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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**JAZZ CHANTS AS A DIDACTIC STRATEGY FOR LEARNING VOCABULARY IN  
KINDERGARTENERS**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper reports an Action Research study that aimed at analyzing the incidence of the implementation of Jazz Chants as didactic strategy to learn English vocabulary in kindergarteners in a Spanish monolingual context in Colombia. Initially, a diagnostic test was applied to 20 kindergarteners at the Bilingüe Hispanoamericano School located in Tuluá-Colombia, in order to establish their knowledge of vocabulary in English; which results were low. Later, a didactic sequence based on the strategy Jazz Chants, focused on learning vocabulary in English, was designed and applied, which addressed three themes established by the institution's curriculum: colors, shapes and classroom objects. Then, the students had to make use of the Jazz chants to perform different activities along the didactic sequence during each session in order to practice and become familiar with the vocabulary. After the didactic sequence, students' knowledge of vocabulary was evaluated again in order to analyze the incidence of the implementation of the strategy, which results were remarkably satisfactory.

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**INTRODUCTION**

English teachers and practitioners in monolingual contexts is important to reflect on the different phenomena, problems and possible strategies to improve any difficult situation for teaching a foreign language. That is the case of the current situation of Colombian education that shows an unenthusiastic outlook regarding the bilingualism situation towards English. If one reflects on the historical process of teaching, different approaches, methods and techniques have been constantly reconstructed in parallel with the evolution of the society; supporting the fact that teaching comes to purify methods and techniques to benefit knowledge as an instrument of reflection for each required historical moment (Vlasich De la Rosa, 2010). In this sense, the world is faced with constant social transformations arises and the need to learn and manage a foreign language is evident due to the phenomenon of globalization which has brought increasingly complex challenges for humanity, it is necessary that everyone is prepared to develop and face them; in this way, the expansion of the mass media, along with the educational approaches that aim at the learning of a foreign language have been of great influence in the daily life of the human being. According to the above, in the particular context of Colombia, the scene

regarding the management of a foreign language is not very encouraging, where official statistics suggest that there is a long way to go since 90 percent of the students from the high school level in public schools barely reaches a basic level in the national standardized test, and a little 2 percent is located in intermediate level (El Tiempo, 2015). Likewise, the results of the last national standarized tests in 2016 showed a favorable increase in areas such as natural sciences, mathematics and Spanish, however the same did not happen in the area of English as it only had an increase of 1.5% (Semana, 2016), which raises the question of whether the appropriate pedagogical strategies are being applied to achieve this goal. For this reason, the Colombian government has set itself the goal of creating projects to support the National Bilingual Program (MinEducación, 2004) and to allow the generation of high quality bilingual education, and there the need for implementing strategies that let students to improve their knowledge of the foreign language arises. In the light of these ideas, the inquiring about the importance of researching processes on foreign language learning at an early age has started highlighting its multiple benefits through new theories and investigation results. In this way, the researchers tried to review the latest and more known approaches, methods and strategies for children in their first scholar process; finding Jazz Chants as an interesting researching topic and reliable to fulfill the expectations for bilingual education in pre-school students. That is how this study aims at analyzing the incidence of the implementation of Jazz Chants as a didactic

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strategy for learning English vocabulary in kindergarteners at the Bilingüe Hispanoamericano School in Colombia, establishing the following specific objectives: a) to identify the vocabulary knowledge of the kindergarteners before initiating the intervention; b) to design and apply a didactic sequence based on the Jazz Chants strategy, focusing on learning English vocabulary; and c) to determine the incidence of the strategy Jazz Chants to learn English vocabulary through the listening skill after the intervention. This paper also highlights the importance of learning a foreign language taking as its main axis, the learning of vocabulary through the didactic strategy Jazz chants according to its characteristics and methodology in the light of its creator Carolyn Graham. Supporting this strategy with statements and theories of authors like Noam Chomsky, Stephen Krashen (1982), Navarro-Romero (2010), among others who helped to articulate and develop this research work. Finally, the paper reports the methodology under which the research was carried out and it also presents the following data collection instruments: a) a diagnostic test, designed by the authors in HTML, where the students had to identify the vocabulary presented by relating the audio with the object on the screen, b) a didactic sequence with three evaluative activities where the evolution in terms of vocabulary recognition were registered and finally c) the closing test, that was the same implemented at the beginning of the intervention, achieving a contrast with the obtained results, evidencing the effectiveness of the implementation of Jazz Chants as a didactic strategy for learning vocabulary in English in kindergarteners.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

A qualitative research was developed, following what is proposed by Kemmis McTaggart (1988) about the methodological design denominated Action Research and the contributions to the theory made by Yigit (2016), so that the line of action pursuing the phases proposed by the author. The study population belongs to the Bilingüe Hispanoamericano School located in Tuluá, Valle del Cauca. The research was developed with 20 kindergarteners (4 and 5 years old), belonging to social strata 3, 4 and 5. An action plan was established in order to respond to the phases established by Yigit (2016). Firstly, some important information was collected to determine the starting point of the students' knowledge at the beginning of the intervention by an HTML application where students related the sound of words about colors, shapes and classroom object; the researchers took into account the time used by finishing the activity and the number of known words. Secondly, the implementation of the strategy was carried out and some information about the process and evolution of the population was collected through journals and evaluative activities. Finally, the implementation of the action plan based on the didactic strategy Jazz Chants was evaluated, where the findings were discussed and analyzed in order to make a series of reflections and conclusions about the work carried out.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to establish Jazz Chants as a possible effective strategy to develop basic vocabulary in kindergarteners, it is necessary to reflect on how a L2 learning or acquisition process is. Some authors have studied deeply the different approaches, methods and methodologies used for teaching English as a second or foreign language in order to classify them by regarding teacher and students' roles, settings,

strategies, etc. (Brown, 2000; Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Richards and Rogers, 2014). Although, "to build a complete state-of-art about models and approaches for teaching English as a foreign language is quite hardworking due their continuous researching process" (Romero, 2017, p. 7). However, most scholars point out the need for establishing different strategies according to the actual requirements of students' context and focusing in the learning process. In this way, it is important to take into account some key topics when language learning in children is studied.

### The younger, the better?

Lenneberg (1967) and Bongaerts (1989) state that there are many factors that affect L2 learning. They emphasize that adaptability of the brain in childhood facilitates language learning in a great measure through the absence of prejudices, shyness, fears; as well as biological factors, such as the plasticity of the brain by relating and transforming complex information into a simple and effortless process. However there are other authors that deny these previous facts. For instance, Genesee (1976), Cook (1978) and Ellis (1985) state that older students learn the language with the greatest agility and speed thanks to their conceptual maturity. In terms of grammar and syntax, they are able to learn more by the constant exercise of metacognition they perform. This dilemma continues but governments and schools have made a decision about it. Kindergarteners should start a stimuli of a foreign language in order to take any advantage of the brain plasticity. That is how some kindergarteners around the world are taught commands, basic vocabulary and expressions in a foreign or second language. In Colombia, a suggested curriculum from transition or zero grade was published in 2017 in order to establish the basic learning outcomes of kindergarteners.

### Vocabulary in kindergarteners

In the same way, some authors recognize the importance of vocabulary as an essential aspect in the learning of a language being the closest medium to attend when people is communicating; supporting that without grammar it can be transmitted little, but without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed (Brown, 2000; Wilkins, 2002; Kwiatkowska, 2009). Hand in hand with the previous approaches, Krashen (1982) emphasizes the importance that in the process of learning a language students are in constant contact with comprehensible input, stating that the communicative competence is a result of having first developed listening skills. The same way, Brown (2000) points out the input as a fundamental point in a language learning process; he represents it as an ecology metaphor where input is the clouds that water the seeds (learners) in order to enhance their actual growing; the input effectiveness depends on the implementation of adequate strategies, which are represented by the soil in his metaphor. It is also important to bear in mind the ages of learners in order to establish didactic strategies. Piaget (1961) coined the "Preoperational Stage" as a period when children had already acquired their mother tongue, so that they can use symbols (such as words or pictures) to represent objects; they focus on the use of words and images unconsciously and in a simple and quick way, carrying out a process that requires much more effort in adults. Noam Chomsky (1968) calls it "linguistic alert" where in this same age range, (birth to pre-adolescence) the comprehension and learning capacity of new languages is greater, compared to other development stages. Hence the

importance of stimulating the acquisition of vocabulary in children through significant strategies.

### Jazz Chants

Jazz Chants is a strategy born in the USA, thanks to Carolyn Graham, a professor at the University of California, who defines them as a rhythmic expression applied to words, phrases and sentences of the English language by a 4-beat compass, which is the main characteristic of the musical genre Jazz. This way the paces, the accent and the intonation of the Jazz Chants should be an exact reply of to what the student would listen in a natural conversation with a native polite speaker (Zhang, 2011, p. 564). In this way, the Jazz Chants are a strategy that seeks to put musicality into words as well as natural phrases and sentences of the English language, taking into account that the language has a similar rhythm to the musical genre Jazz. Instead of affecting students' pronunciation, Jazz chants allow to reproduce words, phrases and sentences musically, respecting their correct pronunciation. Based on Graham, the Jazz Chants greatly optimize learners' oral comprehension and production skills. This is probably the most important point because as students acquire vocabulary the accent and rhythm are practiced, being highly motivating because these can be accompanied by jumps, palms by stimulating an alternative environment where role plays, activities in pairs or teams could be used while learners are strengthening language basic vocabulary by singing, clapping, or shouting.

It is important to mention that there are different types of Jazz Chants, where the teacher makes the decision of which prototype to carry out taking into account the needs required by his students, but primarily Jazz Chants can be divided into two large groups:

- Jazz Chants for topics, which can be carried out on students who are new to English because they focus on using vocabulary such as: days of the week, months of the year, seasons, family, and so on.
- Jazz Chants for structure/grammar, which focuses on teaching or practicing English grammatical structures such as questions, structures, imperatives, verb to be, among others.

Therefore, this strategy promotes in children a more understandable language about grammar because it has a repetitive rhythm very young students can get easier. This makes Jazz Chant appropriate for all ages, since as mentioned help students remember difficult words or phrases (Jin Zhang, p. 564). A musical partiture of Jazz Chants is used in Fig. 1 to illustrate how this part of vocabulary is practiced by using a specific rhythm. Relating to the strategy, some researches, carried out by research specialists in different contexts found that Jazz Chants allow students to improve their listening and speaking skills while facilitating the memorization of words thanks to the rhythm that is generated in them (Graham, 1986; Foster, E., 2006; Jin Zhang, 2011). Therefore, after a literature review of approaches and methods used is ESL and EFL processes, more specific for promoting vocabulary learning and placing kindergartener students in contexts to be in contact with comprehensible input, it was found that the didactic strategy called Jazz Chants responds to the characteristics mentioned above. The strategy is also adaptable to any number of methodologies, but it responds effectively to any spin-off approaches and methods from the Communicative Language Teaching – CLT Approach: TPR, TBLL, CLIL, among others;

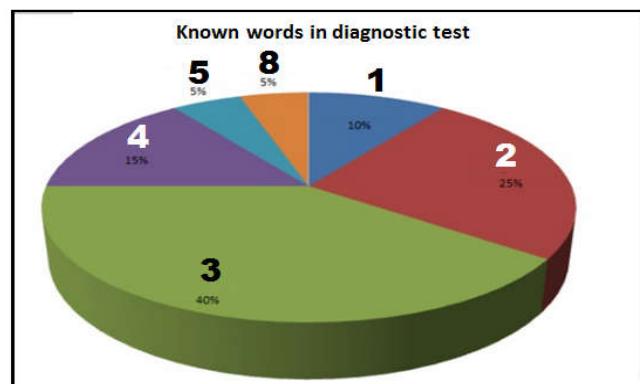
having as a fundamental purpose to establish communication in order to develop the communicative competence (Chomsky, 1965) (Hymes, 1991) (Bérard, 1995) (Marsh, 2002) (Nunan, 2004). It is also necessary to take into account student's needs and the skills that should be developed according to the context, using authentic sounds and vocabulary of daily life for a better and faster learning of the language. In this way, Jazz Chants was the strategy implemented in the research, taking into account that they promote the learning of vocabulary through comprehensible input and develops in students the ability to interact naturally and spontaneously in different contexts, adapting to their cognitive needs, without necessarily involving a deep knowledge at the theoretical level.



**Fig. 1. Musical partiture of Jazz Chants for colors**

### FINDINGS

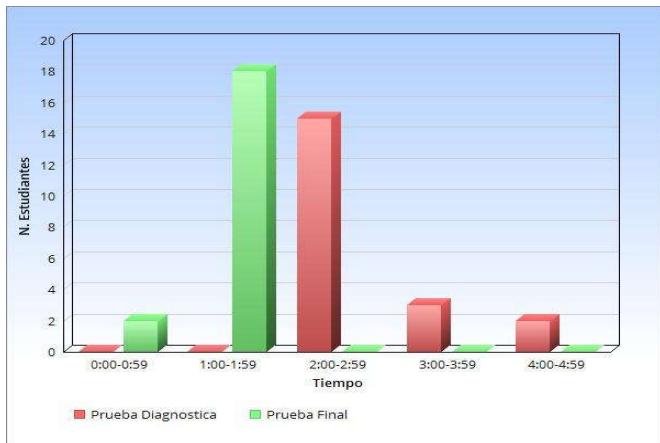
According to the instruments applied to the population, the following results were obtained, by a diagnostic test called "Checking your ears" and created according to English school plan. A qualitative approach, considering the theories and statements of Kemmis and McTaggar (2000) about action research, was carried out for the collection and analysis of results. First of all, a diagnostic test was performed where the number of hits in each question was taken into account (Fig. 2) and the time spent to finish the activity (Figure 3).



**Fig. 2. Results of the diagnostic test – known words**

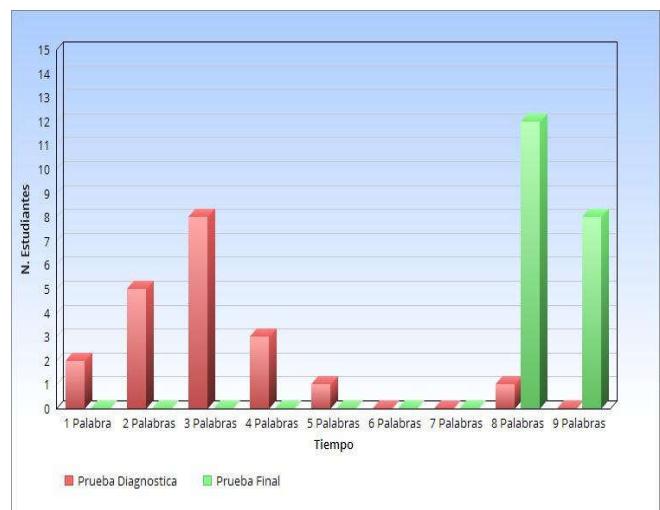
The results found in the diagnostic test, show that the majority of students before starting the intervention were able to recognize only 3 out of 9 words from the test, being an unfavorable result taking into account that the population were students from a bilingual school. This fact arises the need for

interfering this problematic, since nowadays it is known if a student increase his vocabulary, he will get confidence to speak, read or write in a foreign language (Moreno, 2011). Once the strategy was implemented with students, the same test was applied in order to compare results in terms of time and known words and make a contrast between them (Fig. 3).



**Fig. 3. Comparison of time**

The red bars belong to the data collected in the diagnostic test and the green bars to the final test. The red bars can be evidenced insecurity indecision, or little knowledge of vocabulary by students because they stayed in a range of 2:00 and 2:59 minutes to answer 9 questions, contrary to the results of the final test where most of students were in a range of 1:00 and 1:59 minutes; it means half of the time that students took in the diagnostic test. As “mental agility is directly related to knowledge” (Kathleen Stassen, 2007), the final test shows positive results in terms of vocabulary knowledge. The fact that the time was reduced by half, a mental ability is evidenced at the moment to attend their previous knowledge showing a compressible input that according to Krashen (1982) is vital for an effective learning of a foreign language.



**Fig. 4. Comparison number of known words by students**

It can be concluded that effectively, there is a significant increase in terms of learning vocabulary, as it can be seen the green bars belong to the final test shows that 100% of students recognized between 8 and 9 words, without indecision or requesting an audio replay as it happened in the diagnostic test, on the contrary students were able to answer to the test at the first attempt without doubting or showing insecurity, results that prove that the use of jazz chants as a strategy for learning

English vocabulary as Carolyn Graham (1986) said, facilitates the participation and memorization of words asseverates that effectively there is a significant improvement in the apprehension of vocabulary, as it can be seen in the results.

## DISCUSSION

Relating to the research carried out in Bogota by Navarro, Gómez and Florido (2014), it is possible to state that the implementation of the didactic strategy Jazz Chants was an essential part of vocabulary learning, even though the population was high school students, they found the strategy fun and of significant use, stating that students managed to memorize a greater amount of words, aspect that is beared out with the results gathered in this paper, relating the approaches of Stephen Krashen (1982) when he affirms that the process of acquisition of a second language takes time and the ability to communicate arises after developing the listening skill, proving to be a more beneficial in early ages. In this report is visible the increasing results in vocabulary acquisition by kindergarteners through the usage of Jazz Chants, which is appropriate for developing the suggested curriculum for this grade. Addressing the research done by Ph.D. Suzanne L. Medina, who proposes as a strategy for learning English vocabulary the Story-Songs, the research showed that they had a greater acquisition of vocabulary when stories were sung to students, which corroborates the fact that through the auditory stimulation it is possible to facilitate the learning of a foreign language as it was verified in this research work with the results of the final test, where it can be affirmed that the implementation of the Jazz chants produce a greater effect on vocabulary learning, than simple repetition as it is sustained by Carolyn Graham (1986). Finally, the research carried out by Mayorga Mena (2012), has several similarities with regard to the present work of degree, since both investigations were developed in a child population and both works have great relation when approaching authors like Stephen Krashen (1982) and the linguist Noam Chomsky (1968). On one hand, the first of them believes that the students simply enjoy listening, singing and mainly repeating, whose effect proved to be very assertive for the population intervened in both contexts. On the other hand, Krashen (1982) states that this involuntary repetition may be a manifestation based on Chomsky's Theory of Acquisition of Language because our brain has the natural instinct to repeat what it hears around it. Findings about the time used by students at the moment of recognizing words is a proof of the development of learners' competence for using their knowledge about colors, shapes and classroom objects in a specific context.

## Conclusion

According with the data collected during the project, in terms of the implementation of Jazz Chants as didactic strategy, they can evidence that the use of the strategy had a significant impact in kindergarteners not only in terms of acquiring vocabulary but it also can develop other skills such as pronunciation, listening or grammar, since it is a versatile strategy that can be used with any population. Some university professors specialized in research as Jin Zhang and Elizabeth Foster who support that Jazz Chants facilitates the memorization of words thanks to the rhythm that is generated. Complementing proposals like Wilkins (mentioned in Thornbury, 2002) stating that without grammar it is possible to transmitting little but without vocabulary nothing can be transmitted demonstrating how the acquisition of vocabulary

can become very important in the process of learning a second language. In addition, the jazz chants as a didactic strategy can be implemented in any methodology of bilingual education models such as CLIL or TPR, thanks to its versatility.

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