

Universidad Nacional

Sistema de Estudios de Posgrado

Centro de Investigación y Docencia en Educación

División de Educología

Promoting the use of Cartoon Characters to Motivate First Grade Students of Porrosatí
School to Engage in the English Language Learning Process

Trabajo final de graduación para optar al grado de Magíster en Educación con
Énfasis en Aprendizaje del Inglés

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Campus Omar Dengo, Costa Rica

2022

Promoting the use of Cartoon Characters to Motivate First Grade Students of Porrosatí School to Engage in the English Language Learning Process

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Abstract

This article proposes to promote the use of cartoon characters to motivate first-grade students to Engage in the English language learning process. To do so, a qualitative research project was conducted. The participants were six first-grade students of Porrosatí school, in Costa Rica. In the study, cartoon characters were depicted as educational pictographic characters, images, and visual aids purposely created to engage the pupils in the learning process. Their use aims to appeal to learners' imagination and creativity to foster a safe and welcoming learning atmosphere that makes them feel motivated and engaged with the new language learning process. As a result, pupils felt safe in a welcoming environment that fosters access to their imagination and allowed them to develop meaningful cognitive connections, addressing the target language learning process's beginning challenges and enabling their active participation in English language classes. Consequently, challenging aspects that negatively affect the optimum development of the target language learning process such as fear of facing an unknown language and foreign language anxiety can be overcome. In conclusion, promoting the

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use of cartoon characters is an effective teaching-learning technique to motivate first-grade students to engage in the English language learning process.

Keywords: cartoon characters, creativity, fear, foreign language anxiety, imagination

Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo promover el uso de personajes de dibujos animados para motivar a los estudiantes de primer grado a participar en el proceso de aprendizaje del idioma inglés. Para ello, se realizó una investigación cualitativa. Los participantes fueron seis estudiantes de primer grado de la escuela Porrosatí en Costa Rica. En el estudio, los personajes de dibujos animados se representaron como elementos pictográficos educativos, imágenes y ayudas visuales creados con el propósito de involucrar a los alumnos en el proceso de aprendizaje. Su uso tiene como objetivo apelar a la imaginación y creatividad de los alumnos para fomentar una atmósfera de aprendizaje segura y acogedora que los haga sentir motivados y comprometidos con el nuevo proceso de aprendizaje del idioma. Como resultado, los alumnos se sintieron seguros en un entorno acogedor que fomenta el acceso a su imaginación y les permitió desarrollar conexiones cognitivas significativas, al abordar los desafíos iniciales del proceso de aprendizaje de la lengua meta y facilitar su participación activa en las clases de idioma inglés. Debido a esto, se pudieron superar aspectos desafiantes que afectan negativamente el desarrollo óptimo del proceso de aprendizaje del idioma meta, tales como el miedo a enfrentarse a un idioma desconocido y la ansiedad por el idioma extranjero. Por lo tanto, se concluye que promover el uso de personajes de dibujos animados es una técnica de enseñanza-aprendizaje efectiva para motivar a los estudiantes de primer grado a involucrarse en el proceso de aprendizaje del idioma inglés.

Palabras clave: ansiedad por el idioma extranjero, creatividad, imaginación, miedo, personajes de dibujos animados

Introduction

The transition between the preschool and the elementary stages in Costa Rica is a meaningful step taken by first-grade students because this will be the first time they face a new language without previous formal knowledge. Since the English language is not taught in the educational institution where I work, Porrosatí School, during the preschool stage, first graders face their first encounter with the English language in a formal way when they attend their lessons at school. This should be a joyful moment for them since they are going to start to learn and experience new school situations. However, some challenging aspects can negatively affect the optimum development of the target language learning process. These are fear of facing an unknown language and foreign language anxiety. For this reason, learners' age and educational background must be taken into account to provide them with a safe and welcoming learning atmosphere that makes them feel motivated and engaged with the new language learning process, letting fear and foreign language anxiety aside.

Porrosatí School is located in Paso Llano, San José de la Montaña, Costa Rica, a rural area located near Barva Volcano's National Park. It is a D1 school² with a total of 37 students, six of whom are in first grade. The first-grade group has two girls and four boys, who are around seven and eight years old. All of them enjoy and actively participate in the English lessons. Another aspect to consider is their geographical context. The main community places in Paso Llano are the school, the church, and a small public playground. The town's productive activities are focused on cattle caretaking and small touristic startups such as a few restaurants and some street dairy products. There are no essential services such as a grocery store, a police station, or public telephone access. Amusement activities for students are related to helping parents with their duties and going to the river or the volcano for a hike. Most of the students

² Educational center of primary education, with an enrollment of 31 to 90 students.

come from local families who have lived there for many years. Some others come from nomadic families who rotate from one farm to another as cattle farm caretakers. To reach school, many of them have to walk long distances under harsh climatic conditions characterized by heavy rains and cold temperatures. These traits make it difficult to achieve a balanced level of proficiency in the development of the proposed curriculum because, unlike most Costa Rican public schools, English is not taught in the preschool stage at Porrosatí school. Therefore, it is necessary to offer these students pedagogical strategies that allow them to develop the confidence required to interact in the new language by providing a healthy and safe learning environment.

In consequence, to provide a welcoming learning environment that inspires the students to be involved in the development of the target language, it is necessary to offer teaching strategies and materials that appeal to their age, socio-cultural environment, and previous educational background. So, to reach this goal, it is necessary to use innovative, creative teaching methods to address the learners' needs. Mesén (2021) has declared that teaching creatively requires innovative procedures to engage school children in learning. An innovative approach can lead the teacher's quest to offer his or her students a respectable amount of learning that requires their creativity and critical thinking to face different projects. Thus, it is also important to acknowledge that first-grade students' ages range from six to seven years old. Hence, they are in a developmental stage where imagination plays a significant role. Therefore, there is a rich field to be explored and exploited to use a different educational approach to take advantage of this specific learning trait.

For this reason, to motivate first-grade students to engage in the English language learning process, appealing to their imagination will play an important role to offer them a harmless and friendly learning environment. "When children are educated in environments where they feel safe to explore language without feeling anxious, they not only enjoy learning

but also flourish in their learning targets” (Kiaer et al., 2021, p. 19). To lead them to reach this goal, cartoon characters can be used to create a welcoming, friendly and safe atmosphere and to help them to develop meaningful cognitive connections that will address the target language learning process’ beginning. Their main purpose is to motivate students to actively participate in the English language learning process, feeling safe and willing to learn a new language. Thus, this paper will address the implementation and results obtained from the experience of using cartoons to teach English in hopes it can inspire teachers in similar contexts.

Challenges: Fear and Foreign Language Anxiety

One of the key challenges teachers need to face to promote a fruitful target language learning development is to offer a safe space for children where they feel secure and free of fear. As Halmatov and Aleksandrovna (2021) have manifested,

one of the most common emotional reactions in childhood is fear because the instinct for self-preservation is strongly expressed, and life experience has not yet been formed.

Fear helps children be careful in unfamiliar situations and prevents them from developing, showing confidence and independence. (p. 97)

There are different types of fear present in each stage of children's life, which portray the kind of emotions, intellect development, and social context experienced by younger students. However, children in the preschool stage and first cycle stages can recognize harmful environments and other situations that might represent a threat to their emotional and physical well-being. In this sense, fear shows on as an emotional tool to identify potentially dangerous atmospheres. Therefore, welcoming, creative strategies that appeal to students' positive emotions and imagination, providing a safe space for expression, will help them to overcome the fear of being exposed to what they might consider an unfamiliar situation.

Similarly, foreign language anxiety is another condition that could prevent children from being engaged and motivated in the English language learning process. Oruc and Demirci, (2020) stated that foreign language anxiety expresses as a nervousness felt when communicating with their teachers and peers that prevent students from engaging in their learning process. On the other hand, participation in foreign language learning environments requires particular cognitive circumstances, emotional predispositions, and social skills. In addition, it requires students to be attentive, motivated, concentrated, and willing to achieve the proposed objectives to develop the target language. However, as Eylem and Cavide (2020) stated, for most students studying the target language in non-English speaking countries, foreign language anxiety appears to be a predictable trait in which they experience psychological barriers against language learning. Therefore, to prevent this condition a creative teaching approach must be present.

Creative, Innovative Teaching

For us teachers, it is vital to consider the unique challenges and traits that affect first graders' encounters with English language classes to design creative and innovative pedagogical strategies. These strategies must appeal to the student's imagination and motivate them to engage in the new language learning process. A creative approach can lead the teachers' quest to offer their students plenty of learning opportunities that require creativity and critical thinking to face different projects. It also adds weight by giving the teachers the task of determining how and when this creative process must take place. Mesén (2021) claimed that “instructors also make judgments based on their knowledge to decide whether creativity should be requested as an option to determine learning success” (p. 79). Therefore, when teachers propose a creative approach, they aim to appeal to students' creativity to improve their language learning progress. Undoubtedly, “learners' creativity helps them make decisions and

be more critical of their learning and context” (Mesén, 2021 p. 79); then, it will be necessary to provide them with meaningful and creative learning resources.

Likewise, Rus (2020) proposed to offer a creative approach that stands from a critical point of view that uses innovative pedagogical tools to develop the proposed learning goals. This educational approach has considered the student's needs, skills, and psychological and social context to offer them learning experiences that engage them in the process and allow them to express the vivid image of their reality. For this reason, innovative teaching is required to achieve this goal. As Rus (2020) has claimed, "innovative teaching is the process leading to creative learning, the implementation of new methods, tools, and contents which could benefit learners and their creative potential" (p. 340). Therefore, the implementation of a creative and innovative approach that considers learners' age traits and educational background to provide a safe and welcoming learning atmosphere aims to make Porrosatí School first-grade students feel motivated and engaged with the new language learning process, without feeling threatened by fear or anxiety and allowing them to adapt themselves in the new language learning environment.

On the other hand, Bowkett (2010) defined ways of using different kinds of pictures to improve the student's language literacy. He has manifested a need to develop originality and creative teaching approaches that allow students to find a healthy way to express themselves and develop confidence. Bowkett (2010) stated that creativity requires students to establish new cognitive links. To achieve this, it is necessary to view things from different angles and analyze the possible solutions from each of them. Once this perspective is achieved, it will be possible to generate an autonomous, original, and innovative thought. Because of this, “the more practice a child has in being original on this individual level, the greater the chance that one day they will have original thoughts that are new to everyone” (Bowkett, 2010, p. 1).

Therefore, by considering the inner world of students and promoting teaching techniques that

allow them to bring it to light, it would be possible to develop confidence, creativity, and critical and original thinking.

Appealing to Children's Imagination

Veraksa et al. (2022) stated that imagination is defined as the dexterity to create new meanings through image combinations, colors, and blueprints at the mental level. These novel creations are vital because they allow meaningful connections to be made with the real world that children experience. From there, meaningful cognitive links are established to develop skills, process and organize information, determine decision-making, and manage an emotional response with visuospatial working memory and cognitive flexibility. Therefore, "the role of imagination in cognitive activity is of great importance since, by its virtue, we can see the connections and laws of the world around us through images" (Veraksa et al. 2022, p.1). As a result, reality is visualized through images, symbols, and forms such as drawing letters, used in speech, writing, play, and drawing. Therefore, appealing to children's imagination is a good way of promoting cognitive development.

In addition, Veraksa et al. (2022) have stated that there are two types of imagination: Passive Imagination and Active Imagination. Passive Imagination includes daydreaming and dreams. On the other hand, Active Imagination generates new graphic elements in an original creative way considering the particularities of the child's environment, blending reality with fantasy; which leads to the production of new and original content in its cognitive and linguistic background. These processes are necessary to face unknown scenarios and unravel the conditions of an uncertain and changing environment where there is a basic motor pattern, but its form and the result of the action can vary. Therefore, fostering students' Active Imagination by using cartoon characters will allow them to be more productive, creative, and able to carry out linguistic tasks that will make them feel secure to perform in the target language.

On the other hand, Nipriansyah et al. (2021) have mentioned that imagination emerges as a mental process generated by recognizing the environment from a deep observation and evaluation of it. Therefore, "in early childhood cognitive development, visualization is still necessary to transfer knowledge; this learning process requires interesting means or tools to stimulate children's motor development" (Nipriansyah et al., 2021, p. 80). Hence, Nipriansyah et al. (2021) stated that creativity in the early school years is a mental process that allows the creation of new cognitive content through the efficient inclusion of imagination and aesthetics. Consequently, safe, inclusive, and pleasant spaces are required to appeal to children's imagination and creativity. From this environment, it will be easier for students to develop soft skills such as communication, cooperation, analytical thinking, and creative thinking. These cognitive tools will allow them to adapt to their school environment with self-confidence and overcome the fears caused by fear and anxiety.

Cartoon Characters

Cartoons can be seen as teaching materials that effectively enliven the classroom atmosphere and ensure better learner motivation and participation while making the teaching and learning of English an enjoyable, stimulating, and memorable experience. For example, Thakur (2015) has defined cartoons as "drawings that exaggerate some physical feature, action, or quality of a person or thing depicted" (p. 4). Besides that, he claimed that "visual elements, with or without a caption, in a cartoon give us a bunch of starting points for discussion and could be used as a springboard for any amount of language work" (Thakur, 2015, p. 4). Therefore, the use of cartoons in English language classrooms is an effective teaching/learning resource that appeals to the learners' imagination and creativity to foster interest and engagement with the target language lessons. In addition to that, "cartoons can be used as an effective tool for teaching critical thinking and promoting higher-order skills" (Thakur, 2015, p. 4). Hence, it will be easier for students to create the language content's cognitive links through

visual images that arise from their context and share emotional and social bonds. As a result, they will feel welcome and safe within a learning environment that provides access to an imaginary and creative space where they can leave fear and foreign language anxiety aside.

Cartoons have the power of visual communication and change people's minds. For example, Gamage (2019) has defined a cartoon as "graphic media containing interpretative pictures using symbols to create a brief message and quickly change an attitude towards people, situations or specific events" (p. 108). Therefore, cartoons are reliable authentic teaching-learning materials to provide a safe and welcoming learning atmosphere by allowing pupils to assume a positive attitude toward the target language lesson that makes them feel motivated and engaged with the new language learning process. Hence, by using them, it is possible to reach "better learner motivation and participation, transforming the teaching and learning experience into an enjoyable, stimulating, and memorable experience" (Gamage, 2019, p. 107). For instance, Gamage (2019) claimed that the use of cartoon characters facilitated students' speaking skills, making the input more understandable and attractive while performing collaborative learning. Furthermore, cartoons' use can improve students' relationships with classmates and promote peer learning (Gamage, 2019). Consequently, using cartoon characters to engage students in the English language learning process can provide pupils with an attractive, safe, and welcoming learning atmosphere.

On a different note, Bowkett and Hitchman (2012) have highlighted different techniques to use comic characters to improve language literacy. They also considered the need of developing emotional intelligence by taking into account the person's holistic nature. They acknowledge emotional intelligence as a critical factor to avoid fear and foreign language anxiety. The use of cartoon characters, as suggested by these authors, then provides ways of accessing cognitive tools necessary to develop a successful second language learning process, for example, observation skills and vocabulary expansion (Bowkett & Hitchman, 2012). As

Bowkett and Hitchman (2012) manifested, creating quick characters has the following learning benefits: “Reinforces the value of clear, succinct writing and carefully chosen words. /Develops observational skills. Encourages consideration of the whole person, rather than just the physical appearance, creating an opportunity to develop emotional intelligence” (p. 91). Consequently, cartoon characters provide meaningful ways of accessing the cognitive tools necessary to develop a successful second language learning process.

Cartoon Characters in the Classroom

Using cartoon characters in the classroom is an ideal strategy that will allow teachers to access students' imaginary worlds to motivate first-grade students of Porrosatí School to engage in the English language learning process. To do so, within this paper, "cartoon characters" will be depicted as educational pictographic characters, images, and visual aids, drawn on the board or made out of paper, cardboard, fabric, or any other recycled material or digital composition. Besides that, cartoon characters not only represent pictures of what is narrated in a text like other visuals in the list. Sometimes callouts might be added to express phrases' meanings. They also will stand for graphic representation of grammatical elements presented within the content to be studied. For example, question marks, letters, phonemes, nouns, and adjectives, among others. They will be delimited as images or drawings purposely created to engage the pupils in the learning process.

For this, the scaffolding practice was carried out during the introduction of contents aimed at fostering the results. According to Garcia et al. (2013), the learning of a second language is developed through a process of transition and scaffolding toward a continuous practice that requires the willingness, effort, and dedication of the learners. This group of elements will result in a significant transition between the new language input (declarative knowledge) and mastery of it through continuous practice, to automatically access it through the

automation process (procedural Knowledge). Therefore, significant communicative tasks are required to lead to the production of an authentic language. These tasks must be designed to promote the development of specific linguistic elements and the language used to be practiced considering the assertive guidance and active participation of the students. It also requires meaningful feedback delivered at the right time and in the right situation. Therefore, the practice of scaffolding steps will be carried out during the development of content to help in the transition from declarative knowledge to procedural knowledge.

Consequently, to develop this strategy, the action plan was developed for five weeks, from February 22nd to March 25th. It was expected that during this time, the students would feel safe in a welcoming environment that fosters access to their imagination. The aim was to develop cognitive links that enable them to actively participate in English language classes. Besides that, the purpose was for learners to learn new vocabulary words and linguistic patterns that allow them to talk about personal information; for example, name, age, and grade, among others. And finally, the students created a cartoon booklet where they could translate cartoon images into spoken language. Therefore, to implement this process, the action plan was designed to be developed by following the Ministry of Public Education's (MEP, 2016) corresponding study program for the first cycle, first level, Unit 1: All About Me. The unit content included language functions such as greetings and saying goodbye in proper contexts, introducing themselves, identifying personal traits and feelings, and getting to know others. Those functions were developed in the four linguistic skills by using cartoon characters.

Activities

Week 1: from February 22nd to 25th. The content to be studied included the vocabulary words *I* and *am*, and the question word *who*. Besides that, punctuation marks, and question marks.

- Warm-Up: It is made by telling a story about how words are made by letters. Throughout the storytelling, different cartoon characters representing different letters were introduced.
- Activating Prior Knowledge: Students' names are randomly selected and "written down" on the board using letters' cartoon characters.
- Modeling: The vocabulary words *who*, *am*, and *I* were presented through cartoon characters representing individual letters that joined stand for a word. They were modeled and clarified by the teacher and repeated and practiced by the students.
- Task Rehearsal: The students made their own I-cartoon character using cardboard, colored pencils, and plastic eyes, among others (See Figure 1.).
- Task Completion: The students identified the words *I*, *am*, and *who* when they were presented through the corresponding cartoon characters.
- Task Assessment: The assessment was done throughout the lesson development by observing students during each one of the stages in the performed activities. This allowed the teacher to take action in the present moment and make any adjustments in the process to improve students' outcomes when it was necessary.

Figure 1

I-cartoon character



Note: Cartoon designed by one of the first-grade students

Week 2: from March 1st to March 4th. The content to be studied included the vocabulary words *not*, *a boy*, and *a girl*. The previously studied vocabulary words (*I* and *am*, and the question word *who*) were recycled and used in a scaffolded sequence to develop a new syntax structure.

- Warm-Up: It is made by introducing boy and girl cartoons used as puppets. These elements act out by singing the song “I am a boy; I am a girl”.
- Activating Prior Knowledge: The students brainstormed the vocabulary words learned in the previous lesson.
- Modeling: The previous vocabulary words *who*, *am*, and *I* were reviewed. Besides that, the new words and fragments *not*, *a boy*, and *a girl* were presented. They were modeled and clarified by the teacher and repeated and practiced by the students.
- Task Rehearsal: The students made their ID cartoon characters using cardboard, colored pencils, and plastic eyes among others (See Figure 2.).
- Task Completion: The students learn to join the pronoun *I* the verb *am* with this cartoon representing their names. Besides that, they identified the words *I*, *am*, and *who*, *not*, *a*

boy, and a girl when presented with the corresponding cartoon characters (See Figure 3.).

- Task Assessment: The assessment was done throughout the lesson development by observing students during each one of the stages in the performed activities. Students used the cartoons to orally construct sentences by linking cartoons sequentially.

Figure 2

ID



Note: Cartoons designed by first-grade students

Figure 3

A Boy



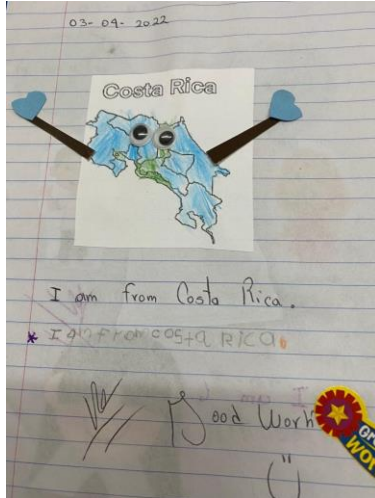
Note: Cartoon designed by one of the first-grade students

Week 3: from March 8th to March 11th. The content to be studied included the vocabulary words including numbers from one to ten and the words from previously studied vocabulary word sets were recycled and used in a scaffolded sequence to develop a new syntactic structure (*I am six/seven, and I am from Costa Rica*).

- Warm-Up: It was made by presenting the video Numbers Song - Learn to Count from 1 to 10.
- Activating Prior Knowledge: (Mono-bingo Game) Bingo cardboards with the studied cartoon images were handed out among the students and they moved the token to the corresponding place as they heard their names.
- Modeling: Previous vocabulary words were reviewed. Besides that, the new words (numbers one to ten) and the preposition were presented. They were modeled and clarified by the teacher and repeated and practiced by the students producing the corresponding sentences in oral and writing forms.
- Task Rehearsal: Students colored a worksheet containing figures of the numbers. Besides that, they made the “from Costa Rica” cartoon by coloring a map using cardboard, colored pencils, and plastic eyes among others to cartoonize the image (See Figure 4.).
- Task Completion: The students identified the lesson’s words when presented with the corresponding cartoon characters. They read aloud the new fragments and sentences.
- Task Assessment: The assessment was done throughout the lesson development by observing students during each one of the stages in the performed activities. This allowed the teacher to take action in the present moment and make any adjustments in the process to improve students’ outcomes when it was necessary. Besides that, the students used the cartoons to role-play in front of the class the learned vocabulary and orally constructed sentences by linking cartoons sequentially.

Figure 4

From Costa Rica



Note: Cartoon designed by one of the first-grade students

Week 4: from March 15th to March 18th. The content to be studied included the vocabulary words *student*, *school*, *first*, *grade*, and the preposition *in*.

- Warm-Up: (Chant) I am a student, and I love my school.
- Activating Prior Knowledge: (Wheel of Fortune Game) key vocabulary words' cartoons and an arrow were placed on a board, taking the form of a wheel. The students whirled the arrow, and according to what the cartoon arrow indicates, they made oral sentences using the learned vocabulary words and language structure.
- Modeling: Previous vocabulary words were reviewed. Besides that, the new words (*student*, *school*, *first*, *grade*) and the preposition were presented. They were modeled and clarified by the teacher and repeated and practiced by the students producing the corresponding sentences in oral and writing forms.
- Task Rehearsal: The students made a mini-mural representing the vocabulary words.

- Task Completion: The students identified the lesson's words when presented with the corresponding cartoon characters. They read aloud the new fragments and sentences. Besides that, while working in pairs, the students used cardboard images to complete a template on the board to produce oral sentences (See Figure 5.).
- Task Assessment: The assessment was done throughout the lesson development by observing students during each one of the stages in the performed activities. This allowed the teacher to take action in the present moment and make any adjustments in the process to improve students' outcomes when it was necessary. Besides that, the students used the cartoons to role-play in front of the class the learned vocabulary and orally constructed sentences by linking cartoons sequentially.

Figure 5

Board Template



Note: Designed by first-grade students

Week 5: from March 22nd to March 25th. During this week, the purpose was to put hands-on and elaborate a cartoon booklet where students could translate cartoon images into written and spoken language.

- Step 1: Pieces of Bond paper were handed out among the students.
- Step 2: Students pasted the cartoon characters made out throughout previous lessons following a progressive sequence.
- Step 3: Cardboard callouts were handed out among the students so they could write the sentence corresponding to each one of the pictures.
- Step 4: The booklets were assembled.
- Step 5: The students illustrated the cover page.
- Step 6: Students presented their projects in front of the class (See figure 6.).

Figure 6

Booklets



Note: Cartoons designed by first-grade students

Results

The information collected throughout the evaluation process was carried through a qualitative process during different stages of allotted time including different types of information gathering instruments, for example, observation records, checklists, and goals evaluation rubrics, among others, provided the necessary information needed to measure the scope of the results

achieved throughout the process. These instruments showed that cartoon characters could be used to create a welcoming, friendly and safe atmosphere that encouraged the students to feel comfortable and secure when developing the proposed activities. In addition, it made it easier for the pupils to understand and learn the new vocabulary words and sentence structures.

Furthermore, recycling information from the previous activities allowed them to feel familiar with the content and make meaningful cognitive links that allowed them to easily read and understand what they had learned. Consequently, it was possible to develop a scaffolded learning process where the students had the opportunity to use what they already knew and mix it with the new content, expanding their area of output and performance. The students manifested that the activities were funny and easy to do and that they enjoyed doing them. Thus, they were able to foster confidence and feel motivated to interact with their peers by engaging in the English language learning process within a healthy and welcoming environment. As a result, at the end of the process, the learners were able to produce oral and written sentences with language content relevant to their social context that they could also read and understand.

And finally, they also were able to understand the oral presentation of their classmates and enjoy the different kinds of cartoons that were created. Therefore, considering learners' age and educational background to address their needs led the teacher to create innovative and creative teaching methods that motivate students to engage with the classes. Besides that, it encouraged the students to overcome the obstacles that were preventing them to develop a positive attitude towards the new language. Hence, they gained confidence and felt motivated to healthily grow their aptitude and successfully engage in their foreign language learning process, leaving fear and foreign language anxiety aside.

Conclusion

The first-time young students who face a new language without previous formal knowledge is a meaningful experience that might define their attitude toward the new language and its educational process. However, some challenging aspects could negatively affect the optimum development of the target language learning process. These factors were fear of facing an unknown language and foreign language anxiety. For instance, “students who suffer from foreign language anxiety get use avoidance techniques in their language production, making many preventable errors and showing an inability to participate in spontaneous conversations” (Kiaer et al., 2021, p. 25). For this reason, the learners' age and educational background, were taken into account to provide them with a safe and welcoming learning atmosphere that made them feel motivated and engaged with the new language learning process. This was a joyful moment for them since they were going to start to learn and experience new school situations. Whereupon, utilizing educational pictographic characters fostered opportunities to create a welcoming learning environment.

Indeed, there were some complexities considered before making this teaching proposal. These mainly were students' age and social background. Kiaer et al. (2021) stated that socioeconomic status, parental education level, and pre-existing learning disabilities, are factors that might lead them to experience foreign language anxiety in young learners. Therefore, the challenge was to design, plan, and implement teaching/learning activities and teaching resources and materials that motivate students' active participation. These resources considered students' age and social background to reach a meaningful learning process that prevented them from developing fear or foreign language anxiety. For this reason, cartoon characters provided ideal opportunities to foster a safe learning environment that appealed to learners' imagination and positively engage them in the target language learning process.

In essence, the use of cartoons as educational pictographic characters created a welcoming, friendly and safe educational environment where the students were encouraged to feel comfortable and secure when developing the proposed teaching/learning activities. In addition, its use fostered students' development of meaningful cognitive connections. It made it easier for the pupils to understand and learn the new vocabulary words and sentence structures. Besides, it allowed us to address the target language learning process's beginning challenges fruitfully. As Kiaer et al. (2021) manifested, if children are cultivated in milieus where they experience a harmless environment where they can discover new languages without feeling anxious, they not only enjoy learning but also flourish in their knowledge endeavors. For this reason, cartoons used as educational pictographic characters provided ideal tools to create and offer this safe space for learning.

Finally, it is necessary to raise awareness of the importance of constant professional development that will help us to gain knowledge regarding new teaching/learning approaches, technological advances, and current educational streams. We need to continue in our quest for knowledge, develop our autonomy, and take advantage of the particularities of our working environments. This endeavor will help us to generate research that frames authentic results and allows us to tackle the current challenges that prevent us from offering the best possible educational proposal. Furthermore, we need to be willing to be exposed to different educational approaches and methodologies that consent us to develop experience from diverse sources considering that experience can not only be reached throughout time but also from experimenting.

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DECLARACIÓN JURADA

Yo, María del Carmen Fernández Loaiza cédula de identidad 1-0810-0600, estudiante de la Universidad Nacional, declaro bajo fe de juramento y consciente de la responsabilidades penales de este acto, que soy autor intelectual del Trabajo Final de Graduación Titulado "Promoting the Use of Cartoon Characters to Motivate First Grade Students of Porrosati School to Engage in the English Language Learning Process" , para optar por el grado de Maestría en Educación con énfasis en Aprendizaje del Inglés.


María del Carmen Fernández Loaiza

Heredia, a los 05 días del mes de setiembre del año 2022.

Refrendo

Los abajo firmantes avalamos el Trabajo de Graduación de la estudiante María del Carmen Fernández Loaiza, cédula 108100600, que lleva como título **Promoting the use of Cartoon Characters to Motivate First Grade Students of Porrosatí School to Engage in the English Language Learning Process**, dado que cumple con las disposiciones vigentes y la calidad académica requerida por el posgrado.

Firmado por JUAN PABLO ZUÑIGA VARGAS (FIRMA)
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Mag. Juan Pablo Zúñiga Vargas
Tutor del énfasis Aprendizaje del Inglés
Maestría en Educación

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M. Ed Rita Arguedas Víquez
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