Action Research Project

The Use of Learning Strategies to Improve Vocabulary Acquisition

PRESENTA

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Abstract

Numerous studies around the world have contributed to understanding the diverse factors that influence the acquisition of the English language in different EFL contexts. The majority of research studies have focused on young adult and adult learners, with fewer studies exploring the learning strategies used by children at elementary school level. This Action research, in contrast, focuses on the study of a group of elementary students who seem to lack vocabulary and vocabulary learning strategies. In this study, it is described how the researcher identified, and confirmed, the nature of this issue in her teaching practice; followed by the action plan, based on three vocabulary learning strategies that were designed and implemented in an attempt to solve this problem. The findings indicate that the intervention had a positive effect on students’ vocabulary acquisition, but at the same time, other problems in need of further investigation emerged, such as: lack of motivation, and teaching training on how to teach vocabulary learning strategies in the classroom.

Key words
Language acquisition, learning strategies, vocabulary, young learners and co-operative learning
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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Language is an important device and a very beneficial means for human beings to communicate with other people” (Prandika, 2012:60). By using language, people can talk and understand each other. However, “conventionally, linguists perceive language as a complex communication system” (Pendidikan & Bahasa, 2008:2). Moreover, Mitchel and Myles, (2001: 14) argue that “language must be analyzed on several levels such as phonology, syntax, morphology, semantics and lexis, pragmatics and discourse”. Taking into account the different parts of the language, teachers can choose the most suitable topics to teach to their students according to their level and age.

Vocabulary learning has been considered as an integral and significant area of language teaching as Casco (2011:31) mentions “words are the basic building blocks of language, the units of meaning from which larger structures such as sentences, paragraphs and whole texts are formed.”

Nam, (2005) states that nowadays English has an important role in the economical and educational development of different countries. That is an important reason why non-English speakers are motivated to learn English as a foreign language. Nam (2005:125) remarks “Learners of EFL study English for different purposes: passing the examination, career development, pursuing their education and others. In most countries, English as a Foreign Language is part of the educational curriculum, particularly in state schools.”

English is the most learnt foreign language in Mexico. Despite this, most EFL learners have some difficulties to achieve the acquisition of the language. According to Farhady (2002: 275) “in any teaching situation, factors such as curriculum development, syllabus design, teacher training, material development, methodology, and testing the achievement of the learner are involved.”

The process of learning a new language has different implications. Learners should have access to the meaning of the words, as well as the different grammar structures that they need to communicate. However, in Mexico, “the enduring
effects of the vocabulary limitations of students with diverse learning needs is becoming increasingly apparent” (Baker, Simmons & Kameenui, 2011:1). This may be because one of the drawbacks of learning English as a foreign language is that EFL learners are not immerse in a rich-input learning context. EFL teachers, therefore, need to create environments, similar to real life, in their classrooms where students can practice the English language. However, in most cases, their attempts to do so are not enough (Baker, Simmons & Kameenui, 2011).

Given the fact that EFL learners have some limitations to learn and practice the language in context, extra emphasis needs to be placed on learning strategies inside the classroom. Ghazal (2001:1) states that “…learning new vocabulary is a challenge to foreign language students, but they can overcome this by having access to a variety of vocabulary learning strategies.”

The presentation of new words to students can be an issue for discussion among teachers. Research on vocabulary instruction (Prandika, 2012; Ching, 2009) indicates that children learn most of their vocabulary indirectly by engaging daily in oral language listening to adult conversations. Furthermore, vocabulary may be taught directly; this can be done by introducing specific words according to the topic of the lesson, and by providing opportunities for active engagement with new words.

Vocabulary development involves children’s understanding of the meaning of new words and being able to use them in context. It also involves teachers’ guidance of how to use a variety of strategies to learn new vocabulary. Vocabulary learning strategies are a subcategory of language learning strategies and constitute knowledge about what students do to find out the meaning of new words, retain them in long-term memory, recall them when needed in comprehension, and use them in language production (D’Antoni et al., 2010).
In the present paper, an attempt was made to investigate how the implementation of three vocabulary learning strategies: pictionarys, mind maps and the peg method, could help young students to improve their vocabulary learning acquisition. Moreover, the perceptions that students had of these and the impact that the strategies had in their English language learning process were analyzed and organized in different categories.

1.1 Context

Education has a strong influence on the economic development of each country (Hanushek & Wößmann, 2007). Through the years, most governments have argued that students can be a way to improve economic prosperity because through education people learn, analyze, and apply different knowledge acquired in schools in order to solve specific problems in the society. Education in Mexico, in particular, seems to be changing according to a new educational reform. That is why, nowadays, teachers are expected to focus more on how students can solve specific problems in real situations by using the knowledge learnt in the classroom rather than just learning theoretical knowledge (Hanushek & Wößmann, 2007).

According to Jaques (2000), practical competence is what teachers expect their students to achieve. Competence is a new term that has been implemented in the educational system in Mexico. By means of this educational system, students will be able to apply the knowledge that they learn in the classroom in their own context; that is, students will be able to solve different situations in their daily life as members of a society. Regarding EFL, Nam, (2005:110) explains “competence refers to the abstract and unseen representation of language knowledge inside our mind, with its probability to make and comprehend original utterances in a given language”

This study was carried out in Xalapa, which is located in the center of Veracruz State. This city has been recognized for the promotion of different cultural events in order to encourage people to appreciate arts and culture in general. That is why
there is a variety of public and private schools which offer education to people from different cities in Veracruz. Some years ago a program called PNIEB, in which the main objective was to promote English classes in the highest grades of public elementary school, was implemented. Unfortunately, this program has diminished because of the lack of economic support from the Mexican government. Consequently, the necessity to learn English to have a better grade in the subsequent school levels, secondary school, high school and university, where English is a required subject, has motivated some people to study English in private schools. That is why private institutions have increased their popularity in Xalapa because most of them offer English classes at their schools.

Although Mexico is situated near an English speaking country, there are some limitations that students have to face when they are learning English as a foreign language. One of these drawbacks is the time in which they are exposed to the English language. That is a reason why private schools offer English classes from preschool grades to university level. In contrast to public schools, in private schools students have one to three hours of English classes every day. At the same time, the need to be recognized as an institution encourages school authorities to improve their quality of education.

The institution where this study was carried out was a private elementary school. This school has six buildings; two of them are exclusively for the elementary level. These buildings have six large classrooms, each of them has a board, a set of markers, an eraser, three bookcases to organize teachers and students’ books, 20 to 25 chairs, as well as curtains which are used when the teachers use a projector during their classes; also, it is important to mention that every classroom is well illuminated. There are two projectors available for the elementary teachers, but unfortunately there are no laptops; that is why teachers have to bring their laptops to their classrooms to present multimedia material to their students. Students take English classes every day for one and a half hours. They use three books during the course: a student’s book, a workbook and a grammar book. Teachers are expected to cover all the topics during the length of the course. During the course,
English teachers encourage their students to develop their language skills such as speaking, listening, writing and reading. In this institution, the English subject has an important role in students’ academic development because at the end of each course students apply for Cambridge language certifications.

The English level expected from students is a high one. School authorities ask teachers for annual work plans, where teachers need to organize the topics to be taught every week, the aims of the week, month, bimester, and the aims of the course. Another important characteristic of this school is that in the upper grades such as fourth, fifth and sixth grades, English teachers teach the computer classes in English; this may be a challenge for the teacher, if s/he is not familiarized with the use of technology.

1.2 Participants
Nineteen, 5th grade beginner students, 10 girls and 9 boys, from a private elementary school in Xalapa, participated in this research. Their ages ranged from 10 to 11 years old. They are from the upper class and most of them have studied English before. Some students have traveled abroad, but the majority of them only practice their English in the classroom, and when they surf on the internet or listen to music in English. Some of these participants have studied English since preschool grades. I have noticed that these students have a better level of English than students who have recently become part of the institution. However, despite the fact that they have studied English before, they seem to lack vocabulary.

1.3 Description of the problem
Students seem to have difficulties when they try to communicate and share their opinions in different contexts because although they are aware of the grammatical structure of the sentences, most of the time, they do not know how to write or say some words in English because their vocabulary seems to be limited. These particular situations appear to make some students feel angry, frustrated or even de-motivated. For some students, the first exposure to the English language may
be de-motivating for them because of their lack of words or expressions to communicate. It is known that the process of learning a new language takes time and commitment from both teachers and learners. When teachers identify their learners’ strengths and weaknesses, they can help them to learn a language in the most suitable way according to their learning styles, intelligences, as well as their particular context.

1.4 Objectives
The three main aims of this action research project were the following:

a) To identify an aspect in my teaching practice which should be improved;
b) Verify the identification of the problem through the use of a variety of data collection techniques, and discover the nature of the problem;
c) Design, implement and evaluate an action plan in order to solve the problem identified.

The first and second objectives were accomplished by carrying out an initial research stage, through the use of three different data collection techniques: focus group, observation and previous tests. Then, the data collected was analyzed to identify the problem, and after that, to find different ways to solve it. The third objective was achieved by the implementation of an action plan during four weeks which was designed taking into account the findings of the initial research stage.

1.5 Research question
The researcher of this study wanted to discover how students’ vocabulary could be improved by using specific strategies used in the classroom. Thus, the research question was:

How may students’ vocabulary acquisition be improved by fostering awareness of learning strategies?

1.6 Map of research report
The present study comprises five chapters.
Chapter one presents the context of the study by providing an overview of the TEFL context, followed by a brief explanation of the EFL context, as well as the most important characteristics of teaching and learning English in Mexico. Moreover, the context, participants, objectives, research questions, as well as the nature of the problem of this action research are described.

Chapter two reviews some important facts about the use of vocabulary learning strategies in the classroom and how students can take advantage of them during their English language learning process.

Chapter three defines the action research methodology used. This includes the data collection methods that were employed to confirm the identified problem. This is followed by the findings of the initial research. Finally, there is a description of the action plan that was implemented in answer to the problem detected.

Chapter four describes how the action plan was evaluated and the categories that emerged from the analysis of the data.

Finally, chapter five includes a summary of this research process, the implications of the findings, as well as the limitations of this research. This is followed by suggestions of possible changes next time around and suggestions for further research.
Chapter 2: Vocabulary learning strategies

This chapter presents a brief overview of how young students learn and the multiple factors involved in order to clarify the need for the three specific vocabulary learning strategies used in this investigation. What is more, how students may take advantage of such strategies to understand and remember vocabulary on a daily basis. The use of vocabulary learning strategies as a possible solution to help students to improve their vocabulary learning acquisition was based on previous studies: Thornbury (2002), Prandika (2012) and Spackman (2002). These researchers describe the benefits and drawbacks of the use of each vocabulary learning strategy in the classroom, as well as a set of activities to present vocabulary to students.

2.1 Young learners learning process

There are different theories about how young students learn. Piaget (1967:12) suggested that children work through different stages of learning such as

1. Sensory-Motor Stage (from 0 – 2 years) in which children seemed to learn through physical interaction with the world around them.
2. Pre-operational stage (from 2 - 7 years) when children need concrete situations to process ideas.
3. Concrete Operational Stage (from 7 - 11 years) in which children begin to conceptualize and do some abstract problem solving, though they still learn best by doing.
4. Formal Operational Stage (from 11-15) in which children are able to use abstract thinking on their own.

Another expert, Vygotsky (1978), maintained that there is a difference between what children could achieve on their own and what children could develop when an adult was able to work with them, which was described as the zone of proximal development.

Regarding the theories above, it can be said that most of the children learn from the world around them and from the suitable guidance of adults. In a very practical
way, they can interact with actual, physical and concrete aspects, which should be appropriate to their age, as suggested by Piaget.

### 2.2 Multiple intelligences

According to Gardner and Hatch (1989: 6) there are seven multiple intelligences or ways in which people acquire and use knowledge.

1. **Logical-Mathematical Intelligence**: the ability to detect patterns, reason deductively and think logically. Most often associated with scientific and mathematical thinking.
2. **Linguistic Intelligence**: the ability to use language masterfully to express oneself rhetorically or poetically. Also allows one to use language as a means to remember information.
3. **Spatial Intelligence**: the ability to manipulate and create mental images in order to solve problems.
4. **Musical Intelligence**: the ability to read, understand, and compose musical pitches, tones, and rhythms.
5. **Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence**: the ability to use one’s mind to control one’s bodily movements.
6. **Interpersonal Intelligence**: the ability to apprehend the feelings and intentions of others.
7. **Intrapersonal Intelligence**: the ability to understand one’s own feelings and motivations.

Taking into consideration Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences in the teaching and learning language process, teachers should pay attention to the particular characteristics of their students. They should think of all the intelligences as equally important and structure the presentation of the material in a style that engages most or all of the intelligences because each child will have his own unique set of intellectual strengths and weaknesses.
2.3 Young Learners of English

There are different factors related to young learners which involve knowledge regarding how they learn, as well as their characteristics in the teaching and learning process. Teachers need to review whether or not their practices have been in accordance with the principles of teaching English to young learners.

According to Key (2004: 11), to support young learners of English in the classroom teachers should:

A) Try to establish a sense of community in their classrooms as well as to create a positive classroom environment where students feel comfortable.
B) Get to know, as much as possible, all their students to encourage during their language learning process.
C) Modify their speech according to their specific context for example: to speak slowly, to complement an instruction using body language and others.
D) Provide opportunities for interactions such as role plays, team work, short pair conversations and others.
E) Take advantage of the flexibility of young minds by complementing activities with visuals, realia and movement. Also, to involve students in making visuals as well as to move from activity to activity to catch childrens’ attention.

Considering the information about how children learn, English teachers can plan their lessons and design their activities in order to provide their young students with enough ways to learn English. Children cannot learn English without opportunities to practice English. Providing students with opportunities to interact with other students will naturally enhance English language development.

2.4 Learning strategies and styles

strategies into three major types: metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and social/affective strategies. Based on my context, I focused on what O’ Malley and Chamot propose. In general, Chamot, Foster & Keatley, (2011: 6) remarks by using metacognitive strategies “students begin to think about their own learning, they can then begin to notice how they learn, how others learn, and how they might adjust how they learn to learn more efficiently.”

In this way, students will take more responsibility for their knowledge and their vocabulary acquisition and eventually their language skills may be improved.

The main goal of cognitive strategies is to involve “mental engagement with language in materials or tasks in order to develop understanding and hence learning” (Grenfell & Harris, 1999: 12). Cognitive strategies mainly refer to verbal and written repetition as well as some mechanical means involving vocabulary learning. In his study about Japanese students’ vocabulary learning strategies, Schmitt found that up to 76% of Japanese learners reported they used verbal and written repetition as consolidation strategies, making them the second and third most-used strategies separately. Although some teachers disagree with the fact that repetition is useful to learn vocabulary, other teachers believe that through repetition students can improve their level of proficiency.

Moreover, social/affective strategies such as the learners’ cooperation, their asking for clarification or their control over the emotion and affection necessarily implicated in learning a foreign language are important during the language learning process. Social strategies involve learners using interaction with other people to facilitate their learning. Students interact with people in order to learn and practice their knowledge and it is through this interaction that learners can improve their language acquisition. Therefore, Iverson (2005:28) mentions “teachers should be sensitive to students’ affective needs, such as a positive learning environment and good relationships, provide cooperative learning activities and help students learn strategies that strengthen their ability to be more independent.”
The implementation of affective strategies in the classroom, therefore, may have a positive effect on students’ ability to learn a new language.

Other aspects to take into account are the learning styles, which is a term that refers to different ways in which people learn, process, and retain information. There are four primary learning styles suggested by Edwards (2002:4):

Visual learners learn through seeing. Children who are visual processors tend to observe parents’ or teachers’ body language and facial expressions for content and learn through demonstrations and descriptions.

Auditory learners learn through listening. Children who are auditory processors learn through participating in discussions and talking things through.

Tactile learners learn through touching. Children who are more tactile prefer activities or projects that allow them to use their hands.

Kinesthetic learners learn through moving and doing. Children who are more kinesthetic learn through physical sensations and may have trouble sitting still for long periods.

There are a variety of types of learners in a classroom. Therefore, it is important to incorporate multiple activities in the lesson planning. It is also important to know what the predominant learning style is, to avoid favoring one single learning style and shortchanging other types of learners in the classroom. This leads to the main topic in this research project: vocabulary learning strategies.

2.5 Vocabulary learning strategies
To communicate effectively, learners need strategies to achieve their language goals. According to the Oxford dictionary (1990) strategies are

...operations employed by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval and use of information, specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations.
The need to improve language learners’ vocabulary has motivated some teachers to find different ways to elicit useful information about the process of their learners’ language acquisition.

2.5.1 Pictionary
Thornbury (2002: 104) states that the “pictionary game is a game that involves the students guessing word or phrases from drawings”. Moreover, Khasna (2014: 54) explains that “using Pictionary game is an effective and appropriate technique to make interesting atmosphere in teaching and learning vocabulary”. Participants seem to show preference for visual material, that is why the use of pictionary as a way to present new vocabulary was used. “Learning activities will be more effective if the material, technique and media for teaching English to the students is based on situation, condition and environment” (Khasna, 2014: 13). According to Thornbury (2002: 104), there are steps to play the Pictionary game, these are as follows:

1) The students work in teams, each member of the team takes turn to be the artist.
2) The artists go to the front of the class where the teacher shows them a word or phrase on a card.
3) At a cue, they quickly return to their group and try to get their group to correctly guess the word by drawing it with pen and paper.
4) The first team to guess correctly earns a point; then a second artist takes the floor and repeats the steps with another word.
5) At the end of the game, the group can use the pictures as memory prompts in order to recall and write down the expression that came out.

2.5.2 Mind maps
“A ‘Mind Map’ is a graphic tool which contains a central key word or image and secondary ideas that radiate from the central idea as branches” (Casco, 2011: 1). The use of mind maps in the EFL classrooms is a strategy that many teachers
have used in order to teach vocabulary to their students. Through the use of mind maps “the key idea crystallizes the subject of attention while the branches represent the connections established with the central idea, forming a connected nodal structure” (Casco: 2011:1).

According to Prandika (2012) mind maps activities have a positive impact on students. It engages the learners’ attention to the topic because of the use of graphics, colors and images. Furthermore, the use of a set of images helps students to connect the words with previous knowledge, and the way in which the mind map is displayed helps students to identify what they know and what they do not. Also, the mind map is a tool that helps students to organize their ideas in their writing or speaking activities because the different elements of a mind map can be easily linked. Casco (2011:5) explains that “using maps empowers the learner because it allows him to decide where to start and what to leave out. The possibility of making decisions develops a sense of self-efficacy and fosters autonomy.”

Although in some studies the use of mind maps has not had a significant impact on learners’ vocabulary acquisition, (D’Antoni et al., 2010); there are other studies in which the use of mind maps as a strategy to learn vocabulary has had an important influence on students’ vocabulary learning process (Prandika, 2012; Ching, 2009). In these studies there was a significant difference in language achievement between the students who were taught by using the Mind Mapping strategy and those who did not.

2.5.3 Peg method
According to Spackman (2002:12), the peg method has as a main objective to associate each number, zero to nine or a letter of the alphabet with different words. People may remember different vocabulary by associating each word with a specific number or letter. The peg method has been used by many teachers in order to help students to learn vocabulary (Spackman, 2002). However, although
this method is considered a suitable option for presenting vocabulary to children, unfortunately it is not widely used outside the classrooms. That is why this cognitive method is just a way to familiarize students with new vocabulary and teachers should find different ways to help students to practice vocabulary in different contexts.

These three strategies may hopefully be a guide for teachers working with young students to help them acquire vocabulary. However, there are some other aspects that should be taken into account such as cooperative learning and constructivist theory, which may help understand how to cope with children’s learning-teaching process.

2.6 Cooperative learning between young students

The term cooperative learning (CL) refers to students working in teams on an assignment or project under conditions in which certain criteria are satisfied, including that the team members be held individually accountable for the complete content of the assignment or project.

(Felder & Brent, 2007:34)

There are different drawbacks and benefits of using cooperative learning activities with young students. According to Felder and Brent (2007) placing students in groups does not mean that they will work together. They argued that during team activities some students tend to leave the work to others and what is more, others take the important roles to benefit themselves at the expense of the members of the group. In contrast, Putnam et al. (1996:46) affirms that “…in the affective area, co-operative learning influences the development of positive attitudes towards peers, including children from diverse cultural and social backgrounds, and children with diverse learning needs.”
To solve some limitations of the use of cooperative learning between young students, Gillies and Ashman (1996:34) suggest four crucial aspects to take into account during the cooperative learning activities.

- Positive interdependence which occurs when students understand that they need help from others to achieve the task assigned by the teacher.
- Promotive interaction where students encourage themselves to do what they have to do.
- Personal responsibility which emerges when each of the students understands that they have to do his/her part of the work.
- Social support, which refers to the guidance that the teacher give to his/her students to work together as well as a brief explanation of the importance of working in teams in the classroom.

“Co-operative learning is a pedagogical practice that promotes socialization and learning across different curriculum areas and classroom settings.” (Gillies & Ashman, 1996:50). In this study, through the use of cooperative activities the teacher tried to promote the interaction between students as well as to save time because of the length of the English class.

### 2.7 Constructivism as a Paradigm for Teaching and Learning

In general terms, constructivism affirms that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences (Thirteen Ed Online, 2004). Constructivism as an approach to teaching and learning, is based on the premise that students learn by fitting new information together with what they already know. Constructivists believe that learning is affected by the context in which an idea is taught, as well as by students’ beliefs and attitudes.

According to Christie (2005:3), teachers should follow certain roles in the classroom in order to help their students to use and develop their abilities and build on their prior knowledge and experiences such as:
• Encourage and accept student autonomy and initiative.
• Try to use raw data and primary sources, in addition to manipulative, interactive, and physical materials.
• When assigning tasks to the students, use cognitive terminology such as "classify," "analyze," "predict," and "create."
• Search out students' understanding and prior experiences about a concept before teaching it to them.
• Encourage communication between the teacher and the students and also between the students.

Moreover, teachers should individualize and contextualize students' learning experiences, help their students to develop processes, skills and attitudes and consider students' learning styles in their lesson planning (Murphy, 1994).

Most teachers hope that their students will not only learn knowledge in itself, but that they will learn more about how to learn, which is something that they can carry with them, the rest of their lives (Rychen, 2003). There are different theories and authors that propose different ways to encourage and help students during the different stages of the English language process, but teachers should choose the most suitable according to the particular characteristics of their students such as age, level, learning styles, multiple intelligences, context and others.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter first presents the type of Action Research chosen for this study. Different definitions of action research are included. Secondly, the data collection methods are explained. Thirdly, the implementation of the data collection instruments, the way in which I administered them in order to collect the data is described. This is followed by how the data collected was verified by using triangulation. Finally, based on the findings of the initial research, the action plan designed to achieve the objectives previously mentioned is described.

3.1 Action research

According to Skytt (2000), action research is a strategy teachers can use to investigate a problem or area of interest specific to their professional context. It provides the structure to engage in a planned, systematic and documented process of professional growth. Through the development of an action research, a teacher identifies a problem in his/her context, and does something to solve it. The teacher explores how successful his/her efforts were, and if not satisfied, makes changes and tries again. It is a cycle which implies collection and analysis of data, and various possible implementations.

Action research has been known by many names such as collaborative inquiry, emancipatory research, action learning, and contextual action research (Maheshwari, 2012). As well as its multiples names, action research has been defined from different perspectives, for example, Gilmore et al. (1986:176) define it as “a way to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to further the goals of social science simultaneously”

They also mention that it is through the collaborative work among the members of the system which will help to accomplish the goals expected in a particular context. He emphasizes the importance of co-learning during the action research process. Moreover, Dick (2002:12) affirms that "action research is a true reflection of its
name as it is intended to achieve both action and research at the same time”. That means that researchers should reflect about what is the problem that they have identified and consider how they may improve certain weaknesses in their contexts. Taking into account this definition, it can be said that, people who use action research as a way for professional improvement, need to be aware of the characteristics and steps in order to carry out what an action research implies. Although there are different kinds of action research, according to my context and the events that have taken place during my teaching practice, this study focuses on educational action research given that “action research is actually suitable for any person or any group or organization who wishes to improve his performance; As a matter of fact, action research is widely used in education, especially by teachers who use it to improve their teaching” (Maheshwari, 2012:5)

Dewey (1929) states that professional educators should become involved in community problem-solving because educational action research concentrates on curriculum development, professional improvement, and applying learning in a social context.

Different models to follow have been proposed to carry out an action research study. Creswell (2005:37) suggested eight steps to follow during the development of an action research report:

Step 1: Determine if action research is the best design to use;
Step 2: Identify a problem to study;
Step 3: Locate resources to help address the problem;
Step 4: Identify information to be needed;
Step 5: Implement the data collection;
Step 6: Analyze the data;
Step 7: Develop a plan for action; and
Step 8: Implement the plan and reflect
In brief, these processes of action research are different from one another since they are either basic, simple or elaborate models. During the research study, one may find different models either more effective or less suitable than the other ones depending on particular situations and educational settings. However, Borgia & Schuler, (1996:15) argue that through the implementation of action research, “Teachers investigate their own practice in new ways, looking deeper in what they and their students actually do and fail to do and through the identification of the problem, teachers will find different ways to enrich their students’ knowledge.” As well as Borgia and Schuler, Maheshwari (2012:4) argues that “teachers engage in “participatory” or “self-reflective teaching”; they reflect on what they have learnt and what they can do to improve their own educational situation”

The main characteristics of this kind of research meets the demands of my particular context; that is why the action research method was chosen in order to improve particular weaknesses in a specific teaching practice. Through the use of this method, the researcher can enrich the way she perceives her context and then look for different ways to solve her problems by implementation of certain strategies.

3.2 Data collection techniques
In each kind of research approach, one or many data collection techniques may be used. Most of the time, researchers will decide for one or more data collection techniques while considering their particular situation. In order to confirm the problem identified in this inquiry, three different data collection techniques were used in the following order: focus group interview, observation and previous examinations.

3.2.1 Focus group
Focus group interviews are useful in exploring and examining what people think, how they think, and why they think the way they do about the issues of importance to them without pressuring them into making decisions or reaching a consensus (Liamputtong, 2011). A focus group interview is one of the multiple qualitative
methods to collect data. Based on the nature of my context, I needed a data collection method which helped me to know the different perceptions that my students had about the English language and "Focus groups provide rich and detailed information about feelings, thoughts, understandings, perceptions and impressions of people in their own words" (Liamputtong, 2011:6). Focus groups are situated between individual interviews where only one respondent is involved in a considerably structured setting and participant observation where many participants are involved in a relatively unstructured of 'natural' setting (Conradson 2005).

According to Tuff (2005:1), "The purpose of the focus group is to make sure that the information that is collected is a true representation of participants' feelings and beliefs". There are certain characteristics that teachers should take into account during the use of this method. The sessions should be held at a neutral place where the participants feel free to express their opinions and emotions. A successful focus group discussion relies heavily on the development of a permissive, non-threatening environment within the group where the participants can feel comfortable to discuss their opinions and experiences without the fear of being judged or ridiculed by others (Hennink 2007). Moreover, researchers should take into account the length of the class as the discussion may take up time. Having this in mind "focus groups of eight to ten participants were considered ideal giving a variety of viewpoints while making sure that everyone has a chance to participate" (Tuff, 2005:2). However, the participants of my focus group were 19 students, for that reason, the information obtained from the focus group was complemented with the notes taken during the observation.

Focus group interviews were used as a data collection technique because the participants were 10 year old children. Therefore, in order to avoid any kind of interference in their opinions, the focus group interview was the most suitable method according to my context. Owing to their age, in order to save face, participants could use general answers to describe their perceptions about the
English language. By means of the focus group interview, I gave them the freedom to discuss, compare and express their feelings, opinions and perceptions about English. Students were asked to work in teams; then a cardboard was given to every team. The researcher asked her participants to write or draw what English implies for them, in which situations they use English and how they feel when they use it along with their personal perceptions about the English class.

3.2.2 Observation

“Through the use of different data collection techniques, researchers can complement their evidence”, (Doyle & Griffin, 1995: 242). To obtain more data during the focus group interview, another data collection technique was used: observation. According to Slack et al. (2001) during an observation, researchers should have a clear idea about what is being observed. Then they should choose the most suitable kind of observation to use with their specific participants. Also, they have to take into consideration the time to conduct their observation.

There are different kinds of observation, Slack et al. (2001) state that the first categorization of observation is participant or non-participant observation. The main difference between these kinds of observations is that in participant observation, the observer is part of the group. Therefore, he or she should be as objective as possible in his or her observation. In contrast, in a non-participant observation, the researcher does not participate directly in the activities being observed. To complement this second kind of observation, researchers can use direct or indirect observation. Through direct observation, researchers observe the participant’s behavior as it occurs and in indirect observation they observe the effect of participant’s behavior. Finally, researchers can use structured observation, observers either predetermine what to observe, or carry out unstructured observation, which implies monitoring all the behavior during their observation.

Although observation has different benefits, such as “greater data accuracy than direct questioning, in natural settings people behave naturally” (Grudens et al.,
observation seems to have some limitations such as the length of the observation period which is generally short or the researcher may record events subjectively. Nonetheless, observation can provide some very interesting insights and through this technique, researchers can identify and take into consideration non-verbal language during the observation.

To enrich the information obtained during the focus group activity the researcher decided to observe and take notes at the same time using an anecdotal observation record, see appendix 1. When the participants were writing and drawing, the researcher walked around trying to be unperceived, she wrote some key words that she had obtained from listening to the short conversation among the students. The multiple gestures and body movements were very important during the process of collecting data because it helped to understand the drawings and sentences on the cardboards and the students' ideas. Moreover, through the observation some limitations of the focus group activity were rectified.

3.2.3 Assessment in English Foreign Language contexts

Assessment and evaluation play a central and important role in teaching and learning. Cheng (2006: 1) mentions that teachers:

...view student assessment as a central teaching function in their classrooms. They devote a large part of their preparation time to creating instruments and observation procedures, marking, recording, and synthesizing results in formal and informal reports in the school system.

A systematic testing component is an essential part of every language program in most language classrooms despite the fact that many teachers feel intimidated by the terminology, and the use of statistical concepts (Brown, 1995:12).

Some studies indicate that the purpose and function of assessment should not be to test students' learning outcomes, as in large-scale standardized tests, but to facilitate students' learning process. This is especially important for young language learners (Yang, 2008). Evaluation in EFL classrooms should take into
consideration certain factors such as validity, reliability, authenticity, elicitation and scoring. It has been suggested by Rogers et al. (2007:72) that:

...teachers’ and instructors’ beliefs about assessment and evaluation can directly affect how they design and implement their student assessments and evaluations and how they interpret the results. In the research literature regarding teachers’ beliefs, various terms (e.g., attitudes, opinions, perceptions, and rules of practice) have been used.

There are a variety of approaches that analyze assessment in EFL contexts from different perspectives. From the point of view of the language learner-centered approach Finch, (2002:6) comments that “integrated into the day-to-day curriculum, assessment can become both a means and an end, and considerations of validity, reliability and efficiency cease to be a major issue in the ongoing reflective self-examination of language performance.”

Task-based process assessment involves a criterion-referenced orientation, with Criterion-Referenced Tests (CRTs) providing direct information “about what the learner can actually do with the target language” (McClean, 1995:37). Also, Finch (2002:5) mentions that

The authentic assessment model is thus particularly suitable for tertiary students, since it encourages them to gradually assume responsibility for their own learning and for the assessment of that learning, as the cycle of intention, action and reflection becomes a personal endeavor, facilitated by: portfolios, projects, self- and peer-assessment, learning conversations, and reflective journals.

There are multiple opinions about which is the most suitable way to assess language learners. Some people agree that through the assessment, learners can be aware of their language improvement and then they may identify their strengths and weaknesses and enrich their knowledge. Some researchers affirm that assessment should take into account the different factors that influence the language learning process as “The general purpose of assessment is the
collection, evaluation, and use of information to help teachers make decisions that improve student learning” (McMillan, 2007: 8).

The analysis of previous examinations was very important during the first stage of the process because through the analysis of previous tests the results obtained from the previous data collection techniques were confirmed. The previous units’ tests were analyzed and it was found that in most of the questions where students were asked to write full sentences they wrote some words in Spanish although the grammar structure was correct. These facts confirmed that although most of the students had an acceptable level of English they seemed to lack vocabulary.

3.3 Verification of data
When I started to analyze my teaching practice, different hypothesis emerged as possible causes of a particular problem therefore; one of the problems that I had to deal with was the subjectivity of my analysis. At the beginning, I thought that my students did not participate because of their lack of interest or motivation. Most of the time, when I asked my students to participate, they just said a couple of words and then they remained silent or some of them told me that they did not want to participate. As a possible solution to this problem, I started to look for different data collection methods to identify the problem observed which had to do with the lack of vocabulary strategies used by students.

According to the Oxford dictionary (2000:389) verification is “The process of establishing the truth, accuracy, or validity of something”. Moreover, Morse et al (2009:9) state that verification in qualitative research “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”. To obtain reliable and valid data, researchers should verify their findings using different methods according their particular contexts.
There are different methods to verify the data collected which is why the first step was to identify which methods could be useful. One of the possible methods to use was the member checking method. According to Barbour (2001: 56) member checking is defined as “a quality control process by which a researcher seeks to improve the accuracy, credibility and validity of what has been recorded during a research interview”. Also, another method is the peer debriefing method where the researcher discusses with a disinterested peer, findings, conclusions, analysis, and hypotheses about a specific investigation (Mertens, 2005). Furthermore, prolonged engagement is another useful method to validate findings, as Murse (2009:54) explains that during this method researchers should: “be[ing] present in the site where the study is being done long enough to build trust with the participants, experience the breadth of variation and to overcome distortions due to the presence of the researcher in the site.”

In order to verify the collected data from the focus group, the notes during my observation, as well as some previous tests, were triangulated. “Triangulation is the mixing of data or methods so that diverse viewpoints or standpoints cast light upon a topic” (Olsen, 2004:3). Moreover, Schwandt (2010:298) defines triangulation as: “a means of checking the integrity of the inferences one draws. It can involve the use of multiple data sources, multiple investigators, multiple theoretical perspectives, and/or multiple methods.”

He continues by affirming that: “The strategy of triangulation is often wedded to the assumption that data from different sources or methods must necessarily converge or be aggregated to reveal the truth”.

I examined the data collected in the focus group, I checked it with my observation notes and I considered the previous English exams in order to triangulate the data. Miles & Huberman, (as cited in Meijer et al., 2002: 146) explain that triangulation in social science research refers to a “process by which a researcher wants to verify
a finding by showing that independent measures of it agree with or, at least, do not contradict it.”

By using this method, the findings were corroborated and that helped the teacher-researcher to go to the next section of the action research project, the implementation of some strategies to try to solve the problem identified.

3.4 Outcome of the initial research
Through a deep analysis of the three data collection techniques, the following categories in common were found.

3.4.1 Shyness
On most of the posters, and during the observation, I could notice that most of the students feel shy when they have to talk in English: “cuando no me sé las palabras mejor ni hablo porque que tal que me equivoco” (Student 1). In other words, I discovered that some students do not participate in class because they do not want to make mistakes. Moreover, another student drew a boy with a red face and an X as his mouth. In order to understand what it represented for him, I asked him to describe with words what the drawing meant. The drawing represented how he felt when he participated in class.

3.4.2 Frustration
Students seem to be frustrated when they cannot communicate effectively with other people.

…a veces me pongo a jugar Club penguin en las tardes y me choca que no puedo decirle a mi amigo de Canadá qué lugar visitar…

(Student 2)

In the previous sentence, student 2 feels frustrated when he cannot communicate with his friend. This is an example of how the lack of vocabulary affects the way in which students try to practice the English language outside the classroom.
Another example that illustrates my participants’ frustration is a small drawing on one of the posters. It is a small girl who is talking to people, they have question marks on their heads, and on the little girl’s head there is a black cloud and lightning. She represented the frustration that she feels when people do not understand what she says. This was confirmed also by what she wrote later on a different poster.

3.4.3 Motivation
Although in some drawings participants represented how they feel when they cannot communicate in English, other participants represented how they feel when they can “communicate” in English with other people.

…a veces no me sé el significado de las palabras y le pregunto a la miss y ya luego ya sé cómo decir la palabra

(Student 3)

This extract appears to show that when one of the participants does not know the meaning of a word, she wants to find out so asks the teacher.

In sum, these extracts represent how the students feel when they do not know how to say or write some words in English. Through the analysis of the information provided by the students the researcher identified most of the learning styles of her students and some of their favorite classroom activities, as well as their perceptions about the English language and some of their strengths and weaknesses during their English class. This information helped the researcher to identify different ways to help her students to improve their vocabulary acquisition.

3.5 Rationale
Taking into consideration the action research model suggested by Skytt (2000) the researcher identified the problem of her particular context through the triangulation of the data collected from three data collection techniques: observation, focus group and previous English tests. These techniques were selected according to what experts mentioned in their articles as suitable techniques to interview children to collect the most reliable information from them. After the analysis of posters,
notes and tests, she noticed that her students seem to lack vocabulary when they tried to communicate in English.

The initial outcomes of this research project showed that most of the students showed interest for activities which imply drawings and visual materials so she started to collect information about learning strategies and then specifically about vocabulary learning strategies and after an extensive analysis she chose three of them to develop in her action plan. The criteria to choose the three strategies, was based on the multiple intelligences, which the teacher identified during the analysis of the posters made during the focus group interview.

Then, in order to solve the problem identified, an action plan was designed and implemented as a possible solution to the problem. The designing of this action plan was based on the concept of cooperative learning which emerges in the answers of the participants as one of their favorite activities: work in teams during the English class. Also the researcher took some ideas from constructivist theory to encourage her students to use a variety of activities to create more knowledge and then to reflect on drawbacks and benefits of the three vocabulary learning strategies.

3.6 Action plan
Before implementing the Action plan, the participants were asked to answer a quiz from the current English book (Fireflies 5) in order to know what previous knowledge the participants had before the implementation of the three vocabulary strategies. A quiz was used because according to Yang (2008) teachers can identify their students' strengths and weaknesses, and know if their students have learnt or not the expected knowledge of the week, month or year. Through the analysis of the participants' answers the researcher could corroborate that students lacked vocabulary. Most of the participants wrote correct grammatical sentences, but there were words missing in their answers.
3.6.1 Implementation

As a possible solution to help participants to improve their vocabulary acquisition, three strategies to learn vocabulary were employed. The researcher implemented these three vocabulary learning strategies: pictionarys, mind maps and the peg method during a month. Each vocabulary learning strategy was employed during a week and evaluated every Friday. The length of the class was an hour and a half. At the end of the month, I presented my students some vocabulary from one of the units in the students' book without using any vocabulary learning strategy. After a week I asked them to answer a quiz in order to know if they had learnt the vocabulary seen in class. Then I organized a group interview in order to know if they had used any of the three learning vocabulary strategies they had used in the previous weeks. In more detail, the implementation consisted in the following:

Week One:

During three days the researcher presented her participants thirty words about countries and nationalities using the Pictionary strategy. In order to familiarize her students with the Pictionary strategy, during the first session, she presented the students five countries and five nationalities using the Pictionary strategy: Mexico, Mexican, Canada, Canadian, Brazil, Brazilian, Spain, Spanish, Peru, and Peruvian. She put the cards on the board with the name of the countries and nationalities and next to each card she pasted a picture to explain the meaning of each word. During the next session, she asked them to work in teams of five in order to finish the activity on time because each session was 90 minutes in length. She gave them 5 countries and nationalities, different to the words used in the previous session (China, Chinese, Argentina, Argentinian, Chile, Chilean, Japan, Japanese, USA and American). Then, she gave them twenty cards where the students were asked to write the previous ten words and next to them a drawing to explain the meaning of each word. Finally, she asked them to paste the cards on a poster. During the third session, the researcher asked her students to repeat the same activities used in the second session, but using 5 different countries and nationalities: Australia, Australian, France, French, Scotland, Scottish, Bolivia, Bolivian, Italy and Italian.
Week Two:
Another topic from unit 5 from the Fireflies 5 English book was chosen: cooking items. I presented ten new words to my participants, using a mind map: blender, bowl, can opener, casserole dish, and cookie cutter, cutting board, pastry brush, frying pan, grater, and grill. I wrote cooking items on the board and then I drew some lines using different colors, at the end of each line I wrote the ten previous words and I drew one drawing next to each word to represent their meanings. They showed interest because they like to draw. During the next session, I asked them to make a mind map using another ten words: knife, ladle, lemon squeezer, measuring cup, measuring spoon, mixing bowl, nutcracker, oven mitts, peeler, and pie pan. I gave students markers, magazines, and glue and they made their own mind maps using different words, drawings, key words, and some of them sentences. During the third session, I asked them to do the same activities as in the second session, but now with ten different words: pizza cutter, wok, pot, potato masher, salt shaker, fork, spatula, whisk, tongs, and oven mitt.

Week Three:
Ten words were presented to the students using the peg method. Letters from the alphabet were used to present vocabulary related to the food pyramid. Some letters of the alphabet were written on the board and below each letter, one word was written which started with the previous letter: A-apple, B-Banana, C-Cherry, D-Date, F-Fig, G-Grapes, H-Hazelnut, K-Kiwi, L-Lemon, and M-Mango. The researcher explained to the participants that it could be a way to remember and associate the new words seen in the unit. During the second session, the students were given ten new words: carrot, lettuce, onion, cucumber, peas, garlic, spinach, radish, tomato, and pepper. The teacher asked the students to write ten numbers from one to ten and organize the ten words in the number order. After that, students pasted a picture for each of the words related to its meaning. In the following session, the teacher asked the students to write the alphabet in their
notebooks. Then she wrote ten words on the board and asked her students to organize a set of words alphabetically and include a small drawing.

After the three weeks, the researcher continued working with another unit from the current English book course (fireflies 5), she introduced the new words by using flashcards and some examples in context without using any strategy explicitly.
Chapter 4: Findings

The findings obtained in this research study were related to the way children felt when learning vocabulary and how they could take advantage of the strategies suggested. The findings showed that children may feel comfortable by doing some activities that include drawing rather than the writing ones. Students participate more when they were working in teams than when they worked individually. Also, there was an increase in the vocabulary that participants learned after the implementation of the action plan.

4.1 Evaluation

The evaluation that I used to evaluate the implementation of the three vocabulary learning strategies was summative evaluation.

Summative evaluation takes place after the learning has been completed and provides information and feedback that sums up the teaching and learning process. Typically, no more formal learning is taking place at this stage, other than incidental learning which might take place through the completion of projects and assignments.

(Hanna & Dettmer, 2004:36)

This kind of evaluation was used because the strategies were evaluated every week and after a month the usefulness of the strategies were evaluated through the use of a focus group interview.

At the end of the first week, the researcher evaluated the first vocabulary strategy: Pictionary. She asked the students to write in class, a text message using the words seen during the week. This type of short text was chosen because most of the participants like to write text messages to their friends. Through the analysis of the sentences that each student wrote in the text message, the researcher could notice an improvement in their writing although some of the students still made some spelling mistakes.
At the end of the second week, the second strategy, mind maps, was evaluated. The students were asked to make a comic where they used cooking vocabulary. When I asked them to make their comic, they were very excited because I told them that they could use their favorite cartoon characters or singers in their comics. Derrick (2008) mentions that comics have important benefits. They are a wonderful tool to attract and engage the reluctant reader and to help students to learn vocabulary.

When reading the comics that my students had made, I could see that most of them had remembered the words seen in class, but some of them still had missing words in their sentences. Although I asked them to use six squares in their comics they made more than that, they used different colors and they enjoyed presenting their work to their classmates. Only two of the participants did not finish the activity so they did not participate during the presentation, but they paid attention to their classmates.

During the third week, the researcher evaluated the last vocabulary strategy; peg method. She asked the students to write a short story. They wrote from 40 to 60 words. They could choose the topic, but they were asked to use the vocabulary seen during the third week. When these stories were checked it was noticed that most of the students used more vocabulary seen in the previous two weeks than the vocabulary seen in the third week. They remembered the vocabulary learnt with the use of pictionarys and mind maps, but the vocabulary seen in the third week was not significant for them.

During the fourth week, the teacher presented new vocabulary on the English program using flashcards, posters and examples in context. On Thursday, the researcher asked them to answer a quiz in order to review the words seen during the last week. An improvement was noticed in the participants’ grades. Most of the students could write sentences correctly, but others still had problems with the spelling of some words.
4.2 Findings and analysis
At the end of the four weeks, the researcher asked the students to work in groups in order to discuss what they thought about the strategies that were used to learn vocabulary during the four weeks. A focus group interview was used as it was noticed in previous classes that some children feel intimidated when people ask direct questions about a specific topic. Each of the four teams was observed, but not very closely in order to avoid making the students feel shy. However, I participated in their discussions little by little, and I asked them if they had found the vocabulary strategies useful for them. In general, 6 of the 19 participants told me that they had used mind maps to study the vocabulary, 8 preferred to use pictionary to study new vocabulary and 4 students told me that they study lists of words because it was easier for them.

4.2.1 Visual learners
Some students mentioned that it was easy for them to remember the words in English with drawings.

A mí me gusta dibujar y con los dibujitos me acuerdo más de las palabras en inglés, dibujar es genial  
(Student 1)

However, other participants mentioned that they do not like to draw because they do not know how.

No me gusta dibujar es muy difícil me gusta más escribir las palabras y ya nada más  
(Student 2)

As can be perceived, this strategy depends on whether or not a student feels he/she can draw successfully, if not then they prefer to just write the words. So it depends on their learning styles as Edwards (2002) suggests learners have different learning styles and this is corroborated in the previous extracts. Student 1 seems to be a visual learner and in contrast, student 2 seems to be a tactile
learner. These differences between students encourage the researcher to select activities taking into account, as much as possible, the four learning styles.

4.2.2 Motivation

Some students told me that they felt great when they could remember the words that we saw during the week. In addition, the use of strategies to learn new vocabulary motivated some students to learn more and ask more questions about the topics.

...cuando no me acuerdo de la palabra, cierrro mis ojos y me acuerdo de la actividad y entonces me acuerdo y es más fácil (Student 3)

When teachers are able to identify and design activities according to the multiple intelligences of their students, as Gardner and Hatch (1989) suggests, they can provide students with a variety of tools to learn a language and facilitate the language learning process.

In contrast, other participants mentioned that they did not remember the meaning of some words even with the use of the three previous vocabulary strategies. In addition, to not liking them, “...no me gustó lo que hicimos en las clases, ni me aprendí las palabras esas” (Student 4) they did not learn. This means that the researcher needs to look for different strategies, the next time this action plan is implemented.

4.2.3 Usefulness of the strategies

Some of the participants found the use of the three strategies to learn new vocabulary interesting.

...me pareció divertido como aprender las palabras nuevas porque con las listas me da mucho sueño” (Student 5)
In contrast, other students said that they did not like the activities that the teacher asked them to do. In addition, some of them mentioned that they did not like the English classes.

… no me gustaron los dibujitos que hizo la maestra en la clase, ni le entendí ni me gusta la clase de inglés…

(Student 6)

Therefore, this indicated another problem that had emerged to investigate at a later date to solve the weaknesses of the action plan implemented. Taking into account Skytt’s (2000) model, the teacher could analyze her students’ comments deeply to find alternative ways to help her students to learn vocabulary.

4.2.4 Cooperative learning
During the implementation of the strategies, students were asked to work in teams and little by little they began to see the advantage of this

… me gusto hacer equipos porque así nos ayudábamos entre todos y dábamos ideas de lo que se nos ocurría…

(Student 7)

For some students to work in teams was a good experience. Also, the previous extract shows that most of the students shared their ideas during the activities to enrich their work as Putnam et al. (1996) mentioned in their work.

However, other students mentioned that they preferred to do work individually to avoid discussions with their classmates.

… me gusta mejor trabajar solito porque luego solo quieren poner lo que ellos dicen

(Student 8)

This extract shows how some students adopt some negative roles in the team as Felder and Brent (2007) mention in their work. Through the analysis of this opinion, it can be said that although there are different advantages of working in teams, it
could be possible to ask students to work individually to avoid misunderstandings and conflict between students.

The multiple categories identified from the data collected showed that although most of the activities were designed considering the four learning styles, some participants had limitations to learn the vocabulary presented. Likewise, there are different theories such as collaborative learning and constructivism in the teaching and learning process which seem to be suitable to complement the implementation of the vocabulary learning strategies but at the end, there were some limitations.
Chapter 5: Discussion and reflections

The method used to carry out this investigation was action research; this consisted of identifying a particular problem, in a specific context, and then thinking about different possible solutions to solve this problem. Following the model that Creswell (2005) suggests in order to carry out action research, I identified a problem in my particular context based on previous observations and notes, then I corroborated the problem identified through the implementation of three data collection techniques: analysis of previous examinations, a focus group interview and observations. Then after the corroboration of the problem I started to look for different strategies to help my students to improve their vocabulary.

I chose mind maps, pictionary and the peg method because some researchers mentioned that these strategies are suitable for teaching young learners (Yang, 2008) and also because most of my students showed interest for drawing so I took their preferences into account, too. After that, the next step was to design an action plan to implement the three vocabulary learning strategies during a month and also how to evaluate each strategy weekly. After the month, I analyzed the information collected, and I noticed that the majority of my students had improved their vocabulary retention, but others had not. Moreover, based on the analysis of the findings, I realized that the vocabulary seen using the mind maps and pictionary were more significant for my participants rather than the vocabulary seen using the peg method strategy.

5.1 Implications
The findings have several significant implications for both teaching vocabulary to young learners, and the way in which these learners perceive the usefulness of the vocabulary learning strategies. The findings suggest that participants benefit most from the first two strategies implemented during the month: pictionary and mind maps. Through the analysis of the participants’ writing, I could notice an improvement in the vocabulary seen using the previous strategies.
In contrast, the vocabulary presented using the peg method, was not significant for them because when I asked them to write a story using that specific vocabulary, they used the vocabulary seen during the previous weeks. Nevertheless, it appeared that the participants had improved their vocabulary about specific topics because during the following exams the majority of them wrote full sentences in English. This small improvement may motivate other English teachers in this institution to use different strategies to teach vocabulary because the lack of vocabulary is a general problem in this context. Teachers should be aware of the variety of the strategies that they can use to present new vocabulary to students and to facilitate their students’ vocabulary learning process.

The implementation of new strategies should take into account the level of the students, as well as their multiple intelligences. During the implementation of the strategies chosen, the majority of the students showed interest for them because in the three strategies the students were asked to draw. Drawing was an interest that most of the participants shared. This was noticed in the observations during my focus group interview in the initial research. Taking into account their preferences, teachers can encourage students to learn (Dörnyei, 2001).

Something important to take into account is to help students be aware of the benefits and drawbacks of the multiple strategies that they can use to learn English. Teachers could organize an English workshop every month to familiarize students with the strategies and help students to use them and take advantage of them especially when studying for their exams.

5.2 Limitations

During this investigation there were three main limitations. The first limitation emerged during the first cycle of this action research. I used a focus group interview to collect data, but unfortunately I could not record my students because of school policies. In order to combat that limitation, I decided to use an observation strategy to take notes, but it was not practical because I had to take notes when I was listening to my students’ comments. The second limitation was
during the implementation of my action plan, my school authorities did not allow me to take photographs when my students were writing, but fortunately I could take notes from their work. Finally, the third limitation was the lack of time because at the beginning, I wanted to implement each vocabulary learning strategy during two weeks in order to explain more details to my students about the characteristics of each strategy, but as I had to follow the English program, I could only implement each strategy during a week.

5.3 Changes next time around
In order to rectify the majority of the limitations, school authorities and teachers should give talks to the parents in order to explain the usefulness of carrying out research in order to improve teachers’ teaching practice, and to explain what it implies in order to avoid misunderstandings during the data collection process.

As it was seen, the vocabulary presented with the peg method strategy was not representative for the students. The next time around, teachers could use another vocabulary learning strategy instead to present vocabulary and see how it works. However, if teachers decide to use the same strategy, they should explain better what the peg method is and give more examples to make sure that students have understood its characteristics.

Finally, to save time during the evaluation of the strategies, teachers in charge of the group can familiarize students with the different kinds of texts in order to give them an idea of what to do when teachers ask them to write a mail, letter, test message and others, before the implementation.

5.4 Conclusions
By means of the implementation of action research projects in teaching practice, teachers can improve the way they teach, but there are other factors such as students’ goals, parents and school authorities’ expectations and school rules that have a strong influence on the teachers’ performance. That is why school authorities and English teachers should work together to achieve the students’
goals because it is through research that teachers can identify their students’ strengths and weaknesses, and then find the most suitable strategies to help them in their learning process.

The findings presented in this research seem to indicate that students can improve the way they learn vocabulary if they are aware of the benefits and drawbacks of the different vocabulary learning strategies. Nevertheless, there are other factors that have a strong influence during the process of learning vocabulary such as motivation and autonomy. Teachers need to take these elements into account in order to provide their students with the most suitable strategies to learn English.

Taking into account the findings, I will make some changes in my teaching practice in order to help my students to learn English because sometimes teachers take for granted that students do not want to learn, but sometimes it is because they did not know how to learn. Therefore, I will continue implementing different strategies to guide them during my practice.

5.5 Ways forward (possible 2\textsuperscript{nd} AR cycle)
Taking into consideration the information obtained from this 1\textsuperscript{st} Action Research cycle, possible issues emerged for a possible 2\textsuperscript{nd} AR cycle. Further research using a 2\textsuperscript{nd} AR cycle could investigate other vocabulary learning strategies to take into account, as much as possible, students’ different learning styles. In addition, the use of different activities to practice vocabulary such as role-plays, brochures, collages, trivia games and others could be considered in order to engage the majority of the students to participate during the review of vocabulary learnt in the classroom. Moreover, there is a possibility to adapt this investigation to other contexts, on the condition that the researcher corroborates the similarities between the context where this investigation was carried out and his/ her context. If there are no similarities, future researchers could take some of the ideas from this investigation to complement his or her work.
References


Appendix 1: Anecdotal Observation Record

Name: ______________________________________________________

Date and Time: ______________________

Observer: __________________________

Observations of events and behaviors:
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Comments/Summary:

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<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Summative Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 1</td>
<td>Application of a quiz to students.</td>
<td>Teacher asks her students to answer a quiz.</td>
<td>To assess students’ knowledge about specific vocabulary (unit 5, fireflies 5 English book)</td>
<td>Quiz analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teacher presents the names of 5 countries and 5 nationalities using the Pictionary strategy. Mexico-Mexican Canada-Canadian Brazil-Brazilian Spain-Spanish Peru-Peruvian</td>
<td>Teacher presents ten words to her students. She puts one card on the board with a word. She pastes an image next to each word to represent its meaning.</td>
<td>To familiarize students with the use of Pictionary strategy to learn vocabulary.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Students practice the Pictionary strategy.</td>
<td>Teacher asks her students to work in teams of five. Teacher gives her students a set of twenty cards. Students are asked to write a word on one card and draw the meaning on the other (countries and nationalities). China-Chinese Argentina-Argentinian Chile-Chilean Japan-Japanese USA-American Australia-Australian France-French Scotland-Scottish Bolivia-Bolivian Italy-Italian Students paste the cards</td>
<td>Students will identify the use of making a Pictionary to learn vocabulary.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>Objectives</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Students put in practice the Pictionary strategy. Teacher asks her students to work in teams of five. Teacher gives to her students a set of twenty cards. Students should write a word on one card and draw on the other (countries and nationalities). Greece- Greek Portugal-Portuguese Cuba-Cuban Poland-Polish Ireland - Irish UK- British India- Indian Egypt- Egyptian Russia- Russian Germany-German Students paste the cards on a poster to show it to their classmates.</td>
<td>Students will identify the use of making a Pictionary to learn vocabulary.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Students write a text message to one of their friend using the vocabulary learnt during the week. Teacher asks her students to write a text message to her students using the vocabulary learnt in the previous sessions.</td>
<td>To know if the students have learned the vocabulary or not by using the pictionary strategy.</td>
<td>Text message</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teacher explains vocabulary about some cooking items by using mind maps. Teacher uses a mind map to present ten new words to her students. WORDS: Blender Bowl Can opener Casserole dish Cookie cutter Cutting board Pastry brush Frying pan Grater Grill</td>
<td>To familiarize students with the use of mind maps to learn vocabulary.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students put in practice the mind map strategy.</td>
<td>Teacher asks her students to make a mind map using cooking items vocabulary. WORDS: Knife Ladle Lemon squeezer Measuring cup Measuring spoon Mixing bowl Nutcracker Oven mitts Peeler Pie pan</td>
<td>Students identify the use of mind maps to learn vocabulary.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Students put in practice the mind map strategy.</td>
<td>Teacher asks her students to make a mind map using cooking items vocabulary. Words: Pizza cutter Wok Pot Potato masher Salt shaker Fork Spatula Whisk Tongs Oven mitt</td>
<td>Students will identify the use of mind maps to learn vocabulary.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Students make a comic using the vocabulary learnt during the week.</td>
<td>Teacher asks her students to make a comic in order to practice the vocabulary learnt during the week.</td>
<td>To know whether or not the students have learned the vocabulary seen using the mind map strategy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Teacher presents vocabulary about food pyramid using the peg method.</td>
<td>Researcher writes a part of the alphabet on the board. Teacher puts a picture and its name bellow each letter. Letter-picture and word A-apple B-Banana C-Cherry</td>
<td>To familiarize students with the use of the peg method to learn vocabulary.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
2 Students put in practice the peg method strategy.
Teacher asks her students to organize ten words using a number order from 1 to ten. Students write the number, the name of the word and a drawing.
1- Carrot
2- Lettuce
3- Onion
4- Cucumber
5- Peas
6- Garlic
7- Spinach
8- Radish
9- Tomato
10- Pepper
Students identify how to use the peg method to learn vocabulary.

3 Students put in practice the peg method strategy.
Teacher asks her students to write the alphabet in their notebooks. Teacher writes ten words on the board and she ask her students to organize a set of words alphabetically including a small drawing.
Words: Meat Ham Sausage Fish Lamb Turkey Salmon Pork Beef Veal
Students practice how to organize new words according to the peg method.

4 Students write a short story using the
Teacher asks her students to write a short story (60 words) in order To know whether or not the students
Short story.
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<td></td>
<td>vocabulary learnt during the week.</td>
<td>to practice the vocabulary learnt during the week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teacher presents new vocabulary using flashcards, posters and examples in context.</td>
<td>Teacher presents to her students a new topic (environment activities) without any of the previous strategies. Recycle plastic bottles Ride a bike Turn off the lights Solar energy Wind energy Plant flowers Unit 5 from the fireflies 5 English book.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teacher presents new vocabulary using flashcards, posters and examples in context.</td>
<td>Teacher presents to her student a new topic (clean-up activities) without any of the previous strategies. Paint over the graffiti Fix the broken windows Mow the lawn Recycle plastic bottles Repair the fence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Teacher asks her students to answer a quiz about the vocabulary seen in the last week.</td>
<td>Teacher asks her students to answer a quiz about the vocabulary seen in the last week.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teacher asks her students to work in teams. Teacher asks her students to discuss how useful the three vocabulary strategies were to learn new words. Teacher monitors the activity in order to listen her students’ opinions.</td>
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