Communicative Language Teaching Strategies to Develop Senior High School Students' English Language Speaking Skill

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Abstract*: To analyze the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) strategies to develop the English - speaking skill, a qualitative investigation was carried out at Don Bosco High School in Esmeraldas by using the analytical – synthetical, hermeneutic, deductive, and inductive methods. This research was applied to 105 students from senior education. The observation and survey were the techniques applied to collect information. The observation process revealed that teachers use strategies to develop speaking; however, everything was translated into Spanish to help the students understand the instructions. On the other hand, the survey results from learners and teachers revealed that teachers apply the CLT methodology as well as some activities to improve communication like role-plays and oral presentations. This study concludes that teachers know about the theory, techniques, strategies, processes, and methods to teach the speaking skill. However, they do not apply them properly. As a result, those students can understand the English language, but they cannot produce it.*

Keywords: CLT Strategies, English Language, Speaking Skill, Teaching-Learning Process

Introduction

Teaching speaking in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is one of the main challenges that teachers must face in the classrooms. Iqram (2015) mentioned in his investigation that the use of the learners' native language can be diminished in the classrooms when teachers provide the necessity to use the foreign language. This can be done when applying appropriately the teaching methodology.

In Ecuador, based on the English language standards, the methodology to be applied is the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and the learners' exit profile should be B2. Its main objective is to develop communication. Nevertheless, there are some cases in which this methodology does not follow its focus due to several factors like lack of knowledge about the method, low English levels from teachers and students, or lack of English teachers in schools. As a result, the exit profile is not accomplished. This is the reality of some schools along the country that would be the reason of the low levels of English students get when they graduate.

The problem of this investigation is: What communicative language teaching strategies are applied at Don Bosco high school to develop the students' speaking skill?

To give an answer to the main question of this investigation, the main objective was to analyze CLT strategies which may contribute to the development of 2nd level senior students' speaking skill at Don Bosco high school. This conducted to specific objectives which were: to determine what CLT strategies teachers applied to develop the speaking skill at the mentioned high school; to diagnose other strategies used by teachers to develop the speaking skill and to diagnose the difficulties students had when producing the foreign language.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

The CLT principal goal is for learners to develop communicative competence. It emphasizes on meaning rather than grammatical structures (Hymes 1972). The communicative competence is defined as the

ability to interpret social behaviors, and it requires the active involvement of the learner in the production of the Target Language (TL). Furthermore, when producing and interacting in the target language, some type of competences must be considered. First, the linguistic competence is the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Second, the sociolinguistic competence; it is the capability to say the appropriate thing in a determined social situation. Third, the discourse competence; it is the ability to start, follow and finish a conversation in a coherent manner. Finally, the strategic competence is the ability to communicate effectively and solve problems caused by misunderstandings (Campione & Brown, 1984).

Speaking

According to Hughes (2002), there are two main aspects to take into consideration when teaching speaking. These are accuracy and fluency, being fluency an important aspect to maintain the pace of a conversation.

Harmer (2007) proposed several strategies and activities to teach speaking. For instance, pair work and information gap activities make teaching this skill feasible because learners are interacting among them by using questions/ answers and mingled/cocktails strategies. Also, other activities such as describing and drawing, describing and arrange, find similarities and differences on pictures, role plays, drama, debates, interviews, telling stories, survey, group work, among others.

The Sociocultural Theory by Vygotsky

Vygotsky (1997) focuses on how the children's society and culture influence on their development. Based on this theory, a person's social world is directed by a determined language which is used to interact, among others. This author also stated that the child's cultural development is done in two stages: interpsychological and intrapsychological.

In addition, the Zone of proximal development is a fundamental characteristic of this theory. It analyses the abilities learners must work with on a certain task and, predicts what the learner will do independently in further tasks (Scott & Palincsar, 2015). According to Campione & Brown (1984), this process is called dynamic assessment. It is to measure how well a learner reaches a task when the teacher provides help. For instance, problem solving tasks are used in this assessment.

Antecedents

Iqram, (2015) provided several strategies to help EFL learners of Bangladesh. He proposed three main purposes why promoting speaking in the classroom; these are: rehearsal, feedback, and engagement. It is essential for students to organize their ideas to express their message. Techers should offer them time to practice what they have already written. Finally, motivation is also an important factor when producing a foreign language. Teachers must provide the appropriate exposure to the language to get students engaged and motivated to produce English.

Mendez (2011) proposed 14 strategies to develop the speaking skill of English Language Teaching (ELT) students from a BA course of a public university in Mexico. Some strategies were, first, to use synonyms when the learner does not know that word in the FL. It provides fluency when the learner is producing the language; second, the use of gestures to communicate.

Cardenal, (2016) planned a course for B2.1 students from Universidad de Alcala in Spain to develop speaking in an EFL context. His course was developed in three ways: first, whole-group sessions, where learners had to work in pairs or individually to carry out activities like debates and oral presentations, as well as writing activities; second, the practical lessons learners face activities like problem solving, analysis of articles, role plays and workshops; and finally, seminars consist of attending lectures, using multi-media tools to watch videos and playing interactive games.

Guerra, (2014) intervened in a B1 low intermediate classroom at Ambato, Ecuador, for 2 months, and proposed communicative activities of 60 minutes each to improve speaking. She demonstrated that students were engaged and motivated by the application of this approach due to the analysis of her results. Most of learners improved their level significantly. Finally, Caicedo (2016) proposed a booklet as a didactic material based on drama to develop the speaking skill at a public high school in Esmeraldas.

Method

The current research was carried out at Don Bosco high school with Spanish-native speaker students. In this high school, English is taught as a Foreign Language from Initial to high school. Students, at first levels, receive four periods of classes per week; each period has 40 minutes. Whereas high school students, 1st, 2nd and 3rd, receive five periods of classes per week.

The students per class are 38 – 40 students. That fact makes the teaching of the oral skills difficult because it causes indiscipline in the classroom. On the other hand, this high school does not use the textbooks provided by the government, teachers use books from Oxford University Press with the help of the Books & Bits editorial. The books they use are *Play time, Everybody up and Got it 2nd edition.* In doing so, the books satisfy the needs of the learners by classifying them into the levels regarding the European Framework of languages. Senior learners use the book 'Got it!', which contains 4 units per level.

The population involved in this investigation was formed by Spanish speakers' students from 2nd year of senior education from Don Bosco High School. As there exist three courses from second level, 2nd A with 34 students; 2nd B with 35 students; and 2nd C with 35 students. There are 105 learners as an overall. These students from 2nd B had greater weakness when speaking in English. This is a topic to be aware about because they are going to get graduated from high school in one year and their English level is low.

The investigation developed was a mixed one, of a descriptive scope since it labeled the problem of the speaking skill of students from Don Bosco high school in Esmeraldas, Ecuador.

The hypothesis was: Learners may improve their speaking skill by means of suitable communicative strategies.

The methods applied in this investigation were: Analytical and synthetical because of the result of the reading of theories and analysis of problematics presented in the study. Deductive and inductive due to the analysis of the results obtained throughout the logic reasoning. Besides, an observation process was done to obtain general conclusions regarding the problem of this investigation (Hernandez, Collado, and Lucio, 2003).

The techniques used were observation and surveys. First, through the observation period lasted 2 months during the English classes. The results of this technique were collected by means of a rubric. On the other hand, there were two surveys applied to teachers and students to measure their perspectives of the lesson and collect information about techniques that can be useful to improve the English-speaking skill in those learners. The teachers' survey had 6 multiple choice questions and 1 open question which, involved topics related to CLT strategies.

The students' survey had 6 multiple choice questions asking the same but modifying the vocabulary and type of questions.

The data collected on this investigation were processed by the Microsoft Excel program following the statistical percentile method.

Results

Regarding the activities applied by teachers to develop oral skills in those students who cannot produce the English language. It was observed in the T-L process that the 90% of teachers used songs, games, drama, role plays and oral presentations, as it is evidenced in figure 1. These are the most frequent in the teaching-learning process. However, they also applied some others, but these are not totally presented in the process.
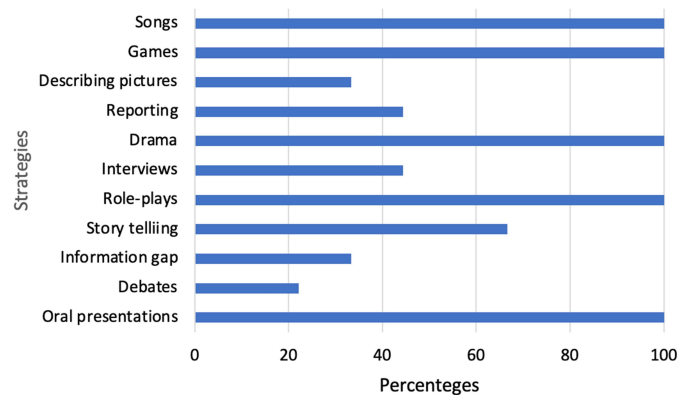

Figure 1: Strategies applied by teachers. Source: Survey applied to teachers

Students were asked about the activities their teacher applied in the class to develop the speaking skill; it is evidenced, in figure 2, that the main activities exercised are songs, games, drama, role-plays and oral presentations. Nevertheless, from 20% to 40% of learners also marked other activities which have been done with less frequency during the teaching-learning process. These results have a close relationship with the question presented to teachers. It was also noticed during the observation process, that learners did the activities presented on figure 1. It is evidenced that learners are conscious of the activities that their teachers applied in order to make them to speak.
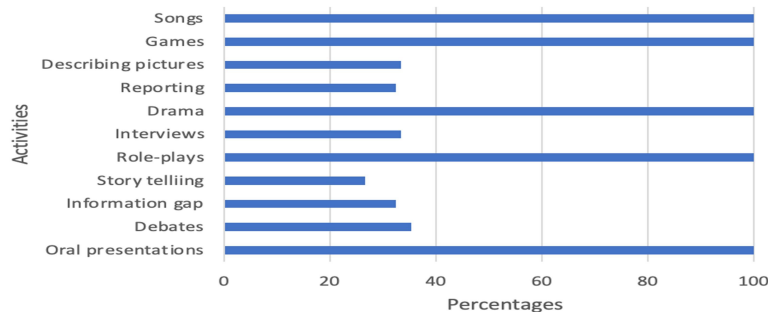

Figure 2: Activities applied by the teacher to develop students' speaking skill. Source: Survey applied to students

Concerning other strategies teachers use in order to improve the speaking skill, they were asked about what strategies they apply to give instructions. As illustrated in figure 3, the results revealed that body language is the main strategy they applied for the process to be completely understood. Additionally, they also used to translate instructions to clarify the message.
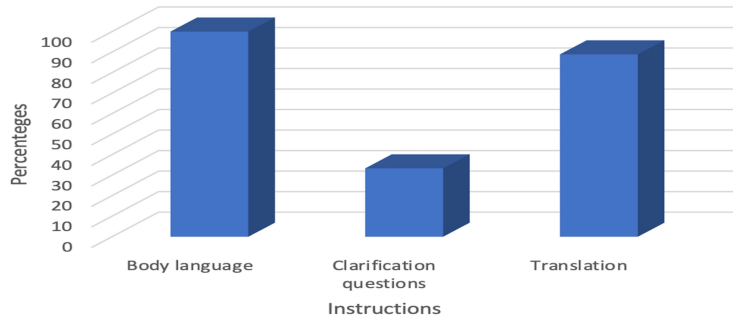
Figure 3: Instructions given in class. Source: Survey applied to teachers

When analyzing how instructions were given during the teaching-learning process, as it is appreciated in figure 4, those instructions were given 30 % in English and 70% in Spanish. Additionally, the 89% of teachers said that instructions were given 100% in Spanish. A reality observed and evidenced during the observation process revealed that everything was translated into the learners' mother tongue, Spanish.
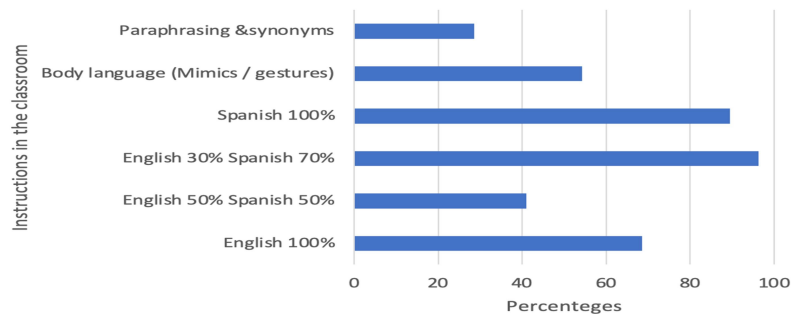

Figure 4: Instructions given in the classroom. Source: Survey applied to students.

Learners had several problems when producing the English language. As it is illustrated in figure 5, the main problems presented are when organizing ideas to express their opinions. This issue leads to the lack of lexicon and verbs. The students do not have enough vocabulary to express their ideas in a clear way. Besides, there were other problematics when students had to speak, first, they were aware of pronunciation, second, they translated every single word before producing an idea, and third, they were aware of the grammar structures they had to use.
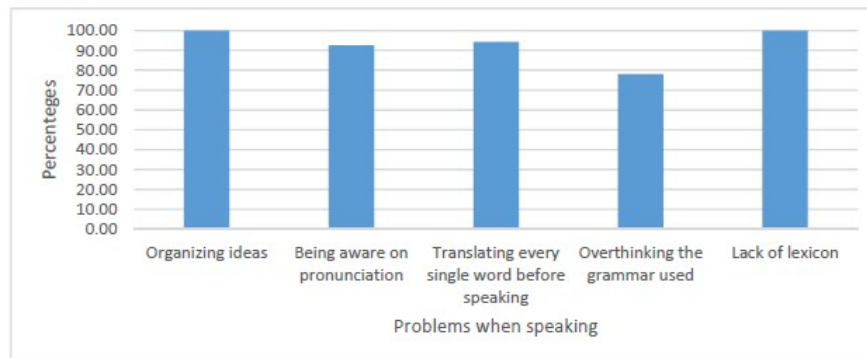

Figure 5: Problems that learners had when producing the English language. Source: Survey applied to students

Regarding the results collected, and the learners' needs observed during the period of observation; the author analyzed the results which helped her to propose strategies to develop the English-speaking skill on 2nd senior students from Don Bosco high school.

Some strategies were proposed due to the learners' likes and needs. It was observed that teachers tried to apply them; nevertheless, the procedure was not well handled, and learners did not produce the English language. There were three main inconvenients observed during the 2 months; first, learners tried to translate every single word before expressing an idea; second, they did not know enough lexicon like verbs; and third, they were always aware of the grammar they used. As a result, they were repeating texts instead of producing the language by their own. It is important to mention that the book used by the learners provided topics which can be exploited orally. This gives learners opportunities to talk.

The proposal consists of a group of strategies that follows the Ludic Methodology. These are: Oral presentation, online games: Socrative & Kahoot, games, drama, role-plays, describing pictures, reporting and picture narrations. These strategies have been integrated to the content of the book the students use in classes. The way in which those strategies can be used is explained below.

CLT Procedures

1. Presentation

The teacher presents the content by means of games, flash cards, video, or audio material in order to engage the pupils to the content.

2. Practice

Learners use / apply the content presented and manipulates the language based on their own opinions. Then, classroom interaction is promoted. The teacher monitors the process and makes corrections if needed.

3. Production

Learners create their new knowledge based on the content studied. Learners report in front of the class by means of role-plays, drama, or oral presentations. The teacher writes down mistakes and provides feedback to the whole class to correct mistakes.

The proposal is a complement for the book got it 2nd edition 'A' used at Don Bosco high school. This material is an adaptation of how the topics should be taught to develop the English-speaking skill in 2nd senior students. In doing so, the main objective of this didactic resource is to improve the communicative competences based on the same topics and units applied in the teaching-learning process observed during the investigation.

Discussion

Improving the speaking skill is a difficult task but not impossible. It becomes a problem because there are large and multi classes. That is the reason why, methods and strategies are fundamental in the teaching-learning process. In this case, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is the main method applied at Don Bosco high school to develop speaking.

Iqram, (2015), who provided lots of strategies, insisted that teaching speaking in large classes only require to keep in mind these three purposes: Rehearsal, feedback, and engagement. In that way, the teacher can monitor and keep students focused on the task and working. This conclusion has a close relationship with the results of this investigation. Large classes are a reality at Don Bosco high school, when teachers want to create a good environment for learners to talk; it generates indiscipline in the classroom.

It was observed in figure 2, from the results of the survey applied to students, that teachers applied lots of activities to talk and provided the time for learners to practice by means of ludic activities. For that reason, the strategy proposed by Iqram, (2015) may help teachers to control learners and keep them focused on the speaking activity planned.

Additionally, one of the main strategies that Iqram, (2015) proposed was to use body language so that the process can be understood. Teachers, in this research, were asked on how instructions were given during the class. They answered the same as it was illustrated in figure 3, body language is a good strategy to be understood. Nevertheless, teachers also answered that translation is another strategy that they used in order to provide instructions to the class.

On the other hand, Cardenal, (2016) agreed that oral presentations are needed to let students be in touch with the language. Besides, teachers and learners of the present investigation answered that oral presentations and dialogues are beneficial; nevertheless, some innovations must be done. The results of this study demonstrated that teachers and learners would like dramas, songs, more ICTs, and handcrafts would cause a positive impact on the learners T-L process as well. Motivation plays an essential role in the process.

Guerra, (2014) stated that once you get your students focused and motivated, you can apply any kind of activities. Everything is about catching the students' interests on the most relevant activities, those which are principal for daily conversations. The results of this investigation demonstrated that teachers motivated learners by means of creating a suitable environment where confidence was present. However, a minimum percentage of learners said that they did not feel that motivation at all. Furthermore Guerra, (2014) said that teachers should diagnose the learners' needs and interests. Then, they should use the technique, method and strategy which causes more impact on their learning.

The ludic methodology provides confidence and motivation. According to the results of this investigation, learners would like to be taught based on that methodology because it is attractive and new for them. For that reason, Caicedo, (2016) proposed a didactic material based on drama, in which he explained how to apply it in a public school with the main objective of improving the speaking skill. This is one of the strategies proposed in this research since not all students liked dramatizing the whole time. The strategies proposed for 2nd Senior students from Don Bosco high school are *Oral presentation, Online games: Socrative & Kahoot, games, drama, role-plays, describing pictures, reporting and picture narrations.* As this is a multi-level class, these strategies fit to their needs and likes.

Conclusions

CLT strategies contribute to the development of the English-speaking skill. However, the lack of processes is missing when applying them. Some strategies such as oral presentations, role-plays are the most frequent ones used in the English Teaching-Learning process.

Teachers also applied some other strategies like describing pictures and reporting any situation to provide learners opportunities to talk. Nevertheless, the results revealed that learners needed more guidance before giving instructions to describe pictures and report the situation given. It means they needed more clarification questions.

Learners involved in this research had lots of problems when producing the TL. It was noticeable that they had lack on vocabulary and verbs to express their ideas clearly. Besides, they translated word-by-word the message they wanted to express. Those processes interfered the production of the language in a fluent manner.

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