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# THE INFLUENCE OF AGE ON VOCABULARY ACQUISITION IN STUDENTS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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**UNIVERSIDAD DE PIURA  
FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS DE LA EDUCACIÓN  
MAESTRÍA EN EDUCACIÓN  
MENCIÓN EN ENSEÑANZA DE INGLÉS COMO  
LENGUA EXTRANJERA**

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## APPROVAL

The thesis titled **THE INFLUENCE OF AGE ON VOCABULARY ACQUISITION IN STUDENTS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE** presented by Mr. César Augusto Orosco Rojas, in accordance with the requirements of being awarded the Degree of Master in Education with Mention in **Teaching English as a Foreign Language**, was approved by the thesis director: Dr. Majid Safadaran Mosazadeh and defended on ..... 2017 before a Jury with the following members:

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President

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Secretary

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Informant



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## **INTRODUCTION**

During the decade of 1990's, the Peruvian government eliminated the public instruction of English as a foreign language at Primary level moving it exclusively to the secondary level where students of this level would study English in two pedagogical periods of 45 minutes each. This change gave rise to new generations of Peruvian students who, by the end of secondary education, had been learning English for "only" 5 years.

This particular situation in Peru differs from other countries like Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand where the learning of English starts in first grade primary (6 years old) with 8 hours per week, China and South Korea in third grade (eight years old) with 4 hours per week, or even other Latin American countries like Chile and Colombia that, in the last decade, started national programs to increase the level of English of their population by moving the age of English learning to primary level and by teaching more hours of English per week.

Being an English teacher for some years gave me the opportunity to teach the language to students of different ages, levels of proficiency and social conditions and witness the different ways in which children, adolescents and adults react to comprehensible input in L2 and acquire the language. This experience, in addition to have had the opportunity to read and investigate more about the information stated above and compare it to our reality made me wonder about how important age in the acquisition of a foreign language, in this case English, is.

Several studies have shown the benefits of starting to learn a new language as early as possible. This has mostly been shown in naturalistic situations, that is, with people who learn the language in the country where the language is spoken. Chomsky, for instance, commented in his celebrated review of 'Verbal Behavior' "It is a common observation that a young child of immigrant parents may learn a second language in the streets, from other children, with amazing rapidity . . . while the subtleties that become second nature to the child may elude his parents despite high motivation and continued practice" (Chomsky, 1959, 49). In other words, it normally happens in these cases that although children have a slower rate of development in the target language, they quite often surpass older learners in the long run achieving a superior ultimate attainment.

In formal settings, that is, in non – immersion contexts, results are not so clear because some research demonstrates that “the sooner, the better” assumption cannot be applied in instructional settings in a straightforward way. As a naturalistic setting, older learners usually exhibit a quicker rate of development. Nevertheless, regarding ultimate attainment, differences in favor of early starters are rarely found.

That is why the “age question” has become inextricably connected with language teaching and arises some other questions like: Is there an optimal age, a critical period or a sensitive period? If the differences exist among children, adolescents and adults in L2 leaning, can some methods be used to narrow the gaps? How does the age factor affect the development of linguistic abilities? Are adults really inferior to children and even to adolescents?

To answer these questions, many studies have been carried out to explore the relationship between the age stages and L2 acquisition by analyzing the experimental data. In essence, the whole problem bases on how the brain maturity rate affects the L2 acquisition, which involves several fields, such as neuropsychology, psycholinguistics, pedagogy and statistics. The optimum age for starting a second language has also been a perennial issue in education and figured highly for example in the British controversies of the 1960s over whether French should be taught in the primary school.

Most of the studies concerned with age and learning of a foreign language focused on phonology and syntax and very few have dealt with vocabulary. One of the reasons to analyze these areas and not vocabulary may be that it is considered that words can be learnt throughout the whole life and therefore lexis is not usually seen as having any age constraint as syntax or phonology may have. However, age may be argued to have an effect on the acquisition of vocabulary as well. First of all, some aspects of vocabulary are believed to be learnt implicitly, and it has been argued that those aspects of language that are learnt implicitly are maturational constrained. Secondly, although neurological differences between syntax and vocabulary have been found, especially as regards brain location, these differences do not necessarily entail that if the acquisition of grammar is affected by age that of vocabulary may not be influenced by learner's age.

Therefore, we believe that there is a gap in research as regards the effects of age on the acquisition of vocabulary that the present investigation wants to bridge. In particular, the first concern in our study is to explore if students who started learning English earlier will have better lexical sets than those who started later.

In order to accomplish the purposes of this investigation, this study has been structured and carried out in the following way: Chapter 1 is devoted to giving account about the investigation outline which involves the formulation of the problem, the questions which gave rise to the investigation and the hypotheses or possible solutions to those investigation questions. Later on, we used some time to talk about the objectives or guidelines of this dissertation, the justification or reasons why we decided to work on this matter, limitations that arouse while the investigation took place. Finally, we mentioned previous studies that have been done previously in this matter and keep some relationship with the investigation not before mentioning some teaching / personal experiences which were the starting point of the whole investigation.

Chapter 2 reviews the theoretical framework or literature on age and second / foreign language acquisition, focusing in four specific aspects: vocabulary, age and vocabulary acquisition and the existence of a critical period for the effective learning of a language; age and time of exposure in language acquisition; and finally, age and second language acquisition.

Once the background has been provided, chapter 3 presents the methodology and procedure used for the analysis of the data. In this part, we took a look at the type of investigation and its design, the instruments for the data collection are described and the participants that took part in the present research are presented.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the data analysis and results obtained after applying the instruments described in chapter 3. We took a glance at the performances of the population during class observations, examinations and pair interviews.

A general discussion that takes into account all the results from the work carried out is offered in chapter 5 where conclusions are also provided and issues for further research identified.

To close this research, a list of the bibliographical references mentioned in the present study and three appendices are included at the end.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INVESTIGATION OUTLINE**

#### **1.1. Formulation of the problem**

The influence of age in the lexical acquisition of a foreign or second language has always been controversial. While teaching my own classes and observing other classes at different levels I started asking some questions to myself which gave path to this investigation.

Questions:

- When is it advisable to start learning a second / foreign language?
- Is there a critical period when humans acquire a second / foreign language more easily?
- Is the amount of exposure to comprehensible input in a second / foreign language crucial in the final acquisition of that language?
- Are young learners (children) more capable of acquiring a second / foreign language than older learners?

As English teachers, we have been bombarded with different ideas about how important age in the acquisition and mastery of a foreign or second language is. For this reason, some English teachers favor the exposure of students to comprehensible input since very young age since the centers of language located in the brain are working at full capacity; while others agree on the idea that exposure to comprehensible input

should start later since young learners are not mature enough to understand the use and complexity of a foreign or second language.

With this great debate in mind, I asked myself: Is age a crucial factor in the acquisition of vocabulary in a foreign or second language? If this is so, which could be the possible outcomes of integrating reading and vocabulary acquisition strategies in the teaching of English as a foreign language? These are the questions that guided me while carrying out this research.

## **1.2. Hypothesis**

### **1.2.1. General Hypothesis**

Young children in formal settings; even though they may have problems at the beginning in comparison with adolescent learners a cause of short attention span and lack of strategies in dealing with new vocabulary, finally get to surpass them in acquire a better vocabulary in the long term because of more time of exposure to comprehensible input in English and absence of fear in making vocabulary or grammar mistakes.

### **1.2.2. Specific Hypotheses**

- The early, constant and systematic exposure to comprehensible input in L2 since earlier maturational stages (childhood) increases the opportunities of acquiring a good level of vocabulary.
- The use of suitable materials for the age of students motivates them to work and use the language in different contexts enhancing the chances to acquire a better vocabulary.
- The application of reading and vocabulary acquisition strategies in order to get information in a meaningful way helps to raise the level of vocabulary acquisition comprehension and production.
- The possibility for students to work with a qualified teacher who applies different learning strategies and approaches in

class gives them the opportunity to develop better strategies to deal with lexical problems.

### **1.3. Delimitation of the objectives**

#### **1.3.1. General Objective**

To incorporate the teaching of English to primary students of Peruvian public schools with a suitable amount of English instruction and to increase the amount of hours of English at secondary level in Peruvian public schools.

#### **1.3.2. Specific Objectives**

- To promote the use of vocabulary acquisition strategies for enhancing autonomous learning in foreign language learning.
- To propose the use of a literature – based program in EFL settings as a vehicle for working towards proficiency in the target language.

### **1.4. Justification of the investigation**

- In my opinion, not only Peruvian public school teachers but also the field of teaching English as a foreign language could greatly benefit from a deeper consideration of the role of age in the acquisition of vocabulary as an effective way to promote ultimate attainment of a language. Thus, this investigation establishes the basis for making informed choices and proposing effective instructional practices concerning the use of vocabulary acquisition strategies in EFL contexts.
- As the demand of more competent and proficient speakers of English increases steadily, educators are looking for more efficient and cost – effective ways to improve the skills of the students of English who will face this demand in the future. It is natural, then, for teachers, curriculum developers, administrators and government officials to ask how to do so and the idea behind this research is to allow readers to understand the implications of exposing young students to comprehensible input in English as one of the most

important ways to cope with the always increasing demand for proficient speakers of English. The research findings can be used by textbooks writers, teachers, teacher trainers, etc. to make appropriate decisions in order to improve the effectiveness of their teaching sessions and the implementation of more effective programs for the teaching of English throughout the country.

- Last but not least, by conducting this research, I discovered interesting things about how English is taught in my country. I was able to see the linguistic limitations of teachers of English working in public schools and the effects these limitations produce in their students. It is my wish to share the outcomes with my peers from different countries so as to see if this situation is – or is not – alien to them in order to develop new theories and teaching techniques grounded on our own educational settings.

### **1.5. Limitations of the investigation**

In every investigation it is normal to find some drawbacks and this research was not the exception. Here is a list of limitations found while performing the research.

- One limitation was given by the fact that the teachers who took part in this investigation had different backgrounds, not only in terms of the years of experience as English teachers but also in terms of their command of the English language. In our opinion, this situation just mirrors the reality in our Peruvian public schools in comparison with Peruvian private schools.
- The fact that this investigation had to take place in two institutions caused time limitations since the investigator had to arrange different times for visiting and had to face last minute changes (earthquake's drills, exams of end of bimester, etc.)
- Last but not least, there was also the limitation of accessibility to previous research in English. One reason for this could be the fact that, apparently, Peruvian universities and colleges offering the major of Education in ELT do not ask their undergraduate students to conduct any research in L2 for graduation purposes. Another reason for this situation could be that is the only master program in



TEFL in our country, which means that undertaking research in ELT, is a very limited academic practice in our setting. In conclusion, this lack of accessibility to research in ELT is caused by the fact that Peruvian universities and colleges do not do enough research in ELT.

### **1.6. Antecedents of the investigation**

The topic of the influence of age in vocabulary acquisition in ESL / EFL has always been highly debatable for English teachers, textbook writers, researchers and English learners. Shall we, those immersed in ELT/ESL, consider “the sooner, the better” policy as an effective way of mastering a second / foreign language? Or, quite the contrary is it advisable to delay the learning of vocabulary until learners are mature enough to understand the form, meaning and use of words and phrases?

In our case, the primary concern in the topic of vocabulary acquisition in ELT came from two different experiences.

Experience 1: While coursing my university studies, I had to observe many different classroom settings and students of different ages. These classroom observations took place for eight weeks per semester so I had the opportunity to stay with the same group of students for such time and witness their progress. One of my first observations took place in a national school where I had to observe second grade of secondary students while taking English classes once a week for two pedagogical hours (80 minutes). At the beginning of the observation, I noticed that students did not have a good command of the language, when I asked them if they had studied English before the answer was “*solamente el año pasado; en primaria no llevamos Ingles*”. The teacher in charge of the class tried to teach them classroom commands like “*May I come in?, May I speak Spanish? Please teacher, I need.....*” throughout the lessons together with the grammatical points in order to create an English speaking environment in the classroom but most of the time, the teacher herself spoke Spanish to make herself understood. During the first lessons, students did not use the classroom vocabulary the teacher was trying to make them use; instead they spoke Spanish or simply said nothing. When I asked the students why they did not use the expressions given, they answered things like “*y si me equivocó?, no.....me da roche*”.

By the end of the eighth week, the most “advanced” students tried to use some of those expressions very timidly but it was difficult for them to overcome the “social pressure” of not using English for not be seen as “nerds” or “teacher’s favorite”. At the end of the period of observation, I asked the teacher why, in her opinion, students are reluctant to use English in class and she said it is very difficult to make them speak freely since they are not used to listen to or use English since children; she also claimed that adolescents are more interested in social acceptance of their peers rather than “showing knowledge” which is why they avoid using L2 in a way of not making mistakes in classroom environments so they don’t look as “nerds” in front of their friends.

Experience 2: After observing secondary settings in the teaching of English, I had the opportunity to observe primary settings but for this matter, I had to go to a private institution since in national schools, English is taught only at secondary level. In this occasion I had to observe eight – year old children who took English classes six hours per week divided in three periods of two pedagogical hours each (80 minutes) for eight weeks. Since the very beginning of my observations, I could notice that the teacher in charge performed many activities so students could get involved easily in the class and also she had a fixed set of classroom commands visible for students to use (by coincidence, the same expressions the secondary teacher tried to teach to her students). Students tried to use Spanish in class but the teacher “motivated” them to use English and “forced” them to use the expressions showed in the classroom. Children did not use the expressions at the beginning (first or second class) but after a “silent period” they started to use them making some pronunciation and grammatical mistakes which the teacher corrected right away. The children, unlike adolescents, did not seem to have problems with the fact of making mistakes or be seen as the “teacher’s favorite” and showed satisfaction when the teacher seemed happy with them using English.

At the end of the eighth week of observation, I could notice that the majority of students were using the expressions given by the teacher in a very natural way and experimented with English without paying attention to the possibility of making mistakes. This experience agrees with the idea stated by Heighington (1996): “They have no awkwardness or inhibitions with the new language and are not all bothered about making

mistakes. Most significant of all, they soak up new language and ideas rather as a sponge does water” (Hieghington, 1996:57).

In the same way I did with the other teacher; I asked the teacher about her opinion of this particular phenomenon in class and she told me that children are just picking up the language in the same way they did with Spanish and, if motivated in the correct way, they are not afraid of making mistakes because they just want to “have fun”.

I shall complement these personal experiences with some additional arguments and counterarguments that demonstrate the interest of studying vocabulary acquisition in relation to age.

Although the mainstream literature has not dealt with vocabulary and age, there have been some studies that have dealt with age and lexical acquisition in the teaching of English. As Singleton (1995) acknowledges, there is a small amount of published research available on the topic.

It is a popular belief among many experts in language learning that the aspects that children will learn more efficiently in the first stages of learning a foreign/second language are pronunciation and vocabulary. In a study carried out by Burstall (the NFER Evaluation Project, 1974) on the effects of an earlier introduction of French in primary schools in the UK, most of the teachers believed that starting the instruction of a second language when children were younger than twelve was positive. They held that an earlier start “would help pupils to acquire a wider vocabulary” and that it was the time “to get children speaking French quite naturally, assimilating new words and sounds without difficulty.” (1974:69-70)

Also Torras, Tragant & García (1997) talked to parents whose children started learning a foreign language at a young age. They report that parents believe that, at this early age, children have a special ability to learn pronunciation and that of all the linguistic components; they would basically learn vocabulary, as grammar structures would be too difficult to learn. As regards of instruction in the school context, the majority of parents note that what children learn in class is vocabulary (i.e. isolated words or prefabricated chunks), which they consider obvious as children cannot read or write yet; grammar structures would

come later on. Their opinions can be therefore summarized as follows: Children learn words that will be used in the following years to construct messages in the foreign language and the result of the learning will be seen in the long term. There seems to be a contradiction, though, between the beliefs held by parents as the authors indicate: The parents interviewed think that children assimilate languages better than adults, but that they mainly learn vocabulary. According to a priori belief, this would mean that an early start will be better especially for vocabulary learning.

Nonetheless, these are all beliefs that may or may not correspond to what actually takes place. Empirical studies in this area will have to confirm what is assumed by popular knowledge. Among the studies on the age and foreign / second language vocabulary acquisition, we can distinguish those carried out in naturalistic settings and those conducted in formal settings.

- Naturalistic settings

As terms of naturalistic environments, most studies reveal that younger learners do not perform well as older learners in the short term. Snow and Hoefnagel – Hohle carried an investigation in the Netherlands, with English learners of Dutch which showed that adolescent and adult learners' result in the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test – PPVT - (Dunn: 1959) were better than those of younger learners, thus suggesting an advantage for the older over the younger learners in vocabulary, as well as for aspects of the second language skill that depended strongly on rule acquisition such as syntax and morphology (Snow: 1983). At the end of three months, the older learners were better at all aspects in Dutch except pronunciation. Also older immigrants were shown to surpass younger ones after less than a year in Sweden in most of the proficiency variables studied by Ekstrand (1976/1982). The lexical component in his study was included in each task, and there is no specific vocabulary test.

Along with these findings, Swain (1981) compared L1 English - speaking adolescents in late French immersion programs in Canada with younger children in early immersion programs. She found that adolescents performed as well on a cloze test after about 1400

hours of immersion as the children did after 4000 hours (the young were better in listening though). Also Cummins and Swain (1986) found that older learners would acquire cognitively demanding aspects of L2 proficiency more rapidly than younger learners. In the same line, Harley (1986) found in students of immersion programs that older learners had a greater range of verb vocabulary than the younger early total immersion students after about 1000 hours of exposure.

In spite of this initial advantage for “late starters”, research has shown that as well that “early starters” will most probably surpass “late starters” in the long run. For example, the younger subjects in Snow and Hoefnagel – Hohle’s, research began to catch up with the older ones after about a year in sentence translation tasks and storytelling.

There are other studies that focus on lexis and long term achievement. Hyltenstam (1988, 1992) analyses the written and oral production of three groups of secondary school students: Twelve Swedish monolinguals that form the control group, twelve bilinguals with an age of exposure which started below age six and twelve bilinguals with an age of exposure which started above age seven. One of his main aims is to see the effect of the initial age of exposure in the degree of nativeness in the second language learners’ ultimate attainment.

Grammatical and lexical analyses of the errors in the data were examined and the following conclusion was obtained: All bilinguals that arrived after age seven committed more errors than the native monolinguals, whereas the young arrivals’ group was more heterogeneous (some behave similarly to the monolingual group and some were closer to the other bilingual group).

According to Hyltenstam, this finding suggests that what has normally been assumed for phonology may also take place in the lexicon “The age of 6 or 7 does not seem to be an important period in distinguishing between near – native and native – like ultimate attainment. The results, in particular, support the idea that acquisition after the age of seven does not only hinder native – like attainment of phonology, which the studies reviewed by Long

(1990) clearly lent support to, but also lead to non – completeness and to the promotion of fossilization in the realm of grammar and lexicon” (Hyltenstam: 1992)

There is also another study on vocabulary and long – term achievement that points out that there is probably a sensitive period for lexical acquisition in a second language which closes around the age of six. Spadaro (1998) analyzed the lexical performance of four groups: A control group formed by native speakers and three groups of non – native speakers with various first languages and three different ranges of age of onset in the learning of English (0 – 6 years old, 7 to 12 years old and later than 13). Although all the groups performed similarly in a word association task, the group that started learning English between 0 and 6 years old was judged to be more native – like in an oral task. Learners in this group also completed a series of written lexical tasks, which tested the use of core vocabulary and multi – word units, similarly to the way native speakers did. The results were consistent even length of residence was not a variable in the analysis, It must be noted, though, that the judges who rated the oral tasks were given the manuscripts to read, and therefore, they did not have just lexical information to arrive at their final decision but also grammatical, morphological and pragmatic.

Another interesting study in this field was the one conducted by Magiste (1987) which involved students from Germany in primary and secondary schools. They had been living in Sweden for different lengths of time and performed two production tasks in German and Swedish: Naming pictures and naming numbers. It was shown that it took less time for the elementary students (6 to 11) to acquire an elementary vocabulary in a second language, as she found that the point at which response times in the two languages intersected was after 4 years for primary school learners and after 6 for the secondary school pupils. However, these young learners did not exhibit such a considerable advantage in a more difficult task such as number naming, where the performance of both groups was similar; the advantage young learners have for lexical acquisition seems then to counterbalance task difficulty. When the task was cognitively more demanding, the response was similar for both groups. Therefore, she concludes that although

there might not be a critical age for second language learning, there can be an optimal age because “if the language task allows for the students’ cognitive level, younger students will generally acquire that task with greater ease” (Magiste:1987)

- Formal settings

Studies in formal settings also show that older learners perform better than younger ones in the short – run. Asher and Price (1967/1982) showed that young children (8 year – olds) had the poorest retention in a listening comprehension of commands in their second language. These commands that could be formed by one up to four words were better retained by adolescents and adults. Stankowski Gratton (1980) compared, at the end of the course, two groups of Italian elementary students who started to learn German in Italy during the first and the third grade respectively. The method used to teach students was the “Kommbitte” which consists in learning phrases and sentences that can be combined and used in different situations. Results indicate that students who started instruction later obtained more benefits from the course as their scores were a bit higher than those of students who started earlier, although the difference was not large.

Therefore, it seems that in both contexts (naturalistic and formal) rate increases with age, because if the amount of exposure time is held constant, older learners learn faster than younger learners. McLaughlin, Osterhout and Kim (2004) studied the rate of L2 vocabulary learning of adult learners during the first classes in a second language. They obtained the conclusion that adult language learners rapidly get information about different aspects of L2 words (initially about form and then about meaning). Adult L2 learning is not uniformly slow and laborious” as “some aspects of the language are acquired with remarkable speed” (McLaughlin, Osterhout and Kim: 2004). Two other studies (cited in Singleton, 1995) confirm that slow rate of young learners as regards vocabulary. They both involve observation of foreign language classes in primary schools and they concluded that pupils’ acquired vocabulary is very poor (Scottish Education Department, 1969) and that they have a minimal knowledge regarding the small number of isolated words.

In the long term, contrary to what happens in naturalistic contexts (e.g. Snow & Hoefnagel – Hohle, 1978), younger learners do not seem to catch up with older learners. The same conclusions are reached by studies carried out in different countries: Burstall (1974) in UK, Oller and Nagato (1974) in Japan, and Griffin (1993) in the United States.

Results in Burstall (1974), indicate that an early start does not lead to a better long – term performance. She reports that students who had been taught French from the age of 8 did not reveal, by the age of 16, any substantial gains apart from listening comprehension, the only test in which they were a bit better. In this study, students were asked to identify the pictures that corresponded to the printed items and then to choose the words needed to complete sentences (in the reading comprehension test). In the oral test, the answers to questions referring to illustrations were scored for structure and vocabulary using 4 – point scales. There was no test of free conversation ability even for those belonging to grade 11 (sixteen year olds). However, a number of assumptions have been noted in this study, one of them being that control students were sometimes mixed in the same class with experimental subjects, which may have affected the final results of the students.

Following the same path but this time with another language, Oller and Nagato (1974) performed a cross – sectional study at grades 7, 9 and 11 with Japanese learners of English where lexical competence was assessed only by means of cloze tests. Despite an advantage of 6 years in EFL for students who started English instruction earlier, students who started English instruction later outperformed them towards the end of high – school education. This fact led authors to hypothesize that an early start does not necessarily mean a lasting benefit.

Griffin's (1993) study analyses the long – term achievements of two groups of American learners of French at the end of high school where two tests were used in the assessment: The ETS French Achievement Test, in which vocabulary precision was assessed in a reading task by means of a multiple choice, and the Advanced Placement Examination Test. In this test, students wrote



an essay, which was evaluated holistically for vocabulary, grammar accuracy, idiom usage, organization and style, and they told a story in French. One group had started learning French between kindergarten and grade 4 (early starters), while the other had started between grades 5 and 8 (late starters). She found a clear advantage for late starters despite having received less exposure to the language.

In Ontario, Harley and Jean (1999) carried out an investigation where early immersion students in a French immersion program were better than late immersion students in a yes/no vocabulary recognition test (in spite of being the same age, students who started earlier had more exposure). Nevertheless, a more rapid progress in word analysis skills was observed for late immersion students. For instance, they had better abilities to produce words in the same family of the stimulus word and they easily converted words into cognates. Therefore, the authors concluded that, to some extent, maturity counts by overriding the disadvantage of less exposure.

After having checked different investigations related to vocabulary acquisition in formal and informal settings, as a conclusion I would like to quote Singleton's words (1995) which I believe to be the most plausible conclusion now regarding the age factor and lexical acquisition:

"The age factor operates in relation to second language vocabulary learning in the same way as it operates to other aspects of second language learning, i.e. older beginners exhibit an initial advantage which is progressively eroded as younger beginners catch up with them and eventually overtake them. This pattern is clear in the naturalistic evidence, and is undisturbed by most of the evidence from formal instructional situations, provided that one takes account the very much longer timescale that must be required for eventual advantage of an early start to manifest itself under conditions of sparse exposure" (Singleton:1995)

Taking into account that Peruvian students in general do not have the chance to "live" English within a naturalistic setting, which showed by different studies to be the best way to acquire a good level of

vocabulary, I firmly believe that it is vitally important for English learners to have an intensive exposure to English since very young ages in order to increase their opportunities to reach a good command of the language not only in lexis but also in other aspects of the language.

With this last idea in mind; in the next chapter we will explore important ideas related to crucial concepts for this investigation like the definition of vocabulary, the relationship between age and vocabulary acquisition in which we are going to put emphasis on the critical period hypothesis, the relationship between age and time of exposure in school settings, and the relationship between age and second language vocabulary acquisition in order to establish a clear framework for the following chapters.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1. Vocabulary: Definitions**

Being the term “vocabulary” crucial in this study; in the following lines, a set of definitions related to it will be presented in order to have a clearer idea of what “vocabulary” is.

According to the Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary, vocabulary is commonly defined as "all the words known and used by a particular person"; following the same path, the website Wikipedia defines vocabulary as “A set of words within a language that are familiar to a person which usually develops with age, and serves as a useful and fundamental tool for communication”.

According to Lehr, Osborn and Hiebert (2007) vocabulary, broadly defined, is knowledge of words and word meanings. However, vocabulary is more complex than this definition suggests. First of all, words come in two forms: oral and print. Oral vocabulary includes those words that we recognize and use in listening and speaking while print vocabulary includes those words that we recognize and use in reading and writing. Second, word knowledge also comes in two forms, receptive and productive. Receptive vocabulary includes words that we recognize when we hear or see them; on the other hand, productive vocabulary includes words that we use when we speak or write. In that sense, receptive vocabulary is typically larger than productive vocabulary, and may include many words to which we assign some meaning, even if we

don't know their full definitions and connotations – or ever use them ourselves as we speak and write.

One example of this last idea is seen when children are exposed to a second / foreign language. During his/her infancy, a child builds a vocabulary by instinct, with zero effort because infants imitate words that they hear and then associate those words with objects and actions. During this period, the listening vocabulary (all the words a person can recognize when listening to speech and that it is aided in size by context and tone of voice) appear and the speaking vocabulary (all the words he or she can use in speech). follows, and as a child's thoughts become more reliant on his/her ability to self-express in a gesture-free and babble-free manner the reading and writing vocabularies appear, especially under proper instruction of the language.

Although a young child may not yet be able to speak, write, or sing, he or she may be able to follow simple commands and appear to understand a good portion of the language to which he or she is exposed. In this case, the child's receptive vocabulary is likely tens, if not hundreds of words but his or her active vocabulary is zero. When that child learns to speak or sign, however, the child's active vocabulary begins to increase. On the other hand, it is possible for the productive vocabulary to be larger than the receptive vocabulary, for example in a second-language learner who has learned words through study rather than exposure, and can produce them, but has difficulty recognizing them in conversation. Productive vocabulary; therefore, generally refers to words which can be produced within an appropriate context and match the intended meaning of the speaker or signer. As with receptive vocabulary, however, there are many degrees at which a particular word may be considered part of an active vocabulary. Knowing how to pronounce, sign, or write a word does not necessarily mean that the word has been used to correctly or accurately reflect the intended message of the utterance, but it does reflect a minimal amount of productive knowledge.

Within the receptive / productive distinction lies a range of abilities which are often referred to as *degree of knowledge*. This simply indicates that a word gradually enters a person's vocabulary over a period of time as more aspects of word knowledge are learnt. Roughly, these stages could be described as:

1. Never encountered the word.
2. Heard the word, but cannot define it.
3. Recognize the word due to context or tone of voice.
4. Able to use the word and understand the general and/or intended meaning, but cannot clearly explain it.
5. Fluent with the word – its use and definition.

Within a classroom environment (which is where this investigation took place), the word *vocabulary* is used with varying meanings. For example, for beginning reading teachers, the word might be synonymous with “sight vocabulary,” by which they mean a set of the most common words in English that young students need to be able to recognize quickly as they see them in print. However, for teachers of upper elementary and secondary school students, *vocabulary* usually means the “hard” words that students encounter in content area textbook and literature selections.

For purposes of this work, we define vocabulary as knowledge of words and word meanings in both oral and print language and in productive and receptive forms. More specifically, we use *vocabulary* to refer to the kind of words that students must know to listen, read, speak and write increasingly demanding text with comprehension.

## **2.2. Age and vocabulary acquisition – The Critical Period Hypothesis**

The idea of a direct influence of age on the acquisition of vocabulary is crucial in this study since it is closely related to the existence (or not) of a period of great sensitivity in which humans can learn languages with great ease, either their mother tongue or foreign languages. The following studies give important insights about how influential age in vocabulary acquisition is.

As stated above, age is one of the variables in language learning which has been most thoroughly investigated by many experts (Birdsong 1999, 2006; DeKeyser, 2000; Harley 1986; Long 1990, 2005; Marinova – Tood, Marshall & Snow, 2000; Singleton & Lengyel, 1995) among others. The idea about the existence of a Critical Period (CP) beyond which a language could not be learnt was first thought for a first language (Penfield & Roberts: 1959; Lenneberg: 1967), but was later on extended to other languages different from the first (Johnson & Newport: 1989).

The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), supports the existence of a specific and limited period of time for language acquisition, or as Wagner (2008) claims: (CPH is) “a biologically determined period of life when language can be acquired more easily and beyond which time language is increasingly difficult to acquire”. There are two versions of this hypothesis: The strong version is that language must be learnt by puberty or it will be never learnt from subsequent exposure; the weak version is that after puberty language learning will be more difficult and incomplete.

Johnson and Newport (1989) were the ones who “translated” these two versions of the Critical Period Hypothesis in the mother tongue into two hypotheses for the foreign language: “The exercise hypothesis” and the “maturation hypothesis”. The former states that early in life, humans have a superior capacity in terms of language learning; that innate capacity, if not exercised during this time, will disappear or decline with as people grow older; if exercised for normal L1 acquisition, it will remain permanently intact for later acquisition of a second or foreign language. The latter affirms that the superior capacity for acquiring languages that humans have early in life will disappear or decline with maturation. Therefore, the main difference between these two ideas lies in the fact that the “exercise hypothesis” opens the possibility that adolescents and even adults may have the same chances as children to successfully acquire the L2.

The fact that there exist some old learners who attain native – like competence, (Bongaerts, Planken & Schils, 1995) is one of the reasons why there is some reticence at present to use the term “critical period”. Alternatively, there is a preference to talk about “Sensitive Periods” which are periods of heightened sensitivity or responsiveness to specific types of environmental stimuli, surrounded on both sides by states of lesser sensitivity (Oyama, 1978/1982, 40). However, in spite of the name adopted, there is no agreement on how a critical or a sensitive period may affect second or foreign language learning. Scovel (1969), for example, states that the optimal period should be limited to refer to only phonological learning, which, for better results, should take place before the age of 6 and 15 for morphological and syntactic aspects. Instead, authors such as Long (1990) consider that there are different sensitive periods for different aspects, 6 years old for phonology and 15 years old for morphological and syntactic aspects. Contrary to the views of these

two researchers, Martohardjono and Flynn (1995) postulate that, whereas non - innate aspects of L2 proficiency (like lexical learning is considered by them to be) may be susceptible to age – related degradation, innate aspects (basically syntax and phonology) are likely to be immune to such degradation, as access to biologically endowed support for language acquisition continues into the stage of adulthood.

Independently of the name chosen to describe and give account for the advantages or disadvantages that age may or may not offer when learning a foreign / second language, the question of age in language teaching always involves a question of time which can be understood as “time to start learning language” or “hours required to learn a language” (time of instruction in the target language).

### **2.3. Age and time of exposure in second / foreign language acquisition**

In naturalistic settings (where the target language is the main mean of communication), is quite clear that the more time a person is exposed to that language, the better chances that person will have to attain a native – like competence which is a very desirable situation for children. Since this investigation was conducted within a formal setting of instruction in a country where the target language is used as a foreign language, the time of exposure is limited and its influence in vocabulary acquisition not quite clear as in naturalistic settings. The following studies give interesting ideas about this matter.

As regards the question of age and language teaching, a very popular assumption claims that the earlier one starts learning a language, the better (Scovel: 2000). This idea, according to Bialystok (1997) gives path to two interpretations. The first one considers children better foreign / second language learners than adolescents and adults because they are endowed with a better system for language learning; it assumes that there are biological constraints or innate mechanisms that determine the learning of the language.

The second interpretation claims that, in most cases, children are more successful than adolescents / adults when faced with the task of learning a second / foreign language; they are more motivated and less inhibited. Bialystok (1997), for example, suggests that no maturational

constraints are needed to account for differences between adult / adolescents and child foreign / second language acquisition. According to Bialystok, children's advantage doesn't seem to have a biological basis and would not then reflect the existence of any sensitive period.

What makes the difference between younger and older learners are processing techniques. For example, as some of the category boundaries needed to represent the foreign / second language would be different from the mother tongue, adults / adolescents and children would make use of different procedures to cope with them. For example, adults / adolescents will extend the linguistic categories in their mother tongue, because they are in the process of consolidating knowledge and looking for overall similarities, whereas children will create linguistic categories, which is their most natural option as they are constantly making categories in their mother tongue.

As far as the question of time as "duration" is concerned, a distinction has to be made between "rate" (how fast the language is acquired) and "ultimate attainment", (the final level of proficiency achieved). In 1979; after reviewing the literature available on age and language learning, Krashen, Long and Scarcella (1979/1982) summarized the results obtained by researchers up to that moment in three generalizations, which can be considered still valid today. The first two are concerned with rate:

- Adults proceed through early stages of syntactic and morphological development faster than children (where time and exposure are held constant).
- Older children acquire faster than young children in early stages of syntactic and morphological development (where time and exposure are held constant).

As Singleton (1995) states, they both limit their claim about the short – term attainment of adults and older children to the areas of syntax and morphology. Therefore, it can be said that the advantage is limited both in time (in the long run, young learners will probably overtake them) and in scope (older learners superiority is restricted to certain linguistic aspects, like morphosyntax). According to Dekeyser and Larson – Hall (2005), this initial advantage for older learners could be



attributed to the fact that they make use of explicit learning mechanisms, which are faster than the implicit learning mechanisms that younger learners use.

Regarding the idea of the advantage, older learners have usually shown superiority on areas such as morphology and syntax (Collier: 1987; García Mayo: 2003). Cummins (1980) and Cummins and Swain (1986) try to give a reason this matter: Older learners are better at acquiring cognitive or academic foreign / second language skills because these skills are related to the development of literacy skills in the mother tongue and foreign /second language.

According to Cummins (1979), older learners would acquire academic foreign / second language skills more rapidly than younger learners, but this would not necessarily happen in aspects of foreign / second language proficiency unrelated to cognitive academic language proficiency, which would be less sensitive to academic development. However, he does not specifically state which aspects of foreign / second language, apart from phonology, will be more efficiently acquired by young learners. Probably, the advantage for older learners would not be shown in pronunciation or oral fluency, which are considered less cognitively demanding aspects.

Interestingly enough Snow and Hoefnagel – Hohle's (1978) results in the Netherlands showed that the most remarkable differences between young and older learners were to be found in tests that examined components that depended on rule acquisition (syntax, morphology, vocabulary and metalinguistic ability), contrary to the tests that examined comprehension or communicative skills, where the differences between younger and older learners were less noticeable.

The third generalization presented by Krashen, Long and Scarcella (1979/1982) is related to the level of proficiency achieved after a substantial amount of time.

- Acquirers who begin natural exposure to a foreign / second language during childhood generally achieve higher foreign / second proficiency than those beginning as adults.

Differences in rate and ultimate attainment have been generally observed in naturalistic acquirers of a second language. In general, older acquirers tend to surpass children in the first stages of learning a language, but children catch up with older acquirers in the long run, in areas like grammar or in pronunciation,

Dekeyser (2000), suggested a 10 – year minimum period of residence in an immersion setting (naturalistic context) would be advisable for learners to have reach ultimate attainment levels. In addition to ultimate attainment, Krashen, Long and Scarcella (1979/1982) distinguish in this third generalization between formal and informal learning contexts (which is something that is not mentioned in the two previous generalizations); this last claim can only be applied to situations in which learners are in a naturalistic setting.

In foreign learning, the situation differs from the one of naturalistic contexts. The first difference is that the sources of input in formal contexts are usually poor, the target language is not spoken outside the classroom and sometimes not even inside the classroom, as not always teachers have enough command of the language to use it fluently. The second is that there is limited temporal exposure to the language. As Harley and Hart (1997) note, exposure is very much reduced when the medium of instruction in the class is not the target language but the mother tongue. Exposure has been shown to be an important element in language acquisition, Muñoz (1997) insists that “exposure maybe as crucial as the age at which initial exposure takes place, that is, the age at which pupils begin their instruction in the foreign language”.

In addition to these ideas, Torras and Celaya (2001) discuss “the problem one comes across in formal contexts is that the advantage in ultimate attainment of younger learners that seems to exist in naturalistic contexts cannot always be tested empirically in instructional settings... so there is a need for studies measuring the long – term effects of an early introduction to a foreign language”.

However, these long - term effects would not be regarded as “ultimate attainment” in formal settings. It is because of the lack of exposure or unlimited input that Muñoz considers that “the issue of reaching the end state loses its relevance in foreign language settings” Muñoz comments in her article a series of symmetries that have been

assumed as regards the effects of age in naturalistic and instructed foreign/second language learning. One of the symmetries she talks about is that of ultimate attainment and states that there has been a misapplication of the term in instructional settings. If in a formal context the requirement of crucial conditions like amount of exposure and quality of input fails, the concept of a final product cannot be adopted. Secondly, by definition, to reach an ultimate attainment entails the “finishing” of learning, which would not be the case when learning in formal settings.

Studies examining a possible ultimate attainment in natural settings fall within a kind of age – related research whose objective, according to Muñoz (1997) is to “elucidate the existence and characteristics of maturational constraints on the human capacity for learning second languages”. There is, however, a second orientation in age – related research whose aim is to “identify age – related differences in foreign language learning, often with the aim of informing educational policy decision”. The work in the present dissertation would find place within this second orientation, and it is aiming to identify these age – related differences in vocabulary acquisition in particular.

#### **2.4. Age and Second language vocabulary acquisition**

As Ellis (1985) claims “SLA refers to all aspects of language that the language learner needs to master. However, the focus has been on how L2 learners acquire grammatical systems....Research has tended to ignore other levels of language. A little is known about L2 phonology, but almost nothing about the acquisition of lexis”.

Other authors like Haastrup and Henriksen (2001) and Long (1990, 272) acknowledge this lack of research since there has been a “dominance of syntax over lexis”. On the other hand, Gass (1987) claims that lexicon has not exactly been a neglected component but “has been dealt with somewhat tangentially”

The relationship between age and vocabulary acquisition in the L1 is well documented. A growing number of studies analyze L1 vocabulary development in children (Hamilton & Plunkett, 2000 in English, etc). As far as lexical acquisition in any SL or FL is concerned, the literature covers both early and late vocabulary learning (for instance, Yoshida, 1978 in children; Service & Craik, 1993 in adults). There is also a

number of studies looking for differences between younger and older learners as regards of learning styles (Papalia: 1975), mnemonic strategies (Pressley & Dennis – Round: 1980), meaning production (Verhallen & Schoonen: 1993), transfer (Cenoz: 2003), etc.

However, as Singleton points out, “the age factor, as it relates to second language lexical acquisition, is not a matter that receives a great deal of attention” (1995) because when it comes to the study of language learning and age – related constraints, most studies concentrate on phonology and morphosyntax. Other authors have also acknowledged this lack of research on lexis and age. For example, Long (1990) claims that “there appears to have been little or no published work on ultimate attainment in the area of lexis and collocation”

The emphasis on syntax and phonology and the lack of research of vocabulary in age studies may have several reasons. First of all, studies on age have usually been related to the idea of finding (or not) a “critical period” for language acquisition, either in the mother tongue or in the foreign / second language. As suggested in Muñoz (2006), the idea about the existence of a critical period, that is, a biologically determined period for language acquisition, stems from an innatist conception of language, which claims that children are biologically programmed for language. This conception gave rise, for instance, to generative grammar and Chomskian proposals.

According to Chomsky, a child possesses an innate gift known as UG (Universal Grammar) which consists of a set of principles common to all languages. The critical period hypothesis would fit easily in this theory as it would add the idea that these set of common principles available at childhood would not be accessible forever. In an innatist position, vocabulary does not have a central role, it is a structure that is basic and the set of principles in UG are grammar – related. Therefore, this theory would support the notion that children can achieve different levels of vocabulary but all achieve full mastery of the language structure.

Another reason why vocabulary could have not been studied in relation to age is that, contrary to syntax or phonology, learning vocabulary is a never – ending process even in the mother tongue (Gass:

1999; Service and Craik: 1993), while grammar is not. As Stubbs (1986) states:

“Lexical competence simply never approaches this kind of completeness (that takes place in grammar). The learning of new vocabulary is clearly very rapid in childhood, and then slows down. But a person’s vocabulary may nevertheless keep growing throughout their whole life. New meanings can be learned for old words, and new relations between words can be formed”

It is a common idea that the acquisition of syntax is complete at a particular point in time, while the lexicon is not considered a closed set of rules but a list that can always grow. In addition to syntax, most research on the “critical period” has focused on phonology, as ultimate attainment has usually been identified with a native – like command of the language, especially as regards “foreign accent” in speech. Therefore, studies have concentrated in finding (or not) a relationship between the age and the degree of foreign accent.

It is clear that age (or age-related factors), according to the previous investigations, is a major variable in the acquisition of a second language and in this particular case, in the acquisition of lexis. In the early stages of acquisition, older students are faster and more efficient than younger students because of maturational advantages and manipulation of cognitive strategies learnt during school instruction and also older students have the advantage of cognitive development in their first language to assist them with acquiring school skills in the second language but this early advantage diminishes after some time in favor of younger learners who will enjoy of more time of exposure to the target language (especially in naturalistic settings) to discover the different aspects of the language towards becoming proficient users of the language with some examples of native – like proficiency.

In conclusion, it has probably been a combination of all the causes identified such as the finding or not of a “critical period” for language acquisition and the assumption that the learning of lexis, unlike the learning of syntax is a never – ending process what has made of vocabulary a neglected aspect in age studies and it is for this reason that I decided it was worth investigating this matter more deeply.

Following this last thought, in the next chapter we will provide a brief explanation about the methodology of the investigation and how it took place in terms of the type of investigation, timing, instruments used to collect data, population, variables and techniques used to gather data which will be analyzed in the following chapters.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY OF THE INVESTIGATION**

This chapter presents the methodology and procedures used in the present research to answer the questions proposed in chapter I.

#### **3.1. Investigation type**

Taking into account that our aim is to study things in their natural settings (in this particular case, a classroom environment), attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them, we consider that a qualitative type of research is suitable for the purposes of this investigation since it is very useful in providing complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. It provides information about the “human” side of an issue – that is, the behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals. Qualitative research is intended to penetrate to the deeper significance that the subject of the research ascribes to the topic being researched. It involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter and gives priority to what the data contribute to important research questions or existing information.

#### **3.2. Design of the investigation**

This investigation was made in compliance with the ethics of research and in agreement with all the participants. Below I show the overlapping phases of the investigation, how the data collection instruments were planned and used in order to acquire the desired information and some setbacks found while working each one of them.

We used the term “overlapping” because the phases were not separated from each other. Quite the contrary.

**Table 1: Interactive phases of the research**

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Schedule (in weeks)</b>	<b>Phases</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Aug 31 <sup>st</sup> to Sep 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Week before the actual research	Phase 1: Planning	Getting initial information about the participants and teachers involved.
Sep 6 <sup>th</sup> to Sep 10 <sup>th</sup>	Week 1	Phase 2: Beginning data collection	Registration of critical incidents through Field Notes  Application Movers examination (diagnostic tests).
Sep 13 <sup>th</sup> to Nov 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Week 2 to week 8	Phase 3: Basic data collection	Registration of critical incidents through Field Notes  Application of the classroom readers and the weekly interviews.
Nov 8 <sup>th</sup> to Nov 12 <sup>th</sup>	Week after the research	Phase 4: Closing data	Application of the Movers examinations (posttests).

(Source: Adapted from McMillan and Schumacher;1989)

### **3.2.1. The field notes:**

Eight field notes were made in one private school and other eight in a public school. In order to obtain this information I had to have previous meetings with the teachers in charge of those courses in order to obtain all the facilities (planning phase). In case of the students that study in school A, the teacher and I agreed on performing class observations every Tuesday for two pedagogical hours from eight twenty in the morning (8:20 am) to a nine forty (9:40 am). In case of the students of school B, the school's principal, the teacher in charge and I agreed on performing the class observations every Friday for two pedagogical hours from nine o'clock (9:00 a.m.) to ten twenty (10:20a.m). In both cases, I remained silent during the whole class taking notes following this format:



- Number of week
- Time
- Activity
- Description of the incident
- Personal comment on this situation

Some setbacks I had during the recollection of this information was that school B ordered a “surprise” earthquake drill during one of my observations which made me rearrange the date of that observation causing me problems meeting deadlines. Another setback I had to deal with was the excessive intervention of the teacher in the work of students, especially in school B which did not allow them to actually apply the techniques previously studied.

### **3.2.2. Tests – Movers examination:**

The diagnostic tests were taken on the first Monday of the investigation and the posttests the first Monday after the eight weeks of the investigation was finished in both schools. As far as the time is concerned, 25 minutes were given for the listening part, 30 minutes for the Reading and Writing part and 5 to 6 minutes for the speaking part. Students claimed in many occasions that they did not understand the instructions of the tests which delayed the application of the examinations forcing the examiner to use L1 in order to clarify the instructions. Another problem found while applying the exams was that students had to go to another room in order to take the examination and then come back to their original classrooms causing them to lose classes making teachers uncomfortable.

### **3.2.3. Class readings:**

These pieces of readings were applied during the investigation time in order to work with students some reading comprehension strategies in order to give students tools on how to deal with vocabulary. These readings were carefully selected taking into consideration the age of students, their level of proficiency and topics students find appealing. These readings were applied in class

for eight weeks along with the “normal” classes of the students and were one of topics of the weekly interviews.

#### **3.2.4. Interviews:**

The interviews were taken every Friday during the eight weeks of the investigation in pairs so that by the end of the investigation each student would have faced two interviews. At the beginning of the investigation, the plan was to video record the interviews but during the rehearsal time, I noticed that students tended to pay more attention to the camera than actually to the interview itself so I decided to use a tape recorder in order to get information. Even though the tape recorder was new and was close to the speakers, some of the recordings were not clear leaving some utterances unanalyzed.

### **3.3. Population and study sample**

In order to give an appropriate description of the population and study sample, we are going to make a brief description of the context where the participants are exposed to the target language.

#### **3.3.1. General institution descriptions**

We focused our attention on the following characteristics: Type of school, time in the education field, location, socio – economical background of the school and how English is taught in each of the schools

- School A: School A is a private institution founded 25 years ago located in La Molina, the socio-economic profile of the families is AB. The school is considered one of the best male schools in the city of Lima. English is taught as a foreign language in an intensive way and students in this school have 9 hours of English exposure per week in primary level and 6 to 7 hours in secondary level.
- School B: School B is a national institution founded 64 years ago located in Breña, the socio – economic profile of the families is BC and in some cases D. English is taught as a

foreign language and, according to regulations of the Ministry of Education, the learning of English starts at secondary level where students have two hours of exposure to the language.

### 3.3.2. Study sample

The informants were 40 Peruvian students of these two schools. Twenty students from school A and twenty students from School B. The details are shown below:

**Table 2: The informants**

Number of participants	40 males 20 students from “school A” 20 students from “school B”
Age	8 to 9 years old (school A) 13 to 14 years old (school B)
First language	Spanish
Nationality	Peruvian
Age of first exposure to English in formal settings	6 to 7 years old (school A) 12 to 13 years old (school B)
Time of exposure to English in formal settings	9 pedagogical hours of 45 minutes each (school A) 2 pedagogical hours of 45 minutes each (school B)

(Source: Academic coordination of each school)

We also consider very important to give some information about the teachers who are in charge of those English classes.

- School A: The teacher in charge of this class is a professional English teacher graduated from a local university with 10 years of experience teaching English at different levels. This teacher holds a CAE qualification and attends different seminars and conferences related to English language teaching,
- School B: The teacher in charge of this class is a person who holds a certificate in English given by a language center and does not have an English international qualification in

English proficiency. Even though, this person does not have a bachelor degree in language teaching, this person has been teaching English for 8 years and works in two institutions so this teacher does not have time to attend to seminars or conferences related to language teaching.

### **3.4. Variables**

The variables used in the present dissertation are:

- Independent variables: Age, time of exposure to comprehensible input in L2.
- Dependent variable: Vocabulary acquisition

### **3.5. Techniques and Instruments for gathering data**

The techniques and instruments used during this investigation were:

- Field notes: Made with the purpose of registering incidental events that happened in a classroom with students and teachers during the application of the different tools and strategies.
- Tests: Since students have different age ranges and different amount of exposure to the target language, we used a test which could, in some way, provide the same opportunities to success to students during this investigation. Taking this idea into account, the “Movers Cambridge Test” was applied as diagnostic and posttest. This examination tests competence in the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing and was chosen because of its reliability and validity in order to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the participants in reference to an elementary level.
- Classroom reader’s exercises: Made with the purpose to assess the understanding of the story read in class and to give further practice on the comprehension strategy previously taught. They were applied right after finishing the selection chosen for that week.
- Interviews: Students faced interviews in groups of two every week where they answered questions of the teacher and were expected to

perform “real communication” between themselves. These interviews had three stages; the first one was about general information of the interviewee (name, personal data, hobbies, etc.) in order to check how the interviewee reacted to general aspects of the language, the second stage was related to the readings they studied during their different classes in which they faced different questions to check understanding of the readings and the use of vocabulary learnt during classes, and the last stage was short interaction between students without the intervention of the teacher in order to see how they act in a “real conversation”

After having explained the methodology of investigation, described the instruments used to gather data and described the way in which they were applied, the results and interpretations obtained will be shown in the next chapter.



## **CHAPTER IV**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

This chapter presents the results obtained in the following tasks: Field notes, class readings, diagnostic tests, posttests and interviews. We want to see if those students who started learning English earlier will have a better vocabulary than those students who started learning English later.

#### **4.1. Data analysis**

In order to analyze the results provided by the tests, frequency distributions and measures of central tendency (mean, mode and median) have been used. For the field notes and class readings, descriptions of the incidental events as well as categorization of the mistake(s) have been made. Regarding the interviews, a transcription of some participants' utterances has been made.

##### **4.1.1. Analysis of Incidental events through the field notes:**

During the observations conducted while the participants were taking their classes, I observed limitations in both classroom environments but mostly in school "B". On the students' part, these limitations took the forms of mispronunciations, "false friends", more use of L1 than L2 in order to ask questions or answer the teacher's questions, lack of strategies to deal with difficult words (especially written). On the teacher's part, most of the time the classes were teacher – centered, especially in school B because of time constraints which caused almost no pair or group interaction

and no real communication in class, L2 was mostly used to read aloud sentences, not to express ideas or feelings in a free way. See Field notes (1 to 8) below.

\* The following abbreviations have been used: L1: Mother tongue. L2: Target language.

#### 4.1.1.1. Field notes – School A

Field Note 1 School: A	Week: First Activity: Conducting a Reading Lesson	Time: Morning
<p>Description of the incident(s):</p> <p>While the teacher was conducting a reading lesson, I observed the way in which he dealt with new words. It was like playing “charades”. The teacher used a lot of mime and gestures to convey the meanings while the students were trying to guess the meanings in a funny way (joking and laughing). Students sometimes answered in L1 but the teacher answered back in L2 and assign “points” to those students who used L2.</p> <p>Personal comment on this situation:</p> <p>This was a great manner to convey meaning for children since they had fun but learnt at the same time. The teacher prevented the use of L1 by giving points to students who used L2 instead of forbidding its use which created a relaxed environment in the classroom.</p>		



Field Note 3	Week: Third	Time: Morning
School: A	Activity: Using “Going to” to talk about the future	
Description of the incident(s):		
<p>The teacher showed students some pictures of famous cities in Peru. The teacher elicited the names of those famous cities (Trujillo, Cajamarca, etc) and asked students to imagine they want to travel to those places. The teacher asked: “<i>Where are you going to stay? How are you going to travel?</i>” <i>by bus? No, that is too slow”, etc.</i> The teacher wrote the questions and the answers on the board. On this occasion, students asked for some “difficult” words in L1, the teacher went out of the class for a minute and brought a dictionary and started to “look up” those words.</p>		
Personal comment on this situation:		
<p>This dictionary use was completely spontaneous (the teacher thought this strategy on the spot) but this use of dictionary could be something other teachers should do in order to encourage students to deal with new words.</p>		

Field Note 5	Week: Fifth	Time: Morning
School: A	Activity: Teaching Possessive pronouns	
Description of the incident(s):		
<p>Teacher started the class by talking about the previous lesson. The teacher pointed at a picture in the book in the book and said: “<i>This is a butcher</i>”. (Pronounced like the word <i>but</i>). After some more minutes, as a way to introduce the new topic, the teacher asked the class: “<i>Do you like vegetables?</i>” (Pronounced like the word <i>tables</i>). Almost at the end of the lesson, the teacher conducted a choral repetition drill and said: “<i>write, wrote, written</i>” (pronounced as in “<i>writing</i>”).</p>		

Categorization of the mistake(s):

*“Butcher”, “vegetables”, “written”*: Pronunciation mistakes. Students were puzzled with the mistakes but they started imitating the teacher with the pronunciation.

Field Note 7      Week: Seventh      Time: Morning  
School: A      Activity: Talking about nationalities and occupations.

Description of the incident(s):

The teacher in this school is fluent in L2. The teacher conducts the English classes mostly in English. During this teaching lesson, the teacher was talking about famous soccer players: Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo, David Beckham, etc. which kept the students engaged with the class. The teacher wrote these nationalities on the board: *“Argentinian”, “British”*. As an example, the teacher wrote the following sentence: *“He is a Portuguese soccer player”*. Then, the teacher asked students to copy the information on their notebooks.

Categorization of the mistake(s):

Nationality words: They should be capitalized (punctuation mistake). Students told to the teacher that in the previous Spanish class, they learnt that nationalities are not written with capital letters. The teacher explained that in English this is a rule and gave some examples. Students practiced the examples and wrote them on their notebooks.

#### 4.1.1.2. Field notes – School B

Field Note 2 School: B	Week: First Activity: Conducting a Reading Lesson	Time: Morning
<p>Description of the incident(s):</p> <p>The brainstorming of this reading lesson was entirely conducted in L1. The teacher elicited ideas from the students, these ideas were conveyed in L1, the teacher wrote them in L1 on the board. The teacher did not attempt to provide equivalent ideas in L2. When the brainstorming was over, the teacher read the questions in L2 which appeared on the students' sheets and invited students to provide their answers. In spite of the students' mistakes related to pronunciation, there was no feedback on this issue.</p> <p>Personal comment on this situation:</p> <p>Even for me, it was difficult to understand the teacher's instructions due to mispronunciation. In my opinion, there is lack of appropriate vocabulary in L2 on the teacher's part. The teacher showed difficulty when trying to promote real communication in the L2 classroom due to her own limitations in the target language. Her teaching was also affected due to these limitations. Students' performance in reading just mirrored the teacher's weaknesses in L2.</p>		

Field Note 4	Week: Fourth	Time: Morning
School: B	Activity: Doing drama in ELT	

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Description of the incident(s):

The week before the teacher assigned students – as homework- to perform a role play in the classroom about “asking and giving directions”. The day of the dramatization, students were organized in pairs and the teacher gave them some minutes for last - minute rehearsals. The class became very noisy at this point. I could notice that most of the students were chatting in L1 while others were playing and laughing. When students began their play, I realized most of them had learnt their lines just by heart with little or perhaps none comprehension of what they were saying (some students asked the teacher: *What is the meaning of this?* in L1). The teacher did not correct any of the students’ mistakes.

Personal comment on this situation:

It is clear that the teacher lost control of the situation because students didn’t work in the way they were expected (they were reluctant to work and showed lack of knowledge about how to pronounce new words in L2). Also, the teacher didn’t motivate them in an appropriate way.

Field Note 6 School: B	Week: Sixth Activity: Teaching Possessive pronouns	Time: Morning
<p>Description of the incident(s):</p> <p>Teacher asked the students “Did you finish your <i>homeworks?</i>” at the beginning of the lesson. After some minutes, the teacher wrote on the board: “Possessive adjectives: Mine, Yours, His, Hers, Ours, Theirs”. Then, the teacher asked students to copy the information, displayed on the board in their notebooks.</p> <p>Categorization of the mistake(s):</p> <p>“Homework”: Grammar mistake connected with the countable and uncountable nouns  “Mine, Yours, etc”: Grammar mistake: Confusion between possessive adjectives and possessive pronouns.</p>		

Field Note 8 School: B	Week: Eighth Activity: Conducting a reading lesson	Time: Morning
<p>Description of the incident(s):</p> <p>The teacher used a lot of L1 in classes to give instructions, to provide explanations. The few examples the teacher provided in L2 were the ones which appeared on the student’s handouts. (Approximately 90% of the English class was delivered in Spanish). L2 was used only to read aloud some sentences from the students’ book. Students also showed great difficulty when trying to read aloud in L2</p> <p>Categorization of the mistake(s):</p> <p>Lack of appropriate vocabulary in L2. The teacher had difficulty when trying to promote real communication in the L2 classroom due to the teacher’s own limitations in L2. Students’ performances in reading just mirrored the teacher’s weaknesses in L2</p>		

#### 4.1.2. Analysis of the diagnostic tests:

During the administration of the diagnostic tests, I observed that students tended to answer questions just for intuition or guessing rather than as a result of actually reading the instructions which is a tendency that exists among Peruvian students.

While the examinations were taking place, students kept asking questions for clarification rather than trying to understand what they were asked to do. Younger participants tended to answer all the questions but older learners left “difficult” questions unanswered.

The results of the diagnostic tests were as follows:

##### 4.1.2.1. Analysis of Movers Results - School A

Taken: Week one of the investigation (First Monday)

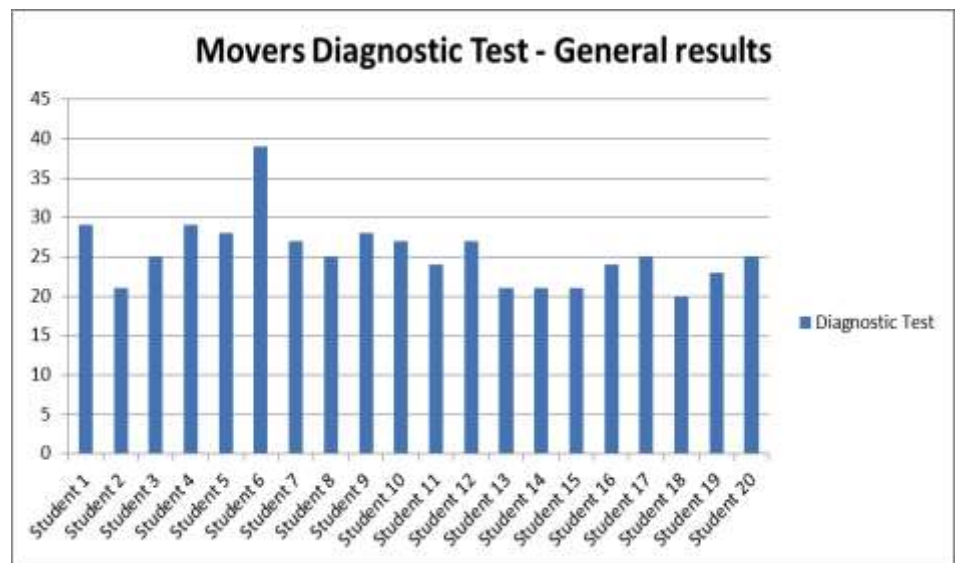
**Table 3: Movers Results - Diagnostic Test School A**

Student's number	Reading: out of 25	Writing: out of 15	Speaking: out of 15	Listening: out of 25	Total: out of 80
Student 1	5	8	10	6	29
Student 2	5	3	9	4	21
Student 3	4	6	10	5	25
Student 4	6	7	11	5	29
Student 5	2	8	8	10	28
Student 6	9	6	13	11	39
Student 7	4	8	9	6	27
Student 8	3	5	9	8	25
Student 9	6	5	8	9	28
Student 10	8	4	7	8	27
Student 11	4	6	6	8	24
Student 12	5	6	9	7	27
Student 13	3	5	7	6	21

Student 14	5	3	5	8	21
Student 15	4	6	6	5	21
Student 16	8	4	7	5	24
Student 17	5	7	6	7	25
Student 18	4	6	5	5	20
Student 19	5	6	5	7	23
Student 20	6	7	5	7	25

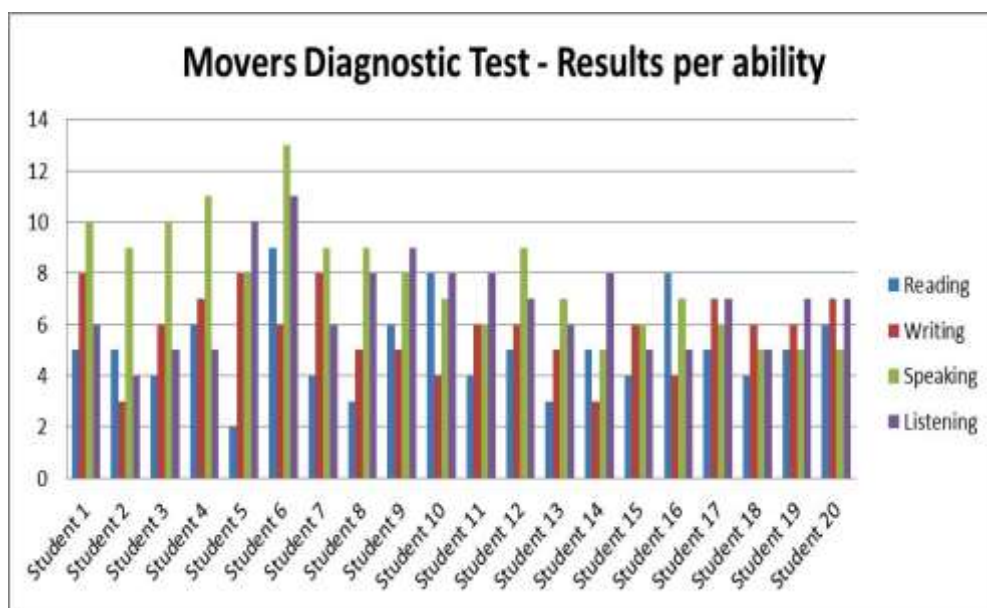
Source: Movers examination administered to the participants during the first week of investigation, 2010

**Graphic 1: Movers General results - Diagnostic Test School A**



Source: Movers examination administered to participants during the first week of investigation, 2010

**Graphic 2: Movers Results per ability - Diagnostic Test School A**



Source: Movers examination administered to the participants during the first week of investigation, 2010

In the first graph, which shows the general results of the test, we can see that the performance of the majority of the twenty participants was almost homogenous with only one student (student N° 6) who outperformed the rest with a 10 – point difference (39 against 29) over the two students who obtained the second highest mark (students N° 1 and 4) and a 19 – point difference (39 against 20) over the student who obtained the lowest mark (student N°18).

This situation is confirmed in the second graph, which shows the results per ability where it can be observed that reading was the skill in which students showed the poorest level of achievement (the top score was 9 out 25 possible points and the lowest score was 2) while speaking was the skill where they obtained the highest scores (the top score was 13 out 15 possible points and the lowest score was 5)



In general, it can be said that the lowest score was 20 while the top score was 39. There is a difference of 19 points between the lowest score and the top score (the range). The average score (mean) was 25.45; the mode (the score that occurred most frequently in these results) was 25; the median (the score which divided this rank – ordered results into two equal halves) was 25. (see table 5)

The results of this examination show that the level of English in this group of students was in overall homogeneous and the differences were noticeable when analyzing the results of the different skills at individual scale. In general, listening and speaking were the skills where students performed better while reading and writing were the ones in which their performance was low. It is important to point out that the skills where students performed better were the ones that, biologically speaking, are developed first when learning a language (listening in the first place, and then, speaking). We consider that the predominance of these two skills (one receptive and the other productive) over the other two is due to the important amount of exposure to the target language since earlier stages of maturity which enabled students to experiment with the language in a more natural way.

#### 4.1.2.2. Analysis of Movers Results – School B

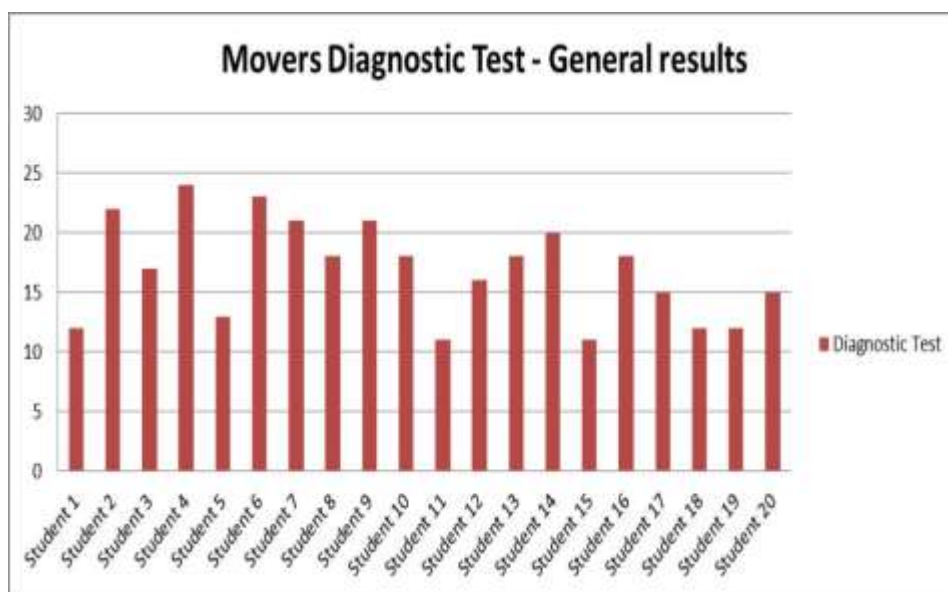
Taken: Week one of the investigation (First Monday)

**Table 4: Movers Results – Diagnostic Test School B**

Student's number	Reading: out of 25	Writing: out of 15	Speaking: out of 15	Listening: out of 25	Total: out of 80
Student 1	3	2	3	4	12
Student 2	6	5	4	7	22
Student 3	4	3	4	6	17
Student 4	8	4	6	6	24
Student 5	5	1	2	5	13
Student 6	9	5	5	4	23
Student 7	11	4	3	3	21
Student 8	7	3	4	4	18
Student 9	5	8	3	5	21
Student 10	8	5	2	3	18
Student 11	1	3	3	4	11
Student 12	7	4	1	4	16
Student 13	6	4	3	5	18
Student 14	3	8	4	5	20
Student 15	1	3	3	4	11
Student 16	7	4	4	3	18
Student 17	3	2	6	4	15
Student 18	2	2	5	3	12
Student 19	3	1	4	4	12
Student 20	5	3	4	3	15

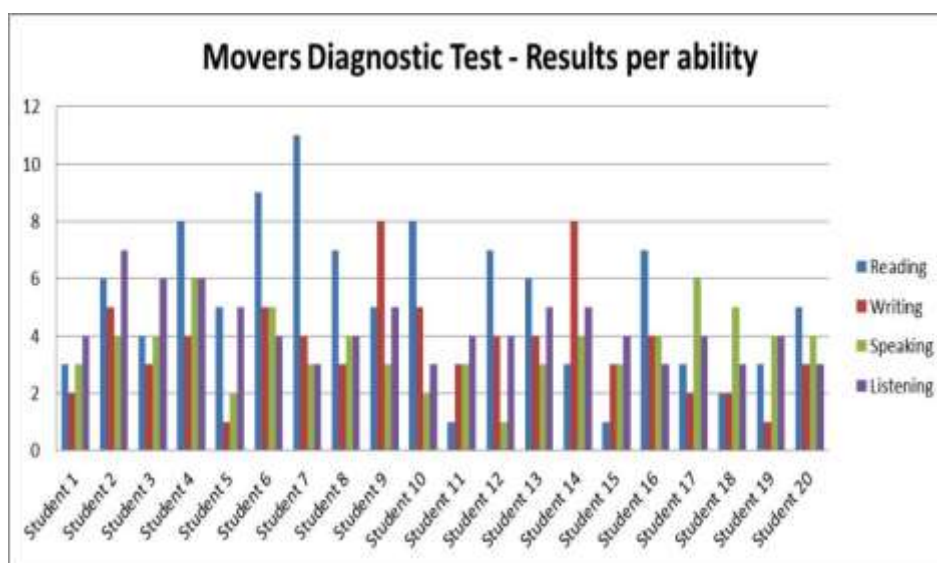
Source: Movers examination administered to the participants during the first week of investigation, 2010

**Graphic 3: Movers General results - Diagnostic Test School B**



Source: Movers examination administered to the participants during the first week of investigation, 2010

**Graphic 4: Movers Results per ability - Diagnostic Test School B**



Source: Movers examination administered to the participants during the first week of investigation, 2010

In the first graph, which shows the general performance, we can see that the performance of the participants was somehow homogenous with one student (students N° 4) who obtained the highest marks over the rest with only a 1 – point difference (24 against 23) over the student who obtained the second highest mark (student N° 6) and a 13 – point difference (24 against 11) over the students who obtained the lowest mark (students N°11 and 15)

In the second graph, that is related to the individual performance, it can be observed that Reading was the skill in which students showed the highest level of achievement (the top score was 11 out 25 possible points and the lowest score was 1) while Listening was the skill where they obtained the lowest scores (the top score was 7 out 25 possible points and the lowest score was 3)

In general, the numbers show that the lowest score was 11 and the top score was 24. There is a difference of 13 points between the lowest score and the top score (the range). The average score was 16.85 (mean); the mode (the score that occurred most frequently in these results) was 18; the median (the score which divided this rank – ordered results into two equal halves) was 17.5 (see Table 5)

The results of this examination make clear that older students showed a poor performance in general terms which is reflected in the results per ability where they performed “better” in Reading and Writing, which are skills that are mostly acquired in formal contexts (it is worth to remember that these students started to study English for two weekly hours when they were in first grade of secondary education – 11 or 12 years old). In the other two abilities (Listening and Speaking), students showed a very poor level of English which we relate to the little amount of exposure to the target language and lack of an appropriate source of L2. One more time, we consider important to point out that these two skills are naturally acquired when interacting with a second/foreign language in a sustained and constant way since earlier stages of maturity in appropriate environments.

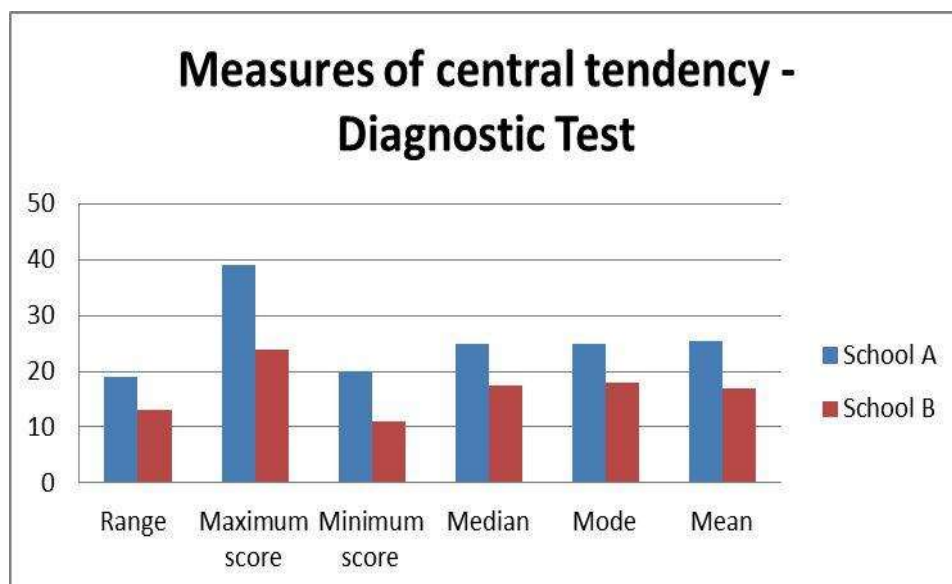
From the data above, we have obtained the following measures of central tendency:

**Table 5: Statistics of the diagnostic tests**

Criterion	School "A"	School "B"
Range	19	13
Maximum score	39	24
Minimum score	20	11
Median	25	17.5
Mode	25	18
Mean	25.45	16.85

Source: Movers examination administered to the participants during the first week of investigation, 2010

**Graphic 5: Measures of central tendency - Diagnostic Tests**



Source: Movers examination administered to the participants during the first week of investigation, 2010

These results make evident that students of both schools don't handle enough vocabulary in order to cope with elementary Standard English. In general, they showed limitations related to pronunciation, in most cases a cause of the influence of the mother tongue in their learning of

English; reading comprehension, a cause of lack of enough English vocabulary and reading strategies in order to cope with difficult words and different types of texts; and use of English which we often relate to grammar.

Young learners showed more problems in the reading and writing components of the test but showed a better performance in the speaking and listening part of it. On the other hand, older learners showed a more even performance, though quite poor, in all four components but did a little bit better on the reading and writing components.

Taking into consideration these results, I think that more exposure to comprehensible input in L2 according to their ages through activities of vocabulary acquisition could help them to overcome some of their limitations while – at the same time – promote their learning in an autonomous way.

#### **4.1.3. Analysis of the posttests:**

After the eight weeks of exposure to comprehensible input in L2 and techniques to work with vocabulary acquisition; students faced once again the same Movers examination in order to see how much they improved after application of the techniques previously stated. In general; I observed that students showed an improvement in their results and above all in their confidence, they did not ask as many questions as in the diagnostic test and looked more familiar with the structure of the examination. The results are as follows:

#### 4.1.3.1. Analysis of the Movers Results - School: A

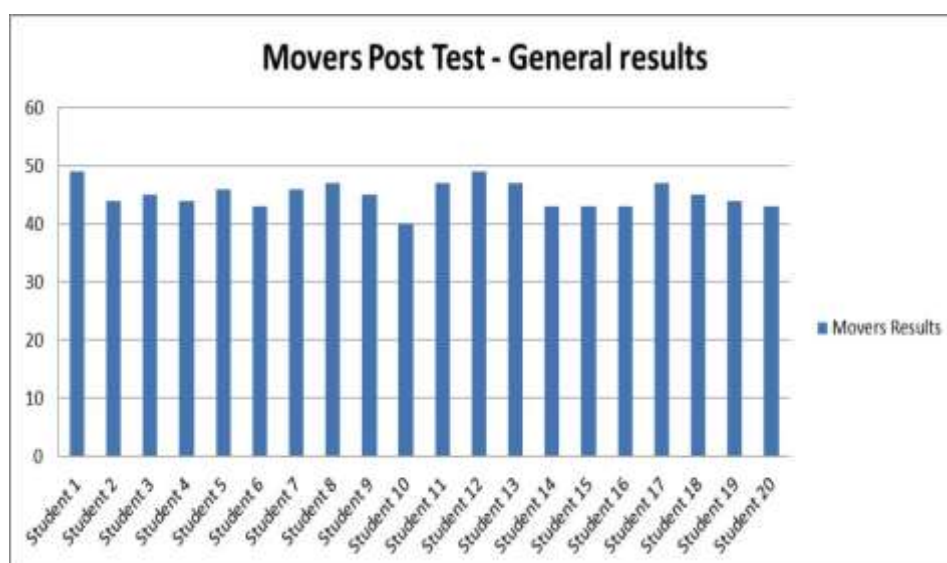
Taken: First Monday after eight weeks of research

**Table 6: Movers Results – Post Test School A**

Student's number	Reading: out of 25	Writing: out of 15	Speaking: out of 15	Listening: out of 25	Total: out of 80
Student 1	16	9	12	12	49
Student2	14	10	10	10	44
Student3	14	9	8	14	45
Student4	18	8	9	9	44
Student5	15	9	9	13	46
Student6	14	8	9	12	43
Student7	17	10	8	11	46
Student8	18	9	9	11	47
Student 9	15	8	9	13	45
Student 10	14	8	8	10	40
Student 11	17	10	9	11	47
Student 12	18	9	9	13	49
Student 13	16	10	9	12	47
Student 14	14	10	10	9	43
Student 15	14	8	10	11	43
Student 16	15	9	9	10	43
Student 17	18	9	9	11	47
Student 18	15	9	10	11	45
Student 19	16	8	8	12	44
Student 20	15	8	8	12	43

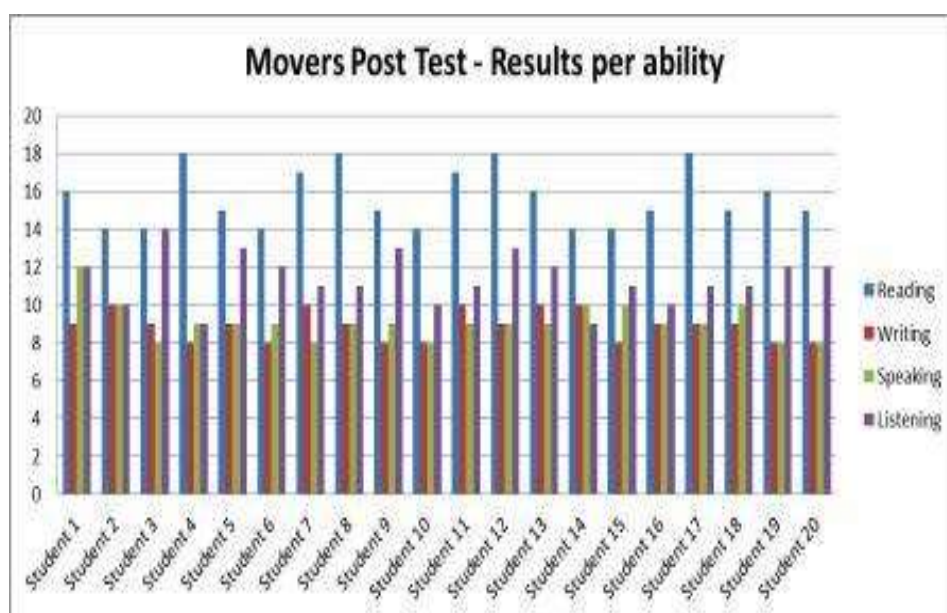
Source: Movers examination administered to the participants after the eighth week of investigation, 2010

**Graphic 6: Movers General results - Post Test School A**



Source: Movers examination administered to the participants after the eighth week of investigation, 2010

**Graphic 7: Movers Results per ability - Post Test School A**



Source: Movers examination administered to the participants after the eighth week of investigation, 2010



After the eight weeks of research, students showed an important improvement on their results of the post test. In the information displayed in graphic N° 5, related to general results, all students increased their marks in comparison with the diagnostic test in more than 15 points in average (the only “exception” was seen with student N° 6 who improved in “only” 4 points). In this examination, the students who obtained the highest mark (49 points) were students N° 1 and 12 with a 20 and 22 – points positive difference respectively in comparison with their results of their diagnostic tests (29 and 27 points respectively); in spite of this improvement, the student who obtained the highest improvement was student N° 13 with a 26 – point positive difference over the results of the diagnostic test.

The improvements shown by students in the post test can be seen in more detail when looking at the different abilities, which is displayed in graphic N°6. Students improved their marks in all of them but, the ability where students showed a better performance was Reading (a completely different scenario if compared to the diagnostic test where this ability was the poorest). All students improved their marks in more than 10 points (students N°5 and N°7 improved their performances in 13 points in comparison with the diagnostic test). On the other hand, students showed a “little improvement” in Speaking (which was their strongest ability in the diagnostic test) where their marks improved between 2 to 4 points.

Statistically speaking, the lowest score was 40; the top score was 49. There is a difference of 9 points between the lowest score and the top score (the range). The mean was 45; the mode (the score that occurred most frequently in these results) was 43; the median (the score which divided this rank – ordered results into two equal halves) was 45. (see table 8)

These results show that after eight weeks of constant work with materials aimed to foster vocabulary acquisition, young learners showed an important improvement in all language skills. They kept the good level in Listening and

Speaking showing a good improvement in the post test which confirms once again that these two skills are easier to acquire for them. In spite of these good results, the skill where they showed the most important improvement was Reading which usually develops after Listening and Speaking within formal contexts of instruction. In this particular case, we consider that the use of the materials to foster vocabulary acquisition in addition to the constant exposure to the language made possible this important improvement.

#### **4.1.3.2. Analysis of the Movers results – School B**

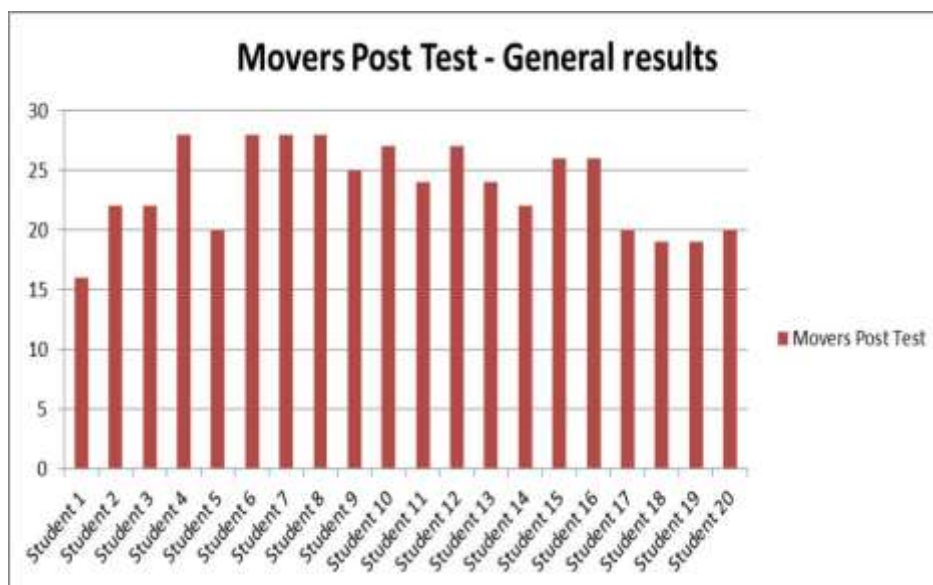
Taken: First Monday after eight weeks of research

**Table 7: Movers Results – Post Test School B**

Student's number	Reading: out of 25	Writing: out of 15	Speaking: out of 15	Listening: out of 25	Total: out of 80
Student 1	5	3	3	5	16
Student 2	8	6	3	5	22
Student 3	6	5	5	6	22
Student 4	9	6	7	6	28
Student 5	6	4	3	7	20
Student 6	10	7	6	5	28
Student 7	12	6	7	3	28
Student 8	8	6	7	7	28
Student 9	6	8	5	6	25
Student 10	7	6	7	7	27
Student 11	4	7	5	8	24
Student 12	9	6	5	7	27
Student 13	8	6	5	5	24
Student 14	5	7	4	6	22
Student 15	5	8	6	7	26
Student 16	8	6	7	5	26
Student 17	6	4	5	5	20
Student 18	5	4	6	4	19
Student 19	4	5	5	5	19
Student 20	6	5	5	4	20

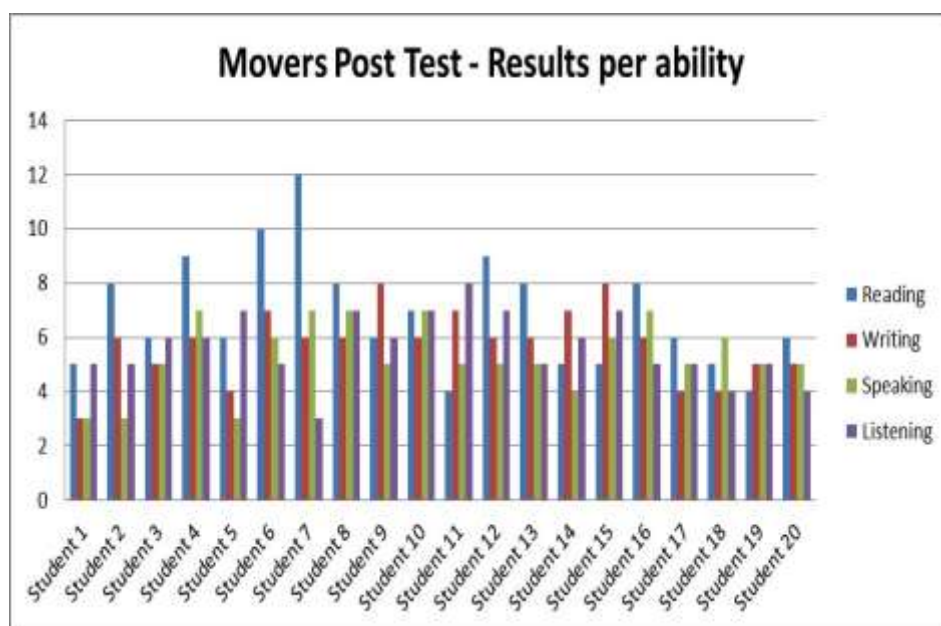
Source: Movers examination administered to the participants after the eighth week of investigation, 2010

**Graphic 8: Movers General results - Post Test School B**



Source: Movers examination administered to the participants after the eighth week of investigation, 2010

**Graphic 9: Movers Results per ability - Post Test School B**



Source: Movers examination administered to the participants after the eighth week of investigation, 2010

After the eight weeks of research, students showed an improvement on their results of the posttest but not as important as the one showed by younger students. All students increased their marks in comparison with the diagnostic test in average 8 points. In this examination, the students who obtained the highest mark (28 points) were students N° 4, 6, 7 and 8 with an 8 – point positive difference, in average, in comparison with the results of their performances in the diagnostic test; but the student who obtained the highest improvement was student N° 11 with a 13 – point difference over the results of his diagnostic test.

The improvement shown by the students in the post test can be seen in more detail when looking at the different abilities. Students improved their marks in all of them but, as happened with “School A”, the ability where students showed a better performance was Reading in which all of them improved their marks in more than 3 points in average (student N° 8 improved his performances in 5 points in comparison with the diagnostic test). On the other hand, students showed a “little improvement” in Listening where their marks improved in 2 points in average.

Statistically speaking, the lowest score was 16; the top score was 28. There is a difference of 12 points between the lowest score and the top score (the range). The average score (mean) was 23.55; the mode (the score that occurred most frequently in these results) was 28; the median (the score which divided this rank – ordered results into two equal halves) was 24 (see table 8). From the data above, we have obtained the following measures of central tendency (see table 8).

These results show that after eight weeks of constant work with materials aimed to foster vocabulary acquisition, adolescent learners showed a good improvement in all language skills. They improved their level in Listening and Speaking but not in the same way as younger learners which confirm once again that these two skills are easier to acquire at earlier stages when exposure to comprehensible input is

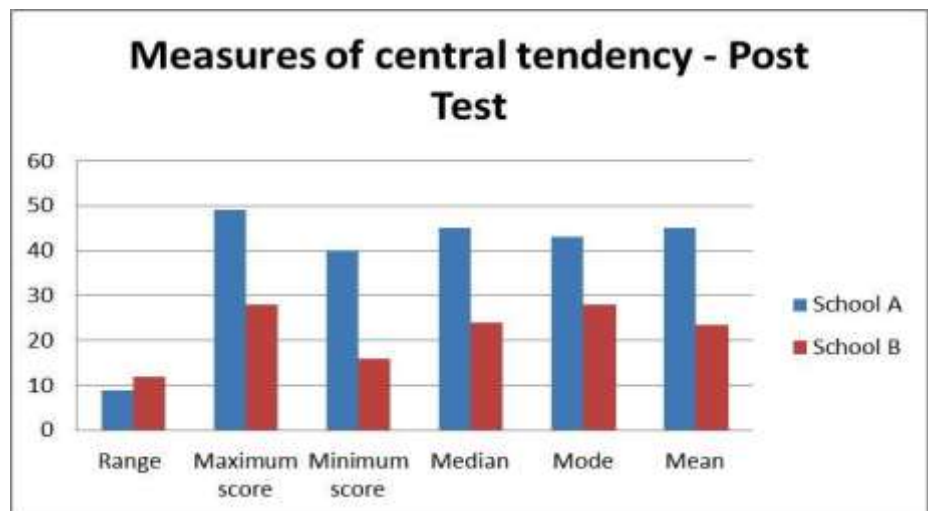
held constant (see results of the post test administered to School A). In spite of the important improvement of these two skills; the skill where they showed the most important improvement was Reading which usually develops after Listening and Speaking within formal contexts of instruction. In this particular case, we consider that the use of the materials to foster vocabulary acquisition in addition to the constant exposure to the language made possible this important improvement.

**Table 8: Statistics of the post tests**

Criterion	School "A"	School "B"
Range	9	12
Maximum score	49	28
Minimum score	40	16
Median	45	24
Mode	43	28
Mean	45	23.55

Source: Movers examination administered to the participants after the eighth week of investigation, 2010

**Graphic 10: Measures of central tendency - Post Tests**



Source: Movers examination administered to the participants during the first week of investigation, 2010

These results make evident that after “only” eight weeks of exposure to comprehensible input in L2 through a variety of texts according to the level and interests of students and exercises to improve reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, students of both schools showed improvement in their vocabularies in the four abilities related to English proficiency but young learners showed a more important advance in comparison with older learners due to the fact of having more time of exposure to the language and be willing to experiment with L2 without paying much importance to peer pressure and fear for making mistakes which contrasts with the situation of older learner’s who are very concerned about this situation.

Young learners showed improvement in all the components but the most important changes were seen on the speaking and especially listening ones (proving the premise that receptive skills are first acquired than productive skills) surpassing the results of the diagnostic test. In general, improvements were seen especially in pronunciation, intonation, use of appropriate register of language in oral communication and listening for specific purposes; they also showed an important improvement in the reading and writing components that will, for sure, be more concrete in time since they have more time available to experiment with the language.

Older learners also showed a slightly better performance in listening and speaking components but problems in pronunciation and fluency, related to the speaking part; and problems in relationship with listening for specific purposes and listening to conversations within a specific context in relationship to the listening part continued to be present on their performances because of the lack of practice and late exposure to the target language. In the reading and writing components there were also improvements, especially in use of English and reading for specific purposes.

#### **4.1.4. Analysis of the classroom reader's exercises:**

In general, the majority of the students showed problems when dealing with the instructions of the different exercises, they asked for clarification constantly and asked if these exercises could be done in their mother tongue which was used in some cases in order not to cause lack of interest in students. Young learners were more eager in trying to solve the exercises and even though they made lots of mistakes, their motivation did not decrease. On the other hand, older learners were more reluctant to solve the exercises and their motivation decreased as soon as they started to make mistakes which forced the teacher to apply strategies to keep the motivation up like solving them in pairs or groups, applying a score system or prizing the students with less mistakes. The assessment was conducted by the teachers in charge and was done right after each exercise was finished; these exercises were assessed using different techniques as self – correction, peer – correction and in most cases teacher – correction.

#### **4.1.5. Analysis of the interviews:**

The majority of the participants showed great difficulty when speaking the target language; in order to overcome this difficulty, they tried to use L1 or use wrong interpretations of English expressions (false friends in most cases). As far as older participants are concerned, they could not handle communication with facility due to unintelligible pronunciation and faulty speech, also they showed a poor control of grammar and their vocabularies were very limited. In case of younger participants, they showed more ease and confidence when speaking English in spite of their limitations in connection to grammar, pronunciation and choice of appropriate words, their vocabulary was limited.

#### **4.1.5.1. Analysis of interviews in school A**

During the interviews children showed to be a little bit nervous at the beginning, but as time went by, they showed interest in interacting with their friends and with the interviewer. During the first three weeks they showed difficulty in participating effectively in communicative exchanges trying to “solve” problems of lack of vocabulary with the use of Spanish or simply by “transferring” Spanish words into English causing the majority of times problems of “false friends”; they also used fillers and momentary silence to cope with these vocabulary problems. Even though, they lacked of sufficient structural accuracy and appropriate vocabulary in those first encounters, they showed confidence and good attitude towards the target language which helped to developed a good environment during the interviews. The problems showed during the first interviews were, little by little, overcame; students used less fillers and momentary silences and increased the time of their communicative exchanges not only with effective answers but also by asking for clarification or for further explanation.

Students showed great improvements in the part related to personal/information questions showing great interest in talking about themselves but in the part related to the discussion of the class readings the improvement was not so big; even though they recognized the characters, settings of the stories, and actions showed (explicit comprehension); but they failed in giving extra information and making inferences about the story (implicit comprehension or “reading between the lines”) which may be caused by lack of reading strategies in order to understand a reading passage. It would be very interesting to see the results of these interviews after a longer period of time to reading comprehension strategies and more time of exposure to English interaction in class, which in my opinion would have an enormous impact in the improvement of the reading comprehension level of the students and their final proficiency in the language.



#### **4.1.5.2. Analysis of interviews in school B**

During the interviews adolescents showed to be a little bit nervous but also kind of puzzled with a “why me” attitude towards the exercise, situation that did not change much for the eight interviews we had. In the same way as younger learners did, they showed difficulty in participating effectively in communicative exchanges trying to “solve” problems of lack of vocabulary with the use of Spanish or simply by “transferring” Spanish words or grammar structures into English causing the majority of times problems of “false friends”; they also used fillers and momentary silence to cope with these vocabulary problems. One big difference I could notice in relation with younger students was that while they did not show much trouble about making mistakes or not having the correct word or structure, older learners showed concerned about not having the right word to say or not using a grammar structure correctly which in the end made students feel uncomfortable of having the conversation. As time went by, students showed little improvement but in general the interactions were short and not fluent.

Students showed some improvements in the part related to personal/information questions with less presence of fillers and long periods of silence but, unlike younger learners, they showed little interested in talking about themselves. In the part related to the discussion of the class readings the improvement was more even in almost all the participants. Older learners were able to recognize the characters, settings of the stories, and actions showed (explicit comprehension); and some of them were able to make inferences or give extra information but they lacked of enough vocabulary to express their ideas in English. In order not to “lose” the opportunity of knowing their ideas about the stories, I let them express them in their mother tongue and they showed a good level of comprehension which, unfortunately, were not able to show in English. I believe this was due to the fact that they have more reading strategies at their disposal because of similar experiences in their mother tongue but they want to transfer

those techniques into English, the vocabulary constraints they have made this task very difficult.

Once again, I consider very worthy to see the results of these interviews after a longer period of time exposure to English comprehensible input in English and more interaction in the English class.

The results obtained in this investigation give path to many interpretations and ideas which will be discussed and expanded in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS**

The results of the study carried out will be discussed taking as a starting point the questions announced in chapter I.

#### **5.1. Discussions**

Although vocabulary has been usually neglected in age studies, we consider that it is a domain in language teaching which cannot be left aside and, although we are nowadays far away from the notion that learning a language means a collection of words, the lexical component is still thought to be important in the process of language acquisition. That is why we strongly believe that lexis should also be an object of study in research on age effects and language acquisition.

The first two questions: “When is it advisable to start learning a second / foreign language?” and “Is there a critical period when humans acquire a second / foreign language more easily?” are closely related since they touch a very sensitive factor in this work: Age.

If age has a role in the process of acquiring a second language, age – effects should be investigated on each language component, not just with the idea to find a “Critical Period” for language acquisition or for different language constituents, but also with the objective to find out which is the most suitable starting time to learn a language in a formal context (in this case, schools) or the amount of hours needed for students to have a good command of the language. As has already been pointed out at the beginning of the present investigation, the problem of age is

closely related to a question of time, which can be understood not only as starting time but also as time of exposure to the language which is a condition to acquire and learn any language. The results of the examinations taken in this research show that after a short period of exposure, younger learners (children) and older learners (adolescents) could improve their level of English in all the four components of the language, especially in Reading, which somehow proves the idea of the existence of a “Critical Period” for the learning of a language. If this happened with a short time of exposure to the language with students who started proper instruction after the age of 10, it would be very interesting to analyze the effects of a sooner starting point in the learning of the language and more hours of proper instruction in the target language. We consider that this sort of research is pertinent nowadays in the light of the changes introduced by different Latin American governments by which the starting age to start the foreign language in formal settings has been brought down, and especially with the new national policy related to the teaching of English in our country.

In relation with the third question which is related to time of exposure to comprehensible input in the target language: “Is the amount of exposure to comprehensible input in a second / foreign language crucial in the final acquisition of that language?”, results from this study indicate that an early exposure to comprehensible input in formal contexts entails having a richer oral and written vocabulary after some time of constant and suitable input, which in the long run will definitely have a strong effect in acquiring ultimate attainment of the target language.

Studies like Jia and Aaronson (2003) have showed that children’s better vocabulary proficiency in the L2 can be a result of a learning experience that it is available to them only due to their less developed L1 proficiency. In other words, when children acquire the L1, there is a direct relationship between words and concepts. If the L2 is introduced early in life, children learn new words for the new concepts too; similar to what happens in L1 acquisition; that is, direct mapping also in the L2 allows them to acquire lexical items efficiently; furthermore, in the best cases they would join concepts in both languages through the means of direct translation.

This fact, once again, raises questions about the most appropriate starting point in the learning of a foreign language and amount of exposure to be successful in language learning (which were dealt in the two previous questions) and, above all, the way in which this exposure should be distributed over time in formal contexts for the study of the foreign language. Together with the starting age and amount of exposure to comprehensible input in English, other factors that should be taken into account in order to get higher levels of achievements; according to Kojic – Sabo and Lightbown (1999), are “learner initiative and independence” which comes from having students highly motivated and exposed to different kind of activities which are, in most cases, far from “old” teaching practices. In class, it could be assumed that most of the time learners do not participate because the classes are teacher – centered and students are not asked for extended participation or are not “pushed” in their output (Swain, 1985). This particular situation was observed in both schools (especially in “School B”) which impeded students to fully take advantage of the time of exposure in class and to have opportunities to experiment with the target language for real communication. In order to ensure students have enough chances to experiment successfully with the language teachers should have enough pedagogical tools (classroom strategies, realia, multimedia resources, etc) to promote real chances for their students to make input to become intake through real manipulation of the language.

According to the last idea; production and practice have an utmost importance for language acquisition and for vocabulary in particular. Kirsner (1994) states that practice is essential in the L1 for lexical acquisition because it provides a basic pool of “automated examples”. However, also in the L2 “a basic pool of automated examples” is essential and therefore practice is crucial in the first stages of learning a language. According to Waring (1997), practice production is indeed a great challenge posed to a learner, and therefore several ways to stimulate that a new word becomes productive have been suggested, especially in the first stages of learning a language, so as to have a vocabulary that allows students to cover the basic communication needs (what Cummins state as BICS). For example, Lee and Muncie (2006) recommend interactive elicitation of vocabulary on the part of the teacher as well as multimode exposure to target language; also productive activities which aim for negotiation of meaning come handy when noticing, retrieval and generation of lexis is needed. Multiple theories,

especially the very well – known contributions of Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences is suitable for this matter since now, more than ever we need to take a big look at how our students learn.

The final question is quite straight – forward: “Are young learners (children) more capable of acquiring a second / foreign language than older learners?” The answer to this question depends very much on the two other factors we have discussed before: Age and time of exposure. If young students of English (children in this case) are exposed to the language since very young age in a constant way either in a natural or formal setting (which is the case of this dissertation) they develop language competences like pronunciation, lexis, and grammar with more ease than older learners taking into account that they will use the same processes of “manipulating the language” as they do with their mother tongue. In the specific case of vocabulary acquisition, since young learners have more time to be exposed to a comprehensible input and have more opportunities to “live” the language, it is easier for them to generate associations between concepts (words) and actions (meanings) which last longer than just reading and writing sentences as promoted by old methods of language teaching. This assumption does not mean that older learners will not be effective language learners since they have more “tools” at their disposal to cope with the different aspects of language which they carry from having learnt their mother tongue, but a cause of interference of the mother tongue itself which may cause wrong associations, fossilizations together with phonetic problems; and in addition with some other external factors like motivation or peer pressure in case of adolescents, they will have more difficulty in acquiring the language in a natural way which, in the end, is crucial for getting language proficiency.

The results obtained in this study on vocabulary, age and exposure make one think that, when planning a foreign language course, it is crucial to bear in mind the following appreciation by Lightbown and Spada (1993) on the decision about when to introduce second language instruction:

“When the goal is basic communicative ability for all students in a school setting and when it is assumed that the child’s native language will remain the primary language, one or two hours a week – even for seven or eight years- will not produce very advanced second language

speakers. When the objective of second language learning is native - like mastery of the target language, it is usually desirable for the learner to be completely surrounded by the language as earlier as possible". (Lightbown and Spada: 1993)

It is precisely the creation of a "surrounding with as much English as possible" that any school should strive for.





## **CONCLUSIONS**

In this final section, some considerations are made in relation to the purposes of the present work, and the results we have obtained. It becomes highly necessary at this point to make a final review of what the results suggest and why. In the same way, it is important that we give some directions for further research.

- This investigation has analyzed the effects of age on vocabulary acquisition in English as a foreign language, which is an area on which very few studies have focused. The lack of research on this field is especially remarkable if we take into account the importance of lexical knowledge in acquiring a full competence in the language, and the educational policies towards language learning in most American countries, where the age at which foreign languages are first introduced in compulsory education has been progressively brought down. We consider that this topic is fundamental in our country in order to analyze, possibly keep changing the ongoing policies related to foreign language instruction in national schools.
- One of the main objectives of the present investigation was to find whether there were significant vocabulary differences between a group of students who started learning English at the age of 6 with 10 hours of exposure to English per week, and another group of students who started learning English at the age of 12 with two hours of exposure to English. It has been shown that when exposure was held constant for longer periods of time and students received comprehensible input in the target language, younger

students acquire vocabulary (oral and written) in a more effective way than those who started learning English later and don't have enough exposure to L2. Children showed to be more capable to acquire the sounds (phonemes), lexis (words and expressions) and rules of the language (grammar) experimenting with it almost in the same way they acquired their mother tongue; since young learners experiment with L2 almost in the same way as in L1, they don't "realize" that they are acquiring and learning a new language and they use what they read, and especially, what they listen unafraid of "making mistakes". Conversely, adolescent learners showed more difficulties in acquiring the sounds and lexis of the language since they may be greatly deprived of this potential advantage children showed when there is not enough exposure and contact with the language for L2 to proceed in the same way as L1 learning.

- Even though older learners (adolescents in this case) have a better performance in the short term due to their superior cognitive development and probably to the advantages provided by explicit learning mechanisms; which also develop with age, and tend to acquire language aspects that involve above all declarative or explicit learning (rules and structures) more easily than young learners showing a better performance in reading and written examinations; when it comes to oral interaction, younger learners show a better performance in the long run since they had had more time to "listen" and to be exposed to real interaction in the target language showing better pronunciation, intonation and a wider set of words and expressions to communicate ideas than older learners. This idea leads us to the conclusion that students who get the chance to be exposed to both grammar structures and comprehensible input in L2 at the same time for longer periods of time will have better chances to use those rules effectively and, consequently, use the vocabulary acquired more properly than those students who only are exposed to "just" grammar explanations for shorter periods of time and have more chances to acquire a native – like competence in the long term. Therefore, we conclude that young learners should be exposed to English comprehensible input since very early in a constant way to develop their innate abilities to acquire all the components of a language (pronunciation, lexis, grammar, use and usage of the language) in an efficient way.

- The application of graded texts (classroom readings), which were chosen taking into account the likes and dislikes of students, the implementation of a variety of exercises which dealt with grammar and lexis carefully designed in order to provide equal chances to all students, and the use of different classroom arrangements (pair and group work) proved to be very effective in motivating students to work in the target language in an unthreatened way helping to lower the affective filter and, consequently, providing a better classroom environment. This idea makes us think about how suitable or not it is to have a core textbook within a classroom environment since there is not one single book that encloses all the “likes and needs” of the students or cope with all their learning needs, which in the end might cause motivation problems especially with adolescents. We consider there are two possible options to this problem: One solution would be to “adapt” the contents and activities of the textbook to the need of students; or to create materials adapted to the unique characteristics of a classroom which implies a deep knowledge of the students by part of the teacher. Together with the “written activities”, a variety of class arrangements that involved interaction among peers proved to work effectively in having the students motivated for longer periods of time. Young learners were very motivated when activities were related to perform physical actions (acting, cutting, pasting), to sing or play language games; they also showed a lot of motivation when activities were performed in pairs or in groups because they had the chance to interact among them. Older learners also enjoyed working in pairs or groups in activities more related to produce texts (mostly written).
- Teachers, in both scenarios, overused “Teacher talking time” (TTT) producing a lack of “Student Talking Time” (STT) which does not give students enough practice the target language in order to consolidate the rules and vocabulary acquired. This problem might be overcome in institutions which give more hours to English instruction, but it sure is a serious problem in other institutions where there is not enough time to promote real communication (like it is the case of school B and national schools in general). To complicate this problem, English teachers of these institutions have to deal with the pressure of fulfilling a classroom program that, in

most cases, comes from superior organizations (Ministry of Education) and does not really fulfill the student's needs.

- Even though teachers in public institutions may have a certification in English given by language centers (which does not mean they are proficient enough in the language) they do not have a degree in English language teaching, which somehow would ensure a proper exposure to professional preparation in order to teach English. This situation does not enable them to be familiar with the different techniques for the teaching of English (in this particular case of vocabulary acquisition techniques) and other ways of grouping students and interact with them which promote lacks of motivation in students since they always "learn" in the same way. We consider this situation worth to be taken into consideration by the authorities in education in order to start fixing the problem of the low level of English in public schools and more research should be done in order to determine the level of the Peruvian English language teachers working in the different regions of our country in order to ensure that students receive an adequate level of English, according to their needs and the demand of a changing world.
- Finally, I do not wish to advocate an exclusively lexical focus in language teaching. Activities and tasks aimed at promoting communication are clearly beneficial, and some explicit teaching of grammar is essential particularly in the early stages of language learning. I do consider, however, that we should pay more attention to the proven findings of research into vocabulary acquisition and try to incorporate them into our classroom practices in a more systematic way.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- More research should be done in order to establish the correlation between age and second language acquisition in formal settings. In addition to that, more research should be done in order to determine the level of achievement of Peruvian English Language Teaching in the different regions of my country: Coast, highlands and jungle; and how professional English teachers are trained by universities or institutes in order to see if they are capable enough to give students and the country what they need. Based on these results, the Peruvian Ministry of Education would be in a more informed position to promote and offer solutions to these situations.
- Constant supervision of teachers and class observation should be done in schools in order to ensure that students are getting the best language instruction possible.
- Seminars or workshops about the teaching of English should be promoted by editorials or well – known professionals in Language teaching in order to give English teachers the chance to receive new ideas and insights about techniques and strategies to be applied in class.
- Clear objectives should be defined and a national curriculum for the teaching of English in Peru should be designed. This curriculum should embody short and clear formulations about how the learning of a foreign language should be done, define a common structure for foreign language instruction (number of obligatory English hours in schools, textbooks, infrastructure, etc),

describe knowledge and abilities language learners should have at certain levels developing an assessment criterion according to international standards.

- Clear standards in the formation and instruction of professional English teachers should be defined. These standards should set the rules for actualization, teaching methodology and promotion of seminars or conferences where English teachers can be in touch with the latest trends in language teaching and second language acquisition. In case of persons who are in charge of teaching English without a degree in language teaching, give them the opportunity to study in universities with facilities which motivate them to finish the career and increase the number of “qualified” English teachers in the country.

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## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

- Appendix 1: Movers examination.
- Appendix 2: Classroom readers & Classroom reader's exercises
- Appendix 3: Transcription of the pair interviews.



**Appendix 1:**  
**Movers Examination.**

Centre Number	Candidate Number
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Cambridge Young Learners English

**Movers**

**Reading & Writing**

Sample Paper



UNIVERSITY of CAMBRIDGE

ESOL Examinations

---

English for Speakers of Other Languages

There are 40 questions.

You have 30 minutes.

You will need a pen or pencil.

My name is: .....

### Part 1 - 6 questions -

Look and read. Choose the correct words and write them on the lines.



a whale



coffee



a shoulder



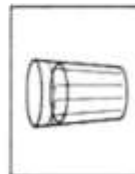
an elephant



soup



a stomach



milk



a bat

### Example

This animal can fly and it comes out at night.

a bat

### Questions

- 1 You can eat this from a bowl. Sometimes there are vegetables in it. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 This is the biggest animal in the world. It lives in the sea. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 This is part of your body. All your food and drink goes here first. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 This big animal lives in hot countries and eats leaves and grass. \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 This is between your neck and your arm. \_\_\_\_\_
- 6 Mothers give this white drink to their babies. \_\_\_\_\_

Part 2  
- 6 questions -

Look and read. Write yes or no.



Examples

There are five white towels in the bathroom.

yes

The two smallest bears are washing their faces.

no

4

Questions

- 1 A big brown bear is having a shower. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 There are some glasses below the mirror. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 The yellow bear is fatter than the blue bear. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 There are four bags in the bath. \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 There are lots of bears in the cupboard. \_\_\_\_\_
- 6 The floor is wet and there is a toothbrush on it. \_\_\_\_\_

8

### Part 3 - 6 questions -

Read the text and choose the best answer.  
Peter is talking to his friend Jane.



#### Example

**Jane:** Hello, Peter. How are you?

- Peter:** ☒ A I'm not very well.  
☐ B I'm John's cousin.  
☐ C I'm going outside.

#### Questions

1 **Jane:** What's the matter? Have you got a headache?

- Peter:** ☐ A No, thank you. I don't want one.  
☐ B No, I've got toothache.  
☐ C No, I haven't got it.

•

2 **Jane:** Would you like to come to my house?

- Peter:** ☐ A Yes, I want home quickly.  
☐ B No, thanks. I want to go home.  
☐ C Well, I like my house a lot.

3 **Jane:** Have you got a coat?

- Peter:** ☐ A Yes, it does.  
☐ B OK, he's here.  
☐ C No, I haven't.

4 **Jane:** Do you want a drink of water?

- Peter:** ☐ A Yes, please.  
☐ B Yes, it is.  
☐ C Yes, I had.

5 **Jane:** Shall I walk home with you?

- Peter:** ☐ A He can walk there.  
☐ B I'd like that, thanks.  
☐ C I can go with her this evening.

6 **Jane:** Is your mum at home?

- Peter:** ☐ A It's his new home.  
☐ B Next to the bus station.  
☐ C Only my dad's there today.

•

**Part 4**  
- 7 questions -

Read the story. Choose a word from the box. Write the correct word next to numbers 1-4. There is one example.

My name is Daisy. I like toys, but I like books and comics.

best. I love stories about men on the moon and about

(1) \_\_\_\_\_ who live in different countries.

I read a good story yesterday. In this story, a boy climbed

a (2) \_\_\_\_\_. At the top, there was a lot of snow. It was

evening, but the boy could see the forest below him.

He (3) \_\_\_\_\_ down on a rock to have a drink and to look

up at all the (4) \_\_\_\_\_.










But then he (5) \_\_\_\_\_ something that he didn't understand.

Something very big and round flew quietly and quickly behind a cloud.

What was it? The boy didn't know and he didn't wait to see it again. He

(6) \_\_\_\_\_ home to his village because he was very afraid.

I wasn't afraid! I enjoyed the story a lot!

 example	 blankets	 rain
 children	 cooked	 stars
 saw	 sat	 mountain

(7) Now choose the best name for the story.

Tick one box.

☐ A boy that Daisy knows

☐ A film that Daisy watched

☐ A story that Daisy liked

## Part 5

- 10 questions -

Look at the pictures and read the story. Write some words to complete the sentences about the story. You can use 1, 2 or 3 words.

### A family holiday



Vicky lives with her parents and her two brothers, Sam and Paul, in the city. Last week, they had a holiday by the sea. Sam is ten, Vicky is eight but Paul is only five. They went to the cinema on Wednesday because it rained all day. They saw a film about sharks. The sharks had very big teeth. Paul didn't like watching them and he closed his eyes.

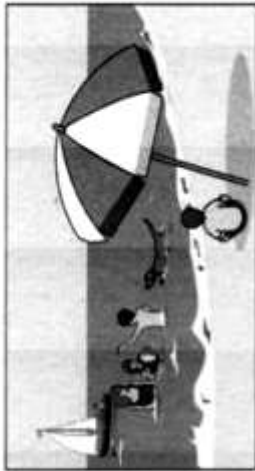
#### Examples

Vicky's family went on holiday last \_\_\_\_\_ week.  
Vicky has two \_\_\_\_\_ brothers \_\_\_\_\_ who are called Sam and Paul.

#### Questions

- 1 The family had a holiday by \_\_\_\_\_.
- 2 It \_\_\_\_\_ all day on Wednesday and the family went to the cinema.
- 3 Paul didn't enjoy seeing \_\_\_\_\_ in the film.

18



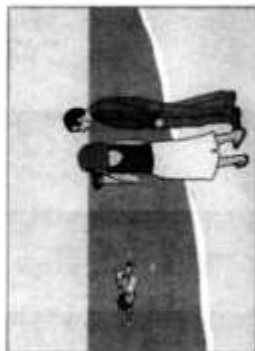
On Thursday, Paul thought about the film. He didn't want to swim in the sea. He sat on the beach and watched Sam and Vicky. They played in the water. Mum gave Paul an ice cream but he didn't want it. Then Dad said, "Come on Paul! Let's go for a swim." But Paul didn't want to.

- 4 Sam and Vicky \_\_\_\_\_ in the sea.
- 5 Paul didn't want the ice cream that his \_\_\_\_\_ gave him.
- 6 Dad wanted to go for \_\_\_\_\_ with Paul.

19







On Friday, the family ate breakfast in the garden because it was very sunny but Paul didn't want any. Then they all went to the beach again. The sea was very blue. Paul looked. There were three beautiful dolphins in the water! He ran to the sea and swam to them. Then Paul's dad threw a ball in the sea and the dolphins played with it. It was great and Paul stopped thinking about the sharks in the film. That evening, all the family went to the cinema again. This time the film was about a funny dolphin and they all enjoyed it.

- 7 The family had breakfast in \_\_\_\_\_ on Friday.
- 8 Paul saw \_\_\_\_\_ in the water.
- 9 Paul's dad \_\_\_\_\_ into the water.
- 10 All \_\_\_\_\_ enjoyed another film at the cinema on Friday evening.



Part 6  
- 5 questions -

Read the text. Choose the right words and write them on the lines.

Cats



- Example** Cats \_\_\_\_\_ have \_\_\_\_\_ good eyes. They can see very well at night. \_\_\_\_\_ cats climb trees and eat meat. They can move very quietly and catch animals. Then they eat them. They have strong teeth.
- 1 There \_\_\_\_\_ small cats and big cats like lions and tigers. Only tigers live \_\_\_\_\_ the jungle. Lions don't. Some people go and see lions and tigers at the zoo.
- 2 A lot of people have small cats in \_\_\_\_\_ homes. These cats are pets. People \_\_\_\_\_ them because they are beautiful.

14

- Example**
- 1 had have has  
All Every Any
- 2 am are is  
at on in
- 3 your their our  
like bring takes

18

Centre Number

Candidate Number

Cambridge Young Learners English

# Movers Listening

Sample Paper



UNIVERSITY of CAMBRIDGE  
ESOL Examinations

English for Speakers of Other Languages

There are 25 questions.

You will need coloured pens and pencils.

My name is: .....

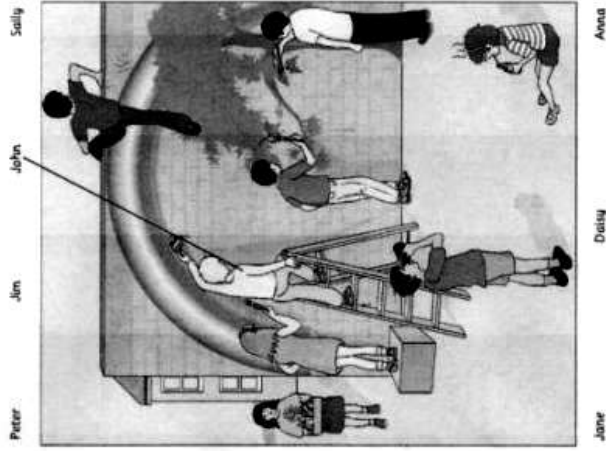
MOVERS



# Part 1

~ 5 questions ~

Listen and draw lines. There is one example.



Blank Page

Part 2  
- 5 questions -

Listen and write. There is one example.

**THE ZOO**

When?     Tuesday

1 How many kinds of animals: \_\_\_\_\_

2 Biggest animal: \_\_\_\_\_

3 Favourite animal: \_\_\_\_\_






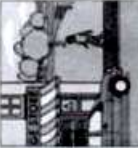
4 Favourite animal's food: \_\_\_\_\_

5 Name of zoo: \_\_\_\_\_ Zoo

4

Part 3  
- 5 questions -

What did Sally do last week?  
Listen and draw a line from the day to the correct picture.  
There is one example.




Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
--------	---------	-----------	----------	--------	----------	--------

5

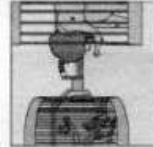
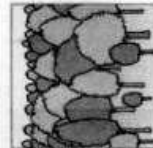

**Part 4**  
- 5 questions -

Listen and tick (✓) the box. There is one example.

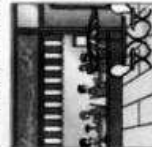


Where did Jim see the film?

		
A <input type="checkbox"/>	B <input type="checkbox"/>	C <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

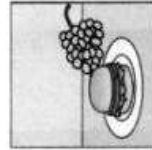
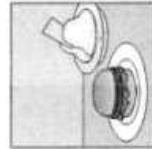

1 Where did the rabbits in the film go?

		
A <input type="checkbox"/>	B <input type="checkbox"/>	C <input type="checkbox"/>

2 Where did the children have their lunch?

		
A <input type="checkbox"/>	B <input type="checkbox"/>	C <input type="checkbox"/>

3 What did the children eat?

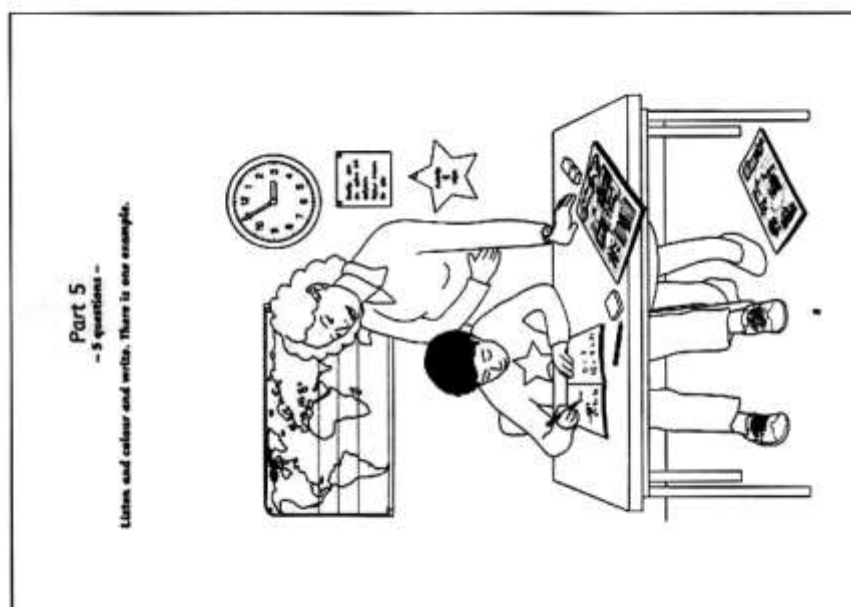
		
A <input type="checkbox"/>	B <input type="checkbox"/>	C <input type="checkbox"/>

4 What did the children do after lunch?

		
A <input type="checkbox"/>	B <input type="checkbox"/>	C <input type="checkbox"/>

5 What did Jim's friends give him?

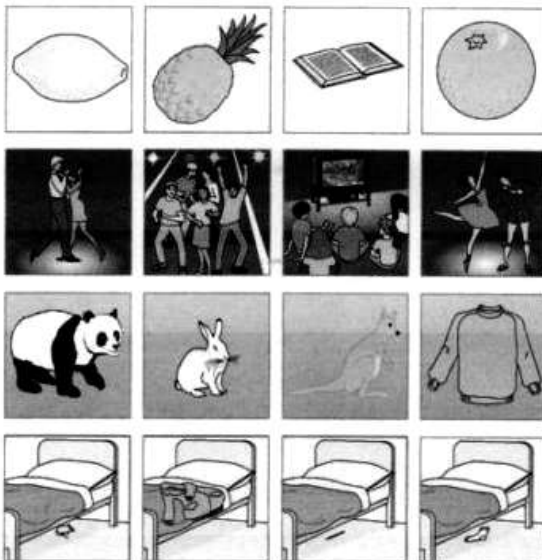
		
A <input type="checkbox"/>	B <input type="checkbox"/>	C <input type="checkbox"/>





MOVIES SPEAKING: Picture Story

2



MOVIES SPEAKING: odd one out

3





MOVERS SPEAKING. Find the Differences

1

### Movers Speaking

#### Summary of Procedures

The usher introduces the child to the examiner. The examiner asks how old the child is.

- 1 The examiner asks the child to describe several differences between the two Find the Differences pictures, e.g. 'This is a bird but this is a cat.'
- 2 The examiner tells the child the name of the story and describes the first picture e.g. 'Fred is sad. He can't play football. His ball is very old. He mum's saying, "Take the dog to the park..." The examiner then asks the child to continue telling the story.'
- 3 The examiner demonstrates how to do this task with the first set of four odd-one-out pictures and then asks the child to choose one picture in the other three sets and say which is different and why. For example, 'These are all animals, but this is a sweater.'
- 4 The examiner asks questions about the child, e.g. 'Who's the youngest in your family?'

**Appendix 2:**  
**Classroom readers and classroom reader's exercises.**

Class reading and activities – School A

Title:

Spot is a Pal

By Tracey Baptiste. Illustrated by Elizabeth Allen

Taken from:

CHAMOT, ANNA, CUMMINS JIM, HOLLIE SHARROKY.  
2006. *Cornerstone C*. Pearson Longman.

# About the Story

Who is in the story?



**Spot**



**boy**

What is the story about?



**The story is about a boy and his dog.**

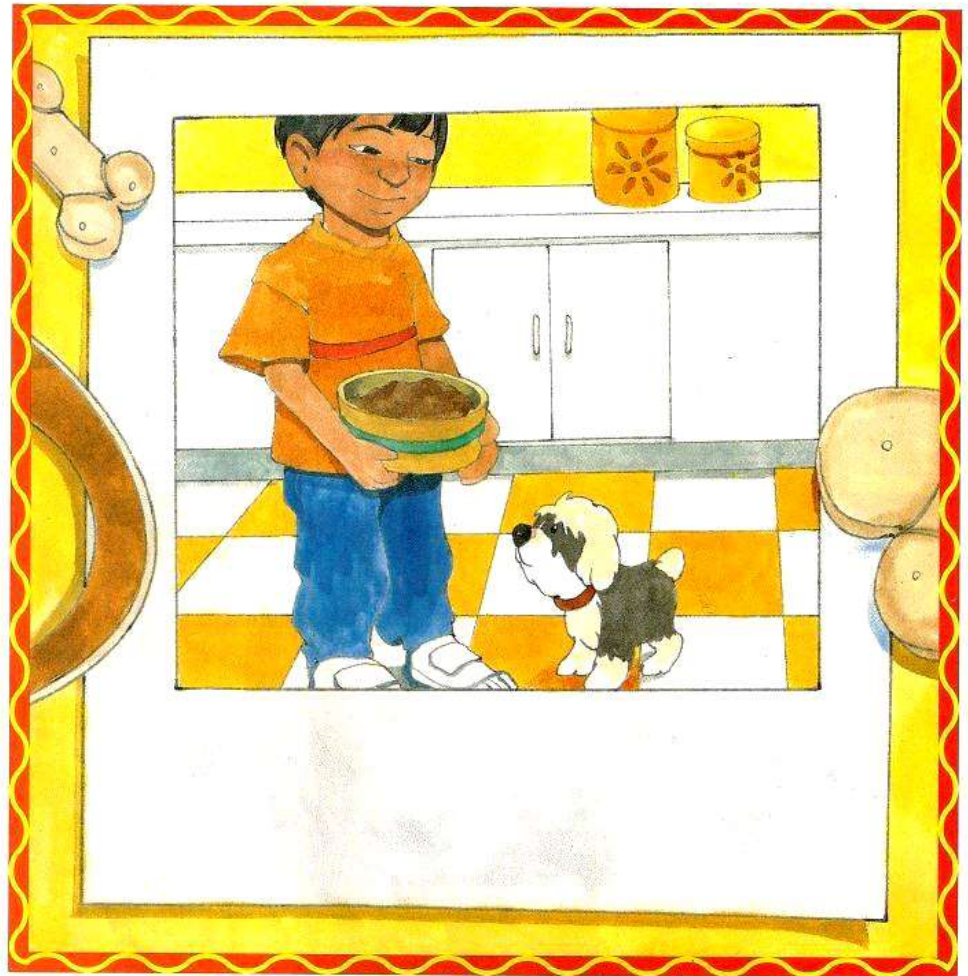
Reading  
1



# Spot Is a Pal

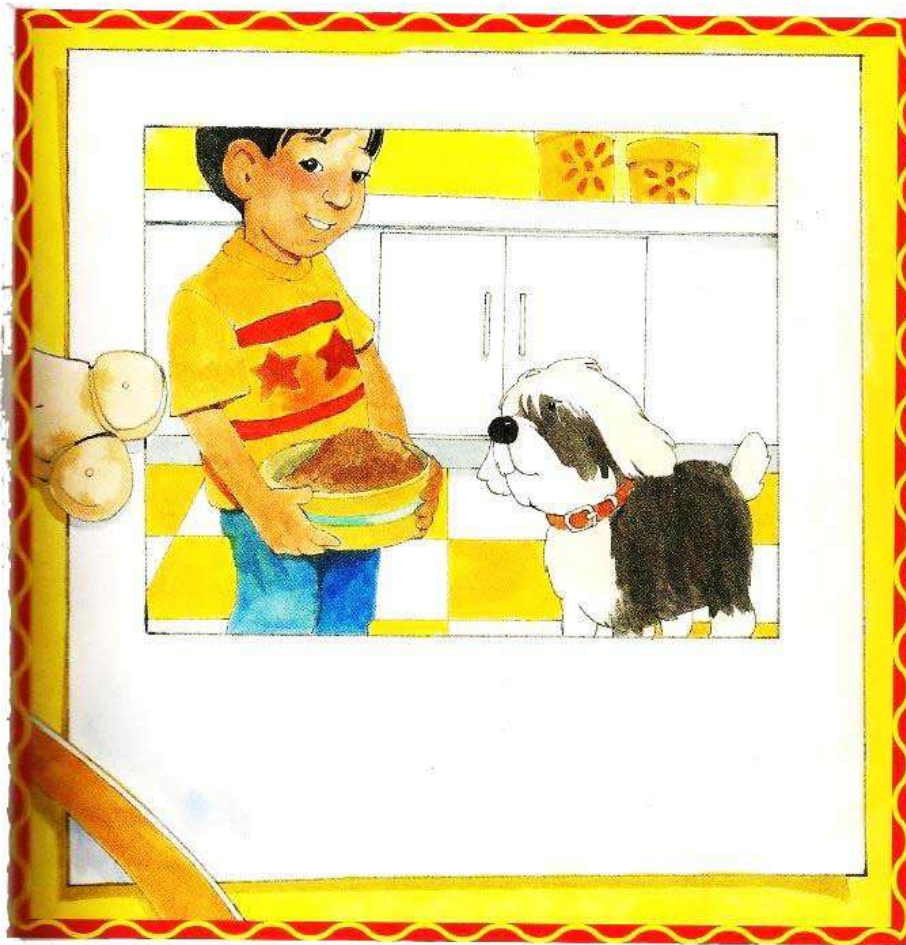


by Tracey Baptiste  
illustrated by Elizabeth Allen



This is Spot. I was five when I  
got Spot. Spot was light, and I could  
hold him. Did my puppy eat a lot?  
Yes, Spot did.

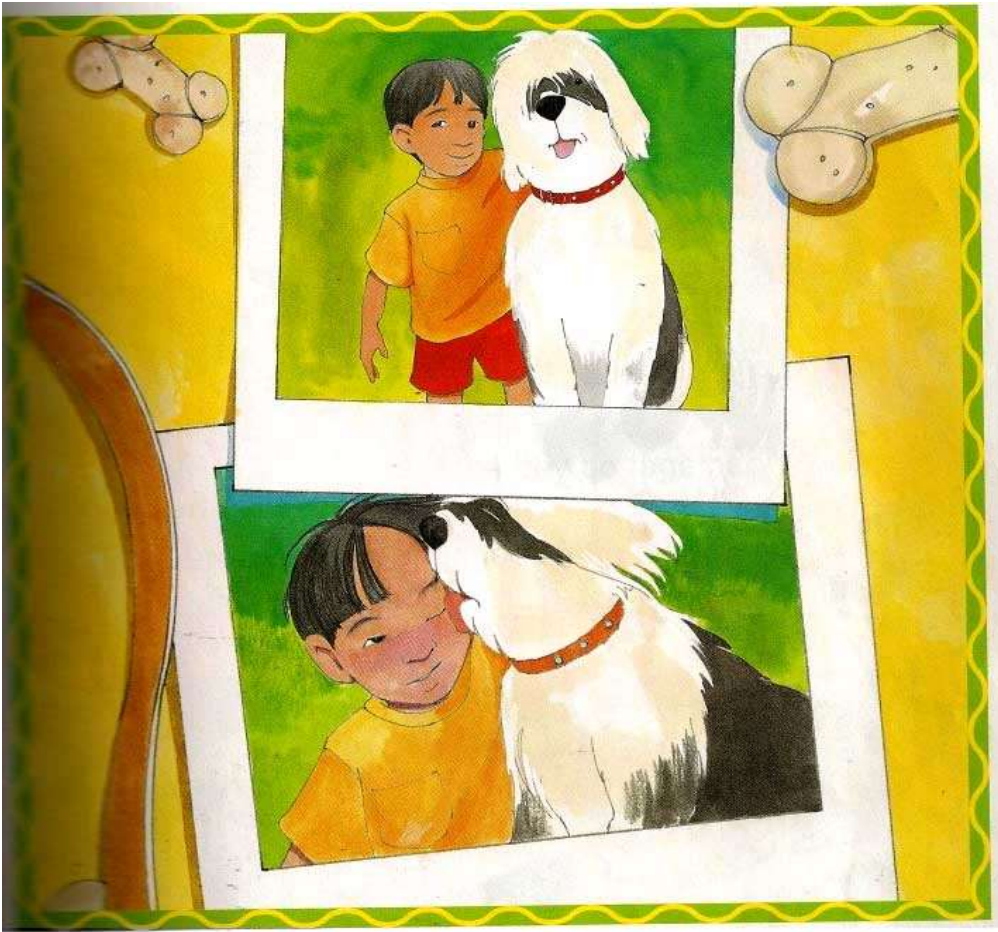




A year has passed. Now Spot is not as small. Spot got big. Spot and I played a lot. We ran and ran and ran. Spot and I had fun. Did Spot eat a lot? Yes, Spot did.



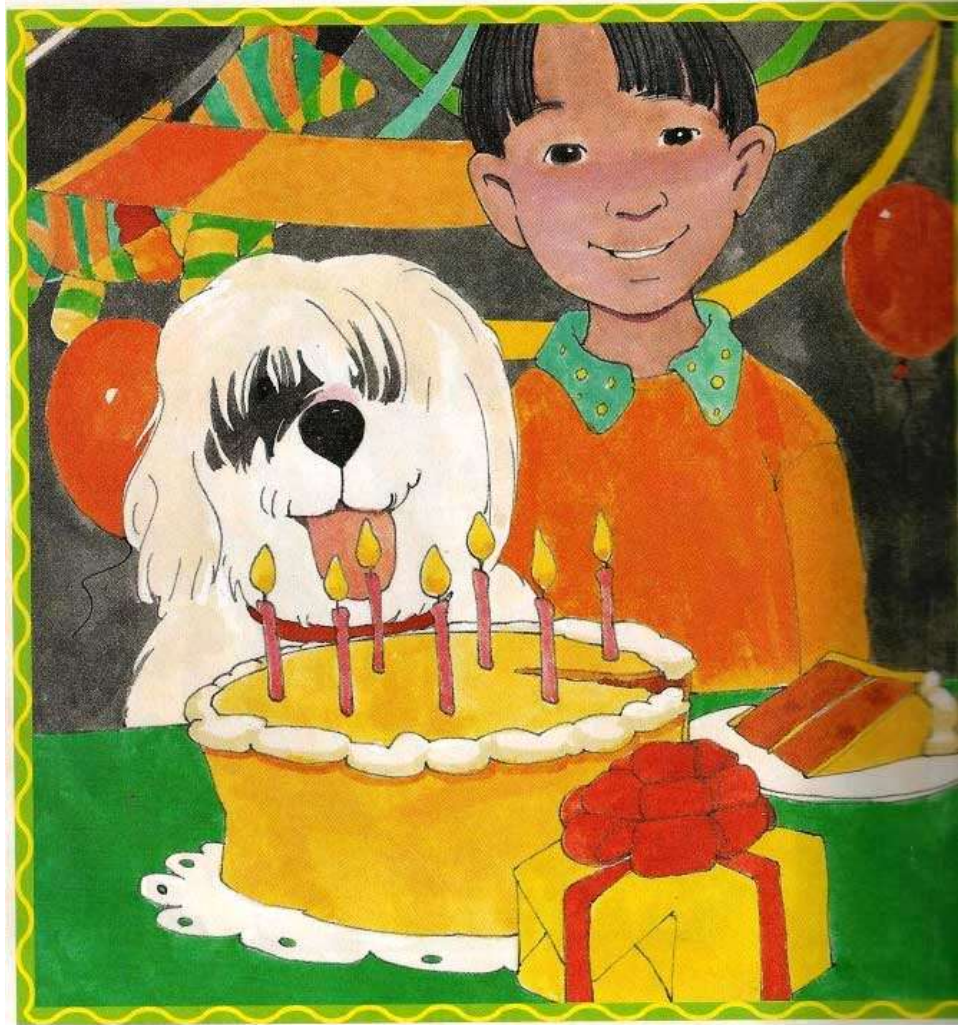
Spot and I got big, and I turned six.  
I had a cake and a hat. I got gifts from  
Mom and Dad. Spot sat with me. Spot  
is a funny pet.



Spot and I sit and grin. Now I cannot  
hold Spot. Spot is not as light. Spot and I  
play and learn tricks. Spot can do a lot of  
tricks. Spot can sit, stop, and beg.

Spot is a funny pet. I got a lick from  
Spot as a kiss. Spot is my best pal.





Another year has passed. Spot is a grown-up dog. I am not grown yet. I am still a kid. I will be a big kid when I am ten. I can't wait to be a big kid. Spot will still be my best pal.

# Think It Over

1. Who is Spot?
2. How old are Spot and the boy?
3. What do Spot and the boy do together?
4. How has Spot changed by the end of the story?



# English Extra Activity

## Vocabulary

A. Fill in the missing letters. Then write the word.

1. li \_ h \_ \_\_\_\_\_
2. f \_ nn \_ \_\_\_\_\_
3. h \_ ld \_\_\_\_\_
4. wa \_ \_\_\_\_\_

### Sight Words

was  
light  
hold  
funny

B. Write the word that completes each sentence.

5. I am in second grade  
this \_\_\_\_\_ .
6. In 15 years I will be a \_\_\_\_\_ .
7. Can you \_\_\_\_\_ my hand?
8. My \_\_\_\_\_ is brown.

### Story Words

year  
puppy  
grown-up

# English Extra Activity

## Comprehension

Reread to tell about the story.



Spot and I got big, and I turned six. Now I cannot hold Spot. Spot and I play and learn tricks. Spot is a grown-up dog. I am still a kid.

### A. Answer the questions.

1. Who tells the story?

- |            |               |
|------------|---------------|
| a. Spot    | c. a grown-up |
| b. the boy | d. the girl   |

2. What do Spot and the boy do?

---

---

---

3. Who is grown-up now? Circle the letter of the correct answer.

- |             |             |
|-------------|-------------|
| a. Spot     | c. the girl |
| b. the baby | d. the boy  |

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: 3<sup>rd</sup> A - B

Read and put the words in the correct order.

1. - Spot - is - this


2. - him - could - I - hold


3. - small - not - is - Spot


4. - a - had - cake - I


5. - with - Spot - me - sat


6. - pet - Spot - a - funny - is


7. - can - Spot - sit


8. - do - can - Spot - tricks


9. - best - is - Spot - pal - my


10. - grown-up - is - dog - Spot - a


# English Extra Activity

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: 3<sup>rd</sup> A - B

Read and put the words in the correct order;  
then write the final sentence.

SOPT

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10

TIGHL

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5 19

DOLH

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8 16

PYPPU

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9

MLSAL

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3 17

GIB

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6

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1 2

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9 10

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KEAC

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SIGTF

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21

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12 20

RTCIKS

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7

SETB LAP

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14

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15 4

GOWNR-PU

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1

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DKI

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13

Class reading and activities – School B

Title:

Everybody wins

**By Pamela Walker. Illustrated by Meredith Johnson**

Taken from:

**CHAMOT, ANNA, CUMMINS JIM, HOLLIE  
SHARROKY. 2006. *Cornerstone C*. Pearson Longman.**



## LITERATURE

### Realistic Fiction



## The Big Question

How can people who are good at different things help each other?

## Reading Strategy

### Preview and Predict

- Read the title.
- Look at the illustrations.
- Read the words and the definitions at the bottom of each page.
- Read the first and last paragraph of the story.
- Predict what the story will be about.

10

# Everybody Wins

by Pamela Walker  
illustrated by Meredith Johnson

Casey was the best basketball player on the school team. She made more baskets than anyone else. She would **dribble** the ball past her teammates to the basket. Some of the other girls on the team called her a **ball hog**.

"Why didn't you **pass** the ball to Jessie?" Damaris asked after a game. "She was right under the basket."

"Because Jessie's too clumsy!" Casey exclaimed. "I wanted to win."

Carla said, "You're being mean. Jessie tries really hard. Besides, we're a team."

Winning was more important to Casey than working with her team.

---

**dribble** move a ball forward by bouncing it

**ball hog** someone who will not give the ball to other players on the team

**pass** throw





The next day, Mr. Vega asked to speak to Casey after class. He told Casey she got another low score on her science test.

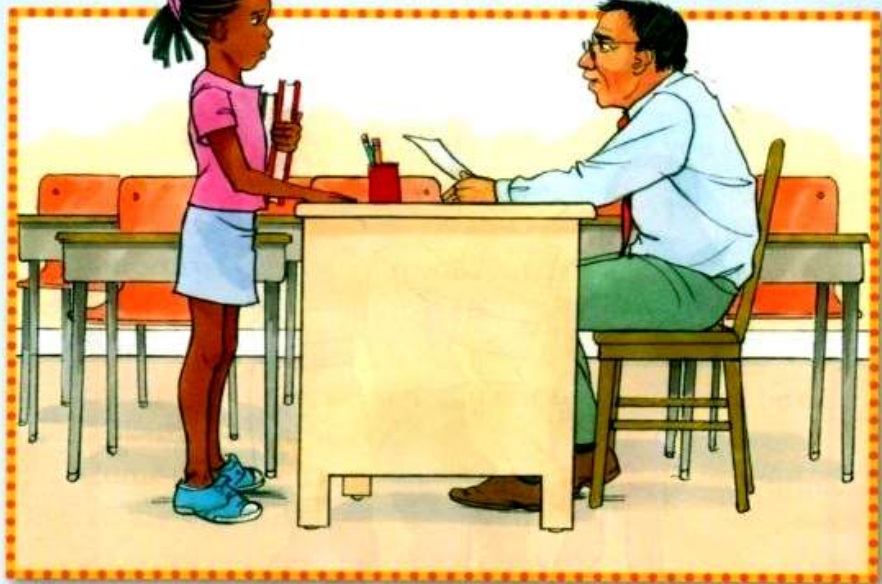
"You're going to have to do much better," Mr. Vega said. "Unless your grades improve, you will have to quit the team."

"Quit the team!" Casey cried. "But I have to play basketball!"

"I'm sorry," Mr. Vega said. "These are the rules. You have three weeks to improve your science grade."

Casey couldn't believe what she was hearing! She would do anything to keep from being kicked off the team.

"Maybe you should ask Jessie to help you," Mr. Vega said. "She's one of my best science students."



**CheckUp**

How do you think Casey will react to Mr. Vega's idea?

Casey was **angry**. The team's most important game of the year was in three weeks. She couldn't miss it. How could Mr. Vega be so mean? He knew the team wouldn't win if she didn't play.

Casey ran out of Mr. Vega's classroom. She did not look where she was going, and she crashed into Damaris and Carla.

"What's the matter?" asked Damaris.

"Mr. Vega said I am **failing** science. He said I can't play basketball if I don't get better grades," Casey said.

"Why don't you ask Jessie to help you?" asked Damaris.

"She's really good at science," said Carla.

"But she's angry with me," said Casey.

---

**angry** not happy

**failing** not doing well







Jessie came out of the art room as the other girls were talking.

"Hey, Jessie!" Carla said. "Casey wants to ask you something."

"I need your help," said Casey.

Jessie was puzzled. "Why should I help you?" she asked.

"I'm sorry I was mean to you. But, if you help me with science, I'll help you with basketball," said Casey.

"Why?" asked Jessie.

"Because if I don't do better in science class, I will be off the basketball team," Casey said.

"Come on," said Damaris. "You two can help each other. Everybody will win."

"It's worth a try," said Carla. "Okay?"

"Okay," said Jessie. "We can try to help each other."

#### CheckUp

Do you think the girls' plan will work? Why?

For the next three weeks, Jessie helped Casey with her science homework.

"When you study," Jessie told Casey, "first read the chapter all the way through. Then go back and write down the words you don't know. You can look up these words in the dictionary."

Jessie even made a practice science quiz for Casey to complete.

During basketball practice, Casey began to pass the ball to Jessie. At first the other girls were suspicious. Why was Casey being so helpful?

"Don't forget to bend your knees right before you shoot," Casey told Jessie during practice.

Casey's science grade improved, and she stayed on the team. Jessie began to improve in basketball, too.







Near the end of the next big game, Casey had the ball. The crowd was yelling and screaming. She was starting to dribble the ball toward the basket when she saw Jessie wave to her.

Jessie was **wide open** and right under the basket.

Casey passed the ball to her, and Jessie shot it into the basket!

"Great job, Jessie!" the team exclaimed. "We won! We won!"

"We won because Casey helped me," said Jessie.

"Great job, Casey!" the team said.

"No," said Casey. "We won because we're a team."

The girls laughed. "Great job, team!"

In the huddle after the game, the team shouted, "Everybody wins!"

**wide open** standing with nobody in the way



**Practice Book**  
pages 5–6

### Reading Strategy

#### Preview and Predict

Before you read the story, you previewed it and made predictions.

- Were your predictions correct?
- Did making predictions help you to understand the story? How?

### Think It Over

- 1 Who asks Jessie to help Casey?
- 2 How do Casey and Jessie help each other?
- 3 What have Casey and Jessie learned by the end of the story?

# English Extra Activity

## Vocabulary

Use with Student Book pages 8–9.

### Key Words

important  
complete  
exclaimed  
clumsy  
improve  
suspicious

**A. Choose the word that *best* completes each sentence. Write the word.**

1. The waiter dropped the food because he was \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Make sure you \_\_\_\_\_ every question on the test.
3. You can \_\_\_\_\_ if you practice every day.
4. The teacher was \_\_\_\_\_ when he found all the students' test answers were the same.
5. "You're the best!" Casey \_\_\_\_\_.
6. We have an \_\_\_\_\_ game on Saturday.

**B. Choose the word that *best* matches the meaning of the underlined words. Write the word.**

7. Players get better when they play every day.  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Don't be distrustful of people trying to help!  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. It's necessary and means a lot to follow the rules.  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. I broke everything because I'm really uncoordinated.  
\_\_\_\_\_

**C. Answer the questions.**

**11.** What things do you like to **complete**?

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**12.** How can an athlete **improve** his or her game?

---

**13.** What was the message the team **exclaimed** when they won?

---

**14.** When have you been **clumsy**?

---

**15.** Why is it **important** to do your homework?

---

**16.** When have you been **suspicious**?

---

**Academic Words**

**D. Read each sentence. Write a new sentence using the underlined word.**

**17.** The audience watched the music director conduct the orchestra.

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**18.** The students made a model for their science project.

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# Reader's Companion

Use with Student Book pages 10–15.

## Everybody Wins

For the next three weeks, Jessie helped Casey with her science homework.

"When you study," Jessie told Casey, "first read the chapter all the way through. Then go back and write down the words you don't know. You can look up these words in the dictionary."

Jessie even made a practice science quiz for Casey to complete.

During basketball practice, Casey began to pass the ball to Jessie. At first the other girls were suspicious. Why was Casey being so helpful?

"Don't forget to bend your knees right before you shoot," Casey told Jessie during practice.

Casey's science grade improved, and she stayed on the team. Jessie began to improve in basketball, too.

### Reading Strategy

List three predictions you can make from the passage.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### Genre

Underline Jessie's advice to Casey.



### Comprehension Check

Circle the sentences that explain what happened when Casey and Jessie helped each other.





### **Use the Strategy**

How did previewing and predicting help you understand the passage?

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### **Retell It!**

Retell the main points of the passage to a partner.

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### **Reader's Response**

How can people learn to help each other?

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### Appendix 3: Transcription on the Pair interviews

Week 1 – SchoolA (3 minutes approx)

Symbols used:

(a phrase or sentence) = The idea was not retrieved well.

(,) = brief pause.

..... = prolonged pause.

// = end of the interview

Teacher: Good morning. How are you boys?

S1: Good teacher

S2: Fine, thank you

Teacher: Let's begin with you, what's your name and how old are you?

S1: I am (S1 says his name).....I have 8 years

Teacher: OK (S1 name), what about you, what's your name and how old are you?

S2: (S2 says his name). I am 9 years old.

Teacher: Great! Let's talk about what you like and don't like. S1, what do you like?

S1: Soccer, play station ....., play games.

Teacher: Nice, is there something you don't like?

S1: .....vegetables, homework, ( )

Teacher: OK.....and you S2.....What do you like?

S2: I like soccer, basketball, play Play station.....don't like soup and.....*no se*

Teacher: Good!!! Now let's talk about the reading of this week "*Spot is a Pal*". The teacher shows a picture of the reading section, did you like the reading?

S1: Yes....I like the small dog ( ). *Me gusta la fiesta*

S2: Yes.... It is good. I like the puppy.

Teacher: OK boys, look at this picture. What can you see in the picture?

S1: I see Spot.....the boy in a *fiesta* ....a birthday and cake.

S2: I see Spot in a birthday (,) he is happy.....the boy is happy....I see cake, balloons y *otras cosas*. (laughter)

Teacher: OK! Very nice boys, now imagine this. S1; it's your birthday party. S2; you are in the party and you start a conversation. Ready?

S1: Yes....

S2: Yes....

Teacher: OK boys, you have to work alone. I will remain silent. Ready go....

S2: Happy birthday (he says S1's name)

S1: Thank you, you like cake?

S2: Yes, it is my favorite *postre*. Is chocolate?

S1: Yes, chocolate.....Eat cake please.

S2: Thank you.....I have a *reg*....present.....It's a soccer ball.

S1: Thank you!!!!..... I like soccer.

S2: Soccer is cool.....Lionel Messi is best. Want play soccer? ( )

S1: Yes, let's play with the friends.

Teacher: OK! Boys...That's all for today. See you soon. Take care.

S1: Thank teacher. Good Bye.

S2: Good bye.

Week 1 – School B (3 minutes approx)

Symbols used:

(a phrase or sentence) = The idea was not retrieved well.

(,) = brief pause.

..... = prolonged pause.

// = end of the interview

Teacher: Good morning. How are you boys?

S1: OK

S2: Fine, thank you

Teacher: Let's begin with you, what's your name and how old are you?

S1: I am (S1 says his name).....I have 14 years

Teacher: OK (S1 name), what about you, what's your name and how old are you?

S2: (S2 says his name). I am 15 *Como se dice años en Ingles?*.

Teacher: Great! Let's talk about what you like and don't like. S1, what do you like? Sports?Music?

S1: Like the *futbol*, Lady Gaga....( )

Teacher: Nice, is there something you don't like?

S1: ( )....*Creo que se dice homework....La tarea no me gusta....*

Teacher: OK.....and you S2.....What do you like?

S2: Soccer, Play station, Lady Gaga *también.....no sé*

Teacher: Good!!! Now let's talk about the reading of this week "Everybody Wins". *The teacher shows a picture of the reading section*, did you like the reading?

S1: No.

Teacher: You didn't like the reading, why?

S1: (,) prefer soccer *me acordé como se dice*.

S2: Yes.... It is good. I like the basket

Teacher: OK boys, look at this picture. What can you see in the picture? Where are these persons?

S1: *Unagirl* and one teacher. They are in school

S2: A teacher, *la chica del cuento*, (,) *cómo se llamaba????*Casey.(laughter) A classroom.

Teacher: OK! Very nice boys, now imagine this. S1; you are a teacher.

S2; you are a student and you didn't present one homework. Ready?

S1: Yes....

S2: *No entendí*. Repeat please

Teacher: You don't have your homework and you have to speak with your teacher (*the teacher makes gestures*). OK boys, you have to work alone. I will remain silent. Ready go....

S1: Homework, please?

S2: Sorry teacher. No homework.....

S1: No homework?, bad boy

S2: Yes teacher ( ) sorry...no time *pe*teacher.

S1: second chance? You need present the homework

S2: Yes, teacher, one chance please.....*mañan*present the homework.....Promise

S1: No homework ( ) bad grade.....you are .....*como se dice flojo*???

S2: Yes teacher.....You are good ( )very good

Teacher: OK! Boys...That's all for today. See you soon. Take care.

S1: Thank teacher. Good Bye.

S2: Good bye.