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LINGÜÍSTICA Y LITERATURA**

CASO DE ESTUDIO

**AUDIO-LINGUAL BARRIER IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND
LANGUAGE: CASE STUDY 8-9 YEAR OLD STUDENTS AT THE
OXFORD SCHOOL OF PANAMA**

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I. INTRODUCTION

Panama as a country, is a very diverse and multicultural hub for many nationalities. It is why, throughout its colonial times, it has welcomed lots of different backgrounds and languages. These languages include Spanish, French, Portuguese, Italian, German, Hindi, Chinese, and other Asian languages as well.

The latter have populated the country in such a way that have become local and contribute to economic growth thanks to their family traits and businesses. Therefore, Asian descendants and newcomers look for the best to pass on to their future generations: places to live, areas to establish new businesses, fellow citizens to socialize with, schools, and universities.

Asian people do not only provide, through hard work and great effort, the best to their children, but also look for the best schools where their children can express their culture and absorb other cultures and Languages.

That is the case I found at the place I work as an English Teacher, where a large number of students, in all different levels, are Spanish speaking Asian descendants or newly arrived Asians who do not speak Spanish nor English. As newly arrived, they face difficulties communicating in English due to their language barrier; and as Asian descendants they show difficulties in discriminating or producing English properly due to their Listening skills being fixed to other types of phonological productions, as well as their articulators.

OBJECTIVE

This paper seeks to find out ways to minimize and solve the Audio-Lingual barrier in learning English as a Second language in Asian native or Asian Descendants studying at The Oxford School of Panama, by finding out methods or strategies that can, in the end, be standardized and put into practice effectively and affectively. To perform the previously mentioned analysis I will focus on the Asian children in third grade, which are in between the ages of 8yo and 9yo. I will document the learning process of Asian boys or girls by using Listening-repetition Drills, Isolated sounds tract phonological production, and Listening or Reading comprehension and summarizing drills.

II. ANALYSIS

In around seven months of working at the school, I have noticed many Asian kids who can communicate using English, but at the same time there are those who cannot. The school teaches all its subjects in English and has a Cambridge Curriculum in all grades. That is why we use 100% English as a means of communication in and out of the classroom. It is when the lack of knowledge or contact with the language becomes notorious and a barrier for many of the mentioned kids and some others.

In class, there are situations where subjects like ENGLISH, GUIDED READING, SCIENCE, and MATHEMATICS become a problem to understand and/or process, due to the level of complexity they bring within. On the other hand, there are kids who are also Asian and from other nationalities, who have been in the school since previous years, but have learnt the Language, yet with some tangible limitations in their pronunciation, but in spite of this, get by with communicating effectively.

It would be an ideal scenario if all The Oxford School's Students enter the school in the early stages of acquiring as well as learning the Language, to develop the same level of mastery as they pass each learning stage. Sadly, it is not the reality, because as I presented in my Introduction, the country is a strategic hub for many Businesses, so these enterprises send their personnel, any time of the year, with their family members and children, to live for as long as needed; as well as, relatives of those who have come first to settle and provide better living conditions and economy for their families, to continue building a larger society, and prepare them for the even greater demands that the future generations might face. So, as a result, these Asian children get registered in the school at any time of the scholastic year and in most cases have never encountered the Language, becoming a great challenge for the system as well as for the Teachers.

In this situation, it would be ideal to implement programs in which these children are enrolled before starting the regular class attendance, one to diagnose and level their knowledge and ability to understand and produce the language; as well as another one, to reinforce the language understanding and production after class schedule, in a more relaxed and dynamic manner.

These ideas would include a more affective as well as effective methodology to engage students in the learning process in a friendlier way, by designing a parallel course and program in which students strengthen and develop their input and output communicative skills while having fun and using methods like: TPR, Natural Approach, and Direct Method.

Hence, I am going to explain the alternative I will suggest implementing as a tool to even balance the levels of knowledge and performance of English among the students mentioned.

First, by designing a survey sheet (Google Form) with questions about their experience at The Oxford School (from now on TOS), the way they perceive bilingual education at TOS, if they would be interested in taking part in an intensive language learning course, if they had made any progress and, if so, how they would describe their experience; if they have found any limitation or difficulty in the learning process, if so, in which area or subject they have identified more struggle; if they have identified any weak area or areas of input or output which have been the most impacting in their learning process.

Second, by applying a general knowledge diagnostic test I will document the level of each student from the sample taken.

Last, I will carry out a 2-week demo course in which I could prove the impact of the proposal.

Based on the results, I would document and suggest the areas to focus on and strengthen. That will show a “Before-and-After” site, giving us the expected tangible outcome from a well thought out process. Furthermore, we want to ensure that the Teaching-Learning process of English as a Second Language is done the most natural way possible by using traditional but effective methods; which nowadays have been neglected due to the aggressive and nonselective implementation of technology, websites, apps and trends, that far from achieving the goal, put conscious and meaningful acquisition and learning, at risk.

III. PROPOSAL

The Oxford School of Panama should design a mandatory system to address the communicative (Input and Output) needs of the Asian kids that arrive in the country and register there. This system should be available all year round, based on educational methods, such as:

Total Physical Response invented by Dr. James J. Asher, which specifies the use of motor commands and body movement to complement communication.

“Total Physical Response (TPR)

Total Physical Response (TPR) is a method of teaching language or vocabulary concepts by using physical movement to react to verbal input. The process mimics the way that infants learn their first language, and it reduces student inhibitions and lowers stress. The purpose of TPR is to create a brain link between speech and action to boost language and vocabulary learning.”

Direct Method invented by Maximilian Berlitz which implies the use of target language (L2) as only means of communication so as anyone acquires a mother tongue.

“The Direct Method was the outcome of a reaction against the Grammar Translation Method. It was based on the assumption that the learner of a foreign language should think directly in the target language. According to this method, English is taught through English. The learner learns the target language through discussion,

conversation and reading in the second language. It does not take recourse to translation and foreign grammar. The first verses are taught while pointing to objects or pictures or by performing actions. According to H.G. Palmer, The Direct Method has the following: 1. Translation in every shape or form is banished from the classroom including the use of the mother tongue and that of the bilingual dictionary. 2. Grammar, when it is taught, is taught inductively. 3. Oral teaching precedes any form of reading and writing. 4. The use of disconnected sentences is replaced by the use of connected texts. 5. Pronunciation is taught systematically in accordance with the principles of phonetics and phonology of the target language. 6. The meanings of words and forms are taught by means of object or natural context. 7. The vocabulary and structure of the language are inculcated to a large extent by the teacher and answered by students.”

“According to Stern (1991), “the **direct method** is characterized, above all, by the use of the target language as a means of instruction and communication in the language classroom, and by the avoidance of the use of the first language and of translation as a technique (see also Jin-fang & Qing-xue, 2007).” As we’ve seen before, this is also true of Berlitz Method (1897; 1916), which is also considered a direct method (Anderson & Larsen-Freeman, 2011).”

Audiolingual Method which was invented by Charles Fries and Robert Lado and seeks to make a learner a better listener and speaker first, and then as result of the former, he/she will become a skillful reader or writer progressively.

“The Audiolingual Method”

Historical Background

Richards and Rodgers (2001) provide one of the most thorough descriptions of the historical background of the Audio-lingual Method, from which the following information has largely been drawn.

Audiolingualism came about as a result of a number of developments in linguistics,

psychology, and politics. In the 1940s, linguists at the University of Michigan and other universities were engaged in developing materials for teaching English to foreign students studying in the U.S. Their approach, based on structural linguistics, relied on a contrastive analysis of the students' native language and the target language, which they believed would identify potential problems in language learning. Lessons consisted of intensive oral drilling of grammatical patterns and pronunciation. The approach became known variously as the Oral Approach, the Aural-Oral Approach, or the Structural Approach”

Natural Approach, developed by Tracy Terrell and supported by Stephen Krashen which explains that all speakers of a language grow use of the target language by using it to transfer messages back and forth as a way of communicating building a wide range of vocabulary implicitly due to the contextual use of the language and words needed to convey appropriate meaning.

“**The Natural Approach**, “a new philosophy of language teaching” (Terrell, 1977, p.121), was first proposed by Tracy Terrell, an instructor of Spanish at University of California and thrived as a result of joint efforts of Tracy Terrell and an applied linguist, Stephen Krashen. Later, these efforts came into being as a book, *The Natural Approach* (1983), which featured several theoretical parts penned by Krashen, and several practical sections by Terrell on how to use the Natural Approach in language classrooms. The term natural, according to Terrell (1977), indicates that his proposal is based on observations and second language acquisition studies that were conducted in natural, i.e., non-academic situations. Although the term natural has been used both in the Natural Approach and the Natural Method (a.k.a., the Direct Method), there are distinctions between these two. Both the Natural Method and the Natural Approach put greater emphasis on making foreign language learning experiences similar to first language learning in children. However, while the Natural Method favors repetition, teacher monologues and accurate production of target language-like forms, the Natural Approach attaches utmost importance to input, exposure, comprehension, and preparedness of learners in lieu of practice (Richards & Rodgers, 2000).”

To achieve this, the recruitment of well experienced, motivated, and prepared personnel, is vital. They must be highly qualified and trained to be Teachers of English as Foreign Language (TEFL Certified) and/or Teachers of English to Speakers of Other

Languages (TESOL Certified) with at least a B2 level Certificate of English Language Knowledge in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and a Teachers Knowledge Test Certificate (TKT Certified), to assure that the Teaching as well as Learning processes meet the required standards of the School’s Curriculum, due to the fact that each year its students undergo International Evaluations that set high expectations in parents that trust TOS to endeavor such a difficult task, which is to academically instruct their children and to prepare them to face the future in their lives in this dynamic world.

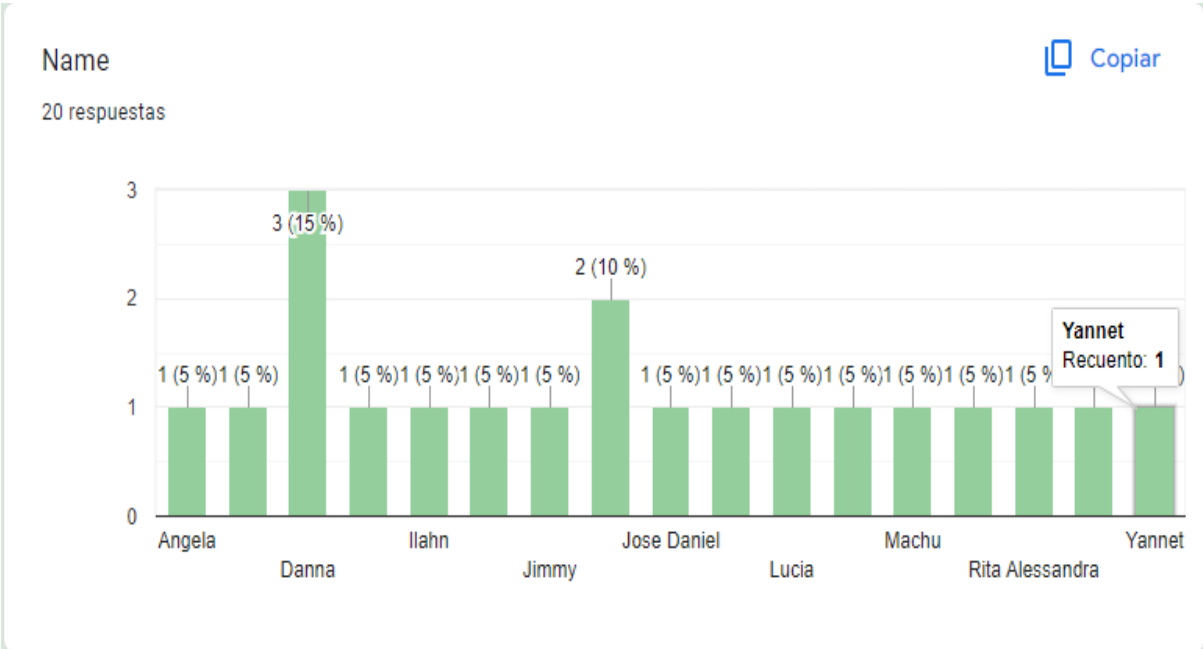
As mentioned above, The CEFR plays an important role in Language Learning and Teaching of any language, all around the world, as shown below.
 Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2023

Here attached, in Annexes, we find the form that will be used to gather preliminary information on how they perceive the school in terms of Learning the language.

To ensure Child Identity Protection, we will not provide full information of each participant of this study.

STUDENTS NAMES

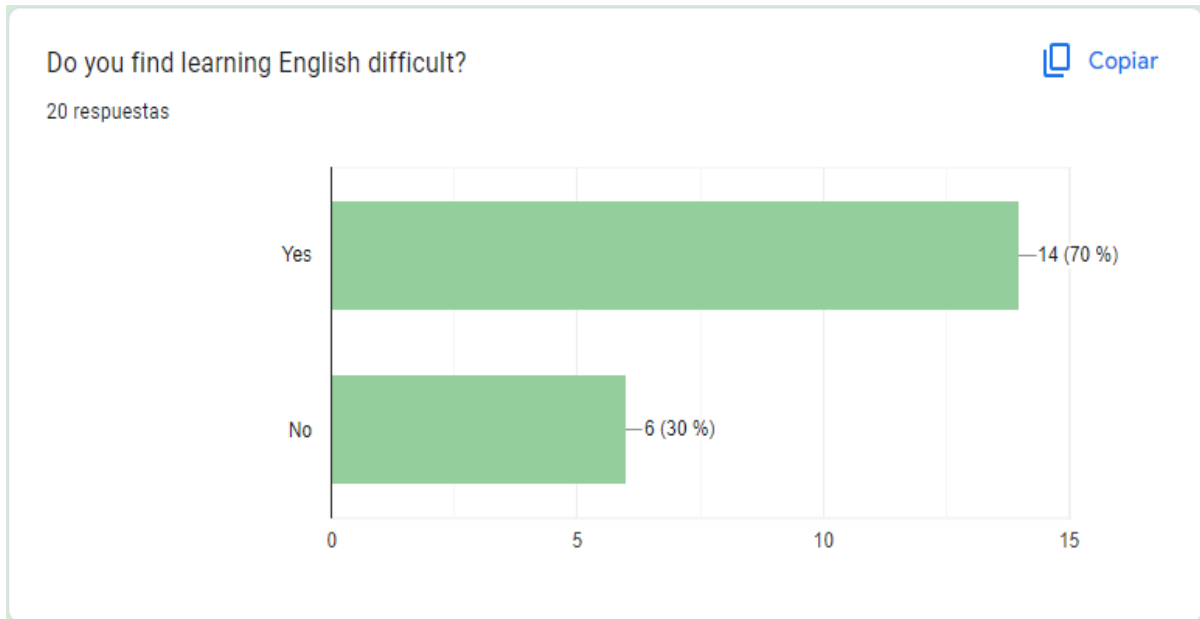
Figure 1: Names of kids involved in the study .



Source: The Oxford School of Panama
 Elaborated by: Monge, L. (2023)

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

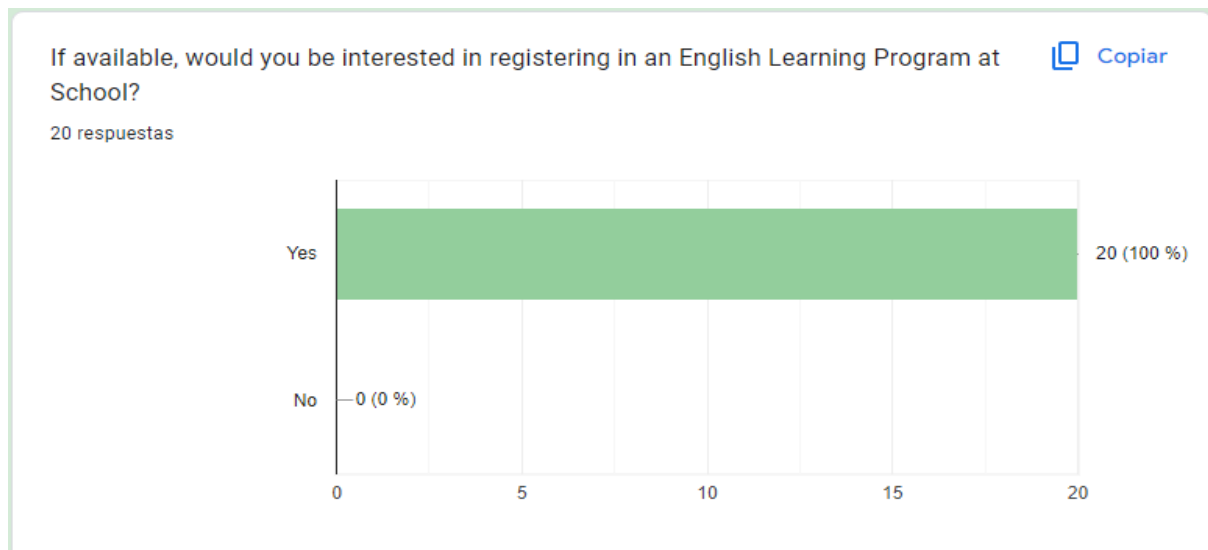
Figure 2: Perception of difficulty when learning English .



Source: The Oxford School of Panama
Elaborated by: Monge, L. (2023)

REGISTRATION UPON AVAILABILITY

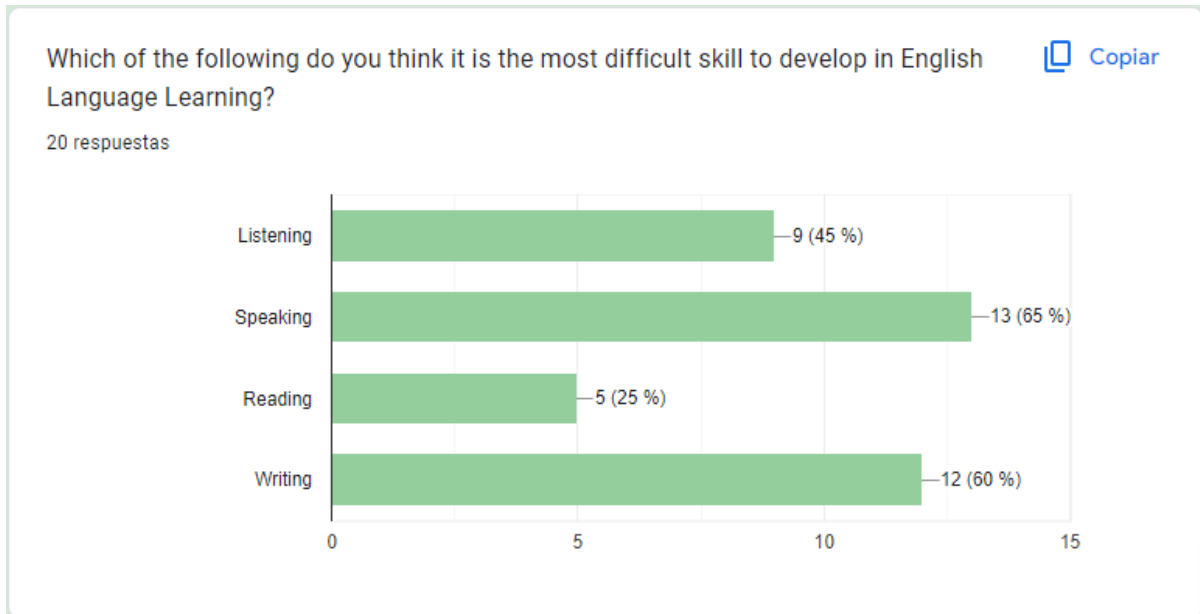
Figure 3: Students that would take the course, if available .



Source: The Oxford School of Panama
Elaborated by: Monge, L. (2023)

SKILL DIFFICULTY

Figure 4: *Level of difficulty of Skills.*



Source: The Oxford School of Panama
Elaborated by: Monge, L. (2023)

After analyzing the data gathered from the survey, the students will undergo a basic diagnostic test, which will help me determine the level at which each student should be placed before beginning the instruction process.

This will set an action plan. The results will be for internal use only.

The test presents a set of questions that, once answered, will indicate skills or knowledge possessed by each student. This will help as fundamentals for the course design and text selection, which will be carried out by the Teacher in charge of each group, being that the course content will be fitted according to the group's needs. Furthermore, each classroom will be complemented with audiovisual aids, which will complement the course by introducing teaching-learning strategies as text discrimination and/or correction by Listening-Understanding drills, as well as, listening to discriminate pronunciation and oral production.

IV. CONCLUSION

After carrying on with the survey and preliminary implementation of the evaluation, previous analysis and performance of the program, we are able to document that the 8 -9 year old students of the Oxford School of Panama with an audio lingual barrier for learning English as a second language, were ready to undergo intensive training in learning, as well as acquiring, the language. The conclusion led us to design a course and select texts that are published by Cambridge University Press, due to the fact that they are designed, written, and published by teams of experts that possess a high sense of social and cultural awareness; and, its content is endorsed by the Common European Framework of References of Languages. After a month of course development, we are able to say, based on tangible progress in Audiolingual discrimination and performance, that the students that took part in this process, will overcome the former weaknesses shown at first, and will sure be able to go on in their further instructional levels without any kind of limitations at communicating anywhere in the world, where English is spoken as a mother tongue or used as second language.

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