

GROUP DISCUSSIONS FOR SPEAKING FLUENCY

Enhancing EFL Learners speaking Fluency Through Group Discussions

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Abstract

This action research study reports the impact that the design and implementation of six worksheets, based on group discussions, had in the speaking fluency development of a group of 14 intermediate-English level students from a languages institute in Bogotá, Colombia. The instruments used for data collection were students' artifacts, field notes, audio recordings, and focus group interviews. The findings suggested that as the materials were designed and implemented taking into consideration students' particularities, they encompassed needs and provided plenty of opportunities to use language meaningfully. It was also concluded that the contextualized materials developed for the study impacted students' learning process and facilitated teacher's work. As the results indicated, the worksheets enabled students to communicate ideas and thoughts successfully, despite any limitation related to English language proficiency and provided them with the necessary confidence to participate in the group discussions. The results also showed that group discussions helped students to develop their speaking fluency and to focus on meaning rather than on the form of the language.

Keywords: materials development, group discussions, speaking fluency

Resumen

Este estudio de investigación acción reporta el impacto del diseño e implementación de seis guías de trabajo basadas en discusiones grupales en el desarrollo de la fluidez oral de un grupo de 14 estudiantes de nivel intermedio de inglés en un instituto de idiomas en Bogotá, Colombia. Los instrumentos utilizados para la recolección de datos fueron material de los estudiantes, notas de campo, grabaciones de audio y entrevistas a grupos focales. Los hallazgos sugieren que debido a que los materiales fueron diseñados e implementados teniendo en cuenta las particularidades de los estudiantes, se ajustaron a las necesidades de los estudiantes y les brindaron oportunidades para utilizar el lenguaje de manera significativa. De igual forma, se concluyó que el desarrollo de materiales contextualizados impactó el proceso de aprendizaje de los estudiantes y facilitó el trabajo de la docente. Asimismo, las guías de trabajo permitieron a los estudiantes comunicar ideas y opiniones a pesar de cualquier limitación relacionada con el dominio del inglés y les proporcionaron la confianza necesaria para participar en las discusiones en grupo. Los resultados también indicaron que las discusiones en grupo ayudaron a los estudiantes a desarrollar su fluidez oral y a enfocarse más en el significado que en la forma del idioma.

Palabras clave: desarrollo de materiales, discusiones grupales, fluidez oral

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Description

This action research study aimed to exploring the impact of six worksheets based on group discussions, in the speaking fluency development of 14 intermediate-English level students from a languages institute in Bogotá. The type of study was action research. The instruments used for data collection were artifacts, field notes, audio recordings and focus group interview. The data analysis was done under the principles of grounded approach. The theoretical constructs that guided this research study were materials development, speaking fluency and group discussions. The most relevant scholars consulted in the field of Materials Development were Núñez and Téllez (2009), Núñez et.al (2017a), Núñez et.al (2017b) and, Tomlinson (2012). In regards to speaking fluency the main authors consulted were: Nation (1989) and Richards (2015). With reference to group discussions: Dickson (2004) and Smith and McGregor (1992). After the data analysis, it was concluded that the contextualized materials encompassed students' needs and provided plenty of opportunities to use language meaningfully, which resulted in fluency improvement.

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Content

This research study comprises five chapters. In the first chapter, the reader will find the introduction, rationale, statement of the problem, the research question, objectives and the related studies. The second chapter addresses the literature review and provides theoretical definitions of each construct. The third chapter contains the methodological design, which states the research approach, type of study and data gathering instruments, it also presents the instructional design, the pedagogical intervention, the methodological approach, and the instructional stages. The fourth chapter encloses the data analysis and interpretation as well as the research categories supported by the correspondent evidence. The fifth chapter unveils the conclusions, pedagogical implications, limitations and the further research.

Methodology

This research study was conducted following the principles of the qualitative research approach since it is aimed to the observation, analysis and comprehension of educational phenomena. Therefore, qualitative research fostered a reflection on aspects where change may be considered. To this regard, Merriam (1998) stated that in qualitative research teachers are essential figures in the process since they are immersed in the context and have the possibility to impact the setting where research study is carried out. The type of study was action research which was defined by Mills (2003) as "any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers, principals, school counselors, or other stakeholders in the teaching/learning environment to gather information about how their particular school operates, how they teach, and how well their students learn" (p. 10). The instructional design describes the pedagogical intervention, which consisted of six worksheets, based on group discussions aimed to helping students to enhance their speaking fluency. The instruments used for data collection were student's artifacts, field notes, audio recordings, and focus group interviews.

Conclusions

The findings suggested that, as the materials were designed and implemented taking into consideration students particularities, they encompassed needs and provided plenty of opportunities to use language meaningfully. In relation to the research question, it was concluded that the design and implementation of materials impacted learning because they were innovative, informative and appealing. Moreover, it was concluded that the participants in this study assumed the responsibility of supporting their classmates' ideas by working cooperatively, this allowed learners to realize that when all the members of a group make an effort to achieve the goal of communication, results can be better than when working separately. In that sense, collaborative work and interaction in the group discussions resulted in group-based learning, which led students to take responsibility for their language learning process and to develop speaking fluency.

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GROUP DISCUSSIONS FOR SPEAKING FLUENCY

Introduction

Globalization has established English as the common language for every endeavor, including business, science, education, and others. Therefore, the Colombian government established the National Program of Bilingualism 2004-2019 (MEN, 2004) that aims to the improvement of the teaching processes held at schools and universities regarding the teaching of English as a foreign language and seeks for the development of the communicative competence in students. However, in spite of the actions that the Colombian government has taken to provide bilingual education, the results are far different from what the government expected. Becoming a bilingual country is not an easy task, it is not enough to adopt foreign educational models, or intend to give mass access to education when the majority of schools do not have adequate physical resources; these and other factors prevent the development of quality education in accordance with national needs and particularities.

Nowadays, education is not longer considered a process of formal instruction where students just sit down and listen to the teacher passively. Learners need methodologies that invite them to reflect, analyze and take positions towards the topics presented in the lessons. Thus, this research study aimed to developing speaking and fluency skills through the creation of a learning environment that allowed effective communication. Bearing in mind that each student is a unique universe that has particular needs, not only in the academic field but also in his interest towards learning, it is important that teachers confirm that the materials used in the classroom consider all the aspects that influence learning. In this regard, Garton and Graves (2014) asserted that “materials are fundamental to language acquisition (...) but materials cannot be viewed independently of their users” (p. 11). Similarly, McDonough, Shaw and Masuhara (1998) added that “the possibilities for actually implementing materials will be directly related to the learners

themselves, and to the whole educational setting in which the teaching is to take place” (p. 4). This means that materials are essential in learning since they depend on both, teachers and learners.

In this sense, one of the most popular materials among teachers of English are textbooks. However, it is a fact that textbooks do not fit students’ needs because as mentioned by Tomlinson (2003) “controlled grammar practice activities still feature significantly in course books and are considered to be useful by many teachers and many learners”. (p. 22). Thus, the best option for teachers is to develop their own materials. First, because materials developed by teachers take into account needs; second, because they can be adapted easily and; third, because they can include relevant information that is related to the learners’ cultural background. On the contrary, most textbooks address topics that are unsuitable for students in terms of culture, and they have exercises that are repetitive and do not allow students to use language in a meaningful way. To this regard, Graves (2000) asserted that textbooks present irrelevance or inaccuracy of content, imbalanced variety of task-types and not motivating activities. Therefore, the six contextualized worksheets developed for this study, included trending topics among young people and were based on a needs analysis survey conducted with the target group and allowed students to interact with others by participating in speaking activities that provided autonomous learning, rather than a teacher-controlled practice.

This document comprises five chapters. In the first chapter, the reader will find the introduction, rationale, statement of the problem, the research question, objectives and related studies. The second chapter contains the literature review which provides theoretical definitions of each construct. The third chapter presents the methodological design, which states the research approach and type of study. The fourth chapter encloses the data analysis and interpretation

supported from the theory that guided the study. The fifth chapter unveils the conclusions that emerged from the data analysis and the implications for further research.

Chapter I

Research Problem

Statement of the Problem

Through my experience as a teacher, I have noticed that students are usually reluctant to speaking only English and they often have difficulties when doing short presentations or participating in discussions and debates. There are many factors involved in this phenomenon. First, students are afraid of making mistakes in front of the whole class; second, some of them lack vocabulary and; third, textbooks are not contextualized to the learners' interests and lifestyles. Hence, to confirm the needs described above, I observed my students for 2 weeks and kept a teacher's journal, where I registered attitudes towards learning. During the observations, I noticed that in spite of the fact that most students used grammar accurately, some of them could not speak fluently when they had to interact with peers or ask and respond questions. I also noticed that it was easier for learners to do structured presentations rather than participating in speaking activities that implied discussing or improvising.

After the observations, I implemented a needs assessment survey (See Appendix A) in which I asked students about their interests and motivations when learning. Most of learners expressed that the most difficult skill for them was speaking. Having in mind the responses in the survey, I decided to look for a learning methodology that helped students to enhance their speaking skills by conveying messages in conversational contexts.

Today's society requires teachers who see education as a means of transformation, teachers who go beyond the academic aspects of teaching and promote the freedom of knowledge, autonomy and social values. Therefore, it is important that teachers empower themselves and understand that the main objective of education is to contribute to the personal

development of students. One way to achieve this transformation is to consider critical pedagogy, which is a teaching approach that helps students to awaken their critical consciousness in search of a more just society. Critical pedagogy was defined by Freire (1998) as the need for the creation of a collective conscience that seeks for social justice. In the same line of thought, Giroux (2012) added that critical pedagogy implies the social commitment of promoting in students the interest in liberation. In other words, in critical pedagogy teachers are transformative intellectuals who empower learners to transform their life conditions.

The present research study was framed under the principles of critical pedagogy established by Giroux (2005) which are: (1). Education must be understood as producing not only knowledge but also political subjects. (2). “Ethics must be seen as a central concern of critical pedagogy” (p. 67). (3). Critical pedagogy creates new forms of knowledge through its emphasis on breaking down disciplinary boundaries and providing new spaces where knowledge can be produced. Thus, this research study implemented six contextualized worksheets based in group discussions that promoted reflections about issues that are part of their context, as well as engaged them in reflections about their role as citizens seeking the common welfare for their communities. In this sense, the worksheets included topics such as Bogota’s problems, animal rights, and social networks, among others; all of which aimed to meaningful exchanges in the discussion groups.

Research Question

How do the design and implementation of contextualized worksheets based on group discussions contribute to the development of speaking fluency in a group of pre-intermediate English students from a language institute in a public university?

Research Objectives

General objective: To explore how the use of contextualized worksheets based on group discussions enhances speaking fluency in a group of pre-intermediate English students from a language institute.

Specific objectives: (a) To assess the effectiveness of contextualize worksheets based on group discussions in the enhancement of speaking fluency; (b) to describe the improvement of speaking production after participating in group discussions, and (c) to analyze how group discussions and the implementation of speaking strategies help students in the speaking production process.

Related Studies

The following research studies are in accordance with the present study since they explored the three constructs that guided this study: materials development, group discussions and speaking fluency. It is pertinent to mention that group discussion is a methodology that has not been fully explored in EFL contexts and most of the research studies about group discussion were done in other areas of knowledge such as social science, law and business.

Regarding the design and implementation of materials to the enhancement of speaking fluency, it is worth mentioning a qualitative action research study conducted by Montaña (2015). The study explored how six worksheets based on vocabulary learning activities and collocations helped students to develop speaking fluency. The study was conducted at Avianca institute in Bogotá, Colombia with a group of 20 students from the program of flight attendance. Students' ages ranged from 18 to 25 years old and they were part of an English intermediate level group. The study aimed to the improvement of oral fluency when dealing with specific situations on

board. The researcher selected field notes, surveys, and audio and video recordings as the data collection instruments.

For the pedagogical intervention, the researcher designed and implemented workshops that contained communicative activities about collocations usage and useful sentences from the aviation field. The findings suggested that fluency is a skill that is gradually improved through explicit instruction on vocabulary and collocations. Likewise, the researcher found that fluency activities allowed learners to complete communicative tasks successfully, to negotiate meaning and to understand other people's needs by using different speaking strategies. This study contributed to my research study because the researcher mentioned and explained different speaking strategies as well as important factors involved in the process of fluency acquisition, such as teamwork, frequency of speaking activities, and practicing vocabulary before interacting.

Similarly, Herrán (2015) conducted an action research carried out with 17 students from an intermediate level of English at the languages Institute of Uniagraria University. The study aimed to developing students' oral communication skills by using communicative speaking activities based on Content-Based Instruction. The gathering of information was done through three instruments: Semi-structured audio interview, field notes and video recordings. The findings revealed that as the workshops contained topics related to students' careers: engineering, accounting, and law, they encouraged the learners' participation and impacted the process of fluency development. As a result, at the end of the pedagogical intervention students were able to do short presentations, where they included the content language practiced in the workshops

In reference to group discussions and fluency, Uribe (2012) conducted an action research on how undergraduate students developed their discussion skills by using group discussions. The study took place at Santo Tomas University in Bucaramanga, Colombia with a group of 20

students from an advanced level of English. Students belonged to the international business program. Field notes, interviews and class observations were used to collect data. In this study, the researcher created a learning environment devoted to the acquisition of discussion skills, with the aim of helping students being proficient speakers and learning to deal with interruptions and backchannels successfully. As reported in the findings, group discussions provided students with an opportunity to experience a new type of interaction, since they implied enquiring about different topics, analyzing the information critically and elaborating well constructed arguments. This research study contributed to my study because it highlighted the importance of using group discussions as an innovative teaching strategy to help students improving their speaking skills.

In the same line of thought, Ariza (2003) conducted an action research study about how students enhanced their speaking skills by the use of different speaking tasks such as group discussions and debates. The study was conducted with 15 students from an advanced English level at the extension program courses of National University in Bogotá, Colombia. Group interviews, written questionnaires and a written interview were conducted to collect data. In this study, the researcher created discussion groups with the aim of helping learners to improve their speaking skills. In the findings, the researcher concluded that as the communicative tasks implied the use of different mental processes where students planned what they want to express, they boosted their confidence and improved team work skills. The researcher also found that after the speaking tasks were held, the students perceived that the fear and anxiety of public speaking was reduced. Additionally, during the interviews the participants mentioned that group discussions helped them to learn to think and respond quickly. This research study was helpful for my study because it had useful information about the use and application of learning strategies.

Regarding fluency, Lam and Wong (2000) conducted an action research about how the application of speaking and interaction strategies helped students to play an effective role in EFL group discussions. The study was carried out in a private high school in Hong Kong, China with a group of 20 students. Students' ages ranged from 15 to 17. In this study, the researchers used speaking and interaction strategies to facilitate the negotiation process during the development of group discussions. To gather data, the researchers implemented audio recordings, interviews and classroom observations. The findings indicated that training students in the use of speaking and interaction strategies resulted in a more genuine interaction during the group discussion. It was also found that peer help and co-operation compensated for the ineffective use of interaction strategies due to limited language proficiency. Furthermore, the results showed that through the group discussions the participants were able to reflect on particular perceptions they had towards the topics presented. This study was relevant for my research study, since it gave me insights about how to use learning strategies and how to choose them according to the participants needs.

Likewise, Ascione (1993) conducted an action research about how some factors and conditions used by teachers in class that contribute to the development of oral fluency. The study was carried out with a group of 15 students from grade 12th in an American high school in which learners' ages ranged from 14 to 17. For the data gathering, the researcher implemented interviews, videos and classroom observations. To begin the study, the researcher selected students that were in some degree fluent, then, she implemented speaking strategies to help students to improve their fluency. After that, she interviewed the participants, she analyzed their responses to determine the factors or conditions contributing to oral fluency and she looked for common patterns among the students that could have contributed to their oral fluency. The findings suggested that oral fluency was acquired as a result of several factors: students who are

positive and self-motivated a learning experience which was enjoyable for students and teachers who have been supportive. This study contributed to my study because it mentioned important aspects to consider when implementing strategies to improve fluency such as, the methods and materials used when teaching, background, personality and motivation to learn.

Setting

This action research study was conducted in a languages institute from a public university in Bogotá, Colombia. The institute has over 7000 students, works under the guidelines of a socio-cultural oriented pedagogical project, and aims to the development of integral human beings willing to generate changes in their social background taking as starting point the reflections raised along the language learning process. This study was carried out with 14 students from a pre-intermediate English level group whose ages ranged from 18 to 22 years old. Students' educational background, as well as socio-economical stratum and academic background, were heterogeneous. Most of them were university students, some of them were professionals from different fields and a few of them were self-employed people who were learning English to qualify their professional profile.

The group had 14 students, 10 women and four men. According to the English levels established by the institute, the learners belonged to a pre-intermediate level and as stated in the syllabus the purpose of the course was to develop the communicative competence in the four language skills, to foster appropriate pronunciation patterns and to raise students' awareness towards the language form, meaning, and function. The English program has 13 levels of instruction. Each level consists of 48 hours. Students attend six hours weekly, three days a week or only on Saturdays. There are about 15 students in each group and a text book is used as a referential material to practice the topics.

Rationale

As a teacher, I have always considered that one of the main aims of education is to go beyond the transmission of knowledge and ensure that students acquire the necessary life skills to be active members of the society. In that sense, it is important that teachers include and embody pedagogical strategies that contribute to the quality of education. Thus, group discussions are a teaching strategy that can be used in the classroom to improve speaking skills as well as thinking and analytic skills. When students participate in group discussions, they need to take into consideration different perspectives of an issue as well as do a critical analysis of their thoughts and viewpoints. When teachers use innovative pedagogical strategies such as group discussions or any other task that involves inspection, they help students mastering the course contents, building self confidence and improving team work skills.

Although speaking is the ability that students prefer, it is the one to which some teachers devote less attention. In that sense, one of my main concerns as teacher researcher was to help students overcoming their fear and insecurity when speaking in English.

This research study contributed to my professional development since it made me define and evaluate the pedagogical methodologies used in my classes, as well as it helped me to reflect on how to enhance learning by implementing pedagogical methodologies that go beyond teaching itself. Similarly, the implementation of this research study contributed to the improvement of the methodological processes held at the institute because it fostered in the educational community a constant revision of the teaching techniques and showed that small actions done by teachers inside the classroom permit great changes that benefit the academic community. Furthermore, this research study contributed to the education field, since it demonstrated

that when teachers work from interests, they help them to become active agents that use the acquired knowledge to reframe learning.

Finally, this research study contributed to the research line on Materials Development and Didactics, ascribed to the research group Critical Pedagogies for Social Transformation based on the principles of “Justice, equity and inclusion”, “autonomy and empowerment”, and “quality assurance and professional development” Núñez, Téllez and Castellanos, 2013 (p. 6-8) since its pedagogical intervention promoted the principle of empowerment and confirmed that when teachers develop materials, they benefit in many ways. First, they can reflect on their teaching methodologies and; second, they can make decisions about how to create or adapt materials based on students’ needs. In this regard, Harmer (2012) affirmed that reflective teachers keep a record of what works and what does not work for students. In other words, reflection in the classrooms starts by teachers who are concerned about how to best fit the learners’ needs.

The current research study also confirmed that materials developed by teachers, benefited students because they responded to the heterogeneity of learners and considered students’ preferences, and interests. The materials of this research study also fostered the principle of autonomy because the exercises in the worksheets changed the idea of the teacher as the only responsible for the classroom tasks and involved students in conscious decisions about their learning process, such as knowing how to use the strategies presented in the worksheets to succeed on the goals of the lessons. The principle of “Justice, equity and inclusion” (p. 6-8) was addressed in all the worksheets, especially in the first and sixth worksheets which questioned students about their current contexts and presented social and cultural aspects of other countries with the aim of making students reflect upon the fact that language and culture are complementary dimensions, which means that learning a foreign language enhances the

discovery of a series of socio-cultural aspects that enrich students' knowledge. Furthermore, it was imperative that the worksheets invited students to analyze others' personal experiences to learn from them.

The next chapter presents the theoretical constructs of the study and the relations among them.

Chapter II

Literature Review

As mentioned before, the purposes of this research study were to design contextualized worksheets and to analyze how students developed fluency when they participated in group discussions. Thus, the theoretical constructs that underlie this research study are materials development, group discussions and speaking fluency. This chapter explains the concepts and presents the connections established among the constructs.

Materials Development

The design of materials has been an important field of study in the Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages (TESOL) area and most materials are nowadays developed by teachers, since they are the ones that know students' needs and the best ways to fit them. Despite the variety of produced materials, there are several benefits when teachers design their own materials. First, they are aimed to a specific group of learners in an educational context. Second, they can include aspects related to the learners' first language and culture, and third, they ensure an appropriate challenge in accordance to the English language proficiency of students. As Núñez, Pineda, and Téllez (2004) stated, "materials development contributes directly to teachers' professional growth insofar as it better their knowledge, skills and creativity, raises their consciousness as regards teaching and learning procedures, and allows them to act as agents of permanent change" (p. 67). In other words, materials development should be a constant process of research and evaluation to improve teachers' skills and their knowledge as instructors and as creators of new alternatives for teaching.

Materials development as a field of study. Materials play an essential role in the teaching and learning processes. However, developing materials is a procedure that requires time, effort and commitment. Materials development as a field of study investigates how teachers can design and implement materials that guide teachers into a deeper understanding of the phenomena that occurs in the classroom. In this regard, Tomlinson (2012) affirmed that “materials development is now not only undertaken by practitioners but is also a field of academic study. It is a practical activity that involves the production, evaluation and adaptation of materials” (p. 144). To this respect, Núñez et.al (2017) added that “materials developed by teachers help students recognize their own learning process and raise their awareness of learning strategy use, language skills, and content” (p. 36) This means, that when teachers develop materials, they enrich learning process and encourage students in the use of learning strategies. Therefore, in this research study six contextualized worksheets were designed and implemented. In them, learning took place in a meaningful and dynamic way, allowing students to take part in the activities done in the classes.

Definition of materials. As materials are considered as one of the cornerstones of the current research study, it is fundamental to analyze the corresponding definition, including a holistic perspective that allows the researchers to internalize the concepts in its broader dimension. To this respect, Tomlinson (2003) affirmed that a material is "anything which is done by writers, teachers or learners to provide sources of language input” (p. 2). Furthermore, Tomlinson (2001) asserted that materials can be presented in different forms, visual, kinesthetic, linguistic or auditory. As a result, he affirmed that there are four types of materials: “(1). Informative, which tell the learner about the language. (2). Instructional, which guide the learner in the language practice. (3). Experiential, which give the learner opportunities to practice the

language in context. (4). Eliciting, which motivate the learner to use the language and (5). Exploratory, which help the learner to inspect different aspects related to the language”. (p.66)

Consequently, the six contextualized worksheets were (1) informative, since they included a series of trending topics with enhancing information for the students; (2) instructional, thanks to the guided learning process offered in them, including in context vocabulary, real conversations excerpts, giving opinion hints and speaking fluency strategies; (3) experiential, through the group discussions that were proposed; (4) eliciting, in relation to the enhancing and motivating topics that were addressed to improve spontaneous speech; and (5) exploratory, since a meta-cognitive process was included through the self-assessment stage. To this respect Núñez and Téllez (2015) added that materials also include “a book, a module, a didactic unit, a workshop, a lesson or a learning task”. (p.57). This means that a material cannot be anything; as it has to be developed with the purpose of teaching.

The concern of materials authenticity has been debated over the last years as it implies the analysis of a variety of fields such as pragmatics, cross-cultural components and second language acquisition. Nowadays, universities encourage educators to create, evaluate and adapt materials in search of a better education. To this respect, Harmer (1998) asserted that the experiences teachers offer students affect students’ motivation and materials developed by teachers play a key role in providing friendly experiences in the classroom.

Types of materials. There are two types of materials: authentic and non-authentic, also known as adapted materials. Authentic materials refer to the resources that present information from real sources such as news and radio programs. According to Richards (2005), authentic materials are teaching resources that were not specifically prepared for pedagogical purposes. He also affirmed that authentic materials benefit students because in their use, students are

confronted with everyday language and they provide the learner with opportunities to use the language in communicative contexts. This means that, when teachers use authentic materials students are introduced to issues that were developed with the actual purpose of informing or entertaining. Therefore, by using authentic materials learners are exposed to real life experiences in the target language in which they will have to interact. To this regard, Morrow (1977) stated that “An authentic text is a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of some sort” (p. 13). Hence, when working with authentic materials, teachers can use scripted dialogues as an input source to exemplify the topic of the lesson or they can use materials to show variations in pronunciation.

Non-authentic materials refer to the textbooks, CDs, videos and other materials used by teachers to facilitate the learning of a language. These materials help students to learn a language in a simplified way but they do not have the characteristics of real-life language. They usually present the linguistic items according to the level of knowledge learners have about the language. Even though most language teachers like using non-authentic materials, some scholars claimed that non-authentic materials omit important features and uses of the language. For instance, McCarthy and Carter (2014) criticized the fact that some textbooks do not present language features such as idioms, as they consider these to be part of natural language that has high occurrence in specific types of discourse. The authors claimed that textbooks rarely deal with this language in a systematic way and that in most cases; idioms are considered to be something that should be studied in the final stages of language courses. Moreover, Rico (2012) asserted that “despite innovative ideas of how to bring cultural explanations to the classroom, course books stay with the idea of language training” (p. 12). In other words, part of the responsibility of teachers is to become materials developers to apply their knowledge in seek of students’

improvement, not only in terms of language learning but also in providing cultural awareness. He also added that “with regard to the cultural information, course books are restricted to talking about an event, a place or a character”. (p. 134)

Accordingly, Núñez, Téllez, Castellanos, and Ramos (2009) affirmed that English teachers should create their own materials, as they stimulate learning process and invite students to take part in demanding learning activities. This means that materials development should be considered an enriching activity that strengthens teachers’ work, increases motivation towards learning and provides an enjoyable experience for both teachers and students. Therefore, the purpose of teaching in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) should be to enhance the learning process of students and to do that, teachers must focus on learning aims rather than debating about authenticity or not of materials. To this regard, Brown (2000) stated that “the best method is the one that teachers have derived through themselves since it implied a process of formulation, tryout, revision, and refinement” (p. 15). In other words, after revising and modifying materials, teachers can ensure the reach of pedagogical goals as well as to provide the basis for enjoyable classroom experiences. That is the case of the current research study, in which the piloting process represented a crucial stage, since thanks to the findings obtained at the time, it was possible to adapt and adjust the six contextualized worksheets, regarding the students’ needs, level of knowledge of English and expectations.

Speaking

To understand speaking, it is important to review its definition and the essential aspects that are involved in it. First, it is necessary to mention that the concept of speaking has changed throughout the years. According to Richards (2014), in the 1960s “a person was considered proficient when he was capable of using grammatical structures in an appropriate way, while the

relationship between language meaning and context was neglected”. (p. 3). Richards (2014) also claimed that “traditional approaches to language teaching gave priority to grammatical competence as the basis of language proficiency because they were based on the belief that grammar could be learned through direct instruction, the use of repetitive practice and drilling”. (p. 6). Fortunately, that concept evolved and as Nunan (1989) stated, nowadays, speaking is considered a productive skill because when learners use it, they need to generate language. In other words, speaking is the ability to use the language in oral form and it only has meaning if it is put into communicative practice. As reported by Richards (2014), the fact that the grammatical competence was considered the most important competence probably happened because in the past language teaching was increasingly influenced by the cognitive theories of language and learning. Therefore, teaching approaches such as the grammar translation method and the audio-lingual method were only limited to repetition of isolated language structures and the formal features of language were not associated to functional aspects, opposite to the case of the six contextualized worksheets developed for the pedagogical implementation of the current study, that were based on the importance of developing speaking fluency for gaining vocabulary expertise and grammar awareness implicitly.

Speaking, an essential element in the communication process. Based on the previous information, it is fundamental to highlight the importance of speaking improvement, to allow students to have an accurate and meaningful language learning process. In this sense, Speaking was defined by Brown (1994) as an interactive process of constructing meaning that entails producing and interacting. In the same line of thought, Richards (2014) affirmed that as the main objective of language is to obtain and communicate information, “it should be presented to EFL learners orally first, to later present it in other forms, each of which can be approached from a

communicative perspective” (p. 73). Therefore, speaking should be taught in terms of how people can use it to exchange ideas and thoughts. In this regard, O’Malley and Pierce (1996) added that speaking means “negotiating intended meanings and adjusting one’s speech to produce the desired effect on the listener”. (p. 59) Leading to the consideration that form and meaning depend on the context in which the language exchange occurs, this is the participants’ context, their collective experiences, and purposes for speaking.

Speaking is also closely related to listening because both skills have interrelated ways of accomplishing communication. As reported by Oprandy (1994), speakers are potential listeners and listeners are potential speakers. This means that every time a conversation occurs, the speaker sends and receives messages simultaneously and even though the learning process of a language implies the connection of many skills, listening and speaking are closely related. As stated by Richards (2015), despite the importance of speaking, it was for many years considered an undervalued skill and some English teachers still today teach speaking just as drilling or memorizing dialogues. However, today’s educational demands require that teachers use engaging teaching strategies that contribute to the improvement of speaking skills. In other words, today’s students are no longer passive agents; they are active participants in the negotiation of meaning. Thus, only if teachers provide students with the necessary elements for an effective communication, students will express themselves properly in each communicative circumstance.

Elements involved in the speaking process. Bygate (1987) highlighted interaction as one of the important elements involved in the speaking process. For this scholar, “interaction skills involve making decisions about communication, such as: what to say, how to say it, and whether to develop it in accordance to ones intentions”. (p. 6). Regarding this issue, Brown (1994) added other features that characterize the oral discourse and make of speaking one of the

most challenging skills for students to develop. These features are: contractions, elision and rhythm. This means that the speaker needs to understand how to produce language according to the situation he is in and the message he wants to convey. Thus, speaking is an essential skill in the acquisition of a foreign language as it includes a great portion of everyday involvement in language activities. In fact, it is through speaking that people express their ideas, feelings, and thoughts. In that sense, when teaching speaking in a foreign language, all the components, features and functions mentioned above should be taken into account.

Another important contribution was done by Thornbury (2005) when he highlighted the immediacy of speaking and affirmed that speaking is a meaning exchanging process that involves organizing the formal structures of the language in short time to manage turns with an interlocutor. This means that the interlocutor needs to know some grammatical features of the language to be able to adapt the discourse depending on the context in which he is participating. Accordingly, in the pedagogical intervention in this research study, students participated in group discussions, which allowed them to interact with their classmates and talk about everyday situations that required authentic communication.

Speaking fluency. Nowadays, researchers still attempt to define the concept of fluency. Therefore, there are two interpretations of what fluency is. The first one understands fluency as a holistic phenomenon that can be tested in a subjective way, and the other interprets fluency as something closely related to accuracy.

The holistic interpretation of fluency. As affirmed by Hartmann and Stork (1976), a person is considered a fluent speaker when he “can to talk intelligibly, using semantically correct sentences by being creative with the language use”. (p. 86). In other words, fluency is the ability to communicate ideas naturally, with a good command of the language, but not necessarily

perfect. Therefore, speaking accurately will only happen after many years of communicative practice. In this regard, Richards (2005) affirmed that "fluency means to be able to maintain a comprehensive interaction despite any limitations in the communicative competence" (p. 14). Hence, fluency can be developed if teachers involve students in activities where they can negotiate meaning, use communication strategies and produce language in context. Another insight was provided by Bartz and Schulz (as cited in Linder, 1986) when they asserted that fluency does not only refer the speed of delivery, since native speakers usually show variations in this area. In short, fluency implies being able to communicate with others by speaking naturally and at a normal speed. Furthermore, Bartz and Schulz (as cited in Linder, 1986) asserted that to evaluate speaking fluency teachers should consider the effort to communicate and the automaticity of the message. Fluency cannot be measured by the amount of words a person says per minute, but it can be observed in terms of how the person fills pauses and interacts with the listener. To this respect, Schneider (1997) proposed making students communicate with English fluency only, without focusing on accuracy. Additionally, Schneider pointed out that after years of study, learners end up with extensive knowledge of grammar and vocabulary that they rarely put into oral practice. Thus, when focusing exclusively on fluency, EFL learners can use the language as a means of communication, rather than as a set of linguistic forms.

In conclusion, fluency is a characteristic that is different in each learner and it can be improved through practice; for this reason, language teachers should take into account that all the students have some degree of fluency and they will only produce language easily and smoothly after they become more comfortable using the language. To this regard, Nation (1989) added that "fluency can be measured by looking at 1. the speed and flow of language production 2. the degree of control of language items and 3. the way language and content interact" (p. 377). In this

sense, the goal of this research study was to enable learners to integrate the language items studied during the classes with the ability to communicate coherent messages.

The quantitative interpretation of fluency. In opposition to the holistic view of fluency, some scholars proposed a more scientific definition. In this position, fluency is considered to be one essential element of oral proficiency and it should be tested in a quantitative way. According to the quantitative interpretation, fluency without accuracy is not useful. The scholars proposed mixing the two micro skills, (fluency and accuracy) to fit students' needs. In regard to this, Beardsmore (1972) interpreted fluency as something purely quantitative. According to him, "oral fluency requires the availability of the communicative competence for the formulation of appropriate utterances in real time, involving a strategy for the elaboration of sentence structures, as well as the selection and insertion of lexical items" (p. 10). In other words, there is a link between linguistic knowledge and performance and each individual sentence must be integrated into a connected and grammatically correct discourse, otherwise it will not be considered as fluent speech. Additionally, Hieke (1985) claimed that fluency measurement should include qualitative parameters and it should not only consider the speech rate which is the most common way to measure oral fluency.

To sum up, even though these definitions mentioned different aspects to consider, all scholars agree in the fact that fluency is essential in speaking because it helps students to enhance not only speaking skills but also other language skills such as listening and pronunciation. Thus, teachers should bear in mind that the degree of fluency varies from one student to another and the best way for students to enhance fluency is to experience the language through speaking activities that include interaction, experimenting with the language and building confidence as EFL speakers. At this point, it is important to mention that this research study was done under the

guidelines of the holistic approach of fluency because I consider that it fits my purpose of going beyond the formal features of the language.

Speaking fluency strategies. To ensure the enhancement of speaking fluency the following strategies were explained to students and implemented in the class sessions. (a) Using lexical fillers, which are words that help learners to fill in the gaps when speaking, the most common of them are: *kind of; sort of; so* and *you know*. Fillers are useful for students because they can give learners time to think of new ideas or to organize the initial one. However, speakers must be aware that over-using fillers can end up in an artificial speech. (b) Scaffolding. As Gibbons (2007) stated, scaffolding is “the means whereby a student is able to carry out a task that, alone, he or she would be unable to complete” (p. 703). This means that scaffolding is when teachers support students in their learning process by breaking the amount of information into small units that so that it can be easily managed by them. (c) Using discourse markers, this refers to the words or phrases that speakers use to connect discourse: first, to begin with, second, third, finally, etc. These words help learners to ensure a coherent organization of their speech. (d) Using idioms and slangs, this is an essential part of fluency that allows students to improve their speaking skills by stepping outside of grammar learning. (e) Responding and Initiating. Through this strategy, students practiced managing a conversation by making responses, asking for a response or introducing a new idea. (f) 4, 3, 2 technique, this is a fluency strategy that involves talking to different classmates about a topic selected by the teacher in 3 rounds. In the first round the speaker has 4 minutes to talk about the given subject. Then the listeners are changed, and the speakers talk about the topic again, but this time they only have three minutes, in the third round, the speaker has only two minutes to talk. The aim of this fluency strategy is to force speakers to produce a new speech for each listener, either by summarizing or omitting information. (g) Doing

communicative free-production activities. Through this strategy learners had the opportunity to produce language by participating in group exercises that required using the language for specific communicative tasks, these types of activities included picture description, analysis of cartoons and problem solving. In light of the benefits mentioned above, students found the different speaking fluency strategies at the beginning of the worksheets and before participating in the group discussions, which constituted the basis for expressing a coherent opinion during the pedagogical implementation.

Group Discussions

One of the most challenging tasks in teaching a foreign language is finding ways to engage students in communicative activities that are interesting and appealing for them, especially in countries where learners have little exposure to the target language outside the classroom. A good alternative for this is the use of group discussions, which is a pedagogical strategy that has been applied by language teachers in the last years that allows both, interaction and group knowledge construction. Group discussions were defined by as Smith and McGregor (1992) as “a broad array of teaching approaches in college settings which include discussions, both formal and informal, that encourage student dialogue with teachers and with each other”. (p5). This means that group discussions foster the communicative competence in students as they have to establish a conversation and interact with others.

Characteristics of group discussions. One of the most important characteristics of group discussions is that they change the dynamics of the class and invite students to take part in the development of the lesson. Likewise, Dickson (2004) affirmed that all types of communication tasks including debates and group discussions should be used in college courses in nearly all disciplines since they are a valuable tool for encouraging critical thinking. In other words, group

discussions stimulate communication and interaction because when students analyze topics together, they are engaged in a reflective process that implies expressing and exchanging ideas. Moreover, Dickson (2004) asserted that discussions encourage students to communicate their thoughts and help learners to master the contents studied during the course. Therefore, language teachers should foster in students the development of critical thinking by involving learners into discussions where they can take positions towards current issues. In brief, when participating in group discussions students use analytic thinking skills to evaluate the validity of their classmates' ideas, as well as the quality of their own intervention. The use of these sub skills was evident throughout the whole implementation process of the six contextualized worksheets, and represented a notorious help for the participants, who acknowledge their progress at the end of the pedagogical intervention.

Procedures for a group discussion. Group discussions can be adapted in a wide variety of ways according to the classroom, setting and the purpose of the teacher. They can be done in small groups or with an entire class. The first stage in a group discussion is planning. In this stage, the teacher gives students some time to look for and understand associated vocabulary, functional language and expressions that they might find useful for the discussion. Each student brainstorms his ideas using a mind map or writing key words or sentences in an outline. After that, students plan the position that will take towards the topic. Finally, learners organize in groups and begin the discussion.

Benefits of using group discussions in class. Hertz-Lazarowits (1983) claimed that the use of any cooperative learning task such as a group discussion benefits not only students but also teachers, since it creates an environment that moves students away from just receiving knowledge into a more active atmosphere in which they construct knowledge by themselves. In addition,

group discussions engage students in interactional tasks, and help learners to develop individual effort. As Snider and Schnurer (2002) affirmed, students place a higher value on learning by participating than on learning by being lectured and receiving information passively.

Consequently, educators from all fields should focus less on teaching content and more on teaching students to analyze and question the information they receive from their teachers.

Another important benefit of group discussions was stated by Dundes (2001) when he affirmed that students who did not speak in front of a whole class feel more comfortable when sharing opinions during a debate or discussion. In addition, Parcher (1998) added that when learners take part in a discussion they need to prepare more intensely than when they are lectured by the teacher. This means that when students participate in a group discussion, they have to go through a process of defining the problem, analyzing various points of view and assuming a position all of which requires individual preparation and the communicative use of the target language structures and features previously learned in class. Additionally, the use of group discussion gives the learners opportunities for the development of group empathy because when students take part in a discussion, they listen to both sides of the argument, rather than just seeing it from their own point of view, which can benefit the class dynamics and foster cooperative learning.

Consequently, through students' interaction in the group discussions, they could minimize the intimidation of public speaking since expressing ideas in groups became a natural procedure done in each class session. Moreover, when group work occurred, collaboration was part of the process and students helped each other to learn as they could ask their classmates questions or clarify confusing points of the language together. In addition, by working in groups, students developed friendship relationships that benefited the classroom atmosphere.

Hence, teachers should involve students in tasks that promote the use of language in context and change traditional instructional strategies for more active strategies such as group discussions, debates or problem solving activities. The concepts developed by the scholars mentioned above provided me with an understanding of the implications and procedures for the development of fluency in students. The next chapter describes the research approach and the type of study as well as it addresses methodological aspects of the current study.

Chapter III

Methodological Design

This chapter is divided in two parts. The first part is the research design which offers the reader an explanation of the type of study and research approach selected for the development of the study. It also describes the context and participants and it outlines the instruments used to gather data. The second part is the instructional design which presents the pedagogical intervention and its objectives. It explains why this study was considered innovative for the EFL field and the community in which it was carried out. It presents the vision of language nature and language learning, the methodological approach and it explains how the pedagogical intervention was connected to the research inquiry.

Research Design

This section contains a detailed description of the approach and type of study used as well as information on how the data was collected, what data collection instruments were implemented and how they were used to collect data.

Approach. This research study was conducted following the principles of qualitative research approach which was defined by Nunan (1991) as “a research methodology that is concerned with understanding human behavior through naturalistic and uncontrolled observation”. (p. 4). In the same line of thought, Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) affirmed that action research “involves the use of qualitative interpretive modes of inquiry and data collection by teachers with a view to teachers making judgments about how to improve their own practices” (p. 273). These interpretative modes seem to fit the type of study defined for the current study.

Qualitative research was chosen as the approach to guide this study for two reasons. The first reason was because I feel identified with the role that the researcher assumes in this type of research, because in agreement with Merriam's (1998) opinion, in qualitative research teachers are essential figures in the process since they are immersed in the context and have the possibility to impact the setting where research study is carried out. Therefore, the purpose of qualitative research guided my study since it fostered a constant reflection on how teachers act and it permits teachers to identify specific aspects where change may be considered.

The second reason was because one of the main objectives I had in mind when I began to conduct this study was to explore new teaching methodologies that I could use to help students improve learning because as it was affirmed by Merriam (1998) "qualitative research employs an inductive research strategy to hypothesize rather than evaluate or prove an existing theory" (p. 7). To this respect Burns (2010) added that the purpose of qualitative research is "to offer descriptions, interpretations and clarifications of naturalistic social contexts" (p. 22). Bearing this in mind, qualitative research helped me to understand better the speaking process as well as it encouraged me to apply new teaching strategies that could improve students speaking process. Moreover, as it was stated by McNiff (1988), teaching should not limit only to generalized issues of the management of the curriculum, but it should be seen as a means of engaging in a critical process of action reflection which is in itself education. Consequently, in the pedagogical implementation of the current study, I concentrated on guiding students in the process of expressing opinions rather than just providing students with linguistic or grammatical aspects of English.

Type of study. This research study was based on the action research approach, which was defined by Mills (2003) as "any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers,

principals, school counselors, or other stakeholders in the teaching/learning environment to gather information about how their particular school operates, how they teach, and how well their students learn” (p. 10). According to him, action research is a systematic process that includes: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. In action research, the researcher, first, plans actions to improve a problematic situation presented in the classroom and after that, he takes actions and documents what happened as a result of the actions and finally, he reflects on the results. Mills (2003) proposed a set of stages to be repeated in action research in a cyclic way. These are the following: Identifying a problem, which was the constitutive element for the current research study; defining the factors that are involved on it, in this case the speaking fluency was determined as a key factor; clarifying theories, by analyzing and comparing the scholars available on the research field; Identifying research questions, based on the needs; describing the intervention that the researcher is to implement, through the contextualization of the pedagogical intervention in the sensitization stage; collecting data, throughout the four instruments: artifacts, field notes, audio recordings and focus group interview; analyzing data and reporting results, when developing and connecting the theoretical constructs to the findings; and taking informed action.

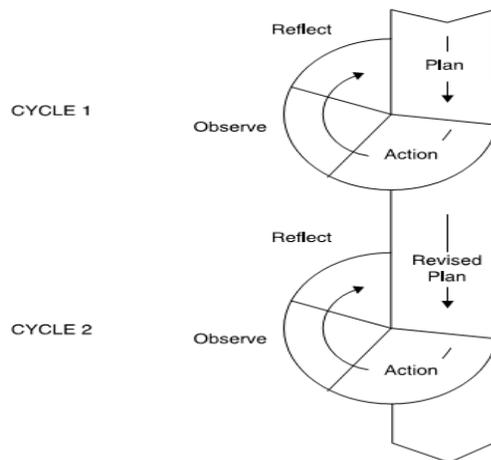


Figure 1: Cyclical AR model based on Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, as cited in Burns, 2010) (p. 9)

As it is shown in the model above, after each cycle is finished, the reflection stage leads to a new cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting that allows researcher to understand a classroom phenomenon, as in the case of this study, action research helped me to comprehend why in spite of the fact that students had been studying English for more than one year, it was difficult for them to use the language easily in speaking situations.

Moreover, action research was selected to guide this study, because as the main aim of my intervention was to gather information related to how students enhance fluency, it suited my purpose of helping students to relate the features of the language learned in class to their personal experiences. In addition, the features proposed in action research are closely related to my research study because by presenting controversial topics in the worksheets I encouraged students to use English by speaking naturally about topics that are appealing for them.

To conclude, action research is a problem-solving approach that gives teachers the possibility to solve or improve any immediate problem presented in an institution. It also supports teachers in the process of proving the effectiveness of teaching methodologies and it builds in teachers a constant interest for developing their strengths as reflective intellectuals.

Participants. The participants in this study were the students and the teacher. The teacher assumed three roles, teacher, researcher, and materials developer.

Students. This research study was carried out in a languages institute which offers courses of different languages such as English, French and Italian. There are on average 14 levels per language and a variety of schedule options to take the courses. The population in this study consisted of 14 students from a pre-intermediate level of English who attended six hours weekly. Most of them were university students while others were professionals from different fields. The participant's ages ranged from 18 to 22 years old. They had a pre-intermediate level of English

and all of them were willing to participate in the development of this study since they were aware of the importance of being fluent speakers. According to the levels established by the institute, a pre-intermediate student is a person who can use the language to communicate his opinions and believes, can talk about a variety of topics such as, travelling and employment, among others and is a competitive language user who is able to use language in context.

The sampling technique used to select the participants of this study was the convenience sampling technique which according to Dörnyei (2007) consists of choosing the participants according to the convenience of the researcher; for instance, availability or accessibility. In other words, the researcher simply selects the population from his nearby environment. For the case of this research study, I implemented the six contextualized worksheets with a group of students from the languages institution where I work; this facilitated the development of the study and the collection of data. In educational research, convenience sampling is usually applied when the participants are easily accessible to the researcher and he can include them in the study without having to go through a lot of requirements. Some reasons that make convenience sampling the most common methodology is due to its simplicity. Moreover, since the researcher can spend a great amount of time with the population, he can take it as an advantage during the data collection process.

Teacher-researcher and materials developer. I assumed three roles in this study. The first one was to be a teacher. As a teacher, I guided students through the process of the group discussion, I encouraged them to express their opinions about the topics, and I provided them with helpful vocabulary to be used in their intervention. The second role I assumed was to be a researcher. In this role I informed the participants about the way this study was going to be conducted and how it was going to contribute to the enhancement of their speaking fluency.

When the group discussions were held, I collected data; I analyzed it and group it into categories with the aim of answering the research question. The third role I assumed was the role of materials developer, in which I designed and implemented the materials taking account the materials development principles and the features established by the communicative approach.

Data gathering instruments. To analyze how students improved their fluency when they exchanged opinions about the controversial topics presented in the worksheets, I collected data through four different instruments: students' artifacts, field-notes, focus group interviews, and audio recordings.

Artifacts. This refers to the physical evidence of the activities done by the participants in any research study. Lankshear and Knobel (2004) affirmed that artifacts are all types of physical evidence that the researcher collects from the participants to analyze and support the learning process. The artifacts provided me with insights about how learners were advancing towards the fluency improvement process, furthermore, the self-assessment survey at the end of each worksheet allowed me to understand in a deeper way student's perceptions about the activities proposed; they also helped me to improve the contents, length and types of exercises in the worksheets. In consequence, I collected artifacts to evidence the learner's fluency improvement process through the implementation of the intervention.

Field notes. This is a valuable instrument that helps the researcher to collect information about the events that occur in the classroom. Freeman (1998) defined this term as the notes gathered by the researcher during the process of observation that aim to examine and understand a specific phenomenon. In the field notes, I registered two types of information: descriptive information in which I documented factual data, such as the settings, the general environment of the class, actions, attitudes, interaction, and conversations, and reflective information, in which I registered my thoughts, questions and concerns when I was conducting the observation. As

Wallace (1998) stated, field notes are a valuable source of information since they inform the researcher about the classroom events, reactions and interactions. In short, the field notes are the researchers' account of everything that occurs inside the classroom; they also help to keep a record of important features of an observation.

The field notes (See Appendix B) taking process was done in three steps in this research study: First, reporting the setting by writing information about the classroom environment such as, noise, and light. Second, writing notes about the development of the class by means of students' interactions and reactions and third, writing relevant comments that the participants mentioned in the group discussions. This process was done with the aim of collecting data concerning opinions and perceptions about the topics in the worksheets. The field notes helped me to understand and interpret the situations that occurred during the implementation.

Audio recordings. Since the purpose of this research was to enhance students' fluency through the use of group discussions, audio recordings were a valuable instrument because they helped me to register and preserve language production. After the audio recording was done, the data collected was transcribed and interpreted, to this regard, Burns (2010) stated that the audio recording transcription "has the effect of concentrating the mind considerably beyond simply listening and provide basis for more in-depth analyses" (p. 98). In agreement with Burns' opinion, I consider that the process of transcription assisted me to deeply analyze the events that occurred in the classroom.

Focus group interviews. The focus group interview is a semi-structured discussion done in groups of four or six participants that aims to the exploration of specific issues by generating a discussion around open ended questions. There are no wrong answers but points of view. Focus group interviews allow participants to agree or disagree with others' opinion as well as it brings

out new information about the phenomenon that could guide the researcher into the findings of the study. Thus, in this study focus group interviews were a casual talk in which the participants expressed their perceptions about the worksheets, and how they perceived the fluency enhancement process. According to Gibbes (1997), focus group interviews help researchers to deeply understand a phenomenon and the components involved on it. Consequently, I decided to use focus group interviews because I believe that feelings and perceptions about the implementation of the worksheets were essential data for this study.

Instructional Design

In this section, I describe the pedagogical intervention, I present the theory of the nature of language and language learning, which establishes the vision of language teaching and learning adopted during the pedagogical intervention, the methodological approach, the connection among the pedagogical intervention and the research question and the instructional phases.

Pedagogical intervention. The pedagogical intervention for this study consisted of six worksheets, containing group discussions aimed to helping students to enhance their speaking fluency. According to Green et al (1997), a group discussion is a useful teaching technique that benefits EFL students in a positive way. First of all, because it encourages students to produce spontaneous language that contributes substantially to their learning process. Secondly, because taking into account that for some students speaking in public and doing class presentations can be an intimidating task, the use of group discussions help students to gain confidence when expressing themselves in English, since it engages them in more natural practices.

During this pedagogical intervention, students participated in the group discussions using the vocabulary and language functions practiced in the classes. After the implementation of the

worksheets, students were expected to improve their speaking skills in terms of fluency. Therefore, each worksheet included all the language components (vocabulary, listening, writing, etc.) and began with an input activity to first involve learners in the topic and then lead to the productive skills such as writing and speaking. For instance, the first worksheet used in this study started with a warming up activity on vocabulary related to social networks, then, it continued with a speaking activity in which learners had to use that vocabulary in context. After that, there was a video that questioned students about the dependence that people have towards social networks. Then, there was a reading passage in which students had a small talk and proposed solutions for the situations. After that, there was a writing part in which learners organized their opinions towards the topics by using a schema and finally the group discussion was generated.

In the same way, it is important to highlight that each worksheet was implemented in four hours of class which corresponded to two classes at the speaking workshop in the institute. The topics of the worksheets were: social networks, tattoos and body modifications, love and dating, supernatural phenomena, animal rights, and problems of Bogotá. Even though the worksheets had all the language components, every exercise was intended to involve students in communicative tasks.

Tomlinson (2010), Richards (2005), Matsuhara (2004) and other scholars defined a list of principles to be followed by languages teachers when developing EFL materials. I selected six of the principles proposed by Tomlinson (2012), as the most relevant to be considered during the pedagogical intervention of this research study. First, “materials should help learners feel at ease” (p.7). As it is known, students who feel comfortable within the learning environment are willing to acquire new knowledge. Therefore, the materials implemented in the pedagogical intervention provided a learning environment in which students felt that learning English was an easy

procedure and that they had an active role in the development of the class. Second, “materials must be perceived as relevant and useful by the learner” (p.7). Besides, the worksheets implemented fostered autonomy for learning; they also provided opportunities to engage learners in real situations that required a contextualized use of language, rather than just using specified features of it. Third, “materials should facilitate students’ self-investment which aids the learner to make efficient use of the resources to facilitate self-discovery” (p.7), this principle was supported by Oxford (1997), when she affirmed that group learning activities helps students improving self-esteem and enhances motivation. Fourth, “materials should provide the learner with opportunities to use the target language to achieve communicative purposes” (p.7). As the worksheets motivated learners to use the language in different ways, they acquired the ability to use the language effectively, according to the intention and purpose of each exercise. Moreover, by analyzing the situations presented in the worksheets, students were able to analyze topics and communicate their opinions and perceptions towards them; for this reason the worksheets were specially designed to promote speaking by addressing topics that were appealing for the students and that could apply to the Colombian context. As Núñez and Téllez (2009) affirmed, learners’ particular needs, informed teaching and learning tendencies, and the wide range of socio-cultural conditions must be properly identified, addressed and considered if we want to promote more interesting, significant, and favorable learning environments. Fifth, “materials should not rely too much on controlled practice” (p.7). This refers to when learners practice language in grammar exercises such as blank filling or drilling and they do not produce language on their own. As reported by, Ellis (1997) controlled practice seems to have little long-term effects in learners. Sixth, “materials should offer plenty of free practice”. (p.7) Bearing in mind that the key to learn a foreign language properly, includes giving students the possibility to connect the new

knowledge into their daily lives, the topics of the worksheets were a useful tool that provided students the possibility to use the language components in a natural way, since the learners had to express their ideas without paying too much attention to accuracy. Accordingly, each worksheet reflected the six SLA Tomlinson principles chosen for the study and considered the interests, needs and context of the participants.

Instructional objectives. The main objective of this intervention is to design and implement six contextualized worksheets to enhance speaking fluency in intermediate students of English. The specific objectives are: (a) To generate an innovative environment where students can use English to communicate orally. (b) To help students to be aware of the importance of speaking fluency. (c) To create materials that address interests to encourage students to develop their speaking fluency skills.

Intervention as innovation. To be innovative is a valuable skill in teachers, it means looking beyond what we normally do, being informed about new teaching methodologies and trying different pedagogical approaches to enhance engagement. The concept of innovation has been interpreted by many Scholars, such as Tomlinson (2012), who defined innovation as “something new which aims to be an improvement on what it already exists. It also aims to be efficient, effective, popular and enduring” (p. 203). In short, innovation is any intervention done by teachers to improve their pedagogical practices as well as the learning enhancement. This includes the creation of materials and pedagogical resources. To this respect, Núñez and Téllez (2009) affirmed that “materials development contributes directly to teachers’ professional growth insofar as it betters their knowledge, skills and creativity, raised their consciousness as regards teaching and learning procedures, and allows them to act as agents of permanent change” (p. 67), which allows to conclude that the implementation of group discussions to develop speaking

fluency, was an innovative tool because it was the first time students had a lesson focused on speaking. Therefore, this study proposed meaningful changes in the way EFL classes were held, since it offered a new pedagogical alternative to motivate students towards learning activities.

Before the implementation of the materials, I developed my own contextualized framework to create the materials (six contextualized worksheets) and to facilitate an impact in the participants' speaking fluency. This innovation was purposeful shown through the materials I developed. To this respect Núñez and Téllez (2017b) affirmed that, "teacher-generated materials, on the one hand, are more likely to provide learners with rich, contextualized and comprehensible input to facilitate their language learning targets; raise awareness of their own learning process and assist their on-going development of a balanced set of skills and content". (p. 24).

In consequence, this pedagogical intervention was innovative for students because the worksheets required the use of thinking and analytical skills, which motivated them towards learning. Also, the discussions contributed to a rise of awareness on socio-cultural problems, tolerance towards others' ideas and on how language is always used for specific communicative purposes. This was supported by Núñez et al (2012) when they mentioned that when teachers develop materials it is important "giving clear instructions, making strategies explicit, balancing and organizing pre and post activities, providing variety in the activities, and including communicative activities appropriate for current language performance" (p. 29)

Moreover, this pedagogical implementation was innovative for me, because I had to assume the role of teacher researcher and that implied self-assessing, modifying my teaching practices and monitoring students to evaluate their needs.

Theory of the nature of language and language learning. The language theory guiding this study was based on Tudor's (2001) four main visions of the nature of language, which are:

The linguistic perspective; the functional perspective; the self-expression perspective and the culture and ideology perspective. In agreement with this theory, I consider the functional and self-expression perspectives as the most appropriate to achieve the instructional goals of this research study.

The functional perspective emphasizes on how “language is used for communicative purposes and how the language form is not independent from the function of language” (p.50). In other words, the function of language is a key element when linguistic processes and structures are used by learners. Following this perspective, when the learners participated in the group discussions, they became aware of how language permits people to interact in social contexts, in this sense, the worksheets developed for this study were communicative focused since learners had to express themselves naturally and assume a position towards a topic.

Additionally, the self expression perspective highlights the fact that “language is a medium to build social relationships and that there should not be any pre-established contents from syllabi, instead learners should experience language by talking about subjects that are relevant to them” (p.51). Therefore, when students participated in the group discussions, they used English with the transactional goal of interchanging their opinions about topics that were in accordance to their ages and interests; consequently, group discussions permitted the creation of a classroom environment that facilitated social relationships inside the classroom and went beyond grammatical aspects of the language.

Regarding the theory of language learning, the experiential learning and the habit formation visions proposed by Tudor (2001) were selected as the most suitable for this study. The experiential learning addresses two main aspects: “learning by doing and experience in context” (p. 51). This refers to using language in context, such as: conversations and discussions, as well

as conceiving the language from a functional perspective that only has meaning through interaction. In this research study, the contextualized materials permitted a permanent exposure to the target language and the topics selected for each worksheet aimed to generate students' constant participation in the lessons.

The habit formation to develop automaticity refers to have refined the skills required in a language and being able to use them automatically. Johnson (1996) affirmed, in this regard, that some aspects of communication require not only the knowledge of the language, but also the being able to use it automatically and in a natural manner. As this study involved students as participants in group discussions, it encouraged students towards a pragmatic use of language that contributed to an improvement of their speaking fluency.

Methodological approach underlying the pedagogical intervention. The methodological approach selected to conduct the pedagogical intervention was the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which according to Richards (2005) is a “set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language and the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning”). (p.2). Likewise, Stern (1983) defined communicative language teaching as a language pedagogy that considers the participatory component as the most effective way for language learning. In the same line of thought, Breen and Candlin (1980) affirmed that in communicative language teaching the process of communication is only produced if the speaker is exposed to genuine linguistic interaction with other speakers of the language.

According to some scholars, when CLT is used, students go through a process of collaborative creation of meaning that leads to autonomous language learning. In other words, learners take responsibility for their own learning by expressing themselves, interacting and using

the language in conversations. As Richards and Rodgers (2001) added, one of the characteristics of CLT is the tolerance of errors as part of the learning process. This means that CLT takes into consideration the communicative function of language rather than structural and formal aspects of it. However, that does not mean that the structural component of language is not considered important or that mistakes are ignored, this methodology proposes teachers to correct accuracy mistakes individually after an activity is completed. In other words, the priority of CLT is involving students in communication tasks where they are aware of the functional use of language by experimenting, but at the same time keeping in mind that the structural component of the language is an integral part of it.

CLT entails a variety of principles that determine how instruction and learning should be structured and delivered. Richards (2005) established the following principles of communicative language teaching: (1). The target language is a vehicle for classroom communication, not just the object of study (2). Errors are tolerated and are considered as a natural outcome of the development of communication skills. (3). The classroom is a community where lessons foster collaboration and sharing. (4). The grammar and vocabulary taught during the lesson must be presented in a functional perspective and it must have a situational context. (5). Teachers should provide opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language but also on the learning process. (6) Participants should know how to maintain communication despite having limitations in ones' language knowledge. (7) Participants must know how to vary the language use according to the setting (p. 3). To sum up, CLT is interested in the needs of learners as well as the connection between the production of language and meaningful communication processes.

Additionally, Richards (2005) criticized the fact that some learning materials still give priority to the grammatical competence, which he defined as “the knowledge we have for a

language that accounts for our ability to produce sentences in a language”. (p. 2). He also added that the goal of language teaching should be to provide real communication opportunities, making an emphasis in group and autonomous learning when he asserted that “one can master the rules of sentence formation in language and still not very successful at being able to use the language for meaningful communication”. (p. 3).

In opposition to the traditional approaches of language teaching, the communicative language teaching includes activities that require negotiation and cooperation between learners which helps students to develop their confidence and to understand language functions. As stated by Richards (2005) CLT changed the idea of “traditional lesson formats where the focus was on mastery of different items of grammar and practice through controlled activities such as memorization of dialogs and drills” (p. 4).

Bearing in mind the principles of CLT, it is important to mention Núñez and Téllez (2017a) assertion “teachers have the possibility of aligning the materials of their pedagogical interventions to those they are already using for their pedagogical interventions to be implemented in the EFL classes”. (p. 23) It can be concluded that communicative language teaching was reflected in the pedagogical intervention of this research study every time that the participants used the contextualized materials that included exercises in which learners had to interact with their classmates, as well as other exercises in which they had to build knowledge together without relying on the teacher as she was only there to facilitate and monitor learning, rather than to transmit knowledge.

Connection of the pedagogical intervention with the research question. The implementation of group discussions helped students to develop their speaking fluency in many ways. First, because while students were organizing their ideas for the discussion, they also

worked on linguistic features of the language to have a better understanding of the language. Second, when the groups discussions took place students used collaborative learning which helped them be fluent and help each other in the understanding the topics and contents of the worksheets. It also permitted students to connect the topics of the class with real life experiences. Furthermore, this implementation was connected to the mission of the institute which states that by reflecting on issues presented along the language learning processes, students are aware of the existing problems in their social background to generate changes.

Instructional phases. The implementation of the pedagogical intervention in this study was divided in the following phases.

Proposed material development framework. To define the materials development framework for the implementation of the worksheets, first, I analyzed the frameworks proposed by Núñez and Téllez (2004) and Matsuhara (2004). Based on the similarities found among them, I came up with my own version of it. In regards to the framework proposed by Núñez and Téllez The authors mentioned as the first procedure: conducting a needs analysis survey, as a second procedure, planning clear objectives, as the third procedure selecting a series of activities, and as a final procedure, carrying out an adequate assessment of the materials, moreover, Núñez and Téllez (2017b) affirmed that to develop materials it is essential to begin with the application of a needs assessment survey, which they mentioned is “an ongoing process to successfully approach students’ objective, subjective, language learning and target needs” (p. 30).

In accordance with Núñez and Téllez framework, Masuhara, (2004) also established as the first procedure the implementation of a needs analysis. As second procedure, setting goals and objectives, as the third procedure, designing a syllabus, as fourth, establishing an appropriate methodology and finally, testing and evaluating the materials to establish its usefulness.

Taking into account the information presented above I created the following materials development framework: 1. Carry out a needs analysis; to explore what the group attitudes and needs towards learning are. 2. Select the methodological approach that is in accordance with the language skill that will be addressed in the study; 3. Set a general objective and specific objectives; 4. Plan and design the contents and activities that will be included in the materials; 5. Pilot the materials; this refers to testing the viability of the research study by exploring and evaluating the instruments, procedures and techniques that will be used. Piloting helped me to identify and prevent possible problems that could emerge during the implementation. In this study, the piloting stage was conducted with students from an intermediate level at the languages institute where I work. In the piloting, I implemented the worksheets to see if they were in accordance to level of English proficiency. Hence, I adjusted the language, deleted information that was confusing and added useful information such as vocabulary lists, and question prompts among others.6. Revise, adapt and adjust the materials developed.

The image below shows the needs assessment survey conducted with the participants, it illustrates learners' answers regarding the question N°2: What is the most difficult skill for you to learn?

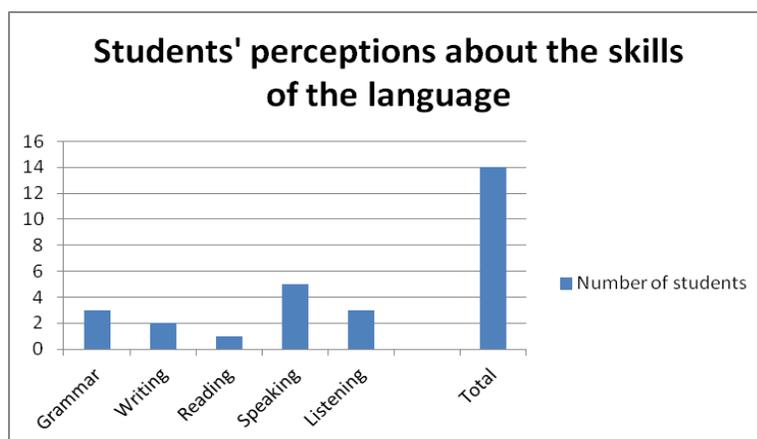


Chart 1. Students' perceptions about the skills of the language.

As it can be seen, five of the 14 students expressed that the most difficult skill for them to learn was speaking, followed by listening and grammar, students also mentioned that they wanted a class in which they did not have to structure their ideas following grammatical rules. Having in mind students' responses in the survey, I decided to look for a learning methodology that helped students to enhance their speaking skills by conveying messages in conversational contexts which is group discussions.

Informed consent. To get authorization to conduct the study, I sent an informed consent letter (See Appendix C) to the participants and their parents. In the letter students were informed about the implications of participating in the study and the confidentiality of the data gathered.

Sensitization. Students were provided with all the information regarding their participation in the study as well as the procedures of group discussions. In this stage I defined the terms group discussion and fluency, I also explained students the objectives of the study, the pedagogical strategies, the procedures, their expected role, my role, and how the study was going to benefit them in the development of their speaking fluency.

Implementation of the materials. Before beginning this stage, a calendar was designed to establish the time devoted to each lesson. Then the worksheets were applied in the class sessions and I guided students through the process of the group discussions. After the implementation of the first worksheet, I analyzed which aspects from the other worksheets needed to be modified to improve them and achieve the objectives proposed for the study.

The procedure for the group discussions held during the pedagogical implementation of this study was basically the same and it was divided in five stages (1). Plan and analyze. Students were asked to brainstorm or mind-map all of the possible ideas that came to their minds when they saw words and expressions related to the topic of the lesson, for instance, animal rights.

Then, students shared their notes with other classmates and explained the relevance of each idea they included in the mind map. (2). Persuade. Students answered a question that guided the discussion, and after that, students had some time to think of ideas and arguments that they could use express their opinion on the topic presented. That process implied, first, compiling arguments and second, prioritizing them. (3). Discuss. The class was divided in small groups, each group read the questions provided by the teacher and expressed their ideas on the topic by relating it to prior knowledge and establishing a position towards it. (4). Conclude. All the group members analyzed the positive and negative aspects of the positions assumed by the group members towards the topic.

The next chapter presents the categories and subcategories that emerged from the data analysis and supports each finding with theory done in the field.

Chapter IV

Data Analysis

Data Analysis Procedure

To conduct the data analysis, I proceeded to read through the data by using the grounded approach, a method of qualitative analysis that enables researchers to conceptualize patterns through constant comparison of the data. Grounded approach was defined by Charmaz (2006) as “an inductive method for collecting and analyzing data to construct theories” (p. 6). Likewise, Corbin and Strauss (1997) pointed out that “grounded approach involves collecting and analyzing data to identify common features and define data categories supported by theoretical insights” (p. 10). In other words, grounded approach constructs theory taking the data as the starting point rather than the other way around, and it moves from the specific to the more general.

Grounded approach is different from other data analysis approaches because it uses the constant comparative method in which data are compared to determine similarities and differences. Grounded approach was chosen as the method to guide the data analysis of this study for three reasons: First, because it is an exploratory method convenient in the investigation of social processes; second, because it helps the researcher to propose, rather than to test theory and third, because it ensures that the research process is protected from the possible biases that can emerge during the research process.

In accordance with the tenets of grounded theory mentioned above, I decided to follow the framework for qualitative data analysis proposed by Charmaz (2006), which consists in three stages for data analysis: “the initial coding, the focus coding and the axial coding” (p. 46). Therefore, I started with the initial coding, a starting stage of organization of data that required going through all the textual data from the focus groups transcripts, the field notes, and the open

questions in the self assessment to look for particular concepts which could help me gaining insights to define the research categories. It also implied assigning initial codes that were related to the constructs addressed in the theoretical framework proposed for this research study, but at the same time, it entailed being open to new possibilities that could emerge in the process of analysis. As Charmaz (2006) asserted “when grounded theorists conduct initial coding, we remain open to exploring whatever theoretical possibilities we can discern in the data.” (p. 47), which means that there cannot be any preconceptions about the new information but the researcher, has to do an objective categorization of the information based on the research study itself.

Charmaz (2006) highlighted the benefits of initial coding that include: fit and relevance when she asserted that “your study fits the empirical world when you have constructed codes and developed them into categories that crystallize participants’ experience.” (p. 54). The next stage in the data analysis process was the focused coding which Charmaz (2006) described as “a more selective stage, in which the researcher uses the earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data with the aim of categorizing it into significant codes”. (p. 57). She also clarified that “focused coding requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize your data incisively and completely”. (p. 57). In the same line of thought, Creswell (2012) affirmed that “focused coding helps the researcher to make sense out of the data, divide it into text segments, label the segments with codes, and examine the codes for overlap and redundancy” (p. 12) This means, identifying the most significant codes within the data to define the research categories.

To do this, I implemented color coding, a technique that facilitates finding interrelationships in the data. According to Taylor and Renner (2003), color coding consists of

“giving each theme a different color and keeping notes of emerging ideas or patterns of how you are interpreting the data” (p. 6). Thus, to perform color coding, I highlighted each common concept that emerged from the analysis of the data from the instruments of data collection: students’ artifacts’, field notes, self-assessment, transcriptions from the audio recordings and the focus groups with a different colors to identify the relation they had to each one of the constructs that guided this study. Then I proceeded to assemble them into groups named by codes; color coding was a key step in the process of data analysis since it helped me to create a visual organization of the data and allowed me to recognize common patterns.

To assure the validity of the findings and to consider different dimensions of the phenomenon of fluency, I used triangulation which was defined by Cohen and Manion (1985) as an “attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint” (p. 254). This means, confirming the consistency of findings generated by different data collection methods with the aim of reducing bias, such as the triangulation method. To this regard Taylor and Renner (2003) added that “Good analysis depends on understanding the data. Write down any impressions you have as you go through the data. These impressions may be useful later”. (p. 2)

Triangulation is divided in two different types: Methodological and theoretical: the methodological involves the use of multiple qualitative or quantitative methods to study a phenomenon. On the other hand, theoretical triangulation involves combining different research methods (quantitative and qualitative) in an attempt to improve research reliability and validity. As Barker and Pistrang (2005) declared: “theoretical triangulation involves finding value in a variety of sources of information, including believing that no research method is inherently superior to any other” (p. 52). Thus, this study used both types of triangulation, theoretical and

methodological, since I analyzed results from different sources such as field notes and transcriptions from audio recordings and compared them with the transcriptions of the focus groups.

Triangulation played a crucial role in the data analysis stage, because it helped me to make connections among the data and to ensure reliability by making the findings certain. Moreover, I reduced the data with the purpose of dividing the amount of data into small manageable segments for easy interpretation. To this regard, Miles and Huberman (1984) affirmed that “data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions and how the researcher interprets it”. (p. 19).

Data reduction assisted me to select relevant information based on common aspects related to each construct, to establish the research categories. The final stage in the data analysis was the axial coding in which I organized the emerging themes into a chart that compiled the categories and their correspondent sub-categories. To this regards Charmaz (2006) affirmed that “axial coding provides a frame for researchers to apply. The frame may extend or limit your vision, depending on your subject matter and ability to tolerate ambiguity.” (p. 66). This means that the data is put into a coherent schema that facilitates its interpretation. Later I carefully revise the data again to select corresponding evidence to support each category and subcategory and corroborated that they were properly supported.

Research Categories

After conducting the analysis of the data, I defined three categories and five subcategories to identify the impact on the speaking fluency of a group of pre-intermediate English students,

after implementing six worksheets based on group discussions as follows. After the chart of categories I will present and interpret the evidence that confirms the findings.

Research question: How do the design and implementation of worksheets based on group discussions contribute to the development of speaking fluency in a group of pre-intermediate English students from a languages institute in a public university?	
Categories	Subcategories
Activating and structuring speaking practice through prior knowledge and scaffolded contextualized materials.	<p>Making connections to prior knowledge impacted students' engagement with the topics of the worksheets.</p> <p>Scaffolded practice in the materials provided a space to develop confidence to discuss.</p>
Achieving language production by using collaborative work in group discussions.	Collaborative work as a tool to enhance language production in group discussions.
Improving fluency through meaningful speaking practice and the use of learning strategies.	<p>Fluency strategies provided support to compensate for lack of ideas and language resources (Strategies gradually help students to elaborate on their answers).</p> <p>Meaning over form predominated in students' production</p>

Table 1. Research categories

Activating and structuring speaking practice through prior knowledge and scaffolded contextualized materials. As the worksheets used in this study included topics that

were in accordance with interests, they offered learners the possibility to use language by exchanging ideas of topics that were familiar for them and that they could easily relate to personal experiences. As it was stated by Rumelhart (1977), “we comprehend something only when we can relate it to something we already know” (p. 265). In other words, comprehending an idea goes beyond the linguistic competence since it requires using the knowledge that the learner already possesses. Moreover, to assist learners in their fluency development, the worksheets were designed using the teaching strategy of scaffolding, which according to Gibbons (2014) is “an instructional strategy that involves assisting students in their process of learning by modifying the level of complexity of the classroom activities” (p. 2). This means, not giving students too much information at once and instead, dividing the contents into smaller pieces to help learners understand them easily. This research category is divided into two subcategories, named *Making connections to prior knowledge impacted student' engagement with the topics of the worksheets* and *Scaffolded practice in the materials provided a space to develop confidence to discuss*.

Making connections to prior knowledge impacted students' engagement with the topics of the worksheets. Learners at the institute come from different backgrounds and have varied interests. However, something this group had in common was their age range. This factor facilitated the creation of the materials since it permitted me to select appealing topics in a Núñez, Téllez, Castellanos, and Ramos (2009) stated that teachers should develop their own materials. First, because materials designed by English teachers stimulate students' learning process, and second, because teachers who develop materials improve their teaching insights, practices and procedures. Therefore, the worksheets included topics that were chosen by students in a survey conducted at the beginning of the implementation. Moreover, to ensure that the topics

were in consonance with interests, I considered prior knowledge, which played an essential role in the learning process. In this regard, Kujawa and Huske (1995) affirmed that “considering who the students are and how they perceive the world based on their culture and surrounding environment helps learning” (p. 32). In other words, prior knowledge influences comprehension since it activates the information students already poses about a topic. In the same line of thought, Brown and Yule (1993) affirmed that “prior knowledge leads us to expect or predict aspects in our interpretation of discourse” (p. 248).

Having in mind that prior knowledge plays a significant role in speaking, it is possible to affirm that when learners have prior knowledge of the topic that is being discussed, they may already know the vocabulary and grammar necessary to participate in the group discussion. In that sense, prior knowledge allowed me to engage students in discussions of topics that were familiar for them to strengthen their ability to communicate ideas and thoughts naturally. To illustrate the stated above, the following excerpts from the open questions in the self-assessment form in the artifacts show how different students valued the fact that the materials were contextualized and exemplify how learners used prior knowledge in their interventions.

“The activities allowed us to express our life experiences and to learn new vocabulary”. [sic] (*Self-assessment in artifacts, worksheet 4*)

S# 1: “I was comfortable when participating in the discussion because I had confidence with the group and as the topics were known, I could give my opinion easily”. [sic] (*Focus group 1*)

S# 4: “I think the topics in the worksheets made us be interested and encouraged us to participate, because we were giving our opinion and not drawing conclusions of a topic did not know”. [sic] (*Focus group 1*)

As we can see, the first student highlights the importance of sharing life experiences and the last student points out the fact that the material was took into account their needs. Moreover, she also perceived the worksheets as a valuable tool that contributed to her learning process.

Similarly, the following excerpt shows how learners connected the topics or situations provided in the worksheets to their life experiences by giving an example of a particular idea.

S# 1: “My grandparents were vegetarian for two years but they had to eat meat again because they lost muscular mass and they had other health problems”. [sic] (*Audio recording transcript, worksheet 5*)

S#2: “I have seen a man that goes in his motorcycle around Bogota giving food to street dogs but that is something that I cannot do because I don't have a motorcycle, but some day I would like to take all of the street animals to live in a safe shelter”. [sic] (*Audio recording transcript, worksheet 5*)

The previous excerpts provide evidence on how students made sense of the topics proposed in the classes through relating different experiences they or their loved ones had in their lives. Connecting the topics of the worksheets to personal experiences helped students to confidentially participate in the group discussions, as well as the fact that the topics were familiar for students encouraged them to participate actively in the group discussion.

Scaffolded practice in the materials provided a space to develop confidence to discuss.

As the worksheets contained several exercises with different levels of complexity, they progressively move students towards stronger learning; they also contributed to confidence in the moment of the group discussion by providing vocabulary and expressions that helped students constructing their intervention. According to Gibbons (2007), scaffolding is “the means whereby a student is able to carry out a task that, alone, he or she would be unable to complete” (p. 4). This means that through scaffolding teachers help students to face the challenges they have to confront during the language learning process. In agreement with the scholars’ opinion, I can affirm that the six worksheets became a bridge for the gap between the language struggled and the content. First, because each worksheet presented the objectives of the lesson to focus on the most important elements of the process of learning; second, because the first page of each worksheet had images related to the content of the lesson to inform students from the very

beginning what the lesson was going to be about; third, because, as the worksheets asked students to produce information in different forms (completing charts, answering questions orally, doing surveys, etc) they helped engaging students in the topic; finally, as the worksheets included lists of expressions to give opinion and to connect ideas they facilitated the language production as well as the construction of meaning. As the following excerpt shows, opinion questions helped students to establish a point of view in relation to the topic.

S# 5 “I agree with these points because I think that animals are so important and it's a good thing that animals have proper protection”. [sic] (*Self-assessment in artifacts, worksheet 4*)

Similarly, the fact that most of the exercises in the worksheets were done in group helped students to decrease anxiety and provided them with enough confidence, so that in the moment of the group discussion their answers came naturally. The following excerpts shows how group work helped students to develop confidence when participating in the group discussion.

S# 2 “Thanks to the discussions, now I can be surer of my answers and to trust my knowledge at the moment of speaking”. [sic] (*Self-assessment in artifacts, worksheet 5*)

S # 4. “At the beginning I had difficulty to participate because first, I am a little shy, and second, because I needed more vocabulary, so it was difficult for me to express my opinion about a topic. But then with constancy and my classmates help I could have more fluency and more confidence”. [sic] (*Focus group 1*)

Observing the previous pieces of evidence, it is possible to see how students recognized that group work is as a tool to share their skills in the language as well as value their classmates' contributions. Having described and exemplified the relevant features embraced by the first research category, I present the second category that emerged after the data analysis.

Achieving language production by using collaborative work in group discussions.

Participating in the group discussions was challenging for students since it implied exchanging ideas on a variety of topics, reflecting about the situations presented in the worksheets and using language to convey ideas properly. In this sense, the following category explains how

participants achieved language production thought the use of collaborative work in the group discussions. Roschelle (1992) defined collaborative work as “the mutual engagement of participants in a coordinated effort to solve a problem together” (p .235). In the same line of thought, Nunan (1997) added that by collaborative learning, students interpret new understandings of the foreign language by doing group analysis. In other words, collaborative work entails that all the members of a group work together to obtain a common goal, this requires that the members cooperate among themselves and search for strategies to reach the goal, in this case, speaking fluency. This category has the following subcategory:

Collaborative work as a tool to enhance language production in group discussions.

After the implementation of the pedagogical intervention, I identified several benefits of collaborative work for the participants in this study: First, when students use collaborative work they exchange ideas, therefore, they learn from one another and generate new knowledge together. According to Smith and Macgregor (1992), collaborative work is “a powerful tool that provides meaningful experiences for students and teachers, in which learning as a group is the motor that impulses other learning processes” (p. 1); second, students who are usually reluctant to speak in front of a whole class benefit when working collaboratively because interacting in small groups helps them to lower the anxiety that is usually caused by the fear of public speaking. To this regard, McIntyre and Gardner, (1991) affirmed that language anxiety can be the result of different factors that are related to the personality, learning environment among others. This means that a person can experience public speaking anxiety when asked to give a talk in front of a class but not when speaking in pairs or small groups"; third, collaborative work allows students to construct knowledge on their own. As Johnson and Smith (1991) claimed “In collaborative learning knowledge is constructed, discovered, and transformed by students”. (p. 1). In other

words, learning is conceived as a process of self discovery that occurs when the student assumes the responsibility of his own process of learning; fourth, collaborative work facilitates learners to deal with limitations related to insufficient language resources. Consequently, students who have limited language resources are supported by the other members of the group; finally, when students listen to others' opinions they are exposed to different perceptions of the issue presented which expands their understanding on the topic and fosters the development of social skills. Vygotsky (1978) affirmed that "knowledge construction occurs within social context that involves student-student and expert-student collaboration on real world problems that build on each person's language, skills, and experience shaped by each individual's culture" (p. 102), considering this, it can be concluded that group discussions responded to necessity of having a space in which they could learn language naturally. The following excerpts from artifacts show the way the activities engaged students in collaborative group work

Speaking

Group work: Imagine a parallel universe where animals were the dominant species, and they treated us like the human race treats them. Look at the images below and share your feelings about them.



(artifacts, worksheet 5)

Speaking

Group work
Organize in groups of five. Look at the following problems of Bogota and propose one solution for each problem. Use the sentences below.



(artifacts, worksheet 4)

As it can be seen in the pieces of evidence, students had to analyze situations together as well as provide solutions for problems. The following excerpt illustrates how students perceived the group discussions:

S # 4 “I think the work in the group discussions is different from what is done in a normal class because here we all have to support each other and there is not stress. In here we all had to give our contributions and we learned one from another”. [sic] (*Focus group1*).

Similarly, student # 3 added

S#3 “In the group discussions, we were all the time helping each other, for example if one of us forgot an idea our partners helped to complement it”. [sic] (*Focus group1*).

S # 1 “Also the fact that other people disagree with your opinion helps you to think of new ideas to convince them, and forces you to speak more”. [sic] (*Focus group1*).

As we can see, student # 4 highlights the importance of classmates support during the interventions and how the discussions helped them to learn the language naturally.

Furthermore, during class observations, I noticed that in spite of the fact that students could use electronic devices to look for unknown vocabulary or they could ask for my assistance with it, learners preferred to rely on one another to compensate for lack of vocabulary.

“During the group discussions there was a moment in which a student did not know how to say one word in English, so he first asked the group members and then he confirmed it with me”. [sic] (*field notes, worksheet 1*).

The following excerpt illustrates how students relied on one another when they did not know how to say a word in English or when they could not express one idea they had in mind for lack of vocabulary.

S # 2 “How do you say gente de la calle?” [sic] Student #6 “homeless people” [sic] (*audio recording, worksheet 6*)

S # 5 “Being in the group discussions was constructive because even though there were classmates who had more level than me, there were times when they needed my help because they were learning too. So a lower

level person can also help a higher level person”.[sic]. (*Focus group1*).

Observing the previous pieces of evidence, it is possible to notice that students recognized the importance of working collaborative when they mentioned that group discussion help students to build knowledge together; as the data indicate, when pupils work collaborative they acquire language through interaction and that differs from what is normally done in a class. Moreover, when students were asked for the dynamics of the group discussions, they mentioned examples of working collaboratively to provide solutions for the problem solving exercises in the worksheets.

S # 2 “For example, when we had to give a solution for the problem of homeless people, each one of us gave an idea and we put everything together to make a logical and fair solution”. [sic] (*Focus group 1*).

S # 1 “ And it was not only to give an opinion but also to be aware of the issues that were discussed because some classmates had more knowledge to help solving certain issues”. [sic] (*Focus group 2*).

To confirm the fact previously described, I present the following piece of evidence that shows how learners helped one another for the development of the group discussion.

“During the group discussion, some students checked their ideas with other classmates: "is this sentence correct? Or is it correct to say"...?" [sic] (*Field notes worksheet 1*)

As it can be seen, students not only shared knowledge about their ideas and opinions but they also helped their classmates to be accurate when speaking.

Improving fluency through meaningful speaking practice and the use of learning strategies. Acquiring fluency in any foreign language is one of the most challenging tasks for learners. Therefore, participants of the current study had to face many challenges during the process of improvement of their speaking fluency. Hence, fluency strategies served the purpose of allowing students to speak quickly and without having to stop a lot. To this regard, Rivers

(1966) stated that “teaching the comprehension of spoken speech is therefore a primary importance of the communication aim is to be reached” (p. 196). In short, meaningful speaking practice is required to achieve the goal of communication. From this category emerged two subcategories as follows: 1. *Fluency strategies provided support to compensate for lack of ideas and language resources* and 2. *Meaning over form predominated in students' production*.

Fluency strategies provided support to compensate for lack of ideas and language resources. Having in mind that becoming a fluent speaker of English requires being confident when speaking in English, I provided learners with different fluency strategies such as: lexical fillers, connectors, the 4, 3,2 technique, prompts to give opinion, circumlocution, scaffolding, responding and initiating, role plays and interviewing. These speaking fluency strategies helped students to overcome the obstacles faced in terms of fluency when participating in the group discussions. Thus, in each lesson learners received instruction and exemplification on how to use each fluency strategy. The strategies were found in the last part of each worksheet right before the group discussion, to guide interventions. The strategies helped learners to reduce hesitation when conveying messages, to gain time while they were thinking what to say next, to speak quickly and without having to stop much. To this regard, Cohen et al. (1996) affirmed that language learning strategies are beneficial for students because they support students in the acquisition process of a target language to improve their knowledge. This means that when students have difficulties producing language they can rely on fluency strategies to gain time to think of a new idea or to re organize the initial one. Considering Cohen et al.'s assertion, it can be concluded that in the pedagogical implementation of this study fluency strategies helped students to exchanged ideas meaningfully with their classmates. The following evidence from students' artifacts shows how the fluency strategies were explained for students in the worksheets.

Fluency strategies



Learning strategy: Using lexical fillers: getting time to organize ideas when speaking.

Speaking fluency strategies:
 Lexical fillers are words that speakers use to fill in gaps in their speech when they are thinking what to say next. They are used when the speaker, agrees to other's opinion, denies the matter, asks others to continue, or expresses hesitation. You must not overuse lexical fillers, otherwise you will sound unconfident when speaking

E.g. Last week I went to the doctor, and I was, eh, kind of, eh, nervous, and the doctor asked me to, um, lie down on a, mmm, sort of a table...!

Common lexical fillers in English

Learning strategy: using connectors and discourse markers.



2. Using Linking words
 It is important that you develop your ideas using appropriate connecting words and phrases. In this exercise you can practice connecting your ideas by using the following words.

Tie Your Ideas Together with Transition Words

Show times:
 first later then
 second next soon
 third earlier
 last before
 during afterward

Clarify:
 in other words
 as a result
 in short
 to put it another way
 putting it simply

(Student's artifacts, worksheets 3 and 5)

The following transcript of audio recordings from the group discussions #2 and #6 shows how students constructed their interventions in the group discussion through the use of the speaking fluency strategies. It is clear how students progressively applied the speaking fluency strategies learnt throughout the pedagogical intervention.

Worksheet # 2 Tattoos and body modifications	Worksheet # 6 Welcome to my city: Bogotá
<p>Student # 1: In my opinion, I agree in some things with you because nowadays you find many people that have many tattoos, it is a trend. I have a friend that has a tattoo of the date in which she was born. [sic] <i>(audio recordings from the group discussion in worksheet 2)</i></p>	<p>Student # 1: In my opinion, I consider that the biggest problem is the garbage in the city, in the streets you see a lot of garbage, the people is unclean and I consider that it is terrible first because there are so many people that don't take care of the city, and second because I consider that Bogotá receives many people from other cities. [sic] <i>(audio recordings from the group discussion in worksheet 6)</i></p>

Table 2. Audio recordings transcripts to show student fluency comparison in group discussion 2 and 6.

Comparing the first and last speeches of participant # 1 it is interesting to see how in the first group discussion that corresponds to the second worksheet, which questioned students about their opinions about having piercing or tattoos, the student only uses the fluency strategy of opinion words, whereas in the second group discussion that corresponds to the sixth worksheet related to giving solutions to the problems in Bogotá, she started her intervention with the opinion words and then she organized her ideas using sequence discourse markers. This means that after some class sessions learners were able to produce longer and more complete speeches. To this respect, Jong and Perfetti (2011) stated that “fluency is related to the speed of access, and control over the available linguistic forms and syntactic devices” (p. 533). This means that one of the essential elements for students to gain fluency when speaking in English is to have the opportunity to speak constantly as they did in the group discussions. As it can be seen in the following chart students' interventions were measured to compare their performance between the first and the last group discussion.

	GD #1	GD #2	GD #3	GD #3	GD #5	GD #6
Number of silent pauses	6	6	5	4	3	2
Duration of silent pause	4 seconds	4 seconds	3 seconds	3 seconds	2 seconds	2 second
Filled pauses	1	3	3	5	5	5
Duration of intervention	2.5 minutes	3 minutes	4.5 minutes	5 minutes	6 minutes	9 minutes

Table 3. *fluency advancement in each group discussion, Student # 1.*

As illustrated by the chart above, it was evident that along the pedagogical implementation students were able to produce more fluent speeches, fill pauses and make less long and less frequent pauses. Moreover, the following piece of evidence from the focus group shows how students recognized the impact that fluency strategies had in their speaking fluency.

S # 2. “At the beginning when I did not know the exact word I was silent and did not know what to do, but after I learnt the strategy of describing the word to my classmates to make myself be understood I could speak better”. [sic] (*Focus group 1*).

S# 6 “I consider that the lexical fillers were important because as we are leaning other language, our brain automatically sends us the idea in Spanish, but when we use the lexical fillers we can continue using the language without having to use Spanish”. [sic] (*Focus group 2*).

As it can be seen in the excerpts above, learners mentioned how fluency strategies helped them to be coherent when speaking in English. This also shows that as the worksheets explained how to use the learning strategies learners were able to speak more fluently in the moment of the discussion. After the analysis of data, other important aspect related to strategies and fluency development emerged. Even though learners were provided with information on fluency strategies, some students created their own strategies for fluency development. For example, they made a general answer for the question being discussed they asked for clarification of questions,

they took notes about what they wanted to say and they provided visual clues such as mimics. The excerpt below exemplifies how students use the strategies built by themselves in the group discussions.

S # 5. “I think it's important that sometimes you do not know a word and you do mimics and they understand the idea”. [sic] (*Focus group 2*).

As we can see in the excerpt students took advantage of all the ways they had to communicate their opinions and feeling about the topics. To this regard, Bailey (2003) asserted that students often have difficulties to convey ideas because they lack vocabulary or grammatical structures. For this reason, they use “communication strategies—verbal and/or nonverbal procedures for compensating for gaps in speaking competence” (p. 19). In short, the level of fluency each learner acquires is related to the effort he makes to make himself be understood by using several strategies such as mimics and others. The following excerpt shows students used non verbal communication strategies.

“Some students were anxious when they didn't know a word, most of them asked their classmates by saying the word in Spanish while others made mimics to represent the word they had in mind”. [sic] (*field notes, worksheet 2*)

In conclusion, the use of fluency strategies helps students to develop not only fluency but also to communicate ideas with less hesitation, but this can only be achieved through a constant exposure of language.

Meaning over form predominated in students' production. Throughout the pedagogical intervention students had to participate in group discussions, which required them to naturally express their opinion about different topics. After the analysis of the data, it was possible to affirm that students seemed to be more interested on meaning rather than in form. This means that students were more concerned about communicating their ideas and opinions rather than

producing perfectly constructed sentences. To this respect, Basturkmen, Loewen and Ellis (2002) affirmed that “in focus on meaning the primary focus of attention is on meaning. Attention to form arises out of meaning-centered activities derived from the performance of a communicative task” (p. 420). This means that learning the form of the language is only possible after a speaking practice that considers meaning as the most important component of language. The following excerpts confirm how students preferred to pay more attention to meaning than to other aspects of the language such as structure or pronunciation.

S # 7. “Sometimes one thinks much in the structure of the sentence, but the important thing is to interact and to be understood even if we have to use mimicry. In the groups one did mimics and one classmate understood the word that one had in mind and told one the word, so all of us helped each other”. [sic] (*focus group 2*)

Similarly student #8 mentioned how in the group discussion they used language for communicative purposes.

S # 8 “Besides the worksheets helped use to learn English, they made us conscious about how to improve aspects of our city, they also had useful vocabulary that explains us how to express ideas”. (*Self-assessment in students’ artifacts, worksheet 4*)

This was also confirmed during class observation.

“Students were relaxed when discussing, in spite that some of them made grammar mistakes it seemed as if meaning was the most important factor in students interactions”. [sic] (*Field notes, worksheet 6*)

From the excerpts above, it can be concluded that for students, being fluent speakers meant having the ability to communicate comprehensibly their ideas and opinions. To this respect, Bygate (1987) stated “a speaker of the language should be able to use the knowledge he possesses about the language in different situations”. (p. 10). In the same line of thought, Hartmann and Stork (1976) added that “a person is said to be a fluent speaker of a language when

he can use its structures concentrating on content rather than form, using the units and patterns automatically at normal conversational speed when they are needed". (p. 86). This means that fluency in learners' speech is ensured only if it is focused on meaning rather than correctness. In this sense, teachers should be able to create an environment where language use occurs through meaningful interaction and leads to the communication of ideas, feelings and opinions.

Having described the research categories and findings that emerged from the data analysis, I proceed to present the conclusions, pedagogical implications, limitations and possible questions for future research.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

This chapter presents the conclusions that emerged from the current study to answer the research question: How does the design and implementation of worksheets based on group discussions contribute to the development of speaking fluency in a group of pre-intermediate English students from a language institute in a public university? This chapter also contains the implications for the EFL community, the institute, the students and me as an English teacher and researcher.

Conclusions

The materials used in this study impacted learning because they were innovative, informative and appealing. As the materials took into consideration students particularities, they encompassed needs and provided plenty of opportunities to use language meaningfully and in context. To this respect Crowford (as cited in Sarapli, 2011) affirmed that “teachers need to take extra care about background and learning abilities in class activities therefore they adapt materials to the context in which learning takes place” (p. 40). Furthermore, the fact that the materials were scaffolded and along each worksheet the students were gradually involved in the development of discussions allowed them to follow multiple routes to the language itself and enabled them to access its content despite any limitations related to English language proficiency. To this regard, Núñez, Pineda, and Téllez, (2004) affirmed that “materials should not turn into a meaningless task with the sole purpose of enjoying and keeping the students busy” (p. 130).

Prior knowledge was also essential in learning process because when students participated in the group discussion they built new knowledge by bringing their prior knowledge about the topics discussed. Prior knowledge also helped the participants to build awareness on the fact that

sharing their cultural knowledge with their classmates supports group knowledge. As prior knowledge aided students in the comprehension of the topic that was proposed for each discussion, it resulted in greater comprehension for all the members of the group. Familiarity with the topic also played an essential role in the development of the discussion because students who were familiar with the topic were able to explain their point of view about the topic by supporting it with examples from their own experience. Hence, it was concluded that the contextualized materials used in this study contributed to meaningful learning because they encouraged students to connect the topics to real life situations.

Speaking is a complex skill for most of learners and it requires support. Nevertheless, the participants in this study assumed the responsibility of supporting their classmates' ideas by working cooperatively. This allowed students to realize that when all the members of a group make an effort to achieve the goal of communication, results can be better than when working separately. In that sense, collaborative work and the interaction in the group discussions resulted in group-based learning. It was also concluded that when students with different levels of language proficiency worked together, they were not only taking responsibility for their personal knowledge, but they were also helping all the group members to gain knowledge as well. In that sense, it is important that teachers include in their classes exercises that consider collaborative work to empower students and make them responsible for their own learning process.

Explicit instruction of fluency strategies resulted in coherent and elaborated interventions in the group discussions, which was confirmed through observations and audio recordings where I noticed an important improvement of speech during the first session of the pedagogical intervention compared to the last session. It was also interesting to see how students constructed their interventions in the group discussion through the use of fluency strategies.

Focusing on meaning and not in form allowed students to express what they wanted to say in a simple but meaningful way. Therefore, students stopped considering errors as failure but as part of the process of learning and spent no time studying formal features of the language; but instead, they used the language in real-life situations. In the pedagogical implementation students received discrete forms of instructions in form via correction, and feedback but not by direct explanations, which helped students to acquire difficult forms of the language in context.

Pedagogical implications

This research study enriched my professional growth in many aspects. First, as the study implied designing materials for the pedagogical intervention that were innovative and in accordance to students' interest it was a challenging task that allowed me to grow as materials developer and to apply the contents studied throughout the masters' program. This research study also enriched my knowledge as a teacher researcher since I had to read about pedagogical approaches, theories for EFL learning and most importantly, to interpret them.

The study also benefited the students from the institute because participating in the group discussions required debating and evaluating classmates' opinion, it also encouraged students to use language as a means of communication changing the vision of learning by leaving aside the formal functions of the language and giving importance to meaningfulness. This study was also valuable for English teachers because it gave them the possibility to explore and learn about the creation of communicative classroom materials to suit their needs.

Limitations

One important aspect when participating in a group discussion is that the groups are well balanced, this means that each group consist of students who have a similar English proficiency. Even though participants in this study had a similar level of English proficiency, their

intervention was affected by personality factors such as shyness or extrovertness that influenced their intervention in terms of length and completeness when they expressed ideas and opinions in the group discussions. Therefore, as most students took advantage of the methodology proposed there were a few of them had difficulties talking freely in the group because they did not feel as comfortable with their knowledge of the language as the other members of the group did.

Bearing in mind that speaking is one of the most challenging skills for students, it can be concluded that a second limitation for this research study was the lack of time. Although most of the time of each class session was devoted to the group discussions, in some sessions the process of teaching and application of the fluency strategies took more time than the initially planned, factor that affected the time of the group discussions.

Further Research

Considering the constructs and the theory underlying this research study, I propose the following research questions to be considered for future research: How do the design and implementation of worksheets based on conversation models impacts speaking fluency? How do the design and implementation of worksheets based on group discussions impacts students' critical thinking skills?

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Appendices

Appendix A: Needs assessment survey

ILUD

Speaking Workshop

Dear Students,

In order to conduct the research study “Enhancing speaking Fluency Through Group Discussions” I will design and implement worksheets, for that reason I would like to know your opinion about your expectations and preferences as English learners. The results will guide me in the process of development. There are not correct or incorrect answers. I just need your honest opinion.

1. What type of materials do you prefer to use in an English class

- a. textbook
- b. worksheets
- c. workshops
- d. other _____

2. What is the most difficult skill for you to learn? You can choose more than one option.

- a. grammar
- b. writing
- c. reading
- d. speaking
- e. listening

3. What is more important for you in a material? You can choose more than one option.

- a. the design and images
- b. the type of activities
- c. the topic of the lesson

4. What is the most difficult procedure when you speak in English?.

- a. to develop the idea
- b. to speak in front of the class
- c. to use grammar properly
- d. to speak fluently
- e. to select the vocabulary.
- f. to pronounce well.

5. Why do you think is it important to practice speaking? You can choose more than one option.

- a. To remember information previously learned.
- b. To listen to myself and correct my mistakes.
- c. To analyze topics and share my ideas about it with my classmates.
- d. To apply knowledge in context.

6. Do you like working in groups? yes _____ no _____
 Why? _____

7. How fluent are you when you speak in English?
 _____ I am a very fluent speaker
 _____ I need more practice
 _____ I am not fluent at all

8. Organize from 1 to 8 the topics that you would like to talk about in class.
 (1= interesting. 8= not very interesting).

Social networks and their impact on society.	
Piercing and tattoos. Pros and cons.	
Animal rights.	
Love and relationships.	
Urban cultures (punk, skinhead etc.)	
Bogotá (places to go, problems etc.)	
Vegetarianism and healthy lifestyles.	
Paranormal activity (ghosts, etc)	

Other _____

9. Is there anything you would like to say that might help the teacher to develop the material?

Thank you! Sincerely, Teacher Ximena Rodríguez.

Appendix B: Field notes format

Field notes format Lesson # 1			
Teacher:	Date:	Time:	Topic:
Observation		Observer's Comments	Data Analysis. First Stage

Appendix C: Informed consent letter for students and parents

Bogotá, Agosto 1° de 2017

Apreciados estudiantes

ILUD

Me permito informarles que yo, María Ximena Rodríguez Chapetón me encuentro cursando tercer semestre de la Maestría en Educación con énfasis en Didáctica del Inglés en la Universidad Externado de Colombia, la cual exige como requisito de grado un estudio de investigación realizado en el aula de clase. Por lo tanto, presento ante ustedes el proyecto de investigación "Group discussions on controversial topics: a way to promote speaking fluency enhancement" que deseo implementar con su participación en este taller de producción oral.

El propósito de mi investigación es analizar cómo se desarrolla la fluidez oral de los estudiantes de inglés mediante la participación en discusiones grupales sobre temas controversiales y la aplicación de materiales auténticos. Para llevar a cabo dichas discusiones, se realizarán ejercicios de vocabulario, escucha y lectura relacionados con el tema, para guiarlos al desarrollo de la discusión en grupo y al fortalecimiento de su fluidez oral. A través de este taller conseguirán saber cómo argumentar opiniones y cómo organizar una intervención en inglés usando conectores. La metodología pedagógica se basará en actividades de producción oral, análisis de videos, juegos y discusiones en grupo.

La participación en este proyecto es de carácter voluntario y se garantizará la confidencialidad de la información obtenida durante y después del desarrollo de la investigación. Ni sus nombres, ni su información serán publicados ya que sus identidades estarán protegidas por un seudónimo. Los instrumentos aplicados durante la recolección de datos, entrevistas a grupos focales, notas de campo y grabaciones de voz serán únicamente utilizados por la docente investigadora con propósitos académicos.

Si en algún momento usted tiene alguna pregunta relacionada con la investigación o su participación, puede contactar a la investigadora, Lic. María Ximena Rodríguez, quien responderá a sus preguntas mediante el correo electrónico teacherximena0712@gmail.com. De antemano agradezco su valiosa colaboración.

CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO

Yo _____ (nombre completo) Estoy de acuerdo en participar del estudio titulado Group discussions on controversial topics: a way to promote speaking fluency enhancement. El propósito y naturaleza del estudio me ha sido descrito por la investigadora, Lic. María Ximena Rodríguez. Yo comprendo lo que se me solicita y también sé que puedo hacer las consultas que estime pertinentes. También comprendo que puedo suspender mi participación en cualquier momento a lo largo del proceso.

Firma del participante: _____

Firma de la investigadora: _____

Appendix D: Consent letter for the director of the institute

Bogotá, 08 de Junio de 2017

**Dra.
Sandra Bibiana Cáceres Rueda
Directora
Instituto de lenguas Universidad Distrital
ILUD**

Asunto: Solicitud implementación proyecto investigativo

Apreciada maestra:

Cordialmente me dirijo a usted para solicitar su colaboración y consentimiento para iniciar la implementación del proyecto de investigación que estoy desarrollando para obtener mi título de Magister en Educación con Énfasis en Didáctica del Inglés, de la Universidad Externado de Colombia, el cual lleva por nombre “Group discussions: a way to promote speaking fluency enhancement in the EFL Classroom” y tiene como objetivo reforzar las habilidades comunicativas y la fluidez de los estudiantes a través de la participación en discusiones de grupo sobre temas controversiales. De igual manera, busco analizar el impacto que este tipo de herramientas metodológicas tienen en el contexto académico y sus posibles contribuciones a la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera.

Para la implementación de mi proyecto es necesario que los estudiantes tengan un manejo intermedio del idioma, por lo que solicito amablemente que para el tercer bimestre del año en curso me sea asignado un grupo del nivel perfeccionamiento 2. Esto con el fin de obtener resultados favorables para el desarrollo de mi proyecto investigativo. Los estudiantes serán notificados al inicio del bimestre sobre los beneficios e implicaciones que conlleva su participación en el estudio, la cual se hará de manera totalmente voluntaria.

El material creado para la implementación de este proyecto será usado únicamente con fines investigativos y podrá ser revisado por usted en cualquier momento. Los datos obtenidos contarán con condiciones adecuadas de confidencialidad y sólo la investigadora tendrá alcance a ellos, de modo que estarán protegidos.

Agradezco de antemano el apoyo solicitado para llevar a cabo con éxito este proyecto de investigación que pretendo implementar en el instituto.

Cordialmente,

María Ximena Rodríguez Chapetón
Docente de Inglés
ILUD

Appendix E: worksheet simple



Worksheet # 5

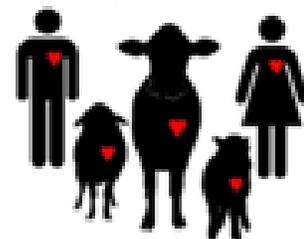
Name: _____ Date: _____

General Objective: To talk about animal rights.**Specific objectives:** (a) To learn about animal rights and propose ways to prevent animal abuse. (b) To use idiomatic expressions related to animals in conversational contexts (c) To generate group discussions about animal rights.**Speaking****Pair work:** Read the animals rights and mention examples of animal use or exploitation.**ANIMAL RIGHTS**

Animal rights are the belief that animals have a right to be free of human use and exploitation.

These are the most important:

1. No animal should be subjected to human use, cruelty or exploitation.
2. All animals have the right to liberty
3. Animals should not be abandoned.
4. Animal should not be exploited for amusement.
5. Slaughtering animals is a crime against life.



Vocabulary: Complete the sentences with the names of the animals in the pictures.



Learning strategy: Using idioms.

1. My grandfather was as brave as a _____.

He wasn't afraid of anything.

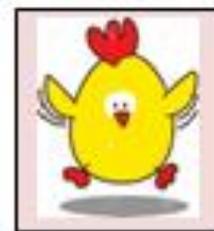
2. My sister is such a copy _____.
First she bought the same car as me, and now she's applying to my university.

3. When she first started working she was a real eager _____. She wasn't liked by her colleagues.

4. I usually go to bed with the _____ because I have to get up early in the morning.

5. Since I started studying at the university I have been busy as a _____.

6. I am going to tell you something that I heard straight from the _____.



Speaking

Pair work: Imagine a parallel universe where animals were the dominant species, and they treated us like the human race treats them. Look at the images below and share your feelings about them.



Learning strategy: Practicing naturalistically.



Speaking

Pair work: 1. Get in groups of two and answer the questions:

What do you do when you are busy as a bee? ~~how~~ do you organize your time?
 Do you know anyone who is as brave as a lion?
 Do you know anyone who is so much an eager beaver that he becomes annoying?

2. Report one of your answers to the class. **Example.** Camilo told me that when he is busy as a bee he wakes up very early, so he can have enough time for all his outstanding issues.

Fluency strategies

Learning strategy: Using role plays to develop fluency.



Speaking fluency strategies:

Role play

Role playing helps you to be a fluent speaker because it gives you opportunities for a lot of language production. When you role play you have to organize your thoughts and make them be interrelated.

... AND
ACTION!



Pairwork: Role play these situations.

Group 1. Role play a conversation in which a woman tells her husband she wants to become a vegetarian.

Group 2. Role play a conversation in which you and your friends discuss whether animals have or do not have emotions.

Group 3. Role play a conversation in which one of you takes a negative position towards animal rights.

Group 4. Role play a conversation in which a woman tries to convince her husband of adopting a street dog.

Group 5. Role play one animal activists' speech at a conference of animal rights.

Listening

Watch this video of a man talking about his pets and answer the questions in the chart.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0_e0u43eKY

	<p>Snake</p>	<p>Rabbit</p>	<p>Hamster</p>
<p>What is the pets' name?</p>			
<p>What adjectives did the man use to describe the animal?</p>			

Write two reasons for having pets: _____

Speaking

Group work : 1. Organize in groups of five and describe your pet. Show pictures and talk about how you got it and the funny things it does. 2. Write the most important ideas from the conversation.

Example: Luisa's pet is a dog. Its name is Lucas. She has had it for 3 years. It was a gift from her boyfriend.

Classmate 1: _____

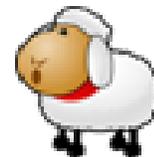
Classmate 2: _____

Classmate 3: _____

Classmate 4: _____

Speaking

Learning strategy: Becoming aware of others' thoughts and feelings.



Group work: Organize in groups of five. Read these opinions about animals rights do you agree or disagree with speaker A or speaker B? why? why not? Give reasons to support your view.

Speaker A

We are animals as we evolved from apes who are animals, so saying animals don't have rights is like saying humans don't have rights. So why do you say they don't have rights?



Speaker B

Animals can't distinguish between good or bad, they have no free will. This is the most obvious difference between an animal and a human: the ability of choosing on a moral basis (what is better and for whom) implies the birth of the term "right", the inability to do so implies the inapplicability of any rights.

They are just like humans. Yes! Animals are very similar to us. Yes, they may have fur and four legs, but they eat and breath. They feel sadness, pain, happiness, etc. Just like humans do. Therefore, they deserve rights.



If animals were to have rights, do you think they would choose to be experimented on or not for medicine purposes? Also, if animals do have rights, won't everyone have to become vegetarians?

Write down a few points explaining why you have this view.

group discussion



Learning strategy: Seeking for practice opportunities.
(practicing the language in naturalistic situations)

Pairwork: Organize in groups of five and talk about the questions below: Use the vocabulary from the lesson.



Is it better to buy or to adopt a pet? Why?



What are your feelings about zoos? How happy do you think animals are in zoos?

Do you think it is wrong to eat animals? What are the advantages or disadvantages of being a vegetarian?



Do you think keeping an animal as a pet is a violation of animals' rights?

What can you do to help the animals that live in the street?

What is the best solution for the problem of animals testing?



Self assessment



Learning strategy: Self-evaluating (evaluating one's own progress in the new language).



Evaluate the material and your progress and performance during the lessons.

My worksheet... Mi guía...	 It does	 It can be better
Includes enough tasks that offered plenty of communicative tasks and group work. Incluye suficientes ejercicios que promueven la comunicación oral y el trabajo en grupo.		
Contains engaging activities that create a comfortable classroom atmosphere which encourages me to participate naturally. Contiene actividades que ayudan a crear un ambiente de aprendizaje agradable que me anima a participar de forma natural.		
Has a catchy design. Tiene un diseño que llama mi atención.		
Has useful content. Tiene un contenido útil.		
Considers my needs and interests. Incluye actividades relacionadas con mis necesidades de aprendizaje e intereses.		
Is organized gradually to facilitate the learning process. Está organizada de forma gradual para facilitar el proceso de aprendizaje.		
Promotes the application of fluency strategies Promueve la aplicación de estrategias que mejoran la fluidez oral.		
Promotes the use of language in context, as well as interaction, negotiation of meaning and group work. Promueve el uso de lenguaje en contexto, interacción, negociación de significados y el trabajo en grupo.		
Any other comment about the material? Cualquier otro comentario acerca del material		

<p>To develop my speaking fluency I _____</p>	<p> I did</p>	<p> I could have done it better</p>
<p>Initiated conversations, and responded to the ones of my classmates. Inicié conversaciones y respondí a las que iniciaron mis compañeros.</p>		
<p>Managed breathing control anxiety and other factors that could affect the speaking process. Manejé mi respiración para controlar factores que inciden en el desarrollo de mi intervención.</p>		
<p>Used pauses in places where natural breaks would occur. Realicé pausas naturales durante mi intervención.</p>		
<p>Participated in the group discussion by sharing my points of view about the topic. Participé en las discusiones en grupo y compartí mis puntos de vista sobre el tema.</p>		
<p>Was respectful towards my classmates and cooperated to contribute to the work group schema. Fui respetuoso con mis compañeros y contribuí a que el esquema de las discusiones en grupo funcionara.</p>		
<p>What other aspects of your speaking fluency did you notice? Que otros aspectos de su fluidez al hablar ha notado?</p>		
<p>The group discussions...</p>	<p> They do</p>	<p> They can be better</p>
<p>Made me use English in an autonomous and meaningful way. Me ayudaron a usar el idioma de forma autónoma.</p>		
<p>Engaged me in the activities since it promotes interactive communication in real contexts. Me motivaron a participar en contextos reales y a interactuar de forma comunicativa.</p>		

<p>Provided me with opportunities to discuss topics in small groups Me brindaron la oportunidad de discutir temas en grupos pequeños.</p>		
<p>Helped me to improve the effectiveness of my communication skills, how to start conversations, how to maintain or change the subject and how to end the topic. Me ayudaron a mejorar la eficacia de mis habilidades comunicativas, como por ejemplo: iniciar conversaciones, cómo mantener o cambiar un tema.</p>		
<p>Helped me to improve my interpersonal skills and encourages me to use the language in communicative contexts. Me ayudaron a mejorar mis habilidades interpersonales y me anima a usar el lenguaje en contextos comunicativos.</p>		
<p>How did the interaction in the discussions contribute to communicate effectively about the topics developed? De que forma la interacción en las discusiones le ayudó a comunicarse efectivamente en los temas desarrollados?</p>		
<p>Comments: _____ _____ _____ _____</p>		

Worksheet developed by Ximena Rodríguez Chapetón.

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