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MAESTRÍA EN LA ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA
Sede Xalapa

Reporte del Proyecto Terminal de Aplicación Innovadora del Conocimiento

Memory strategies to improve vocabulary learning

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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOEFL</td>
<td>Teaching English as a Second Language</td>
</tr>
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<td>EFL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
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<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
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<td>LSs</td>
<td>Learning Strategies</td>
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<td>LLSs</td>
<td>Language Learning Strategies</td>
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<td>VLSs</td>
<td>Vocabulary Learning Strategies</td>
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<td>L2</td>
<td>Language two</td>
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<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
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Key words

Vocabulary, learning, strategies, English, second language, foreign language, memory, retention, recall, research, improvement.
ABSTRACT

Vocabulary has always been a significant subject in the field of English as a foreign or second language. The process of teaching and learning involves both teachers and students. The present study was done in two phases, the first one aimed to understand the nature of an existing vocabulary problem. The second phase consisted on the implementation of an action plan to solve this problem. Moreover, the current inquiry explored if the memory strategies: image word meaning, saying the words aloud, studying the spelling of a word and synonyms helped to improve vocabulary learning. These strategies were implemented in four weeks. During this time, the students were asked to carry out different activities in pairs and small groups. They also did some written exercises to review the words they were introduced. Information and evidence were collected using five data collection methods: teachers’ journal, students’ texts, a vocabulary quiz, a semi-structured questionnaire and a focus group interview. All the data obtained were analyzed using qualitative methods. The findings revealed that the strategies helped the children increase vocabulary learning. It was also shown that students improved aspects such as pronunciation and spelling of words. In addition, the superiority of images over the other strategies was proved. Pictures helped students to develop better understanding of words and recall. The results also proved that explicit instruction of memory strategies can facilitate learning and storage of words in English. Moreover, the research demonstrated that the students' short-term and long-term memory was developed.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In recent years English has become the international language for communication. Therefore there is an increasing need to teach and learn the language in different countries. Due to the growing importance of English, some authors have conducted research in several contexts in order to discover how English Language Teaching (ELT) is conceived and approached. Nowadays, owing to the development of a globalized world, the Mexican educational system has developed programs for Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in public and private education.

In the Mexican context, most of the time English language instruction focuses on teaching grammar structures. So, there is a tendency to overlook vocabulary teaching. Thorbury (2002, cited by Subhash, n/d) says that spending too much time on learning grammar will not improve language learning very much. He says that most improvement will result from learning more words in the target language. In addition, Nation (2001) claims that more attention should be paid to vocabulary instruction because without vocabulary people cannot learn a language, since they lack the words and expressions to understand meaning in oral and written form.

Apart from that, Thorbury (2002, cited by Subhash, n/d) states that some students find difficult the learning of words in a foreign or second language. He says that one of the main reasons is because learners tend to forget the new words. There are several alternatives that can help students master the learning of vocabulary. Regarding this, Zhang (2011) states that vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) can definitively facilitate the acquisition of new words, having a positive effect on second and foreign language learning. So, he suggests that teachers train their students how to use strategies that help them remember new words.

One of the main challenges in TEFL is to make vocabulary instruction more effective, this is why several studies have been done in this field in different contexts. For example, Asgary (2000), Marín (2005), Thompson (2009), Vargas
(2007), Canseco and Navarrete (2005) and Ocampo (2014) investigated how to increase the learning of vocabulary in English through the use of different strategies. Similarly, Ying (2010), Nemati (2009), Tavakoli and Gerami (2013) did some inquiry to explore how useful memory strategies (MS) are to improve vocabulary retention.

It is important to say that many of the studies mentioned before were carried out with adult students in other countries. Therefore, Davis (2009) suggests that research is needed in the Mexican context, in order to gain more knowledge about what is being done in the field of ELT. Similarly, Gürsoy (2004) mentions that some inquiry is necessary to investigate children’s problems with vocabulary and the strategies that may improve the learning of new lexical items.

Hence, taking into consideration the comments above, I consider it is important to carry out a study with children at basic education in the Mexican context. This may contribute to have a broader insight about the importance of explicit vocabulary instruction. It would also provide valuable information about to what extent training on VLSs can help children achieve better vocabulary learning.
1.1 Map of research report

This paper reports a small-scale study carried out with a group of students with problems to learn vocabulary in English. The work is divided into five chapters. The first comprises the identification of the area of practice investigated. It also includes the rationale for topic selection. In this section the relevance of the study being researched is included, and similar investigations in several contexts are mentioned. Additionally, the research context and the participants that took place in this inquiry are described in detail. The last part of the first chapter contains the objectives to be achieved as well as the research questions.

Chapter number two contains literature related to the main topic of this research and it includes theory based on different authors to support the subject matter in this inquiry. The third chapter describes the action research model, which is the methodology followed in this study. After that, the findings of the initial research are briefly explained and a plan of action to improve the vocabulary problem can also be found. Then, all the procedures and activities in the action plan are justified and supported taking into consideration the opinion of several authors. Similarly, the way in which the action plan was implemented is described in detail. Moreover, at the end of this chapter the different data collection methods utilized in this research are explained.

Chapter number four includes the findings obtained from the data analysis. These results are presented in order to verify to what extent the implementation was or was not helpful. The last chapter contains a brief summary of the whole process, discussions and reflections about the findings. Likewise, it comprises the limitations encountered in this inquiry and the changes that would be done next time in order to improve it. Furthermore, the conclusions and implications about the study are added. Finally, some ways forward about a possible second action research cycle are included.
1.2 Context

This study was carried out in a group of fifth graders at a private elementary school. The institution is located in an urban area in the state of Veracruz, Mexico. English is incorporated in the curriculum from nursery school (which belongs to the same institution) to sixth grade in elementary school. The institution aims to develop the four skills of language and help students increase their language competencies so that they can use English successfully in real life communication. English is taught in a two hour daily session from Monday to Friday. Classes are given in English and students are required to use only the target language in class.

Apart from that, there is a computer lab where students are taken for one hour every two weeks to do extra activities related to the topics taught in their regular lessons. In addition, a one hour conversation class is given every two weeks by another teacher. There are two series of books that are used in the program, *Cornerstone* and *Take Shape*. The former contains texts about science and general studies among other genres, and it is divided into six units containing grammar, vocabulary and writing sections. The latter consists of twelve units that contain the same sections as in the other book. Exams are taken every month and a half, after finishing one unit in *Cornerstone* and two units in *Take Shape*.

1.3 Participants

Seventeen students took part in this study. The gender of the group is mixed. There were thirteen girls and four boys and they were from ten to eleven years old. According to the Common European Framework, the students had a basic level of English. The children came from families with a medium or high socio-economical status and many of them had the opportunity to travel to English speaking. The majority of them were also in contact with the language through the media present in their daily lives such as the internet and television. In general terms, the students were well behaved and attentive.
1.4 Description of the problem

During my teaching practice I observed that many of my students faced problems when learning new words in English. Thus, an initial research was carried out within my teaching context to verify that the problem existed and to discover the reasons why it originated. The results showed that students had low vocabulary retention since they tended to forget the new words.

1.5 Objectives

The present study had two objectives. The first one was to prove the existence of a vocabulary problem in this context and understand its nature. After the problem had been validated, the second objective was to design a plan of action to improve the problem by implementing some memory strategies.

1.6 Research questions

This research also aimed to answer the following two questions:

a) What memory strategies can improve my students’ vocabulary learning?

b) To what extent can memory strategies improve retention of words in English?

At this point the description of the problem, as well as the research context and participants were provided. The objectives of the inquiry and the research questions were also stated. Now the organization of this project will be explained.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter introduces the most relevant information related to the subject. For example, it provides the definition of the concepts vocabulary and learning strategies, as well as their importance in language learning. A classification of the vocabulary learning strategies can be found and the four memory strategies utilized in this inquiry are also described. At the end of this first chapter some information about the cognitive theory of learning is added.

2.1 What is vocabulary?

According to Miller (1999, cited by Mukoroli, 2011) vocabulary is “a set of words that are the basic building blocks used in the generation and understanding of sentences” (p.6). As can be seen, vocabulary can be regarded as the words of a language that a person uses to express and comprehend thoughts and opinions. Vocabulary does only comprise a single word, but also or a group of words such as lexical phrases or chunks of language that transmit a specific meaning.

Gardener (2009, cited by Mukoroli, 2011) complements the previous definition and states that vocabulary “is not only confined to the meaning of words but also includes how vocabulary in a language is structured: how people use and store words and how they learn words and the relationship between words and phrases” (p. 6). Therefore, vocabulary does not only involve knowing a single word or group of words, but it also consists of the way in which these words are used to convey different meanings. Apart from this, learning vocabulary entails, among other aspects, knowledge of the spoken and written form, meanings and the accurate use of words in speech and writing (Miller & Gildea, 1987, in Griva, Kamaroudis, & Geladari, 2009).
2.2 The importance of vocabulary in EFL and ESL

Language is primary compound of words; therefore vocabulary is crucial in learning English as a foreign or second language provided that it is conceived as small pieces of bricks that are vital for the huge structure. (Subhash, n/d) Regarding this, Zhang (2011) mentions that

“Vocabulary, as an integral part of a language, plays a crucial part in the language learning process. The primary thing in learning a language is the acquisition of a vocabulary, and practice in using it. Vocabulary is the basic factor necessary for mastering a language.”

(p.2)

Additionally, he mentions that vocabulary is essential to understand spoken and written language and that vocabulary knowledge helps to improve the four skills. Learners who are rich in vocabulary will be able to use the language orally and in written form properly. (McCarten, 2007) However, Asgari (2001) affirms that insufficient vocabulary knowledge causes difficulties in second or foreign language learning because learners cannot comprehend what is said or read without knowing the meaning of the words. Regarding this, Thornbury (2002, in Subhash, n/d) says that:

Language is made up of words. If we want to use language effectively, we must have good stock of vocabulary. We cannot use the language, if we don’t know the words of that language. English language has vast vocabulary. It is the richest language of the world. One cannot learn a language without learning vocabulary. Therefore, the study of vocabulary has occupied the central place in teaching learning activities.

(p. 377)

As can be observed, it is vital for learners to have a good knowledge of vocabulary in order to succeed English language learning; otherwise the lack of it has a negative effect on the four skills. According to this, Zhi-liang (2010) claims “the lack of vocabulary prevents learners from developing language skills like listening, reading and writing” (p.152).

Subhash (n/d) states that reading comprehension can be affected if language learners have limited vocabulary. He says “vocabulary knowledge is fundamental to reading comprehension; one cannot understand text without knowing what most of the words mean” (378). Moreover, (Laufer, 1986 in Zhi-liang, 2010)
claims that “no text comprehension is possible, either in one’s native language or in a foreign language, without understanding the text’s vocabulary” (p.153). In addition, Zhi-liang (2010) affirms that the lack of vocabulary hinders appropriate listening comprehension.

It is important to remember that language is used for communication, which involves the generation and understanding of meanings. This is why knowing vocabulary is indispensable in EFL and ESL. Regarding this, Thomson (2009) mentions that without vocabulary people find it complicated to communicate in their mother tongue and in FL or SL. Similarly, Mukoroli (2011) affirms that “without some knowledge of vocabulary, neither language production nor language comprehension would be possible” (p. 8).

In addition, Lewis(2000, cited by Subhash (n/d) claims that “without grammar very little can be conveyed but without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed” (p. 337). Likewise, McCarthy (1990 cited by Subhash, n/d) argues that

“no matter how well the student learns grammar, no matter how successfully the sounds of L2 are mastered, without words to express a wide range of meanings, communication in an L2 just cannot happen in any meaningful way” (p. 378).

All the information provided so far demonstrates the great importance of vocabulary in the field of EFL. Thus, it is fundamental to be aware of this so that we, as teachers, can incorporate vocabulary instruction in our teaching practices to achieve better language learning.

2.3 What are vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs)?

To begin with, it is important to briefly define the terms learning strategies (LSs) and language learning strategies (LLSs) in order to provide an insight of what vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) are. Chamot & Kupper, (1989, cited by Asgari, 2001) identify learning strategies as techniques used by learners to understand, retain and recall certain information. In addition, Learning strategies are procedures and intentional actions that students follow to make learning easier
and remember linguistic and content area information (Chamot, 1987 cited in Zhi-liang, L. 2010)

Apart from this, Asgari (2011) points out that language learning strategies are considered to be a specific category derived from general learning strategies. In this case, the strategies are focused in achieving the learning of a certain language. Oxford (2003, cited by Asgari, 2011) describes language learning strategies as “specific actions taken by the learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations.” (p.84). Similarly, Oxford (1989 in Zhi-liang 2010) states that language learning strategies are "behaviors or actions which learners use to make language learning more successful, self-directed and enjoyable" (p.154).

Vocabulary learning strategies are a subcategory of LLSs and they are concerned with techniques utilized to acquire new words in a target language. (Gu, 1994, in Asgari, 2011) According to Ruutmets (2005, in Griva, et al, 2009) vocabulary learning strategies are procedures and practices that

"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.” (p.22)

Oxford and Crookall (1989, in Ashgari 2011) claim that the use of vocabulary learning strategies can contribute to make language learning more efficient and proficient. Lewis (2000, in Mukoroli, 2011) mentions that in the case of EFL and ESL vocabulary knowledge and vocabulary learning strategies contribute to the development and enrichment of English. Therefore, since vocabulary is in the heart of language learning, Schmitt (2000) suggests that teachers should incorporate vocabulary strategy training in their courses so that learners are more responsible for their own vocabulary. He also claims that training must be integrated and adapted to particular contexts taking into consideration students’ needs and proficiency, among other aspects.
2.4 Vocabulary learning strategies taxonomy

Different taxonomies have been proposed to categorize vocabulary learning strategies. This paper presents the taxonomy suggested by Schmitt (1997). He divided vocabulary learning strategies into two main categories:

Category 1: Discovery strategies

- Determination strategies
- Social strategies

Category 2: Consolidation strategies

- Cognitive strategies
- Metacognitive strategies
- Memory strategies

Now only the strategies that are relevant to this study will be described. Consolidation strategies are techniques that consolidate knowledge and memory strategies are encountered within this category. Hsiao and Oxford (2002 in Zahedi & Abdi, 2012) maintain that "memory strategies are particular mnemonic devices that aid learners in moving information to long-term memory for storage purposes and retrieving it from long-term when needed for use." (p.2265)

According to what is expressed above, it is presumed that a person learns new words when they are able to remember them for a long-term period. Moreover, this author claims suggests that memory strategies "make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (p.2265). Additionally, (Wu & Chang, 2005 in Zahedi & Abdi, 2012) say that these strategies also help learners to progress word spelling and pronunciation.

Furthermore, Yek (2006) affirms that memory strategies have proved to be effective not only in word understanding, but also in language comprehension. Wu and Chang (2005, cited by Zahedi & Abdi, 2012) states that memory strategies can
increase the number of words that elementary school students learn. The following chart illustrates the different memory strategies.

**Memory strategies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connect word to a previous personal experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Associate the word with its coordinates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect the word in its synonyms and antonyms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use semantic maps</td>
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<tr>
<td>Image word form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image word’s meaning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use Keyword Method</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group words together to study them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study the spelling of a word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Say new word aloud when studying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use physical action when learning a word</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1 (Schmitt, 2000, p. 207-208)*

Now the description of the strategies used in this inquiry will be provided.

**2.4.1 Saying words aloud**

Pronouncing words aloud is a well known strategy to learn vocabulary. Despite being traditional, its use has proved to be effective. Oberg (2011) affirms that “verbal repetition of an item has shown to have positive results with both acquisition and retention” (p. 120). He suggests that for the learning of a target language vocabulary to happen, numerous exposure and repetitious interactions are needed. Moreover, repeating words aloud is thought to facilitate vocabulary pronunciation and word retention. Regarding this, Jenpattarakul (2012) claims that vocabulary learning is improved by repeating words aloud with regularity. He also points out that words that are difficult to pronounce are more difficult to learn, therefore pronunciation needs to be emphasized in order to make word learning easier. Consequently, when students are able to pronounce new words on their own, they are more likely to remember them.
2.4.2 Studying the spelling of a word

This strategy consists on studying the orthographic form of a word. It is presumed that students with good spelling obtain better results in vocabulary learning. Making reference to this, Ehri and Rosenthal (2007) states that “students with better developed orthographic knowledge benefit more from spellings in learning vocabulary words than students with weaker knowledge” (p. 389). The strategy is also considered to aid students remember and produce better pronunciation. It also helps learners to have higher retention. According to this, Ehri and Rosenthal (2005) point out that studying and practicing the spelling of new words results in better understanding of meaning and pronunciation. In addition, they say that with this strategy words are better stored in memory and they are better recalled as well.

2.4.3 Image word meaning

A lot of research has been done about the use of images to teach and learn vocabulary. Image word meaning is a vocabulary learning strategy that has proved to very helpful in the process of learning new words in a foreign language (Joklová, 2009). They help students understand the meaning of new words and remember them better. According to this, Armstrong (2001 in Hashemi & Pourgharib, 2013) states that “learners learn and memorize the vocabularies through visual materials” (p. 624). Therefore, it is considered to be a good strategy to teach and learn vocabulary. Regarding this, Hashemi and Pourgharib (2013) mentions that images are very important in the teaching and learning of English words since they facilitate information to long-term memory. In addition, Hibbing and Erikson (2003, cited by Stocking, 2010) indicate that “adding a visual cue or picture to a word aids in comprehension and memory through triggering background knowledge and decreasing interpretation time” (p. 13).
2.4.4 Synonyms

Synonyms are words with similar meanings that, according to Mashhady et all (2010) “contribute to vocabulary learning and retention” (p.103). Associating an already known word to new vocabulary may make the learning process easier. Making reference to this, Webb (2007) mentions that “unknown words may become easier to learn” (p. 122). Apart from this; he says that synonyms are very necessary for children to understand new words (p. 103).

2.5 Cognitive theory of learning

The cognitive theory of learning comes from Psychology and it centers its attention on how people think, understand and learn new things. According to this, Ertmer and Newby (2013) state that

“cognitive theories of learning stress the acquisition of knowledge and internal mental structures; [they] focus on the conceptualization of students’ learning processes and address the issues of how information is received, organized, stored, and retrieved by the mind.” (p.51)

Similarly, Ocampo (2014) says that cognitive theories pay close attention to the several mental processes that individuals undergo to achieve learning. Cognitive theories emphasize the role of memory in learning since “learning results when information is stored in memory in an organized, meaningful manner” (Ertmer &Newby, 2013, p.52).

Additionally, Thompson (1996, in Alvarado and Viveros, 2002) suggest that memory plays a very important role in the process of language learning. The information processing model, which is very relevant to this study, shows how the human mind carries out a series of information process before it can be permanent stored. It consists of three fundamental elements: sensory memory, short term memory and long term memory.

Sensory memory is the first stage and it functions to briefly maintain information in the brain. It lasts from one to three seconds approximately. Short-term memory is also called working memory and according to Thornbury (2002, in Alvarado and Viveros, 2002) it involves the reasoning, learning and understanding of new
information. This type of memory only retains information for about twenty or thirty seconds.

Differently, long-term memory has bigger capacity of storage. Information can remain there and be remembered after a long period of time. According to Thornbury (2002, in Alvarado and Viveros, 2002) storing information in long-term memory “requires understanding frequent revision, personal involvement and several opportunities for use and application.” (p. 5) In addition to this, Schmitt (2000, in Alvarado and Viveros, 2002) affirms that learners need to manipulate information and transfer it from short-term to long-term memory in order for them to achieve vocabulary learning.

Apart from this, Ertmer and Newby (2013) claim that “forgetting is the inability to retrieve information from memory because of interference, memory loss, or missing or inadequate cues needed to access information” (p. 52). Therefore, these authors suggest that making knowledge meaningful and assisting students to relate new information to prior knowledge enhance memory. Hence it is a good idea for language teachers to consider this comment in order to make vocabulary instruction more effective.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The third section of this project presents the methodology that was used in this study. The outcomes of initial research are provided in order to understand the problem in this context. The action plan resulting from the first inquiry and its rationale are also included in this part. Likewise, the implementation process is mentioned. Moreover, this chapter describes the methods that were used, and how they were employed to collect data.

3.1 What is action research?

In the field of language teaching, action research (AR) is an investigation process that teachers/researchers carry out to improve their teaching practice so that their students achieve better learning results. According to this, Mills (2003, cited by Hopkins, 2008) claims that:

Action research is any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers to gather information about the ways that their particular school operates, how they teach, and how well their students learn. The information is gathered with the goals of gaining insight, developing reflective practice, effecting positive changes in the school environment and on educational practices in general, and improving student outcomes. (p. 48)

This means that researchers, in this case teachers, reflect on an aspect of their teaching practice and act to improve it. The result of this reflection and improvement can lead not only to students’ learning, but also to a teacher’s growth. As can be observed, reflection on teaching practice plays a very important role in action research, since it provides the insight of what can be done to improve teaching.

In addition, Burns (2010) states that action research is an inquiry that involves self reflection, a systematic and critical method by participants who are at the same time members of the research context. She says that “the aim is to identify problematic situations or issues considered by the participants to be worthy of investigation in order to bring about critically informed changes in practice.” (p.5). Taking into
consideration the comments mentioned by the authors above, this is the reason why I consider that using action research in this study can contribute to the improvement of my teaching practice in order to enhance my students’ learning of vocabulary in English.

3.1.1 The action research model

Action research is done systematically following specific procedures and processes. This inquiry was carried out following the AR model proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988). It consists of four essential “moments” (1) planning (2) action, (3) observation, (4) reflection.

![Cyclical AR model based on Kemmis and McTaggart (1988)](image)

In order to complete this work the first step was to identify a difficulty within the research context. Thus, an initial inquiry was done with the purpose of gathering some information to understand the nature of the problem. Once this problem had been verified, a whole research cycle (corresponding to a complete unit of the English V course) was carried out according to the model displayed in figure 1. To begin with, it was established that the participants had problems to learn vocabulary. So as suggested by Gass and Mackey (2005) a plan of action was developed as an attempt to solve the current problem.

Afterwards the plan of action was implemented during a considerable period of time. The intervention was closely monitored and data were gathered using different techniques. Regarding this, Ferrance, (2000) recommends the use of different collection methods to “better understand the scope of happenings in the
Then an analysis was done to evaluate the effects of the intervention. Finally, some reflections on the outcomes were done as a way to propose a second cycle.

### 3.2 Understanding the problem

In this part the results of the initial research are presented to show the nature of the vocabulary learning problem.

### 3.3 Outcome of initial research

First of all, it is important to mention that the data from the initial inquiry was collected by means of observation, students’ texts, a structured questionnaire and a focus group interview. All this information was triangulated and verified by students through the process of member checking. The following chart illustrates the main categories obtained from the different methods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Students’ words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spelling is difficult</td>
<td>“It is difficult to spell the errors”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation is difficult</td>
<td>“Pronouncing the words is difficult”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning of the words is difficult</td>
<td>“I find meaning of the words difficult to get.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low vocabulary retention</td>
<td>“I tend to forget the new words”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning preferences</td>
<td>“I like to learn new words with images.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2. Findings initial research*

As can be observed, the categories above verified that there was a vocabulary learning problem within the research context. It was determined that the main reason why students had difficulties learning vocabulary in English was because they failed to recall the words they had been introduced. Consequently, since the
children tended to forget words, they did not internalize and learn new vocabulary. It was also shown that students found pronunciation and spelling complicated.

3.4 Action plan

Taking into consideration the findings, a plan of action was proposed to improve the vocabulary learning problem. It consists of the implementation of memory strategies, which according to Zahedi and Abdi (2012) “facilitate learners’ vocabulary and develop a long–term retention of English vocabulary” (p. 2265). These strategies are: say words aloud when studying, study the spelling of the words, image word meaning and synonyms. Every strategy is meant to be implemented using different activities, which were chosen according to the nature of the problem and thinking of the appropriate ways to meet the students’ needs. It is important to mention that the order of the activities was set taking into consideration the level of complexity. They are proposed to be done from the simplest to the most complex and from the most receptive to the most productive.

The action plan is designed to last four weeks and the activities are planned to be done four days a week, from Monday to Thursday. Firstly, there will be a vocabulary presentation at the beginning of the week. Secondly, each strategy will be practiced on a different day. Thirdly, the activities are proposed to be developed within a maximum of thirty minutes every session. (See Table 3) Now a description of the strategies and their corresponding activities will be provided and supported by different authors who did previous studies on the same field.

3.4.1 Introducing vocabulary

Every Monday students will be introduced ten new words, which is the ideal number suggested by Stahl and Fairbanks (1986, cited by Newton & Padak, 2013). The written form of the words and pictures that represent the words will be shown during the presentation. Ehri and Rosenthal (2007) mention that exposing learners to the written form of new vocabulary words “enhances their memory for pronunciations and meanings of the words” (p. 389). Additionally, definitions and examples (in slips of paper) where the new words are used in context are meant to
be given so that students can have greater understanding of the vocabulary. Regarding this, Johnson (n/d) claims that it is necessary for students to see a word in context to understand its meaning better. She also claims that “definitions, as well as context can generate a full and flexible knowledge of word meanings” (p. 3).

Moreover, it is intended to leave on the wall the words, pictures and examples, so that all this information is in sight for students to improve word comprehension and retention. Regarding this Ehri and Rosenthal (2005, in Jasmine & Schiesl, 2009) states that word walls “retain knowledge of the word and encourage the applications of these words” (p. 302). Similarly, Oberg (2011) says that long memory can be maintained through the use of retrieval cues such as word walls. At the end of the presentation it is also proposed to give students a photocopy containing the target words with the corresponding pictures and synonyms so that they can match the words with their definition. This way students will be provided with visual aid and word explanation in order to facilitate recall.

3.4.2 Strategy one: Saying new words aloud

Oral repetition will be incorporated by pronouncing the words aloud on a daily basis since this activity is thought to be effective in vocabulary learning. Regarding this, Jenpattarakul (2012) mentions that repetition allows students to learn pronunciation better by saying them aloud in a clear and consistent way.

3.4.3 Strategy two: Studying the spelling of a word

It is suggested to review the spelling of the words every day so that students can keep in mind the written form of the new vocabulary items. Regarding this, Jenpattarakul (2012) claims that proving students with continuous rehearsal on spelling can benefit students’ orthographic knowledge.

3.4.4 Strategy three: Image word meaning

To practice this strategy, four different vocabulary games are suggested to help children learn words in English in a fun way. They are meant to increase students’ interests and motivation. In the first two weeks two competitive games are
proposed. In this case students will be asked to write the correct word according to the picture. The third game is a bingo and it is suggested to improve word retention by using pictures. Regarding this, Jiunn and Li (2011) mention that this kind of game has proved to have significant effects in the improvement of vocabulary learning. The fourth game is a pictionary which, according to Sekti (2014) requires students draw a picture of a word and allows learners to enrich vocabulary and store it in their mind for a long time.

3.4.5 Strategy four: Synonyms

Synonyms will be reviewed doing some matching activities. Students will be asked to relate new vocabulary items to words they already know and that are similar in meaning. This has the purpose of enhancing word understanding and retention. In relation to this, Jiunn and Li (2011) point out this kind of tasks strengthen memory and retrieval.

3.4.6 Written exercises

It is proposed to do a written exercise at the end of each week as a way to reinforce and consolidate knowledge. The first exercise is a word-search puzzle and Vossoughi and Zargar (2009) say that this activity is believed to strengthen word knowledge in an entertaining way. A crossword puzzle is also suggested since this kind of games increase understanding of word meaning through the use of hints (Jiunn & Li, 2011). In order for students to have further practice a fill-in-the blanks exercise will be included. Folse (2006, in Jiunn & Li, 2011) mentions that with this exercise students can improve vocabulary retention and accurate use. Finally, Jiunn & Li (2011) affirm that quizzes evaluate students’ vocabulary learning. So, in order to determine how well students learned the new words a vocabulary quiz will be incorporated.
3.5 Implementation

This section presents the organization of the action plan. Likewise, it describes in detail the procedures that were followed while doing the different tasks. The following table illustrates the order in which the memory strategies were implemented, as well as the different activities that were carried out.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>Week 3</th>
<th>Week 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>Monday</td>
<td></td>
<td>Introduce ten new words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition and spelling</td>
<td>Tuesday-</td>
<td>SS say words aloud and spell</td>
<td>T shows a fill in the blank sentence. SS read the sentence and write</td>
<td>Bingo</td>
<td>Pictionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>them at the beginning of the class</td>
<td>the word on the wall.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>T shows a picture. SS look at</td>
<td>T says a word and SS come to the board and choose the correct synonyms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>it and write the word on the wall</td>
<td>T says a word and SS come to the board and choose the correct synonyms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synonyms</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>SS match the words with their synonyms</td>
<td>SS work in pairs. They say a word aloud and their partners mention the synonym</td>
<td></td>
<td>T mentions a word and SS write its synonym on the wall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written activity</td>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Crossword puzzle</td>
<td>Word search</td>
<td>Fill in the blanks sentences</td>
<td>Vocabulary quiz</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Action plan
**Week 1: Day one**

Ten new words, all of them nouns, were introduced. I explained the meaning of each word and I showed their written form and a picture. On a piece of paper I showed the students an example of the word. Then I stuck all this information on the wall in front of the students and I left it there the rest of the week. Later I pronounced the words aloud and I asked the students to repeat after me. They also spelled the words aloud chorally. After this, students were given a photocopy containing the new words with their corresponding pictures, synonyms, and examples. They pasted the photocopy in a special section in their notebooks. They were asked to read the information individually and match the words with their definitions. Finally, the answers were checked one by one and if some answers were incorrect, students were asked to help their partners correct the answers. It is important to mention that this procedure was repeated during the four weeks.

**Day two**

At the beginning of the class I pronounced the words aloud one by one. I asked students to repeat after me and spell the words in choral repetition (this activity was also repeated every day at the beginning of the class during four weeks). After that, I removed the words from the wall and I left the pictures and examples only. Then I pointed to the pictures and I read the definitions of the words at the same time. When I finished reading, a student from each team ran to the board and wrote the correct answer. Students got a point if they wrote the correct word (accurately spelled).

**Day three**

Students pronounced the words aloud and spelled them. After that, they reviewed the synonyms in their photocopies and then they were asked to close their notebooks. (this activity was done every Wednesday). Later, I mentioned a word aloud and I wrote two possible synonyms on the board. I called two students to the
front and I asked them to circle the correct synonym. This procedure was repeated until all the students had participated.

Day four

Students pronounced the words aloud and spelled them. I pointed to a picture and I asked some students to give me an example using the word. Students could see the examples on the wall to help them make their own sentences. After that, learners were given a word-search puzzle containing definitions and ten words in a box. They were asked to write the correct word next to each definition. Later they were asked to find the words in the word-search and to paste the photocopy in their notebooks.

Week 2, Day one: Same procedure as week 1

Day two

Students pronounced and spelled the words aloud. I made two teams and I pasted two pictures on the board. I gave each participant a flyswatter and I said a word aloud. Then I asked them to come to the front and hit the image corresponding to the word. The student that hit the correct picture got a point for his/her team.

Day three

Students pronounced and spelled the words aloud. They reviewed synonyms. Then they were divided into four small groups and one team of five members. I gave them twenty cards with the words and their synonyms. In their groups, children put the cards on their tables and they took turns to match the words and the synonyms.

Day four
Students pronounced and spelled the words aloud and some of them were asked to give examples using the words. Then, they were given a crossword puzzle containing some clues about the words introduced on Monday. They completed the crossword using the clues. When students finished the activity some of them read their answers aloud. The rest of the students was asked to listen to their classmates to help them in case they made a mistake.

_Week 3, Day one: Same procedure as in week number one._

_Day two_

Students pronounced and spelled the words aloud. I removed the pictures from the words on the wall and I divided the children into seven pairs and one trio. I gave each team a grid containing six pictures of the new words (each grid was slightly different). Students were also given small paper balls. Later, I said a word aloud without showing the image. Students listened to me and if they had the word I had mentioned, they put a paper ball on the corresponding image in the grid. When a team had already completed its grid, students shouted “Bingo”. Then I checked whether the children had marked all the images correctly or not. If there were no mistakes, students got a point for their teams.

_Day three_

Students pronounced and spelled the words aloud. After that, they reviewed synonyms. I divided the children into seven pairs and one trio. They worked together taking turns to say the new words. According to the words, the childrens’ partners had to answer with the correct synonym. The student asking for the synonyms could see his/her notebook, but the person answering could not look at it.

_Day four_

Words were pronounced and spelled aloud. An example using a new word was elicited from several students. Then students were given a handout with fill in the blank sentences. They had to read them all and complete them with the correct
word from the box. After that, some learners read the answers aloud. The other students were asked to be quiet and attentive to help their classmates in case they made a mistake.

Week four, Day one: Same procedure as in the first week.

Day two

Students pronounced and spelled the words aloud. Then I made four groups of four members and one group of five. Each team was given ten words written down in some cards. Student took turns choosing a card and drawing the corresponding picture in his/her notebook. The rest of the students in the teams had to guess the word and the person who said the correct answer got a point. At the end, the winner was the person with the most points.

Day three

Students pronounced and spelled the words aloud. After that, children reviewed the synonyms in their notebooks. Then I mentioned a word and two students were asked to come to the board and write the corresponding synonym. Their classmates helped them if they did not know the answer or if they made a mistake. The same procedure was repeated until all the students had participated.

Day four

The students reviewed pronunciation and spelling as usual. Then I asked them to give me an example using a specific word. Later I gave students a vocabulary quiz containing the forty words presented during the four weeks. The quiz was divided into five sections. In the first part students matched the words with their pictures. In the second part they were given several options to choose the correct spelling of the words. In the third they had to match the words with their definitions. Moreover,
in the fourth section the children matched the words with their synonyms and lastly, they were asked to choose the correct option complete the sentences.

3.6 Data collection techniques

This part presents the techniques used to collect data. It also explains the reasons for choosing these methods, as well as the way in which they were utilized.

3.6.1 Teachers’ journal

Journals enter into the category of observation and according to Burns (2010) “they are extremely useful as a way of capturing significant reflections and events in an ongoing way” (p. 89). This technique was chosen to observe reactions towards specific situations in the intervention. The journal was kept during four weeks with the aim to gather information about the possible improvements in students’ vocabulary learning. Firstly, quick notes were taken during the class time and when the lesson was over, a more detailed description of the students’ responses was written down on the computer. (See Appendix H)

3.6.2 Students’ texts

Burns (1999) suggests that documents done by students complement other observations and provide the researcher with rich information about what those texts represent. In addition, Koshy (2005) says that “these sources can often provide a useful background and context for the project and also can be very illuminating, especially when you are comparing what is claimed and what has happened in practice” (p.96).

In this inquiry the students’ texts refer to the printed exercises the learners did during the implementation. These documents are: the handouts used after each vocabulary presentation, a word-search and crossword puzzle and a fill in the blanks exercise. (See appendixes A, B, C & D) These instruments were used to have physical evidence of the learners’ possible improvements.
3.6.3 Vocabulary quiz

Information was also gathered through a vocabulary quiz (adapted from Tavakoli & Gerami, 2012). The reason why it was used was to evaluate how well the students had learned the forty words introduced during the intervention. The quiz was divided into five sections that included images, definitions, spelling, synonyms and fill in the blank sentences. (See appendix G)

3.6.4 Questionnaire

According to Wallance (1998) questionnaires are written instruments containing questions that participants need to answer by writing their own information or by selecting them from already provided options. In the field of language learning, questionnaires gather students’ beliefs about learning, instruction and activities.

A semi structured questionnaire was administered to ask students their opinions about their vocabulary learning improvement. The questionnaire consisted of five close-ended and five open-ended questions that asked students, among other things, how useful the vocabulary learning strategies were for them. In the close-ended questions students could choose more than one option and in the open-ended questions they had the possibility to answer according to their personal perceptions. (See appendix J) Taking into consideration the level of the students, the instrument was designed in Spanish to ensure that they fully understood the questions in order to obtain more dependable answers.

3.6.5 Focus group interview

Focus groups enter into the category of interviews (Burns, 1999). According to Wilkinson(2004, in Onwuegbuzie, et al., 2009) focus groups are “a way of collecting qualitative data, which—essentially—involv[e] engaging a small number of people in an informal group discussion ‘focused’ around a particular topic or set of issues”(p. 2). They create a comfortable environment; they are less threatening to participants and provide rich data.

The use of this technique was considered pertinent since it promotes a relaxing atmosphere for children. This focus group interview was administered at the end of
the implementation. It was carried out in Spanish in order to provide students with
greater opportunities to express themselves in their mother tongue. This method
aimed to obtain students’ opinions about the usefulness an effectiveness of the
memory strategies. It also meant to discover how students felt during the
implementation process. Some of the questions were similar to the ones in the
semi-structured questionnaire (See appendix J). The purpose of this was to verify if
the students’ answers were consistent or not in both techniques.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This chapter introduces the results of the implementation. It includes the categories established after the data collected from the four methods was examined. To begin with, the evaluation of action was summative because it was done at the end of the process. In order to verify the outcomes of the research the first step was to analyze the information from each of the techniques before mentioned. Then all these data were triangulated to find similarities to create categories. Some quotations from students, which have been translated into English, are provided in order to make the information more reliable. Apart from this, all the categories were grouped into two types: useful activities and learning benefits. The first one considers the kinds of activities that contributed to improve vocabulary learning. Now the categories will be described more in detail.

4.1 Useful activities

This first group considers the kinds of activities that contributed to improve vocabulary learning

4.1.1 Games

Students showed some improvement through the use of some games designed to learn vocabulary. It was observed that the learners did very well when playing with the new words. Most of them carried out the activities accurately and almost any of them made errors. In addition, these activities made the learning process fun. For example, one of the students said “the games were entertaining and they helped me to review”. Another child claimed “we learned by playing”. Likewise, one more student expressed “I had fun and I learned at the same time with games”. This information proves that games created a pleasant environment. They increased the students’ motivation to participate and they improved the learning vocabulary as well.
4.1.2 Review and practice

It was identified that the daily practice gave the students the opportunity to be more in contact with the target vocabulary. It is important to mention that the learners were aware of this change and they claimed that more frequent practice enabled them to learn vocabulary better. Regarding this, one learner said “before we did not review much, but now we have enough practice”. Likewise, another student stated “we review the words more frequently than before and that helps me to learn”. Moreover, another child stated “now we do more activities to learn new words”.

4.1.3 Definitions and examples

Many students considered that being provided with definitions and examples using the new words helped them increase vocabulary. For example, one of them mentioned “the examples were very useful”. The same way, another learner claimed “the definitions and examples of the words helped me a lot”. This shows that students were able to learn the words well after they had understood what the words meant and after they saw how the words are used in context. Many children said that they understood the meaning of the words much better than before. Regarding this, one student said “I understood and learned better the meaning of the words”. This information was verified in the vocabulary quiz, as the great majority of the children answered correctly the section where they matched the words with their definition. This proves that the information provided by the students was reliable.

4.1.4 Images

The great majority of the students reported that images were the most useful tool to increase vocabulary learning. Regarding this, one of them claimed “images were the most useful for me”. Similarly another said “learning is easier with images because they help me to understand and remember the words”. In addition one learner gave similar reasons to justify his improvement in vocabulary learning. He claimed “images represent the meaning of the words, which helps me to understand them and learn them better”. Furthermore, it was observed that the
students had better performance in all the activities that implied the use of images. Hence, images proved the most effective strategy to improve understanding and retention of new vocabulary items.

4.2 Learning benefits

This group of categories comprises the vocabulary learning benefits that students obtained as a result of the implementation.

4.2.1 Vocabulary retention

At the beginning of this inquiry a lot of students had problems remembering the new vocabulary. This time the findings show that students’ long-term memory was developed. The great majority of students mentioned that they were able to retain the new vocabulary more easily. For example, in the questionnaire many of them expressed that they could recall the words better. Concerning this, one child said “I remember the words better and I do not forget them easily”. Additionally, one child said that he had better recall of words and this way he could do the activities more accurately. He affirmed “I seldom forget words and I rarely make mistakes”. Moreover, some students used images to recall the words in case they happened to forget them. Regarding this, one learner said “if I forget a word, I look at its corresponding picture and I remember it fast”. Similarly, another student pointed out “it is easier to remember words using images”. Furthermore, it was observed that students developed short-term and long-term retention since they could easily recall the new vocabulary during all the activities they carried out in class.

4.2.2 Spelling

Another of the aspects that children improved was spelling. It is reported that the learners increased orthographic knowledge of new words. It was observed that the great majority of the children spelled the words correctly in class and it was documented that they obtained very good results in the written activities. In relation to this many children pointed out that they had gained better orthographic knowledge of the words. One participant affirmed “I know how to write the words”,

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Another mentioned “I improved my orthography” and one more claimed “I can write and spell the words well”.

4.2.3 Pronunciation

The findings also show that students' pronunciation was improved through the activities that were carried out in class. Most of the children were able to pronounce the words correctly and they were aware of this improvement. One of them said “I pronounce the words better” and another said “I improved my pronunciation.” It is important to mention that in the initial research it was demonstrated that pronunciation was difficult for students. Therefore, it is evident that students had a progress in this aspect.

4.2.4 Better vocabulary performance

It was documented that students had a progress in the different written activities they were asked to do, including their formal exams (these documents were not used in this inquiry). For example, one student said “I have good results in the exams”, another pointed out “I get better grades.” Similarly, learners stated that they also obtained better performance in the written activities they did on their own in class. Regarding this, one child said “I did the activities correctly because I knew what words to use.” In addition, there was a gradual improvement when giving examples. In this case, the learners depended less on the sentences that showed the words in context. Furthermore, they were able to make the examples faster and, despite the grammar errors, their sentences showed that they knew what the words meant.

4.2.5 Self-confidence

Self-confidence was an additional benefit students obtained. According to this, one student said “I felt more self-confident because I think I learned better”. Another participant made a similar comment; she expressed “I felt relieved because I achieved better learning results”. Likewise one learner claimed “I felt more self-assured because I understood the words better and I reviewed them more frequently”. Finally, some students stated that they felt good since they found the
activities appealing and enjoyable. Regarding this, one participant claimed “I found the activities pleasant”. It is important to mention that since some timid children felt more self-confident they were more willing to participate in the activities in class. Furthermore, these students usually carried out the activities correctly, which shows that they had learned the vocabulary better.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND REFLECTIONS

This last chapter contains a brief summary of the whole AR process and the implications derived from the findings. It also as includes the limitations this inquiry had. In addition, in order to improve the study, some changes for next time around are suggested. The chapter concludes proposing ways forward for a possible second action research.

To begin with, this study was done in two stages. The first one was carried out to verify a problem in my teaching context. Once the difficulty had been validated, a second stage was initiated to put into practice a plan of action as an attempt to find a solution to the problem. The main objective in this study was to help students increase vocabulary learning by implementing memory strategies. The strategies focused on developing higher retention and retrieval. The process lasted four weeks and data were collected using four different methods.

The findings suggest that there was a gradual improvement in the students' vocabulary learning. The memory strategies that were implemented appeared to engage students in a more active learning process. The children seemed to have transferred information from short-term to long-term memory as they were able to remember most of the words that were introduced after four weeks. These outcomes show that students were in a deep cognitive process, which resulted in better retention. Zahed& Abdi (2012) make reference to this and they comment that the more involved students are in a cognitive procedure when reviewing and practicing new words, the more able they will be to recall them an use them later.

Even though all the strategies proved to have improved, to a certain extent, students’ vocabulary learning, it was determined that image word meaning was the strategy that provided students with most learning benefits. For example, images helped students to understand better what the words meant. They also demonstrated to develop higher retention. Similarly, games were the activities the students liked the most. The favorite games were the *bingo* and the *pictionary*. Probably the children considered these two games to be more fun than the others.
Games such as the ones mentioned above increased the student’s interest, and motivation. Consequently, the children were more engaged in these activities and participation rose considerably.

Furthermore, students reported that there were some activities they did not like. They considered them boring and that was noticeable. For instance, some children looked a little uninterested when doing these exercises. Despite this situation, the great majority of then claimed that all the activities had contributed to the improvement of their vocabulary. In accordance to this, one girl affirms “I think all the activities helped me”.

In addition, different materials were used in class and the students were also given printed material where they could find, among other aspects, definitions and examples with the words. These materials also contributed to enhance vocabulary learning. Regarding this, one student claimed “the photocopies the teacher gave us helped me to learn”. Moreover, a few students took advantage of this material since they took it home to study the vocabulary. According to this, one child commented “I study the copies at home”. This reveals that there were children with some initiative to review the words out of the classroom.

Furthermore, the results demonstrate that continuous exposure to the new words enhanced learning. It could be observed that review gave the students greater opportunities to practice the words. This seemed to be beneficial because since the students did several activities during the week the probability to forget the vocabulary reduced noticeably. This shows that the more practice students had, the more retention they developed.

In addition, it was observed that the students worked faster as then time elapsed. For example, the first week students were not familiarized with the new practices and they needed more detailed explanation of the activities. They also asked several questions about how to carry out the exercises. However, from the second week on, the children were more acquainted with the new routines that were established. As a result, they had fewer doubts about the tasks, they worked more
quickly. In addition, even though the students worked slowly the initial sessions, the improvements were visible since the first day of the implementation. This was noticed as the learners had very good results in the first hand out they were given after the vocabulary presentation.

Although the students were frequently paired or grouped with the same classmates, they developed a sense of cooperation. They interacted with their partners doing collaborative work to carry out different activities. Additionally, as some students corrected their classmates, it was noticed that they practiced peer correction. These students contributed to enhance their classmates’ learning since they made them aware of their mistakes and helped them too correct them.

Moreover, it was observed that some students used several indirect strategies such as paying attention, asking partners to help them understand or remember new words. They also asked for repetition or for more examples when they had doubts about specific words. Some children reported that at home they asked some people to explain the words in case they had doubts. Likewise they expressed that they looked for the Spanish equivalent on the internet. Regarding this, one girl said “I ask my parents to help me or I use an online dictionary to translate the word”.

It results interesting to see how some techniques (which were no the focus of this inquiry) derived from the initial strategies. In the same way, it is important to observe that, without receiving suggestions or instruction about these strategies, several students had the initiative to use them. Therefore, these secondary strategies complemented the memory strategies to consolidate vocabulary learning.

Although the children did not mention the word “strategy”, the findings show that the intervention raised students’ awareness about the different techniques that helped them understand and memorize vocabulary. Moreover, the results revealed that some students developed more self-confidence. As it was already mentioned in the previous chapter, students pointed out that they experienced more self-
assurance when carrying out the activities. Additionally, it was visible that these students participated more and they were less shy. This might have been because they were not afraid to make mistakes as they could perform the activities more accurately than before.

It can be said that not all students had the same learning outcomes. This is to say that some learners were more benefited than others. For instance, some students claimed that they could remember the words very well and they did not forget them. On the contrary, there were others who sometimes forgot the vocabulary, but in that case they looked at pictures or reviewed the photocopies they were given. Likewise, there were children who reported to have an improvement in spelling, pronunciation and in written exercises. However there were others who stated that they still needed to practice more in order to improve the aspects before mentioned much better.

5.1 Limitations

One of the first limitations was the time factor. For example, there were some activities that were supposed to last some minutes only, but they took longer. Consequently, there was less time to develop the other activities contemplated in the action plan. Furthermore, due to the big amount of other information to teach in the English course, many of the activities had to be done in a hurry. Furthermore, repeating and spelling the words aloud became tedious for some students since they did the same activity every day. As a result, they lost the interest and became a little bored. In addition, as all the students repeated the words at the same time, it was a little complicated to listen to everybody’s pronunciation. In fact, I was not able to check if all the students were actually doing the activity or not.

Another constraint was that the English class was the last class of the day and by that time several students were already tired and willing to go home. This is may have been a reason why some students seemed reluctant to carry out some activities. In addition, the size of the room and the way the furniture was arranged
did not allow students move around easily. Thus, they worked with the closest people to them most of the time and this did not allow children to interact with more people in the class. Apart from that, students were a little noisy as they got excited about playing games. Sometimes they started disorder that needed to be controlled. Moreover, some of the children got angry or sad when they lost the competitions.

Even though synonyms were useful for students, there were some drawbacks with them. For example, some of the students did not know certain words that were given as synonyms. Hence there was a need to explain both words so that the students could understand what they meant. Moreover, some of the children tended to think that the synonyms were exactly the same words and they tended to use them incorrectly. Therefore I had to explain many times that synonyms are not used in the same way to express an idea. I also had to give them several examples of how to use the words. This was time consuming and sometimes the students kept doing mistakes about the use of the words.

Apart from that, a lot of practice was devoted to study the meaning, the written and oral form of the words. Most of the activities were receptive and they involved recognition of the words. However, there were only a few production activities. As a consequence, the students do not have much exposure to activities in which they actually had to use the words. The lack of knowledge about collocation, some grammar errors and the lack of other words (that were not the focus of this research) prevented the students from creating sentences in which the words were accurately used. For example, they used to make examples with words that did not collocate and, in the case of verbs, the students used to use the words in an appropriate tense.

In addition, another drawback was the anxiety that the vocabulary quiz created to the students. Even though it was explained that this quiz would not affect their grades, some of them even expressed that they were a little nervous. This may have affected, to a certain extent, the students’ results. Likewise, in case some
activities had not been so useful for some students, they may have felt a little shy to admit it when presenting their answers to the whole class during the focus group interview. Hence the results from this method might not have reflected the students' real opinion, about the effectiveness of the action plan implemented.

5.2 Conclusions and implications

The findings suggest that there was a gradual improvement in the students' vocabulary learning. The memory strategies that were implemented appeared to engage students in a more active learning process. The children seemed to have transferred information from short-term to long-term memory since they were able to remember most of the words that were introduced in the four weeks. These outcomes show that students were in a deep cognitive process, which resulted in better retention. Zahed & Abdi (2012) make reference to this and they comment that the more involved students are in a cognitive procedure when reviewing and practicing new words, the more able they will be to recall them and use them later. This suggests that language teachers should choose or design activities that demand more cognitive effort in order to achieve higher understanding and retention.

The outcomes proved that long-term memory was developed. They also show that images reduced the explanation time noticeably. They also made easier and more memorable the learning of new words. Regarding this, Carpenter and Olson (2011) state that “pictures are remembered better than words because they are more likely to be represented by both verbal and image codes” (p. 1). Moreover, some studies such as the ones carried out by Kaçauni (n/d), Hashemi (2013), Abderson (2012), in which images or other visual aids were used report similar results. So, it can be observed that pictures can provide learning benefits in different contexts.

Apart from that, it can be observed that different aspects of vocabulary such as meaning, pronunciation, spelling were increased. These are, according to Harmer (1991, in Alvarado & Viveros, 2008) some essential aspects involved in the learning of a word. Considering that four different strategies were implemented, it can be said that probably each of the techniques provided a specific learning
benefit. From this finding, it arises the assumption that more than one strategy should be used for teaching/learning vocabulary in order to achieve different benefits. This information could be useful for future teachers/researchers, this way they could see that one technique complements another. Then they may want to include training on more than one learning strategy.

Apart from that, the results of this inquiry indicate that constant review and practice is needed to reinforce long-term retention. Therefore, teachers could take this information into consideration to include repetition when teaching vocabulary. Concerning this, Jonhson(n/d) affirms that “good vocabulary instruction builds repetition into the learning process” (p.3). Similarly, it was noticed that established routines to practice vocabulary can create awareness of learning strategies. Additionally, this study also indicates that the use of certain strategies can develop the arousal of secondary strategies, as it was also demonstrated in the work of Miranda (2013). This research demonstrated that the students who first improved their learning were able to help their classmates. For instance, when checking written exercises in total class, some students made a mistake and their classmates corrected them. This shows that, even though peer correction was not emphasized, children developed a sense of it.

It is worth mentioning that the strategies in this study were chosen taking into consideration the learners’ needs. As a result, the students seemed to be more interested in the learning process. These findings imply that, exercises that meet students’ needs can be more encouraging. Motivated students can get more engaged in their learning and consequently, achieve more satisfactory results. This inquiry showed evidence that improvements in vocabulary contributed to build self-confidence. A study conducted by Miranda (2013) also proved that the use of learning strategies helped students become more confident. Thus, this information suggests that motivation enhances learning, and when students succeed in learning, they feel more self-confident.

Generally, the outcomes verify that the aims of this small-scale research were reached. They reveal that direct vocabulary instruction and training on memory
strategies assisted the students to improve vocabulary learning. Retention and retrieval were two main aspects that were highly improved. The learners were capable to comprehend better the meaning of new words and memorize them more easily. In addition, they performed better pronunciation and they increased their orthographic knowledge. They carried out different exercises more accurately to practice vocabulary.

The implementation of the memory strategies provided the students with additional benefits. They were more involved in the learning process and they became aware of the strategies that help them to increase their vocabulary knowledge. It was observed that the children used other indirect strategies that were not formally instructed. It is essential to comment that the intervention was useful to encourage the children to participate more actively. Additionally, the attempt to promote more interaction among students and the variety of activities seemed to have created a pleasant atmosphere. As a consequence, some students built more self-assurance, felt more comfortable and enjoyed the lessons more.

On the other hand, despite its limitations, this study can be useful for teachers in similar teaching contexts and whose students face problems to learn vocabulary. By reading this project, they could realize the importance of memory in the learning process. They could also notice the value of incorporating images in direct vocabulary instruction. Another important contribution could be raising awareness about the advantages of implementing several strategies instead of one. This way, teachers could realize that all the techniques complement each other since they equip students with a specific benefit.

Moreover, this research can be valuable to understand that children need direct training in learning strategies so that they can become more independent. It could also contribute to realize that learners at a young age can develop secondary learning strategies and make use of them out of the class. Besides, the present study could be useful for teachers to recognize that taking into account the students’ interests is of great importance in the achievement of learning. It could also provide future researches with valuable information to prove that vocabulary
learning is not separated from enjoyment. It could also give teachers ideas about activities that can be fun, motivating and effective in vocabulary learning. This way, the teachers may want to adapt these activities and materials to implement them in their own teaching contexts.

On the other hand, some changes could be done to this inquiry in order to improve it. Firstly, instead of reviewing only ten words weekly, all the words presented since the first week could be reviewed every week. This would be done to avoid that students forgot some words with the time. Another adjustment would be using different dynamics to review the pronunciation and spelling of the words. This would probably decrease boredom and reluctance to do the activity. In addition, individual repetition and spelling would be emphasized to listen to every students’ pronunciation and to make sure that students actually carry out this exercise.

More emphasis could be given to pair work in order to increment interaction among students. Likewise, more activities that require group work could be incorporated as a way to promote collaborative work. By doing this, the children would have more opportunities to carry out tasks in which they could learn from each other. Moreover, despite synonyms contributed to improve vocabulary learning, they also created some confusion. Therefore, this technique could be omitted or changed for another.

in addition, more advantages of the technology available at school could be taken. For example, for introducing the new words, images could be projected on a screen. As the institution counts on internet access and some speakers, an online dictionary could be used to play the listening of the words so that students listen to a native speaker pronounce the words. This would make the vocabulary presentation more attractive. Additionally, some interactive activities could be done on the computer to practice the words. In fact, this is one of the suggestions that some students made. Regarding this, one boy claimed “I would like to use the computer to practice the words” [My translation].
Another adjustment that could be done would be teaching chunks of language or words with their collocations. This would have the purpose to enable the students to understand how the words work in relation to others in a sentence. It could also help students use the words more accurately. Moreover, this might reduce grammar errors.

Apart from that, this inquiry gave priority to qualitative methods. However, all this information could be examined using quantitative methods too. By doing this, more precise information would be provided about the number of words that the students learned during the implementation. It would also offer an insight of the words that students found complicated to learn. It would also illustrate the aspects of vocabulary learning that the children improved the most and the least.

On the other hand, further research could be conducted to find out what secondary strategies students utilize in and outside the classroom. It would be interesting to analyze in detail how the use of these strategies can impact vocabulary learning. Another possible study could also be done to determine if direct instruction on vocabulary learning strategies can develop a sense of autonomy in students at a young age. In addition, peer correction could be another important consideration for other investigations. This would discern to what extent encouraging this technique with children could aid them progress vocabulary learning.

Future projects could be carried out to discriminate how the improvement of vocabulary could benefit other aspects of language. For example, additional studies could investigate how the enhancement of vocabulary knowledge could develop each of the four skills of language. Another important consideration for further research should examine in what ways developing self-confidence, through the use of vocabulary learning strategies, can help young learners to achieve better language performance.
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APPENDIX A: Handout

1. Be active (be aktiv) Verb
   Synonym: Do exercise
   Example: You need to be active to be in a good physical condition.

2. Warm up (warm up) Verb
   Synonym: Get ready
   Example: Soccer players always warm up before their games.

3. Cool down (ku/ldoun) Verb
   Synonym: Refresh
   Example: Drinking cold water is a good way to cool down after doing exercise.

4. Work hard (wurk hard) Verb
   Synonym: Work a lot
   Example: If you want to get better grades, you need to work hard.

5. Make Friends (mek friends) Verb
   Synonym: Socialize
   Example: The school is a good place to make friends.

6. Play fair (plai fair) Verb
   Synonym: Play honestly
   Example: Games are better when everybody plays fair.

7. Build confidence (bild konfidenz) Verb
   Synonym: Create security
   Example: Playing sports helps people to build confidence.

8. Cheat (chet) Verb
   Synonym: Trick
   Example: One of my friends likes to cheat on exams.

9. Ascend (asend) Verb
   Synonym: Rise, Climb
   Example: I would like to ascend a mountain when I am older.

10. Comment (koment) Verb
    Synonym: Say, Speak
    Example: Children comment about the nature in their science class.
**APPENDIX B: Word-search puzzle**

---

**The environment**

- Read the definitions and write the correct answer on the line. Then find the words in the word search.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEQUOIAS</th>
<th>NATIONAL PARKS</th>
<th>TRAIL MAP</th>
<th>GROVE</th>
<th>CLIFF</th>
<th>HIKING</th>
<th>REGION</th>
<th>POND</th>
<th>TRIBUTARIES</th>
<th>AREA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. A long walk for fun on the mountain.  
2. One of the highest trees in the world.  
3. A group of trees in a specific place.  
4. A part of an open space reserved for a specific function.  
5. A picture with directions to get to different places in a region.  
6. A big geographical territory.  
7. A body of water, a pool usually artificially formed.  
8. Small bodies of water that flow into a big river.  
9. A high part of rock.  
10. A public and beautiful area with historical importance to preserve nature.

---

**Cliff**

**National Parks**

**Pond**

**Grove**

**Trail map**

**Tributaries**

**Area**

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Please note: The image contains a complex word search puzzle with various words to find. The actual solution is not provided here. It is intended for students to solve as a learning activity.
APPENDIX C: Crossword puzzle

ACROSS
3. A journal written on-line and accessible to users of internet.
6. The period of time when people stop working
7. Diversion, something you do for fun.
9. Information about recent events that are reported on radio, TV, newspapers, etc.

DOWN
1. News Events that happen around the world.
2. A periodical that contains articles, stories and pictures, etc.
4. A meeting, a public discussion about a specific topic of interest
5. The temperature conditions
8. Commercial and professional activity

W E E K 2
APPENDIX D: Fill in the blank sentences

Date: 27/06/2014

1. Brothers and sisters have similar facial features.
2. Alpine plants do not grow much because of the cold weather.
3. I would like to get a diploma for participating in the spelling bee this year.
4. I practice conservation by planting trees.
5. We can pick the trash from the streets to have a clean and nice environment.
6. Last year a hurricane caused a terrible landslide and many people got hurt.
7. I love the scenic view from the top of the mountain. It looks beautiful.
8. A sea ecosystem is formed by aquatic plants and animals.
9. You need to maintain a positive attitude in difficult situations and everything will be better.
10. I like to go to a secluded place when I study. I need silence.

Environment
Obtain
Conservation
Maintain
Scenic
Landslide
Alpine
Secluded
Ecosystem
Features
APPENDIX E: Bingo
APPENDIX F: Word wall
APPENDIX G: Vocabulary quiz
25) **Entertainment**

26) **Area**

27) **Weather**

28) **Pond**

29) **Obtain**

30) **Be active**

31) **Conservation**

32) **Comment**

33) __________ grow a lot. They are around 300 feet high.
   a) **grove**
   b) **tributaries**
   c) **sequoiad**

34) “Isla mujeres” is one of the main __________ in Cancun, Mexico.
   a) **national parks**
   b) **region**
   c) **features**

35) Playing **team sports** is a good way to know a lot of new people and __________
   a) **build confidence**
   b) **make friends**
   c) **play fair**

36) When you watch the __________ you get informed of things that happen in other countries.
   a) **world news**
   b) **local news**
   c) **entertainment**

37) There is a big __________ of coconut trees near the beach in Acapulco.
   a) **secluded**
   b) **grove**
   c) **cliff**

38) American football players need to __________ before they play a game so that they do not get hurt.
   a) **cool down**
   b) **be active**
   c) **warm up**

39) __________ goats have adapted to live in the cold temperatures of the mountains.
   a) **alpine**
   b) **conservation**
   c) **scenic**

40) I read in the __________ that there heavy rain caused several car accidents.
   a) **forum**
   b) **local news**
   c) **world news**

**Good luck!!**
At 12:05 I introduced ten new words and I showed the children the pictures and the word in a piece of paper. I pronounced the words aloud and all students repeated the words aloud after. Then they spelled the words in group. Most of the students were paying attention and they were quiet listening to me. There were two students who were distracted and talking during the presentation, but they were quiet and paid attention after I called their attention. I also showed the students some sentences written on a piece of paper so that they could see how the words are used in context. I pasted the words, pictures and sentences on the wall, next to the board for students to see them all the time during the week. After that, at around 12:22 I gave the children a handout containing the new words presented. This handout had the same pattern as the one that I gave to the students last week. Before reading the handout they were asked if they had any doubts and two of them said that they did not understand the word *grove* and *tributaries*. Instead of answering directly, I had their classmates to volunteer and explain what the words meant. They explained by trying to give a definition and giving examples. After that I confirmed what they said and I gave an additional example and definition of the words and students said that they had understood the words.

Then, I helped the students do the first item in the hand out so that they could see the example of how to answer the activity. I asked the children if they had any questions or doubts and they said they did not have any questions and that everything was very clear. Afterwards, they did the activity individually and the great majority of them took around four minutes to complete the exercise and any of them asked me to help them. I monitored the students while they were doing the activity and the great majority of them did not seem to have problems answering the handout. I only saw two children had made some mistakes and I told them to check their answers, and they did, however they did not change their answers. When the children had completed the handout the activity was checked in total class and most of them were willing to participate. There were two children that had two answers incorrect. This time, I had these two children read their own answers and notice their mistakes. The words that they had answered incorrectly were *pond* and *tributaries* and they may have gotten confused because, to certain extent, the words may sound similar to the children since both of them refer to water. I had them notice that a *pond* is small part of water, and that is sometimes *artificially* created, while *tributaries* are bodies of water that flow into *big rivers*. After this, these children corrected their errors and they made comments like these “oh, I see. A tributary goes to a big river and the pond no.” The vocabulary session finished at around 12:35, so the introduction of the words and the rest of the activities took about thirty minutes.
APPENDIX I: Questionnaire

Fecha 3rd July 2014

Cuestionario

Por favor contesta sinceramente las siguientes preguntas. Puedes elegir más de una opción.

1.- ¿Cuánto tiempo repasabas nuevas palabras en clase?
   - Sí, todos los días

2.- De las actividades que se realizaron en clase, ¿Cuál fue la que más te gustó?
   - Las juegos porque aprendíamos jugando.

3.- ¿Hay alguna actividad que no te haya gustado?
   - Sí, no.

4.- Si respondiste, ¿Por qué no te gustó?
   - No porque todas me gustaron.

5.- ¿Crees que las actividades que se realizaron te ayudaron a mejorar tu aprendizaje de nuevo vocabulario en inglés?
   - Sí.

6.- Si respondiste que Sí, ¿Cómo te ayudaron las actividades a aprender palabras en inglés? Pues en mi desarrollo.
   - a) entiendo mejor el significado
   - b) recuerdo mejor las palabras y no se me olvidan fácilmente
   - c) sé cómo escribir las palabras
   - d) sé cómo pronunciar las palabras
   - e) obtengo mejores resultados en las actividades que el maestro me da clases.

7.- Si respondiste que No, ¿Por qué no te sirvieron?
   - a) la explicación es difícil
   - b) salgo mal en los exámenes
   - c) pronuncio mal las palabras
   - d) no escribo las palabras correctamente
   - e) no me acuerdo de las palabras
   - Otra: No, el último mes me aprendí todo.

8.- Si respondiste que No, ¿Por qué no te sirvieron?
   - Ni una sola respuesta.

9.- ¿Tienes alguna sugerencia para el maestro para enseñar nuevas palabras en inglés?
   - Sí.

10.- Si respondiste Sí, ¿Cuál es tu sugerencia?
    - Que sea computarizado.

GRACIAS!!!
1. ¿Qué hiciste para aprender nuevas palabras el mes pasado?

Vi películas en español y los subtitulos se los puse en inglés.

Y sólo aprendí las palabras que me creaba la maestra...

Vi películas en inglés y le pregunté a mi papá qué significaba.

Hice las actividades que la maestra trajo.

2. Crees que lo que hiciste para aprender inglés te ayudó a aprender mejor las palabras?

Sí. El traductor y los patrones me ayudaron. Si porque entiendo mejor ahora. Si porque ahora ya sé más palabras.

3. De las actividades que mencionaste antes, ¿cuál crees que fue la que más te ayudó a aprender las palabras?

El traductor y el diccionario. Busque imágenes. Que mi papá me ayudara a entender las palabras. Las imágenes que trajo a maestra.

4. ¿Qué fue lo que más mejoraste con esas actividades?

Que ya no se me olvidan y también mejoré la ortografía. Que ya no me equivoco tanto y que ya no se me olvidan tanto. Que la memorí más rápido, que ya tengo mejores calificaciones.
¿Qué hiciste para aprender nuevas palabras en inglés en el último mes?

1. Poner atención en clase y si no entendi le pregunté a la maestra.
2. Las imágenes recordaron y pregunté a la maestra.
3. Las imágenes, apuntándolas y repasándolas y preguntándola.
4. Imágenes, fotocopias, juegos y materiales de la maestra.

2. ¿Crees que lo que hiciste te ayudó a aprender mejor las palabras?
   Sí No ¿Porqué?
   Sí, porque me ayuda a repetir.
   Sí, porque me ayuda a aprender más.
   Sí, porque salgo bien en calificaciones.
   Sí, porque soy buena calificando en spelling.

¿DE LAS ACTIVIDADES QUE MENCIONASTE ANTES
   ¿Cuál crees que más te ayudó a aprender las palabras?
   Todas
   Las imágenes
   Los juegos

¿Qué fue lo que más te ayudó con estas actividades?
   En el vocabulario
   En la ortografía y en el vocabulario
   Mi pronunciación
   EL VOCABULARIO
1. ¿Qué hiciste para aprender nuevas palabras en inglés en el último mes?
   La maestra nos trajo imágenes, fotos y juegos.

2. ¿Crees que lo que hiciste te ayudó a aprender mejor las palabras?
   Claro que sí. ¡Así es como lo hicimos de una manera divertida!
   Sí, porque ahora con todo lo que nos pone la maestra me ayuda mucho.

3. De las actividades que mencionaste antes, ¿crees que fue la que más te ayudó a aprender las palabras?
   Que la maestra nos pusiera fotografías y imágenes.

4. ¿Qué fue lo que te mejoraste con esas actividades?
   La ortografía y pronunciación.