

The Use of Oral Activities to Improve the Scores of Written Spelling Quizzes in a Group of Third Graders

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Abstract

This article presents the effects of implementing oral activities to help students improve their spelling written quizzes' scores in a group of third graders from a private elementary school. Twenty-six students from a spelling class participated in the investigation. The purpose of this spelling class is to help students acquire vocabulary. However, almost 50% of the 26 participants were not obtaining passing grades in the quizzes. After a two-week treatment period where the only change in the class dynamics was the manner in which the target words were practiced, a post-test was administered to the group of participants. The results obtained in the post-test indicated that there was a significant improvement in the scores after the implementation of the oral activities designed to practice the vocabulary items. Therefore, it was concluded that promoting the use of vocabulary through meaningful speaking tasks may lead to more learning and retention of vocabulary than traditional ways such as repetition and rote memorization of words.

Key words: vocabulary acquisition, oral activities, spelling, young learners, interaction

Resumen

Este artículo presenta los efectos de la implementación de actividades orales para ayudar a los estudiantes a mejorar las notas en sus pruebas cortas de ortografía y significado en un grupo de estudiantes de tercer grado en una escuela privada. Veintiséis estudiantes provenientes de este grupo participaron en la investigación. El propósito de esta materia es ayudar a los estudiantes a adquirir vocabulario. Sin embargo, casi un 50% de los 26 participantes no estaban aprobando las pruebas cortas. Después de un período de dos semanas donde el único cambio en la dinámica de las lecciones fue la forma en que se practicaron las palabras por evaluarse, se aplicó una prueba posterior al grupo de participantes. Los resultados obtenidos en dicha prueba indicaron que hubo una mejoría significativa en las notas después de implementar las actividades orales diseñadas para practicar el vocabulario. Por lo tanto, se concluyó que promover el uso de vocabulario por

medio de actividades que incluyan conversaciones significativas podría suscitar un mayor aprendizaje y lograr que los estudiantes retengan más vocabulario que con formas tradicionales tales como la repetición y la memorización mecánica de términos.

Palabras claves: adquisición de vocabulario, actividades orales, ortografía, estudiantes jóvenes, interacción

Introducción

Vocabulary acquisition is an area of fundamental importance in the process of acquiring a second language (SLA). It is so essential that even learners perceive its relevance as many teachers can attest. It is common to find students who ask their second language (SL) teachers what they can do to expand their vocabulary in order to improve their understanding and communicative skills. Learners do so because they are aware of the fact that they need more than knowing grammatical and phonological rules to be capable of maintaining a conversation and to understand longer and more challenging readings in the target language. However, not all learners recognize this necessity which is more often acknowledged by students of a certain age such as adults and, sometimes, adolescents.

Being aware of this reality, many private elementary education institutions in Costa Rica include, as part of their curricula, subject matters in which the acquisition of vocabulary is an essential part of their English programs. In some of these institutions, second language (L2) vocabulary instruction is done through indirect methods such as the *Context Alone* described by Coady (in Coady and Huckin, 1997) in his research on the approaches to L2 vocabulary instruction. According to this method, direct vocabulary instruction is not necessary since new words are acquired from context which most of the time is provided by reading texts. Therefore, vocabulary acquisition is expected to take place in subjects like reading or, in some cases, speaking.

In other institutions, L2 vocabulary instruction is done in subject matters specially designed for this purpose. In this study, vocabulary items are taught using *Strategy Instruction*, a direct approach also described by Coady in the same investigation (in Coady and Huckin, 1997), in which words are taught through techniques such as the repetition and memorization of vocabulary items, meanings, and spelling.

There are some other institutions that promote the acquisition of vocabulary items through the use of explicit techniques as well as incidental ones. Several authors (Allen, Gairns and Redman, Morgan and Rinvoluceri, Taylor, Nation, and Loucky as cited in Coady and Huckin, 1997) favor a combination of direct and indirect methods with the purpose of facilitating the acquisition

of vocabulary. Zimmerman (1997) has claimed that since word learning is not a simple task, it should be approached through different experiences such as in reading, listening, speaking, and writing tasks. Hence, this approach to vocabulary instruction seems to be the most convenient one if teachers expect their students to increase their lexicon.

The private bilingual school where the present research project was carried out offers, as part of its curriculum, a subject matter named *Spelling*. The purpose of this class is to help children acquire new vocabulary and evaluate the students in their level of proficiency when writing the words and knowing their meaning. The words studied in spelling are also studied in context through texts in a subject called *Reading* in which, as its name suggests, is devoted to reading comprehension tasks. As a result, L2 teaching is done directly and indirectly. However, despite studying the target vocabulary using different resources, students keep getting grades in their quizzes that suggest that the new vocabulary words have not been completely acquired.

This fact led us to look for other strategies to make the target vocabulary more meaningful for students and, in this way, facilitate their vocabulary acquisition process. The purpose of this research study is to determine if practicing the target vocabulary through oral production activities generates a change in the performance on written vocabulary quizzes in a group of third graders from a private elementary school.

Literature Review

Many authors (e.g. Altman, Laufer, Long and Richards as cited in Coady and Huckin, 1997; Coady and Huckin, 1997; Khoii and Shariffar, 2013; Min, 2008; Zimmerman, 1997) have agreed on the vital importance of expanding lexicon when learning a second language; this process of learning new words is known as vocabulary acquisition. Most of these investigators also concur on the fact that, in spite of its significance, vocabulary acquisition had been somewhat neglected in the past, and that studies in other areas of applied linguistics such as grammar and phonology greatly outnumber those in the area of vocabulary acquisition (Altman, Laufer, Paribakht and Wesche in Coady and Huckin, 1997; Laufer as cited in File and Adams, 2010; Folse, 2006; Hunt and Beglar as cited in Duppenhaler, n.d.; Zimmerman, 1997). One possible explanation for the gap in this research area might be attributed, at least in part, to a failure in reaching a consensus and to a lack of collaboration among investigators in the fields of psycholinguistics and applied linguistics (Takac, 2009). It was not until the mid 1980s when vocabulary acquisition gained importance in the field of linguistics research, and several studies have demonstrated that understanding the process of acquiring lexical competence in learning a second language is central to achieve communicative, reading, listening, and writing skills (Elley, Ellis, Haynes and Baku, Hincks, Hinkel, Huckin and Bloch, Joe, Laufer and Nation, Lee as cited in Folse, 2006).

Some other authors claim that vocabulary has also been neglected in the classroom by second language teachers probably because it is assumed that new words are going to be acquired automatically from sources such as reading and speech (Zimmerman, 1997). For instance, Coady (in Coady and Huckin, 1997) has asserted that vocabulary instruction and learning have been given neither the attention nor the value they deserve within the field of SLA. Richards (as cited in Coady and Huckin, 1997) had already noticed this deficiency as early as in 1976, and he attributed the negligence to the focus that linguists of the time were giving to grammar and sound. Another reason for this lack of care was mentioned by Zimmerman (as cited in Coady and Huckin, 1997) who has suggested that since SL has traditionally been taught through methods that emphasize syntax and sound, it was not surprising that many teachers followed the same approach and gave very little importance to the instruction of vocabulary. Nonetheless, in recent years—and possibly due to the influence of research on SL vocabulary acquisition—teachers have become increasingly aware of a fact that most students had acknowledged for a long time: that the role of vocabulary when learning a second language is essential. Therefore, further attention to the way in which this component of a language is taught becomes more necessary every time.

Nevertheless, and despite the recent growing interest, second language vocabulary acquisition does not have a theory that sums up all its intricacies to date (Tseng and Schmitt, 2008). Many have tried to explain and theorize certain aspects of the process of L2 vocabulary acquisition, but given the lack of attention from researchers and teachers to this field during years and the inherent complexity of it, it is reasonable that there is not a single theory that satisfies all yet.

What is a Word?

When we talk about vocabulary, there are some terms that need to be explained in order to discuss the topic with accuracy. First, it is essential to determine what a *word* is although defining the term is not an easy task due to its ambiguity. As a result, there are many different definitions, and some of them are inconsistent and incomplete because they neglect variations in meaning and issues like polysemy, homonymy, and grammatical functions. One of the most accepted definitions is that “a *word* is a combination of morphemes that comprise a firm unit suitable for the formation of higher level units” (Skilijan as cited in Takac, 2009, p. 5). However, this explanation neglects the fact that the term *word* is also determined by the meaning given to it by each person and the unit used to count it (Daller, Milton and Treffers-Daller, 2007). Some other definitions are based on the idea of unit even though some units of meaning consist of several words. Richards (2000) has explained that there are some vocabulary items that are single words, but there are some others such as phrasal verbs and idioms that are made up of more than one item. In those cases, the new unit composed of two or more words has a meaning that

is different from the one that each of the items has in isolation. In order to make the distinction clearer, these multiword units have been referred to as *lexemes*, *lexical units*, or *lexical items*.

Another problem that can arise as a result of trying to define the term *word* has to do with the grammatical and morphological changes that a word suffers. Questions such as if inflected lexical items (e.g. *love*, *loved* or *loves*) should count as one or as different words, or if only derived forms (e.g. *care* and *careful*) should be counted as different words pose a dilemma. To solve this problem, the term *lemma* was created to refer to the base word and its inflections (Nation as cited in Richards, 2000).

For the purposes of this study, we will define a *word* as a sound or a combination of sounds or its representation in writing or printing that symbolizes and communicates a meaning (Glossary of Education, 2006). We use a simple definition of *word* due to the age of the participants who are young beginner learners of English. At this stage, students do not have to recognize so many nuances yet; therefore, the definition adopted only considers a few aspects of the term.

Although in this research study a simpler definition of the term *word* will be adopted, explaining the different approaches to understand the term from the beginning are necessary to reveal the complex nature of the vocabulary acquisition process in order to comprehend it and to look for ways that may make it more intelligible for SL learners.

What Does It Mean to Know a Word?

Determining what it means to *know* a word is certainly not an easy task either. Many researchers have tried to respond to the question *what does it mean to know a word?* and the answers are as varied as complex is the task. For Nation (2001), “there are many degrees of knowing” because words are not isolated but interconnected in different systems and levels (p. 23). Folse (as cited in Dupenthaler, n.d.) provided a list of seven aspects a person must be aware of in order to really know a word. In his list, Folse included polysemy, denotation and connotation, spelling and pronunciation, part of speech, frequency, usage, and collocation. This list is not exhaustive though because the number of aspects to know about a word can increase as students advance in their learning process.

It is significant to point out that the depth of knowledge of a word will depend on the level and age of the students. Young learners exposed to a great amount of information not suitable for their age will gain nothing and might get confused. Consequently, a simpler approach to the issue of defining *what is to know a word* seems more appropriate if we are dealing with children. Troute (n.d.) offered a very simple and clear explanation for this inquiry. She asserts that “to really know a word a student must be able to define it, recognize when to use it, know its multiple meanings, be able to use it correctly, and be able to decode it and spell it” (para. 5). Given the fact that the participants of the present study are young beginners, this last definition suits our needs better.

How Is L2 Acquired?

It has been said so far that defining what a *word* is and explaining *what it means to know a word* are complex tasks. This might be due to the fact that the whole vocabulary learning process is a complex activity itself. In recent years, many researchers (File and Adams, 2010; Folse, 2006; Khoii and Shariffar, 2013; Lugo-Neris, 2007; Min, 2008; Nation, 2007) in the field of SLA have tried to extricate the fascinating process of acquiring new words. Their investigations have intended to explain how vocabulary items are learned, and what the best ways to do it are. However, to date, it has not been possible to put together a single theory of acquisition not only because of the inherent complexity of the field but also because second language vocabulary learning can be affected by many variables such as first language, age, background, and culture (Richards, 2000).

In an attempt to understand how this process works, two main approaches to vocabulary acquisition have been described by some researchers such as Richards (2000) and Nation (2007). The first one is *explicit learning* which takes place when vocabulary is acquired through direct instruction by focusing on the words to be learned. The other approach is *incidental learning* which happens when vocabulary items are acquired through the use of meaningful contexts that, most of the times, are reading texts or listening exercises.

Several studies have been conducted to find out more effective approaches for vocabulary learning (File and Adams, 2010; Folse, 2006; Khoii and Shariffar, 2013; Lugo-Neris, 2007; Min, 2008; Nation, 2007; Zimmerman, 1997). Traditionally, those who favor *incidental learning* have supported Krashen's theory (as cited in Coady and Huckin, 1997) which claims that vocabulary learning is better acquired through comprehensible input obtained while reading. Nevertheless, there is negative evidence in the research literature that contradicts this claim. Coady (in Coady and Huckin, 1997) has mentioned a study by Tudor and Hafiz in which a three-month ESL extensive reading program control group of students showed significant improvement in reading and writing, but their vocabulary base showed almost no significant change. A further study from the same researchers yielded similar results that confirmed the previous ones. Coady (in Coady and Huckin, 1997) has also cited some studies carried out by Hulstijn who found that incidental vocabulary teaching leads to very low retention of word meanings. Paribakht & Weshe and Zimmerman (in Coady and Huckin, 1997) reported that reading for meaning alone leads to important vocabulary acquisition, but they also found that direct instruction was more effective in terms of number of words learned and their knowledge depth.

These findings seem to support the argument that explicit instruction might lead to more vocabulary learning than incidental instruction which means that SL students learn more words explicitly than incidentally (File and Adams, June 2010). Nevertheless, and in spite of these results, it must be said that there is ample evidence that proves that a combination of direct and indirect methods leads to greater gains in vocabulary learning. Zimmerman (1997) has asserted that vocabulary learning entails the use of a variety of skills; therefore, to its

acquisition, L2 learners must be exposed to different experiences that will assist in the process. Paribakht and Wesche (in Coady and Huckin, 1997) found that students who received direct and indirect vocabulary learning instruction demonstrated more vocabulary gains and better retention of words. These findings were corroborated by Min's (2008) research study's results: students who were exposed to reading tasks complemented with vocabulary-enhancement activities did better than those students who were only exposed to incidental instruction. Thus, although both *explicit* and *incidental learning* approaches appear to generate positive results when used in isolation, supplementing these approaches seems to produce higher word gains.

Approaches to L2 Vocabulary Instruction

Nation (as cited in Duppenenthaler, n.d., p.7) stated that "vocabulary is not an end in itself". According to him, the goal of learning vocabulary is to facilitate the performance of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. He has also said that one of the most important duties of a teacher is to plan not only the vocabulary to be taught but also the opportunities to learn the language. Hence, as L2 students increase their lexicon, they must also be given the chance to practice vocabulary and to become fluent using it.

Several other authors have also offered ideas for approaching L2 instruction in an effective way in the classroom. For instance, Harmer (as cited in Nation, 2001) has explained what strategies, from the ones most commonly used to present new vocabulary, might result in successful acquisition of new words. He has declared that techniques such as translation and illustration of vocabulary items are economical ways of teaching words; however, they may not be so useful because translation is not memorable and illustration does not work for all words. On the other hand, he recommends simple and clear meaning explanation which, though time-consuming, is really effective for word retention. He also suggests that learners should be an active part of new vocabulary presentation in order to make the process more meaningful for them.

Nation (2007) has proposed a balanced language course where vocabulary is based on four strands: (a) *meaning-focused input* where learners acquire new vocabulary through listening and reading, (b) *meaning-focused output* where learners enrich their vocabulary knowledge through speaking and writing, (c) *language-focused learning* where students' vocabulary learning is done explicitly through direct instruction, and (d) *fluency development* where learners use the previously learned vocabulary in meaningful activities. According to Nation (2007), the strands can be included in a lesson plan in many different ways depending on the purposes of the course. In this manner, each strand can be practiced in a separate class, or they can be mixed in every unit of work. What is important here is that vocabulary learning should not be approached from a single perspective, and that the key to success is to combine approaches that allow students to learn, practice, and expand the vocabulary in a variety of ways

Young Learners and Vocabulary Acquisition

Up to this point, it is clear that mixing both explicit and incidental instruction should be part of a well-structured vocabulary program, but it is necessary to know how and to what extent each one must be used depending on the target population. When working with beginners, it is advisable to teach all new vocabulary items explicitly before presenting students with words in context. However, incidental teaching should be part of the program because when students encounter a word in different contexts, the quality of the knowledge improves, and because successive exposure to the target item helps to store it in the long-term memory (Richards, 2000).

If the target population is a group of young beginners, then the approach has to fit their special needs. Lugo and Neris (2007) claimed that research has shown that children learn vocabulary items through quick incidental learning. The authors have affirmed that children can, with little exposure to new lexical items, make associations of words with general concepts. Nevertheless, this quick exposure is not enough because to consolidate the knowledge of words, children need to be additionally exposed to the target vocabulary and receive explicit explanations of it in order to acquire a true knowledge of the words.

According to Troute (n.d., para. 5), young learners need to notice words in their context, repeat them, be given explanations, expand upon them, and actively use them. She also asserted that children “who interact with words by hearing them, using them, and semantically manipulating them are more likely to learn and retain new vocabulary than those who are asked to look up and define unfamiliar words.” Other researchers (López and Zanón, as cited in Llach and Gómez, 2007) have found that children respond better to vocabulary learning when the attention is placed on meaning and not on language itself. This is due to the fact that, for young learners, it is easier to acquire new lexical items through meaningful activities rather than through memorization. Consequently, teachers must provide students with opportunities in which they can use the new words in a way that is significant for them; this will facilitate the acquisition of the vocabulary taught.

Oral Production in the Vocabulary Acquisition Process

As it has been mentioned throughout this review of the literature, researchers have been attributing in recent years a great importance to vocabulary acquisition as a process to successfully master the target language when learning a second language. Nonetheless, acquiring new words is not an easy task because, as it has been stated before, many factors are involved in the learning process that can enhance or diminish the level in which learners take in new words. Thus, the recent tendency of researchers and teachers is to develop and apply new theories that really help learners improve their language level by using a wide variety of learning activities which are defined as “activities engaged in by

the learner for the purpose of acquiring certain skills, concepts, or knowledge, whether guided by an instructor or not” (Glossary of Education, 2006). In this aspect, oral production activities are recognized by many as a helpful option to use when learning new lexical items.

In order to understand the relationship between vocabulary acquisition and oral production activities, it is important to recall that oral language is the ability to speak and listen. Indeed, the development of thinking and reading abilities is closely linked to the development of oral language. Troute (n.d.) supports this idea by saying that:

Oral language provides a foundation for communication of ideas and intelligent conversations, and the development of other language skills. Before students achieve proficiency in reading and writing, oral language is one of the most important means of learning and acquiring knowledge. (para. 14)

Therefore, words have to be included in students’ oral working vocabulary so as to be comprehended in the written form because L2 learners use similarities and sound to create word connections. In this sense, Takac (2009) mentioned that students can acquire new vocabulary through oral activities that present and provide practice to assure the real comprehension of lexical items by using them in contexts that expose students to real life situations for a more active learning. In addition, oral activities work as triggers that help students recall in a practical way the spelling, function, and use of words in different contexts.

Despite the usefulness of oral activities in the vocabulary acquisition process, they are avoided by teachers who fear losing control of the classroom, so one of the most used techniques for students to acquire new vocabulary is to write the words many times, repeat them, and complete *fill in the blanks* exercises. However, as it was mentioned above, new vocabulary items should not be only presented in isolation; as a matter of fact, items should be introduced in meaningful contexts for learners to elaborate on a new word’s form and meaning in order to facilitate retention. Speaking activities have the purpose of guiding learners through the presentation, practice, and production of new words. Nation (2001) alleged that well-structured oral exercises such as mini lectures, ranking activities, split information tasks, role play, and problem solving discussion are really effective means for students to use and practice different aspects of words. In this manner, oral activities that are well planned and that have specific objectives to achieve can facilitate vocabulary acquisition because they add variety to the usual way of teaching new words. In fact, many researchers attribute better results when using communicative tasks than when only using the traditional word lists and definitions for practicing vocabulary.

Classes in which vocabulary acquisition is the main focus can really benefit from oral activities because teachers will be able to use new procedures to reinforce knowledge and to provide tools for students to try different ways of studying vocabulary. Different classroom arrangements such as pair work or group work in which information gaps have to be filled, stimulate oral communicative practice.

These tasks can be made more effective by giving key vocabulary to the partners involved who can negotiate meaning by using the new words and their speaking skills (Richards, 2000). The previous activity is just one example of how speaking and writing can be combined to learn lexical items, so the students are the real participants and producers of new knowledge. In this type of task, teachers work as facilitators while students can really interact among them using the vocabulary.

Nation (2001) has stated that meaningful repetition—not rote—is necessary for learning new lexical items and that repetition improves the quality of the target words. In this case, repetition is used to constantly expose students to new words, so they acquire the new vocabulary in a more natural way and not as an imposed requirement in their process of learning a new language. Repetition can be carried out in different ways, for example, by exposing students to the same word and to its meaning at the same time, by reminding the same meaning continuously, or by using different contexts to explore meaning (Richards, 2001). Indeed, researchers recommend the use of repetition in oral activities to promote collaborative learning among the students because it allows the instructors to create different exercises to achieve the same goal.

This literature review has led us to establish that there should be a change in the way vocabulary is taught to L2 learners because the traditional ways (e.g. memorizing spelling lists, taking dictations, and completing exercises) have a limited effect on the acquisition of new lexical items. Furthermore, these techniques hardly ever help learners to practice vocabulary in an interactive, practical, useful, and real way. Hence, research has suggested that including oral activities in teaching vocabulary is effective in leading learners into new ways of creating associations between words and definitions which, in turn, will result in a more effective learning process. L2 vocabulary instruction should make use of different teaching techniques and activities that promote and encourage learners' active engagement in building vocabulary (Takac, 2009). Therefore, if students are motivated to expand their own *mental lexicon*, vocabulary acquisition will be perceived as a natural process rather than a tiring activity. Through speaking tasks, students feel the need to remember and to use the learned vocabulary in real communication.

Bearing in mind the inevitable link between vocabulary acquisition and the use of oral production activities, the following question arises: How does students' performance on vocabulary written quizzes change after practicing the target vocabulary in oral production activities in a group of third graders from a private elementary school?

Methodology

Research Design

To carry out this study, we chose a mixed method approach because we considered that it was very appropriate for our purposes. Mixing methods allowed us to collect and analyze both qualitative and quantitative data, something that

gave us the opportunity to approach the inquiry from different perspectives. Also, as Sandelowsky (as cited in Dörnyei, 2011) has explained, using a mixed methodology is useful to triangulate the data obtained which, in turn, would give more validity to our results.

Participants

For this research project, we employed a convenience sampling for pragmatic reasons: the sample was a group of students in one of the researchers' place of work, and whose characteristics fit the purpose of the study. The students participating in this research project were 26 third graders, aged from eight to nine, Spanish speakers learning English as a second language. Their level of English is basic. Before the investigation began, we asked the principal of the school for her consent. The principal gave us permission to conduct the study in the institution and provided us with the necessary information. All of the participants had parental consent and participated voluntarily in the study. The participants have three lessons of spelling classes a week from a total of 20 forty-minute lessons of other subjects in English which include spelling, reading, writing, conversation, grammar, social studies, and science.

Initially, we agreed on the fact that the two researchers would carry out the activities together. However, when the teacher of the group told the students that the other investigator was going to be present, and the participants became overtly excited, we decided that only the teacher of the group was going to be in charge of implementing the speaking activities. We did so to minimize the *Hawthorne Effect* which, according to Mellow *et al.* (as cited in Dörnyei, 2011), is one of the most serious threats to validity. This effect takes place when participants behave differently because they know that they are being part of a study. We suspected that having an outsider in the classroom could make the students change their behavior, so we did not want to risk the validity of the study.

From the 29 students in the group, two were not taken into account in this study because of incomplete data, and another was excluded on the basis of absenteeism.

Setting

The setting of the present study is a third-grade spelling class from a private elementary school in an urban area in Costa Rica. The main objective of this course is to help students use new vocabulary correctly in writing. During this class, a list of 15 new words is presented every two weeks. The words are first introduced with a warm-up activity that generally includes games such as *hangman* and *spelling bee* that are always guided by the teacher with little or no interaction among the students. Then, each student receives a handout with the words and pictures to illustrate their meanings. With this handout, they practice pronunciation by repeating the words and meaning by writing sentences. In addition, the students use a reading practice book and extra written exercises to review the words before each biweekly spelling quiz.

Procedure

At the outset of the study, one of the researchers interviewed the English teacher of the group of participants who was also the other researcher involved in the investigation project. The objective of the interview was to gather first-hand data on the group of participants, teaching techniques used in class to practice vocabulary, pacing of the spelling lessons, and information related to the course design. This information helped the investigator who did not know the group of students not only to familiarize with the characteristics of the participants but also to identify possible problems in the way vocabulary was being taught that could be affecting the students' performance.

One week before the new list of words was presented to the participants, we asked them to complete a questionnaire. The purpose of this questionnaire was to collect information on the types of activities that these students regularly do in class in order to learn new vocabulary items and the students' perceptions toward the subject as well. The questionnaire also aimed at finding out what techniques the participants used at home to study before a quiz. The data gathered with this questionnaire were compared to the data we collected from a questionnaire for the participants' parents and whose only purpose was to corroborate the information the students provided. The questionnaire for the parents was sent home during the same week the participants filled in their questionnaires and collected some days later. Both questionnaires were written in Spanish which is the participants' and their parents' native language. It was done this way because the students' level of English is basic and we wanted to make sure that not only instructions but also questions were clear enough to avoid misunderstandings. In the case of the parents, we did not know how many of them understood English.

After the students and their parents completed the two questionnaires, the participants engaged in specially-designed oral production activities in which they could practice the new vocabulary items in a more dynamic way. These tasks were devised by the researchers for the students to practice both spelling and meaning. All the participants in the study took part in all of the oral activities during the four days in which the list of words was practiced.

During this period, there was a change in the way the new vocabulary words were practiced because the students used a variety of games that they had not used before. The execution of the oral activities was held during four sessions of 40 minutes each. In the first session, the students were introduced to the list of words in the usual way by having warm-up activities and by practicing pronunciation and sentence production with a handout as it had always been done. However, the activities to practice the words were different because students not only had to complete the exercises from the practice book or any other written material required in the lesson plan, but also engaged in pair work oral activities. In the first session of the treatment, the participants worked with a game called *Hangman* in which they had to guess the words their classmates had. Each student had a handout with boxes and spaces to fill in with the letters the

other participant said. If the letter was not contained in the word, a portion of the hangman was added. At the end, the student who guessed more words won.

In the second session, the list of words was reviewed using some flashcards that contained the target items. Those flashcards were posted on the board and were used by the students to repeat the words and provide sentences with them. Then, they completed an information gap *crossword puzzle* in pairs in which the participants had to find the missing words in each of the handouts they had. Each student was in charge of giving the partner the number and clue to guess the corresponding word. In addition, if the students could not guess the word, they could ask for more information. Finally, the students had to corroborate that both guessed the words correctly by showing the handouts to each other.

During the third session, the students played *spelling bee* to review the list of words as a group and repeated the words by using the flashcards from the last class. Regarding the oral activity, they played a *memory game* in pairs in which they had to take turns flipping pairs of cards over to match words and their corresponding picture. In case the students made a match, they were required to use the word in a sentence. The student with the most matches and correct sentences was the winner.

In the last session before the quiz, the students reviewed the material they had in their notebooks including the list of words, written exercises, and the handouts with the previous oral activities. Once they were ready, the students were divided into groups of four to play a *board game*. The players took turns throwing the die and moving around the board which had squares with instructions they had to follow. For instance, the students had to spell words from the list, associate definitions and words, identify pictures, and create sentences. In other words, this activity was planned to have the students review all the topics practiced in the three previous oral activities.

It is important to point out that the teacher made sure that the participants worked with different partners in each of the activities. Furthermore, in order to help students communicate better, a list of useful phrases was given before each game was played.

After implementing the oral production vocabulary activities, a written quiz was administered. The purpose of this written test was to measure the participants' vocabulary acquisition. This evaluation is mandatory, and it is part of the course curriculum. The results from this post-test were compared to the results obtained from similar tests administered prior to the implementation of the oral production activities.

Because the use of oral production activities in class to practice new vocabulary words was the main issue in this study, the students were asked to complete a second questionnaire after the implementation period ended. This questionnaire sought to find out if there was a change in the students' perceptions of spelling and their opinions about the speaking tasks. The questionnaire also aimed at detecting if the participants studied the list of words for the quiz differently. This information was relevant because a change in the way the participants studied at home or an increase in time devoted to studying could affect

the results. This second questionnaire was also written in Spanish for the same reason we did it in the first questionnaire.

Instruments

Five instruments were used in order to collect the required data:

Three questionnaires

(a) First questionnaire for the participants: It consisted of six multiple choice questions and two open-ended questions. Its purpose was to know what kinds of strategies students used to study new vocabulary in class and at home, and the students' perceptions of spelling as a subject. It also aimed at finding out the reason why they use certain studying techniques.

(b) Second questionnaire for the participants: It consisted of five close-ended questions mixed with open-ended ones. The open-ended questions allowed the participants to expand on the option they selected in the multiple choice questions. The purpose of this second questionnaire was to know if there was any change in the techniques students used to study the new vocabulary before the post-test was administered and the participants' opinions about the oral activities implemented.

(c) Questionnaire for the participants' parents: It consisted of three close-ended questions mixed with open-ended questions. The open-ended questions were meant for parents to explain the choices they made. The purpose of this questionnaire was to corroborate the information given by the students. To be able to compare the participants' answers and their parents' answers during the results and discussion phase, we numbered the students' questionnaires and their parents' questionnaires. This let us corroborate answers without threatening the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants.

It is important to mention that the two questionnaires for the participants were piloted with a student from a different class of a similar age. The questionnaire for the participants' parents was also piloted with one of the parents of the student who helped us pilot the questionnaire for the students.

Semi-structured interview

The interview was conducted using an interview guide that consisted of 15 open-ended questions. The questions aimed at finding out information about the kind of activities used in class in order to teach new vocabulary, the type of quizzes administered, and the students' performance. The researcher in charge of carrying out the interview took notes on the answers provided by the teacher-investigator. The answers were also recorded with the purpose of listening to them again if necessary.

Written post-test

This quiz consisted of two parts: dictation and production. In the first part, the teacher dictated seven words from the spelling list. In the second part, the students had to write a meaningful and grammatically correct sentence. Punctuation and capitalization rules were also taken into account. This evaluation was not designed by us because, in the institution where the present study took place, there is a teacher in charge of preparing the exams for this subject. With the results we obtained from this test, we expected to determine if the new oral activities implemented in the classroom were successful in enhancing vocabulary acquisition in this group or not.

It is important to point out that both anonymity and confidentiality were assured in all cases by not asking the participants to provide their names on the questionnaires. Parents and the principal of the school were guaranteed confidentiality through the letters of consent that they agreed to sign.

Results

Interview with the Teacher

The interview data were used to obtain first-hand information about what happens in a typical spelling session in the participants' group. From the interview, it was easy to see that most of the tasks usually implemented in class to practice the new vocabulary items do not promote oral exchange among students and hardly ever between a student and the teacher. The class is carried out this way because of school policies and time constraints. The students use a book that has to be completed; otherwise, parents complain that the materials have not been used. As a result, the institution requires its teachers to plan written activities where the book and the notebook are used as much as possible. The teacher says that she would like to have more time to implement other types of activities that promote more student participation and interaction, but she feels that if she does so, there is not going to be enough time to finish the lesson plan. She mentions that she does not have any freedom to change evaluation dates or to extend the periods assigned to study a certain topic. Therefore, she has to plan her lessons taking into account all the factors previously explained.

Once in a while, the teacher tries to change the activities and carry out games that promote some kind of oral exchange, but the available time allows only very teacher-centered tasks such as *spelling bees* and *guessing games*. According to the teacher, the manner in which the spelling class is conducted makes the students perceive the subject as a fairly difficult one since they are asked to learn the spelling and meanings of words, but the method in which it is done is not appealing. The teacher believes that a change in the way the vocabulary items are practiced is possible in order to allow more student-student interaction. Possible variations would include cutting down the amount

of written practice in class, giving emphasis to oral production, and assigning written work as homework. In her opinion, written work will not be so indispensable if students are acquiring the target items orally. All this information given by the teacher led to an analysis that helped us devise different activities that, in our opinion, could improve the students' performance in the written quizzes.

Questionnaire N° 1 for the Participants

As it was mentioned above, after the interview was carried out, the group of participants completed a questionnaire. The data obtained were used to know more about the students' perceptions towards spelling. The answers that the students gave in terms of what kind of activities are the most frequently used in class to practice new vocabulary and the frequency in which they take place in class coincides with what the teacher had said about the same topic. For instance, the students mention *filling in the blanks* exercises and *repetition of words* as the most common classroom activities. In second place, they mention *dictations*, *letter soups*, and *choral repetition* of words. The least common tasks performed in class are *singing songs* and *guessing games*. It is important to point out that neither of these activities is meant to be done in pairs or groups; therefore, there is little oral student-student interaction.

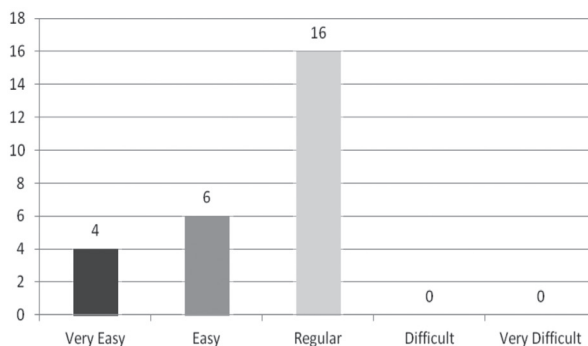
The participants and the teacher also agree on the frequency in which the previously mentioned activities are carried out in class: 88% of the students affirm practicing the new vocabulary items two or more times a week. Only three out of 26 students mention practicing the target words only once a week.

Regarding the techniques the participants use at home to study before a quiz, 21 out of 26 students report using memorization and writing the words as the most commonly used methods. Eighteen students state that they write sentences with the target items and take dictations. A few of them resort to techniques such as drawing, repetition, using file cards with words and pictures, or doing at home the fill-in-the-blanks exercises they solved in class. Eight students out of 26 always study with somebody because they feel they need help, and 14 of them sometimes study with someone and some other times study alone. The reasons why they do not always study with somebody else range from having parents who are too busy to help them to the difficulty of the words to be evaluated. Only six of the participants study by themselves, and they assert they do so because the subject is easy. One student from this group of participants reports that he never studies for quizzes.

The answers to the question that inquires about the participants' opinions about the level of difficulty of spelling are displayed in Figure 1.

When asked to state their perceptions towards the subject, those who think spelling is a *very easy* or *easy* subject claim that the words are not difficult at all, that the words are sufficiently practiced in class, or that they already knew the words. The ones who hold spelling as a *regular* subject in terms of its difficulty

Figure 1
Students' perceptions towards spelling



$n=26$

believe that the words are sometimes easy and sometimes hard to learn; others say that they do not study enough, or that words are not practiced sufficiently in class due to lack of time. A few students mention that they do not understand instructions to activities because the teacher explains everything in English.

Questionnaire for the Participants' Parents

The questionnaire for the participants' parents yielded data useful to corroborate the answers given by the students in the questionnaire they completed. As an example, parents confirm that their children study without any help because spelling is not a difficult subject, because they already know the vocabulary, or because they are very independent. The ones who say that their children always study with help (either with parental help or with a tutor) claim that these students need to study with someone because they suffer from attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), because spelling is very difficult, or because they are not ready to start studying by themselves yet. Some other parents assert that their children study sometimes with help and sometimes without any help at all. The reasons for doing so are varied: some parents want their children to become increasingly independent, some parents are too busy and cannot help their children all the time, and some parents help them depending on the difficulty of the words.

Regarding the techniques the participants use to study before a quiz, most of the parents agree almost flawlessly with their children on the activities performed being dictations, memorization of target vocabulary, and writing words several times the most frequently used methods. The least frequent activities are drawing and doing the practices completed in class again. The only discrepancy between the participants and their parents concerning the most resorted techniques to study before a quiz is the option of writing sentences with the words because only eight parents mention that their children do this activity while 18 participants claim to do it.

Post-test

As explained earlier, a post-test was administered after two weeks of implementing the oral activities specially designed to practice the target vocabulary. The descriptive numbers of three pre-tests scores and the post-test scores are reported in Table 1.

Table 1
Comparison of the scores

Participants	Quiz # 1	Quiz # 2	Quiz # 3	Quiz # 4
1	70	60	70	100
2	90	70	80	100
3	30	60	70	70
4	40	40	60	70
5	20	60	60	80
6	70	90	100	100
7	60	70	90	90
8	20	60	20	90
9	70	80	70	100
10	50	20	60	90
11	70	60	60	80
12	80	50	70	60
13	50	60	90	80
14	80	60	80	100
15	70	60	80	100
16	50	60	80	90
17	100	100	100	100
18	90	80	70	100
19	0	30	10	30
20	30	60	60	80
21	100	100	100	100
22	100	100	100	100
23	60	100	70	100
24	0	30	60	60
25	80	70	100	100
26	90	80	80	100

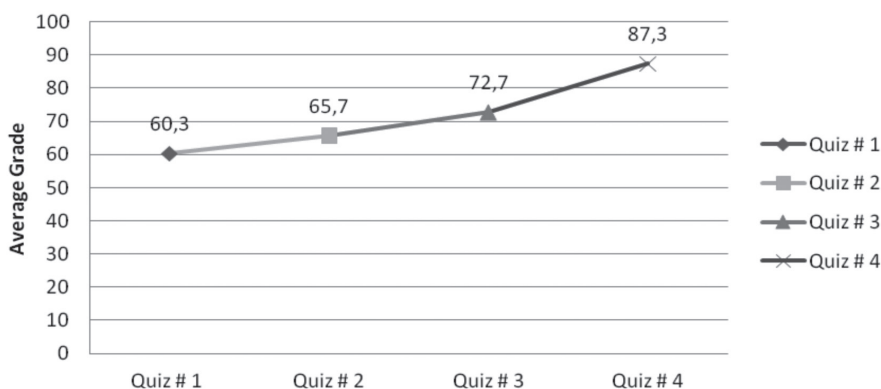
Note. n = 26; Quiz # 1, Quiz # 2, Quiz # 3 = quizzes administered before the implementation of the oral activities; Quiz # 4 = post-test administered after the implementation of the oral activities

The scores of the three quizzes administered before the implementation of the oral activities devised by the researchers, were compared to the scores that the participants obtained in the post-test. It is worth mentioning that each list of words is presented and practiced during exactly the same period of time (two weeks), and that the four grades correspond to the four quizzes they had already taken.

This table indicates that 16 out of 26 students improved their grades. From these 16 students, 14 obtained the highest grade during the present school year: the post-test grade was higher than any of the three scores they obtained in each of the three previous quizzes. From these 14 students, five went from not getting a single passing grade during the present school year to obtaining grades that range from 70 to 90. The table also shows that the number of students who scored 100 increased in the post-test: (a) three students in the first quiz, (b) four students in the second quiz, (c) five students in the third quiz, and (d) 13 students in the post-test. From the 26 participants, five obtained the same grade they obtained in quiz # 3, and three of them have been getting 100's in all the spelling quizzes administered so far.

Additionally, there was an increase in the number of students who passed each test. As can be seen in Table 1, 13 participants passed the first quiz while in the second only 10 of them did. In the third quiz, 18 students obtained a passing grade, and in the post-test, a total of 23 students passed. While the number of students who passed the post-test is not significant compared to the ones who passed the third quiz (the difference is five students), the grades they obtained did improve considerably. The overall improvement of the group is displayed in Figure 2.

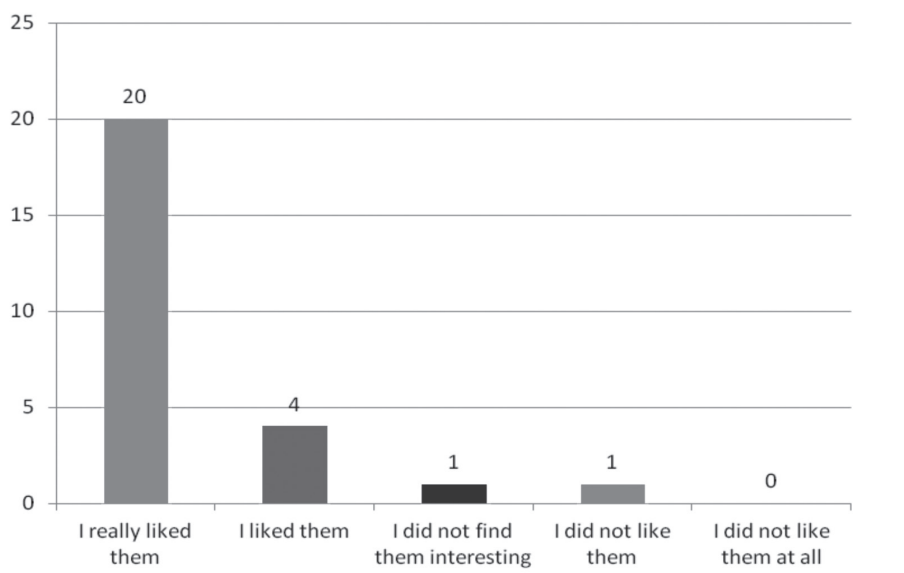
Figure 2
Comparison of the average grades



Questionnaire N°2 for the Participants

After carrying out the oral activities and administering the post-test, the students completed a second questionnaire with the purpose of knowing more about their perceptions toward spelling. The students were also asked to express their opinions about the games that were used for the last two weeks to practice the vocabulary words. Their opinions are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3
Students' opinions about the oral activities used to practice vocabulary

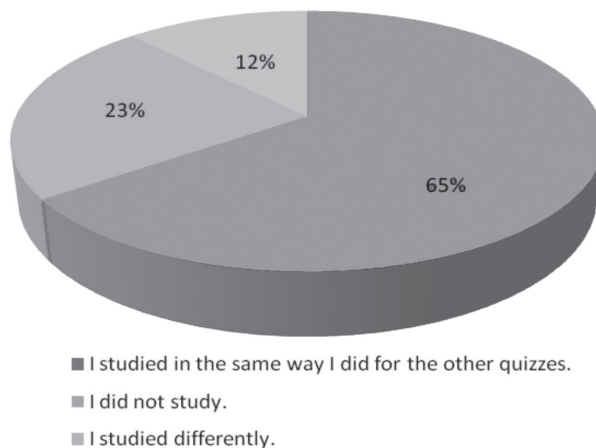


$n=26$

When asked about the reasons why they *liked* or *really liked* the activities, the students indicate that the games allowed them to work in groups, do something different in class, and learn new words in a funny way. The two students who *did not find the games interesting* and *did not like them* allege that they do not like English in general, so every activity that is carried out in class is the same for them. When asked which of the four activities helped them the most to learn new words in English, 11 participants wrote *Hangman*, seven mentioned *Board Game*, three chose *Memory Game*, two said *Crossword*, and three answered that all of them.

The results about how the participants studied for the last spelling quiz (named as the post-test in the present study) are presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4
How participants studied for the last spelling quiz



As can be seen in Figure 4, 65% of the students did not make any change in the way they studied for the post-test. The ones who studied differently explained that they printed some games to play with, photocopied the list of words and their pictures to play memory game, and wrote the words more times than they usually do. From a total of 26 participants, 25 say that it is easier for them to learn spelling by using games and would like the teacher to use them in future spelling classes. The reasons why they think so are varied: (a) they have fun with the games, (b) they have the possibility to work with other classmates, and (c) they learn the words easier. The only participant that did not like the idea of using games in spelling mentioned that it is better to practice the list with written exercises.

Discussion

As it was mentioned in the Literature Review, learners' active participation in building their own vocabulary is crucial, and including oral activities to teach vocabulary allows teachers to implement a wide variety of activities that promote cooperation among peers (Takac, 2009). However, the first findings of the present research study show that the teacher of the group of participants hardly ever uses this type of activities in her spelling classroom, and that fact might have led the students to perform poorly in the written quizzes. With only a few exceptions, scores obtained in three previous quizzes before the implementation of the oral activities demonstrate that spelling is a subject in which these students do not get very high grades (see Table 1).

The interview with the teacher revealed that the techniques she uses to teach spelling are limited by certain external factors that mostly deal with time and institutional policies. These factors affect the manner in which a regular spelling class is carried out. For instance, the most common learning activities

implemented in this class were tasks in which the teacher had a leading role. *Spelling bees* and *guessing games* were all directed by the teacher, and other tasks such as *letter soups* or *crossword puzzles* done by the students were exercises that they had to solve individually. The rest of the activities consisted of word repetition and written assignments in which the participants had to use the target vocabulary items to complete fill-in-the-blanks exercises either in the book or in handouts provided by the teacher. Reasons for this trend lie in the fact that the teacher wanted to have control over the class so as not to lose time and be able to cover the lesson plan and the contents required by the administration. As a consequence, peer interaction does not often take place during the lessons, allowing little opportunity for students to take an active role in their language acquisition process.

The relationship between the types of activities done in class and the low grades obtained by the students are in line with what some researchers have found about the topic. Takac (2009) asserts that consolidation of lexical items is achieved not only through mechanical repetition or copying of words but also through productive practice of target items that might include using them in conversations, stories, and games. Troute claims that “students cannot develop oral language and vocabulary proficiency in a quiet classroom” (para. 12, n.d.). According to her, if students are to master the new vocabulary items, they need to use them. Therefore, when the goal is acquiring vocabulary, one cannot expect students to do it by only working individually on tasks that do not require production from them. Furthermore, Thornbury (as cited in Takac, 2009) recommends several encounters with word items. For him, the transfer of vocabulary to the long-term memory is achieved through multiple encounters at spaced intervals, retrieval, and use.

When analyzing how these students deal with the target vocabulary both at school and at home, it is easy to speculate why an important percentage of them are not mastering the words they are supposed to learn. At school, the participants are being taught vocabulary explicitly when the word meaning is explained, its pronunciation is modeled, and a mental image is created by associating images. Then, they also have opportunities to learn the target words incidentally when they encounter the items in texts during the reading class. Nevertheless, these students are not being given the opportunities to practice that vocabulary in meaningful ways. As a consequence, when they study at home, they simply repeat what they did in class as it was reported in the first questionnaire for the participants and the questionnaire for the participants’ parents. Some might argue that the target words have been retrieved several times in class by means of exercises such as *fill in the blanks*, *letter soups*, and *crossword puzzles*, so the vocabulary items should, in theory, have been acquired after the written tasks. However, the students lack the meaningful practice necessary to make associations that allow the target vocabulary to be stored in the long-term memory.

The results of the first questionnaire for the students indicate that 61% of the participants find this subject fairly difficult, and the reasons they give

suggest that, by the time they study, the words have not been acquired yet (see Figure 1). It is interesting that, in spite of the low grades some participants obtain, none of them identified spelling as a *difficult* or *very difficult* subject. We presume that this perception might be due to the fact that, honestly, none of the students thinks that spelling entails a high level of difficulty, but the lack of the necessary connections between the words and their meanings makes them perceive the subject as uninteresting and boring rather than plain difficult. Bearing this in mind, and because the current study looks at the effectiveness of oral production activities as a means to facilitate vocabulary acquisition, we decided that the activities that we devised had to allow students to practice the target vocabulary orally through meaningful tasks permitting, at the same time, that the participants do it in several different ways with distinct purposes and in an entertaining manner.

The findings obtained after implementing the oral activities show that students gained in the lexical knowledge of the target words. It is possible to infer this by looking at Table 1. As can be seen, 62% of the participants improved their grades in the post-test, and only 8% of them obtained lower grades than the ones they had been obtaining. It is also worth mentioning that the number of students who obtained non-passing grades decreased significantly: (a) 13 in the first quiz, (b) 16 in the second quiz, (c) 8 in the third quiz, and (d) 3 in the post-test. There might be different reasons for these results. First, there was a change in the way the vocabulary items were practiced. The innovation in the activities allowed breaking the classroom routines which might have made the students become interested in a subject where they always did the same. Second, the new activities may have accounted for different learning styles which had not been taken into account before and that are crucial to maximize learning efficiency. Finally, and most importantly, the participants became actively involved in their own learning and cooperated with other peers.

The reasons previously discussed appeared to have contributed to increase motivation which in turn helped the students' significantly better their performance as it is shown in Figure 2 where the total average of the scores is displayed. This fact lends support to Llach and Gomez's claim that motivation, described as the emotional disposition that works like an affective filter in any kind of learning process, leads to more gains in vocabulary acquisition (para. 9, 2007). This claim was evident not only in the considerable improvement in the participants' grades but also in their class performance. Twenty-five of the participants seemed highly motivated because they had total disposition to participate in the activities that were specially prepared for them. Indeed, they excitedly waited for each spelling lesson to see which game they were going to play. Only one of the students expressed that he did not like the activities, but he normally dislikes every activity that is carried out during the English lessons. He states that he does not like English, and it seems that the speaking tasks devised by us did not make him change his mind.

The evidence that demonstrates that students' interest on the speaking tasks appeared to have contributed to the group's significant improvement is that

the average grade of the quiz administered after the implementation of the oral activities increased almost 15 points above the highest average grade obtained in any of the other three quizzes administered before speaking tasks (see Figure 2). This improvement is really significant if we take into account that in the post-test many more students than usual obtained perfect grades. It might be argued that the implementation of the oral activities could have only affected the grades. Nevertheless, there is testimony that some of the students also made changes in the way of studying spelling before the post-test (see Figure 4). For instance, when they were asked about how they studied for the last spelling quiz (which corresponds to the post-test after the implementation of the oral activities), some of participants explained that they recreated certain activities practiced in class; for example, they photocopied their spelling lists and cut out the words and pictures to create memory games. They also reported having used the Internet to find games similar to the ones practiced in class. In other words, the oral activities had a positive effect on what students do not only in class but also at home.

Despite the fact that the games were implemented for only two weeks, it seems that they had a great impact on the students' attitudes towards spelling as well. The participants went from labeling it as a *boring and monotonous* subject to an *interesting and appealing* class. Most of the times, students perceive spelling as a memory subject due to the traditional way in which it is taught, that is, by means of lists of words that have to be repeated endlessly and learned by heart. This perception is not far from reality because, as Takac states, "the role of memory is crucial in any kind of learning and vocabulary acquisition is not the exception" (p. 10, 2009). However, the key point in a spelling class is to know how to address the *memory factor* in a way that makes students practice the words while they store them in the long-term memory in an unconscious process that does not seem so demanding but more as a game to them. Troute asserts that "the more often authentic associations are made with the word, the better it will be remembered and used" (para. 3, n.d.). In her opinion, trying to acquire vocabulary through the memorization of word lists is ineffective.

The findings in our study show that the modification in the way the target words were practiced might have led to a change in the perception of the subject which, in turn, may have allowed students to enrich their lexical knowledge. Students' opinions, as shown in Figure 3, appear to lend support to our claim that student motivation and involvement is a cause for improvement and better performance. Twenty-four students out of 26 affirmed that they liked the oral activities used to practice vocabulary. Only two students had a negative impression of the activities: one did not find them interesting and the other—mentioned above—disliked them.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study sought to determine if the performance on vocabulary written quizzes of a group of third graders from a private elementary school could change after practicing the target vocabulary in oral production activities. Following the

collection of the necessary data and the analysis of the results provided by the different instruments we used, it is appropriate to assure that our question was positively answered. We can affirm this based on the considerable improvement that the participants showed on their written spelling quizzes.

This success may be attributed to two factors. First, during the two-week treatment period, the students were constantly exposed to the lexical items and practiced them in a meaningful way through oral activities. The multiple encounters with the vocabulary words and their use might have helped students internalized the target items without having to resort to memorization only. Second, the oral activities used in class might have led the students to change their opinions towards spelling because the methods implemented were innovative in relation to the ones normally used to practice new words. Even though it is known that memory is crucial in vocabulary acquisition, the participants were able to learn through exercises in which memory takes a second role and oral language takes the leading one; hence, the students were learning and memorizing without even noticing it, something that the students seem to prefer. The students' interest and motivation towards the activities appear to have a positive effect on the students' performance.

The significance of this study lies in the fact that it was able to show that promoting the use of target vocabulary in meaningful oral activities leads to improved grades in the written evaluations, something that might signify enhanced vocabulary acquisition. The present investigation is also significant for its theoretical and practical implications. First, when we were searching for the theoretical background that supported our study, most of the research dealt with L2 vocabulary acquisition and its relationship to reading. Very few studies have explored the relation between L2 vocabulary acquisition and oral production, and there were even fewer studies on the effectiveness of teaching vocabulary to young learners through speaking tasks. Given this fact, we believe that our study can be useful to corroborate and give support to the existing investigation in this specific field. The results we obtained can also be of interest to those who are in search of more successful strategies to approach the teaching of L2 vocabulary in groups of young learners.

We also consider that this study has practical implications for instructors. To begin with, due to the young age of our participants, a spelling lesson should be designed in a way that written exercises do not dominate the class, and teachers should allow more room to communication and oral production. Moreover, teachers need to be constantly changing class dynamics because the activities that are carried out with the students create higher expectations and motivate them to go to class and learn new vocabulary in a more appealing way.

Despite the positive results yielded by the implementation of the oral activities, it cannot be ignored that putting this type of tasks into practice will require more time from instructors because they will have to create or adapt the necessary materials that best suit each specific need. Additionally, teachers will also have to find out ways in which students can complete the required written practice without overloading them with lots of homework. A change in the focus

on how a spelling lesson is taught is possible by making modification in the programs, so the emphasis is not only given to the written component. Therefore, the administrators of educational institutions should also be involved in this new approach to teaching vocabulary.

Notwithstanding, we recommend that instructors of young learners try to implement more oral activities in their spelling lessons, so they gain experience and teach the students how to behave and react towards this new method. In addition, we do believe that if we can give testimony of the benefits that introducing more speaking tasks has on the accomplishment of the objectives, we can have the necessary support from the administration in order to make the required changes in the programs and lesson plans.

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APPENDIX

Questionario 1 para estudiantes

El presente cuestionario es parte de un proyecto de investigación de dos estudiantes de Maestría en la Enseñanza del Inglés de la Universidad de Costa Rica. De antemano le agradecemos por su tiempo y por la ayuda que nos brinda al completarlo.

Instrucciones: Por favor, escuche y lea atentamente cada pregunta y marque con una X la(s) respuesta(s) más apropiada(s) para su caso. Si no entiende alguna pregunta, levante la mano para pedir ayuda. No hay respuestas correctas ni incorrectas. La maestra no necesita saber quién contestó cada cuestionario, por lo tanto, no debe escribir su nombre. Por favor, ponga mucha atención y manténgase en silencio durante la aplicación del cuestionario.

1. Durante la clase de “spelling”, ¿cuáles actividades utiliza la maestra para enseñar las palabras de la lista? Puede marcar más de una opción.

- Dictados
- Repetición de palabras
- Canciones
- Ejercicios de completar
- Adivinanzas
- Sopa de letras
- Crucigramas
- Juegos

2. ¿Cuántas veces a la semana se repasa en clase la lista de “spelling”?

Marque sólo una opción.

- 1 vez por semana
 2 veces por semana
 Casi todos los días
 Nunca

3. En clase, ¿con qué frecuencia la maestra usa juegos para que usted practique las palabras de la lista en forma oral? Marque sólo una opción.

- Siempre
 Casi siempre
 A veces
 Casi nunca
 Nunca

4. ¿Cómo le parece la materia de “spelling”? Marque sólo una opción.

- Muy fácil
 Fácil
 Regular
 Difícil
 Muy difícil

¿Por qué le parece así? Explique. _____

5. Cuando tiene quiz de “spelling”, ¿cómo estudia en su casa? Puede marcar más de una opción.

- Me hacen dictados
 Escribo oraciones con las palabras
 Hago dibujos
 Memorizo las palabras
 Escribo varias veces las palabras
 Hago ejercicios de completar
 Vuelvo a hacer la práctica(s) que hice en clase
 Otro. / Especifique: _____

6. Cuando tiene quiz de “spelling”, ¿cómo estudia?

- Solo(a)
 Con ayuda de otra persona
 A veces solo(a) y a veces con ayuda

¿Por qué estudia así? Explique. _____

Cuestionario 2 para estudiantes

El presente cuestionario es parte de un proyecto de investigación de dos estudiantes de Maestría en la Enseñanza del Inglés de la Universidad de Costa Rica. De antemano le agradecemos por su tiempo y por la ayuda que nos brinda llenándolo.

Instrucciones: Por favor, escuche y lea atentamente cada pregunta y marque con una X la(s) respuesta(s) más apropiada(s) para su caso. Si no entiende alguna pregunta, levante la mano para pedir ayuda. No hay respuestas correctas ni incorrectas. La maestra no necesita saber quién contestó cada cuestionario, por lo tanto, no debe escribir su nombre. Por favor, ponga mucha atención y manténgase en silencio durante la aplicación del cuestionario.

1. ¿Cuál es su opinión sobre los juegos que se realizaron en clase en estas dos últimas semanas? Marque sólo una opción.

Me gustaron mucho

Me gustaron

Me fueron indiferentes

No me gustaron

No me gustaron para nada

¿Por qué piensa así? Explique. _____

2. ¿Cuál fue el juego o actividad que más le ayudó a aprender palabras nuevas en inglés? Si no recuerda el nombre, describa la actividad.

3. ¿Cómo se preparó para el último quiz de “spelling”? Marque sólo una opción.

Estudié igual que para los otros quices.

No estudié.

Estudié en forma diferente.

Diga que hizo diferente: _____

4. ¿Cómo le es más fácil aprender las palabras de la lista de “spelling”? Marque sólo una opción.

Como lo hemos hecho en clase durante este año.

Con las actividades nuevas utilizadas en las dos semanas anteriores.

5. ¿Le gustaría que su maestra siguiera usando estas actividades para enseñar las palabras de la lista de “spelling”? Marque sólo una opción.

Sí No

¿Por qué? Explique. _____

Cuestionario para padres de familia

El presente cuestionario es parte de un proyecto de investigación de dos estudiantes de Maestría en la Enseñanza del Inglés de la Universidad de Costa Rica. Le recordamos que sus respuestas no afectarán de ninguna manera a su hijo(a), pues la información que nos brinde es totalmente anónima y confidencial. Por lo tanto, no debe proporcionar ni su nombre ni el de su hijo(a). De antemano le agradecemos su tiempo y la ayuda que nos presta contestando estas preguntas.

Instrucciones: Lea atentamente cada pregunta y marque con una X la opción (u opciones) que más se ajuste(n) a su situación.

1. ¿Cuántas veces a la semana su hijo(a) estudia o repasa la lista de “spelling”?
Marque sólo una respuesta.

- Todos los días
 - Sólo los días que recibe lecciones de “spelling”
 - Un día a la semana
 - Sólo el día antes del quiz de “spelling”
 - Nunca
 - Otro / Especifique: _____
-

2. ¿Cómo estudia su hijo(a)?

- Solo(a)
 - Con ayuda de otra persona
 - A veces solo y a veces con ayuda
 - ¿Por qué? _____
-

3. Cuando su hijo(a) tiene quiz de “spelling”, ¿cómo estudia en casa?
Puede marcar más de una opción.

- Hace dictados
 - Escribe oraciones con las palabras
 - Dibuja
 - Memoriza las palabras
 - Escribe las palabras varias veces
 - Hace ejercicios de completar
 - Vuelve a hacer las prácticas que hizo en la escuela
 - Nunca estudia
 - Otro / Especifique: _____
-

Spelling Quiz

I Part. Dictation. Listen to the teacher and write the words in the line. 7 pts

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

II Part. Production. Write a sentence with the word: gentle. (Remember: capital letter, period, and congruence) 3 pts

Interview Guide

For the Head Teacher of the Group of Participants

- How long have you taught English?
- How long have you worked in the institution where you are currently working?
- Tell me about the spelling lessons. What is a normal spelling lesson like? What procedures do you follow to present the new words?
- What activities do you implement in class to help your students acquire new vocabulary?
- What are the criteria used to decide on the words to be taught?
- Are these words used or practiced in another subject?
- Does the administration instruct teachers on what activities should be used to teach in each subject?
- Have you ever used oral production activities to teach students new vocabulary words? What kind of activities?
- How is spelling evaluated?
- What do spelling quizzes measure?
- How many quizzes have you applied so far?
- What is the average grade in this subject?
- In your opinion, how do your students perceive this subject in terms of its difficulty?
- Do you think spelling is a difficult subject? Why?
- Is there something else you would like to add to this interview?

