The Direct Method in English Language Instruction for Primary School Students in Santarém-PA: An Experience of TESOL Undergraduates

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Abstract

The Direct Method, a pedagogical approach for teaching additional languages through immersion, emphasizes oral interaction and everyday language usage to facilitate language acquisition. This method discourages reliance on translation and minimizes emphasis on grammatical rules. However, a fundamental question arises about the effectiveness of TESOL programmes in non-English dominant countries in equipping prospective teachers to adopt a monolingual approach. This paper explores the results of a case study aimed at understanding the experiences of two TESOL degree candidates from a university in Northern Brazil. They participated in an outreach project employing the Direct Method to teach English to Year 1 students on the outskirts of Santarém-PA. Data, gathered through proficiency assessments, interviews, and video recordings, were analysed using Content Analysis and video analysis principles in qualitative research. The results revealed challenges faced by the participants due to limited pedagogical knowledge but also unveiled adaptive strategies, collaborative work practices, introspection, and an acknowledgment of the importance of integrating elements from students' physical and social contexts into lessons. Despite challenges, the study underscores the beneficial potential and viability of the Direct Method in non-English dominant contexts, advocating for its critical consideration and adaptation within TESOL programmes.

Keywords: Direct Method, case study, communicative approach, English as an additional language, initial teacher education

1. Introduction

1.1 Contextualization of the Problem

The use of the English language as the primary mode of instruction in classrooms situated outside Anglophone countries has been a longstanding focal point of discussion in academic circles (Haque & Akter, 2012; Han, 2023; Manan et al., 2023). A prominent argument against this practice revolves around the belief that learners achieve the best learning outcomes when subjects are taught in their mother tongue (Kirkpatrick, 2014; Rai, 2023; Igarashi, Suryadarma, & Yadav, 2023). Nonetheless, a consensus among experts regarding the effectiveness of English as a medium of instruction (EMI), the prevailing term used to describe this phenomenon, remains elusive (Salama, 2023; Ntombela, 2023; Del Campo, Urquía-Grande, & Pascual-Ezama, 2023).

The authors of this paper acknowledge that the term EMI aptly applies to the use of English for teaching subjects such as mathematics, history, and geography. However, they advocate for the stance that, in English as an Additional Language (EAL) classrooms, English should be introduced as the primary mode of instruction from the outset. Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize that in certain contexts, implementing EAL instruction in this manner poses significant challenges for many educators, primarily due to their limited proficiency and fluency in the target language. This situation is particularly prevalent in Brazil (Almeida Filho, 1992, 2013; British Council, 2015; Hitotuzi, 2020; Hitotuzi, 2021; Silva, 2023).

A survey conducted by the British Council in 2015 regarding the teaching of English in Brazilian state schools

revealed that numerous teachers perceive English as a subject undervalued by students and their respective institutions. This perception is attributed to factors including the limited number of classes (Note 1), substitutions of classes with other school activities such as the June Festival, and other interruptions that disrupt their classroom routines. These issues, among others, collectively constitute what Hitotuzi (2020, p. 56) metaphorically terms the "roots" of an "*unwanted-millennial tree*". According to the author, addressing these challenges requires the active participation of all stakeholders in the educational process. However, given the intricate nature and extensive scope of these issues, solutions can only be attained through protracteds efforts and strategic actions.

In Brazil, the teaching of English is mandatory in state schools only from the second stage of primary education (Year 6 onwards), and the prevailing teaching methodology involves the presentation of rudimentary grammatical rules, illustrated with concise and contextually limited sentences, which are then practised through repetition and substitution exercises (Santos, 2011). However, this teaching approach faces growing obsolescence with the implementation of the National Common Core Curriculum (BNCC) (Documento Curricular do Estado do Pará, 2019; Seduc-PA, 2023), which advocates a distinct approach to English language instruction compared to what has been traditionally practised in some schools. This transition entails a shift away from an excessive focus on the written form of the language (British Council, 2017; Silva, 2023).

The most significant innovation proposed by the BNCC for English language education is the heightened emphasis on developing students' oral/aural skills in the target language. This framework advocates for a more communicative approach in the EAL classroom, characterized by language practices requiring oral use of the English language, centring on comprehension and oral production. These practices are to be conducted through negotiation in the construction of shared meanings among "interlocutors and/or participants, with or without face-to-face interaction" (Brasil, 2018, p. 243).

However, this issue is inherently intricate. On the one hand, there is an official document advocating a more substantial focus on the development of oral/aural skills. On the other hand, a considerable number of teachers are not adequately prepared to deliver lessons that effectively respond to this demand. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education of Brazil does not offer consistent support and training to enhance teachers' oral/aural fluency and proficiency in English. In fact, there is a dearth of state policies aimed at improving the quality of English teaching in primary and secondary state education through the adoption of specific pedagogical approaches (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017).

Despite the myriad challenges faced by EAL teachers in Brazilian state schools, there are proponents who advocate for the inclusion of English in the state-school curriculum from the early stages of primary education. This approach is seen as a means to optimize the potential of English education as a transformative agent for students. By doing so, children would have the opportunity to become literate in two languages, potentially paving the way for state bilingual education. However, given the challenges underscored by Hitotuzi (2020), Lazarini and Vedovello (2023, p. 13) posit that the implementation of bilingual education in state schools in this country remains "a distant dream to achieve." This is compounded by the fact that only a fortunate few, due to their favourable financial circumstances, can provide this type of education for their children through the private sector.

In addressing the preparation of teachers to tackle the challenges posed by the BNCC's emphasis on the development of students' oral/aural skills in English, professors from a TESOL undergraduate programme at an Amazonian university have initiated an outreach project with a focus on children's English literacy through synthetic phonics. Throughout the project's development, the Direct Method and the Total Physical Response Method played pivotal roles. While six TESOL undergraduates participated in the project, this paper presents data collected from only two of them. At the outset of the project, several research questions were posed, yet for the sake of brevity, this section will explore only one of them:

How do two TESOL undergraduates experience the use of the Direct Method in teaching English to Brazilian Year 1 students within the framework of an outreach project?

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The literature provides ample evidence in favour of a direct approach to teaching additional languages, even to beginners. Several studies have shown evidence of language acquisition when there is extensive exposure to the target language, simplicity, and effective contextualization aided by gestures, body language, and tangible real-world elements embedded in students' experiences (Ellis, 2005, 2015; Bala, 2015; Wang et al., 2019; Abas & Zainurrahman, 2022). Importantly, various scholars have pointed out the need to consider students' social and physical contexts when conducting activities within the classroom. For instance, Dewey (1938), almost a century

ago, advocated for capitalizing on students' experiences and interests to facilitate learning. Similarly, Freire (2015) successfully applied his approach to literacy in the 1960s and discovered that incorporating elements of the learners' environment enabled them to learn to read and write in a short period of time.

The adoption of a direct approach to teaching additional languages finds support from influential thinkers. Michel de Montaigne, a philosopher, recounted his experience of acquiring Latin through a direct approach, highlighting its effectiveness: "Without system, without books, without grammar or rules, without whipping, and without tears, I learnt Latin as pure as my master's own, for I had no way of adulterating or confusing it" (Montaigne, 1958, p. 82). Another philosopher, J. Franke advocated for a self-contained approach to teaching additional languages, proposing that language acquisition could occur without resorting to students' native language. Franke's ideas (1884, as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2014) laid the foundation for the Direct Method, also known as the Natural Method, which gained popularity through the works of Sauveur (1875), Heness (1865, as cited in Escher, 1920), and Berlitz (1888) in the nineteenth century.

In more recent times, Krashen and Terrell (1983) introduced the Natural Approach, grounded in five key hypotheses related to additional language acquisition. The first hypothesis distinguishes between learning and acquisition, emphasizing the organic nature of the latter for a more uninhibited understanding and production of the target language. The second hypothesis predicts the acquisition of certain linguistic items before others, regardless of exposure duration. The third hypothesis suggests the existence of a mental editor regulating speech production. The fourth emphasizes the importance of extensive exposure to comprehensible input along with minimal, not-yet-comprehensible input. The fifth hypothesis posits that a less hostile and tense learning environment enhances language acquisition.

In addition to capitalizing on advocates of a direct approach to language teaching, this study draws upon the principles of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method (Asher, 2012), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) (Willis, 1996; Nunan, 2004; Ellis et al., 2020), the Theory of Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 2006), Neuro-Linguistic Programming (Pritchard, 2009), Lesson Study (Oliveira, Hitotuzi, & Schwade, 2021; Neves-Silva, 2023), insights from Villani (2008) concerning the emulation of teaching practices by teachers at the onset of their careers, and an experience with the target language as a medium of instruction by a Korean researcher (Kim, 2008).

TPR is a language teaching method that was developed by Dr James Asher in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It emphasizes the role of physical movement and listening comprehension in language learning, drawing inspiration from how children learn their first language through listening and responding to commands. This method, which has also been influenced by a monolingual perspective on additional language education, has garnered extensive recognition within the area of language instruction, contributing to the evolution of various language teaching methodologies and approaches.

In the domain of language pedagogy, TBLT emerges as an evolution of the Communicative Approach, a pedagogical perspective originating in the United Kingdom that capitalizes on extensive learner immersion in the target language while emphasizing language use for the purpose of authentic communication (Richards & Rogers, 2014). While TBLT prioritizes fluency over grammar drills, its advocates recognize the value of explicit grammar instruction as a complementation and enhancement of the learning experience. For instance, Willis (1996) provides a comprehensive framework for task-based learning, dedicating a section to language analysis and practice. She also underscores the need for frequent exposure to comprehensible language input, the use of the target language in tasks that mirror real-life actions, and sustained learner motivation. These factors are universally acknowledged by language learning specialists as essential requirements for effective language acquisition.

Gardner's (2006) Theory of Multiple Intelligences proposes that we possess a spectrum of abilities, like linguistic, kinaesthetic, and spatial/visual, not just one general intelligence. This perspective, enriched by research, aligns with Neuro-Linguistic Programming's identification of three key sensory modalities: visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic (Ellerton, 2010; Grinder & Pucelik, 2013; Hoobyar et al., 2013). These modalities often connect to our preferred learning styles. It seems that visual learners learn effectively through images and diagrams, auditory learners favour discussions and stories, while kinaesthetic learners benefit most from hands-on activities (Pritchard, 2009). When teachers are aware of diverse learning styles, they can tailor their lessons to resonate with each student in their classrooms. This inclusive approach is likely to empower the students and lead to a more effective and engaging learning environment for everyone. Though such awareness is far from guaranteeing success, learning in the classroom can be significantly enhanced through collaborative efforts in lesson planning.

Collaborative planning practice aimed at the effectiveness of student learning is at the core of Jugyo Kenkyu, internationally known as Lesson Study. Originating from Japan, this methodology is used concomitantly to promote teacher professional development and student learning in the classroom. The concept of Lesson Study can be considered straightforward: teachers gather to collaboratively plan lessons, observe their implementation, and reflect on them. They can, then, repeat this cycle aiming at improving their students' learning process. However, experience and practice are necessary for conducting Lesson Study effectively (Oliveira, Hitotuzi, & Schwade, 2021; Neves-Silva, 2023). The professors and TESOL undergraduates involved in the outreach project that is part of this study drew extensively from Lesson Study literature (Watanabe, 2002; Takahashi & Yoshida, 2004; Stepanek et al., 2007; Lewis & Hurd, 2011; Hart, Alston, & Murata, 2011; Saito et al., 2015; Takahashi, 2015).

Incorporating theories on learning processes, effective collaboration within a school environment, and diverse strategies for teaching and acquiring additional languages is undeniably essential both in the initial and continuing education of teachers. Nevertheless, when assessing the performance of teachers—especially novice ones—in the classroom, it becomes crucial to acknowledge their role as learners of the target language at specific stages in their lives. During these stages, they have been influenced by a variety of instructors who employed different teaching approaches and methodologies in their encounters. These collective experiences, both inside and outside the classroom, contribute to the formation of diverse beliefs among teachers concerning the target language and its pedagogy. These prior experiences of teachers significantly impact their classroom practices, with their personal beliefs and established practices often manifesting in their teaching methodologies (Villani, 2008).

In a study conducted in South Korea, Kim (2008) examined the perspectives of 133 schoolteachers regarding the use of the target language as the primary mode of instruction in their English classrooms. One of her inquiries focused on the teachers' attitudes towards their own anxiety levels. She was also interested in exploring the perceived advantages and disadvantages for both teachers and students when using English as the primary classroom language. Regarding teacher anxiety, it was found that over 60% of the participants experienced anxiety when employing a monolingual approach to English instruction. However, the study also revealed an interesting trend: as teachers increased their use of the target language in the classroom, their anxiety levels decreased.

In terms of the benefits for teachers themselves, most of the participants expressed their belief that this approach was advantageous for improving oral production skills, fostering self-confidence, enhancing English proficiency, and promoting career development. Lastly, when it came to the benefits for students, most teachers cited several positive outcomes, ranging from improvements in listening and speaking skills to increased motivation to learn the target language.

After establishing the theoretical foundation of the study, the following section will provide a description of the research design. This will encompass details regarding the contextualization of the study, data collection methods, procedures, data analysis, the limitations and ethical issues associated with the investigation of the experiences of TESOL degree candidates who actively engaged in the outreach project. This project employed the Direct Method for the instruction of English as an additional language to Year 1 students in Santarém-PA, Northern Brazil.

2. Method

2.1 The Research Design and the Contextualization of the Study

Given the study's focus on individuals within a well-defined social context, the adoption of a case study research design was considered appropriate (Yin, 2018). The primary aim of this investigation was to explore the experiences of undergraduate students who were enrolled in a TESOL programme as they employed the Direct Method to teach English to Year 1 students within the framework of an outreach project titled *Literacy in English Guided by Principles of the Synthetic Phonics Method*. This project spanned eight months and took place at a federal university in Northern Brazil, referred to hereafter as Amazonian University. Participation in the project by TESOL undergraduates was contingent upon the successful completion of the course *Phonetics and Phonology of the English Language* with a final grade exceeding 7.0 on a scale from 0 to 10. Additionally, candidates were required to demonstrate an intermediate level of proficiency in the English language.

2.2 The Participants of the Study

The participants selected for this study constituted one-third of the total cohort of TESOL undergraduates who took part in the outreach project. These participants were two female undergraduate students in their fourth year

of the TESOL programme at Amazonian University. The project supervisors organized the TESOL undergraduates into two teams, with each team being assigned to a specific group of Year 1 students aged between 6 and 7. These students attended state schools situated on the outskirts of Santarém, a city ranked as the third most populous urban centre in the state of Pará, Brazil. In the study under consideration, the two TESOL undergraduates, hereafter referred to as student-teachers, were tasked with working with a class comprising nine students, which was the larger of the two classes involved in the project.

As the children attended regular school in the mornings, the English lessons were conducted at the university in the afternoons, twice a week, with each session lasting one and a half hours. This schedule spanned a period of 32 weeks. The student-teachers were required to employ the target language in all classroom interactions and activities. Some of these activities were structured around a task-based approach (Willis, 1996) and incorporated the use of commands and gestures in alignment with Asher's (2012) Total Physical Response method.

2.3 The Methods of Data Collection

In line with the study's objective of exploring the experiences of prospective teachers regarding the implementation of the Direct Method in their instructional roles, three primary data collection methods were employed: interviews, proficiency tests, and recordings of lessons conducted by the student-teachers.

To provide a comprehensive assessment of the student-teachers' English proficiency, two types of tests were administered. The first was the online placement test offered by Cambridge English Language Assessment (Cambridge English, 2023). This test provides a proficiency level diagnosis based on the cumulative points earned across all stages of the assessment.

The second assessment was an oral test developed and evaluated in accordance with the format employed by the British Council (British Council, 2018a) for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). This oral test was administered by one of the authors, under the supervision of a project supervisor.

2.4 Study Procedures

The study encompassed four primary stages: planning, piloting, data collection, and data analysis. In the initial planning stage, a framework outlining the methods for data collection and analysis was developed. It was during this phase that the questions comprising the preliminary version of the interview guide for the student-teachers were formulated.

In the subsequent piloting stage, the interview guide underwent testing with other student-teachers participating in the project. This evaluation aimed to determine if the responses obtained were sufficient to fulfil the interview objectives. Adjustments were deemed necessary following the pilot interviews, resulting in the inclusion of two additional questions in the final interview guide.

The third stage involved conducting two interviews with the student-teachers and assessing their English proficiency levels. Furthermore, all video recordings of their initial 30 lessons were categorized by date and prepared for analysis. It is noteworthy that, while all lessons delivered by the student-teachers were recorded, data used for analysis were restricted to the first 30 lessons. This selection was made because this phase of the project placed a stronger emphasis on fostering the development of the children's oral/aural skills, whereas the subsequent phase aimed to enhance reading and writing skills.

The fourth and concluding stage of the study focused on analysing data gathered from the interviews, proficiency tests, and video recordings of the lessons. The ultimate goal was to address the research question: *How do two TESOL undergraduates experience the use of the Direct Method in teaching English to Brazilian Year 1 students within the framework of an outreach project?*

2.5 Data Analysis

The analysis of data obtained from the interviews followed the organizational process outlined by Bardin (1977), which comprises three major stages: (i) pre-analysis, (ii) material exploration, and (iii) treatment, inference, and interpretation of results. During the pre-analysis stage, the initial selection of documents for analysis is carried out, objectives and hypotheses for the analysis are formulated, and indicators are developed to support the final interpretation.

The material exploration stage primarily involves the execution and systematic application of decisions made in the previous stage, encompassing the encoding and numbering of acquired information. In the stage of treatment and interpretation of results, inferences can be proposed, and interpretations aligned with the established objectives are made.

For the analysis of the video recordings, the methodology outlined by Heath, Hindmarsh and Luff (2010) was

adopted, delineated into three stages: *preliminary review*, which includes a concise description and classification of materials; *substantive review*, conducted to identify specific event or phenomenon details for comparison and to outline aspects of interactional organization; and *analytic review*, which entails the examination of related datasets to identify instances of actions that appear to exhibit similar characteristics. Moreover, an analysis guide encompassing the entire process was developed, incorporating some observation tasks recommended by Somogyi-Tóth (2012).

2.6 Study Limitations

This study carries certain limitations inherent to its specific context. Firstly, its structure as a case study within an outreach project with a limited number of participants precludes the possibility of drawing broad conclusions about the association between student-teachers and a monolingual instructional approach (characterized by exclusive use of the target language in classroom interaction). It is crucial to acknowledge the contextual nature of this investigation, and any attempt to extrapolate these results for comprehensive reflections on the practices of EAL teachers in state schools in Brazil or elsewhere would be unjustified.

While a quasi-laboratory setting offered some control, expanding the participant pool on a larger scale was a missed opportunity. As previously mentioned, the research involved six student-teachers, one of whom is also a co-author of this paper. However, due to time constraints regarding comprehensive lesson analysis, it became impractical to simultaneously scrutinize recordings from classes conducted by both project teams. Therefore, the decision was made to focus exclusively on the team in which one of the authors participated, with that author recusing himself to minimize potential bias.

Furthermore, it is essential to consider the professional background of the research participants. As student-teachers at the initial stages of their journey, they lacked the practical experience and insights held by in-service teachers. This underscores the notion that the study's results should not be extrapolated to encompass the experiences of EAL teachers within the Brazilian state primary education system, nor should they be generalized to other primary education systems.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations within the scientific research domain often pose a complex dilemma, as the researcher's pursuit of truth may intersect with the rights and values of research participants (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Recognizing the need for ethical integrity in research endeavours is crucial, but successfully addressing ethical issues necessitates collaborative efforts from all stakeholders. Accordingly, a comprehensive informed consent form was integrated into the research process, and each participant willingly endorsed it. This consent form was particularly crafted to ensure participants had a clear understanding of the study's objectives and its various phases, empowering them to make informed decisions about their participation and contribution. To safeguard confidentiality, the actual identities of the participants have been replaced with pseudonyms throughout the subsequent sections, where their statements and actions are cited.

3. Results and Discussion

This section is divided into three parts to improve the organization of information. The first part presents the data obtained from the English proficiency tests and the initial interviews with the student-teachers, summarized in the form of their profiles. The second part elaborates on the results from the video analyses, offering insights into the student-teachers' experience of the Direct Method within the English language literacy project. Finally, the third part includes a discussion about the follow-up interviews with them, which not only contributed to a deeper understanding of the aspects observed during the video analyses but also prompted reflections on the challenges of adopting a monolingual approach to additional language teaching.

3.1 Profile of the Student-Teachers Participating in the Study

As previously mentioned, this study focuses on two TESOL undergraduates, Amanda and Camila (their pseudonyms), who were actively involved in an outreach project at Amazonian University. Despite attending the same semester and class at the university, they had distinct experiences with the English language.

3.1.1 Amanda

Amanda brought valuable prior experience to the project. She had previously served as an EAL teacher with two different audiences: for two years, she had taught Year 5 and Year 6 students in a state school, and for two months, she had engaged with adult learners in a social inclusion institute. Prior to enrolling in university, Amanda had completed six years of language school education, further enriching her linguistic background through a month-long immersion experience in an English-speaking country, where she interacted with the locals

exclusively in English.

Amanda's self-assessment placed her English proficiency at an intermediate level, with some difficulty in listening comprehension. This perception was corroborated by an online placement test (Cambridge English, 2023), which recommended Levels B1 or B2 within the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Furthermore, an oral proficiency test aligned with IELTS criteria classified her as a Band 7 *good user*. As described on the British Council website (2018b), this band indicates an operational command of the language, albeit with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriate usage, and situational misunderstandings. In general, complex language is managed effectively, and detailed reasoning is comprehended.

During the interview, Amanda offered her perspective on the Direct Method, defining its essence as the exclusive use of the target language for classroom instruction. While her interpretation narrowed the method's attributes as described by Richards and Rodgers (2014), her grasp of its core principle proved vital during the outreach project.

3.1.2 Camila

The other student-teacher, referred to as Camila, also brought prior EAL teaching experience to the outreach project, but her background differed from Amanda's. Camila's two years of previous teaching experience occurred under different circumstances. She had never taught independently in a classroom setting and admitted feeling unprepared for such a role, as she put it, "It was an experience that made me realize I needed to mature a bit more in the classroom because I didn't have such a firm grip or a teacher-like posture. I still couldn't feel prepared to teach."

In addition to her limited teaching experience, Camila mentioned that she had attended private language schools for three years before enrolling in the TESOL undergraduate programme at Amazonian University. She also had contact with native English speakers through a friend, who provided her with what she described as "sort of private lessons." During these interactions, she was encouraged to have conversations in English, although she admitted feeling somewhat intimidated.

Camila self-assessed her English as intermediate, acknowledging difficulties in speaking and listening. She described feeling "stuck" at times and struggled to understand when others spoke. She attributed this to shyness. Based on her online test results, Camila was advised to participate in Level B1 CEFR exams. However, her oral proficiency test results classified her as an *extremely limited user* (IELTS Band score 3), meaning that she could express and comprehend basic concepts only in highly familiar contexts, often experiencing significant difficulties in effective communication (British Council, 2018b, Understanding and explaining IELTS scores section). Despite falling short of the required English proficiency level, Camila was granted the opportunity to join the outreach project.

Regarding her understanding of the Direct Method, Camila demonstrated awareness of its principles, characterizing it as a teaching approach where the teacher must "use the language to be taught [the target language] all the time, speaking it (…) in the classroom without resorting to the learner's mother tongue."

3.2 Analysed Lessons

In accordance with the recommendations provided by Heath, Hindmarsh and Luff (2010), the initial phase of data analysis involved a preliminary review aimed at identifying emerging categories. At this juncture, it became apparent that the wealth of data contained within a single lesson was substantial in both scope and diversity. Consequently, it was determined that a more effective approach to analysis would entail focusing on events occurring within the specific timeframe of individual activities, rather than attempting to document occurrences throughout the entirety of a lesson.

During the substantive review phase, the data were categorized into three primary domains:

(a) Leading Role in Activity Facilitation: This category encompassed an evaluation of the number of activities facilitated by the student-teachers.
(b) Student-Teacher Performance in the Classroom: It involved an examination of all actions undertaken by the student-teachers in the classroom.
(c) Classroom Challenges and Strategies for Problem Resolution: This category addressed the challenges encountered by the student-teachers in the classroom and the strategies employed to mitigate them.

This focused approach allowed for the identification of common data sets within these categories during the subsequent analytic review, permitting insights to be drawn based on the frequency of observed actions relative to the number of activities.

3.2.1 Leading Role in Activity Facilitation

In the analysis of the 30 lessons conducted within the framework of the outreach project, a total of 148 activities were observed. Each activity featured one of the student-teachers taking the lead, with occasional instances of both student-teachers jointly facilitating an activity. Amanda, for instance, despite having missed two lessons in the timespan of the project, assumed the leading role in a total of 50 activities, as shown in Figure 1, which illustrates her progression in terms of activities facilitated per lesson. Her peak was observed during the initial five lessons, followed by a gradual decline that eventually stabilized at an average of one to two activities facilitated per lesson.
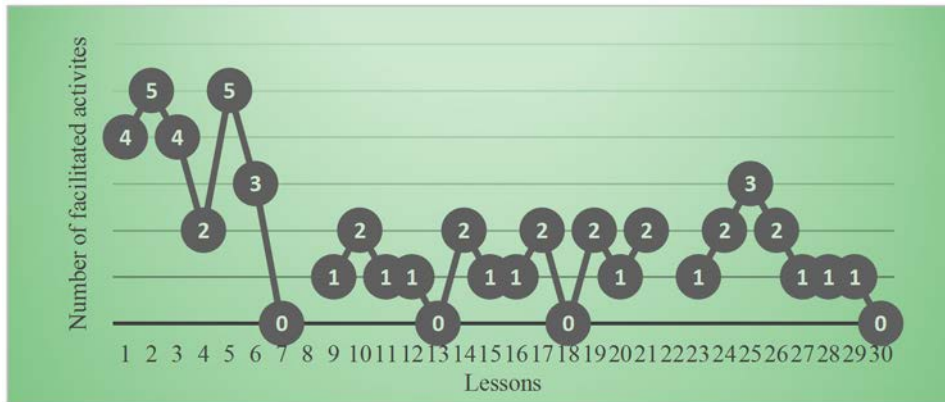

Figure 1. Number of activities facilitated by Amanda

Camila, on her turn, facilitated a total of 43 activities and, while attending all lessons without exception, assumed a slightly lower number of activity leadership roles, as shown in Figure 2. She initially took on significantly fewer leadership roles, even recording zero instances on her first day. Her activity leadership gradually increased, reaching its first peak around the time of Amanda's first absence, during which she facilitated three activities, likely compensating for her teammate's absence. Subsequently, the number of activities Camila facilitated per lesson stabilized at around one, with a peak occurring in lesson 22, coinciding with Amanda's second absence, during which Camila facilitated five activities.
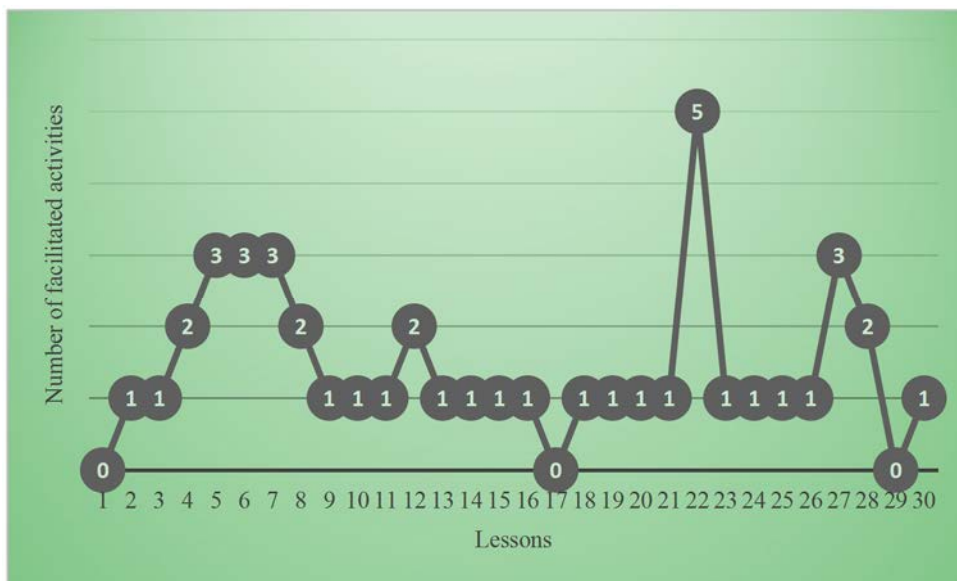

Figure 2. Number of activities facilitated by Camila

The disparities between the graphs in Figures 1 and 2 can be attributed to differences in the student-teachers' profiles. As mentioned earlier, Amanda had prior experience with students within the project's target age group, contributing to her higher confidence in leading lessons. In contrast, Camila was still apprehensive about her individual performance in the target language, which likely accounts for her initially lower number of leadership instances.

Additionally, Amanda demonstrated a higher level of English proficiency than Camila, which could have significantly influenced her leadership position. Camila's self-described insecurity about her English proficiency in her initial interview suggests that language proficiency may have been a key factor in this difference in leadership. However, it is worth noting that as Camila gained more experience with the method and grew more confident in front of the students, she increased her number of facilitated activities, particularly during Amanda's absences. During Amanda's first absence, Camila facilitated three activities, and during her second absence, this number increased to five.

In addition to the individual performance of the student-teachers, there were a total of 55 activities in which both shared leadership responsibilities. The tallies of such instances are illustrated in Figure 3, where the data clearly indicate that occasions when both student-teachers co-facilitated activities outnumbered those facilitated by individual student-teachers. This highlights the prevalent teamwork aspect during the project implementation and underscores a key tenet of Lesson Study in the student-teachers' classroom practice: collaboration (Kim et al., 2021). Furthermore, Figure 3 presents a more consistent distribution compared against Figures 1 and 2, with its peaks closely clustered along the lesson timeline, showing no significant disparities in concentration from the first to the last lesson. An exception is the first day of class, when the student-teachers met the children for the first time, necessitating self-introductions and gathering basic student information. The behaviour of the student-teachers on this initial day reflects elements likely influenced by their personal characteristics, past experiences, and proficiency in the target language.

These variations in leading roles during activity facilitation reflect a trend well-documented in the literature: language teachers who have difficulty speaking and understanding the target language often avoid involving their students in activities that require oral interactions or complex explanations on their part (Chen & Goh, 2011; Ibna Seraj, Habil, & Hasan, 2021; Dang, Bonar, & Yao, 2023). This is one of the robust roots of Hitotuzi's (2020) *unwanted-millennial tree*, hindering the provision of high-quality language education in primary and secondary education in Brazil.

Figure 3. Activities facilitated by both student-teachers

3.2.2 Student-Teacher Performance in the Classroom

In the analytic review of video recording samples following the method proposed by Heath, Hindmarsh and Luff (2010), several themes and subthemes emerged, including (i) teaching resources used in activities, (ii)

student-teacher vocabulary lapses and solutions during lessons, (iii) student-teacher leading roles in classroom activities, (iv) vocabulary teaching strategies, (v) student-teacher oral expressions, (vi) student-teacher interaction with students, and (vii) student-teacher actions during classroom activities. These themes and subthemes are systematically presented in seven tables. The frequencies reported in the tables indicate the occurrence of these themes in different activities, relative to the total number of activities (N = 148). This analysis takes into consideration the Direct Method's emphasis on teacher use of diverse vocabulary teaching strategies, as suggested by Richards and Rodgers (2014).

Table 1, which focuses on teaching resources and their utilization frequency in the observed lessons, provides insights into the student-teachers' classroom practices.

Table 1. Types and frequency of teaching resources used in activities

Teaching Resource	Amanda	Camila	Both	Tally
Images	15	31	15	61
Body language	25	22	24	71
Realia	6	2	3	11
Music	6	6	20	32
Videos	2	3	31	36

When examining the teaching resources employed by the student-teachers, it became evident that they had made efforts to incorporate elements of Gardner's (2006) Theory of Multiple Intelligences to facilitate learning. However, their activities seemed to primarily focus on a subset of the intelligences Gardner (2006) delineates. Consequently, it might be more appropriate to relate their endeavour to certain aspects of Neuro-Linguistic Programming, as described by Pritchard (2009). This is exemplified in activities corresponding to three sensory modalities: visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic. By leveraging these modalities in their lessons, the student-teachers incorporated a degree of diversity in their teaching practice and favoured target language acquisition among their students.

Table 2 illuminates each student-teacher's inclination towards specific teaching resources aimed at enhancing student engagement. Amanda, in many activities that she facilitated individually, frequently employed body language to aid student comprehension, often resorting to miming or brief acting out to convey meaning. In contrast, Camila's activities primarily relied on images, whether physical or digital, which usually required a degree of preparation and could pose challenges in settings with limited time for such preparations. Furthermore, when collaborating, both student-teachers frequently employed videos as a resource, encouraging students to grasp the visual and auditory elements presented in the videos, often featuring short stories that reinforced vocabulary learned in other activities.

Table 2. Types and frequency of vocabulary lapses and solutions during lessons

Lapse Description	Amanda	Camila	Both	Tally
Forgot words and used gestures	0	1	0	1
Forgot words, and was aided by the other student-teacher	4	4	0	8
Forgot a command and proceeded	0	1	0	1

This table also provides insights into occurrences of vocabulary lapses during the student-teachers' instructional turns and how each handled the problem. Forgetting vocabulary was one of the language difficulties mentioned by Camila in her interview, as she felt it disrupted the fluency of her speech and eroded her confidence. However, even without explicitly mentioning this in her interview, the table reveals that Amanda also experienced instances of memory lapses in the classroom almost as frequently as Camila. This implies that Amanda's instances of vocabulary lapses were potentially imperceptible to her, whereas Camila exhibited self-awareness of her struggles.

The contrasting perceptions of their language difficulties could have stemmed from the distinct pathways they took to learn English. Amanda's journey involved a more immersive approach, allowing her to absorb the language more naturally, which likely accelerated her language acquisition process. Conversely, Camila's exposure to English primarily occurred mostly within the structured environment of a classroom, potentially emphasizing formal language learning and grammatical accuracy.

Drawing upon Krashen and Terrell's (1983) Monitor Hypothesis, we can understand how this structured learning can activate a mental monitor within the learner. This monitor, while crucial for achieving correctness and precision, may inadvertently hinder the fluency and spontaneity often associated with natural acquisition. In Camila's case, this heightened awareness of grammatical rules and potential errors might explain her focus on her struggles with spoken English.

Crucially, both student-teachers, despite facing occasional word recall lapses, resisted resorting to their native language. Instead, they opted for collaborative support, demonstrating teamwork that transcended mere activity co-leadership. This support extended to addressing any challenges encountered during activity implementation. Their collaborative approach and supportive attitudes towards each other revealed not only their personal characteristics but also their flexibility and open-mindedness. These qualities, as Beninghof (2012, pp. 4–5) emphasizes, are essential ingredients for fostering "strong co-teaching relationships."

The examined 148 activities revealed a relatively low occurrence of vocabulary lapses, with only 10 instances documented across the entire sample. This observation becomes even more noteworthy when we consider that 7 of those instances occurred within the first 15 lessons. This pattern suggests a potential trend of increasing familiarity and comfort with both the target language and the Direct Method on the part of the student-teachers. As they progressed through the project, their engagement with the target language and dedication to lesson preparation appeared to intensify, potentially contributing to a gradual development of confidence and fluency in English.

Leadership transitions within activities were mostly characterized by the student-teachers' consensual, intuitive, and proactive attitude. When one student-teacher felt less comfortable or believed the other could handle a specific activity more effectively, they would seamlessly switch roles. The relinquished-leadership and declined attempts to cede leadership instances shown in Table 3 were observed exclusively prior to the midpoint of the first part of the project (up to Lesson 12), suggesting an adjustment period when both student-teachers were still acclimating to the Direct Method and the students. The modest number of Camila's leading roles demonstrated in this table indicates that she faced greater difficulty in taking leadership, most likely influenced by factors mentioned in her profile (e.g., teaching inexperience, limited exposure to English, and difficulty in expressing herself in the target language). Lastly, the fact that no further declined turn-taking attempts occurred after Lesson 12, appears to imply improved confidence and comfort in handling such situations as the project progressed.

Table 3. Types and frequency of events around leading roles in classroom activities

Events	Amanda	Camila	Both	Tally
Relinquished leading role	2	4	0	6
Attempted to relinquish leading role	2	1	0	3
Took leading role	15	3	0	18

The third area of focus examines the student-teachers' approach towards vocabulary instruction. Table 4 showcases some instances of this practice, revealing that the teaching strategies employed by the student-teachers were diversified. Camila's teaching approach appears to be more illustrative than Amanda's, evident from her strong preference for images: she frequently associated vocabulary with objects and images, almost twice as often as Amanda did. This strongly suggests that Camila's teaching beliefs reflect a proclivity towards the visual learning style over other styles and underscores the dual impact of learning styles, influencing both her teaching methodology and personal learning preferences. Additionally, as discussed by Villani (2009), the teaching practices of Camila's past instructors could have influenced her own, including her preference for introducing vocabulary before having the students engaged in the activity.

Table 4. Types of strategies and frequency of vocabulary teaching

Teaching Strategies	Amanda	Camila	Both	Tally
Explanation of vocabulary before the activity	11	14	1	26
Repetition (in English) of words used by students (in Portuguese)	12	10	3	25
Naming objects/images (in English) to which students were being exposed	7	15	10	32
Using previously taught vocabulary to teach new words	2	1	0	3
Teaching tricks to remember vocabulary	1	0	0	1
Using different words for the same concept	2	1	0	3
Emphasizing actions/words previously studied by students	8	4	16	28

In terms of teaching sets of words based on previously taught vocabulary, there were relatively few observations. Initially, the hypothesis was that this practice would be more common. However, despite reviewing previously introduced vocabulary at the beginning of each lesson, the student-teachers seldom established connections between previously learned and newly introduced vocabulary. Additionally, there were few instances of using two different words for the same concept, and it appeared that this practice often confused the students rather than aiding their comprehension of the topic at hand. Over time, adopting principles of Lesson Study (Stepanek, et al., 2007), the student-teachers acknowledged this challenge and adjusted their approach to introducing new concepts. This adaptation in their teaching approach underscores a process of reflection and responsiveness to observed challenges, ultimately contributing to the improvement of their teaching effectiveness.

Another theme that emerged from the data, as shown in Table 5, relates to oral expression and encompasses practices associated with the student-teachers' speaking skills and their interactions with one another. During the second interviews, the student-teachers were asked about their use of the Portuguese language in the classroom. Camila admitted to using Portuguese in certain situations, while Amanda claimed to have used it only in emergencies. However, when triangulating the data, discrepancies between the information obtained in the interviews and what was observed during the analysis of the video-recorded lessons became apparent. A closer examination of the recordings revealed that these discrepancies arose because the student-teachers unconsciously slipped into speaking Portuguese at times. Their swift return to English as soon as they realized that they were speaking in Portuguese was a common occurrence, often involving restating in the target language what they had initially said in Portuguese.

Table 5. Types and frequency of student-teacher oral expressions

Type of Oral Expressions	Amanda	Camila	Both	Tally
Substitution with cognate words	1	2	0	3
Interaction in the target language between the student-teachers	0	0	8	8
Use of Portuguese (Note 2)	7	9	0	16
Individual word pronunciation difficulties	1	2	0	3

Camila's and Amanda's reverting to their first language while teaching English seems to reveal that, for teachers whose first language is other than the one being taught, consistently using the target language in class requires more than just fluency, as demonstrated by Amanda's case. They need deep linguistic skills, including the ability to understand and share complex ideas. Additionally, they should be aware of common pitfalls and stay updated on strategies for language immersion. Most importantly, cultivating a habit of using the target language in all events of the lesson (i.e., instructions, discussions, and interactions) appears to be crucial. This requires ongoing self-awareness and reflection to avoid slipping into their first language unintentionally. By focusing on these multifaceted aspects, teachers can create a truly immersive learning environment for their students regardless of their mother tongue.

Nevertheless, excluding these instances when the student-teachers briefly reverted to their native language, the lessons were primarily conducted in English, and significant effort was invested in engaging the students in the proposed activities. Furthermore, it was observed that, during moments of lower demand on their attention, the student-teachers would commonly engage in dialogues in the target language about topics unrelated to the subject of the lesson. This often sparked the students' interest, as they attempted to understand the student-teachers' conversations. Despite the inadvertent use of the native language, the brief exchanges in the target language between the student-teachers provided an alternative means to expose the students to everyday vocabulary, aligning the lessons with one of the characteristics of the Direct Method outlined by Richards and Rodgers (2014)—the incorporation of vocabulary from the teachers' personal context.

In addition to exploring how the student-teachers experienced the method, it was crucial to document their interactions with the students. Given their previous experiences, it was expected that Amanda would take on a more prominent role. However, contrary to this expectation, Camila initiated most interactions with the students, either to gain their attention or encourage their participation in activities, as indicated in Table 6. Additionally, a significant portion of the encouragement for students to develop their oral skills came from Camila. This observation is noteworthy, particularly since Camila had acknowledged facing pronunciation difficulties during her activities, as discussed in the next section. These results suggest that Camila's classroom approach may reflect her personal teaching beliefs, focusing on addressing her own language-related challenges while helping her students overcome similar issues.

Table 6. Types and frequency of student-teacher interactions with students

Type of Interaction	Amanda	Camila	Both	Tally
Guiding students back to the activity	5	14	5	24
Using positive reinforcement (*High five* (Note 3))	9	18	7	34
Encouraging students to repeat words in English	8	40	6	54
Encouraging disinterested students to participate in the activity	1	12	0	13
Using students' belongings to illustrate content/vocabulary	2	4	2	8

As demonstrated in Table 6, the results once more underscore Camila's illustrative pedagogical approach and her preference for using realia to impart vocabulary knowledge with the students, thereby incorporating their everyday experiences into the learning process. This instructional strategy aligns with Dewey's (1938) and Freire's (2015) advocacy of a pedagogical approach that capitalizes on the physical and social contexts of the students. Particularly when introducing novel content, establishing a connection with students' immediate surroundings appears to be a highly effective means of promoting their engagement with the subject matter. Hitotuzi (2016) posits that this approach should serve as a bedrock, priming students for more expansive dialogues encompassing diverse, man-made realities from different parts of the world. It is plausible that, on these occasions, Camila's teaching approach was more perceptible, possibly due to an implicit division of responsibilities between the student-teachers. In this arrangement, Camila assumed a more active role with the students, while Amanda directed her primary attention towards the instructional activities, as exemplified in Table 7.

Table 7. Types and frequency of student-teacher actions during classroom activities

Student-teacher action	Amanda	Camila	Both	Tally
Taking photos of students' productions	1	0	2	3
Suggesting alterations to the activity	8	5	0	13
Explaining the activity before its execution	13	4	0	17
Providing hints without giving the answer	3	0	1	4
Using the other teacher as a model to illustrate activity	16	10	0	26

Both student-teachers frequently alternated leadership roles during classroom activities. While one facilitated the activity, the other provided support by organizing the children into groups and offering an alternative perspective on the task. It is important to note that their collaborative efforts extended beyond the classroom boundaries. Collaboratively, they meticulously planned, facilitated, and observed the activities, followed by in-depth discussions and reflective sessions that informed the preparation of subsequent lessons. In this respect, their routine throughout the implementation of the outreach project bore a resemblance to the practices of teachers engaged in Lesson Study cycles (Takahashi & Yoshida, 2004). However, in contrast to the conventional Lesson Study cycle, where adjustments to lessons are typically based on post-lesson discussions and reflections and subsequently implemented in the following session, the student-teachers in the outreach project adopted a more dynamic approach. They made real-time modifications to activities whenever they deemed it necessary. Notably, these impromptu adjustments often led to the creation of more interactive activities that effectively engaged the students. Amanda predominantly took on the role of an observer, whether leading or assisting with an activity, and she suggested alterations to activities on eight different occasions.

As evident in Table 4, Camila usually took on the task of presenting vocabulary resorting to images or realia before commencing a new activity. In contrast, as shown in Table 7, when activities required an explanation of their mechanics, Camila, due to her language difficulties, did not feel comfortable doing so. Consequently, Amanda explained activities nine more times than Camila did. Another recurring observation from Table 7 is Amanda's preference for using body movements. When it was necessary to demonstrate an activity to the students, Amanda often used the other student-teacher as a model to illustrate the actions that the students were supposed to perform, enhancing the students' comprehension of the activity. These observations highlight the different strengths and strategies of the two student-teachers in facilitating student comprehension and engagement, suggesting that each student-teacher has unique strengths and areas for development, and their collaborative teaching approach allows for a diverse range of instructional strategies to be employed, potentially benefiting the students' learning experience.

3.2.3 Classroom Challenges and Strategies for Problem Resolution

The examination of the video recordings also brought to light a range of challenges encountered by the student-teachers during their lessons, considering the various types of observed challenges and the approaches taken by the student-teachers to address them (Table 8). Unlike in the previous tables, in Table 8, these phenomena are categorized without specific reference to the student-teachers; rather, the focus is shifted towards the challenges themselves. This approach aims to provide a deeper insight into the complexities of adopting a monolingual approach in teaching an additional language. At this point, it is worth noting that certain identified challenges could not be immediately resolved by the student-teachers, and in such cases, they adhered to their lesson plan while temporarily bypassing the issue. Instances of this nature are marked with an *X* in the table, denoting an inconclusive resolution of the problem. To facilitate analysis, the results are presented in descending order, starting with challenges that occurred most frequently and progressing to those with fewer instances.

Table 8 illustrates that a substantial portion of the challenges faced by the student-teachers in the classroom did not originate from their linguistic limitations in the target language. Instead, they were primarily rooted in a lack of pedagogical knowledge related to interacting with children within their specific age group. Despite having completed mandatory courses like *Theories of Foreign Language Acquisition/Learning*, *Educational and Learning Psychology*, and *Supervised Practicum*, along with participating in supplementary activities like the outreach project, which involved teaching children at Amazonian University, it becomes evident that most of the challenges encountered by the student-teachers pertained to classroom management. This observation implies a potential need for a critical review of the academic curriculum within the TESOL undergraduate programme at that university. Such a review should aim for a more balanced education, encompassing subjects that provide theoretical knowledge in the field, as well as additional courses focusing on the practical dimensions of teaching methodologies and classroom management (or revising existing ones), perhaps in line with Richards's (2017, p. 28) advocacy for "suitable training and resources." Potentially, this comprehensive approach will better equip programme participants with the requisite skills to effectively respond to a spectrum of challenges they might encounter as EAL teachers in the future.

It is worth noting that, among the solutions employed by the student-teachers, including occasional use of the Portuguese language or modifications to activities, teamwork emerged as the central factor facilitating problem resolution during the lessons. As cab be seen in Table 8, there is a challenge related to the target language, previously discussed in Table 2, which involves instances of vocabulary lapses. Once again, teamwork played a pivotal role in addressing this phenomenon most frequently.

Table 8. Types and Frequency of Classroom Challenges and Strategies for Problem Resolution

Challenge	Strategy for Problem Resolution	Partial Tally	Final Tally
Managing students (behaviour, participation, new students, etc.)	The other student-teacher assisted	14	37
	Used the Portuguese language	3	
	Directed a question to the student in question	1	
	Counted up to 10	5	
	Changed activity	2	
	Improvised an attention-grabbing activity	2	
	X	10	
Vocabulary lapses	Used mime	1	11
	Remembered naturally	2	
	The other teacher took the lead	1	
	The other teacher helped remember	7	
Involuntary use of the Portuguese language	X	8	10
	Self-correction immediately	2	
Managing materials and equipment	The other teacher assisted	4	7
	Changed activity	1	
	X	2	
Grammatical mistakes made	The other student-teacher noticed the issue and suggested correction	1	3
	X	2	
Insecurity regarding activity leadership	The other student-teacher took the lead	3	3
Assisting a new student to understand and participate in an activity	X	3	3
Assisting students in general to understand the activity	Used the other student-teacher as an example before students began the activity	1	3
	Made changes to the activity	1	
	Explained again	1	
Addressing students' doubts about taught vocabulary	Used body language to clarify the doubt	1	3
	Reiterated explanation	2	
Pronunciation of taught words	The other teacher assisted	3	3
Attending to a student who got hurt	Spoke in Portuguese	1	2
	Took the student to the university health unit	1	
Managing excessively tired students	Engaged students in a calmer activity	1	2
	The other teacher tried to help stimulate the students	1	
Memory lapse regarding previously taught content	Repeated a previously given command	1	1
Managing a crying student	Spoke in Portuguese	1	1
Managing premature depletion of lesson materials	Improvised an activity	1	1
Few students in class due to many going to the restroom	Improvised an activity	1	1
Assisting students in saying already-learned English words	Invited students to repeat the taught words	1	1

Given the most prominent tenet of the Direct Method, advocating for the exclusive use of the target language within the classroom, the occasional resort to Portuguese can be perceived as a challenge when adhering to this method. Nonetheless, the data reveal that when the student-teachers resorted to Portuguese in the classroom, it typically occurred involuntarily and unconsciously, escaping notice in approximately 80% of instances. Another recurring issue pertained to the reliability of the equipment available to the student-teachers. In the project, video projectors and speakers were provided, electronic devices that, over time and with continual use, are susceptible to malfunctions, a circumstance not uncommon in other contexts as well. Addressing such issues demands valuable time that could otherwise be allocated to classroom activities, potentially impeding the flow of the lesson. In such cases, it becomes imperative to establish a more robust contingency plan beyond relying solely on the assistance of the other student-teacher and the alteration of activities – these being the only two solutions employed by the student-teachers.

Drawing inspiration from Lesson Study cycles (Oliveira, Hitotuzi & Schwade, 2021; Neves-Silva, 2023), the student-teachers engaged in rigorous reflection during their lesson planning meetings. They meticulously

reviewed the previous lesson, identifying potential issues like those shown in Table 8: handling vocabulary questions, managing distressed students, aiding overall comprehension, and preventing material depletion. By proactively discussing these beforehand, they effectively prevented their recurrence in the following lesson. The meticulous planning proved effective as many anticipated challenges did not materialize in others subsequent lessons. The student-teachers, equipped with proactive strategies, were able to address potential problems before they could arise. This reinforces the critical role of planning: even the most well-equipped teachers, with deep methodological knowledge, language skills, and student understanding, can face difficulties without effective anticipation and preparation (Fujii, 2016; Faria, Ponte, & Rodrigues, 2024).

3.3 The Second Interview with the Student-Teachers

After the conclusion of the outreach project and the data analysis, a second interview was conducted with the student-teachers. This interview aimed to elucidate specific aspects of their classroom practices and gain further insights into their experiences with the Direct Method. Four additional questions were formulated to provide clarity on observed actions and to elicit reflections on their engagement with this method. The initial pair of questions focused on the types of activities with which the student-teachers felt most at ease and least comfortable.

The responses to these questions unveiled a deliberate approach by the student-teachers in implementing their chosen instructional activities. Amanda expressed her proclivity for activities involving physical movements that concurrently demanded students' concentration. She explained, "These activities were dynamic, yet they required students to pause and attempt to recall, to try to think about what they had to do and how to respond verbally."

In contrast, while acknowledging the pedagogical value of kinaesthetic activities, Camila articulated her preference for exercises incorporating visual stimuli. She believed that the integration of visual aids facilitated rapid vocabulary assimilation among children. She explained,

> because the children, in my opinion, associated [words] more quickly with images. Even though they associated [words] more quickly with images, I noticed that physical actions were more attractive to them. But I could see that images made them associate more rapidly. So, in my opinion, using images made them pay attention, develop, and associate [them] [with] what was [presented] in English more quickly.

When discussing activities that made them uncomfortable, Amanda disclosed her unease with activities solely based on music. As these activities were conducted entirely in the target language, students often initiated them without a clear understanding of how to respond, resulting in a degree of improvisation.

Camila, on the other hand, reiterated her insecurity and justified her reluctance to explain activities. She shared,

> I think, due to my lack of confidence in English, I felt a bit uncomfortable when I had to explain something new, introduce a new topic. I noticed that I couldn't make the children understand what I wanted to say, and I couldn't express myself. So, every time this happened, I didn't feel comfortable.

The third question focused on the continued application of the Direct Method. It sought to determine whether, having employed this method as the primary vehicle for teaching and promoting communication during the project implementation, the student-teachers would consider revisiting this approach in future classes and diverse educational contexts. Both responses were affirmative, perhaps in alignment with the beliefs of most of the schoolteachers in Kim's (2008) study about the benefits of a monolingual approach to EAL teaching. It is not surprising that when people sense benefits in what they do they tend to gravitate towards continuity of their actions (Skinner, 1965; Bandura, 1977; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

The final query considered the personal impact of the Direct Method, exploring how their experience of predominantly employing this method had influenced their attitudes towards it and the English language. Amanda reaffirmed her inclination to revert to using the Direct Method. During the interview, she recounted her experience in a different teaching environment where she had to employ alternative teaching methods. She stated,

> As I mentioned, I would really like to use the target language to teach English. Sometimes, in the middle of the class with the students, I try to speak only in English, and then I have to be reminded by the students to switch to Portuguese. They [say and] ask, 'Teacher, in Portuguese. Teacher, can you translate it into Portuguese?' So, I always have this desire to continue using English to teach.

Concerning her involvement in the outreach project, Amanda emphasized that she employed the Portuguese language exclusively in emergency situations (e.g., accidents involving the children). Otherwise, English served

as the primary medium for conversations, instructions, and explanations of activities. She also mentioned that the most challenging aspect of adopting the Direct Method for her was navigating the early interactions with the students.

> I believe the initial phase was somewhat challenging, especially because English was an entirely new language for the children, and they had never been exposed to it before. So, it was a bit difficult for them to grasp what we were trying to convey, despite our efforts to explain using various methods, models, and even using our own bodies to try to indicate [meaning]. But the initial phase was quite challenging [concerning the communication] between the teachers and the students.

Despite this initial obstacle, Amanda stated that, after persistently using English, the students gradually began to understand and respond more positively to the activities. In her words, they gradually managed to "crack the code" of the target language.

Camila, on the other hand, underscored her personal development in her pursuit of enhanced English communication skills. She remarked,

> My English improved because I had to make an effort to express myself in [it], which led me to seek improvement after each lesson and even after the project had come to an end. Whenever there were words or topics I couldn't express, I prepared myself in advance, and when I couldn't develop or express myself in the classroom, I thought about what I could do to improve [my speaking skills].

Nevertheless, when queried about employing the Portuguese language in the classroom, Camila admitted to using it in diverse situations. These encompassed emergency scenarios akin to those recounted by Amanda, as well as other occurrences arising from the students' conduct, "When they weren't behaving, when they were being very disruptive, there was no way to continue [speaking] in English because they didn't understand (…) To ask them to behave, be quiet, pay attention, because I couldn't say that in English anymore."

Camila encountered her primary challenge with the Direct Method in the form of a limited vocabulary repertoire, which occasionally resulted in speech pauses, subsequently contributing to her feelings of insecurity in front of the students. Similarly to Amanda, she also experienced frustration during the initial phase of using the method when the students failed to comprehend or respond to activities, despite multiple attempts. With persistent effort, however, the students eventually began to grasp the instructions. While they did not actively engage in spoken communication in the target language, they became more receptive to the method and the exclusive use of English by the student-teachers, and they even expressed surprise on occasions when Portuguese was employed.

From Amanda's and Camila's responses to the final query, it is evident that while using the target language for teaching poses a challenge for many teachers with a different first language, it can lead to significant benefits. A positive experience may encourage its adoption in other contexts or, at the very least, inspire teachers to contemplate incorporating this approach into their additional language classrooms.

4. Conclusion

This study examined the experiences of two student-teachers (pseudonymed Amanda and Camila) as they employed the Direct Method in teaching English to Brazilian children. The research adopted a case study approach, involving undergraduates enrolled in a TESOL programme at an Amazonian university. The participants were specifically chosen to join an English literacy outreach initiative aimed at Year 1 primary students attending peripheral state schools in the city of Santarém, state of Pará. Data collection for the study encompassed video recordings of 30 lessons, two interviews with Amanda and Camila, and assessments of their English proficiency. The analytical framework for this investigation drew upon Bardin's (1977) method for content analysis and the insights provided by Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff (2010). An inductive process guided the lesson analysis, classifying data into three domains: Leading Role in Activity Facilitation, Student-Teacher Performance in the Classroom, and Classroom Challenges and Strategies for Problem Resolution. This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the student-teachers' roles, performance, encountered challenges, and employed strategies.

Amanda, an EAL teacher with reasonable language education experience and having participated in an immersion programme, demonstrated intermediate English proficiency and a satisfactory grasp of the Direct Method. In contrast, Camila, despite some EAL teaching experience, reported challenges with English communication. These diverse backgrounds and experiences emphasize the need for inclusive opportunities for aspiring teachers while bringing to the fore the influence of prior experience and language proficiency on leadership positions within the classroom as exemplified by the variations in the number of activities facilitated by Amanda and Camila. Amanda took on more leadership roles and explained activities more often, while

Camila gradually increased her activity facilitation.

Beyond classroom facilitation, the student-teachers' performance demonstrated a clear effort to cater to various learning styles, aligning with Multiple Intelligences theory and notions of Neuro-Linguistic Programming. Their awareness of language challenges and commitment to maintaining an English-speaking environment were evident. Diverse approaches to vocabulary instruction that Amanda and Camila adopted, such as incorporating videos, pictures, and real-world examples related to the physical and social contexts of the students, reflected Deweyan and Freirean philosophies of education. Additionally, their pedagogic practice, which emphasized teamwork, reflection, and proactive planning, indicated a thoughtful and responsive teaching approach aligned with Lesson Study principles.

The second interview provided valuable insights into the student-teachers' experiences with the Direct Method and its impact on their EAL teaching practices and personal growth. Despite encountering challenges, both Amanda and Camila remained positive about continuing to use the Direct Method. Their experiences illustrate the potential impact of the Direct Method on teaching perspectives, language skills, and professional development, exemplifying its potential to support both educators and their students.

Overall, this study contributes to understanding student-teacher experiences with the Direct Method in EAL contexts. The findings suggest that the Direct Method, when implemented reflectively and coupled with effective support structures, can be a valuable tool for language teaching. Moreover, without minimizing the difficulties faced by the student-teachers, their positive experiences with the method substantiate its potential benefits for both teachers and students, urging consideration for its inclusion and adaptation within TESOL programmes alongside a balanced curriculum and collaborative teaching approaches.

5. Further Research

In this area of research, several questions merit investigation. For example, subsequent inquiries could focus on (i) assessing the efficacy of a TESOL education programme in equipping teachers for the challenges inherent in adopting the Direct Method with different age groups and in diverse learning contexts, (ii) examining how individual learner characteristics influence the effectiveness of the Direct Method, and (iii) determining the viewpoints of students exposed to the Direct Method regarding language acquisition. The initial proposal might involve evaluating the impact of specific modules on teachers' ability to navigate language-related issues, implement immersive teaching strategies, and manage diverse challenges in the classroom. The second proposal could concentrate on identifying correlations between factors such as learning styles, personality traits, and motivation, and their impact on exposure to this mode of interaction with students. The third proposal would aim at exploring students' perceptions, preferences, and experiences in relation to language learning within the Direct Method, providing a comprehensive understanding of its effectiveness from the students' perspective.

Authors' contributions

Alessandro Ripardo da Silva undertook data collection, data analysis, and prepared the initial draft of the manuscript. Nilton Hitotuzi led the study design, reviewed the data analysis, and finalized the manuscript. Naelson Sarmento Barbosa handled manuscript formatting and revisions. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Notes

Note 1. Starting in 2024, the Pará State Council of Education has implemented a reduction in the frequency of English classes. This change applies to fundamental education II (*ensino fundamental II*) and secondary education (*ensino médio*). Specifically, for fundamental education II, for children in the 11-14 age bracket, the number of weekly English classes has decreased from three to two 45-minute sessions. In secondary education, for students aged 15-17, the reduction is even more significant, with English classes going from two 45-minute sessions per week to just one. The scenario is even worse in evening classes, where each English class session lasts only 40 minutes (Resolução 504, 2023).

Note 2. The use of the Portuguese language in moments of emergency with injured students was not accounted for in Table 5 because it was considered the most natural alternative to be taken and the one that would best ensure the physical integrity of the child in question.

Note 3. "a greeting or celebration in which two people each raise a hand and bring the fronts of their hands together with force" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019).

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