VISUAL AIDS: ENGAGING STUDENTS IN THE ACQUISITION OF A SECOND LANGUAGE

ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT TO OBTAIN AN UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE IN
“LICENCIATURA EN EDUCACIÓN BÁSICA CON ÉNFASIS EN LENGUA INGLESA”

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SAN BUENAVENTURA UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF EDUCATION
LICENCIATURA EN BÁSICA CON ÉNFASIS EN LENGUA INGLESA
BOGOTA, MAY 13 2011
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To my pure love, thanks for being so patient with me, for loving me the way you do and for enjoying my good moments and suffering my grieves.

To my love ones, all the strength, potential and growth, come from you.

To my dear students, who let me become a better human being, for their willingness to contribute on the development of this project; otherwise I could have not done anything without their help.
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Visual Aids: Engaging students in the acquisition of a second language

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Description:
During the teaching intervention with 8 graders at the Franciscano del Virrey Solis School, some difficulties were identified in the listening and speaking class. There was limited use of didactic tools. There was also poor use of communicative skills and an unwillingness to work in teams. Those issues led to formulate the following question: How does the use of visual aids assist students’ learning of a second language while endorsing social interaction? In order to address this question, it was necessary to establish a general objective. The objective was to identify the characteristics of visual aids that may contribute to the learning of the L2 through
social interaction in order to improve the students’ communicative abilities in 8th grade at
Franciscano del Virrey Solis School.

The theoretical framework took into consideration the following factors: visual stimulus,
meaningful learning, collaborative work, and learning style. These factors helped me to have a
theory for the project. Furthermore, to develop the project even further, it was important to
design a research project and create an instructional design. Specific data was collected while
cognitive, psychomotor, and axiological dimensions were considered to carry out activities
related to the project. Data collection allowed the researcher to establish three categories:
“human relationships: a space for social responsibility”; “previous Knowledge linked with new
knowledge”; and “from image to creativity and visual focus: a motivation to learn”.

Sources:

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Psychology press Ltd, Hove, UK


Stratton.

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Contents:

This project research is divided in 8 sections: 1- Project Description; 2-Theoretical Framework; 3- Research Design; 4- Instructional Design; 5- Visual Aids: a Strategy to Acquire a Second Language and to Promote Social Interaction; 6- Conclusions; Pedagogical and Didactic Implications of the Visual Aids to Acquire a Second Language; 7- Limitations of the Study and Aspects for Further Research; 8-Bibliography.

Methodology:

This project followed the guidelines of the qualitative action research method to improve the education system.

Conclusions:

Visual aids were important elements that students took into consideration to explore their own likes, interests, styles, and needs to obtain knowledge and also to make complex language forms easier to understand.

Peer correction also took place in class activities. It provided an opportunity for students to contribute to their classmates’ learning and their collaborative work.

Visual aids helped to strengthen students’ social skills evidenced during team work activities, aspect that was improving along the way.

These tools reinforced vocabulary and helped students to recognize concepts in order to formulate their own ideas.
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The use of visual aids helped to stimulate students to generate ideas with personal styles in a very creative manner. Always being resourceful.
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Abstract

This action research project had as a main objective to identify how visual aids might contribute to L2 learning process fostering social interaction. This process took place at Franciscan del Virrey Solis school from February 2010 to November 2010, working with 8th graders. Among the main findings of this study it was observed that students appreciated how by interacting with one another they improved their social behaviors to enhance their communication skills. Also the visual display provided visual stimuli by supporting students’ acquisition of the language, since it drew their attention. This was reflected by the creativeness in students’ development of their homework how by adopting tools such as mind maps, posters among others, students could integrate what they learned and what they interpreted from the lessons. These findings also suggest that the visual aids can offer learning opportunities of a second language in a very dynamic and meaningful manner without leaving on the side the text books. It also favored teacher-researcher’s development of the lessons to promote dynamisms in order to strength students’ cognitive, psychomotor and axiological performances.

Key Words

Introduction

The education system has shown some challenges throughout the years. It has emphasized on the importance of interaction between student-teacher, student-student, and student-teacher-knowledge. This has raised more awareness on how to create a dynamic atmosphere in classroom and give more pertinent answers that come from teaching practice and the use of didactical tools, in order to motivate students to acquire new knowledge. Moreover, the educational practice has come up with techniques and strategies to have a huge impact on the teaching-learning process in order to create a meaningful classroom environment that facilitates understanding. Thus, the implementation of visual aids has offered a wealth of information that favors the students’ cognitive and psychomotor processes while working with the students’ axiological strategy that focuses on values such as respect, tolerance, honesty, among others, and also enhances the student’s social skills. Hence, the learning and teaching strategies of a second language can be enriched by incorporating such tools, since they offer a wide range of advantages.

The purpose of this research project was to identify the characteristics of visual aids that contributed to the learning process of an L2, promoting social interaction that improved the communicative abilities of 8th grade students from Franciscano del Virrey School and embodied the values and principles of the school. Consequently, the teacher-researcher followed an action research method in order to implement the study. A set of steps were established to make the study more pertinent to the study context. Also, some instruments were designed to collect data such as field notes, two interviews, and two surveys. Some photographs were taken to show the
students’ behaviors throughout the study. They were analyzed and interpreted. Those tools were used to provide validity to the research project.

Based on the students’ needs, the teacher-researcher proposed some teaching strategies to create changes in the process of teaching a second language in school. Those strategies make part of the instructional design that should be used to boost cognitive, psychomotor, and axiological dimensions. The design integrated visual tools such as magazines, flashcards, picture books, posters, a white board, videos, conceptual maps, and mind maps.

The research study is framed into the research line called “Desafíos Contemporaneos de la Enseñanza y Aprendizaje de Lenguas Extranjeras”, and it was presented to the school of education as part of the process to obtain an undergraduate degree in “Licenciatura en Educación Básica con Enfasis en Lengua Inglesa” from Universidad de San Buenaventura.

This document presents the results of a research project called: “Visual Aids: Engaging students in the acquisition of a second language”, which is divided in 5 sections. In the first section, the reader will find a project description that includes the statement of a problem and some specific objectives. The theoretical framework includes visual attention, meaningful learning, collaborative learning, a teaching methodology and learning styles. The research design describes the type of methodology, the participants in the research, the research setting, and the instruments. In the second section, the instructional design describes the teaching methodology and teaching strategies that were used to improve the acquisition of the language with the help of visual aids. In the third section, the interpretations done from the data are presented. Some categories and subcategories are mentioned with their interpretation. The conclusions are found in the fourth section. They highlight the importance that must be given to the students and the learning of a second language using visual aids. In the fifth section, the reader will find the
pedagogical and didactic implications of using visual aids in the learning process of a second language. The sixth and last section points out some limitations of this research study and some aspects that should be considered for further research.
Project Description

Justification

Today’s educational challenges require effective responses in every single area of knowledge; and learning a second language is a need that makes part of the educational project of each country. Therefore, Colombia has a linguistic policy in its educational legislation that endorses the acquisition of a second language that favors the formation of competent people that can face the challenges of the world today.

Generating a stimulating environment for students is one of the objectives in any teaching-learning agenda that motivates them to acquire a second language, having in mind that the classroom needs to be an opportunity for students to strengthen their communicative abilities in order to thrive in a second language environment. Nunan (1991) suggested that accomplishment of acquiring a target language is based on how to perform a conversation. Thus, a speaking and a listening class should have a meaningful purpose to convey communication. In addition, the classroom scenario should be fun, motivating and dynamic; creating a better atmosphere for students to practice their communicative abilities making them aware on socialness.

Based on these needs, educative institutions like the Virrey Solis School have intensified the teaching of a second language in their curriculum. Such new approach involves increasing English classes to 10 hours a week. It also involves focusing on two sets of skills: speaking-listening abilities and reading-writing abilities, working all together in order to enhance social interaction among students. Although the school has been putting its effort on adding more hours to the curriculum, it is still a problem when students do not improve their communicative skills. Also, throughout the teaching practice performed in this with 8th graders, the teacher-researcher
evidenced that the contents in the curriculum has its focus on grammatical structures and the limited use of the didactic tools such as visual aids to achieve well development of the communicative skills.

This project looked for giving relevance to enrich social interaction in which learners should acknowledge the importance of active and integrative participation in the classroom to acquire the second language using the visual aids. As Collier (1980) suggests, collaborative learning brings a widely range of individual and group benefits in order to improve the students’ oral communication; consequently they should be persuaded to be part of their learning processing by promoting their social skills and in which the classroom becomes a social setting. Besides this, the project pretended to rescue the importance of the use of visual tools in the teaching-learning process of an L2 in an EFL classroom to assist students’ communication proficiency as a generation of social communication. As Treisman (1964, 1993) has mentioned, one of the best techniques to help students learn is through visual information, since they associate concepts with images, using their attention, memory, and awareness of what they see, and later respond to a selection process in order to achieve communication. In addition, it looked for knowing how to effectively promote communicative abilities and collaborative work among students; based on the relationship between the structures of the language itself and the dynamic presentation of the content through the use of visual aids.

One of the most important contributions during the development of the teacher-researcher’s teaching setting was the importance of reflecting upon the didactic tools that could help students work on his/her communicative abilities in the EFL classroom. That went in accordance with the Virrey Solis’ commitment as a school. In addition, the improvement of the social learning environment through teaching strategies that enhanced the students’ commitment,
responsibility and positive responses in the EFL classroom taking into account the need to improve the students’ social relationship. Social interaction is the basis for any learning-teaching process that responds to an educational need. Furthermore, the use of visual aids could activate their minds, stimulating their communicative competences, where they could feel secure and in control when speaking with one another.

Another contribution to the EFL classroom was to provide an instructional design that contains different sets of activities using visual aids in order to boost communication, values and social skills. The teacher-researcher’s role pretended to offer dynamic strategies to be incorporated in the EFL classroom to prompt students’ responses and to build up their communicative performances. Also the students’ role became more student-centered, having more the class focus on the learner, making him the core of his own learning process. Lesson plans included more activities for them to develop guided by the teacher-researcher.

**Statement of the Problem**

The educational worries of the Virrey Solis school has been to find how to teach the second language in an EFL classroom, boosting the students’ communicative abilities based on social interaction. In this context and during a teaching session with 8th grade students, some communicative difficulties were identified in speaking and listening class. From day one, students showed difficulty speaking, which made them feel frustrated and unmotivated; oral expression, spontaneous speaking, understanding instructions, shyness when speaking in public and lack of retention of information, were some of the problems identified by the teacher-researcher.

The students showed no willingness to work in group, lack of active participation in class among other situations which was a disadvantage for the learning-teaching experience. This
situation was evidenced when students showed attitudes such as laughing at others’ interventions and intolerance. Hence, those attitudes made the other students become more reserved and fearful of participating, forcing them to isolate themselves from the group. This was a drawback for students who needed to learn the importance of improving their communicative abilities, bearing in mind the social skills that the school promotes all the time. Freire (1976) considered the importance of word and dialogue, suggesting that adopting collaborative learning strategies is significantly important because that way, students feel motivated to construct their own learning process in which their personal influences and the recognition of others’ work are necessary for a common and individual interest (as cited by Figueiredo-Cowen and Gastaldo 1995).

Class development was limited to grammatical features that relied only on a textbook, a CD, and the board, following a traditional method, and leaving out didactical tools such as visual aids (posters, flashcards, magazines, bulletin board, etc) that could continuously remind them to practice their communicative abilities and strengthen the quality of the class. Novak’s (1998) theory meaningful learning states that students can relate information in a meaningful manner, integrating new elements, concepts, and ideas, to promote an effective way to learn significantly. In a nutshell, the educational model looks to improve classroom practice. Taking into account the problematic situation and the intention of promoting meaningful learning and social interaction, visual aids are seen as influential resources that could foster the students’ learning strategies to acquire a second language through visual aids, in a way that allows them to acquire knowledge, remember information, and engagement during activities. Also, visual aids capture the students’ interest and generate a real need for communication.

Therefore, noticing this problem allowed the teacher-researcher to come up with challenges in terms of how to motivate the students to acquire a second language in a creative
and meaningful way that promoted their communicative abilities and endorsed social interaction. This project looked for ways to approach this problem in a reflective, didactic, and pedagogical manner, and led the teacher-researcher to post the following questions:

**Research Questions**

**Main Question.**

How does the use of visual aids assist students’ learning of a second language endorsing social interaction?

**Sub-questions.**

What are 8th grade students’ perceptions towards the use of visual aids in the EFL process?

What social skills stand out in 8th grade students during the teaching-learning process when implementing visual aids?

**Research Aim**

Identify the characteristics of visual aids that may contribute to the learning of the L2 that encompasses social interaction to improve their communicative abilities in 8th grade students at Franciscano del Virrey Solis School.

**Research Objectives**

To analyze the students’ point of view upon the use of the visual aids and its influence in the acquisition of the second language.

To interpret the social interactive process that comes out when using visual aids to develop communicative abilities.
To identify the strategies based on the use of visual aids that can support the students’ improvement of their communicative performances.
Theoretical Framework: Theory to Support the Use of Visual Aids to Assist the Learning-Teaching Strategies in an EFL Classroom

Dealing with theory is important, since this gives an intellectual foundation when addressing educational concerns that involve both students and teachers. The teacher-researcher is responsible for finding answers to the problematic situations in the classroom which require the application of various theories. The application of theory helps to establish a methodology to guide the research process. It is belief of the researcher that the application of theory in the classroom environment will inform the researcher’s pedagogical beliefs and give support to answer classroom concerns.

This research project is based on the pedagogical needs that came up during a teaching experience that employed visual aids in the acquisition of a second language carried out with 8th grade students. It was important to rely on different theories to recognize the functionality and essential principles provided by researchers and experts in the action research field. The theoretical framework built a foundation for the study which utilized different theories to visualize the relationship between the literature and the study. Furthermore, theoretical foundation was pertinent and coherent with the statement of the problem and the objectives established to accomplish the project.

The following constructs were recognized in order to achieve the goals of the use of visual aids to acquire a second language in an EFL classroom; Visual Attention, Meaningful Learning, Collaborative Learning, Learning Styles theories and communicative and natural approaches of teaching a second language.
The Visual Stimulus and its Influence in the Cognitive Process.

There were early experiments on selective attention which used auditory stimuli. The experts focused more on investigating auditory rather than visual phenomenon, because of the world necessities and events living in the 1960s. However, visual attention theory was presented later on by Claus Bundesen (1990), who, through his psychology research, wanted to find out aspects of visual attention using various display elements. He focused his research on various aspects such as: selection of information, neural mechanism of attention, memory, and visual awareness. The result of this research allowed for large number of classical results in literature about visual attention (Bundesen, 2005).

Bundesen inquired about the importance of visual stimuli that enhances the effective connectivity between teaching-learning. This project takes this idea and applies it to the use of visual aids in the acquisition of a second language. The main objective was to create visual stimuli to support the students’ successful acquisition of the L2. It consisted not only of the display of different visual aids to capture the students’ attention, but to allow them to associate concepts with images, thereby creating a meaningful learning route for them. Attention, memory and visual awareness, according to Mackintosh (1975) directly affect students’ performance. This is based on the impact of the subject reported to the students, the presence of stimuli, and the reinforcement of particular responses. Visual attention theory also helps to fully understand and convey information. Students who learn and think in terms of images to maximize their teaching-learning process, make it more meaningful and practical by relying on extremely helpful visual intelligence (Gardner, 1993).

In order to create group work, a diversity of information, ideas, and concepts that are associated with visual techniques are selected according to what is best or most important to the
VISUAL AIDS

learner. This selection of information could be active or passive, according to the stimuli that the visual sense is receiving. Visual selection of information improves the individual’s performance by transforming the sensory system through the detection of elements. Visual attention allows people to select the information that is the most relevant enduring behavior (Bundesen 1990). This theory supports the implementation of didactic tools that can favor the acquisition of the second language (flashcards, posters, magazines etc). Through them the student can select the information that is most pertinent in order to improve his/her communicative competence.

Within the visual attention theory there is another important theory called “attenuation” which was proposed by Treisman (1993). Attenuation theory proposes that rejected information is attenuated rather than completely filtered or completely identified (as cited by Pashler, 1998). Treisman advocated that the individual’s development depends on attention to a wide range of choices. In his visual research project, Treisman evidenced two types of attention: input and control attention. He stated that input attention is what is provided or delivered to an individual and control attention is what the individual voluntarily wants to accept or receive from the outcome (Treisman, 1964). In other words, the individual has the ability to decide whether the source of information is necessary for his purposes or if the source of information should be ignored. This theory allowed the teacher-researcher of this project to think well about didactic strategies to facilitate students’ concentration, interest, and attention in the functions of images to support the acquisition of a second language.

Visual stimuli also play an important role within the attenuation theory where the brain processes information or receives stimuli at any given time. The stimuli are presented through the display of graphical objects, which becomes the focus of the person’s attention. To accomplish this, it is necessary that the graphics have certain attributes, like color and shape,
which describe a meaning in order to fulfill a learning objective. Color is visual stimuli for the brain because it makes a cognitive map within it (Bundesen, & Pedersen, 1983). This is a way the brain makes interactions between color and shape when processing information. The brain emphasizes color over other characteristics of specific information, developing traits that are captured cognitively by the brain. Color automatically assists visual perception to connect directly with the set of responses, responding to a selection process (Heijden, 2004). Color assists cognitively when displaying visual aids, drawing the person’s attention to things like luminance and contrast. Consequently, color aids the person to preserve the image longer as well as recognize more easily what is being presented to them. In this sense, color plays an important role as pedagogical and didactic strategies in an EFL classroom, since the intention is to stimulate students’ visual learning and their communicative progress.

In addition, shape stimulus is another important element to bear in mind. According to Attneave (1954) shape deals with a psychological dimension within the human being. Projecting different objects in different shapes like triangles, squares, etc, could favor the person’s learning process. Blending color with shape is the most positive stimulus for a learner because it makes the human vision more sensitive to change and it does not limit the mental representation, thus helping the person to create a mental concept. Shape also played an important factor when using visual aids in the classroom because it exercises the memory and at the same time reinforces the learning cognitive process, elements that are very necessary for this research project.

There are some researchers who have focused their attention on the idea that visual aids could be a meaningful way to teach an L2. Baron (2005) supported that idea in her research project with second grade students. The research project was connected with the importance of visual stimuli in the classroom to facilitate the learning process of 38 students from 6 to 9 years
of age whose interest was to acquire a second language. She worked with visual aids to facilitate
the students’ acquisition of a second language. The author highlighted the effectiveness of
learning with visual aids to make the process of learning a second language more appealing to
students. She also mentioned how students reacted positively when she implemented visual aids.
She suggested knowledge was constructed in a dynamic way. The result of this project showed
that visual aids are good resources for teachers. Students can use them to associate information
with images, and to analyze, understand, interact, and collaborate with each other in the learning
process.

In sum, this theory is related to the research purpose when teaching a second language
because of the importance of visual attention when introducing a topic in the classroom. Students
build concepts and explore information on their own at the same time. Visual attention offers
opportunities to visual learners to explore new techniques in a measurable way. It is important to
take into account how color plus shape capture the students’ visual attention as well to assist the
learners’ learning process more successfully. Furthermore, visual elements help the learner
clarify concepts through authentic experiences, enhancing the stimulus of the senses, letting them
choose what is best for them. In other words, the individual has the ability to decide whether the
source of information is adequate for his/her purposes, or if the source of information should be
ignored. Despite the fact that students are not fully aware about this theory and its implications,
the students’ communicative abilities are based on the impact of the subject to which they are
exposed.
Visual aids with Meaningful Learning.

This theory proposes that teachers can assist students by linking their previous ideas or concepts with new ones. This process will make it easier to relate information in a meaningful way to new study elements, concepts, topics, ideas, etc. In Ausubel's (1963) view, students need to relate new knowledge to what they learned once in order to enhance meaningful learning.

David Ausubel (1963), was interested in promoting a route for learning meaningfully. Meaningful learning has practical aim to guide the students’ learning process within an educational model in order to improve classroom practice. Teachers director implement educational changes to make students orient their education process through creative thinking. The intention is to support this study with meaningful theory that incorporates visual aids. The activities that were developed contributed to learning through definition, repetition, connection, and demonstration of what the student sees.

This theory seeks to introduce relevant information with previous knowledge to build up a cognitive structure of concepts. For instance, conceptual maps are influential resources for introducing and connecting new concepts with previous ones. Relying on them will give a clear definition and connections. In turn, it allows this research process to lean on of the use of these tools to foster the development of the classes with meaningful learning. If the relationships between authentic experiences and meaningful learning are brought up, it would foster the students’ creativity to have a more meaningful outcome. Additionally, it would produce a connection between educational needs and the classroom atmosphere. Flexibility in the class would have to exist in order to get good learning results. Positive students, creativity, and openness to work are dependent upon associating and combining known concepts and tools with unknown ones, such as flashcards and posters.
Students need to be aware of and have control of their cognitive processes having a collection of learning strategies. This way, they know how to solve problems, pursue their goals, evaluate their learning process, recognize achievements and review their understanding of the study material. Students will have less need for explicit instructions when doing a task. They will be drawn into their own process of analyzing their thinking process by simply associating new knowledge with previous knowledge. They are able to clarify learning strategies by engaging previous knowledge with new knowledge introduced, remembering what they already know (Novak, 1998). Students create their own learning route to improve their acquisition of new concepts based on what they learned before through the use of visual aids, which emphasize whatever is being discussed. Most importantly, students are able to organize new information, promoting the active reception of that information. Through this development, students make relationships between concepts and meaning, as when they create conceptual maps and mind maps.

There were other proposals during the early 1960s regarding the technique of a mind map as a graphical representation of the brain. They considered this technique as a semantic network. Later Tony Buzan (1974) was interested in the importance of exploring with mind maps. Buzan considered mind maps as representation of ideas, words, concepts etc in a graphic way using colors, images, symbols, and signs embodying what was understood, interpreted, learned or known by students. This was a way to enhance creative thinking, communicative ability, thinking skills, learning skills, general intelligence and quickness of mind (Buzan, 2009) so students were capable of dealing with the association of unknown and known concepts. This is a reliable tool where students can include and improve upon their preferences, memory\(^1\), as

\(^1\) This concept backs up the visual attention theory.
well as the importance of knowledge as a way to reveal what was learned. However, it does not necessarily mean that meaningful learning is going to be developed by the students just by doing mind maps. This is just a tool that can provide certain advantages, guiding the students to discover their learning route. Nevertheless, other visual aids can offer those benefits, such as picture books, posters, or magazines. Moreover, students can be stimulated to link information to guarantee the acquisition of new concepts.

This theory has taken into consideration all of its inputs about the appropriate strategies used in the classroom in order to recognize the students’ prior knowledge and its importance of creating relationships among concepts and images in their learning process. Also, students are going to be able to remember information through visual images by adding new images containing relevant information for them. Using conceptual maps, magazines, posters, flashcards, whiteboard, pictures, and other visual aids will invite students to give their own ideas about the subject studied in the classroom, but most important, these tools will support students’ knowledge with previous information. These visual aids will help them to respond actively, be critical, and finally, procure knowledge and skills. Furthermore, visual aids are relevant to the research project by following a teaching methodology. However, it goes beyond that purpose, inviting students to pursue what they like the most as well as support their knowledge while remembering concepts and promoting the acquisition of knowledge in a free, but creatively manner.

Based on the previous explanation, it can be concluded that within the theoretical foundations of the research project the visual attention theory and meaningful learning theory are conjoined with one another. Since the first one gives the basis to come up with the didactic tools and the second one gives the pedagogical elements for the use of visual aids in the EFL
classroom teaching a second language. On the other hand, these two theories emphasize individual learning. However, it is necessary to take into consideration that collaborative learning is necessary to reinforce the individual learning.

**Team work for a mutual learning.**

Collaborative work in a classroom promotes an appropriate atmosphere for students by providing a more natural and meaningful learning environment. Furthermore, collaborative learning focuses more on the students’ active role in the classroom to clarify their needs and requirements. As Russian Lev Vygotsky (1978) stressed in his social communication interaction theories: students gain more knowledge when interacting with others. Through his social development theory, Vygostky, (1978) emphasized on how through social interaction, the student could generate an individual development that would benefit his/her cognitive development as well as his/her communicative abilities. As it has been proved it is necessary to foster team work in any classroom setting to provide enriching learning experiences for students.

Vygotsky (1978, p57) stated: "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals."

Collaborative learning-teaching satisfies the students’ needs by actively involving them into a process where feedback, negotiation of language, and evaluation of activities become relevant for them. In addition, collaborative learning enriches the students’ cognitive development.

Another important psychologist, Piaget (1954) stated that learning from one another has an important role in growing students’ cognitive development. He complemented his learning
Theories by demonstrating that students needed to interact with others, in order to have reflective minds and comprehensive knowledge of things, especially when they are learned or adopted from one another.

It is essential to emphasize how collaborative learning develops oral communication and social skills, uses team approach, encourages diversity, sponsors a positive classroom environment, promotes higher goal-achievements, etc. Adopting collaborative teamwork during this project encourages students to have a more positive attitude that will favor their learning experience.

The Social-psychologist, Douglas McGregor, proposed his X-Y theory in 1960. He acknowledged the importance of motivation in the human being as a way to generate good results among people. Active participation, the concern of the individual’s well-being, rechecking and solving conflicts between teachers and students, working through influences as well as differences, exhorting people to change roles and human growth were some intentions taken into consideration by McGregor’s (1960, 1990) research. Individuals should be active participants in their work place to solve problems. Each person’s sense of responsibility plays a major role in their own growth by being natural and believing that everything is possible. Certainly, a classroom offers social events where students share a communicative purpose. Additionally, learning strategies are essential to highlight the importance of integrating the use of visual aids so that students recognize things like motivation, recognition, appreciation, and acceptance of different opinions, in order to go through the teaching-learning process successfully.

Ann Lieberman (1985) defines collaborative learning as an opportunity of working together, in order to share experiences. The purpose of creating interaction in a classroom setting
is to obtain positive results, where students can develop and improve their communicate performances. Through contact with one another, students can master the acquisition of a second language by interacting all the time.

The intention of this project is to look for answers of how visual aids help students to acquire a second language by taking into account the collaborative learning which is important to meet the students’ social needs, interests, and cultural background. Thus, teaching a second language requires the teacher to bear in mind the social characteristics of the group. Besides, students should be encouraged to be active participants of the education processes that help students to be leaders in their own learning process. Learning is intrinsically a social structure that allows a student to work on his\her communicative abilities. In other words, collaborative learning is centered on the students’ purpose of their activities that build on social engagement for a common effort; something that students need to be exposed to all the time. For instance, visual aids can allow students to get closer to real thematic situations, such as culture, society, economy, religion, sports, music, art etc. Here, students can be motivated to create communication by giving and discussing their points of view, something that I decided to encourage when teaching the second language.

Another important theorist, Kenneth A. Bruffee defines collaborative learning as “parameters in the social construction of a social reality” (Bruffee, 1993). Collaborative learning facilitates bringing social reality within the classroom to work on real social problems, making education more meaningful and effective than conventional education (Bruffee, 1993). It is necessary to consider that the students’ education cannot depend exclusively on teachers, but also on themselves. Thus, visual aids provide some social teaching strategies, such as group inclusion to solve problems, dialogic teaching, involvement and social responsibility. Moreover,
the use of visual tools in the teaching-learning process of a second language will require learners
to work collaboratively, exposing them to real learning experiences in which learning from each
other will engage everyone reflectively. Accordingly, Bruffee (1993), supports the axiological
strategies (respect, fraternity, understanding each other, dialog, tolerance etc) to be implemented
during the action research project. Teaching a second language cannot be isolated from the
values and principles established in any society.

The document of Science Learning Environment Research led by Etkina, & Van (2007),
considers how educators can develop a learning environment. It investigates how students learn
physics by engaging the activities of physicists with concepts. The use of interaction assisted in
the acquisition of concepts and the development of some individual abilities. The results of this
research were positive because of four factors: physical; relationships; expectations; language
and communication. This supports Collaborative Learning Theory. Therefore, as seen during this
research project, a collaborative education concept improved the process of teaching physics.
Collaborative education can also benefit the process of teaching English as a second language
through the use of visual aids. While students are acquiring a second language, they can also be
active participants promoting their communicative competences. Mutual exploration, problem-
solving, and feedback, lead to a better understanding of the students’ immediate needs.

In sum, collaborative work using visual aids can help discover each student’s potential
through motivation and integration. The classroom is a privileged place where the teaching-
learning process as an interactive model is used to promote social skills for students. It could be
more meaningful if this pedagogical strategy is included in the classroom. It is necessary to set
up a positive classroom environment where students can interact with one another and where
students pair up to check their own work, think in pairs, create team group roles, influence each
other, recognize each other’s work, and solve particular issues. Moreover, this research project looks to endorse students into building social relationships intellectually and the growth of the axiological social principles. There are various performance levels among students. We need to guide those levels toward a common goal. In this sense, everyone needs to be interested in others’ opinions by working collaboratively to improve critical thinking. If we apply and use these strategies as a pedagogical tool in the classroom, there could be more effective teacher-student, student-teacher, and student-student interactions while improving the students’ cognitive and psychomotor skills along with improving the communicative competences.

**Learning Style Theory.**

This theory involves methods of education to identify the students’ learning style. It is important to know which method favors an individual to learn best. Ensuring the use of a particular method could interact with the student and knowledge, taking the concepts effectively, and finally assimilating the information by using the ability that each student possesses to create academic models within themselves. This model of learning style was originated by David Kolb (1981), who through his experimental learning research wanted to find out the individual’s variety of preferences. Also he wanted to exhort teachers to assess the students’ learning style in order to adapt their methods used in their classroom to fit each individual’s learning style. The model engages a process of learning by using four learning stage cycles including: concrete experience, abstract conceptualization, reflective observation and active experimentation. “Most people develop learning styles that emphasize some learning abilities over others” (Kolb, 1984, p.68). These four cycles must be known by students who are developing strengths based on their experience. These learning cycles are explained by Kolb, (1984) as: Concrete experience which involves ideas and experiences, and students’ feelings. Abstract conceptualization that
emphasizes on thinking about new ideas, such as theories and concepts. Reflective observation focuses on internalizing information. The last cycle is called Active experimentation in which students look for accomplishing their goals. Students have reflective understanding of issues.

Moreover, Kolb’s (1984) observation in his research led him to come up with four learning styles in which there is a relationship between the learning cycles orienting the student to the preferred method and where the teacher can rely on to observe the student’s meaningful learning style. There are some such as: Convergent- This learning style depends on theorizing practical issues. Kolb (1984) made a relationship between convergent and AC-AE when students do and think, moving from theory to practice and back. Divergent- This learning style takes into account action and reflection. They are also open-minded by considering others’ points of view, Kolb (1984). In addition, he made the relationship between divergent and CE-RO because these students’ give importance to their feelings and to watching experiences. Assimilative- This learning style relies on theorizing and reflection. Associating watching and thinking with AC-RO, Kolb (1984). These students pay more attention to concepts than people. Accommodation- This learning style stated by Kolb (1984) as based on pragmatism and action. These students (accommodators) carry out plans supported by other people’s analysis taking action. The students who used this learning style are initiatives, working in groups. They always find the practical solution of a certain problem and enjoy the results from those experiences. Their common sense is absolutely useful when achieving their goal. Kolb (1984) related this learning style with CE-AE, since students who like this style are characterized by doing and feeling.

Teachers should enrich the individual’s interest, no matter the learning style combination students go by. The teacher enhances the student’s abilities to learn and focuses on facilitating individual growth, adapting their teaching method in the classroom.
Everyone has to be a facilitator, especially in the classroom, recognizing that the learning style is a way to generate new ideas. The importance here is to identify those learning styles to encourage one’s practice in order to improve it and also to look up for students’ attitudes toward learning (Hills, 2003). Howard Hills in his research about individuals’ preferences, agreed with Kolb’s theory stating that the purpose to establish certain learning styles within the classroom will orient the teacher to a better practice. Furthermore, it is important to relate to one of these learning styles to find the relationship between styles and personality (Kolb, 1984).

This theory is important for this project, since a learning style is a method used in classrooms to allow each individual to learn best. In addition, this theory supports the development of the project by effectively engaging the learning process with the student’s preferences. It is very significant the way the student feels, thinks, does, and watches their own learning process within the classroom. They have to be protagonists of their own learning process, satisfying their needs, interests, and likes among others.

In conclusion, these referents (theories and theorists) allowed the teacher-researcher to establish fundamental contributions to the research project as a result of the theoretical analysis from each construct. This required to turn up with useful research strategies as an evidence of the conscious study of the project, allowing the teacher-researcher to obtain functional results from it.

The Visual Attention Theory highlights attention, memory and visual awareness to stimulate the brain for a full cognitive development, and the student benefits with a better understanding of knowledge obtained from visual perception. Visual attention offers to students learning opportunities to explore new knowledge.
The Collaborative Learning Theory allows for social integration and social thinking through coexistence, in favor of acquisition of knowledge stimulating students’ communicative abilities. Moreover by adopting collaborative team work in the classroom students’ learning abilities can improve taking into account that the students’ role is important to fulfill their cognitive, social and communicative skills. At last, this theory makes emphasis on visual intelligence and interpersonal intelligence through the interaction between students in the classroom.

On the other hand the Meaningful Learning Theory relies on previous knowledge, exploring new concepts and creative thinking that promotes didactic help to acquire an L2 through mental networks. The importance of this theory is how to promote a route for learning meaningfully having in mind the link of students’ background knowledge and new one to introduce in order to build up a cognitive structure of concepts.

The last important theory is learning style in which there is a need to identify students’ likes and dislikes, without imposing methods of teaching in a classroom, but being proactive participants of changing and making our students be their own participants in the educational process. Finally, taking into consideration this theory can help the teacher to decide whether the method used in the classroom is appropriate or not for each individual, making the practice more relevant attempting to educate everyone.

In order to develop the research project, it was necessary to point out the specific type of research that was going to be carried out as well as the characteristics of the population and the tools that were going to be used. It was also important to explain the process of collecting data.
Research Design

Qualitative-Action Research Study.

In order to achieve these goals, the foundation of this project was based on the Action Research method and the necessary tools to accomplish those goals. This method states that the teacher and the student’s role should be active and they should be taken into consideration to find and evaluate the results of the action research project. According to Schmuck (1997), the action research project should be an endeavor to “study a real school situation in order to improve the quality of actions and results” (Schmuck, 1997, p.29). Its intention is to look for the teacher’s improvement, taking into account the student and their surrounding context.

That is why this method was so relevant to the project, since it followed the design of an action research plan that helped to reflect upon the teaching intervention in an ELF classroom. It was also significant to generate a stimulating environment for the learners, finding out their answers about their understanding of the language. Involving the peers in this process was the best thing to do, because they were the most important agents during the development of this action research project. More importantly, they were aware of the need to change the dynamic presented to them in the classroom. Their opinions were very important for the improvement of the class.

The qualitative action research method finds a solution to the classroom’s problems, devoting the teacher’s professional practice to improve the education system. This methodology allows teachers to have reflective teaching in order to improve their teaching strategies and to promote change in the way the students are being taught in the classroom. Here, the following elements should be taken into consideration: interaction, commitment, recognition and understanding of the classroom phenomena.
As it has been mentioned before, action research needs to go hand in hand with theoretical and practical exercises in order to focus on classroom problematic situations and addressing questions that may arise. As Carr and Kemmis (1986, p.113) stated, “Teaching...can only be understood by reference to the framework of thought in terms of which its practitioners make sense of what they are doing. Teachers could not even begin to ‘practise’ without some knowledge of the situation in which they are operating and some idea of what it is that needs to be done”. (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p.113).

In other words, it is important to identify through the teachers’ professional development how a classroom setting becomes a social place that generates situations where by being critical, observing, and reflecting upon those conditions, social situations could be improved, offering a better education to students.

Finally, the project wanted to advocate the importance of bringing up new didactic and pedagogical strategies to motivate our learners to have a better understanding of the language. That way, they could achieve their communicative competences in a second language.

**Research Participants and Research Setting.**

This research study was done at Franciscano del Virrey Solis. This school was founded in 1944. It is a co-ed, private school, with an emphasis on Catholicism, and with its PEI oriented towards a Franciscan philosophy. With a student body of about 2000, the male population is a lot bigger than the female population, since the school used to be a male only school.

The school’s mission seeks to advance the students’ spiritual, religious and ethical formation as well as their intellectual growth. The school is committed to a student-centered education that provides the best education to generate reflective changes to the church and society challenges that students face to make them more fair and equal.
The school’s vision is to reach international high standards of education. It is important to achieve quality education. Thus, the school must promote research in order to have a high level of English among students and to strengthen their technological skills, without forgetting that they must go hand in hand with their Franciscan values. For this reason, the school has intensified the English classes to 10 weekly hours to reach those objectives.

The curriculum structure has divided the student body in 3 parts: the First Division (pre-school to second grade), the Second Division (third grade to seventh grade) and the Third Division (eight to eleven grade). Its schedule goes from Monday to Friday, from 6.45 am to 2.45 pm. Students received 8 hours of class every day. Therefore, they get 40 hours weekly and 10 of those hours are assigned to English class.

The research project was developed with 36 students from 8th grade that were in the Third Division. The grade was composed by 6 girls and 30 boys of the same race. Their ages ranged from 12 to 14 years old. Their social status ranges from 4 to upper status.

This grade showed strengths such as a discipline to do the exercises from the book, do homework on time, outstanding individual work, and an interest to learn. On the other hand, they showed weaknesses such as connecting homework with the real language purpose, difficulty to keep information in their memory, and poor interaction and communicative abilities to express their opinions in the second language. It was also noticed that the classroom’s learning environment did not have enough instructional material to enhance their learning process of the second language.

Grade 8-B was chosen within the three 8th grades that were part of the division, because of their willingness, dedication, responsibility and commitment to improving their communicative abilities in the acquisition of the second language. To make the research project
more reliable and to account for ethical issues of the project, it was necessary to give the students a consent form that they had to sign, in which they accepted their voluntary participation. (See appendix No.1)

Instruments

To provide validity and reliability to this research project, it was important to take into consideration the participants’ opinions about their experience working with the visual tools, as well as teacher-researcher’s perceptions using the instructional material teaching a second language. Accordingly, some instruments were used in order to collect data, providing information to address the research project and to achieve the established objectives.

The following tools facilitated the procedure of data collection during classroom sessions with 8th B grade students:

Field Notes.

This instrument was used during 10 sessions. It looked for the structural as well as the organizational characteristics that created the classroom environment. As Burns suggested “Descriptions and accounts of observed events, including non-verbal information, physical settings, group structures, interactions between participants. Regular dated accounts of teaching/learning plans, activities and events, including personal philosophies, feelings, reactions, reflections and explanations” (Burns, 1999, p.85,86). Also, this method looked at how the students behaved, interacted, and followed the development of tasks and activities to identify individual strategies, challenges, likes and dislikes. In addition, field notes were useful to record students’ emotions, skills and attitudes toward visual aids from the teacher-researcher’s perception. This instrument was a personal but also reflective diary that included teacher-researcher’s thoughts, reflections and the students’ learning experiences. It was important to
know if the students enjoyed the activities performed in the EFL classroom using visual aids. The information recorded was during and after each session to provide more detailed events. The format of field notes was designed by the teacher-researcher taking into account the date, material, and topic as a framework. Also the format body was divided in three items: 1: Classroom Environment- included recording physical and classroom atmosphere as well. 2: General Observations- involved recording the students’ behavior and general attitudes and the use of visual aids. 3: Reflections- involved recording the teacher-researcher’s perceptions upon what was seen and observed during the teaching intervention. (See Appendix No.2)

Interviews and transcripts.

The teacher-researcher considered this instrument very important to collect data because it allowed students to explain their real and personal opinions. Based on Kvale’s (1996) contributions, interviews are very useful because it describes the participants’ experiences and opinions. The interviewer needs to understand what the interviewee wants to convey, in other words to interpret what the interviewee responds. Before conducting the interview a piloting was done to 4 students to qualify the questions of the official interview. It followed Structure questions that were designed by the teacher-researcher to ask to all interviewees their opinions about the use of visual aids in an EFL classroom to improve their communicative abilities; since this design facilitated faster interviews that could be more easily analyzed and compared for this reason it was necessary to transcribe the interview. As Freeman (1998) suggests transcripts are the essential written forms of students’ verbal recordings in which the researcher can examine students’ interventions. The teacher-researcher provided confidentiality and anonymity when performing the interview.

There were two interviews designed during the data collection:
Interview N° 1.

There were 10 students interviewed during their break time. The students that were interviewed participated voluntarily as it was looked for the student to have a spontaneous participation. The purpose was to gather more information from the students and take into account the students’ personal opinions in order to give more validity to the action research process. The interview was conducted in English; however, some of the students answered in Spanish. (See Appendix No.3)

Interview N° 2.

The second interview was conducted to 10 different students and followed the same selection procedure as the first one, but the questions were different because the interview was conducted after collecting the data. The purpose was to look for the students’ opinions about how visual aids had had an impact in their communicative abilities, if so. (See Appendix No.4)

Transcripts.

The interviews were recorded in audio-tape individually which it required the teacher-researcher to transcribe them in order to analyze them. There were some conventions used to identify interviewee’s answers, such as question, surprise, exclamation, excitement, continuation of a conversation (not relevant) and explanation of an action, activity or waiting (See Appendix No.5)

Surveys.

As Tanur (1992) suggested, surveys are a valid and reliable source to collect data. Make it simple and understandable to obtain a quick and complete answer, do not forte to consider
disaggregation and confidentiality issues. The objective was to design a survey that included questions and background information about visual aids to obtain responses from students and improve their learning experience.

There were two surveys designed with different purposes to collect more reliable and valid information:

Survey No. 1.

A survey was handed out to each student at the beginning of the academic period during one session. The idea was to make a diagnosis of which visual aids could benefit students based on their likes, understanding, and approval. A survey was designed to help the teacher-researcher know the students’ preferences about visual tools to help the students learn the L2 more successfully. The survey included multiple choices. (See Appendix No.6)

Survey No. 2.

It was done after collecting data. The purpose was to obtain reliable data to determine which visual aids benefited students the most. Students answered the survey in one session, following the teacher-researcher’s guidelines. A survey was designed to know the students’ preferences about visual tools that could help them meet their learning goals. The survey included two multiple-choice questions and a space where students could write their suggestions, comments or opinions. (See Appendix No.7)

Photographs.

The use of this instrument provided information collected during the sessions. This included students’ outcome, group interaction, workplace, classroom settings, and classroom atmosphere to focus more clearly on the physical environment and to get an idea of
how the classroom functioned. Freeman (1998) has drawn awareness of how photographs can be included as a research tool, which captures researcher’s attention about the classroom social practices. This instrument enriched the analysis of the data by having another source of information to illustrate what was observed in the field notes.

**Collecting Data Procedure**

The data were collected in various ways and sessions. The methodology and theoretical framework of this research followed the qualitative action research model. Observation, application and interpretation of instruments, and data collection were the main techniques used to gather information appropriately.

After the diagnostic week, the teacher-researcher identified some problems in the communicative abilities in the English class, such as listening and speaking skills. In the following weeks, the teacher-researcher introduced visual aids as a strategy to assist the acquisition of the second language and to promote spontaneous speaking. During this process, the main question of the research project was made after it was noticed that the students were drawn to using them in class.

Every day, visual aids were used before the class. The teacher-researcher also made certain that students were working in groups of four students or in pairs. This way, they had the opportunity to generate active learning, work on different things, and get to work with different people to benefit themselves.

Each session combined teaching strategies such as interaction, expectations, diversity, respect, responsibility, and teamwork, among others. In each session, the teacher-researcher explained the procedure of the class, the agenda, objectives to achieve the specific day, and the target visual aids; but the most important thing was to fulfill the students’ expectations about the
topic of the class. The idea was to present interesting and different techniques to capture the
students’ attention and expose a variety of ways to teach a class by using visual aids, but also
exploit their creativity and skills to accomplish their communicative abilities.

The process to collect the data followed the basic elements established in the grounded
theory of qualitative research which focused on: gathering information, labeling, grouping,
categorizing and making propositions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The idea was to find a sequence
during the analysis of the data collection. Labeling was used to facilitate the data analysis
process of the research project to achieve diversity in emergent categories establishing the
findings (Glaser, 1992).

Gathering information process was done throughout the academic year conducting the
surveys and interviews as well as recording the field notes accompanied by photographs.
Collecting data was very important such as recorded the students’ participation and the teacher-
researcher’s reflection providing validity and reliability to the project, especially in the field
notes.

After collecting the data an analytic reading was done to label the findings in the field
notes, the transcript of the interview, and the interpretation of the systematic process of the
surveys, keeping in mind the main question and the sub-questions using certain colors and
shapes to do the conceptual label. Here, it was necessary to relate instruments, based on their
characteristics, to do the conceptual labeling.

The next step was to group the labeled information and to find similarities among the
field notes, transcript of the interview and the survey systematization.
After grouping a categorization was done of what emerged from the data collection. The categories were named based on their commonalities and similar characteristics among them bearing in mind the questions and the sub-questions of the action research project.

The last step was making propositions taken as a foundation the interpretation of the information that gave the support to draw conclusions, expectations and results.

Another important thing was to establish pedagogical and didactic strategies that promoted communicative competences. In order to do this, the teacher-researcher created an instructional design. The objective was to give clear rules on using visual aids to accomplish the objectives of a lesson.
Instructional Design: Visual Aids to Promote Communicative Competences With a Didactic and Pedagogical Perspective

In every single teaching-learning process there is a meaningful influence of the dimensional sensory of the human being that can be a facilitator to acquire new knowledge. An important amount of what humans know usually comes from what we see, so it is good to rely on visual aids to build up effective ways to teach a second language. Such tools can assist the teacher in the English foreign language classroom where images speak for themselves. Hence, they support the language process which can promote communicative competence, achieving the appropriate acquisition of the language by illustrating concepts, ideas, and information. This way, the students’ understanding and preservation of knowledge can last longer.

The pedagogical plan of this research project used different visual aids in each session that combined diverse teaching techniques, such as social interaction, team work, visual memory and creativity with a formative intentional that promoted respect, responsibility and tolerance. In each session, the researcher explained the procedure of the class, the agenda, objectives, and the visual aids that would assist the language learning process; but the most important thing was to fulfill the students’ expectations about the topic of the class that draw the students’ attention and expose them to a variety of ways of learning a subject.

Definition of a research problem, objectives, and methodology, were the research fundamentals required to elaborate an instructional design in which the pedagogical intention was to answer several problems identified during a diagnostic week in 8th grade at the Franciscano del Virrey Solis school. There were problems such as lack of use of visual aids in the classroom to assist the acquisition of any knowledge, linguistic problems, low English level, the methodology used by the students to learn the L2 (only focus on grammatical structures) etc.
In order to give answers to those current problems with 8th graders, the project had the implementation of visual aids as a starting point to evaluate its pertinence in the learning-teaching process of a second language. There were three sessions in the first 3 academic periods, and one session in the last one. In other words, the research project was done from February until October of 2010.

The following is an explanation of the instructional design adopted with the 8th graders in the classroom. There is use of visual aids with the objectives, methodology, pedagogical and didactic strategies. There are visual aids with their activities and the evaluation designed by the teacher-researcher looking for reaching the institution’s evaluative objectives.

Objectives

**General Objective**

To develop communicative competences in the L2 through the use of visual aids to invigorate oral expression, creating a safe class environment where the students’ motivation is stimulated.

**Specific Objectives**

To identify which visual aids are relevant to teach the L2 to 8th graders.

To stimulate active participation, collaborative team work and interaction among students in an atmosphere where there is a meaningful linguistic learning process.

To determine the impact of visual aids through students’ assessment.

**Teaching Methodology**

The teacher-researcher of this project chose to base her teaching methodology on the communicative approach. This approach goes hand in hand, since the main objective is to
acquire the L2 in a participatory which its main purpose is to help students develop their communicative competences in a sociable way.

The Communicative approach focuses its teaching on working around communicative purposes to stimulate communicative skills. As Swain (1985) suggests that it is necessary to look for creating tasks and activities where students emphasize on interaction to learn the language. Its main interest is to communicate and interact with others in real contexts and situations, such as daily routines, classroom situations, world-wide issues, and occupations among others. Facing such situations takes the students to learn the second language throughout a social construction based on their daily needs. “Language-learning success is to be assessed neither in terms of accurate grammar and pronunciation for their own sake, nor in terms of explicit knowledge of the rules, but by the ability to do things with the language, appropriately fluently and effectively “ (Cook, 2003 p.36). In the classroom, lessons should be done to achieve the communicative competence in a second language without any structure. The emphasis of this approach is the interaction as a way to create a social need to promote communication in the EFL classroom. It is necessary to socialize with students in order to generate a space where the learner can identify his or her own output; but this also allows for team work, which they can learn from each other.

Learning a language is not an easy task, especially when it is learnt in an EFL classroom. Students tend to use their mother tongue all the time, so the target language becomes harder to acquire. Here teachers play an important role to minimize the second language pitfalls by providing relevant guidance when teaching the second language (Swain, 1985). For this reason, teachers should have in mind the importance of creating a scaffolding in the students’ acquisition of the language. Based on this, Vygotsky (1978) suggested the “zone of proximal development”,
indicating that a teacher’s guidance or peer guidance are necessary to generate cognitive development. The teacher becomes the bridge between students and knowledge, facilitating their cognitive development. Additionally, scaffolding facilitates the students’ internalization of new information based on prior knowledge. Vygotsky defined scaffolding teaching as the “role of teachers and others in supporting the learner’s development and providing support structures to get to that next stage or level” (As cited by Raymond, 2000, p. 176). Teachers need to generate tasks or activities for students to acquire the second language, including constant communication to one another which supports a communicative approach that stimulates the students’ communicative abilities.

Students need to have the opportunity to share their expectations, solutions, needs and understanding of the language with the teacher’s help. This is why providing comprehensive activities is the key to improve the students’ learning experience when acquiring the second language.

Vigostky (1978) made it clear in his theory of zone of proximal development (ZPD) how the teacher and classmates are supervisors of the students’ progression and cognitive development. Helping students increase their knowledge and the need to scaffold the students’ acquisition of a second language have a significant value for the educational field. This popular theory endeavors the project by emphasizing the need to establish ZPD in the classroom, as students rely on the teacher’s intervention for a successful acquisition of the language by communicating their ideas, thoughts and comments about any topic.

This approach and the zone of proximal development were relevant for the project, because it guided the methodology of the lessons. It is important to renew the instruction, content and pedagogy in the classroom. The teaching strategies of this project had its basis on the
previous mentioned approach and the ZPD to introduce or strengthen teaching methods such as the participatory manner (communicative approach), and creation of scaffolding helped the students acquire the language in a sociable manner. The idea of this project was to facilitate the learner with an easy but consequential acquisition of the language. The students needed to be able to build up grammatical structures to enhance their communicative competences.

In addition, the use of this teaching approach allowed the teacher-researcher to offer learning atmosphere in the classroom and to promote students’ interest, motivation, constant communication, wellbeing, respect and interaction.

The students were able to rely on their communicative performance to develop the activities proposed in the EFL classroom. The integration of communicative abilities was necessary in order to teach vocabulary, grammatical structures, concepts, slangs, greetings and social patterns when facing certain situations, to accomplish language development.

The teacher-researcher’s role became a mediator to support the students’ linguistic learning process, promoting communicative competences in the L2. The students' errors were an open window for treatment error, promoting correction and linguistic behaviors between student-student and teacher-student. This was seen as an opportunity to provide a constructive and supportive feedback without interfering in the development of activities, which looked to not put the students’ affective filter at risk. It was the students’ responsibility to have an active participation where interaction, integration, team work, collaboration, and collective work were the route to learn from one another stimulating the acquisition of the second language in a communicative way.

To address the main problem of this project, the research considered communicative approach the most appropriate to base its pedagogical and didactic strategies in the acquisition of
the L2 assisted by visual aids, since students could develop their communicative competences of the language and content themes while creating a safe classroom environment.

The use of this teaching approach of the second language required some pedagogical and didactic strategies to deepen upon the pertinence of the visual aids in the ELF classroom.

**Pedagogical and Didactic Strategies**

In order to develop lesson plans, it was necessary to design cognitive, psychomotor and axiological strategies to have clear expectations of what students needed and to improve their acquisition of a second language. The following are the strategies that were developed with the explanation of what the teacher-researcher looked for in each session:

**Cognitive Strategy.**

This strategy makes reference about how to do things. The student acquires new knowledge and how their linguistic learning process is being monitored to define their functionality (faster, better and easier). The purpose of implementing this strategy during the sessions was to facilitate or support the students’ knowledge as they built up their internal route that allowed them to understand the variety of information given to them, which ultimately was reflected on their communicative performance level. Furthermore, they knew where they were in order to improve their language acquisition, which benefited them to come up with their own cognitive strategies (association, organizing information, scanning information, among others). This was used to look for ways to assist students in learning important topics through the use of visual material. The strategy was frequently implemented by the teacher-researcher and executed by the students. It is important to point out that there were an emphasis on the explanation of text materials, the introduction of different topics, and the teaching of new vocabulary to achieve the
psychomotor strategy (communicative performance); in other words, to facilitate the students’ information acquisition process assisted by instructional material (visual aids).

**Psychomotor Strategy.**

Psychomotor strategies work on how the students evidence the acquisition of knowledge through some linguistic behavior patterns. The students were able to develop the strategy through some imitation, management of knowledge, implementation of information, expression of what was learned, and the interpretation of the specific topic learned in the classroom; stimulated through individual and team work activities, looking for the confirmation of the cognitive strategy that was previously carried out. The success of developing this strategy was based on the activities proposed in each session. Besides, the psychomotor strategy went beyond that to meet the individual needs. It also looked to promote social abilities, such as social behaviors and attitudes, making the teacher-researcher adopt an axiological strategy in the classroom.

**Axiological Strategy.**

Following the institutional philosophy and the principle that education is not simply to transmit contents but also it emphasizes in the necessity to help the human being to become an ethical, moral and axiological person. This strategy highlighted on respect, tolerance, listening, dialogue, and honesty worked all the time. It did not have a specific moment to implement it because it is a formative process that took place while the students were working.

**Dynamic Inter-Relationship.**

In the following box are the three strategies along with the intention and the activities for each one of them. They are part of the dynamic inter-relationship among them, as it is seen in the box below. The cognitive strategy makes emphasis on “what and for what”; the psychomotor
makes emphasis on the “how”; and, the axiology strategy makes emphasis on the “why” as a social functionality. The what, the how and the why facilitated the development of activities and the creation of meaningful and responsible intentions in the educational experience for teacher-researcher and the students of this project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive Dimensions</th>
<th>Intention</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acquisition</td>
<td>To acquire new knowledge to enlarge and/or reinforce what has been acquired.</td>
<td>Association, scanning, visualization, memorization, modeling among others through the exercises done in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defines</td>
<td>To identify the information acquired.</td>
<td>Giving his/her own concept through the use instructional materials. Verbalization of what it is seen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection/Inter-relationship.</td>
<td>To link and organize concepts and information with what was learned previously.</td>
<td>Elaboration of mind maps, conceptual maps using abbreviations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstration</td>
<td>To express through communicative competences and communicative abilities the acquisition of the knowledge.</td>
<td>Socialization through oral presentations, role plays and mingling activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychomotor Dimensions</th>
<th>Intention</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation</td>
<td>To establish the performance of the topic.</td>
<td>Construction of mind maps, posters and dialogues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection</td>
<td>To choose information based on what is learned following a</td>
<td>Scanning information.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Visual Aids in the Classroom**

The following visual aids were used in the EFL classroom to assist the linguistic learning process and to develop the communicative competences. Additionally, there is a brief explanation of their importance, what their purpose was, and how the teacher-researcher relied on them to succeed in teaching an L2. Along with each visual aid, there are some activities that were carried out in the classroom. Moreover, each activity was developed with the different visual aids (activities did not have to stick with a particular visual aid).

**Flashcards.**

Flashcards assisted the teacher to create different tasks for students, such as finding new vocabulary, memorizing, describing things, matching pictures, doing comparisons, and
speculating. This was a useful tool for students to have different perspectives of things, but most importantly, it emphasized on whatever was being said. The flashcards were designed by the teacher-researcher based on the classroom’s and sessions’ needs.

**General Activities:**

a. **Warm up Activity:** The flash cards were presented to the students to introduce the topic.

b. **Introduction of new vocabulary:** The teacher-researcher presented some flashcards to explain or introduce new vocabulary to the class. On one side of the card, there was a picture. The word was on the other side of the card. Students were able to infer information.

c. **Development of the topic:** The classroom was organized in teams. The teacher handed out a flash card to them to create short stories, expressing what they were looking at and also isolated words to make sure students could just start a conversation based on the given word. The flashcards were rotated among the groups.
and they served to clarify main topics. The main objective was to stimulate the communicative performance.

**d. Oral presentations:** During this activity, the teacher asked students to choose a flashcard randomly and show it to the whole class. This was taken as an assessment activity to know how much they understood from the topic, or how much reinforcement needed to be given.

**Discussion of Picture Books.**

The purpose of using this activity was to promote enthusiasm, motivation, learning, and to achieve the explanation of students’ ideas through oral communication, dialogues and discussions. Students learned the language in a simpler context and in a natural manner when looking at the picture. By providing them this tool, the teacher-researcher assisted them to lose their language learning ability. This also enabled students to resort to visual sense increasing the students’ understanding and retention stage of any topic.
General Activities:

a. **Development of a specific topic:** The picture book was given to the students so that they could interpret an image and make a different story about what was given in the text. This work was done individually.

b. **Socialization:** Groups were arranged in order to socialize the story that they made up, based on a given text.

c. **Discussion:** Students selected the story that they believed was the most suitable for the topic. In the process of discussion, they could suggest changes to the story.

   Afterwards, they chose the person to explain their choice to the whole class.

**Posters in the Rote of Learning.**

Posters reinforced the topic studied in class. This was a reminder of key concepts and topics that were difficult for them to remember such as: irregular verbs, adjectives, body parts,
sports among others that students considered difficult to remember. This tool helped everyone in
the classroom to get organized and stimulate meaningful learning. Posters needed to be large,
clear, creative and simple to capture the students’ attention.

**General Activities:**

a. **Artist creative:** Each student selected a topic that was difficult in the language
   learning process to elaborate it. Students showed their creative authenticity to clarify
   their doubts.

b. **Mingling activity:** sharing, asking and answering information about their poster
   presented to the class by the teacher-researcher.

c. **Memory game:** The teacher-researcher elaborated two posters of the same topic. One
   picture had the images and the other picture had just isolated words. The students had
   to match the pictures when they opened them up.
Magazines for Collaborative Team-Work.

Magazines were accessible at any time to anyone. This tool allowed students to get closer to real thematic situations, such as culture, society, economy, religion, sports, music, art etc. In the process of acquisition of a second language, it is useful to dig deep in any topic. In addition, this could enrich the student’s vision about the world, life and interesting topics.

General Activities:

a. **Hot topics**: The teacher handed out some magazines with different articles to students, thus they had the opportunity to select their favorite topic or the one they considered to be polemic.

b. **Mind map**: Based on the previous activity and following the teacher-researcher’s guidelines of how to elaborate a mind map; the students elaborated a mind map according to the theme selected by them or the one studied in class.
c. **Socialization of mind map:** During this activity the students socialized with the classmates the mind map of the selected topic, taking into account what was studied in class.

**Taking Advantage of the Whiteboard.**

The whiteboard is the most vital equipment used in the schools. The teacher-researcher needed to write clearly, easily and be well organized concepts, ideas or words to understand the topic, in some sessions the teacher-researcher also used the board to draw pictures, images. This tool was fundamental in the teaching learning process, which required the use of visual strategies such as colors, structures, shapes, etc. Furthermore, the students use the whiteboard to create, give their criteria, and develop other topics. As a final objective the whiteboard was a fundamental tool of communication between teacher-researcher’s knowledge towards the students and vice-versa.

**General Activities:**

a. **Teacher’s diagrams:** The explanation of the topics was given on the whiteboard through structures, concepts, ideas and diagrams using different colors, and shapes to increase the visual memory and retention of any topic.

b. **Students’ diagrams:** The teacher motivated students to use the same strategy with topics investigated by them, so they could explain them before their classmates.

**Interesting Videos.**

The use of videos and movies reinforced lesson plans. Some difficult thematic subjects were easier to understand when the material was seen. Here, other aspects of the second
language could be studied, learned and interacted, such as culture, society, arts etc. Using this type of visual aid created excitement to the students to analyze the speakers’ message.

**General Activities:**

a. **Video forum:** The teacher-researcher posted questions to students to generate a discussion and in this way it was promoted communicative competences. The teacher also asked the students to analyze what they learned from the video.

b. **Role Play:** Students followed some linguistic patterns from the video to do a role play achieving the linguistic objective established for the session.

**Use of Conceptual Maps-Mind Maps.**

These tools facilitated the appropriation and relation of concepts of the topic developed in class. It is based on meaningful learning, hierarchization of concepts, and the creativity of its presentation.
General Activities:

a. **Manual conceptual map:** Students were able to elaborate a conceptual map according to a topic using colors, shapes and different forms. They had the chance to demonstrate their cognitive and psychomotor abilities.

b. **Use of C-maps tools:** The students used software to present their understanding of the topic, the organization of concepts, and the criteria they followed to develop a theme. Through the elaboration of C-maps, the students expressed their ability to innovate, execute well, and explain a conceptual map elaborated by them. But most importantly, the explanation in the second language using appropriate vocabulary to express their ideas with the help of C-maps.

**Note:** The implementation of the previous visual aids in the EFL classroom required students to be reminded about the axiological values that allowed a great development of teamwork skills.

**Evaluation**

The process followed three types of evaluation that comply with the institution’s requirements, such as the summative, formative, and integrative evaluation guidelines which went hand in hand with the teacher-researcher’s proposal, where hetero-evaluation, co-evaluation
and self-evaluation were the basis to know the pertinence of teaching an L2 through visual aids. In addition, the evaluation strategies followed the school’s guidelines that fulfill with the bimestrial schedule and the students’ performance. For this reason, the evaluation was qualitative and quantitative, following these school parameters:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
<th>Quantitative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>4.6 to 5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Sufficient</td>
<td>4.0 to 4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>3.5 to 3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Insufficient</td>
<td>2.5 to 3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very low</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.0 to 2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to emphasize that the teacher-researcher and the students made a joint evaluation where the linguistic acquisition was evaluated as a process and not as an evaluation of isolated concepts. Also, there was an invitation to students to be aware, honest, responsible and fair with their own process in the moment of doing the self-evaluation and co-evaluation.

**Integrative Evaluation between School’s and Researcher’s Guidelines**

The next table is the way the researcher illustrates and integrates her and the school’s requirements to evaluate students in each academic period. The evaluation attempted to improve, monitor, validate and justify the students’ and teacher-researcher’s learning-teaching process.
The table above shows the teacher-researcher’s evaluation intentions of how necessary it was to get the students involved. Moreover, the importance of making students aware of their own learning process in which their interests were being considered.

The idea of this scheme was that everyone felt a participant, but also responsible for the improvement of what he/she did in the classroom. After formulating the statement of the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School’s Guideline</th>
<th>Teacher-researcher’s Guidelines</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Who does it?</th>
<th>How to Evaluate?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summative</td>
<td>Hetero-evaluation</td>
<td>Appraising success of any project after completing it.</td>
<td>Teacher-Researcher</td>
<td>The teacher-researcher performed the evaluation through quizzes, open and close question, questionnaires, and suggestions/recommendations about the topics studied in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pedagogical Aspects:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Feedback</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Challenge and motivation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formative</td>
<td>Co-evaluation</td>
<td>Taking place throughout any project to direct future improvement. Collaborative and team work.</td>
<td>Students Teacher</td>
<td>The students were in charge of doing this evaluation of their classmates’ process during group work and socialization presentations. The teacher-researcher made pertinent feedback highlighting the strengths and to work on the weaknesses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pedagogical Aspects:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Potential role</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Clear objectives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative</td>
<td>Self-evaluation</td>
<td>Taking place all the time. Each student evaluated his/her own process according to their learning experience and axiological formation.</td>
<td>Each student, individually.</td>
<td>Each student was asked about the grade based on his/her academic performance and axiological formation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pedagogical Aspects:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Strengthening their autonomy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Perception of oneself</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
problem with its respective objectives, elaborating on the theoretical foundations, using teaching tools based on the proposed methodology, and creating an instructional design, the following step was to analyze the data based on what was collected.
Data Analysis

Visual Aids: a Strategy to Acquire a Second Language and to Promote Social Interaction

The fundamental concept of this research project is the effectiveness of the use of “Visual Aids” as a didactic tool that facilitates the acquisition of a second language as well as the teaching-learning process. The classroom is an important place where visual aids take part in a cognitive and pedagogical sense, favoring the students’ meaningful learning as well as the teacher-researcher’s meaningful teaching.

This research project looked to identify the characteristics of visual aids, promoting communication in a second language as well as social interaction in a non-bilingual school, which allows 8th graders to study English 10 hours a week. In order to accomplish this objective, it was necessary to use three tools: surveys, field notes and interviews with transcripts. They helped to support the coherent progress of the action research process, allowing the identification of some categories that support the findings of this project. Furthermore, the project followed a set of action research principles, norms, guidelines, and values.

After following the grounded theory guidelines that emphasize labeling and grouping and categorize the collection of data, 3 categories were found:

a. Human Relationships: A space for social responsibility

b. Previous Knowledge linked with new knowledge: From image to creativity.

c. Visual Focus: An engagement to learn
These categories were the result obtained in the analysis of data collection, and they emerged through the labeling and the conceptual grouping process, answering the main question of the action research project about the identification of visual aids and the characteristics that favor the successful learning of an L2 with 8th graders.

**Human Relationships: A space for social responsibility**

The classroom is an open space where communication comes up as the result of a relationship between the students, the teacher, and knowledge itself. In this space, people try to grow as individuals, acquiring social abilities that improve their human relationships. When inquiring the characteristics of visual aids to improve communicative abilities in a second language, the concept of human relationships emerged. It is a space for social responsibility, which is of great importance in the development of activities in the classroom.

The social aim was to foster collaborative work and the students’ commitment following social skills such as respectful communication, following rules, solving a problem, learning to disagree, behavioral awareness, showing appreciation, etc. In order to accomplish the objective and goals of each activity, students were encouraged to work on self-control, emphasizing social responsibility in the form of good behavior, where the axiological dimension was a reminder during social interaction.

This category allowed the project to value the theoretical inputs from Piaget (1954), McGregor (1960, 1990), Freire (1971), Vygotsky (1978) and Bruffee (1993) about the importance of nurturing social abilities in a teaching-learning experience in the classroom, in order to favor the construction of individual as well as group knowledge, where the individual can demonstrate his/her communicative and social abilities. Collaborative learning needs to
become a facilitator in the classroom which makes education more meaningful (Lieberman, 1985).

In this category called “Human Relations: a space for social responsibility” is understood as social skills manifested by the students when they interact with each other and where they show positive and negative attitudes. Thus, a couple of sub-categories have emerged: co-learning and social resistance.

**Co-learning: An opportunity for fraternal correction**

Everyone was determined to work together to accomplish the construction of knowledge, considering commitment and social responsibility. This helped students to have reflective minds on what they were learning in the classroom. By working in teams, they had the opportunity to understand different ways of thinking and approaching one another. Furthermore, it was evident that students could learn better from one another: When certain difficulties arose regarding vocabulary, some of the students saw the importance of teaching or explaining effectively to those who could not understand from the teacher. It is suggested by some theorists such as McGregor (1960, 1990), that the construction of knowledge could be significant when influences, the acknowledgment of others’ points of view, and problem solving, answer the student’s own questions. Working with visual aids also made them come up with different solutions for the classroom, and made them learn how to work in groups to learn the L2, bearing in mind that interaction is the basis to enable students’ acquisition of knowledge.

This feature could be evidenced through the analysis of the Interview No.2 from October 25th, 2010 in which they were asked what they thought of the group work using visual aids.
Student No. 5: Cuando trabajamos en equipo y hacemos trabajos conceptuales las personas, entienden más y aportan ideas se logra un buen trabajo y resultado, además aprendemos a trabajar en equipo y nos divertimos aprendiendo.

Student No. 7: Con ayudas de nuestros compañeros hemos integrado más y hemos profundizado más en inglés y hemos aprendido más.

Looking at the students’ appreciations above, the activities done in class have made students learn how to help others and accept others’ opinions. Positive communication is therefore possible, which can improve relationships and communicative abilities. The students’ active learning proved that Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of collaborative learning is effective because it promotes individual development that increases the cognitive development of each student.

Students learned that building knowledge was based on the integration of individual needs as well as team work. Visual aids helped to motivate the students’ interest for classroom activities to respond to their needs, working toward a specific purpose. In the next example the teacher-researcher took into account the students’ answers from interview No. 2 from October 25th, in which they were asked what they thought about the dynamics of the class while working with visual aids.

Student No. 1: Que ha sido más sencillo con las ayudas visuales, todos comprendimos el tema y hay un trabajo más en equipo, donde todos los integrantes del grupo participamos y estamos satisfechos con nuestro trabajo, y que los posters nos ayudan a formar un trabajo bien hecho donde nosotros aportamos nuestro trabajo.

Students were motivated from the first activity until the last one, bearing “teamwork” in mind, as a need and social responsibility that allows any person to avoid selfishness and individualism, but also as a way to help others with their difficulties in learning a second language. They looked at this as a choice more than as a demand from the teacher-researcher, and as an opportunity to develop social skills in order to improve their communicative abilities in
the second language. Visual aids played an important role. These tools were the bridge for students to develop the activities enthusiastically, reflecting on their social and communication skills.

Here, students are showing the axiological sub-axes taught during class and as the school’s aim to enhance respect, fraternity, and friendship, to take them to a healthy co-existence. The following information was taken from field notes on February 15th, 2010.

*Student do not want to make mistakes, they really help each other developing their task, also they corrected among themselves.*

*Student No.1:* No diga “She have”, diga “She has”

*Student No.2:* Why

*Student No.1:* Because that is the grammatical way

*Student No.2:* O.k. Thanks very nice.

*In this example is noted how they really want to help each other and how respectful they are towards each other. (Teacher-researcher’s notes)*

Within the co-learning process, it was evident how students corrected themselves using positive communication. Information recorded in the field notes from February 22nd, 2010, where the activity was to have students walk around and ask one another about their likes and dislikes.

*Moving around in the classroom is great for them. They wanted to talk to other classmates different from the ones next to them. Respectfulness and appreciation of other’s comments and opinions were good. Helping each other and correcting mistakes was evident, as these two students commented:*

*Student No. 1:* I don’t like to{suam} (Student makes the mimic of swimming)

*Student No.2:* Oiga no, swimming?

*Student No.1:* Ahhh yes, I don’t like swim thanks and you

*The student accepted the classmate’s correction showing gratefulness upon the other classmate’s positive help.*
The teacher created activities to help students understand the use of practical experiences to create knowledge from social interaction. Persuasion was present when the teacher-researcher engaged students in every single activity and worked on individual and teamwork skills, allowing communication in the second language. Although some of them had a language barrier, their social skills and the exchanges of information made them realize about the need to put aside those limitations.

The EFL classroom environment was changing little by little. Students corrected themselves, paying attention to their language mistakes, but most importantly, over their attitudinal behavior. These can be seen in the field notes from March 2\textsuperscript{nd} when the students developed a conversation:

*These types of activities seemed to encourage students to learn by themselves and to help others.*

*Student No.1:* I don’t remember the pronunciation, but you don’t write the word with C is with K.

*Student No.2:* O.k. But I don’t know I am going check

*Student No.1:* No, preguntele a la teacher

*Student No. 2:* I look in the dictionary tonight

*Student No. 1:* O.k. Believe

*However, there was one student that called another “stupid” just because this one made the same mistake as the others, here some ownership and appropriateness of student’s behavior took him to realize that that was not so nice and he needed it to apologize.*

*In front of the whole class to demonstrate that he was mistaken and that the behavior adopted by him was not the best.*

The classroom was a setting for allowing personal reflection on the students’ behaviors at certain moments. The fact that some students called each other names and adopted wrong actions made them realize the importance of respecting one another. Remembering the Franciscan
principle about the fraternal correction with a meaningful and formative purpose was emphasized all the time.

In contrast, social resistance came up as a result of the human interaction.

**Social Resistance: A reality in the classroom**

Social resistance emerged during the activities that required team work; there was some social resistance among students in class. The concept of working in groups was a new thought for them, especially when they were working in teams and they were not meeting their own expectations, such as improving their knowledge. Some of them thought that helping others would hold them back. However, the results obtained were very positive. The environment created was key to this process. They were aware of the concept of working together and their acceptance of doing so to allow a good development of activities. As Freire (1976) suggested, there is a need to create a dialogue in which negative and positive aspects will appear. In any interaction, any human can transmit his or her expectations and values to the group, realizing that he or she is different. Consequently, having different opinions or not agreeing with another person is going to be a reality. What is important is how to address those differences (as cited by Figueiredo-Cowen, Gastaldo, 1995).

Students were required to work in groups of 4 to develop a role play and look for solutions to learning-related problems about how to greet people in any setting. In the beginning, they had in mind that they had to work individually as they usually do, but the teacher-researcher explained to them that one of the objectives of the class was to work in teams. Some of them agreed and liked the idea, but others were reluctant to do so. There were two domains that guided
the teacher-researcher to do the class in this manner: self-development and self-reflection. These two domains were integrated in the classroom.

The following information was collected from the field notes from March 2nd, 2010, when students had to get in groups of 4 people to develop a role play about greetings and closing remarks using a poster in any setting (Restaurant, home, hospital etc).

Some students disagreed with the teacher by the selection of the teams, but I mentioned them that it was important to try out with different people. They insisted in creating their own groups but students were not listening to my suggestions.

One student stated: No voy a trabajar con ella porque ella no sabe English (Direct Comment).

Teacher: I stated, Why don’t you give her the chance to show you that she can and she is giving her best, your responsibility is to guide her if she doesn’t know but you won’t help her if you don’t have any solutions but problems, so get to work now.

In the example above, it is evident how they were unwilling to work with other classmates. Based on this, the teacher-researcher had to be a mediator between students to make them aware of the importance of working together to make progress with their communication skills. Based on McGregor’s (1960, 1990) X-Y theory, it is important to state the need to encourage students to participate in order to improve by recognizing the effort of others and succeeding as a group.

On the other hand, it is necessary to highlight the students’ awareness of the need to work in teams, but also how difficult it is to accept to work with someone who is not to our liking and to have to listen to his/her suggestions and inputs. This can be evidenced during interview No. 1 on April 30th, 2010, where the main idea was to find out the students’ appreciations about the advantages and disadvantages of using visual aids in class. Here one student expressed:
Student No. 6: Advantages, podemos ser creativos y puede demostrar sus habilidades del manejo de los temas que se han visto en English, como son trabajos en grupo, se evidencia quien trabaja y quien no. No le veo desventajas en el trabajo de grupo pero sí exige, porque no estamos acostumbrados a escucharle.

The students showed difficulty to accept others’ appreciations or points of views, though they were conscious about the need to work in teams in order to improve their communicative abilities; but most importantly to have better classroom relationships.

The need to work together was acknowledged by students as key to acquire an L2 in pro of their communicative abilities with the help of visual aids. They were drawn by the implementation of visual aids in the classroom and how these tools were helpful to develop teamwork activities. In interview No. 2 on October 25th, 2010, some students answered question No. 3: Como le ha parecido el trabajo en clase con las ayudas visuales desde el punto de vista grupal?

Student No. 3: Bueno el trabajo en equipo que se puede desarrollar es mejor que trabajar solos, además porque damos mejores ideas en grupo que individual sobre todo cuando trabajamos, como por ejemplo con los posters, y mapa conceptual.

Student No. 4: Nos ha ayudado a unirnos y aprender en que nosotros asimilemos lo que aprendemos con la vida real.

Student No. 8: Desde el punto de vista grupal se ve una mejora muy minima ya que se da para desorden cuando nos dan el material.

Recalling collaborative team work and its principles, objectives, and features, made the students forgot about their differences, but most importantly, helped the teacher-researcher use those strategies. They needed to feel themselves as the center of the activity. Thus, the lessons were designed to point out the collaborative team work through the use of visual aids to improve their communicative skills.
One of the main purposes of this project was to strengthen the students’ interaction to facilitate the acquisition of an L2. The atmosphere in the classroom was calm, looking for the students’ participation and maximizing their experience of working with different things and different people.

Although, social resistance is natural in any human group, the teacher should use teaching strategies to encourage social skills and facilitate communication among students which favors their nice co-existence.

These two sub-categories, social resistance and fraternal correction allowed the teacher-researcher to use visual aids which promoted social interaction. These sub-categories go hand in hand, since social resistance let students see the importance of helping each other for a common objective, taking them to show the necessity to make corrections between one another.

**Previous Knowledge linked with new knowledge: from the image to creativity**

When presenting visual aids, students followed a cognitive process of association of concepts and meanings of images. This process involved observing and getting the meaning of an image and verbalizing what the image represented, taking into account their previous knowledge of the language in order to stimulate their spontaneous production of the language.

One of the aims of meaningful learning is to find out how the student is able to link previous knowledge with new knowledge, therefore, facilitating the acquisition and the ability to relate concepts (Ausbel, 1963). The association of concepts with images during the research process addressed the main problem. This also generated a reflection upon the teacher’s role and the students’ role as active agents of didactic as well as pedagogical strategies during the process of second language acquisition assisted by the use of visual aids.
Visual attention is observed when visual aids are shown to students. They selected what was best for them or what caught their attention in the process of the acquisition of an L2. Also, they improved their individual and team performances through linking previous knowledge and associating concepts with images, giving as a result the acquisition of new knowledge to achieve a communicative goal. Visual stimuli played an important role as well, reinforcing particular responses where attention, memory, and visual awareness helped associate concepts with images, as Mackintosh (1975) suggested in his research.

The following answers are the students’ appreciations given when conducted the Interview No.2 from October 25th, 2010 about individual progress working with visual aids:

**Student No.1:** Pues me ha parecido sencillo y más fácil de comprender, ya que las ayudas visuales me ayudan a recordar conceptos.

**Student No. 3:** En los mind maps me han parecido muy buenos, porque lo hacemos con palabras breves he importantes y así puedo entender mejor los conceptos, mejor para cada palabra. Y también los libros con imágenes, que con texto porque ayudan a memorizar las cosas. Y los videos porque me ayudan a mi vocabulario y a aprender de otras culturas.

As it is seen in the previous example, the students gave a cognitive value to the use of visual aids to acquire the second language. They appreciated how this tool had helped them deepen the retention of information as well as the acquisition of new concepts. Therefore, their aim to learn English was short and reachable.

This category found two sub-categories (image recalling and Visual aids) as a stimulus to creativity

**Image recall.**

Through the display of visual aids, memory played an important role among students because they could remember certain vocabulary by just looking at the images given to them.
They were attracted towards the visual aids used in class and they acknowledged how reliable the process of recalling information was.

This was recorded in the field notes from July 23rd where some students showed that if memory is stimulated, the systems located in the neurological part of the brain could help with the process (Treisman, 1993); since, memory systems have been built through the students’ learning years, and each system played a different role in storing, creating, remembering and recollecting information (as cited by Harold, 1998).

They had to open up their books and find the differences between individual sports and group sports. (…) The general activity from this tool was to develop this specific topic under the picture there was a word describing in a general manner the sport, giving the students a hint of the information where they could relate previous information with new one, in order to stimulate their communication. Furthermore students’ attention was all on the flashcards. They mentioned mostly all the words when the flashcards of the sports were presented to them creating longer sentences.

The Information above was collected from the field notes and showed more clearly how much information students could remember when doing an activity. The importance of visual stimuli (Budensen, 2005) was evident when developing such activities in class; students showed the importance of creating their own stories based on what was given to them. In this sense, it was important to stimulate the students’ knowledge in order to foster the acquisition of new knowledge.

Exercising the brain is fundamental to help with the acquisition of information in an L2. It was noticeable how visual aids enabled students to evoke some information that they previously learned. Their reaction towards visual aids was positive because it created a safe and friendly learning environment for them. When students had to express or talk about what they were looking at, they never felt forced to do so; they did it spontaneously, and when students did
not know a certain word or how to say a phrase, they simply did not participate. What is clear here is that students always relied on their memory with the help from visual aids looking to improve their communicative abilities in the second language.

It is evident how the process of memory worked when students looked at their visual aids and added what they already knew, and engaged their memories with the images they were looking at. This was expressed by some students during interview No.2-2 from October 25th, 2010:

Student No. 6: Pues con estas ayudas visuales yo creo que he aprendido mas los conceptos, se retienen mucho mejor, y todas estas ayudas visuales ayudan que uno aprenda más rápido.

The participants in this process demonstrated that they were drawn by visual aids and they also showed how they relied on their memory. They recalled some concepts after looking at some visual aids. Images played a key role in this process. Therefore, students could identify some concepts and ideas after looking at certain visual aids, remembering what was once learned, confirming what Baron (2005) showed in her research project. The researcher tried to do this activity without any visual aids, but it did not have the same impact, because students were not aware of what they were supposed to talk about or remember. Trying to remember something that happened in the past could be easy if the mental context of that event is presented through visual aids. The visual intelligence suggested by Gardner (1993) is evident here. The teaching-learning process is more meaningful because it relies on visual attention, helping students to develop learning strategies.
**Visual aids as a stimulus to creativity.**

Encouraging creativity is a matter of showing students how they can express their understanding of the information presented by the teacher. So, preparing students to be creative was easy, particularly when the didactical sources were visual aids. The teacher-researcher was a merely a facilitator for students to learn the second language in an enjoyable way, making sure that the new knowledge was embraced and expressed by them. The teacher-researcher guided students to understand how the learning process worked without being so explicit, and a learning route helped the students to build up their knowledge. The idea was to find solutions to problems in the acquisition of an L2, promoting creativity in the classroom (Novak, 1998). For instance, when the reading about Tim’s daily routines students were asked to interpret the information freely. The students oriented their learning process by being active, giving results, and having a positive attitude, relying on their memory and what they remembered from the reading.

In the next example, the teacher-researcher was motivating students to develop a mind map with the information read to them. Information collected from the field notes from February 22nd, 2010.

*Students had a great structure of the reading remembering the main ideas; they were able to identify the activities Tim’s everyday activities using the grammatical focus “Simple Present Tense”.*

(...)  
*They were told that the reading was going to be done once. Students’ concentrations and attention to the activity of reading was good.*  
*By doing the warm up activity I was looking to assess students’ knowledge of the previous class.*  

(...)  
*During the warm up activity students felt free to do their mind maps as desire, the use of colors, shapes, and different ideas, but they always followed the mind map*
The use of visual aids helped to stimulate students to generate ideas with personal styles in a very creative manner (see example above). They captured some thoughts after looking at some pictures related to the reading of daily routines, developing and organizing their concepts of what they were going to do. Students were able to make connections between their own daily routines as well as Tim’s daily routines, which took them to structure them on a mind map. Afterwards, they had to explain their mind map to the entire class.

Divergent thinking (Kolb, 1984) emerged as a way to solve the problem that was given to them about action and reflection during the development of this technique. When students were asked to propose an activity about ecology\(^2\), they came up with a positive idea of developing posters with reusable and recycled material in the school as a proposal for the Biology class. This information was gathered from field notes from personal reflection from September 14\(^{th}\), 2010 and some pictures taken with the students’ outcomes:

Students were asked to go anywhere in the school to develop a presentation in a poster of their environmental proposal.

They were reminded of which procedure they may have followed in order to come up with their proposal.

Students brought newspapers, magazines to cut out some pictures in order to create the poster in a sequence way.

The closure activity was that each team was in charge to present the posters. Students were asked about their procedures, proposals, and the creation of the recyclable program of the school.

In the previous reflection it is seen how students were resourceful when asked to do their environmental proposal. Their individual commitments to give an answer to the school’s needs;

\(^2\) Ecology is a transversal topic worked from the Franciscan Values.
being the main reason to build their understanding of doing an effective proposal, which was something that the school wanted to emphasize on.

This sub-category goes hand in hand with the learning style theory (Kolb, 1984) where divergent thinking is a style that appeared during the teaching-learning process. As it was presented during the development of the research project, particularly when they had to do an environmental proposal in which they had to show their creativity and the communicative abilities in order to explain them. They always considered others’ opinions and offered suggestions to clarify their proposals. Besides, some students did a “reflective observation” (Kolb, 1984) before expressing their ideas. They diagnosed the opinions of their peers in order to give feasible solutions to the recycle program that the school was trying to implement to raise awareness to the actual ecology issues.

In the following picture, students developed some strategies on how to work with the tool (poster) and magazines to explain, create and generate their own ideas. Students always tried to have friendly discussions about the process they had to follow for the development of their posters based on the information provided by the magazines. Also, this was relevant in the process of acquiring a second language, where the learning style was very important, allowing the teacher-researcher to identify the students’ abilities or pitfalls in order to offer feedback on language mistakes.
Offering students to work with different materials (craft paper) and visual aids (posters and magazines) nurtured two important aspects in learning. First, the students’ imagination was being interpreted in a fruitful way. Second, they improved their communicative abilities in the second language as it is seen in the picture above. Letting the students act freely to show their learning abilities could help them develop their strengths based on Kolb’s (1981) learning styles theory. The next figure No. 1 taken from survey No.1 conducted in March shows students’ answers. They were asked about which visual aids they thought it could help students learn the second language, here 6% of the population answered that mind maps and conceptual maps were the least they would rely on to acquire the language.
Despite the fact that students answered that those visual tools were not appealing to them, they proved otherwise, since they used these tools to interpret their readings as it is shown in the following picture as a result of a reading comprehension, interpretation and understanding of what they needed to convey before the class. Students worked very hard on making sure their communicative abilities were as clear as their mind-map. Following Buzan’s (2006) proposal about giving credit to the students’ ability of mapping concepts in a creative matter, in this picture the students were able to represent what they understood of the reading using colors, shapes and symbols, but most importantly, their thinking skills were put to work during this activity.
Combining personal and learning styles is not an easy task. Nevertheless, the teacher-researcher was able to study the students’ preferences in the classroom. They needed to feel comfortable. The teacher-researcher enhanced the students’ communicative abilities, facilitating individual growth during the acquisition of the second language. This pedagogical process showed how students could create visual aids to learn from each other.

It is observed how willing they were to participate when they faced up this challenge and how much they appreciated how others organized the project. They saw this as a way to represent different aspects of the main topic. Mapping their concepts involved creating a visual image, proposals, and their own understanding of the topic, following the poster structure as a way to support their communicative abilities when they explained and answered to their
classmates’ questions. This was done taking into account the more meaningful information. The students knew it helped to improve their communication (Novak, 1998).

In sum, to acquire a second language and to develop communicative abilities in a second language, it is necessary to work constantly with previous knowledge to facilitate the acquisition of knew knowledge. Following the main problem of this research project and its main objective, it was found that visual aids fostered the students’ enhancement of their communicative abilities in the second language. From this category and sub-categories, one of the most interesting findings was to identify that the content of the topic was not the center of the class. The center of the class was to see how the topic was presented to the students, making it more appealing to their likes and needs. For this reason, the teacher-researcher was challenged to create and adopt different pedagogical strategies to succeed in the teaching-learning experience. Creativity in the classroom was always part of the students’ work and it also played an important role in the way the teacher-researcher taught, in order to accomplish the acquisition of the language.

Visual Focus: A motivation to learn

Adopting the use of visual stimuli is a tool that can assist the didactic and pedagogical strategies to acquire a second language. During the research process, it was necessary to take into consideration the visual theory that states that the students’ performance shown by their attention, memory retention, and visual awareness, is based on the impact of the subject reported to them, the presence of stimuli, and the reinforcement of particular responses (Mackintosh, 1975).
One of the abilities developed by the students was the visual stimuli intelligence where students were able to understand images, color, sizes, and shapes of some visual aids\(^3\) (Budensen and Pedersen, 1983; Attneave, 1954). Everyone was engaged in the activities developed with images given to them. This was appreciated when students looked at some images and immediately interpreted them. Their personal skills and knowledge about their setting were strengthened through the use of images. For instance, when they knew the concept, they expressed it in their second language; in other words, the visual stimuli helped them to encourage their communicative abilities.

Visual focus: Motivation to learn has two sub-categories: learning versus likes and sensitive knowledge.

**Learning - Likening it.**

The learning and teaching experience for each person should be a constructive blend of different components that are part of the development of the class. Exploring personal interests, needs, likes and styles guided each class to answer to the requirements presented in the classroom during the research project. The use of visual aids as resources to help the class to acquire the second language by promoting social interaction was an important component in the classroom. It was necessary to capture the students’ interest to accelerate their learning process in a meaningful manner. Furthermore, it was important to motivate the students to obtain the best from them. Motivation was an important factor to engage in the students’ desire to participate and to find the meaningfulness of each activity.

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\(^3\) Evidenced from Interview No.2, question 5.
In order to establish the learning-teaching process, it was important to consider the students’ positive attitude toward visual aids and the teaching method developed in the classroom. Field notes from July 23rd, 2010: the teacher-researcher described how students expressed their satisfaction using flashcards and picture books about a sports topic.

Students were pointing at the pictures to explain to each other, they relied on what they saw to communicate their ideas to one another. This was a facilitator to them to assist communicative skills.
(Taken from group No.2 when interacting with one another about sports)
Student No.1: Look at picture, this is, como se llama?
Student No.2: “Rafting” I did this sport when I went to Washington
Student No.1: Usted ha hecho esto, Super!!
Teacher: Please guys,!! speak in English specially when you talk about fun moments. You remembered fun moments, Didn’t you?
Student No.2: Yes teacher, It was good.
Student No.4: It is easy and useful to understand and connect information in a fun way.
Group No.4 Student No.4: Mine! Este tan beautiful!!, What is this?
Student No. 3: This is an individual sport “Bowling” !!
As it is seeing, students seemed very happy when they understand the information through pictures; also the clues given by the picture books helped students to relate and interpret the information, plus the picture.
Even though students are working in groups, each person is working individually. Each person has something different to say about what they see.
Also this tool (flashcards and picture books) is so appealing to students. They are helping each other, but also they are motivated when looking at the picture book.
Students also manifested that when they have interesting pictures that accompanying the text, the learning takes place with little effort.

The evidence above showed how students linked their personal likes, knowledge of the language, and social skills, as well as how they fostered the learning of a second language. Students brought up their own experiences to the class to relate it with what they were studying. Here, the sociolinguistic aspect of the language was introduced to explain to the students how people enjoy life in different ways and how people can establish a social
relationship in different contexts, such as a restaurant, a parking lot, being punctual, personal relationships, doing sports etc.

Making the topic appealing to students was one of the purposes of the class; using a dynamic, didactic, practical, and creative teaching process, responding to students’ needs, and always looking for the stimulation of their skills. Brophy (1986) suggested that the motivation to learn bears on the shoulders of teachers and parents. This is why by creating and adopting such visual tools could encourage students to learn.

The following picture shows how students’ daily activities performed in their houses was so much related with activities that caught their attention. The purpose of the class was to find the relationship between their daily activities with the students’ life in their homes, so they could find a significant and more real purpose of what they were learning, but most importantly, the message that learning is worthwhile. Including the context was something that they loved while their autonomous, competence, self-efficacy of who they were and what stimulated them the most created good expectations in them. They had to explain their hobbies, chores and other aspects freely, so mostly everyone designed a model to demonstrate their daily activities at home.

The next picture was taken when students were creating a demo-tape to explain which part of their houses they enjoyed having fun and taking some time off. By relying on this visual tool students had an easier explanation of what resting peacefulness and calmness mean to them.
On the other hand, to have a successful and meaningful class was vital to begin with a good management of the class, such as writing the agenda and doing a warm up activity including visual aids as a way to motive students in the class in order to accomplish the class objectives. The idea was to draw the students’ attention to the topic rather than being reactive to the students’ needs or demands. Following a lesson plan was fundamental for the classes; however when some adjustments had to take place, students knew more clearly what they were going to be studying in class.

**Perceptive Learning.**

One of the purposes of this research was to propose several visual aids to support the students’ acquisition of the language and their communicative abilities. For this reason, in survey No.2 (question 1) from April 9th, 2010 students were asked which visual aids have assisted their acquisition process.
Figure No. 2

Survey No.2/1

Figure No. 2 shows that students did not have a strong preference for just one visual aid; however, the flashcards (16%) are the ones that helped them the most to learn the topics. Despite the fact that the mind map and the conceptual maps were adopted by them in the development of some activities, 8% of the population did not consider this tool to help them learn the topics at all.

Figure No.1

Survey No. 1
Comparing figure No. 2 (Survey No.2, question 1) with figure No.1 (Survey No.1) which was handed out to students prior to the use of visual aids, it seems that there are not significant changes in their opinions. However, the videos were used to catch the students’ attention before they were actually shown.

Whether students answered in the surveys that mind maps and conceptual maps were not supportive for understanding the topics, the next picture shows otherwise.

At the same time, students were more interested in having an active participation in class, which required the teacher-researcher to ask them about their opinions of which characteristics they liked and which ones they did not of using visual aids, Interview No. 2 from October 25th, 2010. It shows how engaged the students were in that classroom environment, where the theme and visual aids were acknowledged by them.

*Student No.5: por ejemplo las formas, tamaños y colores me llaman la atención. Me llamo la atención el usar muchos las revistas que venían en ingles completamente y las fotos que estas traían porque eran nuevas, y además de todo*
el usar mi imaginación me ayuda a hacerlo mejor por ejemplo en los mind maps, interpretar me gusta porque cada uno da su imaginación a lo que interpreta.

Student No.6 Me gustan los magazines, ya que por sus colores y grandes dibujos ayudan a que yo vea y me atraiga en este tema y entienda mucho mejor. También me gustan mucho los mapas conceptuales ya que puedo utilizar diferentes tipos de tamaño, colores, y estos atraen mi atención y ayudan a retener más información.

Student No.8: Que las revistas son a color y uno puede diferenciar mucho mejor, y ya que están en el idioma inglés y uno puede comprender mucho más a menudo. Los tamaños de los posters son muy bueno ya que se visualiza bien la imagen y la entiende mejor.

Student No. 9: El tamaño de los poster porque me parecen mas fácil grande así como los colores. Las revistas que solo vienen en ingles y uno no entiende algunas palabras y eso no me gusto.

Based on students’ previous appreciations it is seen that the learning resources used in class were not being overlooked by them. Presentation of visual aids, such as shapes, color, and forms, were considered important to engage students in learning the language. It is necessary to discuss classroom resources with students; in other words, to take into consideration their appreciation of the materials that supported their language acquisition.

This sub-category was identified by the students’ perception of the tasks and activities that increased their level of attention in class. Again, stimuli played a relevant role to highly motivate students where they could show their abilities by just being exposed and working to visual aids.

After doing the data analysis, the teacher-researcher found that visual aids were an opportunity to encourage students to acquire the second language. It also favored the students’ communicative abilities and social interaction.
Conclusions

This research has shown the importance of visual attention during the acquisition of an L2. The use of didactic visual tools with pedagogical and didactic sense helped to promote the students’ communicative ability more effectively. The research studied the characteristics of visual aids, taking into account how visual aids helped students acquire the second language more easily. Visual aids helped to strengthen the student’s social skills as well.

The literature review strengthened the process of doing a dynamic research and its theoretical reference was applied to an educational reality in a particular context. This was supported by the qualitative approach and action research theory. This study involved an educational and a social system, because the teacher-researcher became more aware of the need to foster new learning opportunities for the students. It was necessary to acknowledge the educational pitfalls in order to come up with teaching strategies that would highlight the students’ role as protagonists of their own learning process. Visual attention, meaningful learning, collaborative work and learning styles theories were all present throughout the use of visual aids. The use of visual aids targets cognitive, psychomotor, and axiological achievements based on the statement of the problem of this study. The main purpose of this project was to identify the characteristics of visual aids that contributed to the learning of an L2 and promoted social interaction as well as improve the students’ communicative abilities.

The teaching and learning objectives of this project did not only focus their attention on the cognitive and psychomotor strategies. They also identified the students’ strengths and weaknesses in terms of their social skills. The axiological strategy made emphasis on institutional principles such as respect, tolerance, listening to one another, fraternity, dialogue, and honesty, among others. In order to improve coexistence among students, it was important to
put emphasis on collaborative learning through the use of visual aids. The purpose of adopting this strategy was to create an active, participating environment that would foster social values the way it was suggested by McGregor (1990). He stated that participants of any community may have a better understanding of group work by simply integrating individual objectives. Thus, “Human relations: A space for social responsibility” was a category that emerged during the study as an outcome of the relationships among students during the development of classroom activities using visual aids such as magazines, mind maps, conceptual maps, etc. Students engaged in having a better understanding of collaborative work. Class discipline, social accountability, and attitude, helped to strengthen collaborative work. These factors created a more effective learning atmosphere that helped students to learn more concepts about the second language. This category had two characteristics that made the teacher-researcher establish two sub-categories. It was important to understand the dynamics of the group and the students’ needs and difficulties as a team in order to create better communication among them. Eventually, team work became a strategy to promote the students’ commitment to learn more about the second language using visual aids effectively.

Evidence in the “Co-learning” subcategory: An opportunity for fraternal correction in which students teamed together on activities using visual aids to structure their psychomotor process and develop their social skills. It also strengthened the students’ awareness of their values. This was evidenced by the way they respected each others’ ideas. Increasing the students’ learning spaces encouraged teamwork. The students demonstrated their own individual interests, but they also valued the inputs of others. Vigotsky’s (1978) zone of proximal development theory was also evident in this project by the fact that students took advantage of the learning opportunities facilitated by the teacher-researcher in which interaction and collaboration were at
the core. Students could perform separately but they had to work as part of a group. Students appreciated the opportunity to share their ideas in the second language. They had the opportunity to practice in groups and compare and analyze their weaknesses and their strengths. Collier (1980) suggested that there is a need to create spaces within the classroom where students can find group work interesting. This way, they can be aware of the importance learning as a group in a responsible way that allows them to identify and improve their flaws. Students always understood team work as an important aspect of learning. They also identified visual aids as a learning tool that makes their learning process a lot easier. However, a few negative reactions from some students were present in some group activities.

Consequently, some intolerance and rejection came out of some students during their open discussions, debates, presentations, and demonstrations of group assignments. These reactions were also included in the subcategory “Social resistance: A reality in the classroom”. During some activities, some students showed disagreement about working in teams because they felt that some students had poor communicative skills and that would hold them back in their learning experience. When the teacher-researcher selected the groups, some students completely disagreed with that selection, claiming that some of them did not work as well as they did. The teacher-researcher became a mediator to reach the axiological purpose and offer a healthy interaction. She persuaded the students to accept each other and try to make progress in their learning process. As Freire (1976) advocated, collaborative learning is a way to boost the students’ social interaction. He stated that negative as well as positive outcomes will always be part of a dialogue. Peer correction also took place in class activities. It provided an opportunity for students to contribute to their classmates’ learning. Nevertheless, some students did not see peer feedback as a learning opportunity, since they felt that they were on the spot and in some
cases created discouragement and hindered their participation. Consequently, they were taught that learning and correcting each other was very fulfilling, but they needed to learn how to do it without making others feel bad about their own errors. It was evident that adopting visual aids as visual attention stimuli optimized the students’ communicative performance because it became a teaching tool where students participated, socialized and learned.

Visual aids were visual stimuli that exhorted students to go deep into the information given to them; the category that evidenced this process was called “Visual focus: a motivation to learn”. In this category, the teacher-researcher understood the importance of using visual aids as a teaching tool to convey information in order to capture the students’ attention. The stimulation provided in the classroom using visual aids helped students get interested in learning a second language. This was evident in the subcategory “Learning-likening it” where students felt motivated to maximize their knowledge. Another subcategory was “Perceptive learning”. This category influenced students’ long-lasting learning because their perception of the use of visual aids and its importance during this research project became a stronger factor. Visual aids were used as a teaching and a learning tool that was important to stimulate the acquisition of the language and to improve the students’ communicative skills.

The effectiveness of visual aids in the students’ learning process was pretty significant. The students enjoyed working with visual aids. The subcategory “Learning-likening it” was evidenced throughout the research project. Students showed interest and motivation in learning. Based on Brophy’s theory (1987), motivation is relevant when it comes to changes in the students’ attitudes toward either intrinsic or extrinsic learning. However, it should be part of a learning community. Through the use visual aids, the teacher-researcher always encountered both types of learning. Students were able to construct communication, going from short
sentences to more complex conversations. Students also gave importance to aspects of visual aids such as size, form, color, and categorizing the information. Color always caught their attention. Bundesen & Pedersen (1983) pointed out that because of the students’ brain positive reaction to color, this is an effective way to capture the students’ attention. Nonetheless, students were committed to use any visual aid when communication took place. They were important elements that students took into consideration to explore their own likes, interests, styles, and needs to obtain knowledge and also to make complex language forms easier to understand. This was considered visual stimulus, which influenced the students’ cognitive and psychomotor processes that made them learn more easily and they enjoyed it more. It energized the classroom practice, creating a relationship between learning and teaching. Students maintained their interest in the topic, keeping up the good work. They could link the things they liked with the information that was given to them, and most importantly, they continued being motivated using different classroom resources (visual aids). Moreover, the students’ oral communication improved and they were able to socialize their ideas in the second language more easily. Their interpretation through the construction of dialogues, the selection of information, and the formulation of proposals, played an important role in this process. It is necessary to highlight that throughout this strategy, students were able to verify what they had learned (acquisition of knowledge). There were multiple opportunities for learner-learner interactions, which enriched the students’ communicative performance. Visual aids provided them with confidence to express their thoughts in a foreign language.

Perceptive learning was another subcategory during the study project. In this category, the students’ appreciations were taken into consideration throughout the project because they expressed how visual aids such as, posters, videos, flashcards, and others were facilitators to
acquire the second language. Despite the fact that in the survey, the students answered that the visual aids they liked the least were the conceptual map and the mind map, they used them frequently for their presentations and for regular explanations of the topics. Although students knew of other visual aids, they always preferred to work with the same ones, claiming that those involved key words that were helpful for them to explain the topics.

These tools reinforced vocabulary and helped students to recognize concepts in order to formulate their own ideas based on the content that was taught. Students were encouraged to acquire new knowledge all the time. They explored and demonstrated what they leaned. Thus, the last category that emerged during this process was called “Previous knowledge linked with new knowledge: from image to creativity”. Learning took place through the exploration of new knowledge and its association with previous knowledge. In other words, there was a stimulus to learn, so two subcategories accompanied this category: “Image recall” and “visual aids as a stimulus to creativity”. Both of them found that the students’ memory, attention, likes, and encouragement were meaningful to them.

Memory, visual awareness, and attention played important roles in the development of this study. Students were willing to seek the improvement of their communicative abilities by concentrating on the information that was given, acknowledging the “Image recall” subcategory. For instance, flashcards captured a lot of their attention, especially when they were presented as input and control attention. The input looked for proper ways to provide new vocabulary that lasted longer in the students’ memory. Control attention required an engagement to create an atmosphere that was beneficial for the students’ concentration. Novak (1998) highlights the necessity to include these 2 factors in the teaching-learning process as a way to improve individual performances, where students can relate new information with previous information.
Meaningful learning helped students to recall a certain given knowledge. But it was not the visual aid itself that mattered; what mattered was the teaching-learning intention.

Another important visual aid was the poster. It promoted the retention of new language, attention, and memory to make sure that the students used what they remembered from it. The poster allowed having more effective lessons by grabbing the students’ attention. As Treisman (1964) mentioned in his research, anything could be presented to students, but it was important to have a purpose that demanded the students’ visual attention as well as the acquisition of knowledge. Otherwise, it would be meaningless. Furthermore, visual aids helped students to concentrate better in the development of individual activities. This had a strong impact on the acquisition of new language. Visual aids supported the acquisition of new language. They made students more interested in selecting the information given to them and made them more focused and allowed them to use their memory more effectively. Gardner (1993) has made everyone aware of the importance of using visual aids to maximize one’s visual intelligence. The teacher-researcher tried to incorporate this in the class as a way to understand the students’ needs. The benefit for the students was great. They improved their comprehension. Visual aids improved the students’ attention, stimulating their thinking process, and helping to control their anxiety when participating in class activities.

Creativity was embraced from beginning to end, which encouraged students to explain their own learning process. The category that addressed this last aspect of the conclusions is called “Visual aids as a stimulus to creativity”. Inviting students to see the benefits of acquiring the second language through the use of visual aids was a way to show them that learning could be fun and interesting. The students had the opportunity to create their own visual aids as a way to review the new topics learned in class, focusing on language. The freedom the students had of
doing their own visual aids helped them during their presentations and reaffirmed the students’ creative spirit. The teacher-researcher became a guide during the development of some activities. She encouraged students to use their personal styles, likes, and creativity during the learning process. In other words, the use of visual aids stimulated the students’ active classroom involvement. They were able to generate their own ideas, concepts, and thoughts about a specific topic. Kolb (1984) stated that the “learning styles” theory allows students to have their own self-motivation, competence, and autonomy. This freedom will reflect in the students’ learning experience. Another important aspect to highlight is that by allowing students to create their own visual aids, their own posters helped them when communication took place. They became a tool for students to explain to their peers what they had learned.

As it has been said throughout this document that visual aids successfully helped students to acquire the second language more easily, and they also helped students to improve their communicative skills. Visual aids became a powerful influence that have offered teaching-learning strategies to reflect upon the pedagogical and didactic implications of their use.
Pedagogical and Didactic Implications of the Visual Aids to Acquire a Second Language

Teaching a second language requires a continuous reflection upon how to do it with a pedagogical and didactic sense in the classroom. This action research project focused its attention of how the implementation of visual aids that facilitated the acquisition of a second language endorsing social interaction looking for some characteristics of the visual aids. All through the development of the project some pedagogical and didactic implications came up when the visual tool were used in order to improve the communicative abilities.

The development of this research project established pedagogical and didactic strategies to allow a significant teaching-learning process that focused on motivation and interest to acquire the second language and the improvement of its communicative abilities. Furthermore, it required to enhance students’ learning experience through the proper use of resources in the classroom that caught their attention. Thus, the use of visual aids identified various implications to get closer to a how, when, and why to use them in an EFL class.

There were pedagogical and didactic implications that came up with using visual aids favoring students’ acquisition of the language. The visual tools supported the development of cognitive, psychomotor and axiological skills.

An important pedagogical implication of using visual aids during the classes was that it gave clear instructions to the activities done in class. Before the development of a class or an activity, it was necessary that students knew what they were expected to do. This helped to promote their confidence and guarantees their success doing their task. Furthermore, it carried out the students’ cognitive level by allowing them to comprehend and process all the information that was given to them. For example, the purpose of using posters was to clarify concepts and
create some excitement. Nevertheless, it was necessary to instruct students that the purpose of using that tool was to clarify and emphasize on specific information. On the other hand, in terms of didactic implications, posters reinforced the topic studied once in class. This was a reminder of key concepts and topics that were difficult for them to remember such as; grammatical structures, vocabulary and different topics that students considered difficult to remember. Based on Novak (1998), meaningful learning theory bears the importance of taking into account how rote learning helps to achieve a better understanding of new information and any previous information that the student already has. This tool helped everyone in the classroom to get organized and stimulate meaningful learning. Posters are large, clear, creative and simple to capture the students’ attention with the necessary information to give them clues of what they needed to remember or learn.

A different didactical implication was the result of using mind maps and conceptual maps facilitating the appropriation and relation of concepts of the topic developed in class. It was based on meaningful learning, hierarchization of concepts, and the creativity of its presentation; Buzan (1974) has proved that through the implementation of mind maps, students can have a meaningful thinking process of what they are learning. By assisting the students’ learning processes with conceptual maps, mind maps, mental maps, diagrams, etc, students can be engaged in a meaningful learning route by making mental networks that stimulate the acquisition of knowledge as well as the students’ interest. This could determine whether the outcome was good or bad, or if the resources responded to the students’ needs. If the material required changing from one activity to another, it followed a procedure that enables effective and efficient language teaching. This enhanced the students’ psychomotor level because it encourages them to speak spontaneously. Hence, it was necessary to offer them opportunities to use visual aids that
represented something to the students, making their communication much easier without building it so mechanical.

Using picture books promoted enthusiasm, motivation, learning, and the explanation of their ideas through oral communication, dialogues and discussions. By using this tool, the teacher-researcher opened a space for them to improve their language proficiency. This enabled students to resort to visual sense which ultimately helped them out to show and tell what they once learned. Besides, it increased the students’ understanding and retention stage of any topic, since they could remember the information when speaking. Visual intelligence, addressed by Gardner (1993), needs to be recognized in the classroom to embrace the students’ needs and also the different ways to teach. The acknowledgement of this intelligence in the classroom responds to the vision of education that each teacher should have. In other words, visual intelligence develops the students’ performance to guide them in order to deliver a positive outcome in terms of what they are learning. Picture books stimulated cognitive strategy through individual and team work activity.

Another pedagogical implication was to encourage study groups. Apart from teaching a second language, it was important to promote study groups in order to have a more integrative education in an EFL classroom. This feature was shaped by social interaction created in the class. Almost every class activity required social integration that created opportunities for students to develop social skills. Students needed to be taught in order to determine the correctness of their own actions and their respectfulness, friendliness, and generosity towards others encouraging the students to follow social standards when being around others. There have been so many proponents of collaborative classroom learning throughout human history, from
Piaget (1952) to, Bruffee (1993), that show the importance of working collaboratively. It goes beyond just stating a theory. It persuades the educational community to grow an interest in implementing this strategy. Although the concept to define collaborative learning is broad, we can assure that by implementing this concept we can promote interpersonal skills, critical thinking, learning motivation, etc, which I have evidenced during my intervention in an EFL classroom.

It was important for the project to follow the Franciscan philosophy of the Virrey Solis School that follows the principle that education is not simply to teach contents, but also the need to help the human being to become an ethical, moral and person with principles. Thus, a question came to my mind: How can I integrate the use of visual aids with axiological formation? The use of this approach looked to make emphasis on respect, tolerance, listening, communication, and honesty. A good practical example was the use of magazines. This didactic tool allowed students to get closer to real thematic situations. They could read about culture, society, economy, religion, sports, music, art etc. This exercise made them give their personal opinions and interpretations of what they saw or read. Students learned how to understand the other’s point of view, although they did not agree with how the other saw reality. In other words, the use of the magazines as a visual tool to develop second language acquisition was useful to change the students’ perspectives and most importantly, to share beliefs and opinions with their classmates. In addition, this enriched the student’s vision about the world and life itself. They brought up interesting issues when they worked together. Moreover, this tool helped to determine classroom rules for example penalizing (taking time off from their favorite hobby); whoever mistreated his or her classmate by making negative comments. In this sense, the axiological dimension could be working all the time, embracing differences and commonalities, but without hurting anyone.
Another visual aid that was used in the class was the videos. The use of videos and movies reinforced knowledge seen as a didactic implication. Some difficult thematic subjects were easier to understand when the material was seen. Here, other aspects of the second language could be studied, learned and interacted, such as culture, society, arts etc. Using this type of visual aid helped to create excitement to the students to analyze the native speakers’ message since the videos fomented the listening ability as well as the pronunciation while acquiring the second language.

The last pedagogical implication was the evaluation system as a part of the learning-teaching process, which allowed the students and the teacher-researcher to assess the techniques, norms, and methods used in the classroom to teach an L2 through the use of visual aids. The assessment followed the school’s requirements as it can be evidenced in the instructional design (summative, formative and integrative). It was necessary to recognize students’ progress on their communicative and cognitive abilities where it was looked to interpret students’ learning process.

Overall, these didactic implications were positive during the teaching-learning process of the second language using visual aids. The didactic effectiveness of learning techniques with visual aids was assessed by implementing different activities. The instructional dimensions that were implemented and the resources and time required for their teaching were the essence of the classes. Nevertheless, there were some difficulties, such as breaking the barrier of rejecting the development of new activities using visual aids. But there was always an articulation between the contents and visual aids, making the development of the classes more effective, attractive and meaningful for everyone.
Limitations of the Study and Aspects for Further Research

The more visual aids were used, the more meaningful and lasting the acquisition of the language was. However, there were some limitations that came up during the development of this action research project. When group work was proposed to students, class time became an issue because the classes were divided in two stages. In one stage, the students came up with the set procedures for their presentation. In the second stage, they produced and socialized their work plan. Despite the fact that there were clear rules established, some students’ behavior wasted some class time. There was excessive talking, unnecessary discussion, and social resistance, among other things. Another limitation related with time had to do with the execution of activities. Everything had to be developed in the classroom following the school’s guidelines and there were not any extracurricular activities to be done at home.

An additional limitation that challenged the development of the research project was the classroom size, because it did not allow the teacher-researcher to follow up on individual performance within the group. The relationship between two learners was more promoted than the relationship between the learner and the teacher. As a result, it was difficult to follow disciplinary actions, individual learning problems, and clarify any individual doubts during class. The teacher-researcher proposed evaluative strategies, taking into account the group as well as the student’s individual assessment\(^4\). Even though the teacher-researcher tried to implement an integrative evaluation system, it was necessary to make sure that the students evaluated themselves effectively and honestly. Unfortunately, the students did not understand the concept of co-evaluation and self-evaluation, and they were not aware of the importance and relevance of the new evaluation system.

\(^4\) Refer to Instructional Design: 1.5 Evaluation
VISUAL AIDS

It was mentioned before how some of the visual aids used during the development of the project were used by the teacher-researcher to reach specific class objectives and to follow some requirements such as accomplishing the learning purpose, promoting reinforcement of the topic, enhancing communicative skills, and being creative. There was a need to include technological tools such as blogs, institutional virtual platform with audio, among others. They were considered a way to learn more creatively and allowed the students to complement their knowledge using technology. Based on this, the following questions arise for new research studies: a) how can students include virtual technological tools to acquire the second language? b) Which technological tools facilitate the acquisition of a second language and the improvement of communicative abilities? c) How can a class promote social interaction through the use of technological tools?

Another aspect to conduct a research project would be on how to address social resistance in the classroom.

The findings of this research project leaves room for future research that will contribute to solve pedagogical and didactic problems during the process of learning or teaching a second language.
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Lewes, Falmer. P.g 113


APPENDICES
Apreciados estudiantes,

Como ustedes sabes he venido implementando un proyecto pedagógico, con el consentimiento de la jefe de área de inglés, el proyecto de investigación “Visual aids in teaching learning process of the acquisition of a second language”.

El proyecto busca implementar, proponer y evaluar el uso de diferentes ayudas visuales para fomentar las habilidades comunicativas en la enseñanza y aprendizaje del inglés.

La recolección de datos se ha venido llevando a cabo desde comienzos del año por medio de audio-grabaciones para las entrevistas, fotografías, encuestas, y diarios de campo.

Su participación en este proyecto es fundamental y es de carácter voluntario. A todos los participantes se les garantizara:

1. El uso de nombres ficticios para mantener su identidad en el anonimato.

2. Estricta confidencialidad con la formación que se recolecte.

3. Que el proyecto no tendrá incidencia alguna en las evaluaciones y notas parciales y/o finales.

4. La oportunidad de verificar las declaraciones hechas en las entrevistas en el borrador de los informes del proyecto.

Agradezco su autorización para contar con usted como participante en este proyecto. Si esta de acuerdo por favor escriba y firma en la hoja adjunta.

Carmen Edith Doncel
Investigadora
Appendix No.2

<table>
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<td><strong>Classroom Environment</strong></td>
<td><strong>General Observations</strong></td>
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Appendix No. 3

1. Which visual aids were used by English teachers before eighth grade?

2. From those visual aids used in class, which ones did you like the most?

3. Which of the visual aids used until now have caught your attention and why?

4. What advantages and disadvantages did you find about visual aids when you were working in groups in class?

5. Which abilities (listening, speaking, writing or reading) promote the use of visual aids?
Appendix No. 4

De acuerdo con lo que se ha venido desarrollando en la clase de inglés, para las habilidades de habla y escucha por favor responda a las siguientes preguntas:

1. Que ayudas visuales recuerda?

2. Como le ha parecido el trabajo en clase con las ayudas visuales, desde el punto de vista individual?

3. Desde el punto de vista grupal?

4. Desde la dinámica y la lúdica de la clase?

5. Que características de las ayudas visuales le gustaron más y porque, y cuales no?

6. Que diferentes ayudas visuales sugiere usted que sean utilizadas para el aprendizaje de la segunda lengua?
## Appendix No. 5

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<tr>
<td>???</td>
<td>Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>!!!</td>
<td>Surprise, exclamation, excitement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>..........</td>
<td>Continuation of a conversation, but it is not relevant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>()</td>
<td>Explanation of an action, activity, or waiting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Students´ intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Teacher´s intervention</td>
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</table>
Appendix No. 6

Course: __________________________
Date: ____________________________

From the following list, check the one/ones you think can help someone learn English

a. Flashcards _______________________

b. Picture books _____________________

c. Videos __________________________

d. Posters __________________________

e. Magazines _________________________

f. Mind maps/Conceptual maps________

g. Picture, photos and postcards _______

h. None of the above _________________
Appendix No. 7

EVALUATION OF VISUAL AIDS IN THE CLASSROOM

Course: ___________________________

Date: _____________________________

After all the activities are done in English class with the use of visual aids, please answer the following questions.

1. Which visual aids used in class have helped you learn the topics?
   
   a. Flashcards _______________________
   
   b. Picture books _____________________
   
   c. Videos __________________________
   
   d. Posters __________________________
   
   e. Magazines _________________________
   
   f. Mind maps/Conceptual maps________
   
   g. Picture, photos and postcards ______
   
   h. White board_______________________
   
   i. Other _____________________________

2. Which visual aids used in class have not helped you learn the topics?

   a. Flashcards _______________________
   
   b. Picture books _____________________
   
   c. Videos __________________________
   
   d. Posters __________________________
VISUAL AIDS

e. Magazines _______________________

f. Mind maps/Conceptual maps________

g. Picture, photos and postcards ________

h. White board_______________________

3. Suggestions

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________