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Abstract

This research article describes the results of implementing activities through Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) in order to foster the communicative competence in a group of students at Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, a public University in Sogamoso, Boyacá. After an exploration in which it was determined that students prefer activities with ICTs to learn English, contents and activities were adapted so they could fit students' interests. The results are shown in three categories: ICTs as a tool to foster oral production, ICTs to build vocabulary, and ICTs as a motivator to learn and interact in the target language.

Keywords: communicative competence, Information and Communication Technologies, learning English, speaking.

El uso de las tecnologías de la información y la comunicación para fomentar la competencia comunicativa en estudiantes de pregrado de la UPTC

Resumen

Este artículo investigativo describe los resultados de la implementación de actividades basadas en las tecnologías de la información y la comunicación (TIC), con el fin de promover la competencia comunicativa en un grupo de estudiantes de la Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia ubicada en Sogamoso, Boyacá. Luego de una fase exploratoria, donde se determinó que los estudiantes prefieren actividades basadas en las TIC para aprender inglés, fueron adaptados varios contenidos y actividades, de modo que pudieran ajustarse a los intereses de los estudiantes. Los resultados se muestran en tres categorías: las TIC como herramienta para fomentar la producción oral, las TIC como herramienta para construir vocabulario y las TIC como un motivador para aprender e interactuar en el idioma objetivo.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje del inglés, competencia comunicativa, producción oral, tecnologías de la información y la comunicación.

Approximation à la sociologie du langage: vers des considérations générales

Résumé

Cet article offre une vision générale sur la sociologie du langage. On présente des positions par rapport à la distinction entre sociolinguistique et sociologie du langage, dès la perspective que les conçoit comme des disciplines différenciées. Tout d'abord, on fait connaître des considérations théoriques générales concernant le contact linguistique: ensuite, on fait référence à des phénomènes linguistiques qui surgissent dans des situations de contact linguistique, telles que le bilinguisme, la diglossie, le contact linguistique et le choix de langues. Dans cet alinéa, on aborde des thématiques ayant un lien avec des effets sociaux du bilinguisme, à savoir: le maintien et la substitution d'une langue, la loyauté et déloyauté linguistiques ; le conflit linguistique, la politique et la planification linguistique. En plus, on offre de l'information sur l'influence entre les langues : la convergence et la divergence linguistiques, l'interférence linguistique et le changement de code (ou alternance linguistique). Également, on pose deux effets du contact social et linguistique des langues : le pidgin et le créole. On termine le texte avec des conclusions. L'article est conçu, principalement, pour des étudiants universitaires qui débutent dans l'étude de la sociologie du langage.

Mots clés: sociologie du langage, bilinguisme, diglossie, contact linguistique, choix linguistique, politique et planification linguistique.

O USO DE TECNOLOGIAS DA INFORMAÇÃO E COMUNICAÇÃO PARA FOMENTAR COMPETÊNCIA COMUNICATIVA EM ESTUDANTES UNIVERSITÁRIOS DA UPTC

Resumo

Este artigo de pesquisa descreve os resultados da implementação de atividades baseadas em tecnologias de informação e comunicação (TIC), a fim de promover a competência comunicativa em um grupo de estudantes da Universidade Pedagógica e Tecnológica da Colômbia, localizado em Sogamoso, Boyacá Após uma fase exploratória, onde foi determinado que os alunos preferem atividades baseadas em TIC para aprender inglês, vários conteúdos e atividades foram adaptados, para que possam ser ajustados aos interesses dos alunos. Os resultados são apresentados em três categorias: as TIC como uma ferramenta para incentivar a produção oral, as TIC como uma ferramenta para construir vocabulário e TIC como motivador para aprender e interagir no idioma objetivo.

Palavras-chave: aprendizado de inglês, competência comunicativa, produção oral, tecnologias de informação e comunicação

Introduction

Developing communicative skills in English has become very necessary for different academic and professional fields. Many countries and institutions have focused their attention on the implementation of programs that help their students to acquire high levels of proficiency and that favor their interaction in contexts in which the language is essential: business, politics, science, education, etc. Saeed and Congman (2013) emphasize that "communicative competence in the target language is more demanded now than ever before" (p. 187).

Consequently, developing the communicative competence has become of huge importance for EFL/ESL teachers in classes since it is the way in which students can convey information and negotiate meaning in different contexts (Brown, 1994). Institutions, teachers and students nowadays recognize that "graduates with good communication skills are in a better position to explore new avenues in this highly economized society" (Saeed & Congman, 2013, p. 202). The need to help learners to develop satisfactory communicative competence in the target language "has increased significantly the responsibility of the English language teacher" and means a new challenge in the classroom (Saeed & Congman, 2013, p. 188).

Regarding our context, the International Language Institute (III) at the Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia (UPTC) pays special attention to the development of the communicative competence considering the "needs and interests of the community" (Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia [UPTC], 2009, 2013). In these legal considerations, it is also stated that "pedagogical and technological innovations" are necessary to achieve the language learning goals (UPTC, 2009, p. 1). Therefore, the classes are focused on fostering and developing communicative competence by using technological resources so that learners can be more competent in the target language.

Besides the emphasis this institution is having on the foreign language and the use of technology a survey implemented on students showed that they consider the use of technology very interesting for learning. It is well known that students are very skillful in the use of technological gadgets and online environments, which means an advantage at the time of implementing activities in classes. These points justify this proposal in terms of pertinence and applicability. There is a need to change the learning processes since "traditional methods of teaching do not give enough opportunities to develop oral communicative competences" (Straksiene & Baziukaite, 2009). Thus, I wanted to make an important change in order to lead my classes considering learners' abilities for mastering ICT tools.

In order to guide this study the following research question was stated: What is the result of implementing activities through ICT to foster the development of communicative competence in undergraduate students at the university?

This study followed the principles of an action research approach, which is suitable to reflect on our teaching practices so they can be enriched and strengthened (Burns, 2010, p. 7). In order to have specific direction in the implementation of this project, the general objective was to design and implement activities that foster communicative competence in undergraduate students at the UPTC thought the use of ICT tools.

Some specific objectives were also set in order to have a clear path during the research process. They included the exploration of students' interests and needs in relation to their learning process and the use of ICT and communicative activities, the design and implementation of activities which involve the use of ICT and the communicative competence, and finally a reflective process about the implementation.

The main constructs that support this project are communicative language teaching, communicative competence and ICT in language teaching and learning. In the literature review there is a brief description of these theories.

The findings that emerged from the implementation of this project show that the use of ICT in classes had a positive impact on students' development of communicative competence. Besides, other aspects of language learning were benefited such as their acquisition of vocabulary and their interest to learn and interact in the target language. Some conclusions and pedagogical implications in relation to the use of ICT and language learning are mentioned at the end of this article.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Communicative Language Teaching

The first concept considered in this study is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). According to Richards (2006), CLT is a set of principles about the goals of language teaching that have to do with the processes in which learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom. According to this definition, it is important for teachers to be aware of the characteristics of her/his students in order to design and use activities that most favor their capacities and interests. Brown (1994) suggests that communicative language teaching has four important characteristics:

1. It is focused on all the components of communicative competence.

2. Language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes.

3. Fluency and accuracy are seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques.

4. In the communicative classroom, students ultimately have to use the language, productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts. (p. 245)

The characteristics mentioned above give us an idea on how to focus our teaching practices when we want to focus on the communicative competence. We need to consider that the best way to approach our students' language learning process is by taking into account their interests and preferences in order to set the most appropriate environments that best enhance their learning process. It becomes necessary to think of the way to reach all language components though authentic activities and workshops.

1.2 Communicative Competence

Regarding communicative competence, Brown (1994) defines it as "that aspect of our competence that enables us to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts" (p. 226). This author also states that communicative competence is a "dynamic, interpersonal construct that can only be examined by means of the overt performance of two or more individuals in the process of negotiating meaning" (p. 227). In this sense, it is possible to say that when there is interaction and meaning conveying, the participants are using their communicative competence. Richards (2008) suggests that a teacher needs to set appropriate environments in order for the learners to interact with the target language. This can be achieved through tasks, workshops, presentations, and different activities. In this study, oral activities, video workshops, and discussions were adapted to be developed by means of ICT.

According to the Common European Framework of Reference (as cited in Bagaric & Mihaljevic, 2007) communicative competence encompasses three main aspects: language competence, sociolinguistic competence and pragmatic competence. The first one refers to the "knowledge of and ability to use language resources to form well-structured messages". The second one is the "possession of knowledge and skills for appropriate language use in a social context". And the third one "involves two subcomponents: discourse competence and functional competence, both have to do with the so-called planning competence which refers to sequencing of messages in accordance with interactional and transactional schemata" (Bagaric & Mihaljevic, 2007, p. 99). This definition by the CRF is an important construct in this study since the international language institute of the UPTC is regulated through it for the English course in undergraduate programs.

ICT in Language Teaching

Different authors claim that it is very important to consider the use of technology because it provides learners with a more individualized experience and support during the learning process (Ruthven, 2003, as cited in Marsh, 2012; Pardo, 2013). This is an important aspect in language learning as feedback and language practice can be more student-centered. Ruthven (2003), as cited in Marsh (2012), also states that ICT activities promote more students' engagement in a less stressful environment. This author also states that by using ICT tools a teacher can reach more learning styles and promote autonomy and collaborative learning.

In their study called communicative competences and the use of ICT for foreign Language Learning, Aguaged and Rozo (2011) point that "the technological environment is an ideal instrument to facilitate interaction and communicative exchange in language learning" and that they also "contribute to creating communicative contexts" (p. 87). This perspective underpins the objective of this project that aims at fostering communicative competence through the use of activities using ICT. Aguaged and Rozo's (2011) study suggest that "language learning is experiencing a progressive and significant change in this direction", that is, the use of ICT in teaching. This idea also supports what was stated in the introduction of this paper in the sense that many teacher researchers are starting to see the importance of developing and implementing activities that involve technology and virtual environments.

Likewise, in a study carried out by Straksiene and Baziukaite (2009) in a primary school context, it was concluded that language, drama and ICT can be used in an integrated way for teaching and acquiring communicative competences. In the same way, this study aims at integrating the topics studied in regular classes in order to find different possibilities for them to learn and practice the language, and especially to improve their communicative competence. Their study also suggests that the use of ICT can give more chances for students to develop oral communicative competences (2009, p. 291).

Another important contribution to the literature in the field of ICT applied to education is the one by the Commonwealth of Australia (2010) in its article: Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Competence it is stated that

> Information and communication technologies transform the way students think and learn as they support risk-taking and knowledge sharing. These technologies are fast and automated, and interactive and multimodal, and allow students to control how and when they learn. Specific requirements change according to the

needs of individuals to find solutions to problems or to construct and communicate their learning. (p. 1)

The idea stated by the Commonwealth of Australia about ICT in education is probably the most telling one since it involves learners, their attitudes, interests, and their thinking. It could be said that technology in education reaches all intellectual aspects and interests of our learners as they are able to control some aspects of their learning process. Contextual characteristics and students' needs should be considered in order to look for solutions to a given or identified academic problem. As we have seen so far, the use of ICT has many advantages and has been proved to be an important tool in fostering communicative competence. In the next paragraphs, the readers can find the description of the methodology and then the results of this study.

2. Methodology

2.1 Setting and Participants

This study was developed at Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia (UPTC), a Public University in Sogamoso. The University offers different undergraduate programs such as engineering, accounting, and business management.

The study was implemented in a group of level 2 students that belong to some of the programs offered by this university. They were selected as they had already taken level 1 of English and have some experience learning English with the Institute. Their experience in English 1 and expectations can contribute in a better way to the activities proposed in this study. These students take four hours of instruction in the foreign language per week. They also have a textbook from which it is compulsory to cover 3 units per semester. One special characteristic of this textbook is that it is not an A1 text but a pre-intermediate one according to the CEFR. This has become a teaching and learning constrain since not all the students have had the same preparation in the language when enrolling the university.

2.2 Type of Study and Research Process

This qualitative study considers the principles of Action Research (AR). Burns (2010) explains that there is a major cycle that was initially proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988): 1) planning a change, 2) action, 3) observing the process and consequences of the change, and 3) reflecting on these processes and consequences. There is a final stage which basically restarts the process: 4) re-planning.

Yet some authors like McNiff (as cited in Burns, 2010) critic the use of Kemmis and McTaggart's cycle, saying that this is "prescriptive", Burns (2010) claims that this is a

"classic" kind of model that appears in literature about AR and briefly involves the phases of AR (p. 8). The next paragraphs explain the steps of the AR to develop this study.

2.2.1 Planning

Burns (2010) states that in this stage we "identify a problem or an issue and develop a plan of action in order to bring about improvements in a specific area [...]" (p. 8). In this initial phase, through informal talks with students, the researcher found out that they did not have many opportunities to practice the language in a communicative way and that the book they were using for classes was not appealing for them. Hence, the researcher inquired about the students' interests and preferences in terms of activities by means of a survey. This was conducted in a group of 30 students of level two. Through this, it was possible to determine that students prefer ICT learning environments. Figure 1 shows the results of this initial stage:
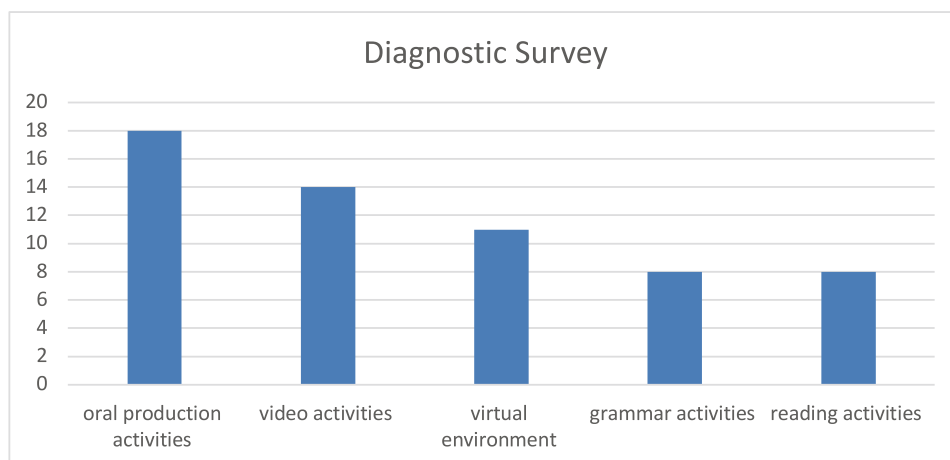

Figure 1. Diagnostic Survey

We can see in the graph that students chose oral production activities and video activities as the most preferred for them when learning English. The other choices were not very appealing for them. This is why the activities were designed and implemented considering this diagnosis; the other aspects of language (grammar, vocabulary, reading) were not set completely aside because the contents and sequences of the textbook required them to be included.

2.2.2 Action

In this stage, the researcher took into account the needs and interests shown by the learners in stage 1 in order to plan, design, and adapt oral production activities to be

implemented in classes. These activities sought to foster the communicative competence and the use ICT as the main tool of implementation. In the activities students had to watch videos about different themes in the laboratory or classroom and then some discussions, debates or video forums were developed.

2.2.3 Observing

In this phase, the teacher researcher observed classes during 6 weeks in which the oral activities were implemented. The main objective of the observation process was to see and register the way students interact during activities. This was also an opportunity to collect data through instruments like field notes and questionnaires.

2.2.4 Reflecting

This was the last step on the action research cycle that made it possible to realize if the implementation was suitable for the learning process and the pedagogical implications of this implementation. This stage helps to determine the consequences and, if necessary, some re-planning that could be done for further research.

2.3 Instruments for Data Collection

Burns (2010) claims that when collecting data in action research projects the techniques must "match well what we are trying to find out" (p. 56). In this sense surveys, questionnaires, observation and field notes were chosen in order to know students' experiences and opinions after the activities.

Surveys: This instrument was used to collect information about students' preferences, interests and objectives with the target language in order to design or select appropriate materials for the workshops to be implemented. Burns (2010) states that surveys are sources which can "provide you with good sources of information" about students' language learning (p. 54).

Observation: This is a technique to collect data as the T-researcher is part of the process and observes in detail what actually happens in the classroom. Interactions of students in discussions, debates, forums, etc. were observed and registered to become familiar with relevant details of the class in terms of the use of language (Burns, 2010).

Observation notes: Burns (2010) explains that in action research, observation notes are used to register what happens in the classroom and that they have a focus; in this case, I registered everything related to students' development of their communicative competence, use of oral skills, and use of ICT.

Questionnaires: This instrument for data collection was used after the implementation of the activities through ICT. They provided valuable information about the students' experiences and the way the workshops had an impact on their learning process.

3. Results and discussion

Through the implementation of this project, it was possible to evidence better performances in students' oral activities in the classroom. In this section, I will present three main categories and subcategories that emerged from the implementation of this project. In order to organize the categories I looked for recurring situations that emerged while implementing the activities by means of ICT (Johnson, 2002, p. 71).

The findings from this study are presented in three categories: 1) ICTs as a tool to foster oral production; 2) ICTs to build vocabulary; and 3) ICTs as a motivator to learn and interact in the target language. This third category is divided into two subcategories: 1) ICT as a complete tool to learn, and 2) ICT as a motivating tool to learn. These categories are explained in the next paragraphs.

3.1 ICT as a Tool to Foster Oral Production

This category clearly describes the positive impact that the activities had on students' speaking skills. In questionnaire 2, students were asked to say if the activities developed in the English course helped them develop their communicative competence in the foreign language and explain why. Some of the comments we can find after applying this questionnaire are as follow:

"It was improved through presentations and group activities" (student 1).

"Yes, because we developed oral activities in real life situations" (student 3).

"It helped me to improve the language and to know in what specific situations it can be used" (student 4).

 "They were didactic aids, besides we practiced listening and speaking which are important at the time of speaking English, since many of us do not practice it" (student 5).

"Because at least I try to speak a bit more fluently than before, although I have many things to learn" (student 17).

It is possible to evidence that the oral activities based on real situations contributed to the development of communicative competence. Group activity was very important since this gave students the chance to interact with each other and convey information. Student

4 mentions that he could learn **when** to use the language. This has to do with one component of the communicative competence called sociolinguistic competence which is the ability to appropriately use the language in a context (Bagaric & Mihaljevic, 2007, p. 99).

The idea above is supported by one of the observation notes taken by the researcher. In this opportunity students had to watch a video related to education, complete a chart and prepare an oral presentation using some questions stated previously. The lines read as follow:

"During the presentation that students did about this video I could observe that some of them, who seemed to be very shy, were speaking more fluently. They completed their presentation and besides, did an outline or mental map about the topic to be presented. I could see that they were not frightened to speak the foreign language. They looked comfortable when speaking and were able to answer follow-up questions in relation to the video. Some students were able to propose changes for the educational system in Colombia" (Observation notes No. 3).

In this sample of the observation notes, we can see that the activity with videos helped learners improve their fluency when speaking. Besides, they used other learning and presentation strategies such as mental maps and outlines. These examples are very relevant since they show clearly the positive impact that activities developed through ICT had on students' communicative competence. Students' comments also show that activities lowered their anxiety to speak and gave them more speaking tools. They were ready to answer follow-up questions; this means that their capacity to construct sentences was improved. A very interesting aspect of the observation notes is that learners were able to propose changes for the Educational System in Colombia, which is a real problem in our context.

3.2 ICT as a Tool to Build Vocabulary

In this second category we will see examples on how the activities developed by means of ICT helped students to learn vocabulary. It is evident that one of the difficulties learners have when speaking or interacting in the foreign language is the lack of vocabulary. Through the implementation of this study, students could enrich their vocabulary and thus, have more words in their minds which they used when they wanted to express opinions or interact in the language. In one of the questionnaires, where they had to describe their experiences, we read:

"The activities helped me to know more words and the way they can be used for
example verbs in different tenses" (student 2).

In questionnaire 2, students had to choose a learning tool (photocopies, textbook or computer) and say why they consider this is interesting. Some answers are as follow:

"I prefer the computer because we have more varied activities which help us to learn more vocabulary and practice listening" (questionnaire 2, student 5).

And in the observing notes the researcher points the following:

"While they were working on the computer, some students pronounced the verbs aloud and tried to remember them by repetition [...]".

"In the conversation practice, they talk to each other and create new situations; they also use new verbs and vocabulary [...]" (observation notes No. 5).

In the examples above, the researcher observed that the students were acquiring new vocabulary and using it to prepare their oral reports. It is also possible to see that the interaction with technology was crucial at the time of learning vocabulary. One important aspect of communicative competence is the knowledge of verbal tenses and their appropriate use. The CEF (2001), as cited in Bagaric and Mihaljevic (2007), states that linguistic competence is the "knowledge and ability to use language resources to form well-structured messages" (p. 99). Thus, knowing grammar and vocabulary is part of this competence and is necessary for accurate communication.

Through this evidence, we can see that activities by means of ICT fostered the acquisition of vocabulary, which is important at the time of interacting with the language. They learnt vocabulary through computer activities and though using it in oral presentations.

3.3 ICT as a Motivator Learn and Interact in the Target Language

This category comprises two subcategories 1) ICT as a complete tool to learn, and 2) ICT as a motivating tool to learn. They explain the way in which using ICT activities helped learners increase their interest in learning English and set and ideal setting for learning.

3.3.1 ICT as a Complete Tool to Learn

In this subcategory, we can find examples on how workshops through ICT involved more than one aspect of the target language and gave students different options for learning and develop their oral skills such as online dictionaries, online activities, videos with conversations, online puzzles, word search activities, among others. Some students expressed this benefit in question 5 (questionnaire 2) as follow:

"I fancied most the computer as a learning tool since it makes it easier when I need to search unfamiliar words and helps to have a faster learning" (student 2).

"The computer is more interactive and friendly as well as more useful than simple paper, in the computer there are the necessary tools" (student 4).

"I think it is the best tool as it offers countless items to be able to develop our English easily" (student 7).

These are only a few examples of the benefits students found in the use of ICT tools to learn English. Besides, the researcher also could notice the same situation in the observation process. We read the following in the observation notes:

"In the first part of this activity I could observe that some students used online dictionaries to look up words and then be able to complete the activity. I saw that some of them were trying to define the words alone; with no help from the teacher, only using an online dictionary" (observation notes No. 4).

These examples show that when students are using ICT tools they can have access to dictionaries, online books, expressions and other types of sources and activities to learn. Students feel they can find the necessary tools to accomplish an academic task. Additionally to the use of different resources to enrich their learning process, students consider that through the use of technological resources they can develop all abilities in the target language, this includes, of course, speaking abilities. This characteristic makes ICT activities a complete tool to learn. This final insight can be evidenced in the next answers given by students in questionnaire 2, question 5. They had to choose a learning tool and explain why it is interesting for them:

"The computer is the most complete source since we can find Reading, writing and listening" (student 9).

In question 1 (questionnaire 2), students had to say whether the activities were useful or not to develop their communicative competence and explain why. These are some of their comments:

"The activities were based on the topics studied; in addition to this, activities covered important aspects to develop my communicative competence (speaking, listening, writing)", (student 12).

In the examples above, we can see that through the use of ICT activities, important aspects of language to communicate like listening can be improved. It is well known that students also need to develop their listening comprehension in order to interact in real life situations. This provides them more confidence since the lack of listening abilities can become a barrier at the time of interacting with someone.

3.3.2 ICT as a Motivating Tool to Learn

This category describes the way ICT activities played an important role in both students' motivation to learn and the lowering of their anxiety. These factors play an important role in learning and oral interaction because if students do not feel comfortable in classes or with the activities they are doing, they will hardly be able to take risks when speaking. Aguaged and Rozo (2011) point out that

> The technological environment is an ideal instrument to facilitate interaction and communicative exchange in language learning […] It contributes to creating communicative contexts which should provide flexible, open and realistic practices in the language lesson for students coming from different levels, ages, countries, etc. (p. 87)

The following pieces of information show the way activities through ICT helped strengthen the above aspects.

In the second questionnaire, question 6, students remarked about the activities they enjoyed the most during the workshops. Some of their comments are as follow:

> "Videos are interactive methods which awaken learning interest" (Student 3).

> "Through videos and virtual environments learning is developed, in the same way the student is more active and with greater interest in the class" (student 9).

> In other question from questionnaire 1, some students described their experiences and their favorite learning tools. One of the learners said:

> "Videos are more dynamic, they catch our attention and their contents are sometimes about culture so we learn other things" (student 9, questionnaire 1).

These insights show that activities developed through videos (discussions, debates, presentations) were a good tool to awaken students' interest in learning. Different from traditional classes, video workshops gave students more opportunities to learn not only linguistic aspects of language, but other topics of interest. Additionally to the students' answers, the T-researcher could evidence this in some activities. He registered:

> "Students were very engaged in the activity. They developed the activities with no help. Besides, some of them were trying to go faster than others" (Observation notes No. 2).

This observation note tells about one activity in which they had to study and practice modal verbs. The idea was to develop the activities at the same time, but some students

wanted to go faster. Another important aspect of this motivational milieu for learning is the way students experienced a different environment, a more confident and sociable one to interact with the tutor and the other classmates. This type of atmosphere also played an important role at the time of speaking since learners felt confident, less stressed and more motivated to use the language. Some evidence of this type of environment is as follow.

> "The environment that is created there makes me feel more comfortable and it is possible to interact more with the teacher" (student 6, questionnaire 2.)

> "There is more freedom to develop activities in the laboratory without feeling so stressed. Thus we can have a better performance" (student 7, questionnaire 2).

These are important benefits of implementing ICT activities in language learning and especially in students' communicative competence. We can see through from this evidence, that students have some degree of anxiety or pressure in traditional classes, which can inhibit them from speaking or having oral interaction in the target language. Students also mentioned that working in that environment can lead them to have self-monitoring during the development of the activities. One student expressed:

> "There is a more dynamic environment in the laboratory and it is a way we can assess the progress we have obtained" (student 12, questionnaire 2).

> Thus, the implementation of this type of activities does not only help to the foster communicative competence but to enrich some other areas related to language learning.

4. Conclusions

Through the initial stage of this study, it was possible to determine that students from this context prefer activities that involve the use of ICT and oral production when learning the foreign language. Thus, designing or adapting materials or workshops in order to fit learners' preferences becomes a challenge and a must in our teaching practices. It is worth mentioning that when learners' needs and interests are considered in the classroom, "learning becomes an easier and faster process" (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Fiorito, 2005; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Krashen, 1981; as cited in Jiménez, 2015, p. 219). Constant reflection and planning is necessary, if we want to help our students to be successful in their learning process. There are priceless benefits when we consider the particular needs and interests of a group when designing and implementing classes and activities.

Supporting classes with ICT increased students' confidence to speak in the foreign language as they could learn and retrieve more vocabulary, improve their listening abilities,

feel less stressed and freer to interact and speak with their teacher and classmates. Ochoa (2014) points that "in any interaction process, learning occurs not only at the individual level but also at the social level" (p. 137), consequently, interaction is a remarkable part of learning process as it gave the participants the opportunity to build up each other.

The development of activities through ICT had a positive impact in students' development of their communicative competences and other aspects of language learning. It is relevant to mention that the use of ICT tools in this study strengthened students' interest in learning the foreign language; Noor-Ul-Amin (2013) asserts that ICT increases "the flexibility" and "delivery of education" in such way that learners can access to education anytime and anywhere. This was observed in this study since there were students with different levels of understanding of the language, different prior experiences, and different attitudes towards language learning and despite this, they were able to develop the activities and workshops through interaction and use the language for communicative purposes. Consequently, it is possible to say that the objective of this study was achieved.

This study was an evidence of the need we have as teacher-researchers to innovate and use different teaching and learning strategies. Using ICT is a very good option not only because students are familiar to the use of these type of technologies, but because they can enrich significantly academic processes. Davis and Tearle (1999), Lemke and Coughlin (1998), and Yusuf (2005), as cited in Noor-Ul-Amin (2013), claim the following:

> ICTs have the potential to accelerate, enrich, and deepen skills, to motivate and engage students, to help relate school experience to work practices, create economic viability for tomorrow's workers, as well as strengthening teaching and helping schools change. (p. 3)

The previous passage reinforces the importance of implementing ICT in educational field. It is important to say that the accelerated dissemination of technological resources in our context and the increasing interest of the government in implementing ICT in higher, primary and secondary education, must lead the institutions and group of coordinators and teachers to rethink their curriculum so it can be more flexible and adaptable to new technologies. More than a trendy issue, suing ICT in class is becoming a need and, why not, an obligation. Hence, students' learning abilities can be improved not only in the foreign language but in other subjects which are important for the integral formation of human beings.

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