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**Improving second language acquisition through  
the implementation of FONTAN system.**

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Research Report submitted  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master in English Language teaching for Self-Directed Learning

Directed by: Ana Maria TERNENT and Nohora BRYAN

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August, 2015

### Declaration

I hereby declare that my research report entitled:

Improving second language acquisition through the implementation of FONTAN system.

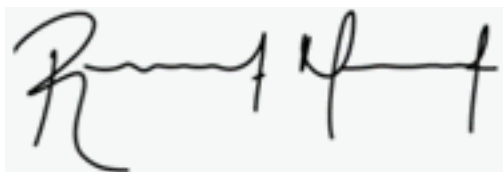
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- complies with the word limits and other requirements stipulated by the Research Subcommittee of the Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures;
- has been submitted by or on the required submission date.

Date: August 10th 2015

Full Name:

Ricardo MENDOZA

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light gray background. The signature is cursive and appears to read 'Ricardo Mendoza'.

### **Acknowledgements**

To Isabel, Bibiana and my parents.

All this work could be conceivable thanks to the help of my wife and the patience of my daughter. This hard process was a successful experience to be what I am today. This could not be possible without the understanding and support from all my family. The times I had to say: “I have to read” and the lot of times I had to say: “I have to write” made me stronger. This whole process made me proud of myself, it also made me feel very proud of the family I have, especially my wife and my daughter.

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### **Abstract**

This research project was carried out with students, parents and teachers from a public school in Chia, Colombia. It was aimed at defining the impact of the implementation of a pedagogical alternative called FONTAN relational system on the students' second language learning processes. The study was a result of a qualitative research, it was based on giving support to the academic factors and individual capacities that have contributed to the expected outcomes and influences on the students' performance in the current level of English at school. Questionnaires, surveys, interviews and views of external observers provided by the university, were used to gather data. The data was qualitatively analysed and results showed that students can become more fluent and confident toward the use of English they can make significant progress in short time. They develop autonomy as the first step to reach Self-Directed Learning and relate what they learn with their experiences while striving for excellence at their own pace. On the other hand, the results also showed that autonomy and its development must be applied across different subjects. The implementation of a well-planned initial need assessment for all language courses could be done through the establishment of teacher learning communities and the access to technological resources.

*Key words:* Autonomy, Self-Directed Learning, FONTAN system

### **Resumen**

Este proyecto de investigación se llevó a cabo con los estudiantes, padres y docentes de un colegio público en Chía, Colombia. El estudio se centró en determinar los resultados de la implementación de una alternativa pedagógica llamada sistema relacional FONTAN en los procesos de aprendizaje de los estudiantes de un segundo idioma. Este estudio también se centró en apoyar los factores académicos y capacidades individuales que han influido en los resultados de los estudiantes en el nivel actual de inglés en el colegio. Cuestionarios, encuestas y entrevistas fueron utilizados para recopilar datos. Los datos fueron analizados cualitativamente y los resultados mostraron que los estudiantes pueden llegar a expresarse con fluidez y seguridad, pueden tener avances significativos en corto tiempo desarrollando autonomía y relacionar lo que aprenden con sus experiencias, mientras se esfuerzan por alcanzar la excelencia a su propio ritmo. Por otro lado, los resultados mostraron que la autonomía y su desarrollo se deben aplicar en las diferentes asignaturas. La implementación de un diagnóstico inicial de necesidades acerca de la enseñanza del inglés, se podría hacer a través de la creación de comunidades de aprendizaje y el acceso a recursos tecnológicos.

*Palabras Clave:* autonomía, aprendizaje auto-dirigido, sistema

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*There are different kinds of learners.  
That is why we have designed a system  
where students can be themselves.  
(Julio Fontan, 2012).*

### **Improving second language acquisition through the implementation of FONTAN system**

The goals to learn a second language have changed. Some decades ago, it was common to know about the language instead of how to use it. Nowadays, it is very important to learn the target language to communicate with native speakers. The present study focuses on identifying the relationships between a personalized learning system implemented at a rural, public school in Chia, Colombia, and the students' acquisition of English as a foreign language in that setting.

Santa Maria Del Rio School is located in Chia, Colombia. This rural public school was chosen by the National Minister of Education and the Mayor of Chia, as a pilot institution to implement a pedagogical alternative called the SERF system, which had never been done before. After a few difficulties, the SERF system was adopted in 2006.

Attending the global trends in language teaching and the imperative need to strengthen students' skills associated with proficiency in foreign language, the Santa Maria Del Rio School decided to contact Universidad de la Sabana in order to implement a project led by the Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures. The implementation of this project at the school was possible with the help of two research counselors, an academic coordinator, a teacher from the university and a teacher from the school. This project is based on the constructs of autonomy, responsibility, Self-Directed learning and leadership. The plan was implemented in two phases,

the first one from July to December 2014 and the second one from January to June 2015. These phases are part of a larger project to be carried out.

Learning a second language demands independent work. That is the reason why learners must be focused on learning by themselves so that they can be able to learn about linguistic and communicative aspects of acquiring a second language. Self-directed learning processes must be based on students' own learning styles, and on identifying strategies that will enable them to acquire a second language successfully.

Collins English dictionary defines hetero-didactic as “other one” and didactic as “intended to instruct”. In this system, the teacher is who presents the content and students are in charge of their learning process. However, there are other alternatives that promote independence for learning. The Fontan Relational System is one of them, this methodology was adopted by a public school Santa Maria del Rio located in the town of Chia. At this school, students learn by themselves. They find out about the content on their own. This is called the autodidactic system, where students decide on specific goals and set priorities for self-directed learning, according to their capability. (Dam, 1995; Karlsson et al, 2007; Cotterall and Murray, 2009).

In this relational system, students can decide how to learn and achieve their goals. The system is a self-learning model based on each student's skills and their capacity for learning at their own pace. This promotes the achievement of excellence in each student and highlights his/her potentials.

All these characteristics are fostered in students from Santa Maria Del Rio School, in terms of the capacity to manage their autonomous and self-directed learning, and this obviously extends into the field of English language acquisition. The present study attempts to determine

the impact of the Fontan Relational System (SERF from the Spanish: Sistema Educativo Relacional Fontan) on students' learning processes in English classes and avoid low level of English as a problem to enter to a renowned institution of higher education.

### **Rationale of the study**

Languages learners must be independent and be able to use the second language to avoid a breakdown in communication. Therefore, educators and languages learners can learn or reflect on improving strategies for students in order to foster autonomy and responsibility. In this manner, students will learn how to focus on their learning process, they will be able to evaluate what they are learning and whether it leads to the defined goals or not. Consequently, students will use the acquired knowledge taking into account their needs and shortcomings.

In a traditional method, the student adopts a receptive role. In personalized methods, such as the Fontan Relational System, which is described below, students have to be part of the learning process. This system seeks the formation of autonomous learners. It allows children and young people to relate acquired knowledge to other knowledge and to their own lives. The proposal to implement this relational system at Santa Maria Del Rio School, arose from the search for new educational practices that give students different alternatives based on their weaknesses and on the poor results of the traditional systems applied in most public schools.

In self-directed learning, teacher and student roles have to be transformed. The teacher must become a guide and a link between knowledge, on the other hand, learners have to be responsible of their process. Teachers can help students develop skills to become more self-directed in the learning process (Little, 1991; Dam, 1995; Karlsson, Kjisik, & Nordlund, 2007).

Nowadays, students can study at their pace. Every student can schedule time for studying according to his/her ability and necessity independently from classmates or teachers. The significant part, is that the teacher leads the process by constantly examining students' progress in the second language. Moreover, students are in charge of their learning through self-directed proposals, such as set goals, attentiveness, and decision-making skills (Brockett, 2012). Students develop their strategies and positive attitudes to overcome most learning difficulties.

The present study, then, seeks to understand how the principles of the SERF system, based on promoting self-directed learning, affect students' English language learning in order to identify factors that may improve the students' results and benefit the process in similar contexts. Also, how the particular characteristics of the system could enrich other teaching approaches in order to contribute to students' learning of English as a foreign language.

### **Needs analysis and problem statement**

Colombian education, particularly public education has traditionally had poor results in national and international evaluations (Botero de los Rios, 2014). Needless to say, results in English have also been very low and have led to the development of national policies and interventions that have had discouraging results (see table 2 below).

In the midst of this worrisome situation which predicts lower educational levels, fewer job opportunities, less workforce capability, and exclusion from the globalized economy, Colegio Santa María del Río has seemed to show consistent improvement in student general scores on the state exam (PRUEBAS SABER 11) and also on their scores in English (see table 1 below). The school's average exceeds the national average and that of the department of Cundinamarca, coming close to the average of Bogotá where most of the bilingual schools in the country are

located. However, it is important to note that this indicator is also affected by socio-economic factors that do not allow students to pay for tuition even if they access higher education. Recent government policies may improve this situation in the coming years with programs such as “Ser Pilo Paga” a program which gives scholarships to the best results in the ICFES national exams.

Table 1

*Santa María Del Rio School National Exam General Results*

	Superior 2011	Superior 2012	Very Superior 2013	Category A 2014
National General Average	43.45	43.94	43.64	48.62
Cundinamarca General Average	44.41	44.73	44.51	49.10
Bogota General Average	46.84	45.74	46.96	54.82
Santa Maria Del Rio School Average	47.53	52.39	49.05	54.04

Table 2

*Santa María Del Rio School National Exam English Results*

	Superior 2011	Superior 2012	Very Superior 2013	Category A 2014
National English Average	42.71	43.34	43.98	49.22
Cundinamarca English Average	43.18	44.52	39.74	50.4
Bogota English Average	45.87	48.79	49.04	54.2
Santa Maria Del Rio School Average	44.65	53.07	47.56	53.14

It is important, nonetheless, to take into consideration that these averages are not significantly high in general. Government studies show that over 50% of students finish high

school with a level that is inferior to A1 (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2014). This makes it very difficult for students to enter and succeed in higher education. However, in light of the apparently promising situation at Colegio Santa María del Río, the researcher proposes this project, in the first place, as a way to determine what factors in the SERF may be contributing to these results which stand out when compared to the national norms for rural, public schools. This may serve to strengthen the model in order to attempt to achieve higher levels of English by these students.

Also, the theory behind the SERF is that the learning process must be centered on every learner. Learners become the central focus of the learning process, they have to guide the process and acquire knowledge by themselves. Yet, this situation, in the researcher's opinion, is not always true. Many students are not autonomous when it comes to learning and they do not want to make any effort to improve their abilities in the English language. The school seeks to foster student autonomy for students in all subjects. Therefore, it is necessary to assess the effectiveness of the system specifically as it is applied in English class in order to determine how to optimize the process so that all students benefit from it.

### **Justification of problem's significance**

For the society and individuals, autonomy has various advantages. An autonomous student can make judgments and assess his/her knowledge acquisition. Becoming an autonomous learner consists of fostering critical reflective thinking. Fostering autonomy in students is a daily challenge for teachers. To be successful in this process depends on different conditions as personal needs and motivation. If every student can define his/her personal goals, arrange and organize his/her learning ability, results will be better. (Holec, 1979). A second

language student should learn how to set goals in order to increase knowledge and improve performance. He/she must know what the objectives are in order to learn a second language.

In the specific case of Colegio Santa María del Río, it is important to become aware of the specific characteristics of the model that may be contributing to students' success in learning English in order to see how those may be strengthened, especially with the aim of attempting to ensure better and more consistent results for all students. How they may be enriched with other strategies for continued improvement; and what lessons can be learned for other institutions to use in the implementation of more successful English teaching programs.

### **Strategy selected to address problem**

In order to determine what factors in the SERF system contribute to self-directed English language learning and what can be enriched or modified, the present study seeks to describe the situation through the analysis of documents, results, documentation of teachers, students, and parent perceptions of the model, as well as the researcher's experience as the English teacher at the school. These views will be complemented by the views of two external observers, a coordinator and a teacher provided by the University to support the process for a year. Finally, the implementation of the SERF system will be contrasted with the theory about autonomy and self-directed learning, like other personalized learning models reviewed in this research project.

### **Research question**

The research question to be addressed in this study is the following:

What factors have contributed to or restrained expected outcomes of the English program of the Fontan Relational System for the students at Santa Maria del Río School?



## Research Objectives

### General:

To determine the impact of the implementation of the Fontan Relational System on students' second language acquisition.

### Specific:

- To assess the organizational factors (institutional, cultural, communications, resources etc.) and individual capacities (students 'and teachers' behaviours and expertise, time, etc.) That have influenced students' academic results.
- To assess the current level of English of students in the school.
- To identify student, teacher, and parent's perceptions regarding the teaching and learning of English within the Fontan system.
- To propose adjustments to the teaching model based on the findings, and a theoretical framework regarding English Language Teaching in a personalized learning model such as the Fontan system.

Language learners and educators can learn or reflect on improving strategies for students to become autonomous and responsible in their second language acquisition process. Thus, when applying these strategies, second language acquisition is enriched and it will be integrated with the student's personal attitude, behaviour and autonomy. Currently, the matter is that teachers must foster learners' autonomy as a social approach; teaching how to use the resources properly, manage time, fostering motivation and students' confidence about what they do.

This research report is divided into six main chapters. The first one consists of a general overview of the aspects that motivated the study, the strategy proposed to address the problem, and the research question and objectives. The second chapter includes the theoretical framework and the theory related to the constructs presented in the study. Chapter three defines the SERF system at Santa Maria del Rio school, teacher and student roles. Chapter four describes the type of study, legal framework, and the context, characteristics of the participants, the researcher's role and the data collection instruments. Chapter five shows the results and data analysis, the data management, procedures, and methodology. Finally, chapter six includes the conclusions, pedagogical implications, limitations and recommendations for further research.

### **Theoretical Framework and State of the Art**

In the traditional teaching method, knowledge is transmitted from the teacher to the students. Besides, the learning process is centered on teachers but not on students. The learner's role is passive rather than active. Today, teaching methods must be focused on pedagogical alternatives and educational interactions that promote autonomy and Self-Directed Learning. Autonomy focused on second language acquisition gives learners the role of being responsible of their learning process, avoiding rejection of help or advice (Dickinson 1982). Students can be encouraged to be self-directed in the interest of improve proficiency in language skills (Blumberg, 2009). This chapter mentions the constructs related to this research project: Autonomy, Self-Directed Learning and the State of the Art.

#### **Autonomy**

Traditional language teaching methods propose that everything that students learn will be available to be used at any time (Little 1989). Students sometimes do not learn what teachers teach because of factors such as motivation, interest or preparation are not focused on their learning process (Dörnyei, 2008).

However, developing communicative skills in a second language is directly related to the tendency to teach learners how to foster autonomy. In this area, this self-sufficiency derives from taking the initiative or making decisions in planning and executing learning activities to reach the goals through agreements with a teacher as facilitator instead of a transmitter of knowledge. For a definition of this term, it is necessary to quote Holec (1981:3, cited in Benson & Voller, 1997:1) who describes it as “the ability to take charge of one’s learning”. On the other hand, David Little (2000), argued that the concept of autonomy is a slippery concept because it is

difficult to define precisely. According to this, he points out that autonomy requires a positive attitude, a capacity for reflection, a readiness to be pro-active in self-management and interaction with others. He considers that the most efficient learners are those who know how to use the previous knowledge to carry out each new task.

Autonomy in language learning is understood as the ability for critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action (Little, 1991). It also implies that students will develop a deep sense toward their learning process. This autonomy will appear in students when they transfer the new knowledge to broader contexts. Therefore, learning appears as something self-motivated and students will assume it as a personal need.

Investigators in the field of autonomous learning continued with similar definitions: “Autonomy is a situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all the decisions concerned with his/her learning and the implementation of those decisions” (Leslie Dickinson, 1993, p. 332). “Autonomy is a recognition of the rights of learners within educational systems”. (Phil Benson, 2003, p. 294).

Taking into account all these concepts about learner autonomy, Sinclair (2000) declares some common characteristics of learner autonomy and they seem to be generally accepted by language teachers. Sinclair declaration is as follows:

Autonomy is a construct of capacity which is not inborn; autonomy consists of learners’ willingness to be responsible for their own learning; there are degrees of autonomy which are unstable and changeable; autonomy can occur both inside and outside the classroom; autonomy has a social as well as an individual dimension; and that promotion of autonomy requires conscious awareness of the learning process. (Sinclair, 2000, p. 5)

After these definitions, there seems to be a consensus among several authors about the components of autonomy in language learning. According to Nunan (1997), there are certain degrees or levels of autonomy (p.195). These levels depend on student's age, how far they have progressed and what they understand as a learning need. This model is composed by five levels of "learner action", they are: awareness, involvement, intervention, creation and transcendence. (See table below).

Table 3. *Implementation of Autonomy Levels Model. (Nunan, 1997, p 195)*

Level	Learner Action	Content	Process
1	Awareness	Learners are made aware of the pedagogical goals and content of the materials they are using.	Learners identify strategy implications of pedagogical tasks and identify their own preferred learning styles / strategies.
2	Involvement	Learners are involved in selecting their own goals from a range of alternatives on offer.	Learners make choices among a range of options.
3	Intervention	Learners are involved in modifying and adapting the goals and content of the learning program.	Learners modify / adapt tasks.
4	Creation	Learners create their own goals and objectives.	Learners create their own tasks.
5	Transcendence	Learners go beyond the classroom and make links between the content of classroom learning and the world beyond.	Learners become teachers and researchers.

Finally, it is necessary to design new methodologies based on what students can learn in order to develop their own communicative skills. Fostering autonomy in students will facilitate a learning process to help improve their self-confidence. Research has shown that high-level

students are able to choose the most appropriate strategies to solve problems, meaning they can deal with specific situations and determine their goals. (Nisbet & Shucksmith, 1991).

### **Self-Directed Learning**

Self-Directed Learning has become a new paradigm for learning. In 1975, Malcolm Knowles published the work “Self-Directed Learning” (SDL) where he defines it as:

“In its broadest meaning, ‘self-directed learning’ describes a process by which individuals take the initiative, with or without the assistance of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identify human and material resources for learning, choosing and implement appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes.” (Knowles, 1975, p.18).

A teacher would describe students as self-directed if they become productively engaged in tasks and activities without the need of continuous direction or encouragement. If students are able to determine their own learning objectives, they will choose their own way to achieve them and self-evaluate their own progress.

Winne & Hadwin (1998) identified four key phases of self-directed learning in academic learning situations:

- Defining tasks. The stage where students have a perception about the studying task, what are their limitations and the resources to do the task.
- Setting goals and planning. In this stage students design a plan to address the task, and determine goals according to their skills and needs.
- Enacting study tactics and strategies. Based on the previous stage, students carry out the plans, tactics and strategies to accomplish the task.

- Metacognitive adapting studying. This final stage, shows how the students change to cognitive structures that will influence future studying tasks.

This encloses a complete model of learning with the previous four basic stages. It also shows that students differentiate studying from learning through metacognitive processes that involve SDL. These metacognitive processes change student's knowledge, skills, beliefs, dispositions and motivational factors that will play an important role in future studying tasks. (Winne & Hadwin, 1998). These authors also proposed that each of the stages should be considered taking into account two main factors. The first one is the student's expertise and domain of the topics and the second one is the degree in which the student is metacognitively active.

Regarding this field, Knowles (1975), mentions that in all these phases proposed by Winne & Hadwin, learners are able to take responsibility and work collaboratively on the construction of concepts. Students develop skills to self-managing, setting goals, resources usage, learning strategies, external support and self-assessment.

Another theorist, Garrison (1997), defines SDL as a practice that allows learners to use self-management through the use of learning resources within the learning context and the use of self-monitoring (cognitive responsibility), and motivation. Garrison's definition of SDL is an approach where learners are motivated to be responsible for their learning processes taking advantage of their construction of new knowledge. These factors are associated with learning in an educational context.

According to this, proficient students can be self-directed. This becomes a very pertinent issue that relates SDL strategies, self-efficacy, and methodologies centered on learners. Teachers

are concerned with helping pupils to enhance their learning abilities through SDL, encouraging them to be more self-directed and efficient in their second language acquisition process to obtain advanced levels of proficiency (Blumberg, 2009). The objective is to encourage students to improve their SDL skills through the implementation of strategies, activities, and tasks. This is regarded as an innovation where students can transform experiences to act with self-confidence.

On the other hand, Brockett and Hiemstra (1991), developed what they called a PRO-model “Personal Responsibility Orientation” where the learners are between the processes of instruction and the personal characteristics. This PRO-model was based on personal responsibility, self-directed learning, learner self-direction and self-direction in learning. All these factors were framed within a larger social context that influences the learner and the teaching-learning process. In this case, Self-Directed learning becomes a way of life. This paradigm helps learners to be more responsible for their learning.

All of the aforementioned is also directly associated with a successful language learning processes. Griffiths (2008), affirms that Self-Directed Learning can be a tool to help students become more independent from teachers. They also can acquire knowledge by modelling and implementing self-directed learning strategies that motivate them to make right decisions to improve their learning process. This will encourage and give them tools to become autonomous life-long learners.

The constructivist conception of the learning process at the Santa Maria School is based on the idea that education’s objective in public schools is to promote students’ personal growth within the group to which they belong. This kind of knowledge will not be successful unless students are assisted through purposeful and planned activities that foster meaningful learning.



Several authors, such as Ausubel and Coll (1978) have proposed that through meaningful activities and tasks students build understanding to enhance their knowledge about the physical and social world, which in turn, empowers their personal growth. Consequently, the characteristics which boost the instructional process are meaningful learning, understanding academic content and usefulness of what is learned. This implies that the purpose of the pedagogical intervention is to develop student's ability to create meaningful learning approaches in different situations.

### **State of the art**

The teaching-learning process requires deep transformations aimed at fostering autonomy and self-directed learning. Personalised education, may be one way of achieving these transformations. To succeed, it is necessary to involve all the school community and the use of new pedagogical alternatives in order to increase the performance of all students.

In these proposals, the teacher can support new strategies and students' intentions to learn in their own way. Moreover, in the new alternatives, students can be in charge of their learning process through autonomy and self-directed proposals such as, setting goals, attentiveness and decision-making skills (Brockett, 2012). Students will develop their own strategies and maintain a positive attitude to overcome learning difficulties.

Autonomous learning and SDL refer to the acceptance for responsibility by students in their learning process. In autumn 2004, Andrew Pollard and Mary James published a handbook gathering experiences about personalized learning at the United Kingdom. Under their slogan "every child matters", they focused their study on improving educational outcomes for students through personalised learning. Their goals were to promote learning autonomy for students to

improve the effectiveness of pupils' group work and enhance their participation through consultation. In these studies, researchers suggested some components of personalised learning such as setting personal targets, mentoring strategies, pupil's choice for study and learning and the understanding of each student's needs. Some of the most important findings of this research were: give students opportunities to decide their own learning objectives, provide guidance on asking questions, help learners to assess their own and one another's learning and give pupils opportunities to assess one another's work. These findings can contribute to the current study with some aspects like student's design of their own learning objectives, second language acquisition through one another's work and acceptance of new strategies to learn.

Another study by Mahdavinia and Nabatchi (2011) in Iran, investigated portfolios as a mean of assessment that helped students with their self-directed learning. They pointed out that students must be explicitly invited to reflect on their concept of SDL, motivation and outcomes. They also suggested that learners include self-assessment to analyze what they had experienced and learned. Self-assessment promoted learners' need to be responsible and be excited about learning. Mahdavinia and Nabatchi (2011), also stated that students should share their intentions, goals, and criteria with other students. The authors in this study found that SDL can enlarge the view of what is learned, demonstrate progress toward goals and offer opportunities for peer supported growth. Students must experience positive attitudes and responsibility towards English classes. These findings can contribute to the current research with the proposal of broaden students view of their goals and the opportunity to acquire knowledge through one's another work. In addition, to achieve autonomy and greater dedication, students need to understand why

the contents are taught. They need to be encouraged to set their goals and achievements through meaningful activities.

Murphy (2011) studied the importance of developing autonomy and the variety of forms it can take. The study examined autonomy in distance language learning and how the ability and opportunity for decision-making are related to the context. In this paper, Murphy points out that teachers could increase the efforts of students guiding choices and decisions they made. Murphy's study showed how learners manage and adjust to their new learning environments by providing practical examples of new knowledge. In this manner, students have the opportunity to exchange their experiences of learning. Through these experiences, learners can foster self-awareness and reflection on the learning process in order to make correct decisions. Murphy (2011) also stated that autonomy can take a variety of forms depending on learning contexts and learner characteristics. This kind of autonomy relates the opportunity for decision-making in a particular context. The study concluded with the following considerations; course designers and tutors could encourage learners to become aware of the experiences and features of their own learning environment and think more explicitly of the choices they can make. Learners, in turn, can actively outline their learning context to establish a positive learning experience.

In October 2012, Hanover's research presented a summary of differences between traditional and personalized education. Researchers from Hannover research council reviewed flexible learning options for students and the use of real-time students' assessment to improve instruction and performance-based curricular frameworks. They pointed out that it is important to give pupils the opportunities to decide their learning objectives, provide them with guidance on asking questions and let them assess other students' work. Their research recommends

empowering learner potentials for autonomous learning. It will help teachers to encourage their students connecting and relating the acquired knowledge with their experiences. Students learn how to construct communities and work cooperatively. This helps student acquire leadership skills and respect for others' pace of learning.

Another study on the effective promotion of autonomy from 2010 is the research of Aliponga, Gamble and Ando in Japan. They argue that learners can improve on their own through further meaningful practice using Ur's model which consist of verbalization, automatization and autonomy. One of their findings in this research was that the teachers need to develop effective classroom practices. With this, students will use a set of mastered behaviors to improve their autonomy. Therefore, teachers can help students setting up an atmosphere where they can improve performance and do their own things. Teachers must take into account the importance of fostering learner autonomy when designing classroom activities.

Bayat (2010) presented the results of a study held in Turkey called "The effects of Out-of-class Use of English on Autonomy Perception". In this study, the author sets out that autonomy is an essential characteristic for a good language learner, which is clearly desirable in language teaching. He also talks about the support given by teachers; it seems to be the key aspect in order to foster autonomy. The teacher must encourage learners to take control of their learning process and support pupils in gaining self-confidence. Students presented higher levels of autonomy perception, they had the opportunity to associate English better with real life situations.

In the same vein, Gökçe Dişlen (2010), asked a group of freshmen students from different faculties of a Turkish university about their concept of responsibility and autonomy. The purpose

of her study was to reflect on different aspects of autonomous learning. Data collection was based on interviews and questionnaires. Her findings showed that the students had a positive perception about learner autonomy, despite coming from a conventional language teaching method. They also were in favor of group work and they placed a high value on teacher guidance through the learning process. This specific study shows the results of a random selection of 24 students in a group of 210 participants. The findings expose the needs of the educational system in Turkey towards training learners to become more autonomous. They could that autonomy is not something to be feared or something very challenging.

These previous studies and experiences mentioned in this chapter are very useful for the research at Santa Maria Del Rio School. The results in these papers, present some commonalities such as fostering autonomy and learning as a process with individual and social dimensions. Furthermore, they coincide that personalized learning in education is not individualization. Finally, teaching is most effective when it is focused on helping learners to overcome different academic misconceptions. Teaching must encourage motivate and engage to learn.

Autonomy and responsibility allow students to foster effectiveness by monitoring their performance, recognizing their weaknesses and reflecting on their individual achievements. When students are able to recognize a weakness, their attentiveness to the learning process is improved and their level of responsibility for acquire knowledge is also enhanced. In other words, when the learning process is assumed, students comprehend most aspects of acquiring knowledge and it becomes their responsibility.

### **The SERF Program at Santa Maria Del Rio School**

Relational education is a response to the changes of today's society and culture, requiring each individual's capability to make decisions, find development options and improve the quality of life. In this system, teachers do not write on a board and do not maintain distance from students; teachers have contact with them all the time. This relationship allows teachers to know students and avoids working with them as a mass or as a group; rather, it emphasizes individual acquisition of knowledge. This is a process where teacher and students can find a mutual and continuous learning. Students are encouraged to learn by working with their peers looking, by direct instruction or by working in groups on specific topics.

The history of Fontan relational system goes back to 1957, when Ventura Fontan and his wife Emilia Garcia (two Spanish psychologists) founded the "Centro Psicotécnico" in Medellín, Colombia, an institution dedicated to educational research, development and experimentation of new methodologies and tools for learning. After 28 years of work and success in research and application of new methodologies, the first Fontan School was founded in Medellín. It was endorsed by the Ministry of Education in Colombia as the first educational Innovation of Colombia. The Colombian government awarded it the "Order of Democracy" of the Colombian Congress in 1985. This relational system has been implemented in private and public schools in Colombia, Spain, Chile and the United States. (Fontan, 2005).

In 2005, the Santa Maria Del Rio School, located in Chia, Colombia, was chosen by the National Minister of Education and Mayor of Chia as a pilot institution to implement the SERF methodology, which had never been done before. After a few difficulties, the SERF system was adopted in 2006. Ninety eight percent of the school staff was replaced due to a National contest

for teachers, so new teachers were trained to work with the Fontan system. The process began with a plan that would support the work of the entire educational community. The six-year plan was the main objective for the school to be a leading educational institution with an innovative pedagogical system focused on students' needs. This plan took into consideration students' skills as the main part of the learning process.

Taking into account all these considerations, Santa Maria del Rio school accepted the implementation of a new pedagogical alternative by designing an institutional project based on the pedagogical experience of SERF and its principles. This would help the school obtain quality results by refining pedagogical aspects in the teaching-learning processes, and improving its financial situation as well as human resources.

Julio Fontan (2005) points out in the document "Sistema Educativo Relacional Fontán- Material de inducción para implantación de pilotos en educación pública." ["Fontan - Relational Education System induction Material pilot implementation in public education"] that the schooling process is not to make all students the same. It is designed to highlight students' potential because their future will depend on it. Learners are different and that is why this system was designed to allow them to be themselves.

Through academic work, students discover the importance of what they are doing. They learn how to do research, and they develop intellectual autonomy and creativity. At the same time, they learn to solve problems, increase their knowledge, work to achieve excellence and assess themselves. They work on projects that require creativity and critical thinking. In addition, they acquire work discipline, make decisions, and learn to be responsible, plan into the future, manage their own time and learn how to work in challenging situations.

The underpinnings of the system are as follows:

- It is based on experiences of every student through a personal project.
- The system respects each student's learning pace.
- The system supports students to achieve excellence in every topic.
- Students' potentials are exalted.
- The system develops intellectual, personal, social and emotional capabilities.

The principles and characteristics of the SERF system are:

- Flexible time and constant performance
- Excellence for all
- Complete individualization
- Written communication
- Experience of intellectual pleasure
- Emphasis on processes
- Induction
- Principle of autonomy
- Principle of Responsibility

The Fontan SERF system proposes evaluation as a continuous process starting from student's life projects. Fontan learners are guided in striving for autonomy as a main goal. Students begin designing and stating clear goals based on what they think they are going to learn for each topic. This plan allows teachers and tutors to make continuous assessment. Setting goals is the key and the goals should be focused on progress (Bandura, 1997). Teachers help students to



identify short-term goals through daily oral assessment, so, in Marshall's (2002) words are helping learners to take charge of their acquisition process.

In this system, teaching and learning are understood as a process where students change the concept they perceive of society into a new perception of the world as a whole instead of isolated subjects. This new alternative proposes that each student's work be original based on experiences and student's potentials over personal projects avoiding memorization and the traditional system.

The Fontan Relational Education System SERF is a response to current changes in the society and culture, which demands that citizens be able to make decisions based on options to improve the quality of life and environment. This relational system is a pedagogical alternative based on developmental thinking that seeks the progress of autonomous and free individuals. Through this pedagogical alternative, students develop autonomy and relate what they learn to their experiences while striving for excellence at their own pace. This kind of strategy emerges to face the social and cultural changes that require students to be efficient in making decisions.

### **Visions of language, learning and curriculum**

The SERF system is an innovative strategy applied to education in the Santa Maria Del Rio School. It is considered a constructivist model that stimulates collaborative and long-lasting learning processes. It also promotes to construct knowledge and meaning from student's experiences as well as the fitting of new information with what they already know. The SERF motivates students to develop culturally-based respect, civil responsibility and social projects in order to enrich their knowledge, creativity, identity and self-esteem.

The Fontan relational system, seeks students' improvement in autonomy and excellence of based on their experiences and the development of their skills. Learners learn the importance of responsibility and autonomy as relevant behaviours that are essential in SDL experience which simply tends to refer "a process that is supported in learner's own direction, rather than under the way of others" (Benson, 2001, p. 34).

Cognitive, emotional, social and cultural contexts of most students are directly related to the beliefs and situations that affect their lives. Taking advantage of the system and centered on students realities, teachers try to fit into the learner's world, instead of students fitting into the teacher's world, focused on needs and likes of students applying the Fontan system principles such as, respect for the students' needs and relevance, respect all different learning styles from students, flexible time and constant performance, excellence for all, experience of intellectual pleasure and emphasis on processes.

To empower different students' skills, the teacher must be creative to develop a strategy for each student according to his/her ability. The SERF system implemented at Santa Maria del Rio school has a teaching and learning process that consists of teaching students all subjects through a study plan which includes a series of topics aligned with the National Standards of the Ministry of Education. They are divided into grades and include the skills to be gradually developed by students. Students must work on their own, getting the information and the theory they can present to the teacher during the classes.

At the Fontan Relational System, students can begin their school activities on any day of the year. Also they can complete their courses at any time and spend time on studies depending on their abilities. There is considerable flexibility that takes into account the student's home life.

Students who need extra time for personal activities, such as socializing, doing sports or playing musical instruments, can do it without seriously affecting their studies.

Students at Santa Maria del Rio, must have the study plan designed by the teacher at the beginning of the school year, this plan includes all the topics and activities that students must accomplish to get a hundred percent (100%) in the subject. In the first stage of the teaching-learning process using Fontan system, the student is asked to present an action plan included in a personal study guide which starts with a reflection from their experiences on the new unit of study and state their prior knowledge such as: everyday life, daily experiences, doubts and what they know about the topic. Then, the students must establish a set of goals related to the topic. After this stage, the student can investigate the theories or information about the unit of study through sources including visual, audio-visual, dialogs, interviews, tutorials and the research of the new information. This procedure leads the learners to the development of a knowledge base.

### **Results after the implementation of the SERF**

Since the introduction of the model in the school, there have been significant improvements. The first graduates of the school achieved a medium level on the state exams (ICFES), just four months after the implementation of the new pedagogical system.

In 2006, the second group of graduates achieved a high level in the national exam, and the following classes 2007, 2008 and 2009 did the same. In 2010, the sixth group of graduated students achieved a higher level in the national exam by having the best results among the schools in the city of Chia. The process of implementing SERF started in 2006, and it has shown excellent results in the eighth class graduated which was at the very top of the ICFES national

exam. (See appendix 2). This has made this a unique public school in Chía's municipality and in Cundinamarca.

In 2012, the school was ranked as the first public school in Chia, second place in Cundinamarca, and 39<sup>th</sup> place in the Colombian ranking. In 2013, the graduate students achieved the maximum level on the state exam, the school is ranked "very superior" by the Colombian Ministry of Education. (ICFES) See Appendix 2. Furthermore, it is the third time that the best score of the public schools in Chia was obtained by a student from Santa Maria Del Rio School. Currently, the school is renowned for its results in the national exam, ICFES. The school has been improving year after year. Also the number of students who want to study at the school due to its academic results has increased.

It is also satisfactory to know that a number of graduated students have accessed higher education and many of them even well-known universities because they qualified for educational grants and scholarships. This acknowledgement has not only been given due to their high academic level but the students were also well prepared in sports and arts. The students of this school are known for their sense of autonomy and responsibility.

At present, the Santa Maria del Rio school has reached a stage where English has become an important subject for students. It has been due to the consistency on the objectives of the principal and English teachers to improve the level of students in order to lead them to start a professional career in a well-known university, avoiding low level of English as a problem to enter to a renowned institution of higher education.

The advances in this area are shown in the annual ICFES report, which indicates that Santa Maria Del Rio School has improved the position in the ranking of schools in “Cundinamarca”. These results demonstrate that the Fontan relational system has helped students in all the subjects in order to be autonomous in their learning process. (See appendix 2).

### **The English class at SMR**

Fontan English classes, just like others at SMR are taught differently from the traditional education model. In the Fontan system, the teacher is another resource and a guide that accompanies the learner to get the information they are looking for. Based on the principles of Fontan system, students’ potentials are highlighted and their autonomy is encouraged in order to make them discover knowledge by themselves.

Students are asked at the beginning of each school year about their likes and dislikes and about the way they would like to learn English. Students accept commitment and responsibility as appropriate behaviours required in the self-directed learning experience. Subsequently the students investigate and understand the unit of study; then, they are required to apply and relate what they have to some aspect of real life through an activity such as miniatures, posters, brochures, billboards, role plays, and flyers among others. After this stage, the teacher will have noticed that the students have understood and related the topic with personal experiences. In this step, students are required to write a paragraph called relation where they express what they learned and how it can be related to their personal experiences.

Finally, students write a twenty lines paragraph called self-assessment; it is an encouraging process that assesses and helps students to recognize weaknesses and enhance their skills about their continuous process of formation, understanding that each student is

unique. Based on this self-assessment, the teacher designs different pedagogical strategies to achieve academic success, with consistent and conciliatory dialog with each student.

### **Teacher's role at Santa Maria del Rio school**

At the Santa Maria Del Rio School, English teachers have to implement the Fontan relational system, SERF, as an innovative strategy to teach a foreign language. It is necessary that the English teacher creates a classroom atmosphere where all the students are invited to investigate, learn and research the topics they are interested in. The teacher's role consists of giving the information about the subjects and controlling students' behaviour, and being a mediator between the knowledge and the context. Teachers have to give up the role of main characters of this process to be the guides or the students' support.

A set of characteristics can be associated with the manner the teachers work all the subjects at the Santa Maria Del Rio School:

Teachers listen to and value student's point of view. This process allows teachers to know students deeply in order to design study plans.

- Tasks and activities are designed to promote students' knowledge.
- Teachers are a resource to solve the most relevant problems in acquiring the new concepts.
- Students who submit tasks or activities can be supported in their process.
- Learners have to submit works for every topic. This will help to reach the goals they have established previously.

Another important characteristic of teachers at Santa Maria Del Rio School, is that they have to be supportive, patient, empathic, and non-judgmental; they must be prepared to dialogue

with the students about the best way to learn, while they avoid interfering with students' learning style. These kinds of characteristics are part of the teachers' profile; allowing the teacher to be a facilitator, a guide and a resource. It is very important to make students notice the significance and utility of independent learning in order to teach them to be responsible for their own learning process, the pursuit of new understandings and the exploration of new concepts.

The dynamic of the teaching function is determined by how the teacher helps to integrate students to society (socialization). Mocker and Spear (1982) state that a teacher's role is important in encouraging learners to take control of their learning process. The influence of teachers in learning can affect learners' attitudes, efforts and improvements. (Dornyei, 2002)

#### **Student's role at Santa Maria Del Rio School.**

The role of Santa Maria Del Rio school students, is characterized by their character and autonomy. They are the builders of their knowledge and therefore should have a high sense of responsibility. The students are capable of making decisions to prioritize needs, make their own schedule, find the solutions to their conflicts, they are able to debate, confront challenges and are competitive with social sense. Students are recognized as interactive subjects. This means they are the subjects of relationships while being responsible, creative and curious. Throughout the learning process at school, students make sense of life, increase self-perception and self-esteem in order to be successful.

The learner does not receive content from a teacher standing in front of the board. The learner has to follow his/her own proposed goals to acquire knowledge. These students become responsible for their own learning process and meet their personal needs, characterized by

individual aspects. The student sets the pace for their own learning and organize their time devoting part of it to research.

Students are interested and motivated, they show ability to work in collaborative teams, and they are able to be self-directed, self-assessed and self-monitored. They have self-learning skills that allow them to learn for life, know how to solve problems, are empathetic, creative and responsible.

New teaching tendencies come with a variety of challenges, which teachers must face. These challenges struggle with old tendencies that most of us are aware of. An educational system, which is being modified daily by new strategies and methodologies, has been modified by techniques and processes focused on learners and individual needs. Learners show the necessity to be understood with their own abilities in their context. Good teaching must be understood in the relationship among reality, concepts, and didactics. In other words, teachers must carry out the same purpose adapting different actions in teaching the learning process in order to satisfy students' intellectual needs taking into account the multicultural background in a classroom.

Therefore, good teaching in schools faces the challenge of forming citizens that are able to enhance responsibility level in every one and promotes the skill to be a decision makers and consequently autonomous learners. These citizens will learn at their own pace, in their time (self-directed learning) and thus become self-directed to make daily efforts because they no longer have a teacher who should decide for them. These are the principles that the SERF is based on and, as can be seen, the implementation of those principles seems to have produced very positive and promising results.



## **Research Design**

This chapter describes the type of study, the trends of a group of population at a public school in Chia, the context where the research was carried out, the researcher's role and the participants who took place in the study. It also portrays some ethical considerations, the different instruments used to collect data and the procedures used for the research.

### **Type of study**

This is a qualitative-descriptive research study that pursues to specify properties or characteristics of any analysis or phenomenon. The study seeks to measure, collect information and describe trends of a group or population (Baptista, Fernandez, & Hernandez, 2010), in this case, regarding the factors that affect English language learning in the SERF, a personalized learning model, implemented at Colegio Santa María del Río.

A descriptive research is aimed to describe what exists. It can uncover new details and interpretations. Krathwohl, (1993) points out that in this kind of research, the descriptions appear following creative exploration and it is useful to organize findings in order to validate explanations.

In this type of research, collected data can be used to give recommendations or specific teaching strategies to be implemented. In this kind of research, the perceptions of the group of people who participated are taken into account. It involves organized and tabulated data that shows the results of the events (Glass & Hopkins, 1984). According to Wehrs (1992), the results can be used to give recommendations or academic advice.

### **Context**

This study was carried out at Santa Maria del Rio, a public school located in Chia, Colombia-which emphasizes on the promotion of tourism and the training of tourist information agents. This school offers a pedagogical alternative approach called Fontan relational system, which promotes student's autonomy and responsibility through self-directed learning and principles that enhance students' skills.

Chia, Cundinamarca (Colombia) has grown because many people have moved to this area and thus increased the construction of large and luxury houses with big gardens. The school "Santa Maria del Rio" is located in "*La balsa, sector Las Juntas*". The landscape in this area is a mixture of urban and rural place contrasting to the old houses which are part of the scene.

The students come from places near the school. Some of their parents are employed in these luxury houses or hired on surrounding farms. Others come from families who grow crops, such as coriander, parsley, green beans, corn and potatoes. Some of these students live in difficult social and financial conditions; not all of them live with their birth families.

Santa Maria Del Rio School is well known in the town due to the fact that the students are very respectful children and teenagers. The students of the Santa Maria Del Rio School are educated through motivation, good behaviour, feelings, self-esteem and values that represent the fundamental underpinning of the willingness to grow socially and academically. They have a sense of responsibility and autonomy.

## Participants

This research project took place at public educational institution. The research involved the following participants:

The respondents that participated in the first survey were 123 students. This sample size guarantees a suitable approach to the main goal in research studies (Goering & Streiner, 1996; Madrid, 2001). They were students from 5th to 11th grade and they are ranging from 9 to 18 years old without considering the sex. Most of the participants were from sixth grade and a small group from ninth grade.

Another group of 96 students from 9, 10 and 11 grades, was tested with a placement test designed by the Universidad de la Sabana. They are ranging from 13 to 20 years old.

Furthermore, a group of 23 parents also responded the questionnaire and 9 of them were interviewed. The questions were chosen from a group designed by the research counselors and the researcher. Some question were like:

- Do you consider that the following factors help your children to achieve learning goals in English class? [¿Considera que los siguientes factores facilitan el logro de los objetivos de aprendizaje de su hijo(a) en la clase de inglés?]
- The school resources [Los recursos que el colegio ofrece]
- Workspaces [Los espacios de trabajo]
- Number of students in the classroom [El número de estudiantes en el salón]
- Compulsory exams [Tener exámenes obligatorios]
- Objectives designed by the students [Que los estudiantes puedan definir sus propios objetivos]

- Teacher proposed contents [Los contenidos que el(la) profesor(a) propone para el curso]
- Students own learning strategies [Las estrategias de aprendizaje de cada estudiante]
- Positive attitude toward learning English [La actitud positiva de su hijo(a) hacia el aprendizaje]

Regarding the questions for the interview, they were like:

What do you know about FONTAN system? What is it about? [¿Qué conoce usted del sistema relacional Fontán? ¿De qué se trata?]

What do you think is the role of parents in this system? [¿Cuál cree que en ese sistema es el papel de los papás?]

What is the role of the teacher? [¿Cuál es el papel del profesor?]

Finally, a number of 7 teachers from secondary were interviewed in order to explore their views and experiences at this school.

### **Researcher's role**

In the present study the researcher assumed different roles as, for example, designer of surveys, encourager, and facilitator for the participants, and analyst of the collected data. The researcher was not independent of the participants, (Denzin and Lincoln 2003). The researcher can be considered as an instrument; through the work of data analysis, he describes and explains relevant aspects of the study. The researcher was supported by two teachers within the school and the two thesis directors. The whole team contributed to the creation of the proposal to enrich the English program at the school.

### **Ethical considerations**

The primary concern in research is to avoid that participants are harmed or damaged, Nunan and Bailey (2009) stated that it is very important to be honest and fair with and accomplish professional standards regarding how the work will be carried out.

A consent form was required as the first step to start this research project; students were asked to sign a form where they and their representatives said that they agreed to participate in the research and allowing the researcher to collect data from them.

### **Data collection instruments**

For the implementation of the study, the research counselors and the researcher designed the instruments taking into account the theoretical framework, in order to answer the research question and achieve the objectives of the study. Data collection instruments were students' survey, parents' survey, parents' interview, students' language level exam, and teacher interview.

### **1. Questionnaires/Surveys**

This was the first instrument used to collect information (Appendix 1). The questionnaires were applied to students and parents and contained questions regarding their understanding and agreement with the Fontan system and the autonomy in English language acquisition at Santa Maria Del Rio School. With this on-line instrument, the information could be collected from a large number of participants.

### **2. Interviews**

The purpose of the interviews was to identify parent and teacher perceptions about the Fontan relational system, its effectiveness and its results regarding second language acquisition. These interviews allowed the researcher to identify weaknesses and strengths from the points of view of those directly involved in the process.

### **3. Placement test**

This test was designed by Universidad de la Sabana and its goal was to determine what the current English level was and how much students used the English at Santa Maria Del Rio School. This instrument was applied in order to have an initial record of the student's English level in the four language skills with the purpose of placing them according to their proficiency. For this test, a group of 96 students, 45 males and 51 females, from 9th, 10th and 11th grades, ranging from 13 to 20 years old, was examined in grammar, writing, vocabulary, reading and speaking skills.

### **Results**

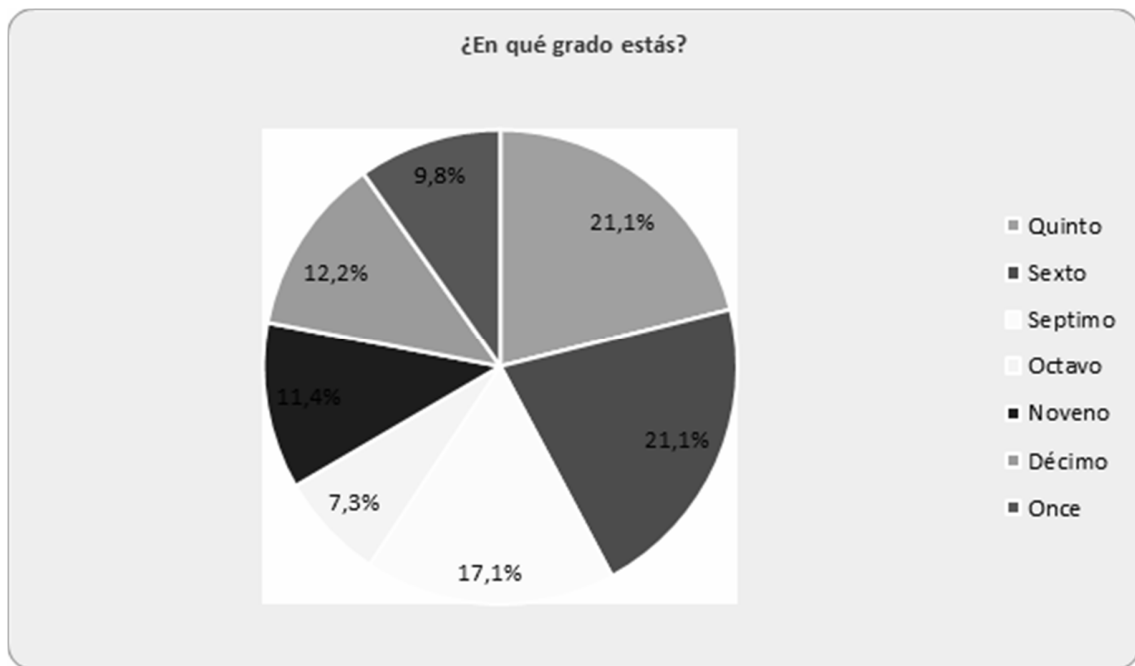
After deep reflections, analysing and comparing results, it was possible to have findings focused on the answer of the research question: *What factors have contributed to or restrained expected outcomes of the English program of the Fontan Relational System for the students at Santa Maria del Río School?*

Researchers analyzed all the information from collected data with the purpose of giving answers, explanations and recommendations to Santa Maria Del Rio School. These aspects were linked to two main concepts: Autonomy and Self-Directed learning.

#### **Students' Survey**

A survey was applied to 123 students from Santa Maria del Rio school. These findings are related to the fact that students learning process is carried out with the FONTAN, relational system which is different from the traditional system.

For this research, the first instrument was an on-line questionnaire used to collect data from students, considering their concept of autonomy and responsibility. This questionnaire was designed starting from a pool of questions and consisted of eleven questions with different answer options and different sections intended to obtain data about autonomy in learning English at Santa Maria de Rio School and their agreement or disagreement with the FONTAN system methodology. Collected data was recorded in Excel tables. In this document, the results are shown with percentages and on pie charts.

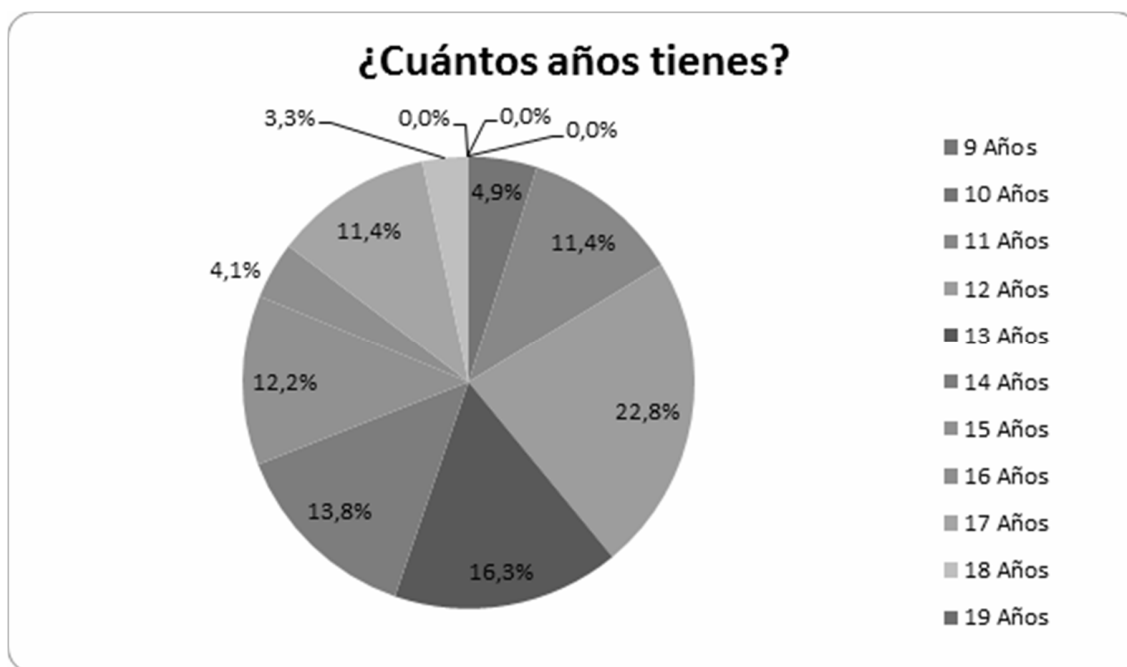


*Figure 1.* This figure illustrates the results for the question number 1: Which grade are you in?

An equal number of students participated from grades 5th to 6th, 26 students each, that is 21.1% of the total population from each course, that is, in total, and 42.2 % of all the students who responded are from these two courses. The next large group is from 7th grade, 21 students, and 17.1% of the respondents. Fifteen students, 12.2% of the respondents are from 10th grade. Fourteen students, 11.4% are from 9th grade; twelve students, 9.8%, from 11th grade. The smallest percentage is from 8th grade, just 9 students, that is 7.3% of the respondents.

The difference in the number of students' responses probably corresponds to the time of the school year in which the survey was applied, at the end of the year, when most of the students are focused on presenting their assignments to finish the topics in every subject. Nonetheless, there are some students from each one of the courses; therefore, there is a probably fairly broad perspective to work with.





*Figure 2.* This figure illustrates the results for question number 2: How old are you?

The chart shows that the survey was answered by students from 10 to 18 years old, being 12 years old students 22.8%, the cluster with the highest number of respondents, due to the fact that most of the respondents were in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade. There are no 9-year-old students. The highest percentage of surveyed students matches up to 12 years old students and a number of 28 respondents. The next remarkable cluster is a group of 20 13-year-old students that correspond to 16.3 % of the total population. Fourteen-year-old students are the third group with 17 respondents that is 13.8 %. The next group is 15-year-old respondents that are 12.2 % with a number of 15 students. An equal number of students are 11 and 17 years old. They are 11.4%. 4.9% of the total population corresponds to 6 students who are 10 years old. A number of 5 students are sixteen years old with 4.1% of the whole percentage. Finally, just four 18 years old students, this is 3%, answered the survey. There are no 19 or 20-year-old respondents.

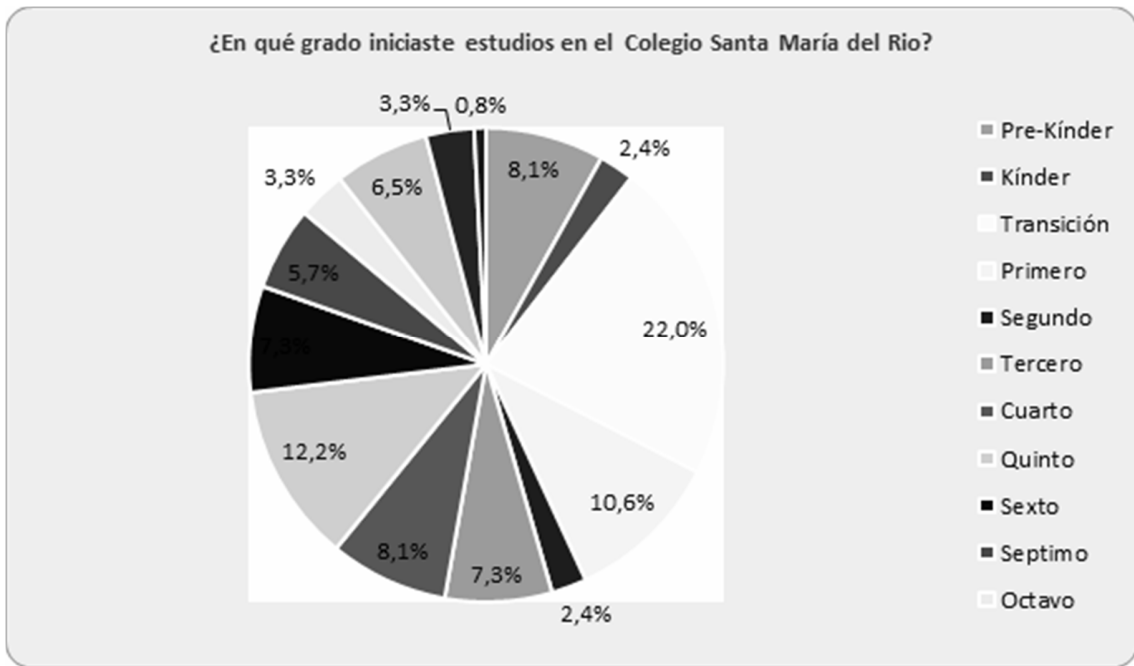
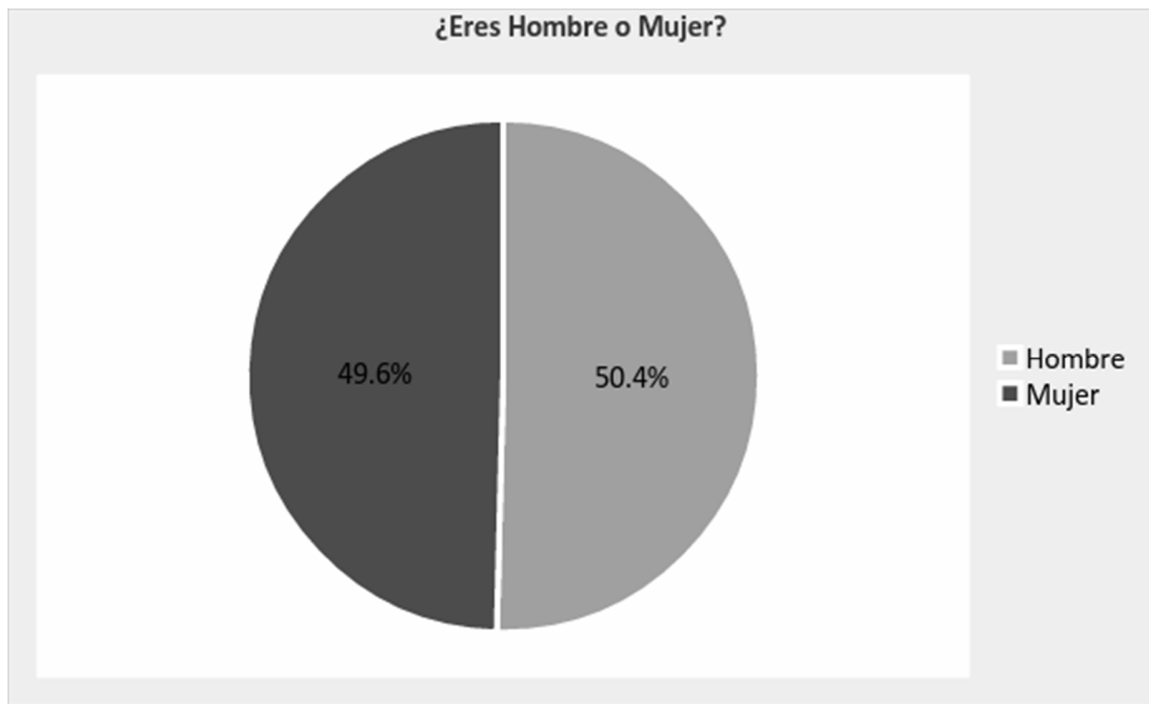


Figure 3. This figure illustrates the results for question number 3: When did you start your studies at this school?

A large percentage of the respondents entered the school in preschool and first grade, 53 students in total 43.1%. Few students entered in second grade, just 3 respondents, 2.4%, another large percentage of the students entered at the end of primary and beginning of secondary (3rd through 7th grade) 50 students that corresponds to 40.6%. As it would be expected, few students enter the school in the higher grades, 17 students in 8th grade and up 13, 9%. This would seem to show that there are generally new students in every grade of the school and would probably have to have implications on diagnostic testing and the methodologies used to address these students' level adequately.



*Figure 4.* This figure illustrates the results for question number 4: Are you a man or a woman?

Regarding the question: ¿Eres Hombre o Mujer? [Are you a man or a woman?]. There is a practically identical number of respondents of each gender, 62 boys, which represent a 50.4%, and 61 women with a 49.6%.

#### **Questions 5 and 6 - Parents' occupations**

The International Standard Classification of Occupations 2008, (ISCO-08) was used to classify the information about parents' job collected in the questionnaire. The ISCO-08 focuses on the "tasks and duties undertaken in the job" as its approach to define the categories. Then the groups are based on the competences that are essential for the job. Other conditions used by ISCO-08 are: the desired knowledge, working elements, other persons at work, and type of products and services produced. These standards group more than 400 occupations consolidated into 130 minor groups, which in turn are gathered in 43 sub-major groups finally aggregated in

10 major groups. For example, the major group 9 “elementary occupations” comprises jobs requiring the competences or skills acquired in primary education. This chart does not make use of groups 0 Armed forces (ISCO-2008)

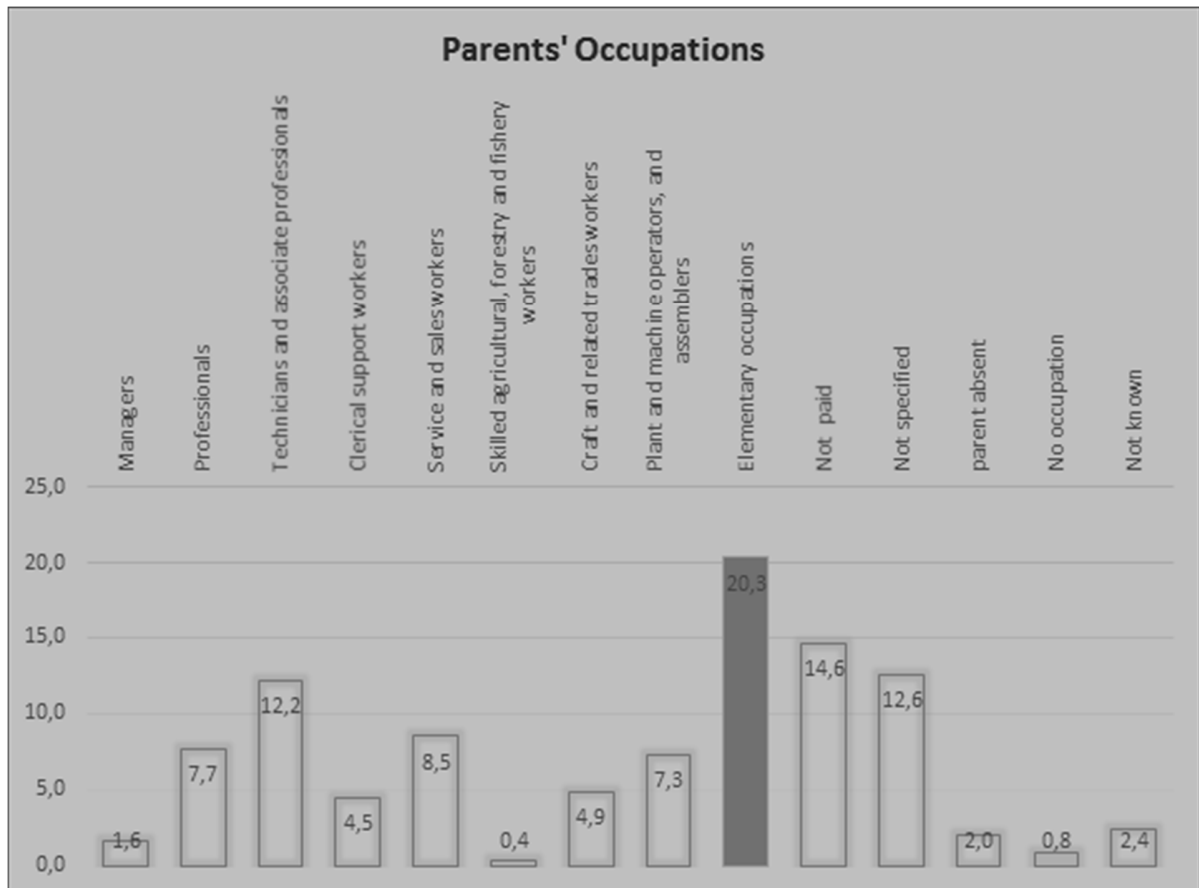


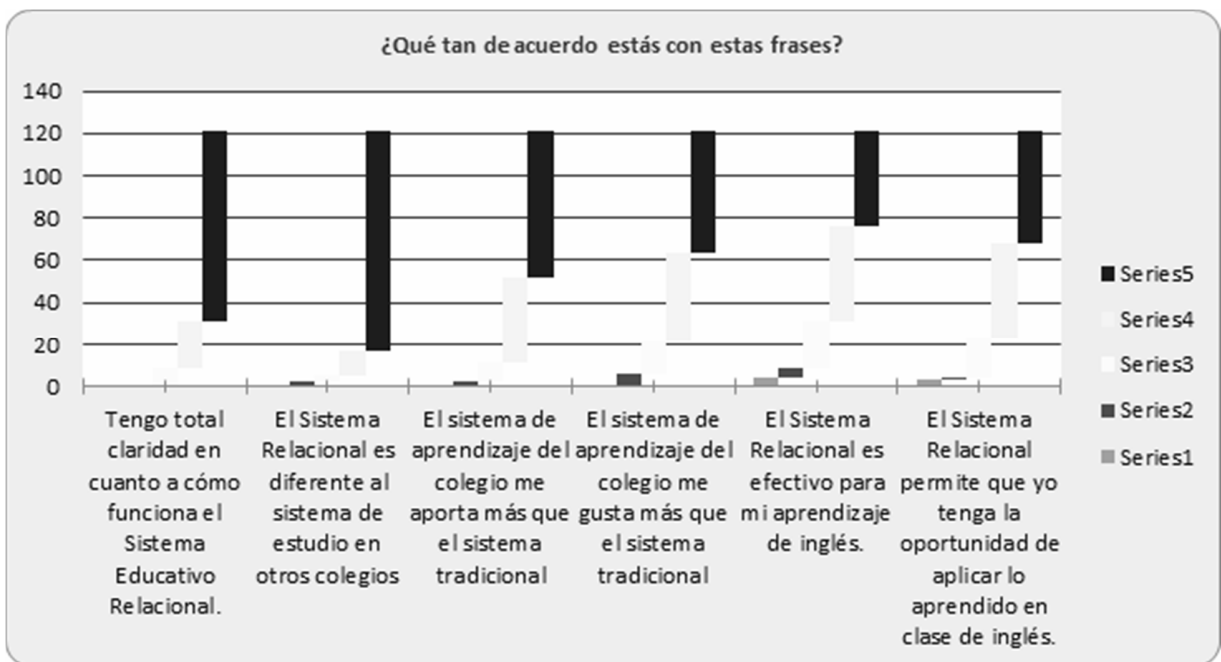
Figure 5. This figure illustrates the results for question number 5 and 6 related with parents' occupations. International Standard Classification of Occupations 2008, (ISCO-08)

As the figure shows, elementary (20.1 %), none paid (14.6%) and those occupations associated to technical competences (12.2 %) are the predominant ways of making a living for the students' parents. It is important to mention that all occupations reported in each of the categories correspond to the lower levels of competence and qualification in each category,

except for the ones that belong to the category of professionals (i.e. teachers, biologists, accountants).

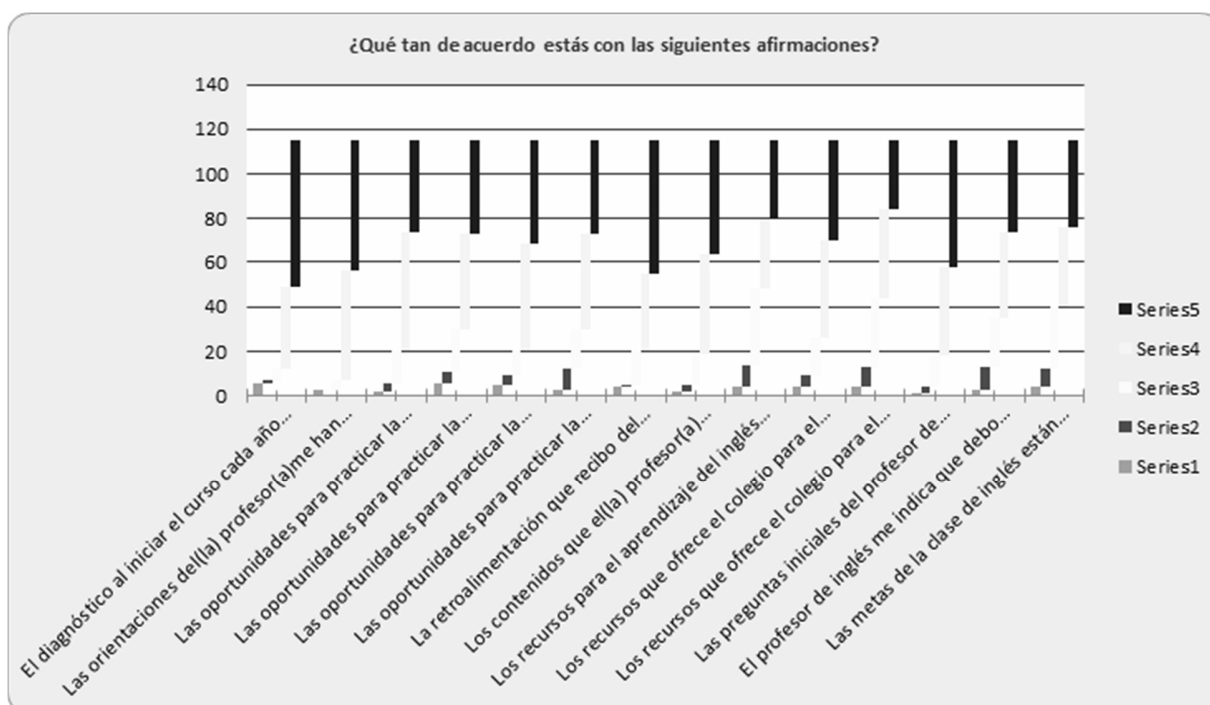
This information is especially important if we take into account the predominant role parents play in accompanying the students' learning processes as can be seen below. These results should be taken into account by the school, especially with regard to Rothman's (2004) position. He has shown that the most important factors associated with the educational achievement of children are not race, ethnicity or immigrant status. Instead, the most critical factors according to him appear to be socio-economic factors. These factors include parental educational levels, neighborhood poverty, parental occupational status and family income.

Of special interest for the school as well, is the high percentage of students who do not know about their parents' occupations. This information corresponds to the clusters reported as *not specified*, and *not known*, which equal to about 15% of the sample.



*Figure 6.* This figure illustrates the results for question number 7: How much do you agree with these statements?

Regarding general aspects of the Fontan System, a vast majority of the students have a positive view of the system. There are a few students, approximately 20% who seem to have doubts regarding whether they like the system more than the traditional system, whether it is more effective and whether they have opportunities for applying what they learn in English class.

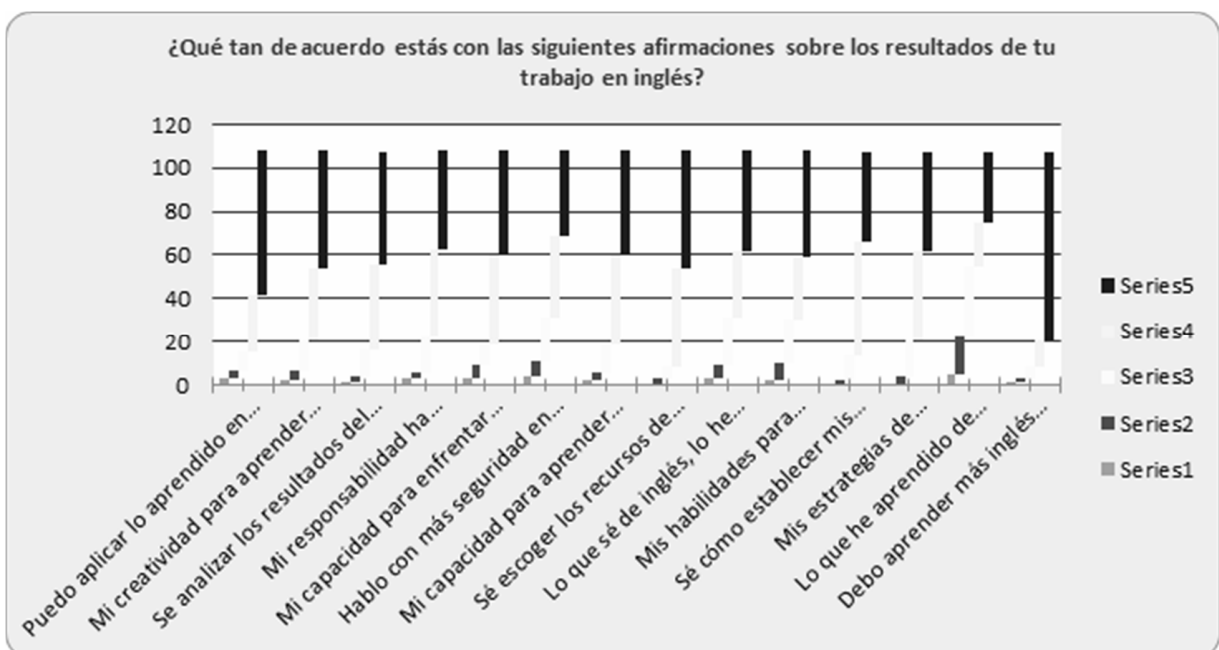


*Figure 7.* This figure illustrates the results for question number 8: How much do you agree with these statements?

In this question, most students have a positive view of the way the Fontan Relational System is applied to English classes. A large majority are in agreement with the fact that the diagnostic test at the beginning of the year is useful for setting their goals. However, it is interesting to note that this is not a regular practice. Diagnostic tests are systematically applied

only to new students. There is a percentage of students (nearly 20) who are not in agreement with the amount of practice dedicated to the different skills, the usefulness of teacher feedback and guidance, how interesting and appropriate the resources are. That percentage increases to nearly 30% regarding a negative view of the availability and variety of the resources for learning English.

It is very interesting to see that the responses to the final statements are also surprisingly positive with more than 60% of the students agreeing in greater or lesser degree with the fact that teachers are always telling them what to do and that the goals for the class are determined by the teacher. This seems to contradict the principles of the SERF. However, considering, the large percentage of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders who responded (42%), this may be attributed, in part, to the greater need for direction that these younger students have, but that fact does not account for the remaining 20% who answered positively.



*Figure 8.* This figure illustrates the results for question number 9: How much do you agree with these statements about your results at English class?

Regarding the students' perceptions about their results in their English learning process, 86% of the students consider that they can apply what they learn in class to real situations. This certainly seems to support the fact that what they are learning is relevant. However, it seems to contradict responses that appear in the previous question when some students perceive that the practice of the language skills is not sufficient.

There is also a very significant percentage of the students, approximately 93% who consider that it is important to learn English in order to pass the ICFES exam. While this could be important for motivation and a contributing factor to the positive results seen on those tests, it may actually influence negatively their desire to learn the language in meaningful ways to ensure learning beyond the test.

The large percentages of students who agree and totally agree on the remaining questions certainly seem to show that students have a positive perspective of their self-direction and self-efficacy. They consider that they have improved thanks to what they have learned at school, however, some state that they do not feel very confident speaking in English (25%) and that what they know is not enough for their future plans (approximately 47%). Generally speaking, they have a positive view of the results but they see room for improvement.



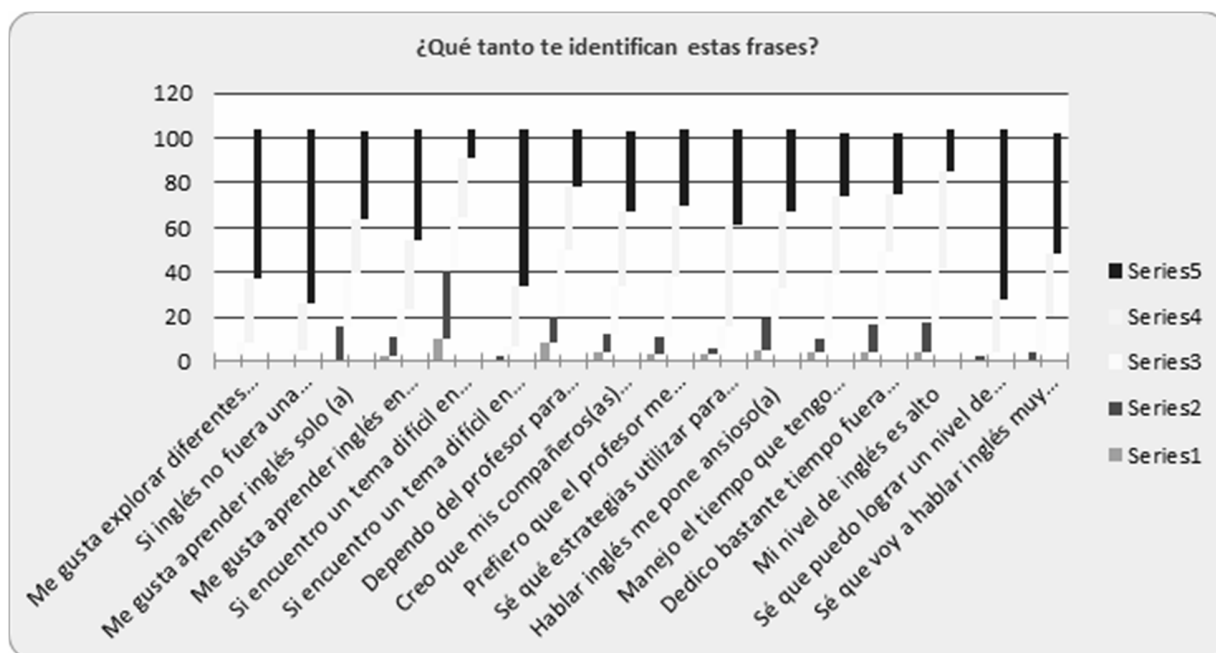


Figure 9. This figure illustrates the results for question number 10: How much do you identify these statements?

Regarding how students perceive themselves as learners, we see once again the confirmation of students' desire to learn English with 95% say they would like to learn it even if it was not a compulsory subject at school and 96% are confident that they can achieve higher levels of English. A large percentage of the students (92 and 93% respectively) say that they like to explore different ways of learning and that when they have difficulties, they look for help.

There are three questions that have a lower percentage although they still present a positive perspective. These refer to a preferences for learning English in small groups (77%), learning about what strategies to use in order to solve problems they have in learning English (85%), and once again, confidence in speaking English well by the time they graduate (80%) which seems contradictory with regard to the 68% who feel anxious when asked to speak in English.

The remaining questions have unusual answers when considering the generally positive outlook presented in the rest of the survey. Only 61% of the students say they like to learn alone. This seems surprising given the methodology used at the school and the fact that, in some cases, it is referred to as students learning on their own. Nor does it correspond to the 77% of students who do not like to learn on their own, nor the 67% who feel that their peers can contribute to their learning of English.

Other interesting results are related to the percentage of students, 34%, who prefer that teachers determine learning goals. As well as the relatively low percentages of students who say they take advantage of time in school (62%) and outside of school (52%) to learn English. Again, these data seem contradictory to the school's goal of fostering autonomy and independent learning, but may be explained somewhat by the large number of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders who participated in the survey and who perhaps have not yet acquired the necessary independence and commitment to work without much guidance from the teacher.

The previous findings show that, in general, students have a very positive view of the system and the way it is implemented at the school. They said they know the elements of the system and find them useful. They feel that the implementation of the system in English is appropriate and contributes to their learning. Their answers reflect self-confidence, self-direction, and self-efficacy.

It is important to note that when many answers reveal very positive perceptions, even small variations in the more "negative" opinions should be analyzed carefully. Thus, there appear to be concerns regarding the flexibility and adaptability of the program to specific needs of some students; the way students are perceiving autonomy and self-direction, compared to the

underlying principles of the system; the consistency of the outcomes for all students; some aspects of the implementation of the system in English class, especially with regards to the objective of learning English beyond results on a standardized test.

### **Results parent surveys and interviews**

Surveys and interviews were conducted to parents in order to compare results and have findings related to the factors that contribute to the learning process and expected outcomes of the FONTAN relational system in the English program at school.

### **Factors that contribute to the learning process**

A large majority of the parents are satisfied with the school's project and methodology. In almost all the items, 70% and more of the parents who responded the survey express that they are in agreement and total agreement with the school's proposals regarding these factors. This situation is not as clear regarding three of the factors: class size (approximately 48% say they don't agree or disagree, or frankly disagree, but, many of the classes have more than 35 students), work spaces (approximately 30% say they don't agree or disagree, or frankly disagree, but we know that the school has limited infrastructure), and group work (approximately 44% say they do not agree or disagree, or frankly disagree).

Responses are overwhelming, 100% agree and totally agree, with regard to students being able to determine their own learning goals, with English being a compulsory subject, the possibilities the system offers students the capacity able to work according to their individual needs, and that the teacher is the one who evaluates. This last statement is a little surprising, when taking into consideration that the system is based on self-evaluation. Undoubtedly, parents are in agreement with the system and with the fact that students must learn English at school.

In the interviews, there is a similar situation. All the parents who were interviewed have a very positive view of the school and state that the system has many advantages such as: fostering independence, autonomy, and responsibility in the students, being a very “different” model that fosters more learning and understanding rather than just memorization, repetition, and being content with what is taught. This, in turn, produces an excellent academic level and outstanding results. Many of the parents highlighted the emphasis made on public speaking and how it prepares them for higher education. They also identified strengths in “non-academic” areas, such as behavior, personal appearance and grooming, as well as, values. Some consider it a more demanding institution compared to others where their children have attended.

Practically all the parents would (and actually have) recommended the school to others. Only one parent openly stated that it is not a system for everyone and two other parents mentioned that some students might have difficulties adapting to the system. Among the occasional difficulties that are perceived, there are: the large groups which make it difficult for teachers to listen to all students when they are ready to present; that some teachers have difficulties implementing that system, and following that line of thought, that the implementation may differ (in one case, a parent states that it should differ) from one subject to another; that some students may not take advantage of this learning opportunity, one parent actually commented “algunos estudiantes vienen a calentar los asientos” [ “some students just come to warm up the seats”]. One parent was quite critical despite being in agreement with many aspects. This parent feels that some parents do not understand the system or may not have the necessary knowledge to support their children in the process; that some students may be overwhelmed and

that the system and the school may be too rigid; that some subjects cover too much material and are too complex for students to understand on their own.

### **Elements of the Fontan Relational System**

Most parents show to be satisfied and in agreement with the school's implementation of the system. In terms of percentages, the situation is similar to the first category of questions. There seems to be greater disagreement (though it is still not a very significant percentage) with regard to each student deciding when they should be evaluated, the way the school addresses students' particular needs, and how the system promotes adequate use of time both in and out of school.

Most of the parents then, agree with many of the postulates of the Fontan system. There is a generalized agreement with the fact that it promotes autonomy and that they receive adequate orientation on the system when they enter the school. However, a percentage of the parents, between 21% and 34% disagree with the aspects mentioned above.

In the interviews, all the parents, except one who is very new to the school, can easily describe the characteristics of the system, pointing out that students have to work on their own to do research on the topics assigned by the teacher in the curriculum; that students have to learn the topics in order to understand well enough to present to the teachers and defend their positions and the work they did in order to attain the points they need.

Regarding the roles and actions of the stakeholders in the learning process, the parents who were interviewed coincided on three important points:

Students are responsible for their work and must do the research and let teachers know when they have questions or when they are ready to present. They must make decisions on their own and find their own solutions.

Parents must be attentive to their children's processes, supervise their work, monitor their agendas, provide or seek for support and resources when they are required, and show their children how what they are learning will help them in the future. One parent actually referred to this role as "being another teacher". They seem to view their assistance as a vital aspect that contributes to their children's successful outcomes at the school and yet these perspectives seem to contradict what they say about the system fostering autonomy and responsibility in the students. One parent even said that if they are not attentive enough, students will not know what they are supposed to do. Another parent said they must be "on top" of the children, and ask teachers if it is necessary.

Teachers are often referred to as guides by the interviewees. In that sense, they should guide the entire process providing the curriculum and resources. They also hear and answer students' questions to evaluate their presentations assigning the appropriate percentage when students demonstrate that they understand the topic. Once again, this seems to contradict the system's emphasis on self-assessment. Several parents commented very favorably on how attentive the teachers are and how well they know their children and monitor their learning.

One parent says teachers need to be persistent and to call parents when necessary. One parent commented that it was sometimes necessary to ask teachers for help when it seemed as though the student was not doing well. Another parent stated that it was the teacher's responsibility to modify strategies according to the specific needs and characteristics of each

student, to provide the students with the bases and resources to do the research and to motivate them to do better.

### **Student outcomes**

Most parents seem to have a very positive view of the results of the Fontan system. They consider that their children enjoy learning English and seem to be quite capable of directing their learning (over 90% totally agree and agree in the questions about these aspects). They also consider that it is important for them to learn; 100% totally agree and agree that they would like their children to study English elsewhere if the school did not offer it. However, they do not seem as satisfied with the level of English their children have (approximately 80% neither agree nor disagree or totally disagree that their children's level of English corresponds to their grade level), the manner in which the system promotes the learning of English (nearly 50% neither agree nor disagree and totally disagree), or the time the children spend studying English at home (nearly 47% neither agree nor disagree and totally disagree).

In general, it seems that parents are satisfied with the program although some seem to have concerns regarding some aspects of the "personalized" nature of the system and, more specifically the implementation and the results of the English program at the school.

Similar results can be seen in the parents' interviews. In general, parents are very satisfied with the results students have, stating that it is an excellent method that prepares students for the state examinations and for the University, as they are used to doing research, speaking in public and defending their positions. They also have a broader scope of knowledge and go "beyond"

what is taught. Parents also consider that the method is not monotonous and instills a love for reading. They also point out that students learn important life skills, as noted above.

All the parents stated that English is an important subject. They feel it is vital for students to be able to access higher education, to travel, and to be better professionals. Some feel that the English program at the school is weak and requires improvement. However, the parent who is relatively new to the school commented that the English program is much more demanding than it was at the other school the child had previously attended.

### **Results teacher interviews**

In general, teachers have a very positive view of the system and the way it is implemented in the school. One of the teachers says it is a system because the different stakeholders participate and are in contact: teachers, administrators, students, and parents. Everyone learns. One of the teachers considers that two key factors that contribute to the learning process in the system are: the communication among teachers, students and parents and the respectful and caring relationship this teacher has with her students.

The process is an exchange of information and knowledge of different disciplines is related with knowledge because it is not isolated. A teacher stresses that the objective of the model is to innovate, improve, and look for an alternative to traditional systems that are not working. The system is intelligent, well-grounded, organized and logical. Students are empowered concerning their own learning processes and manage their time and pace in giving meaning to what they are learning. Everyone knows the rules.

Students work on their own, set their own goals, establish relationships among subjects and have greater ownership of the topics. They follow their interests to find information and



understand it. At the beginning, they need more guidance from the teacher but then teachers support them in being creative. Motivation affects results. The system itself forces students to work and be aware of their own learning processes.

Among the difficulties perceived in the implementation of the system, some teachers mention: the large groups which make it difficult to carry out the process and to give all the children the assistance they require: some students do not make the most of their time in school to do academic activities or consider that “special” schedules which are implemented to help students having difficulties, are really for “passing” the subject if they haven’t worked throughout the year. Although they lack resources, they do the best they can with what they have at hand. Specifically in English, one teacher considers that students have a very low, basic level. The interviewees do not seem to perceive many challenges in the implementation of the system.

### **Elements of the Fontan Relational System**

The teachers who were interviewed seemed to have a great deal of clarity regarding the system. They were able to describe the process and the steps students follow in the learning process from the teachers’ providing the list of topics, to students looking for information, a sequence of feedback and interaction that enables students to evidence understanding in their presentations and, finally, complete the guide which can be done freely, in many cases, in the order they prefer.

Teachers are also able to justify the ways they adapt their implementation of the system according to the requirements of their disciplines, especially when they require intensive practice, such as physical education, art, and the laboratory part of science; or when they are very theoretical like mathematics. One teacher mentions the following components of the system:

management of autonomy; reinforcement of each person's life project, academic aspects. There is some mention of individual and group work.

Regarding the roles and actions of the stakeholders in the learning process, the teachers who were interviewed mentioned the following points: Students must work on their own and at their own rhythms; decide how they want to work and go beyond searching for information; understand what they learn; make their own presentations freely. Students must master the majority of the topics given for the year. Parents are often positive and supportive but not in all cases. They should be tutors at home to continue the assistance given by teachers at school. Responsibility comes from home.

Teachers refer to themselves as guides, leaders, mediators, facilitators, analysts, companions, and coaches. They specify that their responsibilities include: verifying student knowledge, relating the topics with different subjects, providing the study plan, checking student behavior, getting involved in students' lives, correcting student work, giving them feedback and suggesting what resources to use or not to use, noticing weaknesses, guiding and training, reinforcing knowledge, giving assignments, motivating students, explaining concepts, checking students' guides, asking students to provide evidence of understanding, and empowering students to use their knowledge.

### **Student outcomes**

Teachers see that students become more fluent and confident. They do not fail years because they can continue at their own pace until they achieve mastery and they can make significant progress in a short period of time. Learning becomes a pleasure and not an obligation. Students can self-assess their progress and do not focus their learning on grades. They are

empowered to manage their own individual learning processes, their time and pace. Students develop time-management skills, skills for doing research, for public speaking, for argumentation and skills for structuring and producing different types of texts. They do well on state examinations and set goals towards entering higher education. Students develop autonomy, tolerance, and respect. One teacher states that she feels that there is still work to be done on developing autonomy.

### Results of the Placement Tests

The results of the placement tests (Appendix 3) applied to students in 9, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grade in July 2014, show that 70% of the students are classified in Level 1. It is worth noting that some of these students are actually in A level, as they cannot understand the questions in English nor use the language to express simple ideas.

- These results show approximately the same number of students in level 1 in all grade levels with the highest number of students in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, as shown in figure 10.

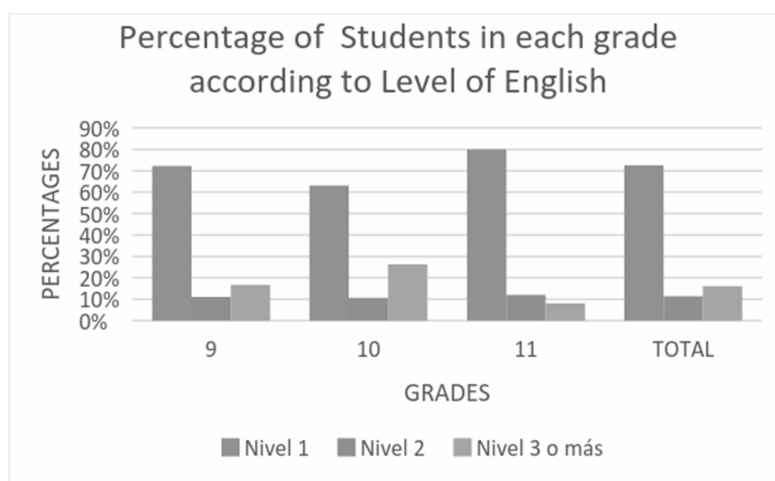


Figure 10. Percentage of students in each grade according to level of English.

Results also show that here seems to be no relationship between the time the students have been in the school and their level of English. Some students who have recently entered the school have higher levels of English and a few students who have been at the school for many years whose results show higher levels than their peers do. It would be interesting to analyze this last situation more carefully to understand why this is occurring and what teachers can learn from it.

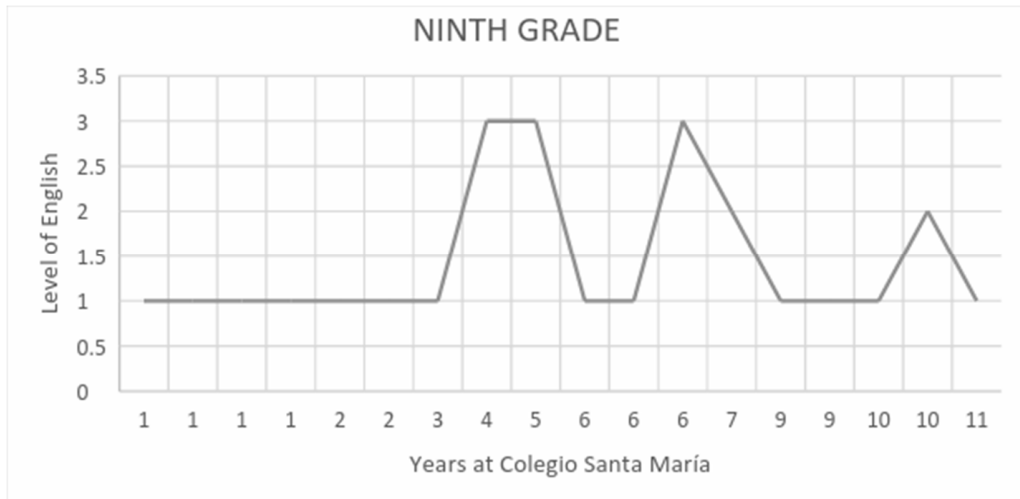


Figure 11. Years at Colegio Santa María from ninth grade students.



Figure 12. Years at Colegio Santa María from tenth grade students.



## **Conclusions**

When the results are reviewed as a whole, it is undoubtable that the generalized perception of the Fontan Relational System (SERF) is extremely positive in terms of the elements of the system, the factors that contribute to student learning, and the outcomes, academic and with regards to formative aspects. There are few, not very generalized concerns that have been pointed out above as the lack of technological resources, the big number of students and the teachers training. These perceptions seem to coincide with the student outcomes on the national standardized exam (ICFES).

However, the diagnostic test given to 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> graders, along with the perceptions of the external observers in the process seem to contradict what the most involved stakeholders seem to perceive. This may be related to issues regarding what some authors consider “young people’s tendency to highlight positive and downplay negative characteristics.” (Grietens, 1999, p. 107). Despite the enormous advantages of self-reports as a means for acquiring respondents’ own views, “there are a number of potential validity problems associated with it. The data are personal and idiosyncratic and thus may bear little relationship to ‘reality’ as seen by you or others.” (Wiley, n.d., p.2)

Every student has different ways to interact, recognize and communicate his knowledge. Through understanding, the student becomes an active subject as soon as he participates, transforms, solves, suggests, and decides about the situation. A well-motivated and encouraged student wants to do things if there is a helpful context based on responsibility and autonomy in acquiring knowledge. The way they acquire new information is associated with their learning style until they become autonomous.

The researchers opted to implement new plans to improve English level at Santa Maria del Rio school, on the expectation that this new strategy joined to the FONTAN relational system would increase the self-efficacy in learning process by making students autonomous in their learning skills so that students could accomplish accurately the proposed activities and tasks.

With these results in mind, the following chapter presents recommendations that address the concerns highlighted in the findings seeking to provide contributions that may enrich the English program and foster consistently higher results in student outcomes.

### **Recommendations**

Undoubtedly, the fact that teachers and staff demonstrate a profound belief that every student has the potential to achieve learning goals autonomously reflects a strong school vision and commitment to modern theories of learning that discard teacher-centered practices. Indeed, very few schools in Colombia have progressed in transforming this belief into the motivator of their practice. The school philosophy has then supported a structure where students' potential and individual differences are respected in order to promote student-centered instruction and autonomy. Teachers and students think highly of the system in all the aspects and praise its effects on learners' autonomy. That is the evidence of a shared vision with respect to what constructivist education seeks and should promote.

There are some aspects that the school may like to consider as suggested by the researchers and assistants involved in the consultancy project. The recommendations are provided after comparing 1) the results of the present descriptive study that reports on outcomes of the questionnaire and interviews applied to parents, the questionnaire given to students and the

interviews to a sample of teachers of the content areas; 2) the observations carried out by the external coordinator and the teacher named by the university in order to experience and gain in depth knowledge of the English program at the school; and, 3) the researcher's experience as a language teacher at the school. The complete report of external observers was presented to the school and the university authorities. These recommendations reflect the significance of some facts identified in the respondents' answers in the different instruments, as well as the perceptions of the academic group involved in the project.

Language teachers seem to rely on the belief that the system itself promotes learner autonomy. When describing the practices that they, as teachers, implemented to enhance learners' autonomy, most of them highlighted that they followed the guide the school has adopted as part of the system. They agreed on their role as supervisors of students' processes and advancement, advisors regarding difficulties, and as providers of resources for students to consult and practice. Though this reflects teachers' trust of the students' autonomy, there is an implicit assumption that all students have the skills to learn the language independently. This is not corroborated by students' proficiency on the language tests. Teachers could probably benefit from reflecting on the process considering that the students that have been in the school for more than three years. What advancement is expected from students that have been in the school for three years in an autonomy-based system and have spent at least 200 hours studying English?

The external observers and researchers make the following recommendations that may contribute to significant and consistent improvement in the academic results of all the students.



1. The language program should base its actions on an operational definition of autonomy for language learning. That could help them take stock during the process of language learning. While some aspects of autonomy and its development can be applied across different subjects, the nature and content of the different learning areas impose on students' different needs, generate different expectations and interests, and demand different strategies, etc. In the field of language learning there are countless definitions about autonomy for language learning than can illuminate the school's language program's definition or principles. Though Henry Holec's seminal work introduced the concept of students "taking control" of learning, researchers have explored the implications of the term and made use of other disciplines – linguistics, psychology, and sociology, among others – probing the multidimensionality of the concept.

Barillari (2011) points out to the need for teachers to address their own beliefs about learner autonomy. Whether they conceive autonomy as self-instruction where students are given all responsibility for their learning and teachers become facilitators of resources and controllers of progress, or whether teachers think they should assume more active roles in the development of learner's autonomy manager, resource and counselor (Camilleri, 1997) and what the decision implies, should be further discussed and agreed upon among the language teachers in the school. Palfreyman (2003) highlights the importance of these conversations in autonomy-oriented educational settings in order to avoid "practical difficulties, which are all the more baffling if those concerned appear to share a common goal" (p. 185).

2. The analysis carried out also showed some factors that need to be addressed both by the institution and by the language teachers. It is the initial diagnosis which is considered in the guide. The advisory team recommends the implementation of a well-planned initial needs

assessment for all language courses. The tool should aim at getting to know and keeping formal records of individual students' current language knowledge, difficulties, needs, wants, interests, learning styles, learning strategies, attitudes toward the language, and language command among others. That instrument could be used as a compass in order to accompany students throughout the process, make them aware of their strengths and needs, set realistic goals for the new course, help them overcome the factors that affect their autonomy for language learning, and celebrate with learners visible and realistic progress in the course.

The needs analysis will also provide the foundation for the ongoing advisory structure for the language program: The teachers as counselors could better help students develop their self-confidence and skills for independent learning providing students feedback and making them aware of the effectiveness of the strategies that they use to solve language learning tasks and problems, and the actual command of language. Provided everything is fully recorded by the school to use documents for further reflection or research. In that form the institution can assure that through the educational process the school bases the language program on appraised learners' differences in beliefs about the process of learning, and also on the learner's readiness for, and understandings of autonomy to get involved in learning a language.

3. The school is invited to study the possibility of further professional development for language teachers. Either in-service collaborative research, or formally established teacher learning communities could benefit the school, the teachers and, ultimately, the students. Johnson (2009) states that there is a close and essential relationship between teachers' professional growth and student learning.

This professional development should focus on two aspects: methodology of language teaching. In the first place, teachers must be aware of the advances in language learning and teaching theory. Stronge (2002) points out how teachers have great influence on how students learn, how much and what they learn, and how they interact with knowledge, with others, and with their environment. The second aspect is equally important. Teachers must continue to improve their own competences in English. On the one hand, they model continuous learning and growth for their students. On the other hand, Krashen (1987) posits that an essential ingredient for language acquisition is comprehensible input through teachers' correct use of the language. This factor may contribute to much better student outcomes in foreign language learning.

4. The availability of resources was negatively assessed by parents, students and teachers. The consultants believe the school could start by including some questions concerning students' use and access to technological resources and internet in the initial analysis. These two aspects certainly require improvement.

However provided the flexible structure the school has, the small number of computers could be used more effectively by students and teachers. In the first place, teachers could make better use of their time if the students upload their needs analysis and progress to a database. With the use of this technological resource teachers can follow their performance and decide who needs additional scaffold his process. The use of mobile phones as an alternative to computers and tablets is also a something that could be explored in order to improve this aspect.

Secondly, teachers and students could also benefit from the vast number of free resources the internet offers. This of course implies teachers' time to select, adopt or adapt resources and to

train students in the selection of resources appropriated to their needs, as well as using a platform that can facilitate student access to convenient and useful resources.

It is very important to consider that technologies that support language learning offer many advantages to self-directed learners. They promote learning and autonomy outside of school among others and they contribute to personalized learning, learner motivation, self-discipline, and critical reflection. However these affordances imply that students have to learn how to select and use resources according to their needs, learning styles and goals. Teachers' familiarity with the use of technological tools and resources is very important in guiding students adequately in these processes.

5. Perhaps one of the major concerns of the teachers was the issue of having large groups. Undoubtedly the importance of pre-planning using the needs analysis and making it visible to both teachers and student through the use of technology might significantly contribute to optimizing teachers' time. However, the language teachers might benefit from the study of the following strategies that are based on the affordances of collaborative learning: using of expert buddies to guide at-risk students; grouping students according to specific needs, learning styles, and goals; providing appropriate guidance; encouraging sharing of learning, strategies and collaborative practices.

6. These recommendations involve a careful study of the methodology applied at the school and the modifications required to ensure that students have:

- Sufficient exposure to English in order to guarantee the development of language competence, especially considering the amount of independent work the students

do and their natural tendency to use resources in Spanish to complete their assignments.

- Appropriate development of competence in the four language skills.
- Meaningful application of knowledge that leads to its use in authentic situations rather than memorization.
- Clarity regarding the purpose of language structures as vehicles for communication, rather than as the central objective of learning.
- Greater motivation for independent learning, rather than the completion of rote tasks.

7. Finally, the interviews clearly show the important role that parents play in the school's educational system. The analysis of the population shows that they may not have the necessary preparation to do that adequately in language learning. Therefore, the school must look for strategies such as collaborative practices, mentoring with more advanced students, and active support for parents in order to strengthen this aspect that can surely influence student's outcome in this area.

Altogether, the recommendations underline the implementation of the above strategies providing a useful framework to help them work better and more autonomously:

- Start with the needs analysis
- Define the principles that identify autonomy for language learning
- Begin the implementation of each strategy with a course and assess its effectiveness,

- drawbacks and affordances. Then, make appropriate adjustments to extend it to all courses.
- Define specificities of teachers' roles
- Make record-keeping a consistent activity both for students and teachers.
- Enhance effective communication among language staff
- Provide opportunities for teacher development

Students can be aware of their strengths and weaknesses throughout the whole process. When they know themselves, they notice that they can do better things by trial and error. The pedagogical strategies in the SERF system must be designed to provide ample training to the students. This approach makes progress possible and peaceful coexistence based on respect for others in order to build a better country for all.

The FONTAN system requires students to manage and plan their time so as to prepare them for the future and be ready to assume critical and proactive positions. When students interact in different situations, they become active subjects, competent to act as autonomous learners and be able to transform their perceptions and actions into voluntary activities. This action is a conscious result of the process of being aware of the interaction between their experiences and what they learn at school.

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## Appendixes

### Appendix 1

#### Icfes results average


COLEGIO SANTA MARIA PRUEBAS SABER 11				
RESULTS	2011	2012	2013	2014
National Average	43.45	43.94	43.64	48.62
Cundinamarca Average	44.41	44.73	44.51	49.10
Bogota Average	46.84	45.74	46.96	54.82
COLEGIO SANTA MARIA General Average	47.53	52.39	49.05	54.04
COLEGIO SANTA MARIA Rank	Superior	Superior	Muy Superior	Categoria A
National Average English Score	42.71	43.34	43.98	49.22
Cundinamarca Average	43.18	44.52	39.74	50.4
Bogota Average	45.87	48.79	49.04	54.2
COLEGIO SANTA MARIA Average English Score	44.65	53.07	47.56	53.14

**Appendix 2****Clasificación de planteles**

Public Schools Ranking in Chia.

Consulta por municipio y periodo académico.

<b>Código</b>	<b>Nombre Oficial</b>	<b>Jornada</b>	<b>Categoría</b>
144741	COL PSICOPEDAGOGICO DE CHIA	COMPLETA	ALTO
086801	LIC CAMPESTRE	COMPLETA	SUPERIOR
156331	FUND COL SAN JUAN DEL CAMINO	COMPLETA	MUY SUPERIOR
042473	GIMN BRITANICO	COMPLETA	MUY SUPERIOR
135921	COL LOS TREBOLES	COMPLETA	MUY SUPERIOR
<b>121756</b>	<b>I.E. SANTA MARÍA DEL RIO - SEDE PRINCIPAL</b>	<b>MAÑANA</b>	MUY SUPERIOR
025957	COL DE MARIA ANGELA	COMPLETA	MUY SUPERIOR
124834	COLEGIO CAMPESTRE SAN DIEGO - SEDE PRINCIPAL	COMPLETA	MUY SUPERIOR
113092	GIMN CAMP CRISTIANO	COMPLETA	MUY SUPERIOR
132316	COL BOSQUES DE SHERWOOD	COMPLETA	SUPERIOR



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# Interactivo

**CLASIFICACIÓN DE PLANTELES**  
Bienvenido(a)


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**CLASIFICACIÓN DE PLANTELES**


Datos de la institución				
Nombre Oficial	I.E. SANTA MARÍA DEL RÍO - SEDE PRINCIPAL			
Código	121756	Calendario	A	
Departamento	CUNDINAMARCA	Municipio	CHIA	

Periodo	Geografía	Química	Física	Biología	Historia	Filosofía	Matemática	Lenguaje	Ciencias Sociales	Inglés	Categoría	Evaluados	% de Evaluados	Natur
2013 **		8	9	8		8	8	9	9	8	MUY SUPERIOR	39	( 95.12 % )	OFI
2012 **		8	8	8		8	8	8	8	8	SUPERIOR	31	( 91.17 % )	OFI
2011 **		8	8	8		8	8	8	8	7	SUPERIOR	49	( 96.08 % )	OFI
2010 *		8	8	8		8	8	8	8	7	SUPERIOR	46	( 100 % )	OFI
2009 *		8	7	7		8	7	6	9	7	ALTO	29		OFI
2008 *		8	7	8		7	7	6	8	6	ALTO	28		OFI
2007 *		7	7	8		6	7	8	6	7	ALTO	25		OFI
2006		7	7	8		8	7	8	7		ALTO	26		OFI
2005	6	6	7	7	6	7	6	7			MEDIO	31		OFI

\* Resolución 489 de octubre de 2008.pdf  
\*\* Resolución 569 de octubre de 2011.pdf



Inicio



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Esta página está diseñada para los navegadores Internet Explorer 7.0, Firefox 2.0 y versiones superiores. En una versión diferente de navegador algunas opciones pueden no funcionar correctamente.

Appendix 3

Placement test results. Table 1

Número	Curso	Edad	Género	en el colegio(año)	Gramática	Writing 1	Writing 2	Writing3	Vocabularic	Reading 1	Reading 2	Speaking	Nivel	Comentarios evaluador
1	9	13	M	5	18/45	3/8	0	0	1/10	2/5	2/5	2	3	son answers about his likes and dislikes. He can d
2	9	14	F	1	3/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	about her family, routine, hobbies but lacks vocabu
3	9	17	F	6	8/45	0	0	0	2/10	1/5	0	1	1	fficulty to understand questions, lacks vocabulary to
4	9	16	F	11	10/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	ences. Isolated words, lack of vocabulary to expres
5	9	14	F	1	13/45	0	0	0	4/10	1/5	0	1	1	lete sentences, lack of vocabulary to express ideas.
6	9	14	F	4	26/45	6/10	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	bulary but she is able to communicate ideas, some
7	9	14	F	1	10/45	3/10	0	0	1/10	3/5	3/5	1	1	complete sentences. Lack of vocabulary to express ic
8	9	14	F	10	7/45	0	0	0	1/10	0	0	1	1	no vocabulary, no complete sentences.
9	9	14	F	2	7/45	0	0	0	2/10	1/5	0	1	1	no vocabulary, monosyllabic answers.
10	9	15	F	3	5/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	ponses, repetition, she doesn't understand some q
11	9		F	9	7/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	hort responses. Didn't understand the questio
12	9	14	F	9	10/45	1	0	0	2/10	1/5	0	1	1	od the questions but answered in Spanish, short se
13	9	15	M	1	14/45	1	0	0	0	1/5	0	1	1	ort answers, yes or no. Didn't understand the questi
14	9	14	F	2	12/45	0	0	0	2/10	0	0	1	1	answers in Spanish, doesn't understand questions.
15	9	14	M	10	19/45	0	0	0	0	1/5	0	2	2	sn't understand questions, mixes to be, present sim
16	9	14	M	6	9/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	stand the questions, answers in Spanish, doesn't kn
17	9	15	F	6	11/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	very resourceful (A2)
18	9	15	M	7	20/45	0	0	0	0	1/5	0	2	2	very positive attitude. A2
19	9	13	M	3	17/45	0	0	0	3/10	0	1/5			NO HAY HOJA DE SPEAKING.
20	9	14	F	3	8/45	0	0	0	0	0	0			NO HAY HOJA DE SPEAKING.
21	9	16	F	2	15/45	0	0	0	1/10	0	0			NO HAY HOJA DE SPEAKING.
22	9	15	M	12	7/45	0	0	0	0	0	0			NO HAY HOJA DE SPEAKING.
23	9	15	M	2	16/45	0	0	0	1/10	2/5	4/5			NO HAY HOJA DE SPEAKING.
24	9	16	F	1	15/45	0	0	0	5/10	0	1/5			NO HAY HOJA DE SPEAKING.
25	9	14	M	1	9/45	0	0	0	0	0	0			NO HAY HOJA DE SPEAKING.
26	9	13	M	10	4/45	0	0	0	0	0	0			NO HAY HOJA DE SPEAKING.
27	9	14	M	5	9/45	0	0	0	3/10	0	1/5			NO HAY HOJA DE SPEAKING.



Placement test results. Table 2

Número	Curso	Edad	Género	Tiempo en el colegio	Gramática	Writing 1	Writing 2	Writing 3	Vocabulari	Reading 1	Reading 2	Speaking	Nivel	Comentarios evaluador
1	10	15	M	13	20/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	2/3	3	Answers about his personal background. He can describe his routine and d
2	10	15	M	9	9/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	Doesn't understand the questions and he replies with single words or in span
3	10	17	M	reptien	7/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	Candidate has difficulty to understand questions. He replies with single wor
4	10	18	M	7	16/45	0	0	0	3/10	1/5	0	1	1	The candidate doesn't understand questions. Lacks vocabulary to answer.
5	10	15	M	11	16/45	0	0	0	2/10	0	0	1	1	Candidate understands some of the questions. He lacks vocabulary to answe
6	10	15	M	3	9/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	By to understand the questions. He lacks vocabulary to answer or answers wit
7	10	17	F	5	7/45	0	0	0	3/10	0	0	0	1	No answers. Just Spanish
8	10	17	M	10	12/45	0	0	0	4/10	0	0	0	1	Isolated words, no sentences. No vocabulary.
9	10	17	M	13	11/45	0	0	0	1/10	0	0	0	1	No sentence structure, lack of vocabulary to express ideas.
10	10	16	M	12	6/45	0	0	0	3/10	1/5	0	0	1	Isolated words, no sentences. No vocabulary.
11	10	16	M	7	9/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	Isolated words, but no sentence structure, some Spanish
12	10	16	M	2	38/45	8/10	0	0	0	4/5	0	0	8	Excellent fluency, vocabulary and structures. He uses complex structures accu
13	10	16	F	13	17/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	No answers. Just Spanish
14	10	16	F	3	2/45	0	0	0	4/10	0	0	0	1	Very little vocabulary but no sentence structures, some Spanish was also use
15	10	15	M	2	24/45	0	0	0	3/10	0	0	4	4	Some pronunciation mistakes, good fluency, long sentences, sentences in pas
16	10	15	M	13	8/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	Short answers. Didn't understand the question.
17	10	17	F	repite 10	11/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	Answers were in Spanish all of them.
18	10	18	F	11	11/45	0	0	0	4/10	2/5	0	1	1	Answers were in Spanish all of them. Didn't understand anything in English h
19	10	18	F	10	9/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	Answers were in Spanish. Didn't understand the questions.
20	10	16	M	7	5/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	Doesn't understand the questions, "como se dice yo tengo" doesn't know t
21	10	17	F	13	9/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	Doesn't understand the questions, answers in Spanish, doesn't know numbers
22	10	17	F	2	10/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	Doesn't know the numbers, "como?", incomplete sentences, "de Bogota", "a
23	10	18	F	8	5/45	0	0	0	1/10	0	0	0	1	Doesn't understand the questions, incomplete sentences, "cuantos años tiene
24	10	19	M	13	8/45	0	0	0	2/10	0	0	0	1	Doesn't understand the question, "en español", "estoy mal en Inglés", "ni idea" en
25	10	15	M	2	12/45	0	0	0	3/10	0	0	0	1	Doesn't understand the questions, answers in Spanish, incomplete sentences, "vivo en el campin
26	10	15	F	2	8/45	0	0	0	3/10	0	0	0	1	Doesn't know the alphabet, doesn't understand the questions, answers in Spani
27	10	15	F	13	12/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	Doesn't understand the questions, answers in Spanish, "es ganadero"
28	10	15	F	13	14/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	A2
29	10	14	M	11	18/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	B1
30	10	14	M	4	14/45	0	0	0	0	4/5	2/5	0	3	A2
31	10	16	F	2	10/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	NO HAY HOJA DE SPEAKING. EL ESTUDIANTE DICE QUE SI LO PRESENTO.
32	10	15	F	3	16/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	NO HAY HOJA DE SPEAKING. EL ESTUDIANTE DICE QUE SI LO PRESENTO.
33	10	15	F	13	7/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	NO HAY HOJA DE SPEAKING. EL ESTUDIANTE DICE QUE SI LO PRESENTO.
34	10	17	M	13	13/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	NO HAY HOJA DE SPEAKING. EL ESTUDIANTE DICE QUE SI LO PRESENTO.
35	10	17	F	6	10/45	0	0	0	3/10	0	0	0	0	NO HAY HOJA DE SPEAKING. EL ESTUDIANTE DICE QUE SI LO PRESENTO.
36	10	15	M	1	21/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	Doesn't understand some questions. Doesn't answer with complete sentences:
37	10	16	M	9	12/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	Doesn't understand the questions. Answers with incomplete sentences, answers in S
38	10	16	M	10	10/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	Doesn't understand the questions, doesn't know numbers, doesn't make full sentences, doesn't h
39	10	15	M	7	11/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	Doesn't understand the question, has some basic vocabulary, doesn't make f
40	10	16	F	11	10/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	Doesn't understand the questions, doesn't understand some questions, doesn't have basic voca
41	10	15	M	3	22/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	Doesn't understand the questions, "I live in El Cairo", "I live with my sister, mom and father", "my father is ... a

Placement test results. Table 3

Número	Curso	Edad	Género	Tiempo en el colegio	Gramática	Writing 1	Writing 2	Writing 3	Vocabulari	Reading 1	Reading 2	Speaking	Nivel	Comentarios evaluador
1	11	17	F	14	10/45	1/8	0	1	3/10	2/5	0	1	1	Has difficulty to understand questions. She replies with single words.
2	11	14	M	6	9/45	0	0	0	2/10	1/5	1/5	1/2	1	Talks about his personal background. He uses basic vocabulary but there is no sentence structure.
3	11	18	M		20/45	3/8	1/10	0	3/10	4/5	3/5	2/3	3	Describes people and talk about plans with certain level of accuracy in grammar structures.
4	11	15	M	6	12/45	1/2	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	Uses vocabulary to expand on answers about his personal background. Use verbs in past in inn
5	11	20	F	repite 1	8/45	2/10	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	Isolated words. No sentences
6	11	17	F	14	7/45	0	0	0	2/10	0	0	0	1	Lacks vocabulary to express ideas. Monosyllabic answers
7	11		M	14	12/45	0	0	0	0	3/5	0	0	1	Doesn't communicate but just through isolated words.
8	11	17	M	5 (repite)	9/45	0	0	0	3/10	0	0	0	1	Doesn't use words in English only Spanish.
9	11	18	M	5 (repite)	12/45	1	0	1	2/10	2/5	1/5	2	2	Doesn't understand the questions, bad English structures. Good fluency.
10	11	17	F	14	12/45	0	0	0	0	2/5	0	1	2	Understood everything but some answers were in Spanish.
11	11	17	F	14	11/45	0	0	0	0	1/5	0	0	1	Doesn't understand the questions "no me acuerdo, no se", answers in Spanish
12	11	18	F	4	10/45	0	0	0	0	1/5	1/5	0	1	Doesn't know the numbers "no entiendo" doesn't understand the questions, "I am Bogota"
13	11	17	F	repite 1	8/45	0	0	0	0	2/5	0	0	1	Doesn't understand the questions, answers in Spanish.
14	11		F	14	11/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	Doesn't understand the questions, answers in Spanish, has some vocabulary, incomplete sentences
15	11	17	F	12	7/45	0	0	0	3/10	2/10	0	0	1	Doesn't understand the questions, "que es eso?" incomplete sentences, "no te entiendo" "the work a obrero"
16	11	19	M	repite 7 y	14/45	0	0	0	1/10	1/5	0	0	1	Doesn't understand the questions, answers in Spanish, incomplete sentences, "Que hace?" talks in Spanish.
17	11	16	F	8	16/45	0	0	0	0	1/5	0	0	1	Doesn't understand the questions, speaks in Spanish, has some vocabulary, no use of 3rd person
18	11	15	M	5	39/45	0	0	0	4/10	5/5	5/5	0	7	Good natural (B1)
19	11	18	F	11	14/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	A-
20	11	18	F	repite 7 y	8/45	0	0	0	0	1/5	0	0	1	A-
21	11	17	M	repite 1	10/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	A-
22	11	17	F	3	7/45	0	0	0	0	2/5	0	0	1	A-
23	11	17	F	14	9/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	A-
24	11		F	6	13/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	A-
25	11	16	F	14	12/45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	A-
26	11	19	M	Repite 2	14/45	0	0	0	2/10	0	1/5	0	0	NO HAY HOJA DE SPEAKING. EL ESTUDIANTE DICE QUE SI LO PRESENTO.
27	11	17	F	4	12/45	0	0	0	2/10	3/5	0	0	0	NO HAY HOJA DE SPEAKING. EL ESTUDIANTE DICE QUE SI LO PRESENTO.
28	11		F	11	11/45	0	0	0	0	1/5	0	0	0	NO HAY HOJA DE SPEAKING. EL ESTUDIANTE DICE QUE SI LO PRESENTO.

**Appendix 4**

Timeline of the project

FONTAN RELATIONAL SYSTEM IMPLEMENTED AT SANTA MARIA DEL RIO  
SCHOOL RESEARCH PROJECT TIMELINE IMPLEMENTATION

ACTIVITY	OCTOBER 2014	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY 2015	FEBRUARY MARCH APRIL	MAY JUNE JULY	AUGUST SEPTEMBER
WEEK	2	1	1	1	2	3	4
Introduction (Research topic, problem, question, objectives, rational.							
Theoretical framework (Literature review, state of the art and bibliography)							
Research design (Researchers' role, context, data participants, type of study, needs analysis, instruments, students proficiency, procedures, instruments validation and ethical issues)							
Results and recommendations (based theoretical review)							
Recommendations based on theory and experiences, what has been done in other settings, which share the same characteristics, that can enhance the LL at SMR							
Final Article (Handbook) Submission							