

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua, Managua

ELT Research



Topic:

The Effect of Teachers` Language Proficiency on Teaching
Methodology at Institute Benjamin Zeledón of Managua

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 Sabatino

1. Dedicatory .

We dedicated this research first to God and then to our family who supported us in this hard process and encourages us in all these years to finish our career.

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4. Introduction

Knowledge of English language represents one of the essential requirements of today's society. Besides other skills, it is considered as one of the most influential factors when applying for a job or maintaining a particular work position, which is often conditional to the advancement of a language level.

Since the ability to communicate in English has become a necessity in human life, people take advantage of different opportunities to acquire it. The best and most natural way to learn this language is to study it in an English speaking country. Being exposed to a foreign language abroad without no interference of a mother tongue is undoubtedly the most beneficial and fastest way to improve language skills.

However, not everyone is provided with such an opportunity. Therefore, the only chance most of people have is learning English in Secondary school, and taking in account the factor that the Nicaraguan Educational System does not include in its curriculum teaching English during the first years in school, that is preschool and primary school, as a result the transition to secondary school is affected by the inclusion of teaching a language in students' curriculum, this can be overwhelming and intimidating for students; therefore some teacher try to engage the students in the class by speaking and communicating in the mother tongue, in our case in Spanish, they consider student are more eager to learn the language if they use Spanish than using a language they cannot pronounce or understand.

This research intends to analyze how this decision affects the learning process and if it is more effective than using English to motivate the students to produce the target language.

5. Problem and Research Topics

5.1. Rationale

This research has drawn attention to a dilemma to what extent a mother tongue should be implemented into English lessons.

The work is divided into two parts, theoretical and practical. The theoretical part deals with learners' characteristics, their attitudes and expectations to English learning and ways of acquiring it. It also provides various points of view on mother tongue use in English teaching and its advantages as well as disadvantages.

The practical part consists of a research on mother tongue use and teaching observations conducted at Institute Benjamin Zeledon in Managua. The aim of the work is to consider the appropriate amount of mother tongue and target language use in English lessons. The issue of teacher proficiency is also of concern to language teachers themselves. Teachers want to know that they are up to date with their language and content knowledge. There is currently a perception that language teachers in Nicaragua are not as proficient as is desirable.

In Nicaragua we have some universities that offer the ELT Degree with different approaches but the educational institutions who hire these graduated teachers are deeply concerned on teachers' language proficiency mainly. In spite of different methodologies and techniques teacher can use in the classroom one of the key elements in language teaching is the teacher using the language efficiently in a fluent and accurate way. Teachers are expected to master the language because that is what they are teaching: a language. Determining a sample in a public school can provide a better idea of the language proficiency of English teacher in public schools. We selected one of the most emblematic institutes in the public educational system: the institute Benjamin Zeledon. It is located in one of the most populated areas of the capital and it receives 2, 347 students of primary and secondary schools in the morning, afternoon and night shifts and 786 students of adult education in Saturday and Sunday shifts.

All these students are assisted by 47 teachers for the whole curriculum which is basically composed by nine subjects and from that big number of teacher they have 11 English teachers in all the shifts. One of the teachers is hired to teach in two shifts, the morning and the Saturdays.

We intend to determine the level of English Language proficiency the teachers demonstrate in their classrooms, the amount of target language they use in the classroom during the English classes and the way they interact with the students and make the students produce the Second language with the example or modeling.

All the teachers in this institute have a degree in English Language Teaching, - this is one of the reasons we decided to do the research in this school and all of them have more than 5 years of experience in this institute or in a former one.

5.2 Research Questions

1. What is the real level of proficiency of an English teacher when finishes his career and he ready to work in a school?
2. How are English teachers using the target language in the classroom?
3. How confident teachers are when they use English Language in their classes?
4. Are teacher using English or Spanish during English classes?

5.3 Problem hypothesis

The mother tongue predominates in the English classes in the institute Benjamin Zeledon; which may be due to the following variables:

- a) The teachers' language proficiency is still low.
- b) Teachers' lack of confidence to use the target language
- c) Students often tend to reject a teacher that tries to create a full English class environment.
- d) English teachers are not usually required to use English in the class.

5.4 Objectives

5.4.1 General Objective

Analyze the importance of using the English language as a way to motivate the students to learn the target language.

5.4.2 Specific Objectives

1. Determine the level of English language proficiency of English teachers at the institute Benjamin Zeledon.
2. Define the impact of using English or Spanish during the English class.
3. Verify how the use of Spanish in the English class affects the teachers' methodology and their own performance.

5. Theoretical framework

This research deals with a dilemma: the extent to which the tongue should be used in English lessons and whether it is beneficial for achieving teaching goals. Various linguists offer different views on this issue, so we have decided to explore each of them in order to find a reasonable solution to effective teaching. The outlook into history of teaching methods is supposed to serve as a tool for considering advantages and disadvantages of particular approaches to mother tongue use and their comparison with current trends.

The use of the mother tongue in the L2 classroom has always been a controversial issue, due to the existence of very diverse opinions. On the one hand, researchers that are completely against the use of the L1 in the foreign language classroom can be found, and on the other hand, there are those who consider it beneficial for the learners.

During the late 1970s and the early 1980s the use of the mother tongue in the classroom was considered as a “bad thing”, because the learners should have a maximum exposure to the target language. Therefore, researchers such as Richards and Rogers, who considered that the L1 should be inexistent within the L2 classroom, can be found (Martin, J.M. 2000:31).

Nowadays, this perspective is changing and more and more professionals are being convinced of the facilitating role of the first language (L1) in the second and foreign language classroom (L2). In our specific case, this conviction comes from personal experience, classes that have been observing, and books we have read.

Many previous studies have focused on the different uses of the mother tongue in the classroom; its advantages and disadvantages for secondary school students; or even adults. But, what about young learners, that have just started with the acquisition of a second language? All these studies have not taken into account that learning a foreign language at early stages is much more complicated than it appears to be and neither have they used control or comparison groups in order to verify in which way children prefer and are more motivated to learn a second language.

The importance of motivation in the acquisition of a L2

Motivation is a very complex construct because not everybody agrees with its relevance and therefore, it is very complicated to arrive to its components. But it is a construct that has to be analyzed carefully due to its capital importance in foreign language learning. Dornyei (1998) defines motivation as follows:

A process whereby a certain amount of instigation force arises, initiates action, and persists as long as no other force comes into play to weaken it and thereby terminate action, or until the planned outcome has been reached.

It is not easy to encourage young people to speak or listen in a foreign language for a whole lesson, as some can be quieter or less confident than others. Therefore, teachers need to provide a comfortable atmosphere where the children feel motivated and secure about making efforts to listen or communicate in the L2. In order to feel motivated, young children may need to be exposed to their mother tongue, for a long time before they feel confident enough, because ignoring the L1 can lead to low self-esteem and demotivation, and this can lead at the same time to the refusal of learning another language.

Acquisition versus learning

Although these terms are sometimes perceived to be the same, they have been distinguished by many linguists. Stephen Krashen (Svoboda, 2006) claims that adults have two different ways of developing competence in second languages: acquisition, which is a subconscious process identical to the process children utilize in acquiring their mother tongue, and learning, which is a conscious process that results in "knowing about the language".

Teaching a foreign language to adults requires focusing on getting the adult students to consciously learn language items in isolation. This is demanding and time consuming and the results are not always satisfying. Nevertheless, the new approaches and methods in language teaching enable adult students practicing dialogues in everyday situations to be prepared for dealing with them in reality.

Teaching methods considering mother tongue use

There are various teaching methods used in different types of language courses. Their diversity is a result of properly considered objectives of each educational institution. It is essential to realize students' reasons for learning English and then adjust the way of teaching to students' needs. Some adult students may prefer drilling exercises to enhance their grammar knowledge as soon as possible, whereas younger learners are interested in playing language games especially those involving lots of movement and visual aids. It is vital to find out which teaching method would be the most suitable for a specific language group.

Grammar -Translation Method

The Grammar –Translation Method was developed in the 18th century and was introduced as a way of teaching modern languages to school children. The method itself came from the way individual learners studied classical languages such as Greek and Latin. This was done mainly by studying the grammar in detail and translating texts from the original into the learner's language. According to Lindsay (2006, 16) the specific feature of this method is individual learning, which means that students' interaction is missing and they are working individually at their desks. He also mentions that this method is based on deduction, which is far less challenging than induction. In practice it means that students are given an explanation of a certain grammar rule and their task is to memorize this rule and apply it in given sentences in form of translation. Little or no attention is paid to the ability to speak or communicate. Vocabulary is not taught in connection to a relevant topic by using pictures, but every single word has to be memorized from a long vocabulary list. It has been found really demanding to memorize all words without using them in sentences.

On the contrary, grammar rules are given a lot of attention, especially word endings and sentence formation. The fact, which would at present time definitely seem ridiculous to all, is the unnecessary for teachers to be able to speak the target language in order to teach. The only thing that matters is correct translating with no emphasis on preparation for real life

situations. Reading and writing belong to prioritized skills at the expense of speaking, listening and pronunciation. As far as the use of mother tongue is concerned, students are exposed to it all the time because no emphasis is on active target language use.

The teacher is using mother tongue immediately after entering the classroom. Greeting the students, explaining the vocabulary and grammar and even assigning the homework are communicated in mother tongue. Target language is used only in translations, which does not provide the opportunity for students to get used to it. Constant translations challenge the students to rely on the fact that each term and structure has an exact equivalent in the target language. Therefore, students very often find themselves in situations outside the classroom when the memorized language item does not correspond to reality.

This causes confusion, embarrassment and also discouragement in further studying. Learners do not get much out of the lessons concerning practicing listening and speaking skills and are unable to cope with language barrier outside the classroom. Moreover, the dominance of translation and grammatical accuracy rather than fluency may be demotivating for some learners and cause problems in sustaining motivation to achieve their goals in mastering the target language. This method can be only useful for those students whose aim is to achieve development of reading skills in order to be able to read scientific texts with no intention to produce speeches or be involved in communication.

At present many learners still prefer to be taught this way mainly due to their previous learning experience when they were young pupils. They expect to be given a text in English, read it and translate it together in class. After translation, vocabulary and phrases explanation follows, but it is done in mother tongue, not in English as modern language trends suggest. However, some learners are still satisfied with this method and reject to use only target language within the lesson. They do not feel confident when being put in real life situations and prefer to stick to routine, which is based on working with a particular text and its translation. Even though it is demanding to persuade these learners to change their mind about the way in which they study more efficiently, professional teachers are able to do so by using interesting activities.

Direct Method

Direct method appeared as a reaction to grammar-translation method and overcame its two major faults by substituting language contact for grammar recitation and language use for translation. Teachers identified translation weakness and tried to come up with a new approach focusing on conducting the lesson only in target language. According to Knight (2006, 17) direct method represented a modern trend which was based on similarity between the L1 and L2 acquisition and enabled students to learn language in a natural way.

Lado (1964, 5) also points out that learning a foreign language is the same as learning the mother tongue, which means that exposing the student directly to the foreign language impresses it perfectly upon his/her mind. He adds, however, that this is true only up to a point, since the psychology of learning a second language differs from that of learning the first one. The child is forced to learn L1 because he has no other effective way to express his needs. In learning L2 this compulsion is largely missing, since the student knows that he can communicate through his native language when necessary. Furthermore, with the L1 the child's mind can be thought of as "a tabula rasa" where the patterns become impressed, whereas with the L2 the habit patterns of L1 are already there and L2 is perceived through the habit channels of the native language.

The central idea of this method is the association of words and sentences with their meaning through demonstration, dramatization, pointing etc. The meaning of words and structures was communicated directly through mime, gestures and practiced in question-answer exchanges between teacher and students. Learners were not taught grammar rules but worked them out for themselves. Encouragement to use only target language was perceived as advantageous; however, when dealing with young learners it proved to be an obstacle. As has been already mentioned, there are differences between L1 and L2 learners. In the following outline we can distinguish their features:

First- language learner

- a) He has no command of another language before learning the target language.
- b) He is neurologically immature, thus his mother tongue is not fixed.
- c) He learns to recognize and cope with reality through the target language.
- d) He requires a high-contact-frequency with the target language to learn that all things have names.
- e) He requires a high contact-frequency with the target language to recognize the meaning of sounds representing the names of things because his range of experience with the outside world is limited and as he has no knowledge of the equivalent meaning of sounds from another language for the same things.
- f) He requires a high contact-frequency to establish integration of mother tongue sounds with things.

Second-language learner

- a) He has command of another language before learning the target language.
- b) He is neurologically mature, thus his mother tongue is fixed.
- c) He learns to recognize and cope with reality through the mother tongue, not the target language.
- d) He already knows that all things have names.
- e) He has already experienced the process, involving high contact-frequency and maturation, of recognizing the meaning of sounds representing the names of things in his mother tongue. As he is now neurologically mature, he need not be subjected a second time to the same process in the new target language merely to recognize the equivalent meaning of target-language sounds for the same things.
- f) He has already established integration of mother-tongue sounds with things, but requires high contact-frequency to establish new integration of target-language sounds with the same things. “

Audio lingual

Audiolingualism was developed when it was believed that learning a language was similar to learning new habits. According to Knight (2006, 18) language was described in terms of the way it was structured – individual sounds, letters, words, structures and sentence types. Learners were expected to learn the grammar of the new language not by learning rules but

by producing the language accurately by responding to stimuli. These stimuli were prompts which would lead the learner to produce particular sentences. Speaking and listening were seen as the basis of language learning with reading and writing coming later.

A common feature of the audio-lingual classroom was drill. Teacher asked the learners questions using pictures as prompts and learners produced a sentence using appropriate grammatical structures. These were taught in a particular order – simpler structures were practiced before more complicated ones. Correct pronunciation was strongly encouraged from the beginning and the teacher tried to prevent students' errors. Target language use was dominant in learning process and mother tongue was considered a disturbing element, which was not permitted in lessons.

Nowadays language teachers still find drills useful for practicing sentence patterns because they can be valuable in getting elementary learners to build their confidence. However, the more advanced students are, the less drill they ought to be exposed to since too much drill limits their future ability to interact with other speakers naturally.

Total Physical Response

"Babies don't learn by memorizing lists, why should children or adults?"

TPR is based on the idea of similarity between L1 and L2 acquisition, i.e. we should study a foreign language in a similar way as children learn their mother tongue. First, children just listen to what they are instructed to do, react to it by smiling, turning etc. and speak later when they feel ready for it. This communication is called "a language-body conversation" and is also simulated in mastering L2. The basic element of this method is listening skill, which is taught by giving commands in a pleasant way. Teacher's gestures, voice and actions are essential aids to learning and make it easier for students to acquire a foreign language faster. However, this approach is mainly suitable for children at elementary level, who enjoy being given commands and seek activities involving movement in class. Teachers try to ensure learning to be as amusing as possible using games and fun activities.

They should also respect the silent period when pupils do not want to produce any language and should not force them to speak. Even though this method focuses on young learners, it can be also used with adults in story-telling activities, involving gestures and miming to accompany the story for relaxation at the end of the lesson or when the atmosphere in the class is tense. Mother tongue use is accepted but not encouraged. It is used by the teacher for introducing what is going to be taught in the lesson and for explanations when students have difficulties with understanding in the target language. The more familiar students are with a foreign language, the less mother tongue they use in lessons.

Suggestopedia

"Learning is a matter of attitude, not aptitude".

This approach, developed by Georgi Lozanov, is based on modern understanding of how a human brain works and how we learn most effectively. It is quite lenient to students because it is based on relaxation and a pleasant atmosphere in class, which is achieved by comfortable seating and musical accompaniment. A large focus of attention is on students' feelings, all activities and special procedures are to make learners relax and feel confident and so have the right conditions for natural and easy learning. For suggestopedia are typical bilingual materials, in which mother tongue translation serves as a helping tool whenever the student feels unsure about the meaning of the word. Therefore, mother tongue plays a vital role in this type of learning and is used to the extent which corresponds with a language level of the learner.

Students are provided with a text, which is written in both, target and native language. This ensures students' confidence when reading the text and trying to understand it. Moreover, each text is provided with a list of vocabulary items, which are translated into mother tongue. Each translation relates only to the given text, which brings about a disadvantage of learning the word only within a given context. Nevertheless, this method is currently used in teaching a foreign language to adults and is found beneficial by a majority of them.

Communicative Language Teaching

"Communicative language teaching is based on the view that learning a language means learning how to communicate effectively in the world outside the classroom".

(Lindsay, 2006:20)

This approach developed as a reaction to limitations of previous methods which put little emphasis on the ability to interact with others and lead a fluent conversation. Communicative function of language was highlighted as the major tool for using language in real life situations.

Main features of CLT:

- The goal is to learn to communicate in the target language
- There is an emphasis on meaning and using the language rather than on structure and form of the language
- Various oral activities such as role plays, dialogues, debates and communication games
- Learners often interact with each other through pair or group work"

(Knight, 2006:20)

Role playing is a typical feature of this method and involves learners acting as someone else. Ladousse (1987, 6) points out that role play puts students in situations in which they are required to use and develop language necessary in social relationships and helps them build up their social skills. Thanks to being put into different roles, students have the opportunity to embody various personalities, which prepares them for real life situations.

This is undoubtedly advantageous for them, but also connected with difficulty for the teacher to manage the whole class. Doff (1989, 141) mentions that it is important to give students clear instructions, define the task clearly and explain to students the benefits of working in pairs or groups. According to Freeman (1986, 131) it is vital for teacher to be able to set up activities and promote communication in class. Moreover, all speaking activities should be logically organized and have clear objectives, which are to be announced to students before setting up the activity.

Discussions and debates are other commonly used activities, which are usually introduced to the students via short excerpts or listening tasks. These serve as a hint to what is going to be discussed later. Adult students really appreciate this type of conversation and after overcoming shyness at the beginning of the activity, they usually become enthusiastic about the topic and opinions of the others. Thus, target language is practiced and students are exposed to it all the time through mutual interaction in class. From the above mentioned we can deduce that knowledge of mother tongue is not taken into consideration since it is seen as irrelevant for students' foreign language acquisition.

Communicative language teaching is widely used in language teaching all over the world. It has shifted the focus from learning *about* the language to learning to communicate *in* a foreign language. Despite its popularity, there are problems associated with this approach, such as the emphasis on pair or group work, which can create problems in some classes. Young learners may become noisy and scatterbrained, which can result in chaos in class. Adult students, on the other hand, may think it is a waste of time talking to other L2 speakers rather than having conversation with a native speaker. This problem occurs more and more often in language courses for adults where students require a native speaker for their conversation lessons claiming that they want to be exposed to "English professional" as much as possible. English accent, knowledge of slang words and idioms are undoubtedly temptations for a majority of adult students. On the other hand, some hired native-speaker teachers do not need to know much about the language in order to become teachers, which is often overlooked by some students.

Task-based Learning

Task-based learning focuses on the process of communicating by setting learners the tasks to complete using the target language. During this process the learners acquire language as they try to express themselves and understand others. The learners are given the opportunity to use a full range of skills and the language they have already gained.

“Task-based learning is typically based on three stages. The first is the pre-task stage, during which the teacher introduces and defines the topic and the learners engage in activities that either help them recall words and phrases that will be useful during the performance of the main task or learn new words and phrases that will be useful during the performance of the main task or learn new words and phrases that are essential to the task. This stage is followed by the “task cycle”. Here the learners perform the task (typically a reading or listening exercise or a problem-solving exercise) in pairs or small groups.

They then prepare a report for the whole class on how they did the task and what conclusions they reached. Finally, they prepare a report for the whole class in spoken or written form. The final stage is the language focus stage, during which specific language features from the task are highlighted and worked on. Feedback on the learners’ performance at the reporting stage may also be appropriate at this point.”

This method offers students’ entertainment and enthusiasm since it is a welcome change from routine grammar exercises and enables the students to experiment with English words they already know. There is no threat of failure or public correction and students feel free to express themselves without anxiety. Only target language use is permitted even if the vocabulary, word forms or grammar are not perfectly correct. The main aim is to show the students that expressing oneself is vital in language learning regardless making mistakes. L1 use is redundant due to teacher’s use of visual aids and body language, which ensures students’ understanding within group or pair work. Nowadays task-based method is considered one of the most effective and attractive ways of foreign language learning. However, it requires creative and well motivated teachers, whose enthusiasm and liveliness are prerequisites of successful language teaching.

The role of L1 in teaching English to adults

Setting the language to be used in class

At the beginning of each course, the form teacher usually provides his/her students with general information about the course and also class management rules. Since adults are, as has been already mentioned above, mature and experienced people, there is no need to

devote time to discipline problems. In connection with obeying certain classroom rules, I would rather concentrate on target language use and its benefits for adult students.

It is essential to familiarize the students with the extent of target language and mother tongue use in lessons as soon as possible. Delaying conveying such information could cause problems later on and lead to misunderstandings between teacher and students. Each language school and its teachers approach this dilemma differently. Some teachers advocate the principle that only target language should be used within the classroom, which is actually a contemporary trend. They find it important to use target language as often as possible even if it causes misunderstanding. They use interesting and motivating techniques to encourage adult students to use English as much as possible. In such classes Underwood (1991, 37) suggests introducing the idea of students paying a fine if they speak their mother tongue. The fine box is placed on the teacher's desk or anywhere in the classroom and students take turns in being responsible for the language used by all group members. This turn-taking has many advantages, mainly building up the sense of responsibility and self-confidence which also positively attributes to successful learning. The teacher should not be the one to enforce the fine; this would undoubtedly seem ridiculous in a class of adults. Another technique used to maintain English the only language spoken in class could be using "a point system" when a teacher marks black points on the board to the name of the student who used mother tongue.

However, this contemporary trend to use only target language in class has many drawbacks perceived by the teachers who implement mother tongue in their lessons. They claim that speaking only English can lead to confusing situations and students' anxiety to express themselves. Thus, mother tongue should be used when struggling with a certain grammar rule or vocabulary item, when using only English would be ambiguous and time-consuming.

Taking all these arguments in account, each form teacher should weigh all the advantages and disadvantages of mother tongue use and then familiarize the students with the

classroom policy. Once introduced and explained by the teacher, the rules of language use must be obeyed by students until the need for change occurs.

Problems with inadequate mother tongue use in lessons

Once the extent of mother tongue and target language use is established, the teachers expect their students to be disciplined and follow the rules concerning L1 use in lessons. However, the teachers do not always meet their expectations and have to face situations when students are apparently unwilling to use English in the lesson. Use of target language plays a vital role especially in communicative activities during which the students have the opportunity to practice language in real life situations. Even though mother tongue use is not permitted in this kind of speaking activities, the majority of students tend to replace the words or phrases they do not know in English by their equivalents in L1. This may lead to failure of the whole lesson since it focuses on students' dealing with real life situations where mother tongue use would be irrelevant. The objective of the lesson is to improve students' ability to face such situations in target language environment.

However, Harmer (2005, 131) claims that there are understandable reasons why students revert to their own language in certain activities. The first reason he mentions is the language required by the activity. This means that teachers should bear in mind the level of their students and prepare relevant topics requiring already covered vocabulary. If pre-intermediate students, for instance, were asked to lead a fluent discussion on "environment", they would probably switch to L1 due to their insufficient vocabulary needed for this topic. In this case, students are not to be blamed for failure because it is teacher's responsibility to adjust lesson to students' level.

Another reason why students use their native language in class is according to Harmer (2005, 131) "the need to use translation to make sense of a new linguistic world through the linguistic world the students are already familiar with. Code-switching between L1 and L2 is naturally developmental and not some example of misguided behavior". (Harmer, 2005:131)

Use of mother tongue, according to some linguists, is also acceptable when students are performing "pedagogical tasks", in which they cooperate in order to explain to each other in L1 what teacher's instructions are and what they are supposed to do. This kind of behavior is usually tolerated by teachers since they realize students' anxiety and embarrassment when having problems with understanding. In some cases it is even encouraged by teachers who welcome students' cooperation and willingness to help each other in order "not to lose the track".

Another reason of students' mother tongue use which is quite rare in practice is language used by their teacher. In most cases teachers use target language as much as possible and have to deal with students' problems with understanding. However, there are also teachers who do not feel confident to lead the whole lesson in English and switch to L1 to make it easier for themselves and students, too. This may, surprisingly, be perceived positively by students due to easy comprehension of what is being explained. On the other hand, there is uncovered danger for students to adapt teacher's mother tongue overuse. Moreover, they will feel comfortable using it too. "Teachers need, therefore, to be aware of the kind of example they themselves are providing". (Harmer, 2005:131)

Finally, the amount of L1 use in class depends on students' different learning styles and abilities. Some students prefer to use L2 wherever and whenever possible to have maximum contact with the target language. The others, on the contrary, seem to rely on mother tongue and feel confident with translation exercises especially when dealing with new vocabulary and grammar. Students' learning strategies may also change during a learning process. For instance, beginners who relied on mother tongue may later on take the opportunity to use English in more difficult situations and thus gain the confidence while speaking in target language. Beginners also tend to learn new vocabulary through lists of translated isolated words but after reaching an intermediate level, they change their strategy and start to search the meaning of words in monolingual dictionaries. This step forward enhances not only their language level but also self-confidence.

Linguists' attitudes to L1 use in lessons

Another important aspect of this research is the pros and cons of mother tongue use in English classes and the introduction of attitudes of some linguists to this issue considered in their works.

The need of maximum exposure to English

"Every second spent using the L1 is a second not spent using English! - And every second counts! "

(Atkinson, 1993:12)

This quotation clearly proclaims the use of English only, which is justified by the amount of our precious time wasted while using mother tongue instead of target language. We could hardly find anything easier than to start our lesson in the L1 because it is more convenient and less stressful. However, Atkinson warns that teachers have to be careful while using the L1 because it can gradually become the main language of the classroom. This must be avoided at all costs because there are no benefits for students in such learning environment. For successful mastering foreign language, it is vital to be exposed to that language as much as possible. Even passive listening to English without completing any tasks is better than no English at all. Students become accustomed to native speakers' pronunciation and intonation. This can help even the beginner students to perceive the new language although they understand very little of it. The more the students listen to English in class, the more they revise what they know and thus increase their knowledge. Routine exposure to English and its use help adult learners adapt to real life situations which they have to face outside the class while dealing with native speakers e.g. at international conferences or on business trips.

Only English or mainly English?

When dealing with the issue of mother tongue use in our lessons, we should carefully consider two vital questions to be asked by each language teacher:

"Should we use ONLY English in the lessons? "

"Should we use *MAINLY* English in the lessons? "

(Atkinson, 1993:13)

The answers to these questions are obviously not the same. We can encounter the teachers who devote each minute of their lesson only to English use and feel guilty about using L1 in class and have a reproach of not achieving the "ideal" of one hundred percent English. This type of teacher would be scarcely found among beginners or pre-intermediate students. These students are not yet prepared to communicate in English fluently and without serious mistakes, thus the L1 use is unavoidable. Moreover, exposing adult students at low levels to a target language only could be stressful and frustrating. Even at higher levels, the majority of adult students find it essential to include L1 into the lessons. According to Atkinson, mother tongue use in activities such as grammar explanation, checking comprehension, giving instructions, discussing classroom methodology and checking for sense brings many advantages. It can also be a vital resource and there is certainly no reason why any teacher should feel guilty about using it. The limited use of L1 can have a powerful and positive effect. Moreover, for adult learners the occasional use of the L1 can give them the opportunity to show that they are intelligent and sophisticated people.

However, this point of view is not shared by another linguist Peter Harbord. He points out that by giving instructions and many other teacher-student interactions are an ideal source of language for student acquisition. He is convinced that the more English is used, the better for students. In his opinion, student learning environment should be as authentic as possible and the mother tongue use should be avoided in most situations. This is quite arguable mainly when considering his idea of giving instructions *only* in English. Giving instructions is a stage in a lesson which is highly emphasized in methodology; therefore no teacher should underestimate its importance.

No matter what our lesson is intended to focus on, either listening or reading comprehension, we as teachers should check students' understanding of the given instructions. This phase is vital in any learning process and skipping it could cause

misunderstanding or frustration because the student finds himself/herself lost and does not know what he/she is expected to do. Therefore, the whole activity loses sense for him/her until the instructions are explained again in English or translated into first language. Only after that the student is able and willing to continue in work.

Another linguist dealing with the issue of mother tongue use is John Eldridge. He claims that the use of the L1 in class should be allowed and teachers should not prevent their students from using it. He suggests that there is no evidence that using only English would improve learning efficiency. He claims that most of the code-switching he has observed is highly valuable and related to purposeful goals.

Harmer (2003, 132) is in agreement with Eldridge and points out that the students are likely to use their mother tongue anyway so there is no point in trying to get rid of it completely. Such an approach is unlikely to work and may even lead to discouragement of students who would appreciate its use at some stages. Harmer also mentions that it is important to distinguish activities according to their objectives. For instance, if the communication activity focuses on fluency, the use of a language other than English would make the activity essentially pointless. If, on the other hand, the students are working in pairs studying a reading text, the use of the L1 may be quite acceptable since they are using it to clarify their understanding of English.

Classroom language and mother tongue

"Use mother tongue only when every other method has failed".

(Gardner, 2000:9)

In his work, Bryan deals mainly with classroom English and investigates whether the class instructions should be given either in target language or mother tongue. He points out that some people feel that teachers and students should never speak their mother tongue in English lessons. However, this could cause problems in class.

There is an important place for learner's L1, especially with beginners who will not understand if everything is said in L2. If they do not understand instructions, they do not know what to do and will become confused and stressed. In this stage, they may decide that English is too demanding for them and will stop trying and enjoying it, which is especially true for weaker ones. So, too much English may be an obstacle, but if we translate the entire classroom English, it will not improve the situation either, because students may stop listening to English and wait for a translation.

This way, many positive and creative features of our teaching would disappear, students would stop taking active part in the lesson and, in addition to it, and they would get into habit of translating everything. Bryan (2000, 8) suggests that instead of giving instructions in English and then translating them into mother tongue, teachers should use English only and include gestures, body language, movement, pictures, actions, descriptions to clarify the meaning of what is being said. Mother tongue is advisable to be used only when every other method has failed.

When the learners seem confident with a familiar language expression, they are introduced to a new one, but only after ensuring that the previous ones have been understood by the whole class. However, how can we check it? The most important thing when giving instructions is to observe and notice whether the students carry out the orders. Hesitating and puzzled or doubtful looks are signs of misunderstanding and seeking for help. Thus, the teacher should repeat the instructions more slowly, remembering not to change or translate the words. If the student still does not get the meaning, hand movements or demonstrations are effective to remind him/her of the word. Sometimes, it is inevitable to challenge the student to describe the problem in mother tongue to get rid of tension and recreate pleasant atmosphere.

"Using the mother tongue, we have learned to think, learned to communicate and acquired an intuitive understanding of grammar. The mother tongue opens the door not only to its own grammar, but to all grammars, in as much as it awakens the potential for universal grammar that lies within all of us. For this reason, the mother tongue is the

master key to foreign languages, the tool which gives us the fastest, surest, most precise, and most complete means of accessing a foreign language".

Dr. Wolfgang Butzkamm (German language professor)

Advantages and disadvantages of mother tongue use

Advantages of mother tongue use in lessons

- It serves as a mediating device to understand particular linguistic forms among learners sharing the same first language
- It improves learners' self-image and motivation
- It leads to better cognitive development of students
- Students are able to better understand what is taught, analyze problems, express views, develop an enquiring mind and cultivate critical thinking
- It helps to reduce learners' anxiety
- It raises awareness of the similarities and differences between languages
 - Links between mother tongue and target language are built through comparison and translation

Disadvantages of mother tongue use

- Students spend only a short time in class on a daily basis and have little contact with target language outside class, therefore, mother tongue should not be allowed
- The more students are exposed to English, the more quickly they will learn it
- As they hear and use English, students will internalize it and begin to think in English
- Teacher's input in mother tongue, instead of target language, slows down the process of natural language acquisition
- Target language input can be made comprehensible by adjusting to the students' level; therefore, the use of mother tongue is irrelevant.

6. Method

The population of English teachers at Institute Benjamin Zeledon is:

11 English Teachers in- service in the institute Benjamin Zeledon

They have the following characteristics:

- ✚ 7 female teacher and 4 male teachers
- ✚ All of them have more than five years of experience
- ✚ All of them are graduated teachers
- ✚ 10 of them have a full schedule; it means they have 30 hours of class a week, six hours of class every day.
- ✚ 2 of them are part time teachers, one of them has 22 hours of class a week and another has 20 hours of class, they complete their schedule with other subjects such as natural science and coexistence and citizenship (Convivencia y Civismo)

The methodology we implemented to obtain information is to observe classes, interview the teachers and the principal, all of the provided enough information useful for our work, the top amount of students in a classroom is 47 and the smallest group that these teacher assist is 32, w consider these are large groups and it is an obstacle for the eleven English teachers to fulfill some activities they plan, they do not know many strategies to teach large groups so they always try to deal with this situation in their classrooms.

6.1. Results and Discussion

We observed four class sessions and we made some interviews to teachers, we designed our own instruments to check the methodology teacher implement and how this affects the learning process of the students. We divided the techniques into communicative techniques where they use mostly English as the mean of communication with the students and grammar translation method where they use the mother tongue, Spanish and more mechanical activities are developed.

The following chart shows the performance of the teachers in the classroom in the different moments of the class: initial activities, development activities and consolidation activities. In the initial activities they call the attendance, check homework, remember some aspects of the former class session and remind students some orientation of the school behavior such as punctuality, order and discipline.

In the development activities the teachers usually present the new topic or continue the topic of the last class and make practice activities and ask some students to present their responses to share with the group, they also monitor the learning effectiveness of the students if it is a new topic. In the consolidation stage they try to reinforce the practice and clarify the errors, some of the personalized the errors, other clarify them in general and they also assign some home work and ask the students to practice determined part of the topic because it is going to be assessed in a future session.

Here are the results:

Teachers we observed	Initial Activities	Development activities	Consolidation activities
Teacher 1	English	Spanish	Spanish
Teacher 2	English	Spanish and English	Spanish
Teacher 3	English and Spanish	Spanish and English	Spanish and English

Teacher 4

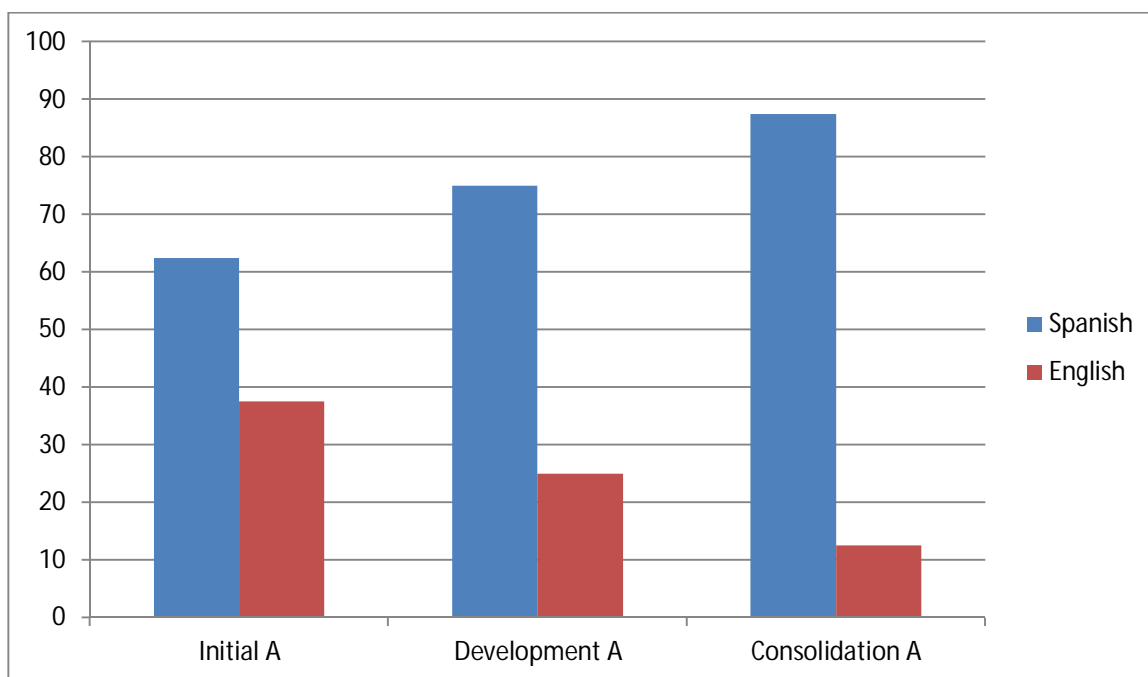
Spanish

Spanish

Spanish

The time of the session were 45 minutes and the first question was how to determine the amount of a language teacher use in very stage, we considered that if the teacher uses only one or two words or phrases in one language and the rest of the time used the other language, the second one predominated over the one, for example if they only used two word in English and the rest of the time they use Spanish, definitely Spanish predominated in that stage, we also include the participation of the students but we have to say that in all the four sessions we observed the students speak only in Spanish even though the teacher made questions in English , the students replied in Spanish.

In this chart we can see the percentage of English and Spanish teacher use in the different moments of the class.



As we can see in the graphic above the teacher use mostly Spanish in their classes now, how does this affect their success in their teaching process? We try to identify communicative activities and mechanical activities to validate the performance of the teachers and the effect of the activities in the learning process.

In the following chart we can see the contrast of the different activities in the class, taking in account that we consider a communicative activity those that aim at the communication of meaning. They focus on fluency. They pass from strictly guided tasks through semi-guided to free-communication tasks. Some examples are: pair/group tasks, following directions; picture identification; discovering differences; discovering missing information; arranging pieces of information in sequences, communicating patterns and pictures, reconstructing story sequences, etc.

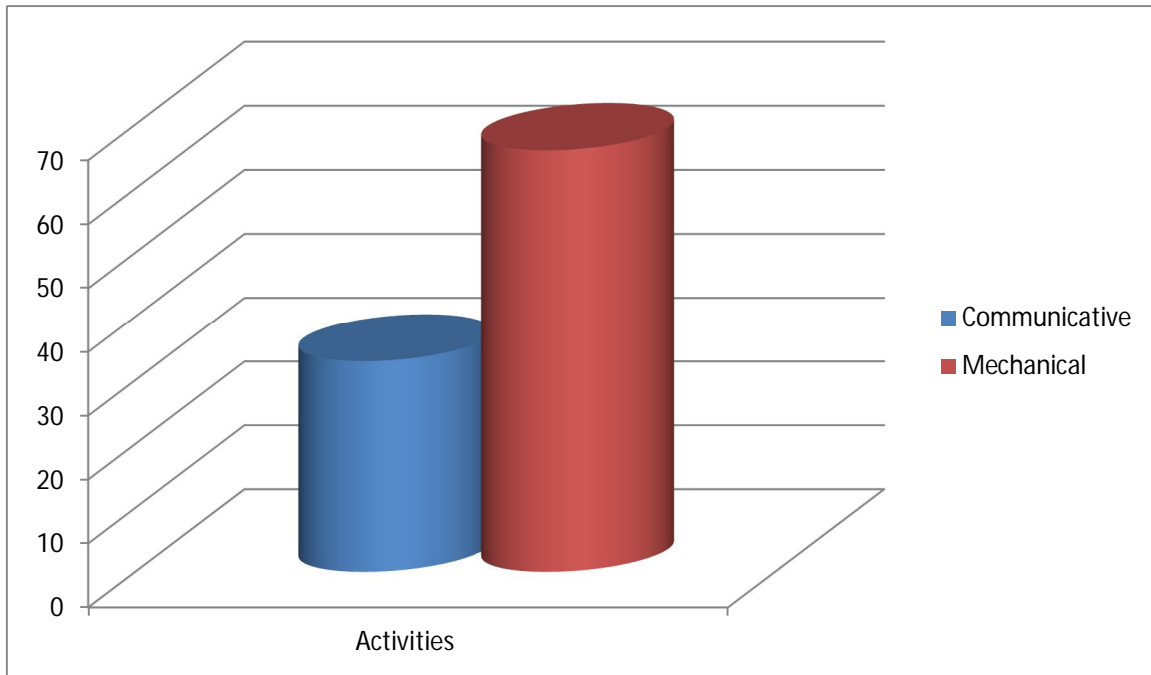
On the other side mechanical activities are repetitions, memorized dialogues, translation of readings, yes-no questions, etc.

Another aspect that we took in account was the way the teacher introduce the new topic, if the use only Spanish to explain the topic or if they present only the grammar and there is no functional language learning in the process, that can be considered a mechanical and grammatical way to present a new topic, the highest number of activities in a 45 minutes class session was six and the other class sessions had two, three and four activities.

Teachers we observed	Communicative Activities	Mechanical activities	Total activities
Teacher 1	2	2	4
Teacher 2	2	4	6
Teacher 3	1	2	3
Teacher 4	0	2	2
Total	5	10	15

We have to add that most of the communicative activities were developed in the development stage and the consolidation stage was full of mechanical activities, this leads to the conclusion that the teaches feel confident when they use Spanish to consolidate the content they have developed in the class.

In the following graphic we can see the difference in the methodology of the teachers we observed in their classrooms:



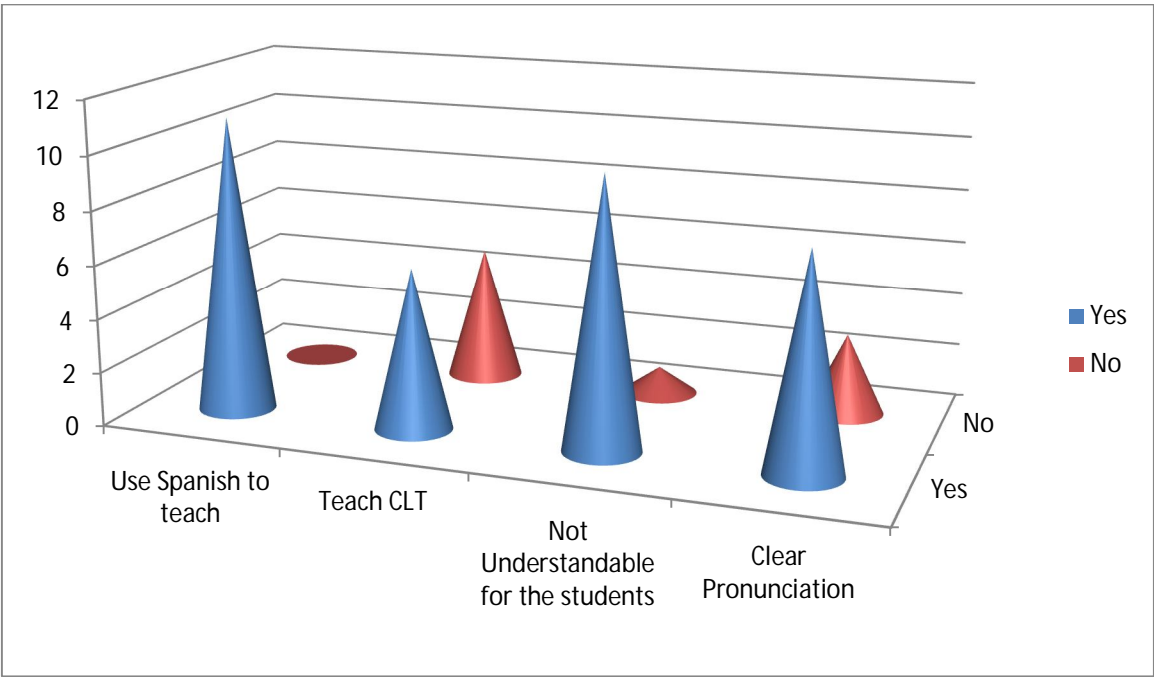
We also made some interviews to teachers, students and the principal to analyze their opinion and viewpoint about our research and the topic of it. They were willing to share their ideas and the way they consider teaching practice should be.

We made eight questions basically for the teachers, they answered all of them with courtesy and they were interacting in a positive way in the interviewing process. The questions were yes no questions.

Question	Yes	No
1. Do you favor to use Spanish most of the time during your English Classes?	11	0
2. Do you use communicative activities in your class?	6	5
3. Do your students have problems understanding your English orientations?	10	1

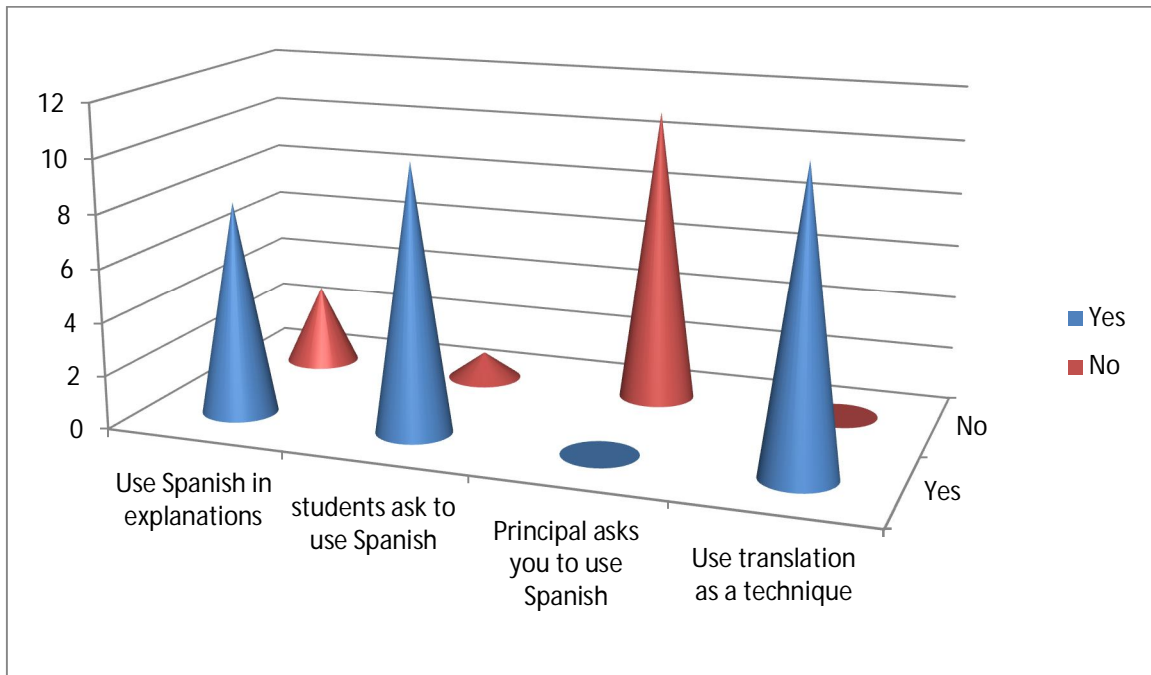
4. Do you think your pronunciation is clear enough for your students?	8	3
5. Do you prefer to use the mother tongue to explain the activities in class?	8	3
6. Do your students ask you to use Spanish in the classroom?	10	1
7. Does the principal ask you to use only English in the classroom?	0	11
8. Do you translate new vocabulary into Spanish to your students most of the time?	11	0

As we can see all the teacher in the institute Benjamin Zeledon agree they have to use Spanish in the classroom, we have to be careful to analyze this results because what they mean is using Spanish they create a more confident environment for their students. This is the most impressive result so far and we can see in graphic the complete information of the interview in the first 4 questions:



It is interesting to see that the teacher do not like to use English in their classes all the time but they consider they are very communicative and have a clear pronunciation, however they think that if they use the English language in their classes they are not going to be understandable in their orientations, we may conclude here that probably they have a different definition of the communicative approach in ELT.

In the next graphic we can see the results of the other four questions:



In this second part of the survey we see that also students encourage their teacher to use Spanish and make them feel they are more efficient if they use the mother tongue in the classroom, the principal also makes her part because she does not get involved in the process of valuing the use of one language or another in the classroom, teacher add that the principal consider the English class a “different one” meaning that the principal does not like to get involved with teachers who speak a different language.

Translation is predominant and almost a necessary tool for teachers and students because they expect to be clear of the language making a translation to the mother tongue.

When teacher explain they use as much Spanish as they think will make their students understand the content and as we observed and confirmed in the class observation Spanish is the comfort zone for teachers and students.

6.2 Conclusions

First of all, this experience let us an important experience, sharing with public school English teachers was really rewarding and enriching for our knowledge and our future in the field of English language teaching, this could be considered the first important conclusion in this research.

Regarding the topic and the problem we research we can land in the following ten conclusions:

1. In the relationship between the students and the teachers the language they use is very important; students tend to accept a teacher who speaks more Spanish in the classroom than a teacher who tries to create a full English environment in the classroom.
2. English teachers prefer Spanish as the language of communication to explain and direct the activities; they think this is the more effective way to guarantee the effective learning process.
3. Most of the teachers in this institute do not keep updating their knowledge of ELT and their language development; this is demonstrated in the low language proficiency.
4. English is taught mainly in pieces, words and several expressions, functional language is not a priority and mechanical activities predominate in the English class.

5. English teacher think they are approaching their class in a communicative way but they do not know the principles of the communicative approach and they tend to implement more memorizing and translation activities than promoting the production of the second language in the classroom.
6. We do not think that all the teachers are low proficiency in the English language in this school but most of the do not use English in their classes so they reduce the practice of the language and lose some abilities to use it.
7. The role of the principal is reduced to check administrative issues and the educational and pedagogical aspects are a not relevant topic so teachers do not feel affected by the principal and they make their own decisions regarding methodology and teaching techniques.
8. Mastering the second language is important for English teacher but not to use it in the teaching and learning process, they may be fluent when talking to somebody but as soon as they enter to their classroom they prefer Spanish and lost all the possibilities of interacting with students in the target language.
9. Using Spanish affects considerably the methodology of the English teachers because they become more mechanical than meaningful in their performance.
10. Having large groups is a factor that teacher use to justify the use of Spanish in the English class, they do not know how to manage large groups and they prefer to speak Spanish to make students feel comfortable in the class.

6.3 Recommendations

We learned a lot with this research, we shared with all the English teachers and they provide excellent conditions to do our work and to get the real and important information for our research.

Therefore these recommendations are with all the good spirit and intention to suggest what the institute Benjamin Zeledon, all the educational community can do to improve the teaching conditions and in consequence the learning results of the students.

These are our recommendations:

1. The teachers should take advantage of the support they receive from the principal to encourage the students interact with the target language, this can be done in a progressive way so the students do not feel intimidated using English in their English class.
2. The Ministry of Education should implement a program to train the teachers in both language development and teaching techniques, specifically how to integrate the communicative approach in the classroom, they could improve the learning results with more communicative activities but they need to be trained in this relevant topic.
3. Another topic they could include in the workshops can be teaching large groups, this is a reality in our school and we observed the difficulties teacher face every day to manage and teach large groups, even though Education Law in Nicaragua establishes no more than 25 students in our classrooms, we could see that the classrooms are crowded, if it is not possible to divide these groups, at least prepare the teacher to deal with this situation can be a pertinent solution.
4. The principal should be more involved in the teaching and learning process, we understand that being a principal is a big responsibility and the time is short to assist all the issues of a school but the main reason of this work is education and to

achieve quality they should implement some pedagogical advisement and accompanying the process as well, the principal is a leader and the influence of her experience must be an important element to achieve success in the learning process.

5. Finally we can recommend the teachers and the principal to take advantages of the monthly encounter teachers have in public and private schools, it is called TEPCE; in this moment they should exchange their experiences and try to learn from other teachers who have been successful in their classes.

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8. Appendixes / annexes

8.1

Survey for English teachers of the institute Benjamin Zeledon

Put a check to say yes or no to the following questions

Question / Pregunta	Yes	No
1. Do you favor to use Spanish most of the time during your English Classes? Está a favor de usar el español en la clase de inglés?		
2. Do you use communicative activities in your class? Utiliza actividades comunicativas en su clase de inglés?		
3. Do your students have problems understanding your English orientations? Tienen problemas los estudiantes para entender sus orientaciones?		
4. Do you think your pronunciation is clear enough for your students? Considera que su pronunciación es suficientemente clara para sus estudiantes?		
5. Do you prefer to use the mother tongue to explain the activities in class? Prefiere usar el español para explicar las actividades en la clase?		
6. Do your students ask you to use Spanish in the classroom? Le piden sus estudiantes usar español en la clase?		
7. Does the principal ask you to use only English in the classroom? Le pide la directora usar solo inglés en su clase?		
8. Do you translate new vocabulary into Spanish to your students most of the time? Le traduce el vocabulario desconocido a sus estudiantes la mayor parte del tiempo?		
Nota: si tiene alguna duda sobre las preguntas puede consultar en español o en inglés a la joven que aplica la encuesta.		

8.2 Class observation

Sheet of class observation

General data:

Name of the teacher:

Grade: Shift:

Number of students:

Topic:

Aim of the session:

Strategic Methodologies: describe the kind of activities in every stage

Initial Activities:

Development Activities:

Consolidation Activities: