



UNIVERSIDAD METROPOLITANA DE CIENCIAS DE LA EDUCACIÓN

FACULTAD DE HISTORIA, GEOGRAFÍA Y LETRAS

DEPARTAMENTO DE INGLÉS

INCREASING MOTIVATION TO LEARN EFL THROUGH THE USE OF VARIED TEST
PREPARATIONS IN 7TH GRADE STUDENTS IN ÑUÑO A

TESIS PARA OPTAR AL TÍTULO DE PROFESORA DE INGLÉS

AUTORA: CLAUDIA PAZ NIÑO DE ZEPEDA ALVEAR

PROFESORA GUÍA: MARY JANE ABRAHAMS SANCHEZ

SANTIAGO DE CHILE, MARZO DE 2016



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Dedico este trabajo a todos los que me han apoyado por este largo camino:

A mis padres, Alejandro y María, por su apoyo incondicional,

A mi hermana, Cecilia, por siempre tener una palabra de aliento,

A mi novio, Pablo, por estar siempre dispuesto a ayudarme y guiarme en momentos de duda

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Agradezco enormemente todo el apoyo brindado por el Colegio Lenka Franulic, quienes me abrieron sus puertas como estudiante y ahora como profesora e investigadora. Agradezco además a los séptimos básicos que ayudaron en esta tarea y quienes me enseñaron mucho sobre ser paciente y perseverar.

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Abstract

This investigation seeks to find and understand the perceptions and motivations of 7th grade students in a public school in Ñuñoa towards learning English as a Second Language, taking into account the different study methods and preparations they do before they face a test. This investigation will be carried out using the action research approach, considering the fact that the researcher is also the teacher appointed by the school to teach in this level. This approach will help the researcher get to know the students' motivations in more depth. In addition, as this research study took the complete academic year to be carried out, we are able to see a more complete picture of the students' different perceptions and motivations towards English as the year advances. Finally, during the course of this investigation, two specific new points were taken into account, which were the students' use of the media as part of their learning process and the help they received from their parents or legal guardians before the tests.

KEY WORDS: MOTIVATION, STUDY HABITS, MIDDLE SCHOOL

Introduction

Over the months leading up to the start of my first year as a full time teacher, I had had classmates and teachers tell me that one of the hardest year groups to teach was middle school, considering how immature and unfocused they could be and all of the internal and external changes they were facing. I had experienced it by myself the year before as I was doing my practicum with a 7th grade, which was a classroom full of noise, misbehavior and different knowledge levels.

In the case of the specific school where I was appointed to teach 7th grade, the Lenka Franulic school in Ñuñoa, the students faced the English subject with strong emotions, depending on their level of expertise. There was no middle ground, they either loved or hated the class, since some of the students on this group had failed previous years because of this subject. It was not a smooth start, the students knew I was a new teacher and they noticed every time I was nervous and did not know what to do, or how to react to their unruliness. This moment exactly is what led me to ponder on how I could make the class different and more attractive to them, making their grades go up so their self-esteem and confidence in the subject would go up as well. I decided to make this change in the testing area of the subject, considering how this is an unavoidable part of the school life, and one of the most stressful too. In the words of Alfie Kohn (1994), “The question educators need to ask is not how motivated their students are, but how their students are motivated”.

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Literature Review

During my period as a teacher of English as a foreign language student, I was always excited when it came to testing my abilities or my knowledge of the English language. But the same could not be applied in my time as a teacher assistant or as a student teacher, because tests seemed to be difficult or discouraging for my students.

Study habits

Students are constantly told to study, to achieve good marks and to remember what was done and learnt in class, but teaching study methods is not as common, so they do not always know what method works best for them to learn and are usually lost under the pressure. What I hoped with this study was to make students understand that when they take studying in their own hands they can change the outcomes, thus feeling more motivated towards learning a foreign language.

In the words of Simpson, Hynd, Nwast, and Burrell (1997), “if writing does, indeed, increase understanding, then students who better understand content concepts as a result of writing may experience increases in their feelings of self-efficacy”. Simpson et al. (1997) also viewed learning study skills in the classroom as part of the curriculum, rather than a separate part of the lesson. They mention the skill of “free writing”, which is writing about the concepts that will be covered in an assessment, as a way for the students to be and feel more prepared for the given assessment. In this “free-writing” method, the student is prompted to put ideas on a paper about the topic or content to be assessed so they can explore it in depth.

In order to do this, the students needed to first be acquainted with what study skills are. According to Tuckman (2003), study skills are defined as “the learning and motivation strategies that enable a student to be successful.” This state of “being successful” due to their own independent learning helps students be more motivated and keep on learning even more.

In addition, making the students become self-aware of their study skills and/or their self-efficacy as independent learners helps them become more active, not only in the teaching and learning of a new language, but also afterwards, in college and in the work place (Chadha, 2006).

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Finally, an important point is what Albert Bandura (1977) named as “self-efficacy”, which is accomplished by the mastery of experiences, which in turn motivates the students even further.

Motivation in middle school

Motivation is of vital importance when someone is pursuing something new. According to the Encyclopædia Britannica, motivation is defined as the “forces acting either on or within a person to initiate behavior”, which can be applied to the classroom setting as the willingness presented by the student in order to do the tasks at hand.

During middle school, where children develop into teenagers, motivation for studying sees itself challenged as new experiences at school come into play, such as new classmates, different teachers, new school environment, etc, which leads the students to be focused more on the external aspects of the classroom than in the contents themselves.

Reasons for bad results

Through a series of conversations with students and mentor teachers, we narrowed down the reasons for the bad marks to a few, for example

(a) the little base knowledge a student has on a certain subject area: Although Chile’s educational system is regulated by laws that state the contents to see in class, not all contents can be seen during the course of a year, not every teacher teaches the contents in the same way and the English subject only starts legally in 5th grade, so the students tend to have varying degrees to formal exposure to the language.

(b) the lack of student motivation to study before a test: It is usual for stressed out and unorganized students to try and cram before a test, studying only a few days prior to the assessment instead of studying class to class, this leading to anxiety, fatigue and poor results, among others.

(c) the repetitiveness of the tests patterns, that do little for the different intelligences present in the classroom: According to Howard Gardner (1983), there are as many as eight different types of intelligences that any human has, such as visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, etc;

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but in the classroom setting only two of those intelligences are exploited: verbal-linguistic and logical-mathematical.

This group of seventh grade students were faced with new challenges as they entered a different school system, where they met more strict teachers, new methodologies and even a different schedule. This translated for them into more difficult contents and tests, which often left them disappointed with their grades.

Action Research Question

In most schools there are written assessments in the middle and at the end of the year to measure what the students have learnt and what the teacher has taught during lessons. A new approach to testing has been the use of different methods, such as plays, comics, dioramas, etc. whose objective is to “gather evidence about how students are approaching, processing, and completing real-life tasks in a particular domain” (García and Pearson, 1994, p. 357).

But, as a new teacher in this public school, sometimes it was hard to change the methods through which the contents are tested. I was required to do at least 2 written tests per semester (the midterm and the final test) and I did not feel I was given the chance to try other testing methods, because we have too many contents to cover and objectives to accomplish as to “waste” time on something that the school and I did not know would work or not.

I decided to try and motivate my students through the way that they prepared for exams, either by helping them prepare in class, holding extra lessons covering the material or teaching them how to learn independently.

These different kinds of preparation allowed my students to feel a shift in the way they saw the subject, as they noticed that they were capable of taking the subject in their own hands and succeeded in learning the contents proposed for the year. In addition to this, the students could see the tests as a form to prove their knowledge and to grow, not just as a punishment or as a stressful 90 minute period.

All of this led to my action research question of: **How can I help my students become independent learners so they can pass tests and be motivated to learn English as a second language simultaneously?**

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Methodology

Research design

For the purposes of this research, the Action Research (AR) method was the most useful to follow, as the researcher was also the teacher of the class. AR is defined as the research carried out within the activity itself, usually in the education field, to improve a problem presented, and carried out by the teachers themselves (Burns, 2010).

McNiff (2002) proposes a series of steps to follow while carrying out AR, such as:

1. review our current practice
2. identify an aspect we want to improve
3. imagine a way forward
4. try it out, and
5. take stock of what happens.
6. modify our plan in the light of what we have found, and continue with the 'action'
7. monitor what we do
8. evaluate the modified action, until we are satisfied with that aspect of our work

During the review of my teaching practice, I noticed how students often faced the evaluations with almost no preparation at all; most of the students only prepared for the test the day before and paid little notice to what happened in the classroom. As this, the study methods, was the aspect in need of improvement, I decided to make each evaluation special in some way, presenting the students a different method each time, so they could, hopefully, find their own way to study, making it more effective and making them more self-efficient and self-confident.

Population and sample

a) School's background

Location and History.

Lenka Franulic School is located in a quiet residential neighborhood in Ñuñoa, which means the school surroundings are safe for the students.

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This school is public, mixed and with no religious sponsorship, which accepts any kind of student who wants to enroll. In spite of these facts, there is a basic placement test, which only helps to know the possible students' level of English before they enroll.

Enrollment and attendance.

At the beginning of the year, the school had 982 students and 64 of those were in 7th grade. By the end of the year, the registration was 974 in the school; 61 of them in both 7th grades. Two seventh graders left the school because of bullying issues at the end of the first term (both attacker and victim were advised to enroll in different schools) and one student was transferred from another Ñuñoa school during the second term.

As far as the attendance is concerned, most of the students show a high level of attendance, but at least 40% of the school's population arrived late to the first lesson, most of the reasons for this to happen were the parents' or the weather's fault.

Community participation.

In the case of this particular school, parents and legal guardians are mildly aware of the pupils' development in school, because most of the parents only appeared interested in cases where the students were performing poorly or in cases where there were bullying issues. Most parents were only present in school on parents and teachers meetings, so they could receive the report card, or after the Head Mistress or Home Teacher would repeatedly call.

Previous English Teachers.

During their education at this school, the students have had 4 different English teachers. All three of them presented different levels of English studies; two of the teachers were full time English teachers, while the other two were elementary school teachers with varying degrees of specialization in English. They had not had a class taught entirely using the target language before, so the methodology implemented in seventh grade was surprising for them at the beginning.

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Special Needs Project.

The school has a special needs project, which helps the school community deal with the different needs and aspects of every student. In 7th grade, only one student is part of this project, due to his schizophrenia which has been treated with pills and makes the student a little slower when it comes to the learning process. Other than that, the rest of the students present good health, both physical and mental.

Availability of resources.

The school counts with access to a library, where there are enough Ministry dictionaries for every 7th grade student. In addition, every teacher has their own classroom, where specific materials can be stored, and where they have a projector, posters related to their subject and Wi-Fi access. Also, every year the school receives enough Ministry books for the students and teachers, including the CD with extra materials.

Classroom situation.

There are 32 students per class and access to data projector, dictionaries and white board. The students present different English levels and ages and also there is a poor disciplinary system in place. The students who have been part of this school from first grade have had teachers who are not specialists in the language, which made the transition from no use of target language to full use of English difficult and discouraging for them. Also, most of the new students have had little experience with the language, as they have started learning English in 5th grade.

Schedule.

The students only have three hours of English a week, divided in a 2 hour lesson and a 1 hour one. All the lessons are concentrated on one single day (Monday); which means that if the student is absent for the day, the student misses all the lessons of the week. Also, there are external testing procedures every month, which happen on Mondays, meaning that one of the seventh grades misses the two hour lesson.

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b) Students' background

Origin, Age and Gender.

Most of the students come from counties nearby the school, being the most common ones Ñuñoa, Macul, La Florida, Peñalolén and La Reina. The students' ages go from 11 to 15 years old; 90% of the students are 11 or 12 years old, 10% of the students have failed previous grades, from one to three times, which makes the class and their knowledge be mixed. Concerning gender, the 7h grades are divided almost equally between male and female students. In the case of this school, the race of the students is not considered an issue, considering that the majority of the students are Chilean or have lived in Chile for more than 5 years, so they consider themselves as Chileans, for they have acquired the customs and language.

Previous years' failures.

Most of the students who have failed their previous years at school have done so because they have had issues with the English class. They express that they “do not know” or “do not understand” the language, so they are unable to learn it or practice it. This lack of motivation has a huge impact on the rest of the class, as the older students are seen as role models by the younger ones.

Students' attitude towards the language and the class.

Low interest in the subject from a wide range of students; partially because of the few hours a week the subject has and because of the lack of opportunities they have to put the language into real practice. Moreover, the students express that they find difficult to express themselves in English due to the fact that they lack the practice or confidence to do so, they are afraid to sound “ridiculous” pronouncing certain English sounds, such as the /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /θ/ or /ð/ sounds.

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c) **Teacher's background**

Education and development.

The teacher of English for the 7th grades is a newly appointed teacher, who has a two year experience on the field of teaching, but has a wide experience with the English language, having lived in the UK for a year, as part of a teaching exchange program.

Classroom management.

The teacher presents difficulties with the management of the students, being quite distracted at times from the lesson by the students with personal stories and questions unrelated to the content. This is a problem that takes time away from the classroom, making it noisier, more unfocused and, in the end, less proficient in the language.

Procedure

Infrastructure and materials

The classroom is a big classroom, well furnished and with enough chairs and tables for every student. Furthermore, the classroom is quite new; as it was part of a building renovation project that the school did 8 years ago.

Methodology and Use of English

During the class, the students have access to dictionaries, to their English copybooks and to the English texts given by the Ministry of Education. Apart from that, the teacher uses an increasing quantity of English in the classroom, being near a 30% in March, and reaching up to an 80% by the end of the year.

Assessments and preparation

During the year there were several types of evaluations that will be detailed in chronological order as follows, along with the study skill presented for each one:

1. April: At the beginning of the academic year, the students were presented with a list of the most common irregular verbs in English. The task at hand was to study at home the

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first third of the list and then sit for the test, as the verb list would not be covered during the lessons. Also, this evaluation was designed by the school's English Department, and is mandatory for all students in 7th grade onwards. This list was taken from the 8th grade Teacher's book.

The preparation for this test was done at home; the verbs were presented in class along with the structure of the test.

2. May: In the third week of May, the students from 1st grade onwards had to sit for the English midterm. This test was taken during a specific timetable set by the Curricular Department and is followed by all the other subjects' midterms. This test covered the contents seen in the first unit.

There were review lessons before the test date and the students were encouraged to share their notes and, to finish this round of preparation for the test, the students were able to ask questions the day before through the Facebook platform, where the teacher set an account especially for the occasion.

3. June: During the final week of June, the students had to sit for the English Final Exam. This test carried two marks and followed the same structure as the May midterm. This test covered the contents seen in the first and second units, plus the second third of the irregular verbs list.

For this test, the students had to prepare a cheat sheet, which consisted on bullet points of the content seen, with an example of their own creation. This cheat sheet was not allowed during the test itself and took the students 90 minutes to prepare.

4. August: At the beginning of August, the students sat for the second verb test, which covered the final third from the irregular verb list.

During one of the lessons prior to this test, I conducted an oral mock test, which consisted of 3 oral questions, where I would give them a certain verb and the student had to conjugate it and then create a sentence. Besides the teacher asking the questions, they were preparing themselves with a partner.

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5. September: There were two evaluations during September. The first one was at the beginning of the month, where the students had to create an oral report about a sport and sportsperson they chose, they had no limitations as to which sport and sportsperson they wanted to present. For this presentation, the students had access to the school's laptops and they worked in pairs or on their own. By the end of the month, the students sat for the Unit 3 midterm, which followed the same structure as the May midterm.

For the oral report, the students were allowed to use the school's laptops and WiFi access during the class, so they could gather the needed information. As one of the criteria in the rubric was the students' readiness, a protocol was created to ensure the fairness of the process, in case some of the students presented themselves unprepared. The protocol is as follows:

1. The student got his/her mark lowered, according to the rubric.
2. The situation was talked over with the Head Teacher and with the Curricular Department Head, who helped the English teacher talk with the students on the importance of being responsible.
3. The student's parents or legal guardians were called into the school to talk about the situation.

And for the midterm, the students were able to ask questions through social media, allowing them to ask and answer each other as well as the teacher.

6. October: This month was devoted to the reading and debating of the book Pocahontas, which they had to read at home and discuss in the lessons. The test was at the end of the month and it was a written test.

The students were given a class period to create a cheat sheet, which they could take with them on the day of the exam. The notes had to comply with the following criterion:

1. The notes had to be written in English.
2. The notes had to be written during a specific class.
3. The notes could not be more than one page long.

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4. The notes had to be handed in to the teacher at the end of the lesson and would be returned to the student at the beginning of the test.

7. November: The last evaluation the students faced was a written final test, which covered the most important structures and vocabulary seen in the year (with the exception of the irregular verbs and Pocahontas). This test also followed the structure from the previous written final test, but it also included a multiple choice item, which was checked by a marking machine.

For this test, two of the lessons were not performed by the teacher, but by the students, with the teacher's help. They were chosen by the students themselves, and they had to pick one of the topics to explain in front of their classmates, as a different way of reviewing the contents and consolidating their knowledge.

All these tests were designed by the teacher in charge of the grade and supervised by the English Department.

Students' Feedback.

After every evaluation, and when the students were confronted with the results they had obtained, the students were prompted to give some kind of feedback towards the evaluation; either about the content, the form, the level of difficulty, the type of expected answers, etc.

The students either followed their trains of thought and debated or answered specific questions given by the teacher and followed turns to speak. The first method allowed the students take control of how much they expressed while the second helped them narrow down their ideas and be precise when speaking.

The usual questions were related to how they felt towards the evaluation and to the level of preparation they had done before it. Examples of questions are: (a) How much did you prepare for the evaluation? (b) Considering the preparation, how difficult was the evaluation? (c) What problems did you face during the evaluation? D) Was the result of the evaluation the outcome you expected? Why? Why not?

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This feedback was oral and in the mother tongue, so that the students expressed themselves more freely. The students' feedback carried no marking or punishment, so that the students could feel free and safe to answer as much or as little as they desired, as long as they answered honestly and respectfully.

Finally, at the end of each term, there was a general feedback concerning the lessons themselves, considering facts like the materials used, the teaching methods, their preparedness before tests, the help they receive at home, etc. This feedback was written and confidential, and the students had the possibility to write comments at the end of the page.

Questionnaire

At the end of each term, there was an anonymous written questionnaire (Appendix 1) for the students to fill out, related to their preparedness, their attendance, the level of engagement with the class, etc.

The Lickert-type scale allows the students to state their opinions of the subject and their study habits. The possible answers for each statement were (a) Strongly disagree, (b) Disagree, (c) Agree and (d) Strongly agree. The neutral possible answer "neither agree nor disagree" was left out of the questionnaire to force the students to give an opinion.

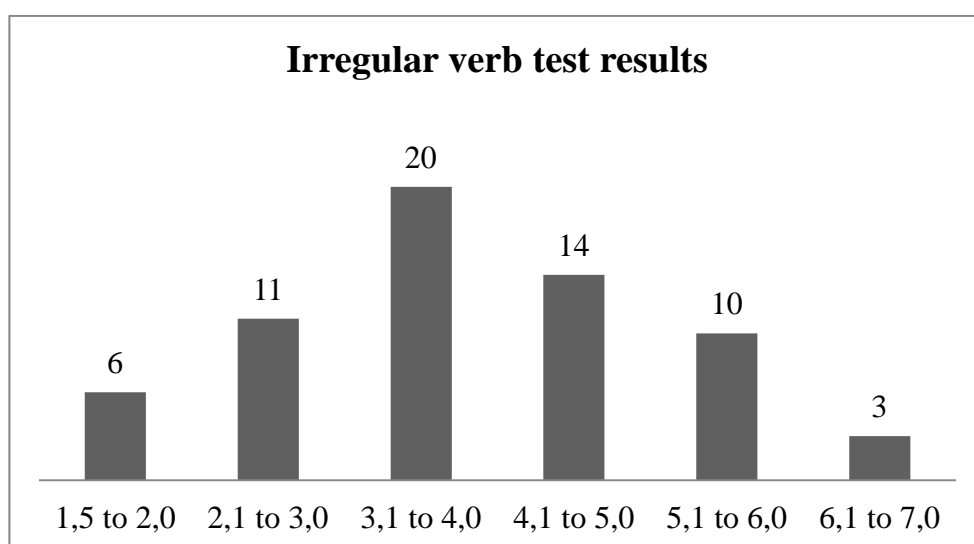
Data Analysis

Test results

The test results changed over the year, as the students realized how much the fact that they prepared for a test impacted their mark.

Test number 1: First verb test.

The students presented themselves unprepared for this test, hoping for the teacher not being present for the test, the test date being changed or the test being excessively easy. The students' marks proved how little they studied the irregular verbs list, as only 42% of the students achieved a passing score.

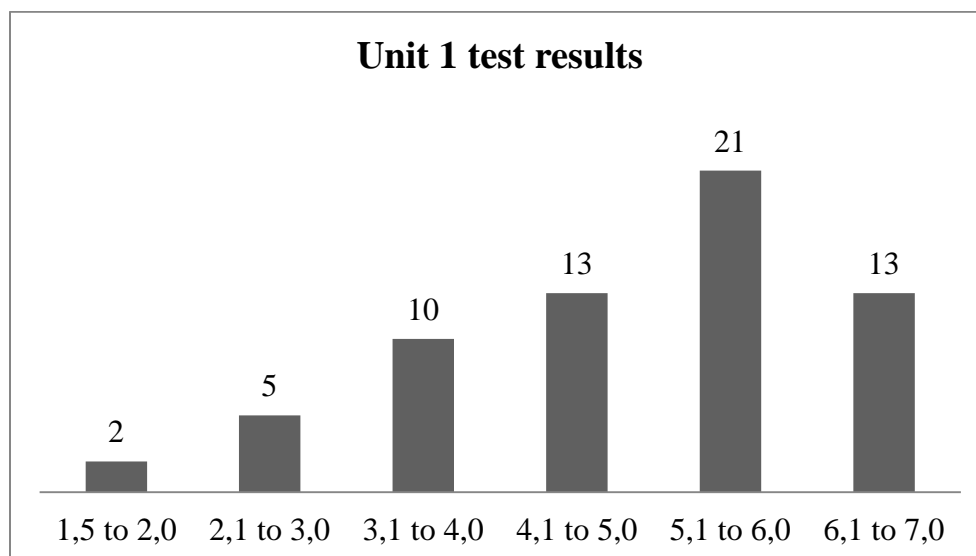


Test number 2: Unit 1 test.

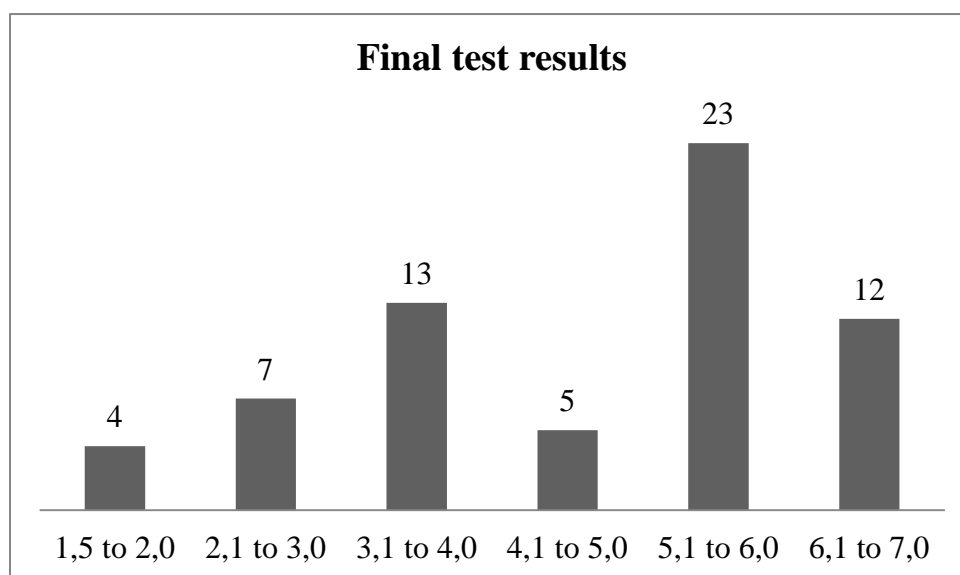
Contradicting the previous test results, the students prepared a lot more for the unit test, considering how bad their marks had been, and the fact that they did not want to fail the year, so they made an effort to improve their marks.

In addition, the content appearing in this test was the content seen through the first half of the term, so they had had the time to ask the questions they had, to cover the material with the teacher and to exchange notes with their classmates.

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**Test number 3: Final test.**

For the Final test, the students had to study materials from both units 1, 2 and the second third of the irregular verbs list given at the beginning of the year. The students were nervous, but overall prepared, as they had participated more in class and they reportedly studied more on their free time.

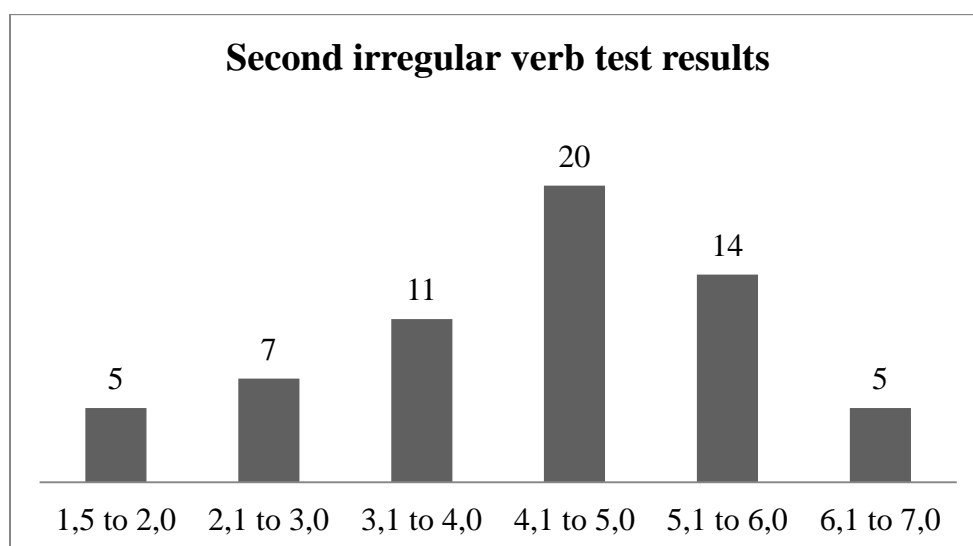


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Test number 4: Second verb test.

For the second and final irregular verb test of the year, the students had now acquired the necessary skills to study on their own free time and they were already familiar with the test structure.

Once they successfully got through with the mock test, they were allowed to be out of the classroom for 3 minutes. The teacher did not control the time the students were outside the classroom, it was self regulated and most of the students respected the time set.

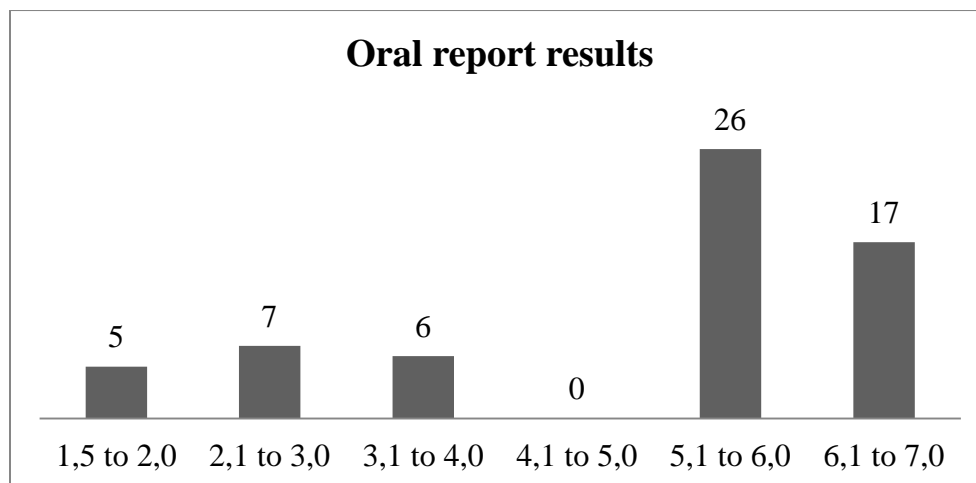


Test number 5: Oral report.

For the oral report, which they had to work on in pairs, the students showed a deep lack of commitment, as 30% of the students were not ready to present their report on the date that had been set. This had an impact on their marks, as one of the criteria in the rubric was the readiness. In spite of this situation, the 70% of the class that did have their report on time, had a passing score over 5,5.

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As there was a protocol created for this situation, the students knew what would happen if they did not show their work on time. After all of the steps were taken, the students showed a more responsible attitude towards the subject.

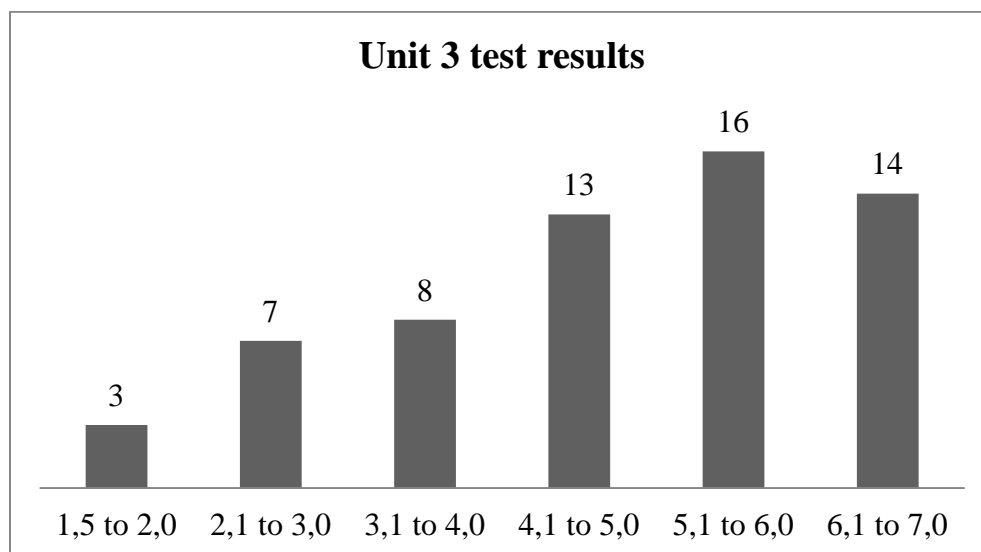


Test number 6: Unit 3 test.

For this test, only contents from unit 3 were taken into account, so the students had the time during the lessons to discuss their questions and to ask for the teacher's help. By now, the students had a better grasp of the subject and the language, so they showed nearly no issues when answering the test.

Also, for the preparation of this test, some students offered to form study groups on Fridays, which was a day when their lessons ended earlier and they could work in the school in a freer manner.

Following the May midterm protocol, the same measure was taken, where the teacher would answer questions via social media the day before the test. The students were able to ask in a more effective manner because they felt they were on their element, asking through the computer, eliminating the stress related to talking in front of the classmates in the classroom.



Test number 7: Extensive reading test.

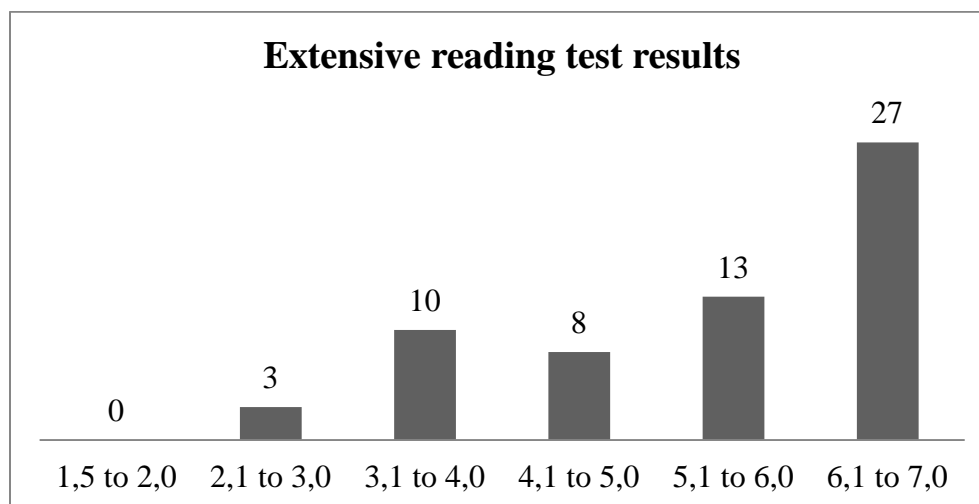
The book chosen for 7th grade was Pocahontas, retold by Tim Vicary, by the Oxford Bookworms.

The book was chosen for (a) the tense presented in the book was the simple past tense, which had been studied the previous year, so it would not be a new structure, and (b) the story was compelling for the students, considering the majority of them has grown up watching the Disney movies, so the story of Pocahontas was known to them.

For the duration of this test, the students had access to a page of their notes, which they prepared in advance during one of the lessons. The possibility of having their notes during the test dramatically improved the lessons leading up to the test itself, as the students paid more attention to the plot, characters and vocabulary present on the book. As such, they were able to retain more details and to express themselves better on the written part of the test, which resulted on better marks.

Some students used the Facebook platform to ask questions about the book the days prior to the assessment. These students shared the answers provided by the teacher with their friends, so an unexpected book debate took place, which helped the students boost their confidence before test day.

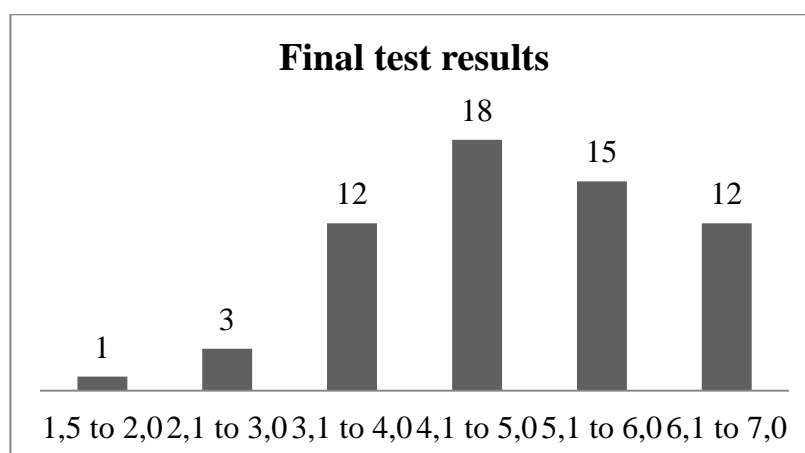
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Test number 8: End of year final test.

For the last test of the year, the students had to cover the most important grammar points from units 1, 2, 3, and 4. The two weeks prior to this test, the lessons were devoted to reviewing these points, so they could see and apply all the contents mixed together and use them as they would in real life.

As it happened before the previous tests, there was some debate over Facebook over the contents of this test, but now it was the students themselves who answered each others' questions.



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Time table and attendance

There was a continued link between the students who participated more in class and achieved better results, contrasted to those students who were absent on Mondays (which was the day when we had our three hours of English) or who arrived late to class.

There was a group of 6 students who, in spite of all the talks, extra learning opportunities and added efforts, were not able to acquire the minimum requirements to pass the subject.

Four of these students argued that they just lacked the talent to learn a second language, while the other two students did not care enough for school as to make the effort to improve their marks.

The only exception to what was previously mentioned is a girl, who travelled a lot with her family but still managed to achieve top grades on the tests. When asked about it, she said that she “loved learning languages, especially English”.

Students' feedback

Open questions results.

After every evaluation results were given, we held a small talk related to the students' preparedness and the tests' difficulty. As the questions were made orally and the students were not obliged to answer, some students' opinions were never voiced, as they were too shy to speak in public.

1. First verb test: 80% of the students admitted that they could have prepared better for this test, as they did not want to take it and assumed the date would have been changed. They also admitted that they had made a mistake they would never do again, as they had found the test “hard” and not very approachable.
2. Unit 1 test: Most of the students who talked mentioned they had prepared for this test as they wanted to obtain better grades. One of the positive differences they saw on this testing preparation was the possibility of using Facebook as a tool for learning, considering they had only needed to write the question they had while studying, and

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did not have to wait for the next school day to have it answered.

3. Final test: Despite the fact the students were nervous before the test, they admitted that having done a cheat sheet helped them memorize and internalize some examples and structures seen in class, as well as new vocabulary. The students reported they had achieved the results they had expected, as they had prepared enough.
4. Second irregular verb test: In spite of being similar to the first test in terms of structure, the students reported a better preparation the second time around; considering they knew the material better and had acquired a study method – it being studying with friends, writing the verbs over and over again or reciting them every chance they had. It also helped them to have the mock test, as they had the chance to answer real questions asked by the teacher without the possibility of looking at their irregular verb list.
5. Oral report: For this evaluation, the students were divided into two big groups of opinions, namely (a) those who had not prepared and (b) those who were ready to present their findings. For the first group, their lack of success was due to their laziness and the expectation that not being prepared would have had no punishment, in spite of it being a part of the rubric. For the second group, one of the hardest parts of the assignment was to speak in English in front of all the classmates, so they took extra care of their pronunciation and pace. But all of the students agreed on the fact that being able to choose their own sport and sport person made the assignment more attractive. One of the students mentioned that, being able to report about Quidditch (the fictional sport played in the Harry potter saga) and Victor Krum (one of the most famous players in the saga) had been “the best thing ever” to happen at school.
6. Unit 3 test: The most mentioned benefits of this test’s preparation were the fact that they could still ask through social media and that they had formed study groups at school. There were no issues regarding the test itself, as the students were used to

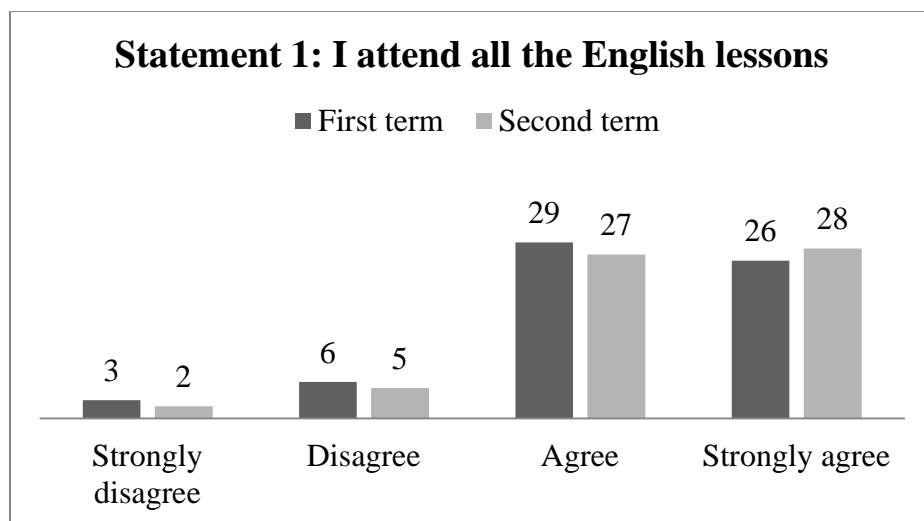
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the formatting.

7. Extensive reading test: Even though it was difficult for the students to read a book in English at home, they found a challenge in the fact that they could have a piece of paper with their notes during the test and accepted it gladly.
8. Final test: The students reported that they had found teaching the contents themselves “entertaining” and “new”, and it helped them put the contents in a simpler language, often paired with drawings or mimicry. In addition, they realized how independent they were now; compared to the level of preparation they had done before first test of the year, as they were able to answer each others’ question without much hesitation, either orally or via social media.

Questionnaire results.

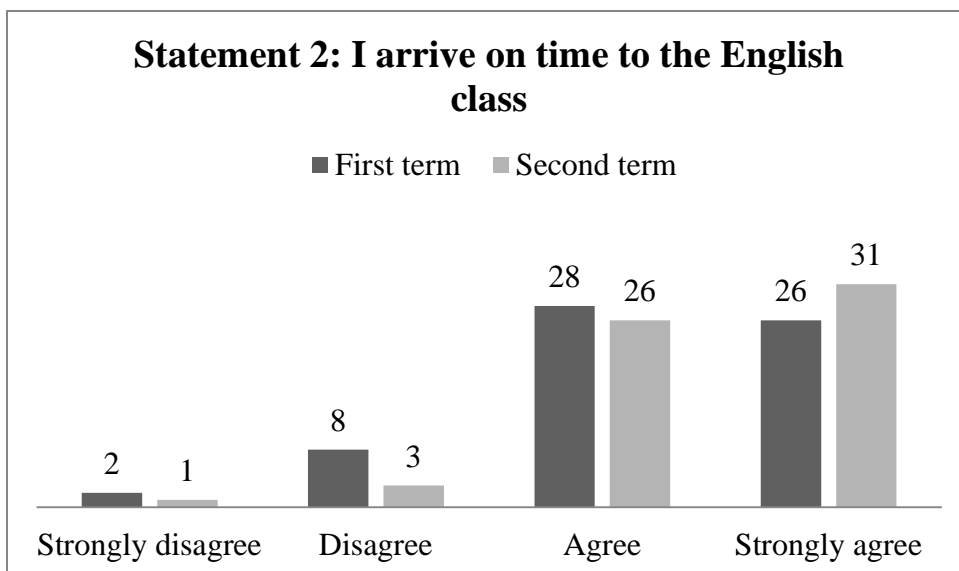
1. **I attend all the English lessons:** in terms of attendance, there were no significant changes over the course of the year, as in this grade it is still the parents who are fully in charge of waking the students up and taking them to school.



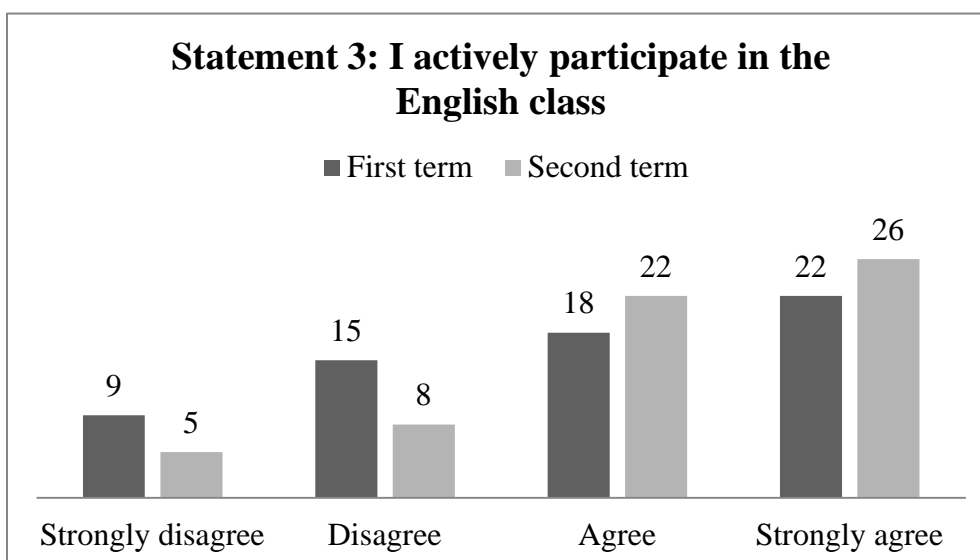
2. **I arrive on time to the English class:** Different to the previous point, the students changed their attitude towards the beginning of the second term, as they saw the

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classmates who were never late for class achieved better results.

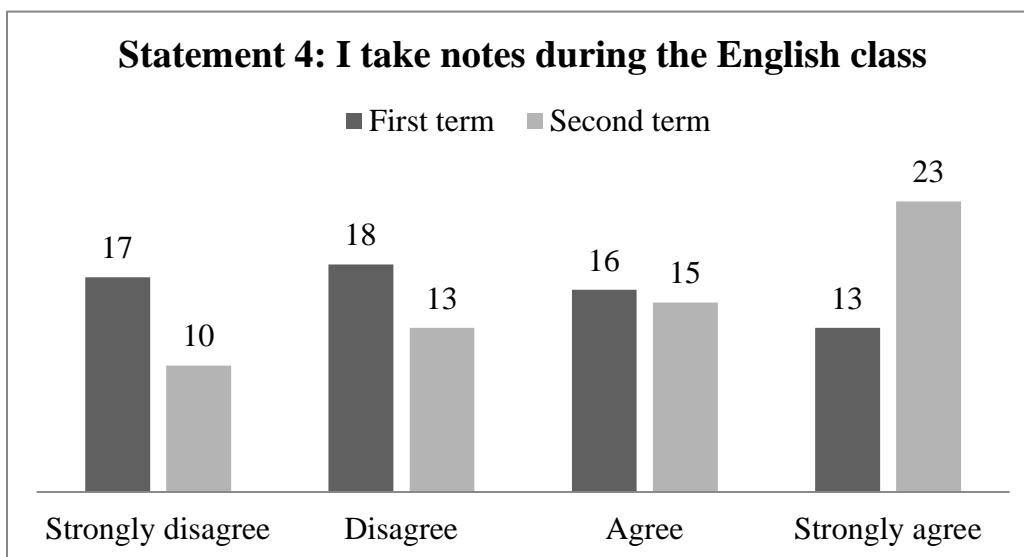


- 3. I actively participate in the English class:** again, as the previous point mentioned, this statement's results shifted from one term to the next. It was the students themselves who encouraged each other to participate more in the English class, as they saw it as a way to achieve better marks. Still, there was a group of students who would not feel compelled to participate, as they were very shy.

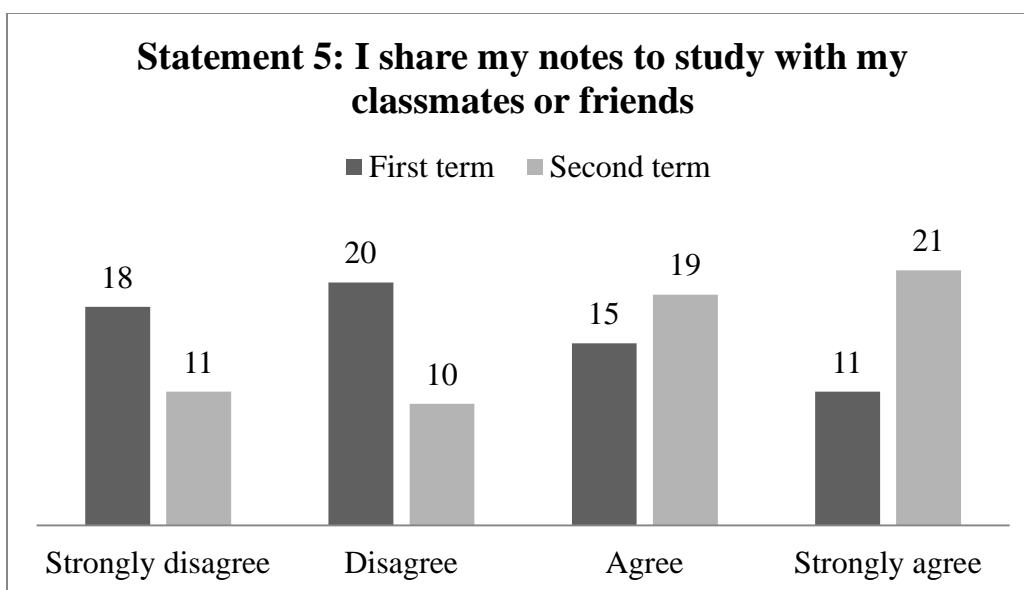


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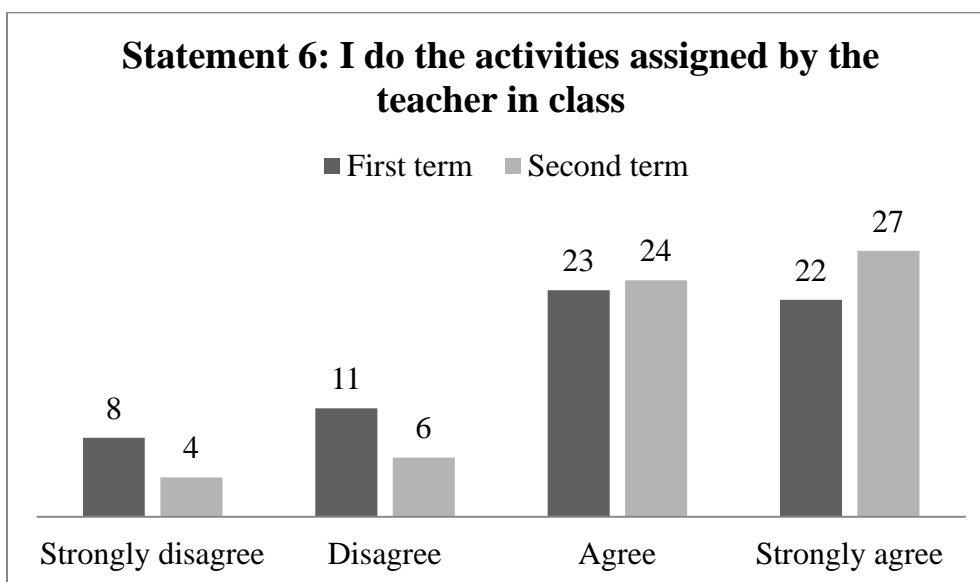
- 4. I take notes during the English class:** Most students had to be told to take notes, as they were not used to this system during the English class. Once they started taking notes, they could see a change on their marks, as when they did the cheat sheet for the Final test or the notes for Pocahontas.



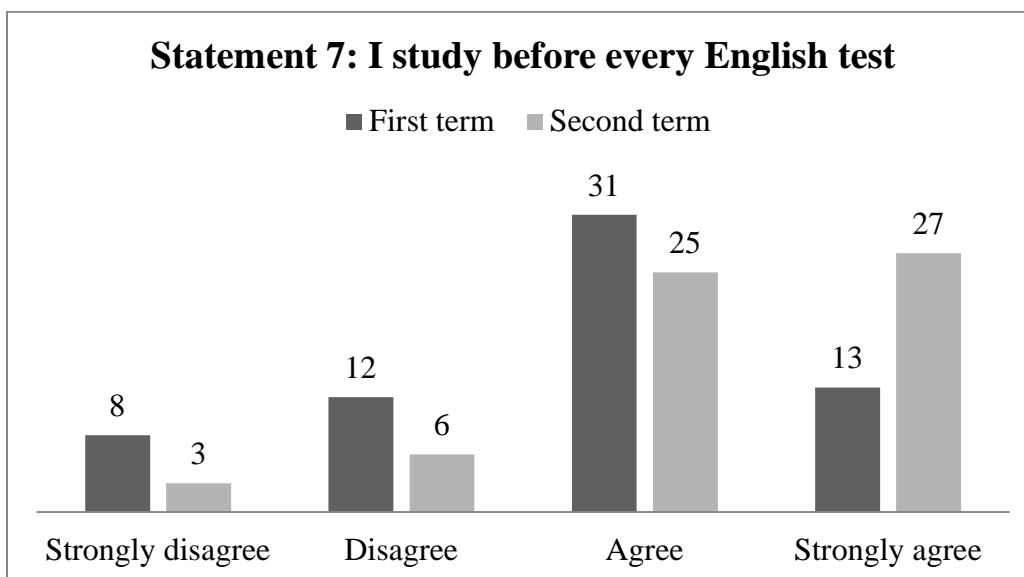
- 5. I share my notes to study with my classmates or friends:** Even though the students usually shared their notes with their friends, by the end of the first term they also started sharing as a year group, seeing that their levels of English were similar and that they faced the same realities.



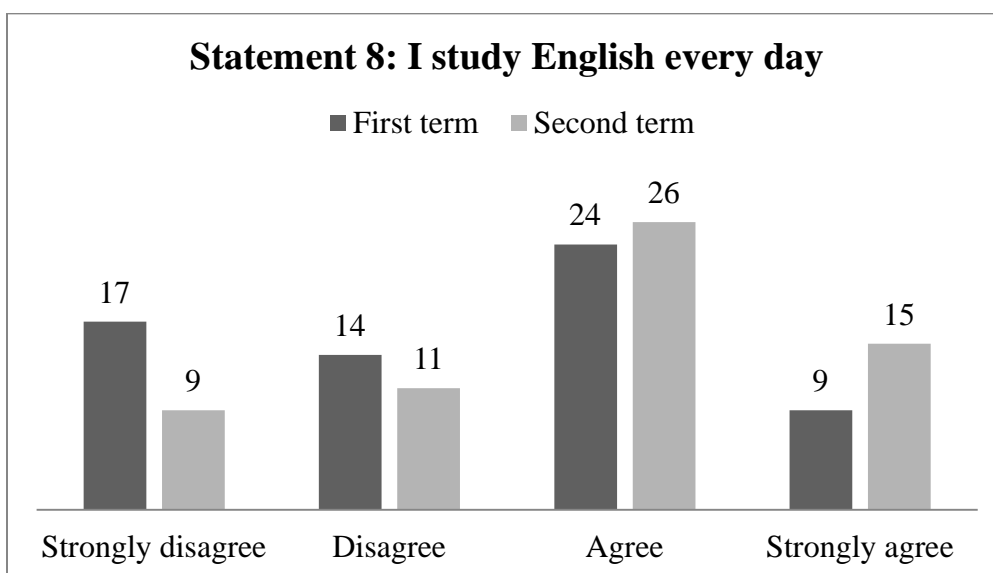
- 6. I do the activities assigned by the teacher in class:** doing the activities in the lesson was never a problem for this year group, as they always had the materials they needed on hand and were very supportive with the rest of the classmates. In addition, there were rewards assigned when they had all the activities done well, for example a chance to go to the toilet, the possibility of eating in class, etc. Even though some students were not proficient enough in the language as to work on their own, they found helping hands on their classmates.



- 7. I study before every English test:** This is a statement that changed from one term to the next, as they saw themselves much more independent and responsible on the second half of the year.



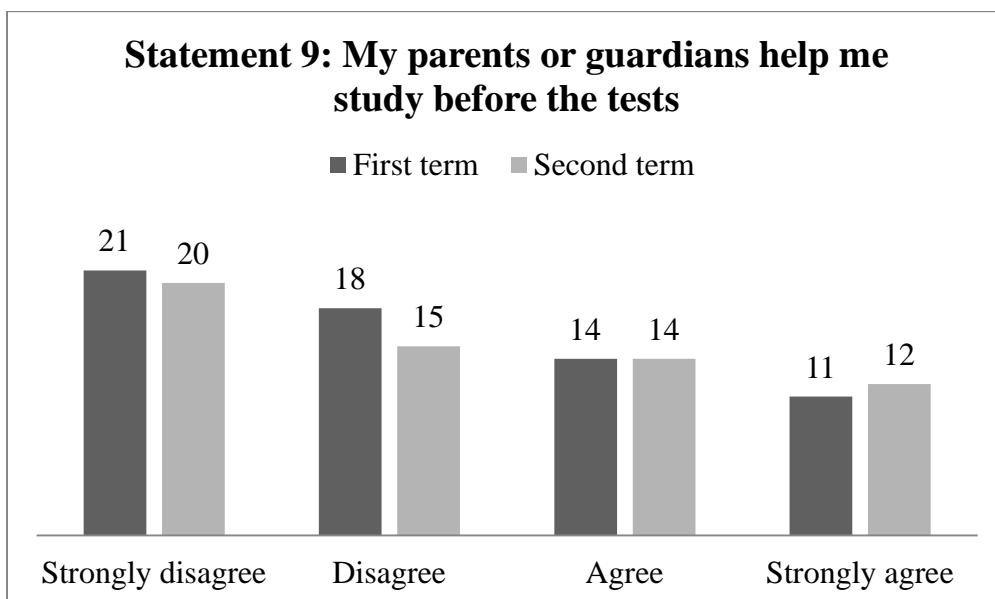
- 8. I study English every day:** Most of the students did not find a point in studying English every day, as they saw it as an added obligation on top of all the class work they already had. When the students noticed that “studying English” did not necessarily mean reading their copybooks over and over, but that they could watch movies or listen to songs in the target language, they saw a rise of their English proficiency, as they found new vocabulary that came from a source they were more interested in.



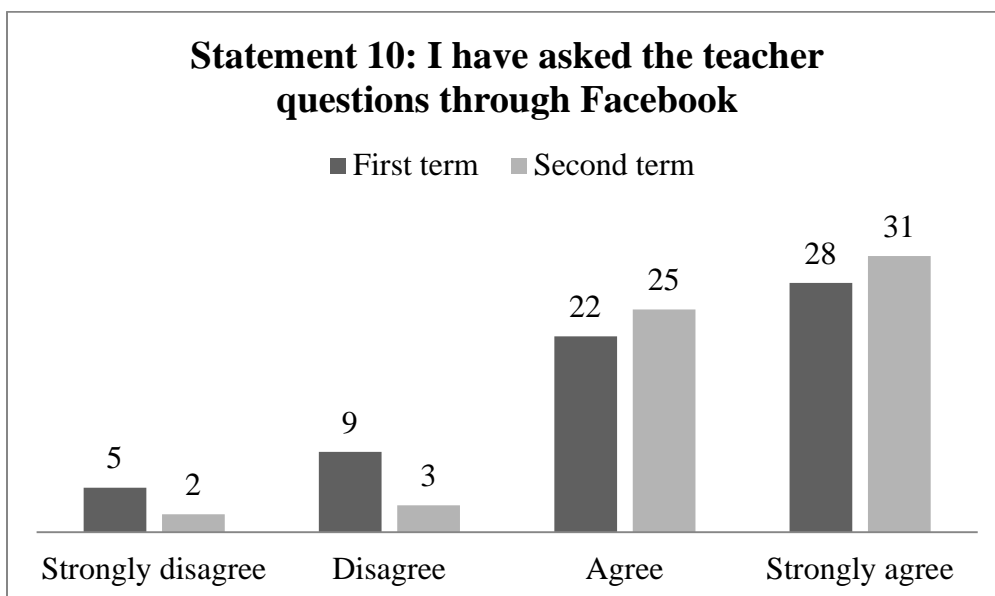
- 9. My parents or guardians help me study before the tests:** this is one of the statements that did not change during the course of the year. Most students stated that their parents

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or legal guardians did not have enough time or knowledge of the target language as to help them study.



10. I have asked the teacher questions through Facebook: Adding the social media as a tool for learning helped the shyest students voice their questions safely, as they did not need to raise their voices to be heard. Some students also mentioned that they asked other teachers to adopt the same method, as they could ask answer questions while doing other things.



Summary and conclusions

Over the course of the school year I was able to draw a series of conclusions related to the topic of this investigation and two conclusions that are off topic.

First, 85% of the students showed better marks than last year's, proving that effective motivation helped them achieve their objective, which was improving their marks, and my objective as well, which was to make them feel happy and empowered while learning a second language.

Second, by giving the students the tools and confidence they needed to tackle the subject, they were able to experience the other side of learning: enjoying what you do. Most students see school as a place where they are told what to do, how to do it and where they find friendship and love, but when they are given the chance to take the subject in their own hands, it becomes something alive and ever changing that they can mold at will. An example of this is what happened when they were able to teach their own review lessons, to put into practice how they thought they could teach the subject and they created new experiences for their classmates as well. As a teacher, I did not tell them how to teach the class, they simply went with what they had learnt on every area of their lives and taught a lesson.

Third, as study habits are not strictly part of the English subject, rather, it is a cross curricular subject; it made the students take what they had learnt and transfer their newly acquired habits into other subject areas. This helped the students with their self-confidence, as now they were not only improving in the English subject, but in other areas as well.

One of the unexpected conclusions that arose from this study was the effectiveness of team work. Once the students felt more at ease with the subject and their knowledge, they started sharing their study habits, notes and time not only with their friends, but also with their classmates, sometimes being them the ones who reviewed the contents, on their own free time, without the teacher needing to be present to keep the pace of the lesson. This stroke me as curious, considering that at the beginning of the year they were a heterogeneous group with little to no interest in getting to know each other, they ended up bonding over the shared success on the subject.

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Also, as I saw my students work in teams, it made me realized how well teachers work when they work in teams as well. The teachers who have been working at the school for longer than I have helped me see the problems from different angles, which made us get new and different solutions and improve as educators. In addition, one of the recurrent topics of the English Department meetings was how well the students were doing now that they had established their study habits, which made us make the decision of improving their study habits from the beginning of the year, not only with the students, but also getting the parents involved in the process.

Finally, I believe that once you get to know your students you are able to bond and expect from them what they can truly do and be, and the students feel the encouragement in that and push themselves harder in order to achieve better results and become better students.

Reflections

One of the things that caught my attention the most during the duration of this study was the importance of teaching the students far beyond the contents and objectives that are mandatory. Sometimes, teachers get caught up on what they need their students to do (in the case of the English subject it could be learning a certain set of verbs, being able to listen to and repeat, reading a book in the target language, or simply just grammar), instead of focusing on what their students need to be (respectful, good human beings, supportive) before they try to learn the contents of the subject area. Once you start teaching them things that they see valuable for their near present – study habits for the upcoming test – allows them to gain enough confidence to create wonderful things with the learning they do. And from then onwards, you can help them discover who they are as people, not only as students, and that helps them become the students we expect in the first place.

The teacher plays an important role in the classroom, not only as the one giving the contents or structure of the class, but also giving the students the confidence enough for them to go on learning the subject materials. Many times the students feel that they can do better or worse on a subject because of what the teachers express in the classroom. Talking with one of the 7th graders who was performing poorly in the subject, he confided that he felt that he had no talents with the language because he had never – in six years of learning it – been praised for his few advances. That made me think of how I had thought of that particular student: I saw him as being maybe uncaring, for not letting me do the lessons; lazy, for not doing the classwork; or simply unmotivated, for he never seemed to be present in class. Had a self-fulfilling prophecy just happened in my classroom? Had the student been uncaring, unmotivated and lazy because I thought he was that way? Maybe, with this attitude, I was contributing to widening the gap between low- and high-achieving students, and impacting on the student's self-confidence. This is something that I am looking forward to changing next school year.

One of the most significant reflections that I can highlight from this study is the fact that, no matter how awful the class group looks like at the beginning of the year; you can always – and should always – do your best to make the students feel confident in the subject, making the classes motivating and discovering the hidden talents the students may have. In the case of these

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particular seventh graders, I discovered many innate leaders and communicators, who have what it takes to be brilliant future teachers themselves.

Finally, one of the questions I have left for future research has to do with the parents' or legal guardians' real involvement in the child's studies, considering how sometimes the parents think it is up to the school to educate and teach their children, when in reality it should be a triad between the school, the family and the state.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire

Your answers are confidential

Instruction: Circle one answer for each statement.

1. I attend all the English lessons.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly agree

2. I arrive on time to the English class.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly agree

3. I actively participate in the English class.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly agree

4. I take notes during the English class.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly agree

5. I share my notes to study with my classmates or friends.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly agree

6. I do the activities assigned by the teacher in class.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly agree

7. I study before every English test.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly agree

8. I study English every day.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly agree

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9. My parents or guardians help me study before the tests.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly agree

10. I have asked the teacher questions through Facebook.

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly agree