

Results of a research project carried out in the primary classroom using two units of work based on the task-based approach

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ABSTRACT: This research proposes a new model of a Task-Based Didactic Unit while at the same time attempting to demonstrate its effectiveness in the Primary Classroom. The main objective is to find out whether more effective English Language Learning is brought about when we apply Task-Based Didactic Units than when we apply Didactic Units based on the Traditional Approach: Presentation, Practice and Production. In the Post-test, significant differences between the Control Group and the Experimental Group were produced in Reading Comprehension, Listening Comprehension (as part of Speaking), and in the lowest third of the group (22 pupils).

Key words: task-based approach, research, results

RESUMEN: Esta investigación pretende aportar un nuevo diseño de Unidad Didáctica basada en el Enfoque por Tareas, y comprobar su efectividad en un Aula de Primaria. El objetivo principal es comprobar si el aprendizaje de una segunda lengua (Inglés) es mejor cuando aplicamos Unidades Didácticas basadas en Tareas que cuando dichas Unidades están basadas en el Enfoque Tradicional: Presentación, Práctica y Producción. En el Post-test, hay diferencias significativas entre el grupo control y el experimental en la Comprensión Lectora, en el Componente de Comprensión Oral dentro de la Expresión Oral y en el tercio inferior del grupo. (22 alumnos).

Palabras clave: Enfoque, tareas, investigación, resultados

1. INTRODUCTION

This research was based on two Units of Work which follow the Task-Based Approach. The topics were: 'Animals' and 'Stories'. The Task-Based Approach is a framework which can help teachers plan their classwork. Estaire & Zanón (1993) refer to this framework for planning Units of Work. It consists of six stages. These can be followed by the teacher either working on his/her own, working with colleagues, or working in conjunction with the students.

The first stage is to determine a theme or interest area by taking into consideration students' interests, experience and level. Grammatical terminology is avoided. The foreign language class should encourage global and interdisciplinary work in such a way that the same topics which are studied in other areas can also be studied in English at the same time.

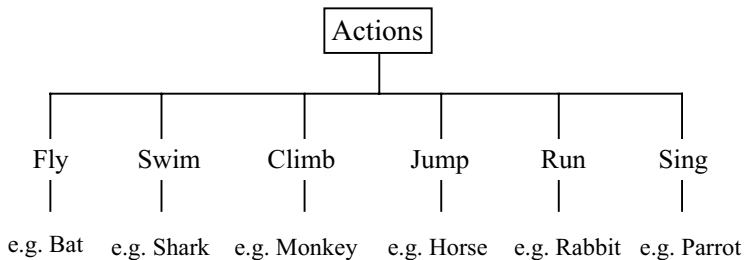
For instance, the theme of ‘Animals’, referred to above, was covered in English in the same way as it was covered in the pupils’ mother tongue. For this purpose, charts like this one were used:

Table with information about different animals.

NAME	CLASS	WHAT THEY LOOK LIKE (Colour, <i>have got</i> ...)	HABITAT	FOOD	ABILITIES
Tiger	Mammal	Red/brown with black stripes	On land	Meat	Walks, jumps, climbs, runs, swims.

Alternatively we could use Conceptual Maps about different aspects of the topic, showing pupils one way of learning by themselves. For instance, here is an example about Actions:

Figure 1. Animal Actions.



The second stage is to plan the Final Task or Tasks. For example, in the Unit of Work already referred to, ‘Animals’, the Final Task was ‘A Quiz’ where pupils had to demonstrate their knowledge about animals and in which they had to develop their listening and speaking skills, as well as attitudes such as participation, tolerance and mutual respect.

The third stage consists of thinking of the objectives in terms of skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing and Attitudes-Values. There will also be sub-skills for each one of the skills. For the Speaking skill in the Unit of Work ‘Animals’, the sub-skills would be: Pronunciation, intonation, stress and fluency.

The fourth stage consists of specifying the Content. The content will be related to the vocabulary and structures necessary to deal with the topic and also the thematic aspects related to the development of the four skills. For the Unit of Work ‘Animals’ this meant: Descriptions, rhymes/chants, stories, narrations, dialogues and songs.

The fifth stage is based on planning the process. Before we decide on the most convenient tasks that we need to develop so that the Final Task can be carried out successfully, we should think of Strategies-Procedures, that is, the way to develop a skill and a value.

An example of Strategy-Procedure in the Unit of Work ‘Animals’ would be written in

the following way: “To develop verbal fluency through a quiz about animal descriptions, at the same time fostering participation and tolerance”. This would correspond to the following scheme: **SKILL:** SPEAKING, **VALUE:** RESPECT, **SUB-SKILL:** VERBAL FLUENCY, **ATTITUDE:** PARTICIPATION AND TOLERANCE, **CONTENT:** ANIMAL DESCRIPTIONS, **METHOD-PROCEDURE:** QUIZ.

From Strategies-Procedures will come the tasks to be done and the way to do them. (What and How)

Tasks from Strategies-Procedures.

SKILL: SPEAKING	
SUB-SKILL: VERBAL FLUENCY	
WHAT? – Animal Descriptions	HOW? – Dialogues – Games – Quizzes

It is also possible to think of Tasks first. These tasks would suggest the objectives that must be achieved, the content which we work with and the process of Strategies-Procedures to follow.

The sixth stage is Evaluation. A large proportion of task-based work within a Unit is not dependent on teachers working directly with the class. This allows teachers much more freedom of movement in the classroom and gives them the opportunity to monitor students' work and concentrate on observing what is happening in the classroom.

2. RESEARCH AND RESULTS

2.1. Objective

The main aim of this research was to find out whether the results of the learning process of a second language (in this case English) were better when we apply Units of Work based on tasks (instruction based on Task-Based Approach) than when we apply Units of Work based on a traditional approach (PPP-Presentation, Practice and Production). The hypothesis is clear: it seems that there will be a difference in favour of pupils to whom a Task-Based Approach is applied and this difference will mainly take the form of better results in evaluation tests.

The concrete objective was to check the realization of three skills: Listening, Speaking and Reading in two groups of the fifth year of Primary. (Control Group and Experimental Group). In the latter, a Task-Based Approach was applied.

Another objective which could be considered as a secondary objective, but no less important, consisted of establishing the relationship between English learning and different factors: The pupils' Spanish level, Mechanical Calculus, Mental Calculus, the parents' educational level and the hours spent in an English Academy as an outside activity if that was the case. The hypothesis suggested in this sense is that the greater the level in these variables, that is, the higher the level in Spanish, the better the parents' cultural level, the greater the number of hours in an English Academy, etc, the better the results in English.

2.2. Method

2.2.1. Participants

62 students in the semi-private school 'Nuestra Señora de la Consolación' (Madrid) participated in the Experiment. Two groups, 5ºB and 5º C, were chosen at random as Control Group and Experimental Group respectively. The Control Group was formed by 33 pupils and the Experimental Group by 29 pupils.

2.3. Design and procedure

The design used was a quasi-experimental design pre-post with an equivalent control group. First, pupils were evaluated in the Pre-test, to establish a base line and be sure of the equivalence of the two groups (Control and Experimental groups), and that the English level was roughly the same for both groups. Finally, pupils were evaluated in the Post-test.

2.3.1. Variables to study

Three variables were established (in English): Listening Comprehension, Reading Comprehension and Speaking.

English Listening Comprehension, in which pupils had to show comprehension of texts heard in English, was evaluated by four questions which were different in the Pre-test from those in the Post-test.

Evaluation of Oral Comprehension.

	LISTENING COMPREHENSION			
	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3a	Question 3b
PRE-TEST	Max: 6 points Ref: Teacher's Book of 'Big Red Bus2', p 111 (Lobo y Subirá, 1993)	Max: 5 points Ref: Teacher's Book of 'Big Red Bus2', p 123 (Lobo y Subirá, 1993)	Max: 5 points Ref: Fanfare 3. Teacher's Book, p 24 (Bazo, Hernández y Peñate, 1995)	
POST-TEST	Máx : 10 points Ref: Winnie the Witch, p 18 (Paul, Kurky & Valery, 1995)	Máx: 5 points Ref: Inglés 6. Guía Santillana, p 23 (Martín y Sánchez, 1984)	Max : 5 points Ref: Road to English. Book Four, p 59 (Palencia y Donson, 1995)	

Question 3b evaluated the Listening Comprehension which resulted from the teacher-pupil interaction during the conversation to evaluate Speaking. This Listening Comprehension was marked from 1 to 10 points.

Example of a Listening question in the Pre-test

The teacher will read a text and the pupil will have to fill in the table below, by answering only to what he/she is required to.

The corresponding answers to Alison are given by the teacher as an example. The text is as follows:

One. Example: Hello! I'm Alison. I've got brown eyes and long black hair. I'm twelve years old.

Two. Hello! My name's George. I'm nine. I'm tall. I've got big blue eyes and a small nose.

Three. Hello! My name's Jane. I've got long brown hair and brown eyes. I've got glasses. I'm ten years old.

Four. Hello! I'm Jerry. I've got brown eyes. I'm short. I'm eight. I like ice-creams. Mmmmm!

Listening exercise. Question 1 (Pre-test).

	Age	colour of eyes
Alison	12	brown
George		
Jane		
Jerry		

Adapted from Lobo, M.J. and P. Subirá. (1993:111). Guía Didáctica de “Big Red Bus”. Heinemann

Example of a learner’s response in the exam

jesus jela Moreno
5ºC 2 ciclo

EVALUACION INICIAL.

1. Listen and write.

El profesor leerá un texto en el que se hace la descripción física de cuatro niños. El alumno tendrá que rellenar la tabla que se presenta más abajo contestando sólo a lo que se pregunta.

La primera vez, el profesor leerá todo el texto seguido y los alumnos podrán tomar algunas notas en un papel aparte.

La segunda vez, el profesor se detendrá después de cada personaje presentado a fin de que el alumno tenga tiempo para completar sus notas y pasar a limpio sus respuestas definitivas.

	age <i>Edad</i>	colour of eyes
Alison	12 age	Browman
George	9 age	Blue eyes
Jane	10 age	Browman eyes ?
Jerry	8 age	Browman eyes ?

(6)

Example of a listening question in the Post-test

1. Winnie is a witch. She lives with her cat, Wilbur.
Listen to the following passage of the story and fill in the blanks with one word.
The answers are: head, body, tail, whiskers, legs, eyes, chair, floor, climbs, tree.

Adapted from Paul, K. and V.Thomas. (1995:18). Winnie the Witch. Edition for learners of English. Activities and adapted text by: Jane Cadwallader. Oxford.

Example of a learner's response in the exam

4=

Teresa Yagüe
5^c

LISTENING EXERCISE.

1. Winnie is a witch. She lives with her cat, Wilbur.

Listen to the following passage of the story and fill in the blanks with one word.

Wilbur has got a red head, a yellow body,
a pink tail, blue wisec, and four
purple legs.

But his eyes are still green.

Now, Winnie can see Wilbur when he sits on a chair,
when he sits on the floor, when he sits in the
garden.

And even when he climbs to the top of
a tree.

7

Reading Comprehension, by which pupils had to show their understanding of written texts, was evaluated by a question in the Pre-test and another question in the Post-test. In the Pre-test, the maximum score was 8 points and in the Post-test, the maximum score was 6 points.

Reading question in the Pre-test.

Read, draw and match

They have to read five sentences and match them with the corresponding pictures
 Adapted from Lobo, M.J. and P.Subirá (1993:116). Guía Didáctica. Heinemann

Example of a learner's response in the exam

Jesús Yela Morano
 5ºC 2 ciclo

3 Read, draw and match (8 puntos)

1 The film is at three o'clock.
 2 The nature programme is at half past four.
 3 The music programme is at a quarter to nine.
 4 The cartoon is at a quarter past two.
 5 The sports programme is at four o'clock.

Reading question in the Post-test.

Read the following text and answer if the following statements are True or False.

There are six statements for a four-paragraph text.

Adapted from: Palencia, R. y C. Donson (1995:69). Road to English. Book Four. Primaria.
Example of a learner's response in the exam

True or false?

1. The tiger is extinct. *False*
2. There are tigers in America. *False ✓*
3. Some tigers are white. *False ✓*
4. Tigers can swim. *True ✓*
5. Tigers can see at night. *True ✓*
6. Some tigers eat people. *True ✓*

5



Some species are not extinct, but they are in danger. One of them is the tiger, which lives in the forests of Asia. People kill tigers for sport and for their fur and destroy the forests where they live. There were 60,000 Bengal tigers in India in 1945, but now there are only about 3,000.

Tigers are big cats. They are about 3 metres long and weigh between 100 and 240 kilos. Most are yellow and white with black stripes, but there are white tigers and even blue-grey tigers in China!

Tigers are excellent athletes: they can jump 4 metres and run at about 50 kilometres an hour. They are also very good swimmers and can easily swim 5 or 6 kilometres. They can see perfectly at night and use their cat's whiskers to identify things which they cannot see clearly.

They usually hunt other animals like deer, and only old and tired tigers attack people. The most dangerous place in the world is on the coast of Bangladesh.

The Speaking skill, in turn, was divided into four sub-variables: Pronunciation, accuracy, vocabulary and fluency. The students had to take a test (different in Pre-test from Post-test) and each pupil's answers were recorded on a dictaphone.

Each one of these 4 sub-variables was assessed according to the criteria of three teachers who listened to the recordings and reached an agreement on each pupil's score in this variable. Each one of these sub-variables was awarded from 1 to 10 points. The final score was the arithmetic mean of the four sub-variables.

Oral test in the Pre-test

Understand and provide simple answers to questions related to personal information

The teacher will ask no more than ten questions to each pupil.

Transcription of an oral test from a pupil in the experimental group with her corresponding evaluation sheet which includes results in 'Evaluation sheet: Test 1 (Pre-test) and Test 2 (Post-test)', shown below.

Pre-test:

Teacher: T

Pupil: P

T: What's your name?

P: My name is Teresa.

T: And how are you?

P: Ah, I'm, I'm, I'm ten years old.

T: What's your mother's name?

P: My, my mother's name is Carmen.

T: How old is she?

P: She is, she's... I don't know.

T: How many brothers and sisters have you got?

P: two brothers, and eh, four sisters.

T: What are their names?

P: Javier, Carmen, Luis y María.

T: Do you like sports?

P: Yes.

T: What's your favourite sport?

P: Basket.

T: Do you like school?

P: No

T: What's your favourite animal?

P: eh, the lion.

T: why?

P: It's beautiful.

T: What time is it?

P: It's eh, eh, eh.

T: What day is today?

P: eh, it's, it's...

T: When is your birthday?

P: it's the ... first, the first, es que no me acuerdo.

T: What colour eyes have you got?.

P: eh, my eyes are brown.

T: What's your father like?

P: What

T: What's your father like?... ¿Cómo es tu padre?

P: He's tall, brown eyes, white hair, he's thin.

T: Where are you from?

P: I'm from Madrid.

T= Teacher.

P= Pupil.

Evaluation sheet: Test 1 (Pre-test) and Test 2 (Post-test).

1. Ficha para evaluar la expresión oral

visit

Apellidos: YAGÜE Muñoz	Nombre: TERESA		
Fecha:	Curso:	Grupo:	

ASPECTOS	Prueba 1	Prueba 2	Prueba 3	Nota
Pronunciación	8	9		
Corrección formal	7	8		
Vocabulario	7	8		
Fluidez	8	10		
Comprensión oral	8	10		
	7,5	8,75		Nota global

Escalas de gradación

Existen muchos factores a tener en cuenta al evaluar la capacidad de expresión oral. La utilización de escalas de gradación pueden ayudar al profesor a hacer una valoración más justa. La ficha incluida a continuación resume los aspectos descritos en las escalas facilitando la puntuación.

Escalas de gradación para la evaluación de la expresión oral

NOTA

Insuficiente	La pronunciación hace que el discurso a menudo resulta incomprensible. Frasas gramaticalmente incorrectas. Vocabulario muy limitado. Tutubea y se expresa con dificultades. No comprende apenas nada de lo que dice el interlocutor.
Suficiente	Su acento extranjero dificulta la comprensión global. Los errores frecuentes demuestran un control imperfecto de las formas. El vocabulario es limitado y a veces incorrecto. Se expresa con bastante inseguridad y titubeos buscando las palabras. Entiende el lenguaje sencillo pronunciado lento y claramente.
Bien-Notable	Pronunciación adecuada. Los errores no obstaculizan la comunicación. Vocabulario apropiado. Habla con relativa soltura. Comprende con rapidez una conversación sencilla.
Sobresaliente	Buen acento y ritmo. Se expresa con corrección y fluidez. El vocabulario que utiliza es apropiado y variado. Comprende perfectamente al interlocutor y es capaz de contestar improvisando.

Oral Test in the Post-test.

Five questions were asked and they had to answer orally:

Transcription of an oral test from a pupil in the experimental group with her corresponding evaluation sheet which includes results in 'Evaluation sheet: Test 1 (Pre-test) and Test 2 (Post-test)', shown above.

Post-test.

T: What's your name?

P: My name is Teresa.

T: Do monkeys live in the sea?

P: eh, no, eh, monkeys live in the tree.

T: What does a monkey look like?

P: A monkey like like a bananas.

T: Do giraffes eat meat?

P: eh, no, giraffes eat, eh, eh, how do you say hojas en Inglés?

T: leaves.

P: leaves.

T: Can a lion fly?

P: No, it can't.

T: What can it do?

P: It can swim, run, walk and eat.

T: Do you remember Puss in Boots? Tell me something about Puss in Boots.

P: The cat says the boy, how do you say comprar?

T: buy comprar.

P: buy, buy a bag and buy a boots. The boy, eh, the boy, the boy, the boy buy a bag and the cat, eh, eh, the cat ...hunts a rabbit and the cat, eh, take the rabbit and go to the Palace and, how do you say dar

Ty P: give to the King and the king...

T: Do you remember Pretty Ritty? Does Pretty Ritty marry the cat?

P: Yes.

T: Yes, and does Pretty Ritty like Doggo?

P: No,

T: Why not?

P: But

T: Because

P: Because, because, how do you say voz?

T: voice

P: voice are ugly.

3. OTHER SECONDARY VARIABLES

Other secondary variables like Spanish level or Verbal Aptitude were studied. This Verbal Aptitude was divided, in turn, into the following variables:

Writing was assessed by an essay about holidays where some guidance was given, e.g. about content/ideas and also about how to express these ideas. It was assessed by the psychologist of the school as high/medium/low using various criteria.

Reading Comprehension. This skill was assessed by the teachers who gave the children a text from a reading book which was adapted to their age but which they had not yet read. They were given 10 minutes to read and afterwards they were asked to write the development of the story (beginning, middle and ending). The scale used to assess this skill was the same as the one used for Writing: High/ medium/low.

Speaking was assessed by the teacher through continuous evaluation. Teachers took into consideration the pupils' participation in situations of communication related to the school (teamwork in groups, debates, class meetings, the teacher's and other classmates' expositions). They also took into account whether the participation was constructive (listening ability, respect for other pupils' opinions, ability to agree, reasoned opinions...). Another indicator of the Speaking skill was the oral texts (tales, accounts, expositions and easy explanations...). Other factors assessed in Speaking include the organization of facts and ideas, the adequate use of forms in oral language, that is, pronunciation, intonation, rhythm, vocabulary, sentence structures in the text. The scale used was the same as in the previous cases: High/medium/low, according to the teacher's criteria and bearing in mind all these indicators.

Listening Comprehension was assessed in the same way as Speaking and according to the same scale; in this case indicators of a good level of Listening Comprehension for the children of this level and according to the criteria established by the Education Ministry were the following: To get the general sense of habitual oral texts by understanding both the ideas and the relations established between these ideas; and to interpret some non explicit elements present in the ideas (double meanings, humour, etc.) assessing these elements critically. Listening Comprehension was assessed by students' ability to listen to general texts and identify approaches to certain themes and uses of the language which denote a social, racial, sexual...discrimination – and then to use these factors to correct their own production.

Spelling was assessed from a dictation which was composed of 13 or 14 lines and marked according to the following criteria: High/medium/low.

Definitions. The students were asked to define in normal language each one of the six words given and the scale was established in the following way: High/medium/low.

The following variables were also considered:

Mechanical Calculus. For mechanical calculus, a test was carried out with four arithmetical operations: addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. The assessment was according to the following scale: High/medium/low.

Mental Calculus. For mental calculus, seven questions were asked and the students had to calculate the operations mentally. The result for each one of the operations was written on a sheet of paper. The scale used for the assessment was: High: seven or six correct operations; Medium: 5 to 3 correct operations; Low: 2 to zero correct operations.

Parents' educational level. The cultural level of students' parents was calculated on the basis of their level of studies, classified in the following way: Advanced University Studies:4, University Studies:3, Secondary Studies:2, Primary or Elementary Studies:1

If the father and mother did not have the same results, the mean between them was calculated. Half of these scores were included in an immediately superior category and the other half in an immediately inferior category so that data were neither overestimated nor underestimated.

Hours spent in an English Academy. The variable here was the number of hours pupils spent studying English in an Academy outside the school during the term in which research was taking place.

All these secondary variables can be generalized in the Control Group in the same way as the Experimental Group. The only difference between them was the instruction which was carried out during the term. In the Control Group, the instruction was based on the traditional approach and the students followed the book 'English' by O'Callaghan and Salinas (1994), whilst for the Experimental Group the instruction was based on the Task-Based Approach, the theme of this research.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Descriptive analyses

At a descriptive level, and if we focus on the Pre-test, we can see that there do not seem to be any differences between the Experimental Group and the Control Group in the different variables (We are not taking the pupils' sex into consideration.) This lack of differences was expected because we were trying to be sure they were equal in their English level. In that way, if differences were produced in the Post-test, the reason would be in the type of approach that was applied. Nevertheless, it is important to check that there are not significant differences between both groups from a contrast of hypotheses.

If we divide the groups into boys and girls, we can observe that for the English variable and for the other three sub-variables into which the English variable was divided, there are no great differences in the Experimental Group, although we see slight differences in the Control Group which will have to be contrasted afterwards.

If we attend to the statistical figures in the **Post-test**, we can not see an increase in the scores in the Experimental Group with regard to the Pre-test, but we can see a decrease in the scores in the Control Group.

PRE-TEST (without taking into account sex).

	LISTENING COMPREHEN- SION	READING COMPREHEN- SIÓN	SPEAKING	ENGLISH LEVEL
EXPERIMENT AL GROUP	Mean: 18.93 Variance: 29.07 Standard dev: 5.39	Mean: 6.62 Variance: 1.24 Standard dev: 1.11	Mean: 3.87 Variance: 9.85 Standard dev: 3.14	Mean: 29.42 Variance: 82.81 Standard dev: 9.10
CONTROL GROUP	Mean: 18.91 Variance: 34.02 Standard dev: 5.83	Mean: 6.45 Variance: 2.26 Standard dev: 1.50	Mean: 3.98 Variance: 8.89 Standard dev: 2.98	Mean: 29.34 Variance: 81.18 Standard dev: 9.01

POST-TEST (without taking into account sex)

	LISTENING COMPREHEN- SION	READING COMPREHEN- SIÓN	SPEAKING	ENGLISH LEVEL
EXPERIMENTA L GROUP	Mean: 19.52 Variance: 40.40 Standard dev: 6.36	Mean: 4.93 Variance: 0.49 Standard dev: 0.70	Mean: 4.75 Variance: 7.68 Standard dev: 2.77	Mean: 29.21 Variance: 84.27 Standard dev: 9.18
CONTROL GROUP	Mean: 17.88 Variance: 48.36 Standard dev: 6.95	Mean: 4.15 Variance: 2.32 Standard dev: 1.52	Mean: 3.62 Variance: 8.91 Standard dev: 2.98	Mean: 25.65 Variance: 111.72 Standard dev: 10.57

This has a very easy explanation although it does not seem so obvious. English tests applied to the students in the Post-test were clearly more difficult than those applied in the Pre-test, that is, they were more appropriate tests for the level required at that age taking into consideration what they had been doing during the term.

4.2. Strange potential variables

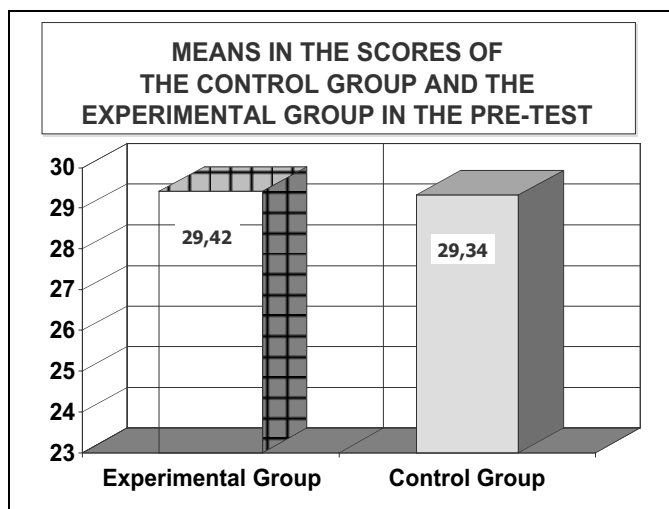
As far as secondary variables are concerned, there is no statistically significant difference between the Control Group and the Experimental Group. Therefore, we can be sure that these variables are not going to contaminate the statistical analysis which is going to be carried out to see if there are differences between the groups as far as the English level is concerned.

4.3. Inferential analysis: comparisons between both types of approaches

As has been previously mentioned we are not measuring in the same way in the Pre-test and the Post-test, so we can not make direct comparisons between both tests. What we can do is compare the Experimental Group and the Control Group in the Pre-test, and also separately in the Post-test. If we do not find significant differences in the Pre-test and we find them in the Post-test, we can assert that a change has been produced, and therefore that there is a statistically significant difference between both types of approaches.

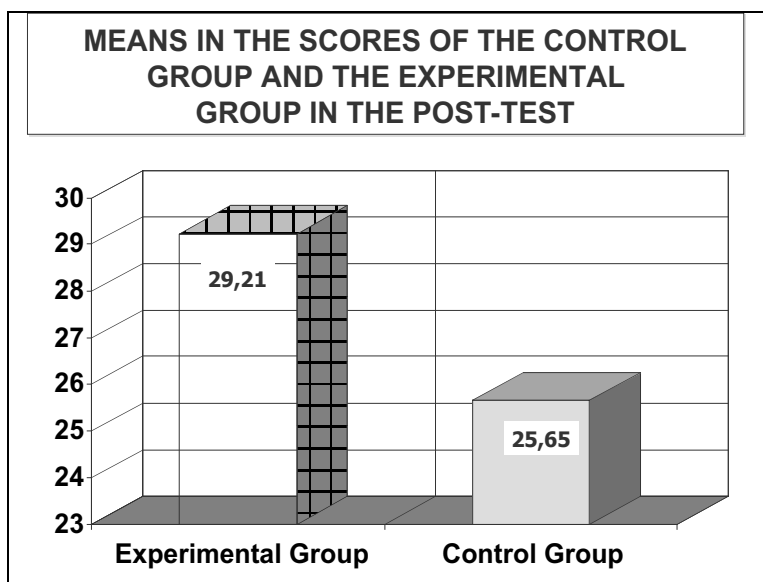
By carrying out a one factor variance analysis for the Pre-test of the English variable, we do not find significant differences between the Control Group and the Experimental Group.

Figure 2.



By carrying out the same type of analysis for the Post-test we find that although there is a decrease in scores of the Control Group in relation to the Experimental Group, the differences between both groups are not statistically significant.

Figure 3.



By carrying out the same variance analysis for each one of the three variables into which the level of English has been divided, we discover that only in the variable 'Reading Comprehension' do we find significant differences between the groups in the Post-test, as we can see in the table below. (Significant differences are produced if we take $\alpha=0.05$; if we took $\alpha=0.01$, we would not say that significant differences were produced between the groups in the Post-test for Reading Comprehension).

ANOVAS of the three variables into which the English level was divided, in the Pre-test and the Post-test.

	PRE-TEST			POST-TEST		
	F	gl	p	F	gl	p
LISTENING COMP.	0.00	1,60	0.98	0.93	1,60	0.34
READING. COMP	0.24	1,60	0.63	6.39	1,60	0.014
ORAL EXPRESS	0.02	1,60	0.89	2.39	1,60	0.13

There were also significant differences in the Listening component within the Speaking skill between the Control Group and the Experimental Group (in the Post-test): ($F(1,60)=4.81$; $p=0.032$).

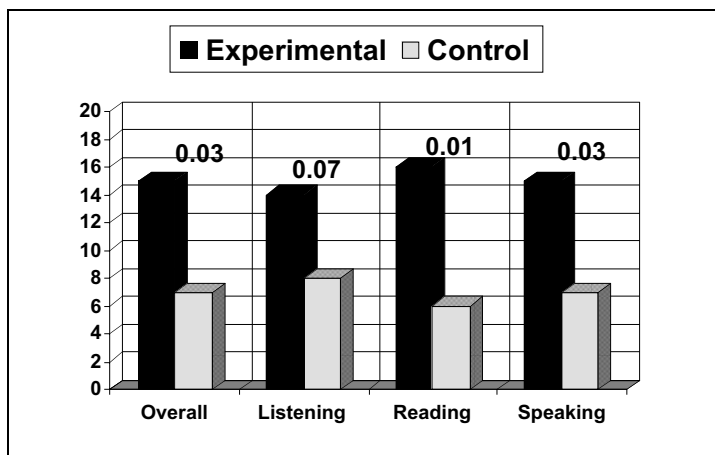
By sexes, there was no difference between boys and girls, that is, neither in the Control Group nor in the Experimental were there differences between sexes; therefore it is possible to eliminate sex as a possible contaminant for the results.

In the Post-test, in the lowest third of the group (22 pupils), significant differences were also found in favour of the Experimental Group for overall English level, Listening Comprehension, Reading Comprehension and Speaking.

2tails binomial test (Siegel,1956).

	EXPERIMENTAL	CONTROL	P =
Overall	15	7	0.0335
Listening Comprehension	14	8	0.0715
Reading Comprehension	16	6	0.013
Speaking	15	7	0.0335

Figure 4. Post-test (lowest third, N=22).



4.4. Correlations between secondary variables and English learning

We find a clear relationship between secondary variables and English learning; the higher the level in those variables the greater the English learning, according to the initial hypothesis. That is logical because most of them are linguistic variables and they are expected to correlate highly.

Correlations between secondary variables and English learning.

	ENGLISH LEVEL	ENGLISH LISTENING COMPR.	ENGLISH READING COMPR.	SPEAKING
VERBAL APTITUDE	.669**	.646**	.481**	.603**
WRITING	.405**	.389**	.300*	.371**
READING COMPREHENSION	.616**	.612**	.419**	.535**
SPELLING	.446**	.446**	.407**	.333**
DEFINITIONS	.423**	.374**	.309*	.456**
LISTENING COMPREHENSION	.610**	.590**	.462**	.560**
ORAL EXPRESSION (SPEAKING)	.547**	.528**	.318*	.532**
MECHANICAL CALCULUS	.182	.183	.120	.156
MENTAL CALCULUS	.485**	.462**	.289*	.484**
HOURS IN ACADEMY	.434**	.457**	.231	.347**
PARENTS' CULTURAL LEVEL	.408**	.378**	.218	.440**

* statistically significant correlation with $\alpha = 0.05$.

** statistically significant correlation with $\alpha = 0.01$.

Correlations between secondary variables, in general, are positive, high and statistically significant. This indicates that, clearly, these variables are important and are influencing the English learning.

We can see in the Table that there is not just a high correlation with the English level, but with each one of the components in which such a variable was divided. The lowest correlation was produced with the sub-variable 'Reading Comprehension' in English.

After the variable 'Verbal Aptitude', the highest correlations were found in 'Reading Comprehension' (Spanish), Listening Comprehension (Spanish) and Speaking (Spanish). The three, in the same way as Verbal Aptitude, correlated to a lesser extent with reading comprehension in English than with the other English variables.

In general, if we notice carefully all the secondary variables and the correlations with the English level and its components or variables we can see that the lowest correlations are produced practically in all cases with the variable 'Reading Comprehension'.

This fact is interesting and we will have to look for an explanation for it in the discussion about results, because this is the only variable in which we have found a statistically significant difference between groups in English learning.

It seems that it is not by chance that this was the only variable in which we discovered that groups behaved in a different way and this is also the variable which correlates the least with the rest of the variables.

Because of that, it was considered important to find the correlations of the different secondary variables with Reading Comprehension in English by taking into account whether we are talking of the Experimental Group or the Control Group.

The Correlations found in both groups appear in the following table:

Correlations of Reading Comprehension with secondary variables by groups.

	EXPERIMENTAL GROUP ENGLISH READING COMPREHENSION	CONTROL GROUP ENGLISH READING COMPREHENSION
VERBAL APTITUDE	.295 N = 26	.584** N = 33***
WRITING	.072 N = 29	.394*
READING COMPREHENSION	.407* N = 29	.468**
SPELLING	.360 N = 28	.456**
DEFINITIONS	.244 N = 27	.279
LISTENING COMPREHENSION	.424* N = 29	.573**
ORAL EXPRESSION (SPEAKING)	.212 N = 29	.394*
MECHANICAL CALCULUS	.156 N = 29	.264
MENTAL CALCULUS	.145 N = 29	.388*
HOURS IN ACADEMY	.482** N = 29	.124
PARENTS' CULTURAL LEVEL	.491** N = 29	.253

* statistically significant correlation with $\alpha = 0.05$.

** statistically significant correlation with

$\alpha = 0.01$.

*** the control group was composed of 33 individuals for all the secondary variables.

We find clear differences between the Experimental and Control Groups as far as correlation is concerned. We find that there are much higher correlations in the Control Group than in the Experimental Group.

5. DISCUSSION

As far as the design of this research is concerned, it is necessary to say that tests before and after implementing the plan were different and it is not possible to make a direct Pre-test / Post-test comparison. On the one hand, it is necessary to note the absence of standardized tests for this type of research in English learning. It would have been necessary to make two new tests which measured the same in the Pre-test and the Post-test, that is, two parallel tests. That task, because of its complexity, would have exceeded the objectives of this research.

The initial test was considered a starting point where we could check to see if there was any initial difference between the Control Group and the Experimental Group.

According to the statistical analysis of the results in the Pre-test, there were no significant differences either in the English variable (including the other sub-variables in which the English variable was divided) or the secondary variables. For this reason, we are sure about the equivalence of both groups in the Pre-test. Both groups had a similar level of English and secondary variables can be eliminated as possible contaminating variables.

In the Post-test, there was a significant difference between the Control Group and the Experimental Group in the skill 'Reading Comprehension'. Furthermore, this is the skill that correlates the least with the other variables (either in English or with the other secondary variables).

There could be some reasons for a significant difference in Reading Comprehension. In the Experimental Group, pupils worked with photocopies, most of them in colour, so the texts were more communicative. However, in the Control Group, pupils worked with the textbook which implied more grammatical texts. This circumstance may have contributed to a better presentation of the didactic material in quantity and quality and for this reason were able to see the reading text better. It is also necessary to note the fact that, in the Experimental Group, learning strategies such as the use of notebooks in alphabetical order, cards, making of illustrated dictionaries, conceptual maps, tables, etc. were stressed.

There were many pupils who put these techniques into practice and because they were able to study vocabulary in a systematic and organized way, this could have contributed to a better learning vocabulary, and because of that, to a better READING COMPREHENSION. For example, in the Unit of Work 'Animals' a table was being elaborated throughout the Unit (in the form of a Mural for the whole class; also each one of them, individually, made their own tables). In this table, as shown at the beginning of this article, they had to take notes on the different characteristics of the animals which were being studied, that is, name, class, physical description, habitat, food and abilities. This table was a guide for the pupils to be able to process and assimilate all the information they were receiving. This information would enable them to carry out the Final Task: A Quiz.

Another element to be taken into account is that in the Experimental Group, each pupil read at least one story as an exercise of intensive reading. On a sheet of paper they had to answer a series of comprehension questions. It is understood that these tasks of extensive

reading, as well as the greater facilities for intensive reading, could cause the students in the Experimental Group to get a significantly greater score in relation to the Control Group.

There were also significant differences between both groups in the Listening component within the Speaking skill: ($F(1,60)=4.81$; $p=0.032$). It is important to indicate the statistically significant differences found in the component of Listening Comprehension, which is produced in the interaction between teacher and pupils in the Speaking test. It is important because one of the main characteristics of the communicative Task-Based Approach was taking place: the cooperative spirit in a socially shared experience. An improvement in this aspect would contribute to the fundamental objective in the Task-Based Approach: The creation of adequate contexts of language use to exercise the communication processes.

At the same time, the cause for not having found significant differences in the rest of the English variables between both groups, can be attributed to the fact that the research lasted just one term. Nevertheless, in the lowest third of the group (22 pupils), significant differences were also found in favour of the Experimental Group. This is an interesting fact because it proves that among the twenty two last pupils (those with the lowest marks), the difference between those who belonged to the Experimental Group and those who belonged to the Control Group was significant in all the variables. That means that the Task-Based Approach was beneficial for those pupils with more problems in English learning.

In the English language, sounds and spellings do not always coincide and because of that it is more difficult to acquire the language orally than by writing. This could be one of the reasons why in such a short time the pupils were able to assimilate written English better than oral English.

Perhaps if there was more time to apply this plan of Task-Based Units of Work, we could find significant differences between both groups. Although there are not many significant differences at an inferential level, there are significant differences at a descriptive level. Both general and more specific differences are in favour of the Experimental Group.

Time seems to play an important role here. Learning a foreign language is a gradual and extensive process developed over a long period of time. Because of that, if we had continued with the process, these tendencies in favour of the Experimental Group would have achieved a greater consistency. Nevertheless, this is a hypothesis to be proven.

As far as correlations are concerned, we see that English Reading Comprehension is, precisely, the one which correlates the least with the rest of the secondary variables. We have to add to that circumstance the fact that it was this variable of English Reading Comprehension where we found a statistically significant difference in favour of the Experimental Group. This could mean that English Reading Comprehension has certain autonomous features. We can deduce that it was a specific didactic plan which had a greater influence on the results obtained afterwards.

It seems as if English Reading Comprehension worked in a more independent way than the rest of the skills studied for this research. This could have been caused by the role played by the learning of specific vocabulary for the development of such a skill. This factor of the vocabulary, treated in a contextualized way through the Task-Based Approach, seems to produce a significant benefit, in this case for the Experimental Group.

There is also a clear relationship between secondary variables and English learning, the higher the level in such variables the greater the level in English, according to the initial hypothesis. This is logical because we are talking mostly of linguistic variables and they are

expected to correlate highly. The variable which correlates the most with English learning is 'Verbal Aptitude' and from this variable of Verbal Aptitude, the sub-variable which correlates the least with English learning is Writing. For the rest of the sub-variables we find very high correlations.

The rest of the variables: Spelling, Definitions, Mental Calculus..., also correlated with English learning, although to a lesser extent, except Mechanical Calculus, for which no correlation was found. This is an interesting piece of information because that makes us think that teaching a foreign language is not based on mechanical imitation as was thought when structuralism was in vogue. Instead, it is based on mental mechanisms through which all the linguistic system is processed both in reception and production. It is this theory of the cognitive processing approach which underlines the Task-Based Approach.

On the other hand, Writing in English was discarded from this research because in the previous years, this skill had hardly been taught and there was very little basis for research. Anyway, if we take into account the pupils' age and level as well as the general context of teaching and also the research context, the three researched skills can be considered the three most basic ones. For future research, investigation of the four skills should be carried out because the four skills should be studied in an integrated way even though emphasis varies depending on the pupils' age.

The fact that the variables 'English Listening Comprehension' and 'Speaking' were descriptively superior in the Experimental Group in addition to what has already been mentioned about the results in the lowest third, makes us become optimistic as far as this Task-Based Approach is concerned to facilitate the process of Oral Communication in a significant way.

It is necessary to indicate that in the natural scenario (of the maternal language) of a child, the oral code represents a previous step to the written one and from the ontogenetic point of view it also happens that children acquire naturally the oral code (comprehension-expression) before the learning of the written code. It is logical, to a certain extent, that in a different environment like the classroom, the written code is reinforced and especially if learning time is short. This could be one possible reason why significant differences in favour of the Experimental Group were found just in Reading Comprehension and not in the other variables as well.

It could be said that a skill like Reading Comprehension is more related to learning than to natural acquisition. On the other hand, in such a short period of time as a term, it seems logical that the results related to learning stand out more than those related to natural acquisition.

Some variables in this research could not have been controlled. For instance, in the Experimental Group, in some of the hours there was alternation between the regular teacher and the teacher carrying out the experiment, which could have had an influence on the pupils' achievement

6. CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusions extracted from the research are the following:

a) A statistically significant increase is not produced in English learning, globally considered for all variables and for all students, when we apply the Task-Based Approach in relation to

the traditional approach. What is seen in the descriptive data is that there is a tendency in favour of the Experimental Group. It is likely that if we had had more time, we would have had a significant increase in the Task-Based Approach.

b) There is a significant increase for Reading Comprehension, Listening Comprehension in Speaking, in addition to the significant differences in favour of the Experimental Group in the lowest third of the group (22 pupils). This could be because of the characteristics of the tasks administered to the Experimental Group or to different vocabulary learning strategies which had an influence on the increase of learning as far as Reading Comprehension is concerned. Another possible explanation could be based on the environment where learning takes place: The classroom. It seems that the classroom encourages written learning more than oral learning. Oral learning seems to be encouraged more in natural scenarios where interaction with other human beings takes place.

It doesn't mean that interaction in the classroom does not take place; but even though it does take place in the classroom, the nature of it is not the same and written language is encouraged more than oral language in the classroom.

c) We find a clear relationship between the secondary variables and English learning, the greater the level in such variables, the greater the English learning, according to the initial hypothesis. This is logical because most of these secondary variables are linguistic variables and they are expected to correlate highly.

The variable which correlated the most with English learning was 'Verbal Aptitude' and the sub-variable 'Written Expression' was the one which correlated the least. The rest of the sub-variables had very high correlations.

The rest of the variables: Orthography, Definitions, Mental Calculus...also correlate with English learning, although to a lesser extent., except Mechanical Calculus, for which no relation was found with English learning. It does not seem that Mechanical Calculus has an influence on the acquisition of a foreign language like English.

d) Reading Comprehension (English) was the variable which correlated the least with the secondary variables and besides we find clear differences between the Experimental and Control Groups as far as correlation is concerned. We find that there are much higher correlations in the Control Group than in the Experimental Group. This seems to raise the idea of a greater autonomy in the variable of Reading Comprehension in English than in the rest of the English variables which are more related to Verbal Aptitude.

The fact that there were significant differences in 'Reading Comprehension' in favour of the Experimental Group and correlations with secondary variables were lower in the Experimental Group than in the Control Group increases this idea of autonomy for the variable of 'Reading Comprehension'.

General conclusions

It is obvious that each educational stage has its own characteristics and that the Task-Based Approach will have to fit in with them. As far as Primary Education is concerned, pupils at that age enjoy active learning (learning by doing) and because of that, this approach can predispose the pupil favourably towards the teacher and his way of working.

The learning of a foreign language does not take place in an isolated way without connection between tasks. Rather it takes place through a sequence of tasks in a process over the long-term. In such a process, Units of Work designed by following the Task-Based Approach offer the possibility that such tasks fulfil a purpose, have an intention and achieve the end objective of the Final Task.

That purpose and that intention make us work on a series of learning strategies in such a way that what is learnt is not limited to the short-term but has a forward hold in a sequenced succession of tasks and therefore has repercussion over the longer term. This long-term can be understood as the time that we take to carry out the Final Task. Also it could be understood as a longer time which enables the learning to last and be accumulative, that is, it is allowed to build on that knowledge and increase it.

One of the strategies to achieve this aim over the long term consists of the elaboration of tasks in a spiral form. They are recurring tasks which can have some obvious modifications in relation to the pupils' level but also they can have some modifications in some of the elements of the tasks or they can be merely repetitive.

Our two Units of Work followed the criteria of giving learning tools to the students so that students were able, through a sequence of gradual tasks, to use the language. In that way, language was not something improvised but something elaborated through the learning process. It is not important just to teach language – we also have to teach how to learn it. In that way, students can be more autonomous and efficient in their learning. That autonomy will give them security and resolution when they have to actually use the foreign language and will allow them to use it more naturally.

The Units of Work intend to reflect those principles. It is obvious that the results of the application of such Units for such a short time (a term) in an Experimental Group can not offer complete and conclusive data in relation to the Control Group. For the data to be more definitive, a long term study for a period of years would be necessary. However, at the end of the learning period, we were able to check the result of a specific way of learning (in this case Task-Based Approach).

Although the application time can seem short, it is a starting point to continue that line of research and to show some tendencies. On the other hand, if the research had lasted longer, (a year, for example) obviously the work of planning and application would have been greater and the results would not have been definitive either as the advantages of this approach would have to be considered over a longer term. It is necessary to point out the difficulties in finding a school where the research could be carried out; this would be even more difficult for the whole academic year.

Comparing different methodological approaches for a long period of time could be preventing others from the supposed beneficial effects of the approach we are researching. Nevertheless it could be possible to develop the investigation in two different schools, for example, or to make adequate compensations for the control group.

It is difficult to learn a foreign language in an environment where that language is not usually spoken. The experience of connecting different subjects like Knowledge of the Environment, Dramatization etc, with the English Units of Work can make us think about investigating the learning of the English language through different subjects the students study like Knowledge of the Environment, Dramatization, Physical Education, Music, etc.

As there are very few opportunities for the students to practise outside the classroom, if they used the foreign language as a vehicle through which to learn other subjects, the time of using the foreign language would increase. Researching the coordination of the different teachers to synchronize the topics of the different subjects with the topics in the English language would be interesting because in that way the learning for the students would be more significant than when they are only learning the foreign language.

In that way, if a coordinated relationship between subjects were promoted, it is supposed that Listening Comprehension would increase as is shown by Swain for those students in immersion linguistic programmes in Canada. But their spoken level was much lower than the level attained in Listening Comprehension.

The Task-Based Approach has the students speak as much as possible in the foreign language through communicative tasks, whose maximum exponent is the Final Task which is entirely communicative and where the students arrive through a process of a realization of other communicative tasks and other supporting cognitive, morphosyntactic, phonetic, semantic and discourse tasks.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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