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Enhancing English Language Learnings Communicative Production through Open Creative  
Tasks

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### **Abstract**

This action research study explores a Task Based Learning unit about students' production with 23 high school ELLs at a private school in Colombia. Actions included a unit design about travel diaries and creative tasks: matching, listing, brainstorming, guided and independent practice. Data included observations, students' work, interviews with students, and a teacher journal. The results revealed that students were more confident when being showed the process of formal production and communicating their own experiences rather than making up information or talking about someone else.

*Key words:* Task Based Learning, oral and written production, creative tasks, e-learning.

### **Degree Requirement**

This action research project is submitted as a requirement of the Bachelor of Education in Teaching Foreign Languages (English-French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellín, Colombia.

### **Acknowledgements**

This is being a huge challenge for me to study and finish my career. I had to face a lot of situations since the moment I started it. It was such a hard and long way that the times I thought about quitting are countless. I had to work since the beginning of the career which made me feel frustrated for not taking all the courses needed to finish in the five years expected. I did not even know if I was going to be a good teacher since I had my doubts about it. But there was a person in my life who always believed that being a teacher was in me. He recognized my potential even before I could understand it existed. My father who is resting in peace is the one who I dedicate my work to. There are other people who made this possible. My advisor was especially patient and so clear with her ideas that I felt I could do anything she asked for. And finally my mother and husband who insisted to much that I should have retaken my studies and believed that I was not a failure.

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### **Preface**

After so many years of working and studying at the same time, the moment of finishing my career had finally arrived. I had already worked for several places and learned tips for teaching English in each of them. However, each experience is different and the challenge of working and doing my practicum at the same time was still to come. Moreover, there was a quarantine that was not expected either and taking my project to the virtuality was even more challenging. I realized then that no matter how much experience a person might have, there are always unexpected situations that test our ability for teaching. Through my experience I have learned that there are all kinds of students, but there is something I have found in this specific context. There are all kinds of English levels and throughout the years the students who do not achieve good grades are always the same. So I made my choice, I needed to come up with an idea that benefitted all the group, not only the ones who were already proficient in the language, but also the ones who have not had a good experience with learning and feel discouraged to improve it. I myself had this fear for speaking English that took a while to get away, and I would have liked to have teachers who had seen that when I was studying.

### **Description of the Context**

In this section I will describe the school information, the English instruction for sixth graders and the participants of this action plan

#### **School Location**

Colegio Benedictino de Santa María is a private, elementary-secondary school that was founded in 1958. This school is located in Envigado in Calle 24 Sur N° 39-36 in the municipality of Zúñiga in the limits of Envigado with Medellín City. The Benedictine monks of Saint Mary are a community that has lived in the monastery since 1954 and that founded the school Colegio Benedictino de Santa Maria, they share the same property with the institution where you can find the monks' house and the school. Since the foundation of the school the community has as a priority, the constant care of the institution. At the beginning it was a semi-rural area. Nonetheless, the urban development brought changes and nowadays it is located in a residential area surrounded by apartment buildings and urbanizations.

It is a private educational institution that trains children and young people in Christocentric values with academic excellence, promoting an aesthetic, sports and community life character, to transform society with leaders who put their Benedictine spirit at the service. In the year 2023 the Benedictine College of Santa Maria will be recognized for the formation of leaders capable of contributing to the transformation of an increasingly human society, through our educational proposal with Benedictine will.

English instruction is given seven hours a week during three periods of the year. This instruction is supposed to be related to the Cambridge English as a Second Language Curriculum Framework (2016), designed by the University of Cambridge. In this respect, it



is expected learners to progress in terms of the CEFR across the Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing and Use of English strands in the curriculum at a faster pace than other institutions. The high school teachers are encouraged to consider topics studied in other areas in order to contextualize grammar concepts and communicative skills. With these topics, the teachers can develop tasks with communicative activities that give students contact with English and opportunities to talk about themselves, their families, experiences, opinions and so on. The teachers and students do not follow a textbook, but they design their own materials.

I am a teacher who has worked in several institutions such as Colegio Colombo Británico, Colegio Calazans, and Centro Colombo Americano. I have also taught in schools outside Medellin, most of the time with elementary students. I have studied and worked at the same time since the beginning of my career and improved my English given the requirements of the places I have worked to. At Colegio Benedictino de Santa María I have been teaching sixth, seventh and eighth graders since 2019, but high school students since 2017. To decide what to teach, the Benedictine English Team get together twice a week and bearing in mind the curriculum and the students' needs, they design each lesson. In my personal opinion English must be taught with both the elements for communication and grammar structures in order to be proficient in the language. All learn in a different way, so it is necessary to give students opportunities of different activities that help each of the learning styles.

The twenty-three kids in a sixth grade class used to learn English during seven hours a week, but since the confinement they have only three hours which are divided in Tuesdays from 9:00 to 10:30 a.m. and Thursdays at the same time. This schedule is positive

as usually students are always energetic and motivated to study at the beginning of the day. They are between 11 and 13 years old. There are four girls and nineteen boys in the class. All students have a very good relationship with me, being quite affectionate and spending time with me outside the class. They also get along with each other quite well most of the time. For instance, they solve questions and offer their help when the teacher cannot offer support to all of them in a short period of time.

The English class is in the same classroom where they receive all their lessons. It is a large place with many windows that illuminate it, it makes it hot specially in the afternoons, so the students must move their chairs to be more comfortable. The walls are brick color and they are decorated with posters of important information, the schedule, their birthdays, class agreements, and posters they create in different classes, these are changeable throughout the year. Also there are some colorful lockers behind the desks for them to put their stuff in. However, they rather have their back packs hanging from their chairs. The desks have blue chairs and tables. The tables have a trapezium shape so it is easy to move them around the classroom and arrange groups for work. The classroom has a big teachers' desk that is fixed on the floor and is located next to the window, it makes it necessary to close the blackouts in the afternoon shifts because it gets very hot. In front of the students' desks there is a big white board and a TV above it. All teachers have a laptop and a HDMI cable to project what they need on the TV screen. The school counts with an English lab which needs to be booked in case you need the students to use the computers for any online exercise. The school also has other areas that the teacher can use when the activity requires to be developed outside. There is a coliseum, soccer fields, halls and a

huge library disposed with tables and chairs, so the students can read or do a different workshop.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The identification and understanding of a problem to change and improve is very much part of my action research process. In this section of my proposal, I will discuss how the students are afraid to participate in the foreign language, even when they are given the vocabulary and structures to do it. They understand instruction but are reluctant to use the English language as a way of communication and they turn to Spanish each time they want to say something. This problem became apparent after doing observations of how students were learning English and talking to my coworkers. When I began to plan and teach my lessons, I became more committed to giving students learning experiences that would reflect a whole-to-part approach to learning a foreign language.

During my first class observation, I realized that I did not give my students enough opportunities for using the language. They had all the input they needed for solving reading tasks and grammar exercises, but when it came to writing or speaking, their production was limited (Observation February 12th, 2020). They used the models given in class to make their productions and that did not seem very original. I wanted them to use the language in a natural way, that they communicated their thoughts, opinions and experiences the way they do it in their mother tongue, instead of reproducing someone else's conversation with some different words. Also, when they had homework it was very common to receive students' texts with information that seem not to be written by themselves but someone else or maybe a translator and I wanted them to start using the language without fear so I could

correct their mistakes and take them to an autonomous process that would allow them use the language and improve their performance while learning (Journal March 18th 2020). Starting the class, I would always greet the students saying “hello, good morning” and most of the time said the instructions in English, even though I frequently needed Spanish for clarification. Students were given the worksheets with the vocabulary and information needed to fulfill the tasks. They seemed not to have trouble for knowing what to do, but when interacting with others the use of English was not common, they spoke to their classmates in Spanish and when asking questions, they said: “Teacher I have a question” and then they asked what they were willing to know in Spanish. They also asked permission for going to the bathroom in English and used the vocabulary or sentences used in class when participating actively but they were far from having an improvised conversation in English, even with simple sentences (informal talk with students, February 26th 2020) .

Other times, I would check the students’ comprehension of the instructions by asking them to say again what they were supposed to do, sometimes they did it in Spanish and sometimes in English. I used translation in order to understand texts and vocabulary in general (Teacher journal February 28th 2020)

Some students have difficulties when focusing on the development of activities. I consider this was due to their lack of motivation for performing the task and their fear of using English. Sometimes they decided to play or draw while the others were studying, so it was necessary to remind them the importance of finishing their work on time, but they replied saying that they did not know English or that it was very difficult for them. I even

had to assign classmates to help them understand what they were supposed to do (teacher journal February 13th 2020)

### **Theoretical Framework**

Having analyzed interviews and class observations in the sixth of the school I have noticed that the students do not have enough opportunities for using the language which leads to lack of participation in the language. My objective with this study is to give students sufficient exposure in order to increase their tools to use the language in the four communicative tasks (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and being able to report their work in an oral or written way. The idea is to give the students the possibility to choose the language they are using instead of practicing a pre-selected one. I believe that by doing this, the students will be able to communicate aspects of the language that are meaningful and relevant for them. By knowing what they want to communicate they will be able to use the language with simple sentences. They will feel more encouraged for participating since they will have the resources to do it.

In this section I will describe the concepts that will guide my study. I will start with the definition of e-learning, then, the communicative competences followed by the methodology that I am focusing on which is task-based learning. Then I will explain what a task is, the different types of tasks, and the integrated tasks that involve more than one communicative skill. Finally, I will define the task stages (pre task, task cycle and language focus). In this study I will center on the first two stages, pre task and task.

#### **E-learning**

First of all, it is necessary to clarify that the world circumstances have taken us to see education in a different way. That is why e-learning gives as the possibility to have

access to education with the help of electronic technologies through online lessons. That's how I will develop my project from home.

According to Alvarez Gómez and González Romero in their work about e-learning 2005; in the last years, the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have given way to countless possibilities for teaching and learning English, showing great potential in the possibilities of interaction, communications and access to information. Distance, online or virtual education has developed a series of pedagogical resources that permanently involve multiple forms of communication and interaction: forums, video conferences, e-mails, chats and conversations, documents, links of reference, game programs, among others; They demand from the teacher the challenge of taking advantage of these technological resources to make students more aware of their learning process, the methods that are used for the appropriation of theoretical knowledge, and how to apply it. Bearing in mind their responsibility for when, how and how much should they learn.

Virtual teaching processes start from the idea of “non-attendance” and aim to the building knowledge from the “**autonomous learning**”<sup>1</sup>; faculty that allows the student “learn how to learn” (Mayor and others, 2005) and forces the teacher to adopt and incorporate pedagogical strategies, developing a way of teaching oriented to the development of tasks that take the students in a conscious and objective way to the acquisition of knowledge.

Online education does not make the relationship: teacher-student the base of learning, but rather gives priority to the student's contact with the educational material over

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<sup>1</sup> We refer to autonomous learning as the faculty that allows the student make decisions that take them to regulate their own learning in order to achieve a specific goal in a context and specific conditions for learning (MONEREO 1997)

the teacher, where the contact with the teacher, if there is one, is rather a guide; likewise, the teacher is no longer the source of knowledge or information (Del Mastro, 2003); and its role is transformed into a voice that, from experience, challenges the student to interact with knowledge, to know what to do with it, how to acquire it and how to put it into practice.

On the other hand, virtual education cannot offer advantages on its own, since it also depends on certain factors that influence the success of this autonomous training experience: development of affective-emotional strategies that link and positively involve the student in "wanting to learn" (Alonso & López, 1999) and help him consolidate a positive mental model about himself and his ability to learn (Ontoria & others, 2000); building an appropriate space-time environment for learning, which provides the optimal physical and environmental conditions for the regular course of the activity, at the right time and moment; consolidation of a permanent exercise of self-planning and task performing, directly related to assessment and self-assessment processes of achievement and learning goals (Bornas, 1994).

This process widely enables the personal realization of the life project, since it contributes to the acquisition of their own skills to be able to continue with the learning process on their own, developing self-discipline, self-management, personal commitment, etc. Aspects that seen within an educational-training context help to "train" people throughout their lives with a learning methodology that never ends. The development of autonomy will not only depend on the student's interaction with the content through the use of ICTs in a learning environment; It also depends on the interactions between participants, who influence their peers, assuming the role of more expert mediators, and promoting the

exchange or confrontation between different points of view.

### **Communicative competence**

Having clear that we will use the help of technology to carry out this project, I will explain what the communicative approach is. The communicative approach involves competences and to understand the concept of competence it is settled that:

“A communicative competence includes the following aspects of language knowledge:

- Knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions
- Knowing how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants (e.g., knowing when to use formal and informal speech or when to use language appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication)
- Knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts (e.g., narratives, reports, interviews, conversations)
- Knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one’s language knowledge (e.g., through using different kinds of communication strategies)” (Richards 2006).

### **Task based learning**

Understanding what a communicative competence is, it is important to mention that task based learning is a methodology that comes from the communicative approach. In the case of TBL, the claim is that language learning will result from creating the right kinds of interactional processes in the classroom, and the best way to create these is to use specially



designed instructional tasks... (Richards, 2006). Task-based learning explores how natural language learning processes can enhance learning in the classroom... (Willis 1996). And according to British Council

Task -based learning offers an alternative for language teachers. In a task-based lesson the teacher doesn't pre-determine what language will be studied, the lesson is based around the completion of a central task and the language studied is determined by what happens as the students complete it. The lesson follows certain stages. A Task-based approach *TeachingEnglish / British Council / BBC*

I decided to use task based learning since according to what is mentioned before it is the most natural way of learning the language in a virtual classroom context.

### **Task**

Moving forward the task is then, according to Nunan, (2004), “a classroom activity in which students use, manipulate and play with the target language in such a way that grammar control takes a second place”. It means that grammar is still important but not the focus of the class, the main goal is to use communication to express meaning. Ellis (2003), states that task is “a way of providing communicative practice for language items that have been introduced in a more traditional way” (p. 28). In other words, tasks provide the students the possibility of using the language for communication meaningfully by using all the resources the students have previously learned.

### **Task stages**

Concerning Willis (2003) and British Council (2002), there are some components of the task based framework which are: pre task: in this component the student will be exposed to the language, receive instructions about the task and see a model of the task or a similar

one. In the sixth grade of the school we will spend great time in this stage, since is the focus of my research, giving the students enough exposure in order to increase their communicative competences. The second stage is the Task cycle which is divided in three parts: task, planning and report. Task is the moment when the students develop the activity while the teacher serves a monitor, in planning the students decide what they will show about the result of the task and the report is when the students will present in a written or oral way what they have done. After the report there is a language focus that will not be part of this study. In this context I will focus on meaning rather than form in order to enhance students' production.

### **Research Question**

How can Open Creative Tasks Enhance English Language Learners Communicative Production?

### **General Objective**

- To establish how the implementation of open creative tasks enhance students' communicative production.

### **Specific Objectives**

- To explore how comprehensible authentic material can contribute to students' exposure to the target language.
- To evaluate students' work with the language (vocabulary, functions, expressions and grammar) during the pre-task stage so that students can use it in their own production.

- To determine how a variety of tasks e.g. listing, ordering and sorting, etc. can enhance students' production.
- To explore opportunities for students to interact and communicate in English, sharing personal information related to their closest context.
- To explore how grammar and vocabulary in situational context facilitates students' production.

### **Action Plan**

In order to give the students more opportunities of using the language for communication and improve their oral and written production I have decided to use a plan directed to the Task Based Learning methodology and focused on creative tasks. To fulfill my objective, I had to take into account the contents of the curriculum and carry out some actions that will improve the course development. I planned a Unit that would be developed in three weeks. The rest of the time would be devoted for reviewing the outcome of each task and a final project that includes what they have learned throughout the three-week plan. Towards accomplishing each of the objectives I will explain in detail what I did.

The students were exposed to authentic texts and videos about the topics they were going to study in the presented lesson plans. The material was selected based on the English level of the students in order to encourage them to make an effort to understand the language and be able to use it later. Also, they were given instructions in English and they learned some classroom expressions. The first video they watched was about how to design a travel diary. Then they read and listened about other travel journals and finally they were able to make their own with the models presented.

The students would also use the language in short tasks such as matching, ordering and sorting. They had to match questions and answers related to the travel journals, trips and places around the world, that way they would learn contextualized vocabulary and expressions. Later on, they reviewed vocabulary related to trips and they combined it with the structures seen and previous knowledge. That way they could go from simple to more complex structures. The grammar structures that they learned along these three weeks were prepositions, gerunds and passive voice in present and past continuous. And they would also learn chunks to express complete ideas about the topics learned.

The students would have the opportunity to talk in pairs and in small groups about their personal travel experiences. They asked and answered questions related to the cities, tourist places, restaurants, places to stay, activities and positive and negative aspects of the trip, and later about a given text that they had previously read. The students were expected to be able to understand any question and answer it with their own information or with information given. They would share the information presented on the text or videos with the class.

The students are elementary; it means that most of them reach an A2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference. Which means the vocabulary and grammar they are expected to learn must be related to themselves, people they know and the places that surround them. They are expected to ask and answer questions in the target language understand and use familiar expressions, relate events from their past, including their weekend activities and interesting stories. The students had selected materials according to the needs of the level of the language that they needed to

achieve but also according to the language they are being able to use.

### **Development of Actions**

In this section of my work I will describe the actions that were implemented with regard to achieve the objectives I planned for this project.

In order to design the unit, it was necessary to contrast the school curriculum and my beliefs so they did not interfere with the natural development of the students' lessons. The school intends to teach the students how to read and interpret authentic texts in pursuance of giving the students what they need to write their own production. On the other hand, I was looking for giving students opportunities of improving their oral and written production.

So, first of all I searched oral and written texts related to travel journals that were authentic and had appropriate language for the students to understand them. I found a video in which a girl describes the way she designs a travel journal, and some written travel journal samples.

I created a unit of six lessons of one hour and thirty minutes each, with the help of my advisor and the rubrics she presented. It took three weeks to be implemented. The unit design was based on the school curriculum and the Cambridge Secondary 1 English as a Second Language Curriculum Framework.

In the first week I decided to use open creative tasks such brainstorming, matching and listing, an exercise of grammar for better comprehension and a small free production

about a personal experience related to a trip. I started the lessons by informing the students their final production (a travel journal) to better understand the objective of each lesson.

For the second week, students had a closer approach to a travel journal, they were expected to socialize what they thought it had to include, then they were presented a travel journal video in which a girl was talking, decorating her notebook and sharing information about her trip. Students were asked general questions and gist information questions, they had a think, pair, share time and, as during the first week they had a freer production in which they had to record a travel experience.

Finally, for the third week students continued to learn about travel journals. This time they had the chance to explore vocabulary related to this topic and read an extract of a travel journal. They were also assigned some comprehension questions and grammar exercises. Finally, they planned their text and wrote about their first day of their travel journal.

While monitoring the implementation of the units I realized that the video was easy to understand for most of the students, but it was necessary to give others more time to listen to it, so that generated independent work in a different schedule.

In the same way, during the online sessions it was necessary to lead the students step by step so they kept engaged with the task and finished their work during the time established. Nonetheless as in the case of the video a few students needed to work independently which was not considered during the planning stage.

Anyway it was possible to finish the implementation of the whole unit in the three weeks that were expected at the beginning. I gathered all the students work in order to

analyze their written and oral production and evaluate if they had improved according to what I had seen during my previous observations.

I wanted to find out how students felt when producing their own texts, so I implemented a survey in which they expressed their opinion related to the development of the lessons and I compared the results with the students' performance in the tasks, my own observations and my journal.

### **Findings and Interpretations**

With this action research study, I sought to collect information related to the sixth grade students' oral and written production through open creative tasks. In general, it is evident that the Task Based Learning Approach was beneficial to the students in terms of giving them opportunities of participating actively during the lessons, which was not possible with the worksheet resources and texts used previous to the development of actions.

#### **Authentic Material Helped the Students Have a Model for their Production**

The texts chosen for the development of the project were texts of real travel journals and a video of a New York girl who spoke about her experience on a trip to Barcelona. The fact that the texts were authentic helped the students connect with the writers and speaker and understand better what was expected from them to produce. According to my own reflections, I could tell the students enjoyed these texts, given that they participated actively when I asked general and gist information about them. Sometimes, they even shared what they knew about the places presented in the travel diaries. (Teachers' journal May 20<sup>th</sup> 2020)

### **The Use of Open Creative Tasks Enhanced Students Participation and Interaction**

Even though there were students who were reluctant to participating in class, it was easy for them to share simple ideas such as listing vocabulary related to trips or brainstorming what a travel journal is about, what it must include, and what is interesting about it. Students showed to be more interested in talking about themselves than talking about topics that were not connected to their personal life experiences.

### **Students Participation and Interaction Leded to Better Production of their Oral and Written texts.**

Students were allowed to speak or in English or in Spanish. Some of them have told me in informal talks that they do not feel confident when they have to say everything in English, because they prefer not to ask anything. On the other hand, there were others who took advantage of every opportunity of participating. Which can be seen in the following excerpts:

No profe, es que el año pasado nos obligaban a decir todo en inglés, entonces si uno no entendía pues era mejor quedarse callado, porque para uno pensar en toda esa pregunta en inglés, sin uno saber hablar, pues prefiere uno no decir nada. Además, si uno hablaba español nos bajaban puntos, entonces para qué hablar si uno va a perder (Students' interview February 22nd 2020)

No, si uno no habla inglés aquí ¿entonces cuándo? ¿No ve que nosotros no vivimos en Estados Unidos? La única oportunidad que tenemos para hablar inglés es en el Colegio, en la clase, y cuando uno viaja, pero de aquí a eso... (Students' interview February 22nd 2020)



During the lessons they asked for clarification of the instructions or the way they wanted to develop the tasks, so when they were given the instructions in English they showed comprehension, which means they just needed more time and self-confidence to be able to participate in the target language. Also, in the videos they recorded, it was evident that they felt more confident talking to their camera than doing it when their classmates were all listening.

I could contrast their written work before the implementation of the unit with the ones produced afterwards. As a result, the coherence, spelling, creativity and grammar structures are clearly more accurate in the last ones. Nonetheless it is important to bear in mind that during the time they were at the school they did not have the same resources they have on the internet when studying at home.

### **Advantages and Disadvantages of Studying and Teaching Online**

This project took action during quarantine, so students were receiving online lessons. They had a video conference twice a week, in which I explained the development of their task and they did an independent work afterwards. I had to stay online during one hour and thirty minutes each lesson in order to monitor the students' process while doing the activities.

There were some positive aspects about this kind of work. They became more independent and autonomous. They developed skills related to ICT, they were able to create animated videos, mind maps, online presentations and find ways of interacting through video or phone calls. Also, they learned how to use the internet for their own benefit, such as converting their worksheets to a word doc, so they could work on them,

using an online dictionary and even tools for improving their production such as writing assistant applications. (Students' work and recorded online lesson May 21st)

In contrast, it was difficult for me to know who was really paying attention to the explanation of the topics and who was not. It was necessary to call the names of the students who did not talk, to know how they were doing with the task. Sometimes, they wrote on the chat and sometimes there was no response. In the end, I had to wait for them to send their work in order to know how clear the instruction was. I could notice that the students who did not have an outstanding process in the school, also had issues in the virtuality. (Students' work, May 15<sup>th</sup>)

### **Improvement of oral and written production**

Students felt more confident when talking and writing than during the first academic period of class. They revealed that they understood what they had to do during the lessons, they liked the materials presented throughout the development of the unit and they felt they improved their speaking and writing skills. (Inquiry, June 4<sup>th</sup> 2020, see Appendix A)

I could observe that they were motivated to writing their travel journal for different reasons. First, they were told what they were expected to do since the beginning of the unit. Immediately they started asking questions about how they were going to perform the task. Second, they were guided step by step from simple to more complex tasks.

During the first week they had to brainstorm, match, classify and do some grammar exercises about prepositions. They were exposed to some expressions and vocabulary related to trips. They had to make their own production of a short paragraph where they mentioned a personal experience, at a restaurant, at the airport... and they included the

language studied. In order to do that they were given chunks that could help their production, so it was a controlled practice. While explaining what they had to do, the expressions that contained prepositions were shown several times. I shared my screen with the students and they had the same document in their devices. However, the instruction online is more impersonal which leads to students' inattention.

During the Second week they brainstormed what a travel journal was, what it had to include, and all they could come up with when they were mentioned a travel journal. Then they were exposed to the language through the video which clarified their ideas. By the end of the week they had to make a podcast in which they talked about a travel experience. I could hear in their podcasts the effort they made to improve their production, compared to other oral activities performed in the classroom. The video was easy to understand for most of the students, but there were others who struggled when answering the questions and they required to do it for homework. Given the circumstances of the pandemic, it was not a good idea to charge the students with more independent work.

Finally, in the third week they had to learn more complex structures (passive voice) and they were exposed to a travel journal that they could read and listen to at the same time. By the end of this week, students were expected to write their first day of their travel journal. That way I could collect the work of two written texts and oral podcast and check the progress of the students throughout the lessons. Even there were students who did not write very elaborated texts, there was an improvement of their writing that was evident in the tasks of the first and third week. (Students' work April 30<sup>th</sup> 2020 and May 19<sup>th</sup> 2020)

### **Conclusions**

My intention with this project was to increase students' opportunities of performing in the language in order to improve their oral and written production. I found that through Task Based Learning it was possible since they were exposed to the language all the time, not only because of my instruction but also for the materials presented. They could read and listen to other peoples' pronunciation in a real context, and use their production as a model for their own work. Also, they had to perform pre task activities such as brainstorming, listing and matching before they had to speak or write in a more formal way, that prepared the students and did not force them to produce without input.

I found during the implementation of the project that there are always aspects that you cannot have into consideration in spite of planning everything in detail. Teaching my lessons online was a huge challenge, since the amount of students increased as so did their inattention. It is not possible to control what the students are doing on the other side of the screen, but I could control what I did to keep my students involved. It is important to find other strategies such as the use of ICT during my lessons and bear in mind what students could teach me too. Also, I had to find other ways of interaction among the students such as chat, video calls or phone calls to replace the think pair share time used in the traditional classroom.

Something that it was important to take into consideration was timing. I could develop the unit in the time expected. The tasks designed for the virtuality were shorter than the ones used at the school. However, there were some students who needed more time for finishing their work, some stayed the whole lesson for advisory, but others did not interact or responded during the video conference. Also, grading their work was time consuming. Students became more independent and found strategies for improving their

performance but always expected the teachers' feedback of their work which most of the time had to wait until the end of the class that they had sent their work.

### **Reflections**

I found this project enriching for different aspects. First, I found Task Based Learning as a very useful approach to enhance students' motivation, interaction, comprehension and production of the target language. In this case I consider that teachers are the ones who have to think of giving the students opportunities for producing, not the students being forced to speak in English without any input. So, I hope this would encourage future students to work on similar issues of research.

Also, the fact that I had to take my project to the virtuality was something totally new for me. I had to prepare myself very well before every single lesson. That was not only with the activities I was going to assign the students, but also the tools they would need to study online. Fortunately for me, the students also had some tips to teach me about the use of these new technologies. Something that I need to stand out is the fact that during virtual lessons it is necessary to bring something new every single class, so they do not feel bored doing the same kind of activity all the time. In this case I used online games, mind maps, online surveys and other interesting websites to keep the students interest.

Finally, it is relevant to keep the door opened for the students to ask questions or talk to you about their performance. This specially for the ones who have special needs and might feel more reluctant to participating when others are present.

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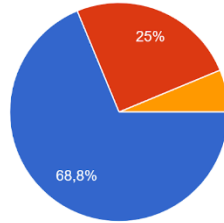
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### Appendix A

How satisfied are you with the instruction given by the teacher?

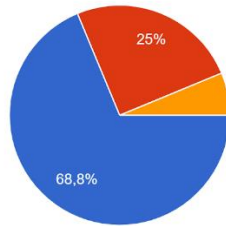
16 respuestas



- Very satisfied; I understand what I have to do
- Satisfied, I understand almost all what I have to do
- Unsatisfied, I almost never understand what I have to do
- Very unsatisfied, I never know what I have to do

How do you feel about the resources used during the lessons?

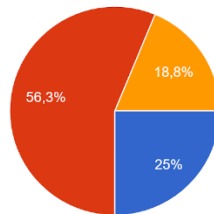
16 respuestas



- I liked the texts and videos presented
- I liked some of the texts presented
- I didn't like the materials presented

How do you feel about participating in the class?

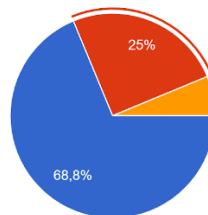
16 respuestas



- Great, I like to participate a lot
- Good, I like participating but not so much
- Ok, I can participate but I don't like to participate at all
- Bad, I don't feel I can participate in this class

What do you feel about your own production?

16 respuestas



- I am better at speaking and at writing than before
- I am good at speaking and at writing but NOT better than before
- I am not so good at speaking and at writing but I am better than before
- I am not so good at speaking and at writing and I am NOT better than before



### Appendix B

One day my mom woke me up, I was on my bed and she said to me: Juan gui today we are going to go to san Andres, I got happy, I thought that was like 9:00 am but no, my mom waked me at the 3:00 am, I was proud of my parents for this surprise, I taked a shower, I was very happy, I was going to go to san Andres with my parents, it was like a dream, my parents knew about my emotion and they said to me “calm down Juan gui”. we went to the airport and, I wanted to buy a present for my parents but at that moment a person from united states offered me a candy, I was scared but my parents toked me out of there, our airplane went out of the airport at the 5:00 am, when we were in the air plane the pilot plaid a video about the precautions that we had to have, it was great I only wanted to be in san Andres. (Students’ work April 30<sup>th</sup> 2020)

hello, today I am going to talk about my first travel to San Andres; I was very excited by my first travel. when we went down of the airplane I was very happy and surprised because I never had sawed an airport. this is my first day in San Andres: one day my mom woke me up, I was on my bed and she said to me: Juan gui today we are going to go to san Andres, I got happy, i thought that was like 9:00 am but no, mom waked me at the 3:00 am, I was proud of my parents for this surprise, I took a shower, I was very happy, I was going to go to san Andrés with my parents, it was like a dream, my parents knew about my emotion and they said to me “calm down Juan gui”. we went to the airport and, I wanted to buy a present for my parents but at that moment a person from united states offered me a candy, I was scared but my parents toked me out of there, our airplane went out of the airport at the 5:00 am, when we were in the air plane the pilot plaid a video about the precautions that we had to have, it was great I only wanted to be in San Andrés.

