Fomentar la capacidad de expresión oral en los estudiantes universitarios mediante estrategias de comunicación

Fostering the speaking skill in university learners through communication strategies

Favoriser l'expression orale chez les apprenants universitaires grâce à des stratégies de communication

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Abstract

Speaking in a foreign language can be a vast challenge for most learners, and this is the case of a group of learners in a university setting located in Cartagena. Therefore, this article reports the findings of a pedagogical intervention, which implemented communication strategies to foster university learners' speaking skills. The strategies aimed to reduce learners' reliance on their L1, to strengthen their L2 oral fluency, and to lower their affective filter when performing oral tasks. Twenty-two learners participated in the intervention stage, which consisted of six workshop that were designed including several communication strategies and then implemented. Data collected, in the action stage, displayed that communication strategies had a positive effect on learners' L2 oral proficiency, and suggested that the implementation

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of these strategies and meaningful oral tasks were beneficial to broaden and to refine their lexicon, to improve their fluency, and to lower their affective filter.

Keywords: Affective Filter; Communication Strategies; Fluency; L2 Repertoire; Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) Approach.

Resumen

Hablar en un idioma extranjero puede ser un gran desafío para la mayoría de los estudiantes, y este es el caso de un grupo de estudiantes en un entorno universitario ubicado en la ciudad de Cartagena. Por lo tanto, este artículo reporta los hallazgos de una intervención pedagógica, la cual implementó una serie de estrategias de comunicación para fomentar las habilidades orales de los estudiantes universitarios. Las estrategias tenían como objetivo reducir la dependencia de los alumnos en su primera lengua, fortalecer su fluidez oral en inglés y reducir su filtro afectivo al realizar actividades orales. Veintidós estudiantes participaron en la etapa de intervención, la cual consistió en la implementación de seis talleres que se diseñaron incluyendo varias estrategias de comunicación. Los datos recopilados, en la etapa de acción, mostraron que las estrategias de comunicación tuvieron un efecto positivo en la competencia oral de los estudiantes en el idioma extranjero y sugirieron que la implementación de estas estrategias en compañía de actividades orales significativas fue beneficiosa para ampliar y refinar el léxico de los estudiantes, mejorar su fluidez, y reducir su filtro afectivo.

Palabras Clave: Filtro Afectivo; Estrategias de Comunicación; Fluidez; repertorio en una segunda lengua; Enfoque de Enseñanza del lenguaje a través de tareas.

Introduction

For more than a century, language teaching was mostly devoted to developing linguistic competences – lexical items and forms – with the belief that by doing so, learners would acquire the ability to effectively communicate (Bailey,2005). This approach of teaching progressively changed to one that emphasizes the notion of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972), (Canale & Swain, 1980) in which interaction and meaning were regarded as a distinct feature of grammar knowledge (Savignon, 1991). Then, not only does speaking require a linguistic component but also social skills like adequacy, politeness, formality and the use of strategies to perform effectively despite learners' language weaknesses (Nunan, 2018). In this research project, the researchers considered the speaking skill an immediate need for the EFL learners enrolled in

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the Music program of a private university in Cartagena, since it would give them the opportunity to advance in their professional life and to interact with colleagues in other parts of the world.

A qualitative methodology was used to develop the research proposal, and given the nature of the problem, the researchers opted for the implementation of action research for the pedagogical intervention as an attempt to foster the speaking skill. The proposal was developed in three stages: diagnosis, action, and evaluation. In the first stage, several instruments were applied in order to collect data and to identify the problem. In the action stage, the pedagogical intervention was developed through the implementation of six workshops, and in the evaluation stage, results from the instruments were analyzed in order to assess the scope of this intervention.

Results suggested that the use of oral communication strategies have a positive effect on learners'L2 oral proficiency. Learners found alternatives to deal with a communicative situation, improved their lexical repertoire, and learned how to be resourceful when it came to using it, bettered their fluency, and dealt successfully with emotional factors, which may have hindered their performance in their L2.

Rationale

This study attempted to make contributions in the EFL community as it evidenced the way learners' speaking performance improved. It considered some strategies and tasks that could be used by EFL teachers to foster the speaking performance. In this view, learners are recommended to take advantage of their current lexical knowledge and their partners' scaffolding development and assistance in order for them to better their speech accuracy, fluency, coherence, and lower their affective filter when performing an oral task. In this sense, it is important to highlight the fact that the learning of linguistic and lexical features does not guarantee the master of the speaking skill. However, these features contribute somehow to achieve learners personal, academic, or professional goals. Thus, effective oral communication implies interaction abilities, the skill for learners to know when to talk (turn-taking), and talking in real time – in most cases, with little to none preparation – (Thornbury, 2005).

This research project attempted not only to benefit learners, but also to help the researchers have insights on what the most effective communication strategies and oral task work for fostering the speaking skill. Thence, the results could enrich the researchers´ own practice as language teachers.

In the national context, this project aims to provide EFL teachers with a source of ideas and strategies to be implemented in their L2 classes for improving university learners' speaking skills. In this sense, this project may help learners to develop effective

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oral communicative skills as proposed by MEN (National Ministry of Education) with its "Colombia Bilingüe" project.

Moreover, the results of the study will let EFL teachers reflect about their current teaching practices and make the necessary changes to foster learners' speaking skills. They can resort to a number of approaches, strategies, and tasks, which can be implemented in this regard. The proposal suggests EFL teachers and professors to focus on improving learners' communicative competence, by designing tailored methodologies, strategies, and tasks, which best respond to their very particular needs in their settings.

Finally, by taking into account that this is a research endeavor, it will serve for other researchers to have a brief overview on current practices and inquiry aiming to foster EFL learners' speaking skills. Research is no longer exclusive of specific researchers, book developers, material writers, or methodologists (Bygate, 1987). And now, teachers are much enthusiastic about the importance research has and the impact it causes on their daily teaching practices, and how beneficial it is for teachers, learners, and the community, in general (Castro & López, 2014). Implications of this research will help teachers to gain some knowledge about which tasks and strategies seem to prove beneficial for learners in the development of their speaking skills. Then, teachers can tackle learners' prior knowledge, by adapting strategies and tasks, which best suit their particular needs.

Statement of the Problem

During the implementation of the diagnostic stage, some instruments were administered to know more in depth the strengths and weaknesses of the students related to the EFL process. Observations, learners' surveys, and teacher's interview showed that learners relied on their L1 when they failed to find the right word or structure to get their message across in the L2. They mixed their mother tongue with the target language as a way to compensate for their weakness in the L2. This weakness was also reflected on their difficulties to attain oral fluency like in the case of producing incomplete utterances.

Moreover, it was evident that learners relied on memorization and translation from the L1 to the L2 and vice versa as a means to accomplish language tasks. This information provided evidence of learners' reliance on the L1 whenever they had difficulties, which could be an indicator of poor lexical knowledge that hinders their

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oral skills. In addition, the language elicitation instrument used in the diagnostic stage indicated learners' weaknesses in production of complete speech, accuracy, and fluency.

On the other hand, the results of the data evidenced learners' concern and anxiety when performing oral tasks. They reported having felt dissatisfied with their oral performance.

Considering the results of the diagnostic stage, aspects, such as learners' reliance on their L1, oral fluency, and affective filter were key in the design of actions in order to improve their current learners' situation. The researchers used that data in order to reflect and to devise a pertinent pedagogical intervention, which affected learners' speaking performance positively.

Research Question and Objectives

Research Question

How can communication strategies under the TBLT approach affect college learners' speaking skills in a public university?

Objectives

General Objective

To examine the impact that communication strategies have on college learners' speaking skills.

Specific Objectives

- To describe the effect that communication strategies have on learners' affective filter.

- To determine if communication strategies diminish learners' reliance on their L1.

- To appraise the influence that communication strategies have on learners' L2 oral fluency.

Theoretical Framework

This section considers some theoretical concepts, which contribute to frame the situation for a better description, understanding and analysis. The concepts, which are relevant for this study are briefly described: speaking, speaking activities,

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communication strategies, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), affective filter, oral fluency, and vocabulary

Speaking

Thornbury (2005) describes some of the key features of any speaking act: (a) its linear nature. It means, it is produced word by word, utterance by utterance. (b) Its contingent nature, which explains that speaking depends on the flow of the conversation. That is to say, people should adapt what they say, by taking into account their interlocutor's responses. And (c) its spontaneity, which implies little time to plan what people intend to say. In the EFL context, a speaking activity should then allow learners to develop their oral skills as long as it enhances the fulfillment of the aforementioned features, inherent to a real communication situation. In the learning process, teachers must provide learners with plenty of opportunities to use their linguistic and lexical knowledge in a more functional manner, by having them speak, as much as they can, in class.

In addition, Bygate (1987) acknowledges that language learning is not just a matter of knowing about the language, but how to use it properly, in a given situation. In this sense, there is a distinction between knowledge and skill in a foreign language. Similarly, Chastain (1998) differentiates several components in speaking: grammar knowledge, strategies for communication, sociolinguistic and discourse competence. When the teacher promotes the development of these components, learners can perform meaningful oral traits. By considering these conceptions, the researcher recognizes speaking as a complex skill, which requires that learners know how to react in a real conversational situation supported by their communicative strategies, linguistic knowledge, and awareness of the social interactions involved in the speaking act.

Speaking Activities

Prieto (2007) distinguishes four types of speaking activities, which are used in the classroom setting, namely, performance, controlled, guided, and freer activities. In performance activities, the focus of the activity is on the communicative act rather than the linguistic features of the target language with the premise that linguistic mistakes will disappear as language is practiced. The controlled activities involve repetition to achieve language accuracy. She provides examples of this type (find someone, who carries out tasks, answers questionnaires, and fills in information gap tasks). Guided activities usually involve a model, which learners follow and adapt to their communicative need. These tasks still focus on accuracy and practice on a specific linguistic form. and

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the last type, freer activities, offers a space for creative practice, which aims to fluency development, with less emphasis on the drill of grammar structures.

In addition, Herazo (2010) suggests two activities: to help learners to develop their speaking skills and to make them resemble more like those used in authentic oral production. The former, *survey activities* are based on learners' oral tasks in which they ask questions to their partners in order for them to get some information. In these tasks, learners do not memorize lines or questions. They rather ask questions on the spot as they need some information, by listening up to their partners' answers as they interact. These tasks, as opposed to *script-based exchange* activities, provide a more authentic communication since learners do not know what their partners' answers will be like. Thus, they are actively involved in speaking and listening tasks, not just repeating a script previously learned by heart. The latter relates to *pedagogical conversations,* which are teacher-learner tasks, which enable a contingent and equal interaction. They are not planned conversations. They rather emerge naturally. In this case, either the teacher or learners may initiate the conversation, the role of the teacher is not much of an evaluator, but of a guide, who helps to direct the flow of the conversation, by trying to elicit learners' linguistic competence in the L2 in meaningful encounters. Therefore, in *pedagogical conversations*, L2 teachers focus on communication rather than grammar. As for the Initiation-Response-Follow-up (IRF) approach, it is the L2 teacher, who always initiates a conversation, he waits for learners' response, and he provides them with the necessary feedback.

Communication Strategies

In a broad sense, Oxford (1990) defines strategies as actions, behaviors, steps, and techniques, which students use intentionally for L2 skills improvement. Bachman and Palmer (1996) provide a definition of what is called *strategic competence:* "(…) a set of metacognitive components, or strategies, which can be thought of as higher order executive processes that provide a cognitive management function in language use as well as in other cognitive activities." (p. 70). Moreover, Nakatani's (2005) definition of this term is the capacity of communicating effectively in a process which implies a planning (pre-task), an interaction process (on-task), and a follow up (post-task) in the achievement of a communicative goal.

In this study, the term *strategies* are coined as the intentional use of an array of metacognitive and cognitive actions before, during, and after the oral task, and the application of the linguistic knowledge in a functional manner in order to accomplish an oral communicative goal. In terms of oral communication strategies, Dörnyei (1995)

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divides them into compensatory, time-gaining, and avoidance or reduction strategies. For the purpose of this research, the researcher opted for only compensatory and time-gaining strategies.

Compensatory Strategies

This set of strategies are useful for learners when their linguistic repertoire is limited. In terms of speaking, it is a means of helping learners to keep the flow of a conversation, at the same time that they can learn new vocabulary and expressions as they interact with their interlocutor. (Oxford, 1990)

Appealing for assistance "involves asking someone for help in a conversation by hesitating or explicitly asking for the missing expression. (…) [in this strategy] the learner wants the other person to simply provide what learners does not know, not to explain or clarify" (Oxford, 1990: 95). Learners simply say the first part of the sentence and wait for their partner to complete the sentence, or they ask questions like *how do you say …?*

In the use of **circumlocution or synonym**, the learner either describes or provides examples of the word he wants to convey. For instance, *the thing you use to cut the hair;* or use a word that is close in meaning to the lexical term that the learner does not remember or know. For instance, use *ship* to refer to *sailboat*. (Dörnyei, 1995; Oxford, 1990; Tarone, 1981).

Adjusting or approximating a message involves students altering their output, they omit some information, simplify ideas, or express something that has a similar meaning to what they pretend to say. They also use expressions that are less accurate, as a resource to replace ones they do not know or remember. (Oxford, 1990; Tarone, 1981).

When students **select the topic**, they have the chance to decide on topics that are of their interest and thence they feel more comfortable with; and advantage of this

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strategies is that they can opt for topics that contains vocabulary that is familiar for them. (Oxford, 1990).

Word coining takes place when learners create a new word to convey a word that they do not know. They can also create a new L2 word by using a "supposed rule," for example, use *vegetarianist* for *vegetarian).* (Dörnyei, 1995; Oxford, 1990).

Time-gaining Strategies

These strategies are mainly aimed "to gain time and maintain and to keep the communication channel open at times of difficulty" (Dörnyei, 1995: 58). Within these strategies, the researcher used "**fillers/hesitation devices** - using filling words or gambits to fill pauses and to gain time to think (e.g., *well, now let me see*) -" (Dörnyei, 1995: 58).

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

The pedagogical intervention in this research was framed within the TBLT approach. This approach is characterized by fostering real communication, by involving meaningful tasks, which promote learning, and learner's constant interaction in a naturalistic setting (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). In TBLT, tasks are 'goal oriented,' which means that students need to interact, understand, and negotiate the meaning so that they can successfully achieve them. Besides, tasks also have an outcome, which implies that students do not complete tasks just for the sake of practicing linguistic forms but rather they use language functionally (Willis, 1996).

Considering these key features, TBLT suited the research proposal since this approach embraces activities, which feature situational conversations (giving directions to a stranger/friend, making a phone call to a hotel). Thus, being the perfect setting for introducing oral communicative tasks and strategies, which assist learners in the development of their oral skills.

Furthermore, Willis (1996) distinguishes two phases in TBLT, the pre-task, and the task-cycle. In the pre-task, the teacher introduces the topic and the task students will perform, teacher and students explore the topic and learn vocabulary and expressions that may be helpful to accomplish the task through activities like short word games. In this phase, the author recommends listening to recordings of conversations or reading

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pieces of text, which are related to the task. On the other hand, the task cycle is divided into three subphases: task, planning, and report.

In the task, learners carry out the task in their corresponding groups while the teacher monitors and checks comments on learners' production. Later, in the planning, they prepare a report of what they had done, practice, and polish up what they are going to say. Then, the teacher goes around the class, by giving them some advice and by making suggestions for improvement.

And finally, in the report phase, learners give an oral report of what they did. The teacher gives other learners a purpose to listen, so the teacher can ask other learners to take notes, to make any comments, or to add information about their partners' presentations. The teacher's role is to relate and to summarize all learners' contributions. The teacher's feedback could be either about content or form.

Affective Filter

Krashen (1982) states in his affective filter hypothesis the relationship between affective variables and their effect on language acquisition, by suggesting that learners, who have a high or strong Affective Filter tend to have more difficulties to assimilate input. Thus, they will have a hard time to express their ideas fully, which interferes with an effective communication. This assertion has as main pedagogical implication: a call for teachers to foster a learning atmosphere that lowers learners' Affective Filter so that the learning process results successful.

Moreover, Krashen (1981) distinguishes some categories inherent to the Affective Filter (motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety,) and claims that these feelings have different repercussions in the quality of learners' L2 acquisition.

Finally, Xiaoyan (2009) argues that the concept of Affective Filter can be incorporated in the language teaching setting because it could have a positive impact on learners' learning process. He recommends EFL teachers to create an adequate classroom atmosphere, which helps learners to lower their levels of anxiety, to be tolerant with the mistakes they make since it is inherent to the learning process, as long as communication is not sacrificed. The main idea is to get the message across, where

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both the speaker and the receiver feel satisfied about the message being conveyed in the communicative act.
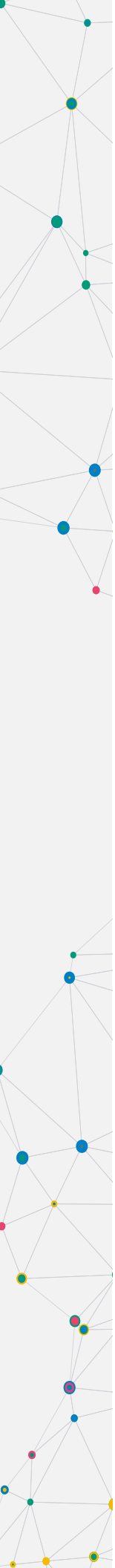
Fluency

Hammerly (1991) considers that the term *fluency* should not only be narrowed down to speaking fast and well. Instead, he insists that in the L2, *fluency* should refer to a fast and smooth communication. However, it does not necessarily imply that learners should produce a completely free grammar errors speech. Regarding this assertion, González (2008) argues that there is a relation between *fluency* and *accuracy*, by exemplifying that an L2 user, who focuses on *fluency*, tends to be less accurate in his speech, and, the other way around, if the learner focuses on grammar accuracy, his fluency tends to hinder his performance. By considering these claims, we should conceive that oral communication involves creativity and spontaneity (Bailey, 2005). Thence, EFL teachers, who aim to foster fluency in their students should allow learners to speak freely, by avoiding emphasis on grammar correctness, as long as learners' grammar mistakes do not compromise meaning.

Moreover, Chambers (1997) distinguishes between *natural* and *unnatural pauses* in L2 learners' speech. On the one hand, it is important to highlight that pause are a natural component in any language, on the other hand, L2 learners make long pauses as an indicator of their limited repertoire. In this order of ideas, teachers should identify whether learners make pauses in their speech because a lack of the L2 vocabulary (unnatural pauses), or their pauses are intentional for their speech (natural pauses.)

Vocabulary

Vocabulary is an essential component of any spoken language, and the researcher considered necessary to define and highlight its relevance in communication. Schmitt (2000), Neuman, and Dwyer (2009) agreed with the idea that learning vocabulary is paramount in oral communication, which, at the same time, involves a bidirectional process of oral productive and reception of the language. Consequently, vocabulary is the core component in language acquisition. Following that idea, the researcher asserts that these units of language provide learners with knowledge in order to convey meaning according to the context when expressing needs and emotions both orally and in writing.

Likewise, Wilkins (1972), states that "without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (p.111). In light of this definition, learners

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need to be constantly exposed to new lexical knowledge in both written and oral forms, to effectively communicate in conversations through speech. They should be able to understand and to utter most of the information they receive in order to ensure better oral performance.

Methodology

This section includes the process of the study which includes with the type of research, participants, methods, and instruments.

Type of Study

Considering the learning situation described in the statement of the problem and the objectives, the researchers used a qualitative approach of enquire, following an action research process. Moreover, as action research is a flexible design that allows the use of triangulation of different methods, the researchers decided on a Mixed Methods design (convergent design) as a means to collect data from different sources: learners, coordinators, and teachers, by having a broader picture of the current situation in the EFL context. Thus, having enough descriptive data gathered from (interviews and observations) that is complemented by qualitative data collection techniques, such as surveys.

Participants

The participants chosen for this study were twenty-two EFL learners, who are part of a Music program in a private university in Cartagena. The sample population was chosen because they were enrolled in a basic level of the English course (A2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference) and they demonstrated a homogeneous level of English proficiency. The sample was made up of eight females and fourteen males, aged 18 to 22 years. They came from similar socioeconomic backgrounds (strata 1 and 2).

Instruments

The instruments and techniques used for data collection in the diagnostic stages were teacher's interview, coordinator's interview, learners' survey, and teacher's

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observation along with diary entries. After gathering the data, the information was triangulated to obtain the most recurrent situations.

In the pedagogical intervention, the researchers devised a set of oral communication tasks and with speaking strategies aimed to enhance learners' speaking skills. Evidence of this process was gathered through direct observations, diary entries, learners' surveys, and assessment rubrics to have richer and deeper insights of learners' opinions and attitudes regarding the speaking skill, and the actions implemented in class.

In Table 1, instruments used in both diagnostic and evaluation stages are listed along with a brief description of their objectives.

Table 1. *Techniques Used in Diagnostic and Evaluation Stages*

Stage	Technique	Objective
Diagnostic	Teacher's Interview	To explore opinions, attitudes, and practices about teaching and perspectives towards learners' skills.
	Coordinator's Interview	To learn about his opinion about teaching, aspects related to the university context, and perspectives of music students.
	Learners' Survey	To become familiar with their FL background, attitudes, perceptions and preferences when learning English.
	Teacher's Observations	To record learners' moves, actions, and interactions in the EFL class.
Evaluation	Learners' Survey	To find out learners' self-perception of their oral performance, their perception towards communication strategies, and feelings towards the speaking tasks.
	Assessment Rubric	To assess learners' speaking performance.
	Teacher's Observations	To record learners' moves (attitudes, behaviors, individual and group work patterns, class participations, and comments) and teacher's moves (instructions, actions, and comments).

Action and Evaluation Stage

During the implementation stage, six workshops were administered with the sample population. For the process, the six communication strategies were alternated, including two strategies in most of them. These strategies were introduced by giving

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an explanation on their use and some examples for their implementation. Table 2 summarizes the topics, objective and strategies applied in each workshop:

In the evaluation stage, the researchers gathered evidence from the six interventions, by using different instruments.

In the journal, some entries of the students' attitudes, behaviors, individual and group work patterns, class participations, and comments were recorded; as well as some of the teachers' actions (instructions, comments, interactions with students). In addition, some reflections and interpretations of these situations observed in the implementation of the workshops were also recorded.

The surveys' objectives were to find out learners' self-perception about their performance in the speaking tasks, their perception towards the implementation of the communication strategies in the workshop, and their feelings towards the speaking tasks.

The rubrics aimed to assess learners' speaking performance in a scale from 0 to 5, taking into account the following criteria: comprehensibility of speech, fluency (coherence and cohesion, continuity and flow of speech), accuracy and appropriateness of vocabulary, and effective use of communication strategies.

Table 2. *Content of Workshops*

| No.	Topic	Objective	Strategies
Workshop 1	Healthy lifestyles	To discuss about healthy lifestyles and to provide suggestions on how to improve healthy habits	Approximation. Appealing for assistance
Workshop 2	Healthy lifestyles (part 2)	To share opinions and experiences related to physical activities or lifestyles	Circumlocution Fillers
Workshop 3	The environment	To discuss about environmental issues To talk about possible solutions for environmental problems To share different points of view about environmental issues around the world and in our country	Word coining Selecting the topic
Workshop 4	Being a wise consumer	To discuss about people's purchasing habits and how it affects our savings To give advice on how to save money To ask, to buy, and to pay for a product	Approximation Circumlocution

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Workshop 5	Who's your favorite artist?	To discuss about the most influential artist in Colombia To talk about your favorite artist's life To share your preferences in music	Fillers Selecting the topic
Workshop 6	Are you into technology?	To talk about your habits when using technology To debate about different issues concerning the use of technology	Word coining

Findings

Figure 1. Displays the codes that were evinced after analyzing the results in all the workshops:

Figure 1

Emerging Codes in the Triangulation Process
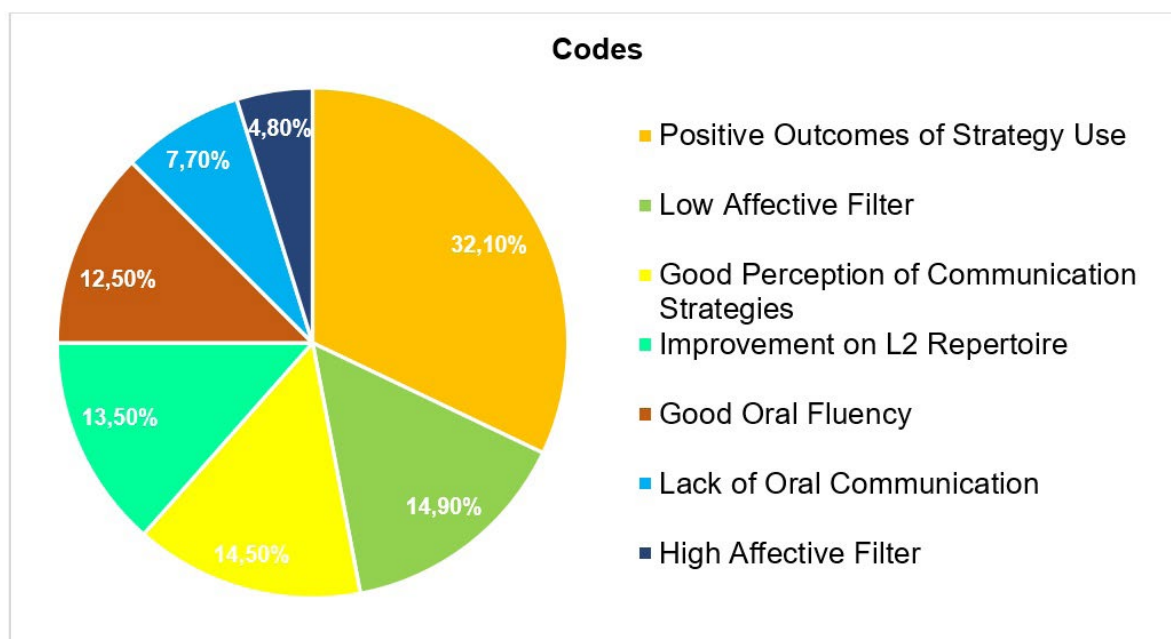
Findings revealed that the learners expanded their vocabulary and tended to reduce their L1 use in the classroom. Their oral production in the L2 improved significantly in terms of fluency and coherence. In that way, they reduced their emotional issues that could affect their oral performance. Thus, the implementation of *communication strategies* was helpful to improve learners' oral performance.

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This section presents the findings from the different variables taken into account in the implementation and evaluation stages:

The Impact of Communication Strategies on Learners' Speaking Performance

The introduction and implementation of *communication strategies* had a positive impact on the overall learners' speaking performance. They showed a significant improvement on their oral speech since they incorporated appropriate communication strategies in their set of language strategies. These helped learners to better their fluency and coherence, to broaden their lexicon, and to be resourceful when using their current vocabulary to tackle problems. These might affect their oral communication processes, as well as those affective factors, which might hinder their oral performance. In addition, learners applied these strategies throughout the workshops, in the speaking tasks, effectively. It was relevant to pinpoint that they recognized the importance of using communication strategies consciously to compensate for any linguistic gaps and to improve their oral production. Thus, they could select the most suitable communication strategies to overcome any drawback, which could interfere with their speech production.

Learners' Affective Domain

Students felt confident, and relaxed during the development of the oral tasks and activities to practice the communication strategies. For instance, the *selecting the topic* strategy allowed them to have control over the topics they wanted to share in the class presentations, thus, they felt confident and at ease when speaking since they had the opportunity to talk about topics that they were familiar with and organize the information accordingly. Besides, strategies like *approximation, fillers,* or *circumlocution* allowed them to repair their communication and maintain their speech, thence, these tools influenced their confidence, since they could deal with difficulties they had in their oral performance. Moreover, students ascribed the positive shift in their affective domain thanks to (a) the type of tasks which usually covered topics they were interested in or related to their professional context, (b) the type of classwork which permitted students learn and find support from their partners' scaffolding, and (c) the positive classroom environment fostered by teachers and students' traits.

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Learners' L2 Lexicon.

Communication strategies helped students broaden, refine their L2 vocabulary, and use it resourcefully to coin words, use synonyms, or describe objects or actions when they did not know or remember a target word; thus, they could continue their speech despite disregarding some vocabulary they needed to complete their utterances. Through the workshops, they learned to use the *approximation, circumlocution,* and *word coining* strategies to compensate for their lack of L2 vocabulary and avoid using the mother tongue when they encountered drawbacks in their communication. It was noted that some students used L1 at the beginning of the intervention, however students progressively avoided it in the subsequent tasks; as a result, they were able to complete oral tasks dispensing with the use of the L1.

Learners' Fluency and Coherence.

Through the implementation of the *communication strategies* students made a significant progress regarding their oral fluency. Learners were able to produce coherent, and fluent speech, and express complete ideas. Students' progress was evident since they managed with issues that affected their oral performance -long pauses, constant hesitation, and word repetition-. They relied on the use of *fillers, approximation, and appealing for assistance* strategies to better and maintain the flow of their speech. Consequently, these strategies provided lexical alternatives, thinking time, and reliance on students' help as tools to avoid breaks in their communication and abrupt pauses in their speech.

Conclusions

In this section, conclusions and pedagogical implications are stated for EFL teachers, researchers, and those interested in implementing actions in order to improve learners' oral skills in the classroom setting.

Communication strategies prove to have positive effects on learners' overall speaking skills. An adequate combination of these strategies along with certain oral tasks allow L2 learners to use it in a more spontaneous manner, by requiring little or no previous preparation. This assertion is supported by the most recurrent codes in the evaluation stage, *Positive Outcomes of Strategy Use, Low Affective Filter,* and *Improvement on L2 Repertoire.* For instance, *picture descriptions, discussion cards,* and *surveys* are tasks, which

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imply learners dealing with communication in real time, by using their immediate lexical knowledge and speaking skills in an impromptu speech.

The Impact of Communication strategies on Learners' Affective Domain

The use of *communication strategies* has benefits not only for learners' performance, but also for their feelings and attitudes towards the oral tasks that they perform. In so doing, EFL learners raise their confidence and lower their Affective Filter when performing speaking tasks due to the use of different communication strategies, such as *selecting the topic, fillers, approximation, and circumlocution*.

Furthermore, teachers should provide learners the opportunity to select a topic based on their personal or professional interests in developing speaking tasks. This contributes to the enjoyment of the task itself, and it gives learners a sense of confidence, which, at the same time, influences on their ability to provide more organize and richer oral speeches.

Moreover, the use of strategies like *approximation, fillers,* or *circumlocution* also have a positive influence in their confidence and levels of anxiety; the fact that learners acknowledge they have tools to maintain a conversation helps them to reduce their affective filters since they have the ability to hold a conversation and, in case students have any difficulties, they can deal these drawbacks by using communication strategies as a means to compensate for some linguistic gaps.

Likewise, the strategy *appealing for assistance* is helpful to handle with issues such as anxiety and shyness. In this sense, this strategy allows students to be scaffolded by their partners whenever they have any problem with their oral performance and, at the same time, it promotes interaction among students, creating a positive and collaborative classroom climate.

All in all, the use of communication strategies is associated with a shift in learners' affective domain and their mindset towards the oral tasks in the L2. They become more confident because of their partners' support and the tools that the strategies provide them to retrieve vocabulary and repair their lacks in oral communication.

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Improvement on L2 Lexicon

The strategies *approximation, circumlocution,* and *word coining* are helpful for learners to improve and broaden their L2 repertoire. Students who incorporate these strategies, have the advantage to use their lexicon resourcefully to convey words they still disregard and reduce the L1 use, thus, they avoid failures and hold their speech.

These strategies are an alternative to compensate for gaps in L2 vocabulary, to do so, students learn how to use their available vocabulary to convey meaning and complete their ideas successfully. However, it is recommended to introduce these strategies to learners who have a sufficient lexical knowledge (A2 level of English proficiency and up) since a good amount of vocabulary is necessary to successfully use these communication strategies to craft and convey the meaning of the target words.

In addition, by using the communication strategies, students progressively dispense the L1 use in oral tasks. When they have drawbacks, the use *approximation* was effective to use similar words when they disregard a target word, *circumlocution* helps them to convey the meaning of a word by describing its more remarkable features, and *word coining* allow leaners to craft words. All these benefits from communication strategies reduce significantly their reliance on L1. Considering these effects, if teachers implement these strategies, students can reduce significantly their L1 use and communicate effectively as they are learning new vocabulary.

The effect of Communication Strategies on Oral Fluency and Coherence

In terms of fluency, students can benefit from the use of communication strategies to foster this ability. Strategies, such as *fillers, approximation* and *appealing for assistant* are effective to foster this aspect; their use facilitates students' production of a speech that is coherent, connected, and smooth.

Firstly, students use *fillers* as a way of avoiding abrupt breaks in their speech since they gain thinking time to organize their ideas and recall the target words that they need to complete their utterances. By doing these actions, learners can reduce long pauses in their speech and maintain the attention of the audience. Similarly, the use *of approximation* and *appealing for assistance* are beneficial for students to have more lexical alternatives and partners' support when trying to convey an idea with their interlocutors, thus, both strategies help them to produce a complete and coherent speech. In addition, these strategies help them avoid problems that may affect their

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oral performance, namely, long pauses, hesitation, and word repetitions; therefore, implementation of these communication strategies is suggested for teachers who aim to tackle these issues as a means to produce a coherent and fluent discourse.

The Implementation of a TBLT Approach to Foster Oral Proficiency

The use of a TBLT approach is advisable to improve learners' speaking skill. Students feel less stressed when grammar accuracy is not the goal of communication. The dynamics of the tasks and the assessment criteria are emphasized in the communicative and functional aspects of the speaking, rather than the grammar aspects. These decisions are constructive for learners' affective filters since they feel calm, unconcerned, and confident when performing oral tasks without any pressure for producing a free grammar errors speech.

Moreover, TBLT results in an effective shift in their affective domain thanks to (a) the type of tasks which usually covered topics they were interested in or related to their professional context, and (b) the type of classwork which permits students learn and find support from their partners' scaffolding.

In addition, by seizing they key features of TBLT like real communication, meaningfulness, and goal-oriented tasks (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Willis, 1996,) students have the opportunity to better their fluency and vocabulary since they focus on achieving successfully a task rather than producing an accurate speech, allowing them to practice freely and negotiate meaning to reach the goal of the task. All in all, TBLT is a suitable approach to introduce and to practice communication strategies leading to learners' improvement speaking skills.

Limitations of the Study and Call for Further Research

On the other hand, along the action stage, there were some limitations that are necessary to acknowledge for the purpose of informing teachers and researchers who intend to replicate or adapt this study. For instance, some oral tasks required teachers to prepare students beforehand in order for them to achieve the goals. Additionally, students tended to over rely on their notes when performing role plays and oral presentations tasks, causing a lack of spontaneity in their speech. In this case, the researchers suggest teachers and researchers, who are interested in working on the improvement of speaking skills to consider the importance of exploring varied type of oral strategies and tasks to improve specific components of the oral skill. That means,

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trying oral strategies that intend to develop fluency, vocabulary use, and pronunciation, so that there is spontaneous and authentic communication.

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