

Navigating ADHD: Testing Practical Approaches for Inclusive English Language Instruction

Navegando el TDAH: Evaluación de enfoques Prácticos para la enseñanza inclusiva del idioma inglés

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Abstract:

In the field of education, teachers are constantly improving their teaching skills in order to deliver meaningful and complete lessons. However, the growing awareness of mental health and specific conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) has revealed that many traditional teaching methods, strategies, and materials are becoming insufficient to meet the needs of students with this condition. Therefore, the main purpose of this research was to identify and try out suitable methods, strategies, and techniques to support a student diagnosed with ADHD in demanding areas of English language learning such as writing, use of English, and reading. This study followed a qualitative approach through action research, allowing the observation and analysis of classroom practices in a real educational context. The findings suggest that methods such as Total Physical Response (TPR) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) can be effective when working with students with ADHD, while elements such as strong teacher-student rapport and a gentle, supportive tone for providing feedback and praise were found to be essential for successful learning outcomes.

Keywords:

ADHD, methods, approaches, techniques, strategies, ESL

Resumen:

En el campo de la educación, los docentes se encuentran en constante mejora de sus habilidades pedagógicas con el fin de ofrecer clases significativas y completas. Sin embargo, la creciente concientización sobre la salud mental y condiciones específicas como el Trastorno por Déficit de Atención con Hiperactividad (TDAH) ha puesto en evidencia que muchos métodos, estrategias y materiales de enseñanza tradicionales se están volviendo insuficientes para satisfacer las necesidades de los estudiantes con esta condición. Por lo tanto, el objetivo principal de esta investigación fue identificar y poner en práctica métodos, estrategias y técnicas adecuadas para apoyar a un estudiante diagnosticado con TDAH en áreas demandantes del aprendizaje del idioma inglés, tales como la escritura, el uso del inglés y la lectura. Este estudio siguió un enfoque cualitativo a través de la investigación-acción, permitiendo la observación y el análisis de las prácticas de aula en un contexto educativo real. Los hallazgos sugieren que métodos como la Respuesta Física Total (Total Physical Response, TPR) y la Enseñanza de Lenguas Basada en Tareas (Task-Based Language Teaching, TBLT) pueden ser efectivos al trabajar con estudiantes con TDAH. Asimismo, se encontró que elementos como una relación sólida entre docente y estudiante, un tono amable y de apoyo al brindar retroalimentación y reconocer el esfuerzo, son esenciales para lograr resultados de aprendizaje exitosos.

Palabras Clave:

TDAH, métodos, enfoques, técnicas, estrategias, inglés como lengua extranjera

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Fecha de recepción: 13/01/2026, Fecha de aceptación: 13/03/2026, Fecha de publicación: 05/05/2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29057/lc.v7i14.16896>



1. Introduction

In the education field teaching methods and approaches are never static; for the teachers and researchers are constantly improving the quality of teaching and, consequently, of education itself. In recent years, diversity (emphasis on learning differences) has emerged as a pressing topic in the Mexican education system for teachers to study in depth.

Within this broad field of learning differences, ADHD has become increasingly relevant. Being a student with ADHD and not having guidance and adapted classes at school make the learning process feel almost impossible. Mahr (as cited in Ivask, 2015, p.11) explains the experience of being a student with ADHD as the following:

Imagine living in a fast-moving kaleidoscope, where sounds, images and thoughts are constantly shifting, feeling easily bored, yet helpless to keep your mind on tasks you need to complete. Distracted by unimportant sights and sounds, your mind drives you from one thought or activity to the next. Perhaps you are so wrapped up in a collage of thoughts and images that you don't notice when someone speaks to you.

According to Turketi (2010), there has been a misconception about students diagnosed with this condition, often being referred to as the "lazy students" or "trouble makers" in the classroom. These beliefs often come from a lack of necessary preparation and knowledge from the teachers. If combined with programs and classes that are not open to adaptations, these conditions will inevitably lead learners to a poor performance and frustration, resulting in a failed subject most times (Turketi, 2010); emphasizing the gap between the needs of students with ADHD (on a cognitive level) and the demands of a traditional EFL classroom.

Based on my experience as both a student and now a teacher with different English groups, learners with ADHD are every time more present among groups, and most of the time teachers are not prepared to address their needs. That is why, through qualitative action research, I designed and implemented activities that met the needs of a student diagnosed with ADHD in my group, during 12 weeks –10 classes– in a course that I taught on Saturdays. This study aims to investigate if the methods, strategies, techniques, and approaches chosen are beneficial for the student and can be used in further classes or not. I also expected to see an improvement in his learning experience and establish a suitable pace to work and classroom environment for him and the rest of the group equally.

The teaching methods used were chosen after reviewing previous studies that have demonstrated positive results with ADHD students. I implemented them in my ten English

classes while monitoring and documenting the progress of my student –hereafter referred to as Charly–. Therefore, this study aims to answer the following research question: How does an EFL student diagnosed with ADHD respond in terms of learning outcomes and engagement to different instructional practices used during writing, Use of English, and reading tasks?

The relevance of this study focuses on three different areas: Promoting Inclusivity (by understanding and addressing the needs of a neurodivergent student). Professional Development for Educators (by providing some suggestions of different methods, approaches, strategies and techniques to work with a neurodivergent student. Guiding educators who may lack formal training or experience in this area, and consequently, raising awareness on the importance of supporting the diverse needs of students). And finally, contributing to the field of Education, I hope this research is beneficial in the ongoing conversation about inclusive teaching practices, providing practical guidance for educators facing similar challenges.

2. Literature Review

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (as cited in Raggi & Chronis, 2006), ADHD is a chronic neurodevelopmental disorder, where a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with functioning or development are very evident. In the context of an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, these characteristics are not only relevant because learners require sustained attention for long periods of time, but also because the context demands: processing input in real time and active participation in communicative tasks. Raggi and Chronis (2006) state that the symptoms of this condition interfere directly with academic performance, especially when tasks require a long attention span and interaction with peers; which explains why activities related with listening comprehension and or speaking skills are often more challenging. Students are required to follow multi-step instructions while interacting with peers who sustain conversations more easily. Simultaneously, they must process new information and maintain focus. Similarly, Ivask (2015) says that students with ADHD struggle equally with receptive skills such as reading, and productive skills like speaking, highlighting the elevated demand these skills require at a cognitive level.

Although ADHD turns tasks into greater challenges for diagnosed students, it cannot be solely seen as a negative characteristic. In their study, Turketi (2010), states that ADHD also boosts strengths like creativity and high energy, which are highly valued in the classroom. For instance, a student with high levels of energy and creativity can promote engagement in more dynamic activities. This new perspective emphasizes the need for adopting pedagogical

strategies that perceive ADHD as more than just a deficit, by not only addressing the challenges held within, but also boosting the students' strengths to foster meaningful participation and inclusion in the EFL classroom.

Since ADHD not only impacts the individual learning of the diagnosed student, but also the learning environment itself (the work pace of the group, the perception and beliefs towards ADHD and their peers diagnosed with it) inclusion and the understanding of English as a Foreign Language classroom become crucial. According to UNESCO (2017), inclusion is defined as "a process that helps to overcome barriers limiting the presence, participation and achievement of learners." Furthermore, UNESCO (n.d.), states that the role of inclusion in the classroom is to, first, identify the barriers that prevent everyone from learning, and secondly, remove those barriers from curricula to pedagogy and teaching. In order to carry out an effective class for a student diagnosed with ADHD, it is essential to understand the environment where he studies and the subject he learns. This perspective then turns out very relevant for this study. This is because it perceives inclusion as a transformation of classroom practices.

Inclusion

The International TEFL and TESOL website (2025) define an English or EFL classroom as an academic environment located in a non-English-speaking country, where a group of learners study English as an additional language. It is important to note that students almost never have other contexts (beyond the school setting) where they can practice the language. Therefore, the main goal of an EFL classroom is to provide a space where students are helped to learn, understand, and eventually use the different skills of the language, including receptive skills (listening and reading comprehension) and productive skills (speaking and writing). The limitations of an EFL makes practice even more crucial. When a learner does not speak or practice at home, the classroom is an opportunity for meaningful language exposure

Based on these central concepts, a student diagnosed with ADHD who studies in an EFL classroom cannot be limited to solutions such as individual attention –an individual teacher– or private classes treating them as isolated cases and preventing them from interacting with others. Instead, this research focused on implementing methods, approaches, strategies, and techniques that promote interaction, and participation among the group. In order to identify the most suitable ones to help the student diagnosed with ADHD to improve his individual progress in the different English skills, and foster inclusion in the classroom.

General Education Research versus English Language Classroom Research

When talking about the experts reviewed for choosing the different strategies, techniques, methods and approaches for this project, it is important to highlight that while some authors conducted their research in general education contexts, others worked specifically within the EFL classroom. Although these perspectives may differ from each other, both were taken and combined to work efficiently in this project.

Research done in general education contexts, such as Reid (1999), Raggi and Chronis (2006), Vu and Nguyen (2020), and Katsarou et al. (2024) helps by offering an understanding of ADHD as a whole condition. These studies give a general description of behavioral and cognitive characteristics of the students that face in everyday classes regarding emotions, self-regulation, and attention. While it is important to focus on tools that work specifically on the different skills of the English language, it is also essential to count on a solid base to appropriately address students' needs regardless of the subject. Such tools can be easily identified in these general education studies. On the other hand, research carried out in EFL contexts—such as Turketi (2010), Kurbonova and Umarova (2024), Tello and Argudo (2024), and Ivask (2015)—focuses on what can be done to fulfill the specific goals and demands of an EFL class. These authors offer a wide range of suggestions on methods, approaches, techniques, and strategies, such as the Total Physical Response method and feedback techniques (which will be addressed later in this section), that help to work on the different receptive and productive skills of English.

Bringing both perspectives together was necessary for this research to ensure that the class was designed not only with tools reported to help maintain a student with ADHD engaged, but also with a complete understanding of the student's overall needs before focusing on the subject itself. As will be mentioned later in this document, the work of improving classes for a student diagnosed with ADHD goes further than dividing a long task into manageable chunks or turning activities into something more interactive or dynamic. I now turn to discuss two teaching methods that have proved to be effective with ADHD students.

2.1. Total Physical Response Method:

Total Physical Response (TPR) has been used extensively in English classrooms; it creates a stress-free environment for learning and keeps students engaged for more time. TPR makes the learning process easier and more engaging, with activities that are more practical than theoretical, allow movement, interaction and, consequently, meaningful learning.

In their study, Reid (1999) explains that one of the main

characteristics of ADHD is hyperactivity. Students with this condition need constant movement and ways to keep active. That is why, it was found that giving activities with constant movement on most English skills is highly suggested. This way, students can channel excess energy and the teacher minimizes potential disruptions during the class. While the results from Reid (1999) are relevant for this study, they were conducted in a normal classroom; this is the main difference with the study from Ivask (2015), who confirms these tasks to be more effective for ADHD in the EFL classroom. This is mainly because they have to do with a variety of games or and physical movement. Aligning with this idea, Turketi (2010) makes a correlation between movement and learning styles. It was found that most students with ADHD are good kinesthetic learners and moving is crucial for their learning process. It is established that TPR can help to reduce stress, lower the affective filter and improve interactive skills. Additionally, the natural hyperactivity of the students can be used perfectly for tasks that involve acting, mimicking and making faces while learning English as a Foreign Language.

Even though TPR seems to be a very good method for students with ADHD, Kurbonova and Umarova (2024) made an important note on its use: TPR should not be overused in the EFL classroom since students can get bored easily. Instead, TPR is suggested as a method to accompany others –for instance using it for warm up activities–. As a result, movement and games are still present in the lesson, for specific activities. This ensures students will not get used or bored of it soon. For these reasons, TPR was used in my classes sporadically for skills such as grammar and use of English as a way to make lessons the most interesting possible for Charly.

2.2. Task Based Learning Teaching Method

As explained earlier, students with ADHD struggle to maintain focus in a lesson. That is why this is a crucial issue to attend in order to have a successful class. Sometimes, tasks related to productive skills result more difficult for students with ADHD due to their length and complexity. That is why Kurbonova and Umarova (2024) agree with Ivask (2015) on the idea of using tasks that involve speaking, videos and matching exercises for EFL classrooms. This agreement is justified by the idea of learning by experiencing, which keeps the students interested in working towards a specific goal.

This idea was amplified with the study from Turketi (2010), who dove deeper in the use of Task Based Learning Teaching –hereafter referred to as TBLT–. They explained that videos and activities that foster real communication for a non-linguistic task, can help foster language acquisition. By prioritizing the productive skills (writing and speaking), everything learned from activities that involve receptive skills (reading and listening, mainly) helps to check and monitor the speech accuracy rather than supporting its immediate production. This structure not only makes

activities more manageable, but also helps to reduce the cognitive “overload” that students with ADHD tend to feel with extensive tasks.

Charly has presented issues with longer tasks in the past, finding them overwhelming and seeing himself as incapable of completing them. This is why breaking long tasks into manageable chunks through TBLT was to be tested as soon as possible in my classes.

2.3. Verbal Reinforcement, Praising and Rewards Techniques

Students with ADHD are often found with little to no self-confidence. They see their level as insufficient to complete a task or “understand a topic”. For this reason, verbal reinforcement, praising and rewards are important techniques to use with students with ADHD (Turketi, 2010). This idea is supported by the study from Tello and Argudo (2024), which suggests that verbal reinforcement must be done every time a student performs an activity or behaves appropriately. This is because students often struggle to behave themselves during a lesson. Following a similar path, Vu & Nguyen, (2020) highlight the importance of reinforcing the self-esteem of students, making them feel a sense of achievement and even setting them as role models. Expanding this idea of a sense of achievement, Vu, and Nguyen, (2020) suggest not only stopping verbal affirmations and reinforcement, but accompanying it with little tangible rewards like a sticker or a candy. These rewards can also be later exchanged for a short break, for example.

This idea is also supported by Reid (1999), who encourages teachers to grant little rewards when students complete a task on time or, in terms of behavior, when they behave well during the lesson. Kurbonova and Umarova (2024) affirm that when students try harder, rewards become more meaningful and they will be more likely to show bigger enthusiasm when being given another task.

Finally, in order to expand this idea even further, Turketi, (2010) says that to acknowledge the interests and abilities of the students is also helpful and important. This can fill them with pedagogical and psychological support if the teacher is also understanding, patient and unhurried to encourage their self-confidence. All these ideas combined are not only helpful for improving behavior, but also motivating the students and helping to regulate their emotions (this will be explained in depth in further sections).

2.4. Peer Tutoring Approach

Katsarou, et al. (2024) state that students with ADHD often present difficulties to plan, organize and self-regulate when doing a task. In addition, their tendency to be either impulsive and mean students, or –on the opposite– being extremely sensitive to the comments and reactions of people from their surroundings, their abilities for social interaction –like maintaining eye contact or understanding

social cues— are not trained enough.

Because of these characteristics, peer working is highly suggested with ADHD students. It is important to highlight that this peer work can be also referred to as a “buddy system” (Vu, & Nguyen, 2020). This “buddy system” requires the teacher to pair up a student with ADHD with a “more proficient or mature student” so he/she can help the teacher with instructing and answering questions.

In the study conducted by Raggi and Chronis (2006) that talks about academic impairment evident in students with ADHD (and the different strategies to address it properly) a similar idea can be found. This study states that getting this help from what they call a “normal student” with a student with ADHD can fill the need of individualized attention, allowing—in addition—the students to work at their own pace and have a moment to interact with each other.

2.5. Intervention Strategies

According to the current diagnostic and statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in its 2000 version from the American Psychiatric Health Association (as cited in Raggi & Chronis, 2006), inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity are the main causes of academic impairment in children and adolescents with ADHD. That is why interventions focused on both behavior and academic performance are important. According to Reid (1999) a teacher should only interfere when specific problems appear, constantly evaluating the effectiveness of reinforcers and punishments (which are only applied when reinforcers do not work). Expanding this idea, Tello and Argudo (2024) claim that behavioral interventions involve non-verbal techniques such as: select actions that can be tolerated and prohibit distractions (such as cell phones and toys) to help foster concentration.

While behavioral interventions are important, academic performance is vital too. This is why Raggi and Chronis, (2006) expand the interventions alongside with Katsarou, et al. (2024), explaining that extra help is needed here. Some students with ADHD have different areas of improvement when it comes to productive tasks (such as oral and written communication). For instance, most of them have poor handwriting and spelling, which is why improving fine motor skills and breaking tasks into small and manageable steps is recommended.

The importance of interventions has been established above. However, the teacher should not be the only one checking on the progress that a student makes. Because of this, Vu, and Nguyen (2020) explain that fulfilling the needs of what they refer to as “special students” is only reached through cooperation. For this cooperation, it is important to count with the incorporation of parents, experts, teachers and school (P.E.T.S.) to interfere.

2.6. Feedback Techniques

Working with students with ADHD is a work of trial and error to find and adapt methods and approaches that best fill

their needs. However, there are some techniques that cannot be missing in any class. Ivask, (2015) identifies feedback as “the only universal effective tool”. This is based on the perception of feedback as a tool to address both behavior and classwork aspects, and give suggestions for improvement. It may also include any necessary reminders for keeping both students and parents informed. Additional to this perspective, Reid (1999) defends the importance of constant feedback, related to behavior and task completion—but mostly behavior—. However, he also defends that feedback is not a permanent, static technique that students will always rely on. This is because its main goal is for students to gradually become responsible for evaluating and regulating their own behaviour without a third party (in this case, the teacher). Finally, Tello and Argudo, (2024) dove deeper on the importance of feedback related to behaviour. They explain the importance of putting it into practice in front of the teacher, but also after classes and out of the school environment. In this moment, the support and presence of parents and friends become vital. Their job is to help put into practice what has been reinforced through feedback as much as possible, all this in order to build up consistency and form these changes into habits (without further reminders or help from the teacher).

Given the importance of feedback for both behavioral and academic improvement, its importance, within the goal of creating autonomy and long-term habits on the student, its importance for this study is undeniable, being the only technique to use on every lesson despite the methods or approaches that accompany it.

2.7. Educational accommodations considerations

Despite having different methods and tools to address the needs of a student with ADHD, there are many other important considerations to take. Mahr (as cited in Ivask, 2015) explains that the minds of students with ADHD are constantly running with different images and thoughts. Little stimuli that seem unimportant for others—like noise or many bright colors— can lead them to a significant distraction from the tasks assigned. Even the instructions being said at the moment can pass unnoticed for them when their mind is elsewhere due to external factors they cannot control. This is why changes towards possible distractors are necessary, however, they must be done based on the preferences and needs of the student.

These changes are known as the Educational Accommodations and they can go from how a teacher gives instructions, to seating arrangements.

Kurbonova and Umarova (2024) explain that the way students with ADHD perceive the world is very peculiar: their sensory receptors get a lot of information every second, struggling to focus solely on what the teachers say. For this reason, they often struggle with long explanations that do not go straight to the main idea. The biggest

suggestion given here is keeping instructions short and presenting contents in an engaging way.

Agreeing with the necessity for changes established above, Reid, (1999) contributes by suggesting to avoid noisy classrooms, keeping 3-5 short rules and constantly repeating them with students to foster habit formation. Finally, they suggest sitting the student with ADHD near the teacher, preferably surrounded by “role model” students to ensure good behavior along the class. Despite this suggestion seeming very strict (as it ensures the student remains sitting), it can be improved with the idea from Vu and Nguyen, (2020) who explain that students with ADHD need to move from time to time. For this reason, assigning them roles to help around the classroom can keep them in movement in a controlled way. If possible, teachers can also allow chewing gum or fidget toys.

Educational Accommodations not only have to do with classroom management or instructions, but also with the work done outside the classroom. For this reason, Tello and Argudo, (2024) contribute by suggesting short interactions with students to talk about topics of their interests. The information obtained from these talks can be further used in class. For instance, by setting examples with those interests. This small addition can help the student keep engaged and make the knowledge easier to remember.

Another important consideration to have in the classroom has to do with negative emotions the learner may experience. Students with ADHD are characterized by an elevated affective filter. This means that, as stated by Vu and Nguyen, (2020), they tend to be vulnerable and susceptible towards problematic traits in the classroom. For this reason, creating the perfect space for any learner, especially those with ADHD is highly requested. This can be achieved by solving interpersonal conflicts and maintaining a stress-free environment. Despite the elevated affective filter being a need to address, not everything surrounding hypersensitivity is mandatory negative. The authors also explain that these students can identify non-verbal signals and changes such as intonation, body movements and even eye movement! This is why their final suggestion is to use that sensitivity to avoid correcting misbehavior verbally. Little signs can be established, representing going back to the seat, opening up a book or notebook, or even respecting turns to speak. All these signs can help the teacher to prevent disrupting the class pace with constant verbal interventions in an interesting and less stressful way.

While all the literature reviewed in this chapter establishes methods, techniques, approaches and, little studies were found addressing the EFL classroom. For this reason, it is important to demonstrate their efficacy for this specific case with Charly: a student diagnosed with both ADHD and

depression (which will become more relevant in further sections of this study).

3. Methodology

As previously stated, this study aims to adapt and apply different methods and approaches in order to promote the inclusion and enhance the learning experience of a student with ADHD in an English course, establishing a suitable pace of work and classroom environment for him and the rest of the group. This is done in order to identify the most effective ways to teach and maintain the good behaviors of my student with ADHD and ensure he gets the most knowledge possible of future sessions, without disrupting the overall classroom pace to answer the following research question: “What are the most suitable methods and approaches to work with a student diagnosed with ADHD?”

3.1 Worldview, Approach, Design

A constructivist worldview –which, as mentioned by Creswell & Creswell (2018), is the one that deals with the understanding of the world wanted by every person individually, this understanding leads people to create subjective meanings and researchers to look for the complexity of views– was adopted. A qualitative approach was used to carry out an action research design which as stated by Creswell & Creswell (2018), it is characterized by its cyclical process of problem identification, planning, action, observation, reflection, and replanning, all in order to improve practices in a specific context –or addressing specific issues as well–.

This project was planned to last 12 weeks –this is because each module of the course takes five weeks and classes take place on Saturdays. However, one of those days has to be dedicated to give an exam, so new topics are not taught and no methodologies can be applied. For this reason, two classes from an extra module were used–. In each class a new topic was taught and a different method was tested. During the first five classes, the strengths and weaknesses of those methods were tested and for the last five classes, the best ones were combined. The effectiveness of each method was identified through journal entries, in which the reaction of the student towards the method was observed; if those observations were positive in terms of how he behaved and participated through the different moments of the class, then the method was considered to be repeated in further sessions.

3.2 Setting

This study was conducted in a Mexican University in the state of Hidalgo that offers English courses on Saturdays to all ages. The reason to develop the research in this specific place is because I am currently working with a group in this school and it is the only place where I can see

Charly, my main participant. Being a particular course where teachers have the freedom to design the classes according to the pace of the students –as long as a deadline is respected– gave me the chance to apply the different methods depending on what my student and the group in general needed.

3.3 Participants

The study was intended to be conducted with a group of 21 teenagers –whose ages range from 10 to 14 years old– from the “beginners’ group” of the Universidad Tecnológica de Tula Tepeji –hereafter referred to as UTTT– Saturday English course. From this group, the study focused specifically on a student diagnosed with ADHD hereafter referred to as Charly, a 13-year-old student diagnosed with ADHD and depression as a side condition.

This group that usually works at a fast pace and the condition of Charly assures that all techniques addressed not only the needs of this student diagnosed with ADHD but the needs of the complete group. Furthermore, consent was granted by Charly’s guardian and I provided an Information Sheet. As for the rest of the group, they were not informed of the adaptation of the methods, approaches, techniques and strategies used with the group. This was done because revealing such information could have influenced the way in which they reacted to the methods and even generate wrong beliefs or misconceptions towards their classmate, Charly. However, as a way to ensure they were familiarised with the purpose of the project and the procedure established, they were told that classes would be slightly different since I was trying new methodologies I was currently learning in college, all in order to make classes more engaging and meaningful for them.

3.4 Instruments

The instrument used for this research was based on observational data through a journal where entries were done after every class. The criteria followed in each journal entry were focused on the attention span, the task completion (whether it was achieved and if not, to what extent), the behavioral regulation and the interaction with other learners observed on the student. The purpose of these journal entries was to keep track of the observable behaviors rather than only subjective impressions. This way, the analysis of the real responses of the student towards the methods became more structured and ensured more natural and complete results. This instrument contained a set of fourteen questions and criteria to evaluate the efficiency of the methods and approaches applied. The questions for this entry were adapted from the criteria established in the study done by Reid (1999). Although this instrument was used to evaluate the reaction of just one student, it can be applied to a bigger audience if necessary (See Appendix 1). In addition to the class work, small conversations with Charly took place during

breaks in order to know how he felt and some of his likes and dislikes apart from the topics learned in class. This information was later used for giving examples to the class. For instance, when teaching grammar, the sentences written on the board talked about a sport that Charly mentioned to enjoy or, when possible, the grammar structure was used to talk about an activity Charly does or a character from a game or show he and the class can easily identify.

3.5 Data Analysis

By using a qualitative approach, the different reactions Charly presented during these twelve classes were registered through journal entries following the model of action research. On Appendix 2, a table with the observations of each class can be found. This table was organized with the number of the class, the method(s) used and the moment in which they were included in each class, as well as a note of the general reactions of Charly towards them and a space for further considerations to take before implementing the method again in further sessions.

In order to make decisions on whether each method could be modified or reused in the next session, a thematic analysis was done. This thematic analysis followed the next process: to begin with, each journal entry was reviewed in order to identify repetitive patterns across each session registered; the patterns to identify were related to participation, attention and engagement. These observations were then classified into broader categories so as to compare the real effectiveness of each method. The new categories included the reduction of disruptive behavior, the active participation in class and during team or pair work, the increased focus and the task completion. Once the entries were reviewed, the methods that were considered more effective after the review and classification were repeated on further sessions. For instance, if there was less disruptive behavior, if the interaction with his peers increased, or even if the attention was sustained longer.

Additionally, the methods which did not meet the required level were thoroughly evaluated: if there was a way to adapt them to further classes, in a way that met the needs of the student, they were applied again. However, if any method had no evident ways to modify and apply it again, it would have been excluded from future sessions. This last condition was established to ensure that any decision taken was made with the goal of keeping improvement based on the positive patterns of the previous sessions.

4. Findings

Before getting into the findings for each tool applied, it is important to mention how inclusion was reflected and how the EFL context became evident throughout the process. As addressed at the beginning of this article, a student with

ADHD has different needs that must be supported without any form of isolation—neither by giving him the teacher’s full attention and neglecting the rest of the group, nor by assigning a personal teacher who would exclude him from classroom interaction.

English as a Foreign Language requires communication, interaction, and participation. For this reason, the combination of a general education view and an EFL classroom view was highly beneficial. The methods suggested by both perspectives allowed Charly to follow the lessons with less nervousness and, consequently, be more open to interacting with his peers, while his classmates also seemed more eager to include him during teamwork. For the rest of the classroom, the use of funny and interactive activities that required mutual support to achieve a common goal contributed to creating a more supportive environment—even when more demanding tasks, such as writing and speaking, needed to be completed.

All of these general observations (which will be explained in more detail in the following sections) show how the interaction obtained through classroom dynamics fostered inclusion while also allowing the group to meet the specific goals of English as a Foreign Language. I now present the findings for each tool applied in each lesson. These findings are interpreted along with previous research on ADHD and EFL, emphasizing on the interaction, inclusive practices, task design and support to the student regarding self-regulation.

4.1 Methods

4.1.1 Total Physical Response

At the beginning of this study, ADHD was explained as a condition in which symptoms like inattention and hyperactivity are the most evident, which affect the attention span of students in class directly. Going back to the opinion of experts, TPR is seen as a “double sharpened sword”. This is because it comes in very handy for students to free off energy –by combining hands-on activities and games with the necessary skills–. However, its over use can become boring and predictable, losing its effect for keeping engagement –especially with students with ADHD–.

This method was tested during sessions number 1 and 6, and the results show that games not only made knowledge stay in the long term memory –this will be explained in detail with the next method–, but also gave Charly an opportunity to show his creativity and humor to his peers by using movement rather than words –for example, by explaining the activities he could do through mimicry–. These findings help extend the idea given by Turketi (2010) and Ivask (2015) about the importance of movement and interactive activities for students with ADHD.

In class 1, the students were taught how to talk about abilities using the verb “can”. The instruction given was to choose one activity the students can do and keep it secret, make groups of five and take turns to mimic their activities. The team had to guess it and say if they can or cannot do that activity. Here, TPR was used to recall verbs checked on previous classes in a funny way, which required both creativity and movement rather than typical writing tasks. Given his playful and imaginative nature, Charly showed more ease at this activity; this is due to the active interaction with his team. Additionally, their classmates showed no problem including him in teams; he came up with several ideas and even offered help when a classmate struggled figuring out what activity to do or how to represent it clearly. He showed a less stressed demeanor when grammar lessons did not demand to remain silent and sit; this tranquil demeanor was proven in the lack of his mother tongue to communicate during the task, and since he was not asking for someone else to participate before him. The results also reinforce the idea that reducing reliance on immediate verbal production can lower anxiety and increase participation in EFL contexts, as suggested in the literature. However, consistent with Kurbonova and Umarova (2024), the findings also indicate that TPR should be used strategically to maintain its effectiveness over time. So consistent with the theory of Kurbonova and Umarova (2024), TPR is proven effective to work in the English classroom with students with ADHD; the anxiety is lowered when the task demands less immediate verbal production and the participation is increased. However, this method is to be used strategically in order to keep its effectiveness overtime

4.1.2 Task-based learning

When the attention is turned to how a student with ADHD responds to his environment in the classroom, the reaction to different stimuli varies a lot from a student without this condition. If long instructions are set as the stimulus the reaction obtained will be an overwhelmed student whose attention cannot focus on a task that seems never ending and difficult. This is why authors like Kurbonova and Umarova (2024) and Ivask (2015) suggested breaking any long task into more manageable little chunks through TBLT. According to Nunan (2004):

A task is a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language, while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form.

Examples of how this method was applied were found in class 7; Charly had always struggled with writing tasks. However, this new task was broken into simple steps to write a contrast paragraph using “but” and “however”. Students were first asked to do a comparison between a

cellphone and a TV, after which they brainstormed ideas in a Venn diagram. The next task was making sentences comparing both devices based on their functions; these sentences would be used at home to create a complete paragraph. Dividing the process to do the writing into different short tasks, and being this his second writing made Charly feel less overwhelmed. This was proven on how his attention remained on the activity rather than on distractors (as it happened before this study). He needed subtle reminders to keep focused though, as well as guiding questions when feeling confused. However, he was able to hand in his tasks –with 10 extra minutes to complete his sentences–. The greatest observable improvement was the ability to focus on the task; he was not walking around the classroom or talking to his peers to avoid writing. He was also given some bubblegum, which seemed to help ease his hyperactiveness. In the end his sentences needed some grammar and spelling corrections done after some guiding questions. It was demonstrated that the findings align with the studies of Kurbonova and Umarova (2024) and Ivask (2015) who insisted on breaking down a long task into manageable smaller steps, so as to sustain the attention of the student for much longer, avoid feeling overload and hand a more complete result in the end.

By using this method for a writing task, Charly seemed less stressed for corrections given as guiding questions. Additionally, allowing him to chew bubblegum was good to reduce his need of walking around at least for enough time to complete a task. His participation on the warm up showed the previous knowledge indeed reached his long-term memory (as he mentioned several adjectives and examples using the vocabulary learned on previous sessions). These results prove the effectiveness of TBLT for the EFL context as it comes in very handy for tasks that demand the processing of much language content, while also helping to address the great challenge that short sustained attention represents.

4.2 Peer Tutoring Approach

Teaching a student with ADHD does not only imply finding the most suitable methods, approaches, strategies and techniques, it has to do with their feelings towards interaction too. Students with ADHD tend to show either a shy and quiet attitude or a very impulsive, noisy and –sometimes– even mean one, making it difficult for them to socialize and interact in either case. This is why the peer tutoring approach was put into practice. Being paired up with a “more proficient or mature student” as Vu, and Nguyen, (2020) suggested, Charly showed lack of confidence and constant distraction at first, leading conversations towards different interests in common with his classmate or random topics. However, after being helped through guiding questions from the other student, as well as instruction reminders, he seemed more open to work and cooperate. Later on, class 9, this same approach was tested in team work. Students were divided into two

teams at the back of the classroom. On the board there were two headings “Countable” and “Uncountable”. One student from each team ran to write a given object under the correct heading, then, they said a sentence using the object and a correct expression of quantity. If both were correct, their team got a point. The winning team got a 5-minute early break. Giving praising phrases to the students when they got the correct answers served to fuel the motivation of Charly to participate and do his best –he even asked his classmates to double check before participating–. When it was not his turn, he took the chance to discuss the correct answer with his team (although he was asked to be quiet as he answered for others sometimes). These findings align perfectly with the idea proposed by Vu and Nguyen (2020) as they talked about peer support as a tool to increase participation and boost confidence. The progress observed in Charly highlights the importance of a social support mechanism to facilitate the completion of tasks that demand communication and interactions, essential elements for learning a second language.

At this point, dynamic activities have proven to help Charly retain most of the knowledge. This was proven when answering his course book, most of his answers were correct without much help from the teacher or his classmates. In addition, he showed more will to participate. Not only because he wanted to move around and speak, but because he has demonstrated his study habits at home. Seeing Charly getting the right answers and praising comments, made his classmates praise his effort too, making him feel more confident to interact; the constant monitoring ensured the model students were not leaving him aside, and he seemed more confident and comfortable asking for clarification. Proving that, along with good classroom management techniques –which will be discussed later on– this method is effective to work with this student with ADHD.

4.3 Strategies and Techniques

4.3.1 Intervention strategies

When interfering with misbehavior, the usual disciplinary comments or measures are not always suitable for students with ADHD, this is because in many cases, they present extra conditions as well. In this particular case of Charly, it is important to remark that his ADHD is accompanied with depression, making him very sensitive when it comes to direct correction or feedback. Charly takes direct corrections and interventions about misbehavior very badly; in previous classes he called himself “unintelligent” or “bad student”, he made it clear he underestimates himself for not “understanding instructions” –comments that had never been done in the classroom by any other person–. He has reached the point of crying even when the corrections were made using a gentle tone and without more students noticing. Seeing this panorama, the intervention techniques for misbehavior were immediately changed. Instead of direct requests to sit down and

continue working –for example– he was reminded discretely in order for him to obey and take them the best way possible.

These modifications support Reid (1999), who emphasized the importance of addressing behavior interventions with flexibility and the emotional needs of the student in mind. In the classroom, when the behavior did not represent a big disruption to the class, direct interventions were not required; instead, a system of signals was created. This extends the idea of Vu, and Nguyen (2020), who explained that the attention these students pay to non-verbal signals and changes such as intonation, body movements and even eye movement is very impressive. In the classroom signs that meant going back to his seat, opening his book or notebook and waiting to participate were taught. Additionally, standing next to him to call his attention was used as well. This new way of correcting his behavior was effective and even funny since he felt the teacher and he knew some kind of “secret language” that not all the group could understand.

As for academic interventions (corrections), Charly seemed more comfortable when they were treated as guided questions. For example, “remember what happens with the verb when the subject is a girl?” or “when we show contrast what is the correct word, and or but?”. The answers to these questions led him to notice and correct errors, which subsequently opened the door to praise and verbal reinforcement, proving the big importance of adequate ways of interfering with students with ADHD as stated by Tello and Argudo (2024).

4.3.2 Verbal Reinforcement, Praising and Reward Techniques

As it was mentioned above, students with ADHD can be very sensitive and shy when it comes to interacting with others because they lack self-confidence. Which is why verbal reinforcement and praise come in very handy. It is important to acknowledge when a student with ADHD is achieving a goal; this recognition helps them gain the self-confidence they usually lack (Turketi, 2020). This is why meaningful praising phrases were used, for example, when Charly offered to read out loud instructions or short texts. This improvement shown aligns perfectly with the study of Tello and Argudo (2024), in which the importance of building self-confidence is highlighted for the students to become more comfortable in the English classroom. His creativity and willingness to do mimicry came in very handy to set him as an example, increasing his willingness to participate and engage even when the tasks required team or pair work. By recognizing his great job with the group, Charly also showed a sense of achievement which helped his peers to praise him as well with an applause or a positive comment. In the EFL classroom, where communication is a vital key, this becomes relevant for

improving interaction and having a meaningful linguistic development.

In order to reinforce the effort Charly was putting in class, toys were introduced as a motivational element during the lessons. This change proved the effectiveness of the idea from Vu, and Nguyen (2020), about accompanying praise with a little prize like a sticker or a candy. The reward offered in the classroom now included both recognition and the opportunity to play with the toys after completing a task. Looking back to day one, the very shy and quiet Charly that I met has reached a higher level of self-confidence, which is reflected in the change in his attitude and self-esteem. These findings are highly significant for the EFL classroom as they prove verbal reinforcement, praising and rewarding must be applied, when possible, to encourage students to become more confident and eager to speak.

4.4 Pedagogical Implications

In order to work with a student with ADHD, the teachers must make decisions that go beyond designing tasks and complete classes. Having students with ADHD requires addressing needs that go from how to manage a classroom, how to adjust the surroundings of the students, where to sit him till the extent of noise allowed in the room. All these matters that must be modified at a certain point are called educational accommodations.

Some of these accommodations include thinking about the distracting surroundings –mentioned in the “Total physical response method”. For example, based on my observations I noticed that giving short and clear instructions worked when having Charly do an activity.

While subtle changes like allowing creative examples showed his engagement with the class; further adjustments like assigning him a seat near the desk surrounded of “role model students” proved an increased good behavior, and making sure that no distractors like toys, phones or loud noises were present made a difference in the attention paid each lesson.

All these findings enrich the ideas from Ivask (2015), about the adjustments to the classroom environment as an important tool to ensure the effective integration of different methods, approaches and techniques to the class; adjustments related to classroom environment, task design, and instruction delivery are another very important way to address the needs of the learners.

5. Conclusions

During this study, the research question: How does an EFL student diagnosed with ADHD respond in terms of learning outcomes and engagement to different instructional practices used during writing, Use of English, and reading tasks? has been answered. It was demonstrated that not all areas are easy to adapt and to work with the different tools suggested for this type of students. This is why educational accommodations have to be considered to

help my student by fulfilling his particular needs. There may not be a "universal method" to work with students with ADHD, but there is always something that must be modified. Teachers have to remember that no program or activity is completely suitable to work with all students. For example, not all students can do a piece of writing without breaking the whole task into small chunks or modifying its difficulty. No traditional method can work flawlessly in every class. In this research only two methods were tested. Techniques for feedback and verbal reinforcement, praising and rewarding techniques can be considered the most effective and recommended way to work with any student diagnosed with ADHD in this particular case. More days of observation as well as more techniques and methods are suggested to be implemented in further research in order to obtain more robust results. In addition, it is important to consider that despite many methods and techniques having proven to work effectively with Charly, not everything was easy and perfect. This research employed ideas to work in areas such as use of English, speaking and even grammar. However, I personally consider more reading and speaking methods to need to be investigated and tested or investigated to work with all the skills.

Finally, we as teachers know that it is in our hands to make a student get engaged, feel curious, like or if possible, love the English subject. But we can also be responsible for them to dislike or even fear it if our teaching practice is done carelessly, if every error is pointed out without allowing flexibility, scolding and correcting rather than guiding, listening and, most important, supporting them. So, as much as possible, it is important for teachers to keep understanding and tolerant with their students, to be the kind of teacher they would have liked to have when they took the place of their learners that are now in front of them. It is important to teach through love and remember because each and everyone of them learns at their own pace and in different ways, but all of them have teachers as their biggest model and, under the right direction, there will always be students who achieve big goals and show great improvement.

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