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MAESTRÍA EN LA ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA

Reporte del Proyecto de Aplicación Innovadora del Conocimiento

The Use of Competitive Games to Motivate EFL Telesecundaria Students to Learn English

Línea de Generación y Aplicación del Conocimiento:
Procesos de Enseñanza-Aprendizaje del Inglés en el Sistema Educativo Público Mexicano

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ABSTRACT

The present action research describes the implementation and results of an action plan consisting in the use of competitive games with students of a Telesecundaria from Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico. This plan was designed in an attempt to motivate these students learn the English language. The participants were a group of thirty students in a junior high school. They participated in four games, one per week, to learn and review basic level grammar structures and vocabulary of the target language. In these games, the students were asked to match images with their corresponding vocabulary, to write a list of words using an initial letter that was given to them, to draw an image to be guessed by their classmates, and to review the vocabulary learned by using a Goose Game, which is a board game where the players go backwards or forwards a number of spaces indicated by rolling the dice.

The findings from this Action research revealed that students were motivated to learn English by playing these four competitive games in the classroom. Additionally, these Telesecundaria students became aware of the importance of learning. Finally, the research showed that students' collaboration while playing the games contributes to their motivation to achieve their objectives.

Key words: Motivation, Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Competitive Games, Intrinsic Motivation, Telesecundaria Mexican System.
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<td>1A: First grade, group “A”</td>
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<td>ACTFL: American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages</td>
<td>6, 47.</td>
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<td>AR: Action Research</td>
<td>12, 17, 18, 19, 23, 29, 36, 37, 39, 40, 41.</td>
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<tr>
<td>EFL: English as a Foreign Language</td>
<td>5, 12.</td>
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<td>ELT: English Language Teaching</td>
<td>7.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEP: Secretaría de Educación Pública</td>
<td>9, 47.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEFL: Teaching of English as a Foreign Language</td>
<td>6, 7.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TESOL: Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages</td>
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) implies, as Krieger (2005, p.8) explains, that the “instruction of the language takes places in a country in which the target language is not spoken”; therefore, it is a place where students do not have enough exposure to it. However, there are many reasons to learn a foreign language such as: to be more competitive in the labor market, to pass an exam, to be able to communicate with foreign people, to get a job, to get an academic degree, or to obtain greater understanding of other cultures. Consequently, the teaching of foreign languages needs to focus on the fulfillment of the diverse objectives of people that study them.

In fact, foreign languages have something to offer to everyone, as explained by the National Standards in Foreign Language Education of the United States of America (NSFLEUSA), and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), which have five target areas that encompass all the reasons to study a foreign language. These are: 1) Communication, 2) Cultures, 3) Connections, 4) Comparisons and 5) Communications. The first one is described as at the heart of second language study, whether the ‘communication’ takes place face-to-face, in writing, or across centuries through the reading of literature. When learners study other languages, they gain knowledge and understanding of the ‘cultures’ of the language or languages. Moreover, nobody can truly master a language until they have mastered the cultural context of the language. The third target area, ‘connections’, provides additional bodies of knowledge that may be unavailable to the monolingual speaker. It is by ‘contrast and comparison’ of the target language with the mother tongue, the fourth target area, that students develop insight into the nature of language and the concept of culture, and realize that there are multiple ways of viewing the world. Finally, students create ‘communities’, the fifth target area, with all the previous target areas. They do this at home, as well as around the world in diverse contexts and culturally appropriate ways.
This action research deals with the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). This is also known as Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) or English Language Teaching (ELT). This concept can also be used for the teaching of English in Telesecundaria, which is the Mexican context where this action research was carried out. This sub-system is one of the kinds of junior high school in Mexico. It uses the study program “Plan de Estudios 384” in which it is established that English teaching has to be shifted from structure and translation to concentrate more heavily on communication. According to Aramayo et al. (2006, p.7) the new study program for teaching English as a foreign language in secondary education is significantly different from the previous programs. There are changes in the conception of what learning a foreign language implies and, therefore, content and teaching methodology are also different. One of these changes is that the teacher is expected to work in English most of the time.

In Telesecundaria, the contents of the English program have to be covered by the teacher who also teaches the rest of the subjects. The teacher first presents a 15 minute long instructional video, and later monitors the group while they complete approximately 35 minutes of exercises from the textbook to complete the one hour class, three days a week. That is, according to Lara (2008, p.94), Telesecundaria “is a system in which televised lessons are transmitted daily for 15 minutes, depending on the subject and grade level”. Rather than instructing, the teacher is responsible for making sure that the students watch the correct program and complete the accompanying text. This description is similar to the description by Calderoni (2007, p.2) who claims that the “Telesecundaria Model has three basic components: the 15 minutes of TV programming, the specially designed texts and lesson plans, and, of course, the teachers”. For example, in the first year, the students may watch nearly 200 programs in Mathematics, 100 in Biology, and similar numbers of the other key subject areas. All the programs are designed to teach basic concepts in an effective way.

In the teaching/learning process (including the foreign language) in the Telesecundaria system, one of the key factors for success is motivation. Ryan and
Deci (2000) argue that in the language teaching context, teachers usually use the term motivation to refer to students’ attitudes towards language learning, and Dörnyei (2001, p.5) states that

Some students show enthusiasm, commitment and persistence to certain activities or periods of time, but some others might react completely different, and this does not mean that they are not able to learn. In some cases motivation could affect even the most intelligent students due to their lack of interest.

Students from Telesecundaria face different problems in learning English as a foreign language. One of these problems is their lack of motivation which is the focus of this AR.

1. Context
This research took place in a Telesecundaria school in Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico. The school is located in the outskirts of the city, where the social and economic environment can be considered as poor. Consequently, this is a factor that may affect these students’ learning process. Another element affecting the teaching learning process is the student population, which was relatively high. Each group had approximately 30 students who had to take classes in small classrooms. Apart from this, the school building looked chaotic, with one classroom piled next to the others, with very few free areas to walk and no garden, but with a big sports field. 1A, the classroom of students in which this research project was carried out, was too small for the 30 students. However, it had a computer with no speakers, and a television set. Apart from this, there was also a pile of old and unrepaird chairs which were stored there, taking the place of more important objects. As the other groups in this school, room 1A had one teacher in charge who was the instructor for all the subjects. S/he had to prepare classes and grade all the subjects, including English, by taking advantage of the televised instructional videos. This teacher was also the one who discussed the problems of the learners with their parents. Most of the time, these issues were related with misbehavior and low educational achievement.

This Telesecundaria School, as the other types of schools in the country, has
...the mission to offer to the most vulnerable groups of the country secondary education, with a solid formation in each discipline with ethic principles and social solidarity, which can allow to develop their aptitudes and capabilities in order that students are able to develop successfully in basic education.

(Secretaria de Educación Pública (SEP) 2011)

This educational authority has the vision that *Telesecundaria*

...is an international vanguard owing to its high academic achievement, worthy installations, classrooms equipped with information and communication technology, and diverse didactic material.

Unfortunately, in the school that was the context of this research, these aspects were not covered, at least not the technological ones. Computers were available, but no speakers; there was a television set, but not as large as was needed. Additionally, the English textbooks had not been updated since 2006.

2. Participants

The participants in this action research were students from group 1A in the previously described *Telesecundaria* in Xalapa. This group is one of the four, first grade groups at this Junior High school. It is composed by approximately 30 students, males and females, from 12 to 15 years old. These students lived in areas close to the school, and had all the problems that are common in a marginalized zone of a city. The main problems of these students were: malnutrition, low attention from their parents, and bullying by their other classmates. Additionally, some of these students were involved in theft of objects belonging to their classmates, and disrespected their teachers by overusing their cellular phones and other gadgets during class time.

The level of English of these students was basic even though some of them had received classes while at elementary school. Some of the students were able to pronounce some isolated words and phrases in the language, and participate, do the homework and the exercises in classes, better than the others. This difference in knowledge and participation turned the classroom into an ideal space for the practice of bullying in the sense that some students did not want to pronounce because they
could become the object of criticism and derision. In addition, students often misbehaved during the English class. They did not pay attention to the instructions, did not participate, did not do the exercises that they were expected to complete and they played a lot or preferred to sleep. In sum, the discipline problems were a factor affecting the English language class on a daily basis.

3. Description of the problem

Telesecundaria students were working with an obsolete book edited in 2006, while the program they were following dated back to the year 2009. Moreover, in the English subject, the methodology used by the teacher in charge of the group, was mainly grammar-translation-based including exercises with instructions in English and Spanish. The methodological approach included the exhibition of 15 minutes of instructional video in English, plus 35 minutes of solving exercises from the textbook. Furthermore, students did translation and dictation tasks using both the target language and the mother tongue which were designed by the teacher in charge of the group. S/he taught all the subjects, but was not a specialist in the English language. Apart from all this, the students faced inherent problems from the moment they were living in an underprivileged zone, with drug addiction, alcoholism, and early pregnancy, among its characteristics. This complex context had been the reason why the school authorities constantly organized talks with the students’ parents to look for solutions and raise general awareness regarding these issues.

The situation described above may contribute to the students’ lack of motivation to learn English, which is the problem that is the object of this action research project. Owing to this lack of motivation, the students usually did not participate in class; instead they preferred to play instead of doing the assigned task, or they misbehaved during the instruction, thus making it more difficult to achieve the objectives or learning outcomes of the study program. Lack of motivation, which is a complex issue due to its causes and effects, can be considered a negative factor to overcome in the foreign language learning process.
4. Objectives
The main aim of this study was to motivate Telesecundaria first graders to learn English as a foreign language by participating in competitive games. These games were “Goose Game”, “Drawing Game”, “Matching Game” and “Writing Game”. The proposed strategy was to encourage them to play competitive games while learning new vocabulary, grammar structures or other content. These games were “Goose Game”, “Drawing Game”, “Matching Game” and “Writing Game”. The objectives of these games were to make a general review of the whole unit; to learn vocabulary related with false cognates; review “places in town” by matching vocabulary with its visual representation, and to increase vocabulary and learn how to spell words correctly. By these means, it was hoped that students would be motivated to learn the language while they were trying to win each of the games, even though they knew that there would be no physical prizes.

5. Research question
How may competitive games motivate EFL Telesecundaria students to learn English?

6. Map of research report
This Action research report is divided into five chapters: 1) Introduction, 2) Literature review, 3) Methodology, 4) Findings and 5) Discussion and reflections.

- The first chapter includes the context in which the research was carried out; the participants; the description of the problem; the aim and objectives; and the research question.
- The second chapter includes the theory regarding the motivation of students to learn English as a foreign language: the two types of motivation, in particular intrinsic motivation, and how it is developed in cooperative learning. This is followed by the concept of games in the field of the teaching/learning process. Finally an explanation of their variation, competitive games is included which is the object of this study.
• The third chapter is divided into three sections: 1) the research design which explains the reason why the AR model was used; 2) the identification and understanding of the problem, including the data collection techniques: a focus group interview, an interview as informal-conversation, and participant observation, followed by triangulation as data verification, and the outcome of initial research; 3) the action plan including its rationale, and the implementation.

• The fourth chapter includes two sections: 1) the evaluation of the action plan, including the data collection techniques and verification; 2) the findings and analysis of the data.

• The fifth chapter includes: a brief summary of the whole process; the implications - basically how this research could serve in the English teaching process in Telesecundarias; the limitations - the difficulties found during the research process, such as: lack of time and financing; the possible changes next time around, the conclusions, and finally the ways forward and a proposal of a possible second AR cycle to continue this research.
CHAPTER 2: MOTIVATING EFL STUDENTS THROUGH COMPETITIVE GAMES

This chapter describes the theory related to EFL learner motivation. It includes the concept of competitive games, as well as how they differ from other kinds of games. It also deals with both: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is highlighted, in particular how it may be developed by employing a cooperative learning approach.

1. Motivation

Motivation as a key factor for succeeding in language learning has often been mentioned in research. Several definitions have been used, but there is not one on which everybody agrees. However, it is a fertile area for researchers because motivation is related to human behavior and implies a complex mental process. Motivation can be studied from different perspectives; one of these is the motivation to learn a second language, as is explained by Rehman et al (2014, p. 254):

Motivation is considered as an integral part in the achievement of any goal. It is an important factor that has a positive influence in any educational learning process especially in learning second language.

The concept above implies that it is necessary for students to have motivation in order to be successful in learning a second language; however the teacher needs to be motivated also. Brown (2007, p.85) claims that motivation is the “extent to which you make choices about goals to pursue and the effort you will devote to that”. Gardner et al. (1994, p.347) define motivation as the “individual’s attitudes, desires, and effort”, whereas Ryan et al (1995, p.55) affirm that “it is concerned with energy, direction, persistence and equifinality - all aspects of activation and intention”. Additionally, Cheng and Dörnyei (2007, p.153) define it as

...one of the key factors that determines L2 achievement and attainment. It serves as an impetus to generate learning initially and later as a sustaining force to the tedious process of acquiring a target language
Authors such as Brown (2007, p.13) consider motivation an important factor; moreover, he considers it a part of his theory for English teaching.

1.1 Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation
As mentioned above, the concept of motivation has been analyzed from different perspectives, and authors agree it is a main factor for succeeding in foreign language learning. Also, they divide motivation into two main types: intrinsic and extrinsic. Regarding the first one, Ryan and Deci, (2000, p. 55) explain that it “is what encourages individuals to perform a particular task because of the internal rewards such as joy, pleasure and satisfaction of curiosity”, while Schmidt et al (1996, p. 14) explain that extrinsic motivation is “doing something because of an external reward that may be obtained”. Nevertheless, intrinsic motivation has been used more in academic contexts. Ryan and Deci (2000) consider that the more intrinsic motivation is present, the more autonomous learners become. Veevers (2007, p.1) explains that in the field of pedagogy it is widely understood that intrinsic motivation is the more desirable and research has repeatedly shown up the benefits of this kind of motivation for academic success.

2. Cooperative Learning approach
Motivation influences students to do the task that is required. Cooperative Learning suggests that motivation may be enhanced with the help of their classmates. Abass (2013, p.16) explains that “to be motivated to learn, students need ample opportunity to interact with each other as well as steady encouragement and support of their learning efforts”. This process can also be explained by the concept or definition of cooperative learning provided by Coffey (2008, p.1) who claims the following:

Cooperative learning is an instructional method in which students work together in small, heterogeneous groups to complete a problem, project, or other instructional goal, while teachers act as guides or facilitators. This method works to reinforce a student’s own learning as well as the learning of his or her fellow group members.

Working cooperatively, as in competitive games, can also contribute to an awareness of the English language. Regarding the importance of English, Shen et al. (2009)
provide a concept of language awareness, where they state that it is a means of helping learners to help themselves. In a case study, Tran et al. (2012, p.5) explain that “it was the awareness of the importance of English that motivated the students to engage in English as a Foreign Language learning in the first place”.

3. Competitive games and motivation
Games as a teaching strategy in the classroom can promote motivation, which is an essential element if students are to complete an assigned task. This is the reason why Brown (2007, p.68) considers that the “most powerful rewards are those that are intrinsically motivated within the learner”. Also, Ahmadi (2011, p.9), states that motivation

... is one of the key factors that determine L2 achievement and attainment. It serves as an impetus to generate learning initially and later as a sustaining force to the tedious process of acquiring a target language.

In addition Gilbertson (2010) believes that students who feel intrinsically motivated are more likely to do tasks more willingly versus students who are extrinsically motivated with a reward.

In order to explain the concept of games for teaching purposes, Prodomou (1992, p.120) provides one working definition of game as “an enjoyable activity involving an objective that is achieved by following certain rules, usually in competition with one or more other people”. Bearing in mind the description above, it could be possible to say that students learn when they participate in competitive games and they enjoy being in the classroom when they engage in a match. As a result, playing becomes a way to develop language skills. Trainor et al (2008, p.3) support this idea, by saying that play,

…provides opportunities for children to experience learning in a meaningful and purposeful way. It is a means by which children can develop the skills and capabilities to be effective learners

They add that play provides a context for children to access the content of a program, and it motivates students to learn, especially in a competition or when working in
teams because learners like a challenge. Verner (2011, p.2) explains that “games are fun for reviewing and they motivate and engage students. Whatever they are studying, there is some way to add some competition”. Games involve activities in the target language that promote interest and motivation in the students. They have benefits, but there are also reasons to limit their implementation. Games as a teaching strategy help students to learn unconsciously through play, in a stress-free context. However, a disadvantage is that the teaching-learning process becomes noisy, and so the teacher may find it difficult to control the group. Additionally, clear instructions are sometimes hard to give and students often do not understand them or listen to them. Games are important in people’s especially children’s lives, but some teachers consider them time-consuming with no educational value.

In order to define the concept of didactic games as a strategy to be applied in the classroom, the definition of Spagnolo and Cžmár (2003) can be useful. They explain teaching games as “an activity that brings fun and pleasure for pupils and also realize stated educational goals” (pp.58-59). The use of didactic games is part of many modern theories of education, as supported by Vankus (2005, p.1) who mentions that “many psychologists stated the importance of games for children’s development, as Groos, Volpicelli, Piaget, Bärbel, etc”, and for Sigurðardóttir (2010, p.7-8) there are some reasons that games deserve a place in the language classroom.

First of all, they are fun, which is extremely important, because they can help activate students who may have been inactive before, due to lack of interest, and second, games also play a big part in helping participants build relationships, and to feel equal.

One type of game is competitive games. Kiley (2014, p.2) explains the concept as follows: “[A] competitive game is where some combination of players must win while some other combination of players must lose”. The author proposes four types of games according to who wins: competitive games in which a player or some players win or lose, cooperative games in which all players can win or lose, collaborative games in which all players can win, but it is not possible for everybody to lose, and quasi-competitive games in which it is not possible for all players to lose, but it is
possible for them to all win. Sigurðardóttir (2010) proposes a model of categorizing games as either competitive or cooperative. In the former, some students win or lose the game, but they can be a useful way to encourage some students to be interested and to maintain their focus. In contrast, in cooperative games, the main purpose is that all students work together, and the emphasis is not on winning or losing.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the AR model used in this research, as well as the data collection techniques that were used in both stages: 1) Identifying the problem; and 2) evaluating the action plan, are described. In the first one, an interview as informal conversation, a focus group interview, and participant-observation were used. In the second one: narrative reports, a semi-structured interview and a focus group interview were used. The results of both phases were verified through triangulation technique. The chapter ends with a description of the Action Plan that was designed, implemented and evaluated.

1. Research design

This study was based on the concepts of action research (AR). Several authors, such as Koshy (2005), Carr and Kemmis (1986), Burns (2008), and Mackey (2008), among others, define action research in education as a method of inquiry and self-reflection in order to bring about changes in teaching practice. Koshy (2005, p.13) states that AR

\[ \text{AR is to facilitate practitioners to study aspects of practice – whether it is in the context of introducing an innovative idea or in assessing and reflecting on the effectiveness of existing practice, with the view of improving practice.} \]

Additionally, Carr and Kemmis (1986, p.162) claim that AR “is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practice”. Some of the definitions of AR refer to a self-reflective, critical, and systematic process to examine the teaching practice. Burns (2008, p, 5) states that the aim of AR “is to identify problematic situations or issues considered by participants to be worthy of investigation in order to bring about critically informed changes in practice”. In other words, AR is an approach that studies a teaching practice with the aim to improve it through self-reflection.
The main characteristic of AR is that it is developed in cycles, and it includes the following stages: plan, action, observation and reflection, re-planning and action. It also implies, as Burns (2008, p.4) claims, that

The processes previously mentioned interact, not in a linear sequence, but dynamically with each other and also that several cycles have to be done before satisfactory conclusions about the investigated problems can be reached.

Mackay (2008) declares that AR can be understood only when a researcher works on it. This has been explained by a teacher who worked with Ann Burns in Australia (Burns, 2008, p.4. citing Hamilton, 1999):

My experience of action research is that it is difficult to grasp or explain the concept until one is in the process of doing it. It is in the doing that it starts to make sense and become clear.

AR is not without its disadvantages. One is that AR is often considered a soft option of research. Another refers to the difficulty of the ethical considerations that are expected in AR, such as keeping private the name of the school or participants, obtaining permission of participants to collaborate in the project, or being non-intrusive in the activities of the participants. Koshy (2005, p.84) explains that in AR “special care needs to be taken both for data collection and the dissemination of findings as it would be easy to recognize people and events within local situations”. However, AR has advantages. Burns (2010, p.18) considers that AR “can be a very valuable way to extend our teaching skills and gain more understanding of ourselves as teachers, our classrooms and our students”. AR also helps teachers to become more effective.

2. Identifying and understanding the problem
This section describes the data collection techniques and the verification of data that was used to identify and understand the nature of the problem that is the object of this action research. These were interviews as informal-conversation, focus group interview, and participant-observation. Triangulation was the procedure used to verify the data.
Data collection techniques refer to the ways of obtaining information in order to understand a research problem. Chaleunvong (2009, p.3) claims that data collection techniques “allow us to systematically collect information about our objects of study: people, objects, phenomena, and about the settings in which they occur”, whereas Climacosa (2013, p.2) states that data collection

...is the process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest, in an established systematic fashion that enables one to answer stated research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes.

In other words, data collection techniques are instruments to obtain and analyze information that researchers use to obtain results on the topic they investigate.

There is a wide variety of techniques such as interview, observation, survey, focus group, questionnaire or test. According to Cohen et al. (2011, p.375), there are basically eight kinds of techniques:

1. questionnaires;
2. interviews;
3. accounts;
4. observations;
5. tests;
6. personal constructs;
7. role-playing;
8. visual media in educational research.

The data collection techniques that were used in this AR study were: 1) interview as informal-conversation, 2) focus group interview, and 3) participant-observation. The first technique, interview as informal-conversational form, has been defined by Cohen et al. (2011, p.413) as questions that “emerge from the immediate context and are asked in the natural course of things [with] … no predetermination of questions, topics
or wording”. The technique has disadvantages such as the difficulty to analyze the data. It is also less organized if some questions are induced and do not arise naturally. Even though this technique has drawbacks, it was used in this AR to understand the research problem considering that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. AR offers, as is described by Crabtree and Cohen (2006), the following advantages: the interviews can be carried out informally, which means that researchers do not need to schedule a time with the interviewees to carry it out, and that it does not put any pressure on the interviewees, which implies that they will answer more freely and openly.

In order to identify and understand the research problem, the informal-conversational interviews were used with the teacher in charge of group 1A (Appendix 1), and with some of her students at the end of the class. I did not take my interview guide to the interview so that the interview would seem more like a natural conversation and so they could answer more freely. Instead, I had learned the questions by heart so as to focus on the identification of the problem. I asked them about their motivation to learn in the English class. The students and the teacher answered without pressure. The interviews turned out to be more of a conversation than an interview, although I was taking notes and recording them. I used two days to carry out the informal-conversational interviews in the students’ classroom. The drawback was that there was no order in the information they provided, as they sometimes talked about unrelated issues.

The second technique that was used was the focus group interview, which is defined by Thomas et al. (1995, p.206-219) as

…a technique involving the use of in-depth group interviews in which participants are selected because they are a purposive, although not necessarily representative, sampling of a specific population, this group being focused on a given topic.

Powell (2002, p.1) defines it as “a structured small group interview in order to gather information about a particular topic guided by a set of focused questions made by a
facilitator or leader”. Some of the advantages of this technique are described by Cohen et al. (2011). They say that if a focus group interview is used in a large group, the process is hard to manage. Some of the participants participate more than others, and the answers to the questions may not be representative of the group. Although it has disadvantages, this technique was used taking into account some benefits of the technique. Khan et al. (1991, p.44) explain that a focus group interview

...provides a wealth of insight into motivation, attitudes, and feeling. Also it fosters the generation of ideas, encourages participants to express their views freely and frankly, the moderator has a better opportunity to clarify the questions, and it represents an easy way for the facilitator to solve problems.

This technique was used with group 1A in order to obtain information about the problem of this research (Appendix 2). As a moderator, I first introduced myself and thanked the participants, as well as explained the purpose of the activity. I divided the group in eight teams of four students, and provided them with 65 x 32 centimeter sheets of paper and markers, explaining that there was no right or wrong answer. I wrote the questions on the blackboard for them to discuss in their teams, giving equal opportunity to all to express their ideas. At the end, each team presented their answers to the group. The moderator asked for more detailed comments in order to clarify their ideas.

The third data collection technique that was used is participant observation. I employed my reflection notes that I wrote at the end of the class to use them as evidence related with my role as an English subject teacher. Cohen (2011, p.456) defines it as “a research process that offers an investigator the opportunity to gather live data from naturally occurring social situations”. The observation can take several forms which can be combined. One type is participant observation, which is defined by Domenico and Phillips (2012, p.1) as a

...key social science research approach. It involves observing and interacting with the subject of interest while actively participating in the setting as well as getting very close to research participants and
gaining an intimate knowledge of their practices through intensive immersion in the field of study.

According to Cohen et al. (2011) this technique requires the researcher to be empathic and sympathetic, in order to gain access to insiders’ behaviors and activities while maintaining the role of the researcher. I used participant observation basically in my role of an English subject teacher to be an observer in my classes (Appendix 3). At the end of the class I used my lesson plan as a document to add some notes and write observations about the behavior of my students during specific activities. In conclusion, it can be said that data may be gathered in many different forms. The choice of technique depends on the context in which the investigation takes place, its advantages or disadvantages, and the working style of the researcher.

2.1 Verification

In qualitative research, a verification process is used in order to check the accuracy and inconsistencies in the data. Morse et al. (2002, p.9) define this verification as

… the process of checking, confirming, making sure, and being certain. This concept also refers to the mechanisms used during the process of research to incrementally contribute to ensuring reliability and validity and, thus, the rigor of a study.

Verification of data can briefly be described as the process which ensures that data is correct or at least plausible. Bielak (2003, p.5) provides a more detailed definition of verification of data, stating that it is: “Assessing data accuracy, completeness, consistency, availability and internal control practices that serve to determine the overall reliability of the data collected”.

In recent years, two main approaches to verify data have emerged: transformational and transactional. In the former, the data has to be validated in its micro and macro context, in other words, the information collected must be analyzed from many perspectives. In the latter, transactional validation, the techniques are seen as a medium to insure an accurate reflection of reality. Cho and Trent (2006) explain that transactional techniques are basically: member-checking, bracketing and
triangulation. The first one, also called member validation, respondent validation, or member validation, it is defined by Bryman (2002, p.1) as a “procedure whereby a researcher submits materials relevant to an investigation for checking by the people who were the source of those materials”. The second one, bracketing, has been described by Tuford and Newman (2010, p.1) as a method used by some researchers “to mitigate the potential deleterious effects of unacknowledged preconceptions related to the research and thereby to increase the rigor of the project”. Triangulation, the third one, according to Cohen et al. (2011, p.195) is “the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of the human behavior”, whereas Guion et al. (2011.p, 1) explain that triangulation …involves using different sources of information in order to increase the validity of a study. In extension, these sources are likely to be stakeholders in a program—participants, other researchers, program staff, other community members, and so on

In other words, triangulation is a process to verify data from different sources. There are different types of triangulation, but the most common is data triangulation, defined by Hidalgo (2014) “as gathering data through different sampling strategies, so that parts of data are collected at different times and social situations, as well as from a variety of people”. Totten (2012) points out that

An advantage is that the use of several sources can provide more outcomes, but that disadvantages can be the cost, as the use of different methodologies requires a large budget, and also that it is time-consuming when the data is analyzed.

In conclusion, the data for this AR were collected by means of three techniques: informal-conversational interview, focus group interview, and participant observation. Triangulation of data allowed this research to compare and contrast the results of the analysis. It helped to identify and understand the nature of the problem which is explained in the following section.
3. Outcome of initial research

After collecting and verifying the data, it was concluded that students from 1A seemed to have little motivation to learn English. In the informal-conversational interview with the teacher and some students, it was learned that they considered the English class a boring subject. Their reason for this was that the class activities were mainly translations from English to Spanish. Another activity that was common in their experience was solving a lot of exercises from the book. In other words, for the participants, the English subject seemed to them to be a predictable routine, with no surprises that could make it more interesting. The English language subject seemed to be considered neither as relevant nor fundamental, but a complementary subject to fill in the program at the Telesecundaria. The participants also expressed that they considered it was hard to learn the target language because, unlike Spanish, English pronunciation is different from the way it is spelled.

The previously mentioned responses were also echoed in the focus group interview. It became clear that most of the students did not seem to like English classes. The reasons they gave were that they found it “boring”, “tedious”, “only translation” and the language itself was “difficult to pronounce”. During the presentation of their posters, several comments were made about the difficulty they had in pronouncing words in English properly, or to understand the language, which is why they disliked the subject. Several expressed that it was “hard” and that they were not learning English even if they tried hard, but mostly they admitted that they did not pay attention to the class, neither did they practice English. One student said that the other students laughed at him because of his bad pronunciation. These comments show that students seemed uninterested in English classes and were not very motivated by the language.

The analysis of my participant observation also echoed similar findings to those above. The students seemed mostly uninterested in the English class. Most of the students did not participate very much in class, did very little homework, and preferred talking or playing during the class instead of paying attention. Moreover, the
students did not seem to want to make an effort to study the language; they seemed to want different kinds of activities in which they would not have to struggle or try hard.

As a general conclusion, the collection and verification of the data revealed that these students of 1A in a Telesecundaria in Xalapa had little or no motivation to learn English. The main reasons for this were: that the class was boring and difficult, required a lot of effort, and that they did not see any benefit in the short or long term.

4. Action plan
An action plan can be understood as a group of activities that are developed in the stages required to achieve a goal. With this description in mind, this concept could be considered as a didactic intervention to solve a problem in a classroom by following an order to achieve the objective. After identifying the main problem that consisted in the lack of motivation of Telesecundaria students, it was decided to try and solve this issue by carrying out an action plan using competitive games as a way to motivate them.

4.1 Rationale
This section gives the reasons why, based on theory, competitive games were used as a strategy to face the issue of students’ lack of motivation to learn English. There are some advantages that competitive games offer to learners. It can be said that their use in the English as a Foreign Language classroom can be a way to motivate students to learn, to make their time in class enjoyable, to create a comfortable competitive environment, to encourage students to assume a more active role in the class, to encourage creativity in the learners, and to reduce stress in the classroom. Rose (2007, p.2) claims that

"Competitive games with its innate power to enliven and motivate, can be used to advantage by any language teacher who wishes to boost the collective energy levels of their classes."
Competitive games promote learning unconsciously through play. They also foster collaborative work and promote a relaxed environment. Additionally, Chen (2005, p1) explains that competitive games have several benefits for English classes. They

…stimulate communicative skills. Competitors revealed that they felt less afraid of using their English during game play. I also observed that they were more willing to ask questions and think creatively about how to use English to achieve the goal. The competition gave students a natural opportunity to work together and communicate using English with each other.

Competitive games can take many different forms. Some possible forms are guessing games, role play games, board games, search games, match games, labeling games, competitive games, or combinations.

4.2 Implementation

This action plan included four competitive games which were applied one per week in a four-week period to cover the contents of the English subject: vocabulary of places in town, false cognates, vocabulary in general, and prepositions of place.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK</th>
<th>GAME</th>
<th>PROCEDURE</th>
<th>OBJECTIVE</th>
<th>MATERIAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Matching Game</td>
<td>One student per team passes to the board holding a flyswatter ready to look for the Words or images that are pasted on the board, and when the teachers says a Word or image the first student to catch it, wins a point for his/her team.</td>
<td>1. Motivate students to learn English. 2. Review vocabulary related with places in town</td>
<td>Flashcards with images of “places in town” and the written form of the words, and two flyswatters, one per team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Drawing Game</td>
<td>Students in a team take turns to draw a word related to the false cognates on the board. If the rest of the team guesses the word, they win a point. At the end, the team with the most points wins the game.</td>
<td>1. Motivate students to learn English 2. Review vocabulary related with false cognates</td>
<td>1. Markers 2. Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Writing Words Game</td>
<td>Teaches shows a letter of the alphabet that is written in colorful paper; then students need to write 5 or 10 words with this initial letter. The first student in doing this correctly wins a point for his/her team</td>
<td>1. Motivate students to learn English 2. Increase vocabulary 3. Review how to write words</td>
<td>1.Colorful sheets of papers 2.Markers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Goose Game</td>
<td>Students use a board game to go forward or backward a number of spaces after rolling a dice. For each number on the board, there is a question for the learner to answer with the help of his/her team. If the students answer correctly, they go forward, but if it is wrong they stay on the same number. The winner is the team that arrives at the end first.</td>
<td>1. Motivate students to learn English 2. Review of prepositions of place using a map</td>
<td>1.Goose game board 2.Two dice 3. A map on a TV.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each week of instruction was integrated by three one hour and a half sessions. The third session of the week was considered the ideal time to apply one competitive game as a review of the content of the two previous sessions of the week. In this way, in the first week, the “matching game” was used to review the vocabulary related with places in town, which basically consisted in identifying a word with its visual representation. In the second week, I used the “Drawing game”. The students were asked to make an image of a word that was related with false cognates; the students of their team then had to guess it. During the third week, the activity was “Writing words games” which consisted in writing a list of words with a given initial letter. Finally, for the fourth week, in order to make a review of the use of prepositions of place, the “Goose game” was used. It consisted in arriving at the finish going forward or backward a number of spaces after rolling the dice. The competitions were played as a whole group divided in two teams, each of which was formed by 15 students including a representative. More detailed explanation about the games, procedure, objective and material is described in the table above.

The four competitive games to be played by the students in two teams in order to learn and recall vocabulary or grammar structures were: The “Goose Game”, a competition game in which students used a board to go forward or backward a number of spaces after rolling a dice. For each number on the board, there was a question for the learner to answer with the help of their classmates of team. If the students answered correctly, they went forward, but if it was wrong they stayed in the same number. The winner was the team that came first to the finish. This game was used to make a general review of the whole unit; therefore, students were practicing orally vocabulary and grammar structures. The “Drawing Game” was a competition in which the students who represented their teams made a drawing of a word on the board and the rest tried to guess it in less than one minute. The winner was the team with the most words guessed correctly. This game was used to learn vocabulary related with false cognates. The “Matching Game” was a competition in which two students using a flyswatter looked for the word and its matching image, while several similar flashcards posted on the board were making the search more interesting. This
game was used to make a review of “places in town” by matching vocabulary with its visual representation. The “Writing Game” was a competition in which the teacher showed a letter of the alphabet that was written on slips of different color paper. Students were asked to write 10 words with this initial letter, then the first student in doing it correctly won a point for his/her team. This game was used to increase vocabulary and learn how to spell words correctly.

4.3 Evaluation of action
In this AR, it was decided to implement both summative and formative evaluation, owing to the advantages of both for the project, as well as the nature of the teaching strategies. Summative evaluation is explained by Rossett and Sheldon (2001, p.1) as “a method of judging the worth of a program at the end of the program activities”, while formative evaluation has been said to be conducted during the development or improvement of an educational program or product (Ross, 2005). Chappuis and Chappuis (2008, p.14) claim that “almost any assessment instrument can be used for summative or formative purposes”, adding that in the summative evaluation a formative evaluation can be used. In this action plan, both were combined. In other words, summative evaluation was used to decide at the end of the action plan, whether the students were motivated or not to learn English. The summative evaluation forms were: 1) focus group interview with the students and 2) a semi structured interview with the teacher in charge of the group. Additionally, narrative reports were included as one form of formative evaluation, because they helped me as the teacher to reflect on what was happening during the activities and make changes.; for example, some of the rules had to be changed due to students misbehaving, in addition, changes were made in the teams according to the number of students present in each class, as well as their age, gender, weight and height in order for the games to be played.

In conclusion, the evaluation forms were both formative and summative. Narrative reports were formative because they were used during the program and allowed for changes, but the focus group interview and the semi structured interview were
summative because they allowed me to conclude at the end of the intervention whether or not the students’ motivation had improved.

4.3.1 Data collection techniques used for evaluating the action plan

In order to obtain reliable results for this AR concerning the evaluation stage of the action plan, the data collection techniques used were: 1) Narrative reports of the teacher as an observer-participant, 2) Semi-structured interview; and 3) Focus group interview. These techniques offered more advantages than disadvantages for this research.

The first one is a description of the class based on the teacher’s observation. Richards (2013, p. 95) explains that it is

... a written summary of the lesson that tries to capture the main things that happened during the course of it, such as how the lesson opened, the sequence of activities that occurred, how the teacher introduced each activity, and so on.

This data collection technique also receives names such as; narrative summary, narrative descriptions or lesson reports. Christodoulou (2010) considers that it enables teachers to describe their recollection of the main features of a lesson. Narrative reports were chosen as data collection technique due its advantages: the writer is the teacher who does the research, and also because it is a way to raise self-awareness about the teacher’s teaching practice. The narrative reports were written during the four weeks implementation of the action plan, describing the general perception of the class. Emphasis was placed on whether or not the students were motivated to participate in the competitive games (Appendix 4). In total there were four narrative reports that corresponded to the same number of games that were implemented. During class time, I acted as the English teacher organizing the game activities and observing, but at the end, I took on the role of the researcher who wrote about the students’ reactions to the games.

The second data collection technique used after applying the action plan was the semi-structured interview with the teacher in charge of the group (Appendix 5). It was
decided to do it at the end of the project, mainly because she was also an observer of the class, and she had her own opinion about the success or failure of the action plan. A semi-structured interview, the data collection technique in which one person, an interviewer, asks questions to another person, a respondent, is defined by Cohen and Crabtree (2006, p.1) as the “process in which an interviewer follows the guide of questions”, but is “able to follow topical trajectories in the conversation that may stray from the guide when he or she feels this is appropriate”. This was an additional reason for using it, given that its primary advantage, as explained by Woods (2011, p.8), is that it provides much more detailed information, and it gives the opportunity to ask some spontaneous questions.

Previous to the interview, questions were written that served as a guide for the semi-structured interview, but taking into account that there should be enough freedom to make some additional questions whenever needed. This technique was used at the end of the course once the action plan had been implemented to discover whether the teaching strategies had worked in the group to raise motivation to learn English. It was carried out at end of the last class with no students present.

The third and last evaluation technique was a focus group, which was also used in the previous research stage, with the aim to identify and understand the nature of the problem (Appendix 6). This time a focus group interview was carried out at the end of the implementation stage. The questionnaire was written in Spanish because the students' knowledge of English was not good enough to answer the questions in English. The main objective of this interview was to discover if the students were motivated or not to learn English when participating in the competitive games. In order to register and identify their comments, students were assigned a letter of the English alphabet (26 letters), but as there were 30 students, the other 4 students were assigned the following letters and numbers: A2, B2, C2 and D2.

In order to verify the findings obtained from these three data collection techniques, triangulation, as explained in 2.1, was used.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings and analysis of the data after implementing the action plan, and collecting, as well as verifying the data. From this, the following four categories emerged: Students’ motivation; Student awareness; Cooperative learning and Competitive games. These categories reveal that the use of competitive games as a strategy to teach English were effective in that: students were motivated to learn English; their awareness of the importance of the English subject grew; and cooperative learning increased student motivation to perform the tasks and afforded fun, as well as educational benefits. However, although these competitive games as a strategy to teach English were effective, they are subject to improvement.

1. Students’ motivation
The students at this particular Telesecundaria seemed to be motivated by the implementation of competitive games. In addition, while they were playing games, they were also learning. They were engaged with their classmates, with the teams, and with the English language, learning vocabulary and grammar structures. Most of the learners appeared to be intrinsically motivated because there were no prizes for the winners. One of the reasons that moved them was the pleasure to win and learn. Student K said: “I really like the class because I have fun and learn English”. Student H gave a different reason: “I like it because of the games and I want to learn English”, while student C answered: “I like English class because there are games and they are very funny”. Other students said that they were motivated just because they were learning the language; still others did not give any reason, such as student P: “I like English because it is great!” Therefore, it may be inferred that the students liked the English class due to the fact that they enjoyed playing the games and because they learned the language at the same time. This is in line with Ryan and Deci (2000) who explain that intrinsic motivation encourages individuals to do a task because of the internal rewards such as joy, pleasure and satisfaction of curiosity instead of an external reward that may be obtained.
2. Students’ awareness

The students in the focus group interviews expressed that apart from having had fun, they were also aware of the importance of the English language. While student J said: “I like the class because I learn another language and because I want to pronounce it properly”, student A mentioned: “I want to learn English to understand the meaning of the words when I am surfing in internet”. This awareness of the language was one of the reasons that they felt motivated to participate in the games to learn this target language.

This motivation because of awareness of the language is consistent with Tran et al (2012) who claim, in their case study, that the main factor that motivates students was the awareness of the importance of English. Students of Telesecundaria expressed that they like to play games, which at the same time motivated them to learn English, because it would be useful for them if they traveled outside Mexico and wanted to communicate with foreign people whose mother tongue was English. Examples of this are student F who stated that: “English can help me to communicate with people from other countries”, and student R who mentioned: “If I go to United States of America I can understand English”. They added that they thought they would not have any communication problems once they were outside Mexico, working, studying or traveling. Student D stated: “I am motivated and would like to study outside Mexico, and never give up”.

Other students gave practical reasons for trying to learn English. For example, student A complained: “I pay attention to the class because I have cousins who live in Texas. They are at the same age than me, but when they speak on the phone, they do so in English, and I do not understand anything”. Student K referred to video games when he expressed that: “I participate in the games [in class] because some words are very similar to what I have seen when I play video games, like winner, competition, ready and go”. Additionally, in the semi-structured interview the teacher in charge of the group said: “…with this strategy the students are more aware of the importance of the English language, because they know that it is a subject that they
are going to take in the following grades, even in high school, and at college level”. Students commented also that they were motivated due to the long-term benefits of learning English, such as studying abroad or traveling to an English speaking country. Another reason was given by another two students: “I like the class because it can be useful if I want to visit my friends and family who live in the United States of America” (student R) and: “I want to know more about English because I want to study in the United States of America” (student B).

3. Cooperative learning

Students preferred to collaborate with others to win in competitions than work individually. The game that the students liked the least of the four was the “Writing Game”, which consisted in writing individually a list of ten words with a given initial letter. In contrast, the game they liked most was called the “Goose Game”, in which students had to help each other in order to give the best answer to win. In other words, the students preferred team work over individual work. Abass (2013) supports the idea that interacting with each other in a team encourages and supports the students’ learning efforts. One reason why the Telesecundaria students did not like individual work was that they did not like to write, as expressed by student A2: “I least liked the writing game because I had to write a lot and I got tired, but I liked the drawing games most because everybody was giving ideas to guess the word”. The reasons why they liked the competitive games all seem to point to the fact that they like working together. Student Y said: “I liked the goose game more than the other because everybody in our team participated answering the questions in order to win”. When the students talked about their performance in the competitive games, they talked in the plural and never in the singular to express that they were learning. For example, student D2 said: “We are always winning in the games”. As Coffey (2008) suggested, when students work together, they not only strengthen their own learning, but also that of the other students in the team.

Students were aware that they were enjoying the games, and that they were also learning at the same time. They tended to help their classmates in their team in order
to win the game, even though sometimes the rule was not to help the others as in the Goose Game: “I wanted to help my classmate during the matching game, but I was not allowed to” (student T), or: “I did not want to give a clue to my team but I did it” (student G). Additionally, as a strategy to win, participants in the game selected the best student(s) to be their representative(s) in the game, for instance, student N explained that: “We always selected student A because she is the one that knows more English”. The contrary also happened as expressed by student W: “We selected student L because he participates less and we want him to learn”.

4. Competitive games
The students’ answers in the focus group interview indicate that competitive games were motivating, which was also confirmed by the teacher in charge of the group who was an observer of all the lessons. However, the teacher also indicated that:

…[initially] students panicked about the English subject, they did not like the subject, but when competitive games were introduced, they learned more easily, and now they really like it; however, the games need simpler rules to follow and clearer instructions.

Spagnolo and Cižmár (2003) suggest that games bring fun and pleasure to pupils and also have educational benefits. The teacher in charge of the group agreed with the teaching strategy used to motivate the Telesecundaria students because all the students had passed the final test without having to use the dictionary to read the instructions or complete the test. Nevertheless, she suggested the need to improve the management of the students when working in groups. She pointed out that some students were having problems during the games due to the unclear rules to play the game. For instance, she had observed that students could sometimes help the others, but sometimes not, or that the time allowed for solving the task was either excessive or too reduced. This coincided with the comment of student S: “We respect the rules that say not to help our team representative but the other team was helping theirs, and this was not fair”. Similarly, student E: “It is not fair, because you teacher gave more time to guess the word to them than to us”.
Although most of the students were usually motivated, there were some students who were not. Student O expressed: “I did not like to lose in the game”, and student C2 complained that the other team used the dictionary, which was not allowed: “The other team was doing tricks in order to win the game, having no respect for the rules”. Students were emphatic in saying that they liked the games, but there were some aspects than they did not like. In regard to the latter, students did not like to lose the game and be laughed at if they lost the game, or if they did not pronounce properly the word or sentence. Student C2 explained: “I do not like to participate because I feel everybody is going to laugh at me. I do not know how to pronounce the words in English”.

In general, students had expressed that there were activities that they did not like to do in the English class. They disliked activities such as solving exercises from the book, translating texts from English to Spanish, or writing dictations. Student Q expressed her dislike: “I like the English subject but I do not like to translate or do a lot of exercises in the book. It is boring and difficult”. In contrast, they enjoyed participating in the games. The “Goose Game” was the one that they liked most as the students’ reaction was one of total engagement. While they were unconsciously recalling the vocabulary, there was a winning team which was happy, but there was also another team that was losing and unmotivated.

Student V who was motivated with the drawing game said: “When I was able to guess the word that my classmate was drawing, I felt motivated to guess other words”, or as the teacher in charge of the group explained during the semi-structured interview: “The group is very motivated. There are cases in which students are trying to speak in English with their parents when they are at home”. However, in contrast, some learners expressed that they did not like the competitive games used during the class. Student J informed: “I do not like to lose the game, because my classmates make fun of me and my team” while student Z answered: “I like the games but I do not like the one in which the teacher asked me to write a lot”.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND REFLECTIONS

This final chapter describes the general objective and procedure of this AR; the implications of the use of competitive games as a teaching strategy; the limitations of this research consisting mainly in a lack of time to design a longer action plan, as well as, the changes next time around to improve the competitive games; a conclusion highlighting the effectiveness of this didactical procedure, and finally suggestions for a possible second AR cycle focusing on how competitive games work with different numbers of participants in teams, and with another type of dynamic.

1. Review
The main objective of this AR project was to motivate students from Telesecundaria to learn English by means of competitive games. To achieve this, it was necessary, first, to identify and understand the nature of the problem; therefore, data were collected and verified in the group that was the object of this study. Later, an action plan was designed, based on theory and the problem that was identified. The plan took four weeks in which the same number of competitive games, one per week, was carried out in the classroom. The four competitive games were played in two teams to introduce and review vocabulary and grammar structures of Basic English, so as to motivate the students to learn the language. Data were collected and verified to discover whether the action plan was successful or not in achieving its main objective. The data collection techniques used for this purpose were a semi-structured interview with the teacher in charge of the group, a focus group interview with the students and the narrative report of the teacher-researcher. Finally, a reflection of the English teaching process in the local context was carried out.

2. Implications
The AR revealed that teaching by means of competitive games seems useful to motivate students from Telesecundaria to learn English. Students not only learned the language, but they were aware of the importance to learn English; in addition they enjoyed playing the competitive games in teams with other classmates. It seems to indicate therefore, that competitive games are an effective tool, as well as a fun way
to teach English to teenagers. There are indications that an accompanying benefit is that while playing games and competing, students are learning the foreign language. Nevertheless, competitive games should have clear, specific and simple rules to follow to avoid discipline problems or misbehavior in the classroom. This research may contribute to a change in the opinion that games in the English classroom are only useful to fill time, to create a noisy atmosphere, with no educational contents.

This research may also help to raise awareness in the teachers involved in teaching English in Telesecundarias, the educational sub-system in which this AR was carried out. It has often been said by teachers and students in Telesecundarias that the program and the teaching materials for the English subject are obsolete and unrealistic and that a change in the teaching methodology seems necessary. Students do not like to watch 15 minutes of an instructional video in English and later spend 35 minutes solving grammar exercises from the textbook in every session.

By means of this research, it was found that an essential element to be successful in learning English in the Telesecundaria system is motivation, understood more as an internal force to achieve a goal (for example, to compete in the games to learn the language) than as an external factor (for example, receiving a prize if a team of students wins the competition). Students themselves admitted that they realized that learning English is important for them, as it not only helps them to achieve short-term goals such as learning vocabulary or grammar structures, but also long-term goals such as studying abroad or being able to communicate with foreign people.

3. Limitations
In this research project four limitations can be identified: lack of time to design and extend the action plan to at least 8 weeks; few opportunities for change in the Telesecundaria system; and limited or incomplete technological facilities.
A) Lack of time
Due to time constraints it was not possible to extend the action plan to eight weeks, rather than four, in order to apply eight different competitive games with different objectives. Time was also insufficient for the design of the activities and the preparation of the didactic material, especially because flash cards, board games, slips of paper, etc., to be used in class were all hand-made and therefore time-consuming. A personal objective that was not achieved was to produce materials that were easy to create, low cost, ecological, and easy to use during the class.

B) Few opportunities for change
Telesecundarias have their own way of teaching and evaluating. For example, the program dated from 2009 and the textbook was edited in 2006. As for evaluation, tests are standardized and always use multiple choice options. It is imperative for all rubrics to be in English, as well as Spanish. Therefore, in this context, it was rather difficult to introduce more communicative activities, such as competitive games, without referring to the mother tongue.

C) Limited technological facilities
Although it is expected that schools in Telesecundaria are provided with the equipment necessary to watch the videos and to connect with the national TV system, it turns out that this is not always the case. The school where this AR was carried out was devoid of additional loud speakers for the students to hear the audio files properly. This was the reason why it was difficult to implement activities for listening purposes, thus limiting the action plan. Even though the classroom had a television set, it was not big enough for students at the back to see the images or sentences on the screen properly. There was a computer available, but the operating system was obsolete. Therefore, I decided to take my own laptop to class, as well as the necessary cables. In addition, the school was unable to cover expenses for didactic material, markers, eraser, etc.
4. Changes next time around

One of the changes that seem important next time around is to carefully consider the role of instruction for the competitive games. Instruction-giving is always complicated, but it was more so in a context where the students were not familiar with playing games in class. What is needed is clear instructions, but especially clear and simple rules to play the competitive games. If the directions about what to do, or not, are clear and simple, this will avoid discipline problems.

A second possible change is the size of the teams used in the competitive games. In this AR, the teams always contained 15 students. This was too many students per team, which often increased the students’ distraction and misbehavior. It is suggested that in the future, teams would include groupings in pairs, trios or small groups.

A third suggested change for the future would be to implement games or competitions in which there is an engaging challenge, something that calls more the attention of the students, preferably something more intellectually interesting rather than simply a physical skill or agility.

A fourth aspect to be changed is the extension of the action plan to at least two months, so that there would be more time to explore other kinds of competitions, materials, groupings and content.

A fifth suggested change has to do with the materials used in the competitive games. Here there are two possibilities, to improve the existing materials, or to use less didactic material, taking into account that games should focus on the imagination of the students rather than the materials themselves.

Finally, it is suggested that the teaching context should be taken more into account. If it is complicated to use technology in the English class, then competitive games should be implemented with less use of the computer and/or other technological devices.
5. Conclusions

From the findings and the corresponding discussion, it can be concluded that the use of competitive games may be an effective teaching strategy to motivate students to learn English. They can contribute to a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom, with increased learning as a result. They may allow for real cooperation among peers during the activities in teams, and they can increase student awareness that the English language can have a meaningful place in the real-life situations of the students.

This AR makes a small contribution to the possible modification of how English may be taught to young people, not only in *Telesecundarias*, but also in other contexts. Here it was shown that the use of competitive games as a teaching strategy improves students’ motivation to learn the language. Attention therefore, should be paid to the fact that intrinsic motivation (for example, by allowing students to have fun during the competitions) is far more effective than extrinsic motivation (for example, giving prizes or gifts).

6. Ways forward (possible 2nd AR cycle)

Further research using a second AR cycle could investigate competitive games that are more cognitively challenging to compare them with the games that focus more on physical skills. Additionally, the use of competitive games could be studied with different groupings (such as pairs, trios and small groups), or with different mechanics (such as, throwing a ball, rolling a dice, hitting bowling pins, searching for a given word, drawing a picture, etc). Additionally, rules in line with keeping discipline in the teams could be explored.
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Websites:


APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Sample of the informal conversation with the teacher in charge

1.- ¿Maestra podría describirme como era el grupo poco antes de que yo llegara a impartir las clases de inglés?
Es un grupo que le gusta trabajar, solo que se le dificulta esta materia. En clase hacemos ejercicios de traducción, por eso a todos los estudiantes se les pide que traigan su diccionario. Vemos un rato un video de la clase en inglés y luego resolvemos ejercicios de conjugación del libro de texto.

2.- ¿Considera que les falta motivación para aprender el idioma Inglés?
La verdad sí. Se les hace muy monótono el hecho de que en cada clase tengan que ver un video en la televisión del salón y luego tengan que resolver ejercicios del libro de texto.

3.- ¿Qué otro tipo de problemática enfrenta el grupo?
Afecta al buen desarrollo de la clase de inglés que los estudiantes tienen diferentes niveles y conocimientos del idioma, aparte de que existe mucho bullying entre ellos. Muchos alumnos no se atreven a participar ante el temor de ser objeto de burla por parte de otros compañeros.

4.- ¿Existe apatía de parte de estudiantes de este grupo de aprender el idioma inglés profesora?
Algunos alumnos que no tienen buen aprovechamiento en la clase, y no participan, no realizan trabajos dentro de clase o son apáticos. Tienen problemas individuales dentro de su familia, algunos muy serios como falta de atención, y otros porque se niegan a participar simplemente.
Appendix 2: Focus group interview (stage of identification of the problem)

Questions
1. ¿Qué les gusta y que no de la clase de inglés? ¿Por qué?
2. ¿Te sientes motivado de estudiar inglés en esta clase?, ¿Sí o no y por qué?

Answers
Team 1
1. No nos gusta porque a veces no tenemos la pronunciación correcta.
2. No, porque no le entendemos

Team 2
1. No nos gusta porque a veces es muy difícil entender y pronunciar.
2. No porque no es interesante y no le encontramos utilidad.

Team 3
1. No nos gusta escribir en inglés. No les gusta el inglés al escribirlo sobre todo
2. Nos gusta algo. Porque a veces aprendemos y otras veces no.

Team 4
1. A nosotros nos gusta la clase de inglés porque aprendemos, pero también no nos gusta porque se nos hace aburrido.
2. Estamos algo motivados porque cada vez aprendo muchas cosas

Team 5
1. No nos me gustan los graciosos que se ríen y bromean de los demás durante la clase. No nos gusta que no sepamos pronunciar.
2. Tratamos de encontrarle algo interesante al inglés pero no podemos.

Team 6
1.- No nos gusta porque no hay cosas entretenidas, no se le entiende gusta y porque a veces las actividades son largas.
2.- No nos sentimos motivados porque no aprendemos bien.

Team 7
1.- No nos gusta porque no hay actividades divertidas.
2.- No nos sentimos motivados. No nos enseñan cocas nuevas.

Team 8
1.- A nosotros no nos me gusta porque a veces no le entendemos al idioma. Se nos dificulta.
2.- No estamos motivados. No podemos aprender a hablar inglés.
Appendix 3: Pictures of reflective notes (stage of identification of the problem)

February 26th 2014

Telesecundaria 1 A

Today, the students did not participate too much in the class. It seemed that I had no connection with them, there were some attitudes of them that I could not understand. I have seen to my students in these first day of instruction that they did not want to write anything specially if it is matter of translation.

They have a little or nothing knowledge of the English language. The majority of them have not received any instruction in the target language. And it seemed that they were afraid motivated to stand the course with me.

March 30th 2014

Telesecundaria 1 A

The classroom was noisy. I did not know if it was because of the teacher in charge of the group was not in it, or the students were not interested in the English language class. Most of the activities I planned to apply during the class did not work well. Except one when I said they have to make the mimic for describing the new vocabulary.

Here in the group, not everybody had book, then I had to share it with other classmates in order to solve the different exercises which had explanations in English and Spanish.
Appendix 4: Samples of narrative reports (evaluation stage)

Students were motivated to participate in the game, and unconsciously they were repeating the words in order to guess their meanings, but they were pronouncing them.

Later I put all the flashcards on the board, and I provided the rules of the game. All the words were identified, matching the picture with its written word. The students really enjoyed the game.

Third week
Writing words game

I started this competitive game explaining the rules and showing them the didactical material that I was going to use in the game, consisting in the alphabet written in individual colorful paper, each of them containing a single letter.

The students’ reaction was the total engagement with the game while they were recalling unconsciously the vocabulary. There was a winner team which was happy, but a team which was not.
¿Describa el antes y después de haberse aplicado el plan? Antes los niños tenían pánico al inglés, no les gustaba el inglés. Lo poquito que podíamos hacer era traducir, conjugar. No le entendían al televisor. Hoy para ellos con todas las dinámicas que ha traído, se les facilita más el inglés. Hace un momento que estaba con el padre de familia, que es el niño que tiene dislexia, que le habla en inglés, entonces ha habido un cambio total. Les gusta porque son con los juegos y van aprendiendo, hoy realmente ya les gusta (el inglés). Les dejo prendida la clase, y ya empiezan a hablar y a jugar con los juegos que ponen en la televisión porque ya lo entienden.

¡Qué bueno!, ¿Entonces si mejoraron? Claro que sí, hubo un gran cambio y es positivo. ¿Considera que les falta aún por mejorar en el inglés? Si les falta porque ellos lo único que practican es lo que se ve en clases, y no lo vuelven a hacer solos, ni en casa ni en nada, entonces un idioma que no se practica se olvida. Pero a pesar de que solamente es lo que ellos practican en clase si les ha servido mucho, de hecho el último examen de bloque ya lo presentaron sin diccionario y todos pasaron, la calificación más baja fue 7 en una escala de 0 a 10. Con esta estrategia se han percatado de la importancia que tiene el idioma inglés, porque será una materia que la seguirá llevando en los siguientes grados, en la prepa y en la universidad.

¿Considera a este punto después de que se aplicaron las dinámicas y todo esto, que los alumnos están motivados de aprender inglés? Si. ¿Sobre los juegos de competencia, considera que es buena o mala herramienta para motivar a alumnos aprender inglés? Es buena. ¿Alguna vez me comentó que para mejorar la estrategia de los juegos había que establecer reglas más definidas y más control de grupo? Porque participa uno y se callan los demás, porque como son adolescente se ponen a jugar, para ellos no ven...
el juego con reglas, sino juego es juego. Pero si se ponen las reglas desde el principio, es un grupo que si saben llevar las reglas

¿El hecho de que pierdan en los juegos los desmotiva? No. ¿Un consejo para mí como maestro de inglés? Que siga echándole ganas, muy bien, nos gustó mucho. Incluso los comentarios del director, porque estamos aquí pegados a la dirección le gusta mucho como trabaja, se ha visto muy motivado el grupo, y le vuelvo a repetir, tan motivados que ellos ya intentan el hablar el inglés con los papás. Entonces adelante. Es un grupo muy competitivo entre ellos entonces todos quieren ser los mejores y ganar.
¿Les gusta la clase de inglés?
R = Sí

¿Por qué?
R = Porque tiene juegos variados en otros países.

¿Se sienten motivados de aprender inglés?
R = Sí, nos ayuda a superar variados en otros países.

¿Qué les gusta y qué no les gusta de inglés?
R = No nos gusta escribir, nos gusta los juegos.

¿Les motivan los juegos para aprender inglés?
R = Sí, podemos aprender más.

¿Les gustan los juegos que son competencia?
R = Sí, son muy divertidos, nuestro juego favorito es la oca.

¿Por qué?
R = Nos divertimos.

Ingrid Arantza, Rodrigo Ashania.

Equipo: 7