

## The role of the active learning approach in teaching English as a foreign language

*O papel da abordagem da aprendizagem ativa no ensino de inglês como uma língua estrangeira*

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed at elucidating what the Active Learning Approach (AL) is and determining its role in the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language, proposing, therefore, some activities that follow this perspective of knowledge construction. In order to reach the proposed objective, an extensive review of the literature was conducted. Overall, the proposed activities following AL have the potential to regain students' interest in learning, because it is a student-centered approach and its main objective is to promote autonomy and engagement in the learning process. Moreover, the AL Approach has proved to be a powerful tool when teaching and learning English as a foreign language. This is due to its capability of promoting a more independent learning, and consequently, helping the student to develop more efficiently the abilities needed to communicate in a new language. Having that in mind, we proposed seven activities, using active learning techniques, such as portfolios, discussion in class, projects, visual-based instruction, flipping the lesson, debate as a learning activity, and think-pair-share. Such activities were designed for A2 (basic) and B1 (intermediate) learners according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

**Keywords:** Active Learning, Autonomy, EFL teaching.

### RESUMO

*Este trabalho teve por objetivo esclarecer o que é Abordagem da Aprendizagem Ativa (AA) e seu papel no ensino e aprendizagem do Inglês como língua estrangeira, propondo-se, ao final, algumas atividades nessa perspectiva de construção do conhecimento. Para alcançar o objetivo proposto, uma extensa revisão bibliográfica foi conduzida. No geral, os resultados dessa revisão apontam que a AA tem o potencial de recobrar o interesse dos alunos em aprender, dado que ela é uma abordagem centrada no aprendiz com principal objetivo de promover autonomia e engajamento no processo de aprendizagem. Ademais, a Abordagem da AA tem provado ser uma ferramenta poderosa no âmbito do ensino e aprendizagem de Inglês como língua estrangeira. Isso se deve à sua capacidade de promover uma aprendizagem mais independente e, por consequência, levar o aluno a desenvolver mais eficazmente as habilidades necessárias para a comunicação em uma nova língua. Tendo isso em mente, propomos sete*

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*atividades, utilizando técnicas da metodologia ativa: portfólio, discussões em aula, projetos, instrução com base visual, aula invertida, debate como atividade de aprendizagem, e think-pair-share (pense-agrupe-compartilhe). Tais atividades foram pensadas para grupos de aprendizes dos níveis A2 (básico) e B1 (intermediário) conforme o Quadro Comum Europeu de Referência para Línguas.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Aprendizagem Ativa. Autonomia. Ensino de Inglês como língua estrangeira.*

## 1. Introduction

In developed countries, the generation of people's cognitive and social competences has become a priority in terms of investment. Accordingly, it helps education to achieve a central place in the governmental agenda. Thus, different countries, according to their historical characteristics, tend to promote some reforms in their educational systems so they can be able to face the new political, social, and ethical context. (MELLO, 1991) Therefore, there has been an increasing demand for more effective ways of classroom management, making it extremely important for faculty members to rethink teaching practices. As theories of how people learn have been developed (e.g., in Cognitive Sciences, Neuroscience) the teacher-centered framework started being questioned, opening, therefore, space for Active Learning

Bell and Kahrhoff (2006) state that many educators today agree that students learn more in an active learning environment than they do when participating passively. According to Bransford (1999), the constructivist learning theory emphasizes that individuals learn through building their own knowledge, connecting new ideas and experiences to existing knowledge and experiences to form new or enhanced understandings, and those are the bases for Active Learning. Moreover, one of the goals of active methodologies is to help students to reach their maximum metacognitive potential. However, creating activities with the intention to help students develop their metacognition capacity is not an easy task. In accordance with Feltes (2014), every proposed activity that is focused on the development of metacognition must be well planned as well as sufficiently flexible—and this flexibility can only occur if learners give certain indications. The author also states that the educator must make a major effort in order to realize the indications given by students, so teachers ought to have a sharp sensibility to the different factors that play a role in the learning environment.

This study, by means a literature review based on the most cited authors in this subject matter on theoretical books and research papers, provides an overview of a set of findings resulting from a vast research on the literature about Active Learning. By discussing these findings, we aim at elucidating what active learning is and relating the Active Learning approach with the process of teaching English as a foreign language. Moreover, this study developed a set of activities anchored in the perspectives of Active

Learning for classes of basic (A2) and intermediate (B2) levels for students who study in Language Centers that specialize in teaching English as a foreign language. Consequently, the proposed activities are subject to a future application in classroom with a follow-up experimental study regarding their outcome. Some design adjustments may have to be performed due to some factors such as the complexity of the tasks, the necessary time for the activities to be completed, and different levels of motivation and acceptance from the students.

## 2. Active learning

The Active Learning approach understands that in order to create knowledge, students must be active agents in the process of learning. It is based on the premises of the constructivist theory of learning, which suggests that humans construct knowledge and meaning from their experiences. Hence, any teaching approach that is supported by constructivism will defend that teachers cannot simply transmit knowledge to students, but students need to actively build it in their own minds. This view of learning understands that learners are active agents in the process of knowledge acquisition.

As a matter of briefly contrasting constructivism with other paradigms, Piaget (1973, p. 14) explains:

The third tendency, which is decidedly my own, is of a constructivist nature (attributing the beginnings of language to structures formed by the pre-existing sensory motor intelligence). It recognizes neither external pre formations (empiricism) nor immanent pre formations (innateness), but rather affirms a continuous surpassing of successive stages. This obviously leads to placing all educational stress on the spontaneous aspects of the child's activity.

In agreement with the Piagetian view of how people learn, humans rely on their previous knowledge to accommodate unfamiliar information that later on will have become active learning. Taking into consideration Freire's point of view (1970), the traditional school is not able to provide knowledge because students are not invited to know things but they are invited to memorize the contents narrated by the educator. Whereas, in an Active Learning environment, students do much more than sitting and paying attention to a lecture: in consonance with Bonwell and Eison (1991, p. 5), "they must read, write, discuss, or be engaged in solving problems. Most important, to be actively involved, students must engage in such higher-order thinking tasks as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation." Bell and Kahrhoff (2006, p. 1) state that:

Active Learning is a process wherein students are actively engaged in building understanding of facts, ideas, and skills through the completion of instructor directed tasks and activities. It is any type of activity that gets students involved in the learning process.

Dewey (1924) notes that learning is something that an individual does while studying and that it is an active, personally conducted affair. Furthermore, Lindsay and Knight (2006) emphasize that, in Active Learning, it is part of the teacher's job to encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning and become active learners. In line with Prince (2004), Active Learning is defined as any instructional method that engages students in the learning process, requiring students to do meaningful learning activities and think about what they are doing. Thereby, the core elements of Active Learning are student activity and engagement in the learning process.

Matsushita (2015) reports that, since the first decade of the twenty-first century, Active Learning has been considered the key to transforming university education from teacher-centered to learner-centered.

Since a student-centered approach directs the attention to the learners and to the knowledge that is important to them, it becomes easier to stimulate students. While working collaboratively, students feel less anxious and have a greater amount of support, thus they relax and can function better. In an Active Learning environment, students and teacher are in a constant debate, not only about the content, but also about any other issue that is relevant to the learner. For instance, they talk about how they feel towards the approach that is being used, they share their expectations as well as their frustrations, they negotiate new ways of classroom management, and they have more freedom to experiment autonomous learning. When implementing Active Learning, it is very important to keep an open dialogue with students in the beginning, during and at the end of the term or session.

While some authors consider that active learning can be defined as all kinds of learning beyond the mere one-way transmission of knowledge, Wright (2015) claims that in order to consider an approach as active learning, it must comprise four components that the author describes like this:

First, it involves an interactive, participatory teaching strategy that requires egalitarian relationships and builds upon students' prior knowledge and experiences as a part of the curriculum content. Second, active learning empowers students to analyze information, explain their analyses and create knowledge. Third, it invites students to contextualize their knowledge in light of their analysis of power and geographic, sociocultural, political, economic and historical contexts. Fourth, it supports opportunities for students to engage in collaborative action by applying their analysis to authentic situations and participating in democratic practices aiming to improve their local environments and society at large by making them more equitable and socially just. (WRIGHT, 2015, p. 15)

Above all, active learning grants students the opportunity to exercise their role as social beings. In contrast to passive learning, in this framework, students are in the position of cognizant subjects, therefore, the focus of the class is what the students do and what they become able to do. Consequently, as stated by Saylor and Ganea (2018), as individuals develop their awareness of the process of active learning,

metacognitive judgments about the need for missing information and the variability in potential information sources likely become a guiding force in the learning process, turning therefore, individuals into more autonomous learners.

Bell and Kahrhoff (2006) noted that many disciplines use different terminology to describe essentially the same process. Therefore, it is common to encounter in the literature approaches that are described as the active learning, however under different names, such as student-centered learning, collaborative learning, engaged learning, and problem-based learning. The table below shows the similarities that those lexicons have with active learning.

Table 1 - Active Learning Lexicons

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITY	SIMILARITIES WITH ACTIVE LEARNING
<i>Student Centered Learning</i>	Students are actively engaged in the creation of knowledge. Focused on things that are important to the learners.
<i>Collaborative Learning (Team, Peer, or Group Learning)</i>	Individuals work together to solve a mutual problem. Each student must actively contribute to the group.
<i>Engaged Learning</i>	Getting students actively involved in their own learning and establishing a connection between the learner and the learning object.
<i>Participatory Learning</i>	Often interchangeable with Active Learning but often infers internships or working with communities. It also presupposes specific knowledge that they will share with others in the learning process.

Source: Bell and Kahrhoff (2006, p. 2)

In conclusion, active learning is an approach that enables students to become more responsible for their learning achievements and to feel more empowered as learners and as social individuals.

### 3. Foreign language approaches and methods

Throughout the time, many different approaches came into existence and new methods were designed to teach English as a foreign language. As time passed and society changed, some approaches and methods became inconsistent with the learners' necessities and new ways of teaching language were developed to surpass the old ones.

Yet, before presenting a review of some language approaches and methods, it is important to clarify the meaning of *approach*, *method* and *techniques* because "[...] with this awareness, you will be

able to examine why you do what you do and perhaps choose to think or do things differently.” (LARSEN-FREEMAN, 2000, p. 9). Anthony (1963) gives a very satisfactory explanation of the confusing trio of *approach*, *method*, and *techniques*. According to the author, an *approach* is a set of assumptions dealing with the nature of language, learning and teaching. In other words, it is a set of beliefs regarding to what language is, how people learn and how we should teach. It is the broadest of the three because an *approach* is what is going to guide the method and therefore the techniques.

To illustrate, if a teacher is an enthusiast of the behaviorist theory, he/she will probably believe that people learn by habit formation. In this case, the teacher will approach students as if they were bound to be trained into a desired behavior. Therefore, it is expected that this teacher will be more found of the Audio-Lingual Method, which is made of consistent repetition of the material; small, progressive sequences of tasks; continuous positive reinforcement; and error prevention. For this reason, it is part of a teacher’s job to be aware of the different *approaches* that there are in language teaching.

Now, still in agreement with Anthony (1963), a *method* is an overall plan for systematic presentation of language based upon the selected approach, it is a procedural manner of how we teach something. In other words, a *method* is an umbrella term for the specification and interrelation of theory (that gives rise to an *approach*) and practice, or better yet, it is a link between thoughts and actions. Any method must be derived from an approach. A method consists of two parts: one is *planning* (specification of objectives, syllabuses and textbooks); the other is *task* (techniques, procedures and activities).

Accordingly, a *technique* is the specific activities manifested in the classroom that are consistent with a method and therefore in harmony with an approach as well. It is particularly used to accomplish an immediate objective.

Equally important, teachers must be aware of the many different theories of how people learn. Each theory gives rise to different teaching approaches, which consequently gives rise to different teaching methods. From the late nineteenth century up to today, many different language-teaching methods were tried out. Some of those methods are considered traditional, while some of them present some progressive features.

Below there is a table listing and presenting a brief explanation about the most relevant language teaching approaches.

**Table 2.** Approaches and methods for EFL

APPROACHES AND METHODS FOR EFL	BRIEF EXPLANATION
<b>The Grammar-Translation Approach</b>	<i>The foreign language is taught with the objective of making learners able to read literature written in the target language.</i>

<b>The Direct Approach</b>	<i>Language is studied with the objective of being able to communicate in the target language.</i>
<b>The Audio-Lingual Approach</b>	<i>Language learning is seen as a habit formation, the more repetition, the stronger is the knowledge acquired.</i>
<b>The Comprehension-Based Approach</b>	<i>The process of learning a foreign language is seen as similar to the process of acquiring a native language. So a lot of emphasis is given to listening comprehension.</i>
<b>The Total-Physical Response Approach</b>	<i>The teacher models instructions for students to follow; because learners are not forced to produce anything on their own, it is believed that they learn in a stress-free way.</i>
<b>The Communicative Language Teaching</b>	<i>Language is seen first and most importantly as a system for communication, thus social contexts are put on evidence and students will engage in role play or dramatization to adjust their use of the target language to the appropriate social situation.</i>
<b>The Content-Based Instruction</b>	<i>Students use the target language to learn contents from various fields, so language is used as a mean to an end not an end in itself.</i>
<b>Task-Based Instruction</b>	<i>Students are given tasks to be completed and they must use the target language in order to be successful.</i>
<b>Participatory Approach</b>	<i>It is a student-centered approach similar to the content-based approach, but the content is any issue that comes from students' reality. It is based on Paulo Freire's work.</i>
<b>The Experiential Learning Approach</b>	<i>Similar to the participatory approach, this framework rises from the teacher desire of humanizing the classroom experience while students learn by doing.</i>
<b>The Cognitive Approach</b>	<i>It aims at working with learner's autonomy and metacognition and language learning is seen as rule acquisition, not habit formation.</i>
<b>The Silent Way Method</b>	<i>Teachers are as silent as possible while learner's speaking should predominate to encourage autonomy and initiative.</i>
<b>The Affective-Humanistic Approach</b>	<i>It gives emphasis on the respect for the students' feelings and communication that is meaningful to the learner.</i>
<b>Suggestopedia or Desuggestopedia</b>	<i>Arts and music are used for a relaxing and fun atmosphere that stimulates students' learning in a subconscious level.</i>
<b>Community Language Learning</b>	<i>The teacher/student relationship is compared to counselor/client because the teacher gives advice, assistance, and support to someone that is in some way in need.</i>
<b>The Student-Centered Approach</b>	<i>It encourages student's autonomy because the teacher is only a facilitator who guides students towards learning.</i>
<b>The Problem-Based Learning Approach</b>	<i>Students gain knowledge by trying to come up with a solution to a problematic situation.</i>
<b>The Flipped Classroom Approach</b>	<i>Students learn the content at home through various media and come to class for discussions and clarifications.</i>

**Source:** By authors, from Freeman (2000), Celce-Murcia (2001), Larsen-Freeman (2000), Freire and Macedo (1987), Eyring (2001), Bancroft (1999), Richards and Rodgers (2001), Tan (2004), Bergmann and Sam (2012)

Among those methods, the Communicative Language Teaching, the Task-Based Instruction, the Participatory Approach, the Experiential Learning Approach, the Cognitive Approach, the Student-Centered Approach, the Problem-Based Learning Approach, and the Flipped Classroom Approach are the ones, which we could consider that in a combined way have some of the Active Learning fundamentals.

#### 4. Promoting active learning

The active learning approach is a system that can be used in any area of education. Nevertheless, the objective of this study is to bring the principles of the active learning approach to the process of teaching English as a foreign language.

As we have seen, new approaches have come into existence in reaction to earlier approaches' inadequacies. "[...] teachers have found many ways or methods for teaching languages. All have been admired models in some time or place, often to be ridiculed, perhaps, or dismissed as inappropriate in yet another." (SAUVIGNON, 2001, p. 13). Furthermore, some extrinsic factors will determine the success or failure of a given approach. For instance, the learner's age, nationality, background, and motivation must be considered when assembling a teaching plan. Therefore, the active learning approach may be the answer for issues concerning the lack of interest, engagement, participatory actions, voice, and sense of community, as well as ownership, responsibility and autonomy.

Since academics today know a lot more about learning than they did a century ago, it becomes important to integrate more than one approach or method in order to achieve a well-balanced and effective English class. Equally important is to consider that the active learning approach does not come into scene to dismantle or dismiss any other approach. On the contrary, it comes to elect the most active methods of all the already existing approaches and integrate them as a whole so that active methodologies can be developed in favor of classes that are able to engage students and help them become agents of their own learning.

Before presenting some activities developed to promote active learning, it is important to highlight that the first step towards applying active learning is to reconsider the teacher's role, which means to accept that the teacher is not the one and only responsible for students' learning. By doing that, we can finally move from teacher-centered to student-centered education. In addition, the first class of a new term is the ideal time for the teacher to have a conversation with the students about active learning. Presenting students with the principle of this concept, explaining to them how it works, and how they may benefit from it. Likewise, at the end of each activity, it is important to take a moment and invite students to comment on the class, talking about what they have learned, and how easy or difficult it was for them to use the target language when socializing and learning a new content. Nonetheless, equally important is to give students feedback, listen to them, and take notes about what they say, in order to make improvements for the next lessons. After all, in active learning a teacher is also someone who is constantly learning.

Finally, we are going to present a set of activities designed for teaching English as a foreign language to A2 (basic) and B1 (intermediate) learners, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. These activities are thought to have the potential of promoting active learning

and therefore are based on the principals presented so far. Some activities require a certain level of proficiency in order to be fulfilled by the students. The required level will be shown in each of the activities and they are according to the *New English File* series of textbooks<sup>3</sup> and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Moreover, the activities presented here can be adapted and used to approach a variety of learning topics

#### 4.1 Portfolios

Although a portfolio can be started at any time during the course of studies, it certainly works best when proposed at the beginning of the year or semester. The reason is that one of the portfolio's goals is for students to be able to "[...] gain a better sense of achievement when they can see their work over the course of the term and compare where they started with where they finished." (BELL; KAHRHOFF, 2006, p. 14).

When learning a new language, it is very important to keep track of everything you became able to produce. Therefore, a portfolio is a great visual aid that allows students to deposit their learnings as the course goes and be able to look back at their productions in a clear and organized way.

**Approaching the Subject in a meaningful way:** The teacher explains what a portfolio is, shows some examples of good portfolios, states the purposes of this kind of project and warns students about the outcomes expected at the end of the term.

**Stage one:** If the school has a computer lab, students can have their portfolios started at the school. Otherwise, the teacher can direct students to start it at home. In either case, students will be directed to create a file on their computers where they will be saving all their findings during the term.

**Stage 2:** During the term, the teacher must propose activities that are appropriate and meaningful to the group they are working with. In order to determine the most appropriate activities to a given group, it is important to talk to the students about their preferences, likes and

<sup>3</sup> The suggestion for this series of textbook was influenced by its reputation as a trustworthy English teaching source. Published by Oxford University Press, the American English File series is a respectable and an internationally acclaimed teaching material. We consider the Course-book evaluation regarding New English File by Gutiérrez Bermúdez (2014), who concludes that "Based on the results of the application of the aforementioned criteria, it will be possible to conclude on the suitability of this teaching material on a particular context." (p. 98). The author says that "the contents used in the activities require a level of general knowledge that might be available only to older learners and also, a degree of familiarity with British and American culture that might not be available in all contexts". However, he is considering specific realities, which are public schools in Bogotá, Colombia. On the other hand, Ghasemi and Haghverdi (2012) conclude about American English File series "[...] it stood up reasonably well to a detailed and in-depth analysis [...]" (p. 49). Moreover, the results of a study conducted by Hashemi and Borhani (2015) showed that American English File series was a suitable and appropriate device for language teachers to reach their goals as well as the goals of the language institutes. We have also other good reviews, as the review by Phil Williams (2013), at <http://www.englishlessonsbrighton.co.uk/best-textbook-classes-new-english-file-review/>.

dislikes as well as their objectives and expectations. While those activities are being developed and performed, the teacher needs to ask students to save them to their portfolio file. For example, if students do a role-play, they can video tape it and attach it to their portfolio. The teacher must keep track of what activities were mandatory because it will be easier to identify the extra activities that the students have done on their own.

**Stage 3:** By the end of the term, the teacher will ask students to take a look at the portfolio they have produced and to write a review about it. In addition, the teacher may require students to do a self-assessment and give themselves a grade for their own work.

**Stage 4:** Students will choose one of the many options available of online file sharing to share their portfolios with the teacher and, if pertinent, with their classmates as well. The teacher must write a feedback to the students, otherwise it may seem that all their work has gone unnoticed.

#### **4.2 Discussion in class**

According to Bonwell and Eison (1991), class discussions are one of the most common strategies to promote active learning because by using techniques and strategies for questioning and discussion the teacher creates a supportive intellectual and emotional environment that encourages students to take risks.

Therefore, here is an example of an activity a teacher can perform when using discussions to promote active learning in English as a foreign language class. This activity was designed specifically for teaching the Present Perfect tense while extending students' views.

**Approaching the Subject in a meaningful way:** The teacher starts the class by asking students about some of their previous experiences such as places they have been, things they have done, food they have tried and so on.

**Stage one:** Students will write down some things that they have always wanted to do but have never done. The teacher will ask students to, one by one, share with the group one or two of the things they have written. While students are sharing, the teacher will encourage a discussion by asking them:

*“Why haven't you done it yet?”*

*“What are the pros and cons of doing it?”*

*“Do the rest of the group agree or disagree about the pros and cons?”*

While they answer and the class engages the discussion, the teacher writes down on a paper the reasons given by the students.

**Stage two:** At this point, students are asked to form groups. The teacher gives a piece of paper to each group, and on this piece of paper, it is written one of the reasons given by students previously. Each group will work on finding a solution for the reasons students have given. After the groups have had enough time to discuss and come up with solutions, they must present their findings to the whole class. The teacher can instigate students to get involved in a discussion about how relevant the solutions that they have come up with are.

**Stage three:** The teacher explains that in order for them to talk and make questions about experiences, they must learn a certain feature of the English language which is the Present Perfect tense. The teacher gives students some time to look at their books, or computer or any material that the school can offer, and then, have them present what they have discovered about the Present Perfect tense.

**Stage four:** To wrap up the activity the teacher invites students to share their findings, clarifying their doubts and building the rules for “Present Perfect” with the students. Finally, the teacher directs students to go around the class and ask their classmates about their previous life experiences using the new structure that they have just learned. It is important to encourage the students to continue the discussion they had previously about pros and cons, reasons, viewpoints, ask follow up questions instead of only focusing in using the Present perfect.

### **4.3 Projects**

Projects grant the opportunity to have students building something from the beginning to the end. When a project is relevant and meaningful, students usually show engagement, understanding, and have the sense of achievement when it is finally concluded. Bear in mind that a project takes several classes and must be very well organized in order to achieve the desired outcomes. This activity was designed for level A2 and its objective is for students to practice talking about prices, restaurant orders and food.

**Approaching the Subject in a meaningful way:** The teachers ask students about their favorite food, their favorite restaurants, if they know the name of any international food place, and finally, if they would like to open a restaurant. After having a discussion about it, the teacher proposes the project.

**Stage one:** The teacher writes on small pieces of paper the names of well-known international food places. Students get together in pairs, trios, or groups, depending on the size of the class. Each group will get one paper to discover which food place they will work with. Then, the teacher tells students that they are going to pretend to open a new food place, it must be similar to the one they got in the paper, but it must come under a different name. Students have to use the internet to research about their food place.

**Stage two:** Based on their research, students will come up with a name, slogan and menu for their food place. The teacher must provide or require students to bring materials such as

cardboard paper, colored pencil or markers, glue, scissors and duct tape so students can create a poster with their restaurant slogan.

**Stage three:** Students must research about the communication used in restaurants between server and customer, how to say prices and the vocabulary about food in the target language.

**Stage four:** Students will set up their restaurants in the classroom. They must have their slogan, menu and be ready to serve their classmates. The teacher can ask students if they find it interesting and feasible to bring real food to class. They can bring coffee, soda, juice, mini burger, hot dog, mini pizza, ice cream, brownie, cookies, sandwiches or whatever their restaurants serve. Every student will visit every food place, and they must order something using the target language. After everybody has used the target language to order food and to serve the classmates, they can all sit, chill, and enjoy the food while the teacher gives them feedback and ask them about their opinion on this type of project. Because it is such a demanding task, it is important to evaluate students and give them a mark for this type of work.

#### ***4.4 Visual-Based Instruction***

The use of media in classroom can enhance students' attention; however, they cannot simply be used as a substitute for content explanation. That is, if a teacher shows a video of another teacher explaining the rules for the *Simple Past*, this teacher is not using the video as a tool for promoting active learning. Instead, "Media is best used as triggers for such activities as class discussion about the special significance of the content or as the basis of a short analytical essay about the implications of the events shown." (BONWELL; EISON, 1991, p. 33). This activity was designed for level A2 and its objective is for students to learn and practice the use of regular verbs in the Simple Past tense.

**Approaching the Subject in a meaningful way:** The teacher starts the class asking students, for example, if they know who invented the lamp, or if they know who painted *Monalisa*, to instigate students' curiosity. After that, the teacher can explain that what they are doing is talking about people who did great things in the past.

**Stage one:** The teacher shows images, a short video, or a slideshow presentation with images of great inventions or great moments in history without showing the person who was responsible for those inventions or historical moments.

**Stage two:** Now, the teacher divides the class in two groups and gives, to each student of both groups, a paper with an activity printed on it. Group "A" has information that group "B" does not have and vice-versa. In order to complete their information they must interact with a person from the other group. Students go on until they have all the missing information completed.

**Stage three:** The teacher asks students to take a look at their sheets, which are now completed, and think about how the Simple Past is formed, what has happened to the verbs, what auxiliary verb is used for questions and so on.

After students have shared some of their findings, the teacher may use the knowledge students already have to build new knowledge. One way to do it is to point out to the verbs and say:

*“You already know the verb to invent, but what happened to it?”*

By doing this, the teacher will make students realize that the verb has gained “ed” in the end of it, and that it means the verb is conjugated in the “Simple Past” tense and that it is a regular verb. At this point, the teacher asks students to help formulating the rules for building affirmative, negative and interrogative sentences. The teacher does not give the rules as a way of transmitting the knowledge, instead, he lets students discover and build the rules using the evidences they have seen so far.

**Stage four:** To wrap up the activity, the teacher shows the images from the beginning of the class again and at each image he/she asks:

Teacher: *Did Neil Armstrong invent the phone?*

Students: *No, he didn't.*

Teacher: *Who invented the phone?*

Students: *Alexander Graham Bell invented the phone.*

The activity goes on until all the images have been shown to students.

#### **4.5 Flipping the lesson**

Although this approach was designed to be used every single class during the whole term, the foreign language teacher can also choose to only use this method sporadically for one lesson only. By flipping the lesson, students will have to learn about a content outside of the classroom, leaving the time they have in class available for practice rather than for teacher's lecture. This activity was designed for level B1 and its objective is to introduce the topic Reported Speech in a meaningful way.

**Approaching the Subject in a meaningful way:** Teacher tells students about the time that we did not have means of communication, so to spread information people had to rely on “messengers” who would carry out messages from one person to another. Before the invention of writing, those “messengers” had to listen carefully to what a person had said and report it to another person using oral communication.

**Stage one:** Teacher divides the class in two groups. One group goes to a different classroom in the school, this way the two groups are away from each other.

**Stage 2:** Students from group “A” have to think about a message that they would like to send to group “B”. After that, they choose one classmate to be the “*messenger*”. It is important to instruct the students to avoid simplistic and short messages. The “*messenger*” walks to the other room to deliver the message and afterwards the whole class can compare the message that was supposed to be delivered to the one that was actually delivered. It brings a humorous feature to the activity because by the time the students deliver the messages, they may have forgotten how the complete message was.

**Stage 3:** Teacher explains that telling people what others have said is called “Reported speech”, because you are reporting the words of someone else. The teacher tells students that they will not learn how to build “Reported Speech” in class. However, they will learn it by themselves at home by reading the instructions on page 140 from the *American English File 3* textbook, and doing the exercises on page 141 from the same textbook (See Appendixes). The teacher dismiss students and tells them that the next time they see each other, the students will have already known the rules for “Reported speech”.

**Stage 4:** After having studied about “Reported Speech” at home, students come to class with their notes on their findings. Teacher directs them to sit in pairs or trios, and share with the classmates what they have learned with the material they have studied at home. The teacher goes around the class helping students who are struggling, clarifying their doubts and giving more attention to those students who need the most. Then, the teacher invites each pair or trio to come to the front of the classroom and present what they have understood about “Reported Speech”. Since a lot of time has been saved because students studied the rules at home, the teacher has more time to do some activities that will make students practice. One example is the whispering game. Student “A” whispers a message to student “B” and he/she has to report the message to the whole class using reported speech:

Student A: *I want to go home.*

Student B: *She said she wanted to go home.*

#### ***4.6 Debate as a Learning Activity***

According to Bell and Kahrhoff (2006), debates help students to acknowledge opposite points of view, develop skills such as listening and speaking, demonstrate need for supporting evidence, research and investigate, and dismiss simplistic approach to complex issues. This activity was designed for level B1 and its objective is to encourage students to use the target language to express opinions and to persuade others while listening attentively and respectfully to classmates’ viewpoints about careers.

**Approaching the Subject in a meaningful way:** If students are too young to have a career now, the teacher can ask them if they have already decided or thought about what career they want to pursue when they grow older. However, if they are old enough to be already engaged in a career, the teacher can talk about the reasons that took them to choose the profession they have today.

**Stage one:** The topic for the debate is “Career, passion or money?” The teacher divides the class into two groups, the groups will seat across from each other. While one group will defend that we must choose our profession based on the money it can provide, the other group will defend that professions must be chosen based on how much passionate we are about them.

**Stage two:** Students will be given some time to talk within their group and brainstorm reasons to support their thesis. After that, the teacher gives a microphone (it can be a toy microphone) to the group that will speak first. Each member of the group will present one proposition in favor of the groups’ argument. The same procedure will be done for the group that will speak second. The teacher should explain, beforehand, that it is very important to respect while the opposite group is speaking, as well as to take notes about their premises so they can refute those reasons later on.

**Stage three:** Now, it is time for students to gathered again and discuss, within their groups, how they can refute the reasons given by the other groups. After some designated time, the teacher will ask them to take their seats again because the refutation stage will begin. After each refutation, the opposite group has one minute to come up with a speech to defend themselves.

**Stage four:** At this point, the teacher wraps up the lesson by giving some feedback to students. As homework, the teacher can ask students to research about polemical topics and bring some topic suggestions for their next debate.

#### 4.7 *Think-Pair-Share*

Chowdhury (2016) explains that this is a collaborative learning, which consists of provoking student’s thinking with a well-elaborated question. This activity promotes classroom participation as it encourages a high degree of students’ engagement, as well as high-order thinking skills. Bell and Kahrhoff (2006 p. 28) wrote that this activity “Focuses student attention, encourages problem solving individually and in groups, allows shy students to gain confidence, increases the body of material for student response, provides forum for auditory and kinesthetic learning.” This activity was designed for level B1 and its objective is to foster students’ problem-solving abilities and learn about the topic “Conditionals”.

**Approaching the Subject in a meaningful way:** Since internet is something relevant for most of the people, the teacher poses the following question:

*What if the entire world had the internet blocked for one week. What do you think would happen?*

**Stage one:** The teacher poses the question and tells students to think about an answer or more than one answer, individually.

**Stage two:** Students pair-up and share their thoughts with their peer.

**Stage three:** Each pair presents their thoughts to the class.

**Stage four:** At this point, the teacher asks:

*Are we talking about something that is certainly going to happen or something that is hypothetical?*

After students answering that it is a hypothetical situation, the teacher asks:

*What indications do you have that this is a hypothetical situation?*

The teacher will guide students to conclude that the use of the word “if” and the modal “would” is an indication that it is a sentence built to express a hypothetical situation.

To wrap up, the teacher can ask students if they heard any response that was particularly good, unusual or funny, and they can talk about it.

Teachers are often looking for better ways of teaching; however, in this search they usually encounter more theories than practical instructions. This section aimed at creating activities that can easily be implemented in basic (A2) and intermediate (B1) classes of English as a foreign language in language centers. Therefore, after studying the theory, teachers can use the activities shown in this study to have a more clear idea of the kind of tasks that have the potential to promote active learning. The activities presented encourage students to be more engaged, more autonomous, and responsible for their own learning. Besides, they are student-centered activities, which mean that they grant students the opportunity to be active agents in the learning process.

It is important to notice that all the activities were designed to be of an easy implementation, they do not require any change in the school’s facilities, or any financial investment. More importantly, the techniques above do not request the use of a black board, nor the use of traditional seats displays (students sitting in rows). Therefore, the first thing the teacher can do to create an active learning atmosphere is to abandon the blackboard for a while and ask students to sit in circles, or on the floor, or even allow them to stand up if they prefer to do so.

Nonetheless, teachers must be aware that some of the activities presented by this study may be excessively complex for the type of students they have, or they may show some problems regarding time, number of students, and different interests and motivation within the students. In such case, some changes in the tasks may be necessary in order to adjust them to the class’s context.

In regarding to evaluations, it is common for each school to have its own standard way of accessing students’ performance. Nevertheless, in an active learning environment, learners should be evaluated all the time and marks should be granted according to their commitment to the activities, self-reliance, willingness, group cooperation, and interaction skills. In addition, as a formal assessment, the

teacher may ask students to write an essay about their experience with active learning. By proposing a self-reflection, the educator encourages students to think about the way they learn things, the barriers they have encountered, their own weaknesses and strengths, as well as their motivations to continue, or not, being active learners.

### **Final Considerations**

This study is an instrument for reflecting upon how the Education context has changed over the years, making it extremely important for faculty members to rethink teaching practices. Consequently, a literature research on the Active Learning approach was conducted in order to verify its capability to bring to the classroom elements which are key on breaking the cycle of teaching-centered, one-way transmission lessons. Furthermore, throughout the study, the principles of Active Learning were brought to the specific ambit of teaching and learning English as a foreign language. The final objective of this study was to present Active Learning as a potential approach to improve learners's outcomes regarding to English as a foreign language. By demonstrating the role that the Active Learning approach has in students's learning, it is possible to have a broader understanding of how an individual can benefit from classes that grant the learners the right to be responsible for their own cognitive development.

Through an extensive review of the literature, we were able to comprehend what Active Learning is and how beneficial it is for Education in any area of knowledge. However, despite of the alleged advantages that progressive approaches bring to the teaching and learning of a foreign language, teacher-centeredness is still broadly used by faculty members while student-centeredness is faced with some resistance. Taking this into account, it is important that universities and schools invest in teacher training, providing the appropriate resource support for teachers to learn more about Active Learning and start implementing it in their classes.

After all, the literature review shows strong evidences that learning is more effective when the learners build it rather than when teachers try to transmit it. Finally, regarding to teaching English as a foreign language, Active Learning has all the necessary assets to make classes more interesting, meaningful, inclusive, and even more fun.

Considering the seven activities developed on section 5, it is evident that a variety of approaches were blended together to create an active atmosphere. Teachers of a foreign language may use a wide range of different textbooks, containing traditional approaches as well as modern ones and still be able to promote active learning. Even when using an extremely traditional approach such as the Grammar-Translation, the instructor who is inclined to promote active learning understands that the material is just a supportive platform and not the dictator of the teaching and learning process. Thus, the textbook must

be perceived as a mean to an end, not an end in itself. As an example, if the school requires the teachers to use certain materials that lack constructivist principles, they can still create a student-centered atmosphere. Even with some limitations from the educational institution, it is always possible to promote active learning as long as the teachers see their students not as an empty vessel where knowledge can be deposited, but as capable learners who are able to construct knowledge autonomously.

Moreover, the activities presented in this study can and must be modified in order to attend the schools' requirements, students' age, classes' time, level of students' motivation and resources available. This way, Active Learning can be implemented in any type of class and foreign language learning achievements can be enhanced due to learners becoming more autonomos, engaged, and motivated.

This study is a work in progress. Certainly, there is space for a deeper investigation in the scope of active learning and foreign language learning. Thus, a great complement to this study could be a better understanding regardind to all the theories on how humans learn, as well as the use of technology to promote meaningful learning. The proposed activities in section 5, were designed to be of easy implementation, with no necessary financial investments, and possible to be adapted to most schools' infra-structures. However, some of them may need to be adjusted to contemplate learners' social contexts as well as schools' requirements.

Finally, a field research is plausible to be conducted so to obtain more accurate results regarding the students' outcomes when subjected to active learning strategies. Therefore, we consider two ways of using this study in the future. First, the activities proposed could be implemented in classroom followed by a critical analysis about how the activities were received by the students and how they can be improved. In other words, a calibration of the activities could be conducted in a first moment. Secondly, an experimental study could be conducted in order to measure the efectiveness of the proposed activities in promoting active learning. By having a control group studying in a passive class framework and a test group in an active learning environment, it would be possible to measure and compare the students' performances in each of the groups with a post experience test. After all, the only way to ensure any change in the current educational context is by continuing carrying out research and testing new hipotesys on how people best learn.

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