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Enhancing speaking abilities through out-of-class assignments in group 9-1 at Liceo Las

Mercedes

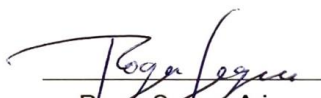
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Abstract

The present research aims to enhance the speaking abilities of a group of ninth graders by connecting what is developed in class with their out-of-class activities or assignments that involve the English language. This group consists of 24 students with ages ranging from 14 to 16 years old that attend their first trimester of 2023 in a public and rural high school by the name of Liceo Las Mercedes located in Pérez Zeledón. Among the findings, it was noted a slight improvement in the participants' fluency and grammar as well as a significant improvement in their vocabulary. However, by the end of the implementations, the students still presented issues in terms of pronunciation. The results also showed the importance of passive input of great quality in order to familiarize students with the target language as well as the need to create spaces for review and doubt solving when the teacher plan the lessons.

Key words: Out of class activities, media, high school education, speaking abilities.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	6
Table of contents.....	7
List of Tables	9
List of Figures	10
Chapter 1.....	11
Introduction.....	11
Rationale	12
Purpose.....	13
General Objective	13
Specific Objectives.....	13
Research Questions	14
Hypothesis	14
Chapter 2.....	15
Literature Review.....	15
Speaking Abilities	15
Out-of-class Activities.....	17
Audio-visual Media in English Teaching.....	20
Chapter 3.....	23
Design and Method.....	23
Research Method.....	23
Type of approach.....	24
Context	25
Data Collection Procedures	25
Action Plan	26
Intervention Assessment.....	28
Chapter 4.....	29
Findings.....	29
Pre-test Results.....	29
Post-test Results	31
Comparative Analysis of Results.....	33
Chapter 5.....	37

Reflections	37
Plan for further action	37
Chapter 6.....	39
Conclusions.....	39
Outcomes	39
Implications.....	39
Strengths	40
Limitations	40
Chapter 7.....	41
Recommendations.....	41
References.....	42
Appendixes	45

List of Tables

Table 1. Implementations from the Action Plan.....23

List of Figures

Figure 1. Pre-test Results	25
Figure 2. Post-test Results	27
Figure 3. Pre-test and Post-test Fluency Results	29
Figure 4. Pre-test and Post-test Pronunciation Results	30
Figure 5. Pre-test and Post-test Vocabulary Results	31
Figure 6. Pre-test and Post-test Grammar Results	32

Chapter 1

Introduction

This chapter seeks to present the details that serve as the base for the implementation of an action plan to enhance the student's speaking skills in class by connecting them with out-of-class activities involving the language. Among the different skills that are part of learning the English language, speaking has been chosen because the relevance of English as a tool to communicate globally and as a platform for personal and professional growth has harvested the idea that “even if there are four skills in the English language, speaking skills are the most effective one among them as a majority of communication is done through speech” (Rao, 2019, p.11) which encourages teachers and researches to put more emphasis on that skill as well as find new ways to improve in that area.

In the case of Costa Rica, the focus on the speaking skills comes mostly from the increasing demand for bilingual people by the most relevant companies in the country which are mostly transnationals that are part of the service business. This scenario has created the need to implement new plans to improve the way English is taught in both schools and high schools that are designed to enhance each of the four skills but also establish effective communication through speech as the ultimate goal to be achieved. Nevertheless, getting students to actively use the target language to communicate with each other has proven to be challenging and has demonstrated that teachers must put great effort into generating engagement and creating more opportunities to practice the speaking skill in order to refine it.

To sum up, this research acknowledges how important it is nowadays at a personal, professional, and institutional level to improve the English-speaking skills and how crucial

engagement is in that process especially when it comes to young students. To build on that idea, this project takes into account the activities students perform out of class that involve the target language and how to connect them with the speaking practice in class to enhance the abilities in such area.

Rationale

In many cases, the number of lessons available for an English teacher to not only cover the content but also to practice the target language constitutes a great limitation especially when it comes to speaking skills. It is important for the English teacher to implement further speaking practice by taking advantage of the activities students are part of outside of class, particularly those in which they are exposed to the language such as movies, streaming shows, video games and music. It is easy to observe how frequently young students are exposed to different pieces of media that originated from an English-speaking context which may not only raise interest in learning the language but also provide a cognitive background that the teacher can refer to in class. Therefore, research on this topic is of great importance in order to explore how to incorporate these out-of-class activities into the in-class speaking practice as “English extracurricular activity is proven to have a very significant role in improving students’ English speaking ability.” (Kardiansyah & Qodriani, 2018, p.69). This is why the project focuses primarily on both the speaking abilities and the out-of-class assignments.

The present action research is also based on the fact that Costa Rica is actively working towards a bilingual population due to the dynamics of its economy and the increasing professional offers that demand such bilingualism. The way this is planned to be achieved is precisely through the country’s educational system starting from early ages but mostly focused as of now in the high school level. One of the challenges in such task is to get the young students

to be proactive when it comes to using the English language for communication since practice is crucial to identify the highs and lows of the students' performances in the speaking skill when trying to communicate their ideas. As expressed by Jean-Pierre et al. (2021), "students' disposition toward oral presentations can vary widely, from those who express comfort, ease, and confidence to those who perceive this assessment as a daunting challenge" (p.1). This type of research is certainly a great tool to explore a possible approach to face these different scenarios as well as other ones that may surface.

Purpose

The purpose of this action research is to implement a specific technique that can enhance the way students' speaking abilities are developed in class by assessing how effective it is and what it requires to be applied. This can generate as well new ideas for other ways to improve the speaking skill and show how valuable students may find seeing their out-class activities or interests reflected in their classroom. This research also seeks to present the particular case of an institution from Pérez Zeledón which can provide further information about the English teaching reality in Costa Rica and specifically in one of its rural areas.

General Objective

To enhance the speaking abilities through group oral presentations involving out-of-class assignments

Specific Objectives

- A. To diagnose the students' speaking abilities through a test
- B. To implement speaking activities based on out-of-class assignments involving topics such as movies, streaming shows, video games and

music

- C. To assess the effectiveness of the activities in improving the students speaking abilities

Research Questions

- A. How can oral reports be used to effectively connect in and out-of-class speaking activities involving the English language?
- B. What benefits does it offer to make use of topics such as movies, streaming shows, video games and music in assignments?
- C. What do students expect of the speaking activities developed in class?

Hypothesis

Students will show improvement in their speaking abilities when they take part in speaking assignments that are connected with their out-of-class activities.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This project seeks to explore how the implementation of a technique involving out-of-class assignments can help improve the speaking abilities in class. Following this idea, the present chapter analyzes the literature available on two fronts: the development of the speaking skill and the importance of out-of-class activities. This literature review also provides a solid background to build upon as well as a clear perspective of how this research can innovate.

Speaking Abilities

Among the four skills that are part of learning a new language, speaking is often pursued as the ultimate goal by both teachers and learners. It is undeniable that many people enroll in English learning programs primarily to learn oral communication as a means to further their career or apply for jobs that otherwise would not be an option. This also creates the expectation that English classes at elementary schools and high schools should aim to produce young learners capable of fluently speaking the language. Based on this perception, it is possible to observe why many researchers tend to focus on this particular skill which is also true for the current project.

One common topic in the literature in regard to speaking abilities is the constant search for more effective and engaging ways to practice. Nevertheless, it is not always about coming up with new methods but rather refining some of the already known ones. For instance, it is understood that “individual and group oral presentations are pedagogies that provide an opportunity to strengthen public speaking skills” (Jean-Pierre et. al., 2021, p.1), but they can only be efficient and engaging if they are properly designed. Instead of the traditional oral

presentations that have students present in front of the class with visual aids such as PowerPoint slides, the teacher can opt for techniques that are more concise and require no such materials. Jean-Pierre et. al. (2021) described in their study on enhancing public speaking abilities that “by removing the use of visual supports, students had a greater opportunity to learn how to make eye-contact with their audience while using persuasive language to convey their message” (p.2), which exemplifies how slight changes in the way activities are approached can generate great benefits in learning.

Another area of speaking abilities discussed in the literature is the challenges that teachers face when trying to develop them. Paneerselvam and Mohamad (2019) offered a well-rounded review of this topic and arrived at the conclusion that the biggest concerns in the process of teaching speaking are related to the students’ confidence, motivation, state of mind and limitations (p.3300). Overall, learners feel anxious, insecure or lacking knowledge that will affect how they perform in their speaking practices in terms of engagement and productivity. Alongside these obstacles, the aforementioned authors summarize as well some approaches that can help teachers handle such situations:

The past studies that have been reviewed and discussed earlier indicate that there are several suggested approaches which have been proven as effective tools in overcoming the ESL learners’ challenges and enhancing their speaking skills. The approaches include using social media such as Instagram, flipped classroom, debates and games as learning activities within and outside classroom. (Paneerselvam & Mohamad, 2019, p.3304)

It is very important to give emphasis to developing speaking abilities out of class becomes imperative given that, “the limit of time for class activities becomes obstacle in enhancing students speaking ability significantly” (Kardiansyah & Qodriani, 2018, p.60). In addition,

having students be constantly exposed to the target language both in and out of class helps them familiarize with it, thus making them feel more confident and knowledgeable. There is a diverse set of possible activities or assignments to practice the speaking skill in an extracurricular basis, but overall, “English extracurricular activity is oriented to public speaking skills such as debate, speech, news casting, storytelling, and etc.” (Kardiansyah & Qodriani, 2018, p.60), activities that are mostly focused on promoting interaction and real-life conversation pointing to a practical use.

To sum up, the consulted sources support the argument that out-of-class assignments can be key to improving the speaking abilities. First, they serve as an innovative approach that offers a change of pace to what students are used to which contributes to their engagement. Then, they can make the target language more digestible and familiar so that students can feel confident and at ease when speaking. Finally, out-of-class assignments provide more space to practice, thus overcoming the time constraints that the English classroom suffers from when trying to balance teaching the four skills.

Out-of-class Activities

Several papers can be found regarding the topic of the use of the English language outside of class and its relevance in the learning process that occurs inside the classroom. These out-of-class activities are considered an improvement on the usual methodology in English teaching since “instead of presenting only formulaic English in textbooks, an out-of-class activity can increase students’ exposure to English in existing and familiar contexts” (Guo, 2011, p. 252). This idea of using English outside of the classroom environment is vastly present in the consulted papers as a way to expand what teachers develop in class. As described by Daukšaitė (2020)

Knowing which activities students engage in outside the classroom and learn English at the same time is helpful to their teachers, since it provides ideas not only how teachers can guide their students' out-of-class language learning activities but also how they could bring more out-of-classroom activities into the classroom to make learning more authentic, engaging and motivating. (p.142)

Such a type of statement encourages teachers to gather information on their students' interests and to take them into account when planning their lessons. Teachers would need, then, to keep up with the new trends the students are part of that may very likely involve the English language given the globalized context prevalent nowadays.

Among the sources reviewed on this topic, it is also observed a focus on the role of technology and media as tools to develop the target language out of class. The article titled *The Use of English Language outside the Classroom* from the Armenian State Pedagogical University included the idea of how technology affects learning especially in the case of teenagers and how the time given to in-class activities is not enough to develop proficiency. This study focused on students from Experimental English Classes (EEC) with ages between 11 and 16 and various proficiency levels and used a survey and an interview to gather data on the kind of activities they perform that involve the English language. The most prominent results were the use of social media, listening to songs, traveling and searching through the web, activities the participants related to what they call pop culture. However, in their conclusions, the authors expressed their concern about the limitations of the research, specifically how it involved no observation to validate the students' honesty and how the students may have stated to use English frequently due to the popularity the language in their context (Sargsyan & Kurghinyan,

2016, p.44). Regardless, this study certainly demonstrates how English is vastly present in the students' out-of-class activities and is considered an important asset.

Another interesting matter discussed in the literature is the skills most prominently practiced in out-of-class activities. On that line, a Lithuanian study by Aurelija Daukšaitė focused on which skills are practiced the most outside of class by its participants of the B2 level. The results showed that they mostly practice their vocabulary and listening skills while “speaking, as a productive skill, seems to be the most undeveloped skill outside the classroom” (Daukšaitė, 2020, p.141). Furthermore, the participants of the research present no familiarity with the online and app tools to practice the language.

Finally, research carried out for the National Taipei College of Business in Taiwan explores the use of the language outside of the classroom to improve vocabulary and the students' autonomy by implementing an out-of-class assignment which shares some resemblance to the present project. The author dedicated a small section to support the benefits of using out-of-class projects where he states that, “engaging students in out-of-class projects offers the significant benefit of expanding the student learning environment. Realizing that their normal surroundings and activities offer meaningful opportunities to learn English is likely to spark interest and increase motivation to learn” (Guo, 2011, p.247). However, the author also provided insight into the difficulties that arise in this kind of research. In that regard, she shared the following:

The author first assigned the activity as a co-curricular activity for extra credit. Although provided with incentives such as extra credit and prizes, students showed very little motivation to do the activity because it was not part of the formal curriculum. As a result, the activity was changed to a course requirement. Constant reminders and a collection of

drafts midway through the project were necessary to assure that students remained on task. (Guo, 2011, p.252)

This experience offers valuable information on the intricacies that are part of a project of this nature, particularly the challenge of getting the participants involved on it to secure more objective results.

Now, if these studies are compared to the present research, it is observable that what can be found in common is the sense of importance that out-of-class activities have on improving the students' skills. Nevertheless, there are several differences worth pointing out. First, this project seeks to explore this topic in a specific context within Costa Rica and its culture which has the chance to show results that may differ from those obtained in places such as Armenia or Lithuania. Then, the idea is to not only gather quantitative data as in some of these papers but also to add the space to obtain qualitative data from the participants that can provide further details. Finally, the sources showed either results in other areas or just stated the need to pay further attention to the speaking skill; however, none of them worked on improving particularly the speaking abilities which is precisely the purpose behind this project.

Audio-visual Media in English Teaching

Teachers have at their disposal a plethora of different materials and resources to develop their lessons, but it is crucial for them to select the ones that best serve the purpose, goals and context of a specific class. On that topic, Rao (2014) explained:

It has been observed over the years that classroom teaching has become monotonous because of the traditional lecture method where in the teacher is the centre of the learning process. A teacher has to understand that the 21st century students 'have a limited concentration span'

and therefore, it is necessary to bring in colourful and interesting material into the classroom to involve each and every student in the process of language acquisition. (p.142)

Precisely, the right materials and resources can help the teacher decentralize the learning process and boost the students' engagement.

Among the different options available, audio-visual media in the form of videos, film, and video games has seen a recent upsurge in use which can be attributed to various reasons. First of all, "audio-visual media has the ability to overcome the shortcomings of audio media or from visual media" (Hikmah, 2019, p.88) and by combining both as well as adding motion characteristics it can present itself as a more engaging tool. Furthermore, the cultural relevance of audio-visual materials nowadays makes them an ideal method to better connect with the students. A research conducted on a language institute in Saudi Arabia about using movies in the EFL classroom supports this idea as the participants showed higher participation levels and considered movies to be a great tool to expand their vocabulary (Kabooha, 2016, p. 255). In general, media is certainly an excellent resource to implement in class, but it demands teachers to have particular knowledge of their students' interests and context as well as remain up-to-date with the current trends.

This chapter has presented various sources that elaborate on the main areas that are part of the present project. Overall, the literature shows how important out-of-class activities are for the learning process as well as the need to further take advantage of them to develop the speaking abilities. In order to achieve that goal, teachers need to explore different resources that help them connect with their students such as technology and media. Particularly, audio-visual media has become a staple of modern lesson planning due to its unique characteristics and its relevance as part of the culture. All these details gathered from the consulted sources make it possible to

visualize what the present research can offer and serve as guide to formulate the instruments needed in a study of this nature. Precisely, the following chapter presents the design and methodology that has been constructed to carry out this project which, on the one hand, take the aforementioned background into account, but also seek to set it apart given the differences of its context.

Chapter 3

Design and Method

The purpose of this research is to improve the students' speaking abilities through assignments linked to their out-of-class activities. In order to achieve this, it is crucial to establish a well-organized and cemented methodology which is precisely what this chapter encompasses alongside the description of its paradigm, design, approach and instruments.

Research Method

Among the different methods that are part of research, especially in education, the present project is designed as action research given that this method “can be used in almost any setting where a problem involving people, tasks and procedures cries out for solution, or where some change of feature results in a more desirable outcome” (Cohen et al., 2017, p.297).

Precisely, this research seeks to implement a technique that can help improve the performance of a group of people in a specific type of task, the speaking abilities, thus involving the expectation of a more positive outcome after the process has finished. Furthermore, as described by Hine (2013), “through repeated cycles of planning, observing, and reflecting, individuals and groups engaged in action research can implement changes required for social improvement” (p. 151), which is reflected in the present research through its methodology involving a diagnostic pre-test that then leads to the implementation of an appropriate action plan and culminates in an assessment of the intervention to determine the effectiveness of the implementation in terms of improvement.

Type of Approach

Before describing this project's approach, it is necessary to understand more general aspects that also serve as basis for it. First, the approach is part of a constructivist paradigm that "seeks to understand a phenomenon under study from the experiences or angles of the participants using different data collecting agents". (Adom et al., 2016, p.5), a paradigm that takes into account the idea of building knowledge by cooperation between the researcher and the participants. Furthermore, the design applied is experimental based on the definition provided by Ryan and Morgan (2007):

The Research design that is used to test a Research Design of causal relationship under controlled situation is called experimental design. We should remember that an experiment is an observation under controlled conditions or in other words, we can say that it is a design in which some of the variables being studied are manipulated or which seek to control the condition within which persons are observed. (p.78)

It is also important to note that the experimental design implies data obtained both before and after the implementation of an action plan. Finally, the approach of this project is defined as qualitative, an approach in which the "researcher relies on the participants to offer in-depth responses to questions about how they have constructed or understood their experience" (Jackson et al., 2007, p.23). A research of this nature certainly demands to assess aspects beyond the statistics; it needs to tackle the subject with comprehension of its social and human essence and keep in mind that the ultimate goal is to enhance the condition of a particular group of people.

Context

This study is carried out in an institution located in the community of Las Mercedes in Pérez Zeledón. This area from the south of Costa Rica is a valley surrounded by some of the most prominent peaks of the country which separates it from the urban metropolis affecting its accessibility, hence why it is considered a rural area. It is mostly dedicated to agriculture, tourism and services, the two latter demanding bilingual people with proficiency in the English language. Part of the population consists of Costa Ricans that emigrated to the United States in the past in search of job opportunities and then returned to their community as well as their children who were born overseas. The institution is a public day high school with a technological orientation founded in 2006. The group chosen to draw the participants from consists in 24 ninth grade students with ages ranging from 14 to 16 years old that take three English lessons of forty minutes each a week.

Data Collection Procedures

A test will be applied in order to diagnose the speaking abilities of the participants which is the base for the action plan and the analysis of its results. This test consists of an impromptu or lightning presentation in which each participant from the selected sample (30% of the participants) describes their favorite film, streaming show, song or video game. Each participant will count with five to ten minutes to perform. The test will be evaluated through an analytic rubric that includes four indicators of learning and three achievement levels: not achieved (0 points), in process (1 point) and achieved (3 points). It will also contain a space for further comments on the observed performance. This rubric as well as the topic for the test are based taking into account the official ninth grade guide from the Ministerio de Educación Pública (MEP), Costa Rica's governmental institution in charge of public education. Once applied, the

grades obtained from the rubrics will be presented in the form of a graphic, followed by a description or summary of the details annotated in the comments section of the rubric that serves as insight on the causality behind the results of this pre-test.

Action Plan

An action plan will be implemented throughout the course of four weeks with two implementations per week and eight implementations in total. Each week there will be one implementation designed around the Speaking Interaction (SI) segment of the lesson and one designed around the Speaking Production (SP) segment of the lesson. Each segment includes a pre-task and a post-task activity. To be part of these segments, students will be organized beforehand in groups of x members. These groups will remain the same for every implementation. Based on their interests, each group will choose one of these four categories: films, streaming shows, music or video games. In each of the segments, the students will work with the category they selected, with minor variances based on the scenario and assessment strategy that correspond to the respective lesson. The implementations will always be of a spontaneous nature with minimal planning and visual aids. The only variation between each of them will be the form in which the speaking practice takes place; students will be asked to perform different types of presentations such as role-plays, descriptions and recreations. A short description of the implementations is provided in the following table:

Table 1*Implementations from the Action Plan*

Segment	Pre-task	Task	Post task
Speaking Interaction	Students reflect on their respective favorite type of media.	Students share the information with each other.	Students share the information with the rest of the class.
Speaking Production	Students plan and organize a presentation related to their respective type of media	Students rehearse their presentation.	Students perform in front of the class.
Speaking Interaction	Students receive questions about experiencing their favorite type of media.	Students ask the provided questions to their peers	Students share the answers with the rest of the class.
Speaking Production	Students prepare a recreation based on their respective type of media.	Students rehearse their recreation.	Students perform in front of the class.
Speaking Interaction	Students prepare to role-play based on their respective type of media.	Students share ideas with their peers while in their role-play persona.	Students share the most relevant ideas with the rest of the class.
Speaking Production	Students brainstorm ideas for a fictional online community.	Students rehearse a presentation based on their ideas.	Students perform in front of the class.

Speaking	Students are divided in two	Students engage in	Students discuss the
Interaction	groups that represent each side	a debate.	ideas shared through
	of a debate.		the debate.
Speaking	Students reflect on social	Students rehearse a	Students perform in
Production	networks and their connection	presentation to	front of the class.
	with media.	share their ideas	

Intervention Assessment

In order to assess the effectiveness of the implemented action plan a new test will be applied to a randomly selected sample equivalent to 30% of the participants. In this test, each selected participant will describe their favorite film, streaming show, song or video game. Each participant will count with five to ten minutes to perform. The test will be evaluated through an analytic rubric that includes four indicators of learning and three achievement levels: not achieved (0 points), in process (1 point) and achieved (3 points). It will also contain a space for further comments on the observed performance. This rubric as well as the topic for the test are based taking into account the official ninth grade guide from the Ministerio de Educación Pública (MEP), Costa Rica's governmental institution in charge of public education. Once applied, the grades obtained from the rubrics will be presented in the form of a graphic, followed by a description or summary of the details annotated in the comments section of the rubric.

This chapter has described the methodology, design and approach that constitute the foundation of this project. These components are key in order to understand how this research will tackle the subject at hand in the next chapter which will present the analysis of the data and the observed findings

Chapter 4

Findings

Following the purpose of this research, enhancing the students' speaking abilities through activities directly related to their out-of-class interests, this chapter summarizes the results obtained by the implementation of the action plan layered out in the previous chapter. This presentation of the findings includes the pre-test designed to diagnose the state of the participants' speaking skill, the post-test applied after the different implementations, and a comparative analysis of these results to assess the effectiveness of the action plan.

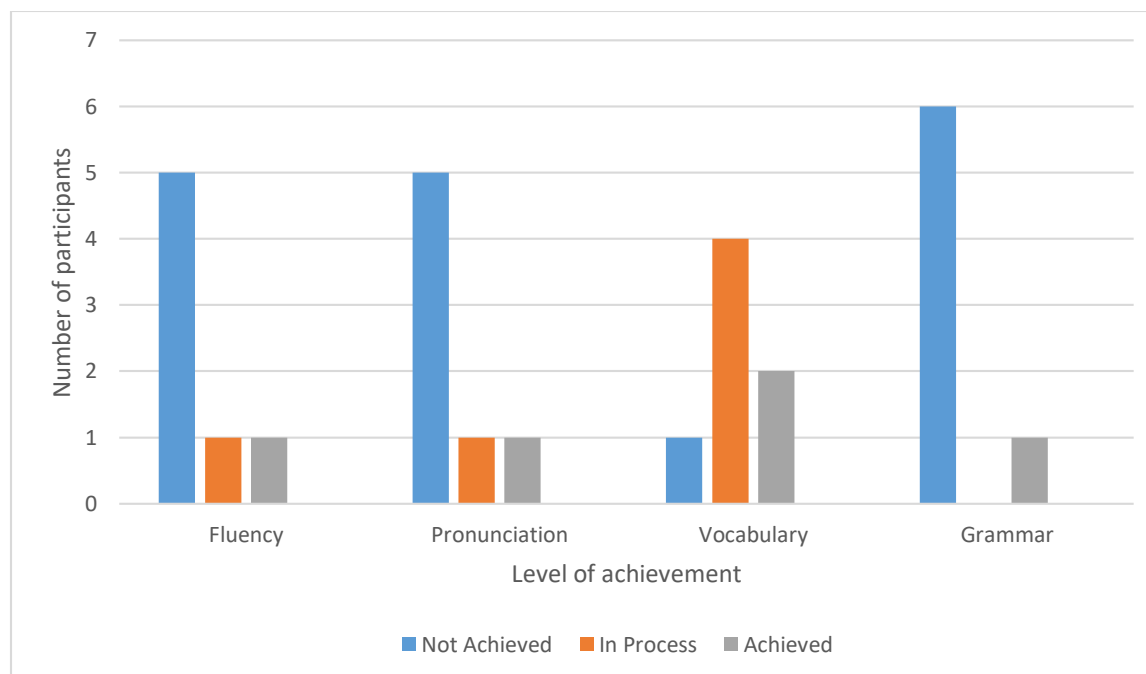
Pre-test Results

A test was applied in order to diagnose the speaking abilities of the participants. This test consisted of an impromptu or lightning presentation in which each of the seven participants from the selected sample (30% of the twenty-four participants) described their favorite film, streaming show, song or video game. Each participant had five to ten minutes to perform. The test was evaluated through an analytic rubric that includes four indicators of learning and three achievement levels: not achieved (0 points), in process (1 point) and achieved (3 points).

The summative results are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Pre-test results



Note. Classification of participants based on their scores on each of the four indicators of learning.

As shown in the graph, the majority of the participants did not achieve the expected level of fluency, pronunciation and grammar. Only one student excelled in those three indicators while another one received an intermediate score in two of them: fluency and pronunciation. On the other hand, most of the participants showed a good level when it comes to vocabulary with four of them sitting at an intermediate level and two at the highest score. It is important to note that the one student who did not achieve the expected level in vocabulary obtained the same result in the remaining indicators.

Alongside the rubric, a comment section was included in order to gather more descriptive details on the participants' performance. Several pieces of information from these notes are key to complement the discussion on the results. First of all, the student who excelled in every indicator mentioned that she is studying the language at home with a relative who is a proficient

speaker. Furthermore, the participant who consistently obtained an intermediate score in three of the indicators (fluency, pronunciation and vocabulary) shared his experience learning the language informally through the media he consumes. He claims this media has provided him with most of the vocabulary and has made him feel more comfortable when trying to communicate in English. Nevertheless, most sentences he produced were flawed in terms of grammar structure hence his score for that indicator. Finally, the rest of the participants struggled equally to carry out their performances. They were able to come up with the words to describe their answers but had many issues forming complete and grammatically correct sentences as well as achieving the correct pronunciation of most of those words.

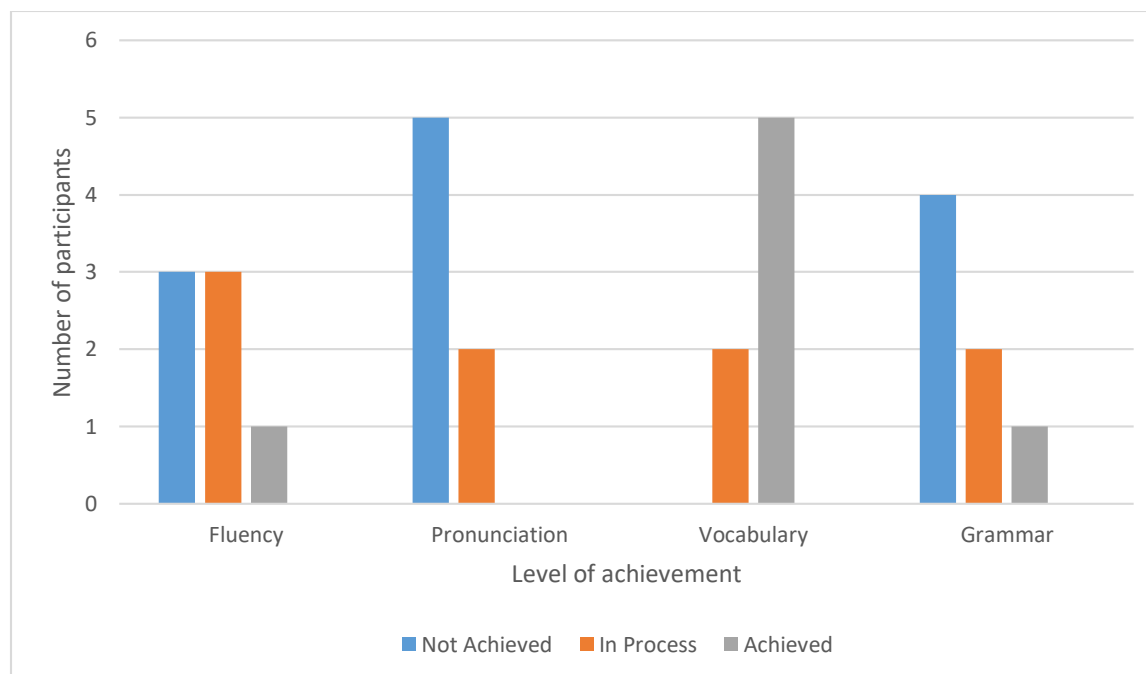
Post-test Results

After completing the implementations from the action plan, a test was applied in order to assess the level of improvement in the speaking abilities of the participants. This test consisted of an impromptu or lightning presentation in which each of the seven participants from the selected sample (30% of the twenty-four participants) described their favorite film, streaming show, song or video game. Each participant had five to ten minutes to perform. The test was evaluated through an analytic rubric that includes four indicators of learning and three achievement levels: not achieved (0 points), in process (1 point) and achieved (3 points).

The summative results are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Post-test results



Note. Classification of participants based on their scores on each of the four indicators of learning.

Figure 2 shows that most participants struggled with fluency, pronunciation and grammar. In the case of fluency, only one student demonstrated the expected level while the rest were split equally in the “not achieved” and “in process” categories. The graph also shows that none of the participants excelled in pronunciation. On the contrary, the majority of them did not achieve the expected level in that category. On the other hand, the results in vocabulary were more positive as none of the participants received a negative assessment; however, it is important to point out that most of them are still in process of achieving the expected level. Finally, only one participant demonstrated a high level of achievement in regards to grammar while the majority of the group are part of the “not achieved” category.

From the comment section on the rubric, it is relevant to note that many of the participants referred back to words or phrases that were taught during the implementations.

Comparative Analysis of Results

The data obtained from both tests were subjected to a comparative analysis that is summarized in Figure 3, Figure 4, Figure 5 and Figure 6.

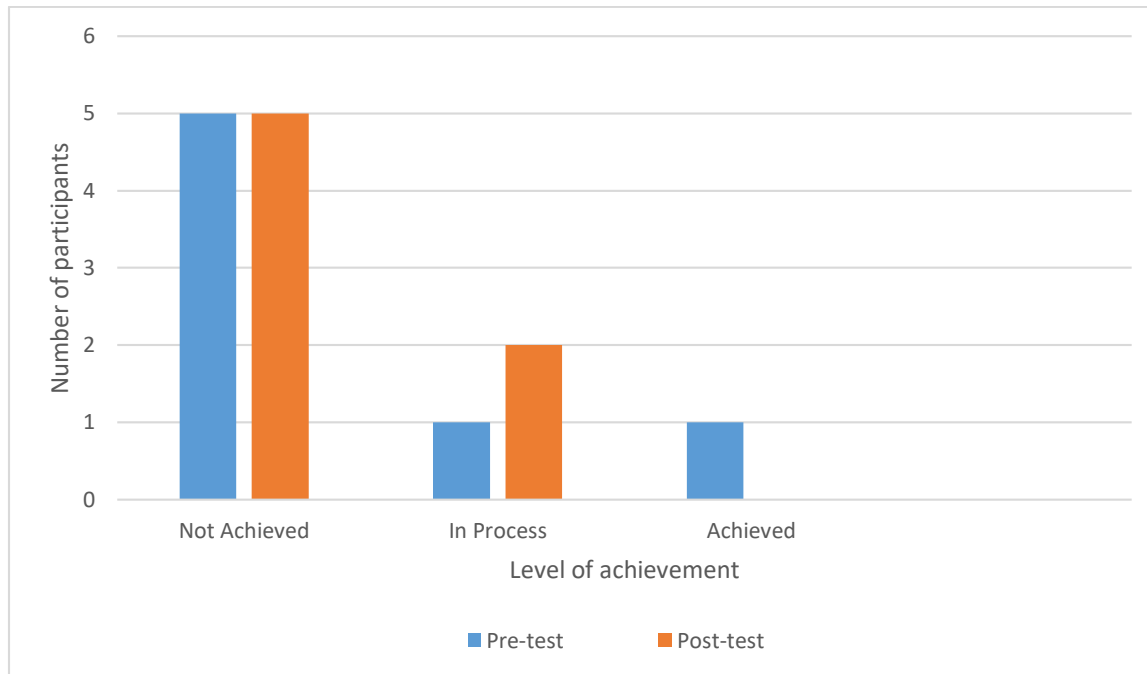
Figure 3

Pre-test and Post-test Fluency Results



Note. Comparison between the pre-test and post-test results in the area of fluency.

This first comparative graph shows that a slight improvement in fluency. Even though the number of students that achieved the expected level remained the same, the number of them with a neutral assessment increased.

Figure 4*Pre-test and Post-test Pronunciation Results*

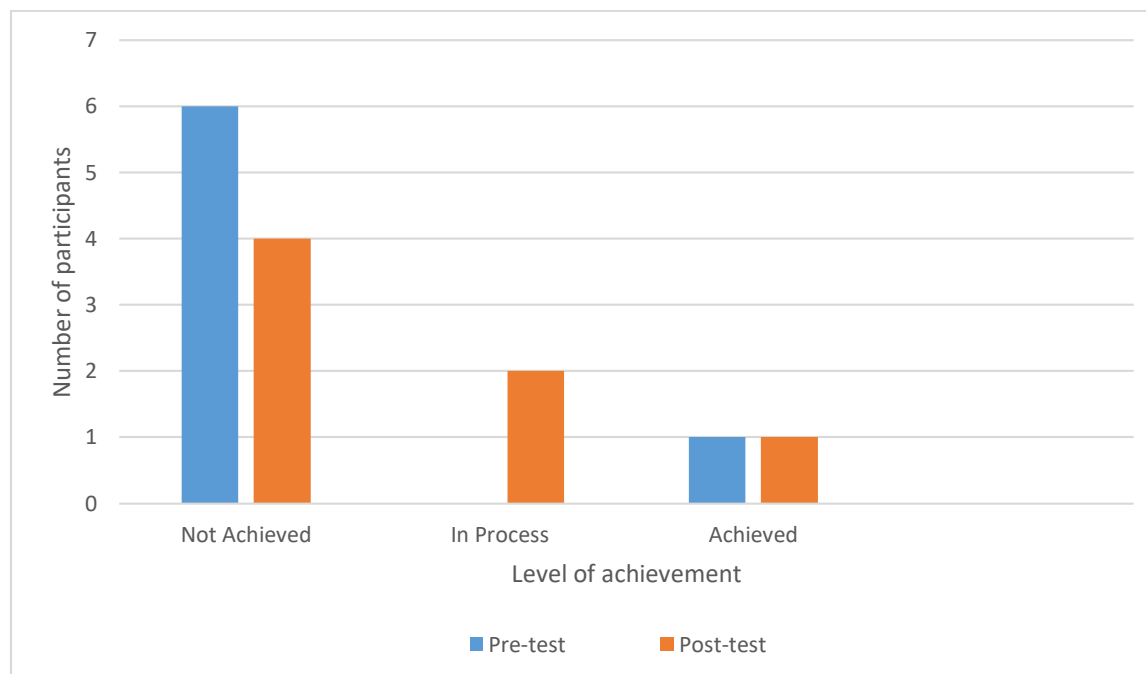
Note. Comparison between the pre-test and post-test results in the area of pronunciation.

When it comes to pronunciation, the results were mostly similar. Both tests had the same amount of participants in the “not achieved” category while the remaining categories were only one participant away from each other. The post-test had more participants with a neutral assessment than the pre-test, but it did not have any student with a positive assessment. It is important to note that the one student who achieved the expected level in the pre-test shared that she studies the language at home with a relative who is a proficient speaker, and that this student was not part of the sample for the post-test.

Figure 5*Pre-test and Post-test Vocabulary Results*

Note. Comparison between the pre-test and post-test results in the area of vocabulary.

As seen in figure 5, vocabulary showed the most notable level of improvement. In the post-test, the number of students in the “not achieved” and “in process” categories decreased while the number of them with a positive assessment increased a 150%. With these results, vocabulary became the only area in which the majority of participants reached the highest level of achievement.

Figure 6*Pre-test and Post-test Grammar Results*

Note. Comparison between the pre-test and post-test results in the area of grammar.

In the area of grammar, the level of improvement as showed in figure 6 was moderate. The difference lies in how more participants reached an intermediate level of achievement while less of them received a negative assessment. The amount of students that achieved the expected level remained the same, but it is important once again to understand that the pre-test involved a participant who studies the language out of class with a proficient speaker while the post-test did not.

This chapter has summarized and compared the results gathered from the pre-test and the post-test. In general, the post-test showed improvement in fluency, vocabulary and grammar while pronunciation remained in a similar level.

Chapter 5

Reflections

After completing the research, it is possible to reflect on most relevant aspects of the experience. First of all, the project was a great opportunity to comprehend the reality of teaching English in a rural public high school in which students perceive English mostly as a tool for their professional future as they themselves expressed. The research also provided insight on how to work on improvements within the limits of the official guides and curriculum. The implementations from the action plan were successfully adapted to such guidelines, but the fact that they were just a fragment of the class impacted the pacing and the consistency. The level of engagement showed by the participants in the first sessions was moderate, but it increased gradually each subsequent implementation. Some students shared that they liked the flexibility of the activities in terms of visual aids and support materials which may be one of the reasons that contributed to their engagement. The participants showed some issues when trying to pronounce some of the vocabulary related to the activities. This situation may be connected with a lack of passive input as the students shared that their teacher would not always speak in English and struggled herself to pronounce some of those very same words.

Overall, the research was a smooth experience with various learning opportunities for everyone involved, but its completion left the impression that it should be replicated with a wider scope and with a more complex action plan.

Plan for further action

Even though this project is certainly focused on enhancing the speaking skill, the experience acquired during its implementation points towards the need to incorporate some of

the other skills in the action plan. For example, adding passive input in the form of listening activities can help students further familiarize with the pronunciation of the target vocabulary and offer contextualized examples on how to use it in a sentence. Nevertheless, these activities from the other skills should be kept simple and always serve as support for the speaking practice which is the primary aspect of the research. Following this line of thought, it would be better for the action plan to cover an entire class instead of just the speaking segments. This change would positively impact the pacing and consistency of the class and would make it possible to design the rest of the segments involving the other skills in such a way they would feed into the speaking activities.

Chapter 6

Conclusions

Outcomes

After the intervention, the participants significantly improved the level of their vocabulary, even reaching the highest level of achievement. However, there was no improvement in pronunciation, and the slight improvements in fluency and grammar were only enough to get students to move from a negative assessment to a neutral one. The implementations connected the students' out-of-class activities to the speaking practice in class by involving their favorite types of media (movies, streaming shows, videogames and music and achieved good levels of engagement from the participants.

Implications

The flexible nature of the implementations from this action plan allowed students to express themselves with more ease and successfully encouraged them to use the speaking practice in class to share details about their out-of-class activities that involve the English language. Since students were constantly producing speech directly related to their particular favorite type of media, they developed more confidence when performing with each subsequent implementation. The familiarity of the topic made the organizing and planning process of each activity easier and allowed the students to recycle ideas they may have discarded in previous performances.

Strengths

Despite the context of the institution, the classroom was well equipped with internet connection, a screen and a projector which allowed students to customize their presentations to their liking. The participants showed always disposition to cooperate with the research and improve their speaking abilities.

Limitations

As most of the students were not at the average level expected from a ninth grader, they required time to review some topics before taking part in the speaking practice. The problem with this situation was that the time allotted for each activity did not leave time for any review or to further practice areas such grammar and pronunciation before the students prepared their performances. The students had also trouble to assimilate the changes in pace and consistency in class since the implementations took place in isolation from the rest of the class which was developed by their teacher.

Chapter 7

Recommendations

To continue building upon the improvement achieved in the speaking abilities through the present action plan, students should keep engaging in conversation about their favorite media both in and out of class. Teachers and high schools should work in creating spaces for such conversations and show interest in the activities students perform in their free time that may involve the English language. By doing that, teachers can come across other topics worth incorporating into their lessons.

It is crucial that teachers reserve a space for review and doubt solving when planning their lessons so that their students can take full advantage of the speaking practice, particularly when students have not received proper teaching according to the level they are at. The idea is to provide students with enough resources before they are asked to perform. This way, they would feel more confident and have an easier time when planning and organizing their presentations.

Teachers must also demonstrate the level of proficiency that their students expect from them. In this research, some participants expressed that they can perceive when their teacher struggles with pronunciation, grammar or any other area of the language which has undermined their confidence in the learning process and has made them lose interest in the class. It is imperative to understand that a great percentage of the passive input comes from the teacher hence the need to always speak English in class and to do it properly.

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Appendixes

Appendix A. Rubric for pre-test and post-test assessment

High School: Liceo Las Mercedes Teacher: Joseph Gómez Sánchez Group: 9-1			
Indicator of Learning	Achievement level		
	Not achieved 1	In process 2	Achieved 3
Fluency	Learner carries out the task with hesitation that interferes with the message. Some long pauses to recall meaning.	Learner carries out the task adequately with some hesitation that seldom interferes with the message. Few short pauses to recall meaning.	Learner carries out the task with confidence. Very sporadic short pauses to recall meaning.
Pronunciation	Learner makes constant mistakes in pronunciation. (More than 5 mistakes)	Learner makes occasional mistakes in pronunciation. (3 to 5 mistakes)	Learner makes only a few mistakes in pronunciation. (1 to 2 mistakes)
Vocabulary	Learner struggles to find the appropriate words or phrases to convey the message for most of the presentation.	Learner can find the appropriate words or phrases to convey the message for some parts of the presentation.	Learner can find the appropriate words or phrases to convey the message for most of the presentation.
Grammar	Learner makes constant mistakes in grammar. (More than 5 mistakes)	Learner makes occasional mistakes in grammar. (3 to 5 mistakes)	Learner makes only a few mistakes in grammar. (1 to 2 mistakes)

COMMENTS:

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Appendix B. Worksheet provided for the third implementation

Worksheet #1

Liceo Las Mercedes

Group 9-1

Teacher Joseph Gómez

Instructions: Organize in your respective groups. Your group will be paired with another one. Ask the following questions to the members of the other group and fill this worksheet up with the answers gathered.

1. What is your favorite type of media: movies, streaming shows, music or videogames?
2. What is your favorite genre?
3. How do you access to that media? (internet, TV, radio, etc.)
4. What do your family and friends think about your favorite media?
5. What do you seek when engaging with your favorite media? (fun, excitement, relaxation, reflection, socialization etc.)

Appendix C. Detailed description of each implementation

Assessment Strategy	Pre-task	Task	Post task	Time
SI.1. discuss different things to do for fun.	Students are organized in their respective groups. They think of three main reasons why they enjoy their respective favorite type of media.	Each group is paired with another to share between them the reasons they selected and compare them.	Students are encouraged to share the similarities and differences they noticed in their reasons to pick a favorite type of media.	20 min.
SP.1. describe experiences, events and storytelling related to exercise, sports and games	Students are organized in their respective groups. Each group prepares a role-play based on a talk show in which two students serve as the host and the rest as guests that are part of a project related to their respective type of media as well as to exercise and/or sports.	Each group practices their performance while the teacher checks on each of them.	Each group performs their role-play in front of the class.	30 min.

<p>SI.2. ask and answer questions about experiences, events, past experiences.</p>	<p>Students are organized in their respective groups. Each group receives a worksheet with a series of questions about past experiences when engaging with their favorite type of media.</p>	<p>Each group is paired with another. Each group asks their respective pair the questions on the worksheet and fill it up with the answers gathered.</p>	<p>Teacher selects some members of the groups to share what the answers they obtained from their peers.</p>	<p>25 min</p>
<p>SP.2. describes what is occurring in a film or book.</p>	<p>Students are organized in their respective groups. Each group selects a scene from a film, show, videogame or music video and then prepare a short recreation of it.</p>	<p>Each group practices their performance while the teacher checks on each of them.</p>	<p>Each group performs their scene recreation in front of the class.</p>	<p>30 min.</p>
<p>SI.1. ask for and gives opinions about the latest media, virtual communities, and apps.</p>	<p>Students are organized in their respective groups. Each group role plays as marketing experts for their respective type of media. They need to think about great tips to use</p>	<p>Groups share among them the tips that came up with as if they were part of a social media and</p>	<p>Students are encouraged to share the best tips they received from their peers.</p>	<p>25 min.</p>

	social media to promote their productions	marketing symposium.		
SP.1. describe media, apps, virtual communities and networks.	Students are organized in their respective groups. Each group brainstorms ideas for a fictional fan page they would create to support an artist from their respective type of media.	Each group prepares and practices a short presentation in which they show their fan page to their classmates.	Each group performs their presentation in front of the class.	30 min.
SP.1. describe media, apps, virtual communities and networks.	Students are organized in their respective groups. Each group brainstorms ideas for a fictional fan page they would create to support an artist from their respective type of media.	Each group prepares and practices a short presentation in which they show their fan page to their classmates.	Each group performs their presentation in front of the class.	30 min.
SI.2. express comments about media, virtual communities, apps and security	Students are organized in their respective groups. Each group is divided in two. One half is assigned to be in favor of artists using their social media at all times and sharing their personal lives with their fans	Each group develops a small debate based on the position they were assigned while the teacher	Teacher selects some members of the groups to share the ideas discussed in	20 min.

	while the other half is assigned to be against it.	checks on each of them.		
SP.2. describe experiences with media, apps, virtual communities and networks.	Students are organized in their respective groups. Each group thinks of how social media, apps and virtual communities have impacted their engagement with their favorite type of media. Then, they prepare some examples and ideas to share with the class	Each group practices their presentation while the teacher checks on each of them.	Each group performs their presentation in front of the class.	30 min.