audio. Por tal de conseguirlo, dos grupos fueron creados y comparados: El grupo que trabajó con grabaciones de audios y el grupo que solamente utilizó el texto. La diferencia entre ellos es que el primer grupo fue expuesto a grabaciones de audio en cada sesión de lectura mientras que el otro grupo solo leyó. Los resultados demuestran que las dos estrategias ayudaron a los participantes a mejorar el inglés en cuanto a la adquisición de vocabulario, pronunciación y comprensión. Aun así, la diferencia entre los dos grupos es claramente visible y el grupo de audio recibió mejores resultados que los otros en los términos mencionados anteriormente.

Palabras clave: Inglés, libro de texto, metodologías, Aprendizaje Natural, grabaciones de audio.

Resum: La importància del anglès està creixent considerablement a les nostres escoles. Aquesta investigació presenta dues metodologies diferents per ensenyar-lo i millorar-lo: L’Aprentatge Natural i la gravació d’àudio. La investigació va ser duta a terme amb nens i nenes de 9 anys de l’escola Els Estanys. El seu contacte amb aquesta llengua ha sigut significativament elevat durant la seva escolarització, així doncs, ja tenien estratègies per entendre i aprendre aquesta llengua estrangera. L’objectiu d’aquest estudi era comprendre un llibre de text a través d’activitats d’Aprentatge Natural i millorar la

pronunciació fent servir gravacions d'àudio per acompanyar la lectura. Per tal d'aconseguir-ho, dos grups van ser creats i comparats: El grup que treballava amb les gravacions d'àudio i el grup que només va fer servir el text. La diferència entre ells és que el primer grup va ser exposat a gravacions d'àudio a cada sessió, mentre que l'altre grup només va llegir. Els resultats demostren que les dues estratègies van ajudar als participants a millorar l'anglès en quant a l'adquisició de vocabulari, pronunciació i comprensió. Tot i això, la diferència entre els dos grups és clarament visible i el grup d'àudio va obtenir millors resultats que els altres en els termes mencionats anteriorment.

Paraules clau: Anglès, llibre de text, metodologies, Aprenentatge Natural i gravacions d'àudio.

1. Introduction

The main reason that inspired me to study this topic is the interest of knowing how an English primary teacher can develop a book session without depending on the traditional way and using two similar methodologies: Total Physical Response and the Natural Approach. I have always been interested on this topic because I believe acquiring a foreign language needs to be motivating, dynamic and significant for children and the previously mentioned methodologies allow the learning go through these aspects. Moreover, reading books help children learn and acquire many aspects from the foreign language: like vocabulary, pronunciation, some language structures, new concepts, among others. So, the combination between the methodologies and the book, benefit students to enhance the English language. Finally, another fact that has motivated me to go further on this investigation, is to know if the research I carried out last year with 4 year-old children could be adapted to Primary students. The name of the last year's project was: The adaptation of an English storybook in a Catalan context through Natural Approach and TPR activities.

The present research takes into account the fact that the pupils have already been exposed to English. That is the reason why I decided to use a reader instead of a storybook. In addition, instead of just reading the book by myself I added the audio recording which complemented the reading. I think that the introduction of the audio can help children to be aware of the pronunciation and the English comprehension.

For these reasons and in order to support my objectives, the research questions that I formulate are the following:

- Will our school pupils in the 3rd year be able to understand an English reader with the help of the Natural Approach activities?
- Does the audio recording affect the pronunciation and comprehension of the learners?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Language acquisition

Recently, the importance of the English language has significantly been growing all over the world. Even though there are many languages around the planet, English has literally become an international method of communication. According to Samia, language is more than simply a way of expression, it helps people form relationships and know how to interact in different social contexts depending on sociolinguistic situations. (Samia, 2015). In other words, language permits people to understand and be communicated in the world that involves us. For this reason, it is absolutely important to be in contact with the foreign language from the early stages in order to learn it, be capable to understand it and use it in a future. As Saputura said, in the young learners' age it is extremely important to encourage their intellectual, physical, emotional, and social development. (Saputura, 2017 p. 166).

In order to have a successful assimilation of the language, it is essential to have a competent educator. Accordingly, teachers should be qualified in the segmental and suprasegmental aspects of the language. Also, another significant point to take into account is the motivation. This impulse benefits children in being interested and concentrated in the learning of English. Actually, there are two types of motivation: The intrinsic and the extrinsic motivation. According to Ryan and Deci, the extrinsic motivation is a construct that pertains whenever an activity is done in order to attain some separable outcome (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p.55). An example would be a child doing his/her homework just because his/her mother promised him/her to buy a new toy if he/she accomplishes it. On the contrary, these authors also wrote that the intrinsic motivation refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p.60). An example of it would be a child doing his/her homework just because he or she wants to learn and acquire more knowledge.

2.2 Teaching English

The process of learning and acquiring a second language is different as the learning and acquiring the mother tongue. According to Navarro (20010), the first action that the educator might do before teaching English is to investigate how the children he/she has in the class have learned their mother tongue. During the mother tongue procedure, children assimilate and integrate the speech through the listening and the participation in the context that he or she lives. In contrast, the foreign language has to be taught using different methodologies and theories in order to comprehend, incorporate and understand this new language. Related to Betsabé Navarro (2010), the first language is learned in a subconscious and spontaneous way while the second one is taught by training though a specific methodology and with marked objectives. For this reason, the foreign language must be respected and adapted to children's knowledge and awareness. Krashen (1982) told that during the early years, there is a stage where in accordance with the input hypothesis, speaking ability emerges on its own after enough competence has been developed by listening and understanding. (Krashen, 1982, p. 27). He called it the Silent Period and it is essential that educators consider it and take it into their mind in order not to fall in the temptation of forcing children to talk or reproduce the input received if they are still not ready. Moreover, there are different stages for acquiring the high bilingual level. According to Hayness (2007), most English language learners go through these five stages before being bilingual:

1. The first stage is called Preproduction, also known as the silent period. In this stage children cannot speak the language but they receive input.
2. The second stage is called Early Production and at this moment the number of vocabulary increases.
3. Third stage appears when the speech emerges. They are capable to reproduce short sentences.
4. The fourth stage is the Intermediate Fluency and at this step children are ready to pronounce long complex sentences. To reach the final step, it is significant that children get involved in the target language.

In order to achieve all these steps, it is absolutely necessary to use the adequate strategy and methodology to learn, acquire and improve English. Teachers have an undoubtedly

important role during this process as they are the ones who can help children to move forward and archive the success. As Juan Mayor (1994) wrote, the teacher is the one who literally impacts on the children's learning by using the L2 for teaching how to produce and compose texts and how to produce and compose speech. Also, he adds that the teaching strategies and the learning should be complemented and shared between the educator and the learner.

Furthermore, the motivation, as it is mentioned before, is crucial for the development of all the steps. Teachers must encourage children and help them to succeed. To achieve it, educators may let students to be autonomous during the learning and acquisition process. As Bajrami (2015) told, the teacher's role in an autonomous learning classroom is to provide the learners with the skills and ability to practice what they have learned no matter if we talk about a language classroom or any other course. (Bajrami, 2015, p.426) This means that even though the educators facilitate the information to children, they should take into account the fact that learners are the owners of their learning. For this reason, they can help students preparing and supervising the activities and planning the lessons in order to help children organize themselves. Also, the author adds that a big part of implementing autonomy in the classroom is to teach diverse learning strategies, and assist the learners in finding the methods that best suit them. (Bajrami, 2015, p.426). In other words, this means that each child needs a different methodology or strategy for acquiring the information as each one has a different special need. Accordingly, teachers should be the ones who facilitate them the different possible ways to learn in order to help the student to choose the one which benefits them. This fact is unquestionably essential to be carried out in class as teachers must guarantee the learning for every child.

2.3 The Natural Approach

The Natural Approach is a methodology used for teaching a foreign language. Usually, it is used during the first stages, concretely when children have acquired 500 words and they are capable to start reproducing some English. Even though, this methodology is very flexible, which means that it can be adapted to any age. According to Krashen and Terrell (1995), only when the students are able to comprehend or nearly comprehend the

message, the learning and the acquisition will appear. For this reason, it is absolutely important to observe if children are prepared enough for learning a foreign language. Also, when they start producing English, children can respond using the target language, the native language or both. This fact means that the silent period is absolutely respected in this methodology and children are not forced to talk till they feel they can do it.

Both authors, authors Krashen and Terrell (1995), developed 5 hypotheses that define the Natural Approach learning:

1. Learning/Acquisition distinction.
2. The Natural Order hypothesis.
3. The Monitor Hypothesis.
4. The Input Hypothesis.
5. The affective filter hypothesis.

For this approach, visual aids are hugely significant. In agreement to what Krashen and Terrell said, whatever helps comprehension is important. This is why visual aids are so useful. Pictures and other visual aids supply for the adult what “the here and now” does for the child. (Krashen and Terrell, 1995, p.55). Another crucial aspect of this approach is the use of real communication as it helps children to understand and assimilate the different concepts in a clear way. In addition, this methodology gives abundant importance to the vocabulary. According to Richards and Rodgers, the importance of the vocabulary is stressed, for example, suggesting the view that a language is essentially its lexicon and only inconsequently the grammar that determines how the lexicon is exploited to produce messages (Richards and Rodgers, 2001, p. 130). This means that the language is the vehicle of the communication and without the knowledge of the vocabulary, children would have difficulties in the production of messages.

The student's main role is to be active during all the class session. They might participate, listen, follow the rules and respond either using TPR or speech productions. They have to be absolutely involved in a meaningful communication in order to acquire vocabulary, intonation, English structures, among others. However, according to Richards and Rodgers (2001), the teacher's main role is to give an adequate comprehensive input, create an interesting and friendly atmosphere and a diversity of activities as the using of different contents, contexts and a variety of group sizes.

2.4 Audio recording

English, as it is already known, it is written or spelled one way and pronounced in a different way, sometimes. For this reason, children have many difficulties in learning how to articulate the target language. Also, the spelling can confuse children in the way that words are actually read. Cakir (2011) argued that if the sound of word differs it may lead the listener to misunderstand the message. In order to keep away from such kind of misconceptions we need to provide foreign language learners with the listening activities leading to correct pronunciation. (Cakir, 2011, p. 1801). This means that the way how a word is pronounced has an extreme importance as it can totally change the meaning. For this reason, educators have to provide students extent resources for improving it.

Audios are a competent strategy to teach a foreign language. It consists on playing English audio recordings to students with the aim to motivate and contextualize. It is said that it enables students to access resources that support learning wherever they are; without the need to attend a specific location at a defined time. (Using audio and video for educational purposes, 2014, p. 3). It means that even students are not in a 100% English context which causes that they do not practice this foreign language in a daily basis, audios allow students to listen to native speakers. Through that, they learn and acquire the different aspects of this language for instance pronunciation, intonation, among others.

This strategy, benefits children in many ways. On the one hand, it promotes motivation and increases children's attention. As Paddick noted, sound in a classroom improves students' attention and thus their interactions increase. In other words, students learn and retain more through increased hearing ability. (Paddick, 2015, p. 1). On the other hand, audios help children to improve and assimilate many English skills: intonation, pronunciation, phonics, grammar, lexical, among others. Referred to what Cakir exposed, listening is a very active and integrative language skill, involving a grasp of phonological, lexical, grammatical, and ideological complexities as well as performance factors typical

only of speech such as rate of speech, clarity of intonation and pronunciation, hesitations, pauses- (Cakir, 2011, p. 1802). Internalizing all these aspects is not an easy task, for this reason, there is a process that each child follows when he or she listens to an audio recording. This stages occur in a sequence and in a rapid succession. Nunan (2001) indicated that listening is a six-staged process, consisting of Hearing, Attending, Understanding, Remembering, Evaluating and Responding (Nunan, 2001, p.23). These means that listening is not an easy job and while students are



Figure 1: Basic stages of listening process and their functions. (Nunan, 2001, p. 24)

attending to a listening, their brain does not stop moving forward in order to achieve the last part and succeed in the target language.

For all of the reasons mentioned previously, audios are an undoubtable method for learning and acquiring a target language. They provide fundamental characteristics as motivation, contextualization and interest in an English class. Also, they contribute in enhancing English skills.

2.5 Readers

Reading is a significant skill used for practicing and learning a foreign language. Through it, many aspects are developed and for this reason, it is considerably practiced during English lessons. As Mikulecky said, Effective reading is essential for success in acquiring a second language (Mikulecky, 2008, p. 1). This means that this approach provides numerous determining benefits that improve the knowledge of the target language. As more readers a child reads, the more knowledge he or she will gain.

Two of the main progresses that a student can acquire through reading are the quantity of vocabulary and the spelling. In terms of vocabulary Krashen (1989) claimed that in vocabulary learning, the skill-building view involves learning words one at a time, by

deliberate study, and may include analysing their parts, their prefixes, suffixes, and roots, and exercises. (Krashen, 1980, p. 440). In the same way, related to the spelling, he argued that the skill building approach to spelling is through word lists, spelling rules, and exercises. (Krashen, 1980, p. 441). Both statements signify that a reading can provide students useful resources for extending their target knowledge. Also, both concepts have different features to be taught and different features to be acquired. It is important to say that both vocabulary and spelling are considerable characteristics to take into account in terms of learning a foreign language.

To achieve the exposed concepts, students should read authentic texts where they can easily use strategies to understand it. Buescher defends that authentic materials or texts are a key component of a literacy approach to teaching reading (Buescher, 2009, p. 21). Sometimes, teachers tend to simplify texts as it is thought that children need easy readings to understand and assimilate what it is read. Actually, this action is not correct at all. The authors Swaffar and Arens (2005), wrote about this topic and they stated that even real L2 texts seem complicated for children, they provide a redundancy that helps children's comprehension. It is important to highlight the fact that children need to think and relate their mental schemes in order to learn and assimilate the information. For this reason, educators have to supply competent readers in order to go further in their knowledge. If students do not have the need to think, they will not make any effort and their brain will become lazier.

2.5.1 Graded Readers

Graded readers are books with a variety of levels. Depending on the age of the student, he or she would read one reader or another. Each reader is adapted to children's age and the knowledge he or she should have at this period. Nation and Wang Ming-Tzu defined them as books which are specially written or adapted for second language learners. This involves severely restricting the vocabulary that can occur, controlling the grammatical structures that can occur, and matching the length of text to the vocabulary and grammar controls (Nation and Wang Ming-Tzu, 1999, p. 356). This statement means that in each book, the vocabulary, the grammar, the length, etc. are carefully treated with the purpose of helping students to achieve the success in reading skills.

Several English skills are assimilated through graded readers. Both authors, Nation and Wang Ming-Tzu noted that these books help children gaining skill and fluency in reading, establishing previously learned vocabulary and grammar, learning new vocabulary and grammar, and gaining pleasure from reading. (Nation and Wang Ming-Tzu, 1999, p. 356). As it is mentioned before, all these attributes are gradually taught/learned and as much a student accomplish a level, more skills would he or she acquire. Usually, teachers recommend children to start at level 1 and then, go further. This method helps children establish a base and level up with no complications.

3. Methodology

3.1 The study

The present study has two different aims: On the one hand, to investigate the effect of the Natural Approach activities in the reading comprehension. In order to accomplish it, a weekly reading from different pages of a reader are carried out. Also, many activities from the approach mentioned are executed with the purpose of succeed in my hypothesis.

On the other hand, the second objective is to analyse the effect of the audio recordings in foreign language students. In order to achieve this objective, participants were split in two groups and only one group was exposed to the listening during all the sessions.

In order to support my objectives, the formulated research questions are the following:

- Will our school pupils in the 3rd year be able to understand an English reader with the help of the Natural Approach activities?
- Does the audio recording affect the pronunciation and comprehension of the learners?

This study has 3 different hypotheses:

1. The chosen texts will be understood by the students through Natural Approach activities.
2. The group of students that are exposed to the listening, will have better results in terms of pronunciation and intonation.
3. The vocabulary learned in each text will be assimilated and used in other sessions.

3.2 Participants

This investigation was carried out in “Els Estanys” school, in Year 3. Currently, there are 24 students in this class and all of them are between 8 and 9 years old. As this research was done during school sessions, only 12 students were able to be observed. Even though, activities like the reading and the Natural Approach games were performed with the whole group.

With the aim to achieve my hypothesis, I distributed the participants in two groups: the listening group and the non-listening group. In each group, there were 12 students in total and only 6 of them were investigated. This fact was because the teacher of the school had to develop Science sessions while I was carrying out the project, so, investigating all students would last too much and many Science sessions would be missed. However, both groups had the same text, the same Natural Approach activities and the same previous and last evaluation. The only difference between one group and the other was the audio recording of the text.

It is important to highlight the fact that English is remarkably studied in this school, for this reason, children have a well established base of this language. Even though, in the chosen texts, there were many tricky words for them.

In both groups, students participated actively from the first day. Although at the beginning they were a little bit confused, the energetic participation and the motivation of some of them caused the absolutely interest on the reading. In the non-reading group, there were two boys that easily got tired of reading and they used to annoy their mates. When these actions took place, they had to be moved to another part of the class. Since then, the children’s attention, concentration and interest increased considerably.

Finally, it is significant to explain the distinctions between the audio and the non-audio group. In the first one, students were notably quiet, concentrated and in silence from the first second. However, when the educator asked them what they understood about the reading, they were only focused on what they read and they reproduced the same as in the reading. They memorized. In contrast, the second group was more nervous, talkative and less concentrated but they were able to respond the questions about the text using their own words and going further. They related what they read with what they knew.

3.3 Instruments

With the main purpose of answering the objective questions and the hypothesis formulated at the beginning of the study, many instruments were used. The observation has become an indispensable one as through it, the educator could analyse and see the effects of the Natural Approach activities, the improvement of the intonation and pronunciation and the comprehension of the different texts. However, as there were many students to observe, the use of video cameras has been essential.

A part from the instrument mentioned, many others have been used:

- The reader called *Camouflage* (Khanduri, 2013)
- Reading photocopies
- Flashcards
- Audio recording
- Previous and after exam.¹
- Video camera

3.4 Procedure

The procedure of this study has been regular and constant. As it is mentioned before, this investigation was carried out in “Els Estanys” school in the Year 3. In total, eight sessions were developed, including two test days that were executed the first and the last day. The time spent in each session was 45 minutes in both groups (audio group and non-audio group) and it was done during two days of the week: On Mondays and on Wednesdays.

As students were divided in two groups (the ones who listened to the audio and the ones who did not), the session was divided in two parts: The first 45 minutes spent in the first mentioned group and the other 45 minutes for the other ones. While these sessions were performed, the other group was doing Science so, in order to make it simple, the investigation was done in two different classrooms. In that way, only the teacher had to move.

In both sessions, the organisation was the following:

¹ See the previous and after exam in the appendix 1

1. Welcome + Read the text² or read the text once and listen to the audio recording 3 times. (5-10 min)
2. Ask what they understood (5 min)
3. Ask for the tricky words (If they know the meaning). (10 min)
4. Play Natural Approach games. (10-15 min)
5. Read the text or listen the text again (2)
6. Ask what they finally understood. (5 min)

In other words, the class started with a welcome in order to help children to be put in the context. During this short period of time, the educator asked children many questions as: How are you doing?, Are you happy today? Do you have enough concentration to start working? Do you remember which book where we reading? Do you remember what it was about?, among others. Then, the educator spread out the reading photocopies, one for each child and she asked them to read it the times they need till they feel they understand it. When this step was already done, children explained what they understood, using the language they preferred and without pressure. Meanwhile, the teacher was writing on the blackboard what they were saying. Just after it, the teacher wrote on the board and one by one, the name of the different tricky words appearing in the text. She asked for the meaning of the word and all options were accepted, which means that if there were different definitions/translations for the word, were they all valid. At this point of the session, the teacher started the Natural Approach games. The first game was the following: The teacher created 3 different groups of 4 students in each and she spread the pictures of the tricky words on all the tables they were sat. In groups, children had to relate the flashcards with the tricky words. That activity made them argue, discuss, listen to other perspectives, accept other points of view, etc. When the discovery was done, each group told to the class which options they had and the others had to say if they did or did not agree with the results. The purpose of this activity was to discover by themselves the solution. In case there was a very complicated word, the opportunity to use the computer was given. The second game was this one: The educator used to start the game choosing some pictures and stick them on the board. Then, she asked the boys and the girls to be focused on the pictures in a concentrated way. After a few seconds, their eyes had to be closed and one the teacher took one out. When the learners opened their eyes, they had to guess which was the missing picture. In the second time, the one who succeed could replace the teacher's role. Finally, it was asked to read the text again and explain what it

² See the text in the appendix 2.

was understood after being working the vocabulary words. As their previous explanations were still on the blackboard, they could relate, compare and see their improvement.

The group who worked through the audio-recording had exactly the same session's structure. However, instead of reading the text the times they need, they could read it only once and then they listened to the text three times. Also, after the Natural Approach games, they just listened to the audio, which means that they did not read.

Finally, it is important to say that the first and the last session were absolutely different as it was test day. This means that not all the students effectuated it and only the chosen ones (8 from each group) participated. During these sessions, children were in their usual class and one by one (only the 8 mentioned) came to the class where the educator was. In there, they were filmed while they were reading aloud a text about the "Camouflage" reader. All of them read the same part of the text. Also, they completed the fill in the gaps text.

4. Results

After the research, these results came up:

Firstly, and related to the formulated question, *will our school pupils in the 3rd year be able to understand an English reader with the help of the NA activities?*, the results showed that the mentioned approach increases significantly the English knowledge of students in two different ways: In vocabulary assimilation and in reading comprehension.

Here comes a visual results of the study. The difference between the first and the last test is considerably notable. All students, except "N" from the audio recording group, raised positively in their results. Only two students from the second group achieved the highest mark, which was 6. Even though, most of them obtained a 4 and a 5 which is an absolute success. Also, it is easily visible the fact that the audio recording group obtained better marks than the other one.

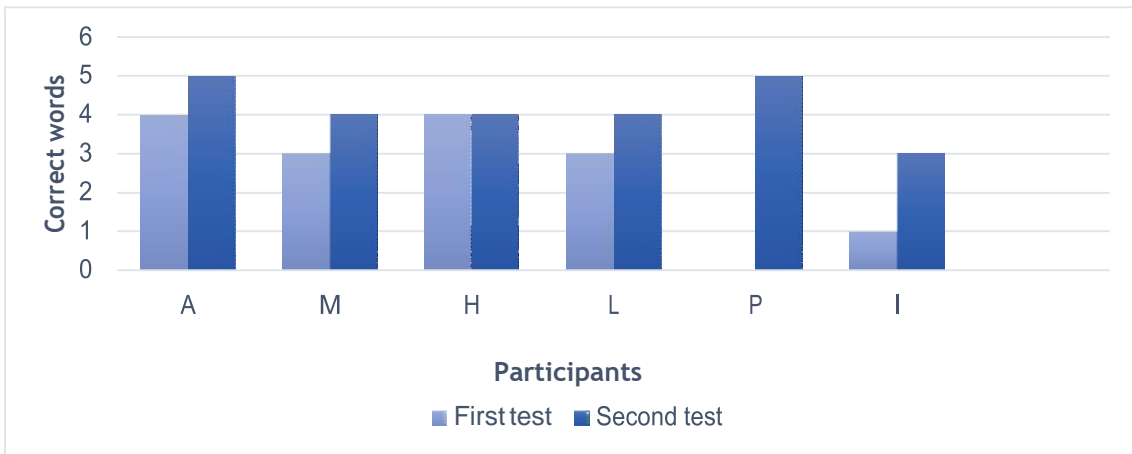


Figure 1: The results of the not audio-recording group

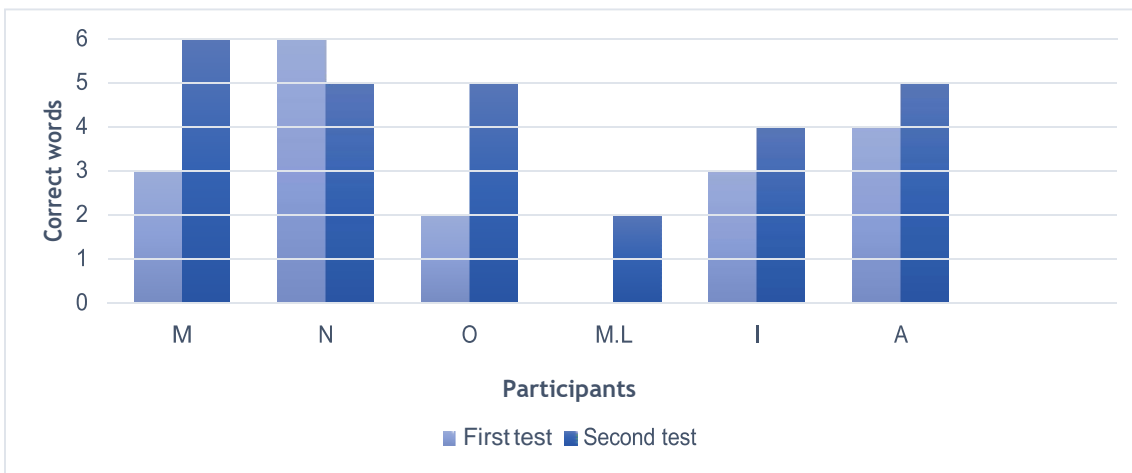


Figure 2: The results of the audio-recording group.

During the first session, children used to explain what they understood in Catalan or Spanish as all the vocabulary treated was new for them. However, from the second session to the last one, an extraordinary change in their communication happened. As the first main words worked were the base to understand and talk about the reader, they started using this vocabulary to explain the comprehension of the other pages. It is true that after all the readings, when they were asked to explain what they understand, participants tend to use the assimilated words previously worked. Later on, after the activities, students combine the new words learned with the acquired ones in the early sessions. This fact happened in both groups.

Here there is an example of the non-audio listening group:

- First session:

Before working the text, students said:

- “This explain the camouflage of lion”.
- “Animals use camouflage and the tiger camouflage”.

After working the main vocabulary words, they stated the following:

- “The animals is camouflage to other animals, they are scared”.
- “The tiger is using the camouflage because *no els vegin*”.
- “The tiger is using the camouflage in the grass”.
- “The tiger has stripes”.
- “To protect themselves not to eat”.

In this session, the words we worked were: *Camouflage, tiger, fur, stripes and grass*.

- Last session:

Firstly, they said these statements:

- “It’s the same picture because it is using camouflage. This summer and this winter”
- “The fox is fur”
- “The bird a little bit stripes”
- “The chicks are using camouflage”
- “No snow, no camouflage”
- “Chicks have feathers”

After the Natural Approach activities, they understood the following:

- “Aric fox have fur to use camouflage”
- “The grouse have feathers to camouflage”
- “The chicks have the same feathers as the mummy”
- “Now it is summer because they are not white”
- “The snow is *desfeta*”

In this session, the words we worked were: *melts, Artic fox, grouse, summer, chicks*.

In contrast, here there is the example of the audio recording group.

- First session:

The first session of the group with audio, after the reading/audio recording, they said the following:

- “A lion”
- “camouflage”
- “The tiger camouflage on the grass”.

Later on, after working on the vocabulary, they comprehended the following:

- “Es camuflen *perquè no els ataquin*”.
- “The tiger has stripes and fur on its body”.
- “*Els animals es camuflen d’altres animals*”.
- “*El tigre té pels i en els pels a vegades té línies*”.
- “*Les línies els ajuden a amagar-se a l’herba*”.
- “*El tigre quan veu que venen a per les cries, les defensen*”.

In this case, the words we worked were: *Camouflage, tiger, fur, stripes and grass*.

- Last session:

After asking them what they understood, they said:

- “Now is not white and the fur is another colour”
- “There is a bird and a dog”
- “The bird has feathers in their body but now white colour”.

Then, their vocabulary increased and added the following:

- “The grouse is a bird”.
- “In winter the animals are white and when it finishes are brown. The grouse is black and white”.
- “The chicks have brown feathers”.
- “They change the colour for camouflage”.
- “The Artic fox have brown fur”

In this session, the words we worked were: *melts, Artic fox, grouse, summer, chicks*.

As it is observed in the examples, both groups acquired the same vocabulary taught with no distinctions. Even though some students were more motivated in terms of participation

and learning, all of them made the effort to improve their learning and be concentrated in the work. This means that even in the examples there are just a few examples, all students contributed in the games, in responding the questions and cooperating in their group work.

Secondly, and related to the formulated question, *Does the audio recording affect the pronunciation and comprehension of the learners?*, the results demonstrated the following:

In the first reading, test it was observed how almost all participants were not able to read properly the words *stripes*, *hide* and *camouflage*. In contrast, the words “grass” and “tiger” were correctly pronounced and intonated by the majority of the students as there were known words for them. As there are many Spanish speakers in this school, most of them read *camuflaje* /ka.mu.flə.xe/ instead of *Camouflage* /kæməflaʒ/. Also, what it was observed during the first evaluation was that some students read slowly and confused and they need to reread the difficult words. Sometimes, if they felt insecure about the word, they read it letter by letter. These facts happened in both groups as by this time, they had not been in contact with the reading and the listening yet.

In the second reading test, all the statements mentioned before changed. Both groups were more confident in the text as they already knew the words. This time, only two participants (student A from the Audio-recording group and student P from the not audio- recording group) had to reread words. It is true that the Audio-recording group read the text more quickly and with more security than the others. The results showed that the group exposed to an audio obtained excellent improvement. Similarly, the other group, had also an incredible progress but still having many problems with the words *stripes* and *hide*. These words were the most difficult ones to pronounce and that is why they had problems on them.

These tables show the progress between the first (+) and the last session (X) between both groups:

Table 1: The results of the not audio-recording group in the pronunciation evaluation.

| | A | | M | | H | | L | | P | | I | |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Tiger | + | X | + | X | + | X | | X | | | | X |
| Camouflage | | X | + | X | | X | | X | | X | | X |
| Fur | + | X | + | X | + | X | + | X | | | + | X |
| Stripes | | X | | X | | | | | | | | |
| Hide | | X | + | X | | X | | | | | | X |
| Grass | + | X | + | X | + | X | + | X | + | X | + | X |
| TOTAL | 3 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 |

Table 2: The results of the audio-recording group in the pronunciation evaluation.

| | M | | N | | O | | M.L. | | I | | A | |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Tiger | + | X | + | X | + | X | | X | + | X | + | X |
| Camouflage | + | X | | X | | X | | X | | X | | X |
| Fur | + | X | + | X | + | X | | X | + | X | + | X |
| Stripes | | X | | X | | X | | | | X | | |
| Hide | | X | | X | | X | | | | X | | |
| Grass | + | X | + | X | + | X | + | X | | X | + | X |
| TOTAL | 4 | 6 | 3 | 6 | 3 | 6 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 4 |

As it is observable, the improving is clearly significant and all children showed better results in terms of pronunciation on the last evaluation. Even though, it is seen how the words *stripes* and *hide* caused difficulties in many students. At the same time, the easier between the not audio recording group and the audio recording group. The first one, even though their improvement, still had difficulties in pronounce correctly some words. Only 2 participants guessed all the words while in the second group, 4 of them could do it. In

addition, in the first group, there was a boy who was only able to correctly pronounce 2 words while in the second one, the minimum words guessed in all participants were 4. The second table shows that few *X* are missing, which means that almost all of them acquired the adequate English pronunciation.

5. Conclusions

After carrying out the different sessions and obtaining the exposed results in the previous part, the following statements are concluded:

First of all, and related to the first question formulated, I can strongly affirm that it is achieved. The participants, through Natural Approach activities, could understand the reader and acquire many English vocabulary. This statement is confirmed during the last evaluation where it is seen that children were able to talk about the text using the words worked through the sessions and choose the correct vocabulary word in the evaluation worksheet. As the activities planned were developed using pictures, children had the opportunity to manipulate them and acquire the meaning through a visual way. For this reason, it was a motivating activity and they were absolutely concentrated and focused on what it was asked. In addition, as after each text reading they were asked about what they understood, most of the boys and girls participated in giving their opinion and while doing that, the others could listen and get more information about the reader. This fact guaranteed that almost all children comprehend what the text was about in an interesting and natural process. Participants were learning and teaching without being aware of it. At the end of the sessions it was absolutely fascinating to see how all of them could talk about camouflage using only English and without having any problem in producing the input. This means that they really interiorized the vocabulary related to it and they did not need to put many effort in talking about it. It is true that during each session we had some talks about the other sessions in order to refresh memory. So, repetition was one on the key aspects of this investigation.

Secondly, and according to the second question, it was also accomplished. Even both groups improved their pronunciation and comprehension, the one who was exposed to the audio-recordings obtained better results. What I could observe during the investigation process is that children need to know the word in order to pronounce it correctly. At the beginning, in the first evaluation, some participants already knew some

words like *grass* or *tiger* and for this reason they did not have any problem in reading and pronounce it correctly. In contrast, the words *stripes* and *hide* were completely difficult for them and they had to read the word letter by letter slowly. In the last session, as they already had been in contact with the vocabulary, an increasing progress was noticed. Even though, it is true that children need to receive a lot of input in order to assimilate what is taught. For this reason, the main difference between both groups was that the not audio-recording group, in the last evaluation, still had difficulties in both tricky words. The other ones, instead, were more capable to produce them correctly. This fact is because the audio-recording group had been in contact with an English audio recording every session that helped them to learn and assimilate the correct pronunciation. Maybe, if the other ones received the same input would finally succeed on it as well. Also, the fact that the audio-recording group had to be focused on the listening in order to be able to participate in the talks and understand the text, helped them to make the acquisition done. So, in some way, they were forced to pay attention to the audio. In my opinion, if this forcing did not exist, maybe, they would not have learned as much as they did because they would not have the need. Related to the comprehension part, it is important to mention that the use of audio produced participants to be more aware of what the recording was saying and it was reflected in the last evaluation where that group obtained better results than the others. They all had to do a cooperative work in order to understand and get words from the audio. The other group, as they were reading on their own, they could read the text or words the times they need and for this reason, they were not focused at all. So, it was an individual task and they did not have to make any effort for helping the group to understand what it was said. At the end, both groups comprehended the reader but ones with more capabilities and success than the others.

To sum up, The Natural Approach is an efficient and motivating methodology to help children improve their vocabulary acquisition and comprehension skills. As it can be adapted to any age and to any interest, it is absolutely useful and the success is accomplished. Moreover, in order to help children improve pronunciation skills, audio-recordings are the way. As we are not in an English context, the use of them can benefit students in being aware of the different aspects of the language. Even though, it should not be forgotten to plan some activity after that with the aim to guarantee their effort in listening to it.

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7. Appendices

Appendix 1: Previous and after exam.

Name

Date



This (1) is using (2)..... to hide in the (3)..... . The tiger has (4)..... on its body. The fur has (5)..... The stripes help the tiger to (6)..... in the grass .



- | | | |
|------------------|-----------|-------------|
| 1. a) lion | b) tiger | c) elephant |
| 2. a) camouflage | b) skin | c) hands |
| 3. a) grass | b) forest | c) house |
| 4. a) lines | b) fur | c) eyes |
| 5. a) hair | b) lines | c) stripes |
| 6. a) jump | b) lie | d) hide |

Name: _____

Date: _____

Science



CAMOUFLAGE



Camouflage

Animals use camouflage to hide from other animals.

This tiger is using camouflage to hide in the grass. The tiger has fur on its body. The fur has stripes. The stripes help the tiger to hide in the grass.

A Tiger

