Universidad de Valladolid

FACULTAD de FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS
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Grado en Estudios Ingleses

TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

"**THE ADVANCE IN COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE CLASSROOM**."

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Vº Bº

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2016-22017

ABSTRACT

SUMMARY

The aim of this paper is to test how the advance in communicative strategies for teaching English in the classroom has led to a change in the way students use language not only as a simple working tool that locates grammar and vocabulary in the first step, but as a game tool that allows them to interact with each other and in which communication plays the most important role. In this way, the student experiences a change of role with the teacher, being the former who establishes the bases of his/her learning according to his/her own motivation, achieving a more complete integration of the language and an improvement in their communicative skills.

Keywords: communicative approach, strategies, immersion, bilingualism, proficiency, interaction.

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este trabajo es probar cómo los avances en las estrategias comunicativas para la enseñanza del inglés en las aulas han supuesto un cambio en la forma en que los estudiantes utilizan el idioma no solo como una simple herramienta de trabajo que sitúa la gramática y el vocabulario en el primer escalón, si no como una herramienta de juego que les permita interactuar entre ellos y en la que la comunicación juegue el papel más importante. De esta forma, el estudiante experimenta un cambio de rol con el profesor, siendo él mismo quien establece las bases de su aprendizaje de acuerdo a su propia motivación, consiguiendo una integración más completa del idioma y una mejora en sus habilidades comunicativas.

Palabras clave: enfoque comunicativo, estrategias, inmersión, bilingüismo, competencia, interacción.

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1. Introduction

Getting an effective teaching that promotes the active participation of students and the development of communicative competence, remains a challenge for the teachers of English as a second language (ESL). The research on the teaching of a second language (L2) has shown that students implement their skills when they participate in activities that facilitate interaction and allow them to use the language in the classroom (Jin, 2008).

As a future teacher, I understand that the teacher is one of the main factors in promoting the students´ confidence about learning the language and to develop the ability to express themselves, so that the use of a defined strategy can make the difference between a positive and a negative result.

Sometimes learning English can be a complex problem for those non-native speakers who are not comfortable with the language (Marsh & Lange, Swarts, 2000). The teaching of a L2 is not an easy task, but it requires exceptional teaching skills, if we take into account that the majority of teachers of a foreign language in Spain base their teachings on materials which follow the curriculums already pre-established by the government.

We understand the need to create alternative resources that help us develop our work in a more effective way in the classroom. According to Krashen & Terrell (1983), many teachers of English as a second language are concerned above teaching the grammatical system, without taking into account how students can transfer that grammatical knowledge to meet the language needs in the real-life situations. Terrell postulated that the knowledge of the grammar of a second language (L2) is not enough to communicate effectively. And other authors such as Ellis (1991) have reiterated that effective teaching and learning of a language in the school will improve the teaching of other subjects.

When the students speak in class, they use simple and very limited vocabulary to respond the questions of teachers; these words often do not give space for the free expression of ideas and the opportunity for students to develop or rationalize this expression. On the other hand, there is a high number of students who, even with the necessary skills or other developed skills such as reading or listening, lack the confidence

to express themselves in English. It is undeniable that the problem of massive failure in English generates low levels of fluency in that language. But it is very significant that, even those students who were handled well in other skills, feel intimidated at the time to develop their knowledge (Wragg, 1989).

Sometimes, when the teachers need to ask questions, some students who raise their hands to indicate their readiness to respond are most favored during the training process. So, it may be necessary a change in the approach that will be used to develop certain skills in students. On this subject, Kennedy and Cutts (2005) noted that the traditional methods of teaching English are insufficient to achieve the current educational objectives, due to the inability on the part of the students to demonstrate a reasonable knowledge of what they have learned in the course.

In a study carried out by the company of English Teaching; Kids & Us and the University of Barcelona about the learning of English through the comparison of the level in spoken, written and read, from the students of Kids & Us and students of primary and secondary education in public education, shows the low level of spoken English was in the students of the public education. Specifically, in the measures of grammar and vocabulary, interaction and management of discourse is more than a point of difference between the students of Kids & Us and the High School. (Tragant Mestre, 2012:3)

It is important to note that the interaction is the basis of this project. English learning students need to deploy their skills in an educational and entertaining way, and there is no doubt that these improvements are linked to the teachers and the necessary materials developed by them (Wallace, Stariha, Walberg, 2004). According to these authors, the practice with the teacher, with other classmates or with the group in general, the whole interaction in the classroom, it is one of the best ways to teach how to talk.

2. Thesis statement

This research is designed to prove how the communicative approach has made a difference in the abilities the students get when studying English. The strategies applied will be focused in the communicative approach and in a didactic way to learn English.

In this thesis, we want to explore new teaching methods and strategies that English teachers think they could use to arouse students' interests in learning communicative English and make recommendations that could help students in the acquisition of the second language.

First of all, we will work in a literature research about the traditional methods of teaching and learning English in Spain, the communicative focus, and the bilingualism to know the details of the evolution of the strategies of teaching English in the classroom.

2.1. Objectives

The main objective of the study is:

To make a review of the communicative approach.

Also we have some secondary objectives:

- Study the traditional strategies for teaching English in Spain.
- Understand the importance of the communicative focus
- Analyze the new perspective of teaching English.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1. The introduction of English teaching in Spain

In Spain, during the 1970s, there was a substantial change in teaching foreign languages with the introduction of a foreign language as a compulsory part of the Spanish education system. This change occurred as a result of the approval of the *Ley General de Educación* (1970), which represented a comprehensive reform of the education system.

This law mentioned the importance of learning a foreign language starting at the age of eight, although it was not mandatory to start this early. It did not detail the time that should be destined to teaching a foreign language; however, the 40% or 50% of 25 hours of teaching lessons per week should be allocated to the general treatment of the areas of language and therefore, the foreign language was included here. Besides, the recommended foreign languages to be learnt were English and French (Aparicio, 2009).

In the Spanish school context, bilingualism was adopted as an educative model in 1996 when the *Ministerio de Educación* and the British Council agreed on a collaboration to work in primary schools all over the Spanish territory. Nowadays, as a consequence of this agreement, there are 62 primary schools and 40 high schools with more than 23.000 students all over Spain (Aparicio, 2009).

The agreement included the drafting of a curriculum based on the English curriculum, with a bilingual curriculum of the 40% in English although adapted to the Spanish educative needs. So they work with science, history and geography in English language.

The above-mentioned project has been in force for two decades now. Several studies have been carried out during this time which clearly show the successful results from this experience (MECD 2010). As a consequence of this success, and due to the social demand, the diverse governments of the different Spanish Autonomous Communities have reinforced the implementation of their own bilingual program. Furthermore, their corresponding educative laws have even drafted their own guidelines to carry out this bilingual tuition.

Thus, nowadays, bilingual education is a fact in the Spanish schools. Furthermore, the *Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte* (MECD), and the Regional Education Authorities are jointly developing the program of learning foreign languages (*Programa Integral de Aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras 2010-2020)* and the program for improving foreign language learning (*Programa de fortalecimientos de competencias en la lengua extranjera* - PFDCLE 2012). As we will indicate later, each of the Autonomous Communities has contributed very significantly to the strong and rapid expansion of so-called learning programs that integrate content and foreign languages.

Regarding the State education laws, all the organic education laws adopted since 1990 have brought a great progress regarding the treatment of foreign languages in the Spanish educational system. The approval of the *Ley Orgánica General del Sistema Educativo* (LOGSE, 1990) extended FL teaching from primary to high school; the *Ley Orgánica de Educación* (LOE, 2006), established, as one key aspect, the students' acquisition of the "linguistic communication competence", which refers to the official language or languages, and the foreign language as well. It also established the objective of teaching at least one foreign language and its promotion from the second cycle of infant education. Lastly, the *Ley Orgánica de la Mejora de la Calidad Educativa* (LOMCE, 2013), includes as one of its principles the promotion of multilingualism as in line with the rest of the European countries, which set it as an essential objective for the construction of a European project for 2020.

3.2. The approach of the communicative focus

The project will be based in the promotion of the communicative approach, the increase in communicative competence of the student, the accomplishment of motivating activities, in addressing the importance of the confidence of the students and the attitudes and the role of the teacher in the classroom. This project assumes also that the benefit of the application of this type of strategies is bidirectional, because it incurs into the professional development of teachers, understanding that the success of the students' learning depends on the teacher's ability and the students´ own motivation.

The communicative approach (from now on CA) is one of the most significant paradigms for professionals who are concerned with the development of student's communicative fluency. Although many authors have contributed to explain the meaning of the communicative approach, Richards and Rodgers (2014) assert that there is a universally accepted definition,

> (...) A theory of the teaching of languages that defends a communicative model of the language and a use that seeks to apply this model in the teaching system, in the materials, in the roles and behaviors of the teacher and the student, and in the activities and class techniques, (Richard and Rodgers, 2001).

In the grounds of Applied Linguistics and English as a foreign language, the CA and communicative language teaching (CLT) have been used interchangeably to delimit an approach that focuses on the communicative needs of students (Riley, 2008). According to Jin (2008), the communicative approach refers to a set of principles on teaching; it includes the curriculum and methodology indications (Focus on meaning, Communicative competence is the desired goal, Learner- centered, Fluency is the primary goal, students are expected to interact with other people, dialogues center around communicative functions, intrinsic motivation, task-based), and requires the participation of students in tasks that promote the use of language instead of studying it.

Emphasizing the importance of input and output processing, Qian (2010) defines the CA as the student's commitment to learning through activities and events that allow them to express themselves freely in the language that they are learning. In a communicative environment, attention is not focused on the forms of language but on the ability to educate students to express ideas, concepts and notions within a context. Savignon (2002) defined CA as a multidisciplinary approach that focuses on the elaboration and execution of participatory communicative activities, that promote the development of the capacity of functional language of students.

By providing more detail on the nature of communicative activities, Mambo (2004) defines CA as the use of real-life situations to activate communication among students, with students being directly responsible for the outcome of class activities. The definition of Mambo reflects the nature of activities in real situations, which give students the opportunity to learn the language while they are using it. Richards and Rodgers (2001) portray the CA as a process in which learners learn a language in pairs or groups, exploring their resource potential about solving language learning problems through tasks.

After analyzing the different definitions of the CA, this project can understand this approach as the use of relevant educational materials (use of ICT's as videos, social media, etc.) that provide students with the opportunity to learn a language, while interacting in groups to perform real-life situations. Learning through tasks, we give the student the opportunity to make an automated use of the target language, away from those programs

already pre-established. For this purpose, the students and the teacher are active partners who share responsibilities in order to ensure an effective development of the L2 use and a communicative improvement.

3.3. The new perspective of language and communication

Criticism to the previous teaching methods, forced linguists to shift attention towards the developing of an integrated teaching approach. The integrated approach encompasses more than one language teaching method and attends to the teacher and student's needs (Garrido, s.f., Wnejie, 2009). Some researchers (Savignon, 1987; Richards & Rodgers, 2001), believe that the CA was an alternative to the Britain 1970s structuralism and audiolinguistics. In this period, there was a strong movement between British linguists towards the functional and communicative potential of language, that could satisfy the linguistic needs of the students. In addition, teaching using the grammatical method of translation meant, that pupils were not communicating through appropriate social language, gestures and expression. All this encouraged the emergence of the communicative approach (Savignon, 2002; Woozley, s.f).

In another context, Lowe (2003), through his work for the European Council that was seeking to follow-up on the CA since the 1960s, saw his approach first flourished between 1970 and 1990. At that time, in England teachers taught on the basis of functional curriculum, which emphasized communicative functions. Audiolinguistics influenced communicative functions because teachers continued to expose students to repetitive teaching. The first phase of the CA was more focused on the use of language to perform functions, advice such as request something and apologize. Around 1980, the first phase of CA development, suffered a setback resulting in a reform influenced by Krashen's theory of learning of the late 1970s. According to Krashen (1982), there is a distinction between the acquisition and the learning of a language. Krashen argues that the grammatical structures of a second language are learned, while the acquisition of a language is an unconscious process that develops as the individual uses the language for communication.

Lowe argues that the second phase of the communicative approach is superior to the first phase, because of the distinction between precision (dealing with grammar and

linguistic forms) and fluency (which attempts to encourage students to speak without being interrupted). Krashen further argues that irrespective of category (accuracy and fluency), the use of an information and discussion gap based on real-life situations is essential for all communicative activities in the classroom.

Malik (2008) argues that although Krashen's opinion has received a number of criticisms, his ideology remains relevant in teaching and learning of an L2, as it presents a detailed description of the CA.

Savignon (2002) links the rapid increase in the linguistic needs of immigrants and workers in Europe and North America, and the British linguistic tradition. Such entangled needs in social and linguistic contexts, led to the development of a based learning program on non-functional linguistics. Woozley (sf), who states that the CA is a product of various approaches, stresses the importance of communication in language teaching and also notes that it began with Chomsky's cognitive approach, which clearly underlines a distinction between "performance" and "competence" (Firth and Wagner, 1997).

The goal of CA can be interpreted as the development of oral expression, with less emphasis on reading and writing in order to develop a communicative style of teaching, based on the authentic use of language and communication among students in real life. Alatis (2007) distinguishes between CA and other teaching methods such as "teacher-centered language classroom" and "learner-centered language classroom". It should be mentioned that in the development of this project the "learner-centered language Classroom, "or student-centered teaching", is not synonymous with CA, since the latter is an aspect of the communicative approach.

3.4. The Integrated Content and Language Learning (CLIL)

Integrated Content and Language Learning is a methodological approach, which arises from the European need to provide the new generations with the necessary preparation for the EC initiatives proposed to Member States, in order to learn two languages separately of the mother tongue. The low levels in foreign languages of the citizens of some European countries (Spain, Portugal, Italy, etc.) and the ineffective traditional methodologies used to teach them, which did not give the expected results, led to

the search, once again, of an integrated teaching method or approach, in order to reach the objectives of a world where integration and globalization require a series of knowledge and skills, very different from those that were needed in previous times.

In spite of the efforts and investments made by the European Community in the different action plans and programs (European Commission, 2014), whose main objective was to promote language learning and to enable pupils in Member States to improve their level of language proficiency, we can say the results were still far below expectations.

> The findings of a comparative analysis of the Member States "foreign language education policies" discuss the possible reasons for the disappointing state of students' foreign language competences in the Member States. According to this analysis, there are a fair number of countries, where learning time is considered to be adequate, but achieved competency levels at the end of secondary education are too low, thus pointing to a problem with the efficiency and quality of teaching. (European Commission, 2014: 1).

The comparative analysis of the "Improving the effectiveness of language learning: CLIL and computer assisted language learning" carried out in the year 2014 by the European Commission shows that it is necessary to implement approaches that allow greater exposure to language in natural contexts and to integrate them in the curriculum, an approach that has already been tested in some European countries with very satisfactory results. That approach is what is known as CLIL.

Many authors have defined this term, and even Marsh, has been adding modifications over the time. The first definition that Marsh (1994) gives about CLIL is the following: "it refers to situations where subjects, or parts of subjects, are taught through a dual-focused language, namely the learning of content and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language.

He then defines it as:

> CLIL refers to situations where subjects are taught through a language which is not the language used in mainstream education, with dual-focused aims, namely the learning of content, and the simultaneous learning of the target language (Marsh, 2002: 15).

It is an inclusive approach insofar as both language and content have the same importance. It does not mean to study a non-linguistic subject in a foreign language, but with the language and through it.

At a Symposium held by the Department of European Languages in Graz in November 2005, he refocused the approach more precisely:

> This approach involves learning subjects such as History, Geography or others, through an additional language. It can be very successful in enhancing the learning of languages and other subjects, and developing a positive 'can do' attitude toward themselves as language learners in the youngsters (Marsh, 2005: 2).

Other authors such as Graddol (2006) or Dalton-Puffer (2007) have also contributed to the definition of this term. For Graddol, this approach also has a double objective, which is the language and the content learning, but it is necessary that the student receives the necessary support to develop the language skills that will need to learn the contents. According to Graddol, CLIL is not exclusive for excellent students or for those with a high linguistic level; what is fundamental is that the teacher adopts the appropriate methodology. On the other hand, it places this approach in a wider educational context considering that it can be used to study English through specific contents; That is to say, it does not limit the use of this approach to study only non-linguistic subjects, but also the possibility of using it to study the English language.

> CLIL is an approach to bilingual education in which both curriculum content (...) and English are taught together. It differs from simple English-medium education, in that the learner is not expected to have the English proficiency required to cope with the subject before beginning to study. Hence, it is a means of teaching curriculum subjects through the medium of a still being learned language, providing the necessary language support alongside the subject specialism. CLIL can also be considered (...) a means of teaching English through the study of specialist content (Graddol 2006: 86).

Dalton-Puffer (2007: 1) provides the following definition regarding the term CLIL: "educational settings where a language other than the student's mother tongue is used as a medium of instruction" and "using a language other than the L1 as a Medium of instruction ". Although all these definitions can vary in certain words or length, they have the same objective, that is the integration and the study of the contents of non-linguistic subjects using a different language from students one as a means of instruction.

At present, the most used definition or perhaps the one that has prevailed is:

> A dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for learning and teaching of both content and language, with the objective of promoting both content and language mastery to pre-defined levels (Maljers, Marsh, Wolff, Genesee, Frigols-Martín and Mehisto 2008, quoted in Marsh, Mehisto, Wolff and Frigols Martín 2008: 11).

If we compare the different definitions to which we have referred, the one provided by Marsh in 1994, when the term CLIL is coined, he spoke of a "foreign language" and in 2002 of "a language that is not used in general education", to end up speaking of "an additional language" in the definitions of 2005 and 2011.

This has led to the original Spanish term AICLE that is translated as an Integrated Content Learning of a Foreign Language.

3.5. Bilingualism as an educative method

The online Webster's dictionary (2015) defines ´bilingualism´ as "the constant oral use of two languages" and ´bilingual´ is referred to someone "using two languages especially as spoken with the fluency characteristic of a native speaker; a person using two languages habitually and with control like that of a native speaker".

However, the definitions of bilingualism are numerous, and differ from the position that the person should be able to control both languages as a native speaker (Bloomfield 1935), to other authors who consider that the person does not need to be as a native speaker but just to be able to speak in the second language while following the correct structures or paraphrasing his or her mother tongue (McNamara 1967). As McNamara maintains, "a

bilingual is anyone who possesses a minimal competence in only one of the four language skills, listening comprehension, speaking, reading and writing, in a language other than his/her mother tongue" (1967, in Hamers & Blanc, 1989:6).

There are plenty of classifications for the types of bilingualism. Depending on the field of study, different authors define the concept and classify it differently. From the perspective of Hagège (1996) and Lambert (1974), we can find the following classification:

- Equal or unequal bilingualism, according to the social status that each language occupies for the society. The relationship between the two languages can be of equality or subordination depending on the social, geographic and political circumstances which exist between the two cultures of the languages. An example may be the relationship between Spanish and Catalan in some regions of Spain where the minority language has had and still has a role of subordination to the majority language.

- Additive or subtractive bilingualism, which refers to the relationship between the two languages, and/or cultures that influence the sense of community and social group; therefore, it relays attitudes to the child about acquiring a second language. The first one occurs when the social environment of the child considers bilingualism as a cultural enrichment whereas the subtractive bilingualism is seen as a loss of identity.

At the school context, society in bilingual Communities, like Canada, demanded their children to be trained in bilingual education programs so that they could receive the knowledge and cultural heritage at the same time they learnt a new language (Krashen, 1996). The original main objective of this bilingual education was to support students whose mother tongue was not English, but who could perfectly follow the curriculum of the class, in order to make them competent both in French and English. Due to their success, these programs rapidly spread across Canada (Lorenzo and Gladstein, 1984).

In the European scenario, according to the Council of Europe (2007), as a result of advances in democracy, different sectors of the European Union have promoted the

importance of language teaching and learning, focusing on the importance of being able to communicate in two languages in addition to the mother tongue. As Beacco affirms,

> Plurilingualism is the capacity of individuals to use more than one language in social communication whatever their command of those languages. This set of skills constitute the complex but unique competence in social communication, to use different languages for different purposes with different levels of command (2005:19).

Multilingualism and bilingualism are terms that have evolved during the years. Cenoz and Genesse define multilingual education as:

> Educational programs that use languages other than the L1s as media of instruction (although some teach additional languages as school subjects) and they aim for communicative proficiency in more than two languages. Accomplishing this calls for complex educational planning in order to accommodate multiple linguistic aims, curricular materials, and teaching strategies within the framework of limited school schedules. Multilingual education, like bilingual education, can take different forms because it is necessarily linked to the sociolinguistic context in which it takes place and has to take account of the relative status and use of the languages involved (1998:14, in Jessner, 2008:33).

Studying a second foreign language for at least one year is compulsory in more than twenty European countries. In most European countries, students begin studying their first foreign language as a compulsory school subject between the ages of 6 and 9, according to the statistics of a Eurostat report (European Commission, 2012). This varies from country to country, and sometimes within the same country. For example, in the German-speaking Community of Belgium, children start learning a foreign language when they are three years old, but parts of the United Kingdom (excluding Scotland) wait until the age of eleven; Ireland and Scotland are two exceptions that do not have compulsory language requirements, but Irish students learn both English and Gaelic (although neither of them is considered a foreign language), and Scottish schools are still obligated to offer at least one foreign-language option to all students aged 10-18 (Devlin, 2015).

English is the most-studied foreign language across almost all European countries and at all educational levels. Fully 73% of primary students in Europe and more than nine-in-ten secondary students were learning English at school in 2009-10 (Devlin 2015).

4. Methodology

In this part of the project, I have created a questionnaire to twenty Secondary School English teachers, ten of them being teachers in *Blanca de Castilla* School, and the other ten in *Alonso Berruguete* Secondary School, both in Palencia, about the evolution they have experienced in the English teaching methodology since they were students to the present moment. The above-mentioned questionnaire consists on fourteen questions in which they had to mark with a cross whether they agreed or not. What we want to investigate is if there was a big difference between the traditional teaching method that prevailed about thirty years ago and the new communicative approach that schools use now. This responds to a quantitative investigation motivated by an objective analysis of the numerical data.

Here I attach the questionnaire used:

Evolution in the English Teaching Method

Questions aked to twenty scondary school English teachers about the evolution they have experienced in the english teaching methodology since they were students to the present moment

1. **Did your teachers use to use English as a tool most of the time during the lesson?**
   Marca solo un óvalo.

   ◯ Yes

2. **Do you use English most of the time during your lessons?**
   Marca solo un óvalo.

   ◯ Yes
   ◯ No

3. **Did your teachers motivate you with games, role plays and films?**
   Marca solo un óvalo.

   ◯ Yes
   ◯ No

4. **Do you consider that the motivation of your students is the most important part of your job?**
   Marca solo un óvalo.

   ◯ Yes
   ◯ No

5. **Did your teachers put you in contact with real life situations when you were a student?**
   Marca solo un óvalo.

   ◯ Yes
   ◯ No

6. **Do you think that putting your students in context of communication is essential during the lesson?**
   Marca solo un óvalo.

   ◯ Yes
   ◯ No

7. **Did you have any contact with any native speaker during your student years?**
   Marca solo un óvalo.

   ◯ Yes
   ◯ No

8. Have you had any English speaking person in your class to talk to your students in English as a way to practice everything learnt during your lessons?
Marca solo un óvalo.

○ Yes

○ No

9. Were you motivated to measure your proficiency in English with some external exams?
Marca solo un óvalo.

○ Yes

○ No

10. Do you encourage your students to pass English exams to improve their motivation ?
Marca solo un óvalo.

○ Yes

○ No

11. Did your school take part in any international programs ?
Marca solo un óvalo.

○ Yes

○ No

12. Are you required to help when your school organizes an international program?
Marca solo un óvalo.

○ Yes

○ No

13. Did your text books include the four skills when you were an English student?
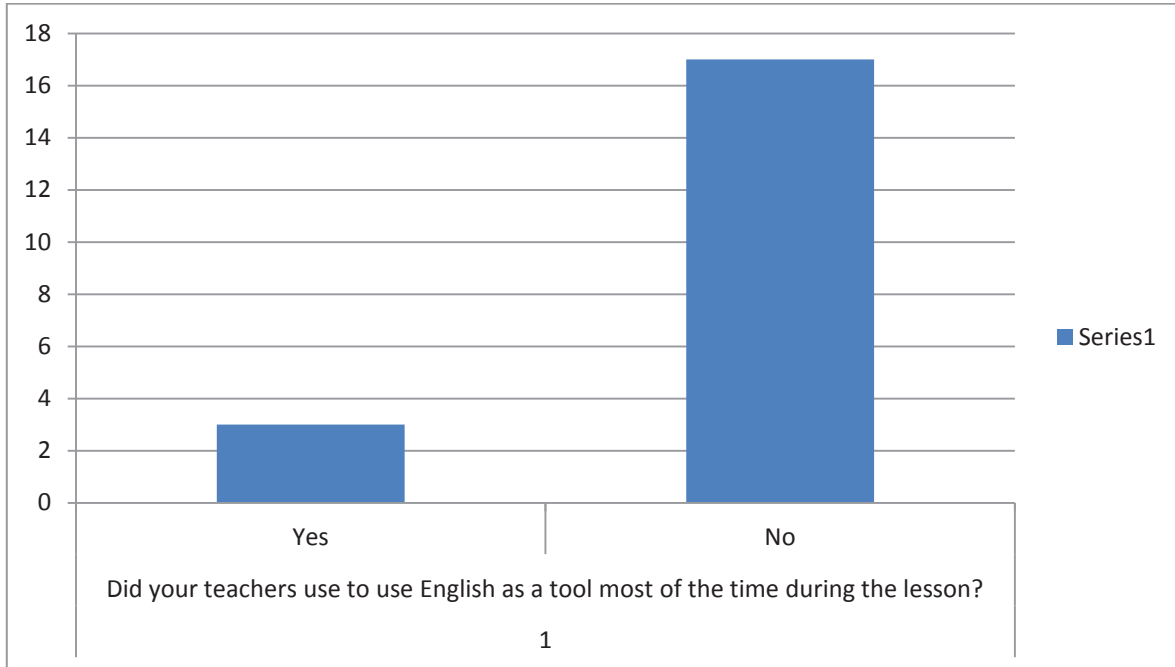*Marca solo un óvalo.*

○ Yes

○ No

14. When choosing a text book do you think grammar and vocabulary are the most important aspects of the book?
*Marca solo un óvalo.*

○ Yes

○ No

5. Results

Here I attach the table that results from the questionnaire, in which I used a primary source, as I have carried out the comparative study.


According to question number one: Did your teachers use to use English as a tool most of the time during the lesson? Seventeen of them did not use English as the main tool, in comparison to the three of them that did.

Do you use English most of the time during your lessons?
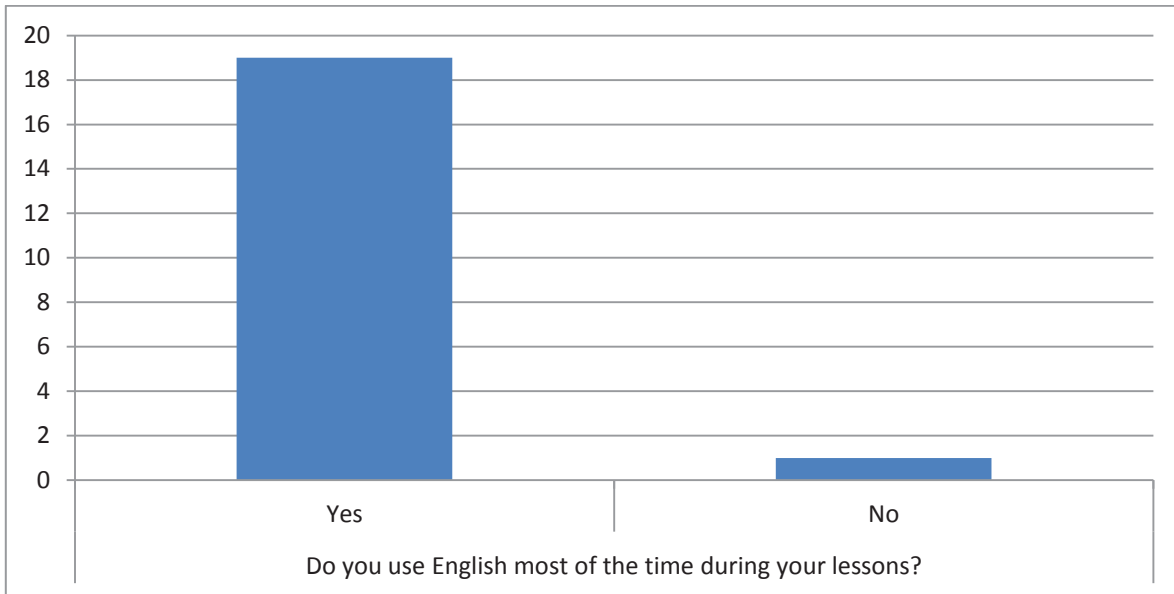
Regarding question number two: Do you use English most of the time during your lessons? Most of the teachers, eighteen, use it most of the time, while just one of them does not.

Did your teachers motivate you with games, role plays and films?
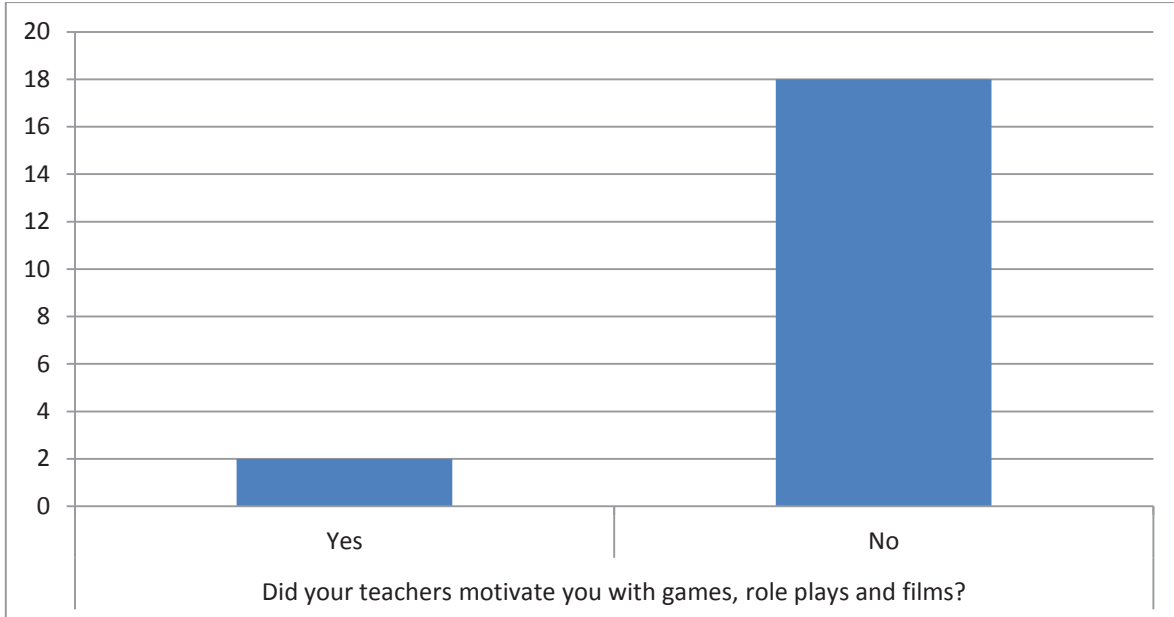
According to question number three: Did your teachers motivate you with games, role plays and films? Just two of the teachers were motivated with games, whereas eighteen of them were not.

Do you consider that the motivation of your students is the most important part of your job?
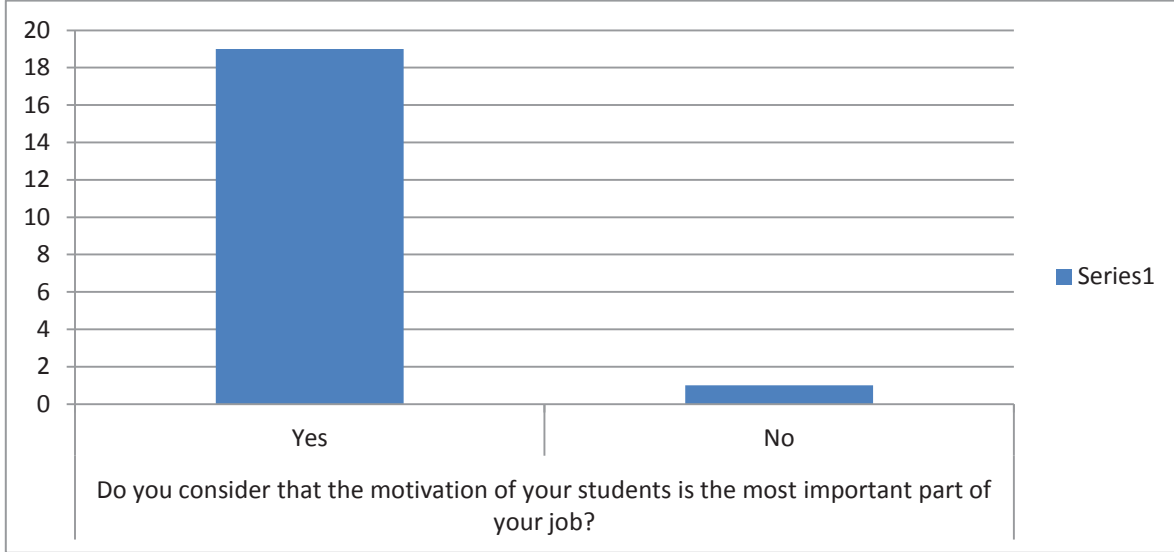
Regarding question number four: Do you consider that the motivation of your students is the most important part of your job? For the majority of the teachers asked, nineteen, motivation is crucial, while just for one of them is not.

Did your teacher put you in contact with real life situations?
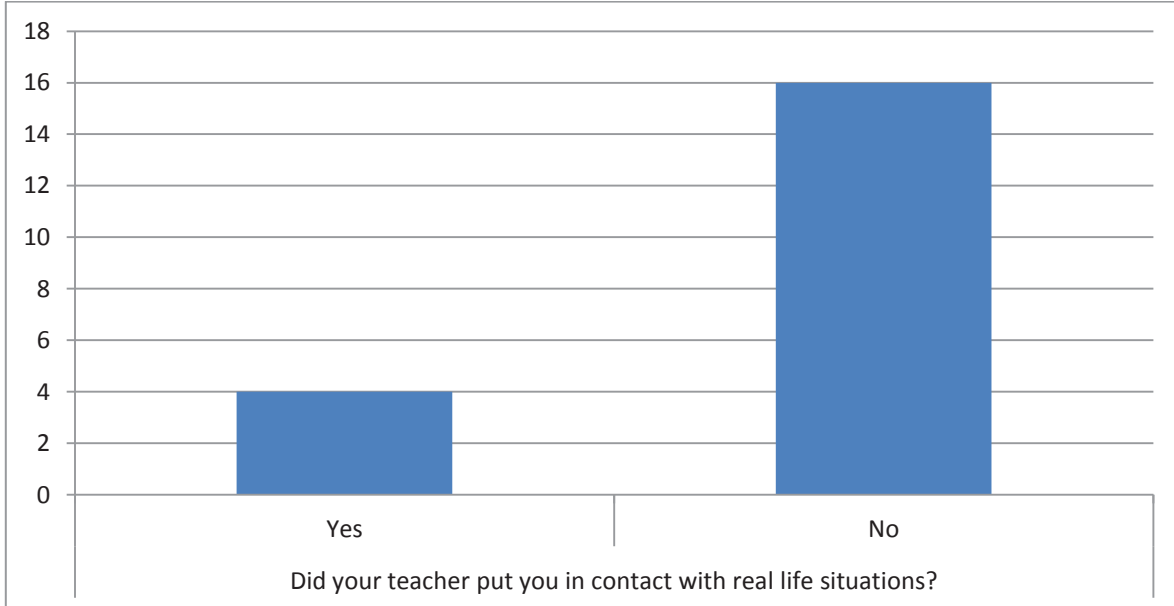
In question number five: Did your teacher put you in contact with real life situations when you were a student? Sixteen people have not experienced real life situations when learning, while four of them did.
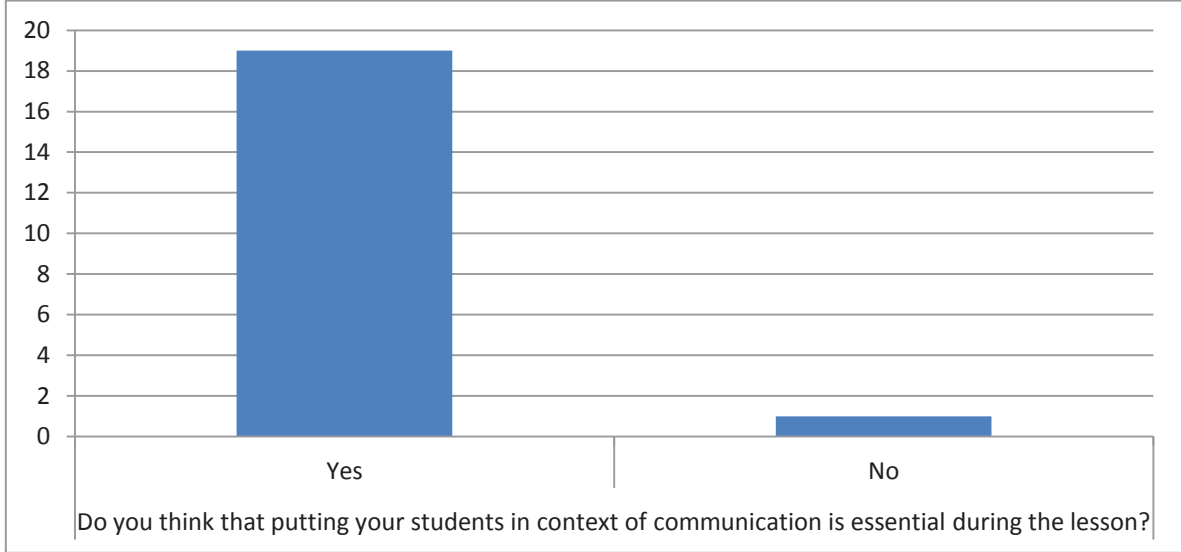
In question number six: Do you think that putting your students in context of communication is essential during the lesson? For nineteen teachers communication is very important, whereas just one of them thinks the opposite.
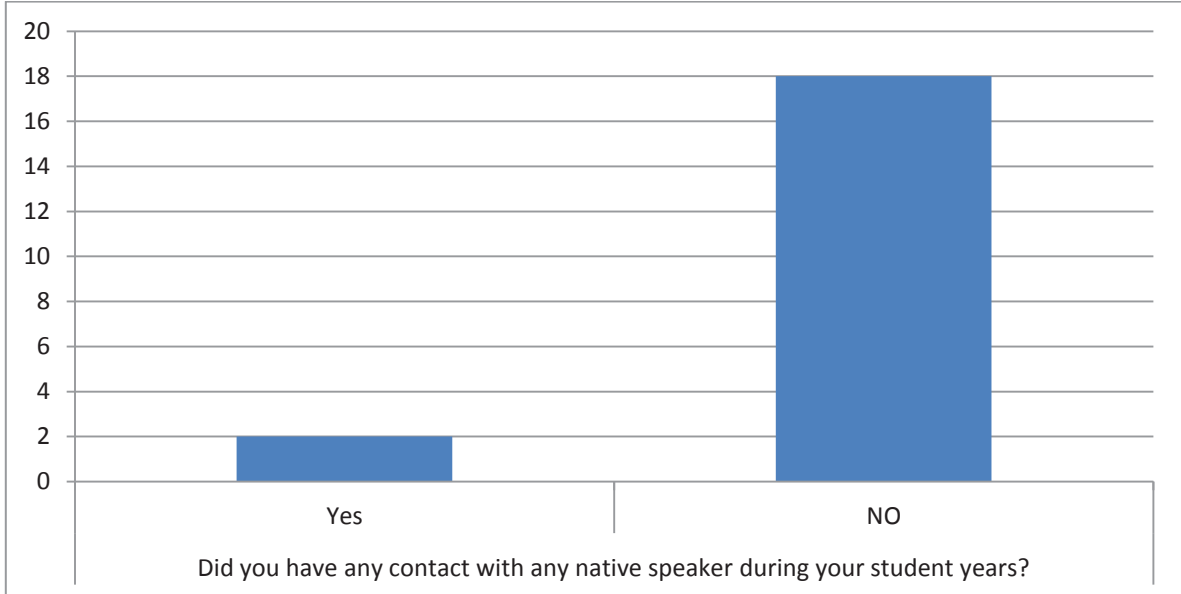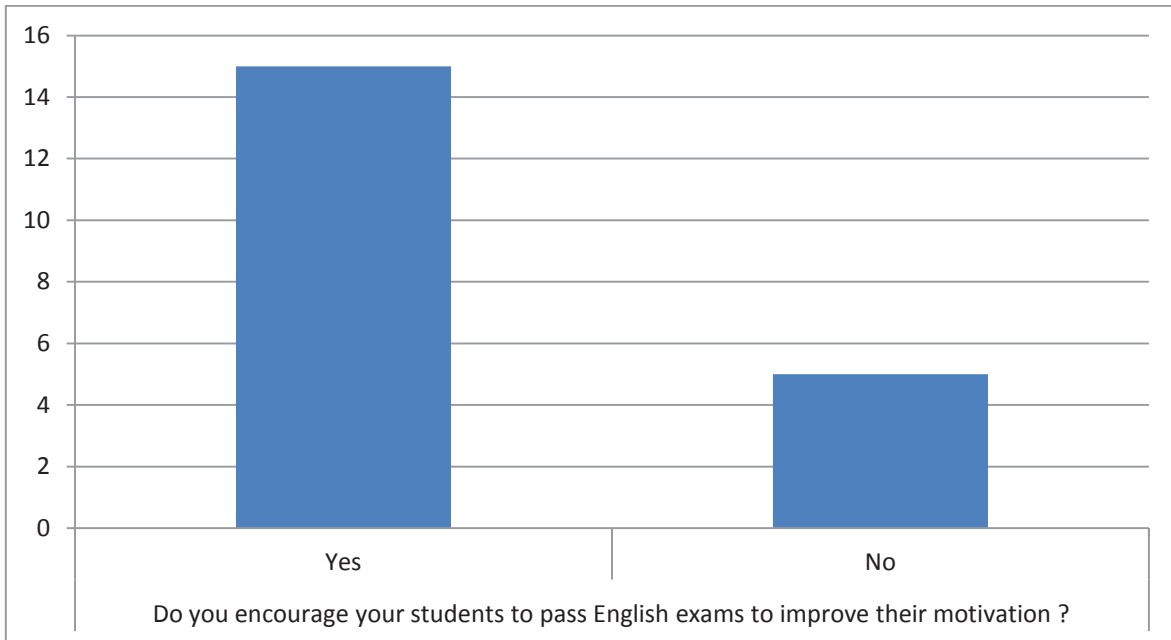

According to question number seven: Did you have any contact with any native speaker during your student years? Just two of them answered ''yes'', while eighteen answered ''no''.

Have you had any English speaking person in your class to talk to your students?
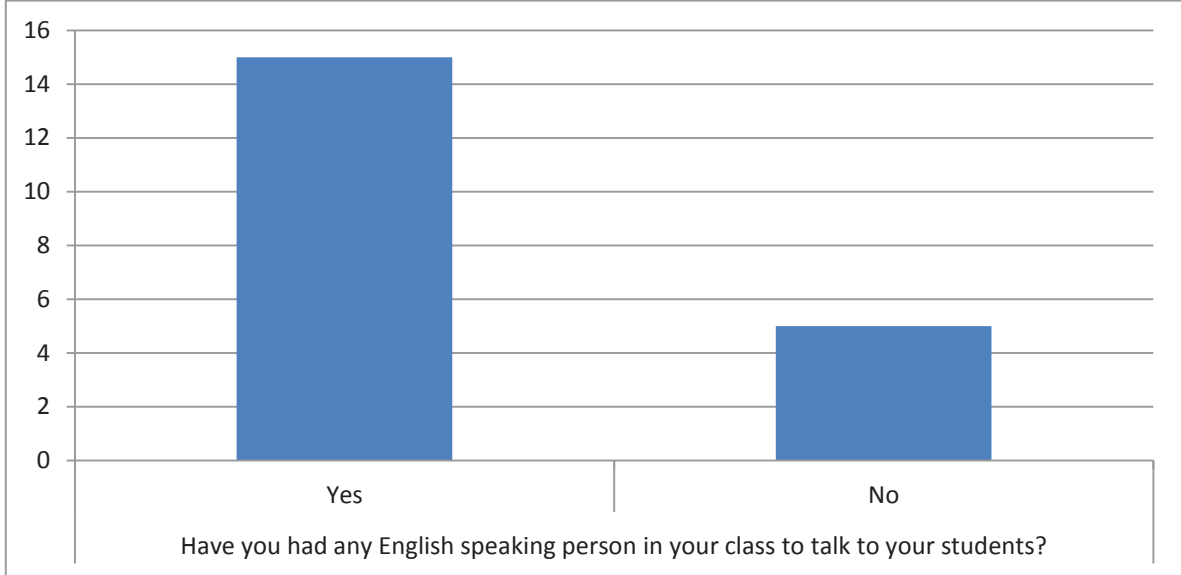
Regarding question number eight: Have you had any English-speaking person in your class to talk to your students in English as a way to practice everything learnt during the lessons? Fifteen people have had an English-speaking person, whereas five people have not.

Were you motivated to measure your proficiency in English with some external exams?
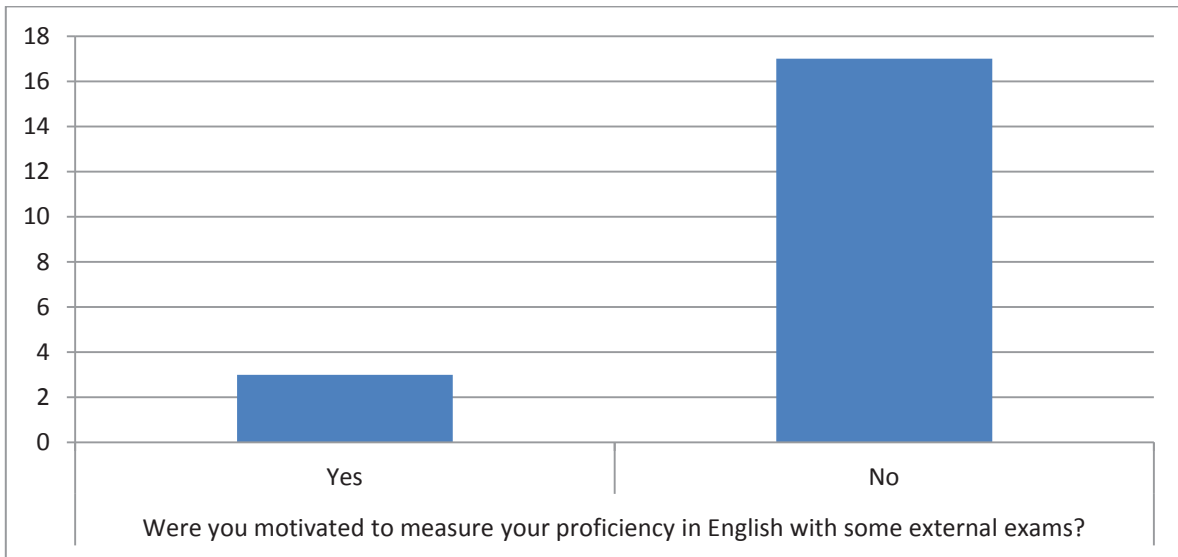
In question number nine: Where you motivated to measure your proficiency in English with some external exams? Just three of the teachers answered ''yes'', while seventeen of them answered that they were not motivated.

Do you encourage your students to pass English exams to improve their motivation ?

According to question number ten: Do you encourage your students to pass English exams to improve their motivation? Fifteen teachers do encourage their students, while five think they do not do it properly.

Did your school take part in any international programs ?
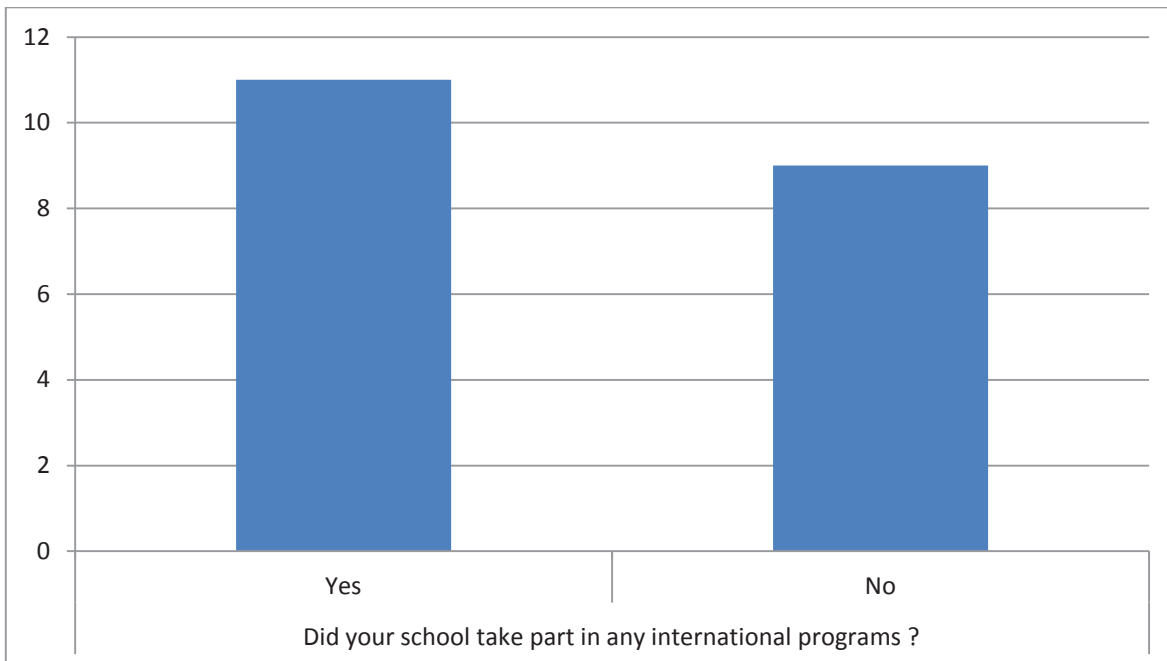
In question number eleven: Did your school take part in any international programs? Eleven people lived the experience, while nine did not.
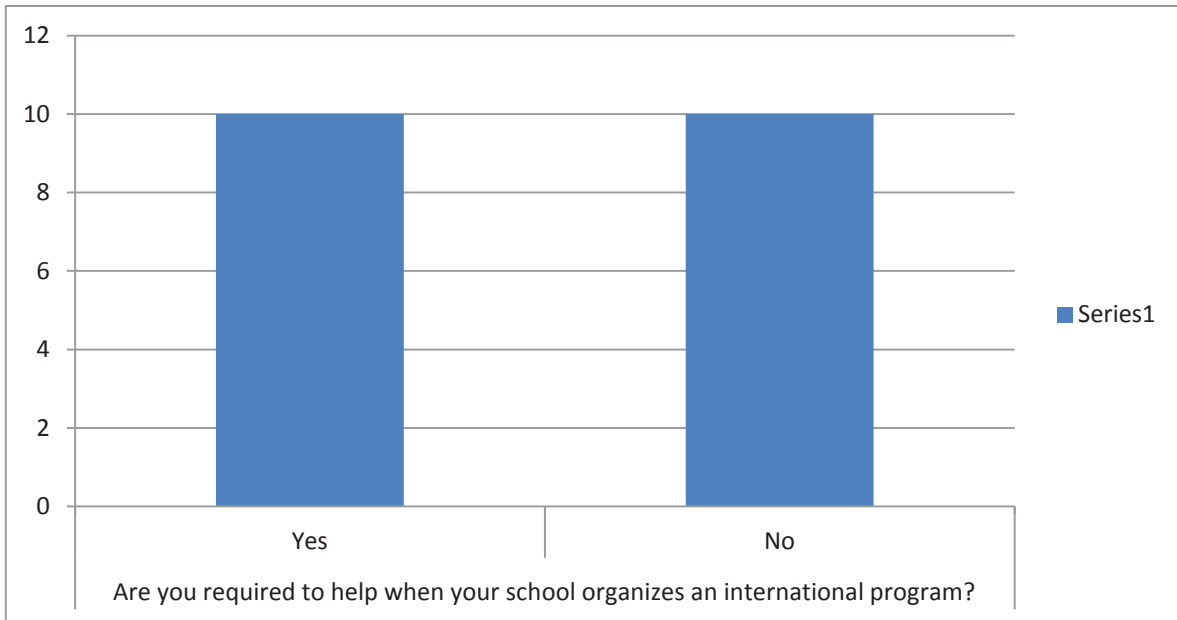
Regarding question number twelve: Are you required to help when your school organizes an international program? there has been the same result.
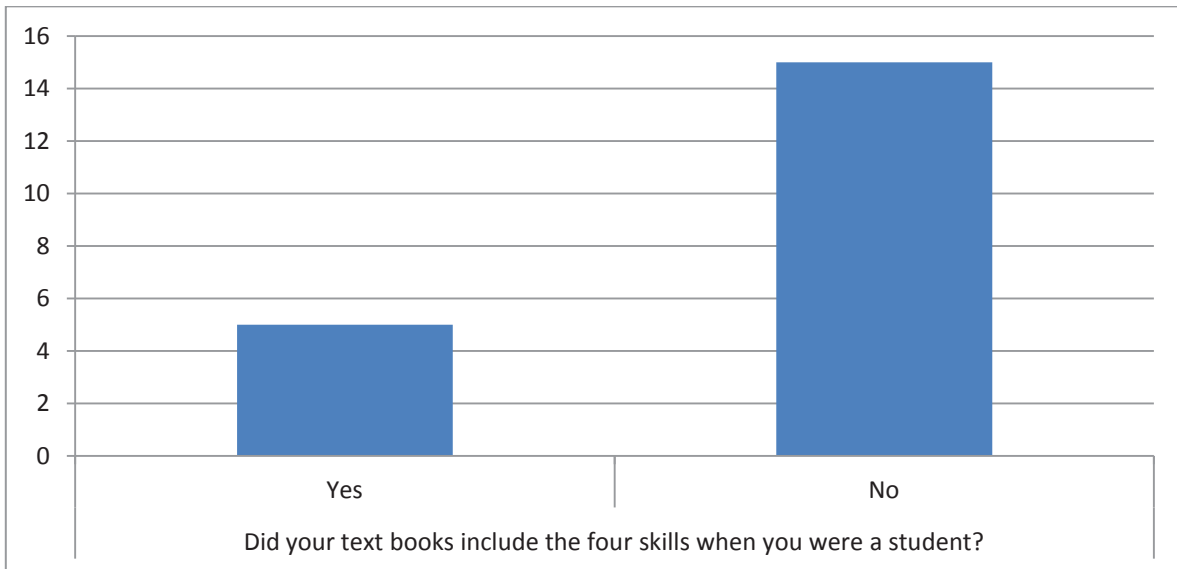
In question number thirteen: Did your text books include the four skills when you were a student? most of the teachers, fifteen, did not practice the four skills when learning, whereas five of them did.
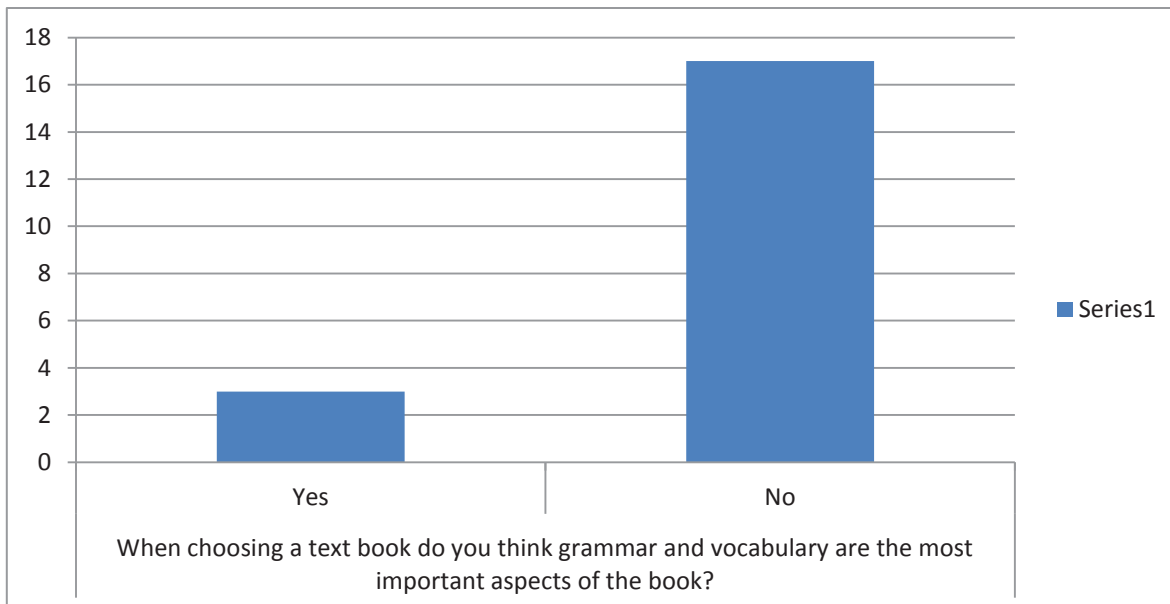
Finally, in question number fourteen: When choosing a text-book do you think grammar and vocabulary are the most important aspects of the book? the minority of the teachers, just three consider grammar and vocabulary the main aspects, while seventeen of them do not think so.

What we want to demonstrate with the questionnaire and respective table after analyzing the results is the important role that the communicative approach has achieved in recent years. As it has been proved, all the teachers asked have the same opinion in terms of the advance in the strategies for teaching English. They know better than anyone what is being a student and a teacher and they are the clear example of experiencing both ways of teaching and learning. They have experienced how the role of the teacher and student has been changed giving priority to the interaction between students and not to the simple study of the theory, which is basically grammar and vocabulary. Through developing the four skills with which students need to communicate properly in English and integrating them in the examinations, teachers have encouraged students to be more self-reliant and they let them free to find the best way of learning the language through their own motivation.

6. Development of this research

6.1. Communicative approach

The communicative approach arises at the 80's at Europe, as a result of a need of changing the generative grammar method for teaching a second language. At that time, they used to follow a strict grammatical model without taking into account other factors which take place in the communication, such as the context, the body language, and the sociocultural knowledge of the speaker and the listener. Although this new approach had its boom at that time, it was used years before by linguistics, psychologists and pedagogues, among others.

Rodolfo Lenz (1912) said: "if knowing the grammar deeply was an indispensable condition to be a language artist, poet, writer, orator, ¿Why aren't the better grammarians the biggest writers? (Quoted in: Cots et al. 2007) and later, Américo Castro 1924 wrote: The grammar doesn't serve to teach how to speak or how to write the own language, just like the physiology and acoustic studies don't serve to teach how to dance, or mechanics to teach how to drive a bike. This is so vulgar that is shameful to write it over and over. (Quoted in: Lomas, C.)

Considering this situation settled out by the structuralism, it was clear the need of an imminent change in the language teaching methodology. After numerous studies from linguistics, sociolinguistics, pedagogues and psychologists, it was concluded that it is not necessary for the student to recognize a lot of grammatical structures, and use them on communicative situations that are far from the reality, that is why the communicative approach was born. For this reason, at the end of the 60's, British linguistics like Candlin and Widdowson affirmed that the principal objective of learning a second language was the communicative competence. Therefore, the proposal of this new approach was to develop a communicative competence in the students.

6.1.1. What is the communicative competence?

There are many definitions to the term communicative competence. According to the REAL DECRETO 1513/2006 of December 7th (BOE, Friday, December 8th, 2006), the communicative competence could be defined as the use of the language as an oral and written communication instrument of representation, interpretation and understanding of the reality, knowledge communication and construction, and the organization and autoregulation of the thoughts, the emotions and behavior. According to the Virtual Cervantes Centre, communicative competence is defined like:

"The ability of a person to behave adequate and effectively on a determinate community. That involves respecting grammar rules and other levels of linguistic description (lexical, phonetics, semantics) as much as the use of the language rules related to the sociohistorical and cultural context at which the communication took place (Hymes, 1971). The communicative competence works to know when to speak, when not to speak, what to speak about, with whom, when, where and what way"; in other words, it is the ability of making grammatically correct and socially appropriate sentences (quoted in: CVC. ELE Keywords dictionary). The communicative competence is the ability that a person has to communicate through any way (oral or written), in any circumstance, and with anyone. Thus, it is necessary to look after the four levels of language (reading, listening, speaking and writing).

6.1.2. What is the communicative approach?

The communicative approach arises at the 70's, as a consequence of a rejection to the audiolingual method and the generative grammar. The principal objective of this method was to encourage the students to act naturally in a real situation with other speakers of the target language, giving them the necessary tools to do that and beginning from their own needs. In order to achieve that, it would be necessary to create real communicative situations in the classroom. In this way, they would learn to respect other sociocultural codes, so this approach pretends to be significant for them.

This new teaching conception collects contributions of other researching areas. Apart from cognitive linguistics, there are other fields like functional linguistics (Halliday), sociolinguistics (Laboy) and pragmatic (Austin). Furthermore, the interlanguage concept describes how while the students interiorize knowledge and develop linguistic skills and abilities, that knowledge is being modified, considering the language learning as a constant evolution. The most important consequence of the interlanguage concept is that it creates a cohesion between all the linguistic skills in such a way that the speaker counts with all the resources to talk. In short, when learning a second language, we can incorporate more complex structures replacing the easier ones once they have been interiorized.

In the communicative approach, the student is the protagonist of the teaching-learning process. He/she should learn to learn, and the teacher is a mediator whose function is to guide the student in order to increase his/her communicative skills. Not only is the communication an objective by itself, but also the sociocultural aspects where this communication takes place, the bound between the speakers and the communicative reasons. This approach looks for linguistic fluency more than for grammatical correctness. The most used methodologic techniques are:

- **Role Play:** they are similar to a real communication. This team game allows an immediate feedback, generating a learning motivation among the students.
- **Project:** they usually are long-term activities. A project is an approach about a common subject. The student must search for information about it, and finally present it in front of the rest of the classmates.
- **Learning through games:** it is the new fashion in the learning process not only in English teaching but also in the rest of the subjects. It boosters the students' attention because they are learning using the same tools they use in their free time.

There are other activities like classroom debates, theatre performances or round tables where the student is the only protagonist. Using this kind of activities, the English

book moves away to a second place. The communicative approach was introduced in Spain in the 90's, but it had a slow integration because communicative and structuralist methods continued to coexist at that time.

6.1.3. Notional Functional approach

One of the communicative teaching program proposed is the Notional Functional approach, which arises in 1976 at the United Kingdom, thanks to Wilkin's Notional Syllabuses work. It is based on other author's theories, such as the Competence Communicative Model of Hymes and Halliday's functional grammatical. It consists of a functions and notions system connected to the linguistic exponents needed for communication.

Melero (2010), defines the notional categories as ``the speaker's intentionality, the communicative competence, and what concerns language, such as asking for information, introducing someone or greeting.''

Those elements which are usually taught are regular for any situation. The Notional Functional approach contents of teaching are based on learning real life classifying situations (functions) throughout structures already established. It is focused on the meaning and what it is said. Finally, the language and communication analysis is realized through the notions and functions already mentioned. This approach methodology is called, *PPP (*presentation-practice-production). It is focused in precision at communication. In this way, the Notional Functional approach that was developed inside the communicative framework, allows new language teaching techniques as the task approach.

6.1.4. The communicative approach in Spain

Within Europe, and to be concrete, in Spain, there has been a lot of efforts from public and private educational sectors in order to update the pedagogic approaches and the teaching language tools. It is essential to take a look on the cultural relevant events that have taken place in Spain. Since the 50's, the use of the Spanish language as a

communicative instrument and its international prestige have increased because of the approach to EE. UU. Once broken the diplomatic and economic isolation suffered by Spain after the Civil War, added to the intensification of the relations with a lot of other countries being part of the ONU since 1955 and also because of the fact that Spain has become a touristic point of Europe most developed countries since the 60's.

In 1986, Spain joined the European Economic Community, and the interest in the Spanish language and culture significantly increased.

Nowadays, Spain is a host country of immigrants. Most of them are from Africa. They started to learn the Spanish language because they need it for taking a job, among other crucial issues. (The Economist, 2002)

This situation leads us to think about setting new teaching objectives, needs and conditions in order to develop different methodologic approaches.

Since the 60's, the new promotions of language teachers have learned from the assimilation of the communicative principles promoted by European institutions as the European Council.

The threshold level on its Spanish version (Slagter, 1979) confirms the development of the educational system based on a curricular content, applying didactic experimental efforts based on the Notional Functional budgets. That was the first try to translate a language from a sociolinguistic point of view.

The basic idea is that the language could respond much better to the students' needs through the identification of the linguistic functions, and teaching lexical and grammar structures.

7. Discussion

We had the opportunity of seeing the changes on American and European culture, as a result of a deeply revision of the foreign language teaching principles.

Until now, the theoretic contributions from different scientific areas related to learning language allow to support investigation projects and didactic experimentation, which responds to a more comprehensive vision of the purchase mechanisms.

The contributions of linguistic theory have highlighted fundamental aspects of the language communicative dimension, so they should be considered in a pedagogical proposal in order to develop the communicative competence. Joined together with the pragmatic contribution, text theory and discourse analysis have increased the focus on functional grammars. On the other hand, linguistics has been interested in the communication as a process, and the analysis of the variables that structure concrete communicative situations.

To these new linguistic perspectives should be added the contributions of learning theory, and particularly, the second language acquire studies, that started with generative grammar but recently started to be applied on a systematic way in the natural learning process. Along the last three decades we noticed the development of a new paradigm based on the language as a communicative instrument. It helps us to understand the complex process of language learning from a humanistic vision.

The language teaching has increased its bases and perspectives incorporating the theories and research contributions coming from different fields which have in common the objective of considering the originated implications of the relations between language and communication. In fact, the new theoretical approaches are interested in the language analysis from the communicative perspective, just as the learning theory and educational contributions have been very meaningful to the teaching language.

Considering the communicative approach as the new model or dominant paradigm, it is important to advertise that it is not based on a concrete model, but it answers to the main objective of developing teaching procedures that recognize the interdependence between language and communication and that has been a change and an evolutionary period without definitive results throughout the 30 years between the Threshold Level and the European common framework of reference.

After a first moment of extraordinary dynamism characterized by the first communicative proposals, it has been initiated recently an integration and realistic period that leads to review some of the initial approaches based on the database. The methodologic revolution presented from the Modern Age has been developed around two main principles: the language conception in relation to its use, and the new position of the student in the center of the teaching-learning process (Molina, 2005).

The first principles within a new language conception affirmed that in the language classroom, the meaning comes from the use and the exploitation of the communicative and discursive aspects, that is to say, the language should be studied to be used in real life as an instrument that enables the communication between the users. This new vision face teachers and students to a linguistic social defined universe, because the learners of a language are considered like members of a society who should make tasks in a particular context. In short, the essential elements of the new contributions on the language teaching could be synthetized in the next items: (Nunan, 1988)

— The language studies approaches are increasing in order to include the social use dimension, and the linguistic and extra-linguistic factors which take place in the communication.

— Emphasis on the idea of a protagonist role of the student respect to his own learning process.

— Diversification of the teacher's functions, not only like a rule model, but also as an intermediary who assumes the work of creating the proper conditions to promote the student's skills.

—Interest for the student's individual variables, and particularly, for the affective dimension in teaching language ant its role in learning: learning styles, motivation, classroom transactions and intercultural process.

— Search for the balance between linguistic and pedagogical dimension, putting the emphasis in the curriculum as a link between teaching practice and theory.

— Link all that was previously exposed, in order to learn a second language as long as allows to achieve a new social personality.

8. Conclusion

To draw my conclusions, I have talked to different Secondary School teachers in Palencia, Burgos and Valladolid (Castile and León), who have been so kind to dedicate their time to talk to me about all the changes they have gone through since they started working. I can tell that I am completely overwhelmed by the enthusiasm I have found in these professional people, who have been working for thirty years or so. They are with no doubt really concerned about the learning process and they have a lot to say about it.

After studying all the changes that have been produced in the way English has been taught in Spain, we can affirm that there has been a great improvement in the results. I have been talking to different teachers I have contact with, because I consider they are the ones that can really tell the changes they have experienced through the years because they have been the real protagonists of the action. It has been their common sense and not the different laws which have produced all the changes in the teaching of English. In recent years, almost all the students in secondary education are able to use the four linguistic skills, that is to say they are able to use the language with more or less proficiency. All the students in Spanish schools have listened to native English speaking teachers, they have been in contact with real materials, and they have used English as a tool to communicate. According to Ruth Vega, teacher in *Juana de Castilla* Secondary School in Tordesillas, ''we are living a change that was completely unthinkable in the past, I mean when I started teaching 29 years ago''.

I am sure that all the changes that have been produced in the English classroom have nothing to do with the intentions of the English teacher. Throughout the thirty or more years an English teacher practices his/ her profession during their working life, they have got more changes than any other professional, and this creates a great confusion in them. They have to adapt to these changes disregarding their own opinions. According to Pedro Escudero, teacher in *Maria Moliner* Secondary School in Laguna,

They have not asked us our opinion; we have to proceed as we are told. They change laws, material and they never ask us about our considerations. I think that we deserve higher consideration because we are the ones who are in front of the students, and the ones who know what we have to do. There was a time when it was forbidden to use the students native tongue in the classroom, later on it could be done, and the new tendency is that if it helps the student make comparison with their own language to simplify the process, it is allowed to be done in the classroom. You can get crazy along the process.

The different editorials have adapted their materials to the need of the students as well as to the needs set by the government to adapt the curriculum to the new laws. The most famous editorials dedicated to the teaching of English: *Oxford*, *Cambridge* or *Burlington Books* have adapted their material according to the times. This does not mean that they have always got the right approach. Sometimes they have had to change books that were appropriate because they did not suit the law of the moment. For example Conchi Fernández, Head of the English Deparment in ''Filipenses'', *Blanca de Castilla* School in Palencia, claims that she remembers a very good book called *Hot Line*, from Oxford University Press Editorial that had to be changed when the ESO started because international material was not allowed and did not suit the syllabus of the moment.

It is clear that the communicative approach is the right one, but it is quite a subjective one and it was clear that the institutions needed to set up standards that could establish levels of competence that are the same for all the students. *Cambridge* started these exams and standardized the teaching of English with different levels of competence. According to Carmen Fraile, teacher in *Alonso Berrugu*ete Secondary School in Palencia, "It is not clear if these exams are the most adequate way to prove the student´s proficiency, but at least, they have unified the level of all English-speaking students."

The English lesson has changed into a more entertaining place. The English teachers have got a long and hard task because they learnt the English they knew through the traditional method, in other words, learning vocabulary and grammar, and they have had to teach it in a completely different way. They are not basing their teaching in content but in

competence, so they have to teach their students how to learn to learn. They have to learn content with a purpose. If they learn new words and new grammar is because they need them to communicate and the feedback they receive is immediate. They can establish communication or they can read or understand a written message. Marisa Martinez, teacher in *Alonso Berruguete* Secondary School in Palencia states, ''the level of proficiency they get, has a lot to do with the interest and motivation of the students.''

The English teacher has had to adapt to all the changes without the possibility of doing what they really thought was more appropriate and without being able to apply their common sense in their task.

Talking to Encarna Fernández teacher in *Montes Obarenes* Secondary School in Miranda de Ebro, she explained that

> All the teachers know that there is a long way to go and there are lots of things to be done, as for example change the content the students are asked to pass in the exams to enter University. The times are changing but the student is still required to fulfill grammar tasks and the knowledge of vocabulary disregarded of context is still considered essential.

According to Ana Fátima Bueno teacher in *Blanca de Castilla* School in Palencia, ''we are professional people, we love what we do and we always try to do what is best for the students. We always do what we are told, but we always use our common sense when practicing our profession.''

The English teachers have a long way to go to accomplish their targets. They have to be faithful to the government laws but they have to have in mind that their students are going to be using English in their near future and they have to prepare them in a more realistic way than the one proposed by the different educational laws.

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