Understanding Students' Personality and Learning Styles to Implement Effective L2

Instruction

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Dedication

This great success in my life is dedicated first of all to God, because He has given me the strength to fulfill this goal. In addition, I want to thank my parents, my wife and my children and all my family, because all of them have taught me to face all the problems and never give up against adversity, they have also taught me to fight for my dreams and be a better person day by day.

Resumen

Esta investigación fue realizada con el fin de tratar de ayudar a los profesores de inglés de colegios públicos en Colombia a entender no solo la personalidad de los estudiantes sino que también sus estilos de aprendizaje y así implementar instrucciones más adecuadas y enfocadas en las necesidades de los estudiantes al momento de dictar clases.

Este proyecto surgió de la necesidad de conocer y entender las diferencias que los estudiantes tienen al momento de aprender, en este caso una segunda lengua (Ingles) ya que se ha evidenciado que no todos los estudiantes tienen un mismo estilo de aprendizaje y que cada uno desarrolla sus propias estrategias al momento de aprender.

Este proyecto contiene una serie de capítulos los cuales permiten explicar claramente el problema de investigación, las teorías y autores que lo apoyan, la metodología implementada y las conclusiones.

Palabras claves: extraversión, Introversión, personalidad, estilos y estrategias de aprendizaje.

Abstract

This research paper was done to try to help not only L2 teachers but also students from Colombian public schools to understand students' personality and learning styles to implement L2 instruction focused on students' needs at the moment to teach and learn respectively.

This project was carried out due to the necessity to know and to understand students' differences at the moment to learn a foreign language, for this reason, it is necessary to notice not all of the students learn in the same way and each student develop his/her own learning styles and strategies to reach the learning process.

In this research you can find series of chapters which give a clear explanation not only about the research problem, the theories that support this research but also the methodology and the conclusions.

Key words: extraversion, Introversion, personality, learning styles and strategies.

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Introduction

Foreign language (L2) teaching methodologies such as communicative language teaching, cooperative language teaching or task-based language teaching, have given major importance to the idea of developing teaching strategies, activities and materials that are student-centered and not teacher-centered, as it used to be some decades ago. This means that postmodern L2 teachers may be urged by the need of seeking tools that empower them to improve their instructional performance inside the classroom. Therefore, one of the implications of implementing student-centered methodologies should be developing a greater interest in learning about students as individuals and about the characteristics they have by assessing their skills, needs, interests, background, likes and dislikes. All of this in order to provide students with better instruction and address the usual problems learners find in the L2 classroom.

It is commonplace that in EFL settings there are heterogeneous classes with mixed abilities, age, social, cultural and economic backgrounds as well as students who will progress and become proficient language learners and the counterpart students who will struggle to succeed at this academic task.

Sometimes it may be hard for inexperienced and even experienced teachers to know what to do to help those students who show struggle at developing their communicative skills in the target language. It may be frustrating trying to figure out what to do to help the not-very-successful students. However, it is necessary to know that there are many factors that affect the development of second language learning. According to Keshavarz, Kiani, Rakhshani and Sepehri (2013) personality is one of the factors that influence language learning. In accordance with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), which is an instrument to identify people's personality, there are mainly four areas to discover the types

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of personality, mentioned areas are extroversion vs. introversion, sensing (concretesequential) vs. intuition, thinking vs. feeling, and judging (closure-oriented) vs. perceiving. As suggested by Keshavarz et al (2013) these eight personality traits differ in the way they learn a language, and such features may result advantageous or disadvantageous for language learners. Usually, the outgoing students are more likely to be successful at learning and on the other hand, those who demonstrate low self-confidence and shyness are the ones who have the most difficulties to achieve the academic goals of a certain language learning program (Kezwer, 1987). Nonetheless it is important to know that students who are introvert but self-confident may be good at certain areas of language learning like grammar or vocabulary development.

In line with the previous ideas, the main purpose of this research paper is to raise awareness about the differences in students' personalities in order for teachers to develop more personality-based plans in language instruction. This goal will be attained by discussing some of the main factors that influence second language learning with a deeper exploration on the effect that certain traits of students' personality have on successful proficiency in the target language. Among those traits, it has been demonstrated by different theorists (e.g. Zhang, 2008; Wesche, 1977; Johnston and Orwig, 1999; Erton, 2010) that extraversion is a common characteristic of students who are more likely to succeed in 12 learning. For this reason, when reading this document, it will be possible to raise awareness about this fact so that teachers can improve their performance within classrooms.

In order to start developing the main ideas of this research paper, it is necessary to have a deep look at the different factors that influence 12 learning and how they can be a crucial part for students to become successful and proficient language users.

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Factors that Affect Second Language Learning

Theory on the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) explains that "views on why some learners are more or less successful range from factors which are largely internal to language and mind, to explanations which involve communicative need and opportunity" (Saville-Troike, 2006, p. 62). Namely, among the different factors that influence the acquisition of a second language (L2) are age, sex, aptitude, motivation, cognitive style, personality, and learning strategies (Saville-Troike, 2006). Alongside, there is another factor considered to be crucial in L2 learning processes which is the Critical Period Hypothesis, this refers to the age at which learning begins (Candlin & Mercer, 2001).

In line with the above, Candlin et al. (2001) suggest a list of some of the characteristics that are believed to enhance effective language learning. Among the personal characteristics that might help a language learner succeed are as follows.

A good language learner:

a) is a willing and accurate guesser.

b) tries to get a message across even if specific language knowledge is lacking.

c) is willing to make mistakes.

d) constantly looks for patterns in the language.

e) practices as often as possible.

f) analyzes his or her own speech and the speech of others.

g) attends to whether his or her performance meets the standards he or she has learned.

h) enjoys grammar exercises.

i) begins learning in childhood.

j) has an above average IQ.

k) has good academic skills.

l) has a good self-image and lots of confidence (p. 50).

As shown so far, the extent to which an individual succeeds in L2 learning depends on a variety of factors ranging from cognitive differences among learners to psychological and social aspects such as aptitude or personality. The available literature related to the elements that influence L2 learning has focused mainly on individual factors such as motivation or anxiety (Woolfolk & Margetts, 2012). However, this paper will focus mainly on how personality influences language learning.

Personality and Second Language Acquisition

During the last few decades many approaches for second language teaching have given considerable importance to developing student-centered methodologies and teaching strategies that cope with students' needs, interests and skills (e.g. communicative language teaching (CLT), task-based instruction among others). Hence, learning about students' personality traits and learning styles could be a great advantage for both teachers and learners (Erton, 2010).

The reasons why it is so important for L2 teachers to know about their students are that there is a strong relationship between students' personality and success in L2 learning (Saville-Troike, 2006). For instance, according to Cook (1993) "there are three reasons for being interested in personality. They are; first, to gain scientific understanding, second, to access people and next, to change people" (p.3).

As a way to come out with strategies that enhance language learning and teaching it is necessary that teachers study personality in depth given that there exists a close relationship between the students' personality, the style and the chosen strategy by students to obtain efficient language learning processes and therefore, achieve effective results in performance of the target language.

In order to know what kind of strategies teachers can develop to address their students it is first necessary to start by defining personality and the different types of personality traits that students have in a L2 learning situation.

According to Child (1986), personality is the "more or less stable and enduring organization of a person's character, temperament, intellect and physique which determines his unique adjustment to the environment" (239). Furthermore, personality is a system of values, attitudes and behaviors that are characteristic of someone and which account for

their particular way of functioning in the environment (Strelau, 2000). It is well known that everyone is born as an individual and that personality is acquired with time and that the development of personality depends on upbringing, past experiences, dreams and ambitions, self-image (Ramos, 2010), the environment and education.

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is an instrument that helps people worldwide to have a clear insight about the way they take in information, make decisions and relate to people (Seperhi, Rakhshani, Keshavarz and Kiani, 2013). This tool identifies individual preferences in terms of four major areas.

Johnston and Orwig (1999) describe these four areas as opposing pairs as follows:

[1. Introvert vs. Extravert

Introverts think best by themselves by processing ideas in their own minds. They can be tired out by too much contact with other people. On the other hand, extraverts are usually energized by being with other people and often think best if they can discuss their ideas.

[2. Sensing vs. Intuitive

Sensing thinkers take in information sequentially through their senses and are most interested in the concrete and the here-and-now. Intuitive thinkers however, are interested in theories and possibilities and often make good guesses without going through sequential steps.

[3. Thinking vs. Feeling

People with a thinking preference tend to make decisions objectively in a logical and impartial way. In contrast, people with a feeling preference tend to make decisions subjectively on the basis of their feelings and perceived effects on people.

[4. Judging vs. Perceiving

People with a judging preference like things to be clear and settled and strive for closure. Opposite to the above, people with a perceiving preference like things to be open-ended as long as possible. (p.1)

Equally important, Saville-Troike (2006) describes a different array of personality traits as follows. Most of us may be either:

"Anxious or self-confident, risk-avoiding or risk-taking, shy or adventuresome, introverted or extraverted, inner-directed or other directed, reflective or impulsive, imaginative or uninquisitive, creative or uncreative, empathetic or insensitive to others, tolerant of ambiguity or closure oriented" (p.89).

It is also indicated by the previous author that the elements that have a correlation with success in 12 learning are when the learners are self-confident, risk-taking, adventuresome, imaginative, empathetic and tolerant of ambiguity. On the other hand anxiety has a strong relationship with low levels of negative school achievement and low language proficiency as it has been reported by different researchers in this area (e.g. Yerkes and Dodson, 1908; Covington & Omelich, 1987, p.393; in Woolfolk et al.2012).

The Influence of Extraversion on L2 Learning

As it has been shown in this work, various studies have demonstrated the existing relationship between personality and second language acquisition. Nonetheless the study of personality traits such as extraversion remains somewhat limited (Van Deale, 2005). This section will explore some of the available literature that focuses on the study of extraversion affecting L2 learning processes among students.

Rossier (1976) demonstrated a positive correlation between oral fluency and extraversion as measured by a pictorial stimulus test on a sample of Spanish speaking adolescents learning English as a second language. Similarly, Dewaele and Furnham (2000) carried out studies on the variation found in French inter-language which revealed positive relationships between extraversion score and utterance length. Furthermore, Zhan (2008) argues "since studies have shown that extraverts (or unreserved and outgoing people) acquire a second language better than introverts (or shy people), it seems also important for second language learners to develop personality" (p.2), this in order to enhance their communicative skills in the target language.

Alongside the linguistic factors that have been a matter of investigation among researchers are fluency, accuracy and complexity. This research paper, based upon the different analysis carried out by means of the available literature suggests that students who are extraverted might have better results at developing certain variables as fluency and accuracy compared to introverted learners.

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Correlation between Personality Traits, Learning Styles and Learning Styles

As Erton (2010) suggests "in order to develop strategies for learning and teaching purposes, personality should be studied by the language teachers to provide a more fruitful learning and teaching environment both for himself and the learners..." (p.1) all of this given that there is a strong relationship between students' personality, the style and the strategy chosen to achieve a certain academic goal at the end of a particular study program.

In order to understand the relationship between these three concepts, it is important to clarify the definitions of learning styles and learning strategies. In line with the previous, research suggests that a student's ability to learn in the classroom depends not only on his prior preparation but more on his characteristic approach to learning (Erton, 2010). Furthermore, according to Felder and Henriques (1995, in Erton 2010) "students learn in many ways, by seeing and hearing; reflecting and acting; reasoning logically and intuitively; memorizing and visualizing" (p.21). From this perspective, it is clear that a learning style is the same as a particular behavior or approach chosen to learn a certain item but no learner can be the same because of obvious differences in terms of individual characteristics. Consequently, as Moore (1993) argues "learning styles are the mental processes and instrumental settings a student uses most effectively while learning."

The relationship between learning styles and personality is that extraverted learners follow an auditory style, whereas introverted learners are more visual kind of learners. (Nosratinia, n.d.)

In general words it is valid to say that it is a great implication for 12 teachers to study and learn about their students' learning styles in order to provide effective instruction that accommodates to the learners' needs and so that they can enhance their academic achievement and become more likely to succeed in language learning.

Teaching Strategies Based on Learning Styles and Personality Traits

As shown so far there is a big connection between personality and language learning, and as it was stated previously in this paper, it is necessary for EFL teachers to raise awareness about students' personality and learning styles in order to plan instruction and activities based on that knowledge of each individual student. Therefore, this section will focus on how to deal with learning about students' personality and how to implement activities that agree with each student's need.

In order for teachers to develop activities that take into account students' personality traits and learning styles it is first necessary to understand what kind of personality students display inside the 12 classroom. To do so, as described in a previous section in this document, it is suggested that teachers implement a personality questionnaire that indicates if students are more introverted or extraverted. Once the teacher gets to know the type of personality that students have, it will be possible to match those results to the learning style they belong to. As it was shown before, students who display extraversion are more likely to have an auditory style of learning, whereas introverted students tend to have a visual style of learning.

Taking into account the previous ideas, the following is a series of features that teachers could consider when developing activities after they know their students characteristics. This is a list of variables described by Dr's Bandler and Grinder, (n.d.) in Verster (2010) in the Field of Neuro-Linguistic Programming

1. If students belong to the auditory-kind-of learner:

- a. ...like the teacher to provide verbal instructions
- b. ...like dialogues, discussion and plays
- c. ...solve problems by talking about them

- d. ... use written and sounds as memory aids
- 2. If students belong to the visual-kind-of learner:
 - a. ...look at the teacher's face intently
 - b. ...like looking at walls displays, books etc.
 - c. ... often recognize words by sight
 - d. ... use lists to organize their thoughts
 - e. ...recall information by remembering how it was set out on a page

Identifying personality types in students

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is one of the biggest tests to identify personality traits. However, this has to be administered by a professional supervisor. Nonetheless, in order to make it more convenient for both teachers and students, there are available many on-line free and easy-to-use personality tests not as ample or professionally valid as MBTI but they can certainly give an insight of whether people are introvert or extravert.

For instance there is a free web test known as 16personalities which is similar to the MBTI because it indicates the personality type and furthermore it provides additional information that will help understand strengths and weaknesses related to people's dominant traits. It can be taken by students who are 13 and on. The test can be found on www.16personalities.com it takes less than 12 minutes and it can be taken in any language.

Once students have taken the test, teachers can make their students send their results via e-mail in order to have a clear idea of what type of personality students have and to develop activities that fit with students' personality, needs and interests.

Activities for extraverted students

As it was mentioned before, students who have an extraverted type of personality tend to follow an auditory style of learning. For that reason, the following are a series of activities that can be implemented taking into account this information.

Given the fact that aural learners are driven by sounds, teachers need to make sure to include a variety of sound and noise in their lessons. For auditory students it is possible to use:

Listening activities, songs, listening to stories, verbal, instructions and explanations, poems and riddles, dictations, monologues, role-plays and debates.

Using songs. When using songs in the classroom always make sure to teach a grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation point so that the song is not only entertaining and interesting but also meaningful in learning.

Activity

The following is a description of a way of using songs that can be adapted to any topic or any lesson.

[1. The first step is to decide the topic you want to emphasize or strengthen with your song. The chosen song can be used at the beginning of any lesson as a way to introduce a new topic or it can also be used at the end of it in order for students to practice what they learn throughout the lesson.

[2. After deciding the topic, look for a song that includes the topic. There is a freeto-use website that has a wide variety of songs classified in alphabetic order and in the grammar or language point you want to teach. The website is http://www.esllounge.com/songstop.php [3. If you decide for example to teach a tense, say present simple, one idea is to look for the original lyrics to the song and leave out all the verbs that are in present simple.

[4. Make copies of the lyrics without the verbs in present simple and number the gaps.

[5. Cut the lyrics into five to six pieces depending on the number of paragraphs that the song has. This will be like a warm-up activity for students. The idea is that the first thing they have to do is listen to the song for a first time to put the pieces of lyrics in the correct order. There may be five or six cards that include the lyrics, you can hand them out and tell students that they have to put those cards in a descending order.

[6. After students organize the lyrics, tell them that they have to complete the lyrics with the words they listen. An option here is to write on the board a list of the missing words combined with words that do not appear in the lyrics to help students complete the blanks.

[7. Repeat the song twice and then check number by number. Elicit from students and encourage them to participate and to tell you the missing word in each gap.

[8. An alternative to using songs is to modify the lyrics by changing words with others that are similar in pronunciation. For this, you can highlight the words that you changed to help students pay attention to the words they have to change once they listen to the song.

[9. Another alternative is to write only the initial letter of the word you want to leave out.

[10. An additional option to use songs is by using karaoke activities in which students recite and repeat written words to help them with pronunciation and to have fun while practicing new language.

Songs are a very good way of teaching a language point because they can be adapted and used with any language level because they can be modified taking into account students' skills, needs and interests.

Using dictations. Dictations can become an interesting way for students to practice listening and speaking skills which can be done among students to students or teacher to students.

Activity

- When using dictations first you have to look for a passage or a short story that includes a language point that has been recently taught. Depending on the level of your students you can decide to start by dictating phrases and short sentences before moving to passages.
- You can record yourself reading the passage and then play the recording in class or you can dictate lively the passage. Also, you can look for free dictations online in websites like YouTube.
- Make sure students prepare their materials (paper and pen or pencil).
- Repeat three times using different speeds each time. Start by reading fast, then slow and the slower.
- Once you finish you can have your students compare what they have to see their differences before checking with the original words.
- You can display the sentences, passage or story with a projector or with a video beam and your laptop.
- You can ask your students to work in pairs and do the same exercise by dictating each other a short passage or a list of sentences.

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Dictation activities can be very significant because they can give students many opportunities to practice pronunciation and fluency as well as listening skills and this can prepare them to other listening activities because they are actively participating and paying attention.

Activities for introverted students

In previous sections in this document it was explained that introverted students tend to have a visual style of learning. Considering the previous information, it is possible to use the following activities with this kind of students. These activities are aimed at mitigating this lack of success in L2 learning.

Remember that visual students, opposite to auditory students, prefer to read, watch and pay attention to written forms, and images through videos and acting demonstrations.

Appropriate activities for visual learners may include the use of flashcards, board games puzzle and word games (crosswords, word search, word worms)

Conclusions

The active process of learning how to learn is an empowering experience which can lead any individual to discover and have a clear insight of one's learning style and later on achieve better academic results and enhance self-confidence, however, it is important to acknowledge that no one's style is better than another, although many language school programs favor certain types of learners over others. On the other hand, students should be prepared to expand their learning style repertoire so that they can easily learn in a variety of learning situations. It should be emphasized that a person does not probably suits to only one type of learner. Therefore, what L2 teachers should aim for is to strengthen those areas where some students are weak.

In relation to our Colombian context and more specifically, referring to public schools in Pasto, this student-centered way of teaching English as a foreign language may be really adequate and advantageous. This because teachers have to deal with large classes that involve a great difference in students' personalities and learning styles. Therefore, if this issue is tackled by identifying the specific way in which students learn, instruction could be much easier and also because planning lessons based on students' personality could provide teachers with more personalized instruction. At the same time, that this could trigger more ideas for activities that explore all kinds of learning styles. Moreover, if teachers raised awareness about their students' personality, other problems could be tackled such as demotivation, low grades and lack of participation in class work, this is so because if teachers address every individual kind of learning style, and by recognizing the differences inside the classroom, students will have more chances to succeed taking into account that every person learns in a different way, and at the same time, each student needs a different approach to accomplish the learning goals set by the language program.

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According to the literature reviewed in this paper in relation to second language acquisition (SLA) there are many factors that affect language learning such as age, sex, motivation, learning styles and personality. Mainly, this paper discussed the differences between those students who are extroverted and introverted. It is believed that extravert students are the ones who have an easier process of language learning while introversion may be a liability in some situations for language learners.

In the present paper a personality trait that was mentioned widely was extraversion, by saying that students who are extravert tend to learn faster or better in certain areas of language learning. However, it is important to realize that every person learns in a different way, and by recognizing this fact, planning and instruction may be modified and adapted based on that idea.

In relation with the above, it was suggested that extraversion might be developed throughout the process of language learning. Nonetheless, a possible limitation of promoting extraversion in students may be that students are attached to the thinking that they cannot display an extraverted-type behavior because the situation inside the classroom requires students to be shy out of respect to the teacher as it is mentioned by Ellis (1994). For this reason, it is a big responsibility to create an atmosphere and an environment where the student can feel safe, confident and free to participate actively and engage in every activity developed in class.

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ANEXOS

ANEXO A.

UNIVERSIDAD DE NARIÑO English Lesson Plan Background information: Course: English Grade: elementary students Teacher: Mario Fernando Hernandez Bastidas Time: 50 minutes (10:00 am - 10:50 am) Objectives: Students will be able to identify not only Daily activities but also they will be able to use a correct present simple grammar structure. Subsidiary aims - Present the topics and possible activities to be developed in class - Teach new words and expressions to use saying daily activities. - Create a motivating environment for the students Personal aims: - Be motivated and active to enable students to interact during the class. - Be prepared for any possible problem. Class Profile: Number of students: 35 students Age: between the ages of 15 and 20 Level: beginners Personality: extravert and introvert Language: Skill focus: listening, reading and writing. Sub skills focus: Pronunciation Vocabulary: all the vocabulary they remember and the vocabulary presented in class (get up, have a shower, have breakfast, go to work, come home and so on) Materials: Flash cards Board Previous class work: Students just finished their introductory level so, it is expected they can introduce themselves, recognize some grammatical structures like the present simple. Besides, they have a repertory of words from different topics like animals, places, family and jobs.

Step	Time	Activity	Procedure	Teacher's task	Students' task	Interaction	Purpose
1	3-5 min	Opening	Teacher arrives; introduces himself, asks the students to say their names their ages, the place where they live using simple questions like: what is your name?	Introduces himself, asks one simple question to each student.	Listen, answer the simple question teacher will ask.	T✦✦Ss	Diagnose if the students recognize and use the structures teacher uses (speaking) when introducing himself and themselves, and,
	2-5 min.		After that, teacher presents the contents, the vocabulary, the activities and some commands (get up, have/take a shower, have breakfast, go to work, come home etc.) to be used in the class.	Explains the course specifying the topics and the activities. Answers possible questions. Be motivated and motivate students.	Describe/organize pictures according to daily activities, create an individual daily routine and ask questions.	T → Ss	Provide the students with some unknown words or expressions to use in class.
	3-4 min		Create a daily routine Teacher asks the students to write on the board some of the activities they do in one day.	Teacher pushes students to do it quickly. If it is necessary, the teacher will give the first activity or select one student randomly, to motivate them. Teacher writes down the information.	Write the possible activities and score them from 1 to 10 according to their likes.	Ss ↔ T	Get possible topics or activities taking into account the students likes. Motivate them to participate and, increase student's confidence. Involve the students in the activities selection process. Diagnose if they can write simple words in English.
2	4-6 min	Review	Students work individually. They have to remember words or expressions in English related to the topic they have already learnt and write them down and hand them in a piece of paper to the teacher.	Supervises the students work. If it is necessary, provides the directions again to avoid the waste of time.	Work individually to Create and hand in a list of vocabulary they remember.	Ss Individual work	Diagnose the vocabulary that the students know. Make students interact among themselves.

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3	1 min	Main Activity	Using the previous activity, teacher introduces the main activity (create a daily routine).	Chooses a nice, simple and short example of a daily routine considering the students age and level. Gives clear instructions to the students.	Pay attention to the instructions. Ask questions if they do not understand the instructions or one difficult word.	T→ Ss	Introduce a new activity
	4-5 min		Students analyze the example while the teacher explains the meaning and give the pronunciation of some words that they do not know.	Analyzes the example interacting with the class. Make students repeat the words as a whole and individually. and answers possible questions	Pay attention, ask questions, and repeat the pronunciation of the words given by the teacher.	T → Ss	Explain and teach the meaning of some unknown words or expressions to the class. Give the right pronunciation of some words. Clarify some doubte to avoid
	7-9 min		After they understand the example they read it (2/3 min) two or three times in order to create their own daily routine using the words and expressions given by the teacher on the board.	Uses the words and expressions written on the board, create their daily routine. Helps the students if they do not know one word.	Pay attention on the meaning of each word or expression. Ask for help if they do not understand or know one word.	Ss ↔ Ss	doubts to avoid misunderstandings. Diagnose the level of the writing students have by using grammar and expressions. Give the students a chance to enjoy a class while learning.
	2-3 min	Coherence and cohesion	 Students will read their daily activity When samples are finished teacher asks one student to write a sentence by using one flash card on the board. 	Chooses randomly one student from the whole class.	Write one sentence of their own example by using one of the flash card.	Ss←→T	Collect all the samples given by the students.