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THE USE OF ONLINE STORYTELLING TO IMPROVE ORAL FLUENCY ON ENGLISH LEARNERS AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This study focuses on the application of online storytelling as a strategy to improve oral fluency. It takes part in a public school of languages where young adults study English as a foreign language (EFL). This research has its theoretical basis on communicative competence and provides literature review on speaking skills, storytelling technique, background of similar projects with issues on oral fluency and the methodologies. It Also provides information about the research model instruments that supports this study. This research develops online Storytelling activities to achieve the

objectives of this project. Finally, it demonstrates how the application of storytelling online has positive results on oral fluency and encourage the fostering of creativity.

Key Words: Storytelling online, oral fluency, oral communicative competencies.

Resumen

Este estudio se centra en la aplicación del storytelling en línea como estrategia para mejorar la fluidez oral. La intervención se lleva a cabo en una escuela pública de idiomas donde los adultos jóvenes estudian inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL por sus siglas en inglés). Esta investigación tiene su base teórica en la competencia comunicativa y proporciona una revisión de la literatura sobre las habilidades del habla, la técnica de narración, antecedentes de proyectos similares relacionados con problemas sobre la fluidez oral y metodologías. También proporciona información sobre los instrumentos del modelo de investigación. El estudio presenta diferentes aplicaciones de la técnica del storytelling en línea para alcanzar objetivos de este proyecto. Esta investigación demuestra cómo la aplicación del storytelling en línea tiene resultados positivos en la fluidez oral y fomenta el fomento de la creatividad.

Palabras clave: storytelling en línea, fluidez oral, competencia comunicativa oral.

Learning English as a foreign language represents a challenge for some students in Mexico, particularly in oral fluency. Nowadays and due to the current pandemic COVID-19, education is changing so fast that teachers should look for new ways to interact with their students by using virtuality. This project presents an innovative use of online storytelling with the purpose of helping students to develop their oral fluency.

Through the adaptation of learners' stories online, storytelling helps to gain strength and develop one's verbal powers. It is an art that gives satisfactory feelings, promotes motivation and along with aptitude and attitude producing positive results in reaching speaking fluency. Also, it is an emotional way of learning English as a foreign language, which involves narrative, stimulates inspiration and creativity that impacts the process of learning EFL through the adaptation of learners' stories.

Nevertheless, learners face difficulties in speaking fluently in English as EFL. Learners struggle inside trying to speak fluently, but they often do not feel capable or confident. According to many researchers, learners face fears and have a common emotional struggle of being afraid, lack of confidence and nervousness.

Problem Statement

This study takes place in a public language school in the northeast of Nuevo Leon, Mexico. By observing different classes, it was detected that learners have difficulties at the moment of speaking English. Regarding young adult learners, they are a part of a level B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Language.

Learners still do not develop their communicative competences in oral situations. Learners are slow in verbal skills and are also not fluent in English as a Foreign Language. It is detected that the strategies are not enough for learners to improve their oral skills. However, fluency in learners' speech as part of communicative competence has been detected as a main problem.

Objectives

General Objective

To evaluate how learners improve oral fluency during academic courses in a public school of language.

Specific Objectives

- To analyze oral difficulties learners have when they speak English.

- To analyze the strategies learners' use to obtain oral fluency and the factors why these are not sufficient to improve fluency when they are speaking English at the B2 level.

- To propose strategic activities to improve oral fluency problems when learners are speaking English.

Research questions

- How learners improve oral fluency during academic courses in a public school of language?

- What are oral difficulties learners have when they speak English?

- What strategies have been used and what are the factors that make these insufficient for the students to speak fluently?

- What strategic activities can contribute to learners´ fluency when they speak English?

Interpretative analysis

Storytelling implies expressing our own stories. Through Storytelling emotions are engaged and confidence built, this leads to the project's focus, which is speaking fluently. It is creative and inspirational and each narrative is developed with motivation in mind. It will be innovative due to our world facing a global pandemic that leads us to take in consideration online resources.

Through Storytelling online, learners could stimulate their oral competencies, thus gaining fluency. The practice of speaking through this technique, leads to overcoming their difficulties and feeling more confident in speaking EFL. This leads toward a satisfactory feeling of the results of Storytelling online, with the intention that the students could speak fluently in learning EFL.

Through storytelling it's possible to learn new words, develop listening skills, understand phrases and the differences in tone, accents and expressions, which is different from our native language. In addition, learners can overcome their emotional difficulties as fears, lack of

confidence or nervousness. Moreover, developing on the emphasis of this project to increase fluency in speaking skills.

Further, this will foster a good relationship between the student and teacher. It is necessary as well as our job as teachers, to be interested in their training process of a language learning, trying to make didactic content and good atmosphere in the classroom, also can have some relaxation in students and develop without fear their oral skills in learning English as a foreign Language.

Therefore, Storytelling online will be applied in different ways and will be represented as short stories and performances, expecting a positive result. It will work with short learners' narratives, to contribute to develop their fluency. In addition, the development of this technique could help to overcome any emotions of fears in learners. It demonstrates how Storytelling works with narrative and emotions from the start to tell our own stories.

Literature Review

Linguistics in Learning a Language and Communicative Competencies

Linguistics by Saussure (1916) was the study of the language, in which speech, social and cultural influences are involved, then Chomsky (1965) argued that linguistics is the system of communication between native speakers of a language with grammatical rules, subsequently Lacan (1966) emphasized language as structure which develop a discourse.

As these authors mention, linguistics is related to language and through learning a language is developed the communicative competencies. Authors were so selective with their words and their meanings, for example; language in the field of Lacan (1966) related to the unconscious construction. Speech and discourse through Saussure's (1916) study in which language is viewed as a signs to express ideas. Chomsky (1965) as a system of communication.

That means that languages are signs of a system to communicate, involving rules of language, speech, discourse and others, also social and cultural influences and also abilities as a part of linguistics. Language is interacting with people with a communicative purpose which gets involved in our behavior and the effects produced in others behavior (Brown 2007). Nevertheless, Muñoz (2010) considered language in terms of learning, as a practice of mistake and to give meaning.

Learning a Language as EFL

Learning a Language to communicate is part of communicative competencies. For that reason, communication and its abilities are important. The goal of learning a new language is to communicate and be understood in EFL. Also it is mentioned that to be able to learn it is necessary communication and besides learning it is part of communicative interaction (Kaplun, 2002). Moreover, learning a language as EFL is part of interaction within a communicative purpose.

This project is related to develop fluency in speaking English as a Foreign Language (EFL), accordingly to Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill and Pincas (1980) is called foreign language because it is not part of our

culture or nation, is commonly taught in schools but if someone is interested in learning English, it means that they had a purpose to speak English. The process of learning EFL involves many factors as far as affective factors considered (Imura 2007).

Kramina (2000) defined that the product of learning a language is that it develops a conscious process, also Krashen (1982) mentioned that learning has conscious parts. Robbins (2007) defines it, such a part of the process when students are able to learn a language. Language learning through strategies leads to improved oral competencies, thus learning English as an EFL (Lessard, 1997). Oxford (1990) takes importance in strategies, mentioned that it is an essential key for teachers to know, also strategies are important tools and the teacher should know how to apply toward a better way of teaching English as EFL. An important aspect in learning a language is becoming fluent (Lepota and Weideman, 2002).

Language teaching has been in constant change in a constructivist, learner-centered and centered in the learner, constructivism takes importance in learner's language teaching and seeks to find construction in meaning and understanding in societies adding new information and experiences (Gardner, 2017). Prepare nonnative speakers to use language through: interaction, classroom discussion and conversation, involves many methods to use to teach EFL (Lonesco, 2007). Learning a language also involves two important parts, those are; social and cultural aspects as well competences assure Bolten and Gröschke (2012).

Learning a language - combined with interaction, motivation, and inspiration could be part of a good process to develop oral skills. Learning should arouse interest lifelong (Herbart 1982). Learning a language is a

process which involves the teaching-learning process and it depends on the skills and preparation that is based on communication techniques (Woolfolk, 2010). It is not always easy, but in this case it is expected through the development of the project to be able to demonstrate good results.

Oral Communicative Competencies

The ability to communicate with others and produce sentences in many different situations is known as oral production, assured Bygate (1987) and O'Malley & Valdez (1996) presented as a way to share instead of relying on ability. The way people can communicate to other people and how it became a conversation is called oral production. Also to communicate is necessary to involve speech and discourse.

Oral communication by Lazaraton (2001) are grammatical competencies, sociolinguistics competences, discourse competences and strategies competences. Oral production could be seen as a challenge, requiring acknowledgement of the language and overcoming fears to communicate effectively (Otarola, 2019).

Speech is part of speaking and its utterance, it involves a speaker and a hearer (Earle, 1969), also it is an individual act as mentioned in Saussure (1916); it is made by intelligence and will. Along with these, the eight parts of speech and its rules emerged. On the other hand, discourse is also part of speaking, more than a sentence, but with the rules of a sentence, larger than an utterance and becomes a part of a conversation. Alonso and Fernandez (2006) as well as Barthes (2006) explained discourse as a message related in our society.

Speaking is an oral action of using speech to communicate and develop communicative competencies as fluency. Nevertheless, McDonough and Shaw (2003) considered it as a desire, created with a purpose to achieve our interests, in which they can communicate and produce utterances. Accordingly, with Bailey (2005), is a skill that aims to give meaning in communication. The process to learn a language, thus, speaking becomes a challenging skill. Speaking is communicative competence in teaching English as Foreign Language. It is part of an ability argued Tarvin (2015). Moreover, Savignon (2002) categorizes it as a power to interact through speaking while saying meaningful words.

Accordingly, Freud, (1987), words are magical and depend on how they are used, words transfer knowledge and also can be used in relationship between teacher-student during learning language process, also mention how can words have power and can be used to motivate learners, using words towards positive results, due to words arousing emotions. For that reason, it is mentioned how it can be applied in the linguistics field related to overcoming difficulties and gaining fluency in speaking.

Fluency as a Communicative Competence

In this case fluency is emphasized as an ability to speak rapidly and smoothly. Also at the same time having cognitive pressures in time of processing its utterance as a part of fluency (Lennon, 2000). Besides, Götz (2013) suggested that productive fluency can be achieved through a process of strategies and through pay attention to hesitations and disfluencies in a person's speech. Fluency is related to memory, also it is

related to the concepts and the meaning of the words during the production of the speech, (Hodges, Salmon, & Butters 1992).

To improve speaking skills Harris and McCann (1994) categorized the importance of fluency as an ability to use the language. Segalowitz (2010) recommended a separate mental effort to produce smooth speech, spoke about cognitive (as fast mobilization of coordination) and utterance fluency (features of spoken, output). Swain (1997) had an output hypothesis and speculates that the output represents the interlanguage, but in Swain (2006) replaced the word output for languaging. Output means an image or thoughts that reproduce through speech, it is a cognitive activity in learners' mind.

Lonesco (2007) points out that the speaker needs to feel confidence and be able to start a conversation. Speaking has been faced with many problems such as lack of confidence or fear even anxiety at the moment of speaking, feeling embarrassed or they couldn't be understood, it is associated with lack of vocabulary and translation problems, disinterest of topics. Another reason that they struggle is that they don't have enough time to practice and they cannot practice outside the class. Lack of motivation by teachers is another problem, (Tokos, 2013).

Horwitz (1987) also related aptitude and motivation as improving oral skills. Moreover, Towell (2012) argued that also speed fluency depends on memory systems (linguistic information). Learners must store information to develop their oral skills. Jacob (1993) related it with ways of context to give meaning, mainly in utterance and coherence in relation to how speaking makes sense.

Storytelling in EFL

Storytelling will be used on this project, but - What is Storytelling? It is the representation of existence through stories. (Cajete, Donna & Holyan 2010). Patrick Rothfuss, (2011) assure that all of us are made by stories and all of us always have a story to tell. People always wanted to create stories as a way to leave a story as records, pictures, tattoos that also represent a story in the memory (Kaeppler, 1988).

Through listening, exercises, questions, dramatic structures or just communication is a way to use storytelling (Snijders, 2011). Salmon (2008) assured that through storytelling, can manage speeches and use them for best convenience. Nowadays there are many tools that could be used to represent a story or storytelling (Ruediger, 2019). Storytelling to speak through the narrative of memories, involving cultural and linguistic contexts, it could be used as a technique to teach EFL (Atta, 2012). It will be used as a technique due is more than an activity, and also has a pattern to follow as Brown (2001) considered to be a technique.

Miller, (1974) mention that stories have been part of our lives since our ancestors painted on the rocks (trying to leave a message) and during the moment that they created signals or when trying to say events that had happened. Learners always seek a way to develop their oral skills. Little (1997) assured and fostered the contact with native speakers because it leads to learning about their culture and comprehending their culture as well as reproducing and practicing speaking is the best way to learn English.

Human relationships need to learn good communication to get good behavior (Egan, 1989). Express our ideas, tell a story, ask questions, listen and say our thoughts, make a speech or discourse. It is part of communication and part of storytelling. Also, an important factor is the teacher's relationship with students. For that reason, communication is the objective, also crucial key, but to have good communication is necessary in learning a language as EFL.

Storytelling Online

Technology and the internet offer new opportunities related to EFL through new learning and teaching skills (Nunan and Richards, 2015). Nowadays online courses have increased due to the current pandemic. It is expected to develop storytelling online as an alternative process in EFL.

Storytelling has been developed well mainly in digital practices in our everyday life (Fina & Sabina, 2019). The storytelling has become a new way of art in narrative which learners can show their experiences as resources within areas cultural and educational context, also it is able to integrate to the teaching – learning of EFL (Martínez, Martínez and Perez, 2014).

For that reason, interest grew up in developing Storytelling as a technique to improve oral competencies, focused on fluency as main competency. It also helps to gain verbal powers and involves emotional and social aspects. It will be developed online, due to the global context of the pandemic. Using the resources that will be easy to use and facilitate resources to develop their oral production.

Methodology

A methodology is a procedure to be applied in a certain situation, in this case, in an educational situation. The aim of an effective research methodology is to obtain its objectives of investigation successfully (Creswell, 1998). The methodological process to collect data is by doing an action research in which problems of study in an educational area were found. Commonly this kind of research includes a cycle as a model of study in which its steps are to plan, to act, to observe and to reflect, until the detected problem is resolved (Labaree, 2020).

This section contains information concerning a specific problem, the process design aims to explain step by step how the data was collected, and the instruments used to analyze the situation (Labaree, 2020). The study of this situation is about a problem discovered in EFL, and it allows it to emerge as an action research project that is intended to explore creative strategies which will help to form a well-developed EFL education (Latorre, 2003). This research focuses on carrying out its stated purpose to improve fluency in learners of English as a Foreign Language through Storytelling online and is intended to explain step by step how to develop a successful methodology.

Action Research Design

Action Research is the methodological process that provides the design for his study, to collect data and it is aimed at addressing a specific problem. For this research, the field of the study is an educational context focusing on the improvement of speaking practices.

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This study incorporates all the characteristics of an action research study by following its cycle (see figure 1), in which a problem was observed in the educational environment and then the intervention to make changes in class (Burns, 2008), began to be planned as well as the cycle began from the plan. For that reason, the acting is a part of the assumptions of the problem taken into account. It is also considered as observing the problem's situation because the acting works through observations and is followed by a plan to modify the practice in the classroom and reflect the results.

This project also involves qualitative research to measure the findings of this research. The use of the qualitative research is appropriate due to the validity of the instruments selected and to support the practice of the technique used in this project. The emphasis on qualitative research is important due to the way that it can be experimentally measured in terms of frequency and how to develop a research problem with the practice (Labaree, 2020).

Action research could be applied in different ways as it is a process which involves discussion, is learned by experiences and follows different types of models of cycles by many authors (Bound & Stack, 2013) After recognizing the research problem, it is necessary to pick a model to follow. The model shown in figure 1, which is based on Ferreira (2010), will be implemented in this study.

Figure 1

The action research cycl

It explains the circles of plan (which allows us to identify the main problem)– act (which usually will be the changes in the practice), observe and reflect (observing the effects changing and reflecting about the results), and then it could be repeated all over again with a revised plan.

Place of the Conducted Research

This action research project was conducted in a public English language school located in the northeast part of Nuevo Leon, Mexico. This school was a center of languages of different languages. This study focuses only on English as Foreign Language online classes. Nowadays classes are taken online due to the pandemic.

The population of the study

The participants were young adults from a group of fourteen learners. They were six males and eight females. Learners took their classes in this public school on weekdays. Their classes began at 8:30 am and ended at 10:00 am. Their classes were for 1 hour and half. As it was mentioned before that due to the global pandemic, the classes were online during the semester and all the classes were completely recorded.

The level was selected intentionally because this study focuses on students of level B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference. As an extra note, three of the participants took extra English classes as a complement for their English course.

Instruments for data collection

To collect data appropriately, it was necessary to use observations, field notes and questionnaires. Observation was the part in which the investigator is in the situation, this is the main step from the beginning. Field notes in this case were used as a complement for the observations to register all necessary information in order to fulfill the objectives of this study. Questionnaires were created with types of classification questions that were implemented to know students' perceptions about their oral skill and to evaluate if the learners were in agreement or not with their current classes (Latorre, 2003).

Observations. The following aspects were taken into consideration to make the observations: time of class/ age/ gender, cognitive level of fluency, student's ability to speak, speaking practice, problems related with

fluency in speaking, activities implemented by the teacher to improve fluency in EFL and oral participation of students.

Field notes. Field notes were used each day during the observation with the idea of adding the most important and relevant information. The observations were recorded for the research purposes and led to write the questionnaire.

The following ideas were taken into consideration during the observation: cognitive level of fluency, activities implemented by the teacher to improve fluency in EFL, participation of students, student's ability to speak, speaking practice, and problems related with fluency in speaking. These items were the things that were observed and to get acknowledgement of the gender and age, a questionnaire was created which focused on the learners' fluency and the aspects related to fluency with all the doubts that the observation left.

Questionnaire. First of all, the field of the study was with a group of young adults, for that reason the first instrument was an online survey questionnaire. The questionnaire starts with demographic questions, to know about their age and genre. Then, it is included in a Likert scale with five options to choose the frequency. The options were: always, usually, occasionally, hardly ever, never. These would measure their attitude, behavior and level of cognitivism towards their current level of English as EFL. Also it included some open ended questions.

These questions were developed to confirm the problem they faced and what were their attitudes to move forward in fluency in EFL and to know more about their attitudes toward its level and if they realized that

they did not practice their oral skills enough. Questionnaires were developed based on these observations, in order to determine how effective the technique of storytelling online could be in learning EFL.

In the case of the questionnaire, it was created to give meaning to the doubts formed through the observations. There was also a questionnaire structured by the researcher and according to the observations, it focused only on aspects of fluency in EFL. The survey questionnaire used the "forms" instrument by google. It included fourteen questions demographic information, a Likert scale and open ended questions.

The questionnaire was made by the following questions: Questionnaire –Gender/ level / other studies/. How is your confidence level in speaking? How do you feel when you speak? Is your current level of practice sufficient? Do you learn how to speak by listening or repetition? What is the factor you consider problematic when you are speaking? Do you have extra classes?

Analysis and Interpretation of Results

O*bservations*. The results in the observations were that while learners did know the grammatical rules, they barely practiced speaking in their classes. Another problem that was detected through data collection was that the learners did not even try to practice their oral competences, for example, when they had a question almost all the time, they asked in their mother tongue, which is Spanish. In their classes they did not speak frequently in English, despite their level of English and they had not achieved fluency.

Field notes. It was detected the problems presented in fluency were results of the observations through Descriptive notes and Reflexive notes.

Questionnaire. In this section students mentioned that they felt very nervous when they spoke in English, also they commented about their insecurities that made them feel that they forgot the answers, they felt the lack of confidence and pressure to answer when they were asked how they felt when they were speaking English in their classes and also mentioned it as a problem in their oral communication.

Discussion

The data collection implemented, carries out the development of this proposal and also aims to contribute to the teaching-learning process. It allows acknowledgement of the factors that could be taken into consideration at the moment of the application of this technique.

During the observations it has been detected that the strategies implemented by the school are not enough for learners, most of the time, learners are just filling the blanks on their book and do not practice their speaking skills constantly. Next week they will carry out the application of the Storytelling online, in which they can practice their skills and demonstrate the effectiveness of Storytelling.

Conclusion

This project obtained positive results in trying to help school learners with level B2 (according to CEFR) in learning English as a Foreign Language. Storytelling is the method that will be applied to young adults learners. It is considered a good technique to improve their oral skills, because learners

have had difficulties in speaking English as a Foreign Language. Through observation it was detected that the students know a lot of vocabulary but presented problems when they are speaking.

For this reason, storytelling as online technique, will be take into consideration to improve their oral skills, will be focused on fluency, it is expected that through easy short stories about events happened in their life, learners will be feel comfortable and with a subject of their interest will be a good way to develop their oral fluency skills.

Good results are expected accordingly with other authors that have applied this technique, besides it involves creativity and learners of this range of age enjoy these kinds of activities.

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