Act Up For Equality! Improvement of Reading Comprehension in a Second Language Through a Gender Perspective

Act up for equality! Mejora de la comprensión lectora en lengua extranjera a través de la perspectiva de género

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Resumen

Este artículo ofrece una propuesta didáctica para mejorar tanto las estrategias de lectura como la fluidez del inglés como primera lengua extranjera. La intervención está implementada con alumnos de 4º de la ESO y 1º de Bachillerato y basada en una adaptación de la técnica de drama pedagógico conocida como Lectura Dramatizada. Creados y compilados específicamente para este proyecto, los materiales de *Act Up for Equality!* son muestras reales de literatura, redes sociales y otras fuentes auténticas relacionadas con el movimiento #MeToo y la antología Milk *and Honey* de Rupi Kaur, cuya temática principal versa sobre el acoso sexual y la desigualdad de género. Así pues, este trabajo está adscrito a la asignatura transversal de Igualdad de Género, como se especifica en la ley educativa actual LOMCE 8/2013.

Palabras clave: inglés L2, comprensión lectora, perspectiva de género

Abstract

This article shows a didactic proposal to improve both reading strategies and fluency in students of English as a first Foreign Language (EFL). The intervention is implemented with 4th ESO and 1st Bachillerato students and is based on an adaptation of the drama pedagogy technique known as Reader's Theatre (RT). The materials used for Act Up for Equality! were specifically created (and compiled) for this project and they are real samples of literature, social networks and other authentic sources related to the #MeToo movement and the poetic anthology Milk and Honey by Rupi Kaur, which revolve around the subjects of sexual harassment and gender inequality in an attempt to work on the cross-curricular subject of Gender Equality, as specified in the current educational law LOMCE 8/2013.

Keywords: English as a Foreign Language (EFL), reading comprehension, Gender perspective.

1. INTRODUCTION

As Prensky foresaw at the turn of the century, a new generation was emerging. The digital natives, as the scholar coined them, brought a completely different manner of understanding the environment surrounding them and a new way of intercommunication was established from that moment up to now, both in terms of social relationships and inside the classroom (Prensky 1). Digital natives have a particular set of features that widen the gap between preceding generations and themselves. These implications, then, urge for a transformation in the design of the curriculum, as it no longer suits the needs of the people attending the educational system.

The Council of Europe has acknowledged some of these differences and has updated the Common European Framework of Reference that "reflects the increasing awareness of the need for an integrated approach to language education across the curriculum" (22) and changed the traditional view of language as a division in four skills to a more realistic perspective of how language works. Nevertheless, there is still a lot of improvement to make, especially when it comes to reading comprehension in an era where digital natives are overloaded with textual information, and yet, they are not able to develop critical skills towards what they read. Most teenagers spend hours and hours browsing over the Internet, reading digital content in different social networks and videogames, and still find it difficult to discuss what they read or answer questions about the global meaning of texts. And this is even worse when they are asked to do it in a foreign language like English.

On the other hand, during the past decade there has been a polarization of ideas regarding feminism. Whereas the number of people attending Women's March has increased in a considerable way during the former years, far-left wing parties have won many adepts as well all over the world. These attitudes can be discerned both on social media and in high school classrooms. Nevertheless, apart from the clichés and fake news that revolve around in the discussion of women's discrimination, many students are completely detached from their real context and problematics.

These two aspects, the need to improve students' reading comprehension and to become aware and eradicate sexism, shape the project *Act Up for Equality!*

2. AIMS

This project was implemented because the authors realised that students had serious problems in engaging in the activity of reading as well as understanding both the explicit and implicit information in the text. This was due to several factors: their lack of reading strategies to tackle a text, their demotivation with regards of the textual genres included in textbooks which are not appealing to teenagers, and their misconception that understanding a word and being able to translate the information included in the text presupposes its comprehension. Such diagnosis was alarming, taking into account that textual input has a fundamental role in students' everyday lives.

To become aware of the socio-cultural and cross-curricular content they come across both in the classroom and on the Internet, it is essential to develop reading strategies and a critical attitude. Among the wide range of topics they face, gender equality and prevention of discrimination and sexual harassment are of key importance — especially if the new waves of sexist attitudes among teenagers are taken into account. All these aspects have been considered in the design of the project *Act Up for Equality!* and to achieve the following goals:

1. To give students reading strategies to improve their reading comprehension and fluency.
2. To encourage students to become independent readers through a progressive building up of knowledge.
3. To develop a critical attitude towards Gender Inequality through literary texts and social media as well as group discussion.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To tackle the problem and improve their reading skills and critical perspective, a series of materials were created following the needs and motivation of students. The proposal deals with the subject of gender inequality in general, and in Hollywood in particular, as the movement #MeToo originated and was spread in the social media.

a. Reading Comprehension

This project was mainly based on the recommendations made by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), a guideline used by teachers to create materials, develop their syllabus, adapt their teaching practice and evaluate students who are in the process of learning a foreign language. The CEFR has adopted an approach that leaves behind the four linguistic skills and replaces them with four models of communication: reception, production, interaction and mediation — which offer a more realistic representation of the complex reality of communication (Council of Europe 30). Inspired by the proposals made by the CEFR, both the Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte (MECD) and the Generalitat Valenciana (GVA) have designed specific curricular concretions in every stage of Secondary education, from Educación Secundaria Obligatoria (ESO) to Bachillerato.

Reading comprehension can be worked in many different ways to fulfil the goals established in the syllabus. In this sense, Halliday proposes a theory of language called Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). This theory argues that texts owe their existence to context, as language users have a reduced number of choices due to context constraints (Brisk 3). As stated by Eggins (2) in Brisk's work, SFL is "a very useful descriptive and interpretive framework for viewing language as a strategic, meaning-making resource" (4). Thus, this theory provides teachers with the necessary tools to teach students how language should be used in different contexts.

It is also worth mentioning the project developed by Rose and his colleagues, the Reading to Learn (R2L) Project, which guides teachers to help students to examine and understand texts Through R2L. Here, students become skilled to interpret and analyse a text, deconstruct it and interrogate the meaning underlying the social conventions and the choice of words that appear in it. Nevertheless, context does not only depend on sociocultural aspects and the lexis used. The purpose of the text and the genre conventions also frame the meaning of the text (Acevedo and Whittaker 39-40).

Nonetheless, this is a challenging task in today's society because of two main reasons. On the one hand, learners belong to the digital age and are used to interact with their surrounding environment by means of technological gadgets. These social and technological changes are neither contemplated in textbooks nor as a pedagogical tool.

In fact, the most popular gadgets among students are punished and forbidden in the classroom most times. This results in them being exposed to conventional and old-fashioned genres which are not appealing to teenagers at all. In turn, although students are constantly exposed to Facebook posts (Espinosa) and WhatsApp messages, most of them do not engage in another type of reading. According to De Azúa, 40% of the Spanish population has never read a book. The problem lies in the fact that people confuse the cultural need or social elegance of reading with the mental practice deriving from it. Furthermore, many teenagers lack the literacy to express their thoughts with words and resort to violence and aggressivity. Although this might not be the only reason, more cases of bullying and exclusion are taking place in the school context in the present time.

b. Drama Pedagogy in Foreign Language Teaching

Drama Pedagogy in Foreign Language (FL) Teaching has achieved a considerable growth since the 1970s, both as a field of research and as a pedagogical technique (Schewe 5). This is due, in part, to the holistic nature of drama, as it "encourages adaptability, fluency, and communicative competence. It puts language into context and, by giving learners experience of success in real-life situations, it should arm them with the confidence for tackling the world outside the classroom" (Belliveau and Kim 7). Among the many dramatic approaches adopted in the FL Classroom, Reader's Theatre seems to be a useful technique to learn languages, as it fosters language improvement in many areas at once. In a nutshell, RT focuses on reading skills and comprehension, fluency and expression, allowing a multidirectional practice of these skills. Students have to analyse a text to understand its meaning. Therefore, a repeated and fluent reading of a text allows a better comprehension of the extract. Similarly, when students comprehend what they read, they are able to read a text with more confidence and at a more rapid pace.

RT is especially interesting in Second Language (L2) and FL Teaching because teaching reading to Secondary students is particularly challenging as they are exposed to texts which are not meaningful for them (Macalister 387). Conversely, RT provides students with a purpose to practice a text orally, as Readers Theatre International suggests, as cited in Chard and Tyler: "Students read from the scripts, focusing their energies on interpreting and sharing their understanding of a character through appropriate intonation and oral expression" (166).

In addition to all the aforementioned aspects, Drama Pedagogy in general and RT in particular, have beneficial outcomes at social level. Many times, people who are learning an L2 do not feel confident enough to start up a conversation with strangers in a language

different from their mother tongue. However, theatre offers students a secure scenario that prompt learners to interact with each other.

c. Gender Perspective

Finally, there is a third approach worth mentioning in the development of the classroom experience dealing with a gender perspective. Due to many different factors, an increase of sexist attitudes is now taking place in Secondary high schools all around Spain. In a survey conducted in a high school in Zaragoza, 80-85% of students said that violent behaviours were a common practice (Lasmarías). Notwithstanding, this is not an isolated case among students. Female teachers also feel threatened by male students. In Andalusia, a survey was carried out among teachers and results were startling: 84% of female teachers had suffered verbal abuse or physical aggression, some of them even both at the same time (Díaz).

Therefore, teachers have an important role to play in stopping sexism from achieving an unbearable stage. This is why, despite having a shortage of resources that deal with equality among genders, and in spite of what textbooks disregard because they are controversial topics, teachers have the duty to bring questions about female discrimination to the classroom and teach students ways of fighting sexual discrimination and abuse, or what some people call despite being politically incorrect, feminism.

Moreover, according to Serra (4), most students feel that the main objective of studying English is acquiring skills to obtain a better job, disregarding the cultural and social component inherent to a language. Thus, in an attempt to show students appealing, contemporary cultural content of the American and British culture and tackle gender discrimination at the same time, we decided that the #MeToo movement was an interesting choice. It started in 2006 to support victims of sexual abuse and was popularised in 2017 as it spread on the social media and was adopted as a motto by many Hollywood celebrities in different events with international media coverage such as the Golden Globes and the Oscars Ceremony Awards. The #MeToo movement seemed convenient for three main reasons: (1) despite being an international movement, many students were oblivious of the movement and its strength; (2) they could get acquainted with some well-known actresses, writers and singers from different English speaking countries, and (3) most importantly, they became aware of the power of social media in terms of political and social vindications.

4. TEACHING PROPOSAL: ACT UP FOR EQUALITY!

a. Context and participants

The project Act Up for Equality! was implemented in two different levels of a state secondary high school: a group of 4th of ESO (15/16-year-old students) and a group of 1st

of Bachillerato (16/17-year-old students). The first group was formed by 23 students (11 men and 12 women) and the latter group was made up of 26 students (11 male students and 15 female students). This experience was developed as a part of the curriculum of the English subject in a conventional classroom. The group of 4th of ESO devoted 4 sessions of 55 minutes to the project due to time restrictions, whereas the group of 1st of Bachillerato worked on the project for 7 lessons of 55 minutes. It took place in the first fortnight of March to celebrate International Women's Day.

b. Procedure

Each session devoted to the implementation of Act Up for Equality! was based on a Task-Based Learning Methodology following Ellis' guidelines in *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Thus, the activities were sequenced in a Pre-Task, Main Task and Post-Task. The main objective of this project was devoted to providing students with reading strategies in order to become independent readers taking into account the contents and indicators of success included in the Decree 87/2015, which defines the curriculum in 4th of ESO and 1st of Bachillerato in the Valencian Community. To engage the learners in the readings and develop their critical attitude, students were offered texts related to the topic of sexual harassment. Some of them were poems from the Indian-Canadian poetess Rupi Kaur but some others were extracts from Instragram and Twitter posts. The introduction of new genres had a twofold purpose: to attract students to the readings and raise awareness of sexist attitudes on online manifestations.

After an initial questionnaire on students' reading strategies, a running dictation was performed only with 1st of Bachillerato students due to time restrictions. Students had to rewrite an excerpt from Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* to check their actual performance. Then, a first presentation was delivered to activate reading strategies, as they pondered over what steps had to be taken into account when they read. In addition, it was intended to foster the learners' predictions about the topic that would be introduced in the Main Task (critical thinking) by getting them involved in a group discussion. Then, students performed the first Main Task. It consisted of a poem analysis at class level taken from *Milk and Honey* (Kaur 39). Some biographical data and literary features about the Indian- Canadian poetess were also presented to the students to help them contextualize the poem. The second Main Activity proposed was a poem analysis taken from the same book (Kaur 19, 22, 35, 36, 38). However, its analysis was developed in smaller groups (four or five students). Furthermore, students were distributed a nine-question worksheet focusing on the overall meaning of the women to work firstly on the semantic level of the text, both at micro and macro-level so as to understand the general meaning of the text and, secondly, to deal with some questions of

evaluation and personal response. In this part, the students had to relate the content of the poems with events from the real life, developing a critical attitude towards what they had read and relate it to news and facts from their contemporary society.

In the next stage, a handout and a worksheet with tweets and comments made by celebrities were handed out to the students. These worksheets contained comments made by celebrities and extracts from posts on social media. The aim of this worksheet was that students could be able to understand and evaluate comments they could find on the Internet. The worksheets were divided into three sections. The first one dealt with sexist and discriminatory comments; section two included female celebrities' responses to discriminatory comments and finally, the last section had some Instagram and Twitter posts on the #MeToo Movement. Thus, examples of materials from section 1 included sexist comments made by President Donald J. Trump, an extract from an interview made to Chris Evans and Jeremy Renner referring Scarlett Johansson as a 'slut' and an excerpt from Kanye West's Famous. In Section 2 students could find a reply by Mayim Bialik to an interviewer undervaluing her intelligence, Rihanna's confirmation that she did not need a man in her life, Jennifer Lawrence's complaints about body shaming among Hollywood actresses and Megan Fox's experience of her sexual objectification in most of the roles she was offered. Finally, Section 3 dealt with comments made by female celebrities on the #MeToo movement vindicating her rights and some of the mottos established during the media campaign, as for example Uzo Aduba's speech: "I want all the girls watching here now to know, a new day is on the horizon. And when the new day finally dawns, it will be because of magnificent women".

Regarding the worksheet, each group had a different document for section one. Nonetheless, in regards to sections two and three, questions were the same for all groups. As an extension to what students had done in class, and with the aim to check if they had understood the main aspects of the project, as a Post-Task activity, students had to record themselves reading the texts that had been worked in class with the proper intonation. For that purpose, apart from practising the interpretation of texts in class, the students were given access to a Drive Folder with the worksheets and audio-recordings made by native speakers to rehearse pronunciation at home. Each group was handed in a QR Code with all the materials and recordings.

The audios in the folder were recorded by Erasmus students at the Facultat de Filologia, Traducció i Comunicació (FFTiC) from Universitat de València coming from different parts of the United Kingdom. They were asked to read the poems in a comprehensible way and with a neutral tone. That way, students could check the pronunciation of the words they

found more difficult to utter but could not be influenced by their intonation when they recorded their own creations. The QR Codes were given along with a document containing the instructions for video or audio recording. Once they had their files recorded, they had to send them by email to the teachers.

c. Data Collection Tools

The project Act Up for Equality!, far from aiming at students' improvement of their linguistic attainment in just one area of the four main language skills, was an ambitious project where language, expression and critical thinking were worked simultaneously. Therefore, different procedures of evaluation were needed to monitor their progress in every step of the sequence as well as in every sphere of learning, despite they had taken place at the same time. For such purpose, the best method of assessment was a holistic evaluation. This is the reason why students were assessed taking into account not only an initial evaluation of their knowledge in reading comprehension, but also a formative and summative assessment at different stages of the project.

Table 1. Data Collection Tools

Type of Evaluation	**Description**	**Function**
Diagnostic Test: Running Dictation Reading Comprehension Questionnaire	Examine students' level of reading comprehension both through a survey and practice and find out the reading strategies they use.	Become aware of the different levels of students to adapt the materials and distribute the groups.
Summative Assessment: Audio/Video Recording	Check students' level of understanding of the concepts and skills learned in class.	Determine the student's grades at the end of the project.
Formative Assessment: Students' Participation Poem Analysis Tweets and Comments Analysis	Determine students' progress in different areas throughout the sessions.	Monitor students' performance and give them feedback to improve their results. Conclude what aspects need to be reinforced and what elements are already acquired.

d. Results and Discussion

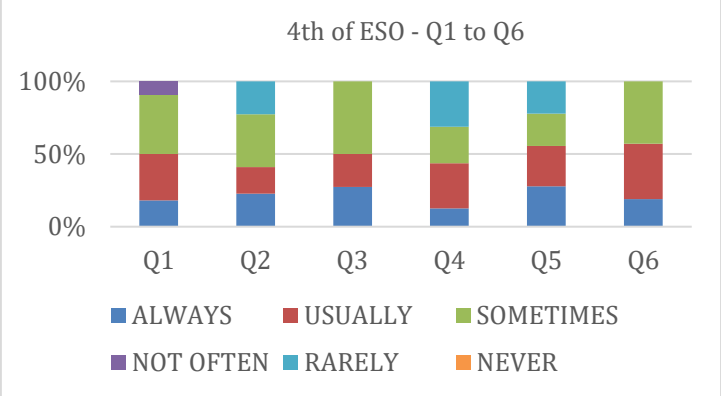
In this section, the results obtained and the conclusions drawn in the intervention are shown. Within each type of evaluation —diagnostic test, informal assessment and content

evaluation— there is a description of each group's performance in every activity or survey carried out throughout the sessions included.

i. Diagnostic Test - Initial Questionnaire

22 students of 4th of ESO carried out the Initial Questionnaire. Most students stated that they usually (32%) or sometimes (41%) understand what they read, whereas a smaller part (18%) always recognized what they read (Q1). Only two students said that they often do not understand the information given. Thus, this was a good starting point to give students strategies to improve such aspect. Regarding the use of other elements inside the text (Q2), there was a great variety of responses. 36% of students sometimes used titles or illustrations to generate meaning, whereas others either always (23%) or rarely (23%) used them. These elements were usually ignored by students. Thus, it was surprising that at least 23% of them admitted using them to generate meaning. In terms of reading strategies (Q3), half of the class (50%) sometimes used the information they already have to guess the meaning. A 31% usually gave up when they did not understand the text, but the same number of students used strategies that helped them continue reading, although in the end they sometimes surrendered (Q4). This can be explained by a surprising factor: a 28% of students never used a dictionary if they did not understand a word, the same amount of people who usually used it (Q5). Hence, it can be inferred from these results that students did not usually comprehend what they read and such fact discouraged them and they abandoned the task. As far as the mental representation of the reading is concerned, most students either usually (33%) or sometimes (38%) tried to see the pictures of what they read in their heads (Q6). Thus, this strategy could help them to visualise the information better.

Graphic 1. Initial Questionnaire 4th of ESO. Q1 to Q6

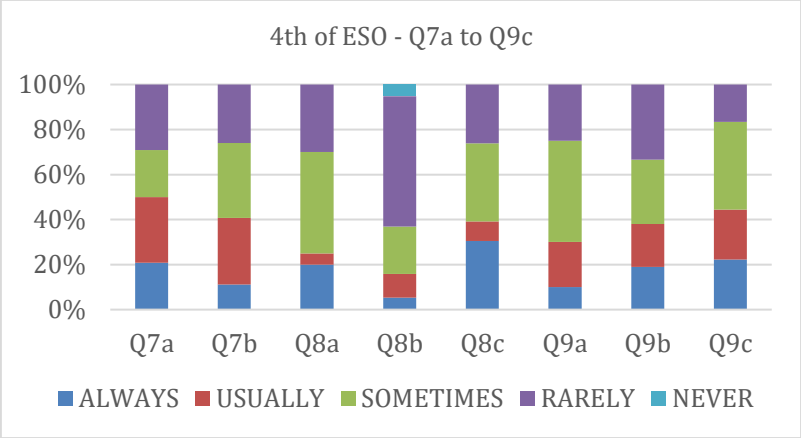


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The anticipation of events did not characterise students of 4th of ESO. Most students either sometimes (33%, 21%) or rarely (29%, 26%) guessed what would happen both before the story started (Q7a) and when it progressed (Q7b). The fact that learners did not make predictions about what they were going to read affected comprehension considerably, as they did not reflect on the topics that might be related to the text. On the other hand, they sometimes (48%, 45%, 35% respectively) reflected upon what they read at the different stages of reading (before the story Q8a; during the story Q8b; after the story Q8c). This strategy helped them ponder over what they had read and review key aspects.

Moreover, they sometimes linked what they read to both their personal experiences and scenes they watched on TV. But rarely did they make a relation among texts (Q9a,b,c). This is something common among students and this is why the referential level of reading was one of the central aspects of this project.

Graphic 2. Initial Questionnaire 4th of ESO. Q7 to Q9

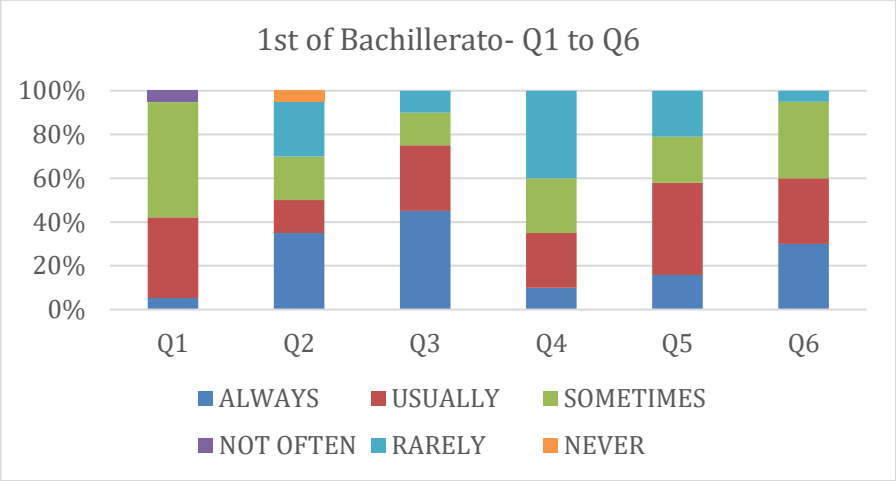


These results were challenging in some aspects, especially in regards to the referential level. Nonetheless, the fact that students sometimes used strategies to guess the meaning of the words and did not generally compare the texts to experiences from other sources allowed more room for improvement.

Regarding the 1st Bachillerato group, out of 20 students in 1st of Bachillerato, 53% of them informed that they sometimes understood what they read, but sometimes they did not. 37% of students usually understood what they read and a small percentage of 5% of students stated that they either always, not often or rarely comprehended the text (Q1). Similarly, the fact that a small part of students admitted always understanding the text encouraged us to mainly focus on providing them with tools to improve such aspect. Seven students used illustrations or figures to convey the meaning of the text. Nevertheless, five of them rarely

paid attention to those elements (Q2), a common practice among most readers. These elements are important sources of information and this is why they should not be disregarded. 45% of students used the information they already had to predict the meaning of words they did not know (Q3). If not, 42% of the class usually recurred to a dictionary when they were not familiar with some lexical items (Q5). The fact that students used dictionaries generally means that students are interested in understanding what they read. Furthermore, 40% of students usually used strategies when they did not understand a word, although 25% of them admitted giving up (Q4). Regarding the mental representation of the reading, there was a diversity of responses. 7 students pictured what they read in their heads (Q6). A small percentage of students rarely (4%) or never (17%) did it. This could mean different things. Maybe, they did not understand the text and could not make a picture of what they read or maybe they had a particular form of processing information that did not imply making mental representations of the information understood.

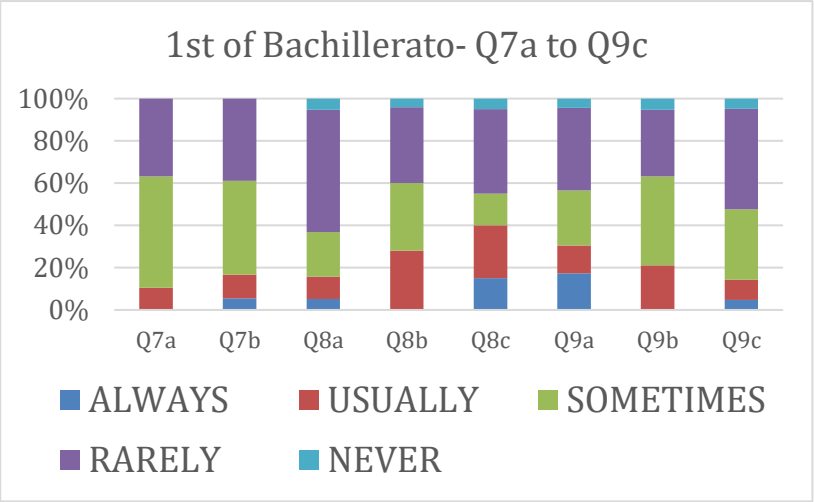
Graphic 3. Initial Questionnaire 1st of Bachillerato. Q1 to Q6



Besides mental representation, they sometimes anticipated the events before (Q7a) a story strated or throughout (Q7b) the reading. In addition, they rarely asked themselves questions at any stage of the reading (Q8a,b, c). This showed that students could relate information within the text to obtain a global perspective of its meaning. However, they could not make a link between what they read and what they had experienced in real life. As to the referential level, they rarely made links with other texts, their personal experience or TV programs (9a, b, c).

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Graphic 4. Initial Questionnaire 1st of Bachillerato. Q7 to Q9.



This was at odds with the result of the other group, who made a greater link with the latter sources rather than the former described here. As said before with 4th of ESO students, as they hardly used the referential level of reading to create relations between texts and other sources, the activities proposed would improve such an aspect.

ii. Running Dictation (1st of Bachillerato)

From all the stages carried out during this activity, the synthesis of the excerpt was the most relevant task for the project. Although some summaries had been exceptionally well elaborated, the majority of students copied some words literally. Nevertheless, the final product had no sense or was little related to what the original source said.

Here are some samples:

Figure 1. Running Dictation Sample 1

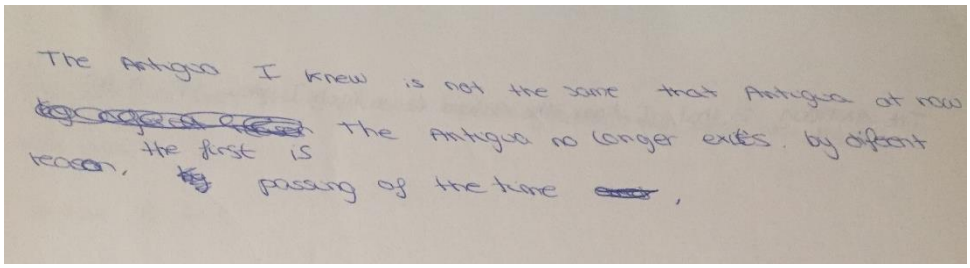


Figure 2. Running Dictation Sample 2

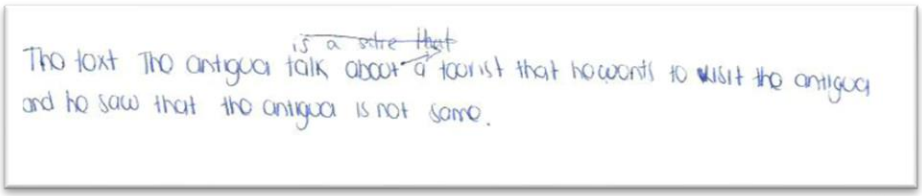


Figure 1 is a literal transcription of some lines of the text: "The Antigua that I knew" (l.1); "That Antigua no longer exists" (l.3); "the passing of time" (l.5). Even the 1st person singular used by the narrator is kept in the summary. In contrast, figure 2 shows inconsistencies. For example, students wrote that "the text the [A]ntigua talk[s] about a tourist that he [who] wants to visit the [A]ntigua". This idea of a foreigner collides with the first sentence of the text: "the Antigua in which I grew up" (l.2). Besides that, students assigned a masculine profile to the narrator despite not having evidence to prove that, as discussed before. These facts made us realise that students were able to memorise several lines literally. And yet, they had little idea of what the text was about. For this reason, questions in the worksheet aimed at general aspects about the context of the extract rather than specific questions that could be answered by copying a sentence identically without the need of understanding it.

iii. Informal Assessment

Classwork was an important aspect of the process of learning as well as the grades. In fact, 10% of the final mark of the project was students' participation, attitude and work.

4th of ESO students showed an active engagement in all the activities proposed — both the Drive Presentation and the worksheets. Although students had different levels, groups were arranged in a balanced manner. Therefore, differences in attainment were reduced because learners at a lower level had the support of their classmates. In general, group work during the sessions was gratifying, as students were equally implied. Obviously, there were exceptions and in a specific group only one girl did all the hard work. Nonetheless, their team members paid attention to her work. Besides students' interest in the topic and appreciation of the activities proposed, part of the success might be due to the help of the other teacher. The fact that there were two teachers to monitor students' undertaking of the tasks made it easier for all of us.

The analysis of 1st of Bachillerato was a bit more challenging. Students seemed more reluctant to participate —be it because of the nature of the activity or because they were shy. Nevertheless, they were more mature in some aspects and could perform the task more efficiently. There were two groups of performance clearly distinguished. On the one hand, some students served an active role and performed the task responsibly. Within this group,

some students were highly attracted by the topic —in fact, one of them was acquainted with Kaur's work— and showed a great commitment towards the activity and discrimination issues. Others simply wanted to obtain a good grade and completed the worksheet thoroughly to achieve their purpose. On the other hand, a small number of students showed a negative attitude towards the task. Although they participated when they were monitored, other students were in charge of the completion of the worksheet.

iv. Content Evaluation (Worksheets: Poem Analysis and Tweets and Comments made by Celebrities)

The completion of the worksheet by 4th of ESO students was quite satisfying. Despite time restrictions during the 1st session, students could complete most of the questions. Some of them offered more elaborated responses than others. Nevertheless, the main aspects of the poems were reflected in all the worksheets. Furthermore, most students could relate the scenes described by Rupi Kaur with some personal events, news or books and films. Only two groups could answer the last question on the poem analysis worksheet: "How can sexual harassment be prevented?", to what they responded that education and women's self-esteem and sense of power were the solutions. In addition, an improvement in the comments in the second worksheet could be discerned. Despite the complexity of texts, they offered more detailed answers and used the vocabulary reviewed at the beginning of the class.

Students of 1st of Bachillerato also did a great job completing the worksheets. They had more time to perform the poem analysis which is reflected in their responses. Nonetheless, a difference in the level of English and maturity could be distinguished across the groups. Out of the five groups, three of them offered well-argued responses, whereas the other two responded with short answers or did not complete the task despite having enough time to do so. These students were more acquainted with the terms explained at the beginning of session two. Thus, they already used them in the first worksheet. This is the reason why less progress between activities could be discerned in this group. They also were very critical towards sexual harassment and education and a more severe punishment were their suggestions to prevent sexual discrimination and abuse.

v. Audio or Video Recording

Eighteen 4th ESO students out of twenty-three recorded themselves reading the poem and five did not complete the task. In general, students' interpretation of the task was good. Fluency was the most remarkable aspect of this group. With some exceptions, most people obtained more than 7 out of 10 in this section. Nonetheless, the marks on pronunciation were more varied. Some students did an amazing job, whereas others made little effort in

rehearsing at home. Since they had all the materials to check the pronunciation of words, this section was the most strictly graded. Finally, with regards to intonation, students also performed differently. In contrast to pronunciation, this was the most difficult part, so students were not graded particularly low. Moreover, it has to be taken into account that this group did not have as many chances to practice intonation as the group of 1st of Bachillerato. Nevertheless, some of them expressed the feeling required for the excerpt. However, others did a more lineal representation of the poems and tweets.

In turn, twenty-one out of the twenty-six students in 1st of Bachillerato sent the recording and five did not perform the task. In their case, fluency was also the most salient section of all three. Grades in pronunciation were also good in general and only 6 students had a grade below B. Finally, regarding intonation, most students offered an acceptable interpretation of the excerpts they read. However, only five students obtained a grade A. Students had practised intonation at different stages during the sessions. In addition, they had recorded their videos and audios in class, so they could ask for feedback. For all those reasons, the researchers were stricter with their products than with 4th of ESO students. Nevertheless, they still obtained good marks.

vi. Evaluation Sheet

4th ESO students were given the evaluation sheet as a homework task a day prior to Easter Holidays. Some of them did not attend school on the following day and this is why only twelve students handed in the document. It is surprising that, despite allowing them to respond in their native language, except one student all of them answered in English.

Regarding the part of reading comprehension, there was a disparity of opinions: five students found the meaning of the texts difficult whereas seven had no problems in understanding all the words. Nevertheless, they all agreed in the fact that context is important to understand specific words of a text and the meaning underlying and framing it.

In terms of fluency, all students admitted being able to read the text quickly enough to sound natural. Although some of them attributed this fact to practice or the memorisation of passages, most of them thought that meaning was also a factor influencing their lack of fluency. For instance, a student said: “After working on it, I could read it quicker because I knew all that I was reading so it was easier”. Also, they thought that the purpose and attitude of the speaker were important when a text was read aloud. However, although eight of them empathised with the writer or the speaker, four had problems expressing the same feelings. One of the most repeated reasons was: “Those people have had experiences and feelings which I haven’t had”. All of them, though, agreed on the fact that reading comprehension

and fluency were linked. However, rather than considering it a bidirectional relation, some thought that comprehension affected fluency and others stated that it was vice versa.

Finally, with regards to critical thinking, two of them said they never judged what they found on the internet, four of them said they sometimes did (depending on the content), and the rest said they always analysed online content. From the two former groups, two of them were not sure if they would have a critical view of what they read on the internet in the future. However, all of them enjoyed the activity and found it really interesting. Three of them referred to group discussion as a useful tool to learn.

In turn, twenty students of 1st of Bachillerato completed the evaluation sheet. Eleven of them did it in Spanish and nine in English. As to reading comprehension, there was also a diversity of opinions regarding the difficulty of the text: 15 students thought that it was easy to understand whereas the rest had problems in understanding the meaning without help. All of them considered that context was important to guess the meaning of words and to have a better comprehension of the purpose of the text. Nevertheless, some students admitted having used a translator to check words in Spanish. As to the introduction of background information about the author and the text, a student said: "Leer el texto varias veces y tratar de entender no solo lo que pone, sino también lo que quiere dar a entender el autor ayuda bastante".

In terms of fluency, except one, all students agreed that after analysing the texts, they could be read more easily. For example, a student explained: "After reading it and answering all the questions, it was easier to read and understand the text because we got used to the words and the topic." They also agreed on the fact that the purpose and attitude of the speaker were important to understand what they wanted to represent and to empathise with the text. However, 17 learners had difficulties in interpreting the text. Some of them attributed their problems to pronunciation issues; others said they had problems in expressing feelings in English: "En inglés no sabía poner voz de enfadada"; others had not been through the same experiences and could not position themselves in the speaker's shoes; others were aware of the fact that they had to interpret and did not consider themselves good actors and actresses: "Es algo actuado y no natural". Yet all of them were aware of the link between reading comprehension and fluency.

Finally, regarding critical thinking, most students acknowledged having analysing skills when reading posts on the internet, either always (50%) or sometimes (40%). Nevertheless, 10% did not pay attention to the content of discriminatory tweets. Five of them were not sure of if they would analyse the posts they encounted in the future as in detail as they had worked in class, but they would be more critical. In relation to the question "Do you think

these activities are interesting and helpful?", one student admitted not having learned anything new. Therefore, he would not like to do these types of activities in the future. However, the rest assured enjoying them and there was positive feedback: "I think this topic is very important because we never 'study' it at school. They are interesting and helpful because if we talk about it, some people raise awareness. Nowadays we talk about this topic on social media. However, it still happens"; "Sí me gustaría, porque trabajando cosas de la sociedad podemos aprender mucho más y también aprender inglés."

5. CONCLUSIONS

Act Up for Equality! was a project designed for a three-flod purpose: teaching different reading strategies to digital native students; for a specific target: Secondary students of 4th of ESO and 1st of Bachillerato; and in a specific way: through the sequencing of activities designed from authentic materials.

Regarding the first objective formulated, it was successfully achieved. Although some students were already acquainted with different reading strategies, especially at the word and semantic level, they improved them both and adopted a new perspective towards reading. Thus, from then on they were also capable of relating the texts under analysis to personal experiences or events from other textual or visual sources.

Besides that, through the drama technique known as Reader's Theatre, they worked on texts in a completely different way and learners became aware of the strong relationship between reading comprehension and fluency. In addition, they worked on expression and interpretation of texts in order to turn them into meaningful sources and deeply understand the attitude and purpose of the writers or speakers. However, this latter part was quite challenging for most students as they were not used to perform texts or could not empathise with the feelings and events depicted in the texts.

The interdependence among elements and across skills and topics was encouraged rather than the teaching of specific words and structures. This was proved in the students' analysis of texts, which showed a correlation of knowledge and an improvement of expression and understanding from one session to another. This was done through the use of genres familiar to the students. Although they analysed literary texts in the form of a poem, which they were not used to, they also examined formats which were much more common in their everyday lives, such as tweets and Instagram posts among others. This way, they engaged in the task and offered a more positive attitude than they had done with reading activities included in textbooks.

Finally, they also participated in a discussion on Gender Inequality. Some students were more attracted to the topic than others, as reflected in their daily performance in class. However, they developed a critical attitude towards content they are prone to find when they surf on the Internet on different social networks and websites. In fact, most students stated that this project helped them to adopt a more judgmental attitude towards online content in the future.

In general, the results of this experience have been fruitful. Nevertheless, there are some factors to take into account that might have affected the final outcomes of the project. First of all, time constraint regarding the duration of a class had negative effects. Although classes in Secondary Education are supposed to last 55 minutes, the truth is that they only last for 45 or 50 minutes. Similarly, as students worked in teams and groups were large, the teacher could not monitor if all of them had worked in a balanced way.

Regarding Reader's Theatre, two approaches could be adopted in drama pedagogy: small and large scale. Due to time restrictions, a small scale approach was developed in this project. Notwithstanding, to take full advantages of the benefits of theatre education in EFL, a large-scale approach towards RT would be much more effective. Hence, a future research project could be oriented towards the implementation of Reader's Theatre in a large-scale in the learning of English in Secondary Education. Therefore, the dramatic reading of a whole play could be considered. That way, more time could be devoted to aspects of fluency and expressive reading of a text in a foreign language, as most students have problems in reading aloud and showing their feelings both in their native tongue and in a foreign language.

It is also worth mentioning that from all the students who completed the final evaluation sheet, only one admitted his reluctance to repeat this kind of activity. Nonetheless, the rest of the students stated their enjoyment of the project. Therefore, this approach could be adopted to work other cross-curricular subjects such as immigration, refugees, politics or media manipulation among others. Both to fill the lack of information in textbooks on these kinds of subjects and to work on critical skills towards content related to these topics that students can find on the Internet.

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