Speaking strategies for improving conversation skills of students of English Language at Universidad del Valle

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ABSTRACT

The objective of language learners should extend beyond mere comprehension to encompass effective communication in the target language. However, in Colombia, many English learners primarily focus on mastering grammar, relegating spoken proficiency to a secondary priority. This phenomenon is compounded by a prevailing perception among English educators that speaking skills are ancillary to the core curriculum. While English education in Colombian high schools often centers on passing standardized exams such as the Prueba Saber, university students recognize the necessity of English proficiency for both professional advancement and navigating a globalized society. At Universidad del Valle, students from diverse educational backgrounds, with varying levels of English proficiency, enroll in courses aimed at developing both general and academic language skills. Despite the emphasis on communicative competence in these courses, questions persist regarding the alignment of instructional activities with this pedagogical framework. Consequently, it becomes imperative to assess the efficacy of specific teaching methodologies in enhancing students' speaking abilities. This action research investigates the impact of implementing classroom activities such as role plays, short speeches, and interactive exercises aligned with the academic program's objectives. By focusing on these specific activities, this research aims to explore how their integration into the curriculum can enhance student engagement, learning outcomes, and overall academic performance. The study seeks to fill a gap in existing literature by providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of these pedagogical strategies in achieving the desired educational goals of the program. By observing the effects on students' speaking proficiency, this study seeks to identify strategies that effectively foster linguistic fluency

and communicative competence. Through rigorous analysis and evaluation, it aims to provide valuable insights into the optimization of language learning practices, particularly concerning the development of speaking skills in English language education contexts.

Keywords: Language learners, effective communication, target language, role-plays, short speeches, English learners, Universidad del Valle, Colombia

DEDICATION

To my mom, for having patience and supporting me during these two years.

To my brother, Takumasa for his financial support and for being my inspiration.

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"A good teacher can inspire hope, ignite the imagination, and instill a love of learning." - Brad Henry

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PREFACE

Improving conversation skills is a pivotal aspect of mastering any language, particularly for students at the Universidad del Valle who are learning English as a second language. This preface aims to outline the rationale and objectives behind exploring effective speaking strategies tailored to enhance the conversational abilities of these students.

The journey to fluency in a new language involves numerous challenges, particularly in developing the confidence and competence required for spontaneous conversation. Traditional classroom activities often emphasize grammar and written skills, which, while essential, do not fully address the dynamic and interactive nature of spoken communication. Recognizing this gap, this research focuses on implementing and evaluating specific speaking strategies designed to boost students' conversational skills.

One of the key methodologies explored is the 432 speech technique, which encourages students to engage in structured, timed speaking exercises. This technique was selected due to its proven success in language learning contexts, including with Japanese language students. For these students, there is both a local and national speech contest in which beginners deliver a five-minute speech. After participating in these contests, students often feel more motivated to study the language. The practice involved in preparing the speech, helps them understand the importance of fluency and pronunciation for effective communication, especially when judged in a contest setting. Moreover, the structured yet flexible framework of the 432 technique ensures that students engage actively and meaningfully. Additionally, the inclusion of grading for

these activities maintains student motivation and commitment to improving their speaking skills.

Initial observations indicated reluctance from students to participate in voluntary speaking activities, particularly those that were ungraded. To address this, graded speaking exercises were introduced, which significantly increased participation and engagement. Students practiced with their peers before presenting to the teacher, which not only improved their confidence but also promoted collaborative learning—a crucial aspect of language acquisition.

This research underscores the importance of selecting activities that align with students' interests and needs. It advocates for a trial-and-error approach, continuously refining strategies based on feedback and outcomes. Moreover, the collaboration and insights from fellow educators play a vital role in this iterative process, bringing fresh perspectives and innovative ideas to the classroom.

In conclusion, the exploration and implementation of speaking strategies like the 432 technique represent a significant step towards enhancing the conversational skills of English language students at Universidad del Valle. This preface sets the stage for a detailed examination of these strategies, highlighting their potential to transform language learning into a more interactive, engaging, and effective experience.

INTRODUCTION

The Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages program at Univalle is structured into three distinct stages, each comprising two levels. The initial stage, encompassing levels 1 and 2, adopts an integrated approach that emphasizes both general communication skills and fundamental academic abilities. Here, the focus lies on developing oral and interpersonal communicative competence among students. Moving into the second stage, consisting of intermediate levels (courses III and IV), the emphasis shifts towards enhancing written communicative competence, bolstering general academic skills. Finally, the third stage delves into more specialized coursework (levels V and VI), dedicating attention to both written and oral academic communication.

For the purposes of our research, we concentrate on the foundational levels 1 and 2 of the first stage. These levels cater to students from diverse academic backgrounds, many of whom have recently graduated from high school. For these individuals, successful completion of levels 1 and 2 in English is a requisite according to their respective academic programs. However, a notable challenge emerges: transitioning students' English learning objectives from a focus on grammar to a more communicative approach. Our aim is to introduce activities geared towards enhancing speaking skills, thereby facilitating this pivotal shift in learning objectives.

The 432 speech technique was chosen due to its demonstrated success in various language learning contexts, notably with Japanese language students. This technique involves structured, timed speaking exercises, allowing students to practice speaking on topics of their choice. This fosters a sense of ownership and relevance in their learning process. The structured yet flexible framework of the 432 technique ensures that students

engage actively and meaningfully. Additionally, the inclusion of grading for these activities maintains student motivation and commitment to improving their speaking skills.

The transition from a grammar-focused to a communicative approach presents several challenges for students. First, there is often an ingrained habit of prioritizing grammatical accuracy over fluency. Students may feel anxious or self-conscious about making mistakes while speaking, which can inhibit their willingness to practice speaking in front of peers. Secondly, students accustomed to traditional rote learning methods might struggle with the spontaneity and unpredictability of communicative activities. They may lack the confidence to engage in unscripted conversations, which are essential for real-world communication.

Moreover, the existing curriculum and assessment methods, which heavily emphasize grammar and written exams, might not provide sufficient opportunities for students to develop their speaking skills. Consequently, students might not see the immediate relevance or benefit of improving their oral proficiency, further diminishing their motivation.

To address these challenges, our aim is to introduce activities specifically geared towards enhancing speaking skills, thereby facilitating this pivotal shift in learning objectives. By incorporating the 432 speech technique, along with other interactive and communicative exercises such as role-plays and short speeches, we hope to create an environment where speaking practice is both encouraged and rewarded. This approach not only aligns with the academic program’s objectives but also ensures that students gradually become more comfortable and proficient in using English for effective communication.

CONTEXT

This study was conducted with a sample comprising six students enrolled in the English with General and Academic Purposes program, specifically levels 1 and 2, at Universidad del Valle, Melendez campus, Colombia. The majority of the participants were pursuing a degree in Statistics, a comprehensive ten-semester program. Within the Statistics curriculum, English language learning is integrated as part of the academic requirements. Students are mandated to complete two levels of English courses, each offering three credits, as an essential component of their complementary training within the academic program. The participants are undergraduate university students from different regions of Colombia. They are in the initial stages of learning English, corresponding to the basic A1 level as defined by the Common European Framework of reference for Languages. Students from the English level 1 group were selected based on their low grades and the intention of improving their performance through the activities of the research. However, most of the first selected group were absent the days of the activities and they won't be a good reference to the research so students of English level 2 group were asked to be volunteers to the research and four of them were added. From level 1 were selected two indigenous descendant girls between 17 and 19 years old and from level 2 were selected two boys and two girls between 18 and 20 years old, three of them white and one mulatto student. All six participants were from sociocultural status between 2 and 4.

PROBLEM

The primary issue identified pertains to the substandard level of speaking proficiency among students enrolled in English for Academic and General Purposes at levels 1 and 2. In response, this research endeavors to address this challenge by devising and executing specific speaking activities aimed at enhancing students' oral communication skills. These activities are meticulously selected to align with the communicative competence framework delineated within the academic program's curriculum. Notably, these activities are designed to be both time-efficient and relevant to the subjects covered in the course curriculum. By adhering closely to the communicative competence guidelines outlined in the program, this research aims to ensure that students are provided with opportunities to engage effectively in various linguistic contexts. The expected learning outcomes include improved grammatical accuracy, enhanced discourse management, and better strategic competence. Moving forward, the implementation of such activities promises to foster a more robust and comprehensive development of students' communicative abilities.

Do I follow the communicative competence established in the program?

Which communicative competence activities can I implement?

JUSTIFICATION

The academic program for English at the Universidad del Valle is rooted in a pedagogical approach centered on the concept of language as outlined by Canale and Swain (1980), emphasizing the cultivation of communicative competence. This entails the development of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic sub-competences, as delineated by the Council of Europe in 2002.

However, students enrolled in the program often face limited opportunities to practice English outside the classroom setting. Consequently, speaking activities primarily occur within the confines of the classroom. Furthermore, existing research on English language acquisition among university students is scant, with most studies focusing on high school learners who possess distinct learning objectives.

Moreover, the few available studies typically explore activities conducted beyond the classroom environment. Recognizing this gap, the present research endeavors to identify and implement speaking activities tailored to enhance the oral proficiency of university-level English learners. Specifically, the study aims to evaluate the efficacy of various speaking strategies with students enrolled in levels 1 and 2 of the English program. These two levels were selected because it is important to strengthen the study of English in students at the initial stages, guiding them in speaking skills from the beginning. The research initially focused on level 1 students, and based on the analysis of these participants, it was deemed beneficial to include level 2 students as well. This decision was made to gather more comprehensive information on the impact of the implemented activities. Through meticulous observation and analysis, this research endeavors to contribute valuable insights into optimizing speaking skill development within the university context.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

In alignment with the University's program's aim of fostering communicative competence, this research endeavors to identify and assess activities conducive to enhancing university students' speaking proficiency. By scrutinizing a cohort of students across various academic levels, the objective is to pinpoint activities that effectively bolster oral communication skills within this demographic. To achieve this aim, it is imperative to meticulously observe the behaviors exhibited by students during the implementation of these activities within the classroom setting. These two levels were selected to strengthen the study of English in students at the initial stages, guiding them in speaking skills from the beginning. The research initially focused on level 1 students. Additionally, based on the analysis of these participants, it was deemed beneficial to include level 2 students to gather more comprehensive information on the impact of the implemented activities. Moreover, the focus will be on assessing whether the emphasis on communicative competence is achieved by observing students' behavior when using these activities in the classroom.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. Study the reasons why students avoid speaking tasks in class: Conduct comprehensive research to understand the underlying factors contributing to students' reluctance to engage in speaking activities during class sessions. Consider factors such as fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, cultural background, or past negative experiences.
2. Explore strategies to improve the speaking skills of English learners at the beginner's level: Explore effective teaching methodologies and pedagogical approaches tailored specifically to beginners in English language learning. Focus on techniques that gradually build confidence and encourage active participation, such as structured speaking activities, scaffolded exercises, and supportive feedback mechanisms.
3. Determine the level of engagement of students when participating in roleplays, rhymes, tongue twisters, and short speeches within the English language teaching context: Employ a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods to assess student engagement levels during various speaking activities. Utilize observation, surveys, interviews, and student feedback to gauge their enthusiasm, interest, and perceived effectiveness of these activities.
4. Analyze how the incorporation of diverse techniques like role-plays, rhymes, tongue twisters, and short speeches caters to different learning styles and preferences among students: Conduct a thorough analysis of how different learning styles, such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic, interact with various speaking techniques. Identify which techniques resonate most with different students and how they can be adapted to accommodate diverse preferences and abilities.

5. Identify any challenges or limitations that students perceive in the implementation of role-plays, rhymes, tongue twisters, and short speeches within the English language teaching framework: Explore potential obstacles that students encounter when engaging in speaking activities, such as linguistic barriers, cultural differences, or personal discomfort. Collect feedback from students to understand their perspectives on the effectiveness and practicality of these activities in improving their speaking skills.
6. Create awareness in other English teachers to reflect if we are promoting communicative competence in our students: Advocate for a reflective approach among English teachers to critically evaluate their instructional practices and their alignment with the goal of fostering communicative competence in students. Encourage peer discussions, professional development workshops, and collaborative lesson planning to share insights and best practices in promoting effective communication skills development.
7. Encourage other teachers to review their style for promoting communicative competence, drawing conclusions from Tim's research by modifying the text: Encourage fellow teachers to critically examine their teaching methodologies and assess how effectively they promote communicative competence among students. Provide insights from Tim's research findings to illustrate the importance of student-centered, interactive approaches to language teaching. Offer practical suggestions and resources for integrating speaking activities that prioritize authentic communication and meaningful interaction in the English language classroom.
8. Evaluate my role as a teacher to identify effective strategies for guiding students in their English learning process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Upon reviewing existing literature, it was noted that there were more studies conducted with high school students than with university students. Notably, at Icesi University, several studies have focused on oral skills in English. One such study is "The Use of Cooperative Learning as a Way to Foster Students' English Oral Skills" by Jairo Alexander Galeano Casanova. This research, conducted at a private university in Pasto, involved analyzing students' collaborative work on various speaking skills within group settings. The study concluded that Cooperative Learning, a student-centered teaching method, proved to be a practical approach to implementing the communicative approach. Through this method, students provided mutual support, with advanced learners assuming the role of tutors for their peers. This approach enhanced student motivation, facilitated better vocabulary comprehension, and improved pronunciation skills through collaborative learning activities.

In *Noticing Own Oral Performance, Through a Focus Task in a Group of EFL Beginner Students by* Jhonny Segura Antury, the impact of noticing on the oral performance of beginner English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners through the implementation of a focus task. Statistical analyses, including descriptive analysis and the Wilcoxon test, were conducted on the number of language gaps identified by participants in their oral performance, alongside an examination of students' perceptions regarding noticing, procedures, and outcomes of the focus task. The goal was to ascertain whether the focus task facilitated noticing, thereby improving participants' oral task repetition. Results indicated that the task indeed promoted noticing, resulting in enhancements in content, grammar, and vocabulary in oral production. However, despite participants' identification of a significant

number of pronunciation gaps in their initial oral presentations, did not translate into learning during task repetition.

Using Stories for the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language by Jaime Enrique Chacón Pedroza is a study that outlines the implementation of a reading comprehension strategy among eleventh-grade students at Vicente Borrero public school during the afternoon session, aiming to enhance their performance on the English section of the Icfes Saber 11 test. A comparison is made between the 2020 and 2021 test results of afternoon students. In 2020, the curriculum followed conventional methods, while in 2021, an intervention was introduced focusing on the use of literature and stories emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic to integrate English with other subjects, leading to the implementation of a Project-Based Learning model. This intervention facilitated the development of communication skills and resulted in improved test outcomes and English proficiency among students.

The Impact of Role-play on Oral Fluency in English of a Group of EFL Beginner Students from Yuly Rocio Piedrahita Velasco, is a study that took place in San Jose de Tarbes School, a private and catholic school managed by the San Jose de Tarbes Congregation from France in Popayan city. This study examined the impact of role-plays on enhancing oral fluency in English among EFL beginners, incorporating formulaic expressions and instructional modeling. The data were gathered through recordings, teacher logs, interviews, and performance analysis of ninth-grade students. The study involved assignments, planning, acting, and reflecting on real-life scenarios. Although role-playing did not significantly improve oral fluency, it enhanced accuracy, vocabulary knowledge, and students' recognition of language utility in class through memorization, repetition of

chunks, and modeling. It offers the students chances to practice their speaking skills first as a game where they have the possibility to learn by doing, making mistakes and interacting with their classmates. Piedrahita suggests that these kinds of activities require teachers to be more creative in finding or creating activities to give the students tools to enhance knowledge, especially in those areas that students with lower levels need to improve. Piedrahita recommends that, as a preparatory measure, students at lower proficiency levels undertake preliminary work to foster motivation and provide necessary support for their upcoming learning endeavors

Some works related to speaking in Univalle's library:

At Universidad del Valle (Univalle), several studies addressing speaking skills were identified. For instance, Luis Felipe Hoyos Zúñiga conducted a study titled "Role-play as an Assessment Strategy in an English as a Foreign Language Course." This action research was conducted in a seventh-grade English class at Los Ángeles del Norte school. The findings revealed that role-playing facilitated dynamic and continuous student interaction, thereby enhancing motivation, cooperative work, fluency, and reducing exam-related stress. By simulating real-life situations, role-play contributed to improved English oral production and meaningful learning experiences. Additionally, this method mitigated evaluation apprehension and bolstered discipline through sustained student engagement. The research underscores the potential for further investigations into the integration of role-play as a regular practice to argument oral competencies in foreign language classrooms across Colombia.

*Task-based Speaking Activities for the Development of Oral Fluency for 11th Grade Public School Students by V*anessa Bermúdez Urrutia, is a research focused on analyzing

the impact of Task-Based Instruction on the oral fluency of grade eleven students. It is a comparative quantitative analysis of students' oral production before and after the implementation of a Didactic Unit based on this methodology. The results indicated an improvement in students' oral fluency, measured through syllable counting, after the pedagogical intervention. The number of repetitions, repairs, and filled pauses remained stable, which suggests that the length of the speech did not affect these aspects. However, the amount of pauses was affected; this may be due to the fact that longer turns inevitably produce more pauses. As a recommendation, additional research on fluency evaluation based on quantitative data and Task-Based Instruction is needed in other contexts and with larger groups, in other to get more precise information about whether or not fluency increases with this type of instruction.

Planning and implementation of activities for the improvement of oral comprehension and production intended for students of the Foreign Language Pilot Program at Universidad Del Valle: The Song's Club experience from Manuela Fernanda Castañeda Pulgarín and Mayra Alejandra Pereira Mestra (2018). According to the educational policies in Colombia, the School of Language Sciences at Universidad del Valle focused on enhancing English courses for undergraduate programs to meet student needs. A curricular restructuring for Foreign Languages was proposed and implemented as a Pilot Program from 2016 to 2020. This program provided students with additional learning tools and promoted language proficiency in English, French, Portuguese, and German through independent work and autonomy, facilitated by the Red de Centros de Apoyo para el Aprendizaje de Lenguas (RedCAAL). As part of this initiative, the English Song's Club was introduced within RedCAAL to enhance students' oral comprehension and production through meaningful learning activities using songs. This research was

conducted over two academic periods in 2017, it employed a qualitative approach, specifically a case study, following Robert Yin's model, to assess the effectiveness of the English Song's Club in improving foreign language learning at Universidad del Valle.

Suggested guidelines to develop speaking skills with mixed-level college students in an English conversation club from Rosana Alejandra Gómez Cayapú (2019) focuses on the implementation of extracurricular activities, such as conversation clubs, to improve communicative competencies in English among undergraduate students at Universidad del Valle. These clubs, led by students of the bachelor’s degree in foreign Languages English-French, were investigated during the second semester of 2018. The work, framed in a case study model with quantitative elements, reveals a series of effective activities and strategies to develop speaking skills and overcome linguistic limitations among participants, offering valuable recommendations for future conversation club facilitators.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

In Colombia the main goal for most high school students is for having a good performance in the State examination. For this reason, their focus primarily revolves around studying grammar.

However, when they go to the university the learning goal is studying language for communication. Recently, with the development of technology and language research in this globalized world, university students need communicative competence in their English learning process. The term of communicative competence was introduced by Dell Hymes in his seminal work “on Communicative Competence” published in 1972. Hymes argued that language proficiency goes beyond the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary and includes the ability to use language appropriately in various social contexts. He proposed that communicative competence involves not only linguistic knowledge but also sociolinguistic, pragmatic and discourse competence.

Sociolinguistic competences refer to the ability to understand and use the language appropriately in different social and cultural contexts. Pragmatic competence refers to understand and using the language in context to achieve communicative goals, and discourse competence involves the ability to understand and produce extended stretches of language in connected discourse. This refers to knowledge of discourse structure, coherence and cohesion, as well as the ability to participate effectively in conversations. Hymes suggests that language teaching should go behind teaching grammar and vocabulary and for including the communicative competence is required the exposure to authentic language use, interactive activities, and attention to sociocultural factors.

To implement communicative competence in language teaching, teachers might find support from Discourse and Context in Language Teaching (Celse-Murcia, M., & Olshtain,

E., 2000) which suggests making an effort to include an awareness of discourse and pragmatics in their lessons. They discuss how pragmatic competence or the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts is crucial for effective communication. They provide practical suggestions of some prerequisites for speaking in another language, such as:

a) Knowing the vocabulary relevant to the situation
b) Ability to use discourse connectors (well, oh, I see, okay, etc.)
c) Ability to use suitable “opening phrases” and “closing phrases” (Excuse me or thank you for your help).
d) Ability to comprehend and use reduced forms (reducing vowel sounds is particularly important in English).
e) Knowing the syntax for producing basic clauses in the language.
f) Ability to use the basic intonation -or tone- patterns of the language.
g) Ability to use proper rhythm and stress in the language and to make proper pauses.
h) Awareness of how to apply Grice's maxims in the new language.
i) Awareness of the various conversational rules that facilitate the flow of talk.

Celse-Murcia, M., & Olshtain suggest that for an effective oral communication teachers should integrate these guidelines in the speaking activities and speaking practice. They emphasized that learners need to engage in a meaningful interaction that reflects authentic language use and they suggest teachers must promote fluency, accuracy and appropriateness in communication.

Furthermore, they highlight the importance of providing learners with opportunities to practice speaking in different contexts and situations, both inside and outside the classroom. The activities can be structured as role-plays and simulation or unstructured to promote spontaneous conversation. They also advocate to incorporate authentic materials and real life tasks to make speaking activities more relevant and engaging for learners.

The authors also stress the importance of creating a supportive and non-threatening environment for speaking practice to help learners feel comfortable taking risks and making mistakes. Also, they recommend giving students constructive feedback and encourage them to improve in their speaking skills.

Sandra Sauvignon in her studies about communicative competence, explored the multifaceted nature of language proficiency, promoting the importance of integrating linguistic, sociocultural, and pragmatic aspects of language use in language instruction. She defined communicative competence as the ability to use language effectively in various social and cultural contexts. Encompassing not only grammatical accuracy but also pragmatic understanding, sociolinguistic awareness, discourse skills, and strategic competence. She observed that CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) encourages the use of various speaking activities and tasks that simulate authentic communicative situations. Some of these activities are: role-plays, discussions, debates and problem-solving tasks. The aim of this kind of activity is to engage learners in interactive communication, allowing them to practice and improve their speaking skills in a supportive and communicative environment. Sauvignon's research suggests that CLT fosters learners-centered approach to speaking instruction, where learners are actively involved in the learning process and have the same opportunities to express themselves, share ideas, and

negotiate meaning with others. This learner-centered approach helps learners to be motivated, with confidence and autonomy in developing their skills.

In Beyond Communicative Language Teaching: What's ahead? She explores the future directions of language teaching beyond the traditional communicative language teaching (CLT) paradigm. She found out that the educational context in Japan is characterized by a strong emphasis on standardized testing and conservative approach to pedagogy. This traditional approach often prioritizes grammar-focused instruction and rote memorization over communicative activities and meaningful language use. Furthermore, some educators may be resistant to change, who are accustomed to more traditional teaching methods. In this way, Sauvignon advocates for a proactive approach to address resistance to CLT, emphasizing the importance of collaboration, professional development, and institutional support in promoting the communicative approaches to language teaching. Additionally, she emphasizes the importance of fostering a supportive and collaborative teaching environment where teachers can share experiences, ideas, and best practices related to CLT implementation.

These authors, Dell Hymes, Celse-Murcia, Olshtain, and Sandra Sauvignon, collectively underscore the pivotal role of communicative competence in language instruction. Their works converge on the notion that language proficiency transcends mere grammatical knowledge, extending to sociolinguistic awareness, pragmatic competence, and discourse skills. Emphasizing a holistic approach to language teaching, they advocate for the integration of various language aspects, including vocabulary, syntax, discourse structure, and cultural context. Their collective voice resonates in the call for authentic language use, urging educators to provide learners with opportunities for meaningful interaction and engagement in communicative activities such as role-plays and debates.

Furthermore, these scholars champion a learner-centered pedagogy that empowers learners to actively participate in their language learning journey. They advocate for supportive learning environments where learners feel comfortable taking risks, making mistakes, and receiving constructive feedback. Sandra Sauvignon, in particular, addresses the challenges facing language teaching, such as resistance to communicative approaches and standardized testing. Her insights prompt educators to adopt proactive measures, including collaboration, professional development, and institutional support, to advance communicative language teaching practices. In essence, the collective wisdom of these authors propels the discourse on effective language instruction, advocating for a holistic, learner-centered approach that nurtures communicative competence in diverse educational settings.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR SPEAKING SKILLS

The activities selected for improving speaking skills were chosen with the consideration that the participants are university students. These activities include short stories, tongue twisters, rhymes, and the 432 technique.

9.1 Short story. The Oxford Dictionary Online defines a short story as a story that usually has imaginary characters and events that are short enough to be read from beginning to end without stopping.

Short stories are literary texts that can be used for language learning as authentic material. Anderson (2003) views reading skills as the most important instrument for academic settings because reading is more than a single skill. It is a collection of skills through which readers interact with written words and texts for information and enjoyment.

Most of the time, students have much work to do and often feel overwhelmed so reading short stories will be less frightening. Short stories are a way to introduce vocabulary so students will have more words to use when they need to communicate. Different activities using short stories bring vocabulary input, facilitating the retention of target words. Important activities derived from short stories include dictation, oral presentation, and group discussion, among others.

There are several reasons to encourage the use of short stories in an ESL classroom. The main reason is their suitable length which allows learners to conclude the reading in less time. It can be entirely read within one or two class lessons (da Silva, 2001, pp. 171-178).

Literature has been used in teaching ESL since the nineteenth century when was used with the Grammar Translation Method (Khatib, 2011).

Short stories seem to be the most suitable choice due to its potential to help students enhance the four skills -listening, speaking, reading and writing- more effectively because of the motivational benefit embedded in the stories (Pardede, 2011).

The use of short stories is recommended especially in places where English is learned as a second language and students' exposure to the language is limited.

Abu Zahra and Farrah (2014) state that the use of short stories in the ESL classroom exposes students to distinctive opportunities for educational, intellectual, cultural, and linguistic development. Ceilan (2016) highlights the advantages of literature, in general, and short stories, in specific, in four points: First, students experience an authentic model of language. Second, it helps ESL students understand another culture. Third, it can reinforce the language skills in teaching. Erkaya (2005) has a different perspective for short stories. She believes that short story has motivational, literary, cultural and higher-order thinking benefits. By the other hand, Khatib (2011), believes that using short stories has advantages in creating the students' interpretations and analysis by involving their views, experiences, and feelings.

How can short stories be used in the classroom?

Duncan and Paran (2017, p.51) showed that (…) reading aloud is "one of the activities to identify, to study main passages (…) he also encourages learners to read aloud at home to practice their pronunciation." Most students become familiar with the use of authentic materials and that is important to developing learning and reading abilities, "learners read aloud and the person who reads pays more attention to pronunciation and less to comprehension".

It is important to select the appropriate story because using this kind of literature can promote autonomy and motivation, and cultural enrichment as Donaghy stated:

It is also highly motivating for students to discover that they can read in English and that they enjoy it. For this reason, it is important that the books are interesting to students and at a level appropriate to their reading ability. Using short stories may expose students to different genres and they might learn how to transmit messages according to the speaking situation. It is also very effective for introducing students to their own culture to promote knowledge by topics close to them.

9.2 Tongue twisters. Students can improve their speaking abilities through tongue twisters which apply assistance to students in memorizing words and pronunciation. Lutfiani & Indri (2017) state tongue twister is a statement or phrase that is challenging to pronounce because it has several identical sounds. Putri (2018) adds that the tongue twister approach taught students how to use tone and word stress when reading basic descriptive phrases. A tone twister is a fun game to learn about pronunciation and how fast the speakers can speak as clearly as possible.

Tongue twisters are delightful, and they can significantly improve students' speaking skills. As stated by Gonzalez (2009) practicing tongue twisters people can learn English to strengthen their speaking skills. In addition, the characteristics of tongue twisters are found in the repetition of words and sounds that emphasize aspects of speaking. Those are pronunciation, word emphasis, intonation, speed, and speech.

Some researchers have used tongue twisters to study the improvement of language speaking. Along with making learning simple, this also means that learners will not be disturbed to articulate the phrases incorrectly due to nervousness or discomfort; instead, they

will find it amusing and enjoy it (Yuniar et al., 2021). Students will engage more easily in the language learning process if they are having fun. This method makes students desire and practice learning English speaking. Gonzales (2009) elucidates that tongue twisters are employed to repeat a word as quickly and accurately as feasible.

9.3 Advantages of using tongue twisters

- Tongue twisters require precise articulation and enunciation of sounds. By tongue twisters, students develop better control of their speech organs such as tongue, lips, and vocal cords.
- This improvement contributes to a clearer and more fluent reading of narrative texts.
- Enhance students' phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness is the ability to recognize and manipulate individual sounds in words.
- Developing phonemic awareness can assist students in decoding and understanding words while reading narrative texts.

9.4 Role-plays

Richard (1985) defines role-play as a drama-like classroom activities in which students take the roles of different participants in a situation and act out what might typically happen in that situation.

Doff (1992) states that in a role-play, students imagine a role (e.g. a police officer, a shop assistant), a situation (e.g., buying food, planning a party) or both.

Tompkins (2001) defines role-play as one of the classroom teaching techniques that encourage students to participate actively in the process of learning English. Hedge (2000)

states that several advantages have been claimed for role-play as a fluency activity if it is performed in pairs or groups rather than one group acting in front of the class.

9.5 Advantages of using role-plays

- Role-play is an interesting and effective activity to communicate. Knowledge of language is not enough; the task demands artistic skills too. (Maley, 2005, p.112)
- Gives students an opportunity to practice communicating in different contexts and different social roles. Students place themselves in someone else's place for a while and they could use their English creatively for having a conversation. Representing someone else will help timid students to overcome their shyness of speaking.
- Develops learners' fluency in speaking. They can practice a wide range of language functions such as greetings, apologizing, etc.
- Learners focus on communication of meaning rather than an appropriate use of language.
- Students practice communication in the target language in a pleasant and safe environment which is the classroom.
- Students will speak with self-confidence and with no fear. Role-play reduces anxiety and humiliation when speaking in front of their classmates.

9.6 "432" Technique

Learners in this technique deliver a four-minute talk. Then they deliver. The same talk in three minutes. Finally, they present the exact same talk in two minutes (Arevat & Nation, 1991). The use of the technique allows students to reach a higher level of performance in relation to fluency than they otherwise would have (Arevat & Nation, 1991).

The aim of this technique is for students to become more fluent in English speaking. The talks delivered by the students are improvised; they only have a few minutes to take some notes about the main ideas of the topic they are going to talk about, only writing down keywords (De Jong & Perfetti, 2011). This technique suggests that students change their listening partners in every delivery because if they do not do this, they will feel the need to change the speech and add more information in order to maintain the listener's attention (Arevat & Nation, 1991). The features of repetition and decreasing time make an important contribution to the development of fluency. Repetition can increase fluency as learners have the opportunity to deliver the same talk three times (Asri and Muhtar, 2013). Students can feel more secure about their speech after the third delivery since they are allowed to make corrections. On the other hand, time pressure forces learners to express their ideas faster and more efficiently (De Jong & Perfetti, 2011). Studies of De Jong and Perfetti (2011), Nation (1989), Al-Shibai (2004), and others suggest that students can improve in the use of this technique by increasing the amount of WPM and reducing the number and length of pauses.

For this study, I made a variation by giving students a list of topics for 2- and 1-minute speech taken from the internet and they had time to write it and practice for it. Also, instead of having students as the listeners, the teacher will listen to their speech.

9.7 Advantages of using 432 technique

- This technique can be applied in several contexts, such as reading aloud in which students read a passage in four minutes, then three minutes and, finally in two minutes. This will help students' fluency in reading or their pronunciation.
- Using this technique helps students feel more confident and less embarrassed to speak in front of their classmates.

- This technique can be done by the students, not necessarily require the teacher's presence to deliver the speech.
- The technique can be applied to students of all English levels by changing the topic or the number of words in the speech.
- For this technique not much time and resources are needed, and it can be done at any time during the academic program.
- Any topic can be used for this technique, it can be introduced a variety of genres or topics such as the culture of different countries, having an intercultural approach in the classroom.

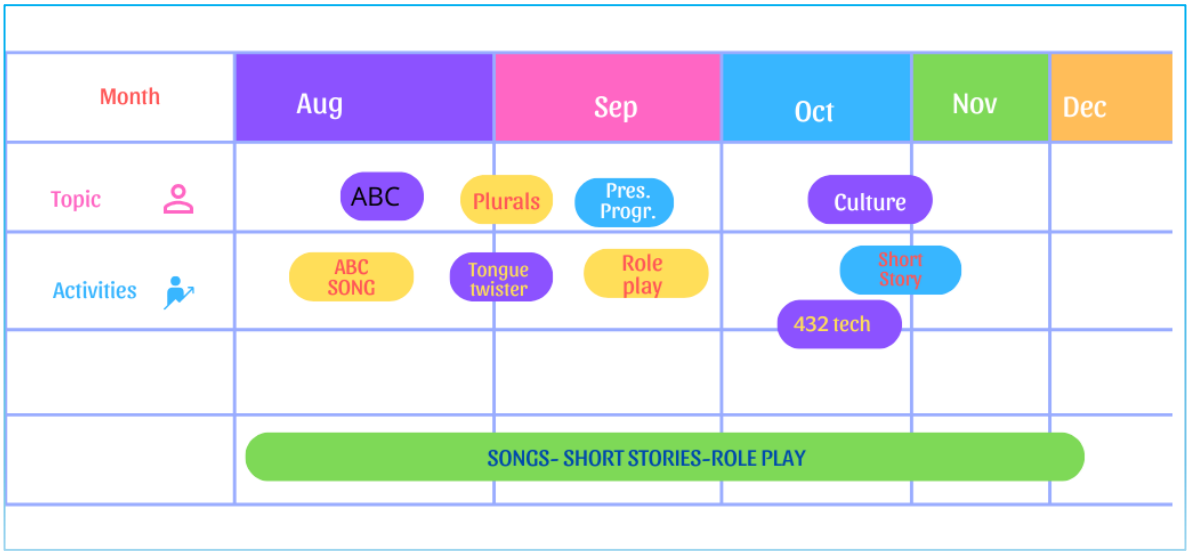
METHOD

This work is action research, since it is a form of investigation designed for use by teachers to attempt to solve problems and improve professional practices in their own classrooms (Parsons & Brown, 2002). It is based on the analysis of qualitative data. The teacher evaluates the effectiveness of selected speaking activities that could help learners to improve their oral skills.

10.1 Participants

The participants are 6 students (17- 20 years old) from Universidad del Valle from the course of English for General and Specific Purposes, 2 students (girls) are from level 1 and 4 students (2 girls and 2 boys) from level 2. The course of English for General and Specific Purposes is a 16-week course with 4 hours per week. Six weeks after beginning this course, students have an oral presentation and the teacher asks them some questions about the established topic. However, I observed they couldn't make a real oral presentation, most of them read their presentation and couldn't answer the teacher's questions. In this group of students, some have studied English in a language institute, at school or on their own. However, they don't speak English very well. None of them speak a different language from Spanish to English as their second language.

10.2 Instruments



- Interviews: are done at the end of the semester to know students' opinion about the activities.
- Survey: were conducted with students that preferred online survey instead of interviews, due to lack of time.
- Class observation: Notes are taken after each activity and some modifications are done. Songs, poems and idioms are added for new vocabulary acquisition.

10.3 Implementation

Before the implementation of each activity, I will explain what the activity is about and how was it performed.

10.4 ABC SONG

To introduce the English course, the first activity for guiding students to speak English is watching the video of the ABC song, which is important for learning the sounds of the letters and for practicing the spelling of the words. I used a YouTube video for

children and with the pictures and the rhythm, it is an effective, fun, and quick way to learn it.

Did you get used to the ABC song? What do you think about learning English through songs and rhymes?

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9kU_YJwNtY&t=2s)

S1: Yes, I did, it was very effective for me, since I memorized the ABC.

S2: Yes, I got used to it. I think songs and rhymes are very effective because they are catchy and easy to remember.

S3: the ABC song is a good way to start learning the alphabet in a fun way and helped me to spell words effectively. Therefore, I believe songs are a good tool to improve listening and acquiring new vocabulary.

S4: Yes, I believe it is an interesting way to learn English.

10.5 Short speech activity- 321 Technique

321 technique is a variant form of 432 technique. From the internet I introduced a page with the List of the Best English Speech Topics for Students and from this list they will select the topic of their short speech and write about it. After writing it, they will practice with their classmates or teacher. They will present it for 3 times in 3 different days and each presentation will be better than the previous one.

Regarding the short speech activity, how did you feel during the process (writing, practicing and presenting)? How did you feel saying it in front of others?

S1: I have never liked talking in public either in English or Spanish and in those days, I was thinking in my math midterm exams.

S2: During the process I felt very good and creative to do it. During the presentation, I also felt good and with confidence to pronounce it.

S3: The process of writing, practicing and presenting was very valuable, since whenever I do these activities, I learn more vocabulary, expressions and connectors that helped me avoid repetition and to use synonymous words. Saying it in front of others was a challenge because it is unusual to give presentations in a language other than one's mother tongue, however, I enjoyed doing it because it was a very familiar topic such as thinking about the future.

S4: Regarding the writing process, I felt quite comfortable, regarding the practice felt a certain degree of discomfort and with the presentation I felt quite calm. When I said it in front of others, I felt normal, I felt no change mentally or emotionally.

10.6 Short story

Mary had a Little Lamb

By Sarah Josepha Hale

Mary had a little lamb,
Its fleece was white as snow;
And everywhere that Mary went
The lamb was sure to go.

It followed her to school one day,
Which was against the rule;
It made the children laugh and play
To see a lamb at school.

And so the teacher turned it out,
But still it lingered near,
And waited patiently about
Till Mary did appear.

Why does the lamb love Mary so?
The eager children cry;
Why, Mary loves the lamb, you know,
The teacher did reply.

*https://www.storynory.com/mary-had-a-little-lamb/

How did you approach the process of memorizing the text for the short story speech? Did you use the audios (Mary had a Little Lamb)?

S1: No answer

S2: I repeated it several times in my mind and then I said it for me several times until I could memorize it completely.

S3: Actually, I tried not to memorize every word, I studied the ideas that I wanted to convey. By doing this, I think the presentation will come out more natural and fluent.

S4: I felt much satisfaction.

In the short story, did you find words difficult to pronounce? How did you manage it?

S1: The story was difficult; I didn't know how to pronounce it.

S2: I found two words that I could not pronounce, and I used Google Traductor.

S3: Actually, I replaced some words for words that I knew how to pronounce, and I was mostly used to saying. However, I practice a lot reading and repeating each word until the presentation will come up better.

S4: Yes, I used the tools given by the teacher at the appropriate time. (web page and video of the story).

For English Level 2 students, I replaced the short story activity with the 432 speech technique. The short story activity was voluntary and ungraded, leading to low participation. Only three students, who had low grades and several absences, engaged with this activity. To address this issue, I substituted the short story assignment with the 432 technique and made it a graded component.

10.7 Role-play

Students will watch an animated video and in groups they will represent one of the characters. They will decide who will represent each character and they will role-play while watching the movement of lips of the characters.

What is your opinion about using "role-play" in the English learning process? How did you feel practicing the role play? (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=feai5JCEzqs)

S1: I found the verse difficult; I did not know how to pronounce it.

S2: It is an excellent tool for students to practice pronunciation and for having more socialization, also it is a fun learning technique. I felt confident and safe participating in the role play.

S3: The role-play technique is a useful tool for practicing dialogues and for expressing better our ideas. A good intonation is required to express the characters emotions. In this activity it felt good, since it was fun, and I had to pay attention to my turn and be coordinated with my classmates so everything will come out well.

S4: These kind of activities are NECESSARILY uncomfortable, since they involve speaking in public and more specifically in this activity you have to take a role, in other words you have to go out and play a role of a character. Which ultimately makes us leave our personality to assume and represent someone else's. I felt extremely uncomfortable.

Which do you consider are your main limitations or challenges to participate in this type of activity?

S1: It could be spoken without hindrance, since it is hard for me to speak English.

S2: The main challenges for me are to overcome my nervous feelings when speaking in public and the pronunciation of certain words in English.

S3: Perhaps one of the limitations for me is not knowing some words and the pronunciation of certain words in English.

S4: Perhaps one of the limitations is not knowing some of the words and their correct pronunciation to be able to do it better.

S5: The limitation is the poor familiarization and adaptation of this type of scenario.

10.8 Wrap up questions

Do you have any suggestions or recommendations for the teacher related to the English learning activities?

S1: I have no recommendations since she does a great job teaching English, it depends on how each student does or not do the proposed activities.

S2: I can only suggest that she continue doing these types of activities because they motivate us to learn and achieve her objectives in a more dynamic and fun way.

S3: is good to continue using this type of activity because it makes the class more interactive and understandable.

S4: No, I consider that the teacher does what is fair and necessary. The rest falls in the student's commitment.

DATA ANALYSIS

After analyzing the student's answers, it can be concluded:

- Songs are an effective and enjoyable method for learning English, helping students acquire new vocabulary.
- Engaging students in short speeches serves as an effective method to introduce them to public speaking. The opportunity to present in front of their peers fosters confidence, as students often feel more at ease compared to addressing the teacher directly. Moreover, allowing students to freely choose their topics empowers them and encourages ownership of their speech content. Additionally, the brevity of this activity makes it conducive to incorporation across multiple class sessions, maximizing its instructional potential.
- The utilization of short stories elicited varied responses among participants. Specifically, two students expressed difficulty in pronouncing certain words, while only one student actively utilized the tools provided during the activity. Additionally, one student decided to replace the words she didn't understand with words she knew, losing the rhymes of the poem.
- Through role-play, students demonstrated an understanding of its purpose and acknowledged the significance of intonation and pronunciation. However, one student expressed discomfort in both public speaking and assuming a character's role.
- The limitations to participation in these activities included unfamiliarity with certain words or uncertainty about their pronunciation, lack of confidence in public speaking, and not having experience with this kind of activity.

- Students perceived these activities as enjoyable and essential for their learning. They expressed motivation to engage with these methods and recommended that the teacher continue incorporating such activities. They did not have any complaints regarding the activities and believe that students should also participate actively in the learning process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students enjoyed learning with these activities, they could understand the purpose of each activity and they could enjoy learning. Using the short story didn't yield the expected results. It might be better to select a different story or present the story in a different way, having a pre, during and post reading guides and better explaining the purpose of using a short story. Additionally, different results might have been obtained if the short story activity had been graded. This was an optional activity suggested for students that had low grades at the end of the semester. The presentation of this activity was outside regular class time

Activities such as songs, rhymes, role play, short speech and short story are good tools for introducing new vocabulary. It is important to select the adequate material, however selecting something that all the students would like is difficult.

The 432 technique proved to be more effective than the short story activity based on "Little Lamb" for several reasons. First, the speech topic was open-ended, allowing students to write and speak about subjects of their choice. This autonomy in selecting topics and words made the activity more engaging, and the students received grades for their efforts, adding a motivational factor. I chose the 432 speech technique because of its success in my previous experience with Japanese language students, where it yielded positive results.

It was encouraging to observe students practicing with their classmates before presenting their speeches to the teacher. Although they did not receive direct guidance from me, this peer practice boosted their confidence. The collaborative nature of the activity fostered a supportive learning environment, further enhancing their confidence and participation without the need for direct teacher intervention.

CONCLUSIONS

In the approach to language teaching, various activities are incorporated aimed at enhancing students' speaking skills. These activities serve as effective tools for expanding vocabulary and refining pronunciation. By providing materials that encourage students to independently discover new words and explore their pronunciation, notable improvements have been observed in both their lexicon and articulation, which are crucial components for effective communication. Educators are encouraged to prioritize activities that foster speaking abilities, recognizing that proficiency in grammar alone does not suffice in developing communicative competence.

Through this research, valuable insights into students' challenges and barriers in honing their speaking prowess were gained. A prevalent issue identified was the lack of confidence stemming from insufficient vocabulary and uncertainty about word pronunciation, which hindered their willingness to engage in public speaking. Contrary to the common belief among educators that speaking is a standalone subject unsuitable for conventional classroom settings, the findings underscored the feasibility and significance of integrating all language skills into the curriculum to attain the desired communicative competence outlined in academic programs.

I firmly believe that the activities implemented in my research fostered an enjoyable learning experience for students, thereby fostering their enthusiasm for language acquisition beyond mere grammatical study. By incorporating authentic materials distinct from textbook content, students were encouraged to perceive English as an integral aspect of their daily lives.

The primary obstacle to public speaking often lies in the lack of confidence, which can be addressed through collaborative learning activities. To mitigate students' apprehensions, it is suggested to gradually acclimate them to public speaking by initially engaging in brief speeches within peer groups before progressing to larger audiences. Additionally, instances were observed where students sought peer feedback on their speeches, demonstrating a proactive approach to skill development.

Importantly, all the techniques employed in my research are readily accessible online, offering educators in both public and private institutions the opportunity to integrate them into their classrooms without the need for extensive program modifications.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although it was initially challenging to convince students to participate in the research, the experience was valuable for evaluating teaching methods and identifying activities to enhance classroom practice. It is crucial to select activities that best suit students' interests and needs through a process of trial and error. Activities should engage students and align with their interests to be effective.

In refining teaching strategies, seeking feedback from other teachers is essential. A different perspective can provide new ideas that benefit our students. Through this research, several activities that promote communicative competence were identified. However, it is also important to continually analyze students' needs and preferences to select activities that resonate with their lives and experiences. This ongoing reflection and adaptation ensure that teaching remains relevant and effective.

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE 1 (ENGLISH LEVEL 1)

¿Has tenido experiencia previa estudiando inglés antes de ingresar a la universidad?

Si es así, ¿durante cuánto tiempo estudiaste inglés antes de ingresar a la universidad?

¿Dónde realizaste tus estudios de inglés?

¿Aparte del español, hablas otro idioma?

¿Te has familiarizado con la canción del abecedario en inglés? ¿Qué opinas de la efectividad de canciones y rimas para aprender inglés?

Respecto al concurso de cuento corto, ¿puedes explicar por qué no tenías interés en participar en un concurso de oratoria? (Mary had a Little Lamb- https://www.storynory.com/mary-had-a-little-lamb/

¿Cómo abordaste el proceso de aprendizaje del texto corto para el concurso de cuento corto? ¿Utilizaste recursos como escuchar el audio? (Mary had a Little Lamb)

¿En el texto del cuento corto encontraste palabras que te resultaba difícil pronunciar? ¿Cómo las superaste?

¿Cuál es tu opinión sobre la técnica del "role play" en el aprendizaje del inglés? ¿Cómo te sentiste al practicarlo? (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=feai5JCEzqs)

¿Cuáles consideras que son tus principales limitaciones o desafíos para participar en este tipo de actividades?

¿Tienes sugerencias o recomendaciones para la profesora en relación a las actividades de aprendizaje del inglés?

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE 2 (ENGLISH LEVEL 2)

1. ¿Has tenido experiencia previa estudiando inglés antes de ingresar a la universidad?

2. Si es así, ¿durante cuánto tiempo estudiaste inglés antes de ingresar a la universidad?

3. ¿Dónde realizaste tus estudios de inglés?

4. ¿Aparte del español, hablas otro idioma?

5. ¿Te has familiarizado con la canción del abecedario en inglés? ¿Qué opinas de la efectividad de canciones y rimas para aprender inglés?

6. Respecto al discurso corto, ¿cómo te sentiste durante el proceso (escritura, práctica y presentación)? ¿Cómo te sentiste al decirlo frente a los demás?

7. ¿Cómo abordaste el proceso de aprendizaje del discurso corto para la presentación?

8. ¿En el discurso corto encontraste palabras que te resultaba difícil pronunciar? ¿Cómo las superaste? ¿Qué recursos utilizaste?

9. ¿Cuál es tu opinión sobre la técnica del "role play" en el aprendizaje del inglés? ¿Cómo te sentiste al practicarlo? (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=feai5JCEzqs)

10. ¿Cuáles consideras que son tus principales limitaciones o desafíos para participar en este tipo de actividades?

11. ¿Tienes sugerencias o recomendaciones para la profesora en relación a las actividades de aprendizaje del inglés?