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**Teaching English to students with  
low intellectual capacities through  
ICTs: Online Reinforcement Tasks**

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## ABSTRACT

Students with low intellectual capacities are equally important as other students. Therefore, there is a need to make a contribution in the field of language learning by providing them with online reinforcement tasks which are going to increase and reinforce not only their knowledge about the target language but also their motivation and their self-esteem. In order to do so, the present project seeks to provide an analysis of the educative requirements of students with special educational needs especially low intellectual students as well as to develop low intellectual students' communicative competence by conveying motivating online reinforcement tasks.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of communicative competence has been considered extremely important in second language acquisition. As Widdowson (1978, 1989) claimed, learners should become communicatively competent since it is crucial for their needs as well as for their language learning development. Nevertheless, it could be said that in the preceding education, students had to show different cognitive abilities in order to achieve communicative competence. As mentioned by the National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs of Persons With Severe Disabilities (2003) teaching communication skills allow students with low intellectual capacities to reinforce thinking abilities. Considering this information, students with low intellectual capacities should be provided with communicative services and support to make them reinforce this communicative competence in terms of second language acquisition (Kleinert, J., Holman, A., McSheehan, M., Kearns, J. 2010).

As stated by Jones, Abbott, and Beltrán (2013) there has been a change when considering children with special educational needs in terms of second language learning. The concept students with special educational needs is a wide term used to define different senses of diversity. Diversity involves personal diversity (everyone is different), educational achievement, sociocultural diversity and diversity in cognitive limitations, diversity in physical limitations and cultural diversity, among others (MIET 2013).

These students with special educational needs not only need to develop the communicative competences (Kleinert, J., Holman, A., McSheehan, M., Kearns, J. 2010), as it is stated by the new educational law, LOMCE, it establishes seven key competences which also need to be achieved. These seven competences are linguistic

competence, mathematical competence, digital competence, learning to learn, social and civic competences, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship and finally, cultural awareness and expressions. As it can be seen, digital competence is crucial in the creation of the educational planning. Hence, as mentioned by García and López (2012) there is a need to include this competence, otherwise, social exclusion could be obtained this competence is not a part of the learning process.

As for the usage of technologies in the classroom, as mentioned by García and López (2012) technologies can be considered not only as an educational support to students with special educational needs but also as an aid to transform educational contexts into inclusive contexts to improve education.

The aim of this project is threefold:

i) to analyse the educative requirements of students with special educational needs especially low intellectual students.

ii) to develop low intellectual students' communicative competence by conveying online reinforcement tasks.

iii) to increase low intellectual students' motivation as well as self-esteem.

## 2. DIVERSITY IN THE CLASSROOM AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

As mentioned above, the term diversity is very important in order to understand the variety of students attending classes. When dealing with secondary education, a wide diversity is presented in all the classrooms due to the fact that this educative stage is compulsory and therefore all the students must attend classes. Hence, it is really important to distinguish as well as being aware of the differences in terms of the students' abilities to learn. Other features which determine the diversity of students in the classroom are motivation and learning styles (Arnaiz et, al., 2004). In order to create a meaningful learning process, students' characteristics need to be considered when creating materials (MEC, 2004). Bearing this information in mind, there is a need to consider not only the students' diversity when dealing with motivation and learning styles but also the intellectual capacities of our students. Considering the students' characteristics, as stated by Barrera (2009) due to the diverse variety of students with special educational needs, different profiles can be presented. There are learners who show some difficulties in the learning process, learners with physical problems, learners with cognitive problems development, students with diagnosed illnesses, etc.

In order to make the teaching and learning process more effective, the students with special educational needs have to be identified and they should be provided with activities to reinforce their learning as well as creating group activities to make them feel integrated with the other learners. Furthermore, it is important to mention that they should be evaluated considering their limitations (Barrera 2009).

Considering this importance of bearing in mind diversity in the classroom, this should be reflected in the creation of the course planning. As stated in the Order 65/2015, when creating this planning, several aspects such as the types of materials, didactic resources,



learning styles and attention to diversity should be considered. The course planning is not the only measure which needs to be taken. Teachers need to work cooperatively together with the management group of the educational centre, the pedagogical coordination technical group, and parents (Barrera 2009). Nevertheless, if the students with special needs follow different procedures they can feel excluded and frustrated as they do not feel a sense of belonging to the same group. In order to avoid this frustration, the teacher should make them feel as part of the group and therefore inclusion should be promoted (Barrera 2009).

### 3. STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS: LOW INTELLECTUAL CAPACITIES

As stated in Imsero in the report of the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2013, in the Spanish database of people with disabilities, there are several people who are aged from 0 to 17 years old who present a disability of 35.63% in terms of intellectual capacities. Among all the disabilities, low intellectual capacities are the most frequent being followed by the mental disabilities (22.14%). The American Association on Intellectual Disabilities defines low intellectual capacities as ‘a disability which is characterised by significant limitations in the operation of intellectual and adaptive behaviour which is shown in conceptual, social and practical skills’ (Luckasson et. al., 2002).

It is really important to consider the fact that this disability is not longer considered as an only trait of a person, it should be regarded as a mode of interaction of the person with the environment. This information is considered as such because of the variety of the disability in terms of the aid this person could receive. Considering this interactive perspective, there are three elements which need to be considered which are the possibilities or skills of the person related to the usual environment, the possibilities of

the functional participation in these environments and the adequacy of the set of aids and support provided by the families and professionals.

Considering this perspective, there is a need to consider these three components in students in order to determine supportive plans as well as their magnitude and length. These three components are organised into a multidimensional perspective which contains five dimensions which will determine the capacities as well as the limitations of the students in order to plan further support which will be needed to improve its daily operation. These five dimensions are intellectual capacities, adaptive behaviour, participations, interactions and social roles, health and context (Antequera et al. 2014).

Dealing with intellectual capacities, it refers to the intelligence of the person including the ability to reason, plan, solve problems, abstract thinking, comprehend complex ideas, learn quickly and learn due to experience. Adaptive behaviour refers to the conceptual and social abilities as well as the practical procedures to operate on a daily basis. This adaptive behaviour affects everyday life as well as the ability to deal with vital changes. Regarding participations, interaction and social roles, they refer to the places where students live, play, work, socialise and interact. Positive environments favour growth, development and well-being. It is in these environments where students with special needs experiment, participate and interact and assume a role. With reference to health, it refers to the physical, psychological and social well-being which have an impact by easing or inhibiting human operation affecting the other four dimensions. Finally, context means the interrelated conditions which are present in the student life. Considering an ecological perspective, there are three levels: microsystem, mesosystem and macrosystem. Microsystem refers to the immediate social space among the student with special educational needs with family members, and other close people. As for mesosystem it refers to the communities and organisations which provide

educational and supportive services. Finally, macrosystems are general patterns regarding culture, society and population, countries or socio-political influences (Antequera et al. 2014).

As for the classification of the intellectual capacities, there are several levels of retardation starting from slight mental retardation which mental quotient is between 50 to 69, moderate mental retardation which mental quotient is between 35 to 49, serious mental retardation which mental quotient is between 20 and 34, and finally, severe mental retardation which mental quotient is less than 20. Nevertheless, there is a need to consider the fact that students with low intellectual capacities should be considered as independent and continuously changing (Antequera et al. 2014).

After having defined the main characteristics of students with low intellectual capacities, there is a need to define their main cognitive characteristics as well as their language and their ability to communicate. The following characteristics belong to the group of slight mental retardation due to the fact that it could be said that it is the most common regarding public secondary education since students with severe mental retardation might attend special educational needs' schools. These characteristic will be followed by their supporting needs (Antequera et al. 2014).

With reference to the cognitive traits, students present less efficiency when focusing their attention as well as with memorising strategies and remembering information. In addition, they present some difficulties when distinguishing relevant aspects of information, abstraction, generalising and they have adversities regarding metacognitive abilities. Considering these traits, teachers have to conduct some assistance and adjustments. These adjustments are related to the curriculum by considering the contents, objectives, activities, assessment, methodology etc. What is more, teachers

need to ease the distinction of the core elements of learning by providing simple instructions, understandable vocabulary, with visual and symbolic support. Their background knowledge should be also considered when teaching new content as well as explaining the reason for learning this content. Besides, there is a need to promote success in the activities which these students have to do as well as providing them with the necessary strategies to convey these exercises.

In terms of the language and communication, students with low intellectual capacities develop their speech as other students. Nonetheless, they present a retardation acquiring the language. With reference to the acquisition of elements such as discourse and pragmatics, these students need more time for developing these competences properly. In addition, complex structures will be more difficult to achieve such as literary expressions as well as metaphors. Comprehension tends to be more difficult when dealing with complex texts (Antequera et al. 2014).

In order to cope with these difficulties and ease comprehension there are several strategies which can be used such as using simple and short sentences, emphasis on intonation, etc. Other aids such as gestures or visual support can also facilitate comprehension and therefore should be included. Reading and comprehension should be worked independently to enhance and improve this skill. As for feedback, it is a crucial element which needs to be used since it favours linguistic development (Antequera et al. 2014).

Apart from using strategies to facilitate comprehension, there are other elements which are extremely necessary regarding comprehension and learning such as resources. In fact, Antequera (2014) proposes several materials which can be used with students with intellectual disabilities such as didactic materials and information communication

technologies. Focusing on information communication technologies, they are extremely useful in order to improve the ability of communication and therefore learning.

Bearing in mind these personal characteristics, considering them will allow teachers to focus on the student with special educational needs in order to plan objectives and goals related with the standard of living, for not just limiting the objectives to the academic goals (Antequera et al. 2014).

Dealing with the necessities of students with intellectual disabilities, the educational curriculum plays a crucial role in order to determine the requirement of the students considering their level of competence and the resources which can be used in order to make learning more effective. Once the educational needs are established, it is crucial to determine the educational process and responses to facilitate the learning process (Antequera et al. 2014). These dimensions will assist the teacher to promote inclusion due to the fact that everyone deserves being admitted in society. As affirmed by the Arc of the United States (1998), the support and services required by disabled students should be provided within their community, where they live, where they learn and where they work.

When mentioning inclusive education it refers to the integration of students in a classroom without making distinctions in terms of origin, race, language, religion and disabilities among other things (Saiz 2005). As it is defined by Saiz (2005), inclusion involves a process of transformation in which the educational institutions will be developed considering the students' diversity, identifying and removing barriers of learning, socialisation, as well as participation by enhancing their abilities. In fact, inclusion is a right as it is established in the article 24<sup>th</sup> of the United Nations in the

“Universal Convention of People with Disabilities” adopted the 13<sup>th</sup> of December in 2006.

Bearing in mind this inclusive perspective, there are several measures which can be done in order to promote educational support. Firstly, there is a need to establish a cooperative teaching aid. That is, teachers should work together with other specialists such as the psychoeducational responsible, the educational management, etc. In addition, cooperative learning should be regarded especially when there are several levels in the classroom. Finally, individual programming is an aspect which should be applied in order to master the learning process when dealing with special educational needs. This individual planning consists of an adjustment of the syllabus as well as including supportive and reinforcement materials of the learning process (Saiz, 2005).

#### 4. TECHNOLOGIES TO ENHANCE LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TO PROMOTE INCLUSION

Currently, there is a need to satisfy the different intellectual capacities of students. In order to achieve this response, information communication technologies seem to be a fundamental tool (Bosco 2002). That is, the usage of ICT can be seen as a great tool in order to reinforce students' knowledge due to several reasons. Firstly, they allow learners to manage and regulate the frequency of repetition considering their needs and without being under pressure of working at the same pace as other students (Kennewell 2004).

Considering the purpose of this project, these technical resources are pivotal not only for enhancing the learning process, but also in their daily life due to the increasing exposure and usage of technologies in society. They are divided into traditional

technology, electronic technology, audiovisual technology and digital technology. As for traditional technology, it refers to all types of didactic resources which are used to enhance self-learning and supporting individual needs. Regarding electronic technology, it refers to those means of communication which are used to ease disable people's lives. Audiovisual technology refers to the usage of the media to enhance learning by considering the objectives, and the contents being taught as well as their impact on today's society. Finally, with reference to digital technology, there is a need to point out the several educative benefits of these types of technologies. These technologies involve the usage of the Internet and computers and tablets, etc. They can be used as the core of the learning process or as reinforcement aids (Feliz and Ricoy 2002).

Furthermore, ICTs are considered motivating for students due to several reasons. Kennewell (2004) connects aspects such as self-correction to motivation. Self-correction is different to the traditional forms of error correction. The system of error correction provided online offers a more private feedback which reduces embarrassment and therefore self-esteem.

Another issue which needs to be considered is the students' self-esteem, as defined by Wilson (2014), students with learning difficulties might present low self-esteem which can lead to upsetting behaviour. In order to avoid this negative behaviour, there are several strategies which can be done to ease the learning process and therefore increase motivation. Teaching students considering a multisensory approach as well as learners who learn kinaesthetically, visually and auditory will provide teachers with the key towards a satisfying language learning. What is more, the learning process should be divided into a slower pace in which learners will be able to over-learn the content they present more difficulties with.

In order to provide students with ICTs activities to reinforce their knowledge, it is really important to consider several factors when creating or when choosing these resources. Several teachers working with students with special educational needs proposed a framework in which seven steps should be considered when teaching students with special educational needs (Coyle et al., 1994:34). These steps are setting goals, meeting and understanding new language, imitation, practising, creative use of language, and assessment, evaluation and recognition of achievement. The step 1 *setting goals* refers to the clarification of the activity in a visual and clear manner. As for step 2 *meeting and understanding new language*, it means the usage of several strategies which aim at easing understanding. Considering step 3, *imitation* is mentioned taking into consideration motivation since repetition should be enjoyable and entertaining. In order to acquire the target language, there is a need to produce some *repetition* (step 4) of the target form, step 5 *practising* which is needed in order to acquire the target content. After this practice, students have to use the language creatively, that is, step 6 *creative use of the language*, and step 7 which deals with *assessment, evaluation and recognition of the achievement*. This final step is really important in order to raise students' self-esteem.

Regarding the enhancement of inclusion through the usage of ICTs Abbott (2007) proposes three e-inclusion categories which are the training and rehearsing, assisting learning and the active role in language learning. As for training and rehearsing it allows students to practice the target language form in order to master it. ICTs provide students with the opportunity to practise several times as needed and therefore, to reinforce their learning. As for the assisting learning, technologies allow disable students or students with special needs to compensate the learning process and enhance



learning. Finally, students maintain an active role in language learning since they have to participate all the time through the usage of technologies.

Another benefit about the usage of these technologies is that they can be adapted to the students' previous knowledge and to their learning pace (MIET 2013). As mentioned by Soto and Fernandez (2005) the usage of technologies can be really beneficial to be used in the classroom since they involve crucial terms regarding attention to diversity such as accessibility, collaboration as well as equity. What is more, information communication technologies allow teachers to provide students with complementary activities as well as reinforcement activities in which students can self-control their job.

In line with these advantages, Cabero (2008) listed several benefits of using technologies when dealing with attention to diversity. Technologies help to overcome cognitive, auditory, and motor disabilities' limitations, provide immediate feedback, favour synchronic and asynchronous among the teacher and the students, allow multisensory communication, individual training (students progress according to their pace), enhance independence as well as autonomy, enhance social and labour market insertion, provide moments of leisure, and finally, technologies diminish the feeling of academic and personal failure due to the fact that students are more motivated and they approach sociocultural and scientific knowledge. Nevertheless, it needs to be mentioned that these benefits mentioned above are not simply obtained by technologies themselves but to a good approach of how to use them to be effective and to promote inclusion (Cabero 1999).

In order to deal with attention to diversity in the English classroom, Barrera (2009) offers several techniques to be adapted in the methodology of the target language teaching. Therefore, these techniques are the usage of tasks, experimental learning,

cooperative learning, learning through projects, etc. Considering the former, tasks are seen as a great core of learning since there might be implied different levels of difficulty. What is more, tasks can be conveyed individually, in pairs, etc. Dealing with the experimental learning, it refers to the process of learning by experimenting. Thus, students can use Internet to find relevant information and therefore they will also learn incidentally. Cooperative learning could be considered as another beneficial technique to promote inclusion and make students work together and help each other to achieve a common outcome.

As mentioned earlier, one example of using technologies in the classroom is by means of tasks. As stated by Girón-García (2012) tasks are efficient activities to use the target language in the classroom. Nunan (1989) affirms that tasks make learners understand, manipulate, produce as well as interact by focusing on meaning rather than on form. Considering the importance of self-esteem in students with special educational needs, Willis (1998) claims that tasks seem to raise students' self-esteem since students do not experience public failure. What is more, Task-Based Approach is correlated with cooperation as well as metacognitive and autonomy development. Metacognitive development entails task planning, learning process control as well as self-evaluation. In line with language learning development are Web-Quests. Web-Quests contain learning activities which incorporate Internet in order to achieve the aim by integrating knowledge. These tools consist of several parts which are the introduction, task, process, resources, evaluation and conclusion. As for the introduction, the purpose of the Web-Quest is established considering the future goals. Afterwards, the task is key since the desired final outcome is stated. The process aims at providing the instructions to develop the target task. With reference to resources, they need to be presented to the students in order to conduct the task efficiently. Evaluation is used in order to make

students aware of the aspects which are going to be assessed. Finally, conclusion compiles the learning process (Dodge 1997). Another type of tool to enhance language learning is Cybertasks which can be considered a third generation of Web-Quests according to Girón-García (2012). Cybertasks aim at enhancing language literacy as well as learning autonomy.

## 5. ONLINE REINFORCEMENT TASKS

Taking into consideration the tools mentioned above which aim at enhancing language learning, online reinforcement tasks also attempt to promote language learning by considering the most beneficial traits of WebQuests and Cybertasks. What is more, the framework which should be considered when teaching students with special educational needs is also relevant (Coyle et al., 1994). Hence, these online reinforcement tasks contain several stages and the task is a core unit to be done collaboratively. That is, these tasks will be better conducted in groups of two students with low intellectual capacities. These online reinforcement tasks aim at reinforcing students' knowledge of the target language in a motivating manner.

These reinforcement online activities are arranged into topics and aim at reinforcing students' vocabulary, grammar structures and pronunciation as well as being motivating for students and at developing their self-esteem. They are created by means of the website *Zunal* as its structure is appropriate for conducting online reinforcement activities in the same website in a clear and organised structure which is essential for low intellectual capacities. There are different online reinforcement tasks organised into the basic English vocabulary which is taught along primary education. Therefore, reinforcement activities are provided in order to achieve the final outcome, that is, the task. These online reinforcement tasks are:

[Online high school reinforcement task](#), [Online hobbies reinforcement task](#), [Online family reinforcement task](#), [Online home reinforcement task](#), [Online emotions reinforcement task](#), [Online food reinforcement task](#), [Online means of transport reinforcement task](#).

These online reinforcement tasks are made of six main stages. One example of these different stages of the online reinforcement task will be provided.

I) Welcome: a description and key words of this online reinforcement task are presented. This section refers to the stage one of the framework of Coyle et al., (1994) which is *setting the goals*. (See Appendix A)

II) Introduction: the main objective is introduced as well as the purpose of the final task. This is in line with *meeting and understanding the new language* Coyle et al., (1994). (See Appendix A)

III) Task: the final task is explained. This is also related to the stage with *meeting and understanding the new language* since the main objective is introduced and therefore students meet the target goal Coyle et al., (1994). (See Appendix B)

IV) Process: in this stage reinforcement online activities are provided to students. This stage is linked with Coyle's stages (1994) 3 *imitation*, 4 *repetition*, 5 *practising* and 6 *creative use of the language* since students reinforce the learning process by means of motivating activities and they start creating the task. (See Appendix C)

1<sup>st</sup> activity: students revise the target content by means of a story created by the tool *Cartoon Story Maker*. This tool can be very motivating for students since several characters can appear and they are sequenced in different scenes. (See Appendix D)

2<sup>nd</sup> activity: students watch a video which contains the target vocabulary. These video is selected from *Youtube* and it aims at reinforcing the target vocabulary in an interesting perspective since videos are carefully selected for these students. (See Appendix E)

3<sup>rd</sup> activity: students listen to the *Voki*. A *Voki* is a speaking avatar also created by the teacher. It offers a wide range of accents and it seems to be appealing to students. The *Voki* tells information about his/her life with the target vocabulary. (See Appendix F)

4<sup>th</sup> activity: students convey the task. After having reinforced their knowledge, students are going to do the task. The task is collaborative and it is done through the tool *Wikispaces*. Therefore, two students will write about the content by using a wiki. A wiki is a collaborative text which allows students to write the same document together. The typology of the task depends on every unit. (See Appendix G)

V) Evaluation: in this stage, students will know how they are going to be evaluated. The evaluation will consider the vocabulary used depending on the amount of the reinforced words which have been used as well as the written task in which its appropriateness according to the vocabulary, the grammar structures and context used. This can be related to Coyne et al., (1994) final stage which is *assessment, evaluation and recognition of the achievement*. (See Appendix H)

VI) Conclusion: in this section the task is concluded and students are provided with online games related to the topic in order to make them autonomous learners and enhance the learning process. This can be also related to Coyne et al., (1994) final stage which is *assessment, evaluation and recognition of the achievement*. (See Appendix I)

## 6. CONCLUSION

After considering the diversity of students which can be found in the classroom it can be concluded the fact that inclusion needs to be promoted in the English classroom as a key aspect in this current society. In order to do so, students with special educational needs, especially students with low intellectual capacities, deserve to be provided with online motivating tools in order to reinforce their knowledge and develop their communicative competence. This online reinforcement tasks aim at being used when facing diversity in the classroom in the near future as well as to develop students' self-esteem and motivation towards the target language.

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## APPENDIX A: WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

**Welcome**

Introduction

Task

Process

Evaluation

Conclusion

Teacher Page

### \* Welcome



**Welcome:** Hobbies and free time  
**Description:** task:reinforcement hobbies  
**Grade Level:** 9-12  
**Curriculum:** English / Language Arts  
**Keywords:** hobbies free time  
**Author(s):** [Angelscg Cg](#)

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## Hobbies and free time

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### \* Introduction



We are going to review the vocabulary about hobbies  
First, we will review the vocabulary with funny stories and videos and later you will talk about your hobbies  
=)

About Author(s)

Evaluate WebQuest

## APPENDIX B: TASK

### Hobbies and free time

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#### \*Task



In this task you are going to plan a week-end activity with your classmate. You have to decide which activities are you going to do. You will write the plan on wikis

## APPENDIX C: PROCESS

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Statistics

Export WebQuest

Share This WebQuest

### Process



1. First of all, let's have a look at a story to revise the vocabulary
2. Watch the video about children's hobbies and pay attention to what they say
3. Listen to Christopher, the voki, listen to his hobbies
4. Go to wikispaces and do the task

 [1- cartoon story](#)

## APPENDIX D: CARTOON STORY MAKER

FIGURE 1.31.11



Frame 8 of 11

[http://zunal.com/zunal\\_uploads/files/20150501055130ytuve.pdf](http://zunal.com/zunal_uploads/files/20150501055130ytuve.pdf)

## APPENDIX E: VIDEO

### 2- children's videos





APPENDIX F: VOKI

---



3. Hobbies voki

APPENDIX G: WIKI (TASK)

The screenshot shows a web browser interface for a wiki page. At the top, the browser address bar shows 'angelshobbies > Página de inicio' and a search bar with the text 'Búsqueda'. The user's profile 'angels1992' is visible in the top right. Below the browser bar is a red navigation bar with icons for 'Miembros', 'Proyectos', and 'Events'. The main content area features the title 'hobbies' with a star icon. To the right of the title are buttons for 'Editar', '0' comments, '1' page view, and a menu icon. The task text reads: 'In this task you are going to plan a week-end activity with your classmate. You have to decide which activities are you going to do. Remember the new words you have learnt.' At the bottom of the content area is a white box with a speech bubble icon and the text 'Add Discussion'.

## APPENDIX H: EVALUATION

### Hobbies and free time

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  - Process
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- 
- About Author(s)
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  - Export WebQuest
  - Share This WebQuest

### Evaluation



#### Evaluation Rubric

	Perfect	Great	okay	needs more practice	Score
<b>Vocabulary used</b>	there is a wide range of vocabulary	The vocabulary is appropriate	The vocabulary used is okay	There is few vocabulary	
<b>Written task</b>	The written task includes a wide range of vocabulary, context, etc.	The written task includes some vocabulary	the written task includes few words	The written task needs improvemnet, it is not clear	

## Hobbies and free time

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### Conclusion



I hope you have reviewed the vocabulary

Remember that if you want to practise more you can play different games, for doing so check the link

Thank you

 [hobbies games](#)