Improving speaking skill using the speaking practice tool Spacedeck[1]

Mejorando la habilidad oral usando la herramienta de práctica oral Spacedeck

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ABSTRACT

Thanks to the work that the ILO has been carrying out to promote social justice in all work environments, the number of organizations that allow the inclusion of certain levels of disability within their personal processes, guaranteeing access and adaptability of jobs for an adequate development of work activities based on their strengths, for this reason, this research intends to carry out a systematic review about the labor inclusion of people in a disability condition. The work developed corresponds to a qualitative approach of a descriptive nature, because the results presented will be based on the contributions and findings found in 15 articles obtained from the Redalyc, Scielo and Scopus databases. Results A search was made using bibliographic managers, in the initial search of articles 120 were found and after eliminating according to inclusion and exclusion criteria, of which 15 articles were finally found, after the investigation it is concluded that the labor inclusion is a factor that tends to the improvement of the productivity in the organizations and the loyalty of the workers in condition of disability

key words: Spacedeck, speaking skill, ICT, communication

RESUMEN

La habilidad de hablar es la más difícil de enseñar, dar seguimiento y evaluar. Este trabajo está orientado a analizar las dificultades asociadas al desarrollo de esta habilidad en el Centro de Idiomas de la Universidad Católica y usar TICs para propósitos de mejora y práctica del uso del idioma inglés en forma oral. La metodología usada fue de evaluación investigativa. Para encontrar las dificultades asociadas al desarrollo del uso de inglés en forma verbal, 201 estudiantes y 17 profesores fueron encuestados y se llevaron a cabo 5 entrevistas a 5 docentes. La información fue analizada y cuantificada para revelar algunas dificultades en el desarrollo de la habilidad oral. La aplicación

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multimedia llamada Spacedeck fue usada para desarrollar una herramienta práctica. Con esta aplicación los estudiantes pueden trabajar desde sus casas, colaborar, y corregir con otros estudiantes para completar cualquier actividad asignada por el profesor usando archivos, fotos, videos y más.
Palabras clave: Spacedeck, habilidad oral, ICT, comunicación

1. Introducción

Most of the students from Catholic University with the exception of few groups must complete six levels of English at the Language Center that has an equivalent of a B1 level in the Common European Framework in order to graduate. Teachers and students face difficulties related to speaking skills and it is necessary to find the feasibility of implementing the speaking practice tool Spacedeck for students from levels 1 and 2 and determine the reaction and the willingness towards its use in the teacher's syllabi. Students do not have to learn only inside four walls and technology has opened doors anywhere in the world and at any time to solve some problems at the moment of learning a foreign language. Technology is becoming an efficient medium for finding and using information as part of the learning process.

The objective of this paper is to analyze the difficulties that students and teachers face associated with the development of the speaking skill at the Language Center at Catholic University and use Information Communication Technology (ICT) for the enhancement and practice purposes for speaking.

Checa (2002) and Bygate (2009) agree that little attention has been placed on speaking, as it is the most difficult skill to learn. Learners may know all the grammatical rules by heart; however, they are unable to perform in real time and put the rules in practice. The focus on writing, grammar or any other area of writing or reading is given much more emphasis than the undervalued skill of speaking and teachers do not distinguish that there is great importance in speed and regularity when speaking. Teachers should pay attention to what is fluency and accuracy that promote competence when it comes to speaking in the target language.

On the other hand, Bradawi (1997), Florez (1998) and Miller (2001) point out that there is a lot of difficulty that teachers and students face related to speaking skills. Previous research demonstrates that difficulties may arise due to the difference between systematic forms of speaking learned and spontaneous speaking. Not only are there problems of this nature, but also psychological, social and linguistic conflicts such as fluency vs accuracy, lack of confidence and pronunciation. Being able to decipher what problems related to speaking are within the teacher's classroom is essential to be able to tackle them one by one until oral communication develops.

If more attention is paid to speaking skill, students that attend to the English Language Center at UCSG could feel more confident and this attitude can promote competence at the moment of communicating in the target language. Ellis (2002) says that teachers should also pay attention to what fluency and accuracy is and focus on authentic and functional language where learners are in control and they do communicative tasks through exchanging information and working collaboratively.

English is the dominant language when it comes to technology. Navdal (2007) says that now that most students enjoy being online, they are somehow forced to learn English because most of instructions,

internet texts and messages are in English. Therefore, technological tools can open up an entire new world of teaching and learning environments. According to Claudia, Todesco and Steil (2004) It can influence the student's motivation, critical thinking, autonomy and more.

Knowing the problems related to speaking and the indirect approach, Information Communication Technology (ICT) can greatly aid in both of these matters and enhance student speaking skill to give rise to development. The world is increasingly becoming digital. Young people are an online population where they connect, communicate, access data and spend most of their time. They do all sorts of activities online related to all aspects of life including work, socialization, reading the news, and getting updated on information in general. They also entertain themselves through the internet, with videos, podcasts, social media, etc.

To be able to practice at their own pace at home or in their spare time helps the student feel comfortable with less pressure and more initiative because they are on their own without peer pressure or teacher supervision. Enochsson (2012) in a study on online communities, has shown that everyone can find a comfortable place when it comes to Internet. This means that the shyest people can come to light and still have the opportunity to shine and express themselves by participating online. Although there are projectors, and speakers with one computer in each classroom at Catholic University, there is no use of ICT in which each student gets to participate and practice speaking outside of class hours and have controlled assessment by the teacher.

Education Scotland (2016) and Ara (2009) mention that connecting technology with education is key to learning. Students become motivated and engaged when these two are related. Students need to learn by fun activities other than traditional learning methods that lead them to halt their learning rather than enabling it. Therefore, it is a good idea to combine technology with speaking to overcome difficulties that halt speaking development and to increase students' engagement and willingness to speak and communicate which is the main issue especially for beginner levels. It is crucial to tackle this when students begin to learn the language so that they become familiar and gain confidence to overcome any difficulty and gain fluency with accuracy for the levels to come.

Inan and Lowther (2010) indicate that Information Communication Technology does not only involve the use of devices such as desktop computers, laptops, speakers, or Internet for instructional purposes. It refers to the use of technology which must be prepared, ready for delivery and has to have purpose to become a learning tool for students. Vandewaeterea and Desmet (2009), emphasize that it is also demonstrated that ICT can enhance foreign and second language learning. EFL books all have CDs with interactive content and websites that provide games, additional exercises, and even videos with language learning information.

This information will be useful for teachers working at the Language Center at Catholic University because they will have the opportunity to help students enhance and develop their speaking abilities not only inside the classroom but outside as well. They can use their imagination to create new speaking activities having limitless online resources. Furthermore, they can assess students instantly and have knowledge on student participation. Students will feel free to express themselves with ease and comfort from their own homes. They will be able to interact with other students at the same time and give and receive instant feedback. They will learn how to work "together" in an online community and collaborate.

Navdal (2007) refers that English is the dominant language when it comes to technology. Now that most students enjoy being online, they are somehow forced to learn English because most of instructions, internet texts and messages are in English. Therefore, according to Claudia, Todesco and Steil (2004) technological tools can open up an entire new world of teaching and learning environments. It can influence the student's motivation, critical thinking, autonomy and more

To ignore the opportunities given by technology to help solve difficulties such as learning how to speak English would be detrimental. Therefore, this article is a valuable tool that will help develop students' speaking skills outside class hours with the help of technology and the teacher will be able to get closer and closer to the aim of making students communicate verbally.

2. Materiales y métodos

At the Language Center at the Catholic University of Santiago de Guayaquil, students have three hours of English every week for a semester and each semester is one level of the six they must complete in order to obtain a B1 level in the Common European Framework. Having stablished the situation the groups to be studied are the students and teachers of the aforementioned Language Center. The most important aspect to be studied is the speaking skill. It is necessary to mention that it was required to analyze what the difficulties teachers and students face related to this skill. Other variable is the Spacedeck technological tool.

The first step to do the study is to define the universe and the population. The universe is formed by 17 teachers and 1300 students from the Language Center at Catholic University of Santiago de Guayaquil. Once the universe is established, the sample size of the population used in this study is of 201 students with an error margin of 5% and a confidence level of 90%. The sample size of teachers is all 17 teachers for a survey and 5 teachers for an interview. To be able to get a sample size a formula is used from an online sample size calculator called Raosoft. (http://www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html).

To collect the data, the students were given a survey to complete with the aim to prove that there is difficulty with speaking as a skill. Teachers were also given a survey to demonstrate the difficulties or inhibitions for teachers and students for developing students' speaking skills. This data collection occurred at two different times: before and after showing the technological application called Spacedeck. The representative sample of 201 student surveys and 17 teacher surveys were completed, and 5 teacher interviews were taken to evaluate the feasibility of using Spacedeck as part of the syllabus. The data collection is from semester B 2016 – 2017. Since the aim of the project is not only prove but to improve, evaluation research is the appropriate method to conduct it.

There were two surveys taken, a student survey and a teacher survey. These surveys were completed to be able to point out difficulties related to the speaking skill from student perspective and from teacher perspective. The survey questions were taken from a study called Factors Affecting Students Speaking Performance at Le Thanh Hien High School and a study called An Investigation of the Difficulties Faced by EFL Undergraduates in Speaking Skills. The questions taken from both of these surveys were slightly adapted to fit the purpose of the research.

3. Resultados

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The following are results from the Student Survey of a total of 201 students from levels 1 and 2. The questions of the students' survey were kept in the original language which is Spanish so that there is no confusion or misunderstanding from students because they are in beginning levels of English. It is also included the results of the teachers' survey which questions were in English for logical reasons.

The results presented in the table below correspond to the questions that were related to the objective of the work.

Table #1. Students and teachers' survey

Students'			
Questions	**Results**		
Speaking exercises in class	Always	Frequently	Hardly ever	Never
	43%	47%	9%	1%
Classes focusing on reading and writing	Always	Frequently	Hardly ever	Never
	32%	51%	15%	2%
Students feeling motivated to speak English.	Always	Frequently	Hardly ever	Never
	24%	41%	32%	3%
Students understanding most of the dialogues and content when the teacher speaks in English.	Always	Frequently	Hardly ever	Never
	14%	40%	37%	9%
Using Spanish in class.	Always	Frequently	Hardly ever	Never
	16%	44%	35%	5%
Use of computers to do homework.	Always	Frequently	Hardly ever	Never
	41%	36%	18%	5%
Factors that affect students when speaking in English	Lack of security when speaking			
	Not enough time to prepare			

	Pressure to speak English correctly
	Not enough knowledge about topics for discussion
	Low ability for listening
	Lack of motivitation
Factors that would help for developing speaking skills.	Listen to examples
	Work at home in activities to develop speaking skill
	Having enough time to plan oral activities
	Individual and peer correction using the Internet
	Listening to their own voice to self-correction
	Choosing their own time to practice

Teachers'				
How long teachers devote to teaching speaking in the classroom.	Less than 15 minutes	15-30 minutes	30-45 minutes	45 minutes – 1 hour
	12%	47%	23%	18%
How long teachers devote to oral activities in the classroom	Less than 15 minutes	15-30 minutes	30-45 minutes	45 minutes – 1 hour
	12%	47%	23%	18%

What teachers assess on speaking	Pronunciation
	Accuracy
	Fluency
	Interaction

	Participation
Factors affect students' speaking performance from teacher's point of view	Not enough self-confidence
	Lack of knowledge in general topics
	Using of mother tongue
	Anxiety
	Lack of motivation to speak
	Not enough time for preparation
Problems encountered when teaching speaking	Not enough time because of large number of students
	It is too demanding to attend every student's phonological and linguistic difficulty
	It is difficult to assess and have tangible evidence for feedback
	There are not enough resources, tools, etc.
	It is difficult to plan speaking exercises; it is much less systematic than other skills
Factors that would help for developing speaking skills	Listening to audio models for guidance
	Listening to their voice on their own so they can evaluate themselves
	Doing activities to develop speaking at home
	Receiving individual and group feedback online
	Working with partners via online
	Choose their own time to practice

Results of Teachers' interview

The interviews were done to 5 teachers that work at the Language Center at Catholic University. It had two parts: the first part was done before explaining the web application Spacedeck and the second part was after explaining and showing the use of the web application Spacedeck to the teacher.

Part I Before explaining the web application SPACEDECK to the teacher.

Question 1: Do you always use English during lectures or instructions? Why or why not?

Three teachers responded that they do use English at all times when two other teachers said that they use English and Spanish according to the situation but mainly according to the behavior of students. One teacher mentioned that the ratio they use is around 50-50 because the reality of the students is that 10 students are fluent and 20 are not.

Question 2: How do you encourage speaking in class hours? Is it mandatory for the students to use English at all times inside the classroom?

Teachers mentioned different methods to encourage students such as write useful language on the board from the very beginning of the class so students may point at them easily, mimes, bring material from kindergarten, applauding a positive response, place stickers on work, insist on listening only to English responses by saying phrases like "what did you say?" and hinting them to say in English. It is visible that there is no specific methodology involved when it comes to encouraging students to speak and the focus on each teacher may be motivation that may not precisely interpreted as motivation from the point of view of the student, but a traditional way of motivation that they have learned through their own experience in school or typical motivation that is not precisely related to students of that age.

It is mandatory for students to speak in English and three of the five teachers do insist on students to speak English at all times; however, the other two teachers said that the reality is different and students tend to speak Spanish most of the time.

Question 3: What type of speaking activities do you do in your classroom?

The teachers said that dialogues, bring pictures, ask questions, write questions, surveys, vocabulary games, games in general, ask random questions, play role activities, discussions, dramatization, ask questions related to their interests, performance, ask opinions, debates and oral presentations. Most teacher did coincide on asking questions to students which is the traditional way of inciting a response from students. Further than that, there was no speaking activity related to ICT. One teacher said that their focus on dramatization is keen to his teaching class; nonetheless, most teachers do not seem to have a strong response and focus on specific speaking activities. It is also meaningful to mention that two teachers included in their response the lack of time being that they only have three hours per week and the number of students being too high (30 students per class). Therefore, it is difficult to dedicate enough time to speaking activities.

Question 4: Do you follow the book's speaking activities or do you create your own?

All teachers said that they do use the book's speaking activities if it is appropriate with the class that they are given. Otherwise, they create their own material. Two teachers expressed that they bring

their own photocopies. Only one teacher said that they modify the speaking activity to fit for the students' interests.

Question 5: Have you ever sent homework related to speaking? If not, do you think it is possible?

It is evident that teachers have a dubious concept of what homework related to speaking is. All of the homework that they gave as examples to whether they had sent homework related to speaking, had to be performed the next day in class meaning that they were not speaking at home, but writing at home and planning what they were going to say the next day. There is no actual speaking involved because a student may sit at home and simply write the text and not practice at all so that the next day they will simply read what they have written and this is not going to develop their speaking.

Question 6: What do you think about using ICT for education?

The concept of ICT was not part of the knowledge of most of the teachers when they had to answer to the question of what they think about using Information Communication Technology for education. One teacher thought that courses paid online is ICT itself. Another teacher said that it is really necessary; nonetheless, they mentioned bringing copies which demonstrates that they have no knowledge of what ICT is. Another teacher said that they do not use it at all. One teacher did mention that they do not like to depend on technology because of possible black outs, and that they prefer the traditional way of teaching. Overall, they said that it is important and are open to it without having much knowledge on what the concept is and how they may use it.

Question 7: Do you use any technology in your classes? What resources do you use and how?

Teachers responded to the question of what technology they use in class: overhead projector, digital format of books, CDs and websites without really specifying a specific tool or type of activity they do in a specific website. Another teacher mentioned that they do not use technology at all when it comes to speaking. The most that they use is to bring pictures and make them predict. Another teacher logs in to the website related to the book and plays videos, listening sections, and virtual books. It is evident that teachers do not have much knowledge on all the resources that are available on the internet and one teacher even mentioned that they do not use ICT because there is no computer lab.

Part II After explaining and showing the use of the web application Spacedeck to the teacher.

Question 1: Have you ever used or heard of Spacedeck? Or any other tool that is similar?

All of the teachers have never used Spacedeck, nor have they heard of any other similar tool. They mentioned tools such as an application called Charades, Oxford Series Platform where the teacher may receive scores and grades; however, he did this in another institution, and Itools. Most teachers were hesitant and took a long time to remember any technological tool or even remember the names of technological tools they have heard which demonstrates that they do not use them at all or frequently.

Question 2: What feature of the tool caught your attention the most?

Teachers mentioned some of the features from Spacedeck that caught their attention the most such as visual images and color, being able to upload any kind of information specially videos, and being able to share videos and audio recordings. One teacher mentioned the thought of how far they can

go with this tool in terms of level. Somehow it demonstrates that teachers are not familiar with the common features of technology such as videos, audios or even colors.

Question 3: What feature of the tool is the most useful for you?

One teacher mentioned the limited time they have in class and how this could help them by making students practice at home, and improve their pronunciation. Another teacher mentioned that it engages the student's attention for its colors while another teacher mentioned that they may upload any kind of information such as links. It was interesting how a teacher mentioned that they might be able to use the program to teach Spanish to foreigners. Only one teacher mentioned the interaction students may have with one another. Through these answers, it was perceived that most teachers did not fully realize the power of working at home and being able to talk with other students at the same time and practice speaking outside class hours. They were not fully aware of the potential change it could bring nor the features that actually standout and are different from what they use daily when teaching.

Question 4: How long do you think it will take you to become familiarized with the tool?

To this question, most teachers responded that they were not really familiarized with technology. However, it was surprising to hear that some said three hours, a few hours, a few days. While two people said, it might take a long time without giving a specific time span and most said that they would have to go home and see what the program is exactly so that they would have more notion on how long it would take them to be completely familiarized with the tool.

Question 5: Do you think students will be willing or reluctant to use the tool? Why?

Four teachers said willing because students are interested in technology and it will be something new for them. One teacher specified a percentage saying that 70% would be willing and a 30% not because they do not have smartphones. Even though a smartphone is not the only recording device, it is an additional information that is interesting to know to see at what level students are familiar with technology. Another interesting point a teacher mentioned is that students use technology every day and since they do it every day there is a high chance that they will be willing to try this tool.

Question 6: Do you think there are benefits to the use of this tool within your class?

Teachers said it would help save time since they do not have to listen to thirty students within the amount of class hours, they could do it at home and still be able to listen to them. Two teachers mentioned that first they would have to make students be familiarized with the tool and then they might use it at home but not in class because they do not have computers in class. Another teacher mentioned that it would make her class different because it would be something new and engaging for students. However, a teacher expressed a contrasting thought that it could benefit because he would communicate with the students in their world using their type of tools, but they might be tired of the internet which is common and might even enjoy a traditional class of speaking and dramatization may even sound interesting to them.

Question 7: What are the difficulties or drawbacks on using this tool?

Some of the difficulties and drawbacks on using the application are to identify that students are honestly doing the homework on their own instead of recording the voice of another student, problems with constant internet connection, convince the professor to use the tool and the difficulties with people who are not tech savvy. According to a teacher, he would like for there to be a workshop showing step by step how to use Spacedeck until the teacher can feel secure to do it himself. Moreover, another teacher said the time it would take her to prepare an activity using the tool to serve a specific purpose.

Question 8: Do you think the combination of the book's speaking activities with the tool is appropriate?

All teachers did think that the combination of the book's speaking activities with the application was appropriate. Some mentioned it to be challenging, and interactive while another teacher said that if they plan it before it will be appropriate. This teacher thinks of using the tool for creating new activities and therefore, talked about planning before time. Another teacher expressed their concern for students who do not have the desire to learn English.

Question 9: Can you think of other ways to use the tool for speaking activities? How?

Most teachers thought differently when it came to answering this question. One teacher said that they could use it in class to project it on their board to elicit from the students, reinforce vocabulary or even introduce new vocabulary. Another teacher said that they would send homework using the tool. Another teacher mentioned again that they wanted to create something similar but in Spanish for another class he has with foreigners who are learning Spanish. Then last but not least, a teacher mentioned to make students record a video about themselves and then classmates may record their voices giving opinions about each other's videos. It is interesting to know that teachers are interested and thinking of ways to use this tool instead of simply answering no.

Question 10: Will you be willing to try the tool and include it in your planning?

All teachers said they would be willing to try the tool and include it in their planning. However, one teacher mentioned that they might use it for upper levels, while another teacher kept insisting on a workshop where teachers will be given the chance to start a Space from zero to creating something themselves with the help of a guide.

At this point, it can be important to mention that further training for some teachers to use the tool with dexterity would be necessary, or at least to do the basic that is to know how to use models of the possible activities that can be made for them.

4. Discusión

The results of the project pointed out the different problems that affect students from developing speaking skill.   The case of students speaking Spanish or being reluctant to use the target language with their peers is a difficulty that teachers face in their classes. It can be important to mention that the classes are too crowded and the number of hours to teach English is not enough to obtain better performance from students. The use of ICT, in this case the multimedia web application called Spacedeck, to develop speaking skill would help students to feel comfortable and self-confident as

they do not have to do it in front of the whole class but for themselves, at their own pace and in a place they are used to. They would not feel pressure to perform well at first moment as they can listen to the information (dialogues, conversations, etc.) as many times as they want.

5. Conclusiones

When students feel it is time to record their own voice and send it to the peers and teachers would make them feel satisfied and confident to speak to other people. They can listen to their own voice on their own so they can auto evaluate. Of course, this happens with time, unfortunately, during a semester there is not enough time to attend every student's phonological and linguistic difficulty.

To develop speaking in places where English is taught only in few hours, students can listen to audio models for guidance and do activities to develop speaking at home using not only Spacedeck but other multimedia web application that are available on the Internet. Teachers should prepare audio models for guidance and encourage students to do activities to develop speaking at home. The technological web application Spacedeck (or others) could grasp teachers' attention and convince them to incorporate the tool within their planning.

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