



The incidence of the Communicative strategies in the English language learning

La incidencia de las estrategias comunicativas en el aprendizaje del idioma inglés

A incidência das estratégias de comunicação no aprendizado do idioma inglês.

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Abstract

Since English has become the global language, it is transcendental that students who attend to higher education have a good management of language skills. For that reason, the current research aimed to look for information about the incidence of the communicative strategies through the application of an educational intervention to improve the English language learning in students of the Bachelor's degree in Agroindustry. An educational intervention was developed in 50 students of the second level of the Bachelor of Agroindustry degree at the Escuela Superior Politecnica de Chimborazo. The intervention consisted of identifying the level of the linguistic skills of the students at the beginning; from there, to propose communicative strategies and activities to improve them. After the intervention, the results were compared by using the T-student test in the SPSS statistical software and it was determined a significant incidence in final results. At the beginning of the study, low levels were registered in all language abilities; however, they considerably rose. Important improvement in listening, reading, speaking and writing was evidenced. Finally, it is concluded that the intervention improved the level of the students of the Bachelor of Agroindustry career on the skills related to its learning.

Keywords: Learning; communication; skill; strategy.

Resumen

Como el inglés ha llegado a ser el idioma global, es trascendental que los estudiantes que asisten a la educación superior tengan un buen manejo de las habilidades del mismo. Por esa razón, esta investigación tuvo como objetivo buscar información sobre la incidencia de las estrategias comunicativas mediante la aplicación de una intervención educativa para mejorar el aprendizaje del idioma inglés en estudiantes de la Licenciatura en Agroindustria. Se desarrolló una intervención educativa en 50 estudiantes del segundo nivel de la Licenciatura en Agroindustria de la Escuela Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo. La intervención consistió en identificar el nivel de las habilidades lingüísticas de los estudiantes al comienzo; a partir de ahí, proponer estrategias y actividades comunicativas para mejorarlas. Después de la intervención, los resultados se compararon mediante el uso de la prueba T-student en el software estadístico SPSS y se determinó una incidencia significativa en los resultados finales. Al comienzo del estudio, se registraron bajos niveles en todas las habilidades de la lengua objeto de estudio; sin embargo,

aumentaron considerablemente. Se evidenció una importante mejora en las destrezas tales como escuchar, leer, hablar y escribir. Finalmente, se concluye que la intervención mejoró el nivel de los estudiantes de la carrera de Licenciatura en Agroindustria en las habilidades relacionadas con su aprendizaje.

Palabras claves: Aprendizaje; comunicación; destreza; estrategia.

Resumo

Como o inglês designou um idioma global, é essencial que os estudantes que assistam à educação superior tenham um aprendiz de habilidades do mesmo. Por exemplo, esta pesquisa como objetivo buscar informações sobre a incidência de estratégias de comunicação usando o aplicativo de uma intervenção educativa para melhorar a aprendizagem do idioma inglês nos estudantes de licenciatura na Agroindústria. Se você deseja uma intervenção educacional em 50 estudantes do segundo nível da Licenciatura na Agroindústria da Escola Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo. A intervenção consiste em identificar o nível das habilidades lingüísticas dos estudantes no exterior; a partir de aí, estratégias e atividades de proponentes comunicativas para as principais armas. Despacho da intervenção, os resultados são comparados com o uso do aluno T-aluno no software SPSS estatístico e determinam uma incidência significativa nos resultados finais. No caso de estúdio de gravação, se você estiver registrando bajos niveles em todas as habilidades do idioma do objeto de estúdio; pecado embargo, aumentar consideravelmente. Veja uma importante mejora nas histórias contadas como escuchar, leer, hablar e escribir. Finalmente, conclua que a intervenção melhorou o nível de estudo da empresa de licença na Agroindústria e as habilidades relacionadas com a aprendizagem.

Palavras-chave: Aprendizaje; comunicação; destreza; estrategia.

Introduction

People who obtain their Bachelor of Agroindustry must be professionals with wide familiarity of different languages. Mainly English which has become the global language (Northrup, 2013) and the communication means most used around the world.

This research work was carried out because teachers should support their students in their English language improvement through learning strategies as it is required to fulfill some academic requirements to be competent in their professional field (Common European Framework of

Reference for Languages, 2001). The students belonging to Agroindustry career at “Escuela Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo” must establish fluid communication with their colleagues worldwide. Therefore, the direct beneficiaries of this research would be the students of second level of English at Agroindustry career at Escuela Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo during the September 2019 - January 2020 academic period. The importance of this research lies in the necessity to encourage and engage students to learn English and look for strategies to achieve the main goal of this education process. Furthermore, it is needed to mention that teachers must use meaningful tools and instruments in their teaching process.

A low development of basic language skills due to low ranges of interest in English learning was identified. Besides, there is a significant relationship between communication in the classroom and the academic performance of students, a number of students will require support to meet communication objectives. This support depends on teaching strategies, techniques, activities, or the materials.

This research aimed to apply communicative activities to consolidate the language skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) improvement and learning in students of Agroindustry. In doing this, a teaching intervention was implemented in 50 students who belonged to second semester of the career of Agroindustry at the Escuela Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo. The study consisted of identifying the level skills of the students at the beginning through a pre-test (PET test) and based on that fact, defining communicative strategies and actions to improve them. After the intervention, a post-test was addressed to the target population and the results were analyzed and the T-student test was applied to compare means.

Communicative strategies

Harmer (2007) states that Communicative Approach also called as Communicative Language Teaching is framed in what and how to teach. Those aspects set down in language functions such as apologizing, requesting, inviting, promising, among others (Canale & Swain, 1980) which emphasize the use of English for real communication that needs the four skills of the language to be improved such as listening, reading, speaking and writing (Herrera, 2012). The communicative method and strategies engage students into meaningful activities which use authentic material (British Council, 2019).

The Communicative language teaching showed up in the late of twentieth century because of the fails caused by the Grammar-Translation Approach. This approached proposed a new way of teaching which was student-centered for communication purposes. Vygotsky (1978 as cited in Herrera 2012) argued that learning process takes place in the zone of proximal development. This learning process depends on the learner's background knowledge (Husain, 2015).

Chomsky (1986 as cited in Herrera, 2011) argued that the Communicative Approach was based on the constructivism since it was based on the theory that human beings were born with a genetic capacity to learn a language. In other words, people were born with an inherent system which is used for language acquisition (Language Acquisition Device) and interaction process. Besides, he stated that languages have similar grammar structure or "universal grammar".

Kinds of communicative strategies in the classroom.

During the implementation of this research, the Agroindustry students faced some communicative strategies in the classroom. All of them were carefully chosen to engage students into meaningful communication settings. All of this were done in order to scaffold students in their language improvement. Moreover, there are some characteristics that teachers and students in communicative classrooms must develop (Castellà, 2017):

1. The desire to interact between the teacher and the students.
2. The teacher and the students must have a purpose for communication. It means language functions must be included in the classroom interaction. Ex. Inviting, apologizing, questioning, booking, etc.
3. The ideas need a meaning, not a form. In other words, content needs to be appropriate to be understood.
4. The teacher must encourage students to use a variety of vocabulary words.
5. The teacher develops an almost null intervention in order to focus on promoting individual and autonomous work avoiding interruptions.
6. The materials used must promote the student's creativity.

Moreover, some of the communicative strategies used in the current research were: questioning, information gap, games, conversation, and storytelling (László, 2017).

Questioning involves asking and answering questions. In fact, Richards (2005) suggests that this strategy can be developed through the appliance of warm up activities, interviews and surveys, guessing, among others. Stating with simple yes/no questions is a suitable activity to develop and ice break; at the same time, information questions are helpful to look for students' background knowledge. In doing this strategy, warm up activities promote engaging, motivation, and self-confidence to produce questions if something is not very clear (Rasel, 2014).

Richards and Rodgers (2001) refer to Information gap as a very active and meaningful strategy because the students use the language and puts communication skills into action in order to discover or obtain information they need. Information gap activities provide a knowledge gap between peers that can be bridged through the language. Furthermore, information gap activities are considered as "functional" because they let the language users share their knowledge and processing such as in personal information, differences and similarities on things, role playing, among others (Aliyev & Ismayilova, 2017). Therefore, students not only enhance their vocabulary and grammar but also the functions of the language for an effective communication (Hébert, 2018).

Yet another strategy is playing games which is enjoyable and have rules to follow (Borrás, 2015). Games are valuable to motivate and engage the students to continue improving their language skills. One of the main points in using games is the less stressful moments the students face while learning (Cerda, 2018). Spelling, search, matching, and jigsaw are just few examples of games that can be reliable to teach English and include communicative purposes (Healey, 2019). Those examples contribute to strengthen socialization and interaction among students (Growth, 2018)

Harmer (2007) argues that conversation aims to provide tools for effective interaction. Conversation is a real-life activity because it occurs at any time and situation (Cambridge dictionary, 2020) in daily life. When the language user is conversing, he or she is engaged in a mental process that comes up with meaningful content (Berg, et al., 2018). While conversation practices in class, students use language to share ideas and socialize on topics of their interest. Besides, turn taking is well-managed in a clear example of higher level of respect and good socialization skills (British Council, 2015).

Storytelling is another reliable and effective communicative activity to be put into practice in EFL classrooms (Mutiarani & Lidiyatul, 2015). According to Friday (2014) the main goal of storytelling is to produce lengthier and more meaningful texts. Storytelling also provides enough tools to engage, motivate and produce narrative stories to improve the language (Xiao, 2012). Tales, legends, experiences are significant tools to use in class to promote meaningful learning moments (Saxby, 2020).

Methodology

This research was focused on applied research with a quasi-experimental design, mixed approach and descriptive, explanatory and correlational scope. The universe was made up of the 50 students enrolled in the second semester of the Bachelor's degree in Agroindustry from the Faculty of Livestock Sciences, which belongs to the Escuela Superior Politecnica de Chimborazo during the period from September 2019 to January 2020. Those students formed the intended population since they fulfilled the requirements for the inclusion and participation in the current research.

Participation criteria

The participation criteria were centered on several important aspects like enrollment, registration, and time availability.

First, the students enrolled in second level of English of the Bachelor's degree in Agroindustry from the Faculty of Livestock sciences of the Escuela Superior Politecnica de Chimborazo had the opportunity to be part of this research. Secondly, the students who spontaneously expressed, through informed consent, their approval to participate in the research became part of the intended population. Besides, the students with free time available to participate in the planned activities within the educational intervention were taken into consideration.

Research process

The intervention included carrying out a group of theoretical and practical strategies that combined activities related to the communicative skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing) necessary for the management and use of the English language; the actions such as questioning, information gap, games, conversation, and storytelling mainly focused on elements related to oral and written interpretation, speech and writing. The first step was the identification of the skill

level in each of the elements mentioned above. In doing this, a diagnostic test (pretest) was applied. This was the PET (Preliminary English Test) and the results were integrated with the students' self-perception through a self-applied questionnaire that was designed for the investigation specifically.

Since the needs were identified, several theoretical and practical actions were drawn up those aimed to decrease weaknesses and improve knowledge. The intervention plan consisted on a series of classes out of normal schedule during 20 weeks, two hours each, prior coordination with the participants. In each teaching activity, an initial knowledge exploration question and a final knowledge assimilation question were applied. After the intervention phase, the posttest was taken by the students. It was the same PET exam which was taken at the beginning.

During the pretest, a survey was also taken simultaneously with the main aim to gather information related to the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants and to explore their self-perception about their basic English language skills.

The information gathered was tabulated in an Excel database. Afterwards, these data were analyzed through the statistical software SPSS. Absolute frequencies and percentages were identified for the qualitative variables and measures of central tendency and dispersion for quantitative variables. The T-student non-parametric test was used to determine changes in the percentages related to English language proficiency in students before and after the intervention.

The confidence level was 95%, the margin of error was 5% and the statistical significance was defined at $p = 0.05$. The results were expressed through statistical tables to facilitate their understanding and interpretation.

Results

After performing the information processing, the following results were obtained about personal information of the intended population.

Socio-demographic analysis of the population

Table 1. Socio-demographic analysis of the population

Statistics					
		Age	Gender	Origin	English competence: Self-evaluation
N	Valid	50	50	50	50
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Std. Deviation		1.173	.503	.490	.731
Age					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18	4	8.0	8.0	8.0
	19	9	18.0	18.0	26.0
	20	19	38.0	38.0	64.0
	21	11	22.0	22.0	86.0
	22	6	12.0	12.0	98.0
	23	1	2.0	2.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	
Gender					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	23	46.0	46.0	46.0
	Female	27	54.0	54.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	
Origin					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Urban	19	38.0	38.0	38.0
	Rural	31	62.0	62.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

English competence: Self-evaluation					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	High	7	14.0	14.0	14.0
	Medium	15	30.0	30.0	44.0
	Low	28	56.0	56.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Source: Starting survey (2019)

With 50 valid cases, the analysis of the socio-demographic characteristics of the students was developed which is included in the research (Table 1). An average age of 20.18 years old with a standard deviation of 1.173 is observed. A predominance of female students (54%) and rural students (92%) are shown. 56% of the total students identified themselves as having low competence of basic English language skills.

3.2. Intervention results

These results were obtained through the PET test exam where students had to accomplish several tasks focused on the 4 language skills such as reading, listening, speaking and writing. Those results are shown in the table below.

Table 2. Pre-test and post-test results

		Statistics									
		Listening		Reading		Speaking		Writing			
		Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
N	Valid	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		1.52	2.86	1.48	2.98	1.52	3.02	1.46	2.92	5.98	11.78
Median		1	3	1	3	1	3	1	3	4	12
Std. Deviation		0.863	0.833	0.863	0.845	0.814	1.059	0.788	0.966	3.014	3.454
PAIRED SAMPLE TEST				Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					Sig. (2-tailed)	
				Mean	Lower	Upper					
Pair 1	Listening Pre-test - Listening Post-test			.089	-1.518	-1.162		-15.129		.000	

Pair 2	Reading Pres-test - Reading Post-test	.104	-1.709	-1.291	-14.423	.000
Pair 3	Speaking Pre-test - Speaking Post-test	.104	-1.709	-1.291	-14.423	.000
Pair 4	Writing Pre-test - Writing Post-test	.096	-1.652	-1.268	-15.262	.000
Pair 5	Pre-test - Post-test	.306	-6.416	-5.184	-18.930	.000

Source: Pre-test and Post-test results (2020)

Table 2 shows the results of the analysis of student language skills during the pretest and the post-test. It is observed that in all the investigated skills there was a predominance of students with a low level of skills since the higher score is 5, however the most of the students have 1 as the mean. It is clearly visible that the improvement occurred with students because they obtained a mean of 5.98 in the pre-test; however, the mean in the post-test was 11.78.

Besides, with a 95% level of confidence, in the paired sample test, the two tailed significance is .000 which means that there is significant difference between the means between the pre-test and the post-test.

While performing the initial diagnostic test (pretest), low grades were obtained in relation to the level of skills of the students of the English language. This result corresponds to similar works where students show a poor preparation before entering the university of the students (Aliyev & Ismayilova, 2017) (László, 2017).

During the intervention, the students actively participated in class and developed a number of activities such as questioning, dialogs, role plays, games, storytelling, and filling gap that aimed to enhance the reading, listening, speaking and writing skills. The actions carried out allowed in a short period of time to raise the skill levels of the students included in the study. This result reinforces the hypothesis of the efficiency of carrying out educational interventions to consolidate knowledge on specific topics (Guapacha & Benavidez, 2017).

Conclusions

This intervention based on communicative strategies to improve the English language learning had a positive incidence in students who belong to Agroindustry career of the Faculty of Livestock Science at Escuela Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo during the academic period September 2019 to January 2020.

Communicative strategies such as games, dialogs, questioning, filling gaps, and storytelling play an important role in the improvement of communicative competence of the students since they aim to use the language in real-life which constitutes meaningful ways of learning.

Therefore, it is highly recommended that teachers put it into practice and continue doing further research with university students.

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