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TOPIC: Pedagogical strategies to teach grammar.

SUBTOPIC: Pedagogical strategies used to teach grammar to a group of seventh grade students in the morning shift at San José School in Jinotepe, Carazo, Nicaragua.

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Dedication

We dedicate this research firstly to our lord God for giving us the wisdom and the strength to carry out the investigation during this time.

Secondly, a special mention to our parents for their moral and economic support.

In addition, this research is dedicated to our instructors Xiomara Valverde and José Luis García, teachers who helped us with the investigation development.

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Thank you very much.

Abstract

This paper is based on some strategies that a teacher uses to teach grammar in high school, this research was achieved in a private school. We used the qualitative method, where it was necessary to make a classroom observation in order to figure out grammar strategies and the way those ones were applied. It was very useful to apply some data collection tools to obtain real information. During the process was found some strategies used by the teacher in order to explain grammar rules in the English class.

At the end of this research, we propose some strategies to improve the teaching grammar in the classroom.

Key words: Strategies, grammar, teacher, classroom observations.

Index

I. Introduction

Nowadays English is one of the most spoken and learned language in the world. English is also essential in any economic, social, and academic field. People who want to have better learning opportunities start at a very early age the learning of this important language. In Nicaraguan High schools, English is taught as a second language since seventh grade.

In order to know more about English teaching the purpose of this investigation is to find out the strategies used to teach English grammar in high schools. To develop it, seventh grade class at San José School was selected. This school has a population of eight hundred four students (high school 317, elementary school 398, and kinder garden 89 students). In addition, there are two English teachers in the school.

This investigation was done on the second semester of this school year. San José is a private school, located in Jinotepe, Carazo, Nicaragua.

The research was structured in some stages that include introduction, background, justification, general and specific objectives, theoretical framework, and methodology, result of analysis, conclusions and recommendations.

The introduction refers about the main purpose of the investigation and the structure of it.

The background is about previous information related with the topic and some researches made by some people.

The justification is focuses on why we decided to address this topic (pedagogical strategies), and the importance this one has. In addition, there is an explanation of the real purpose of the research and suggestions we want to give to the staff of English teachers of that school.

The objectives are focuses on the strategies used by English teachers to teach grammar.

Theoretical framework includes some theories that have helped to explain some aspects related with the research.

The methodology shows the procedures to follow to collect information, and tools used to get information.

The analysis results are divided into descriptive and interpretative analysis and the conclusion deals about the final results of the investigation as soon as there are some recommendations in order to improve strategies already used by the teacher and new ones to be included.

II. Justification

Teaching grammar strategies are very important in this investigation because it is an essential part in the acquisition of the second language (English). Grammar allows to the learner to know the correct use of the language to put it into practice in anywhere.

This investigation is based on strategies about how to teach English; because it is not common that teachers in Nicaragua use grammar strategies to teach English, this means that the majority of Nicaraguan teachers use the traditional method (lockstep) (Holliday, 1993). In spite of the educational program (MINED) contains interactive contents where teachers can apply different kind of strategies to develop a grammar class, these ones do not do it.

The investigation reflects strategies used by teachers to teach grammar in class and how these ones are applied.

This investigation helps to find and promote some alternatives to improve the teaching of grammar and complementing the methodology used by the teacher.

III. Objectives

General Objective

Research teaching grammar strategies used by the teacher from San José School in Jinotepe, Carazo, to give feedback about how to improve the teaching learning process in the students and get better results.

Specific objectives

1. Identify the strategies used by teachers to teach grammar in a group of students in seventh grade.
2. Describe different kind of items these teachers use to teach grammar.
3. Propose some solution alternatives to apply new strategies to teach grammar in a group of students in seventh grade.

IV. Theoretical framework

4.1. Background

This topic has not been studied yet in the schools in Carazo. This is a first attempt to describe how the teaching of grammar affects the learning of English in students at the high school level. In order to learn more about research, we refer to the Ministry of Education MINED Teaching Curriculum. There we learned that the high schools in Nicaragua follow a well structured program that establishes not only the content but teaching and assessment strategies that teachers can use during the writing and preparation of their lesson plans. In short, teachers have the necessary tools to teach.

English is a foreign language used and spoken by many professionals, academics, and people at the different levels of our Nicaraguan society. In the educational context, English is taught as a requirement for five years in high school public and private education. On the other hand, in many private schools English is taught since Kindergarten. According to (Holliday, 1993) in high school teachers teach English using a structural approach that is based on grammar study and each one of its aspects which are involved in an educational process. It has as main objective the development of the language as a working and growing tool. English teaching trains students in translation of short written texts and in the analysis of basic grammar structures.

The National pedagogical University of Mexico made a research on June, 2011 based on the use of technological strategies (Enciclomedia) with the purpose of promote teachers use this kind of strategy to facilitate the contents about grammar and at the same time to innovate their teaching methodology.

Another study made by students from Bilking University of Turkish in 2005 reflected about an investigation of the employment of grammar teaching strategies

by university teachers. This study has revealed that Turkish university preparatory teachers use a variety of strategies specifically for teaching and using grammar structures. These grammar teaching strategies may vary from comparing the rules of the target language with those of the native language to seeking practice opportunities in order to use newly grammar structures.

Grammar is defined primarily as a set of forms and structures, which comprise the main focus of the textbook syllabus. Grammatical meaning plays an important role; it is dealt with in an unsystematic way. The grammar is focused on making sentences correctly.

The usual classroom methodology to teach English grammar is based on oral presentation, explanation, and practicing (Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2012). Learning is seen as a conscious process and grammar rules are used deductively; it means, grammar is explained by the teacher based on books or by practicing. The most common forms of exercise type are gapped sentences, pattern drills and sentences for transformation, reflecting a form-based, rather uncontextualized view of grammar. Grammatical competence is measured according to the ability of student ability to manipulate sentences, rather than being performance-oriented.

"*Learn to learn is an inspiring principle of a variety of educational reforms in the world*" (Monereo, 1997).Nowadays, it is really important that students are able to develop abilities that allow them to make an effective management of the acquired knowledge. Learn to learn does not refer to a direct learning of contents but to the learning of abilities to which they learn by doing the action. According to Monereo, students can interpret and analyze the language in their own way. Students need to be ready to face the labor field to put in to practice the abilities and knowledge they have acquired. "*This language contains a set of skills and sub skills, each one has specific functions to develop the language acquisition, one of the sub skills is grammar, which is consider an important part of English*". (Monereo, 1997)

4.2. Teaching grammar

Teaching English Grammar "*is the essential handbooks for teachers who prepare and deliver effective grammar lessons. It combines a comprehensive grammar reference with practical teaching advice, helping teachers to both understand grammar points and present them*". (Scrivener2010: 51)

Grammar teaching does not have to be a mere display of forms and rules. Ideally, teachers and students should be actively involved in the co-construction of the grammar lesson. This can be done through the use of other techniques rather than traditional.

It refers to something that is taught in a specific area with the purpose of acquiring skills or knowledge. In this case we refer to the English teaching in a specific level of learning, teaching of the components of the language, specifically grammar contents, as we know grammar could be integrated in all the skills, teachers just need to choose the appropriate strategies that include dynamically activities to provide those contents.

English Grammar Teaching has to be an attractive and integral. It has to provide the most natural way to learn in a great and energetic environment, where students can establish a good relation among their classmates, and put in to practice good values such as cooperation, solidarity and self-confidence, all of these ones allow them to create an interactive class. Teaching is based on giving basic grammar to students which facilitates a gradual advance during each stage of the learning process; this attempt to the achievement of meaningful learning.

4.3. Grammar

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English offers a definition of grammar as "*the study and practice of the rules by which words change their forms and are*

combined into sentences". As can be seen in his book named "Teaching and learning Grammar", (Harmer, 1987)shared the same view and makes it more explicit by emphasizing that grammar is "*the way in which words change themselves and group together to make sentences.*"

Its concept says it is the central of the teaching and learning language. Also it is one of the most difficult sub skills to teach well. The term refers to the study of such rules and this field includes morphology, syntax, and phonology, often complemented by phonetics, semantics, and pragmatics. It means that grammar includes rules that allow students to produce correct utterances in a language, and these ones are guided by specific structures to be adequated in our language and have a good communication.

When a teacher teaches grammar contents he or she needs to be sure what the purpose of the class is and what he/she wants to teach to the students, but the most important thing is he or she knows well about the topic, if the teacher understand perfectly the contents about grammar rules, the teacher will create an interactive and meaningful class, but if it does not happen the teacher will just drill simple concepts and examples in a traditional and normal way. Those contents would not motivate to the students to learn more and apply those ones in real situations. The role of a teacher is to make possible an easy and funny class and less complicated to avoid boringness in the students and get meaningful learning.

4.4. Kinds of grammar

According to (Nordquist, 2010) there are different types of grammar:

4.4.1. Reference Grammar

"It is a comprehensive collection of rules which are applied in a particular language. In other words it is to grammar what a dictionary is to words". (Nordquist, 2010)

This kind of grammar is the one that contains a set of rules directing a specific context and has its own features which categorize it and distinguish to the other. English has a specific reference grammar that allows students to look for specific information according to our needs.

4.4.2. Prescriptive grammar

The definition says: "*prescriptive grammar contains rules about what is and what is not acceptable in any given language"* (Nordquist, 2010) . It means those are the acquired knowledge students applied in a formal way; those are the established structures which must be followed, in order to get involved the language in a specific culture. In an educational context the traditional teaching demonstrates that teachers must teach those exact contents to the students, but they have to take into account many obstacles which interfere in the teaching learning process, so they have to contextualize those contents according to the reality of the students.

4.4.3. Descriptive grammar

Here, people actually use the language, they interact with others. It is the opposite of the prescriptive grammar, because grammar is used in a less formal but with good sense to communicate. It does not mean this grammar is incorrect, but it means, it is a common pattern to follow, because people have been exposed to it and most of the situations do not demand the use of a formal language, since communication happens on the street among friends etc, it is part of our culture and our daily life. Education is not the , although students must establish a respectful and appropriate relationship with their teachers, teachers need to be aware that outside the classroom the situations are different and most common is that students are going to use informal language where the most important is the communication.

4.4.4. Internal mental grammar

"It allows speakers of a language understand and create new sentences. This is the kind of grammar we develop as we acquire our native language". (Nordquist, 2010)

As this definition says, it is the initial knowledge of grammar that human acquires at the same time they develop their language skills, for example in private schools, students learn English since the low levels beginning of the learning process for example in pre-school, so they have a better acquisition and comprehension of the language and when these ones are in high level they use better the language with more abilities than other.

4.4.5. Linguistic grammar

This type of grammar is associated with a particular linguistic theory. Some linguistic grammars are more concerned in describing grammatical structures, these are call formal grammar. Others are more concerned with the use of grammatical structures, they are called functional grammars.

This kind of grammar seems to be similar to prescriptive and descriptive grammar in the way they use formal structures in formal situations, but they may differ in the function that each one performs.

4.4.6. Pedagogical grammar

It is usually a subset of the total number of rules that have been compiled for teaching grammar to language learners. "*Pedagogical grammar draws on a number of different linguistic theories, in other words it is eclectic*". (Nordquist, 2010)

This is the kind of grammar that is closely related and applied in the educational field. It does not means that is the unique, but it is the one that contains and joins a great variety of aspects to the rest of the grammar types, which provide a complete set of useful tools to the teaching of grammar contents in the educational process.

4.5. Teaching Strategies

"*Teaching strategy is generalized plan for a lesson or lessons which include structures, desired learner behavior, in terms of the goal of instruction, and an outline of necessary tactics to implement the strategy*".(Cited in Strasser, 1964)

When teachers develop a class compulsorily, they have to plan it, based on a set of strategies which will provoke an meaningful learning in the students, students can be more confident and have a better environment as a better acquisition of the language, those strategies must have a lot of creativity, dynamism, entertainment, and about all a meaningful teaching to wake up the interest of the students.

It means, it is a planned activity in which teachers use to make an effective English class. That is why strategies are very useful to the teacher to apply them according to the class objectives.

4.6. Kind of teaching strategies

According to (Freeman, 2000)there are many useful strategies in the field of grammar teaching.

4.6.1. Dictation

"*It consists on asking learners to reconstruct a dictated text so as to capture as much as possible its information content in as accurate and acceptable a linguistic form as possible*". (Morirsh, 2004)

4.6.2. Role plays

Role play means that it is taken in a safe environment in which students are as inventive and playful as possible. It refers to *"the changing of one's behavior to fulfill a social role".*(Ladousse, 2004)

A role play is a strategy that allows to the students a better development in their writing skills. It is an interactive activity where the students perform a conversation assuming different roles putting into practice grammatical structures. This activity, motivate the students to produce the language in a natural way.

4.6.3. Dialog Memorization

(Freeman, Diane Larsen. Muhammad Asif Pak, 2000)Claims:

Dialog or short conversations between two people are often used to begin a new lesson. Students memorize the dialog through mimicry; students usually take the role of one person in the dialog, and the teacher the other role. After the students have learned the one person's line, they switch role and memorize the other's person part. Another way of practicing the two roles is splitting the class in two groups one take a role and the other group to take the other one. After that pairs of individual students might perform the dialog for the rest of the class.

4.6.4. The Transformation Drill

(Freeman, Diane Larsen. Muhammad Asif Pak, 2000) States that *"The teacher gives students a certain kind of sentence pattern, an affirmation sentence where Students are asked to transform this sentence into a negative sentence. Other examples of transformations are to ask of students to change a statement into a question, an active sentence into a passive one, or direct speech into a reported speech."* These activities can be orally or written.

4.6.5. Textbook

"A textbook is a book used to study a subject. People use a textbook to learn facts and methods about a certain subject. Textbooks sometimes have questions to test the knowledge and understanding of the learner". (Dictionary, 2013)

4.6.6. Visual aids

Teaching aid, as its name suggested*, "Is a kind of aids which support the teaching and learning activities of teachers and students",* Teaching aid *it is a "tool used by teachers, facilitators, or tutors in order to help learners to improve any skill; and relieve anxiety, fears, or boredom, since many teaching aids are like games*". (Morirsh, 2004)

(Ur, 1996) suggest "*it is important for learners to have plenty of contextualized examples of the structure to understand them. It is undeniable that the teacher can present a grammar item more easily by showing the contexts in which that item occurs, and visual materials can help provide such contexts and situations*".

Learning to use the language in real communication is necessary for learners, and visuals provide learners with a chance of exposing to the reality. Visuals aids make language learning closer to real life by offering authentic topics and real situations using the target language items, which of course helps students absorb the points faster and memorize them longer. The teacher can present a structure simply and clearly by showing it *"directly using things that student can see objects around the classroom, teachers, and students can be used as pictures".* (Doff, 1998)

V. Methodology

This investigation was carried out during the second semester of the Academic year 2013. It was developed in a group of seventh grade students.

The school has a population of eight hundred eighty students (high school 317, elementary school 398, and kinder garden 89 students). In addition, there are two English teachers in the school.

The sample was selected intentionally, because we decided to observe the English teacher from seventh grade where there are forty eight students at San José School in Jinotepe, Carazo, Nicaragua.

The observation was focused on the use of strategies. During the observation was identified the most common strategies used by teachers in the classroom to teach grammar to their students. To gather the information was used the following data collection tools: observation sheet, interview and pictures.

5.1. Data collection tools:

5.1.1. Classroom Observation

The process of classroom observation was based on the objectives of our research; a rubric was designed to observe the strategies that teacher uses to teach grammar in the classroom.

The rubric contains four aspects to evaluate (Type of strategies and application) three or four classes were observed; every class lasted forty five minutes. (See appendix 5).

5.1.2. Interview:

It is a popular method of data collection. The objective of the interview is to obtain information based on the program. The interview was structured with semi – opened and closed question, the purpose of these ones is to make a comparison between the classroom observation and the information that the teacher provided us, to sum up we can say they use types of strategies to teach grammar. (See appendix 6).

5.1.3. Pictures:

Pictures are evidences which prove something. Pictures help to show real situations. During each classroom observation some pictures were taken to show the way teachers explain the grammar structures. (See appendix 1, 2, 3 and 4).

The analysis of this information shows, these teaching strategies contribute to the learning of the grammar structures taught in the classroom. That is to identify which strategies are the most useful, meaningful and effective to put into practice in any given teaching process and interaction.

In this research observation sheets, interview and pictures to collect objective information from the teacher were used. In addition was necessary to record the behavior of the teacher during the class interaction and teaching process. All the above helped to recognize on the use of teaching strategies.

The methodology used in this research was really useful to observe and identify some strategies applied by the teacher at the moment she was teaching English grammar. The classroom observations, interview, and pictures were meaningful tools which allowed in the evaluation of those strategies and how they had influenced in grammar teaching in order to develop the language.

VI. Analysis of the data results

Data obtained from the application to the teacher from seventh grade	
Strategies	**Applied**
Dialog Memorization	0
Role plays	1
Transformation drill	4
Textbooks	4
Dictation	0
Visual aids	0

6.1. Descriptive analysis

The purposes of this observation sheets were to identifying the strategies used in the classroom and describe the application of every one of them. To achieve this objective was necessary to do about four classroom observations and apply an interview directed to the English teacher.

In the first classroom observation we found that the teacher applied the role play as a strategy to explain the grammar.

In the rest of the classroom observation the most common strategy used was the textbooks and transformation drill.

Classroom Observation

The results obtained in the process of classroom observation were directed to an English teacher from seventh grade with a population of forty eight students at San José School.

The classroom observations were done in a month (once a week); we visited the school four times and we were observing the teacher in a period of forty five minutes.

We realized that from all observations which were made, the most common strategies used by the teacher were role plays, transformation drill and textbooks.

Role play was applied one time during the fourth classroom observations; this strategy was developed as an interactive activity with the purpose of putting into practice the use of the modal "can" (abilities).

The teacher always used textbooks (each book contains activities to be developed in the classroom) and transformation drill as strategies to develop and support her class. These strategies were applied in the following way: she was introducing the class through a textbook that contained all activities that students had to do in class.

The grammar was explained on the board (affirmative and negative sentences, short questions), through samples taken from the textbook, teacher asked them to answer short question, then they had to change sentences into questions, this strategy is known as transformation drill (Freeman, 2000) the teacher said to students to modify the grammar structure on a given content.

During this classroom observation, the teacher did not use the dialog memorization, dictation and visual aids as strategies to teach grammar suggested by Freeman and Muhammad.

Teacher Interview

In addition, to collect data information about strategies that teacher uses; an interview was applied in order to give to her feedback to help in the teaching learning process, this interview was structured with a set of semi opened questions. (See appendix 6).

The purpose of this one was to know about the strategies used by English teachers in class, another purpose was to compare the information obtained from classroom observation and the teacher's interview.

In the interview the teacher said that she uses as strategies to teach grammar, role plays, textbooks and dictation.

Comparison from both data tools was made, and we realized that in classroom observation, there were found three strategies: role plays, transformation drill, and textbooks and from the interview the teacher told us that she used three strategies: dictation, role plays and textbooks, so we concluded that she was using a strategy that she did not know ¨transformation drill.¨ In her interview she said that she used dictation as a strategy but we did not observe that during the class.

Pictures

Pictures were used as evidences to prove the way that the teacher explains the grammar, it was necessary to be in the classroom to observe the application of the strategies used by the teacher.

In these pictures the way the teacher was explaining the grammar structures (the modal can, it expresses abilities is shown. she was writing sentences using the modal can and she asked to the students similar examples like she was teaching on the board.

6.2. Interpretative Analysis

According to the information obtained from the observation classroom and the interview that was applied to the teacher; we can say that the teacher from this

school teaches in a traditional way, where she is her students pay attention to her explanations.

During the process of classroom observation, we were focusing on the teacher, because we wanted to know the strategies she used to teach English grammar, we applied an observation sheet where we addressed some aspects that were focus on our main general objective.

The activities can be well controlled during the class through a good application of strategies that allows a better understanding of the class. The teacher could implement visual aids to support her class, *"this tool is very attractive and could encourage to the students to learn more about English grammar"*. (Ur, 1996)

Classes were traditional, because the teacher did not use too much strategies, it was just about three of them. It is necessary that the teacher can apply other strategies that help to develop and improve her classes during the moment a grammar explanation is given.

VII. Conclusions

During the process of data collection we found that the teacher from a private school teach English grammar in a traditional way because they prefer to use the most common strategies like, textbooks, role plays and the transformation drill than other ones since they don't have economical resource to get other kind of material such as copies, wall charts, data show, lab etc. also because forty five minutes is not enough time to work with forty eight students, so they have to call the attendance, order the classroom, check homework etc. The teacher could apply other strategies like (Freeman, Diane Larsen. Muhammad Asif Pak, 2000) Propose such as the use of visual aids and dictation to improve the students' grammar knowledge, so they do not need to spend money.

As a result of this observation, three strategies used by the teacher were found, which were textbooks, role plays and transformation drill. Those strategies were developed based on the contents provided by the National Curriculum (MINED).

Textbooks were used to follow a logical sequence in order to teach English. In the observation class, the use of it was identified; all of the students had their own books. It means that each one has the tools to construct their knowledge, but in order to have a successful acquisition of the language; the use of a text has to be complemented by different and attractive strategies which provide meaningful learning.

It is not a hard work to include those interactive strategies, however there are some factors which affect this process and they are: time, number of students, frequency of the class and lack of material, all of these factors avoid having an interactive environment. Lack of participation is another factor most of them are quiet in class because they do not understand or because they do not feel motivated by the teacher.

7.1 Recommendations

In order to improve the teaching English grammar, some alternatives to implement other strategies that support a better comprehension of grammar in English are

propose. The teacher could include some strategies like visual aids; this strategy could be applied through post cards, charts, flashcards, those strategies are very dynamic and can catch the attention of all students (Ur, 1996).

Teacher can use realia as a strategy to improve the students' understanding, the teacher can use objects from real life according to the contents she is going to teach. This strategy is very useful because it allows connecting the previous knowledge with the new one to acquire.

Dictation is a good alternative to implement the correctness of grammar in English and at the same time he or she puts into practice the writing. It could be that the teacher asks for a student who pass in front and write some words or sentences on the board spelled by the teacher.

The teacher has to take into account the level of the students and also he or she has to plan an attractive class that contains different strategies that motivate and facilitate the learning of the students.

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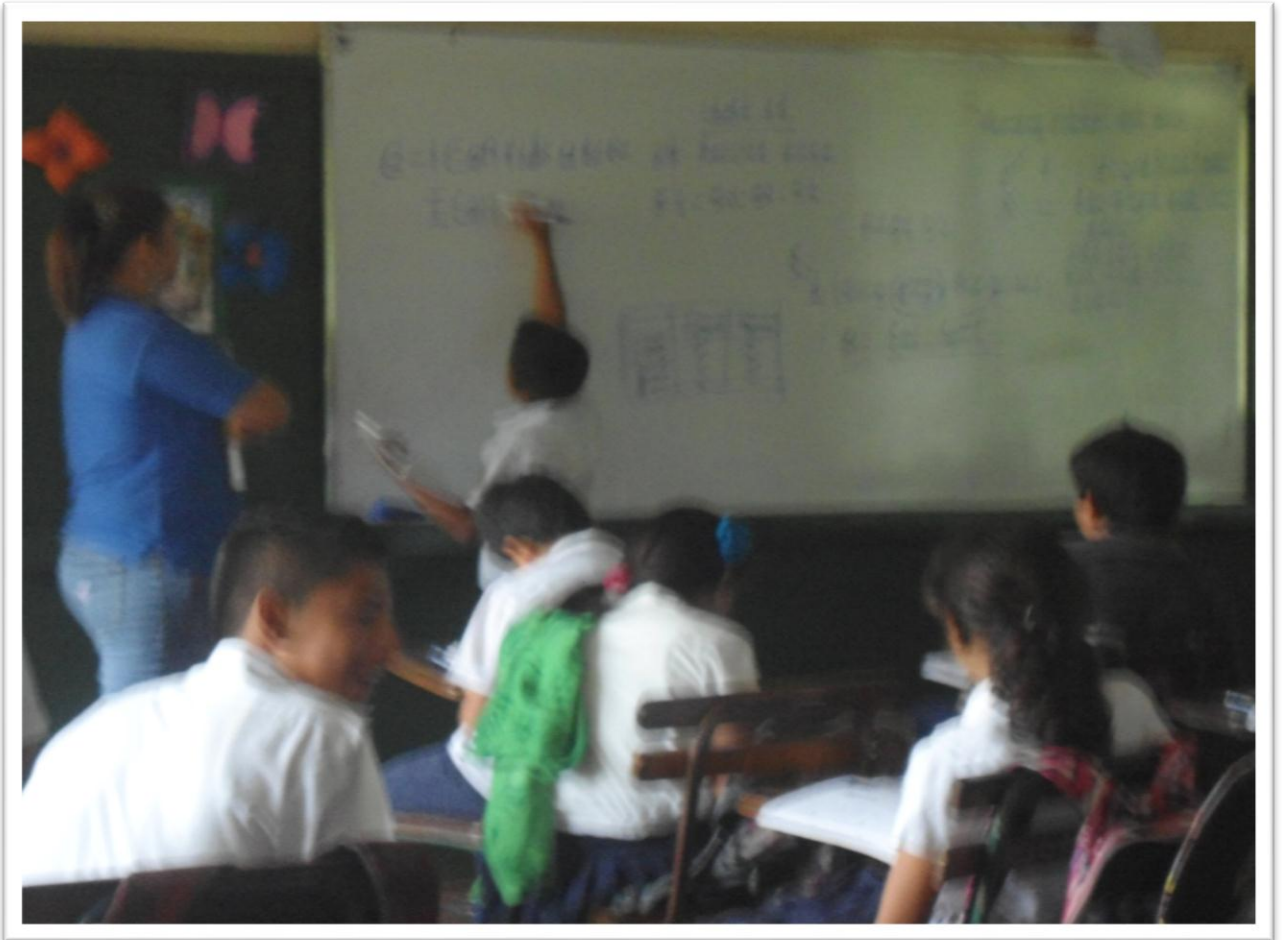
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IX. Appendixes

APPENDIXES

Appendix 1

In this picture the teacher was monitoring the student performance, the student was completing an exercise on the board about the use of can and can't.

Appendix 2

Here, basic explanation about the topic was written on the board and students were completing some exercise on their books.

Appendix 3

In the picture the teacher was explaining and giving instructions to the students in order to complete some exercises on their books.

Appendix 4

The teacher was checking students' performance meanwhile they were completing some exercises on their books.

Appendix 5

<p align="center">**Observation sheet**</p>

Generalities of the class

School name:

Type of school:

Teacher's name:

Grade:

Discipline:

Date:

Number of students:

General Objective: Discover the strategies that the teacher uses to teach English Grammar.

I-What kind of strategies does the teacher use to teach grammar?

a. Dialog Memorization
b. Role plays
c. Transformation Drill
d. textbooks
e. Dictation
f. Visual aids

Strategies used by the teacher	Yes	No	How
Dialogue Memorization			
Role plays			
Transformation Drill			
Textbooks			
Dictation			
Visual Aids			
	Others		

Appendix 6

<p align="center">**Interview**</p>

1- What strategies do you use to teach English grammar?

A-Dialog Memorization ☐

 B-Role plays ☐

C-Transformation Drill ☐

D-Textbooks ☐

E-Dictation ☐

F-Visual aids ☐

G- Other ☐

2-What is the most common strategy, you use to teach grammar? (Explain)

3-Do you think that the use of your strategy have helped you to improve the grammar teaching? (Why?)

Yes ☐

No ☐