

## **“On Air”: Participation in an Online Radio Show to Foster Speaking Confidence. A Cooperative Learning-Based Strategies Study**

“Al aire”: participación en un programa de radio en línea para fomentar la confianza al hablar. Un estudio basado en estrategias de aprendizaje cooperativo

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The daily observation of class sessions has enabled me to recognize that students possess a feeling of self-distrust in oral activities. For this reason, I designed a study carried out with a group of twelve eighth graders. This article illustrates an action research project conducted to enhance students' confidence when speaking on an online radio show. The data were collected by using surveys applied to students, audio and video recordings and a teacher's journal. The data analysis procedures included a blend of inductive analysis, grounded theory and trend analysis. Results indicated that the research process prompted students' speaking confidence through the use of technology. The study was also an opportunity to improve the teacher's performance, and become a facilitator by steering a pedagogical intervention that allowed students to make decisions to overcome their lack of speaking confidence.

*Key words:* Confidence, cooperative learning, participation, radio, speaking.

La observación diaria de las clases de inglés me ha hecho reconocer que los estudiantes manifiestan una sensación de frustración al participar en actividades de producción oral. Por esta razón decidí diseñar un estudio para desarrollar la confianza de los estudiantes en la producción oral, participando en un programa de radio en línea. Dicho estudio de investigación-acción se llevó a cabo con un grupo de doce estudiantes de octavo grado. Los datos fueron recolectados con encuestas aplicadas a los estudiantes, grabaciones en audio y video y diarios de la docente. El análisis de datos se realizó usando una combinación de análisis inductivo, teoría fundamentada y análisis de tendencias. Los resultados indican que el proceso de investigación fue una experiencia positiva que facilitó la confianza al hablar en lengua extranjera usando la tecnología. El estudio fue también una oportunidad para apoyar y mejorar el trabajo del docente, quien asumió el papel de facilitador al diseñar una intervención pedagógica que permitió a los estudiantes tomar decisiones para superar su falta de confianza en actividades orales.

*Palabras clave:* aprendizaje cooperativo, confianza, participación, producción oral, radio.

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## Introduction

Learning a language implies a practice of the four communicative skills. When it comes to introducing oral activities in the classroom, some of the obstacles that teachers –specifically in contexts like the school/object of this research include– have to face are large classes, students with low levels of vocabulary and grammar, and lack of motivation to complete the exercises satisfactorily. As a result, the English activities have mainly been focused on writing and reading. Additionally, the concern of training for the ICFES<sup>1</sup> test (similar to the SAT in the U.S.) is another reason to avoid planning speaking activities because this test does not include an oral component. Conversely, a common motivation that students have regarding the listening skill is the use of players (mp3 or mp4) at every moment during school time. They listen not only to music, but also to the different radio shows, commenting about presenters' expressions and the spontaneity that they demonstrate in each broadcast. These elements were integrated to ask the following question that became the starting point to conduct the present research project: *To what extent can cooperative learning-based strategies –participating in an online radio show– foster speaking confidence in 8<sup>th</sup> graders at La Chucua School?*

The research question was supported by the following objectives:

General objective: To determine the effects the interpersonal and small-group skills strategy has on the enhancement of English speaking confidence in a group of eighth graders through an online radio show.

Specific objectives:

1. To identify the reasons for students' lack of confidence when speaking in the target language.

2. To create a strategy derived from interpersonal and small-group cooperative learning principles through team and individual decision-making interventions.
3. To use students' knowledge about radio language to foster English speaking confidence.

## Theoretical Framework

Three areas to take into consideration in order to complete such action research were relevant to conduct this study: First of all, it was necessary to identify the possible reasons that produced students' lack of confidence when speaking. Secondly, it was pertinent to understand and evaluate the importance that radio has acquired in schools, especially since it establishes a good environment for socialization and helps to sort out academic problems through discussion, sharing, and reflection with a target audience. Finally, it was necessary to identify the key elements regarding the cooperative learning instructional strategy that guided the study.

## Confidence in Speaking

For most school community members, speaking English in Colombian public schools is not common. Reading activities, for example, are more appealing since students have expressed that they feel more skillful with them. Despite learning English grammar rules and vocabulary, they are not confident in applying them in a spontaneous conversation. Additionally, in the case of La Chucua School, the amount of students in each classroom (about 40) does not permit teachers to closely monitor students' oral performance. Furthermore, based on students' answers and reactions when requested to participate in oral activities, it has been identified that anxiety is one of the factors that influences the lack of confidence in 8<sup>th</sup> graders when they are prompted to speak English. Brown (2007, p. 161) stated that anxiety –being a

<sup>1</sup> ICFES (Instituto Colombiano para el Fomento de la Educación Superior) is a Colombian agency in charge of regulating the State exams when finishing studies, including high school and undergraduate ones.

result of self-esteem, self-efficacy, inhibition and risk– has become the biggest challenge in language acquisition.

In order to understand what happened to the students who participated in this project when they had to be involved in oral activities, it is necessary to discuss types of anxiety. Oxford (1990) has helped Brown to identify two types of anxiety, depending on the level or the learning/environmental situation: *trait anxiety* (defined as a permanent bias to be anxious in different aspects), and *state anxiety* (in a learning situational level or specific moment). Brown (2007) has also categorized three components of foreign languages anxiety as the following:

1. Communication apprehension, arising from learners' inability to adequately express mature thoughts and ideas (individual level of anxiety in real or anticipated communication).
2. Fear of negative social evaluation, arising from a learner's need to make a positive social impression on others (others' opinions, product of unfavorable impressions due to the result of the learners' avoidance of situations in which they are observed).
3. Test anxiety or apprehension over academic evaluation (the feelings of anguish a person has before, during or after an exam with a sense of “blinking out”) (Horwitz, 2001 and Oxford, 1999, as cited by Brown, 2007, p. 162).

Based on these assumptions, anxiety appears when learners experience apprehension in a situation that requires the use of the target language and they do not feel skillful enough to perform as confident speakers. Consequently, the correlation between anxiety and performance arises. The observations of the sessions with the target group evidenced that they tended to experience trait anxiety because, as formerly mentioned, students feel that they are not able to speak appropriately in the target language.

According to Oxford (2002), language anxiety occurs when learners must perform in the target language and they assume that the teacher expects

them to perform well. Without the appropriate management –in terms of guaranteeing a safe environment where making mistakes is part of the process–, anxiety would be a real problem for students. In addition, Oxford proposed two effects that anxiety might produce in the learning process: *Harmful anxiety* (the negative form that forces learners react to the situation, decreasing their participation); and *helpful anxiety* (a positive form that controls anxiety to assist the learning process) (Oxford, 2002, p. 59). Krashen (1987) established that the best outcome occurs when there is an environment that allows the learner to forget about anxiety, as cited by Brown (2007). Consequently, the learners feel comfortable and receptive when they receive constructive criticism in a healthy learning environment.

Hughes (2002) also suggested the importance of the environment for acquiring confidence in speaking. According to her, pragmatics, socio-linguistics and ethno-linguistics share the significance of the relationship between language and social interaction. Likewise, she presented a set of materials that helps teachers provide students elements to activate their speaking, such as particular expressions in conversations and their purposes. These resources include a set of interactive schemes that –once students practice a lot in a way they feel familiar with them– help them reduce their anxiety. These schemes include greetings and follow-up questions. In the case of this action research study, the schemes proposed were related to the radio context.

Additionally, realia includes elements to set up radio shows e.g. recording devices, players, editing software and a platform with which to upload the show. Likewise, the recording sessions in the school radio station gave students the sense of their roles as radio broadcasters. Thus, my objectives with the present study were directed toward setting up an instructional strategy that permitted 8<sup>th</sup> graders to

foster their confidence in speaking. Based on the fact that they chose “Radio Show”<sup>2</sup> as the topic for their English class project, this strategy became the pathway for reaching my study objectives.

### School Radio

Based on experience from programs applied to different public schools in Bogotá by Montoya and Villa (2006) (e.g. their team work in the program called “Onda Cheverísima”, and later by the “Subsecretaría de calidad y pertinencia: Dirección de ciencia, tecnología y medios educativos” in the Secretaría de Educación of Bogotá), it has been demonstrated that when students speak without being observed, their fears diminish and they recognize that they can produce commercial-like shows. Furthermore, they are capable of producing meaningful products, taking into account that they know the context of their audience, their needs and problems (Montoya & Villa, 2006, p. 13).

Being aware of the importance of using radio at school implies thinking of two aspects used to achieve the purpose of this action research study:

#### Radio Language

For Montoya and Villa (2006), school radio is not only the studio and the microphone; radio broadcasting is the dynamics between words, imagination, creation, music, and sound effects. These elements permit users to narrate stories, which lead to discussions about real life and experiences (Montoya & Villa, 2006, p. 33).

Montoya and Villa (2006), as part of the team that has led the inclusion of radio in the Bogotá public school system, have determined the following elements of radio language:

1. Music
2. Words
3. Silences (blanks)
4. Sound effects

### Internet Radio or Webcasting

Kozamernik and Mullane (2009) conducted an action research project about the impact of webcasting. They stated that radio programs are not only available from terrestrial networks, but also by other means like satellite, cable or mobile phones. The growth of the Internet has affected mass media, and these changes in radio technology have had an unexpected result because radio has become not only just radio, but also associated metadata, synchronized slideshows and even short video clips (Kozamernik & Mullane, 2009). Consequently, radio is no longer linear broadcasting. During this action research study, the recording and storage of audio files allowed students to have a look at their performances and to constantly re-evaluate them.

This constant revision inspired the students to be active participants in the project because by means of constant practice, listening to recordings and receiving feedback from their peers, they knew it would improve their confidence to speak English, thus taking advantage of online radio since the students would find a meaningful and appealing way to be listened to and express their feelings and thoughts using the target language.

In the same way, Compaine and Smith (2001) conducted research that recognized the contribution of Internet radio concerning the acceptance of diversity due to the variety of shows created by measuring the level of variety being created by Internet radio broadcasters. According to them, Internet radio has increased the number of broadcasters as setting up an online web 2.0 resource is free. In the case of land radio, the situation is the same. Consequently, Internet radio has added diversity, defined

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<sup>2</sup> “Radio Show” is the name of the project. At the beginning of the school academic year (2009), I gave them several topics to work in English class. They decided on the one related to radio.

in this case as a variety of formats and genre shows extending to diverse audiences.

### Cooperative Learning

There is a concept that is closely related to cooperative learning: *Educational interaction*. Coll and Sole (1990, as cited by Díaz-Barriga & Hernández, 2002) stated that educational interaction presents situations where the members of a team act simultaneously and reciprocally in a specific context to complete a learning objective. In this case, the teacher's role in this study is seen as that of a facilitator who is familiar with the tools that aid the attainment of the goals (the Internet radio show). The teacher also provides the students with the information necessary to operate the software used to produce the radio show. Additionally, the teacher guides the students in the process of writing scripts, practicing, providing feedback, and encouraging them to be confident when speaking during practice activities, ensuring that they have an environment in which they can feel confident to speak. In addition, McGroarty (1989, as cited by Olsen & Kagan, 1992) identified some benefits of planning and implementing cooperative learning activities in acquiring English: (a) an increase in the frequency and variety of second language practice through interaction, (b) the possibility for the development or use of the first language in ways that support cognitive development that permits second language skills, (c) the opportunity to integrate language with content-based instruction, and (d) the opportunity for students to assume an active role.

Likewise, the benefits that Gillies (2007) mentioned when setting up cooperative learning groups were also considered: (a) Positive interdependence among group members, referring to the need that students have to contribute to their teams in order to achieve a common goal; (b) use of interpersonal and small-groups skills, where students learn how

to communicate their ideas to teach other members and, at the same time, learn how to recognize their other members' ideas, establish agreements and manage conflicts. Cooperative learning provides the opportunity to develop a personal rapport that activates the willingness to help each other by listening to the entire group say what needs to be said in a way that every idea is considered (Gillies, 2007, p. 29).

Contemplating the former theoretical constructs, we feel it is possible to infer that using software for producing online radio shows could be a motivation to work cooperatively on a team in order to foster speaking confidence. Furthermore, the inclusion of technology in the classroom could act as a strategy that enables participants to discover their interests, weaknesses and the strengths involved in the development of a successful learning process.

### Context and Participants

IED La Chucua is a public school located in Kennedy neighborhood, which is in the southern region of Bogotá. The school was founded in 1976 as part of "Escuela Nueva"<sup>3</sup>, as one of the governmental programs. In 2000 the school was transformed into an institution that offered instruction for students at the pre-school, elementary and high school levels.

Currently it has about 1,300 students per shift. The majority of students' families belong to stratum 2 and 3, and they usually live in the surrounding neighborhoods.

Most English classes are given in the native language because there is some resistance on the part of the students and some of the teachers to use the English language. Lessons are mainly focused on

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<sup>3</sup> Escuela Nueva is a pedagogical model established in the 70's especially designed to offer elementary education in rural zones, where a teacher was in charge of three grades (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup>) and another teacher in charge of the rest (4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades). The groups were small in each classroom (about 10 students).

vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. Consequently, students' level is A1 (according to the Council of Europe, 2002); some of 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> graders are reaching A2. They are false beginners.

For La Chucua community, language is the most important means of communication. In fact, communication is an area that is under development for students. In general terms, L1 has a relevant importance at school, following up with the PILEO<sup>4</sup> program.

### Participants

The participants of this action research study were the students of group 802 at La Chucua School. The study started with 38 students aged 13, but –because of some changes that occurred during the academic year– the study ended with 12 students. The group received two sessions of English of eighty minutes each per week (160 min.). The most common materials used in class were study guides, handouts (provided by the teacher), books, dictionaries, texts from the Internet or Encarta™ encyclopedia, and handicraft materials (provided by students). They studied the book *Teenagers* (Norma Publishers), whose copies are in the library.

The sessions were planned according to the Ministry of Education standards<sup>5</sup> in English language education, which were adapted according to the students' level. Students were able to use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases as well as interact in a very simple way (Council of Europe, 2002, p. 24), but they did not feel confident speaking. In class, the teacher-talk time used to be high. They were encouraged to participate orally. When this study began, the students were in the stage of producing just monosyllables and other isolated

words. In addition, they also had difficulties recalling vocabulary, especially verbs. As a result, after considering the weaknesses and strengths identified in the institutional English test results last year, the board of English teachers decided to work with projects in order to increase students' motivation and performance levels. In the case of the target group of this study, they decided to work with the topic "Radio Show".

### Data Collection Instruments

The data collection instruments utilized in order to carry out this project were students' artifacts (video and audio recordings), the teacher's journal, and an initial and final survey.

#### Surveys

Surveys were used to confirm the reality that students lacked confidence speaking in the target language and the long term trends referred to the areas where the students thought they had improved.

Previous to the implementation of the project, the survey was applied to the entire group. The questions were directed at finding possible reasons that the students felt little confidence speaking in English. After the implementation, a new survey was handed out in order to consider what students thought about the project in terms of its relevance. It was given to the twelve students who finished the project. Additionally, the researcher's observations were compared to the students' thoughts and opinions.

#### Audio Recordings

Thus, audio recordings became not only a source of material for the radio show, but also were used as data collection instruments, given that they evidenced the students' English speaking confidence level. This instrument was applied during the implementation. The transcriptions were recorded on a form (Given, 2008, p. 40).

4 PILEO: Plan Nacional de Lectura, Escritura y Oralidad (National plan of literacy: Reading, writing and oral skills).

5 Ministerio de Educación Nacional (2006). *Estándares Básicos en Lenguas Extranjeras: Inglés*.

### **Video Recordings**

According to Given (2008), video recordings offer moving images of the interaction and behavior of the participants during the implementation. For this study, the approach applied was *researcher-generated* (Given, 2008, p. 917) because the researcher chose the subjects and the content of the video.

Video recordings were made at the end of the implementation. They were used to analyze the students' impressions about their own performance. Those videos were filmed after students' recordings. The transcriptions were recorded on a form.

### **Teacher's Journals**

According to Sagor (2005), journals are important during the period of implementation because they are used to document a lot of information (as a complement of the other instruments) which is useful at the end of the process. He states that the more observations the researcher collects in the journal, the more information will be available when analyzing data (Sagor, 2005, p. 108).

During each lesson (giving input, planning the section of the show and recording), I registered my observations after participants completed their activities. At the end, I compared my observations with the identified aspects in the audio and video recordings.

### **Pedagogical Intervention**

As previously mentioned, the pedagogical interventions used included identifying the reasons that students did not like participating in oral activities, finding the most appropriate cooperative learning strategies, designing the strategy, and putting it into practice. The steps used to develop the study were grouped into three stages: Pre-Implementation, Implementation, and Post-Implementation.

### **Pre-Implementation Stage**

This stage was used to identify the reasons that impeded students to feel confident when they participated in oral activities. To complete this stage, a written survey was handed out (Appendix A).

A lesson plan was designed to observe the participants in action and also to identify the facts or situations that made students feel uncomfortable in oral activities. The teacher's journal was implemented in order to record the students' performances during this first activity, focusing the observations on the speaking confidence (Appendix B).

After reading and analyzing the first insights, the next step consisted of looking for the most appropriate cooperative learning strategies.

### **Implementation Stage**

This stage began with the organization of cooperative teams. Likewise, three lesson plans (connected with the syllabus) were designed to conduct the process of speaking confidence acquisition (Appendix C). Each lesson included input, planning, recording and editing sessions. Similar to the pre-implementation stage, each implementation lesson was observed and the observations were reported in the teacher's journals. Additionally, a blog was set up (<http://consulemos.blogspot.com>) to record reflections about the study.

### **Post-Implementation Stage**

All the data were grouped together and classified in order to be analyzed. A final online survey (available at <http://www.encuestafacil.com>) was also displayed for students to fill-in, and the final show was edited and set up.

At the same time, the creation of the online radio station was set up. Because of time constraints, few students participated in uploading the radio show to the web. That is why a tutorial was created for the rest of the class.

### Data Analysis

For this study, a blend of three approaches was applied: The foundation of Quinn’s *inductive analysis* (2002), the procedure of Sagor’s *trend analysis* (2005) and the coding techniques proposed by Corbin and Strauss (1990) in the *grounded theory*. It was found that each isolated approach might not respond to the question and did not coincide enough with the qualitative type of research and most of the data that were collected. This combination of approaches is explained later.

Quinn (2002, p. 56) stated that inductive analysis consists of the identification of patterns, categories and themes of analysis from the emerging data, instead of imposing before the data collection. From these specific observations and findings, the theory is constructed.

In Trend Analysis, Sagor (2005) proposed three *Action – Change – Relationship (ACR)* questions that must be answered to make a precise analysis:

#### ACR Question 1: What Did We Do?

It consists of reconstructing the actions that occurred during the implementation, considering two steps: 1) Allocating time (the relationship between the time planned and the real time invested); 2) Looking for patterns (the identification of issues in common, in the different data collection instruments); Sagor (2005) stated that

identifying the actions that a phenomenon produced permits the researcher to predict what might occur in the future.

#### ACR Question 2: What Changes Occurred Regarding the Achievement Targets?

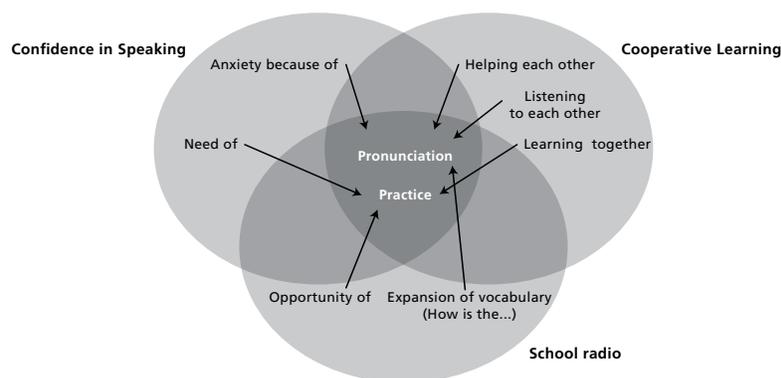
The researcher explains the achievement target during the course of the project, comparing and contrasting trends and how external factors of *triangulation* affected the possible changes.

#### ACR Question 3: What Was the Relationship Between Actions Taken and Any Changes in Performance on the Targets?

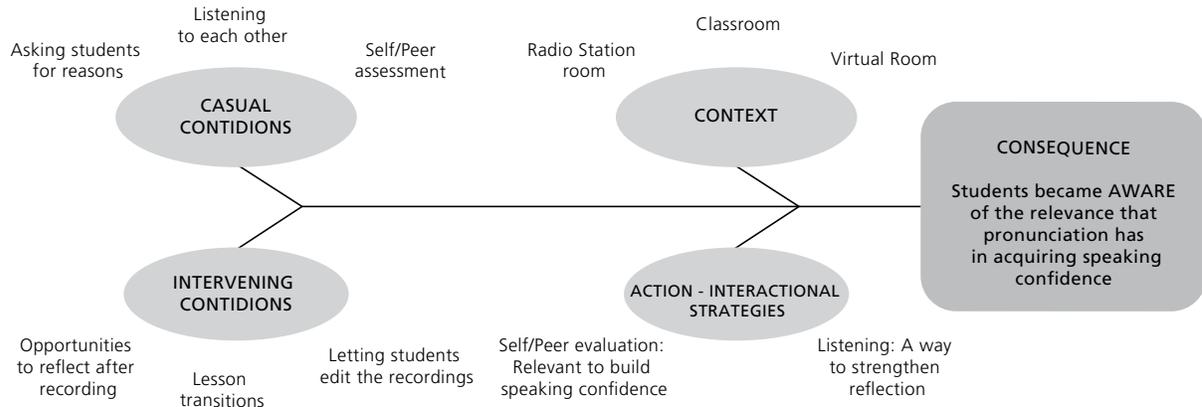
In this phase, the findings are used in order to answer the previous questions. Then, it is necessary to identify changes in performance in the data and this way, it is possible to determine the pattern or patterns that are closely related to the actions or situations that could explain such changes.

The Grounded Theory is basically the inductive development of theory, based on the collection of data. According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), grounded theory consists of reading and re-reading the collected data and identifying certain variables, called categories, as well as the relationship between them. The categories are identified by means of following a process called *coding*. This is the aspect of grounded theory used in the present study.

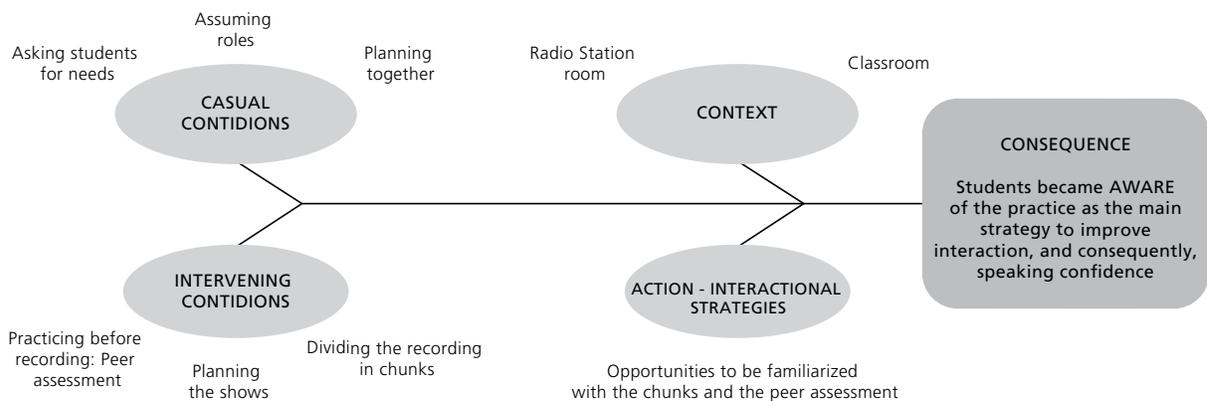
Figure 1. Emerging Patterns from Constructs



**Figure 2. Paradigm Model Applied to the Emerging Category "Pronunciation"**



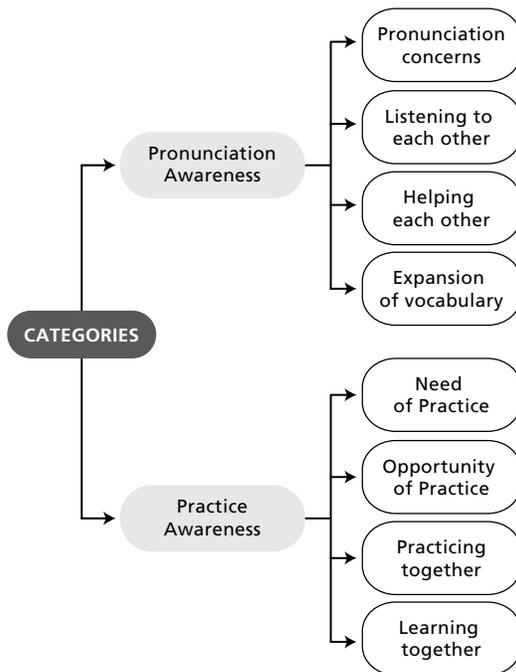
**Figure 3. Paradigm Model Applied to the Emerging Category "Practice"**



### Findings

In the pre-implementation stage, and after applying the initial survey, 40% of the students did not like interacting in the target language; 55% did not like interacting in the target language because of their classmates' reactions (laughing), 25% because the other people did not understand (pronunciation), and 15% because the teacher corrected pronunciation. The reasons for students' fears included the fact that 80% of the students did not think their pronunciation was good, and 20% felt they did not have enough vocabulary and did not have opportunities to practice.

On the other hand, after the implementation the students felt that their pronunciation had improved. They recognized a need to practice to remember the lines. This discovered requirement is the strategy that they found to face their anxiety. Restating Oxford's proposal (2002), a change in the setting (from classroom to radio studio) motivated students to practice (evidenced in constant repetitions) to perform better and, given that they were assuming the role of "radio broadcasters", they showed awareness and willingness to be understood.

**Figure 4.** Categories and Sub-categories

Thus, the emerging categories were *pronunciation* and *practice*, as presented in the Figure 4.

To establish the relationship between the emerging categories and the other elements, (the possible subcategories at this point), *axial* and *selective coding* techniques –proposed by Corbin and Strauss (1990)– were applied. Corbin and Strauss defined axial coding as the process of putting the data back and establishing the relationship among the emerging categories. In so doing, the *paradigm model* was followed. The elements of the paradigm model are: causal conditions (situation or event that permitted the phenomenon to occur), context (the properties that were valid when the phenomenon occurred, for example, location), intervening conditions (conditions or actions that facilitated or constrained the phenomena), action and interactional strategies (how the participants acted, reacted, interacted, and handled the elements previously mentioned; and finally, the consequences (outcomes) (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, pp. 99-115).

Figures 2 and 3 show how I applied the paradigm model to identify the categories and subcategories, placing the findings in the elements mentioned above.

Applying the paradigm model allowed being more precise while defining the categories and identifying the sub-categories.

*Pronunciation awareness* refers to the importance that students give to pronunciation as a means of feeling more confident when speaking. The sub-categories are the following: *Pronunciation concerns* (defined as a concern that students experienced when they had to face speaking-based activities); *listening to each other* (the active and positive attitude that students developed in connection with their peers' pronunciation skills process, avoiding laughing or intimidating their peers. It was the result of an improvement in their relationships and effective communication); *helping each other* (the enhancement of a constructive attitude when listening to each other, as seen in Figure 5, Excerpt 1).

**Figure 5.** Excerpt 1: Recording Form – Describing the Situation

Student 1: Very secure. She didn't need to read in the moment of recording. Better pronunciation. She helped Student 2 a lot. She used some expressions to encourage him.

Finally, the *expansion of vocabulary* (the students' challenging attitude to develop pronunciation skills through the acquisition of new vocabulary which was needed to transmit an understandable message) strengthened this feeling of awareness. During the implementation, the teacher's journals evidenced the students' concerns regarding pronunciation e.g. when planning the shows students usually considered pronunciation

an issue. In Excerpt 2, shown in Figure 6, I evidence the decisions I made to provide a solution when I saw students' concerns and frustration because of their pronunciation.

**Figure 6.** Excerpt 2: Teacher's journal.  
Class Implementation 2

Given the frustration that I have noticed in the students, I have decided to set up a pronunciation exercise with each group. However, I was surprised because some groups were already working in this aspect (pronunciation). This activity was consisted on repeating and showing what they have found in the dictionary or in Google. Some others wrote the pronunciation.

The final survey –applied after the implementation– showed that 75% of the students felt that the use of the target language in the class increased fairly (60% - 70%). 35% of those students expressed that it was because they felt that their pronunciation had improved (Appendix D).

*Practice awareness* is defined as the recognition that students give to practice as a strategy to achieve confidence. The subcategories, *Need of practice* (students acknowledged that they needed to do more so that they could improve their performance in subsequent sessions), *opportunity of practice* (the result of the reflection regarding the first subcategory; events, situations or actions that provided students different moments to take action on some issues that they considered needed further improvement), *practicing together* (the main strategy established as a product of an explicit or implicit decision of the team members in order to make effective use of their time during each implementation session), and *learning together* (suited the social effect of cooperative learning; new information was shared and consequently, students became aware of a better understanding not only of

the language topic, but also of the radio language). During the project study, the students' views were reiterative in terms of the needs to practice and the opportunities that the lessons planned for the present study offered for doing so, as seen in Excerpt 3, where some students were reflecting on their own progress as well as their peers.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 7.** Excerpt 3: Video Recording Transcription<sup>6</sup>

Teacher: Well, how did you feel this time?

Student 1: I felt good, as usual.

Student 2: Yes of course, much better.

Student 4: Yes, better.

Teacher: What about you? (Referring to student 3)

Students 3: Well... I think there is something else missing...

Student 2: No my friend, there is something missing, but it is few, isn't it?

Student 1: Yes folk, last time you almost cried.

Student 2: Right, this time you did understand.

Similarly, they recognized that it was more appealing to practice with their peers (on the cooperative teams), and in this way they learned together. Excerpt 4 –that shows how students provide each other help– demonstrates that applying the interpersonal and small-group cooperative learning skills improved the relationships amongst the teams' members since the motivation arose not only to have a successful individual performance, but also, according to Johnson (2003, as cited by Gillies, 2007, p. 42), to facilitate learning in others.

<sup>6</sup> Originally in Spanish. Translated by the author.

**Figure 8.** Excerpt 4: Audio recording form. Describing the Situation<sup>7</sup>

Student 1: Very secure. She didn't need to read in the moment of recording. Better pronunciation. She helped Student 2 a lot. She used some expressions to encourage him ("Just do it, it's easy!" "Don't be a fool, you can do it, just as we already did").

**Figure 9.** Excerpt 5: Teacher's Journal. Implementation Class 3

The group starting practicing the script first by reading, then the members took the time to read alone one line, and then they joined to practice the line learned hiding the paper with the script.

The interpersonal and small-group skills cooperative learning-based strategy enabled students to identify the reasons they did not feel confident when speaking as well as the actions required for dealing with this issue. Identifying the reasons is a starting point for facing the anxiety that oral activities produced in the students. Likewise, adopting Gillies' strategy (Interpersonal and Small-group skills) allowed students to cultivate social strategies that eased the incorporation of new information (and pronunciation of this new vocabulary) and, thus, to feel more confident with the recordings (students' oral production in this study). Likewise, the interpersonal and small-group skills strategy helped participants to change their attitudes, contributed to the teams' tasks and assisted each other. In Excerpt 5 it is possible to identify the importance of listening as a source to provide feedback for the others. It was through the application of Gillies' interpersonal and small-

group skills strategy (2007) that students were provided opportunities to learn how to listen to each other and develop a critical assessment in a constructive way.

Based on Gillies (2007), the change in behavior evidenced in these expressions of encouragement permitted students to feel confident and motivated them to be active participants in the task including supporting the team's vision without the fear of being ridiculed in front of their peers. The result of being active listeners helped students achieve the common goal. This project also demonstrated that participating in a radio show was an engaging opportunity to use students' knowledge and expand it to develop speaking confidence in English by means of practicing, recording, listening to, reflecting and editing (or recording again if necessary). The radio show –as a final product– allowed participants to work on their pronunciation needs, derived from their explicit concerns related to speaking confidence expressed during the earlier stages of the project. Following the strategies previously mentioned, the study validated Montoya's and Villa's assumptions regarding the way students spoke without being observed (resembling a radio show performance). Students felt that they were in a healthy and encouraging environment that facilitated their production and raised their confidence when speaking.

## Conclusions

This action research project guided students to become aware and reflective in terms of identifying reasons for the lack of confidence and the possible solutions to overcome the problem. This is the first time that the participants had the opportunity to reflect upon their difficulties and propose solutions for improvement. It became a crucial step in developing speaking confidence since learners were able to identify their own weaknesses and strengths

<sup>7</sup> The interaction was originally in Spanish ("*Hágale que es fácil!*". "*No sea bobo, ud., puede, como lo hicimos antes*").

and, therefore, could decide both individually and as a group the actions to take for the process.

The cooperative learning-based strategy –framed under the foundation of Gillies’ (2007) interpersonal and small group skills strategy– helped the students build a secure environment. It is, as Oxford cited, *cooperating with others* where students agree on procedures for working together on an activity that has a common goal (the production of the show). Furthermore, participating in the show demanded from the students what Oxford (1990) called *empathizing with others* which for the present study meant *becoming aware of others’ thoughts and feelings* (Oxford, 1990, p. 173). The students demonstrated a more positive attitude as a result of listening as a resource to advise their peers on how to perform better in terms of pronunciation (their main concern) for the up-coming recording sessions. Therefore, the students’ confidence increased since their attitudes were modified towards motivation for performing better based on their self-reflection and peer-assistance. As a consequence of increased motivation, it is possible to say that speaking confidence in 8<sup>th</sup> graders from La Chucua School was fostered, not only because it enabled social interactions, but also because it influenced the academic performances of learners in the English classroom.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

Conducting a project like this implies that one has or acquires knowledge of the content area (in this case, radio shows). If this is not so, it would be useful to create a collaborative team of teachers or ask for assistance from an institution that specializes in this field. In this way, a multidisciplinary project could be designed and the students could have the opportunity to integrate different information from different courses in order to achieve a common goal.

This integration of different disciplines would entail a change in the schedules and school routines. Likewise, providing opportunities for the students to visit a real radio station (in order to cultivate the interest that students could have in mass media) could be seen as an additional productive strategy.

Young learners will always like mass media, so leading or conducting a project that involves communication and certain media resources will be appealing and meaningful to them. Therefore, through the integration of the affective filter (Krashen, 1974 as cited by VanPatten & Williams, 2006), mass media and language issues could be integrated to foster motivation and more meaningful usages of the target language.

### **Further Research**

One of the primary areas for further research would be developing oral production through the implementation of this interpersonal and small-group skills strategy. Students could use this gained knowledge to start a subsequent study, in addition to Gillies’ proposal, on Oxford’s statement about applying indirect strategies to the four language skills, and more specifically, the social strategies: *Asking questions, cooperating with others, and empathizing with others* (Oxford, 1990, p. 169). In this way, students would be helped to become more proficient because, according to Kessler (1992, as cited by Oxford, 2002, p. 60), (1) the input received will be a more comprehensible product of peer interaction; (2) they will have better developed listening skills that would help oral performance; (3) they would receive an instant reaction from their peers regarding their participation; and (4) they could relate new information to their previous knowledge, among others.

Maintaining the target group will be crucial and could be the leading group that will allow students of other grades to integrate a multidisciplinary

team that would be more independent and autonomous in terms of decision-making.

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## About the Author

**Nubia Consuelo Lemos Tello** holds a BED in Modern Languages (Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, Colombia) and an MA in Edumatics with emphasis in Multimedia. She also studied in a professional development program at Universidad Nacional de Colombia. The article is based on the study she conducted while studying for an MA in ELT - Autonomous Learning Environments at Universidad de La Sabana, Colombia.

## Appendix A: Initial Survey\*

### Welcome to the survey!

This survey has the purpose of determining the percentage of oral production in English class, and your range of confidence as well. I thank you in advance for your honesty when filling it in.

1. How much do you use oral English during the sessions?  
 Every time  
 Frequently  
 Sometimes  
 A few times
  
2. In which situations do you use oral English?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
3. How many of your classmates have you recognized as speakers of English during the sessions?  
 All of them  
 The majority  
 Some of them  
 Few  
 No one
  
4. How much information do you share when speaking in English?  
 A lot; more than what I have learned in class or according to the teacher's instructions.  
 Very little, just what I have learned in class.  
 None.
  
5. When the teacher speaks in English, you:  
 Understand all or almost all and you reply (interchanging information).  
 You recognize the general idea and do not answer or you answer in monosyllables.  
 You understand little information and do not provide answers.
  
6. Who do you prefer interacting with in class (to speak English with)?  
 With the teacher.  
 With your classmates.  
 You do not like speaking English or you are frightened to do so.

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\* Survey originally presented to the students in their mother tongue (Spanish).

7. Are you frightened of speaking in English as you do in Spanish?
- a. Yes \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. No \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. More or less \_\_\_\_\_

IF THE ANSWER IS “YES” OR “MORE OR LESS”, ANSWER QUESTIONS 8 AND 9.

8. What is your main fear when you are requested to speak English?
- \_\_\_\_\_ That your classmates laugh at you.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ That the audience expresses their lack of understanding what you are saying.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ That the teacher corrects your pronunciation.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Other (Please, specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- 

9. Why do you feel afraid when speaking English?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Because you feel that your pronunciation is not appropriate.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Because you do not have enough vocabulary.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Because there are not enough opportunities to practice in class.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

10. Do you think that the topic “Radio Show” that the group chose at the beginning of the school year will help you overcome your fears of speaking English? Would you feel more confident?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Yes
  - \_\_\_\_\_ No
  - \_\_\_\_\_ It would be a starting point
  - \_\_\_\_\_ I am not sure about it

IF YOU ANSWERED “YES” OR “WOULD BE A STARTING POINT”, PLEASE ANSWER THE LAST QUESTION

11. How do you think that the Project “Radio Show” would help you to overcome your fears when speaking and help you feel more confident when speaking?
- 
- 

Thanks for your cooperation.

Adapted from:

Thornbury, S. (2005). *Planning and assessing speaking. How to teach Speaking*. England: Pearson, p. 113.

## Appendix B: Sample of Teacher's Journal

IED LA CHUCUA SCHOOL  
TEACHER JOURNAL Nr: 1

TOPIC: Comparing people  
Date: August 25/2009 Room: 15

### 1. Description of the activity

Students prepared a radio show section where they have to talk about people establishing comparisons. This activity corresponds to the topic worked in class (Comparatives and superlatives)

### 2. Observations

Each group has already prepared the show:

Group 1: Sandra - Kathrin - Kimberly - Angie: Show printed. Students are reading. They have one paper to be read by all of them.  
Angie → Tried to make a spontaneous pronunciation  
All → Spanish-like pronunciation. Worried about fluency  
He is reading while the others are paying attention.  
They noticed errors in pronunciation (pulling tails)

Group 2: Karen - Alejandra (The others were absent).  
Reading  
Before the activity asked for pronunciation correction - translation (titles of songs - why?). More focused on playing the recorder. Music is the guide of turn-taking.

Group 3: Bryan B - Espinosa - Jhan Carlo.  
Before the activity - pronunciation concerns and unknown words  
Fluency - OK - Reading  
Transitions - very good (Continue with...) ("finally...")

Group 4: Cristian - Michael - Johan.  
Reading / Spanish-like pronunciation  
Clarity in terms of turn-taking  
Ss were guided by music (background).  
Ss didn't use the indicated topic (Comparatives - Sup).

3. Data source to base the observations on Audio Recording - Direct observations.

### 4. First Analyses

There was a lot of reading (they didn't memorize the script).  
There was concerns about the pronunciation but they waited until the last moment, and consequently they didn't were aware enough.  
They recognized the importance of the turn-taking.

## Appendix C: Sample of Lesson Plan

### “Recommendations for vacations”

**Teacher:** Nubia Consuelo Lemos Tello

**Date:** September 14<sup>th</sup>

**Institution:** Colegio La Chucua IED

**Class time:** 9:50 – 11:00

**Length of the class:** 70 minutes

**Room:** 15

**Number of students:** 38

**Average age:** 15 / Virtual Room

**Level:** Elementary

**Group:** 8<sup>th</sup> grade (802)

#### **Aim**

By the end of the lesson students will provide a suggestion report:

- By giving an oral report about vacations.
- By identifying and using compound words.

#### **Assumed knowledge**

Students recognize modals for suggestions or advice (should – should not)

Students are familiar with WH- CLAUSES: What, where, when.

Students are familiar with Yes-No questions.

#### **Materials**

- PowerPoint presentation.
- Handouts for pair work.
- Handouts for writing the script.

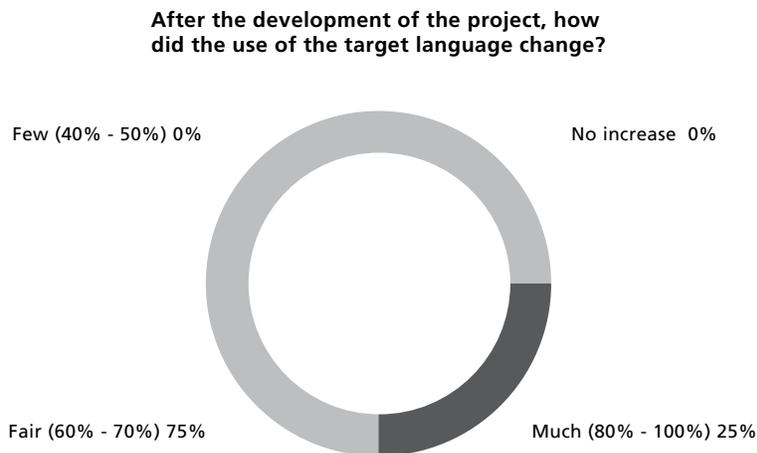
Stage	Aim	Procedure Teacher and student activity	Time and interaction
Warming up	To activate input, checking previous knowledge	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students are organized in rows and each row is a team.</li> <li>2. Each row receives a set of cards with different words: The students of each team have to organize the words in order to build a sentence with the modal verb. The first team to build the sentence gets a point.</li> <li>3. Two other tries are set up.</li> </ol>	<p>10 minutes T – GW</p>
Presentation	To present vocabulary regarding vacations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Students observe two pictures of places. Students explain the relationship between them (places to take a rest).</li> <li>5. Pair Work: Students receive a handout with a set of pictures of different elements that are necessary for vacations and the corresponding words. Each pair must match the pictures with the words.</li> <li>6. The whole class corrects the exercise and justifies their answers. Solutions are displayed on the smart board.</li> </ol>	<p>10 minutes PW</p>
Practice	To build compound words	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Pair work: Exercise 2 in the handout. Students match the names in column A and B to make compound nouns.</li> <li>8. Then, they build sentences using "should" (affirmative – negative)</li> </ol>	<p>15 minutes PW</p>
	To build modal verb sentences for giving suggestions	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>You should wear sunglasses if you travel to Cartagena. You shouldn't carry gloves to the beach.</i></p>	<p>20 minutes</p>
Production	To build a section of a radio show talking about suggestion for vacations	<p>GROUP WORK: The students are organized in groups (according to the groups of the class Project "radio-show". Each group plans a section for a radio show. The objective of the section is "Recommendations for vacations". For doing so, each group must:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Think about the name of the section.</li> <li>2. Check and correct the sentences created during pair work.</li> <li>3. Decide on the use of radio elements: Music, special effects, words, etc.</li> <li>4. Start writing the script of the radio show section.</li> </ol> <p>Each group presents their production to the teacher for being corrected in terms of pronunciation and sentence structure.</p>	<p>15 minutes</p>

## Appendix D: Sample of Final Survey Results

### Final Survey Results

**Number of students surveyed:** 12

**Missing students:** None



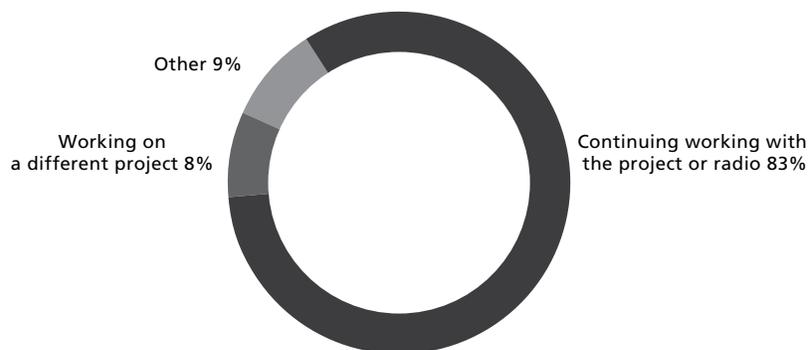
- Reasons for the increase:
  - Pronunciation was taken into account (2 surveys).
  - The style is different (better).
  - We changed our way of listening.
  - It is a motivation to learn English.
  - It is an opportunity to put into practice what we learned.
  - By recordings we learn how to pronounce.
  - It demands using vocabulary.
  - My speaking increased a lot.
  - I don't feel embarrassed when speaking English.
  - Because we didn't speak English before, but now we understand and the expansion of vocabulary and the use of radio, we can speak more.
  - Sometimes we speak and sometimes we don't.
- Reasons for no improvement:  
(No answers)

**Why do you think you are more confident?  
Which aspects helped to become so?**



- Other aspects:
  - To speak with more grace.
  - The timbre of the voice is higher.

**Which strategy would help you continue  
increasing your speaking confidence?**



Other: To develop study guides that go from the basic to the most difficult.

- (If you chose the first option in the previous question). How do you think the project “Radio Show” can help you overcome your fears and feel more confident when speaking?
  - Being more spontaneous and confident when speaking.
  - Applying everything we have learned.

- People around me do not laugh at me when I make a mistake.
- By having workshops where we can connect the topic and the vocabulary.
- Listening to the recordings after editing to notice how we are improving and if we are doing a good job. Practicing and learning.
- Everybody is listening to us.
- When speaking I used to feel nervous but when it is time for the radio show I feel motivated because it's a way that I like to speak.
- I don't have any fear, but the problem is that I don't understand. However, the radio show is good as it was managed now. I would like to be allowed to choose the topics and not everybody have the same topic.
- It is an opportunity to continue practicing, and in this way, I feel more confident and relaxed.
- More workshops, vocabulary activities, recordings, different genres of radio show (role play, drama, news, etc.)
- Perhaps speaking close to my friends eases speaking in front of a bigger audience.
- Working on pronunciation, learning more words in both written and oral ways.