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Artigal method: a successful way of teaching English in Early Childhood Education

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Resumen

Este proyecto analiza uno de los métodos más utilizados en España en Educación Infantil para la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera: el método Artigal. Con el fin de fundamentar la base teórica del trabajo, se describe, en primer lugar, la importancia del aprendizaje de lenguas en edades tempranas en base a dos teorías del campo de adquisición de segundas lenguas: la Hipótesis del Periodo Crítico y la Hipótesis de la Diferencia Fundamental. A continuación, se describe el método Artigal y las dos principales metodologías que lo sustentan: el método Audio-Lingüístico y la Respuesta Física Total.

La implementación del método Artigal tuvo lugar en un aula con 19 estudiantes del segundo curso de Educación Infantil. La evaluación se realizó mediante la observación directa del alumnado y una prueba final. Los resultados de la prueba mostraron que el 91% del alumnado alcanzó los objetivos planteados para la propuesta. La observación de aula a su vez confirmó la eficacia y adecuación del método para el grupo de estudiantes. El trabajo concluye con un análisis crítico y unas sugerencias de mejora tales como la reducción del número de estudiantes, la renovación y digitalización de materiales, o la mejora en la formación del profesorado.

Palabras clave: Educación Infantil; inglés; aprendizaje temprano; método Artigal; análisis.

Abstract

This project analyses of one of the most widespread methods for teaching English as a foreign language in Early Childhood Education in Spain: Artigal method. In the theoretical framework, first, the importance of the early learning of languages is described based on two theories from the field of Second Language Acquisition: the Critical Period Hypothesis and the Fundamental Difference Hypothesis. Second, we offer a detailed description of the Artigal method and of the two main methods on which it is based: the Audio-Lingual method and Total Physical Response.

The implementation of the Artigal method was conducted with a group of 19 students in the second grade of Early Childhood Education. The development of our project included direct classroom observation and a final evaluation to measure the outcomes. The results showed that 91% of the pupils achieved the linguistic objectives selected for the proposal. The

observations confirmed that the method was suitable for the specific group of students. Based on these results, a critical analysis and a series of guidelines for improvement are described; such as the reduction in the number of students, the updating of content and digitalisation of the materials, or the improvement of teacher training programmes.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education; English; early learning; Artigal method; analysis.

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INTRODUCCIÓN

La sociedad globalizada en la que vivimos ha revelado la importancia y necesidad del conocimiento de distintas lenguas con el fin de tener éxito en la vida laboral, académica y personal. Por tanto, es imprescindible que la educación nos brinde la posibilidad de obtener una enseñanza de idiomas de calidad desde edades tempranas, para en un futuro no sentirnos en desventaja con respecto a las exigencias de la sociedad actual. En este contexto, el presente Trabajo de Fin de Grado se centra en la enseñanza del inglés como idioma extranjero en Educación Infantil y, más concretamente, en uno de los métodos más utilizados en las aulas de hoy en día en España: el método Artigal. A lo largo del trabajo, se realizará un análisis exhaustivo del método, dividiendo el documento en dos secciones principales:

En la primera sección, se realizará un estudio de diversas fuentes bibliográficas con el fin de formar la base del marco teórico. Investigaremos acerca de las características principales del alumnado de Educación Infantil, relacionándolas con dos teorías que sustentan el aprendizaje temprano de las lenguas (la Hipótesis del Periodo Crítico de Lenneberg y la Hipótesis de la Diferencia Fundamental de Bley-Vroman). Además, en este apartado analizaremos en profundidad el método Artigal y sus implicaciones pedagógicas, incluyendo aquellas teorías que sustentan su validez (método Audio-Lingüístico y Respuesta Física Total).

En la segunda sección, aplicaremos el método Artigal en un aula del segundo curso de Educación Infantil, exponiendo detalladamente el desarrollo de las sesiones, la evolución del alumnado con respecto al idioma extranjero, y los resultados obtenidos tras su evaluación. Todos estos datos nos servirán de base para la realización de un análisis crítico en el que se tendrán en cuenta ambos éxitos y fracasos observados. Finalmente, plantearemos una serie de propuestas de mejora para futuras aplicaciones del método en base al análisis previamente realizado.

OBJETIVOS

El objetivo principal del presente Trabajo de Fin de Grado consiste en hacer un estudio completo del método Artigal como técnica de enseñanza de la lengua inglesa en Educación Infantil. Por tanto, para ello es necesario cumplir una serie de objetivos específicos que nos permitirán realizar un análisis exitoso, los cuales serán enumerados a continuación:

1. Comprender la naturaleza específica de la adquisición de las lenguas en edades tempranas.
2. Analizar el método Artigal y sus implicaciones pedagógicas, reconociendo las teorías de enseñanza del inglés que sustentan su validez.
3. Implementar el método Artigal en un aula de Educación Infantil con el fin de examinar los resultados obtenidos y realizar un análisis crítico.
4. A partir de los resultados del proyecto, sugerir una serie de propuestas de mejora que podrían resultar útiles para futuras aplicaciones del método.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the reading and analysis of several bibliographic resources, we have been able to create a solid framework that substantiates the Artigal method, which is the object of analysis of the present project; and that makes a necessary contextualisation for the convenience of the reader. More concretely, this epigraph is divided into three different sections; the first one describes the characteristics of children at early ages and their relation with English teaching; the second one analyses two methodologies from the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA); and the third one offers a detailed description of the Artigal method.

1.1. Childhood and English teaching in a school context

This first section describes the general characteristics of the children at the Early Childhood Education stage (aged 3 to 6), taking into consideration three different factors involved in their evolutionary development: motricity, cognition and language; in order to relate them with the importance of the early teaching of languages in a school context.

1.1.1. *Characteristics of the children at the Early Childhood Education Stage*

If teachers want to succeed when teaching English as a foreign language in Early Childhood Education, it is essential to know the specific characteristics of children aged 3 to 6. This set of features will serve as guidelines to recognise the limitations and possibilities that students have when learning a foreign language. Given this fact, the most significant characteristics will be analysed below, considering three different aspects of development: motricity, cognition and language (Fos, Pavia, Pérez, & Salas, 1996).

Regarding *motor development*, children throughout this stage will progressively gain control over their bodies, refining arm and leg movements; and developing fine motor skills such as controlling wrist and finger movements. Therefore, this results in a gradually increasing accuracy of movements that will allow them to use new instruments, thanks to which they will be able to solve problems. However, all these processes require time, as 3-year-old children's body is not mature enough to do simple actions such as using school materials with ease (scissors, pencils, crayons, punchers, etc.) as they need experience to gain control over their movements. In short, control of children's body is a feature that can be useful from the point of view of English language teaching, since in this context it is necessary to use extra-linguistic elements, such as gestures and body movements, to facilitate the comprehension of the foreign language.

Regarding *cognitive development*, children at this stage start constructing new concepts about the world around them thanks to the interaction with objects and people. They organise these new concepts in a set of knowledge schemas that are constantly being refined and modified, due to the experiences they live. According to Piaget, children from 2 to 7 years old are in the pre-operational stage, which is characterized by an egocentric, irreversible and animistic thinking. This stage is divided into two substages that will be explained below, as there are evident differences depending on the age.

- *Children from 2 to 4 years old*: their symbolic and pre-conceptual thinking allows them to represent non-present objects through symbols, as they can assimilate new information and accommodate it to the new thinking schemas being constructed. This fact has great importance for English language teaching, as children at these ages are able to imitate things without their real presence, which involves introducing symbolic play as a tool for learning. Therefore, pupils can begin to express themselves in the foreign language through roleplaying, as they can adopt different roles to facilitate the acquisition process.

- *Children from 4 to 7 years old*: their intuitive thinking makes children develop new mental representations based on things they perceive, placing more emphasis on the interaction between real objects and living things. Also, they place the human being as the main author of the experiences they live, leaving animism aside; and start making comparisons, divisions and operations with quantities.

Finally, regarding *language development*, it is directly influenced by the communicative situations and the linguistic models to which the children are exposed. The mastery of language skills is a critical and crucial factor for their psychological development, so it needs to be developed as much as possible, taking advantage of the curiosity and desire to learn that students at these early ages always have. For this reason, the more language opportunities available for them, the better acquisition of the foreign language. More concretely, for English teaching, it is important to make these language opportunities useful for the students so that they can give meaning to the knowledge being learnt and use the foreign language as an efficient means of communication to be used in different social situations.

1.1.2. The importance of English teaching at an early age

Language is the tool that facilitates communication and interaction between human beings, influencing the mental structure of our brain and contributing to our social and cognitive development. Due to that, language must be fully exploited in all educational areas from an early age, providing the children with the possibility to acquire new knowledge not only in their mother

tongue but also in a second or third language. That is so because the incorporation of a foreign language in the educational field has proven to be an effective tool, which allows students to develop new and useful skills and to acquire new knowledge. Therefore, Early Childhood Education must emphasize students' acquisition of foreign languages because they are perfectly capable of developing language skills at that age, as has been demonstrated in the previous section. However, if children start learning a second language in higher levels of education, it will be much more difficult for them to process its acquisition, as the language skills required will be much more complex and adapted to the educational contents of the stage (González, 2018).

Some of the theories formulated in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) which support early exposure to languages will be explained below.

The Critical Period Hypothesis from Lenneberg (1967) states that, when individuals pass a certain age, they will be very unlikely to reach native-like levels of proficiency. That is so because there seems to be a decline in the ability of learning new languages, which takes place gradually from age 6 to age 16; as in that moment human beings lose the mental capacity required for the implicit assimilation of the abstract patterns of language. Therefore, children are better than adults at acquiring a new language implicitly, as they assimilate and understand the foreign language with ease; without even being aware of it (DeKeyser, 2000). To support his theory, Lenneberg claims that those children who become deaf before their second year of life, do not show any differences regarding oral skills in comparison to those who are congenitally deaf. However, those who become deaf after the age of 2, having been exposed to the experience of oral language; can be easily trained in all the oral aspects of language. Therefore, Lenneberg interprets this as an indicator of the starting point of the critical period: 2 years old (García-Mayo & Lecumberri, 2003). Therefore, from age 2 to age 6, children who are exposed to a foreign language rely on their implicit capacities to acquire it; being very likely to succeed through the assimilation of the abstract patterns of the language.

There is another theory that provides support to the early acquisition of a second language: the Fundamental Difference Hypothesis, developed by Bley-Vroman in 1988. This theory also states that whereas children learn a second language through implicit mechanisms, adults are not able to rely on these innate mechanisms, so they have to rely on alternative ones; such as problem-solving capacities. Therefore, only adults with a high level of verbal ability will succeed in the acquisition of a second language, having the possibility to reach a near-native linguistic competence (DeKeyser, 2000). For this reason, the younger the children are exposed to a foreign language, the easier it will be for them to acquire it; as they will take advantage of their innate mechanisms of acquisition and will not have as many problems as adults to assimilate the patterns of the language.

1.2. Second Language Acquisition theories related to Artigal method

The method object of analysis in the present document is called *Artigal: Ready for a story!* It is a specific teaching programme, with very specific guidelines to be implemented in the early years in the EFL classroom. In the detailed descriptions of this programme, no theoretical foundation is mentioned. However, it can be directly connected to two methodologies, which have been highly recognised and validated throughout the history of second language teaching: Audio-Lingual method and Total Physical Response. However, it is necessary to make a brief description of the main characteristics of the Artigal method, in order to first make a contextualization and to later fully analyse the theories that served as the foundation for its creation.

1.2.1. Brief description of the method object of analysis

Artigal: Ready for a story! is a specific method to teach English as a foreign language to children at the Early Childhood Education stage (aged 3 to 6), created by the Catalan professor Josep María Artigal in the 1980s. It mainly consists of the group dramatization of simple stories, attaching great importance to audio-lingual skills by making students continuously repeat a set of sentences and gestures in order to better comprehend the foreign language. Therefore, the observable variation in students throughout the development of the stories is the gradual production of ever longer sentences in English, as the method makes them actively participate by using the English language as the principal mean of expression. However, the method does not only consist of group dramatizations of stories but on different activities that students carry out once they have constructed the meaning of the language presented. In these activities, pupils take advantage of the materials offered by Artigal, which include songs, finger puppets, storybooks and picture cards, among others.

Finally, although this method makes students protagonists of their own learning process, teachers are responsible for guiding the whole process, by acting as role models, presenting the dialogues and gestures that need to be repeated, and providing them with assistance throughout the development of the project.

1.2.2. Audio-Lingual method

One of the approaches that underpins the tenets of the Artigal method is the Audio-Lingual method, which was proposed by American linguists in the 1950s. The psychological basis of this methodology is behaviourism, which interprets language learning in terms of operant conditioning: stimulus-response and positive/negative reinforcement. The main aim of the Audio-Lingual method is to develop students' communicative competence in a second language through dialogues and pattern

drills that they need to repeat; which include single-slot substitution, multiple-slot substitution, and transformation (Mart, 2013). Therefore, as has been mentioned previously, Artigal method takes advantage of these guided drills in order to promote students' oral expression, as these allow them to easily produce speech in the target language.

The most important feature of the Audio-Lingual method is the separation of the 4 language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), giving high importance to audio-lingual skills and prioritizing them over the graphic abilities. Therefore, learners must listen first to the target language before developing the rest of skills, as they will be more likely to internalize features such as pronunciation and intonation (Abu-Melhim, 2009), (Liu & Shi, 2007). Again, this idea can be easily appreciated in Artigal method, as it attaches great importance to audio-lingual skills throughout the development of the stories, and leaves writing and reading skills aside, considering them of little relevance for children at an early age.

Talking about the main phases of the Audio-Lingual method, first, the teacher reads a dialogue and contextualises it so that students can memorize it with ease. Then, children repeat the dialogue using the foreign language automatically. The more they repeat, the better they will speak the target language fluently. Finally, the teacher changes some words or phrases in the dialogue so that students can apply the language learnt to other situations (Mart, 2013).

The main strengths and weaknesses of the Audio-Lingual method according to Abu-Melhim (2009) will be specified below:

This approach emphasizes listening and speaking through the repetition of oral texts which are read by native or very proficient speakers, so one of the main advantages is that students end up being proficient in pronunciation, especially in intonation. By developing students' sensitivity to intonation, they are able to recognize the different phonemes of the language as well as its stress, and to differentiate the structure of questions, exclamations, and statements. Therefore, as pupils are not expected to produce speech until they receive enough listening input, comprehension takes precedence over performance; allowing them to build self-confidence. Moreover, the Audio-Lingual method gives importance to correction in terms of pronunciation from the earliest learning stages, so speech errors are amended before they become a problem.

One final advantage is the importance given to the cultural background of the language being used, which sharpens students' sensitivity to the relation between culture and language. This emphasis gives students a sense of comparison between two different cultures (their own and the new one being learnt) and makes them become acquainted with differences in meaning, as language and culture have deep effects on each other.

Talking about the disadvantages of the Audio-Lingual method, the principal one is that students do not learn to communicate spontaneously as native speakers would, because their production in the target language is guided throughout all the learning process. Some results show that students are unable to transfer the language skills acquired in the classroom to real communicative situations. Therefore, it is said that in the Audio-Lingual method pupils memorize a set of sentences and repeat them all the time until they are able to internalize some patterns of the language. Moreover, in some cases audio-visual tools are overused in the method, so the production of speech is not given much importance although it is an essential factor when learning a new language effectively.

Finally, it must be said that a language cannot be taught through repetition exclusively, as has been demonstrated by different theories of language acquisition such as innatism (Chomsky, 1965), cognitivism (Long, 1980) or socio-cultural theories (Vygotsky, 1978). It is clear that this method is suitable in Early Childhood Education to encourage students in their first steps, but it will soon need to be complemented by other methodologies and approaches that consider language acquisition beyond mere repetition.

1.2.3. Total Physical Response

The second approach that served as the basis for the creation of the Artigal method is the Total Physical Response (TPR) methodology, which was developed by the psychology professor James Asher in the 1960s. This method mainly consists of the establishment of psychomotor associations to specific terms presented in a foreign language in order to facilitate its acquisition; so the main language skill worked is listening. Therefore, teachers who use this method present the target language in the form of some commands that students listen to, and they immediately react with a physical action to demonstrate that they understand the content presented (Asher, 1968). As stated before, this idea is clearly present in the Artigal method, as students associate gestures to each of the sentences repeated in the dialogue because it facilitates the comprehension of the language and its later memorization.

The TPR method in turn incorporates ideas from three different theories: Linguistic, Pedagogical, and Sociolinguistic (Canga, 2012):

- Regarding the Linguistic Theory, the main idea collected is to consider the *verb* as the principal aspect of learning, by using the imperative mood to make students react with a physical action.
- Regarding the Pedagogical Theory, TPR relies on the behavioural psychology; as the concept of stimuli-response is the main foundation of the learning process. As has been specified in the previous section, gestures and body movements facilitate the comprehension of a foreign

language. Therefore, it is essential to establish a relation between the development of students' motor skills and the learning of a foreign language, in order to recognise both possibilities and limitations.

- Regarding the sociolinguistic theory, the TPR methodology does not exclude any social group when learning a second language, as all the ideas proposed can be carried out with many different levels, from very early ages.

Finally, although almost all contemporary language learning methods state that students learn both listening and speaking skills at the same time, Asher contradicts them because his data showed that when children learned both skills simultaneously, listening fluency was impeded. Therefore, the TPR method emphasises listening and demonstrates that children are able to comprehend the target language before being able to speak, as they successfully obey to the complex commands presented (Asher, 1968).

1.3. Artigal: Ready for a story!

After having analysed Audio-Lingual and Total Physical Response methods, which are the theories that provided the foundation for the creation of the Artigal method; now it is necessary to make an in-depth description of the method object of analysis. Consequently, this section will specify its procedure, characteristics and pedagogical implications for teaching English as a foreign language in a school context.

1.3.1. Description of the method

Artigal: Ready for a story! is a specific method to teach English as a foreign language in Early Childhood Education, and was created by Josep María Artigal in 1986. As described previously, this method takes influence from the Audio-Lingual and Total Physical Response methods, as it attaches great importance to audio-lingual skills by making students continuously repeat a set of sentences and gestures that are associated in order to understand the foreign language with ease. However, it was created based on a set of reflections from Josep María Artigal, after years of experience as a teacher of foreign languages.

Talking about the creator of the method, he was born in 1952 in Catalonia, Spain. In 1977, he started working as a teacher of Catalan in Early Childhood Education and in the first cycle of Primary Education. Some years later, he worked as a teacher of foreign languages with students from 3 to 7 years old, and started to create his own method, as he discovered that his students understood the language but did not make use of it. Due to that, he decided to develop a method based on a set of

practical proposals that would allow children to use the target language from the very first moment. This method is called *Artigal: Ready for a story!* and has engaged more than 18,000 students up until now. (Artigal, 2003)

The method object of analysis mainly consists of the group dramatization of a series of simple stories, through which students gradually produce ever longer sentences in English. These dramatizations are initially presented without visual support and, once the meaning of the language has been constructed, they are complemented with different resources such as images, songs, and storybooks; and students carry out different activities. The stories proposed present from 2 to 5 characters, with whom students feel identified from the first moment, as they illustrate situations that children can easily experience in their daily lives; so this fact makes them abandon the role of mere observers and turns them into the main characters of the stories. There is a total of 12 stories presented in the *Ready for a story!* proposal, which can be worked with students from 3 to 6 years old, as they are simple and adapted to their age. Some stories are more complex than others as they are intended to be worked at a concrete age. For this reason, there is a specific order to be followed, although teachers are the ones who decide the stories they want to work with and the order to follow.

Regarding language, students are not expected to have a high level of English to understand the stories proposed, as the vocabulary presented is simple and the teachers are responsible of making the process of acquisition both significant and achievable for them (Artigal, 2005). Artigal argues that we can only learn a new language if we are sufficiently exposed to it, which entirely agrees with findings from research in the field of Second Language Acquisition, where the importance of input has been well-established since Krashen's early work (1982) and has been empirically demonstrated in relation to the age factor (García-Mayo & Lecumberri, 2003), (Muñoz, 2006). In other words, students need to have opportunities to use the language they are learning, otherwise, they would not be able to give a real meaning to the knowledge being acquired. Therefore, Artigal method makes them feel competent when using the new language from the very first moment, as it makes them lose the fear of speaking in English by dramatizing the stories all together as a group.

"Las lenguas no se aprenden primero y se utilizan después; las lenguas se adquieren cuando se usan." (Artigal, 1996)

1.3.2. Development of the method

The stories proposed by Artigal are intended to be developed during at least two school years, devoting approximately one month to each of them. However, teachers are the ones who decide how many weekly hours they want to devote to the proposal, as it may need to be adjusted to other

methodologies used inside the English classroom. The structure to be followed when developing each of the projects will be specified below.

When presenting each of the stories, the scenic space needs to be organized in a specific way, depending on the story being worked on. So, once the teacher and the students are placed on their respective positions, the first dramatization starts. The teacher is the one who plays the different roles that take part in the story, but students have to listen carefully and repeat what the teacher is saying and doing.

In order to understand better the specific procedure of the method, it is necessary to take one of the stories proposed by Artigal as an example: "Peggy and Granny" (Artigal, 2005). The main plot of this story is that Peggy, who is a little girl, is hungry. Her grandmother offers her soup, but Peggy does not like it so she refuses it. However, her grandmother finds a good solution to Peggy's problem and decides to offer her chocolate, on the condition that she eats the soup first. Finally, Peggy accepts and eats the soup.

In this story, there are only two characters: *character 1* corresponds to Peggy, and *character 2* corresponds to Granny. Regarding the distribution of space, students need to be sitting on the floor forming a semicircle, and two chairs are placed in front of them with some space between each other. These chairs are used by the two characters, and the narrator is placed between them. Therefore, the teacher occupies different positions: *N* as narrator, *chair 1* as Peggy and *chair 2* as Granny (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: scenic layout diagram
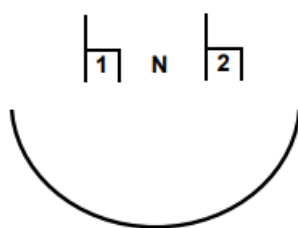
Source: Artigal, 2005.

The teacher first needs to catch students' attention, and then starts dramatizing the whole story, acting as narrator and as the main characters (Artigal, 1996):

- The *narrator* is the first one to appear, and then the teacher introduces *character 1* (Peggy), representing what she says and does, and students repeat simultaneously.
- Then, when introducing *character 2* (Granny), the teacher needs to transform the position and gestures, in order to construct the scenic places where the story is developed.

- Finally, the teacher acts as *narrator* again, concluding the story.

The voices of *narrator*, *character 1* and *character 2* always need to be verbalized in different ways. The narrator's voice is fast, low, monotonous and neither is complemented with gestures nor repetitions. However, the characters speak slowly, loudly, with a musical temp, and they repeat their speech several times, accompanying it with gestures (Artigal, 2005).

During the first 3 dramatizations of the stories there is no visual support, as it would place students as mere viewers, removing them from the scene. However, the absence of real objects transforms them into the main characters of the stories, making them produce sentences in English just by acting. Again taking "Peggy and Granny" story as an example, it is completely normal that during the first dramatizations the children do not have a clear idea of who *Peggy* is or what *Granny* means. However, evidence shows that since the very first moment students are able to recognise who is talking and why, and this fact reveals that they distinguish the different roles that take part in the story and understand what is going on (Artigal, 2005).

After these first dramatizations, the stories are complemented with visual support. Therefore, the teacher continues dramatizing the stories but this time using the materials offered by the method as visual support. Moreover, students start to carry out different activities taking advantage of the materials too. These materials include stickers, flashcards, songs, collages, finger puppets, puppet theatres, story folders, storybooks and PowerPoints presenting the stories. Artigal recommends teachers to keep these materials apart from the students at the beginning so that they do not receive any kind of visual support. Therefore, they can be classified into similar groups and kept in boxes or files, in order to later take them for the follow-up tasks. Taking the storybook as an example, it presents the story being worked on, but some parts of it are missing and students need to do some tasks to complete it. For example, they need to colour objects and characters that appear in the story and stick some bubbles with sentences present in the dialogue. However, all these tasks are performed cooperatively, as it is difficult for children at such a young age to work on their own (Artigal, 2005).

Finally, when the development of the proposal is finished, students keep their work inside the story folder, which is an envelope that they colour and personalize; and take it home so that they can show it to their parents. There, they can read to their families the book that they have constructed, sing the songs together, play with the finger puppets that they have created, or even dramatize the story worked (Artigal, 2005).

1.3.3.   *Teacher training programmes*

Talking about the training of future teachers of the Artigal method, there is a programme offered by Artigal, thanks to which they acquire a set of theoretical and methodological knowledge that will allow them to succeed inside the English classroom. So, during this programme, the teachers involved in the project and one advisor, who is an expert of the method; have at least four meetings during the first two school years. In these meetings, they work on the principal aspects of the method, giving the teachers the opportunity to express their opinions and to reflect on the stablished proposal. Moreover, the advisor also assists to some lessons of the teachers involved so that he or she can both observe and assess their work within the classroom, serving as a role model for them by providing guidance and giving feedback (Artigal, 1996).

Also, there is a didactic guide for teachers of the method, also known as *teacher's book*, where every step they need to follow within the proposal is specified. In this guide, there are some explanations regarding the overall perspective of the story to be worked so that the teacher can start contextualising it. These explanations include the general idea around which the story is organized, a plot summary, the relationship between the different characters, and a description of the scenic places. Then, it also offers the script to follow during the dramatizations, which is written in two different columns. One column provides some annotations which serve as a guide for the teacher, and the other one contains the language (verbal and non-verbal) that needs to be produced. Finally, the didactic guide also provides some examples of activities that can be used after the first dramatizations of the story, once students have constructed the meaning of the language; and these describe in detail how to carry out them successfully (Artigal, 1990).

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE METHOD: A CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

This section is devoted to the implementation of the Artigal method in a state-subsidised school from Pamplona, in which I had the opportunity to participate as an internship student. I considered it convenient to realise an in-depth analysis of how the method was implemented inside a real classroom with real students and teachers, in order to detect both successes and errors and to finally create a set of suggestions for improvement that could serve as guidance for future applications of the method.

The teaching project carried out revolves around the story entitled "The balloon", one of the stories proposed by Artigal in his method *Ready for a story!* The project was developed during 11 sessions, for approximately 1 month, as the students were working at the same time on an English project and the hours needed to be adjusted to both proposals.

2.1. Contextualisation

2.1.1. Description of the school

The present project was carried out in "Nuestra Señora del Huerto", a state-subsidised school of Catholic identity located in the neighbourhood of San Juan, one of the urban centres of Pamplona. This school was founded by the Congregation of "Hijas de María Santísima del Huerto" in 1951 and promotes values according to the comprehensive training project of Antonio María Gianelli. Currently, there are 1,300 students in the school, who are distributed in 5 different stages: 2-year-old classroom, Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, Secondary Education and Baccalaureate. Therefore, students have the possibility to attend this educational centre from the age of 2 to the age of 18, benefiting from a unique educational experience full of closeness.

The school offers different services that will be mentioned below, created with the aims of complementing the students' learning experience and fostering work-life reconciliation of parents.

- *School canteen*: This canteen seeks to create healthy eating habits among students, as well as hygiene habits before, during and after eating.
- *Extracurricular activities:* These activities are related to sports (ballet, football, basketball, tennis, roller-blading and modern dance), languages, robotics, informatics, chess, painting, and music.
- *Extraordinary activities*: Throughout the course, different activities are carried out on a voluntary basis, trying to raise money for good causes.
- *Scout group*: Students who participate in the scout group learn to develop their autonomy in a meaningful way, playing games and carrying out different activities in a collaborative way.

- *School trips*: During the school year, a series of cultural visits are programmed for the different courses, such as going to the fire station, planetarium, theatre, or farm.

Regarding English language teaching, the school participates in the "Programa de Aprendizaje de Inglés" (PAI), a programme proposed by the Department of Education of Navarre, which promotes the use of English as a vehicular language. The main objective of this programme is that students make use of the English language with the greatest possible naturalness, paying particular attention to oral communication. More precisely, in Early Childhood Education, half of the weekly hours are taught in English, and the other half in Spanish; and the main methodology used in the English lessons is Artigal method, although there are also other resources used to complement the learning process.

2.1.2. Characteristics of the group

The didactic proposal of the story "The balloon" was carried out in one classroom of the Second Grade of Early Childhood Education, so students were 4 and 5 years old. There was only one English teacher assigned to this group of students, who was their tutor; and she counted with my assistance during the development of the project.

Regarding the principal characteristics of the classroom, it counted with 3 big tables distributed around the place, each one with approximately 6 chairs. Also, there were a whiteboard and a traditional blackboard, which were constantly used by the teachers to explain content. Not only the children were sitting on the chairs but also on a coloured carpet that was located in front of the boards. This carpet was blue, as it was the representative colour that the group was assigned. There were also shelves for the students to keep their work, hooks to hang their coats and some toys used when there was free time (see Appendix 1).

Regarding the students, there was a total of 19, of whom 10 were girls and 9 were boys. Three of them attended some weekly hours with the speech therapist, as they had language difficulties. Therefore, during the development of the proposal they missed some of the lessons, so they needed help when doing the different tasks in order to understand the activities presented and to not get lost when carrying out them. The rest of the children followed a normative development according to their age, although there were visible differences among them. Some of them were more fluent in English than others, due to the exposure to the language that they received at home. However, some others needed more time to process the information and were not able to produce much vocabulary in the foreign language.

2.2. Objectives

The two general objectives chosen for the project "The balloon" have a direct connection with the Early Childhood Education curriculum of Navarre, as the area of "Languages: communication and representation" emphasises students' first contact with the oral use of different languages inside the classroom. These two objectives imply the familiarization with oral English and the controlled production of memorized speech. Therefore, by the end of the project students will be able to:

1. Understand the story of "The balloon" and identify its main characters and facts.
2. Produce controlled speech by repeating the main parts of the dialogue.

These two objectives highlight both forms of comprehension and expression of the English language, as Artigal method attaches great importance to audio-lingual skills and leaves writing and reading abilities aside.

2.3. Story: "The balloon"

The story chosen to be implemented in the English classroom is entitled "The balloon". This story was initially created by Pilar Vilarrubias in 1978, and then Artigal included it as one of the materials of the *Ready for a story!* method, publishing its didactic guide in 1998. This didactic guide, also named as *teacher's book*, describes in detail how to carry out the didactic proposal of the story. So, in order to make a contextualisation and introduction of the unit, the most relevant aspects of the didactic guide will be mentioned below (Artigal, 1998).

2.3.1. Summary

The main plot of the story "The balloon" is that a little boy, who is walking down the street, sees a red balloon and picks it up. However, the balloon is dirty, so he goes to a fountain to clean it. Then, he blows the balloon up and looks at it proudly.

Suddenly, a little girl appears and asks him to lend her the balloon, but the little boy does not want to. Sad, the little girl asks him to blow the balloon up bigger, and the little boy accepts. However, the little boy blows it up so much that the red balloon pops and the two children fall on the floor.

2.3.2. Scenic layout diagram

As during the dramatizations of "The balloon" the teacher is the one who plays all the roles presented in the story, he or she needs to move from one position to another, changing both voice and gestures. The scenic layout diagram of this story indicates the positions of the *narrator* (*N), little*

boy (*1*) and *little girl* (*2*). The *performance* (*pp*) starts when the pupils sit down forming a semicircle (see Figure 2).

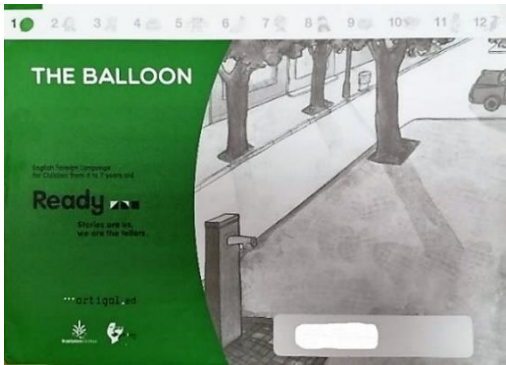**Figure 2: scenic layout diagram**
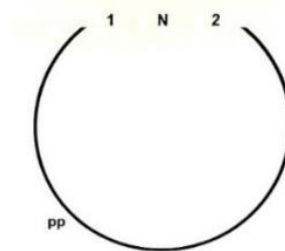
Artigal, 1998

2.3.3. Performance script

In the script of this story, there are two columns, one with general indications for the teacher; and another one with the text to be produced by the narrator and the two characters. The highlighted parts correspond to the voice of the narrator, which always starts and finishes the story with the same sentences: "Once upon a time…" to start and "… And that's all!" to finish (see Appendix 2).
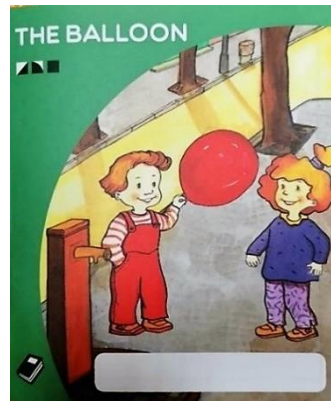
2.3.4. Materials

The story of "The balloon" offers a series of materials to be used during the development of the didactic proposal. More precisely, they can be used after the first dramatizations of the story, as at that moment students have constructed the meaning of the content presented in English. The materials offered will be listed in the following table (see Table 1), but it is not necessary to use all of them, as the teacher has to select the ones that fit with his or her programming. As some of these materials will also be mentioned throughout the development of the sessions, these have also been included as appendixes for the convenience of the reader.

Table 1: materials

	Figure 3: story folder
Story folder	
	Source: Artigal, 1998.

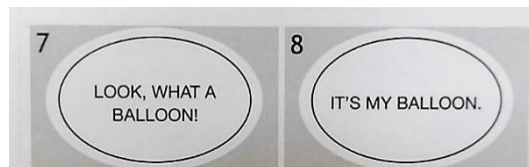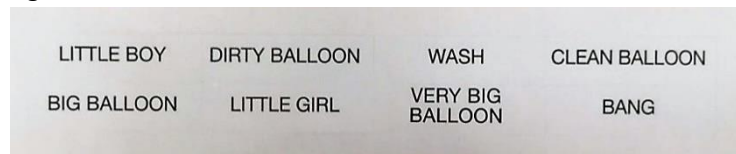|	
Storybook	**Figure 4: storybook** *Source: Artigal, 1998.*
Stickers	**Figure 5: stickers** *Source: Artigal, 1998.* **Figure 6: stickers** *Source: Artigal, 1998.*
Puppet theatre	**Figure 7: puppet theatre** **Figure 8: stickers** *Source: Artigal, 1998.* *Source: Artigal, 1998.*
Bingo cards	**Figure 9: bingo cards** *Source: Artigal, 1998.*
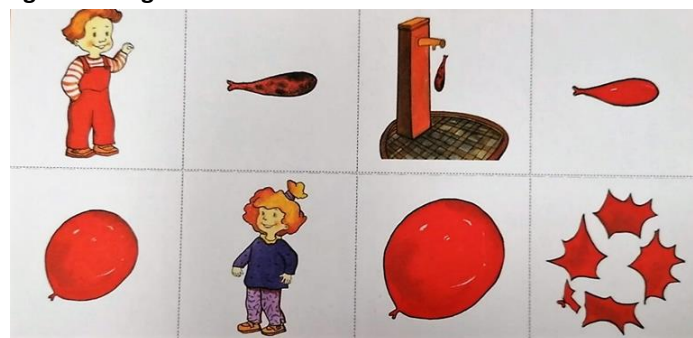
Figure 10: picture cards

Picture

cards
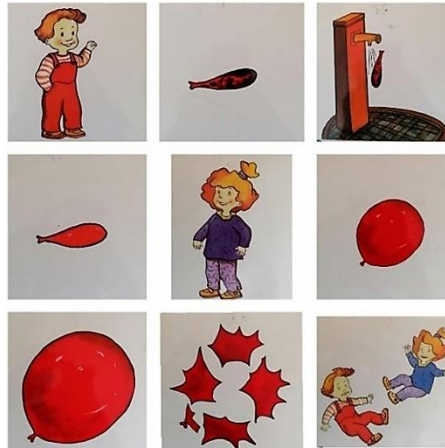
Source: Artigal, 1998.

Figure 11: finger puppets

Finger

puppets

Source: Artigal, 1998.

Figure 12: song

Song

SONG

A little boy walked down the street,
saw a balloon and he got it.
A little girl walked down the street,
saw the balloon and she liked it.
"It's my balloon", the boy told her,
"bigger! bigger!", then she said.
"Bigger!" we said, "bigger!" we sang,
and the balloon made a big BANG!
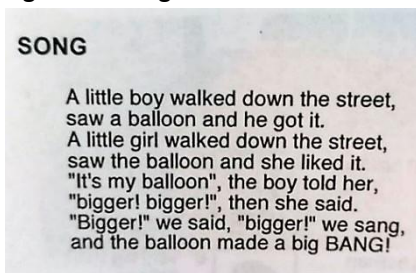
Source: Artigal, 1998.

Figure 13: PowerPoint

PowerPoint

THE BALLOON

Ready for a Story (J.M. Artigal)

Source: Artigal, 1998.

2.4. Development of the project

The teaching project of the story entitled "The balloon" was carried out during 11 sessions, from the 1st to the 25th of February 2021. The following table (see Table 2) shows the chronological distribution of sessions.

Table 2: chronological distribution of sessions

FEBRUARY 2021						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1 *(Session 1)*	2	3 *(Session 2)*	4 *(Session 3)*	5	6
7	8 *(Session 4)*	9	10 *(Session 5)*	11 *(Session 6)*	12	13
14	15	16	17 *(Session 7)*	18 *(Session 8)*	19	20
21	22 *(Session 9)*	23	24 *(Session 10)*	25 *(Session 11)*	26	27
28						

During the first 6 sessions, the teacher only dramatized the story, and the students repeated the dialogues and gestures simultaneously. As it was necessary to introduce the topic and create a context this was the only activity carried out. However, after these 6 sessions, the pupils started to perform some extra tasks using the materials offered by Artigal in order to complement the learning process and introduce new resources. Below, there is an explanation of the specific procedure followed in all the sessions as well as a section labelled *language production*, where we describe the students' linguistic achievements.

2.4.1. Sessions 1, 2 and 3

DEVELOPMENT OF THE SESSIONS

- **Group dramatization of the story without visual support** *(10'):*

The first three sessions consisted of the group dramatization of "The balloon", in which the teacher played the different roles that appear in the story and the students listened and repeated some sentences and gestures. Although in these first sessions it is not recommended to use any kind of visual support, the teacher decided to use a real red balloon for the first performance so that students could see how the balloon popped at the end of the story. The pupils paid a lot of attention to the teacher, listening carefully to what she was saying and repeating some of the gestures being made. Once she got to the part of blowing the balloon up, the children looked at her cheerfully and

impatiently at the same time, keeping their hands over their ears, as they predicted that the balloon was going to pop. And, when it popped, all of them started laughing and shouting with enthusiasm. However, for the second and third dramatizations, the teacher did not use the red balloon again, following Artigal's advice. However, the children imagined it from the very first moment and demonstrated great interest and excitement throughout the performances.

LANGUAGE PRODUCTION

During the first session, students repeated almost all the gestures that the teacher made, and they also repeated the two sentences produced at the beginning and at the end of the dramatization: "Once upon a time…" to start and "… And that's all!" to finish. That was so because pupils had already memorized them due to the development of previous Artigal stories, which always start and finish in the same way.

By the second and third sessions, students started to repeat isolated words, as they were constructing the meaning of the language. These words included: "red balloon", "dirty", "clean", "water", "wash", "okay", "big", "please", "bigger", "super big" and "BANG!". However, those pupils who had language difficulties needed more time to process the information in English, so at this point, they were not able to repeat the same number of words as their classmates. However, little by little in the following sessions they gradually improved and were able to repeat them too. The words that they repeated at this point included: "balloon", "okay", "big" and "please".

2.4.2. Sessions 4, 5 and 6

DEVELOPMENT OF THE SESSIONS

- **Group dramatization of the story with visual support** *(10'):*

Sessions 4, 5 and 6 consisted of the group dramatization of the story as in the previous sessions. However, from the fourth performance on, visual support was included, as students had been exposed to the required number of repetitions of the story and had already created an idea of what the plot was about, and which characters were involved. More concretely, during the fourth, fifth and sixth sessions, the visual support used were the picture cards (see Appendix 3) offered by the method. There was a total of 9 picture cards, which presented the different characters and objects that appeared in the story. The teacher dramatized the story while showing the different pictures to the students one by one by the time they were mentioned. Then, she placed them on the floor so that the children could see them in detail. When including this as visual support, they were able to see the physical appearance of the two main characters and to obtain full details of the context in which the story was developed.

LANGUAGE PRODUCTION

Most of the students started producing sentences and leaving the isolated words aside, so there was a remarkable increase in their fluency. However, not all of them followed the same pace of acquisition as, at this point, some students produced more sentences than others. These new sentences included: "it's a red balloon", "it's dirty" and "it's clean". Therefore, some of the children that did not produce these sentences by session 7, produced them in the following sessions. Nevertheless, those children with language difficulties did not produce sentences but new isolated words, as they had still not been able to assimilate the structure of these English sentences. These new words demonstrated, nevertheless, that they were making progress. These included: "red balloon", "dirty", "clean", "bigger" and "super big".

2.4.3. Session 7

DEVELOPMENT OF THE SESSION

- **Group dramatization of the story with visual support** *(10'):*

The teacher performed the story of "The balloon" with the PowerPoint (see Appendix 4) offered by the method as visual support. She changed the slides while performing the story, according to the scene, objects and characters that needed to be shown.

- **Constructing the storybook (50'):**

To carry out this activity, students needed to be sitting on the floor forming a semicircle in order to work cooperatively, and the teacher was sitting in front of them. First, she gave one storybook (see Appendix 5) to each pupil and, after having taken the pencil case, they wrote their names on the book cover with a pencil. Right after that, the teacher started telling the story with one storybook as visual support, and the students looked at their own books while opening them on the first page and repeating what the teacher was saying and doing. The first thing that pupils noticed was that there were characters and objects white, so they predicted that they had to colour them. As they had previously watched the PowerPoint of the story, they remembered the colours that needed to be used. The teacher told the story while turning over the pages, and the students repeated the same pattern with their own books. The specific procedure of the development of the activity will be specified below:

On the first page, students coloured the little boy and little girl (see Figure 14) according to the respective colours of the hairs and clothes presented in the PowerPoint.

Figure 14: page 1

Source: Artigal, 1998.

Then, students coloured the dirty balloon red (see Figure 15) and drew the water falling from the fountain blue (see Figure 16).

Figure 15: page *3*

Source: Artigal, 1998.

Figure 16: page 4

Source: Artigal, 1998.

On the next two pages, pupils coloured the clean balloon red (see Figure 17), then drew a big balloon, and finally coloured it red too (see Figure 18).

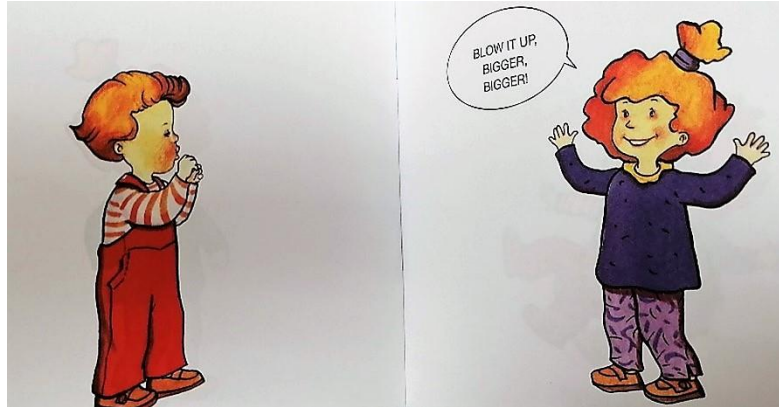**Figure 17: page 5**

Source: Artigal, 1998.

Figure 18: page 6

Source: Artigal, 1998.

Next, students drew a super big balloon and coloured it red (see Figure 19).
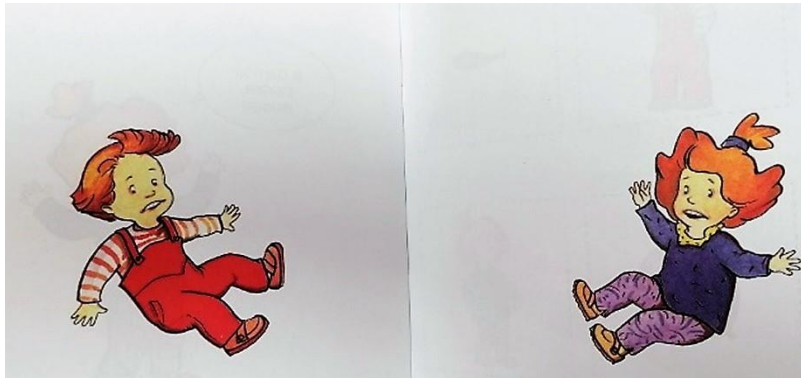
Figure 19: page 9

Source: Artigal, 1998.

Finally, they drew the pieces of the broken balloon and coloured them red (see Figure 20).

Figure 20: page 10

Source: Artigal, 1998

After finishing telling the story and drawing and colouring the items that were missing, the teacher gave 2 stickers to each child, and she asked them to open the storybook on page 7. Immediately, they realised that what the little girl was saying in that scene was missing (see Figure 21), so they stuck the first sticker: bubble number 7 (see Figure 22) next to the little girl, while repeating the sentence "look, what a balloon!".

Figure 21: page 7
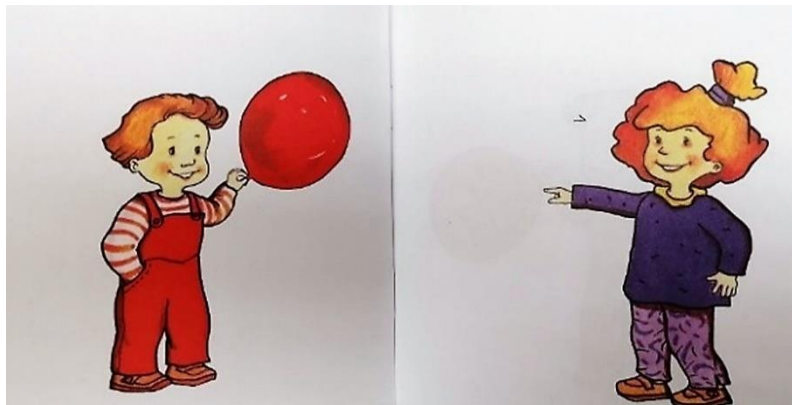
Source: Artigal, 1998.

Figure 22: sticker

Source: Artigal, 1998.

Then, they turned over the page (see Figure 23), and stuck the second sticker: bubble number 8 (see Figure 24) next to the little boy as his text was missing too, while repeating the sentence "it's my balloon".

Figure 23: page 8

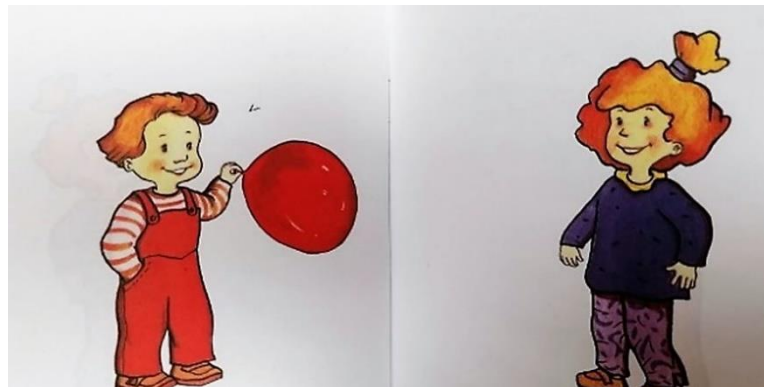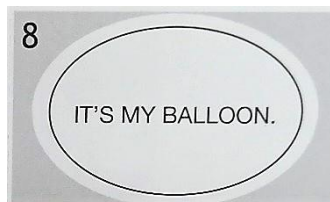*Source: Artigal, 1998.*

Figure 24: sticker

Source: Artigal, 1998.

To finish constructing the storybook, the teacher gave 8 stickers (see Figure 25) to the pupils, and asked them to open the book on page 11 (see Figure 26). On that page, there were pictures of the different objects and characters that appeared in the story, but their names were missing. Therefore, the children had to stick the names that the teacher had already given them on the corresponding pictures. In this case, the stickers and pictures did not have numbers but had the same positions. However, as this task was a bit difficult for them, the teacher and I guided all the process by reading aloud each of the words so that they knew where to stick them.

Figure 4: stickers

| LITTLE BOY | DIRTY BALLOON | WASH | CLEAN BALLOON |
| BIG BALLOON | LITTLE GIRL | VERY BIG BALLOON | BANG |
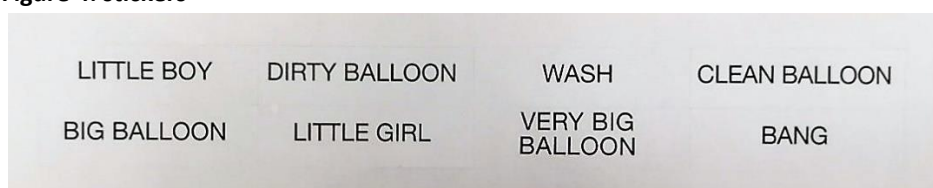
Source: Artigal, 1998.

Figure 26: page 11

Source: Artigal, 1998

LANGUAGE PRODUCTION

The new sentences that students started to produce included: "Can I have it?", "look, what a balloon!" and "it's my balloon". However, the most remarkable change in pupils was the refinement of the sentences they were already able to produce. This means that they improved their pronunciation, paying particular attention to each of the words composing the sentences.

Talking about those students with language difficulties, at this point they started to produce some sentences from the dialogue: "it's dirty" and "it's clean". Therefore, they started to assimilate the structure of these English sentences and were able to repeat them.

2.4.4. Session 8

DEVELOPMENT OF THE SESSION

- **Group dramatization of the story with visual support** *(10'):*

The teacher performed the story using the picture cards (see Appendix 3) as visual support, showing each of them at the moment they were mentioned and placing them on the floor.

- **Constructing the finger puppets from the story (15')**

To develop this activity, pupils sat down at the tables, and the teacher gave two finger puppets (see Appendix 6) to each of them. These puppets corresponded to the characters of *little boy* and *little girl*, but the heads were missing, so students needed to draw and colour them. Therefore, they took their pencil cases and did the task.

- **Telling the story with the finger puppets (25')**

Once all of them had constructed their finger puppets, the teacher made pairs of students and they sat on the floor. First, she gave them the instructions on how to carry out the activity: they had to

tell the story of "The balloon" to the partner they were assigned, using the finger puppets as visual support. Therefore, one member of each pair told the story to the other member, and this last one had to listen to him or her carefully and help when necessary. And, once the first one finished talking, they changed roles. The pairs were made in a balanced way so that one member could help the other when he or she did not know how to continue telling the story.

Moreover, this activity served as evaluation, as the students had been exposed to the required number of repetitions of the story and it was time to see their achievement. For this reason, the teacher and I took notes of the words and sentences they produced when they were telling the story to their partners.

LANGUAGE PRODUCTION

The last sentence from the dialogue that students started to repeat was: "oh! my poor balloon". However, the sentence "Could you blow it up?" was unachievable for them, as they were not able to repeat it due to the complexity of its structure. Therefore, at this point, some students were able to repeat almost all the parts of the dialogue.

Talking about those students with language difficulties, the new sentences they started to produce included: "it's a red balloon" and "it's my balloon".

2.4.5. Session 9

DEVELOPMENT OF THE SESSION

- **Group dramatization of the story with the puppet theatre** *(25'):*

During this session, students were sitting on the floor forming a semicircle as in the previous sessions, and the teacher was sitting in front of them. First, she gave one puppet theatre from the story with stickers (see [Appendix 7](#)) to each child. The activity consisted of making a group dramatization of the story, but this time students had to use their puppet theatres as visual support, and the teacher had her own too. Therefore, each time one character or object appeared in the story, they had to take the corresponding sticker and stick it on the scene, while repeating what the teacher was saying and doing.

LANGUAGE PRODUCTION

From this session on, those students who had already been able to produce almost all the sentences from the dialogue, only improved the pronunciation. However, others were still assimilating some sentences, so they were still not able to repeat all of them.

Regarding those pupils with language difficulties, at this point they had been able to reach the majority of students, repeating almost all the words and some of the sentences. The new sentences they produced included: "Can I have it?" and "look, what a balloon!".

2.4.6. Session 10

DEVELOPMENT OF THE SESSION

- **Group dramatization of the story with visual support** *(10'):*

The teacher performed the story using the picture cards (see Appendix 3) as visual support, showing each of them at the moment they were mentioned and placing them on the floor.

- **Singing and dramatizing the song of the story (15')**

Students sat on the floor forming a circle and the teacher played the song (see Appendix 8) on the whiteboard 3 times. In each playback, students made a different activity:

During the first reproduction, pupils just listened to the song and looked at the teacher, who was singing while doing different gestures and movements. She walked around the circle of students at the rhythm of the music, changing her voice when interpreting the different characters.

During the second reproduction, students sang the song and interpreted the gestures that the teacher had already shown them, all at the same time.

During the third reproduction, students were still forming a circle but this time standing up, in order to walk at the rhythm of the music. So, they walked around the imaginary circle while singing the song and doing the corresponding gestures with their hands.

- **Playing bingo (25')**

Students played bingo with the bingo cards (see Appendix 9) offered as material. In each bingo card, there were 6 pictures of the different objects and characters from "The balloon". But, as there was a total of 8 pictures from the story, students did not have the same bingo cards. These 8 pictures included the characters of little boy and little girl; and the following objects: dirty balloon, fountain, clean balloon, big balloon, super big balloon and broken balloon.

To start the game, students were sitting on the floor forming a circle, and the teacher gave one bingo card and 6 coloured pieces to each of them.

First, she explained them the rules of the bingo, as none of them had played before and were a little bit lost. And then, all together, they reviewed the names of the pictures, and the teacher kept the 8 picture cards in her pocket. So, the game consisted of the teacher taking the different cards one by one from her pocket while saying its name aloud, and the students putting the coloured pieces in their bingo cards when appropriate. To make it easier for them, the teacher stuck each of the cards on the blackboard at the moment they were taken so that students with language difficulties could see them, as visual support was needed for them.

Finally, those pupils who had hidden the 6 pictures with the coloured pieces shouted "bingo", and the teacher checked that all the pictures from their cards were stuck on the blackboard.

LANGUAGE PRODUCTION

Some students started to repeat new sentences and words that they did not repeat in the previous session. However, although there were others who did not make a big change, they improved the pronunciation of the words and sentences produced.

2.4.7. Session 11

DEVELOPMENT OF THE SESSION

- **Roleplay the story in groups (6*0′*)**

Finally, during the eleventh session, the teacher did not dramatize the story as in the previous occasions, as this time students roleplayed the story in groups in order to conclude the unit. This session took approximately 60 minutes, as there was a total of 5 dramatizations, each one lasting approximately 10 minutes.

As there were 19 students, in each dramatization 2 boys played the role of *little boy* and 2 girls played the role of *little girl*. Therefore, while 4 students were performing the story, the rest of them were sitting down on the floor forming a semicircle, listening and looking at them. However, this time they did not repeat the dialogue and corresponding gestures, as they just had to pay attention. The teacher moved away from the scene speaking as narrator, but also served as a support for the children who were doing the performance, as she made the corresponding gestures to guide them. This activity served as final evaluation, as the teacher and I took notes of the words and sentences that each of them was able to produce in order to see their achievement.

LANGUAGE PRODUCTION

As stated in the previous session, some students improved the pronunciation of the words and sentences, and some others were able to produce new ones. However, the only sentence from the dialogue that no one was able to repeat was: "Could you blow it up?". Although they tried to repeat it, they failed, and were only able to repeat the word "blow".

2.5. Evaluation and results

Regarding the evaluation of the project "The balloon", it was characterised by direct observation of the students. Throughout all the activities carried out, the teacher and I observed the evolution in both English comprehension and production of each of the pupils, considering the 2 objectives previously selected:

1. Understand the story of "The balloon" and identify its main characters and facts.
2. Produce controlled speech by repeating the main parts of the dialogue.

However, as the first objective was clearly achieved by all the children because they understood the story being presented from the first dramatizations due in large part to the association of gestures, we focused our attention on the second objective. Therefore, after each session, we took notes of the vocabulary that they were able to produce, in order to track their process of improvement.

Moreover, we graded students' achievement on two occasions, once they had been exposed to enough dramatizations and extra activities: in *session 8*, when students were sitting in pairs telling the story with the finger puppets as visual support; and in *session 11*, when students were dramatizing the story in groups of 4. Therefore, during these two sessions, we took notes of their English production and graded them according to different criteria that will be specified below.

- *AA (adequately achieved)*: The student is able to produce almost all the dialogue, accompanied by the corresponding gestures.
- *A (achieved)*: The student is able to produce some sentences of the dialogue, accompanied by the corresponding gestures.
- *P (in process of achievement):* The student is able to produce few sentences of the dialogue, accompanied by the corresponding gestures.

The final results of students' achievement in sessions 8 and 11 will be shown in the following table (see Table 3), in which pupils have been assigned random numbers in order to preserve their identity.

Table 3: results

	SESSION 8	SESSION 11
Student 1	A	AA
Student 2	A	A
Student 3	A	A
Student 4	P	A
Student 5	P	A
Student 6	A	AA
Student 7	A	A
Student 8	P	A
Student 9	A	A
Student 10	AA	AA
Student 11	AA	AA
Student 12	A	AA
Student 13	P	P

Student 14	AA	AA
Student 15	A	AA
Student 16	P	P
Student 17	A	AA
Student 18	AA	AA
Student 19	A	A
	TOTAL (19):	**TOTAL (19):**
	AA: 4	AA: 9
	A: 10	A: 8
	P: 5	P: 2

Regarding the results listed in Table 3, these show gradual progress in pupils' English production, as students were able to gradually produce a higher number of sentences throughout the development of the sessions. In general, these are good results, as from session 8 to session 11, 8 out of 19 improved their grades and the rest maintained it, so none of them lowered their grades. However, 2 students did not improve the grade of *in process of achievement* (*P*), so they did not reach the second objective selected for the proposal: *produce controlled speech by repeating the main parts of the dialogue.*

The following graphs (see Figures 27 and 28) illustrate the changes from session 8 to session 11, showing the percentages regarding students' achievement in order to better visualize the changes.

Figure 27: results session 8   **Figure 28: results session 11**
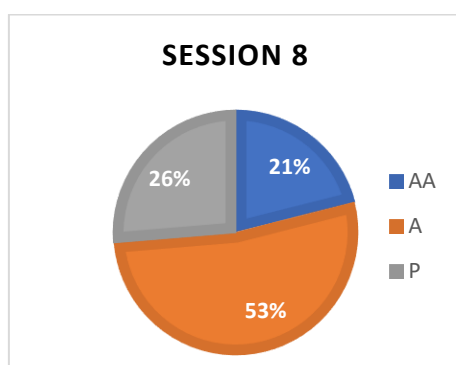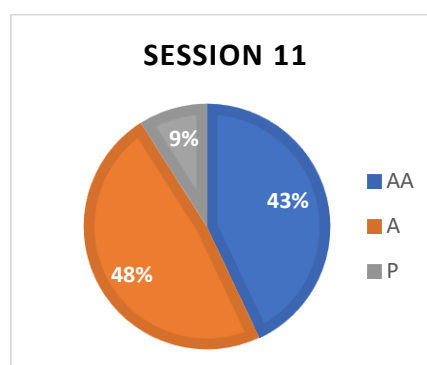
The interpretation of these graphs reveals the following changes in students' achievement from session 8 to session 11:

- 21% of students maintained the grade *AA*.
- 22% of students improved from grade *A* to grade *AA*.
- 31% of students maintained the grade *A*.
- 17% of students improved from grade *P* to grade *A*.
- 9% of students maintained the grade *P*.

Therefore, by the end of the project, 91% of students achieved the second objective selected for the proposal: *produce controlled speech by repeating the main parts of the dialogue*; as they obtained at least an *A*. However, 9% of pupils did not, as they only reached the grade *P*.

2.6. Critical analysis

After having interpreted the results obtained in the implementation of the Artigal method inside a real classroom thanks to the notes taken and the grades obtained in the evaluation, I have considered it convenient to realise an in-depth analysis of the strengths and weaknesses observed. Therefore, this section is going to be devoted to the critical analysis of the method, which will serve as a basis for the later suggestion of a series of guidelines for improvement, which will be specified in the next epigraph.

2.6.1. Strengths

Talking about the advantages that the implementation of the method has revealed, these are numerous for both students and teachers, as it has proven to be a successful method to teach English as a foreign language in Early Childhood Education.

Regarding students' benefits, the principal one is the gradual progress seen in their English production, as they were able to produce ever longer sentences throughout the development of the sessions. Thanks to the notes that the teacher and I took after each of the activities, it was easy to detect a gradual progress in most of the pupils' oral skills. However, although this evolution was evident, students started to speak in English from the very first sessions, as they tried to repeat the vocabulary that the teacher produced, and did not have fear of speaking in the target language. This fact must be taken into consideration, as many Second Language Acquisition theories make students feel insecure when speaking in a foreign language, but this is not the case of Artigal method; as it gives high importance to oral expression and makes the children lose the fear of speaking in English. Moreover, as during all the sessions carried out children worked in a cooperative way, it was easier for them to understand the content being learnt as they relied on their classmates and requested their assistance when necessary. Especially when carrying out the extra activities, as each of them counted with their own material and felt a bit insecure when developing the different tasks.

Another strong point is that the method perfectly suited to the capacities of this specific group of learners, as the story presented seemed really exciting for all the students and they were not tired of repeating the same dialogue over and over again. Instead, they loved listening to the same story in each session and were able to realise about their own learning progress, as they memorized and

repeated a higher number of words and sentences as sessions passed by. This fact provided them self-confidence and tranquillity, as children at such an early age need to have a set of routines which are always repeated in the same way, allowing them to easily progress in the learning process. Furthermore, as the method offers many different materials, pupils received a lot of input that allowed them to create a proper mental representation of the context and characters involved in the story. And, thanks to that, they were able to complement the knowledge they had already acquired during the first dramatizations without visual support, clarifying and refining it.

Regarding teachers' benefits, one of the most remarkable aspects is the versatility offered by the method, as teachers are the ones who decide how to carry out the different didactic proposals; deciding the weekly hours to be devoted, the materials to be used, and the activities to be carried out. So, as Josep María Artigal stated, his method can be worked in many different ways, adapting it to the circumstances of the classroom, complementing it with other methodologies and adjusting it to students' necessities. Therefore, as during the implementation of the method the teacher devoted approximately 3 sessions per week which lasted less than 1 hour, she could perfectly complement it with other methodologies and resources to teach English, fact that greatly enriched students' learning process. However, the creator of the method suggests some pieces of advice for teachers to carry out the projects successfully, such as using his method during at least 2 school years so that students familiarise with it and obtain better results.

Another advantage for teachers is that the didactic guide, also known as *teacher's book*, provides detailed explanations on how to carry out the project, especially the dramatizations, which are the principal aspect of the method. Therefore, when dramatizing the story, the teacher knew exactly how to catch students' attention, distribute the space and play the different roles. However, she missed some feedback and evaluation throughout the project, facts that will be explained in the next section.

2.6.2. Weaknesses

Talking about the weaknesses that the implementation of the method has revealed, these are related to the materials, language production and the teacher training process.

Regarding the *materials*, although they perfectly complemented the learning process during the development of the different tasks; some of them were a bit unpractical for children at such an early age, as they had difficulties when using them. For example, the puppet theatre (see Appendix 7) used in session 9 led to difficulties, as the students were not able to stick and unstick the characters and objects on the scene properly; so the teacher and I had to help all of them during the development

of the activity and the session lasted more than expected. Another material that was unpractical for this group of learners was the storybook (see [Appendix 5](#)) used in session 7, as they had difficulties when turning the pages. The storybook was a small notebook, and its pages were stapled, so each time students turned one page they had to press the book with their hands, otherwise, it did not maintain the position. For these reasons, this session also lasted more than expected and the teacher and I had to supervise them throughout the development of the task.

Regarding *language production*, most of the words and sentences present in the dialogue of "The balloon" were adequate for early learners, except for the sentence "Could you blow it up?", which seemed unachievable for them. This sentence was repeated on 4 different occasions in each dramatization, as it played an important role in the development of the story. Therefore, when the teacher said the sentence acting as *little girl*, students were not able to repeat it although they tried to, so they only made the gesture of blowing the imaginary balloon up and some of them repeated the word "blow". This fact made students feel a bit frustrated because neither those students who were able to produce all the dialogue could correctly repeat that sentence due to the complexity of its structure.

Another fact to take into consideration regarding language production is that, as stated in the results section, 2 students did not improve the grade of *in process of achievement* from session 8 to session 11. Therefore, they were not able to reach the second objective of the proposal: *produce controlled speech by repeating the main parts of the dialogue*, and this fact can be regarded as a failure in their educational achievement.

Regarding the *teacher training process*, the English teacher who implemented the project considered that some feedback was missing, as when carrying out some of the activities she did not know if she was doing it correctly or not. Although the didactic guide specifies the steps to be followed throughout the proposal, she had doubts when developing some of the tasks and considered that it would be useful to have a specialist to whom ask questions and who evaluated her performance. As she had been working with the Artigal method for more than 2 school years, she did not longer count with an advisor, as she was supposed to know how to develop the method successfully.

2.7. Guidelines for improvement

Based on the critical analysis made in the previous epigraph, now it is necessary to raise a series of guidelines that could be useful for future applications of the method in an Early Childhood Education context.

First, I consider that one of the principal aspects that needs to be changed is the number of students participating in the development of the method, as big groups of children do not provide sufficiently satisfactory results. This is so because, as each child counts with his or her own set of materials, teachers need to be continuously supervising them during the development of the tasks, as at these early ages they are not mature enough to work on their own. To this situation is added the fact that, as mentioned before, some of the materials are unpractical for young children, so teachers need to provide them with assistance, otherwise, they would not correctly use them. However, as during the implementation of the project we were 2 teachers dealing with the different tasks, we did not have big problems; but this was not the case of the other classroom, which only counted with one teacher. In that classroom, the development of the project took more time than expected, as the teacher was forced to develop some of the activities in more than one session in order to deal with all the students, which were 20. For all these reasons, I consider that the ideal number of students to successfully develop the Artigal method is approximately 10, as in most Early Childhood Education classrooms there is only one teacher per group of students. Nevertheless, this number could be higher in the case the teacher counted with some assistance.

In relation to the previous suggestion, I think that some of the materials offered by the method need to be changed and adapted to students' necessities, in order to prevent difficulties when carrying out the different tasks. As stated in the critical analysis, the storybook (see Appendix 5) is unpractical for children at such a young age, so I suggest replacing it with a DIN-A4 ring notebook. It would be more convenient for students to count with this notebook as storybook, because the size of the pages would be bigger, and pupils would be able to turn the pages with ease. Therefore, they would have the possibility to better visualise the characters and objects presented, and would not struggle when carrying out the activity of constructing their own storybook. As explained in the previous section, another material that needs to be improved is the puppet theatre (see Appendix 7) because children were not able to correctly place the stickers in the scene when dramatizing the story. Therefore, I suggest replacing the stickers with paper puppets that can be stuck to the scene with Blu-Tack, which is a sticky substance used in most Early Childhood Education classrooms, due to its softness. As children at these ages are still gaining control over their fine motricity, it would be more convenient for them to use this kind of material, as the stickers offered by the method have been proved not to succeed.

Regarding teacher training, it would be extremely useful for teachers to count with a specialist to whom ask questions and who provided them feedback, both positive and negative, not only during the first 2 school years but during the development of all the stories. This way, they would not feel insecure when performing the tasks and the quality of teaching would improve. Another important aspect to consider when dealing with teacher training is the pronunciation, as I consider that teachers

who dramatize the stories need to be accurate and proficient regarding pronunciation, as it has a direct impact on students' language acquisition. Therefore, before developing each of the projects, teachers should study in detail the dialogues to be performed, as these will serve as the basis of the learning process.

Another suggestion for improvement is the digitalization of some of the materials, as most of them are only available in a physical format, so students and teachers do not take advantage of new technologies. Nowadays, many educational centres count with different technological devices such as whiteboards, tablets or computers; so it would be convenient to make use of them as they have proven to have an extremely positive impact on students' achievement. However, another option to consider would be creating new virtual materials instead of digitalizing the physical ones, in order to complement both types. For example, it would be interesting to create videos of the stories being worked on so that students received a different input that would enrich their process of comprehension. As most children love watching cartoons, I am convinced that they would love watching videos which presented the characters and objects of the stories being worked on.

One final suggestion involves creating new stories and updating the current ones, as these were created many years ago and need to be adapted to today's society. Therefore, it would be interesting to create new stories which introduced current significant topics such as multiculturalism, technologies or feminism; as these would allow students to better understand the society around them and to start developing critical thinking. These topics could be introduced transversally, by presenting characters of different races, technological devices that children use, or male characters doing tasks that children may associate to girls (e.g., doing the laundry). Talking about updating the current stories, some characters could be replaced by new ones, as most of the stories always present a male character and a female one. Therefore, it would be interesting that some stories presented characters of the same sex, in order to get away from associating the girls of the classroom with the female character and the boys with the male character. It may seem a trivial matter, but when students roleplayed the story in groups in session 11, they were associated with a specific character depending on their sex, so we took away their freedom of choosing the character they wanted to, leaving gender issues aside.

CONCLUSIONES Y CUESTIONES ABIERTAS

Tras finalizar la redacción del presente Trabajo de Fin de Grado, debemos destacar que el principal objetivo propuesto en un principio, referente a la elaboración de un análisis completo del método Artigal, se ha logrado con éxito en su gran mayoría. Esto ha sido posible gracias al cumplimiento de los objetivos específicos también previamente seleccionados, cuyo proceso de realización será explicado a continuación.

En primer lugar, gracias al estudio de distintas fuentes bibliográficas pudimos conocer las características generales del aprendiz de inglés como lengua extranjera en Educación Infantil, relacionándolas con la importancia del aprendizaje temprano de las lenguas con el fin de demostrar la relevancia de la enseñanza del inglés a niños y niñas de edades tempranas en un contexto escolar. Las teorías que sirvieron de fundamento para esta investigación fueron la Hipótesis del Periodo Crítico de Lenneberg y la Hipótesis de la Diferencia Fundamental de Bley-Vroman.

Más tarde, realizamos un estudio completo del método objeto de análisis y de las teorías que lo sustentan: el método Audio-Lingüístico y la Respuesta Física Total. Estas teorías, altamente reconocidas en la historia de la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera, nos permitieron entender el porqué de la metodología tan específica creada por Artigal, la cual integra los aspectos principales de las dos teorías mencionadas: la importancia de la repetición de diálogos y la asociación de gestos al lenguaje, con el fin de promover una fácil adquisición del idioma extranjero. Así que, gracias a su análisis, conocimos su base teórica, sus características principales y sus implicaciones pedagógicas.

Una vez obtuvimos esta amplia información, aplicamos una de las propuestas didácticas ofrecidas por Artigal en una clase del segundo curso de Educación Infantil con el fin de poner la teoría previamente estudiada en práctica, planteando en primer lugar los objetivos que queríamos que el alumnado lograse. Estos incluían la comprensión de la historia que iba a ser trabajada y la producción oral de la mayor parte del diálogo, ya que tanto la comprensión como expresión oral del inglés son habilidades altamente trabajadas en el método. Una vez planteados los objetivos, aplicamos la propuesta en la clase, y esta nos brindó la oportunidad de hacer un seguimiento preciso del alumnado con respecto al segundo objetivo planteado: la expresión oral; ya que el primero de ellos era evidente para todos y todas desde las primeras sesiones. Por tanto, a través de la observación continua, la recogida de notas en cada sesión, y la evaluación en dos ocasiones; pudimos obtener una serie de datos que resultaron muy útiles para la posterior realización de un análisis crítico.

En cuanto a la observación y recogida de notas, pudimos ver una clara evolución en la expresión oral del alumnado, ya que a lo largo de las sesiones fueron capaces de producir frases cada

vez más largas en inglés. Por tanto, aunque el ritmo de adquisición fuera diferente para cada niño y niña, esta evolución fue gradual para todos y todas.

En cuanto a los resultados obtenidos en las evaluaciones que tuvieron lugar en las sesiones 8 y 11, estos revelaron que en la sesión 8 el 74% del alumnado alcanzó el objetivo propuesto, y que en la sesión 11 el número de estudiantes que lo alcanzó aumentó un 17%, formando estos un 91% del total. En resumen, finalmente un 9% del alumnado fue incapaz de producir las partes principales del diálogo, así que no logró alcanzar el segundo objetivo planteado para la propuesta.

Por tanto, aunque estos datos mostraron en su gran mayoría resultados positivos, consideramos necesario resaltar los puntos fuertes de la propuesta, pero también tener en cuenta aquellos mejorables; así que incluimos ambos aspectos en el análisis crítico que llevamos a cabo tras la obtención de resultados. Por un lado, entre las ventajas encontramos:

- Producción del inglés por parte del alumnado desde el primer momento y evolución gradual de la misma a lo largo del proyecto.
- Motivación generada durante toda la propuesta gracias a la idoneidad de la historia y actividades presentadas.
- Versatilidad del método, ya que este ofrece al profesorado una amplia gama de posibilidades para su aplicación en el aula.
- Guía didáctica que especifica los pasos a seguir durante la realización de las dramatizaciones y actividades.

Por otro lado, entre las desventajas encontramos:

- Poca eficacia de algunos materiales ya que estos no estaban adaptados a las necesidades del alumnado de esta edad.
- Fracaso a la hora de producir una de las principales frases del diálogo por parte de todo el alumnado.
- Fracaso a la hora de alcanzar el segundo objetivo propuesto por parte de 2 estudiantes.
- Ausencia de una formación y evaluación continua del profesorado.

Tras la realización de este análisis crítico, creímos conveniente proponer una serie de sugerencias de mejora que podrían resultar útiles para futuras aplicaciones del método, en base a las desventajas previamente presentadas. En estas sugerencias de mejora incluimos la reducción del número de estudiantes por grupo, la renovación y digitalización de algunos materiales, la mejora de calidad de la formación del profesorado y la creación de nuevas historias.

Por tanto, las conclusiones a las que podemos finalmente llegar tras la consecución de todos los objetivos propuestos al principio del trabajo serán explicadas a continuación.

En primer lugar, el análisis completo del método Artigal ha revelado que este es uno de los procedimientos más efectivos para la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera en Educación Infantil. Esto es así ya que el alumnado se muestra muy receptivo desde el primer momento porque las historias, que son el eje principal del método, presentan personajes y hechos que ellos y ellas experimentan en su día a día y que por ello les resultan motivantes. Por tanto, esto hace que tengan ganas de aprender a través de la dramatización de estas historias, en las que se muestran sorprendentemente cómodos y sin miedo a hablar en una lengua que es en mayor parte desconocida para ellos y ellas. Además, los resultados obtenidos tras la aplicación del método en un aula fueron muy positivos, ya que la gran parte de los estudiantes fue capaz de conseguir los objetivos académicos propuestos en un principio. Este hecho revela que el método es realmente efectivo dentro de un aula, adaptándolo a la situación específica de cada contexto escolar.

Sin embargo, las desventajas plasmadas en el análisis crítico revelaron que una serie de factores del método necesitan ser considerados. Por tanto, veo necesaria una continua revisión de los aspectos que realmente no funcionan dentro de un aula, con el fin de poder mejorarlos o cambiarlos para futuras aplicaciones del método. De esta forma, los resultados obtenidos serán incluso mejores y se adaptarán perfectamente a las necesidades tanto del alumnado como del profesorado de Educación Infantil. Además, como ya he mencionado previamente, sería interesante crear nuevas historias que trataran temas transversales y significativos en la actualidad; ya que esto haría que el alumnado comenzara a desarrollar el pensamiento crítico y a adaptarse a la sociedad cambiante en la que vivimos.

Con respecto a las limitaciones que me he encontrado durante la realización de este Trabajo de Fin de Grado, no puede decir que estas hayan sido muchas. Sin embargo, una de mis ideas principales era la de recopilar opiniones acerca del método Artigal por parte del profesorado de Educación Infantil de Navarra, con el fin de crear un plan de mejora que tuviera la validez adecuada, así que creé una encuesta para llevarlo a cabo. Sin embargo, esta encuesta no obtuvo los resultados esperados ya que únicamente 2 de los 15 centros educativos a los que la mandé contestaron; por lo que las respuestas fueron demasiado limitadas como para servir de base de investigación. Por todo ello, decidí finalmente eliminar la encuesta y basarme únicamente en la aplicación del método en un aula como base de investigación, así que recurrí a la directa observación del alumnado, la recogida de notas y la evaluación; con el fin de realizar un análisis profundo que diera lugar a la final creación de una propuesta de mejora, la cual podría servir de ayuda para futuras aplicaciones del método.

Finalmente, me gustaría dar las gracias al colegio Nuestra Señora del Huerto por darme la oportunidad de realizar este Trabajo de Fin de Grado en base a la implementación del método Artigal en una de sus aulas; ya que de otra manera no habría podido llevar a cabo un análisis completo del mismo. Además, espero que este documento pueda servir de ayuda para docentes que estén pensando en utilizar el método Artigal en sus aulas, teniendo la posibilidad de analizar tanto los éxitos como los fracasos que han tenido lugar en una experiencia de aula; para finalmente decidir si este sería un método válido para su específico grupo de estudiantes.

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APPENDIXES

- **Appendix 1: pictures of the classroom**

Artigal method: a successful way of teaching English in Early Childhood Education

- **Appendix 2: script**

PERFORMANCE SCRIPT

General indications	Verbalizations
Pupils standing up around the circle	
	Are you ready for a story?
Teacher ⇒ N	Once upon a time a little boy was walking down the street
Teacher ⇒ 1	♦ **tip-tap, tip-tap, tip-tap**
	wow! look!
	a red **balloon!**

↓ not necessarily first times ↓

	♦ oh! **yuck, it's so dirty!**
	♦ Shhheee.... **Water, water, water.** **Wash, wash, wash.**
	→ Is it clean or dirty? → Is it clean?
	← Dirty / No.
	♦ Shhheee... . **Water, water, water.** **Wash, wash, wash.**
	→ Is it dirty or clean?
	← It's clean.
	♦ Shhheee... txxxt. OK, **clean balloon.**

↑ not necessarily first times ↑

	♦ **ffffff ... ffffff.**
	wow! what a **big balloon!**
Teacher ⇒ N	**And then along came a little girl**
Teacher ⇒ 2	♦ **tip-tap, tip-tap, tip-tap, ...**
	oh, look! **what a** big **balloon.** Can I have it ?
Teacher ⇒ N	**And** the little boy said
Teacher ⇒ 1	♦ No, no, no. **It's my balloon.**
Teacher ⇒ N	**Then the little girl said**

Teacher → 2	◆ please! blow it up **bigger! bigger! bigger!** ...

↓ not necessarily first times ↓

Teacher → N	<u>And the little boy said</u>
Teacher → 1	◆ bigger? ... **OK** Look at me. Blow... **ffffff ... ffffff.** **wow!** what a super big balloon!
Teacher → N	<u>Then the little girl said</u>
Teacher → 2	◆ please! blow it up **bigger! bigger!** bigger! ...

↑ not necessarily first times ↑

|	
Teacher → N	<u>But the little boy said</u>
Teacher → 1	◆ Bigger? ... **No, no**. Not bigger. It's **my balloon**.
Teacher → N	<u>But the little girl said</u>
Teacher → 2	◆ Yes! Blow it up **bigger! bigger! bigger!** ...
Repeat "No!" "Yes!"	
Teacher → N	<u>**Finally** the little boy said</u>
Teacher → 1	◆ Bigger? ... **OK** I'll blow it up. **ffffff ... ffffff.** **and ... BANNNNG!!!** [everybody falls down] **oh! my** poor **balloon**.
Teacher → N	<u>**The little boy blew up the balloon so much that it popped and everybody fell down**</u> **And that's all!** [everybody stands up]

Possibility, not first times: pieces of red tissue paper in the pocket to throw when the balloon bursts.
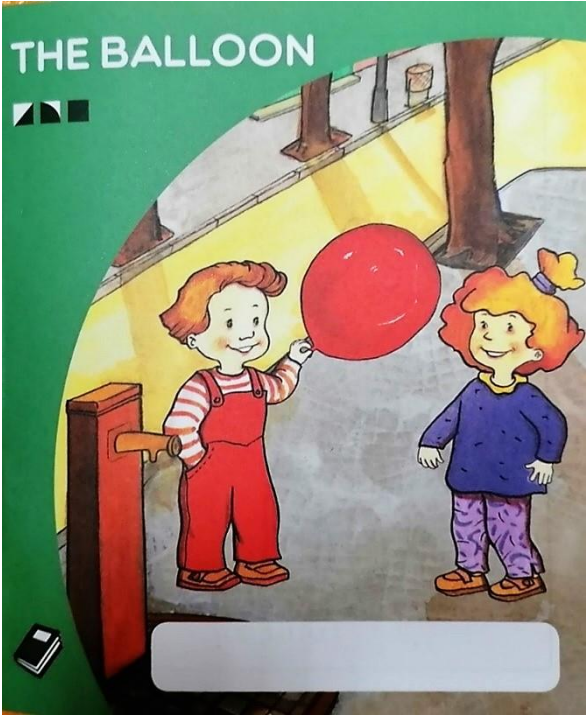
- **Appendix 3: picture cards**
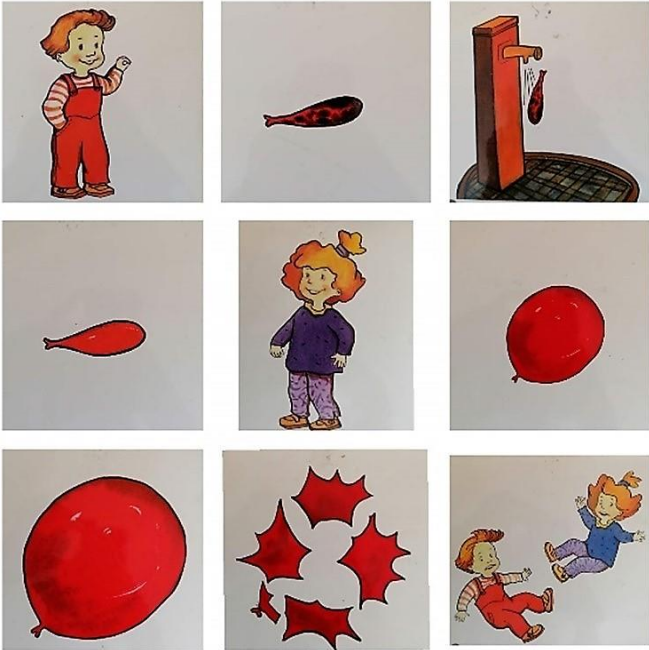
- **Appendix 4: PowerPoint**

Ready for a Story (J.M. Artigal)

- **Appendix 5: storybook**

- **Appendix 6: finger puppets**

- **Appendix 7: puppet theatre**

- **Appendix 8: song**

SONG

A little boy walked down the street,
saw a balloon and he got it.
A little girl walked down the street,
saw the balloon and she liked it.
"It's my balloon", the boy told her,
"bigger! bigger!", then she said.
"Bigger!" we said, "bigger!" we sang,
and the balloon made a big BANG!

- **Appendix 9: bingo cards**