# ENHANCING STUDENTS' MOTIVATION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL BY USING MEANINGFUL AND RELEVANT INPUT AND MATERIALS

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**ABSTRACT:** Choosing and implementing the most appropriate method and materials to foster the learning of a second language is a challenging process. This dissertation provides some insights into the process of Second Language Acquisition and how two opposing teaching methods can favor this process. The first one is the Natural Approach supported by Stephen Krashen, which poses five hypotheses for language acquisition to keep in mind. Even though all of the hypotheses are important, it is a good idea to draw attention to the comprehensible input, the optimal input, and the affective filter because any of them can lead to a successful or failing class. The second one is the Audiolingual method, which more dynamic and effective communicative methods have surpassed, it still contains some elements that may continue to be exploited, especially if they are combined with other methods. There is also an overview of multilingualism, with the aim of reviewing different perspectives that learners of English as a third language may have. A deeper view of teaching strategies to children and the most appropriate materials for them is reviewed to offer a variety of ideas to be implemented with children, regardless of the level of English or age the students have. However, it is recommended to choose the one that appeals to the teacher the most and adapt it to the students' needs. This analysis poses some possible recommendations for teachers to get the maximum benefit of teaching materials for the sake of creating the best possible learning environment.

**KEYWORDS:** motivation, language acquisition, optimal input, vocabulary teaching, reflective practice

Motivating multilingual learners in elementary education presents a unique and complex challenge, particularly in culturally diverse and linguistically rich environments. In many indigenous communities across Mexico, such as those inhabited by the Otomí people, children often grow up bilingual—speaking both their native language and Spanish.

However, when English is introduced as a third language in formal education, students frequently struggle to find relevance or motivation to engage with it. This lack of intrinsic or instrumental motivation can hinder their participation and progress in the language acquisition process.

This article explores the central question: How can meaningful and contextually relevant materials enhance motivation and engagement among multilingual elementary learners in English language classrooms? The study is grounded in the real-life experience of Mr.

Martínez, a teacher working in a public school in Hidalgo, where Otomí children take part of the student population. Despite being bilingual, these students initially showed little interest in learning English, perceiving it as disconnected from their daily lives and cultural context.

The case study presented here offers a practical and theoretical perspective into the challenges and opportunities of teaching English in multilingual and multicultural settings.

It highlights the importance of selecting appropriate teaching methods and materials that resonate with students' backgrounds, interests, and linguistic realities. The research draws on foundational theories of second language acquisition, including Krashen's Natural Approach and the Audiolingual Method, to examine how different pedagogical strategies can either support or hinder student motivation.

Moreover, this article emphasizes the critical role of reflective teaching and the thoughtful integration of vocabulary instruction, visual aids, and culturally relevant content. By aligning instructional practices with students' lived experiences, teachers can foster a more engaging and effective learning environment. The findings suggest that when learners are exposed to optimal input—language that is not only comprehensible but also compelling and abundant—they are more likely to participate actively and develop a positive attitude toward English learning.

Ultimately, this work aims to provide elementary school teachers with practical insights and adaptable strategies to enhance motivation in multilingual classrooms. It advocates for a dynamic, student-centered approach that values cultural identity, promotes meaningful communication, and encourages creativity in the use of teaching materials. Through this view, English language learning becomes not just an academic requirement, but a relevant and enriching experience for all learners.

## SYNTHESIS OF THE CASE

Mr. Martínez is a teacher at a public school in the state of Hidalgo. He works in a community where Otomí children attend, too. Therefore, all of the children from Otomí backgrounds were already bilingual since they spoke Otomí and Spanish. The children he took care of were from 9 to 11 years old. The group for this case study was not too big, only 15 students. All of the students were required to take English, as it is indicated in the curricula for basic education in Mexico. Unfortunately, the students were not interested in learning English because they did not see any benefit from it in their lives.

Mr. Martínez tried his best to get the students involved in the language and have them participate and learn. However, regardless of what he did, the students did not seem interested. He tried different ways to get the students' attention, such as songs, realia, and games. He even went back to reading about Second Language Acquisition, language learning, teaching procedures, and principles. Nonetheless, any of the activities he did, interested the students.

One fellow teacher advised him to integrate a method called Audiolingualism. Consequently, he immediately went to look for information about it and got all the materials he needed to implement it with his students as soon as possible.

He told his students that their classes would change. When the day to implement it came, he planned his lessons and practiced them again and again. When the day to introduce this method came, the students were excited about what they were doing. They were amazed by the images and sounds they had to repeat. Even though they did not know exactly what they were saying, they had some idea because of the pictures that were on display.

The students were not very sure why they were not writing anymore in their notebooks, but the teacher explained to them that this new method was more about listening and speaking. They started with the lesson, and they were involved. After four weeks, the students started to get bored again.

One day, a supervisor came to Mr. Martinez's class to observe how he was performing the Audiolingual method with his students. He observed that the students were participating by repeating the information from the conversations in the three lessons he observed. Then, he asked the teacher about the following lesson and by the time he played it, he realized that there was some vocabulary that was not appropriate to children. For this reason, the teacher felt embarrassed about what happened because he had not reviewed the material in advance and did not know what content there was. In the end, the teacher accomplished his goal of having the students speak, but it was not exactly the way he expected it.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Multilingualism

Teaching and learning languages have become a very important part of education worldwide. Schools in our country, as well as the ones in the international context, have placed tremendous importance on the acquisition of a second and even a third language in the classroom. This incident is also known as "multilingualism." According to Cenoz (2013, p. 4-5), "Multilingualism is a complex phenomenon that can be studied from different perspectives in disciplines such as linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and education".

The international context has been promoting globalization, especially when referring to communication; a major example is the ever-growing use of the Internet. Every day, students from all contexts rely on the Internet to find information, which, in most cases, is presented in English. This has given the language a privileged status in education, gaining new learners every year (Cenoz, 2013).

However, not all people have been able to access the internet the same way. In México, some communities outside the big cities do not enjoy all the advantages new technologies offer. Their interaction with the online environment is little and therefore, their interest in acquiring a different language or getting to know a different culture does not seem necessary for them.

Moreover, some of these people feel threatened by foreign interactions since there has been a slight sense of discrimination against these indigenous cultures and their languages. Holmes (2008) states that when a group does not have a linguistic predominance, they tend to maintain their mother tongue as a symbol of their identity. They are inclined to resist the dominance of other languages in different areas of their lives.

It has been observed that indigenous cultures have learned to speak Spanish out of the need to have access to education. It is also noticeable how in communities next to tourist places, indigenous people have learned to speak English, German, and other languages in addition to Spanish so that they can interact with foreigners. This happens in places such as Cancun, where we can see how people are able to acquire the language due to immersion in a multilingual and multicultural environment.

### The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis

There is a big difference between acquiring and learning a language. According to Krashen (1981:1982), when a person is acquiring a second language, the person does not notice that this process is taking place. It happens in a natural way that

does not require any formal instruction to occur. The acquirers grasp the language regarding the amount of exposure the person has to it. At that moment, the acquirer is not conscious of any grammar rules or the level of complexity of the language being acquired.

On the other hand, learning is a process in which the person is formally instructed. It usually happens in an academic environment and it has a set outline. The person is aware of what and when learning is happening. It involves the learning of grammar rules, and speaking interaction is promoted from the early stages of learning. It is said that it is more common for children to acquire the language and for adults to learn it. However, adults may also acquire the language under the right circumstances and the appropriate amount of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1981).

## The Natural Order Hypothesis

This hypothesis states that language acquisition relies on a specific order. It is not appropriate to force anyone to acquire information for which the person is not ready. It is possible to see an example of this when we are teaching grammar. Teachers should preferably start with the most basic structures and vocabulary implicit in the situation to practice, along with the correct amount of exposure. This way, it might become more accessible to grasp. Then, it is advisable that teachers continue to involve more advanced grammar and vocabulary within the situations afterward.

Dulay & Burt (1974:1975, cited in Krashen, 2009) concluded that some studies show children acquire a second language in the same order, from the least complex to the most complex. Krashen confirmed these studies' results and added that adults follow the same pattern of second language acquisition regarding grammar structures.

Nonetheless, Krashen (1981) describes the natural order in which structures are acquired, which does not rely on the instruction or exposure the acquirers receive. As the name suggests, this order appears naturally in the language and is visible despite the acquirer's background, age, or first language.

## The Monitor Hypothesis

Krashen (1983) declares that grammatical knowledge is useful to language production in the form of an editor for language utterances. This language production is the result of the information that the person has already acquired previously. Then, there comes a stage similar to a self-revision to see if the statement produced was grammatically correct.

However, it is necessary that the person knows the grammar rules and has enough time to focus on the information that is being produced. This analysis takes time; therefore, time is another essential factor for successful monitoring. Self-correction may occur before expressing the statement or even after. Once the person has realized he made an error, he may be able to correct it.

## The Input Hypothesis

This is the most complex one since it relies on the language that has already been acquired, and the person is capable of using it to produce ideas. The actual level of knowledge or competence that the person has is represented as I and for the person to continue to move forward in the acquisition of the language, needs to be presented with some comprehensible language a little beyond where the acquirer is at the time (+1) (Krashen, 1998).

Some people wonder how it is possible that the person understands structures or vocabulary that the acquirer does not know yet. Nevertheless, Krashen (1983) claims that if the person is aided with sufficient meaningful materials and context, the acquisition process can take place. Meaning is the tool that will make acquisition possible rather than form.

It is important to remember that the input hypothesis is related to the acquisition, not to learning, and that meaningful and comprehensive i + 1 should be present so that the person can acquire the language. It is also stated that even if you do not provide i + 1, if the communication was successful, then i + 1 may occur.

## The Affective Filter Hypothesis

This hypothesis expresses there is a filter that can affect the learning process. It is said that even though there is a great amount of comprehensible input in class, some people might not be able to acquire the language due to the affective filter. Lightbown & Spada (2006, p. 37) state that "affect" refers to feelings, motives, needs, attitudes, and emotional states. A learner who is tense, anxious, and bored may "filter out" input, making it unavailable for acquisition."

The affective filter is of great relevance because it might or might not interfere with the language acquisition process. When the affective filter is high, the learners will not be able to integrate the language appropriately. This happens because a high affective filter creates a barrier that does not permit the person to acquire the language.

On the contrary, when the affective filter is low, the learner is open to receiving and using the new information that he is being provided. Thus, it is important that teachers make a great deal of effort to keep the affective filter low to enhance an adequate learning environment.

Learners have to be shown the classroom is a safe space where they are capable of interacting with their peers and sharing their ideas regardless of possible mistakes they might make. One good idea to encourage a language learning environment is to involve learners in situations that may be meaningful for them and are of interest so that they find them appealing and their levels of stress are reduced.

## Teaching Vocabulary to Children

Teaching vocabulary is critical for language learners regardless of their age. However, it cannot be expected that adults and children should be taught in the same way. One of the most critical parts of teaching is considering the student's needs and trying to cater to those needs as much as possible.

Teaching vocabulary to children has to be handled carefully, and it has to be a well- planned activity so that they can benefit from the activity and be involved and engaged at the same time. Cameron (2001) expresses that it is important to remember that children are still developing vocabulary in their first language as well as their intellectual growth.

Thus, the way vocabulary is introduced might be a helpful tool for the construction of further grammatical ideas that may allow them to increase their discourse. She suggests that the children's background is taken into consideration to know what is of help and what might be a barrier.

Cameron (2001; citing Vygotsky 1962; Wertsch 1985) described that children have a different way of giving meaning to words from adults. Children do not necessarily understand a word the same way because they will associate it with the words they already know in their first language. Nevertheless, it is essential to remember that children are still in the process of setting the meanings of multiple words in their own L1 as well. Consequently, the meaning they give could be partially understood in the same way as adults know the word.

Cameron (2001) summarizes that "to actually know a word, children must be aware of its form (spelling, pronunciation, inflections), its meaning (its conceptual content and how it relates to other concepts and words) and its use (how the word can be applied and in what contexts). Graves (2012) advocates that children must be taught vocabulary in an explicit way. Words should be presented one by one, explaining their meaning, usage, pronunciation, and possible variations.

## Classroom Strategies

Different strategies may be used in the language class to support vocabulary teaching. Silverman (2007) suggests these ideas are aimed at helping teachers with the presentation of new vocabulary and to help children foster the understanding, usage, and further acquisition of the same vocabulary in a low affective filter environment. Some of the strategies that have been proven to work are:

❙ Use engaging children's literature to introduce new words.

❙ Explain the words clearly.

❙ Foster children to elaborate examples with such words including different situations from the ones provided in the context.

❙ Aid students to provide synonyms or antonyms of the given vocabulary.

❙ Promote that children perform the meaning of the word or represent it with a drawing. Go over pronunciation a certain number of times.

❙ Review the spelling of the words.

❙ Use the words continuously in different contexts and for some time until the children are comfortable using them and are less likely to forget them.

The Audiolingual method focuses on structure mainly but it is good for vocabulary, as well. The Audio-Lingual method focuses on repeating some words to memorize (Larsen- Freeman, 1992). This method might be a good way to show vocabulary within a listening exercise. Nita & Syafei (2012) stated that language is taught by focusing attention on the words and the numerous repetition drills about the theme. However, the Audio-visual method can be improved and complemented with other ideas, such as games and always providing comprehensible input.

Krashen (1993) mentioned that it is always essential for acquisition to provide a comprehensible input setting in the classroom. The comprehensible input can be offered by having different cues about the theme that is going to be presented in class. This input could be improved by adding materials such as visual aids or realia. Nevertheless, it is not enough to have any kind of comprehensible input. Krashen & Mason (2020) claim that comprehensible is not enough and explain that there has to be an optimal input. According to them, this optimal input has four characteristics:

❙ It has to be comprehensible, which does not mean that the learners have to understand each single word.

❙ It has to be compelling, which means interesting enough so that learners do not get stuck with the word they do not know.

❙ It is rich in language in a way that supports understanding appropriately.

❚ It must be abundant because it needs to provide several moments to acquire the language.

Mason & Krashen (2019) explain that if optimal input is provided in the classroom setting, the output may surpass the expected outcomes from immersion. Integrating different kinds of games could be a good way to change the pace of a class. Games, in general, are seen as useful classroom materials since "games, by their very nature, focus the students on what it is they are doing and use the language as a tool for reaching the goal rather than as a goal in itself" (Terrell 1982: 121 cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001). According to Richards & Rodgers (2001), interactive games may be used in audiolingual lessons to motivate and provide a variation in the rhythm of the class, even if the drilling activities are mechanical.

## The Role of Motivation in the Language Classroom

Language teaching and learning are influenced by external factors such as the environment and emotions. It is no longer exclusively a cognitive process. Therefore, it is important to consider how the emotional part affects language learning. The main focus would be on motivation to explore the different reasons why a person learns a new language. According to Lightbown & Spada (1993), motivation became the most important variable in learning a new language; it may directly affect whether the learner succeeds or not in the learning process.

Different definitions have tried to explain motivation. Gardner (1985) claimed that there is a close relation between the effort one puts into accomplishing language learning, the desire one has to do it, and the positive attitudes toward this objective. Similar to Gardner, Brown (1994) also describes motivation as the combination of desire and effort directed toward achieving a goal. Regarding language learning, this refers to the learner's willingness to get involved in the language and persist in the learning process.

Dörnyei (1994) proposes a Motivational Framework for Language Learning. According to this framework, there are three primary forms of motivation:

# The Overlap of Learning Motivations



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**▌ Integrative motivation.** It occurs when the learner is interested in learning more about English-speaking communities and their cultures. Learners think of English as a connection to a new culture and environment.

**▌ Instrumental motivation.** It occurs when the learner sees a benefit to learning English. Learners are focused on learning English because they see a benefit, such as a better job or academic advancement.

**▌ Intrinsic motivation.** It is related to the joy and satisfaction of learning itself. It is usually associated with activities of interest that the learner already does and wants to explore more in-depth, or it may be associated with a love for the subject per se.

According to Dörnyei's Motivational Framework for Language Learning, integrative and instrumental motivation are important and necessary for learning a new language, whereas intrinsic motivation is essential for persisting in the learning process until the person has achieved the goal that the learner had planned before starting the learning process. Dörnyei & Ushioda (2011) explain that intrinsic motivation is essential because it focuses on the level of engagement, enjoyment, personal relevance, and commitment. This motivation maintains a positive attitude toward language learning and helps keep motivation going.

Dörnyei & Ushioda (2011) also state that the class environment and the teacher strongly influences motivation. For this reason, it is recommended that teachers encourage a supportive, unstressed learning environment. They state that it is essential to help students build up their confidence and resilience by using positive reinforcement. Effort is more relevant than any innate ability. This way, the students may build competence and have a sense of progress (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011)

Brown (1980) also describes a fourth type of motivation, the extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation comes from external elements and rewards, different from the joy or genuine interest that comes from the activity itself. Brown (1980) explains that the performance of the activity is directly related to the fact of earning a reward or avoiding punishment.

Brown also commented that the most usual extrinsic motivations are to earn good grades, gain approval from others, get a secure job, or any other reward. This kind of motivation can not be sustained for a long time. He also suggests that educators should try to foster intrinsic motivation to encourage long-term engagement and deeper learning in the classroom.

## Managing Materials and Resources for Teaching Vocabulary

The importance of adequately selecting materials for children and how material helps to deliver the class. Choosing the appropriate materials will facilitate the delivery of the information. The success of the class does not rely entirely on the materials. Nevertheless, they will enhance the learning experience by fostering a comprehensible input. It is crucial to take into consideration the age, the background, the interests, the needs, the setting, the motivation and the attitude towards the language for choosing the correct material. It is also advisable to consider the students' learning styles in order to cater to the needs of the students as much as possible.

Materials and resources are the most valuable assets for vocabulary presentation and practice. Teachers can quickly contextualize language items in a meaningful and relevant way by properly utilizing the resources available. At the same time, it becomes easier for students to convey the meaning of the language when aided by materials. Some of the most significant strategies for promoting a good use of resources and material in teaching vocabulary are described as follows:

Visual Materials. Scott & Ytreberg (1995) suggest the use of visual aids and realia in the classroom to make vocabulary comprehensible and memorable. They argue that visuals and realia enhance the relevance of the words, making them easier to understand and remember afterward. Visual aids help create a Vocabulary-Rich Environment. The more exposure the children have, the better opportunities to memorize, retain, and use new vocabulary they can take advantage of. Exposure

to vocabulary in the environment supports passive learning as well. Therefore, it is convenient to label objects around the classroom, create word walls, or display thematic posters to help children make connections between words and their meanings.

TPR (Total Physical Response) and Games. Including physical activities to reinforce the internalization of the vocabulary is a particularly suitable idea for children regardless of their age. Asher (1977) mentions that performing activities makes it easier for children to understand and embed the new vocabulary. By acquiring words in this way, children are given the benefit of setting the basis for new language skills in a more natural, fun, and effective way. Wright, Betteridge & Buckby (2006) describe how working with vocabulary words while they are playing educational games is beneficial. They say that games reinforce vocabulary learning and, at the same time, make the learning process more enjoyable.

Songs, Rhymes and Chants. These activities are well recommended due to their simplicity to be recalled for children. Cameron (2001) explains that the fact that songs provide rhythmic repetition allows words to be remembered for a longer period of time. Additionally, the use of songs provides a stress-free learning environment. She mentions that in addition to helping with vocabulary, songs help improve pronunciation and the formation of structures. Moon (2000) points out that songs provide a memorable experience of vocabulary learning because of the music and rhyme. It is repetitive, which favors memorization and language exposure that children need.  He suggests that using songs with specific themes might be more relevant and enjoyable.

Storytelling and Picture Books. Presenting vocabulary through literature that is interesting and appealing to children is very useful. According to Krashen (1993), he explains that reading stories and picture books is an excellent way to provide comprehensible input. The comprehensible input that, in this case, comes through stories and picture books allows learning vocabulary in a natural way. He argues that stories show a meaningful context in which the new vocabulary is introduced, making children understand and remember words through the stories and images. Krashen claims that picture books are especially adequate as a result of the combination of images with vocabulary presented in context. This gives children the opportunity to infer the meanings of words that they do not even know. Moon (2000) supports the use of teaching new vocabulary through stories because it is immersive. She explains that for children it is unchallenging to taste vocabulary within the flow of the story.

High-Frequency Vocabulary and Theme-Based Vocabulary. Graves (2012) emphasizes the relevance of teaching learners sets of high-frequency vocabulary because they are words that they may find in everyday language. They are necessary

to have practical language skills. By introducing these words, teachers help learners build a strong basis of vocabulary useful in diverse contexts. Based on what Graves (2012) explained, theme-based vocabulary is essential as well. Here, words are taught within specific categories (e.g., family, food, animals, colors). Using thematic chunks of information allows learners to connect related words and facilitates better retention. The thematic approach makes vocabulary more meaningful because children are capable of understanding groupings of related words.

## Reflective Teaching

Reflective teaching is the process by which educators examine their own instructional strategies to determine their overall efficacy. Depending on the results of this analytical process, which is based on critical reflection, improvement or change in teaching methods may be necessary. Reflective teaching practice is one of the important processes in teacher education. It stimulates teachers and students to develop various skills like decision- making, metacognition, and logical thinking (Goodley,2018). Only reflective teachers are able to refine and modify their practices for improved teaching and learning. They are able to accommodate the diverse learning styles of students and contribute to the quality teaching-learning process (Afghani & Ferdowsi, 2015).

Reflecting on the teaching practice is important to be aware of the learning process of students. Teachers can follow a concrete methodology that enables them the tool to reflect on their practice. Salmani Nodoushan (2011) proposes the following steps to a more organized reflection on the teaching practice:

> **Data collection.** Teachers can access several sources of information to collect data. Colleagues may be asked to observe classes, write notes, and discuss them later. Students' learning logs and journals are also useful for this purpose.

> **Data analysis.** Data can be analyzed, and attempts can be made to identify patterns in the data. For instance, the reflective teacher can search the data to see if a pattern of learner reluctance to speak during class activities emerges. If so, the learners can be asked why.

> **Plan for action.** After reflecting, the reflective teacher needs to create a plan to incorporate new insights. The information and insights that emerge from the reflective process should be utilized to improve class action and instructional practice (Farrell, 1998). Through reflection, teachers make visible to themselves what is apparent to others but a mystery to themselves. Reflection is the process of bridging the gap between experience and learning (Salmani Nodoushan, 2011).

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE CASE

Mr. Martínez has been struggling to keep his students engaged in English classes. He has tried different ideas, such as bringing realia to class, games, and songs. The latter was the use of the audiolingual method in his classes. It was explained that the lessons served their purpose at the beginning, and he kept the students engaged and participating. It was good that the students grasped the language with the images they saw.

In this case, it was reflected how every method and approach that teachers decide to implement in class has to be contextualized. Otherwise, students might find themselves lost, struggling with words or structures they do not completely understand, or they may fall into the same routine over and over, and then the learning experience becomes tedious. It is good to create a sense of expectation among the students so they do not easily predict what will happen in the following class. Monotony could be an enemy of any class and negatively impact the students' perceptions of the class and the learning process.

### A Sample Lesson for Teaching Vocabulary
### Lesson Design for Student Motivation

This diagram outlines the flow of the lesson designed to enhance vocabulary learning through meaningful, relevant, and engaging materials:

| Warm-Up Activity (Tasting traditional dishes) | Vocabulary Presentation (Visual aids + repetition) | Interactive Practice (Games + sentence frames) | Production (Clay model & peer interaction) |
|---|---|---|---|

This flow emphasizes active engagement, multisensory input, and student-centered tasks that contribute to lowering the affective filter and increasing motivation. The activity sequence is aligned with the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) model and reflects Krashen's principles of optimal input.

A lesson was designed to practically exemplify the implementation of the strategies previously mentioned in the theoretical framework. This lesson aims to align theory and practice, providing the teacher with a clear reference to follow. The lesson was designed for 50 minutes, considering the specific characteristics of the students described in the case study. The lesson plan can be found in Appendix 1, and the materials and resources in Appendix 2.

The main objective of the class is that students describe traditional dishes they commonly have at home. This objective was chosen considering that all students might have a favorite dish making the class meaningful and relevant to them.

The lesson starts with a fun and engaging warm-up, during which students blindly try three traditional dishes that the teacher has brought to class. This activity will definitely call all students' attention, having them actively participate in the task. Even if not every student will have the chance to try the dishes, they will enjoy their peer doing so. Once pupils have guessed all the dishes the teacher will proceed to ask them to vote for the one, they like the most, explaining that they will work on that dish from now on. Considering students' preferences and involving them in the personalization of the lesson helps raise interest and intrinsic motivation. the teacher will then proceed to present vocabulary by incorporating visual aids (flashcards). The language presented will be the ingredients in the most-voted dish.

The practice will first take place as a controlled one, promoting accuracy in pronunciation and aiding vocabulary acquisition. The teacher will conduct a choral drill about the ingredients presented and then have the students play a "hot potato game" to randomly elicit the words from students. The teacher will use the flashcard to elicit vocabulary to provide scaffolding and comprehensible input.

In addition to the vocabulary presentation, the teacher will also focus on the structures "I like" and "I don't like." The teacher must remember that being grammar is such an abstract concept for children, it is crucial to focus better on meaning and communication than on structural explanations. In this regard, the teacher will use some emojis of happy and sad faces to convey meaning and model the utterance. Then, students will be asked to follow the prompts and produce their own sentences in pairs.

Before class, the teacher asks students to bring some clay of different colors. The teacher then asks students to use their clay to make a model of their favorite dish and label it with the ingredients it has. In the case any of the ingredients was not previously introduced, the teacher will provide the word. Once the models are ready, students stand up and mingle around, showing their dishes to their peers and telling them the ingredients it has and they like or don't.

The approach that is suggested to be used is a deductive one, but, if necessary, the teacher may explain things explicitly to make sure there are no questions. Preferably, use the target language only, but be open to using L1 as needed. Have theme-word posters about foods that are commonly used in traditional Otomi food. It is recommended that the students feel comfortable and confident enough to complete the task and help them realize that they are capable of doing it and then use the content correctly to interact with one another in a collaborative way. The suggested method is the PPP (presentation, practice, and production). That way, the students have the opportunity to be exposed to the vocabulary in a natural context, and they will be able to practice and give a final product afterward.

## Suggested Reflective Practice

Only when teachers are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, they are able to improve their practice. This awareness does not come for granted to all teachers. It is difficult to identify the areas to improve and design plans for them. Sometimes, instructors find themselves lost in the overwhelming amount of tasks they have to deliver, making it impossible for them the reflect on their everyday practice. Other times, what is evident to outsiders is not visible to the educator who is immersed in his own practice. Many more times, the need to find suitable strategies for learners leads to frustration and despair, not allowing the educator to recognize the best course of action.

It is in all these situations and more that teachers can benefit from a well-organized routine of reflective practice. As described in Chapter 2, reflective practice requires as a first step, the collection of data. This data is the starting point for all the consecutive improvements. The teacher should consider collecting information from three different sources:

The students. Getting students feedback is essential. The teacher must be open to receiving his pupils' opinions about his class without underestimating the value of these. The teacher can conduct individual interviews, surveys, questionnaires, or even group meetings, caring about finding out the students' feelings towards the language, the class, and the instructor. The teacher can ask students about the activities most enjoy, the ones they enjoy least, the types of interactions they prefer, and their interests. Mr. Martinez can even design and apply a Needs Analysis instrument, which will enormously help him plan the best lesson for his students.

Public education is even all over our country. Therefore, Mr. Martinez is very likely working in a school where there are probably not many English teachers, anyhow he can find very helpful advice from the Spanish teacher. Spanish teachers commonly spend the majority of the day with the students. They know them better than English teachers and know precisely how to handle the intricacies of the class. The teacher should approach these colleagues and ask them for feedback. Even if the Spanish teacher won't be able to help him design the best strategies to foster the acquisition process, they can certainly aid him in classroom management issues.

The Parents. Mr. Martinez must recognize the value of collaborating with parents. Although it is true that many parents are not actively involved in the education of their children, a significant majority are. They like to be considered, they like to be informed, and they welcome being involved in school matters. As a matter of fact, children also like it when their parents are pending on them, and they seek to please them. Teacher Martinez can approach the parents and, at first, ask them about their expectations, what they would like their children to achieve within the

course, what they expect from the teacher, and what they expect from their children in the future. Having this information gathered, he can then design more engaging classroom strategies for his lessons.

The previous will help Mr. Martinez to get a clearer perspective of his class, his students and his own practice. The following step is analyzing all the information gathered. It is important for him to remember that not all parents nor all students will have the same opinions and that while some will prefer certain types of tasks, others won't. The teacher's job is then to include variety. He must balance the diversity of preferences, learning styles, and personalities in the classroom. He can not give everyone what they are expecting in one single class, but he can certainly do it in a sequence of classes, varying types of materials, interaction patterns, and topics.

Finally, Mr. Martinez must consult the bibliography available related to methodologies and approaches. The best teacher is one who has a plentiful supply of resources and strategies to rely on and properly chooses the ones that meet students' specific needs. Having enhanced his understanding of the acquisition process and its implementation, he can design an action plan for the short and long term, selecting appropriate objectives for each stage and defining assessment criteria to analyze the pupils' progress properly.

## A Personal Reflection on Vocabulary Instruction in the Classroom

Vocabulary has to be taught to provide the basis of any communication. When babies start to speak, they just produce words. Nonetheless, those words give them the support to start building phrases and then informal and formal utterances. Even with isolated words, children communicate what they want.

Vocabulary then becomes essential. Sometimes, students feel the need to say something in class, but they struggle to find the words they need, and they get frustrated because of the scarcity in their lexicon. Some strategies that, in my experience, have been helpful for such cases are vocabulary presentations, either with peripherals, theme charts, visuals, realia, or contextualization. Another valuable technique is the use of synonyms, true and false cognates, and root words. All these can be adapted for either basic or advanced classes.

When working with children, I've found it helpful to have peripherals and visuals around the classroom. In some cases, those resources can be used to recycle prior knowledge from the past class or before as a way to introduce new related words. Most of the time, I use flashcards to introduce vocabulary. I also use posters, especially when I am going to present theme words. In some cases, I use songs that are good for practicing vocabulary, such as the alphabet song, "Ten Little Indians" for numbers 1 to 10, and "Old McDonald" for farm animals.

However, other songs are very rhythmic and suitable for practicing fluency with simple words such as "Itsy bitsy spider." Those are some of the songs that I have used the most even for adult classes. As a matter of fact, when going over the alphabet, even if I do not use the song, many students repeat the alphabet at the same pace and rhythm as they would do if they were singing it. This shows how songs do help in remembering vocabulary in the long term.

Since there is always a textbook to follow in every school, I also use them to introduce vocabulary through context, using some of the readings that come there as the main source. Then, I direct the student's attention to the individual words to check the meaning. When the children are a little older and more proficient, I also review parts of the speech (verbs, adjectives, or nouns).

As soon as I have finished introducing the vocabulary words, I have the students repeat at least three different times in a choral drill. Afterward, in smaller groups, I try not to do it individually at first because some children may feel embarrassed or not confident enough to speak. Only if I see that there is a student who is not involved in repeating the words, I invite the learner to do it by himself. However, if he/she does not want to say it, I do not force the child. I try it at a different moment of the class or on another day. I usually like to recycle some essential elements such as the alphabet, colors, or vocabulary seen in the first lesson for a few weeks so that the students do not forget them. For instance, in adult classes, I ask for the alphabet in almost every class for the first or even the second weeks of the course, depending on how fast they memorized it. Eventually, I explain to students why I think it is vital for them to know it, as whenever they have to spell their names after introducing themselves to speakers of other languages or write down the name of another person from a business or work setting.

After revising pronunciation, I like to work with spelling. I have seen that the majority of the children want to spell words or get involved in spelling activities. When the students are at basic levels, I ask them to spell basic vocabulary such as their own names, colors, animals, or food. Nevertheless, I have seen that any kind of vocabulary is a good opportunity to practice spelling. Spelling sessions may sometimes be long, but to do it faster, I sometimes play games in teams in which they have to compete, and this way, the student that loses is the one that is going to spell a word from the vocabulary seen in that class. Most of the bilingual schools like to organize the Spelling Bee competition. That is another way to hold classroom contests in order to get the number of participants that are required. I have sometimes participated with my teenage students in the Spelling Bee contest in secondary school.

Once I have introduced the vocabulary and I have had the students repeat and practice pronunciation and spelling, I like to have them use vocabulary in different ways. Since children's courses are usually slower and longer, there is plenty of time

to practice through games. Different games can be played with children. They love competitions, so any kind of game that poses a challenge is interesting for them. Sometimes it could be just having them choose the correct answer from a word bank to complete a small paragraph or write a word on the board or spell them.

I usually organize them into two or three teams depending on the number of students, and from there, we start to play either educational games or a quick quiz to foster. A competitive moment in which students have to use the vocabulary to complete sentences from the book or create their own simple sentences. A simple game can be used to review the answers of an exercise as well. Children like to draw and color; for this reason, I have asked them to create their own picture dictionaries with words that are easy to represent, such as verbs, adjectives, and some groups of nouns like food, animals, or occupations. For most of the children, it is entertaining and a good way to remember the words. If you are working in a bilingual school, students are asked to have an English-English dictionary.

Then, it is a good idea to use it from time to time and ask students to use it to look up the meaning of some words. This strategy also may apply to adult students. They can use online dictionaries. I usually recommend the Cambridge, Oxford, or Merriam-Webster dictionaries. I use it more in advanced groups to find not meanings but derivatives of some root words and the part of speech that they belong to.

In the case of adult classes, I like to ask them to use the vocabulary in substitution exercises, fill the gaps, role-plays, problem-solving activities, write stories with the vocabulary, and also play games the same way as with children. Most of the adults get involved in games and competitions and enjoy them as much as children do. With adults, even more complex games can be played. However, any game that poses a challenge is practical. The only thing that is important to keep in mind is the time because adult classes are faster and shorter.

Nonetheless, it is recommended to have games from time to time, if not every day. Since adults can use their cell phones in a class, it is a good idea to use interactive games with them. It is also possible for children. Nevertheless, the teacher has to be in control of the game because children are not allowed to use cell phones in class. This could make the game less interactive or entertaining than it might be with adults.

## A Personal Reflection on Selecting the Proper Resources and Material for the Class

One of the most important tasks when planning a lesson is selecting appropriate resources and materials. This decision depends on several factors: the English level being taught, the learning objectives, and the specific language skills to be developed. Materials must align with these objectives—what works for a grammar lesson may

not suit a listening activity. Coursebooks may serve as a base, but often require adaptation depending on the students' age, goals, and available class time, especially in private lessons.

Other relevant considerations include the use of interactive and authentic resources, which promote engagement and expose learners to real-world language use. Teachers must also account for the diversity of learning styles, the availability of technological tools, and student personalities. Age differences also play a role—what motivates children may not be appealing to adults. Furthermore, classroom logistics and institutional constraints, such as space, equipment, or policy on classroom displays, influence material selection. All these elements highlight the importance of careful lesson planning to ensure that resources support, rather than hinder, the achievement of learning goals.

## CONCLUSIONS

The development of this dissertation has demonstrated the value of using intentional strategies to capture students' attention and promote effective learning. It led me to reflect on the importance of selecting appropriate materials, grounded in language acquisition theory, particularly the concept of optimal input. This was a new area of learning for me. I have come to understand its relevance in supporting acquisition and how carefully chosen resources—whether or not a coursebook is used—can greatly enhance classroom effectiveness.

I am satisfied with the work accomplished and the insights gained through this process. I hope this contribution serves as a helpful guide for teachers seeking practical strategies and materials to foster optimal input and boost student motivation. By applying the ideas explored here, teachers may strengthen their practice and better prepare students to participate meaningfully in today's globalized world.

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