

Comprehensible Input to Promote Effective Language Output

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### **Abstract**

This is the report of an action research study whose purpose was to explore to what extent providing students with comprehensible input can promote students' effective language output. Data was collected through my research journal, a survey to students, an interview with the teacher, my teacher's advisor class observation report, and some students' artifacts. The data analysis revealed that when students are provided with the necessary input, clear instructions and feedback, their written and oral productions are more accurate. They also become more participative, more engaged and motivated toward the class, and they feel free of expressing their ideas in a more critical way using the language they have been taught.

**Key words:** input, output, instructions, feedback, critical media literacy.

### **Degree Requirements**

This action research project is submitted as a requirement of the bachelor of education in Teaching Foreign Languages (English- French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellin Colombia.

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## Preface

This work is a report of an action research study carried out at Institución Educativa Octavio Calderón Mejía, in Medellín. This is one of the three schools in the city which implements a methodology called new school that consists of students working in a guide designed by the teacher during each term with the idea of promoting students' autonomy, and group work. The implementation of this study was developed during three months with a group of eight graders.

After the observations I made at the beginning of this project, I could observe that the students do not receive the input they need to develop the activities proposed in the teacher's guide. Thus, I adapted a unit guide in a way that I could implement some strategies to provide students with a comprehensible input that they could use as preparation to present some assignments. In addition they had the opportunity of using what they have learnt to express more freely in a discussion on cyberbullying.

To analyze the result of this process I collected the data needed to do it, and once I finished its examination, I conclude that when students receive the input they need, they improve their performance and trust more in what they know, which motivates them to the point of becoming more participative in class.

This project made more aware that even if the students should learn to be more autonomous to develop the activities, the role of the teachers is crucial, since they have not only to give students the input they need to produce a more effective output, but also to be a guide during their processes.

### Description of the Context

This study will be conducted in the I.E Octavio Calderon Mejia, which is a public institution located in Guayabal Campo Amor, and which has a population of 1180 students. The school was founded in 1968 as an elementary school, and its name was Escuela Zoológico Santa Fé. In 1973 its name was changed to the current one, and since 1996 the school offers not only elementary but also secondary school. Nowadays, the institution also offers three technical education programs in trade, software development and graphic design for students in 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades. Concerning the schedule, it has two shifts: the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades study in the morning and the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades study in the afternoon. The elementary school has the five grades in the morning as well as in the afternoon.

This is one of the three chosen schools in Medellin to implement a pedagogical model called *Escuela Activa Urbana* which is an adaptation of the country model called *Escuela Nueva*. The students work on guides designed by the teacher during each term, and they always work in a round table with the aim of promoting cooperative learning, respect for each other, creativity and autonomy, and the role of the teacher is to be a guide and a facilitator.

Concerning the mission of the institution, it is to offer an educational service based on the *Escuela Activa Urbana* Pedagogy to foster a meaningful learning throughout cooperative working, autonomy and universal values. Its vision is to be recognized in 2018 for its contribution to the improvement of education through its pedagogical model, where the bilingualism and the ICT's play a major role.

The course observed is an 8<sup>th</sup> grade, which has to attend four English classes a week: two fifty five-minute class on Tuesdays and on Thursdays. The teachers follow the plan of the

Ministry of Education for this grade through a guide of activities designed by them at the beginning of each term. This guide is part of the pedagogy of *Escuela Activa Urbana*, and is divided into three parts: In the initial part the teacher introduces the topic and teaches the grammar topics; in the second part the students do practical activities to practice what they learned; and in the third part the students apply their knowledge doing activities such as a project, and a reflection activity.

For the school facilities, it is a three floor building: in the first floor there are located the administrative offices; the classrooms for the elementary school grades, 1 bathroom for kindergarten, two cafeterias, the playground, two restrooms, a handicapped ramp with access to the second and third floors and a small garden; in the second floor there are many classrooms, two of them have a computer for each student, the girls' restrooms, and the teachers' restrooms; in the third floor there are more classrooms and there are also two of them equipped with computers for each student, a library, and the restrooms for boys. The school also has an English laboratory which is not being used at the moment because it is being improved. It is important to say that each place in the institution is labeled in Spanish and in English.

Regarding the classroom, it is well illuminated and as large as needed for the number of students. The chairs and desks are arranged for students to work in round table; each table has six places and the students can sit with the classmates they want during the term if the teacher permits it. Last year, the classroom had each window decorated with sports names and some decoration pasted on them, two big quotes at the walls and a birthday calendar in English. This year there is not any environmental print. There are three big bookcases which contain different English books, including the English Please from the Ministry of Education, but they are not used as class material. There are also five small closets on the right side of the classroom in

which the teachers put their materials. In the front of the classroom, there is a comfortable desk for the teacher, a computer which is connected to a big smart TV and a white board. The classroom is exclusively for the CT, because in this school the teachers are not the ones who go from classroom to classroom, but the students, according to the subject matter.

Concerning the group, it is a 38 student- class: 32 boys and 6 girls whose ages range between 12 and 14 years. Most of these students come from Barrio Trinidad, Cristo Rey, Campo Amor, and Itagui which are neighborhoods that belong to socioeconomic strata 2 and 3. Although they work in round table as I said before, they are well behaved, and respectful with the teacher and their classmates. They are willing to participate in the class activities, and most of them seem motivated to learn English, although they almost never use it to talk. They just use simple words and sentences when they have to do a class activity, and never try to use basic classroom expressions.

The teacher of this course is from Quibdó and holds a BA in Spanish and English teaching from the University of Quibdó. She has ten years of experience in public education; the same time she has been in this school, and not only teaches English but also Spanish. As she is a homeroom teacher, she has to teach entrepreneurship to her group. Her classes are developed in Spanish. She only speaks English when she dictates the agenda, to read the guide and to give examples. Her methodology consists in following the guide she designs at the beginning which contains several activities being the most important the grammar ones and the practical part of it. Discipline is very important for her. That is why she implemented a strategy which consists in giving positive and negative points to the students. These points could be done for participation and for discipline. Her relationship with the students is very close, so they see her as a friend.

### **Setting of the problem**

After observing the English classes of an eighth grade at the I.E Octavio Calderón Mejía, I could identify different issues which are the consequence of a very relevant one, related to the input and feedback the teacher gives to the students.

According to the new school methodology applied in the institution, the students have to work in groups following a text guide during each term. The benefit of this sort of methodology is explained by (Saito, 1999) “Detailed and systematic 'learning guide' for self-learning was developed in order that the students can learn in small groups. The teacher should be a facilitator, who gives the necessary input for the students to accomplish the activities they have to do, and for the students achieve the language goals. Saito (1999) also explains what the role of the teacher should be when new school methodology is implemented. “The role of the teachers is transferred from a lecturer who provides information to a facilitator to support the students who are learning by themselves”. Nevertheless, although the students work in groups, most of the time they are just given the guide to work without receiving any explanation of how to do the activities or any example of how to use the language they are learning. The consequence is that students do not produce oral or written language, in an effective way.

The text guide is divided into four parts, and for each one the teacher just tells the students to work on the exercises without giving them any input. The second part of the guide, for example, is about the grammar the students have to learn for the term. I noticed that when the teacher has to explain this part, she only projects the same guide the students have on the TV screen, and she reads what the guide says and the examples the guide has. This concern is illustrated in the following journal entry. “Next, the teacher starts explaining the theory of cardinal and ordinal numbers, which is presented from the guide for the term, on the big TV the classroom has” (class observation 1, July 21<sup>st</sup> 2016 p.1). Also, the teacher does not use any oral

example, which can give the students an idea of how to use meaningfully the theory she explains, and it is always explained in Spanish. “She shows the theory of the conjunctions “and” and “but” on the TV, and explains it in Spanish. To support the explanation, she completes the first sentence from the guide”. (Class observation 2, July 22 2016 p.4).

Additionally, there are some activities from the guide in which the students are asked to do grammar exercises such as fill in the blanks, answer questions, and underline words etc. But the teacher just dictates the agenda and says the number of the activities they have to do, instead of doing a meaningful activity or at least an introduction of the topics they are going to work on. This situation is evidenced in the journal entry, as follows: “The teacher starts dictating the agenda which consists of doing the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> points from the guide for the term” (Class observation 3, Thursday, July 28th 2016 p. 6). While the students are supposed to work on the agenda for the day, the teacher takes advantage to check the students’ notebooks or grade tests. She does not check if the students are working or not, or if what they are doing is good to give them feedback. When the students ask her for the meaning or a word or expression she answers them that they can use the dictionary to find it, as it is seen in the following journal entry. “All the students can use a dictionary, and when one of them asks the teacher about the meaning of any word or expression, she tells them that the answer is in the dictionary” (observation 4, Friday, July 29th 2016 p. 8).

For the Third part of the guide the students have to practice the grammar theory they studied in the first one, through more meaningful activities. Therefore, the teacher tells the students the activity they have to do, but the students have to read on the guide the grammar they have to use. They do not receive any expression they could use for the practical activities or at least an example. “She asks the students to start working on their cartoons, but she does not give

examples or suggestions for the students to do them; she just says that the students have to read in the guide what they have to do” (class observation 4, Friday, July 29th 2016 p.8)

The result of those events in which the students are not given the necessary input to perform the activities is that their outcome is not effective. They just translate literal expressions from Spanish to English using the dictionary without using what they have learnt from the guide. “Some students start by doing the drawings and others by writing the text. The last ones do it first in Spanish and then they try to translate to English using the dictionary, but most of the time, what they write does not make any sense” (class observation 4, Friday, July 29th 2016 p.9). The same happens in oral activities. “Some of the students practice the guess who game, but they do not use the correct questions or answers to do it” (class observation 7 Friday, August 12<sup>th</sup> 2016 p.13)

Taking into account the information analyzed, it is evident the lack of input and feedback for the students to carry out the proposed activities in an effective way. It is important to note that the idea is not that the students produce the target language perfectly, but that they at least use what they are taught in order to start improving their output. For this reason, I consider comprehensible input would help students to produce the target language in a more effective way. I also consider useful using some teaching strategies as modeling, feedback, and graphic organizers for students to get awareness about how to use the language they are learning.

To finish, since the test guide includes a critical component in its third part, I will implement class discussions based on Critical Media Literacy which permits both working on speaking activities, and make the students reflect about the information they are exposed to in the media. The idea is that students have the opportunity to express their opinions and ideas using

the language they learn participating in groups and a class discussion about the content they see in social networks, and that they move from being passive consumers to active thinkers that question what they find in the media, while they learn English.

Although the new school theory aims to form more independent students, it does not mean that they do not need any support. By the contrary, students need not only a test guide, but also the guide of the teacher to accomplish the target learning goals.

### **Theoretical Background**

As mentioned before, through the observations I carried out of an eighth grade group, I realized that students have a lot of different activities to do during each term, and that they do not get the input they need to develop them. Hence, this study aims to provide students with the necessary input for them to produce an effective language output. It also intends to create a space for reflection where students can express freely about topics they are exposed to in their everyday life.

In this section I will present the theoretical concepts which will guide this process. First of all I will present some key concepts of the input and output theory, and its use in foreign language classrooms. Then I will describe some strategies I will implement as part of the input like modeling, feedback and the use of graphic organizers for students take into account when they have to produce output. Finally, I will talk about Critical Media Literacy as an approach for students to produce freely what they learnt through critical discussions.

In general words, the input is all the information learners are exposed to in the language they are learning. "The most common meaning as used in second language acquisition is language data that the learner is exposed to, that is, the learner's experience of the target language

in all its various manifestations” (Smith, 1993). Regarding Krashen’s input theory, students learn when they are exposed to the target language in a way that they can understand some of the structure presented. It means that although the input message can contain unknown structure, the students can draw the general idea of it. “We acquire, when we understand language that contains structure that is "a little beyond" where we are now” (Krashen, 1982). This is possible with the help of the context and extra-linguistic structure (Salazar, 1996).

As seen, this theory was stated for language acquisition, but what does it happen when talking about language learning? In those formal classroom where grammar is taught first, the students’ learning process observed is the same to that one of the students involved in naturalistic second language acquisition. “the order of emergence of grammatical forms could not be altered by instruction and that mid and late acquired items in naturalistic language learning are also mid and late acquired items for classroom learners” (Vanpatten, 1987). Therefore, teachers in foreign language classrooms play a very important role since they are the ones who give the primary input to students. They should teach not only grammar but also create a classroom environment where the students can be provided with effective input to start using the target language. “L2 acquisition depends on comprehensible input. In the classroom, then, the teacher’s main role is to ensure that learners receive comprehensible input by providing them with listening and reading materials” (Zhang, 2009).

It is clear that the input given to students can’t be the same to the one settled in a second language learning classroom, but it can be intentionally modified to facilitate comprehension or negotiated during interaction. As stated by (Bahrani & Solltani, 2012) “the pre-modified input refers to a type of input that is simplified before it is given to the learners to boost comprehension process” They also talk about an input which can be modified while interaction is

happening in order to negotiate meaning and make input more comprehensible. Teachers can also use elaborated input, which according to Nunan (2000) it consists of "... repetition, paraphrasing, slower speech contains redundant information, the redundancy being achieved through repetition, paraphrase, slower speech and so on". Likewise Thompson (2012) cites Brewster, Ellis and Girard 2002 who refer to this kind of actions and modeling using the context, as a crucial factor for children to learn a second language.

The input by itself is not enough to learn another language. It is required that students produce in the target language which is called output. As stated by Swain (1985) input alone is insufficient for L2 learning, it is indispensable that learners produce output. When a learner produces something previously taught it is called practice, and in the case of language, students are expected to start using the language they are learning. That is to say learners' knowledge of the language arise from their experience with the language. When they get used to be in contact with the new language, they can perceive some generalizations, and they start using them when interacting with others (Collins, Trofimovich, White, Cardoso, & Horst, 2009). Learners, also reformulate the input they receive producing modified output which shows the adaptations they do during the process to facilitate their learning of a second language (Maleki, 2012). As evidenced above, input and output are narrowly linked, they are keys to learn another language.

Taking into account the definition of input it is important to mention the strategies to implement when giving it to learners. In this study it will be used modeling as a way to show the students not only how to use the structures they already know, but also the way they can do the assignments, and to pronounce. They may start by repeating some things, but then, they can start proposing and elaborating their own productions in the target language. "Teachers mediate language and learning in several ways: mode shifting through recasting, signaling to the students

how they can self-reformulate, and modeling alternative ways of recontextualising personal knowledge” (Jungming Ko, 2003) .

Furthermore, students can figure out how the language works in its real context. In this respect Thomson (2012) argues that “The modeling of target language would seem therefore to be an extremely important strategy for teachers to use, as these models may be a student’s only guide on how the additional language is used in a natural environment”.

Another strategy proposed in this study is to give the needed feedback to the pupils, in a way that when they produce output, they receive the effective feedback to improve their performance. Effective learning requires feedback, but it is important that it is comprehensible, useful and relevant because it can affect the modifications students do when using the target language. If the feedback is constructive they use it for rephrasing in the case of oral output. But instead of emphasizing grammar, teachers should model the expected output. Nunan (2000) also suggests teachers “...need to monitor not only how and when such feedback is provided, but also whether the feedback is positive or negative, and who receives the feedback”.

The use of graphic organizers (GO) is also explored in this project because it is a strategy for students visualize and organize what they are learning or producing in their second or foreign language learning process. “Graphic organizers are proven to improve learning and aid students in organizing thoughts, brainstorming ideas, and linking information” (Hill & Miller, 2013). They are commonly used in reading comprehension, but they are also used in written production. The idea in this study is to teach students how to make simple GO that help them to organize their ideas before writing. Beckett & Gonzalez (2004) cite a study carried out by a Canadian teacher who gradually trained her students to create graphic organizers on their own. According to the teacher, with practice, students were able to write coherent writing from graphics using

more accurate linguistic forms. Lehman, 1992 states that graphic organizers help the students to put things in a sequential order, and provide structure, organization, format and a place for the students to relate information to their personal experiences.

Apart from the strategies mentioned above, I will work on Critical Media Literacy (CML) since media is present in students' everyday lives. Nowadays CML becomes a means that provides students with the opportunity to analyze in a critical way the content they find in the media, and that offer the possibility to discuss on the issues found in them.

To talk about what CML is, Brown (1998) states that it involves the purpose of boosting or fostering the "discriminating responsiveness" or critical analysis in its participants. In a world where people are expressing themselves through the use of different virtual platforms that represent the massive means of control, these expressions or messages acquire more relevance and should be questioned. According to Kellner and Share (2007), "these changes in technology, media, and society require the development of critical media literacy to empower students and citizens to adequately read media messages and produce media themselves in order to be active participants in a democratic society" (p.3)

Therefore, CML provides the teacher with various spaces to fully exploit class activities in which students will be able to take advantage of their prior knowledge about different aspects to create more elaborated opinions that go beyond the expected. As stated by Semali (2003), "media literacy becomes a process of analyzing, comparing, interpreting, and making sense of texts in a way that is different from the usual, routine, and preferred meaning" (p.275).

As nowadays almost everybody has to do with social networks, we can say that the interaction with them becomes part of the students' lives and experiences which influences their participation in the classroom. Finn (2105) claims for an understanding of students' engagement

in language learning, as directly connected to their lives outside the classroom. Therefore, implementing class critical discussions related to the students' daily lives, can increase oral participation, which give students the opportunity of practicing what they learn.

In summary, I want to provide students with the effective input they need, spaces, and opportunities to practice so they can produce effective output. They will have the necessary modeling and feedback before and during they carry out each activity, and the opportunity of questioning the world around them using the target language more freely in critical discussions.

### **Research Question**

How can comprehensible input promote effective language output from students?

### **General Objective**

To explore how comprehensible input can promote students' effective language output.

### **Specific objectives**

- To give the necessary input and feedback to students before and during the preparation of activities.
- To provide students with the necessary modeling so that they can produce orally.
- To encourage students to write short paragraphs in English using graphic organizers.
- To motivate students to participate in critical discussions using what they have learnt

### **Action Plan**

Aiming to provide students with the opportunity to produce an effective output, I will give them the necessary input to produce it. To carry out this purpose, I will implement some strategies for students to understand the activities they have to develop, I will model them so

they can figure out how to perform their own productions, and I will give them the necessary feedback when they need it.

First of all, I had to take into account the syllabus, and the methodology the school implements which is New School. Thus, I designed two guides with the requirements of the school to work during the two first terms. In order to implement the strategies to give a more effective input for students to produce a more effective output, I adapted the guide in a way that students could learn and practice the linguistic forms, and do guided activities. Second, I will give students the opportunity for them to express more freely including a critical stance. Finally, in order to analyze the results of the research project, I continued writing down my reflections on my teaching journal, I applied a questionnaire to students and an interview to the teacher at the end of the implementation process, and I took the evidence of the students' artifacts such as workshops and recordings of their productions.

### **The Syllabus and the Adaptation of the Guide**

The school sent a guide sample divided into 5 parts and each part had the explanations of what it had to include. So I designed the first part of the guide to activate previous knowledge, the second one with the required grammar for the grade, the third one included meaningful practical activities, the fourth one had to do with the critical stance and the final part with micro projects on the term topic. I firstly designed two guides, but due to time constraints, I realized it would not be possible to develop the second one. Consequently, I focused my efforts in the first guide. I adapted it in a way that for each activity the students had to develop they had the necessary input, modeling and feedback from me.

### **The Critical Component**

The guide also has to include a critical component, so I designed an activity related to critical media literacy. I first introduced the theme by showing them some negative memes I found in social networks. Then I elicited students with several questions about the issue presented to sponsor a discussion and their reflections on the topic. Finally, the students had to work in groups to create their own meme, but a positive one. The idea was that they had the opportunity to discuss and to reflect in groups about the information they are exposed to in their everyday lives, and that they become “activists” against the bullying in the media.

### **Data Collection**

With the idea of assessing the effectiveness of the given input to students, and how it is reflected in their output, I planned to continue writing in my journal about how that input was given to students, and how it influenced their productions. Additionally, I decided to implement a questionnaire to students and an interview to the teacher at the end of the implementation to know their perceptions about how they felt with the input I gave them, if they consider useful the strategies implemented, and what they think about working critically on what they are exposed to in the media. I also planned to collect some written productions and make some recordings to assess the relation between the students output and the given input.

### **Development of actions**

The following are the actions I carried out to accomplish my goals with this research project.

To design the guide, I followed the requirements of the Ministry of Education which the teachers has to take into account to design the guide. Therefore, I designed the guide for the first

term on the impact of human actions on the environment, and for the critical component on the respect for people's sexual diversity.

The first part of the guide has to do with the activation of previous knowledge, but before getting into the matter, I wanted to give them my first input on giving personal information so they could write a short paragraph about them. I started to talk about me and each time I said something, I wrote it on the board until I finished talking about me. Then, I asked them to write their own paragraph about their personal information and to read it aloud. I continued by explaining the students the topic to work on during the term, and as part of the input I showed them a video about the plastic present in the ocean and how a group of people helps to catch it from it. Although the video was easy to understand, as part of the feedback, I stopped it several times to clarify the unknown vocabulary, and to check if they were understanding it. When the video finished, they had to answer some questions about it.

Another activity we did in this part of the unit was a guessing game to make a list of the known vocabulary about the topic. Next, I completed the words related to the environment, and asked the students to write positive and negative actions from the words, for what they had an example. Finally, they had to answer some questions about the topic.

The second part of the guide had to include the grammar concepts which are normally explained by the teacher, but I changed the procedure. I presented the first grammar topic, but the students had to prepare in groups the next ones. The idea was to give them a model of how to present the topics and give the examples about it in a simple way. Moreover, I gave them clear instructions before the modeling, and I included the needed grammar theory in the student's guide. During their presentations, I gave them the necessary feedback on preparation and

pronunciation. I also made an activity for each topic, so the whole class could practice it, and I could give them feedback on what was not clear.

For the third part of the students' guide, the idea was to design more practical activities, so I showed them images about environmental problems, and I elicited them to reflect on the responsibility of the government, industry and human actions. For this, we had a discussion where they had to use the structures and vocabulary worked in class on the topic. After this activity, they had to write a paragraph about the ecological, and non-ecological practices they implement in their daily lives. As part of the preparation, I explained what a graphic organizer is, I showed them some examples, and we all chose a simple mind map to organize the ideas of the paragraph they had to write. With the participation of the students, I made a mind map on the board with lots of ideas and expressions they could use for their writing assignment which was to be handed in.

In this part of the guide the students also had to do an interview with a classmate about their practices to help the environment and to present it. As part of the input, I showed them an interview on the topic, I explained the language they had to use, and I modeled them some examples of questions and answers using the vocabulary and the structures they should take into account. I also gave them constant feedback before their presentations.

The fourth part of the guide had to include the critical component, and as the topic was the respect for sexual diversity, I decided to work on the memes we find in social networks and that show disrespect against homosexual people. For this activity, I chose some memes I found in social networks, and after I showed each one, I let the students to express about what they thought of them. Then I raised awareness of the fact that we are not only consumers of information, but also producers. So their job was to create in groups a positive meme, which

could counteract the effect of the negative ones. I gave them an example of a positive meme as modeling, and the feedback they needed before presenting their productions.

I did not have time to develop the last part of the guide because they had to write a small play, and prepared a video for the English day. Thus, I suggested to work on bullying in the media to continue with the last topic, I showed them an example of a short video, and I showed them a script for them to take into account the structure. I also gave them feedback on their own script before they did the video.

To assess if the input given to students and the strategies implemented worked for them to produce a more effective output, I continued writing in my research journal. I wrote about the activities done, the preparation for each, the students' attitudes towards the class and their performance in English. I also reflected on how the application of my research project was working with the students. I consider of primary importance the student's and teacher's opinion on the way I conducted the project. Therefore, I made a questionnaire to students to know if they considered useful the instructions, the language, the feedback and the modeling given for them to develop the activities proposed. Likewise, I did an interview with the teacher to see her perceptions on the use of the strategies I implemented, and on the student's output during my research process. I also wanted a proof of the students' output, so I collected some students' artifacts, and I made some recordings of their presentations.

### **Findings and Interpretations**

In order to analyze the data collected from this research process, I first read carefully my research journal, and categorized the information to find possible answers to my research question. Then, I analyzed carefully the survey made to students and the class observation report

my teacher advisor gave me as feedback from the observation of my classes. I also transcribed the interview I made to my cooperating teacher and finally I reviewed the students' productions collected for the analysis. I found several categories which were linked among them, I organized them in a chart and then I classified those that were similar into the three following super categories.

Through the examination of the relations among the data collected, I identified that providing the students with the correct input using meaningful strategies to give it, and a constant feedback, it leads students to improve in many aspects when learning English. They not only showed to improve their oral and written productions, but also their participation and engagement towards the class.

The following is the description of the three main themes drawn through the data analysis: students' active participation through input, students' more accurate productions, and students' engagement and motivation.

### **Students' Active Participation through Input**

Data showed that the activities done and that the strategies implemented to make the input given more meaningful, lead to an increasing students' participation in class. Each activity done to give input to students, were thought for them to participate whether by giving examples, by asking questions, or by answering them.

Contrary to what I expected, they were willing to participate in all the activities proposed. Even if they did not know how to say something in English, they used what they had just learned from the input given, which showed students' understanding of the topics. When they did not understand something, they felt confident to ask questions for clarifying their doubts, which

shows their commitment with their learning process. For instance, during an activity where we were doing a basic graphic organizer on the board and I was giving the input about how to write expressions from a given key word “After the explanation and examples given, I ask for an example to students and say the word trees. Then, they say “plant trees” as a positive action, and “chop down trees” as a negative action” (Research journal entry 4, February 9, 2017). Likewise, my teacher advisor point in her class report that “The students actively participate, felt free to ask questions, to provide examples and truly seem happy in class” (Teacher's visit, April 18, 2017).

In this way, I can say that when students are given meaningful examples and modeling, they are more confident to participate since they can figure out what the teacher is expecting. As the 65% of students expressed in the survey applied, “Es más fácil para mi participar si la profesora ha dado antes un ejemplo porque puedo ver como utilizar las expresiones y el vocabulario que necesito para dar mi propio ejemplo” (Students’ survey, May 11, 2017).

Another example found in my teaching journal (Entry 9, March 7, 2017) indicates how the practice of the input given through examples and modeling, make students more aware of how to use what they are learning.

“I explained through examples, that the first possessive of each pronoun goes at the beginning like in Spanish and that the other one goes to the end. I asked for a few more examples before the class finishes and they showed they got what I said because their examples were more accurate”

As seen, “The teacher’s role is critical not only in providing students with access to grammatical input, but also in setting up the conditions for successful second language acquisition in the classroom” ( Doughty & Pica, 1986).

### **Students' More Accurate Productions after Instructions and Feedback**

Data evidenced that after the students had the opportunity to practice immediately after receiving input, they were more prepared for doing more complex activities like presentations, interviews and short paragraphs. It does not mean that they did everything perfectly, but at least they used what they were taught in a more effective way.

In addition to the input the students received before more demanding productions, they were given clear instructions as part of the input not only about how to do the activity, but also about the required language they had to use for doing them. To this respect, the CT's argues that "If the students do not have clear instructions, they cannot develop an activity in a correct way". In a similar way, the students are aware that instructions give them an idea of the required language they have to include in the activity. 75% of them answered: "cuando recibo instrucciones puedo tener claro el lenguaje que debo usar para desarrollar la actividad. (Students' survey, May 11, 2017). My teacher advisor also underline in her feedback of the class observation that "Teacher instructions are clear, so students know what they are to do".

Constant feedback was also present while the students were doing the activities, so they could become aware of the mistakes they were doing and to correct them before presenting their final products. The feedback was not a simple correction, but an opportunity to encourage students to analyze what they were doing. One of the examples I got from my journal was this: "they show me their answer like this: "Separate plastic, cardboard and glass "I ask them: Who? And they say "yo", so I ask them how to say that in English and they realize they are missing the pronoun "I" (Entry 13, March 21, 2017). As the cooperating teacher says in her interview, "feedback is an opportunity for students to clarify any doubt while they are developing the activities" (Interview to the Cooperating Teacher, May 22, 2017). The students also expressed

that feedback is very important for them, since they answered in the survey that it helped them not only to know how to pronounce before presenting oral activities and how to write when presenting written activities, but also to understand the topic they are working on. (Students' survey, May 11, 2017).

During this study the students did six complex activities for which they used what they learned in an effective way. In my research journal, I registered the result of them and this is one of the examples of a written activity. "I gave back the paragraphs to the students and I was happy to see that those who presented the writing took into account my instructions and the simple graphic organizer we did in class and the result were a more accurate production" (Entry 14, March 23, 2017)

I chose two paragraphs from the students' instruments I collected, which reflect that students took into account the instructions related to the organization of the ideas, the language, and vocabulary required. They are not perfect paragraphs, but the students used effectively what was taught in the giving input stage. (Students' Artifacts, March 21, 2017). The 80% of students also express that they improved their writing during this process. (Students' survey, May 11, 2017).

Another students' work taken as an example for this study was an oral one. The students had the opportunity to express freely in a critical discussion before the activity, to receive the instructions to do it and the needed feedback during its development and the result were some good presentations and a well created meme. "Most of the students did a really good job explaining why the meme showed disrespect to sexual diversity, and creating their own" (Entry 18, April 25, 2017). They had really great ideas, they wrote simple expressions using what they knew, and some of them created digitally which shows that they took advantage of the

technology they are exposed to in their everyday lives. (Students' artifacts, April 20, 2017). The CT's also admits that the students' performance has improved a lot and that they know how to use the language taught. "They have improved their pronunciation and when they have to present an activity, they use the grammar and the vocabulary the teacher have explained before" ((Interview to the Cooperating Teacher, May 22, 2017).

### **Students' Engagement and Motivation**

The data analysis also showed that students were very engaged in the class, since they were very interested in expressing their opinions, in doing the activities proposed well done and on time. In my journal I wrote to this respect that "the students were really engaged doing their posters of the meme they created, and most of them finished the poster in this class, so all of them have to present them next class" (Entry 17, April 20, 2017). Their attitudes toward the class were very positive, so they behaved most of the classes. As registered by my teacher advisor "Students seem very engaged in their learning process, most students work and behave, and they also self-regulate" (Teacher's visit, April 18, 2017).

Furthermore, students felt very happy when they understood, and felt more motivated to do things better. After an accurate intervention of one student during an activity, one student said: "Profe me estoy superando" (Entry 5, February 14, 2017). Then, he characterized for being one of the most participative students. Similarly, another student said in a class: "profe hoy estoy entendiendo todo es que usted si explica" (Entry 17, April 20, 2017).

In addition, it was very rewarding to see that some students started to use simple classroom expressions, as seen in my teaching journal (Entry 10, March 9, 2017) "each time they did not know how to say something, They asked me "teacher, how do you say....?" Which

shows that they are trying to use more English in class". This was very significant since the students' confidence grew significantly once they had had understood the topics, which lead them to feel more motivated and to take more risks when participating.

### **Conclusions**

After the analysis of how comprehensible input can promote students' effective language output, I could observe that when students felt really confident about what they knew, they were willing to participate more actively in class, that their productions were more effective, and a considerably growing of their engagement with learning English. This was possible thanks to the comprehensible input given though the whole process. They had the opportunity of learning the vocabulary and grammar required for the term, and to practice that language firstly through guided practice on topics to which they are exposed to in their daily life, then through assignments so they could work in a more autonomous way, and finally in a critical discussion in which they could use the language they have learned to express themselves in a more spontaneously way.

During the guided practices they demonstrated a great interest in solving their doubts and in participating in class, without being asked for the teacher but because they seemed really willing to do it. The frequency of those interventions was crucial for them to improve their use of English and to prepare for presenting more complex activities which reflected that students were using what they had been taught in an effective way. The accurate result of most students' productions, was the result of the instructions and constant feedback given to them, and their motivation to learn more day after a day.

This study shows that although it is important to let students be more autonomous, it does not mean giving them a task or an assignment without providing them before, the opportunity of being explained the language they need to develop it, the chance of practicing in context that language several times to internalize its use, and to receive an effective feedback. Afterwards, students become more autonomous, creative and prepared to go beyond of the language they have got. I cannot say that all the students got the interest and the accuracy at the same level, but something is sure: they all improved their process in some way, which was very rewarding for me as teacher.

### **Reflection**

Looking back at my academic process at the University of Antioquia, I can say that it has been a hard and long way, but full of fulfilling experiences and rewarding learning. Each semester, I learned new things that enriched my knowledge about the language and about how to become a good teacher. Not just one of those who only are worried about imparting a collection knowledge, but also one who is aware of the important role we play in this changing society.

It may sound idealistic, but I learned that teacher can help to change the world or at least lives in a positive way. We can motivate students when we transmit our love for what we are teaching and for learning new things even if the conditions are not the best. We can help them to improve their learning process and the way they face their lives if we take into account their needs and their context, and we can teach them that learning open doors to a better life.

To close with a flourish, my academic process, the action research project I implemented, showed me that being a teacher in a public school in our country is challenging, but that we have

to believe in what we do, and try to continue improving our practices in the classroom through observation, so we can implement different strategies to choose the most adequate for each group we teach, since all of them are different. As we never stop learning, this is an opportunity to continue doing it not only about academic issues but also from those we teach.

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