

**Using Communicative Activities to Develop Fluency in English in Secondary Students at
Institución Educativa Municipal Cabrera**

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A Research Project

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Department

Nota de Responsabilidad

Las ideas y conclusiones aportadas en el siguiente Trabajo de Grado es responsabilidad exclusiva del autor.

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Dedication

This research paper is dedicated to:

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My father, who has always taught me how to be a persistent person in the achieving of my goals.

Likewise, how to overcome difficulties and find the better solution for every problem. As well as, how to keep a positive mind in spite of the circumstances are not the better. Finally and the most importantly, how to be a female warrior in life.

And my brother, who taught me that everything is possible. If you want, you can.

Resumen

El Ministerio Nacional de Educación Colombiano estableció el programa nacional de bilingüismo. Una de cuyas metas fue ayudar a las personas a ser capaces de comunicarse en inglés. Sin embargo, la evidencia muestra que esta meta no se ha logrado y existe una carencia de fluidez en la parte oral del lenguaje en todos los niveles educativos. Por esta razón, el objetivo de esta investigación temática es analizar el efecto que las actividades comunicativas tienen en el desarrollo de la fluidez del inglés como lengua extranjera en ambientes de colegio. Para este fin, esta investigación define los conceptos claves tales como enfoque comunicativo, forma y función en el aprendizaje del lenguaje, aprendizaje basado en tareas, tarea y fluidez, cuyos conceptos son los cimientos teóricos básicos para sustentar este estudio. Por consiguiente, esta investigación presenta una propuesta didáctica que consta de algunas estrategias para desarrollar la habilidad del habla, la cual está dividida en tres categorías principales de estrategias instruccionales. Finalmente, concluyo que la meta de las tareas comunicativas en el proceso de aprendizaje de la lengua extranjera es básicamente la de ayudar a los estudiantes a desarrollar la competencia comunicativa dentro del aula de clase para hablar con las demás personas de forma fluida en situaciones de la vida real.

Palabras claves: actividades comunicativas, lenguaje, inglés, fluidez

Abstract

The Colombian National Ministry of Education established the Bilingual National Program. One of whose goals was to help people to be able to communicate in English. However, evidence shows that this goal was not achieved and there is a lack of fluency in the oral part of the language at all educational levels. For this reason, the aim of this research paper is to analyze the effect that communicative activities have in the development of fluency of English as a foreign language in high school environments. For this end, the paper defines the key concepts such as communicative approach, form and function in language learning, task-based learning, task and fluency, whose concepts are the basic theoretical foundations to support this study.

Consequently, this research presents a didactic proposal which consists of some strategies for developing speaking skill, which are divided into three main instructional strategies categories: experimental, interactive or collaborative and individual or independent strategies. Finally, I conclude that the goal of communicative tasks in the process of learning a foreign language is basically that of helping students develop communicative competence within the classroom for speaking to people in a fluent way in real life situations.

Key words: Communicative activities, language, English, fluency

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Using Communicative Activities to Develop Fluency in English in Secondary Students at Institución Educativa Municipal Cabrera

Introduction to the Study

Education deals with a learning and teaching process. The same situation that involves the acquisition or learning different skills and knowledge throughout life in academic and non-academic settings. Nowadays, English is a part of this philosophical foundation contained in curricula carried out in primary and high schools, and higher education.

In Colombia, English is studied as a foreign language because it involves the learning and teaching of it to students whose first language is not English. According to Gibbons (2003) as the language use is limited in this type of environments, time and place are essential to practice; that is the reason why learners need to have not only active participation learning activities inside and outside classrooms, but also teachers are to provide the accurate processes to achieve effective results. In 2004, the Colombian National Ministry of Education (MEN) established the Bilingual National Program (PNB). The PNB is an education program, one of whose goals is to help people to become capable of communicating in English, so that the citizens can integrate Colombia into a “universal communication process, global economy and cultural openness, with standards that can be internationally comparable” (MEN, 2002, p.6). Another goal of PNB was to ensure that all high school students graduated by 2019 had reached a pre-intermediate level of English in the Colombian standards scale of foreign language proficiency or B1 in the Common European Framework of Reference for Language Learning, Teaching and Assessment. Evidence shows that this goal was not achieved and that we still continue to struggle to obtain high standards in this language at all levels, namely primary school, high school, and higher education. This experimental study seeks to analyze the effect that instructional communicative

activities have in speaking development, considering that this skill causes many difficulties to learners to become fluent in the target language.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this experimental study will be to test the theory of communicative tasks as the most solid form to develop fluency proposed by Prabhu's procedural syllabus that relates the communicative tasks to fluency development for students at high school settings.

Communicative tasks will be generally defined as those activities focused on meaning that contain information/gap tasks, reasoning/gap tasks and opinion/gap tasks.

Objectives

General Objective

To analyze the effect that communicative activities have in the development of fluency of English as a foreign language in high school environments.

Specific Objectives

- To design communicative activities for high intermediate Colombian learners studying English as a foreign language.
- To implement a variety of tasks-oriented and information-sharing communicative activities for pair and small groups.
- To provide students with the opportunity for learning by offering the access to situations in which they may interact in the target language.

Justification

According to Savignon (1983) the learning of a foreign language is a mental process of meanings through communicative purposes, language is mainly used for communication. Because of the traditional methods that have been used in the learning of English during these last decades, we student-teachers have learned that one of the major flaws on the part of student learning English at all levels, primary, high school, and higher education is the lack of fluency in the oral part of the language. Take, for example, the instructional practices conducted for some English teachers who focus their work mainly on the structural part of the language teaching and the discrete parts of the language system in a fragmented way without giving much importance to the system in terms of integrating the linguistic competence with the communicative competence, or what is the same without considering the usage and the use of the language. Widdowson (1978) argues that the great emphasis on foreign language learning is placed on the usage: “in most cases the passages produced in structurally graded syllabuses correspond to no normal convention of language use and are not representative of any type of language discourse” (p, 79).

This study is opportune in that the Colombian government has taken the initiative to promote the learning of English as a tool for professional and personal growth in response to globalization, universal communication, and cultural openness. To this end, the Colombian Government concurrently has undertaken a big project to improve the quality in the teaching of this foreign language (Mejia, 2006). Hopefully, this research will lead to an understanding of the communicative tasks on the part of faculty teaching English to high school students.

Theoretical Aspects: Connecting to the Conceptual Framework

The different parts identified in the literature review, such as the concepts of communicative approach, form and function in language learning, task-based learning, what a task and fluency are will be the basic theoretical foundations to support and inform this research paper and are going to be presented in the order mentioned above.

The Communicative Approach

The communicative approach is a way to develop communicative competence in certain levels according to the situation of the speaker and listener. We use language to accomplish some functions such as arguing, persuading, or promising within a social context. An information gap is a characteristic that exists when a person exchanges information that the other person does not know. In this way, the speaker has a choice of selecting the information as well as receiving the feedback of it, used in a real context, and put into practice through authentic language. The target language is a vehicle for classroom communication, not just the object of the study. Students should be given an opportunity to express their ideas and opinions. Errors are tolerated and treated as a natural mean within the teaching and learning process. The origins of communicative language teaching are to be found in the changes of the British language teaching tradition, dating from the late 1960s in response to the audiolingual method which was dominant from the 1950s through the mid-1970s. The need to focus on language teaching and communicative proficiency rather than mere mastery of the structures took effect under the name of communicative language teaching.

The majority of the foreign language teaching methods have as a primary goal enabling students to communicate using the target language. Research has demonstrated that the learning of linguistic structures and vocabulary are not enough to get a good preparation for

communication. Students may know the rules of language usage but will be unable to use the language for actual communication. The most important characteristics of communicative language teaching are given below:

1. Learning theory is cognitive rather than behaviorist with a consequent emphasis on meaningful problem-solving activities rather than repetition drills, particularly those without an adequate context.
2. Syllabuses are signed in terms of pupils' language needs based on the situations where they will use the language and on the role they will play in these situations.
3. Language is presented in terms of the functions needed for particular situations and roles (i.e., promises, polite requests, suggestions, apologies, etc.) rather than in terms of language structures: interrogative, past simple, singular, present perfect, etc.
4. Communicative competence rather than grammatical correctness is emphasized, i.e., the ability to understand and be understood rather than the ability to make grammatically and phonologically correct utterances.
5. A strong emphasis on using authentic language for a real purpose. Classroom language activities should therefore replicate those of the real world as far as possible, i.e., reading to find specific information, asking questions whose answer is not already known.
6. On emphasis on pupil centered activities such as pair work which are largely self-correcting and reduce the amount of teacher direction and teacher talk.
7. Students are communicators actively engaged in negotiating meaning. They learn to communicate by communicating students have great interaction with the teacher and with the classmates too. They are responsible manager of their own learning.

8. The teacher in the classroom is a facilitator of learning; he must aim to coordinate the activities so that the learners form a coherent progression, towards greater communicative ability, as a classroom manager the teacher is responsible for grouping activities, he may act as consultant or advisor, helping when necessary the teacher sometimes must form part of the group of communicator, he might decide not to correct errors that he observes in low levels with the beginners.
9. The material is a fundamental aim in this method. This material is considered desirable to give students an opportunity to develop strategies for understanding language. Authentic materials, scrambled sentences, language games, picture strip story and role play are some of the tools to help to carry out this commitment.
10. Culture is the everyday lifestyle of native speaker of the target language.

A general procedure could be like this a) students can work in the small groups because this facilitates the communicative interchange; b) students based on the given material established an active and ongoing to communication; c) the most important aspect of activities are:

1. Pre-communicative activities in which the teacher isolates elements of knowledge or skill that compose communicative ability providing the learners with opportunities to practice separately.
2. Communicative activities are an integration of his/her pre-communicative knowledge and skills in order to use them for the communication of messages. There are many activities which are focused to develop fluency. Let's see some of them:
 - Sharing information with restricted cooperation.
 - Identical pictures and identical pairs.

- Discovering secrets.
- Sharing information with unrestricted cooperation.
- Communication models.
- Discovering differences.
- Following directions.
- Share and processing information.
- Reconstructing story sequences.
- Pulling information to solve a problem.

In a classroom communicative activity, the following steps could be taken into consideration:

1. Presentation of the material.
2. Oral practice of each utterance concerning to that activity involved in the communicative tasks.
3. Questions and answers based on the situations of the activity presented.
4. Questions and answers related to the student's personal experiences but centered around the activity that is being worked.
5. Study one of the basic communicative expressions given in the activity or one of the structures which exemplify the function.
6. Oral recognition, interpretative activities based upon the message.
7. Or a production activities proceeding from guided to freer communication activity.
8. Copying of the dialogues are many talks see if they are not in the class text
9. Evaluation of learning done in an oral way only.

Forms and function in language learning

In attempting to describe the distinction between structure and meaning, language form and language function, methodologists have found various pairs of contrastive terms; although the pairs are by no means synonymous and perhaps no one pair is satisfactory in itself, together they do give a sense of the range of concerns raised in discussions of communicative competence and L2 teaching. (Savignon, 1983:33).

Table 1

Forms and Function in Language Learning

Language Form	Language Function
Linguistic competence	Communicative competence
Grammatical competence	Communicative competence
Language usage	Language use
Linguistic skills	Communicative abilities
Knowledge	Ability for use
Skill getting	Skill using
Mechanical drills	Communication
Accuracy	Fluency
How something is said	What is said

Note: Audiolingual method features vs communicative approach characteristics. This table was taken from: Finocchiaro and Brumfit (as cited in Richards and Rogers, 1986)

Task-based Learning

Task-based Learning is an extension of the communicative approach and is based on the task than in the language. According to Skehan (2003), there are risks in task-based instruction because of the influence of L1 learners who have developed strategies to make meaning relevant in their communication, and these strategies can be used on production or comprehension. Learners can draw upon the knowledge of the current context.

When we deal with L2 learners, the situation is not different concerning their capacity to express meanings contextually and the difference is significant that they have a lower level of language proficiency, and so, when faced with tasks to transact, may rely even more on strategic competence (Bachman and Palmer, in press) to express meanings. Examples of this sort of task transactions are common with words and gestures substituting for language in, for example, the transaction of information gap tasks (Bygate, 1988). Speakers may know that they have produced impressive language, neither for complexity nor accuracy.

In spite of the fact that much of dialect educating has worked beneath the suspicion that dialect is for the most part basic, with lexicon components opening in to fill basic designs, numerous language specialists and psycholinguists have contended that local dialect discourse handling is exceptionally habitually lexical in nature (Lewis, 2008). This implies that discourse preparing is based on the generation and gathering of entirety expressions, units bigger than the word (although analyzable by linguists into words), which do not require any inside handling when they are discharged. Pressure comes from the need to produce and comprehend language in real-time. The central issue is how to plan (or decode) the linguistic and the conceptual content of messages while time is passing, and while other members of an interaction might take the floor, steal turns, leave rooms empty, etc. (Skehan, 1992). There are three pedagogic goals for

task-based approaches. Learners do not have the resources to attend to many things at the same time. We can distinguish between three goals, and, as we will see later, achieving a practical compromise between these three goals is more likely to lead not only to the capacity to be an effective communicative problem solver but also to longer-term linguistic development. The three goals are accuracy, complexity/restructuring, and fluency (Ellis, 2000).

Accuracy concerns with how well language is produced concerning the rules system of the target language. Complexity concerns the elaboration or ambition of the language which is produced. How far do learners rely on prefabricated phrases and established routines, and how far do they need to expand their language resources to meet the communicative challenge? (Ellis, 2000). The process which allows the learner to produce in a progressive way more complex language is restructuring and capacity, on the part of the learner, to regroup their own underlying and developing language system; to frame and try out new theories and then to act upon the feedback which is received from such experimentation. Fluency concerns the learner's capacity to deliver dialect in real-time without intemperate delaying or faltering. It is likely to depend upon more lexicalized modes of communication, as real-time discourse generation weights are met as it were by maintaining a strategic distance from intemperate rule-based computation (Skehan, Willis, and Willis, D 1994).

What is a Task?

Burden and Williams (1987) refer to a task as “anything that learner are given to do or choose to do in the language classroom to further the process of language learning”. According to Richard, Platt, and Weber (1989), a task is an activity or action which is carried out as a result of processing and understanding language (i.e., as a response). For example, drawing a map while listening a tape, listening to an instruction, and performing a command, may be referred to as tasks. For Breen (1987), a task is any structured language learning endeavor which has a particular objective, appropriate context, a specific working procedure, and a range of outcomes for those who undertake the task. Task is therefore assumed to refer to a range of workplans which have the same overall purpose of facilitating language learning. To Nunan (1987), the communicative task is a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right. I concur with these scholars that task are central to any understanding of modern-day pedagogy and current movement in language education. As research shows, tasks are coming to be considered the undisputed mainstay of communicative approaches to ELT, the reason would be obvious: the goal of language teaching is or should be the enabling of students to express personal meaning. What better way to do this than through the communicative task? Therefore, if English teachers want their students to develop a proficient domain of spoken English, they need to provide a lot of input and opportunities for students to become fluent through the use of communicative tasks within the classroom environment.

What is Fluency?

Wolfe-Quintero et al. (1998) give a definition of fluency as how much and how fast individuals can talk in absence of dysfluency indicators. For example, self-correction, recurrences lacking of function and fail attempts (as cited in Abugohar et al., 2020, p. 335). Likewise, Samifanni (2020) states that even though the majority of second-languages teachers concurs on the similar definition of fluency as the quality of being smooth and easy to speak. (p. 101) Similarly, a smooth talker is an individual who are able to communicate in an easy and natural way, giving rise to a speech without any interruptions and delayings. (Bohlke, 2014; Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2009, as cited in Abugohar et al., 2020, p. 334) Based on the previous definitions, fluency could be defined as skill to speak fastly and accurately in order to have an effective conversation among individuals.

Samifanni (2020) states that smooth English talkers are able to express in a confident manner and acquire appropriate collocations. Additionally, learners' fluency is conditioned on the capability to recognize words. However, this fact does not guarantee fluency due to this is often neglected in language classroom (p. 101). Nevertheless, Swain affirms that the carelessness of fluency has decreased due to as researches and academic disciplines have reformed a concept of it and practical inquiries have examined with great care the potentialities of methods in accomplishing fluency. Moreover, fluency and accuracy have become principal subjects in learning a language just as in acquiring it (as cited in Samifanni, 2020, p. 101). As aforementioned, fluency plays an important role in achieving a meaningful communication with people and it is one of the main features that teachers have to take into account when they are teaching speaking. So that, teachers have to search for the best methods or strategies that enable

students to develop fluency in order they are able to communicate in English and they can integrate in a global world among others benefits that represents to speak English fluently.

Didactic Proposal

Diez Rodriguez (2009) defines a didactic unit as any unit of work of variable duration, which organizes a series of learning and teaching activities responding, at the highest level of concretion, to all element found in the curriculum. A didactic unit comprises a project work, a workshop, a lesson plan, and a unit of study. The Colombian General Education Law conceptualizes curriculum as a:

The set of criteria, study plans, programs, methodologies, and processes that contribute to the integral formation and the construction of cultural, national, regional, and local identity, including the human, academic, and physical resources necessary to put into practice the educative policies and to carry out the institutional education project. (MEN, 1994, p. 23)

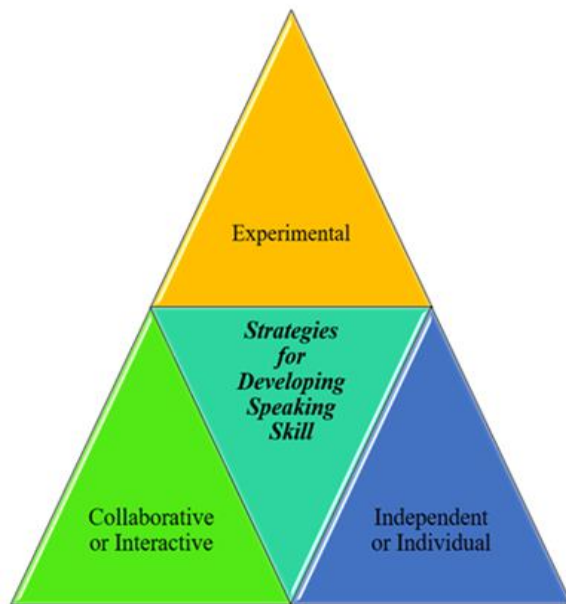
Based upon the concepts pointed out before, the rationale behind the design of my communicative tasks didactic unit, to teach how to develop fluency in English as a foreign language, are grounded into the tenets and principles of those contemplated in the philosophical foundations of curriculum expressed by MEN.

Communicative Task for Developing Fluency

The following section describes the instructional strategies that teachers could use to stimulate and impulse the development of speaking skill. The following figure is a summary of the three main instructional strategies categories, the same that are explained in detail below. Furthermore, it is important to mention that each category consists of plenty of activities, however this guide contains some common examples.

Figure 1

Strategies for Developing Speaking Skill



Note: This figure was taken from Madrid,
Hockly, and Ball, 2000

Experimental Strategies

What are these?

Experimental strategies are mainly focused on personal experiences, where learners can tell others about their daily practices, stories, and anecdotes. Learners provide information supported by reflexion, additionally, its aim is to promote meaningful knowledge in a real context.

Information Gaps

Material. Two worksheets with the same dialogues, but the first one will have information that the second one does not and the other way round.

Purpose. To gather information of the other person to complete dialogues from the clues that the other says.

Procedure:

1. Explain students the situation and context of the topic.
2. Ask them to work in pairs and decide who is going to take each role.
3. Start completing the missing information in each worksheet.
4. Practice the conversation trying out a natural performance, as it were a real situation.
5. Present to the class.

Storytelling

Material. Some pictures or illustrations to make up or remember the stories.

Purpose. To develop creativity, fluency, and mental agility by visualizing the pictures.

Procedure:

1. Ask students look at the pictures that teachers give them.
2. Create or associate the pictures with a story.
3. Tell students to make some notes to help themselves to remember the story.
4. Summarize the story.
5. Tell the story to another classmate.
6. Go and talk to another person.

Collaborative / Interactive Strategies**What are these?**

The objective of these strategies is to foster communication, expressing ideas in groups, teams, or at least in pairs. The participants in these activities contribute to others' knowledge. For teachers, these types of strategies are the best because they allow for easy evaluation.

Discussions

Material. Controversial or attractive topics for students.

Purpose. To improve sub-skills to manage challenging dialogues due to the activity demands arguments to defend students' position.

Procedure:

1. Make students choose the topic that they are going to talk about.
2. Divide the class into two groups and assign roles.
3. Each group is going to come up with ideas and points to be discussed related to the topic.
4. Put students into pairs to discuss the topic expressing their ideas and points of view.
5. Ask volunteers to participate and expose their views.

Role Plays

Material. None.

Purpose. To allow imitation or production of a given situation under specific circumstances, promoting expression of feelings, ideas, and concepts in a funny way.

Procedure:

1. Provide students the situation or topic.
2. Ask student to organize the presentation.
3. Give time to prepare and be ready for the presentation.
4. Go and present the role play.

Simulations

Material. Costumes.

Purpose. To create connections with real world through the representation of different situations that students might face in daily activities aiming self-confidence increasement.

Procedure:

1. Provide the topic that students will perform.
2. Ask them to prepare the dialogues, scene, and materials.
3. Show to the class their representation.

Interviews

Material. Questionnaire.

Purpose. To improve sub-skills to manage challenging dialogues due to the activity demands arguments to defend students' position.

Procedure:

1. Prepare a set of question depending on the topic.
2. Give students the questionnaire to be used.
3. Tell them to ask each other the questions.
4. Compare the results.
5. Elicit participation to answer the questions.

Independent / Individual Strategies**What are these?**

Independent or individual strategies allows EFL learners the freedom to choose the information they are going to produce and present. It is better to use these strategies in upper levels because they are more analytic and require high levels of coherence.

Brainstorming

Material. Paper, pen/pencil.

Purpose. To build connection between the ideas that come to students' minds based on the topic provided by the teacher, the idea is to produce freely ideas.

Procedure:

1. Write down as many ideas as students can in limited time.
2. Organize and prepare the ideas.

3. Show to the class or a classmate what the concrete idea is.

Picture Describing

Material. Different pictures.

Purpose. To enhance analysis of detailed things and transmit to others what student see in the picture.

Procedure:

1. Chose some pictures.
2. Divide the class into two.
3. Show the pictures to the groups.
4. Ask to analyze and see the picture in detail.
5. Work in pairs and give to the partners a picture description in detail.

Reporting

Material. Videos, news, social media.

Purpose. To build critical thinking to support the topics that students are going to report about.

Procedure:

1. Ask students to watch TV programs, news, or videos on Internet.
2. Organize the ideas.
3. Build a short summary about what they saw.
4. Report and sustain the content.

Conclusions

In the development of this research paper, I have learned the main characteristics of a communicative task which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form. One important conclusion out of this work is that the goal of tasks in the process of learning a foreign language is basically that of helping students develop communicative competence within the classroom for them to become fluent when interacting with people in everyday life situations.

I have realized that tasks may have many variations in their applications according to the fashion of how they are conceived. To name just a few cases, to Prabhu; for example, what really counts is what students can do with language, thus the focus on meaning is of a paramount importance, so the activities to develop communication are the cornerstone of the syllabus based only on meaning. Ellis and Batstone have a more balanced conception on tasks and advocate including in the communication activities the presence of form being this latter the central point to the meaning of the task. I think that whatever the conception may be about the learning of a foreign language, these language experts are targeting the same aim through distinct mediums which is to facilitate coherent, smooth, and real communication on the part of students in the target language.

I have understood through the readings of this essential material about tasks and projects, that the latest tendencies in the art of teaching a foreign language are primarily centered on creating opportunities for language learning through problem solving, cooperative learning, collaboration, and negotiation of meaning- processes. The teacher's role is also to help language

learners to become actual or potential language users, in other words, to transfer what they have practiced in an instructional setting to real- life situations.

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