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MAJOR PAPER

Title: *A system of fluency activities to develop basic speaking skills in English in the 7th grade students from “Obdulio Morales Torres” Secondary School*

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“Educar, ¿quién no lo sabe?: es ante todo una obra de infinito amor.”

José Martí.

Dedication

To my mother Leidys Pérez Gonzáles who brought me to life and gave me everything I have and my father Carlos Alberto Montejo Roríguez, for being there for me even from miles of distance. I love you both.

Abstract

The teaching of English as a foreign language in the secondary school is aimed at developing an elementary level of communicative competence which will allow the learners of this level to satisfy basic needs in social interaction, so as to contribute to the formation of a basic general educational level in the students.

Many experts emphasize on the importance of developing speaking ability in this level, as it is prioritized in seventh and eighth grades, and especially to teach oral fluency which is the goal of teaching speaking.

Throughout the use of various theoretical and empirical methods it was found that in Group 7th A at "Obdulio Morales Torres" secondary school in Zulueta, there are problems regarding to speaking ability, mainly with fluency. Many of the students are not able to participate in a conversation about an every day topic and consequently, some of them are not confident about speaking and fall back into in their mother tongue when trying to communicate orally.

That is why the aim of this paper is to propose a system of activities in order to contribute to the development of fluency in basic oral communication skills in the seventh grade students from "Obdulio Morales Torres" secondary school.

The system of fluency activities is the proposal of a fairly wide variety of fluency activities, which integrates systemically as many basic speaking skills as possible and challenges students to speak English, in order to contribute to the development in seventh grade students of fluency in basic oral communication skills.

Introduction

Nowadays English is considered the universal language for business and technology. 322 million native speakers around the world make it the fourth most spoken language after Mandarin Chinese, Hindi and Spanish. Furthermore, it is the most studied second language in the world (about 418 million people study English). It is an official language in United States of America, Canada, The United Kingdom of Great Britain, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, several islands of the Caribbean and the Pacific Ocean, as well as in some African countries, including South Africa. Without a doubt, English is a versatile language that has become necessary in today's world.

English has become a language of great diffusion internationally due to the transformations carried out in the world. It has a great importance in a variety of areas in society.

The teaching of English language has been included in the curriculum at different levels of education, from primary education to the university. It is extremely important that the Cuban people learn how to use this language; due to the fact that Cuba needs to maintain relations with English speaking-countries in the fields of science, technology, education, health, sports, culture and other aspects. Its teaching must not only contribute to the students' linguistic proficiency but also it should contribute to the development of the ability to produce and reproduce new knowledge.

In the secondary school level the teaching of English as a foreign language is aimed at the development of an elementary level of communicative competence which will allow the learners of this level to satisfy basic needs in social interaction and in obtaining information from different sources written in English, so as to contribute to the formation of a basic general educational level in the students.

It is a priority that the students become competent from the communicative point of view, in order to achieve their development in the different areas of communicative competence (linguistic, discourse, sociocultural and strategic). These are specific objectives teaching a foreign language. This involves oral expression, translation and negotiation of meaning between two or more persons orally and in writing.

Language teaching lessons may be classified according to communicative language skills in: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Speaking ability is prioritized in secondary school, especially in seventh and eighth grades. That is why teachers of English should pay attention to four essential aspects during the teaching learning process of this ability in order to achieve its development in the students: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and fluency.

The goal of teaching speaking is oral fluency; that is, the ability to express oneself intelligibly, reasonably accurately and without too much hesitation.

This is the most difficult ability for seventh grade students at “Obdulio Morales Torres” secondary school in Zulueta. That is why, as was confirmed through group interviews with seventh grade students, many of them are not able to participate in a conversation about an every day topic in order to satisfy basic needs such as asking for and giving personal information and getting things done by other people. Consequently, some students are not confident about speaking and fall back into in their mother tongue when trying to communicate orally.

This result may be due to the fact some teachers lay too much emphasis on the practice of pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary and do not pay enough attention to the practice of fluency; that is they prioritize accuracy instead of fluency.

A look at the students’ workbook reveals that oral accuracy activities outnumber oral fluency activities. In addition, the oral fluency activities in the workbook show very little variety and they deal with topics which may not always be interesting for the students.

Therefore the present research intends to give a solution to the following **scientific problem**:

What may be done in order to contribute to the development of fluency in basic oral communication skills in English in seventh grade students from “Obdulio Morales Torres” secondary school?

In order to solve this problem our research will **focus** (object of research) on the teaching-learning process of oral communication in English in the context of

secondary school, and more particularly on the development of fluency in basic oral communication skills in seventh grade students (field of research).

The **aim** of this paper is to propose a system of activities in order to contribute to the development of fluency in basic oral communication skills in the seventh grade students from “Obdulio Morales Torres” secondary school.

In order to guide the research process the following **scientific questions** were formulated:

1. What theoretical and methodological rationale may support the teaching-learning process of oral communication in English in the context of secondary school in Cuba?
2. What needs are there in the teaching-learning process of fluency in basic oral communication skills in seventh grade at “Obdulio Morales Torres” secondary school?
3. What types of activities may be designed in order to develop fluency in basic oral communication skills in seventh grade students at “Obdulio Morales Torres” secondary school?
4. What judgements do teachers of English from Obdulio Morales school make with respect to a proposal of activities in order to contribute to the development of fluency in basic oral communication skills in seventh grade students?

In order to answer these scientific questions the following **scientific tasks** were designed:

1. Elaboration of the theoretical and methodological rationale for the teaching-learning process of oral communication in English in the context of secondary school in Cuba.
2. Needs assessment in the teaching learning process of fluency in basic oral communication skills in seventh grade at “Obdulio Morales Torres” secondary school.
3. Determination of the types of activities needed in order to contribute to the development of fluency in basic oral communication skills in seventh grade students.
4. Evaluation of the proposal of a system of activities in order to contribute to the development of fluency in basic oral communication

skills in seventh grade students, through a survey applied to the teachers of English from “Obdulio Morales Torres” secondary school.

In order to complete the research tasks of this paper the following **methods** were used:

Theoretical methods

Analytic-synthetic method: This method was used during the needs assessment stage of the reasearch process as well as in the determination of the theoretical framework of the research.

Inductive-deductive method: This method was used during the needs assessment stage in order to extract regularities out of a bulk of empirical data.

The historic-logical method: This method permitted to know the background and the evolution of the problem that is investigated and the points of view of different authors regarding the object and field of research.

Empirical methods

Document analysis: This method was used during the needs assessment stage in order to biuld up a target situation in relation to the teaching learning process of oral communication in English in the context of secondary school, and more particularly on the development of oral fluency in basic oral communication skills in seventh grade students. With this purpose the following documents were analyzed: the English program.

The students’workbook was analyzed in order to obtain information about the possible causes that may be influencing negatively on the teaching learning process of oral communication in English in the context of secondary school, and more particularly on the development of oral fluency in basic oral communication skills in seventh grade students.

Interview: This method was applied to the seventh grade teachers at “Obdulio Morales Torres” secondary school, in order to find out about the level of oral ability of their seventh grade students and to obtain information about their views on the teaching and leraning of fluency in oral communication.

Survey: This method was used in order obtain information from a sample of seventh grade students at “Obdulio Morales Torres” secondary school with respect to their opinions concerning English oral classes in their school. This

method was also applied to evaluate the preliminary proposal of the system of activities.

Mathematical/statistical methods:

Percentage analysis was used when processing and quantifying the empirical data obtained during this research.

Population and sample

This research has been carried out at “Obdulio Morales Torres” secondary school in Zulueta town. The population is composed by 98 seventh grade students. Group 7th A was taken as an intentional sample. This group is integrated by 30 students. There are 17 males and 13 females, and its average age is among 12-13 years old. It is a mixed ability group; there are 15 average students, 7 advanced and 8 low students.

Practical contribution

The practical contribution of this research paper is the proposal of a fairly wide variety of fluency activities, which integrates systemically as many basic speaking skills as possible and challenges students to speak English, in order to contribute to the development in seventh grade students of fluency in basic oral communication skills.

Main Part

1. Theoretical and methodological rationale for the teaching-learning process of oral communication in English in the context of secondary school in Cuba

1.1. The teaching-learning process of oral communication in English in the context of secondary school in Cuba

Communication is an active process of interaction which entails mutual influence of participants in sharing information, emotions and behaviors in a communicative situation, which occurs in the context of an activity. (Fernández González, A. M. et. Al, 2000)

Oral communication is a particular way of communicating information, emotions and behaviors among people without resorting to the written word.

Communication requires a sender, a message, and a recipient, although the receiver need not be present or aware of the sender's intent to communicate at the time of communication; thus communication can occur across vast distances in time and space.

Oral communication, or speaking, is a two-way process between speaker and listener (or listeners) and involves the productive skill of speaking and the receptive skill of listening. It is important to remember that both, speaker and listener have a positive function to perform. In simple terms, the speaker interacts with a listener where both change their roles in the conversation. (Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia). That is to say, the speaker may become a listener and the other way around.

It should be kept in mind that the listener's interpretation will not necessarily correspond to the speaker's intended meaning. The message itself, in normal speech usually contains a good deal of 'information' that is redundant.

In the process of oral communication the listener is helped by prosodic features, such as stress and intonation, which are part of the meaning of the spoken utterance, as well as by facial and bodily movements such as gestures.

Oral communication skills are the mastery of the actions which respond to conscious partial goals of the communicative process between two or more

people, which includes both expression and interaction in a particular sociocultural context.

Oral communication skills reflect different dimensions of language such as these:

- Linguistic: the ability to use and interpret linguistic forms accurately.
- Sociolinguistic: The ability to produce appropriate utterances according to rules of use, the communicative situation, and the participants in the communicative act.
- Discourse: The ability to produce and interpret different types of discourse and produce coherent texts.
- Strategic: The ability to use verbal and non – verbal strategies to avoid breakdowns in communication.
- Sociocultural: The ability to understand the cultural meaning underlying linguistic forms and to understand the culture of the people whose language is being studied. (De la Paz Gálvez E., 2012: 19)

Communicative language teaching recognizes the teaching of all these dimensions of language as opposed to more traditional approaches where the emphasis is heavily on the teaching of structures.

The problem of teaching and learning to speak a foreign language is threefold: it includes knowledge, habits (language practice) and skills (performance). (Rodolfo Acosta Padrón Et al., 2002). In this study the attention will be centered on the development of the speaking ability because this is the most difficult one for the students of the sample.

Speaking is a productive skill that belongs to oral communication. Most people think that it is the most important of the four language skills. It could be true if his / her purpose is to use the language orally: to speak.

Spoken language may be used for two main purposes:

- For interaction or social purposes: The emphasis is on creating harmonious interactions and not on communicating information; e.g., for greeting, making casual ‘chats’, telling jokes, etc.
- For transactional purposes: The emphasis is on communicating information, i.e., the communicative acts are message-oriented.

In communication three psychological processes are involved: feedback, choice and information gap.

Information gap: In real life, communication takes place between two (or more) people, one of whom knows something that is unknown to the other(s). The purpose of the communication is to bridge this information gap. In classroom terms, an information gap exercise causes one student to be in a position to tell another something that the second student does not already know.

Choice: Another crucial characteristic of communication is that the participants have choice, both in terms of what they will say and, more particularly, how they will say it. From the point of view of the speaker this means that he/she must choose not only what ideas he/she wants to express at a given moment, but also what linguistic forms are appropriate to express them.

Feedback: The third and final process of communication is to some extent implicit in the two already outlined. When two speakers take part in an interaction, there is normally an aim of some kind in their minds. In real life, one person speaks to another because he/she wishes, for example, to invite him/her, to complain to him/her, to threaten him/her, or to reassure him/her, and this aim will be in his/her mind all the time he/she is speaking. What he/she says to the other person will be designed to research that aim, and what the other person says to him/her will be evaluated in terms of that aim.

Taken together the three processes outlined above seem central to the development of any procedure for teaching the communicative use of language. The teaching learning process of a foreign language inevitably reflects a philosophy of language and of teaching and learning. In this paper the oral fluency activities that are being proposed are in line with communicative language teaching, which attempts to replicate the features of real communication in the classroom, but activities and phases of lessons in which the emphasis is on accuracy still have a place in this approach. Despite the fact that language is more than the sum of its parts, a mastery of the parts will not lead to mastery of the language. There have to be opportunities to make integrated use of everything one has learned. This includes a set of new ideas, concepts and techniques, which, properly applied, can improve our students' learning and make our work as teachers more efficient and rewarding.

Though there are different authors who have written about the communicative language teaching principles that can be used in the teaching of English in the different levels of education, the author of this paper decided to embrace the ones proposed by Neil Naiman in his article "Teaching Pronunciation Communicatively" published in "Communication Journal", INTUR, 1989, because these are in line with the philosophy of teaching and learning in the context of the secondary school in Cuba. Next are explained each of Naiman's principles of communicative language teaching:

MEANINGFUL PRACTICE BEYOND THE SENTENCE LEVEL

This principle instructs us that language operates at levels higher than isolated words or sentences, that language acquires meaning in context; that practice in the classroom should provide for the students to experiment with whatever bits of language they know in order to convey real communicative purposes (orally or in writing); and to process stretches of language as they occur in real life (listening and reading). This principle also has implications in terms of students' motivation since it implies asking them to communicate and to process real meanings of language.

STUDENT-CENTERED CLASS

This principle claims that if students are expected to develop skills they should be given lots of opportunities to participate in pairs, in groups, and for the whole class. In other words, this principle implies that teachers should be "leaving the stage for the students to act." In addition, this principle acknowledges the need to center our teaching on student's needs and interests.

TASK- ORIENTATION OF CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

This principle is related to problem-solving teaching. It states that students should learn by solving close-to-real life tasks and problems. In real life one does not watch the news for the sake of doing it, but rather to follow up on a current issue, for example.

DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIES FOR LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

This principle acknowledges the need for students to develop skills and methods of learning on their own, since it is impossible to teach people everything that they need to know; rather, people should be helped to be able to learn on their own.

PEER CORRECTION IN GROUP WORK

This principle considers that in order for teachers to help students develop accuracy, teachers should use feedback correction techniques. By using these techniques, students are helped to develop self-correction and self-monitoring skills. And obviously, if students are able to correct their own mistakes, they will certainly have the ability to correct their partners' mistakes as well, while working in groups or pairs, and even in situations beyond the classroom.

The principles that have outline above are coherent with this definition of the teaching-learning:

The teaching-learning process is a systemic school process of mediation of the appropriation of culture by individuals, responding to social and learner needs, which is organized and conducted on the basis of students' current and potential state of development, leads to higher levels of student development and aims at an integrated and self-determined education of personality, with a capacity to carry on developing on their own, and to change reality in a concrete socio-historical context. (Dr. C. Doris Castellanos Simons, 2001)

From this perspective learning must lead to the development of higher order thinking skills and to the appropriation of a scientific method; it must be integrated, including knowledge, skills and strategies as well as values and positive attitudes, feelings and interests; learning must be productive, participatory and meaningful, leading to responsible attitudes. This implies that, although the focus of this paper is on the development of speaking abilities, learning is viewed holistically, including attitudinal content as well.

These are also part of the goals that may be pursued with the system of activities that is being proposed:

1. Meaningful learning: contextualization and evaluation;
2. Active learning: deep and strategic learning styles;
3. Motivation for learning: challenging goals, positive expectations, commitment and cooperation; and
4. Self-regulation: reflection, self-evaluation and responsibility for learning

(Castellanos D., 2001)

The teaching of speaking must be carried out in three stages in order to facilitate meaningful learning:

The presentation stage: In this stage, the teacher's task is to present new language in context and to make sure students understand what has been presented.

The controlled practice stage: In this stage, the teacher will provide opportunities for students to practice language in contrived activities which focuss on manipulating language forms, with the purpose of facilitating in the students the development of a minimum of accuracy in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary.

The free practice stage: Finally, in this stage the students are asked to use language for communicative purposes in situations which include information gap and thus are unpredictable in terms of the answers students are likely to produce.

1.2. The development of fluency in basic oral communication skills in seventh grade students

"Fluency the feature which gives speech the qualities of being natural and normal, including native-like use of pausing, rhythm, intonation, stress, rate of speaking, and use of interjections and interruptions." (Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics, 1985:107). Conversely, disfluent is considered the result when a disorder causes a breakdown in normal speech, it is therefore, the opposite of fluency.

It is said that a person masters a language when she/he understands and produces it with linguistic correction and when he/she is able to transmit a message with fluency.

In foreign language teaching, fluency describes a level of proficiency in communication which includes:

- a) The ability to produce written and/or spoken language with ease;
- b) The ability to speak with a good but not necessarily perfect command of intonation, vocabulary, and grammar;
- c) The ability to communicate ideas effectively;
- d) The ability to produce continuous speech without causing comprehension difficulties or breakdown of communication. (Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics, 1985)

When someone is fluent in a foreign language, this means that he/she is able to use the language freely in order to communicate ideas effectively and appropriately.

According to Byrne D. (1989: 8) "The main goal in teaching the productive skill of speaking will be oral fluency. This can be defined as the ability to express oneself intelligibly, reasonably accurately and without too much hesitation."

Fluency is sometimes contrasted with accuracy, which refers to the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences; accuracy in speaking also refers to correctness in terms of pronunciation and vocabulary.

The concept of fluency has been formulated by several authors. Hartmann & Stork (1976) suggest that "a person is said to be a fluent speaker of a language when he/she can use its structures accurately whilst concentrating on content rather than form, using the units and patterns automatically at normal conversational speed when they are needed." Brumfit (1984) feels that fluency is "to be regarded as natural language use." Considering native speakers' oral production, Fillmore (1979) identifies four abilities that might be subsumed under the term fluency, the first of which is the ability to talk at length with few pauses. The three other abilities include the ability to talk in coherent, reasoned, and "semantically dense sentences", the ability to have appropriate things to say in a wide range of contexts, and finally the ability to be creative and imaginative in language use.

In order to teach students to speak a foreign language, teachers need to design their teaching in terms of the communicative functions for which language is used. A communicative function "...is the purpose for which an utterance or unit of language is used. In language teaching, language functions are often described as categories of behaviors; eg., requests, apologies, complaints, offers, compliments." (Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics, 1985:113)

Whether we are apologizing, expressing a wish or asking permission, we use language in order to fulfill a specific purpose.

Savignon describes a language function as "the use to which language is put, the purpose of an utterance rather than the particular grammatical form an utterance takes." (Savignon, 1983.)

The *communicative functions* are the main objectives to be attained in each grade in terms of the teaching of speaking; didactically speaking they are the

skills that need to be mastered by the students. That is why the programs of the different grades in secondary school in Cuba are designed taking into account the different communicative functions of language that are needed for students to communicate at an elementary level.

Leech G. & J. Svartvik (1989) state that a learner needs skills at the word, phrase and clause level, in order to express different meanings such as number, partition, measure, quantity, time, aspect, among others. They add that students also need skills at the sentence level in order to fulfill the following purposes:

A. Ask for and give information

- Ask for information Solicitar información
- Offer information
- Ask about an alternative
- Ask for confirmation
- Ask someone to say something again
- Report statements, negation, questions and commands
- State something
- Negate something

B. Express their views

- Express agreement and disagreement
- Express partial agreement and disagreement
- State a hypothesis
- Express different degrees of possibility: possibility, impossibility, ability, certainty, logical need, probability
- Express attitudes to truth: certainty, doubt or uncertainty, belief or opinion, assumption or appearance

Leech G. & J. Svartvik also add that someone learning a foreign language needs skills at the utterance level, in order to:

A. Express mood, emotion and attitudes

a. Describe emotions

- Express likes and dislikes
- Express preferences
- Express hope

- Say what they are looking forward to
- Express dislike or regret
- Express approval and disapproval
- Express surprise
- Express concern

b. Express will

- Express willingness
- Express a wish
- Express what they intend to do
- Express insistence

c. Express permission and obligation

- Express permission
- Express obligation
- Express need
- Express prohibition

B. Influencing people

- Ask someone to do something
- Request something from someone
- Offer advice
- Suggest something
- Invite someone
- Warning someone
- Promise something
- Threaten someone

C. Establishing a friendly conversation

- Start and end a conversation: start and end the conversation, greet, say goodbye, introduce yourself or someone else.
- Thanking, apologizing and saying sorry
- Express a wish, congratulate someone, express condolences
- Offer something

Following Leech and Svartick (Op. Cit.) skills at the text level include:

- Connecting ideas logically
- Presenting and organizing the information in the text

- Achieving emphasis
- Turn-taking in conversation
- Showing that one is listening (in conversation)
- Redirecting a conversation
- Leaving a conversation politely
- Taking up a point, etc.

But communication not only involves expressing but also interacting. This means that in determining the oral skills that our students need to have a command of, a teacher must consider a level of expression and a level of interaction, as is specified in the Common European Framework of Languages (The Common European Framework and the Portfolio in the Swiss National Science Foundation project: Schneider, Günther & North, Brian (2000): Fremdsprachen können – was heisst das? Chur/Zürich, Rüegger.). For example:

Spoken Interaction

- I can make simple transactions in shops, post offices or banks.
- I can use public transport: buses, trains, and taxis, ask for basic information and buy tickets.
- I can get simple information about travel.
- I can order something to eat or drink.
- I can make simple purchases by stating what I want and asking the price.
- I can ask for and give directions referring to a map or plan.
- I can ask how people are and react to news.
- I can make and respond to invitations.

Spoken Production

- I can describe myself, my family and other people.
- I can describe where I live.
- I can give short, basic descriptions of events.
- I can describe my educational background, my present or most recent job.
- I can describe my hobbies and interests in a simple way.
- I can describe past activities and personal experiences (e.g. the last weekend, my last holiday).

According to Littlewood W. there are two different views of language, the structural view and the functional view. The structural view of language concentrates on the grammatical system, how sentences can be organized. The sentence structure is stable but the communicative function (functional view) is variable. In other words, it depends on the specific situation and social factors. (Littlewood W., 1987)

A single linguistic form can express various communicative functions, and a single communicative function can be expressed by a number of linguistic forms.

“The foreign language learner needs more than a “fixed repertoire” of linguistic forms corresponding to communicative functions. Since the relationship between forms and functions is variable, and cannot be definitely predicted outside specific situations, the learner must also be given opportunities to develop strategies for interpreting language in actual use.” (Littlewood W., 1987:3)

Communicative activities are a bridge to develop communicative skills in the students. They help students to integrate form, meaning and use as they communicate freely and fluently.

According to Littlewood, communicative activities may be divided into two main groups: Functional communicative activities and social interaction activities.

Functional communicative activities emphasize the functional aspect of communication, which is crucial, given the tremendous importance of the ability to use language to convey meaning effectively in a specific situation.

Activities presented in this category are grouped according to the two main uses of language: using language to share information and using language to process information.

a) Sharing information with restricted cooperation. These are activities in which a learner possesses information that another learner must discover. They entail the sharing of information. Among these activities are:

- ✓ Identifying pictures
- ✓ Discovering identical pairs
- ✓ Discovering sequences or locations
- ✓ Discovering missing information

- ✓ Discovering missing features
 - ✓ Discovering secrets.
- b) Sharing information with unrestricted cooperation. Through these activities the learners' communicative relationship may become fully cooperative. This type of activity stimulates interaction among learners and the sharing of information. Among these activities are:
- ✓ Communicating patterns and pictures
 - ✓ Communicating models
 - ✓ Discovering differences
 - ✓ Following directions
- c) Sharing and processing information: Learners must not only share information, they must also discuss or evaluate this information in order to solve a problem. So they must work on the basis of the jigsaw principle. Among these activities are:
- ✓ Reconstructing story sequences
 - ✓ Pooling information to solve a problem
- d) Processing information: This is the last type of functional communication activities. Learners need to share information, then discuss and evaluate facts in order to solve a problem.

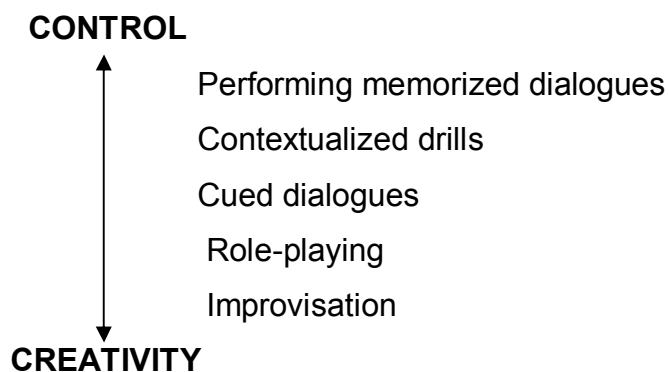
"Problem-solving activities need not be based only on every day situations that arise inside or outside the classroom. The teacher may also present more unusual situations in order to stimulate the learners' ingenuity." (Littlewood, 1987: 37) Learners must not only analyze information, but also justify in order to reach a decision. In general, learners must gradually become more creative with the language they have acquired and more competent.

Social interaction activities emphasize on the establishment of social relationships in communication. With these activities students use the language taking into account a clear defined social context, and attempt to conform to an appropriate social role in the way they speak.

From this perspective, the classroom is considered a social context for language use. This place is often called an artificial environment for learning and using a foreign language (Littlewood, 1987). Thus, in order to exploit the classroom environment as a social context for foreign language, Littlewood presents four ideas:

- Using the foreign language for classroom management. This provides an important opportunity to use the language as a vehicle for communication and as an effective way of satisfying students' communication needs in the classroom. Among these activities are drills and dialogue practice.
- Using the foreign language as a teaching medium. In the same way students learn a foreign language, they can also learn through this language. Here can be included subjects like History, Geography, Literature or cultural background in general. So, the role of this approach is to provide students with useful knowledge.
- Conversation or discussion sessions. This is a very important source because it opens up a rich stimulus for communicative interaction. Here students can practice the language skills that they have learned and they can manage a longer session of social interaction by introducing new topics or expressing their own experiences and ideas.
- Basing dialogues and roleplays on school experience. The importance of those activities is to help students to understand their environment and to cope with its problems. Here can be discussed aspects of their experience. This approach exploits the foreign language learning to communicate the needs of the students. It also explores problems of students' world and motivates communication through the use of simulations. Here can be found dialogues and role-playing. All those activities involve simulations and improvisation, which is the most creative activity.

Littlewood (Op. Cit.) illustrates with the following model how activities are graded from total control to creativity on the part of the learner:



“In the more creative types of role-playing (sic) the teacher controls only the situation and the learners’ roles in it, but leaves the learners themselves to create the interaction.” (Littlewood 1987:50)

Roleplaying activities may be graded this way, moving from control to creativity:

- ✓ Role-playing controlled through cued dialogues.
- ✓ Role-playing controlled through cues and information.
- ✓ Role-playing controlled through situation and goals.
- ✓ Role-playing in the form of debate or discussion.
- ✓ Large-scale simulation activities.
- ✓ Improvisation.

It is up to the teacher to plan the situations within which students will be able to use their language for a purpose in the classroom context. For instance, if the topic being learned is family and relatives then the situation may be introducing or visiting relatives. By creating a situation the teacher is providing the necessary context students need to use the language for a particular purpose.

Drawing on Littlewood’s typology of fluency activities and adding to it from other sources and experiences (Finocchiaro M. And C. Brumfit, 1989; Byrne D., 1989; Ur P., 1996; Acosta R. et al, s/r) for the purpose of this paper, the following classification has been adopted, moving from control to creativity :

1. Activities that ask students to play roles

- b. Disappearing dialogues
- c. Gapped dialogue
- d. Open-ended dialogue
- e. Cued cards
- f. Role plays with instructions and goals
- g. Improvisation
- h. Drama
- i. Simulations

2. Activities that involve students in asking questions

- a. Questionnaires
- b. Interviews
- c. Surveys
- d. Quizzes

3. Activities that rely on creating an information gap based on visuals

- a. Using objects and realia
 - b. Using pictures
 - c. Using mime
 - d. Charts
4. Talking points, debate and discussion
- a. Talking points
 - b. Debate
 - c. Discussion
5. Fluency games
6. Information-sharing activities
7. Problem-solving activities

A successful speaking activity is characterized by the presence of these attributes:

- a. Learners talk a lot.
- b. Participation is even.
- c. Motivation is high, which contributes to achieving a task objective.
- a. Language is of an acceptable level.

(Ur Penny, 1996: s/r)

And a communicative system of activities for oral fluency is characterized by these attributes:

- 1. It establishes a bridge between controlled and free practice activities.
- 2. It presents a variety of fluency activities.
- 3. It presents activities going from the easy to the difficult.
- 4. It presents activities that integrate knowledge of the world into fluency practice.
- 5. It encourages pairwork, groupwork and cooperative learning.
- 6. It integrates skills.
- 7. It gives clear instructions to activities.
- 8. It is connected to partial unit goals or to semester or school-year goals.

The proposal of a system of activities for oral fluency in English in seventh grade students should be based on the following basic oral communication skills, taken from the seventh grade national program:

General goal:

Students are expected to:

Establish a conversation with their peers in which they ask and give personal information about themselves and someone else, describe places and people in simple ways, request different things, express a variety of attitudes and use different social formula in order to behave politely during the conversation, which basically requires a command of the verb *to be* and *the simple present* in simple sentences, a pronunciation that sounds intelligibly, as well as the use of communication strategies when needed, such as asking for repetition or for a definition, asking the other person to speak more slowly and using gestures, cognate words or synonyms to convey meaning. This may require for some students a minimum of previous preparation in order to understand the situation and the instructions of the activity well. (See appendix 1)

2. Needs assessment on the teaching-learning process of fluency in basic oral communication skills in seventh grade students

The following methodology was used in order to complete our second research task:

- Elaboration of the target situation in terms of the goals that are established for the learning of speaking in English in seventh grade and the contents that must be learned.
- Diagnosis of students' learning with respect to fluency in basic oral communication skills.
- Diagnosis of the quality of the teaching materials that are being used, specifically the workbook that is available for the speaking classes and of the teachers' views on the teaching and learning of fluency in oral communication.

With respect to the target situation in terms of the goals that are established for the learning of speaking in seventh grade, the program includes the following specification of educative and instructive objectives:

- Communicate orally in English at an elementary level, which implies being able to interact in order to establish social relationships, making use of the simple tenses and the simple sentence, with a minimum of accuracy that favors comprehensibility, and making use of a finite

number of communication strategies in order to compensate for language deficiencies.

- Self-control their language production and self-monitor that of their peers.
- Show positive attitudes towards learning English, working in groups and the topics that are dealt with through the speaking activities.

In terms of the contents included within the speaking subsystem there is a list of communicative functions that corresponds with the basic speaking skills that students must be able to carry out to communicate orally in English at an elementary level, and there is also a list of basic grammatical structures, pronunciation items and vocabulary areas that must be covered so that students start attaining a command of the system of the language, that may enable them to speak with a minimum of accuracy and fluency. (Appendix 1.1)

Referring to the diagnosis of students' learning with respect to fluency in basic oral communication skills the following dimensions were established:

A. Cognitive dimension:

- Students' level of fluency in basic oral communication skills in English

B. Affective motivational dimension:

- Students' preference for speaking in English, in comparison to the rest of the language components of the subject (reading, listening, writing).

A sample of 30 seventh grade students were surveyed. This class was chosen intentionally, taking into account the following criterion: Access: Given the fact that the author is currently not teaching English, this group was proposed by one of the two teachers of English the author worked with during this research.

Summary of the results of the survey applied to 30 seventh grade students from ESBU "Obdulio Morales Torres" (Appendix 3)

About the students' level of fluency in basic oral communication skills in English

Out of 30 students that were surveyed, 18 (60 %) think that they are doing well in English, whereas 12 (40 %) of them think that their performance in English ranges from fair to poor.

Students' preference for speaking in English, in comparison to the rest of the language components of the subject

Only 50 % of the students prefer speaking, despite the fact that this subject component is more prioritized in the classroom, which may indicate that the students are not comfortable with speaking in English due to lack of success in this activity.

Again, 54 % of the students ask that speaking be prioritized and next is placed writing with 27 % of the students preferring it; one student adds "grammar" (3.3%).

Students think that speaking is the most difficult language aspect for them (40 % of them) and next is placed writing, with 33 % of the students saying so.

Students' opinions are evenly divided in this question: 36.6 % of them think they need more grammar practice, 30 % think it is in pronunciation where they need more practice and 30 % consider that they need more fluency practice.

100 % of the students consider that the activities that are carried out in class are enough for them to improve their speaking ability. This shows their concern not to say anything not may cause their teacher to loose face.

About the teachers' views on the teaching and learning of fluency in oral communication (Appendix 2)

An interview made to two teachers of English from Obdulio Morales Torres secondary school showed these regularities:

They acknowledge the need to use English in the classroom most of the time.

"We should teach students to learn English in English, not in Spanish."

They also think that fluency should be given priority with respect to accuracy.

"We should provide time for free practice."

The teachers are aware of the need for active classes. So they propose the following ideas:

"Students should be the center of the class."

"Teachers have to create exercises for the students because the ones in the workbook are not sufficient."

"We should bring to class pairwork, group work, and dramatizations, open-ended activities."

"Students should do peer correction and self-correction"

“For free practice the students give opinions and they report to their teacher and classmates.”

The survey passed to the students yielded the following results: (Appendix 3)

More attention is paid to speaking, which is natural, given the possibility of dealing with reading and writing on an out-of-class basis. 63.3 % of the students considered that oral English receives more attention in the classroom than the rest of the subject components.

With respect to the diagnosis of the quality of the teaching materials (the workbook in particular)

The following aspects were analyzed in the students' workbook:

- Balance between controlled practice and free practice activities.
- Quality in terms of whether they provide enough for students to carry on the conversation.

In the workbook there is a total of 230 speaking activities. 80 % of them are accuracy activities and 20 % are fluency activities. Units 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10 are the ones having the largest number of accuracy activities, ranging from 77% to 100 %. Units 6, 7 and 11 are the ones with the smallest number of accuracy activities, ranging from 44% to 74 %, which is a strength due to the fact that units 6 and 11 are review units. (Appendix 1)

In general, it may be affirmed that many of the fluency activities in the workbook need updating, more variety and more integration of communicative functions so that students have enough to carry on the conversation, which is crucial in terms of developing fluency in English.

Partial conclusions

The diagnosis carried out has allowed us to identify the following needs:

- The level of fluency in basic oral communication in English in 40 % of the students is below what is expected. This situation is reflected in the fact that 50% of the students do not feel comfortable with speaking due to their lack of success in this subject component.

- The views of the teachers on the teaching and learning of fluency in oral communication shows strengths which must be taken advantage of.
- The accuracy activities in the workbook largely outnumber the oral fluency activities. For this reason, the workbook oral fluency activities need adaptation and complementation so that they may show updating, more variety and integration of communicative functions.

These needs justify our proposal of a system of activities in order to contribute to the development of fluency in basic oral communication skills in the seventh grade students from “Obdulio Morales Torres” secondary school.

3. Evaluation of the preliminary proposal of a system of activities in order to contribute to the development of fluency in basic oral communication skills in the seventh grade students from “Obdulio Morales Torres” secondary school

In order to evaluate the preliminary proposal of the system of activities for indicators were established:

- Pertinence
- Applicability
- Communicative character
- Systemic character

Two teachers of English from this school were asked to answer these questions about the proposal in order to evaluate it on a scale of one to ten, where ten means the highest rank. These are the results of their evaluation and the comments that they made:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Does this proposal suit the needs of your students for oral fluency practice?					1	1				
2. Is it applicable in your school?						1	1			
3. Is this a communicative proposal of activities?							1	1		

4. Do these activities make up a system?				1	1						
--	--	--	--	---	---	--	--	--	--	--	--

What comments can you make in order to improve this proposal?

- Try to cover all the units with more activities;
- Make adaptations to existing activities in the workbook;
- Try to improve the formulation of the aims in some activities;
- Add more tasks within some of the activities so that the students produce extended conversations;
- Try to vary the types of activities;
- It is difficult to apply these activities in class due to lack of printing facilities.

The results of this evaluation were taken into account to improve our proposal.

The definitive version is presented next.

4. Proposal of a system of activities in order to contribute to the development of fluency in basic oral communication skills in the seventh grade students from “Obdulio Morales Torres” secondary school

Aim: The proposal has been designed with the objective of helping students from 7th grade from “Obdulio Morales Torres” secondary school to develop fluency in basic oral communication skills in the English language, which is the main goal of the teaching of English in this level.

Characteristics of the proposal:

- It draws on the existing activities in the workbook, which have been adapted or complemented with other fluency activities.
- Linguistically speaking, this is a communicative system of fluency activities since a key characteristic of all the activities is the presence of an information gap, the practice beyond the sentence level, and their design on the basis of communicative purposes.

- In determining the topics and situations this system of fluency activities has taken into consideration the students' age, so that meaningful learning is attained.
- The activities are graded along the way moving from the easy to the difficult, and trying to challenge the students ever more.
- The activities provide opportunities for intensive oral practice through pairwork.
- The goals and the activities proposed form a system, that is, they form a set of closely interrelated elements forming a complex whole, in which its global behavior attains a common objective. (Marcelo Arnold y F. Osorio, 2003, quoted in Acosta J., 2013)

Unit 1

Activity # 1

Learning goals: Greeting someone, asking how they are and saying good bye
Complete these dialogues. Then, practice them with your partner.

A. Two classmates meet at the sports field.

Andrew: Hi, Bob. How's life?

Bob: _____

Andrew: I'm terrific!

Bob: _____

Andrew: So long.

B. The student meets his (her) teacher. The teacher is leaving school.

Student: Good morning, teacher. How are you?

Teacher: _____

Student: I'm very well, thank you.

Teacher: _____

Student: _____

Activity # 2

Learning goal: Introducing yourself.

(Pair Work)

Student 1.

You are a new English teacher at school. Introduce yourself to one of your students.

Student 2.

You are a new student in the classroom. Meet your new teacher and introduce yourself.

Activity # 3

Learning goals: Asking someone's name and saying your name.

(Pair Work)

Complete the following dialogues, then act them out in pairs.

A. You arrive at school for the first time. Introduce yourself to the class:

You: Hello, _____.

Class: Nice to meet you, _____.

You: _____.

B. Your father comes to school to meet your new teacher:

You: Dad, this is my teacher of English.

Dad: _____.

Teacher: _____.

Activity # 4

Learning goal: Spelling your name.

(Pair Work)

Complete the following dialogue and practice the conversation in pairs.

Two classmates meet at school for the first time.

Student 1: Hi. _____ Miriam Pérez.

Student 2: Hi. _____ Richard.

Student 1: Richard _____?

Student 2: Stevenson. Richard Stevenson.

Student 1: Strange, eh? How _____ it?

Student 2: _____

Student 1: _____

Activity # 5

Learning goal: Spelling your name.

Student A

You are the principal, or the head of the department, or a teacher. This is the first day of the school year. You are in the schoolyard. Introduce yourself to individual students. Ask about their names. Ask them to spell their names and last names.

Student B

This is the first day at school. You are in the schoolyard. You meet the principal/head of the department/teacher. Respond to an introduction and answer his/her questions.

Activity # 6

Learning goal: Asking about someone's age.

Ask three students in class these questions. Make notes of the answers.

1. What's your name? _____
2. How old are you? _____
3. How are you? _____
4. What's your teacher's name? _____
5. What's your phone number? _____
6. What's your ID number? _____
7. What's your house number? _____

(See Appendix 4 for the rest of the activities)

Conclusions

The objective of this research has been fully accomplished through the completion of the reasearch tasks.

This research has assumed a communicative view of language and a theory of learning and teaching which stresses the importance of meaningfulness, activity, interaction and cooperation among the students, and attention to individual and group needs and connection with the students' immediate context.

In the teaching-learning process of fluency in basic oral communication skills in seventh grade at "Obdulio Morales Torres" secondary school the following needs were identified:

- The level of fluency in basic oral communication in English in 40 % of the students is below what is expected.
- The views of the teachers on the teaching and learning of fluency in oral communication shows strengths which must be taken advantage of.
- The accuracy activities in the workbook largely outnumber the oral fluency activities.
- The workbook oral fluency activities need adaptation and complementation so that they may show updating, more variety and integration of communicative functions.

In order to develop fluency in basic oral communication skills in seventh grade students at "Obdulio Morales Torres" secondary school the activities must be graded moving from the easy to the difficult, and at the same time, they should be challenging. In addition, the topics and situations included in the activities must take into consideration the students' age, so that meaningful learning is attained. Furthermore, the activities must be communicative and they must include enough tasks for the students to carry on the situation.

In evaluation of the preliminary proposal, the teachers surveyed considered that it needed improvements in terms of the coverage of all the units, the formulation of the aims, the tasks within the activities and their variety. These judgments were taken into consideration in order to improve the preliminary proposal.

Recommendations

The authoress of this research recommends the following:

- That our system of activities in order to contribute to the development of fluency in basic oral communication skills in the seventh grade students from “Obdulio Morales Torres” secondary school be applied and validated in practice in terms of its effectiveness.
- That alternatives be found to compensate for the lack of printing facilities by building material aids, such as a collection of cards with the activities included in our proposal.

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Appendix # 1

Document analysis guide

Objective:

- To identify the objectives and contents of speaking in the 7th grade English program.
- To analyze the speaking available in the students' workbook in terms of their typology (accuracy or fluency).

Documents: The 7th grade English Program and the workbook.

Points to be looked into:

The program

- Objectives and contents to be attained according to the program.

The workbook

- Balance between controlled practice and free practice activities
- Quality of whether they provide enough for students to carry on the conversation.

Results of the analysis of the seventh grade program

The program of the subject includes educative and instructive objectives. Particularly about speaking, the program states the following learning goals:

- Communicate orally in English at an elementary level, which implies being able to interact in order to establish social relationships, making use of the simple tenses and the simple sentence, with a minimum of accuracy so that favors comprehensibility, and making use of a finite

number of communication strategies in order to compensate for language deficiencies.

- Self-control their language production and self-monitor that of their peers.
- Show positive attitudes towards learning English, working in groups and the topics that are dealt with through the speaking activities.

In terms of the contents included within the speaking subsystem there is a list of communicative functions that corresponds with the basic speaking skills that students must be able to carry out to communicate orally in English at an elementary level and there is also a list of basic grammatical structures, pronunciation items and vocabulary areas that must be covered so that students start attaining a command of the system of the language that may enable them to speak with a minimum of accuracy and fluency. (Appendix 1)

Results of the analysis of the seventh grade workbook

In the workbook there is a total of 230 speaking activities. 80 % of them are accuracy activities and 20 % are fluency activities. Units 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10 are the ones having the largest number of accuracy activities, ranging from 77% to 100 %. Units 6, 7 and 11 are the ones with the smallest number of accuracy activities, ranging from 44 to 74 %, which is a strength due to the fact that units 6 and 11 are review units.

In general, it may be affirmed that many of the fluency activities in the workbook need updating, more variety and more integration of communicative functions so that students have enough to carry on the conversation, which is crucial in terms of developing fluency in English. (Appendix 1)

Analysis of the seventh grade workbook

Aim: To obtain information about the quality and quantity of the oral fluency activities in the the seventh grade Workbook.

Unit	Communicative functions	Grammar	Number of activities in the unit	Accuracy activities	Fluency activities
1	Greeting someone Saying goodbye Introducing yourself Saying your name Spelling your name Asking about someone's age Saying your age	Possessive adjectives Forms of <i>to be</i> The alphabet Numbers	30	23	7
2	Requesting help Locating a place in town Asking where someone lives Asking about someone's address Asking about existence	Prepositions of place Prepositions in an address There + BE (existence) How many	14	12	2
3	Asking about someone's house (existence) Giving information about one's house Ask how to say something in English Describing a house Asking and saying where people are	Adjectives for description Personal pronouns Negative forms of <i>to be</i>	25	23	2
4	Talking about your family Asking about and saying what people are doing now	The present continuous	11	11	
5	Talking about personal belongings Describe what people are doing	Possessive adjectives The present continuous	16	14	2

		(recycled) Possession N+ apostrophe Whose ...			
6	Review		16	7	9
7	Asking and telling where someone is from Describing people according to their personality traits Describing things and animals Describing people physically	Ordinal numbers Questions to ask about descriptions Adjectives to describe Intensifiers	27	20	7
8	Describing the weather	Prepositions <i>in</i> and <i>on</i> to express time Capital letters in days of the week and months of the year	13	11	2
9	Talk about the clothes people are wearing Talk about color	Demonstrative pronouns The indefinite article	14	13	1
10	Asking and telling the time Talking about routines Expressing the frequency of the actions Talking about someone's job	Numbers Simple present and frequency adverbs	38	35	3
11	Review		26	14	12

Summary of the types of activities in the seventh grade Workbook

Unit	Number of activities in the units	Number of accuracy activities	%	Number of fluency activities	%
1	30	23	77	7	23
2	14	12	86	2	14
3	25	23	92	2	8
4	11	11	100	0	
5	16	14	88	2	12
6	16	7	44	9	56
7	27	20	74	7	26
8	13	11	85	2	15
9	14	13	93	1	7
10	38	35	92	3	8
11	26	14	54	12	46
Total	230	183	80	47	20

Appendix # 2

Interview to the English teachers from “Obdulio Morales” secondary school

Objective: to obtain information about the views of the teachers of English from “Obdulio Morales” secondary school with respect to the teaching and learning of fluency in oral communication.

Interview

- Do you think it is important to help your students speak in English at a basic level? Why?
- How do you provide for the development speaking skills in your lessons?
- What kind of activities do you use in order to provide free oral practice for your students?
- Have you collected or designed your own free practice activities or are the ones in the students’ workbook enough for you to respond to your students’ needs?
- How do you organize students’ work for free practice activities?
- How do you address your students’ individual needs in the learning of basic speaking skills?

Results of the interview

Teacher 1

I consider very important to help my students to speak in English at a basic level. At this level they are able to obtain the patterns of the language. The teacher is the center of the class. In this the students will obtain a positive pattern.

In my classes I apply oral exercises such as repetition, pairwork, group work, and dramatizations.

For free practice the students give opinions and they report to their teacher and classmates.

The workbook exercises are not enough to respond to my students’ needs. Teachers have to create exercises for the students because the ones in the workbook are not sufficient.

In class I prepare the activities and then I assign them to students so they prepare themselves individually, in groups or in pairs. Afterwards, they answer what they are supposed to do.

I usually assign dramatizations assuming roles, repetitions, etc.

Teacher 2

I think it is very important to help our students to speak English at a basic level because it is better in earlier ages, but we should teach them to learn English in English, not in Spanish.

For the development of speaking skills, students should be the center of the class. They should do peer correction and selfcorrection, we should provide time for free practice such as pairwork and open-ended activities.

I use some activities from the workbook, but I design as many activities as possible which respond to my students'needs. They are organized in groups, in pairs, taking into account the individual students'needs, their abilities and capacities.

Summary

What teachers of English from "Obdulio Morales Torres" secondary school actually do in order to facilitate the development of speaking skills in their students:

- We should teach students to learn English in English, not in Spanish.
- We should provide time for free practice.
- Students should be the center of the class.
- Teachers have to create exercises for the students because the ones in the workbook are not sufficient.
- We should bring to class pairwork, group work, and dramatizations, open-ended activities.
- Students should do peer correction and self-correction
- For free practice the students give opinions and they report to their teacher and classmates.

Appendix # 3

Survey to the students

Objective: To obtain information about students' learning of oral communication and their preferences with relation to the different components of English as a subject in seventh grade.

Encuesta a estudiantes

Estimado estudiante:

Nos encontramos realizando una investigación sobre el trabajo con la expresión oral en las clases de inglés. Estamos interesados en saber tu opinión respecto, por eso te solicitamos que contestes la siguiente encuesta. Muchas gracias.

1. Enumera en orden ascendente cuál de las cuatro componentes de la asignatura Inglés recibe mayor atención en el aula.

_____ La escritura

_____ La audición

_____ La expresión oral

_____ La lectura

2. Según su preferencia enumere en orden ascendente los cuatro componentes de la asignatura Inglés.

_____ La escritura

_____ La audición

_____ La expresión oral

_____ La lectura

3. ¿Cuál de esos componentes quisieras tu profesor trabajara con más frecuencia en clases? _____

4. Marque con una x el componente de la asignatura que le resulta más difícil.

_____ La escritura

_____ La audición

_____ La expresión oral

_____ La lectura

5. ¿Cómo te evalúas en cuanto a tus habilidades básicas para comunicarte oralmente en inglés?

_____ Excelente

_____ Bien

_____ Regular

_____ Mal

6. Marque con una x tus problemas fundamentales en la expresión oral en inglés.

_____ el vocabulario

_____ la gramática

_____ la pronunciación

_____ la comunicación oral fluida

7. ¿Son suficientes para ti las actividades que se realizan en las clases para mejorar tu expresión oral?

Si _____ No _____ ¿Por qué? _____

Summary of the results of the survey applied to 30 seventh grade students from ESBU “Obdulio Morales Torres”.

Number of students interviewed: 30

Question 1: Ranking of the degree of attention paid in the classroom to each of the components of English as a subject in seventh grade.

	Writing	%	Speaking	%	Listening	%	Reading	%
Number of students who choose each component	1	3.3	19	63.3	6	20	4	13.3

Remark

More attention is paid to speaking which is natural, given the possibility of dealing with reading and writing on an out-of-class basis. 63.3 % considered that oral English receives more attention in the classroom than the rest of the subject components.

Question 2: Students' preference with respect to each component of the subject components

	Writing	%	Speaking	%	Listening	%	Reading	%
Number of students who choose each component	6	20	15	50	4	13.3	5	16.6

Remark

50 % of the students prefer speaking despite the fact that this subject component is more prioritized in the classroom, which may indicate that the students are not comfortable with speaking in English due to lack of success in this activity.

Question 3: What students would like their teachers to prioritize in class

	Writing	%	Speaking	%	Listening	%	Reading	%
Number of students who choose each component	8	26.6	16	53.6	2	6.6	3	10

Remark

-One student adds “grammar” (3.3%).

Again, 54 % of the students ask that speaking be prioritized and next is placed writing with 27 % of the students preferring it.

Question 4: What students consider most difficult for them.

	Writing	%	Speaking	%	Listening	%	Reading	%
Number of students who choose each component	10	33.3	12	40	4	13.3	4	13.3

Remark

Students think that speaking is the most difficult language aspect for them (40 % of them) and next is placed writing with 33 % of the students saying so.

Question 5: Students’ self-evaluation of their ability to communicate orally in English at a basic level.

Excellent	%	Good	%	Fair	%	Poor	%
3	10	15	50	11	36.6	1	3.3

Remark

Out of 30 students that were surveyed, 18 (60 %) think that they are doing well in English, whereas 12 (40 %) of them think that their performance in English ranges from fair to poor.

Question 6: Where students think their weaknesses lie with respect to speaking.

Vocabulary	%	Grammar	%	Pronunciation	%	Fluency	%
1	3.3	11	36.6	9	30	9	30

Remark

Students' opinions are evenly divided in this question: 36.6 % of them think they need more grammar practice, 30 % think it is in pronunciation where they need more practice and 30 % consider that they need more fluency practice.

Question 7: Students' opinions concerning whether the activities that are carried out in class are enough for them to improve their speaking ability.

Yes	%	No	%
30	100		

Remark

100 % of the students consider that the activities that are carried out in class are enough for them to improve their speaking ability. This shows their concern not to say anything not may cause their teacher to loose face.

Appendix 4

Continuation of the system of activities in order to contribute to the development of fluency in basic oral communication skills in the seventh grade students from “Obdulio Morales” secondary school.

Unit 2

Activity # 7

Learning goals: Asking and giving information. Requesting things at a shop.

(Pair Work)

The students will work in pairs based on these situations:

St. A: Imagine you are a customer in a shop who needs some information about something you want to buy.

St. B: Imagine you are a clerk in a shop. Be ready to satisfy the customer's needs.

Activity # 8

Learning goals: Asking and giving personal information.

(Role Play)

-Act out the situation with your partner.

St. A You are at the University when you recognize an old friend from your childhood. Talk to him and ask some questions.

St. B You are new at the University. When you arrived, you found an old friend of yours. He/She wants to know about your life. Be ready to answer.

Activity # 9

Learning goals: Asking about likes and dislikes.

Work in pairs and complete the chart below. Then talk about why you like or dislike these activities

ACTIVITIES	LIKES	DISLIKES
WATCH TV		
LISTEN TO MUSIC:		
CLEAN THE HOUSE		
GO TO SCHOOL		
READ A BOOK		

Activity # 10

Learning goals: Locating a place.

(Role play)

-Act out the situation with your partner.

St. A Suppose you are new in Remedios town. You need to get to some places but you do not know how to get there. So you approach to somebody and ask for directions you need to go.

St. B Suppose you are walking on the street of your town. Then someone approaches to you and asks you for directions. Be ready to give him/her the information he/she needs.

Activity # 11

Learning goal: Socializing with someone you've just met.

(Role Play)

-Act out the situation with your partner.

St. A Suppose you are a foreign student who is visiting Cuba for the first time. You find the country fascinating, but you want to know more about it. A Cuban student approaches to you, introduce yourself and ask the questions.

St. B A foreign student arrives at your school. He wants to know about Cuba. Introduce yourself and be ready to answer all her/his questions.

Activity # 12

Learning goals: Asking and giving personal information.

(Group Work)

-The students will work in groups of 5:

The students are going to talk about music, their likes, dislikes and preferences.

Activity # 13

Learning goals: Asking about existence and expressing existence.

Work in pairs. Think of some public buildings or institutions in your town, city or neighborhood and tell the class. Begin like this...

There is...

There are...

Unit 3

Activity # 14

Learning goal: Describing a house.

Work in pairs and ask each other these questions. As you do so, take down notes of the information.

1. Where do you live? _____
2. What is your house like? _____
3. How many rooms are there in your house? _____
4. What's there in your bedroom? _____
5. What's your bedroom like? _____
6. Where is located your bed? _____
7. What's your kitchen like? _____
8. How many people live there in your house? _____
9. Is there a yard in your house? _____
10. What's your livingroom like? _____
11. What's there in your livingroom? _____
12. Do you like your house? Why? _____

Activity # 15

Learning goal: Asking about someone's house.

Work in pairs and ask and answer the following questions:

1. How many rooms are there in your house?
2. How many bedrooms are there in it?
3. How many bathrooms are there?
4. Is there a dining room in your house?

Activity # 16

Learning goal: Describing the house.

Work in pairs and answer the following questions. Then, report to your class.

1. How many rooms are there in your house?
2. What's there in your living room?
3. What's there in your kitchen?
4. What's there in your bedroom?
5. What's your house like?

Unit 4

Activity # 17

Learning goal: Talking about your family.

(Pair work)

-You are whatching an album of photos from your childhood with your friend Monica. Complete the conversation.

Monica: It is really big and _____ your album, isn't it?

You: Yes, It has almost 32 years of age.

Monica: Look, that beautiful woman wearing a red dress. _____?

You: She is _____. She looked very pretty that night.

Monica: And who is the man beside her? Is he your father?

You: No, he is not. _____. Oh, watch those children playing in the garden. Those are _____.

Monica: Oh, look what a funny and sweet baby. _____?

You: _____. She had only one year old.

Monica: This photo is realy interesting. There are _____. Who are they?

You: _____

Monica: _____

Unit 5

Activity # 18

Learning goal: Asking and saying what people are doing.

Work in pairs. You are at home talking to a firend on the phone. Ask about and describe what you are doing at the moment and what other people are from your family are doing.

Activity # 19

Learning goal: Expressing possession and describing your personal belongings

(Pair work)

Work in pairs. You are at home with a friend. Practice showing and telling each other about your personal belongings. You may use real objects or pictures of them.

Unit 6

Activity # 20

Learning goal: Meeting a stranger

(Pair work)

Practice in pairs.

Two foreigners are traveling on a bus.

Foreigner 1: Excuse me. I'm_____.

Foreigner 2: How do you do. My_____.

Foreigner 1: How do you do.

(Keep the conversation going)

Activity # 21

Learning goal: Asking for and giving personal information.

Work in pairs. Assume roles.

Student A: You are in the principal's office. The principal needs some information about you. Tell him/her your name, age, address, and so on.

Student B: You are the school principal. You are in your office talking to a student. Ask him or her some questions (name, age, address, etc.)

Activity # 22

Learning goal: Asking for and giving personal information.

(Pair work)

Work in pairs and fill in your partner's family tree by asking questions. Then present it on a poster to your class.

Activity # 23

Learning goals: Ask for and give personal information

Act out this conversation in pairs.

Two kids meet at the gym:

Kid A

Introduce yourself.

_____.

Say today is your birthday.

Show B a picture of your family.

Kid B

_____.

Ask about school.

Ask how old A is.

Activity # 24**Learning goals:**

(Pair work)

Work in pairs and act out this conversation between two elderly people.

At the bus stop:

A: _____

B: Good morning, Mr. Roberts. How are you?

A: _____

B: I'm very well, thank you. How's your wife?

A: _____

B: I'm in a hurry. Good-bye, Mr. Roberts.

A: _____

Telephone conversation:

A: _____

B: I want to participate in your contest.

A: _____

B: My name's Phil Lewis.

A: _____

B: I am 15 years old.

A: _____

B: _____.

Activity # 25

Learning goals: Introducing yourselves and sharing personal information with other people.

Simulation activity. Decide who you are first. Work in groups of four.

This is a cultural activity in which you could have people wearing typical clothes from other countries, dancing and playing music, and eating things.

This is supposed to be an International Festival of Youth and Students. There will be people from different countries attending, and they are going to parade with their flags. Then they will introduce themselves, and chat over the snack that they are having. Have a pleasant festival!

Activity # 26

Learning goal: Describe what people are doing.

Work in plenary with your teacher. Then work in pairs.

Your teacher is going to show you part of picture and you are going to guess what there is in the rest of the picture and what people in the picture are doing.

Activity # 27

Learning goal: Describe a place.

Work in pairs based on pictures.

You are going to work in pairs. Your teacher is going to give one of you a picture, with the other one is not supposed to see. The task is for one of you to describe the picture while the other one draws it.

Activity # 28

Learning goal: Describe a place.

(Pair work)

Work in pairs. Close your eyes for a while and think of a place that you like very much. Tell your partner what there is at this place and what people are doing there now. But don't tell them what place you are thinking of, let them guess. Then, take turns.

Unit 7

Activity # 29

Learning goals: Describing people physically according to their personality traits.

Work in plenary first, then in pairs.

One student visualizes his/her best friend in the classroom. He/She thinks about him or her for few minutes. Then, that student tells the name to the teacher.

Each student will ask one question to the student in order to guess what is his/her friend like and who is he/she.

The student that guess the name will start the activity.

Activity # 30

Learning goal: Describing things and animals.

(Pair work)

In dialogue with your partner, describe your favorite animal and be ready to give opinions about your partner favorite one.

Activity # 31

Learning goal: Describing things and animals.

Work in plenary.

This is a game. The teacher brings a magic box that contains some different objects which he/she wants students to guess by using the question: What I am touching now? Students will ask about how is the object and the teacher will answer only with yes or no until a student guess the object.

Activity # 32

Learning goals: Asking and telling where someone is from.

(Pair work)

Practice this dialogue with your partner.

Two strangers are sitting next to each one on a train.

A: Hello. My name is Lucy.

B: Where are you from, Lucy?

A:_____.

B:_____.

Activity # 33

Learning goal: Describing people according to their personality traits.

Work in pairs. Here are some names of well-known personalities. Try to describe each with just one word. Then describe one of them fully, in terms of his/her personality traits and physical appearance.

José Martí: _____

Antonio Maceo: _____

Mariana Grajales: _____

Nicolás Guillén: _____

José Raúl Capablanca: _____

Activity # 34

Learning goal: Asking and telling where someone is from.

All of you in class will assume a new identity. This is an international meeting of youth and students. Walk around the class and find someone who: (for example)

- Is from Brazil
- Plays soccer

Think of who you want to find, and then do the walking around the class. Be ready to report back to your class who you found in this meeting.

Activity # 35

Learning goal: Give an opinion about a subject.

Work in pairs. Give your opinion about these subjects. For example: *English is important.*

1. Math is _____
2. History is _____
3. Biology is _____
4. Computer science is _____
5. Geography is _____
6. Spanish is _____
7. Music is _____

Activity # 36

Learning goal: Describing people physically.

(Pair work)

Ask your partner to describe physically someone close to him or her.

Activity # 37

Learning goal: Describing someone's personality traits.

Work in pairs.

Describe your hero's (or heroine's) personality, and describe him or her, physically. Work in pairs.

Unit 8

Activity # 38

Learning goal: Describing the weather.

Work in groups of four. Let's play in teams!

Represent the following weather conditions and then describe the weather to the people on your team. You may use pantomime or drawings:

A cloudy day

A cold day

A sunny day

A cyclone

A rainy day

Low temperature

High temperature

Dry weather

Activity # 39

Learning goal: Express likes and dislikes about the weather.

(Plenary)

Work in pairs. Be ready to report back to the whole class.

Discuss with your classmates about the kind of weather that you like or dislike and say why.

Unit 9

Activity # 40

Learning goal: Talk about the clothes people are wearing.

Work in penary fist and then in pairs.

One student is going to mime one teacher from the school and the others will gess who the teacher is by asking her/him how ussually he/she dresses.

Activity # 41

Learning goals: Ask and talk about colors with relation to clothes and the weather.

Walk around the class asking these and other questions. When you have finished report back your findings to the whole class.

- What do you wear when it is rainy?
- sunny?
- cold?
- windy?
- hot?

Unit 10

Activity # 42

Learning goal: Talking about daily routines.

Work in plenary first and then in groups of four.

The teacher has a picture that students have not seen; depicting a daily routine the teacher does on Sundays. Students have to guess what this picture is about by asking questions to the teacher.

Then each group of four will be given a picture depicting someone's daily routine. Only one person on the team is allowed to see their picture. The other students on the team are supposed to ask question in order to find out what thepicture is depicting.

Activity # 43

Learning goal: Asking and telling the time.

Work in pairs and act out this conversation.

Two girls meet in a Library.

A

Introduce yourself

Share ideas about B' project.

Talk about the time of the lesson

B

Ask about A' project is

Ask about the time

Say you are late and say goodbye.

Activity # 44

Learning goals: Talking about routines.

Describe what people are doing.

Work in pairs and ask each other these questions:

1. What do you do on Sundays at 9:00?
2. What do you always do every day?
3. What do you never do at night?
4. What do you usually do on Fridays at school?
5. What do you like to do on your free time?
6. What do you think is your mother doing now?
7. What would you like to do right now?
8. What are you doing right now?

Activity # 45

Learning goals: Ask and talk about colors.

Work in pairs. You are talking on the phone with a friend. Begin with these questions, and then go on with other questions of your own.

1. Where are you now?
2. What are you wearing?
3. What color is it?

Activity # 46

Learning goals: Talking about routines.

Work in pairs first and then in pairs. This is a game.

Choose an action and represent it through mimics in front of the class. Your classmates will try to guess the action that you are depicting. Once you have discovered what it is make a little conversation about it with your partner. Keep the game going until one of you has accumulated five points.

Activity # 47

Learning goals: Talking about routines

Work in pairs asking and answering these and other questions about yourselves.

1. What do you do at 7:45 am every day?
2. What do you usually do in your English class?

3. What do you do when the teacher speaks?
4. What do you do at 12:45 pm every day?
5. What do you usually do at 5:30 pm?
6. What do you often do at 8:30 pm?

Unit 11

Activity # 48

Learning goals: Ask and give personal information.

Work in pairs. Use your imagination to create a new friend. He/she is going to be as you want him/her to be. Answer all the questions with the information that comes to your mind:

1. What's his/her name?
2. Where is he/she from?
3. What language does he/she speak?
4. Where does he/she live?
5. What's his/her address?
6. What's his/her telephone number?
7. What's he/she like?
8. What's his/her school name?
9. What's His/her favorite color?

You may give any other information you wish.

Introduce him/her to your class. (...)

Activity # 49

Learning goals: Ask for and give personal information

(Pair work)

Work in pairs and act out this conversation.

Two foreigners meet at the bus stop.

A

Greet B

Ask where B is from.

B

Introduce yourself.

Ask about the time.

Ask where B lives.

Ask about A's family.

Ask about A's job.

Activity # 50

Learning goals: Ask for and give personal information

Work in pairs. Ask your partner these and other questions. Be ready to report to the class.

1. Where do you live?
2. Is it a small town or a large city?
3. Do you have any plants at home?
4. Are there animals in your house?
5. How are you helping to eliminate mosquitoes in your community?
6. Mention some professions or occupations that may help preserve our planet.

Activity # 51

Learning goals: Ask about people's routines and talk about your routines.

Walk around the class and **find someone who** likes to...

1. walk on rainy days _____
2. swim in winter _____
3. study in summer _____
4. have ice cream in winter _____
5. bike on windy days _____
6. go shopping on sunny days _____
7. take cold showers in December _____
8. sleep when it is rainy _____
9. get up early in the morning in August _____
10. swim in the ocean in October _____

Here is an example: *Do you like to walk on rainy days?*

Be ready to report the information back.

Activity # 52

Learning goals: Ask about and talk about likes and dislikes and routines.

Walk around the class and **find someone who...**

1. doesn't like chocolate
2. likes winter very much
3. travels on vacations
4. loves animals
5. enjoys music
6. plays volleyball
7. has a baby sister
8. does the homework at school
9. likes to live in the countryside.

Then report back to your teacher and classmates, orally.

Activity # 53

Learning goals: Stating a preference

Discuss these points in pairs.

- Your favorite activity when camping.
- The best season for camping.

Activity # 54

Learning goals: Describing a place

Work in pairs. Describe a Cuban camp site you have visited. Talk about what you do when you go camping.

Activity # 55

Learning goals: Talk about personal information.

Work in pairs. And act out this conversation

Two friends are chatting at home.

A

Tell your friend about you and your family: your father has a new job, your parents have a new house, etcetera.

B

Ask your friend about his or her girlfriend or boyfriend. Ask about his or her free time activities, etcetera.

Activity # 56

Learning goals: Ask about places in towns and give simple directions

Work in pairs. Two tourists are lost in your province. Can you help them? Act out this conversation.

Tourists: Decide where you want to go, and what you want to do there. Ask for information about Cuba.

You: Decide where you are. Be polite to these foreigners. Show you're willing to help.

Activity # 57

Learning goals:

(Pair work)

Work in pairs. This is a conversation between a student and a teacher. It is recess or lunch time. Keep the conversation going for as long as you can.

Student: You need your teacher's help. Decide what you want to ask him or her.

Teacher: You are free now. Here is a student who asks you for help. Show interest.

Activity # 58

Learning goals:

Work in pairs. Listen and draw. One of you is going to describe a place or someone and the other one is going to draw it. Take turns. You could do this activity as a competition.

Appendix 1.1

System of basic oral communication skills for seventh grade

Unit 1

- Introduce yourself
- Greet someone
- Say good bye to someone
- Ask about someone's name
- Say and spell your name
- Ask someone to spell their name
- Introduce someone else
- Ask about someone's age
- Tell your age or someone else's

Grammar: Verb to be

Unit 2

- Ask for help
- Offer help
- Ask for information about places
- Give information about places in town
- Ask people where they live
- Say where you or someone lives
- Ask about existence
- Express existence

Grammar: There + to be

Unit 3

- Ask someone to describe their house
- Describe your house or someone else's
- Ask for information about places
- Ask about the place where people live
- Say where you live or where someone else lives

Unit 4

- Ask for information about someone's family
- Talk about your family or someone else's family
- Ask what someone does for a living
- Say what you do for a living
- Say what someone else does for a living.

Grammar: Simple present

Unit 5

- Ask about personal belongings
- Talk about personal belongings

Grammar: Possessives

Unit 6: REVIEW

- Ask for permission
- Offer permission to someone
- Decline permission
- Say you are sure
- Say you are not sure
- Ask if someone is sure
- Say you are afraid
- Say you are glad
- Say you are angry or annoyed.

Unit 7

- Ask what someone looks like
- Describe yourself and other people physically
- Ask about nationality, origin and about the language other people speak
- Say your nationality, origin and the language you or other people speak
- Ask what someone is like
- Describe someone's personality traits
- Ask about what a pet looks like
- Describe your pet or someone else's

Unit 8

- Ask someone to describe the weather
- Describe the weather

Unit 9

- Ask someone to describe their clothes or someone else's
- Describe people's clothes
- Ask about color
- Tell about the color of objects

Unit 10

- Ask about daily routines
- Talk about daily routines
- Ask about the time
- Tell what time it is
- Ask about someone's occupation
- Tell about someone's occupation
- Ask about frequency
- Express frequency

Unit 11: Review