Universidad Centro Americana
School of Humanities and Communication

Strategies to teach English as a foreign language to autistic children at a basic level at Saint Mary school.

Thesis to Obtain the Bachelor of Arts Degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

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I. Acknowledgement

First of all, I want to dedicate this thesis to my beloved heavenly Father whose love and mercy are endless and whose grace has been upon me since I was born. To God, the friend, brother, and father who has been with me during my whole life in good and bad moments, thank you Lord Jesus Christ for holding my hand during this process, for having given me wisdom and strength to achieve one more goal in my life, for all the goals the Lord has left me reach. To my parents, and my brothers, specially to my mother Janneth Castillo, whose way of educating me has shown me that education is a bridge to overcome any type of barriers, for all her love, support, and motivation, for being the ideal mother, for showing me how to be courageous, and for having been with me in all the moments of my life. And finally, to all the professors who were with me in this incredible journey, to my tutors Teresa Matus and Emma Luna, for their dedication, support and advise. Endlessly grateful to each and all of you.

Cristel Vargas

First and foremost, I have to thank this last effort in order to conclude my major to God for his endless mercy and the wisdom that he has given me. Dedicated to my beloved son Hector Fernando, who is my motivation every day to get ahead. I will also show gratitude to my family because they have supported me no matter the circumstances, my mother that has been my anchor, this dissertation stands as a testament to her unconditional love and encouragement. To all the professors with whom it has been an honor to share all these years in which their teachings have been the best baggage that I will carry with me. Last but not least to my tutors Teresa Matus and Emma Luna for their support, patience and dedication. Always “In all loving and serving”

Fernanda Mendioroz
II. Introduction

Throughout these years, it has been stated that education is a right for every citizen; however, in Nicaragua, as in other Latin American countries, the culture of inclusive education has serious limitations. Therefore, the most vulnerable children, the ones that have different mechanism to learn a specific subject matter, are mostly excluded by the educational system. A good example of such kids with special learning needs are autistic children.

In Nicaragua, autistic children- and their parents- are not offered a wide range of options regarding schools and programs that can contribute to the development of their skills. Therefore, very little research efforts are focused on improving the way these kids can learn at a school context. How do these children learn? Particularly, how do they learn a foreign language? (English in our Nicaraguan context). No previous studies about the English learning process of autistic children have been carried out by TEFL students at UCA or any other undergraduate programs in the country.

Bearing in mind this reality as well as knowing that autistic children are brilliant beings with tremendous capacities, this research study aims at determining strategies to teach English to autistic children at Saint Mary school. This prestigious school provides quality inclusive education for autistic children in Managua; therefore, Saint Mary school represents a suitable context to conduct this study. There are two kids with autism, in elementary school. They are both exposed to English input while being in the school.

This study is a contribution to the educational system in Nicaragua, because is necessary to expose these aims to have a clear example of the learning of the autistic children; to give the teachers new methods of teaching and dealing with this cases in schools; to face reality with good attitudes; To improve the way of educating children and to bet for the variety. this study would be a starting point which challenges the inclusive education in Nicaragua.
III. Research Questions:

General question:

What are the strategies to teach English as a foreign language to Autistic children in elementary education at St Mary School?

Specific questions:

1. What are the methodologies they apply when teaching these students?
2. Do they apply any behavior plan? (how to deal with these children’s emotions)
3. What particular skills do the teachers develop with the students?
IV. Objectives:

General:

1. Determine strategies to teach English at a basic level to autistic kids in St. Mary School.

Specific:

1. Identify the strategies and tools teachers use to encourage the process of learning.
2. Find out what teaching resources help autistic children be more focused on the class.
3. Analyze what strategies and teaching resources used in class benefit autistic children in learning English.
v. Justification

Learning the English language has become a fundamental tool for the development of humanity, to be consistent and support the educational system for everyone, society should give a look to those who need it but it is very difficult to accept, all those children with disabilities, such as autistic children.

“Autism is characterized by a spectrum of severity, ranging from the mute and profoundly retarded to highly gifted and intelligent individuals (Sigman & Capps, 1997 in Cohem J. 2005). That means that if we make an effort, they can be integrated in our society as engineers, teachers or any other occupation, to grow and change this world. High function autistic children are very intelligent and they should not be hidden, their capacity has to be shown and included in every aspect of life.

To form new brilliant professionals that can change the future of the country, we should bet on the special ability of these children. Students possess different kind of minds, and, therefore, learn, remember, perform, and understand in different ways (Gardner, 1991).

The importance of the project lies in the need for children with autism to be taken into account and have a quality education, observe the way they unfold learning the English language and strategies that teachers use to develop their abilities.

As part of the contributions, this investigation will provide benefits to the children, as well as the teachers. when analyzing the strategies that allow them to learn a language it will be assumed that the differences are but ways to learn.

Teachers will also have earnings to improve their tools and teaching methods, realizing resources that promote children's learning.

This will cause a social and cultural impact that will open our minds to an inclusive society, taking our differences and turning them into variables that include us as part of a change. Also, the results of this research will provide useful information
for the improvement and credibility of the school, making a public knowledge that the school accepts variability and integration as part of the reality that exists in Nicaragua.
VI. Literature Review

In our country there is an increase of the cases of autism. Confidencial (2016) back in the 90s there was only one case of autism every two months and now, the neuropsychologist Dr. Barret diagnoses a new case almost every day thus, the country should take actions on the matter. Now Nicaraguan young people are demanding more opportunities to access English programs that make them more competitive citizens. Nowadays, more people are learning English because of different situations and circumstances. For example, the need of English language in new job opportunities given by foreign investment in the country.

However, there is a significant percentage of people who are unattended by the educational plans and other services, these are the autistic children.

ADA is the American Disabilities Act, these are civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public. The purpose of the law is to make sure that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. People who have autism deserve the same opportunities as any other individual, and the inclusive education is not being supported by the Nicaraguan government to provide quality education to the most vulnerable ones of the society. Few schools are concerned with high quality education for autistic children, moreover, there is no English programs focused particularly on their learning needs.

This research explores how autistic children learn a foreign language in a Nicaraguan educational context. This study primarily aims at determining the different strategies that teachers and management personnel at Saint Mary school use to teach successful lessons to autistic children in an English class. Identifying methodologies and resources teachers can apply to educate autistic children in our country.
**How children learn**

According to many theories, it is observed that there are many researchers that explain the normal learning process, Stassen (2014) states that in the first years of life babies’ start responding and attending to words and expressions and it continues during the years.

From the behaviourist theory that Watson (1998) describes as “the laws and processes by which behaviour is learned” this can be represented in how they act in different situations and how they can learn and develop habits step by step, how do they learn to talk, walk, read etc.

Also, it is concluded that the mother is a great example of the learner. Stassen (2014) p.44 affirms that learning occurs through: classical conditioning this is by association, when babies’ associate stimulus and previous experiences for example sounds of the mother or faces. By operant conditioning that is by reinforcement, if something is maintained would become a pattern because every act has a consequence and through social learning that is from modelling and observed behaviours. What we see we repeat it.

Learning is a very easy process but it contains many interaction and communication with others in order to learn from them. Not only this is developed during the first two years, also emotions are learnt, Jhonson (2011) said that “brain maturation is involved in all emotional development and emotional reactions this process begins with neurons connecting to other neurons”. This is necessary to form a behaviour and temperament on each child getting affected in many ways the learning process and it is completed when the lateralization process has ended.

Primary language acquisition occurs during a critical period which ends at the age of puberty, before cerebral lateralization is complete, James (n’d) explains that lateralization “is the idea that the two halves of the brain's cerebral cortex, left and right execute different functions and they communicate each other”. Stassen
(2014) explains that the part that connects the two hemispheres of the brain is called corpus callosum and is a group of nerves and thanks to them the communication allows children to coordinate the body and brain. When there is a failure in the developing of the corpus callosum it may end in tremendous disorders. “this is one of several possible causes of autism” (Fraizer & Hardan, 2009).

“As the brain ages, however, it becomes less “plastic,” or easily modifiable, marking the closure of critical periods” Neuroscience society (2012) means that when children grow up they start losing the capacity they used to have and they tend to learn less or slower than they did. This is why many people think that when a person is young is the best time for him/her to learn a second language, because the brain is capable of understand and acquire information in a better way.

According to Schutz (2014) there are two independent systems of second language performance: 'the acquired system' and 'the learned system'. The acquire system is similar to the first language acquisition that requires interaction and communication with the target language unconsciously. Unlike the learned system that is when we are conscious of what we are learning and paying attention to, for example, the grammar rules we learn in primary school. This also involves the monitor hypothesis that is the relation between the two systems, you monitor or edit what you have learned unconsciously based on what you learn, distinguishing the imperfections of the language.

There is another theory created called “the input hypothesis” from Krashen that explains how a learner acquires a second language and is by going beyond what is learned, when you are exposed to comprehensible input. However, it is necessary but not sufficient to learn a second language.

As explained before, emotions are involved in the process of learning since the very beginning, to acquire a language Krashen also mentioned that with the affective filter hypothesis, which includes motivation, confidence and anxiety form a mental block and it is difficult to acquire a language, for Schutz (2014) "when the
filter is up impedes the language acquisition”. Positive reinforcement and motivation is always necessary.

Those hypothesis improve and enhance the process of learning, when children learn a language or acquire it, they need motivation and examples to follow so they can produce by their own.

According to Gardner (1991) “Almost everyone has a specific inadequacy or two” we as humans are not perfect and our brain works in different ways. People have difficulties to master a particular skill while some others do not have such struggles. This is what he called multiple intelligences. Other disabilities come right from the brain and the formation of the person in the mother’s belly, some learning disabilities that can cause troubles when learning any subject matter.

American Journal of public health (2005) in Stassen (2014) explains that “Autism spectrum disorder is probably the most troubling brain disorder, not only because its problems are severe but also because the causes and treatments for autism are hotly disputed”

**What is autism?**

To define the term autism has been the task of many researchers and is pretty similar based on the experience of the ones who have studied this brain disorder and the symptoms, negative and positive aspects this may involve. Frith (1996) states that “Autism is a developmental disorder affecting consistently social and communicative skills. Differs from most mental handicap in showing a characteristic pattern of poor intact, and even superior cognitive abilities.”

Kanner (1985) states that autism is due to a specific brain abnormality. which, might be caused due to three different reasons. Such as, genetic fault, brain disease, or brain damage. Each reason involves different factors. Genetic fault is caused when an ancestor of the person who has this disorder was affected by this brain abnormality. Such disorder in this case, is due to heritage circumstances. As
an example, from a great grandpa to a great grandson. Brain disease, is when the superior left hemisphere part of the brain is affected and this causes specific symptoms, in such particular cases autistic people tend to be even shyer when socializing and building rapport with people of the same age. And finally, brain damage, is when the brain is affected at least in a 75% having as a result, a progressive and severe damage affecting directly the emotions, mental health, and body health. This last reason involves, losing memory, aggressive behavior, and social impairment.

Hollander (2003) refers to autism as a brain abnormality which does not follow the same mechanisms when learning a new subject matter, or when developing an innate skill. Hollander on the other hand says that autism is a type of intelligence which goes further for people who have it. Since, this is not a limitation for learning a specific or different subject matters. Autistic children have the capacity to develop different skills, and their cognitive skills are even superior than regular children’s.

There are three different types of Autism Spectrum Disorders according to the autism society of America (2014)

- **Autistic Disorder** *(also called "classic" autism)*
  This is what most people think of when hearing the word "autism." People with autistic disorder usually have significant language delays, social and communication challenges, and unusual behaviors and interests. Many people with autistic disorder also have intellectual disability.

- **Asperger Syndrome**
  People with Asperger syndrome usually have some milder symptoms of autistic disorder. They might have social challenges and unusual behaviors and interests. However, they typically do not have problems with language or intellectual disability.

- **Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS; also called "atypical autism")**
People who meet some of the criteria for autistic disorder or Asperger syndrome, but not all, may be diagnosed with PDD-NOS. People with PDD-NOS usually have fewer and milder symptoms than those with autistic disorder. The symptoms might cause only social and communication challenges.

**How autistic children learn**

These experts have discovered and proved that, autism is not a disorder which causes limitations for the ones who live with such condition. This brain disorder might have different positive effects, but also complex aspects. Areas such as, learning a new language, developing an innate skill, or cognitive skills, might be challenging. But it does not mean that autistic children or adults who have this disorder have to feel limited or stopped by any negative element that this curious and complex brain abnormality may have.

Dr. Kanner (1987) explains that “autistic children have enough intelligence to develop and achieve a high performance at any subject matter”. He discovered that autistic children might develop HFA, which stands for High Function Autism. This HFA term was called this way because during a research he made he had the opportunity to observe that a child was able to learn three languages at the same time, he was excellent playing chess, and understanding math and he was not limited by his condition. However, not all the autistic children may develop such condition. He stated that at least 25% of autistic children may achieve such condition. Sometimes this comes innate, in such case, the child will be able to develop cognitive skills, and perform with a high level of understanding complex subjects, such as chemistry, math or science.

In 1978, there was a research which is mentioned below that was made to a family where there was an autistic child who was really good at languages, his name was
John. John was able to speak 3 languages, Japanese, English, and French. This proves that John was a "language-gifted" autistic child who was always involved in familiar activities, he was always taken into account in the social events at his elementary school, his performance when speaking the different languages was more than satisfactory, his pronunciation was not affected by the syndrome. But, this high functioning skill was not immediately developed. It is important to highlight that this child was not able to develop this language gifted skill until he was 4 years old, his firsts years of life he presented severe speech problems, he was unable to speak, until he became 4 years old. This syndrome affected John’s speech during his firsts four years of life. Eventually, John developed a high functioning skill at languages, which is basically a proof of the statement which was exposed by Kremer (2005) “high functioning Autism does not occur immediately”.

It is not only based on developing a high brain performance, but also being creative. Kanner (1987) explains that skills such as doing paintings, drawing, learning languages, music and arts might be gifted with such condition. This is a really interesting fact, since, these children are actually benefited for having such condition, and of course for having people able to help them to approach all of these positive facts.

Having stated this, it has to be included that autism is a really complex and curious disorder which might bring benefits and also challenging stages. These experts’ researches have shown the positive and the challenging faces of this syndrome. The way these children may present different learning styles, the different issues this disorder may follow, the benefits that having HFA may have. To continue with this interesting topic, it has to be mentioned that this complex brain abnormality follows three specific mechanisms which will be presented in the following paragraphs.

Maddon (2015) states that “there are three main cores in autism spectrum disorder that have been discovered: getting affected in social interaction, language and communication, and repetitive behavior".
These three characteristics of autism spectrum disorder are patterns which are developed by the brain. In this case, autism involves having social impairment which is merely not being able to speak or socialize with any other individual, the language and communication skill might be affected because autistic people tend to have severe struggles when developing such skill, and this issue comes innate. Autistic people tend to develop their “speech” at least in the first three or four years of life. And finally, the repetitive behaviour stage, autistic children tend to follow a repetitive mechanism, and that is why they cannot understand sarcasm or jokes.

The repetitive behavior is a pattern which will be followed by people who have this disorder since this is an action which is unconsciously performed. Children who have autism cannot identify a joke or sarcasm, therefore, people who surround autistic children or adults have to be really careful since they cannot identify this. Repetitive behavior might follow negative patterns. As an example of this Happe & Frith (1996) expressed that If an autistic child throws away the pencils which are on the teacher’s desk and the teacher says “great”, the child will take it literally and will perform this action regularly. (Pp. 199.)

These three main mechanisms or patterns this disorder follows is not an impediment for these children to attend regular classes with regular children. Colihan (2015) says that “having a child who presents autism spectrum disorder (ASD), for example Asperger’s syndrome, at a regular school can be difficult”. Autism in the classroom is something that is hard for teachers, parents, and the child with the ASD to deal with, however, the child can be integrated in the class with the help provided by the teacher and the environment the child is being exposed to. Integrating an autistic child in a daily class with regular children who do not have this condition is a work which must be constructed in a daily routine. Making them feel part of the class, asking for their opinions, or asking them to go in front of the class, will increase their confidence in themselves. This will highly and positively affect their learning process experience.
**Definition of strategy:**

Is a plan of action designed to achieve a long term or overall aim. Strategy might be developed in any area, such as education, games, war etc.

**Definition of technique:**

the manner in which technical details are treated (as by a writer) or basic physical movements are used (as by a dancer); also: ability to treat such details or use such movements as an example, *<good piano technique>*

**Strategies teachers apply to integrate an autistic child in the classroom**

Due to the increment of people who have autism emerges the necessity to include them into schools where inclusive education is promoted. Because of this necessity different strategies have been developed such as:

McDonough (1995) refers to two main strategies to integrate an autistic child in a classroom:

1. being supportive: consists in being empathic with the child, feel what the student feels, put himself in the student’s shoes.
2. Working with their different abilities: each child is different from each other and they have different learning styles so the teacher has to find the way to approach these abilities.

Russo and Koegel (1997) suggested the use of behavioral techniques:

(1) A therapist in the classroom: this consists in having talks and mental support provided to the kids to eradicate misbehaviors. Such as, yelling, kicking, or lack of flexibility.

(2) Training teachers: to capacitate the teachers about how to deal with this brain disorder in the classroom. (Ways of learning, behaviors, etc.)

(3) Measure the repetitive patterns: teachers take control of the stimulation observed such as, repetitive finger movements, scratching, and pulling off clothes.
(4) Verbal response to commands: asking in a direct way to perform an action.

Wire (2014) stated the following techniques:

1. Feeling comfortable in social situations: this means that autistic children can get mad and answer with anger to any working group. The answer is not to keep them apart or exclude them from social working.
2. Establish a model: teacher should interact with the autistic kid in order to maintain communication and to enhance integration.
3. Avoiding many instructions: this is also remarkable because these special kids cannot understand many directions at the same time.
4. To deal with the verbal communication: Direct commands are needed, especially when they tend to speak too loud or too slow, in various occasions the mute is elected by the child.
5. Recording voices: music is very interesting sound that they may like and pay attention to, if so, recording their own voices to remind the recommended volume allowed is a good strategy to help the student. It is important to mention that the pressure does not worth it. Many autistic children could be afraid of hearing their own voices but when they overcome the issue, this might be another skill developed.

6. Pattern preference: a very structured schedule, drills, games, numbers and lists of sequences: are very helpful due to their repetitive preferences.

7. Minimizing distractions: keeping their attention on the teacher and prepare students for any change can be a great strategy to maintain the stress out.

According to Reppond (2015) because of barriers to language and culture, these students have a hard time understanding what is going on around them, which can cause great confusion and frustration. the most important strategy is

1. to motivate these pupils: when learning a foreign language by drawing on their strengths. Based on this strategy, it can be said that teachers need to
have some knowledge of what the issues are surrounding autistic children in order to be able to help them to access the curriculum and to build on their undoubted strengths, once identified.

CESA (2016) explains that the main strategy to deal with autistic children is:

1) Self-management: consists in using visuals to assist the child, using a variety of stimuli in lessons (using materials when possible.)
2) Social communication: talking too much creates anxiety and the child refuses to cooperate, therefore, it is necessary to provide direct instructions and avoid redundancy.
3) Role play/model situations (so students can see instead of just being told)  
   a. May also video tape so students can see
4) Less is more when it comes to verbal
5) Teach in a variety of settings for generalization
   a. Introduce a new skill in a variety of places so that the student can see it applies to more than one setting

Rudy (2016) stated the strategy Applied Behavior Analysis which stands for (ABA) as the process of extinguishing negative behaviors with early intervention, with a therapist.

The characteristics mentioned before just remark the fact that, children with autism can learn if we pay close attention and help them. There are many factors that can be controlled and also many strategies to implement during the learning process.
**Features of methodologies**

There are many features of different methods that can be used with the autistic children to develop their strengths. For Freeman (2009) Direct Method is to create communication, no translation is allowed, the use of demonstrations and visual aids respond in a good way to some of the aspects in which an autistic kid can have problems with. The use of realia is necessary for them to understand. On the other hand, the audiolingual method is excellent as said before, the drilling and patterns calls the attention of the autism children so this method used correctively can reinforce the social interaction and communication. This method includes repetition and correcting in good ways. This is also something that can enhance the student to learn.

A method that can be a double edged sword is the Dessugestopedia method which includes the respect of the student’s feelings. Fine arts provide positive suggestions for students so they can learn and the calm state can provide comfort to the autistic child. It is said that is a double edged sword because it can be helpful for the student but also can distract the student from what they are doing, due to the colors, materials, pictures that they might be exposed to, so it is necessary to do everything step by step and with clear and short instructions.

With all these theories and particular examples of how an autistic child can be integrated in the classroom, it is believed that they not only learn but it can be an excellent experience as a teacher to prove the skills and knowledge about methods and strategies. It is also scary to think about the possibility to have a kid in a classroom that can in a few minutes destroy the lesson and spoil a class. There is no doubt that many teachers may feel worried about these circumstances when they have not received any training to deal with autism. But in order to give them an opportunity it is a must to have qualified teachers who can address their students to a successful learning. According to wirre (2005) “pupils with ASD (Autism syndrome spectrum) can succeed with foreign languages and teachers can work successfully with them, looking or the positive in these pupils, much can be achieved in the classroom”.

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VII. Research methodology

Type of methodology

In this research the type of methodology and characteristics used to accomplish the main goal is a mix between qualitative and quantitative. According to the Qualitative Research Consultants Association, “Qualitative research is designed to reveal a target audience’s range of behavior and the perceptions that drive it with reference to specific topics or issues. It uses in-depth studies of small groups of people to guide and support the construction of hypotheses. The results of qualitative research are descriptive rather than predictive” and according to Jean Roads (n/d) a quantitative research is gathering information focuses on describing a phenomenon across a larger number of participants thereby providing the possibility of summarizing characteristics across groups or relationships. This approach surveys a large number of individuals and applies statistical techniques to recognize overall patterns in the relations of processes.

Participants

The people that are involved in this process of research are English learners, in this case, children with autism in different spectrum, the teacher of the target group, the coordinator and the principal. Also, the psychologist of the school plays a very important role to help each child to develop and deal their capacities, as well as two observers that contributed to the process who are senior students of the major: teaching English as a Foreign Language at UCA.
**Target group**

The target group is composed by elementary level students in Saint Mary bilingual school localized in Ticuantepe, Managua. There are two kids with autism, one in first grade and one in second grade of elementary school.

**The coordinator**

Ana Maria Sevilla who studied Teaching English as a Foreign Language at UCA, she also studied theology and she is the principal of the school with a lot of knowledge with autistic kids.

**The teachers**

They are teachers of English that have experience with content based instructions, making easier the subjects that they are teaching. They also have one teacher assistant working with the group in which the autistic kid belongs to.

**Observers**

It was prepared a class observation format to understand the strategies implemented by the teachers. Also they paid attention at the response of the students and the atmosphere they created when learning.
**Instruments**

The instruments were observations formats, questionnaires and an interview to the coordinator, the psychologist and to teachers.

**Observation format:**

Several questions based on the classroom environment, learners' attitude and teachers' performance. The observers came to the room 4 times and answered the questions according to what they interpreted from the context of the classroom.

**Questionnaire:**

It was given to the principal and to the teachers, it includes series of questions that helped the researchers understand a little bit more about the techniques or strategies that they implement. All of the questions were based on different strategies they know about and if games and materials are useful to teach these autistic kids. They were also open questions about the experience dealing with these children and their knowledge regarding autism.

**Technique to analyze:**

The processing of information was through data analysis, is a process of data collection, analysis and reporting results to show students answers, then a conclusion were discussed and given by the observers about what the Surveys and class observation says.

**Schedule to collect data**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>responsible</th>
<th>Activity or Instruments</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 11th</td>
<td>Cristel Vargas</td>
<td>Presentation and survey to the teacher and the psychologist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 11th</td>
<td>Delia Mendioroz</td>
<td>Observation format preschool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 15th</td>
<td>Cristel and Delia</td>
<td>Observation format first grader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 22nd</td>
<td>Cristel and Delia</td>
<td>Interviews to the teachers.</td>
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Constraints

We had some problems to find the correct school which needed to be bilingual and provide education to autistic children. After that, some problems were presented when we went to the school, first of all, is not that near Managua. The main street that takes us to the school was being reconstructed so we had to walk to get there on time. The school doesn’t have any specific methodology nor a special technique to teach English to autistic kids, however, they do have a variety of really useful strategies which have brought positive results when it comes to the learning process of the students, it was a bit difficult for the personnel of the school when answering the questions of the interviews due to the variety they have.

Procedure:

The research began by choosing the topic of interest for researchers, then was narrowed and contextualized to a specific school that could have the context of teaching to autistic kids. Subsequently, the research questions were elaborated, the general and specific objectives of the research were presented as well. Afterwards, the information concerning to our topic were gathered through the literature review. Some books and internet information, the literature review includes the concept of autism and the types, second language acquisition theories, autism in classrooms and psychology as well as teaching techniques to focus on autistic learning process. Subsequently, the researchers proceeded to design and apply series of indispensable instruments to collect data that allows the research to come up with the appropriate techniques to teach English as a foreign language to autistic kids. Ultimately, the gathered data was discussed, analyzed, and triangulated to come up with a conclusion and recommendations.
VIII. Data Analysis

Results of the interview to the psychologist

The psychologist was asked to answer a few questions related to the way autistic children may learn, she said that what they do to engage the students in the lesson is through activities such as games, drawing and painting. She recommends to the teaching staff to implement fun engaging activities that make the students feel integrated to the class due to the fact that is fundamental for autistic kids to feel included in order to have a satisfactory level of learning. She also remarked on the fact that, she always brings quality psychological attention to the students so that they can trust her in case they have any type of struggle related to bullying or any other situation than can interfere in the learning process, as far as she has been there, the regular children and the special ones get along with each other.

Interview to the principal

The principal of the saint Mary school was asked to answer a few questions related to the different teaching techniques that teachers might apply for autistic children to learn English at a basic level. The principal stated that what they implement in the school is to work with the likes and the strengths of the kids in order for them to achieve a satisfactory level of English. She showed to the researchers the incredible paintings an autistic child made. They work with this special ability in painted gifted as a stimulus to the kid. Teachers are not specially trained to deal with these type of children, but they receive talks from the psychologist so that they are able to help their students to reach a satisfactory level of understanding. The principal pointed out that the school is always open for children who have any type of disorder, as long as they can support these kids and supply a good learning process experience. She also pointed out that they have not had any situation which cannot be controlled inside of the classroom, teachers really have the authority and control over these children, special and regular ones.
Results of the interview of the teacher.

The teachers who had autistic kids in their class were asked about the strategies they use in the classroom, as well as what do they do in case that a situation that cannot be controlled by them is presented. They explained that they haven’t been in any situation where special actions have to be taken. One of them expressed that her little student is very intelligent and she considers him as the best student in the classroom, she also pointed out the fact that, he is one of the best math students in the school. It is also remarkable that the child is also language gifted, as well as he has very good skills at painting and drawing.

She explained that she uses a lot of realia with the students: pictures, textures, colors, recordings and field observation. She also said that it is of high importance to build a friendly environment due to the social interaction difficulties autistic children may present in the class.

Results of the Class Observation:

Senior students were also asked to fill several questions about the environment and the situations presented in a class session getting the following aspects. The place is comfortable and big enough to keep the students safe, due to the place it is located there is no need of air conditioning on each classroom, however, there is a fan on each one, to maintain the heat away. No floor patterns that may distract the attention of the children. Some Dessugestopedia features and content-based instruction features are used in the classrooms, they have a lot of visuals as colors, fruits and numbers made by the students in the wall of the room, on the other hand the number of kids in a classroom is perfect to enhance the learning process and the communication between teachers and students is very fluent, clear and emphatic.
IX. Discussion.

This major section of this research will be developed by data triangulation. Data triangulation composed by the participants who helped the researchers to get this research accomplished; these are the following: TEFL program senior Students, the Principal, the Psychologist, teachers of the Saint Mary school and Class Observations.

The findings presented in the results reveal that in Saint Mary School management personnel have different strategies implemented with kids in order to teach them English at a basic level, that have helped and worked in a good way the process of learning of the Autistic children. To know that, researchers asked the principal if they had a specific strategy to teach English to autistic children. (See Interview to the principal ll. Question 2) to which she answered that they just work with the abilities of each student. There is a technique applied that consists in getting to know the struggles autistic children have and the weaknesses to turn them into a strength. These findings are in substantial agreement to McDonough (1995) who refers that teachers are involved in learning strategies in two ways. First, knowing about supportive, this means being empathic with students and try to support them as much as possible, managing and also teaching the strategies used by their students (working with their different abilities). As a result, these teachers work on areas of improvement for these kids to have a quality learning process with positive results, taking into account this long life condition. For example, the kid who has clearly (HFA) which stands for High Function Autism, made the paintings that the principal showed to the researchers, that is a motivation to the student, to work with what he likes to do in order to facilitate the learning process.

In addition, it is important to mention that multiple intelligences of Gardner are presented in these kids in different ways. One of the kids presents the capacity to think in images and pictures and visualize them, a real artist to say. He drew many paintings, two of them were exposed to the researchers and they were amazed with the art of this kid. For instance, the intelligence of this child is visual spatial, he
learns and practices by drawing and painting. Teachers transform the ability of the kid into a strategy in which he can learn English or any other subject. “It is necessary getting to know your students and understand how do they learn” the teachers said. According to CESA (2016) the main strategy that is being used with this student is “Self management” which consists on using visuals to assist the children. Also, the strategy of using a variety of stimuli in lessons that consist in using materials when possible. Maintaining the attention in whatever topic the child is interested in.

There is when Multiple intelligences play a perfect role. The university northern of Illinois (2009) explained that Gardner in his theory of multiple intelligences stated the potential of each person to have unique skills and they can be used to understand preferences and strengths”. In this case it is used to develop the potential of each child and to know their weaknesses. Working on the abilities also is a way to put down the affective filter. For Schultz (2014) many actions and also environment can stop the learning process, when your confidence and anxiety is being proved there is a mental block and you stop the process of learning. If they are doing an exercise they feel comfortable and they enjoy the activity the affective filter is going down and the brain permits learning.

Furthermore, in the class observation, researchers could see Wire’s strategy number 6. Called “Pattern preference” because in the classroom during an activity teachers were using games, and drillings. Also, they could identify features of some methodologies which were used to obtain the attention of the autistic children and to deal with their struggles (social interaction, lack of communication and lack of flexibility). Researchers asked about the materials used in the classroom (See observation guide), this could reveal the use of colors and sounds are the most useful tools for the autistic children. These findings seem to agree with the freeman L. D (2009) direct method which is to create communication between the teacher and the student avoiding the use of Spanish in the classroom and doing mimics if needed. Visual aids are very important to create a concept of any object. Researchers observed these findings equal with Warber A (n-d) that says “autistic
children learn with imitation and structured environments that accommodate their sensory sensitivities” drillings and well-structured schedules are of great importance. Another features of methods researchers could observe were audiolingual and Dessugestopedia method to create interaction between the students through games and songs. Short commands and clear explanations are part of a strategy called “less is more”, according to CESA (2016) Talking too much creates anxiety and makes things more difficult. Children may feel stressed and they will not want to play or cooperate with the teacher and interact with other students. Such actions would be making more difficult the social communication.

Sanchez C (2016) also explained that some schools in the united states as the Scholar united Redlands District provide sign language to the autistic kids because when they have not developed speech skills this is a better way to communicate with them instead of making them try to speak. According to Warber A. (n.d) “children with autism respond more to hand motions than a person’s face” which is understandable if they have lack of communication and interaction with others.

Correspondingly, during the class observation which was carried out at the school, the researchers could realize that there are no many students with special brain condition or abnormalities. There are only 5 cases where different long life conditions are presented. 2 of these cases are autistic children.
Integrating Autistic students into a classroom is not that easy. Russo and Koegel (1977). Two experts in the study of the autism complexity and the different ways of learning made a research on three prestigious universities in the U.S. As a result, they showed that autistic children need a therapist when including them into a classroom. During the investigation they applied a treatment where the child’s appropriate verbal and social behavior increased with a therapist companion, letting behind the autistic behavior of impairment. Also they proved that the teachers need to be trained with behavioral techniques to maintain the child’s appropriate behavior in school throughout elementary education. According to Rudy (2016) a new strategy called ABA (applied behavior analysis) is the process of understanding the behavior from each children and implement intervention in order to extinguish negative behaviors in classes and in daily life.

Throughout the investigation that has been done, researchers could identify a remarkable aspect that can be improved which is the lack of a therapist or assistance in the classroom specially trained to deal with these specific conditions such as autism. As the principal of saint Mary school stated, they have just one assistant for the kid that is in first grade but the other autistic child who is in second grade need to have an intervention with behavior. This could be such a great help to the students having a positive effect in the learning process experience in motivation and concentration.

This research determined the importance of integrating autistic children in a society starting by giving them the education they deserve. Principal (principal survey part II question 1) and the teachers of the kids (Teachers survey B question 1) were asked about the importance of teaching English to autistic kids. The answers were strongly common when they responded that these kids cannot be limited because of this brain abnormality. They remarked the fact that these kids are able to learn a foreign language and it is important to give them the same opportunities as the other children. By teaching them a foreign language (English) it brings them a chance to be part of a professional world with no exclusion, therefore, a brilliant future.
According to Kremer (2005) to expose children with autism to a bilingual environment can be followed by different steps. First, constantly be in touch with the foreign language, as well as integrate them in conversation and last, developing social skills sharing experiences with others. Grow up in a friendly environment and give them support from parents who are the first source of love and imitation they have, also by teacher, classmates, relatives etc.

The findings explained below merely agreed with the theory of Kremer (2005) that refers in giving the opportunity to learn English is not a questionable fact. On this research this investigator stated that the autistic child was able to achieve a high a performance in English with the help of his parents and brother. However, they used to attend sessions with a therapist who instructed them on how to involve this child in the familiar activities. At the beginning it was difficult due to the different struggles they had, but at the end he became a successful learner thanks to the recommendations and procedures they were advised to follow, and thanks to the opportunity and faith this child’s family provided him with.

It is necessary to remark on the fact that, these children may have many difficulties and struggles when it comes to learn a new language or any other subject matter. As it has been stated autism is a brain abnormality which may cause a child to have different mechanisms or patterns to follow when being at school, socializing, or performing different actions such as singing, drawing, dancing, etc. most of these children have severe difficulties to pay close attention to people, and in the educational area as well. One of the characteristics of autism is that, people who live with this brain condition tend to behave in different ways, get distracted very easily, they may behave in a really aggressive way, be too emotional or even they can be extremely serious. All of these factors may interfere with their learning process experience.

One of the main questions which disclosed really useful information to the researchers was made to the principal. The question was merely related to one of
the characteristics of autism and how was this interfering with the children’s learning process experience. (see survey to the principal part II question 7) the principal was asked to answer how social impairment was affecting these children’s learning experiences. She stated that social impairment is a difficult struggle which needs to be treated in a really close way, in this case the child needs to be encouraged, monitored, and supported by someone who is able to provide the necessary attention to these difficulties, and help the child to overcome such struggles, she also remarked on the fact that the child needs someone as companion in the class, to encourage, correct and provide effective and proper feedback in case that the child makes a mistake to avoid having a negative repetitive behavior.

It is necessary to have someone monitoring and correcting the child in the best way possible. As Firth (1999) mentioned this action may bring effective social interaction in the classroom, but must be followed correctly step by step so that the child can overcome shyness and feel himself able to perform any task, to do by his own end homework, socialize with his peers, gain self-confidence, etc.

To conclude, the findings the researchers encounter were very specific and straight to the point when answering. The interviews and the class observation permitted to achieve the main objective that was to determine the different strategies teachers implement in this school to teach English at a basic level to autistic kids. The surveys could support the information that was needed and matched with the theories researchers had found during this process.
X. Recommendations

The research which was carried out at the Saint Mary School was made with the specific objective of finding strategies implemented used by teachers to teach English a basic level to autistic children. The elements which were used for the researchers to have the necessary information were the following: interviews to the principal, the psychologist and one teacher as well as, class observation.

The findings of this research reveal areas of improvement which really need to be attended so that the personnel of the school can offer a better quality education system regarding on how to teach English to these children. In the interviews which were made to the personnel of the school, they said they do not receive any special training about how to deal with different behaviors there might be presented.

As it has been stated in this research, autism is a brain abnormality which may present different behaviors and may interfere with the learning process experience of the child. These behaviors may include anxiety, depression, shyness, etc. children who have such condition may even behave in a really aggressive way, since aggression is one of the characteristics of this disorder.

One of the recommendations we have for this school is that, management personnel need to know what to do in case of special intervention is needed. If a child behaves in a really aggressive way, they have to be able to take control of the situation, or if the child feels depressed, or anxious the teacher or tutor will have to know what to do to overcome such barrier. It is really important to acknowledge the complexity of this abnormality and how different negative behaviors which block learning process may interfere. Therefore, it is important to take into consideration that for a higher quality education a specialized training for teachers is required, and needed.
The second area of improvement, where we have a recommendation as well, is the lack of a therapist specialized on how to deal with different brain abnormalities, in this case, autism. The school needs someone who supports mentally and emotionally the children. The principal said they do not have a therapist or a psychologist specially trained for the children to be assisted by, they only have one psychologist, but unfortunately she is not specialized in this area. It is extremely important that they have a therapist specialized in this particular area, autism is one of the most complex brain disorders there may exist since different combinations of behaviors, emotions, mechanisms of learning, and weaknesses are included. Children need to be listened, they need to feel they are understood, they really need someone who knows how they feel. Kremer (2005) stated that “having a therapist specially assigned on how to deal with this brain disorder is needed to mentally overcome the multiple struggles this brain abnormality brings.”

The school can definitely improve their educational system with help of an expert trained in the psychological area, since a good mental health is essential to overcome struggles, weaknesses negative behaviors, as well as, this may improve the way the child learns and behave.

The last aspect of improvement we could observe is the lack of an assistant at the classroom. In the school, only one of the kids with autism have special companion during the lessons. There are two cases of autism, but only one of them is receiving this high-required attention. The child who is in first grade has an assistant who is supporting and helping him to draw, paint, do some activities, basically guiding him through the class.

On the other hand, the other child who is in second grade does not have a specialized companion in the classroom. He only receives the lesson with the teacher and the other classmates, but there is not a monitor there with him who helps and supports him, who guides him on how to do specific tasks, homework, someone who provides proper feedback when necessary.

Our recommendation for the school is to pay closer attention to both children and their needs, the two of them need this support and comprehension as well as
getting proper and correct feedback. We think having an assistant in the classroom is extremely required so that the parents of these children as well as the personnel of the school can see the good and positive results on the performance and understanding these children may develop.

If the school is doing such awesome job educating and helping special children without having an assistant in the classroom, a specialized therapist, and a specialized training on how to deal with this disorder, we cannot imagine how incredible the education they provide would be if they decide to overcome these barriers, if the school is prestigious will be even more prestigious having these improvements which really need to be taken into account, in this way inclusive education will be seriously supported by the services the school may provide, and what it really matters, children will be able to learn in a higher level with higher expectations.
XI. Conclusion

The importance of teaching English at a basic level to autistic children has gained strength since the increase of autistic people in Nicaragua. The need this people have to be heard and taken into account has pushed schools to adopt an inclusive education. An education system that restates the rights and the humanity everyone deserves. Nowadays, there are not many schools that support inclusive education and since the English language has reached a level highly required in the professional field, the opportunity to teach English to children with autism has emerged with great force. Saint Mary school is one of the few schools that provides bilingual and inclusive education.

The main objectives of the research were to determine strategies to teach English at a basic level to autistic kids in this school. Identifying the methodologies and analyzing the resources they are using that benefit autistic children in the English learning process. In order to achieve the objectives, researchers followed important aspects such as: learn about what is autism and the possible causes of the disease, analyze the theories that support the idea of teaching them in a normal way and help them when intervention is needed and some research field in the school. Part of the research was to interview the principal and the teachers who are part of this important job.

During the process researchers found similar answers to the questions they had, many strategies are being used to teach autistic children. They work with the different capacity and ability of each kid. They count on a psychologist but unlike the therapist is in charge of preparing a special intervention to the problem presented. Many theories match in perfect ways to the way they are teaching those kids but they need to be well acquainted to this brain disorder and present some kind of plan to develop in particular cases.
The goals were actually achieved, providing more knowledge on how to teach English to children with autism. Defining that there are many strategies to teach them, which, vary and they are used depending on the severity of the disorder the children present. Teaching English to autistic children is not easy, but is definitely a challenge private or public institutions must take.

**Strategies teachers apply at the St. Mary School**

- ✓ ABA applied behavior analysis (taking control over student’s actions)
- ✓ Role-play/ modeling (teaching throughout mimics and movement)
- ✓ Less is more (keeping instructions clear and simple)
- ✓ Being supportive (feeling empathy for the student)
- ✓ Social communication (using visuals to assist the child, using a variety of stimuli in lessons (using materials when possible.)
- ✓ Self-management (avoid anxiety through specific instructions)
xii. Appendix
GUIA DE OBSERVACION DE ESTRATEGIAS Y METODOLOGIAS DE APRENDIZAJE UTILIZADOS POR LOS PROFESORES Y ASISTENTES

Con el propósito de identificar las estrategias y las metodologías utilizadas por los profesores al momento de las clases, se ha diseñado la siguiente guía de observación, la cual será útil para identificar las estrategias más efectivas para enseñar inglés a los niños con autismo en este colegio.

Número de estudiantes __________

Profesor con asistente: si  no

Nivel de espectro autista identificado en el niño o niña: (pida información al maestro)

A. Marque con una x la respuesta (se admite más de una respuesta):

1. Las clases impartidas son totalmente en Inglés

   Si  No

1.2. De ser negativa su respuesta, identifique cuáles son las clases que se imparten en el idioma Inglés:

3. Contenidos de la clase:

   Colores______ animales______ Números ____ Comidas ____ Personas ____ Otros: (identifíquelos)

B. Responda las siguientes preguntas:

   1. ¿Cree usted importante la enseñanza de Inglés a los niños con autismo? ¿Por qué?
2. La maestra repite la lección hasta obtener una respuesta positiva de parte del estudiante con autismo?

3. ¿Se aplica el método de imitación? El cual consiste en pedir al niño repita lo que la profesora está haciendo.

4. ¿La maestra da un trato especial al niño con autismo o los trata de manera igual a todos?

5. ¿La asistente permanece toda la clase con el niño o niña autista?

6. ¿Las asistentes reconocen el esfuerzo y desempeño de los estudiantes cuando ellos realizan efectivamente lo solicitado?

7. ¿De qué manera la asistente o profesora corrige al estudiante si este se equivoca con la respuesta solicitada?

8. ¿De qué manera la asistente o profesora corrige al estudiante en el momento en que este tiene actitudes negativas tales como la distracción, golpear o tirar objetos? Identifique la actitud negativa del estudiante.
GUIA DE OBSERVACION

CONDICIONES DE AULA Y MATERIALES DIDACTICOS.

La presente guía de observación será llenada con el propósito de entender el entorno de aprendizaje del estudiante y las distracciones que ellos puedan tener en algún momento de su día escolar.

N. de Alumnos: ___________

Personas adultas presentes en el aula:

a. Un maestro y un asistente             b. Un maestro

Horas recibidas de clases:

a. 6 hrs y dos pausas de 0:15 minutos   b. 5 Horas y una pausa de 0.30 minutos

C. otro: especifique________________________

Marca con un check la respuesta que se observe:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Uso de la estrategia de imitacion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grabaciones de voz</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pattern preference (juegos y ejercicios repetitivos)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self management (variety of stimuli)</td>
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<td>Representaciones con las manos</td>
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**Objetos que pueden servir de distracción para el niño o niña autista:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abanicos de techo que dan vueltas</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Personas constantemente pasando por el lugar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Posters cubriendo las paredes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Olores externos como la cafetería</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diseños de patrones en el suelo o en las paredes</td>
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**Materiales didácticos utilizados por las maestras/maestros:**

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<td>Plastilinas</td>
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<td>Bloques de construcción</td>
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<td>Fichas de dibujos</td>
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<td>Libros de cuentos</td>
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<td>Otros: especifique</td>
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Otras Estrategias Observadas:

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Estimada Directora Académica del colegio St Mary. Con el Objetivo de profundizar un poco en esta investigación se quiere conocer un poco sobre su experiencia con los niños autistas con los que cuenta su prestigioso centro de estudios. Estamos seguros de que los resultados arrojados por la investigación serán de beneficio tanto para las estudiantes como para su centro. De antemano muchas gracias por su valiosa colaboración.

Nombre de la Directora:

Profesión:

Número de estudiantes en preescolar:

Cantidad de niños con autismo:

1. Marca con una X la categoría que considere:
   1. ¿Qué tanto conoce sobre el autismo?
      Mucho          Poco         nada

2. Considera el aprendizaje del idioma Ingles como:
   Muy satisfactorio Satisfactorio

3. ¿Qué tan importante considera el acompañamiento psicológico a estos niños?
   Indispensable   Importante   No necesario

4. ¿Qué tan importante considera el acompañamiento de una asistente en el aula de clases?
   Indispensable   Importante   No necesario
II. Conteste las siguientes preguntas:

1. ¿Cuál es la importancia del aprendizaje del idioma ingles para los niños autistas?

2. ¿Implementan algún tipo de estrategia específica para enseñar inglés a los niños autistas? Especifique.

1. ¿Cuentan con capacitaciones sobre el autismo regularmente? Si su respuesta es positiva, clarifique la regularidad de esas capacitaciones.

2. ¿Cuentan con un programa especial que apoye el desarrollo de cada estudiante? Si es así explíquelo.

3. Es recomendable que cada niño pase por un análisis psicológico antes de entrar al colegio, ¿ustedes lo aplican?

4. ¿Los profesores están capacitados para lidiar con situaciones extremas con estos niños? Explique como

5. ¿Cómo afecta la dificultad en la comunicación de un niño autista en su proceso de aprendizaje?
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