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Increasing Vocabulary Acquisition in the English Language Class: Using Origami in Community Service Projects

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the use of origami as didactic material to improve the vocabulary acquisition process in children in community service centers in Ecuador. It is subscribed to the postmodern paradigm and the mixed research approach. The participants were 20 students aged from 8 to 10 from two community centers located in Manta and San Mateo, of Manabi province. The instruments used were contextual observation, pre- and post-tests, and a motivation questionnaire. The results showed an increase in participants' vocabulary acquisition in all topics taught. The highest increase in vocabulary was 73.70% in the topic fruits and the least advanced was 10.50% in the topic of shapes in English language. The contextual observation revealed an improvement in the children motivation for learning, increment in the participation, and interest of the students. The motivation questionnaire also showed a favorable position towards the use of origami to learn English. It concluded that origami is an art that contributed positively to the improvement of learners' vocabulary acquisition in English language in community service projects.

Keywords: Arts, English Language, Motivation for Learning, Origami, Vocabulary Acquisition

1. Introduction

Despite of the English language relevance for accessing the information in current education, the exploration of elementary schools and community service projects in Ecuador show that EFL learners tend to present a deficit in the learning and development of the communicational skills due to multiple factors as the lack of interest, students' dedication for learning a foreign language, and time constraints, among others.

A key that students need to master in the process of learning a foreign language is vocabulary. Thus, the limited knowledge of vocabulary can lead students to frustration as they want to communicate their ideas and feelings in the use of the target language, but they don't know the words, they need to do it.

The English language is a relevant subject within the Ecuadorian educational system since through it the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education seeks that students get involved with other cultures. For this purpose, the Ministry of Education (2016) divided the time load of the English subject for each level, in the case of elementary education, a total of three hours per week and states that the activities should be organized according to the students' learning needs. However, the hours provided for English language teaching are not enough, since it has been noted that the students' knowledge of the language is low, especially in terms of vocabulary. In such scenario, EFL instructors require to innovate their teaching strategies to offer more meaningful classes to learners. In addition, demotivation and changes in the educational policies may cause a great conflict when instructors have students with difficulties in the process of EFL learning (Domingo, 2020).

Lauderdale & McArthur (2019) claim that teaching skills refer to the abilities that a professional has in the educational field. These abilities include intelligence, classroom management, communication, and knowledge about the curriculum content. Moreover, teaching skills have to do with the way a person can convey knowledge, emotions and thoughts to the students and help them and all their learning process.

This study proposes the use of origami as an art that can contribute to improve the process of teaching and learning vocabulary in English language lessons. It subscribes to the mixed research approach to contribute to teachers with an innovative way to teach English in elementary schools and community service projects.

The authors' motivation is to provide trusting information about how the use of origami in the students' English language learning process supports the acquisition of vocabulary, their participation, enthusiasm and consequently the improvement of the English language level. The authors propose the following research questions:

1. What are significant changes in students' English vocabulary acquisition when using origami?
2. What topics of vocabulary acquisition reported the participants' highest and lowest advance?
3. How origami helps to improve the educational attitudes and development of students?
4. How does origami can improve the motivation for learning EFL vocabulary?

The purpose of this research work is to determine that origami can improve the vocabulary acquisition process in children in community service centers.

2. Literature review

2.1 Speaking Skill

Speaking is an oral skill that allows people to express and share ideas and thoughts using a language. English communication involves the use of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation acquired during a period of learning and it is improved with practice and upgrade their fluency to keep conversation spontaneously (Mart, 2012). This competence is based on the ability acquired by students to communicate with themselves and with others. In general, this skill requires the learners to have a broad knowledge of the language, especially vocabulary, which will help them to express themselves and to communicate very fluently.

Leong & Masoumeh (2017) state that speaking is considered one of the most important conversational skills. To encourage speaking, teachers can use the language in a real-world context where students can interact and learn faster. Samad et al. (2017) affirm speaking is a productive skill, and its goal is to use language interactively and to do so the speaker must follow a communication process that involves connecting ideas from different contexts. It helps speakers follow messages and give answers correctly. Students' learning depends not only on content and topics, but also on the contexts in which they are taught, the context allows students to stay connected to the target language and keep practicing at the same time allowing them to improve this skill and develop more confidence in themselves.

Saldaria, et al., 2019 mentions that speaking symbolizes students' communicative ability. It means that students can keep a conversation with others. However, in primary school it is usually found that students do not understand the teacher's explanations. This makes students lower their speaking ability, and they cannot express fluently and

causes disinterest to learn English. The process of teaching learning in secondary school must also be creative and innovative; for that, teachers must seek creative ways to engage students, like listening to music, watching movies and so on. It could be a way in which students are constantly interacting with the target language.

To Shamim, et al., 2020 speaking skill is challenging because it is difficult for EFL learners to form sentences or phrases without knowledge about grammar and its structure. Poor teaching methods are one of the biggest problem, students are not supplied with opportunities to practice, and it causes shyness and lack of confidence on them. For that, Sosa (2021) mentions, the use of technology is really useful when teaching speaking, through this, teachers can use videos, audios, storytelling, speech recognition, among others all these activities should be put in context and based on the use of grammar, vocabulary and listening which help students to improve their fluency and to create clear sentences and phrases. Speaking is important for people who want to get new opportunities and increase their level of confidence in expressing themselves and engaging in conversations and even making friends.

2.2 Teaching Vocabulary

In learning a language including English, vocabulary is one of the essential aspects that should be considered before learning the other skills like listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Alizadeh (2016) reports that vocabulary is defined as people's knowledge of the meaning of words. It is also considered as a list of words learned by people to communicate with others; it can be acquired or learned by sight and hearing. It means that the learner can recognize words in diverse contents and differentiate their uses. To Bakhsh (2016) students should pay attention to the elements of English because they are indispensable for improving language building and its skills, and the teacher should provide students with an environment in which they can learn the language on their own.

Vocabulary is one of the most important parts of learning English as the success of other skills and through it, language construction depends (Bhatt et al., 2017). Most English learners commonly seek strategies to increase their vocabulary (Nie, 2017) mention that the purpose of student's learning strategies is to improve learning efficiency and behavior. This means that students not only improve their knowledge, but also their commitment and responsibility to learning, with the aim of improving communication in both oral and written form.

In addition, Anwar & Efransyah (2018) state that vocabulary is an important aspect of English because the speaking skill of students depends a lot on it; it means that they can communicate, answer and ask questions with the knowledge they already have. When students lack vocabulary, they will find difficult to express their ideas, because of the demotivation, and lack of confidence to speak. Thus, students should have knowledge about all skills and grammar to construct clear ideas and improve their understanding.

(Anil, 2017) Improving students' communicative skills also depends on teachers' methodologies: personality, attitude and teaching skills help to transform the learning process and make it more interesting. To (Cummings, et al., 2018) teacher should teach vocabulary in context with exercises that allow students to practice it such as conversations, repetitions and doing activities of practice. Moreover, teachers could implement activities based on reading such as selecting books in which students are interested and through that, learn unfamiliar words, meaning and comprehension. On the same hand, professors can apply gamification, it means teaching vocabulary through games and creative activities. They can help students to increase their vocabulary and their enthusiasm to learn English.

The success of learning something depends on the way it is presented. Teaching vocabulary in context and with the use of gamification helps to increase students' understanding of vocabulary which is the most important during language learning (Irwandi et al., 2018). The success of students learning depends on the context in which they are learning, taking that into account it's been evidenced that public schools have less adequate physical spaces and conditions than private schools. Private schools, having more economic resources, have greater access to technology, resources, and better facilities, while public schools have fewer resources and, therefore, a notorious lack of materials, professionals, and facilities for students' learning (Castillo, 2018). Consequently, the

development of learning in public schools is slow because the teacher and students have constraints during the teaching-learning process either because of the lack of training from the teacher or materials in which the students cannot acquire the necessary knowledge and it turns that they pass from one level to another one with lack of communicative skill of the English language.

2.3 Gamification

According to Hamari & Koivisto (2013), gamification has the purpose of improving individuals learning process through enjoyment. It helps to transform lessons and to create new entertainment spaces inside the classroom for learning and playing at the same time. Besides, Bakhsh (2016) states that gamification provides teachers with a large range of elements to run innovative activities increasing the students interest to learn new words in a foreign language and to develop their communication.

Burder cited by Çeker & Özdamlı (2017) states that gamification aims to increase learners' attention, participation, and interest in a second language acquisition. Meanwhile, Sánchez (2019) states gamification is an alternative teaching strategy used in the Ecuadorian education to modernize and offer quality, interesting, and attractive lessons. This technique consists of transferring the processes of games to the educational-professional field to achieve better results related to learners' knowledge, communication skills, or reward specific actions since the students' preferences and interests, resulting in the reinvention of the learning process.

According to Deysi et al. (2022), it is crucial to provide students with friendly environments where they feel involved and construct their own learning. Furthermore, gamification is a dynamic process that improve the effectiveness and results of the teaching-learning process, allowing students to set up a playful relationship with the contents. Besides, Constanza & Muñoz (2022) state that gamification can maximize children's abilities through experimentation and playing games creating more meaningful and functional learning experience. One of the main keys when applying gamification is to attract learners' interest in the competition, but all activities are intended to involve the students in a learning process.

2.4. Origami

Foncubierta & Rodríguez (2014) show that origami is a finished result, which can be identified as a specific vocabulary according to the figure made out using papers. Origami as an experiential learning offers to students the opportunity to create meaningful learning. Keeping this perspective in mind, origami could be used as a pedagogical tool in teaching practice with the purpose of strengthening students' communicational skills.

Origami is an art, but also a strategy or method used to cover a wide range of skills. Robert Lang (2018), a master of origami, states that origami is an interesting combination of art and science. Thus, creating and folding of a model involves logic for repeating a diagram and sometimes the figures require the student to stick a pattern, which creates relevant principles that can help learners in other situations of their lives. Consequently, learning achievement could reflect a reciprocal transfer, the learner learning from the teacher as well as the teacher learning from the learner, thereby restructuring the teaching methods (Andreass, 2011).

In Ecuador, the origami technique is not highly appreciated as people believe it represents a difficulty for learners; but it is an educational art that can motivate learners to improve their concentration. In addition, origami is a technique that benefits boys and girls with attention deficit (Mogollón & Ortíz, 2016). Besides, it encourages learners' creativity, it contributes to the development of manual dexterity, promoting imagination, and reasoning ability in children. Origami is a technique that offers exciting experiences for creating figures and shapes with paper. It combines a group activity, as well as helping, and stimulating people of different ages. Learning origami is an entertainment, therapy, or a means of skill, but also awakens emotions by encouraging creativity when making paper figures.

Sánchez & Rivera (2018) argue that in the case of origami, the master class can explain the basic concepts and the elaboration of exercises, for the construction of selected figures and the activities related to them. It also

encourages learners to resolve the exercises and all the members of the class must know the process and strategies to repeat the patterns. Thus, Mayo & Suárez (2018) state origami is a fun and educational tool for learning different contents and improving motor skills, self-esteem, creativity, precision, and spatial feeling.

Regarding to origami, there exists a derived technique with it, called the storigami, which is a funny way to use the imagination to tell a story using origami figures. Millah & Sriyanto (2022) state Storigami is a method widely used for teaching vocabulary in English language, because it brings together linguistic skills, psychomotor skills, instructional processes and motivation, cognitive development, sensory skills, creative thinking, and imagination of the students; through this combination, students can have positive effects on their linguistic development. In addition, students get concrete examples of origami shapes helping them to remember new vocabulary developing English vocabulary and creative thinking.

Constanza & Muñoz (2022) argue that origami is considered a tool, an art, and a technique for the integral development of the human being, becoming a pedagogical activity within education. In addition, origami can promote the development of fine motor skills in children of 5- and 6-years age.

Among the previous studies used in this research. it quotes the work of Boruga (2012). It shows that origami is an art as a means for facilitating learning. The practice of origami can improve learners' self-confidence, dexterity, patience, and communication between teachers and students, as well as the development of logical, mathematical, and artistic skills. In addition, origami can cause a positive change in the children's attitudes, who become calmer, friendlier, and more creative. The study of Marji et al. (2023) shows that origami is an educational tool that can impact on the development of school student. They agreed that the use of origami activities can help students to improve their motivation to learn and enhance creativity. In addition, the work of Che Ku et al. (2023) found that gamification tools can engage and encourage students for learning. It allows instructor to give students feedback quickly to realize activities they need to improve and feel satisfied when the activity is over. In addition, Armania & Iqbal (2024) shows that origami can increase the creativity of students. They found that 77% of the research participants improved their knowledge and creativity using origami. Finally, the work of Saleem et al. (2024) determined that elementary school learners in condition of intellectual disability improved their geometric skills stage, resulting in students having a high level of knowledge after the research.

3. Methodology

This work ascribed to the postmodern paradigm. It used an action research project to determine the contributions of origami to improve students' vocabulary in English language acquisition in elementary school. The research was carried out as part of a community service project held in Manta, Ecuador in 2023-2024.

3.1 Participants

The participants were 20 children, 10 boys and 10 girls enrolled in the English community service project in Manta and San Mateo Community Development Centers. Their ages ranging from 8 to 10 years old and in the A1 level of English language knowledge.

3.2 Instruments

This research used the instruments contextual observation, Pre and Post test, and a motivation for learning questionnaire.

Contextual observation. - The purpose of this instrument is to figure out the change in students' motivation when using origami to learn EFL vocabulary. It was created by the research team having three indicators (1) academic development, (2) students' motivation, and (3) students' interaction. The observers responded yes /no answers to determine the changes in students. This instrument was evaluated by a panel of specialists in the field of EFL instruction. They examined and approved the instrument before being used. This instrument was applied during 8 sessions from the beginning to the end of the process.

Pretest and Posttest. - The purpose of these instruments was to find out the level of vocabulary learning of the students before and after the educational intervention. The pretest was prepared according to the vocabulary topics that were socialized and analyzed by the researchers; it had eight questions with multiple choice, filling gaps exercises and identification of images. On the other hand, the posttest was created according to all topics dealt with throughout the research process, 8 questions were carried out. They were multiple choice, filling gaps and identification exercises. Regarding with speaking skills, one oral question was created to complement the learning of the students. These instruments were reviewed by a panel of experts in knowledge assessment. Their recommendation was to reduce the number of items from 25 to 15 in the final version.

Motivation for learning questionnaire. - The purpose of this test was to establish students' perceptions about motivation for learning new vocabulary in EFL using origami. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement on a scale from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Participants marked with an X on the option according to their opinions. The questions were formulated according to the participants perception of contribution of origami to improve their communication skills, new vocabulary learning, and creativity. The instrument was evaluated by an experts panel using a scheme of motivation. They recommended to adjust the questions to guarantee participants would understand and respond accurately.

3.3 Procedure

The activities carried out in this process are explained below.

First stage. - It began with the follow-up of students who consistently attended classes and then five of them were chosen as participants. In the same way, an initialization with them and their parents was made to explain what the research process was about, for which they agreed to participate.

Second stage. - It consisted in the elaboration of a pretest- diagnostic evaluation with topics according to the age of the participants.

Third stage. - The intervention consisted of teaching lessons including the vocabulary topics and reinforcing them by making origami figures, as well as using technological materials for the better understanding of the students. In the same way, during this intervention, the application of the observation form was carried out, aimed to know how motivated the students were to learn through origami.

Fourth stage. - Data and information collection. It began with the application of the posttest to the participants. After having taught all the planned topics researchers applied the post-test which evaluated the students considering the same topics as in the pretest. Finally, the motivation test was applied individually.

4. Results

The presentation of the results will be based on the research questions posed in the introduction.

To respond the research question 1 **what are significant changes in students' English vocabulary acquisition when using origami?**

Table 1: Differences between the pretest and posttest results of participants vocabulary acquisition according to the topics taught.

N°	Topics	Pre	Post	Differences
1	Alphabet	45,20%	99%	53,80%
2	Numbers	22,70%	96%	73,30%
3	Colors	40%	98%	58%
4	Fruits	16,30%	90%	73,70%
5	Animals	71,15%	89,50%	18,35%
6	Transportation	69,40%	81,50%	12,10%
7	Shapes	72%	82,50%	10,50%

Based on the pretest and posttest results, students had a considerable increase in all the vocabulary topics

In answer to the research question 2. **What topics of vocabulary acquisition reported the participants' highest and lowest advance?**

The results in the table 1, shows that the participants got the highest advance in vocabulary acquisition on the topic about fruits. The participants changed their level of vocabulary from 16, 30% to 90% and had an increase of 73,70%. The participant's most limited advance was in the topic of shapes. They passed from 72% in pretest to 82,50% in the posttest; the change was 10,50%.

In relation to the question 3. **How origami helps to improve the educational attitudes and development of students?**

The results of the observation form show the following findings:

According to the indicators: 1. Students can retain the vocabulary being explained, 2. Improvement in their oral performance. 4. Demonstrate vocabulary knowledge by performing activities related to the topics. 6. Demonstrates their learning on worksheets and in-class activities. In the category of motivation of the students it is notable that the students increased their interest in learning to create origami figures and to acquire new vocabulary. They improved their speaking skills because their participation and attention to classes were very significant, and they even improved the companionship between them and helped each other.

In relation to the indicators: 1 They show interest in making origami figures 2. Attend more classes. 3. Participate more in class activities. 4. Lose shyness in public speaking. 5 Help their partners to understand the instructions. About students' interaction within the educational setting, these indicators were: 1. There is companionship with themselves. 2. They give importance to maintaining standards 3. Respect is shown between classmates and the teacher 4. Provide a satisfying atmosphere for class 5. Follow a chronological order when doing activities and 6. Use relevant examples in class. The researchers observed an evident enhancement in students' behavior in both towards their peers and within the classroom. This improvement was accompanied by a notable increase in the level of engagement between teachers and students, ending up with a conducive and satisfactory learning environment.

In answer to the question 4. **How does origami can improve the motivation for learning EFL vocabulary?**

The statistical analysis of the Likert type motivation and satisfaction questionnaire shows that indicators: 1. I see that the figures I made on paper were very beautiful. 3. I have fun using origami so I could learn new words. 4. I like to learn the vocabulary of fruits using origami. 7. I like understanding complicated English subjects using origami. 8. I like that we made origami figures from recycled material. 9. I am pleased that I learned more English by making origami. And 10. I feel that I have improved my English vocabulary learning using origami. The indicator with the highest responses was 4 which represents there is a favorable position in this aspect.

On the other hand, the items that had the most negative responses were the indicators: 2. I feel that my concentration improved by using origami to learn English. 5. I feel comfortable learning vocabulary in a different and fun way, and 6. I had a lot of fun creating paper figures with different designs. The students reported a high negative level; therefore, it can be deduced that students had greater difficulty in those specific items. Finally it can be concluded as a result that from the topics taught that, the topic the students liked the most was about fruits; on the contrary, the topic of shapes was of least interest. As it was shown in the Table 1, the learning percentage of these two topics is remarkable.

5. Discussion

In accordance with the theoretical review obtained in the empirical part of this study, the authors agree with the statement of Boruga, 2012 and Marji et al, 2023 that teaching through origami allows students to generate greater creativity, interest, and motivation for learning.

Furthermore, the authors are in the same mind with the argument of Che Ku, et al. (2023) the use of gamification as a teaching strategy allows for the improvement of participatory and collaborative skills, giving them the possibility to improve quickly through feedback. They also go along with Armania & Iqbal (2024) and Saleem et al. (2024) the use of origami was effective as the students did show improvements in their learning at the end of the intervention.

The results of this study show that activities such as origami make students show themselves to maintain their interest for longer and eagerly wait for new origami themes and figures to be presented in the next classroom as part of the vocabulary. This allows to confirm that the educational intervention using origami is favorable for learning, since the students began with 48,10% in the pretest and ended with 90,93% in the posttest regarding to knowledge of vocabulary.

Among the unexpected results, it has been found that students rather than making the folds to create the figures they liked to personalize the figures by painting them, making them eyes, nose, and mouth, and even writing names on them. This also allowed students to create scenarios with the figures and share them with other peers.

The authors suggest for new studies the use of recycled material and that the figures that are to be performed have simple steps to follow so that the students do not lose the interest; finally, after having performed the figures, more activities should be designed and applied so students can retain the information and link it with further vocabulary. The research team hope that this study will be significant for the professional development of the English area and in the same way the practice of the language can be expanded through creative activities.

6. Conclusion

Based on the results obtained, the research team declares the achievement of the objectives set for this study. Thus, the purpose of this research work is to prove that through origami, students can increase their vocabulary, participation, and enthusiasm to learn English. Hence, it was observed that the students took advantage to learn more vocabulary; the greatest achievement was in the topic of the fruits, while the one with the least achievement was about shapes, so they passed in the first topic from 16.30% to 87.50% and in the second topic from 72% to 82%. This research results can contribute to innovate the teaching and learning current process in Ecuadorian elementary schools and community service projects. It is a contribution to developing innovations within the classroom, stimulating learners' creativity, and introduction of arts to EFL lessons. It also improves the skills of

the learners, such as their fine motor skills and concentration. The weakness of this work could be that the intervention was relatively short, lasting only three months; longer research might be required. Another weakness might be the reduced number of pupils is a small sample, as it does not allow to make a generalization for all the students of Manabí, but this already gives a proposal of how classes can be improved using origami and other arts. A new line of research is proposed: the learning of English through the elaboration of handicrafts. It is concluded from the results that students manage to improve their English learning when using arts such as origami.

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