

The Development of Oral Interaction: The Use of Functional Language to Achieve Communicative Efficiency in the EFL Classroom

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Abstract

Several studies on the teaching of English as a Foreign Language have shown that it has primarily focused on theoretical ingredients such as grammar and vocabulary, hence dropping the development of oral skills into a forgotten background. This approach in teaching has resulted in most students being unable to engage in smooth conversations in their target language. Classroom activities prepared by teachers to improve oral skills are yet mimicked and scripted, limiting students to parrot-fashion speeches. This project aims to highlight the importance of implementing a communicative approach to language learning in the first year of non-compulsory education (1° Bachillerato) in a Spanish high-school located in the north of Tenerife, allowing their students to ameliorate as oral tycoons through an exchange of meanings in contextualized interactions. In order to do so, I used tools such as direct class observations, scrutiny of the answers by a teacher to a questionnaire, and a critical reflection on my own teaching experiences through a design of an array of “small talk” activities where students must communicate in an unrehearsed and spontaneous way with their peers. The results revealed that numerous students are incapable of holding conversations due to obstacles such as shyness and their nightmare: fear of making mistakes. However, these results also indicate that many students could have substantial improvement rates if spoken discourse is tackled unconsciously through the other remaining skills in a holistic way. This study thus may contribute to making language teachers aware of the relevance of adapting activities to students’ interests and foster oral interaction in the EFL classroom.

Keywords: communicative approach, holistic focus, oral interaction, oral skill

Resumen

Según varios estudios sobre la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera, ésta se ha centrado principalmente en ingredientes teóricos como la gramática y el vocabulario, dejando en un segundo plano el desarrollo de las destrezas orales. Este enfoque de la enseñanza ha dado lugar a que la mayoría de los estudiantes sean incapaces de entablar conversaciones fluidas en su lengua meta. Hoy en día, las actividades preparadas por los profesores para mejorar las destrezas orales siguen siendo mímicas, limitando a los alumnos a aprenderse todo de memoria. Este proyecto pretende resaltar la importancia de implementar un enfoque comunicativo en el aprendizaje de lenguas en el primer curso de educación no obligatoria (1º Bachillerato) en un instituto español situado en el norte de Tenerife, el cual permita a sus alumnos mejorar como oradores a través de un intercambio de significados en interacciones contextualizadas. Para ello, he utilizado herramientas como la observación directa de las clases, el análisis de las respuestas de un profesor a una entrevista y la reflexión crítica sobre mis propias experiencias docentes a través del diseño de unas actividades de *small talk*, en las que los alumnos deben comunicarse de forma natural con sus compañeros. Los resultados revelaron que numerosos estudiantes son incapaces de mantener conversaciones debido a obstáculos como la timidez y el miedo a equivocarse. Sin embargo, estos resultados indican que muchos estudiantes podrían tener tasas de mejora sustanciales si el discurso hablado se aborda de forma inconsciente a través de las demás destrezas de forma holística. Por ende, este estudio puede contribuir a concienciar a los profesores de la importancia de adaptar las actividades a los intereses de los alumnos y fomentar la interacción oral en el aula de EFL.

Palabras clave: destrezas orales, enfoque comunicativo, aproximación holística, interacción oral

1. Introduction

In the process of learning and teaching a foreign language, what is mainly sought is that the student grasps every single corner in the development of basic skills. A teacher dreams of helping their students to acquire the entire linguistic kaleidoscope and to perform properly when they listen, write, read and, last but not least, talk. Despite this, the teaching of English as a second language has been linked for many years mainly to the development of written skills, while that oral skills seem to have been in the background (Alonso, 2014; Plasencia, 2019). Nonetheless, with the new approaches in the teaching realm and thus, considering the communicative purposes that characterize the didactics of any language today, oral expression has begun to be vouchsafed key importance and, even more specifically, oral interaction is seen as the most effective way to develop said skill.

First and foremost, learning new languages does not aim at an isolated and artificial approach, which entails mastering vocabulary, phrases and grammatical structures only, but the proper use of such structures in specific communicative situations. Language is a path full of meanings and culture and not a chain of systematically ordered structures. In other words, language is the key to a person's heart as it is the way by which people communicate, build relationships and create a bigger family known as society. Thus, the teaching of foreign languages ought to prioritize the development of the communicative competence.

Furthermore, oral interaction is a particularly important skill that should not be left neglected and disregarded in the classroom. The implementation of oral interaction is essential for the correct and appropriate use of language in any context. For this reason, and the proper development and improvement in the acquisition of a foreign language, this skill and/or aspect ought to be given the limelight and treated with special attention and dedication.

One of the goals of utmost importance is to get students to boost and enhance their communicative competence level. In order to do so, we, as teachers, must teach English within real communication contexts and for communicative purposes. We must get our

students to understand that language is not a mere chunk of words but rather serves as an instrument to build and exchange rich meanings. The importance of communicating in a foreign language is a reality that they should be aware of and that inevitably comes down to its use, function, and relevance in their daily lives, may it be in their academic side of life or the personal one. Thus, knowing the pros of this learning procedure will make learning English much more appealing, motivating and eye-opening.

Hence, my main goal as a future teacher is to get students to be able to understand and use English fluently. It is not about learning things by heart but rather improvising and being natural, so that they can communicate in real-life situations where its use is required. A point to be noted is that the most serious problem lies in the limited creation of environments and scenarios that allow the development and need of communication on behalf of the student. Nevertheless, as a future teacher, I will seek to innovate and sprinkle this missing ingredient, oral interaction, into the traditional linguistic “cauldron” in the classroom.

1.1. Justification and Objectives

When I finished my degree in English Studies, I started home-tutoring and teaching lessons at private institutions. Last year, I began working as a full-time teacher at *100% English*, in a language academy located in Puerto de la Cruz. The vast majority of my students had been coming to this academy since an early age and never had they come upon the need to have remedial or reinforcement classes. The academy stuck to their own books and criteria, which never matched or coincided with the ones used in their schools. In spite of having a far better level in learning a second language than their fellow classmates at school, they also experienced difficulties in taking initiative and the opening gambit to speak English in the classroom. Moreover, these classes were taught entirely in the second language (L2). Nevertheless, the students knew that the teachers were proficient in their mother tongue (L1) when they heard us talking to their parents, family members or legal guardians. During this period, I evidently became aware of the serious lack of initiative and courage shown by the students to communicate in L2. Curiously, even when we continually stressed that they should interact with us in the

L2, they continued to do so in the L1, partly due to out of convenience and because they knew that we understood them.

From that moment onwards, I completely understood that as EFL teachers, we must place special emphasis on oral interaction in L2 in the classroom. To do so, we have to encourage them to raise their hands constantly, inviting them to speak without fear, not correcting them immediately and above all, rewarding them in some way. The students gradually began to build up confidence when I let them demonstrate my intentions and, albeit slowly, they all started to see English as a powerful tool: a communicational gift.

At first, they started uttering simple phrases like “excuse me”, “I don’t understand” and “Can you repeat it, please?” and later on they dared with bigger, more extensive and increasingly complex structures. After months of communicating in the L2 as the only language spoken in the classroom, the students had taken a giant leap in the level of oral interaction in contrast to the beginning of the course.

As aforementioned, my end goal in this master’s degree final project is to contribute to highlighting the importance of promoting, blossoming and improving oral interaction in the EFL classroom. To achieve said goal, the main objective of this work is to design a didactic proposal and/or learning situation where students can develop their oral skills effectively. Oral communication is of utmost importance because of its involvement in the academic, personal, cultural and social spheres. Thus, I have proposed to work on it from the educational or teaching perspective. It is in this school context, and specifically in the EFL learning classroom, where one must develop and practice oral interaction to be able to acquire a correct pronunciation and fluency that allows effective interaction with other partners and interlocutors and thus, be able to deal with future real situations.

The specific array of objectives planned in this project are:

- i) Establishing a clear difference between these two concepts: oral expression and oral interaction.
- ii) Identifying the main factors, problems and obstacles that hinder oral interaction in the EFL classroom.

- iii) Highlighting and pointing out the importance of talking in English on behalf of the teacher in the L2 class for a better acquirement of the language.
- iv) Fostering the importance of learning and soaking in L2 through conversations in an unconscious and intuitive manner.
- v) Creating authentic and informal situations to develop and produce a language with a spontaneous and improvised decorum.
- vi) Making the student deal with the L2 in daily life context and situations.
- vii) Getting the students to use the L2 as a communicative tool.
- viii) Improving students personal and social skills and interactions in the L2.

This project is structured as follows: Firstly, in the next section, I will start by focusing on the theoretical framework, where I will review the different approaches and methods in foreign language teaching. Later on, I will go into more detail about oral interaction and linguistic communication and/or proficiency as skills. Afterwards, I will scrutinize how the oral skill is presented in the CEFRL and in the CLIL program. In the second section, I will delve deeper into the main factors and obstacles that impede oral interaction development in the classroom. In the “action” and/or practical part I will present my suggested design to contribute to alleviate the current problems and achieve my main objectives. In the final section I will present the findings obtained from the implementation of my design and I will offer some suggestions for improvement.

2. Different approaches and methods in language teaching

The history of language teaching is mesmerizing yet labyrinthine due to its complex nature. According to Kumaravadivelu (2006, p. 2), language teaching has a fascinating but rather tortuous one. There have been ongoing debates about teaching approaches and methods spanning over a century. As a matter of fact, English has been taught as a second language since the 17th century and there have been various methods and approaches to teaching it. Asher and James (as cited in UKEssays, 2018, para. 4) define methods as the combination of techniques used by teachers in the classroom to teach the alumni, while approaches refer to the philosophies for language teaching applied in the classroom through the use of different language teaching techniques. Hence, over the last decades, various teaching methods have emerged and evolved in leaps and bounds, including the well-known Grammar-translation Method, Direct Method, Audio-lingual Method or Communicative Teaching Method, among others. Despite their familiar names, unblurred concepts and crystal-clear definitions, these methods are not as easy to implement in practice, as they encompass more than just a single strategy or specific technique.

Furthermore, teaching methods are shaped by a variety of factors, including social, economic, political, and educational circumstances or contexts. They also draw on new language and psychological theories, as well as elements such as practical experience, intuition, and inventiveness (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Thus, to some extent, they represent a combination of language teaching beliefs and an amalgamation of different aspects into one for a rather subjective target audience and alumni mosaic.

Nevertheless, a rather common feature amongst these methods is the overemphasis on specific aspects as the central issue of language teaching and learning. This tendency can be seen through the over-stressing pattern on grammar rules and translation in the Grammar-translation Method, on direct communication in the Direct Method, on rote learning and repetition in the Audio-lingual Method, and on communication in real-life situations in the Communicative Teaching Method (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

Despite their limitations, these methods have contributed to our understanding of language teaching and learning. Today, language teachers often draw on a combination of these methods, as well as manoeuvring with newer approaches such as Task-based Teaching and Content-based Instruction, to meet the new, diverse and motley needs of learners. Ultimately, the most effective language teaching involves two aspects known as adaptability and student-centred. Thus, this approach takes into account individual learners needs, interests, and learning styles (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

2.1. Grammar-translation Method

This Grammar-translation Method, which was originated in the 19th century, is a traditional approach to language teaching that emphasizes the teaching of grammar rules and the translation of literary texts. According to Richards and Rodgers (2014), this method is based on that language is primarily a written tool and/or medium and that the main goal of language learning is to exclusively foster reading and writing skills rather than listening abilities and oral communication skills.

In the Grammar-translation Method, the teacher presents grammatical rules and vocabulary lists, and students practice translating sentences and passages from the target language to their native language, and vice versa. The focus is on accuracy rather than fluency, and the classroom environment is typically teacher-centred. The method posits that the sole acquisition of grammar rules will lead to the ability to communicate effectively in the target language.

However, this method has been immensely criticized for its lack of emphasis on oral communication and its overemphasis on grammar rules and translation. This approach is considered outdated and ineffective by many language teaching professionals today, as it does not reflect the actual needs of learners who want to develop their speaking and listening skills for real-life communication.

Despite its limitations, this method remains widely used in language teaching. This is because seldom are there any inherent contradictions between teaching grammar and

the communicative approach. Moreover, explicit grammar instructions can complement communicative language teaching by increasing learners' conscious awareness of the target language form and structure. Plus, the use of the first language as a reference system can help avoid misunderstandings during second language learning. On the other hand, encouraging learners to think about the formal features of the target language and to practice translation can also help them develop problem-solving skills. All in all, the Grammar-Translation Method is an easy option to implement and places few demands, effort and pressure on teachers' shoulders and thus, less academic burdens on students, which may explain its continued popularity (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

2.2. Direct Method

The Direct Method, also known as the Natural Method, is an approach to language teaching that originated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a reaction against the Grammar-Translation Method (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). According to Brown (2015), the Direct Method emphasizes the use of the target language as the means of instruction, with little or no use of the learners native language. The goal of the Direct Method is to immerse learners in the target language and to teach them to think and communicate directly in the language, without relying on translation.

As a matter of fact, in the Direct Method, teachers use visual aids, real-life objects, and gestures to help learners understand the meaning of words and phrases, and they encourage learners to speak the target language from the very beginning of the course (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The focus is on oral communication and the development of listening and speaking skills, rather than on the typical and traditional grammar rules and written exercises (Brown, 2015). Therefore, the classroom environment is typically student-centered, with the teacher acting as a facilitator rather than a lecturer.

The Direct Method has been praised for its emphasis on oral communication and its focus on meaning rather than form (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). However, it has also been criticized for its lack of attention to grammar and for the challenges it presents to learners who are used to relying on translation (Brown, 2015). Additionally, the use of the Direct Method requires highly skilled and trained teachers, which can be a challenge

in many educational contexts due to insufficient budgets, lack of accent-comprehension or adaptability imbalance, among others.

In spite of these arduous challenges, this method has influenced the development of other different methods and approaches to language teaching, and it is still used in some educational contexts today, particularly for the teaching of spoken languages (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

2.3. Audio-Lingual Method

The Audio-lingual Method is an approach to language teaching that emerged during World War II and became popular in the 1950s and 1960s (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). According to Brown (2015), the Audio-lingual Method emphasizes the use of drilling, repetition, and habit formation to teach language skills. As Richards & Rodgers (2014) state, this method is based on the principles of behaviorism, which suggests that language learning is a sheer process based on forming habits through practice and reinforcement.

In the Audio-lingual Method, teachers use a variety of techniques to create a language-learning environment that is really similar to the way children learn their first language (Brown, 2015). These techniques include dialog memorization, pattern drills, and the abusive use of audio materials such as tapes and language labs. The focus is on developing learners listening and speaking skills through repetitive practice, with little attention given to reading and writing skills (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Moreover, this method is known for its strict adherence to the target language, with little, rare or no use of the learners native language in the classroom (Brown, 2015). The method is also characterized by a strong emphasis on accuracy, with errors corrected immediately and precisely. This approach is designed to create a learning by heart and habit-forming environment that helps learners to internalize the target language patterns and structures (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

In fact, the Audio-lingual Method has been criticized for its lack of attention to meaning and communication, and for its artificial and repetitive nature (Brown, 2015). However, it has also been praised for its effectiveness in developing learners listening and speaking skills, particularly in the context of language training for military, office and secretary assistance, call-centers, political speeches, oratory, bureaucratic purposes or diplomatic personnel, among others (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Nowadays, the Audio-lingual Method is rarely used as a standalone and independent approach to language teaching, but its techniques and principles have been incorporated and intertwined into many other methods and approaches, such as the Communicative Language Teaching and Task-Based Language Teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

2.4. Communicative Language Teaching Method

The Communicative Language Teaching Method (CLT) is an approach to language teaching that emphasizes the importance of communication in language learning. According to Nunan (2003), the CLT aims to develop students' communicative competence through interactive activities that promote meaningful communication. In other words, the focus of this method is to teach language in a way that enables students to use it in real-life situations and practical contexts.

The CLT is based on the principle that language learning is a social process, and that language is learned through interaction with others. As such, it emphasizes the importance of using language in context and in a communicative way. Even Ellis (2003) notes that the CLT is characterized by “a focus on meaning rather than form, an emphasis on communication rather than grammar, and a preference for activities that involve learners in real communication” (p. 156).

Moreover, the CLT places a strong emphasis on the use of authentic materials and activities that reflect real-life communication situations. For example, students may engage in role-plays, discussions, and debates that require them to use the language in a meaningful way. Similarly, they may use authentic and context-based materials such as newspapers, local magazines, and videos to develop their language skills.

One of the key features of the CLT is the use of pair and group work. By working in pairs or small groups, students have more opportunities to communicate with each other and practice their language skills in a supportive environment. Hence, this fosters a team-working, cooperative and proactive mood amongst students. Besides, it helps students to develop their confidence in using the language and to overcome any fear of making mistakes.

Overall, the Communicative Learning Teaching Method is an approach to language teaching that highlights and draws attention upon the importance of communication in language learning. Richards and Rodgers (2001) note that this approach involves placing a greater stress on the use of language in context, and on developing learners ability to use the language for a variety of purposes. Therefore, the CLT aims to help learners to develop communicative competence by adopting a less parrot-fashion approach and becoming more comfortable, natural and intuitive with using the language in real-life situations.

2.5. Task-based Learning

Task-based teaching (TBT) is an approach to language teaching that focuses on the use of tasks as the basis for language learning. According to Willis and Willis (2007), a task is an activity that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language. The aim of task-based teaching is to help learners to develop their language skills by engaging them in activities that require them to use the language in meaningful and authentic ways.

One of the key features of task-based teaching is the use of tasks that are designed to promote both communication and interaction. These tasks may be based on real-life situations or simulations, and can involve a great variety of language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. Willis and Willis (2007) suggest that tasks should be challenging, interesting and relevant to learners needs and interests, in order to motivate them and promote active engagement.

Furthermore, another key aspect of task-based teaching is to focus on language use in context. So rather than simply learning grammar rules and vocabulary in isolation, learners are encouraged to use the language in meaningful ways, and to develop their ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations. Ellis and Shintani (2014) note that task-based teaching involves a focus on meaning and communication, rather than form, and encourages learners to use the language creatively and flexibly.

Moreover, Task-based teaching also emphasizes learner autonomy, as learners ought to be more independent, self-driven; and are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and to engage in self-directed learning activities. Thus, this approach can help learners to develop their confidence and motivation, as well as their ability to use the language on their own in a correct and coherent way.

2.6. Content-based Instruction

Content-based instruction (CBI) is an approach to language teaching that focuses on the use of content from other subject areas, such as science, social studies, or literature, as the basis for language learning. According to Snow and Brinton (1997), the goal of CBI is to teach language through the medium of content, rather than teaching content through the medium of language.

One of the key features of CBI is the use of authentic materials, such as texts, videos, and audio recordings, from other subject areas. These materials are used to teach both language and content simultaneously and are chosen based on their trendiness, relevance and interest to learners. That being said, Snow and Brinton (1997) suggest that the use of authentic materials can help learners to develop their language skills in a more meaningful way and can also help to promote cross-cultural understanding.

In addition, another key aspect of CBI is the integration of language and content instruction. Rather than teaching language skills in isolation, language instruction is integrated with content instruction, and learners are encouraged to use the language in meaningful ways to explore and understand the content. Snow and Brinton (1997) note

that this approach can help learners to develop their critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as their language proficiency.

All in all, content-based instruction casts the limelight on the pupil in this two-way relationship, emphasizing the importance of learner-centered instruction, as learners are encouraged to take an active role in their own learning. This approach involves providing learners with opportunities to engage with the content in a variety of ways, such as through discussions, projects, and presentations, and to use the language to express their own ideas and opinions. Snow and Brinton (1997) further argue that this approach can help to promote learner motivation and engagement and can also help to develop learners' autonomy, enabling them to become "cultural magnets" and proficient orators.

2.7. Total Physical Response

Total Physical Response (TPR) is a language teaching method that emphasizes the use of physical movement and motion to help learners understand and retain language input. According to Asher (1977), the founder of TPR, this method is based on the premise that language learning is most effective when it is accompanied by physical actions or gestures.

Furthermore, one of the key features of TPR is the use of commands and action sequences to teach language. Thus, the teacher gives a command, such as "Stand up", and the learners respond by carrying out the action. Later, the teacher reinforces the language by repeating the command and having the learners carry out the action again. This process helps learners to associate the language with the corresponding physical action, and to internalize the language in a meaningful way (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

Another important aspect of TPR is the use of storytelling and role-playing to create engaging and interactive language learning activities. Learners are encouraged to act out stories and scenarios using the target language, which helps to build their language proficiency and confidence. In addition, TPR activities often involve a high degree of

repetition, which can help learners to reinforce their knowledge of the language and improve their accuracy and fluency (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

In the end, TPR widely emphasizes the importance of learner autonomy, as learners are encouraged to take an active role in the learning process. This can involve choosing their own actions and gestures to accompany language input and creating their own role-playing scenarios and/or output practice the language. By providing learners with opportunities to take ownership of their learning, TPR can help to promote learner motivation, spontaneity and engagement (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

2.8. Silent Way

The Silent Way is a language teaching method developed by Caleb Gattegno that emphasizes the learners' independence and active participation, intuition and interaction in the learning process (Gattegno, 1972). According to this method, the teachers' role is to facilitate learning by creating opportunities for learners to discover and internalize the language on their own.

Furthermore, one of the important features of this method is the use of color-coded pronunciation charts and word charts to help learners develop accurate pronunciation and build vocabulary. These charts provide a visual representation of the language, and learners are encouraged to use them as a reference point for their pronunciation and spelling (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Another key aspect is the use of physical objects and manipulatives to help learners understand abstract language concepts. For example, the teacher may use colored rods or blocks to represent different grammatical structures, and learners are encouraged to manipulate these objects to create sentences and practice the language (Gattegno, 1972).

Moreover, The Silent Way also emphasizes the importance of learner autonomy, as learners are encouraged to take an active role in the learning process. Learners are given opportunities to experiment with the language and to make mistakes, with the teacher providing guidance and feedback as needed (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

In addition, the Silent Way emphasizes the importance of silence and the use of nonverbal cues to facilitate learning. The teacher is encouraged to use gestures, facial expressions, and other nonverbal cues to provide support and feedback, rather than relying solely on verbal communication (Gattegno, 1972).

Overall, the Silent Way is a highly learner-centred approach to language teaching that emphasizes active participation, experimentation, fun and discovery. By providing learners with opportunities to manipulate the language on their own and to discover its rules and patterns, the Silent Way can help to foster and promote deeper engagement and motivation in the language learning process.

Language teaching has undoubtedly come a long way since its first review. In fact, nowadays, the Grammar-Translation Method and other traditional approaches do not work as isolated strategies but rather are combined with others. Over the past century, there have been ongoing debates and numerous new methods and approaches, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. That being said, language teaching is a complex and multifaceted process that involves an umbrella of factors and requires a flexible and adaptable approach. Therefore, my personal view is that language teaching ought to be based on the needs and goals of the learners, as well as the social and cultural context in which they are learning. This means incorporating a range of strategies and techniques, such as blending Task-Based learning and Communicative Language Teaching, while also considering the individual needs and preferences of the target audience. I could not agree more with Kumaravadivelu (2006) when he states that by taking a learner-centred approach and being willing to adapt and evolve, language teachers can create a dynamic, engaging, and symbiotic, in regard to methods, learning environment that promotes meaningful language acquisition.

3. Speaking as a skill in the CEFR and the Curriculum

First and foremost, in order to explain the Speaking skill in L2, I will focus on what is laid down and/or dictated in the official Common European Framework of Reference for Languages document (hereinafter referred to as CEFR).

The CEFR is a key asset that belongs to the language policy project of the Council of Europe, which has unified guidelines for both the learning and teaching of European languages. It is a criterion used to measure the level of oral and written comprehension and expression of a language. This document contains all the necessary components that a learner ought to take into account in order to be able to communicate coherently and correctly. As a matter of fact, this document has been of great help in planning foreign language learning programmes.

That being said, the CEFR has established a scale of six common reference levels for the organisation of language learning. This division is grouped into an array of three blocks which correspond to a more classical division of basic (A1 and A2), intermediate (B1 and B2) and advanced (C1 and C2) levels. These scales are utilized to measure the learner's mastery of the language and to check their progress throughout the learning process. Each level has its own certificate with its corresponding exams and assessment criteria.

3.1. Oral production

According to the CEFR, it is of utmost importance to highlight the differentiation between oral production and oral interaction. In fact, oral production is defined as the ability to “produce stretches of language of a level appropriate to the task and situation, employing a suitable range of cohesive devices and organizational patterns” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 98). For instance, oral production includes the following examples as activities than can take place inside a classroom:

- Making public announcements (wedding and/or pregnancy announcement, tourist guide and instructions).
- Addressing an audience (speeches in public meetings, university lectures, sermons, stage performances, sports commentaries and sales pitch)
- Reading aloud a written text.
- Speaking on the aid of notes, written text or visual aids (diagrams, graphs and charts).
- Acting out a rehearsed role (film, TV series and theatre).
- Speaking spontaneously and intuitively.
- Singing (songs and poems).

Although illustrative scales are provided for the following aspects:

- Oral production in an overall sense.
- Sustained monologue: describing experiences.
- Sustained monologue: discussion and reasoning (e.g., in a debate).
- Public statements.
- Public speaking.

The following chart is the simple version of the CEFR matrix that includes the oral production descriptors in each of the different level scales:

Level	Oral Production Descriptors
C2	Can produce clear, smoothly flowing, well-structured speech with a logical structure, using a full range of rhetorical devices and supporting ideas effectively with subsidiary points, reasons and relevant examples. Can produce speech that shows an awareness of register and the likely effects on the listener.
C1	Can produce clear, coherent, well-structured speech, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices. Can articulate precise meaning and convey finer shades of meaning precisely, and can generally distinguish between shades of meaning that would be difficult for a non-native speaker to recognize.
B2	Can produce clear, detailed speech on a wide range of subjects related to his/her field of interest, expanding and supporting ideas with subsidiary points and relevant examples. Can produce speech that shows an ability to use a variety of organizational patterns and a range of

Level	Oral Production Descriptors
	cohesive devices to link ideas together clearly.
B1	Can produce simple, mainly isolated phrases and sentences on topics that are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
A2	Can produce short, isolated, memorized utterances, with frequent hesitation and self-correction, on a limited range of predictable topics. Can communicate limited information on topics that are familiar or of personal interest, and can generally ask and answer simple, direct questions on familiar topics or topics of personal interest.
A1	Can produce a few isolated words and phrases about people and places, as well as provide basic personal information. Can communicate limited, immediate needs in simple and formulaic phrases.

3.2. Oral interaction

On the other hand, and as the most relevant part of this project, one shall highlight what oral interaction means. According to the CEFR, oral interaction is defined as “the ability to interact in spoken language in order to communicate and to establish and maintain social relations with speakers of the language” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 39). The CEFR further elaborates on the importance of oral interaction in language learning, stating that it “provides the learner with opportunities to receive and process information in real time, to converse and negotiate meaning and to produce a message appropriate to the context and the audience” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 39).

Furthermore, the CEFR also notes that comprehension and expression strategies are constantly employed during interaction. In addition, there are several types of cognitive and collaborative strategies (also known as discourse and cooperation strategies) that involve “controlling collaboration and interaction in actions such as taking and yielding turns, formulating the topic and establishing the framework, proposing and evaluating solutions, reviewing and summarizing what has been said, and mediating in a conflict” (Centro Virtual Cervantes, 2002, p. 75).

Examples of oral interaction activities can include the following:

- Business deals and transactions.
- Casual and day-to-day conversations.
- Informal discussion.
- Formal discussion.
- Debate.
- Podcast.
- Interview.
- Gameshow and TV Shows (Family Feud, “Ahora Caigo” and First Dates).
- Joint planning for a trip or rent payment.

In addition, there are illustrative charts in the CEFR for:

- Oral interaction in an overall sense and/or context.
- Understanding a native speaker.
- Conversation.
- Informal discussion.
- Formal discussion and business meetings.
- Interacting to obtain goods and services.
- Exchanging information.
- Interviewing and being interviewed (speaking and listening).

In this project, the sole focus will only be paid on portraying the general level and/or overall sense of oral interaction:

Level	Oral Interaction Descriptors
C2	Can interact with ease, fluency and precision, handling the most complex interactions effortlessly. Can understand and use idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms, recognising finer shades of meaning even in the most complex situations. Can produce clear, smoothly flowing, well-structured speech with an effective logical structure, using a full range of rhetorical devices and supporting ideas effectively with subsidiary points, reasons and relevant examples.

Level	Oral Interaction Descriptors
C1	Can interact with a high degree of fluency and spontaneity, making clear, detailed and well-structured contributions. Can handle complex exchanges with ease, even when dealing with abstract, complex or unfamiliar topics. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes, and can generally distinguish finer shades of meaning.
B2	Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining views. Can produce clear, detailed speech on a wide range of subjects related to his/her field of interest, expanding and supporting ideas with subsidiary points and relevant examples.
B1	Can interact with reasonable ease in structured situations and short conversations, provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help formulate what s/he is trying to say. Can ask and answer simple questions on familiar topics and can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms his/her family and other people, living conditions, educational background and present or most recent job.
A2	Can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help the speaker formulate what s/he is trying to say. Can ask and answer simple questions on very familiar topics and can use basic phrases and sentences to describe his/her family and other people, living conditions, educational background and present or most recent job.
A1	Can interact in a simple way but communication is totally dependent on repetition and rephrasing. Can ask and answer simple questions about familiar topics and can use basic phrases and sentences to talk about his/her family and other people, living conditions, educational background and present or most recent job.

In order to establish a clear difference between oral production and interaction, we can draw on that in oral production there is prior planning, and the message is addressed to an audience, whereas in interaction there is a two-way relationship or communicative exchange of two or more participants, thus the message is developed according to the evolution and mediation of points and ideas. That being said, this is why we can say that in interaction there is not a straight and/or “right” line to follow, but it is rather subject to improvisation. Therefore, in interaction, we do not only use oral production but also our comprehension strategies. This dichotomous and parallel combination of production and comprehension processes clearly showcases the herculean complexity of cognitive processes. Thus, this is the reason it should be given its deserving limelight. It is in the

L2 classroom that this skill must be developed, for it is in the educational context that the teacher must create the opportunity to produce and express different ideas, i.e., facilitate the possibility for the learner to interact with the teacher and with other classmates and peers.

To focus on the communicative processes of a language, and as stated in the CEFRL, “in order to speak, the learner must know or manage the following elements” (Centro Virtual Cervantes, 2002, p. 88):

- Plan and organise a message (cognitive skills).
- Formulating an utterance (linguistic skills).
- Articulate the utterance (phonetic skills).

According to the Centro Virtual Cervantes (2002, p. 90), the processes involved in oral interaction differ from simple sequences of oral production and comprehension in some ways.

- i) Processes of production and comprehension overlap. While the interlocutor’s statement is still incomplete, the user begins to plan their response based on a hypothesis about the nature of the statement, its meaning, and interpretation.
- ii) Discourse is cumulative. As the interaction continues, participants converge in their understanding of the situation, develop expectations, and focus on relevant issues, which is reflected in the form of the statements produced.

3.3. Competence in Linguistic Communication

Key competences have been designed by the European Union as an essential factor, quality and condition for individuals to achieve fulfilling personal, social, economic and cultural development, which meet the demands of a globalised world. Thus, these make it easier to create a multidisciplinary world and better society linked to knowledge. This means that English will no longer be treated as a mere language but a powerful tool to achieve a wider variety of goals.

In order to properly explain what the key competence in linguistic communication (LCC) consists of, a reference ought to be made to what is established by the LOMLOE law on the official website of the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training of the Spanish Government:

The LOMLOE curriculum (Ley Orgánica 3/2020, de 29 de diciembre) in Spain defines the competence of linguistic communication as the ability to use language effectively and appropriately in different situations, scenarios and contexts (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2020). Therefore, this involves the capacity to understand and produce both oral and written messages, as well as to use language in different formats, media or multimodalities.

Furthermore, this competence involves the ability to reflect on language use, to evaluate and critically analyse texts, and to use language as a means of social interaction and expression of personal identity (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2020). To achieve this competence, individuals must develop a range of skills, including linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic skills, as well as knowledge of the linguistic system, its use and purpose alongside the cultural context (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2020).

In short, the competence in linguistic communication in the LOMLOE curriculum encompasses the ability to use language effectively and appropriately in many different contexts, such as outside and inside school, and multiple modes, the capacity to reflect on language purpose, and the development of an intertwined kaleidoscope: linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic skills, as well as knowledge of the linguistic system and its cultural context (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2020).

According to the LOMLOE, the competence in linguistic communication has many interconnected and mended components that enable individuals to interact effectively in diverse contexts and situations. This competence is comprised of numerous mixed and complementary components, which can help to build a perfect English speaker, such as:

- Firstly, the linguistic component, which encompasses different dimensions such as vocabulary, grammar, semantics, phonetics, spelling, and pronunciation (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2020, p. 265).
- The pragmatic-discursive component, which carries and involves the ability to use language in specific situations and contexts, and includes different dimensions such as sociolinguistic competence, which refers to the use of language in different social contexts; pragmatic competence, which involves the use of language to achieve specific communicative goals; and discursive competence, which refers to the ability to produce and understand different types of texts (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2020, p. 265-266).
- The socio-cultural component, which involves understanding and respecting different cultural norms, values, and perspectives, as well as the ability to use language to communicate effectively with people from different cultures (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2020, p. 266).
- The strategic component, which includes different skills and strategies that individuals use to overcome communication difficulties and/or obstacles and achieve their communicative goals. These skills and strategies may involve reading, writing, speaking, listening, and conversing, as well as information processing and the production of different types of e-texts (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2020, p. 266).
- Finally, the personal component, which involves the attitudes, motivations, and personality traits that individuals bring to the communicative act, and that can influence their communication style and effectiveness (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2020, p. 266).

Overall, the linguistic communication competence is a complex yet multifaceted and pulchritudinous construct that requires the integration of motley knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and that is essential for successful communication in a globalized and diverse world.

Within the same framework, the LOMLOE establishes three levels of knowledge related to linguistic communication competence. According to the law, the first level is “saber” or knowing, which refers to the cognitive knowledge and/or ability that students acquire during their educational process. This includes a deep understanding of language and communication in different contexts, the functions of language, the characteristics of different styles and registers of language, vocabulary, and grammar (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2020).

The second level is “saber hacer” or knowing what to do, which refers to the ability to apply acquired knowledge to oral and written communication in various contexts and situations, including expressing oneself orally and in writing, comprehending different types of texts, listening attentively and adapting responses to different situations, among other skills (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2020).

Lastly, the third level is “saber ser” or knowing to be, which refers to the emotional and social aspect of language. This level includes being open to constructive dialogue, recognizing the importance of dialogue for coexistence, showing interest in interacting with others, and being aware of the impact of language on other people (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2020).

Above all, the teaching of foreign languages is focused primarily on acquiring the communicative competence in order to fully immerse the L2 into the learner’s daily life, using it in real situations where they are prepared to cope with problems effectively and naturally. Thus, English, a compulsory foreign language subject in the Spanish system, ought to provide students with the key knowledge, skills, and attitudes to communicate, converse, and interact properly in the target language. In addition, in the L2 classroom, students should be provided with the necessary resources to express themselves in the language with ease and no pressure. Henceforth, L2 can be considered as a means to a beautiful end known as communication, which helps us shape relationships and allows communication between speakers of different cultures, ethnicities and backgrounds.

While conversation is the most relevant instrument of communication, it is essential to highlight the importance of other aspects and non-linguistic elements such as cultural conventions, the speaker's intentionality or register.

Given the current LOMLOE curriculum, foreign language teaching is based on a communicative approach. This means that the learner is able to use the language for a specific purpose and within an appropriate context. Both the Ministry of Education and the CEFR stress the importance of developing and adopting each of the aforementioned sub-components of the linguistic communication competence: linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic.

3.3.1. A Closer Glimpse of Communicative Language Teaching

This project is primarily based on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which is a widely used approach in the field of teaching English as a foreign language. CLT originated in Britain in the 1960s and was introduced to replace earlier structural methods (Brown, 2015). Since the introduction of CLT in the late 1970s, there have been various definitions and interpretations of the communicative approach, including the following (Richards & Rodgers, 2001):

- Communicative competence involves the ability to use language appropriately in different social contexts and scenarios.
- Communication is seen as a proactive and interactive process, where speakers negotiate meaning and co-construct understanding.
- Language learning should focus on authentic and original communication tasks, which provide learners with opportunities to use language in purposeful and meaningful contexts.

According to Hattum's view (UKEssays, 2018, para. 18), communicative language teaching is a method for teaching a second language where the clear emphasis is pointed

towards the importance of students' interactive ability to express their own ideas in the target language.

On the other hand, Littlewood (1981) propounds that the main objective of language learning is the development of communication skills. Littlewood states that the communicative approach to language teaching does not only emphasize the acquisition of grammatical structures and vocabulary, but also the communicative functions of the chosen language and its dynamic nature. Additionally, Littlewood argues that language mentees should learn how to use language structures in authentic and real-life situations, and understand how these structures relate to communicative functions.

Galloway (as cited in UKEssays, 2010, para. 82) similarly asserts that the aim of communicative language teaching is to equip students with real-life communication skills. This approach does not rely on useless learning or rote drills. Rather, it involves placing students in awe and suspense as to the outcome of a classroom exercise, which will change depending on the reactions and responses of the students. Thus, as real-life situations are constantly changing, students' motivation to learn comes from their desire to communicate on topics and in ways that pique their curiosity instead of the teachers' interests.

The aim of this approach is to enable students to communicate in the language like a native speaker, with a special emphasis on semantic use of language that satisfies their communicative needs rather than focusing on perfect and crystal-clear accuracy. As previously stated, communicative language teaching involves social interaction-based activities such as one-to-one conversations, group debates, dialogues, and role-playing to simulate authentic situations. In order to achieve this, students need to learn the linguistic forms, meanings, and functions of the language. While grammatical accuracy is important, language memorization is not encouraged. Henceforth, this methodology prioritizes the mastery of the language over mastery of structures and aims to achieve effective communication. In other words, understanding and being understood is what really matters. Thus, this makes second language acquisition a more motivating method for students as it reduces the fear of making mistakes and increases courage in them.

3.3.2. The Communicative Skill

As a final aspect of the communicative approach, Littlewood (1998, p. 4) highlights the importance of the communicative ability and/or skill in language learning, stating that the most effective communicator in a foreign language is not necessarily the one who has the best grip of language structures. Instead, the most skillful communicator is often the one who includes both themselves and their listener in the conversation by taking into account shared knowledge and selecting elements to convey their message effectively. To develop these skills, language learners need opportunities to participate in situations that emphasize the use of available resources to communicate meanings as effectively and concisely as possible. As these resources are limited, learners may have to sacrifice grammatical accuracy in favour of immediate communicative effectiveness. Thus, learners must not only need a repertoire of linguistic elements but also a set of strategies for using them in specific situations. Thus, one ought not to only know what to utter but how and when to do so.

In other words, the focus on developing the communicative ability in this project is not on grammatical constructions or the skill to learn rules and vocabulary by heart. As argued by Littlewood (1998), to reach a high level of communicative competence, the learner must relate linguistic forms to non-linguistic knowledge in order to interpret the specific meaning that the speaker intends to convey. That being said, they must be able to manipulate the language system to the point where they can use it spontaneously and flexibly to express themselves accurately. Thus, language learners should have the opportunity to develop strategies for interpreting language in real-world use. When speaking, the speaker must select their words based on the meaning they want to convey, and if communication fails, they must try to solve the problem with a different message and/or approach. In the end, the communicative approach/skill aims to enable a speaker to mould themselves to linguistic and social conventions by adopting specific strategies and adapting to new contexts without any hesitation.

4. The Process of Language Acquisition and the Importance of Oral Interaction

To explain the process of language acquisition, Krashen ought to be mentioned. In his book “Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition”, Krashen argues that acquiring a language does not require extensive use of grammar rules nor tedious exercises. On the contrary, language acquisition occurs slowly and in a steady pace, and speaking skills emerge significantly later than listening skills. Thus, the best methods are those that provide “comprehensible input” (Krashen, 1982, p.9) in situations where the learner is not under pressure and where the messages include what the learners actually want to hear. These methods do not force early oral production in the second language but allow learners to produce when they are actually ready to do so. Krashen maintains that improvement comes from providing communicative and comprehensible information, not from forcing and correcting production.

Acquiring a language is a similar or almost identical process to the way children develop their ability in their first language or mother tongue. Language acquisition is a subconscious and conscious process. Moreover, the language learner is generally not aware that they are acquiring a language, but they are aware that they are using the language to communicate. Thus, the result of acquiring the communicative competence is also subconscious (Krashen, 1982, p. 10). We are generally not aware of the rules of the languages we have acquired. Instead, we have this sort of “notion” or inner-tingle of correctness. Moreover, we simply guess that some grammatical sentences sound right to us and find out errors that sound wrong because we have heard them from the moment we stepped out from our mothers’ wombs. This is done unconsciously and we are real experts even if we are not sure which rule has been violated. In other words, experience makes us distinguish what is right or wrong rather than memorising useless structures.

On the other hand, acquiring a second language also involves “learning” a language, which means consciously acquiring knowledge of the rules and being able to talk about

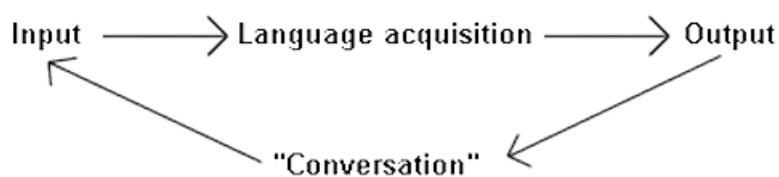
them. Krashen (1982) refers to this process as the ability to learn and understand the rules, commonly known as “grammar” to most people.

Furthermore, Krashen’s theories suggest that engaging in conversation is a crucial element in the unconscious acquisition of language. As we have seen in the previous section, when we converse, or interact orally, we activate several mechanisms. The most important ones are the comprehension or input strategies and the oral expression or output strategies (Krashen, 1982, p. 20).

Krashen argues that in the absence of being able to live in the country where the target language is spoken, it is in the classroom where informal situations should be created to provide students with comprehensible input that is optimal for language learning. Therefore, L2 classes become the greatest resource for learners to experience informal situations that are more similar to the "real world" (Krashen, 1982, p. 58).

4.1. The Input theory

This diagram was designed by Krashen (1982, p. 61) and it perfectly illustrates how oral expression indirectly contributes significantly to language acquisition:



To grasp the input theory, it is of utmost importance to compile information from previous chapters where the author defines input as what we comprehend. Essentially, language learners prioritize understanding the message and its meaning over its form. Apart from our linguistic competencies and/or skills, we rely on contextual clues, our worldly or “street” knowledge, and other para-linguistic and non-linguistic cues to give our messages a meaning. When presented with communication, we go beyond our level of understanding or comprehension skills.

To explain how we are able to understand a language that contains more complex grammatical structures than those we have yet to acquire and properly learn is through the input theory. The most common theory for achieving fluency in a second language is that we first learn the structures and then put them into practice. However, Krashen argues the opposite; when we are spoken to in L2, we first seek out meaning, and as a result, we acquire new structures. This is what he calls “going for meaning” (Krashen, 1982, p. 21).

Moreover, once the communicative act has been successfully carried out, meaning the listener has understood the message, the interlocutors reach a more advanced stage in the communicative competency. Therefore, from this point onwards, communication will occur automatically and naturally.

According to this theory, verbal fluency in a language cannot be directly taught; it must emerge on its own. That being said, the best or perhaps the only way to achieve fluency is to simply provide the learner with comprehensible input. The learner’s first oral productions will come when they feel ready, and in fact, these initial utterances may not always be grammatically correct. Patience is key and we must bear in mind that accuracy develops over time as the learner listens and comprehends more input.

Usually, in L2 classrooms, learners are typically not given a period of reflection after studying a specific grammatical structure. Instead, they are often asked to express themselves in L2 prematurely before they have even had the time to acquire enough syntactic competencies to communicate their ideas effectively. As a matter of fact, when this happens, learners will use the syntactic rules of their L1 while speaking L2, which can lead to interference between the two languages.

All in all, a student develops their communicative competence and oral production skills in L2 by listening to and comprehending the language that surrounds them for months (Krashen, 1982, p. 27). In simpler terms, the more a learner is exposed to L2 input, the sooner their oral expression skills will emerge and get better.

4.2. The role of Output

According to the input theory by Krashen (1982), he asserts that the role of output is crucial in contributing to language acquisition, albeit indirectly. In fact, the more the learner speaks the target language, the more input they will receive. It is through output or oral production where we show our acquired communicative competency in L2 and the control we have in it.

In addition, oral production can play a direct role in complementing and/or aiding conscious language learning. Output assists in learning because it provides a domain for error correction. When a second language user speaks, they may make mistakes. When these mistakes are corrected, the learner is helped to change their mental representation of the rule or alter the environment or context of its application (Krashen, 1982, p. 61).

In fact, when teaching a FL, it is essential to deliver it entirely in the target language as it provides the learner with input that will be useful for speeding up and ensuring the learning process. When conducting exercises to develop oral proficiency, the learners output will demonstrate the mastery they have achieved in the L2.

5. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

In the previous section, we tackled the crucial role of spending long periods exposed to a foreign language to achieve proficiency. The more input and output in the target language, the greater and better the learning outcomes. In this section, I will discuss the quality and effectiveness of our education system's language immersion programs, particularly the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) program or *AICLE* in Spanish. This program represents one of the most significant leaps and breakthroughs in language teaching and learning in these recent years. In fact, it has stirred widespread interest among educators across Europe (Zemach, 2021).

CLIL or *AICLE*, an acronym widely used in Europe and other parts of the world, refers to a teaching and learning approach where a subject that is not related to language is taught in a foreign language (Zemach, 2021). This dichotomous focus aims to acquire both knowledge and skills in the subject and the foreign language. This distinctive feature of CLIL sets it apart from other pedagogical methods that only use language content for the sole purpose of teaching the foreign language.

CLIL relies on a solid theoretical framework that validates it as a highly effective learning approach. It can be regarded as the most recent stage of development of the communicative language teaching approach mentioned in earlier sections. Coyle et al. (2010) have described it as the “definitive communicative methodology” (p. 16) and aims to embody the basic characteristics of CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) by providing a context for authentic and meaningful communication and offering students opportunities for increased exposure to the foreign language and thus, create useful and proactive learning.

CLIL also includes characteristics from task-based learning, as students focus on real content learning tasks instead of just learning the language without a need to apply it constructively to produce a meaningful result.

Furthermore, CLIL combines the fundamental principles of task-based learning and CLT by creating an authentic and meaningful learning environment in which students can explore and discover worldly knowledge while using a foreign language (Coyle et al., 2010). Additionally, CLIL provides a context in which students apply the language as they learn it, rather than spending years in a “repetitive and boring dynamic” of practicing the foreign language inside a classroom for a chance to use the language in the future. (Lorenzo et al., 2009)

CLIL breaks down the isolationist boundaries that characterize the field of language learning by strengthening its connection with general education theories (Lasagabaster & Doiz, 2016). Thus, this program aims to build knowledge through a dialogic, interactive and communicative relationship between the learner, their peers, and the teacher (Coyle et al., 2010).

Nevertheless, the CLIL project is not a completely new trend, but rather a fusion of various theories and approaches (Mehisto et al., 2008). That being said, it combines the best of language teaching with the best of general education. This project is attractive to various educational communities, including parents, and in recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of affiliates and partners to various CLIL programs, from early bird and childhood education to university education.

According to the Council of Europe (2002), CLIL was developed as a response to the EU’s search for effective language learning approaches that could help achieve important goals such as the “Mother tongue +2” for all citizens. This tag and/or dream entails a community with children speaking two mother tongues, better social cohesion, greater mobility within the EU, and most importantly, improving economic strength and competitiveness for their future.

5.1. Advantages of the CLIL project

The advantages and breakthroughs of the CLIL program are highlighted in the *Plan de Impulso de Aprendizaje de Lenguas extranjeras* brochure by the Government of the Canary Islands (PILE, 2016), which emphasizes the inclusion of all students in this

pedagogical project. This document emphasizes factors such as increased student motivation levels, student empowerment to successfully tackle learning situations, as well as exponential improvement in linguistic competence by providing students the opportunity to practice the L2 language in a relaxed and spontaneous real-life context. The cognitive abilities of the students are stimulated as a result of using more than one language in the same context.

Furthermore, according to Attard-Montalto et al., (n.d.) in their CLIL Guide, this program leads to progress in the acquisition of the L2. Thus, students who take part in CLIL classes acquire subject content and improve their language skills as well. The authors propound that CLIL provides students with the necessary tools and preparation for their future in an interconnected and globalized society, where independent learning is compulsory and rather essential, resourcefulness and autonomy are necessary, adaptability in handling various sources of information is expected, and where teamwork and communicative competence in other languages are required to collaborate with foreign professionals (Attard Montalto et al., n.d., p. 7).

Similarly, Schmitt and Schmitt (1995, p. 133) have drawn on the positive impact of CLIL on L2 content acquisition and vocabulary development. They suggest that CLIL programs provide students with more opportunities to be exposed to L2 vocabulary in meaningful contexts, which increases the likelihood of comprehension and retention by connecting the words to their surroundings.

On the other hand, the interaction between the teacher and their student allows the construction of a perfect platform for constructivist knowledge. Moreover, it stimulates critical thinking and linguistic knowledge through an exchange of ideas and debate, thus creating a useful and playful arena for the acquisition of content and language learning (Piaget, 1963).

According to Marsh (n.d.), the benefits and/or advantages of CLIL go beyond the improvement of the linguistic communication competence. The author argues that as students become accustomed to using L2, it becomes part of their thinking patterns, resulting in the formation of new thought structures and/or mental maps, thus enabling the enhancement of conceptual knowledge. This leads to an alignment of concepts and

an improvement of the overall capabilities and performance of the student. In other words, CLIL helps in blooming both language proficiency but also enhances cognitive development and conceptual understanding.

To sum up, this section has highlighted the significance of the pedagogical approach of the CLIL project. It has helped in facilitating language learning and the acquisition of necessary skills for a kaleidoscope of disciplines and life itself. To be frank, this is an approach that I thoroughly support and put my faith in by considering it one of the most effective ones to develop oral production and interaction skills, which is the main aim of my project.

However, we should consider that a CLIL project can only be effective if content-based instruction is implemented by teachers who have a high level of proficiency in the L2 language, otherwise, the effects on students could be counterproductive, such as students struggling to understand the content being taught due to their limited language proficiency. As a result, students may struggle to keep up with the pace of the course or may feel overwhelmed by the volume of new vocabulary and concepts they need to learn. This can lead to frustration and a lack of motivation to continue with the program, which could ultimately have a negative impact on their learning outcomes. Additionally, if the content is not effectively aligned with the curriculum, students may struggle to see the relevance, reasons and practical applications of what they are learning, leading to disengagement and disinterest in the program. The Canarian Government ought to put more effort into training teachers by promoting collaboration and knowledge-sharing among educators. This can include providing opportunities for teachers to network and exchange ideas with colleagues, as well as creating online platforms or other resources for sharing best practices and innovative teaching strategies. Therefore, by investing in teacher training and development, they will be equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to provide high-quality education to their students.

Research suggests that infants have an innate ability to learn languages due to their highly plastic brains and their ability to distinguish between all the different sounds that occur in all languages. According to Kuhl (2010, p. 713), infants are born as “citizens of the world,” capable of recognizing and distinguishing all the sounds of human language. That being said, babies have this magical ability to learn languages through immersion,

without needing formal instruction. According to Werker and Tees (1999, p. 509), infants are able to learn language through context and exposure, and can even learn multiple languages simultaneously without confusion. This is because their brains are highly plastic and malleable, and they are able to adapt to new linguistic environments quickly and easily. Hence, by starting CLIL instruction in early childhood education, students can develop a strong foundation in both content and language, which can serve as a basis for future learning and success.

6. Main factors, obstacles and difficulties that hinder oral interaction in classrooms

In order to boost oral interaction in the English classroom, it is essential to identify and scrutinize the main obstacles that impede its development. For many students, their school, high-school and college language learning classes are the only context in which they can test their oral proficiency. Thus, as “teaching tycoons,” we must focus on this aspect. However, the teacher’s dream to get out participation from students can become frustrating when they do not engage due to boredom, and especially when students are aware of the difficulty involved. Thus, one of the biggest challenges at this point is to encourage learners to speak English during lessons so that they can dwell into, practice, and improve their L2 learning.

According to Brown (2015, pp. 350-351), there are various factors that hinder the development of oral interaction, such as low self-esteem and high levels of anxiety. In my experience as a teacher, as to my internship is concerned, in the educational system of our country, one of the most influential factors is shyness and/or fear. Students feel shy when it comes to speaking in public in a foreign language, fearing criticism and feeling embarrassed about their pronunciation. Henceforth, these factors can be addressed by promoting affective and emotional dimensions and aspects (Krashen, 1982), creating a positive classroom environment and treating mistakes in a special way to avoid hurting student’s feelings. Following this rule, if students understand that they are in a learning process within a safe space without pressure and can improve their oral skills, they will feel more comfortable in class.

On the other hand, time can be a crucial factor due to which teachers neglect and thus, end up expunging speaking activities from their lessons. Teachers sometimes feel constrained by their curriculum and textbook content by focusing on grammar rules and relegating oral interaction to a secondary role and/or background status. Nevertheless, it is important for teachers to approach all language skills with equal importance through a holistic approach. That being said, speaking activities can be organized in a way that

students can cope with writing, reading, and listening exercises simultaneously while interacting with others. The key to success is to engage students in activities where they can communicate while performing other tasks, turning them into multitasking beings. Most of the times, it is the teachers who take control of the class and do not provide an opportunity to students to communicate. In other words, if the one-way relationship is not substituted by a two-way relationship, meaning back and forth communication, no signs of improvement will be shown in the classroom.

Moreover, getting L2 learners to begin using the new language as a communication tool is a real challenge. According to Brown (2015), during the process of acquiring and learning any language, concepts such as Short-Term Memory and Long-Term Memory should be considered, as defined by researchers in cognitive psychology. Brown argues that during the learning process, information usually moves from Short-Term Memory to Long-Term Memory, where it is stored. Specifically, when learning a new language, we store our mother tongue in Long-Term Memory, while information about the new language is stored in Short-Term Memory. If this new information is not transferred, it will eventually be lost, and this is where the problem lies. Hence, the key to acquiring this information and achieving the desired storage is to transfer (Brown, 2015).

In fact, when we learn a new language, we repeatedly seek translation as a way to understand and soak new information more easily and quickly. However, this approach can actually impede the transfer of information that was previously mentioned.

According to Sheehy (2011), the process of translation is unavoidable and that is precisely what makes learning a new language difficult. Hence, we have a paradoxical conundrum concerning the learning process. The author emphasizes the importance of conducting speaking exercises that connect with the students' personalities, hobbies and interests, through the design and implementation of activities that can capture their attention, motivate them, and therefore enable them to speak in English.

Sheehy (2011) refers to three main factors that hinder the development of oral interaction in the classroom:

- **Peer Pressure**

As aforementioned, it is normal to make mistakes during the process of acquiring a new language. Making mistakes is actually positive because it is how we truly learn. As Sheehy (2011) asserts, even native speakers take years to master their language. Thus, it is to nobody's surprise that a foreign language learner must make mistakes before being able to produce something near to a "good" and coherent use of English. However, it is difficult to convey the idea on that mistakes are important and positive in a classroom, where we find teenagers who are going through a period of emotional transition and a new process of personal metamorphosis and self-discovery. During the development of self-esteem, making a mistake in front of a group can cause a lot of embarrassment and fear for future interventions.

- **Lack of Motivation**

Regarding this second aspect, Sheehy (2011) suggests that the lack of an inner zest and motivation among students is caused by the preconceived perception that speaking and communicating in English is not useful. Students do not find it appealing to practice their oral skills to face real-life situations and/or contexts and communicate effectively. Thus, Sheehy proposes the use of immediate rewards when a student speaks in English, as a way to make it truly motivating and to avoid the feeling of being forced to do it.

- **Lack of Support**

Sheehy (2011) argues that there are two types of support: classroom environment and linguistic support. According to her, the use of simple and useful daily phrases in class as linguistic support is quite effective. She also proposes the creation of a trusting environment through the implementation of group work and collaboration to achieve a good classroom environment. Krashen (1982) also adds emotional factors, which can be accompanied by other personal aspects of different nature or lack of resources in the teacher's methodology, as direct causes of a lack of oral interaction.

Similarly, according to Brown (2015), some of the following factors are identified as hindering obstacles to the proper development of oral production in the classroom:

- **Clustering**

For a discourse to be fluent, it ought to be divided into phrases, as speakers do not speak word by word. Students need to organize their responses by adapting them to the grouping of phrases.

- **Redundancy**

When students face difficulties in speaking, they should focus on redundancy, which involves the repetition of sounds, words or constructions, among others to express an idea or concept that has already been expressed using similar units. This allows them to clarify and get forward the meaning of what they want to say.

- **Reduced forms**

It is of utmost importance to instruct students in colloquial contractions as they are necessary in spoken language usage. If they are taught formal and artificial decorum, their speeches might seem robotic and unnatural. Additionally, it is crucial to tackle on certain pronunciation features (such as the distinction between weak/strong forms) and the use of elisions and reduced vowels in unstressed syllables, as all of these aspects can create challenges for learners.

- **Performance variables**

Students should be taught to speak aloud and not to remain silent when they have any sort of doubts or stuttering problems. They can think while speaking and, to gain time, they can use communicative expressions such as “uh, um, well, you know, I mean, or like.” This can also help them sound more natural and less distant with reality and the ongoing situation in regard to avoid awkwardness and strange gaps.

- **Colloquial language**

Teachers should teach students words, expressions, and phrases used in colloquial language, informal settings and jargon. They should also practice them in an appropriate situational context within the classroom.

- **Rate of delivery**

Students ought to acquire a specific speed and/or pace when speaking in a foreign language to sound more natural. That being said, teachers are responsible for providing students with strategies to help them increase in regard to their fluency.

- **Stress, rhythm and intonation**

These elements are key in spoken language because they convey different meanings and purpose. Firstly, stress refers to the emphasis placed on certain syllables or words within a sentence or phrase. This can significantly alter the meaning of a sentence, and without proper stress, a sentence may not make sense. Secondly, rhythm refers to the patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables in speech. It can be described as the “beat” or tempo of speech, and it is what gives spoken language its musical quality. Finally, intonation refers to the rise and fall of the pitch of a person’s voice as they speak. It can convey a range of emotions, such as anger, happiness, or sadness, and can also indicate the intention of a sentence, such as whether it is a question or a statement. Thus, when speaking English, students must become familiar with all these elements to acquire proficiency and mastery in effective communication.

- **Complexity**

Some activities and tasks require a certain level of complexity in the use of grammar and discourse structures. Thus, teachers must be aware that they need to adapt to their students’ language level. Otherwise, they may encounter unsolvable issues completing the activities or tasks.

As previously mentioned, students must learn to interact using the foreign language. If they can only produce speeches without any interaction, they will never be able to engage in a real conversation. Thus, teachers must promote student interaction in the

classroom and create activities where they have to negotiate and speak with their peers or classmates.

As Brown (2015) states, grammatical structures in English have a certain complexity for L2 students, which can cause various difficulties when they try to speak. Teachers should focus on dealing with the most frequent difficulties, especially those that can meddle with communication. Moreover, teaching students contractions and colloquial language can help them become aware of the differences they may hear when listening to a native or proficient speaker. It can also help them produce these elements naturally so that they do not sound extremely formal, artificial, robotic or forced. Another feature to highlight is pronunciation. Teachers should not insist too much on pronunciation when students perform oral activities, as it can create frustration. However, efforts should be made to progressively integrate pronunciation into English classes so that students can become familiar with particular sounds, especially those they do not have in their mother tongue. This will help them see the differences between the two languages and facilitate the production of speech with the articulation of the second language.

6.1. Oral communication strategies

Bygate (1987) identifies two distinct groups of oral communication strategies that L2 learners typically use: achievement strategies and reduction strategies. On the one hand, achievement strategies aim to compensate for linguistic gaps by improvising and substituting a term, which can serve as a tool to convey the message without it being lost or altered. The author distinguishes three types of achievement strategies:

- **Guessing strategies**

Students cannot know every word single word in the dictionary, and they tend to use their previous morphology and grammar knowledge to guess the meaning of a word and express it hoping that the listener will understand what is meant. Sometimes, students try to “foreignize” a word from their mother tongue. This means that the word will be pronounced as if it belonged to the first language. In addition, they may borrow a word

from their mother tongue, hoping that the listener will recognize it. However, students may also use the literal translation strategy, which can be problematic considering “false friends,” a true archnemesis in this process which can create hilarious yet problematic misunderstandings. Another guessing strategy that students may use is inventing a new word in the hope that the listener will understand what is being conveyed.

- **Paraphrasing strategies**

At times, students try to find an alternative to the expression they need, based on their knowledge of the new language vocabulary. They resort to what is called lexical substitution strategies, changing a word to a more general synonym.

- **Co-operative strategies**

This can be witnessed when the speaker receives help from their interlocutor. For example, when they ask for the translation of a word or ask for help to build a sentence together. In my experience, this strategy is without a doubt the most popular among high school students. Nevertheless, it is not considered the most effective way to learn a foreign language as they may become used to asking for help, which could hinder their ability to internalize and be honest and loyal to the learning process.

Achievement strategies ensure that the message conveyed by the speakers is not lost or altered. However, sometimes what the speakers do is shorten the message to make it within the scope of their knowledge or abandon that message and move on to something they can handle. In other words, speakers change their message to avoid problems. An example of a reduction strategy can happen when the student avoids pronouncing a specific sound because they are not sure how to pronounce it. Additionally, sometimes students avoid talking about a topic they are not familiar with because they cannot express themselves adequately and look for other things to talk about, or even stay silent. Silence is a reduction strategy that is quite common in secondary school classes. When a student repeatedly implements this type of strategy, the teacher must encourage the use of other types of strategies that allow the development of oral interaction.

6.2. Strategies that foster oral interaction in the classroom

We have discussed several factors that hinder the development of oral interaction in class. Nevertheless, there are various strategies and activities that can be employed to encourage and promote active participation. Sheehy (2011) suggests three fundamental resources that teachers can use to encourage students to speak in the English classroom:

- **Explaining the importance of speaking/practising English in class**

Many students do not see the relevance or motivational gist in speaking English and do not actively participate in the classroom because they are unable to visualize the future outcomes and understand its importance. Thus, it is up to the teacher to make it clear what their objective is in attempting to get students to speak English in class, and although the reasons may be of different nature, there will always be students who take them into account.

- **Using different resources to increase students' confidence.**

There are various techniques and activities that can be used to encourage students to express themselves using the foreign language. Sheehy (2011) suggests providing a reward every time they use what is known as “easy language.” The techniques that have been outlined by this author are the ones we will see below:

1. Using classroom language, which means using everyday expressions such as greetings or asking to use the bathroom. These should be established as a routine so that students speak and respond in the L2.
2. Using drilling, which involves repeating any word or expression out loud and in unison with the whole class. As Sheehy (2011, para. 8) explains, repeating out loud has a particular appealing zing because the students' voices are safe in a multitude of voices, and it is the sound of English that is strange or amusing to them.
3. Using a buzzword, which refers to a trendy term or phrase.

- **Setting achievable goals that are within everyone's reach**

As a final strategy, Sheehy (2011) suggests setting achievable goals that all students can fulfill. Ideally, every teacher wants their students to overcome the intrinsic fear of speaking and to actively participate and interact with each other in the L2 on a daily basis in the classroom. However, no matter how much we desire this, we must consider the course level and the students' language acquisition process. The lower the level, the less production capacity the students will have. Taking these factors into consideration, Sheehy (2011) proposes two alternatives: if we are working with lower levels, the goal for students could be speaking in English for five to ten minutes in each class. Starting with the "classroom language" mentioned earlier on would be a great idea. On the other hand, with higher levels, it is ideal to establish and clearly identify the right moments and situations where English should be spoken and when the use of the mother tongue is allowed.

7. Methodology

As the main aim of this project, I have lodged the elaboration of a didactic proposal in order to improve and promote oral interaction in an English classroom. This proposal is based on the methodological principles or approaches illustrated in previous sections.

For data collection and subsequent analysis of the educational context, I have relied mainly on my own observation during this brief professional experience I have had as a teacher and on another instrument that is very often used in the action research method (Mills, 2007) to collect qualitative data: design and implementation of a questionnaire with open questions that I gave to the teacher who tutored my internship in this master's degree. The answers to this questionnaire are detailed in the appendix section of this work.

Unfortunately, during my internship I have only been able to attend specific courses due to a shortage of time alongside a strict and rigid use of the curriculum on behalf of the teachers. I have been given "ideal" classes where the reality differs to a great extent from more naughty and tumultuous classes. Despite the efforts of the Department of Education to help every student with any type of hindrance and personal problem, the latter one has had the last word in their behavior, a gap that has left many students without coming to class on a regular basis. Moreover, to this problem we must add the lack of motivation of many students and their shrewdness in knowing that they will move on to the upper course if they fail some subjects according to the Spanish Educational Law/Decree.

Nevertheless, I have been lucky to be able to observe the degree of involvement of the students and their participation in the completion of tasks. Plus, seeing what happens on the other side of the coin, as a teacher, as a student myself, has been interesting and of great help in forging my experience as a future teacher.

7.1. Description of the target audience

My didactic proposal is focused on a target group of students in their first year of Bachillerato, similar to the one I had the opportunity to observe in a limited way during my external internship. In this stage, students have enough knowledge and resources and, therefore, have a good mastery of the L2, considering that they have studied the language since kindergarten. In this year, students have four hours of foreign language instruction per week. That being said, the teacher has an ample timetable where they can interpolate different activities without being forced to prioritize some over others. It is also during this course that students have already reached a certain degree of maturity, as the age range is between sixteen and seventeen years old.

Once these students reach their last Bachillerato year, their attention and motivation will be focused on preparing them to pass the university entrance exam, also known as EBAU, which does not consider the mastery of oral production but is based solely on the evaluation of written production and reading comprehension skills. Therefore, it is of great relevance to overcome their barrier of embarrassment and insecurity in the final stages of high-school before dealing with the real world on the outside, where they have to put to use their skills to strengthen interpersonal relationships and get jobs. In other words, helping them in authentic and real communication rather than mechanical and useless tests is of utmost importance to help them to face the “real tests” in life.

7.2. Instruments and procedures

I shall now proceed to describe in more detail the instruments and procedures used in the design and implementation of my didactic proposal:

- **Previous experience having performed similar activities**

Given the lack of time and excess of holidays, I have taken advantage of the years in which I have taught similar age groups to remember and grasp the results that I obtained from my observation when conducting oral interaction exercises. This short experience

has also served me as a source of inspiration to address the obstacles I have faced during my time as a teacher.

- **Questionnaire**

The questionnaire (see Appendix I) was administered to my internship tutor in order to collect information related to the time she spends with each of the four foreign language teaching skills, the frequency with which she performs speaking and/or oral activities, the main difficulties she has observed in them being performed by students, the factors that hinder the development of oral communication, the different strategies to encourage and motivate participation and the evaluation methods.

- **Direct Observation**

During the lockdown period, I took advantage of the telematic classes given to me to observe and thus, collect data to create a unique didactic unit of interest for my future students. Above all, my aim is to seek and analyze the effectiveness of the methodology implemented by my internship teacher to develop her classes, especially in regard to the oral production activities.

In the following section, I will present the results obtained from the analysis of the educational context, carried out by means of these three data collection instruments.

8. Results and Discussion

8.1. Results from my experience as a teacher

After some years of teaching and during internships, I have noticed that, in general, there are students with great knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary. Most of the students are able to read a text and extract the main points from it. This also happens in the case of listening exercises. However, I have witnessed problems when it comes to both oral and written production. During a written production exercise, despite its difficulty, students can plan and order their ideas, they also have tools to solve doubts and even ask for help from their teacher.

On the other hand, during an oral production activity, none of the aspects above can be used because it is a spontaneous and ad-lib exercise. From what I have observed, when it comes to putting their knowledge and mastery of the L2 into practice and using it to express their ideas, students often have great difficulties. I came to understand that this was the most overwhelming and struggling task for teenagers and the “kryptonite” that frustrates teachers the most.

The main reasons inferred from my observation are insecurity, embarrassment and fear of making mistakes. Even if the subject matter is of great interest and motivating to them, it is a rather difficult task to get them to speak out loud and to the whole class in English. On several occasions, I witnessed that many of them were enthusiastic, but resorted to L1 to express their point of view or to comment on the ideas and remarks of other classmates. It was at this point when I realized that the problem of fear, insecurity, shyness and embarrassment is increased by being forced to use the L2 in particular.

As a general rule, I have been lucky enough to observe that some students are more extroverted and daring than others, and these are the ones who participate more in class when any exercise or activity that requires their participation is carried out. On the other hand, there are more shy students who find it much more difficult to take the initiative to express their ideas or to participate proactively in class. Nevertheless, the problem is worsened when they have to do it in another language that they do not master as their

mother tongue. The insecurity of mispronouncing, or not having enough knowledge to say what they think correctly, makes them even more self-conscious and thus, sabotages their confidence.

As with the rest of the skills, oral production should also be worked on every day and, above all, in a progressive manner. As teachers, we cannot expect our learners to feel motivated, confident and resourceful enough to “jump in” and express themselves in the L2 from day one. Furthermore, students learn step by step, or class after class, and acquire confidence as they surpass themselves with small contributions until they manage to overcome the barrier of insecurity.

From the very beginning, it is essential that oral interaction in our classroom ought to be in English, both in teacher-student communication and in the teaching of content. As already emphasized in this project, during the process of teaching and learning a new language, linguistic immersion in the L2 is of great help for its acquisition. We must take advantage of this golden opportunity and make students be in contact with English, as sometimes class may be the only scenario where students feel comfortable and have enough self-esteem.

In fact, activities to develop students’ language skills should start at a very basic level where students’ contributions are simple and do not require much knowledge. A simple “yes I do”, “me too” or “I don’t know” should be enough to start implementing oral interaction in the classroom as a way of teaching English permanently. The answers and contributions of the trainees should be in accordance with the level of the group and the latter-mentioned aspects will grow as the level progresses.

While teaching all kinds of content, I realized that it is also important to implement a methodology based on “Functional Language” in the classroom. Functional language is the language that is needed in different situations in everyday life situations and are of great help as these are used to perform various functions: greeting, asking permission, introducing oneself, asking or giving advice, explaining rules, apologizing, or agreeing and disagreeing. These functions can have different exponents or fixed expressions that are very useful if they are used correctly. Therefore, learning functional language gives

English language learners the skills, grit and confidence to communicate effectively in a variety of scenarios and/or situations.

The first fundamental step in working on the speaking or oral skill must always be to encourage motivation. Therefore, it is essential to connect with the center of interest of our students in order to make them want to participate. These “trending topics” vary according to age, level of maturity and, above all, the time period and events which we witness.

8.2. Results from the scrutiny of the questionnaire

After implementing the questionnaire to my internship tutor, it was evident that, in general terms, the teacher devotes a fair amount of time to oral production, as she gives it special relevance due to its communicative approach. Despite the difficulties involved in developing this type of activity, she continues to place utmost importance on them.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the skill to which she devotes the most time is reading comprehension, considering it a threshold that opens many doors to learn other skills. The teacher considers that with reading exercises, the new vocabulary of the unit to be worked on can be introduced easily, since finding the words in a context makes their learning more meaningful than finding them in isolation. Grammatical structures are present in said readings and relationships can be established between different skills that are intertwined and worked upon in a holistic way. In addition, students are usually interested in the content of the readings, which facilitates the acquisition of vocabulary and grammatical concepts.

Furthermore, according to the data provided by my interviewee, different skills can be worked on with a reading exercise, including speaking. When they read aloud, they practice pronunciation and intonation. Moreover, the students copy the audio model and correct each other. The teacher also works with them on pronunciation corrections as much as possible to avoid any awkward and embarrassing situations.

After the completion of the reading comprehension activities, the informant's drill consists of an oral interaction in which the teacher asks them questions about the text and the students must respond aloud, thus encouraging them to comment on the content of the reading. In this way, the students hardly notice the fact that they are practicing oral skills in L2.

On the other hand, the teacher considers that the most complex skill is writing. For this reason, and because it is a skill of written production and creativity, a considerable amount of time is dedicated to it within the four hours per week of foreign language. In general terms, the ratio of students per classroom, the special learning needs and the different backgrounds and level of the students make it difficult for the teacher to spend more time doing these types of exercises.

To remedy this drawback, which is present in the development of all skills, we should try to motivate students with simple and easy projects in which they can express themselves in writing. The important thing is to get students to forget their prejudices when writing in the L2, in this case, in English, and to focus on the topic or objective of the project. In order to make these students be able to help each other, they are organized in such a way that they can work collaboratively in small groups or pairs, as it is a boost or help for some of them and a reinforcement and leverage of their knowledge for others.

The teacher also noted that usually students are writing less and less nowadays. This unfavorable aspect occurs not only with foreign languages, but also with their mother tongue. One of the main factors that causes this hindrance and problem is the emergence of technologies, such as cell phones or social networks that facilitate the development of part of the work of oral production. This leads to little involvement in writing on behalf of students, whether in their own language or in a foreign one. This factor does not help to encourage the habit of writing both inside and outside the educational environment.

Focusing on the speaking skill, the interviewee has reported that, on a regular basis, one session is always dedicated to this skill every two weeks. She also comments that sometimes it is done once every week depending on the needs of the group and the time factor regarding the school calendar.

Participation in this type of activity becomes scarcer than participation in activities with the rest of the skills. This scarcity also varies according to the class group because of the different student backgrounds. In the case of the teacher, with two of the three groups she teaches, participation is higher than in the remaining group. That said, when the teacher was asked about the factors that cause low participation, she tackles on the following main factors:

1. Shyness, issues related to the self-esteem of a low percentage of the group and prejudices regarding what it means to speak English.
2. The low level of the student body for this skill. As I mentioned before, with such high ratios in classrooms and with the presence of many student backgrounds, it becomes a very difficult task to devote time to this skill that requires the full attention of the teachers and the involvement of the students. In order to practice these types of activities, students always have the support of teachers who guide and accompany them throughout the whole process of their oral production.

Having analyzed the main drawbacks, hindrances and/or factors that interfere with student participation for oral interaction in the classroom, I will name the measures that the teacher says she uses to effectively encourage students' involvement in speaking activities:

- Organizing small groups or work in pairs to prepare small, simple and guided speaking situations. This technique has already started to be used from the first year of Compulsory Secondary Education as of this year.
- Creating flexible groups so that students' difficulties in the process of acquiring oral skills can be addressed coherently.
- Creating debates through trending subjects or topics of interest to the students so that they are enthusiastic and motivated to speak, give their opinion or disagree. The topics to be discussed always depend on the level of the students.

- Presenting and explaining carried out by small projects with topics of interest to students according to their tastes, hobbies, fortes and preferences.

Lastly, in relation to the importance given to assessment, the teacher has pointed out that in order to assess the oral skill, one must bear in mind that these activities are of utmost importance because any language is meaningless without a *viva voce* exchange of words. During the communicative process, everything that is said comes through oral comprehension. For teachers, this should always be the starting point for teaching and learning a foreign language. From these skills, the student learns to have self-confidence through what they hear, without needing to see it written down in order to understand it. This is precisely one of the points that teachers try to make their students understand at all times so that they can trust themselves and their oral comprehension skills and thus, encourage them to practice and master oral production.

8.3. Results from direct observation in lessons

This school year 2022-2023 will be remembered as the year of the “limbo zone” and spit-balling teaching. The current state of what students should be taught and what not caused by the wavering educational laws forced teachers to continuously ponder about unique and favorable methods to assess students. Students were often confused and kept on asking what competences really meant. In my experience, due to the speed at which everything happened alongside the unclear, drastic and immediate measures taken by the Spanish State, I believe, and I can confirm that we were not prepared for it. There has not been enough time to prepare ourselves to face circumstances of this nature and we have been forced on many occasions to improvise.

On the other hand, the expensive prices of the books have left many students with unequal opportunities because they do not have sufficient means to be able to follow classes. The lack of pitch perfect computers and Internet connection has been, among other causes, the biggest problem. It is clear that both teachers and students have had to adapt to this unavoidable situation, although the consequences have been participation rates going down and thus causing a digital gap. This high-school ought to improve in regard to this matter and fix all types of technological problems to sew up this “hole”.

I have had the opportunity to be a direct witness of a kaleidoscope of face-to-face classes and have been able to interact directly with students in a classroom. Sadly, I have not been able to see as many learning situations I had wished for or competences being implemented correctly, since there was a switch from one law to another. I have mainly been able to learn how content review exercises, reinforcement exercises and the interaction and treatment between the teacher and her students are carried out.

During the first days of my internship, I was guided and ushered by my tutor and other teacher from the English department into physical classes. I used the opportunity to ask about the students, their circumstances, their level of English, their likings and hobbies and above all about the guidelines to follow to carry out the classes in this new reality. My biggest uncertainty resided in the possible changes that the methodology of foreign language teaching had undergone.

One of the aspects that caught my attention was the techniques used by the teacher to encourage active participation during her lessons. On many occasions, the classes were reduced to a simple and mundane interaction between everyone to talk about their current situation, about the concerns of the students and their problems to perform the tasks given by all the subjects. I understood that, taking advantage of the circumstances of the stressful life we were living, this could become the golden opportunity or quest to spontaneously perform an exercise of oral interaction in English and make them enjoy it unconsciously.

Participation was like an iceberg. There were a few students who had the spotlight and shared their opinions with the rest of the class and the majority, camouflaged within the class walls and school bags, were not part of the exercise at all. I can say that this last aspect has been the weakest point of teaching. Many students attended the class session but did not participate in it in any way. Due to Covid's aftermath, some students still wear masks and are slightly hypochondriac as well, so it was difficult to say that these students were following the class or simply entered the session according to their schedule but did not pay any attention. Their lack of interest and daydreaming patterns made me even think that they might have been engaged in some other type of tasks, such as using their mobile phones to open up Instagram and WhatsApp.

Fortunately, as I mentioned earlier, there were marvelous students in all the groups who participated actively, submitting their homework in due time, raising their hands in class, answering questions and doing the activities together. During these sessions, I quickly observed that the degree of participation is directly correlated to the level of English that each individual student has and their level of involvement and motivation in the subject.

The teacher's persistence was essential, and I observed that, even if there were long, awkward and uncomfortable silences, the exercise should not be abandoned. On these occasions, we persisted in our objective until at some point one or more students were encouraged to intervene. After this experience, I understood that it is necessary to insist and get the students to participate in a spontaneous dialogue on a real topic that is being discussed at that moment. I will say that this interaction can become a regular part of the class, becoming the ordinary routine of foreign language classes. This is the only way to instill and spread the use of the L2 for communicative purposes in a real-life setting.

The guts in "throwing oneself" into speaking English in the classroom also entails making mistakes. We must remember that they are teenagers and that they are living a period of their lives in which the fear of making mistakes in public is predominant. Mistakes should be presented as new opportunities to learn and to prevent them from becoming frustrated, corrections should be made gradually and progressively.

Furthermore, another aspect I gazed my attention on was the time the teacher spent speaking in class in L2. I must say that I was positively surprised, practically the whole class was taught in English. In spite of this, many explanations and reminders were given in L1 as the teacher did so with the intention of making sure that her message had been correctly understood by all the students.

As a final remark, I would like to stress the importance and great help shown, once again, by the use of functional language. Previously, in my own experience as a teacher, I explained its usefulness, and on this occasion, I was also able to observe how it is of great help to know phrases, idioms and many expressions that serve to express oneself and others' ideas in everyday situations.

9. Remarks and improvements proposals

After reflecting on my own experience as a teacher, the interpretation of the answers to the questionnaire given to my internship teacher and the direct observation of the classes, and more specifically, of the development of the oral or speaking activities, I will now present the conclusions I have attained.

First of all, and referring to one of the main problems presented from the beginning of this project, I can confirm the scarcity of spontaneous oral interaction exercises that give rise to worthy real situations where students use the L2 as a communicative tool. This unfavorable balance for speaking is because teachers neglect it and try to fill a void with other skills such as reading and writing or the insistence on grammatical structures.

The English textbook is usually one of the main resources and/or materials used by teachers and most of the oral interaction exercises in them tend to be repetitive and not very similar to real situations. Therefore, I firmly believe that exercises to stimulate oral production should be implemented regularly and that respond to real needs in order to work on it unconsciously with a communicative approach. I have also observed that by performing roleplays the only thing that is achieved is that the student learns by heart a dialogue prepared in advance and reproduces it a parrot-fashioned way without really understanding the communicative function, since seldom is it performed in a casual, genuine and laid-back way.

According to the contents of programs such as CLIL or CEFRL and the arguments put forward in the theoretical framework of this paper, I must place special emphasis on the insistence and effort in teaching foreign language classes in the target language. Linguistic immersion in the L2 is essential to accelerate and flourish the process of teaching and learning it. Therefore, I must reaffirm the importance of the teacher using English to achieve greater exposure time to the language and insist that the students use it in the same way.

With this in mind, I would like to highlight the idea that teachers should create and implement, as much as possible, a series of fun and enjoyable activities to encourage

oral production and interaction in the EFL classroom. These types of exercises help to foster motivation and, thus, a higher degree of participation.

In order to achieve communicative efficiency and a language with the same purpose, it is key to teach functional language on a regular basis so that students have sufficient linguistic means so that an informal conversation is not paralyzed or interrupted by a lack of language resources. As a result, they ought to be taught to express themselves with confidence and overcome the barrier of insecurity, shyness and embarrassment that slows down and affects oral interaction in the foreign language classroom.

Having said this, in the following section I will present the design of an activity where the above-mentioned elements are developed. According to the requirements in oral production and interaction established by the CEFRL, and considering the basic needs to achieve a full civic, personal and social development required for an adequate Linguistic Communication Competence, I will further proceed to propose an activity to promote oral interaction in the English classroom.

10. Design and implementation of an activity to foster oral interaction

The following activity and Learning Situation has been designed to be taught to a group of students in the first year of Bachillerato. This activity has been elaborated with the aim of promoting oral interaction in the classroom as this is the main topic of my project.

The basic knowledge of the language and grammatical structures has already been taught and reviewed millions of times during previous courses and stages. The students already have a sufficient level to be able to put the language into practice. In addition, at this age the students have already reached a certain degree of maturity and are able to maintain this type of activity without shyness, embarrassment or insecurity preventing them from doing so. It is also at this age that this last objective must be achieved, since at later ages it becomes an even more difficult task.

10.1. Activity proposal: Small Talks

The activity title refers to small conversations that take place informally in different situations of real and daily life. These are usually dialogues between two or more people that have not been planned in advance and that test their linguistic and communicative skills. By doing so, students demonstrate their knowledge of the L2 and, as the activity progresses, they try to improve it step by step, thus guaranteeing useful and meaningful learning.

The class should be separated into groups of two. It is key that the teacher considers the small percentage of students who are not very participative and joins them during this process with other students with opposite conditions so that a balance is achieved amongst them. The exercise involves randomly choosing a model of a real situation or current situation from different models. The teacher must explain the context in which they find themselves and the different elements that make up the situation and it is the

students who must begin to maintain a dialogue according to the circumstances, subject to improvisation, after a very brief period of less than a minute to think about it.

Altogether, there are five different situations, as described below. It will be taken into consideration that the students with a more advanced level should be the first to act it out so that the others take their participation as an example or model to follow. In the teacher's explanation of the situation, useful vocabulary and expressions will also be provided as idiomatic support in each situation or scenario.

SITUATION 1

While you are dining at a restaurant, the server delays asking for your food order and even after waiting for a while, he fails to provide you with the menu. Eventually, when you decide on a particular dish, the server brings you a different meal that you are allergic to.

Character 1: Customer => Get angry because you have waited for so long and order a main course dish, a drink and a dessert.

Character 2: Waiter => Try to persuade or explain that it is first day at work, you are having a bad day and that you are very busy.

SITUATION 2

After arriving in India, you discover that your luggage has not been delivered to you at the airport. You are required to report this problem to the airline's office. Later on, when you reach your hotel, they send you suitcases belonging to someone else, but surprisingly the clothes inside fit you perfectly.

Character 1: Customer => You are in despair because you can't find your luggage and you are very exhausted and find this situation quite unnecessary.

Character 2: Assistant in the airline's office => You don't see at all any reason to be angry and sad and ask for the hotels address to send the luggage if found and to seek forgiveness, offer to send a refund on the airplane ticket alongside an all expenses paid trip to anywhere the customer suggests.

SITUATION 3

You are at a crowded concert, eagerly waiting for Bad Bunny to start singing. As the show begins, he starts singing a song that you don't recognize. You turn to the person standing next to you and politely ask them what the name of the song is, hoping they might know. Unfortunately, the person also seems clueless and unable to help you. You try to listen closely to the lyrics, *Shazam* it hoping to catch a clue, but the loud music and cheers from the audience make it difficult to hear.

Character 1: Fan 1 (the one who doesn't know the song) => Politely ask the person next to them if they know the name of the song. If they don't know, ask them if they are enjoying the concert and if they have any personal favourite songs by the singer. Finally, you can try to make a connection by sharing your own favourite songs or asking the other person about their music preferences (genres, eras, etc.).

Character 2: Fan 2 => If they know the name of the song, tell the person the name of it and maybe share a fun fact about it. If you don't know the name, apologize and maybe make a comment about how the singer is uttering a deep cut or a new song that hasn't been released yet. Finally, keep the conversation going by sharing your own music tastes or asking more questions about the other person's preferences, hobbies, the reasons they came for or where they are from, among other aspects.

SITUATION 4

You are at a party, and you accidentally spill your drink on someone's shirt. You have to apologize and offer to help clean it up or find any other scapegoat to offer a solution for the hassle you have caused.

Character 1: The one who spilled the drink => First of all, apologize immediately and take responsibility for the accident. Later, offer to help clean up the mess or offer to pay for dry cleaning if necessary. You can also start a conversation to ease any tension and show that you are genuinely sorry for what happened. This could be as simple as asking the person how their day has been or complimenting something they're wearing.

Character 2: Whose shirt got spilled on => Acknowledge that accidents happen and that you don't hold a grudge against the other person. Thank them for offering to help and respond to their conversation starters and try to continue the conversation, showing that you are open to chatting with them. If there is still tension, try to diffuse it by making a joke or light-hearted comment about the situation.

SITUATION 5

You are at a job interview and the interviewer asks you a question that you don't know how to answer. You have to think on your feet and come up with a response.

Character 1: The interviewee => Take a deep breath and remain calm, trying not to show panic or stress. Ask the interviewer to repeat or rephrase the question if they didn't understand it. If they still don't know the answer, they could admit honestly that they don't know but follow up by asking questions to better understand what the interviewer is looking for. If possible, they could draw from their own experience or knowledge to provide a thoughtful response, even if it is not a direct answer to the question.

Character 2: The interviewer => Be patient and understanding, recognizing that the candidate may feel stressed or nervous. If the candidate asks for clarification or repeats the question, try to rephrase it or provide examples to help them better understand. Look for potential in the candidate's response, even if it is not a direct answer to the question and follow up with more questions or prompts to help guide them towards a better response. Be friendly and supportive, acknowledging that it is a difficult situation and that it's okay to not have all the answers.

10.2. Procedure

This learning situation and/or didactic unit has been designed for five or six complete 55-minute sessions. The time can fluctuate depending on the ratio of students and the time spent on each performance or presentation.

During the first five to eight minutes of the session, the teacher should explain the instructions to the students for the activity to be carried out. The class is then divided into groups of two, considering the level of knowledge and the degree of participation of each student in order to achieve homogeneous and balanced groups.

Afterwards, and within a period of ten to fifteen minutes, the teacher will explain each situation so that the students understand the different elements involved and the type of language they should use to adopt and adapt to the situation.

In the remaining time of the session, thirty to thirty-five minutes will be devoted exclusively to group presentations. Considering that the average ratio in schools is 30 students per class and that each group, approximately, needs about five minutes to carry out its task, the following session will be devoted only to the remaining groups to finish the activity and a short period for the teacher and students to make corrections and give out feedback they deem appropriate.

10.3. Follow-up

This learning situation is sequenced in this format as to it being carried out twice in the same evaluation period. The first time the activity is carried out, I consider that the students, being subject to improvisation, will put into operation all the resources they have without prior planning. However, the second time the same activity is carried out, the students already have a history of experiences that will guide them to perform their presentations with more perfection, confidence, self-esteem and self-belief alongside the advantage of not making the mistakes that may have occurred in the first attempt. The goal is to polish their ideas and bring them forward from their brains to their tongues.

By doing so, students will become aware of the needs of this activity and overcome previous flaws and obstacles. Students are engaged in constructing their own knowledge and improving their skills in this context. Meaningful learning can be guaranteed as the lesson has been gradual, authentic, realistic, fun and discovery-based.

10.4. Objectives

The objective of this activity, as I said before, is to work on interactive skills and to develop the communicative proficiency of the students so that they acquire a repertoire of strategies to use them in specific real-life situations. In order to achieve this, the student must be able to speak spontaneously, adapting to the circumstances of the context and preparing a communicative exchange where the message is developed according to the evolution and mediation of different topics and ideas. Therefore, in the interaction process, not only oral production but also comprehension strategies are put into action.

Another goal to be achieved is adequate competence in linguistic communication. The following components have been taken into account: the socio-cultural component for its knowledge of the world and the cultural dimension; the strategic component that allows each individual to overcome difficulties and solve problems that arise in the communicative act; and the personal component that intervenes in the communicative interaction with aspects such as attitude, motivation and personality traits.

According to CEFRL guidelines, casual conversation is considered as an exercise in oral interaction and speaking spontaneously, on the other hand, as an exercise in oral production. In order to reach a basic reference level equivalent to A2+, a learner should meet the following objectives, which can be achieved by performing this activity:

- Can give a simple description or presentation of people, living or working conditions, daily activities, likes and dislikes in a short list of simple phrases and sentences.

- Can participate in conversations with reasonable comfort in structured situations and in short conversations as long as the other person helps him/her if necessary. Moreover, can interact in simple, routine exchanges without much effort, asking and answering questions and exchanging ideas and information on everyday topics in predictable, everyday situations.

10.5. Assessment

With regard to the assessment, as aforementioned, I have solely focused on the oral or speaking skill. The specific competences or evaluation indicators to be chosen were 3 and 4, taken from the First Foreign Language Curriculum (English) for 1st Bachillerato (BOC 2023/58, 2023).

Specific Competence 3: To interact actively with others, with sufficient fluency and accuracy and with spontaneity, using cooperative strategies and employing analog and digital resources, to respond to communicative purposes in respectful exchanges within the rules of decorum: informal and formal.

In other words, they have to learn to plan, participate and collaborate assertively and actively in interactive situations on topics of personal relevance or of public interest known to the students, showing initiative, empathy and respect for linguistic courtesy. Furthermore, they must pay attention to the different needs, ideas, concerns, initiatives and motivations of the interlocutors by offering explanations, arguments and comments, in order to strengthen and expand personal ties, as well as participate in social life with autonomy.

Specific Competence 4: To mediate between different languages or varieties, or between the modalities or registers of the same language, using effective strategies and skills aimed at explaining concepts and opinions or simplifying messages, in order to convey information effectively, clearly and responsibly, and to create a positive environment that facilitates communication.

This could also be referred to interpreting and explaining communicational acts of short and progressively more complex length, in situations in which diversity must be taken into account, showing respect and appreciation for the interlocutors, as well as for the languages, linguistic varieties or registers used, and participating in the solution of frequent problems of intercomprehension and understanding based on diverse resources and supports, in order to construct and modify knowledge, and in this way to transmit information in an effective, clear and responsible manner, as well as to create a positive environment that facilitates communication.

The key competences present in these two benchmarks are as follows:

- Competence in Linguistic Communication
- Competence in Digital Proficiency
- Competence in Sociocultural Contexts
- Competence in Learn to Learn (AA)

Frankly speaking, I have not followed any strict assessment method but rather direct or class observation. Seeking improvement through feedback is rooted in the principles of formative assessment. That being said, providing ongoing feedback and remarks to students throughout the learning process with the goal of improving learning outcomes is what I have trusted on.

One of the keys to success is evaluating raw scenarios and real student performances rather than relying solely on traditional testing methods such as exams or quizzes. This means that teachers are able to observe students in real-world situations, such as during class discussions, group work, or other collaborative activities. By observing students, I was able to put myself in their shoes in these contexts and could get a more complete picture of their understanding and progress. In other words, I have been able to provide targeted feedback to help them improve through an active role in their own learning. Thus, I reckon that this approach to assessment can be especially effective in subjects like language learning, where mastery is a long process that takes time and practice, and where students benefit from an ongoing input and output of feedback and support.

10.6. Results of the implementation of the activity in class

As aforementioned, an array of small talk activities has been implemented to help students practice their communication skills and fluency in English. Some positive and negative outcomes, difficulties or limitations that arose during its implementation, and any surprises or unexpected aspects that emerged will be commented upon. The aim is to provide a nuanced and balanced scrutiny of the impact of the small talk activity on the target audience and to provide insights for future implementations of this technique, which will be discussed in the next section.

These oral activities were implemented in 1º Bachillerato, within the tight time and limited sessions that I was granted, since I began my internship at the end of the second semester and began my learning situation practically in the third semester. This led to the English teacher in hurrying me up in not spending that much time working on the speaking skill, since she did not have enough motivation or necessary resources, such as pitch-perfect computers, good Wi-fi connectivity or operative overhead projectors, to invest that time on developing oral skills in depth. One of the reasons that explains this issue was based on the urgency that the teacher had to rush and move forward as much as she could before the end of the third semester and have the marks for each one of the skills of her students.

During the implementation of the oral activities described above, there were certain aspects that deserve to be highlighted. Firstly, being aware of the current situation in the group and the different work rhythms the students presented was my concern. My initial fear was that the proposed activities would not generate any motivation or interest and thereby cause a lack of participation.

Nevertheless, although at the beginning they were taken aback and lost because they were not used to being proactive, thinking and being part of activities that encouraged the development of conversations or small interactions where they could make use of the content they desired, the degree of involvement and participation in the activities was gradually quite favorable.

One primordial factor that contributed to the effectiveness of the speaking activities was the dynamism and buoyancy students offered as it helped them to stand up, move around the classroom and find a partner to converse with. Moreover, giving them heads up and compliments when they performed correctly was of utmost importance as well. These two elements helped them to break through their “shyness prison” and step into a new and unknown situation with confidence and grit.

A bonus factor that helped was the way in which the oral activities were focused on the random yet realistic topics of conversation. While designing the oral activities, the aim that was sought entailed establishing small interactions where the learner could approach a conversation about an everyday matter in the foreign language, also using all the background knowledge or information they had learned in the previous units.

All of this meant not only that the students avoided the typical curriculum-based and traditional functioning of an English session, where the use of Burlington textbooks and the performance of grammar exercises with its consequent automation takes place, but it also provided the students with contextualized situations that allow them to see the usefulness and practicality of the topics that they usually talk about in their mother tongue in their encounters with students or friends inside and outside the classroom.

Another aspect, which I frankly believe has made the student participation rate rise, has been my level of involvement and effort in these oral activities to reduce any feelings of embarrassment, anxiety or fear of making mistakes and being mocked or ridiculed by the students. I reckon that my sense of commitment to participate with the students in the oral activities was not only motivated to get closer to them and to know what their interests were. I also did not want to be perceived under the typical asymmetrical constraints and strict norms that characterize any teacher-student relationship.

I under no circumstances wanted to be seen as an authority figure or as an eminence who possessed every drop of knowledge concerning English and who sought the same “perfection” for his students. On the contrary, to avoid these feelings of reticence in the students, I tried to participate in these so that they would have the opportunity to ask me questions when they did not know how to express something in English and so that we

would both engage in a feedback process to get to know each other better. I even did it so that they would normalize error as a characteristic element in the process of learning a second language. In those moments when they called me to check if what they were going to say was right, instead of labeling their speech as “wrong” or “inaccurate”, I suggested numerous alternatives to rephrase their message using simpler vocabulary and expressions. In this way, I also contributed to teaching them to avoid keeping quiet if they were not very sure about something. This piece of advice made their level of coyness and timidity to participate decrease substantially, and I could see that they felt more and more confident in addressing me and interacting as a group in the classroom.

Generally speaking, they expressed their gratitude for having been their English teacher for a few weeks. To make sure and determine the level of appropriateness of the activities in their development and involvement, I asked them if the activity had been useful to them. They replied that it was really useful, much more than they had ever imagined. Then, for each scenario, I asked them to tell me what they would highlight about the oral activities and their degree of satisfaction within if the activity had been favorable. Among a mosaic of reflections, I would highlight the following:

- That they had learned to get to know each other better.
- That it was fun and hilarious to get up and talk to their classmates.
- The fact that they were able to have time to be around the classroom, and that the sessions were not as usual (copying in the notebook while remaining “silent”).
- The opportunity to freely go around the classroom chatting with whomever they wanted to and find out that English can be combined with other disciplines such as in acting.
- That it helped them to practice in a real conversation and to communicate better.

- That the practicum teacher helped them as much as they could and was involved with them in every single moment.

Furthermore, they emphasized that they liked the way we worked on the Speaking skill through these oral activities. Roughly speaking, they enjoyed it more because they were more fun and creative, and they have learned more vocabulary by being able to practice it in real and authentic situations.

Afterwards, they stated that it was something innovative and different that was far from the activities in the book, which they found boring and tedious. They also stated that the topics covered in the oral activities were more entertaining, highlighting the amenity and engagement of the activities. Above all, one student confessed that these activities helped him to loosen up more and to cope with conversational encounters in an easier way.

Although the level of excitement, involvement and participation of the students in the oral activities could not have been better, since they were not used to carrying out activities that promoted mobility in the classroom and demanded the use of the L2 at all times, I could perceive how easily they were distracted and fidgety, which often caused them to disconnect and talk about issues that were not related to the activity. They did all this in L1. To prevent this from happening in most cases, I undertook to participate with them in each of the oral activities as a method of monitoring their oral interactions. Even if the percentage of their mother tongue use was higher than that of the foreign language, as soon as I approached them to interact, the use of L1 decreased and they began to make efforts to express themselves in L2. I considered this phenomenon as something normal since they used their mother tongue in almost all the English sessions on a daily basis and thereby being used to it and struggling to leave on the side.

At the same time, through the array of oral activities, I could see that the students were doing wonders to express themselves in L2, but many times they did not know how to form a sentence at all. This was mainly due to the scarce time dedicated to the Speaking skill in the classroom. I could witness how the students made great efforts to be able to communicate in the L2 and even so, they did not succeed. On the other hand, concerning the grammar exercises with my tutor, which were more mechanical, seldom

were there any issues since they had been applying a grammatical structure in thousands of sentences due to an explanation that had been repeated ad nauseam in the L1.

As a self-critique, I must add that, although my intention in developing these oral activities was aimed at improving the development of oral skills in the classroom, I made some mistakes in the implementation process. One of them was that my didactic proposal was somewhat ambitious, and I was so eager to arouse the students' interest, that perhaps the activities were complex according to their level. Although my proposal was contextualized on everyday issues, in which students were expected to assume roles to express communicative functions and contribute to problem solving, the model I created was longer than the dialogues they had been working with previously, which did not need improvisation or creation of their own content. Although my initial goal was to give them guidance on how to create their dialogues using functional structures and sentences that would be useful to them, it was almost impossible for them to create their own dialogues. My internship tutor had confessed to me that they would be unable to remember everything they had been talking about with their partner and write it in their notebooks, so we had no choice, much to my regret for reasons of time, but to make them follow the structure of the example small talk dialogues I created and change some words. The majority were unable to improvise and needed a piece of paper or would get nervous and start from the get-go when they stuttered or got stuck during a phrase. Most students struggled with constructing phrases but were exquisite at writing them on paper to learn it by heart.

All in all, it should be noted that despite the complications that may have arisen in the implementation procedure, these oral activities have tried to connect students with situations that are really close and relevant to reality. I humbly opine that they might not have improved as much as one would have wanted in their linguistic realm, but they have raised their self-esteem and stepped out of their timid bubble and comfort zone. Hence, one of the goals has been achieved and my experience as an internship teacher with them has been tremendously satisfactory.

10.7. Feasible improvements proposals

The activities are entirely subject to improvements and modifications. The level of difficulty can be altered according to the level of the class, the different models of real situations can be changed, or simply more or less vocabulary and useful expressions can be provided along with them, even giving as complete sentences as idiomatic support, which can be extremely useful as a guide so that the students can then follow with their own contributions.

Another improvement that can be made is to adapt the exercise, not only to the interaction between two interlocutors or students, but to be developed by more than two participants, creating situations where more people are required.

On the other hand, subject to image rights and parental authorization, interactions can be recorded in the classroom or even online for later analysis with a critical view in order to take them as an example to improve the second time the same activity is carried out. These can also be used to detect and improve intonation, pronunciation and grammar failures altogether.

Finally, another improvement for this activity can be to add, at one point during the participants' performance, new types of circumstances, words, instructions, or surprise elements that cause the learners to adapt their speech to the new situation. This will make it more challenging yet more effective and enjoyable for the learners.

11. Additional suggested activities to develop oral interaction

It is worth mentioning that the use of technology and gadgets in EFL classrooms has become increasingly ubiquitous in today's world, as it offers various opportunities for students to learn in more engaging, enjoyable and interactive ways. That being said, a mere mobile phone can enhance traditional teaching methods and provide students with access to an array of resources and information that might not be available otherwise. According to a study by the National Education Association (NEA), the integration of technology in the classroom can improve student cooperation, engagement, motivation, and achievement (NEA, 2020).

Furthermore, the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in education has also gained momentum in recent years, as it offers a new paradigm of teaching and learning. ICTs refer to a wide range of digital tools, such as computers, smartphones, tablets, and the Internet, that can be implemented to boost and flourish the teaching and learning process. According to Demiralay and Karadeniz (2010), ICTs can help to increase access to education, improve the quality of teaching and learning, and enhance the overall efficiency of the education system.

To my surprise, the high-school where I am doing my internship or practicum does not allow students to work with their mobile phones even if it were to be used in a class where it ought to be necessary. The teacher can use technology but rather than it being a backbone, it turns into a teaching hindrance due to its conditions. Moreover, technology can only be used by teachers, which impedes a reciprocal and mutual dynamic because students are not allowed to fully engage in the activity with them. This obligatory rule is a major drawback and therefore my following proposal is a hypothetical one for further development in a classroom where technology is thoroughly allowed.

The activity title is **Craiyon**. The chosen name acts as a pun and it refers to a small pencil or stick of coloured chalk or wax, used for drawing paintings. Thus, the name is a combination of the aforementioned tool and the term AI. The goal of this activity is to

foster everyday descriptions that take place informally in different situations of real life. These are a type of language that is used to communicate the characteristics, qualities, and features of a person, place, thing, or idea. In some sense, they are used to create a mental image in the mind of the listener or interlocutor. In this way, helping them in uttering a good description will help them be oral tycoons and visualize or imagine what they are surrounded by. They will have to improvise and test their linguistic and communicative skills. By doing so, students can test their knowledge of the L2 and try to improve it gradually, thus guaranteeing practical and effective learning.

Additionally, descriptions are an important tool in effective communication and can be used in a wide range of contexts, from creative writing and storytelling to scientific or technical writing, advertising, and marketing. In language learning, descriptions can be a crucial and foremost tool to help learners develop their vocabulary, improve their speaking skills, and learn to express themselves more clearly, naturally and effectively.

Altogether, there are 10 different pictures, as described in Appendix II. Firstly, the teacher will illustrate some images regarding quotidian activities and the students have to describe what is happening. This will be the initial task and they have to solely rely on their linguistic level. Afterwards, they will have to create their own pictures through an app named DALL-E, which will be mentioned in Appendix II. As a preliminary activity, I will be describing a picture myself, which will count as an example or model to be followed by them. In my explanation of the situation, useful vocabulary and expressions will also be provided as an idiomatic auxiliary for further use. The steps to be followed in the activity are:

1. Finding an image created by DALL-E that is relevant to daily activities. You can search for images online or generate them yourself using DALL-E.
2. Showing the image to your students and giving them some time to look at it carefully. Encouraging them to notice all the details in the image and think about how they could describe them.

3. Asking your students to take turns describing the image orally. Encourage them to use descriptive language, such as adjectives, adverbs, and sensory words, to paint a vivid picture of the image in their listeners' minds.
4. As your students are describing the image, make sure to provide feedback and corrections as needed. You can also ask follow-up questions to encourage more detailed descriptions and help your students practice their speaking skills.
5. As a twist to this activity, they will have to unravel their artistic side. They will have to generate images by giving prompts or descriptions to the DALL-E AI and they will send it to me once they have done so. Later, you could create an online Art Gallery where every single picture will be portrayed with anonymity.
6. The students will be told to describe each image in their own words. You will also tell them that while sensory details are important, descriptions may also include information about several aspects such as size, shape, color, texture, and other physical characteristics of the object being described. In addition, descriptions can also convey emotional or psychological qualities, such as mood, tone, or atmosphere.
7. Finally, you can ask your students to compare and contrast their descriptions of the image, noting any similarities and differences. This will help them practice their listening and speaking skills and learn from each other's descriptions.

This *crescendo* impetus that technology has adopted inside, and outside classrooms has to be considered by teachers and future upcoming generations. English must not be only treated as a mere language subject but rather as an interdisciplinary way to connect with other subjects. Intertwining English with other ingredients such as technology and art can have a deeper impact on students' performance and therefore, build multifaceted beings. Thus, the sheer reason behind the design of this activity is to make them more outgoing, confident, extroverted and be able to adapt to multiple situations.

12. Conclusions

After conducting this research, with the main aim of analyzing the development of oral production and interaction and the design and implementation of a didactic unit to promote oral skills by simulating a real context, I have reached the conclusions that I shall describe below.

First and foremost, I must emphasize the importance of oral interaction in L2 during our teaching exercises. Even if language teaching has improved substantially, output activities must still be given the relevance they deserve. These exercises must be fully connected to the learners' niches of interest, leading to meaningful learning in an almost unconscious way. When students are fully involved in an activity where they have to maintain a spontaneous and genuine conversation, it is possible to give this subject a communicative approach and interesting twist to show their knowledge and skills.

Putting our students' oral skills to work is when we allow them to really express themselves and use all the resources and materials they have studied to communicate in the classroom. This process is not only relevant in the classroom but should be extrapolated to contexts outside the educational environment. It is not convenient to stop paying attention to the communicative ability of students as it is our tool for them to function properly in our society. To this, we must add that nowadays it is of vital importance to know a second language that allows us to communicate globally and survive as English allows us to do.

Oral production and interaction allow students a real approach to their surrounding world. It is only when speaking with other interlocutors that we can master it, learn from our mistakes and/or flaws in pronunciation or structure and overcome possible problems of confidence or shyness. In short, the L2 must achieve the same function as the mother tongue.

In the educational context, we cannot relegate speaking exercises to the background. On the contrary, teachers ought to provide students with all the tools they need so that English does not become an obstacle but rather a stepping stone in their future goals.

To do this, we must motivate them by creating the need to communicate, we must teach them how to do it and we must make them aware of it. This is the only way to transmit the true use of a language. The EFL classroom must be the perfect platform and door to immerse students in the L2 and get them to learn it while reading, listening, writing and, above all, speaking.

Furthermore, I must stress the importance of EFL classes being taught in the language we intend to teach. In this way we achieve a linguistic immersion classroom where we expose students to the target language for a longer period of time, providing them with comprehensible input as a necessary condition for learning a language. However, it is not enough on its own, and requires output, or speaking exercises, as a complement to this learning journey that forces the student to produce the language.

I cannot end this project without mentioning the importance of adapting some of the academic activities to the virtual or online platform. It has been more than demonstrated to us, during the lockdown in previous years, that new technologies can be a salvation if they are used properly, since they allow the development of learning situations with more ease, flexibility and comfortability without any element interfering in this teaching and learning process. Technology is often considered an enemy, but it has helped many students unravel their talents and, above all, overcome their fear of talking in English. Is technology becoming our friend?

Finally, we must take into account the factors that prevent the active participation of many students from happening. I reckon that we must detect them in order to implement appropriate strategies and solve them as soon as possible. Activities should be designed depending on the level of the students, on what really interests and motivates them and on the specific aspects that affect them negatively, such as anxiety levels or low self-esteem. These activities should be, above all, fun and enjoyable. Students should not be under pressure. On the contrary, they must enjoy the activity they are doing. Everything that is learned with a smile will never be forgotten.

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Appendices

APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW-QUESTIONNAIRE IMPLEMENTED ON ENGLISH TEACHER

1. Of the four skills in foreign language teaching, how much time do you spend on each of them? If there is one that you spend more time on, could you explain why?

I spend more or less these percentages: Reading: 80%, Listening: 70%, Speaking: 50% and Writing: 40%. Undoubtedly, I spend much more time on homework and tasks related to Reading and Listening.

For me, Reading has a quadruple function, that's why I spend so much time on it. Let me explain it to you briefly:

- It is a door that opens many fields for them: knowing the vocabulary of the unit they are going to start working on. It may be new vocabulary and, as they read and learn new aspects of a topic (technology, environment, music, fashion, etc.) and at the same time they learn new vocabulary in context and not in isolation. Vocabulary in context is more effective and its easier for them to remember in their tiny little brains.
- Grammatical structures are also present in these readings and relationships can be established between different skills that are interconnected if I may say so. In addition, students are usually interested in the content of the readings, and this facilitates the acquisition of vocabulary and grammatical points.
- There are many expressions and connectors that the students can use in their future writings, drawing from the source of the readings (idioms, fixed expressions, linking words, number of words in each paragraph...).

- They practice pronunciation, read aloud and help each other with pronunciation and intonation. It is very interesting to observe how they copy the audio model, their classmates and how they self-correct when they realize that they have not pronounced it well and they repeat the word a thousand times until getting it right or spot on. Sometimes, I give them a few seconds to do it and they get it right away. On other occasions, (without making corrections to the student who has read it) I ask another classmate to read it and let the first one notice their mistakes or pronunciation issues. If they still can't do it on their own, then I ask the class to reinforce the pronunciation. I avoid correcting students out loud, as much as possible, because they are often embarrassed to read. They might think that I'm humiliating them. Although it is a small number of students, it is a matter of pulling everyone together and bringing the whole group forward without going into sensitivities, insecurities and complexes that they themselves already bring or create.
- After reading comprehension, we do interaction in which I ask them "out loud" and thus, encourage them to comment on the content of the reading or answer questions, without them noticing that they are participating by practicing the oral or speaking skills.

As you can see, Reading is an incredible way for me to practice various skills at the same time as I work "only on Reading".

2. Which of these four skills do students have the hardest time with? Why?

Writing without a doubt.

- Writing requires a lot of time and dedication and, although I dedicate time to it within the 4 weekly class sessions, the ratio and the learning needs (together with the different backgrounds of the students) make it difficult to dedicate more time to it. To overcome this problem, I try to motivate them with simple projects in which they express themselves -in writing- and forget their prejudices when writing in English and focus on the topic or objective of the project. In order for

them to work collaboratively, (which is a help for some and a reinforcement of their knowledge for others) I organize them in small groups or pairs.

- Students write less and less (not only in the foreign languages they study but also in their mother tongue), technology (cell phones, social networks...) makes them part of the oral production work and this causes little involvement in writing on behalf of the students, either in their own language or in a foreign one. This factor does not help to encourage the habit of writing both inside and outside the educational environment. Fortunately, this is not the case for all of them, and we are glad about that.

3. How often do you prepare Speaking activities for them?

Every 15 days, sometimes every week, depending on the needs of the group and the time factor in the school calendar (sessions in each trimester, vacation weeks in each trimester, Christmas, Carnival, Easter, etc.).

4. Is participation lower than with other types of activities? If so, what do you think are the main factors that impede or hinder oral production?

Yes, although it depends on each group. The participation is not always lower, in 2 of my 3 groups the participation is higher than in the remaining one.

Factors:

- Shyness, self-esteem of a fortunately small percentage of the students in the group, prejudices as to what it means to speak in English.
- Level of the students in this skill. Increasingly, we find ourselves with high ratios, many student backgrounds and that makes it difficult to dedicate to this skill that requires the full attention of teachers and involvement of students (always with the support of teachers who guide and accompany them throughout the process of their oral production).

5. How do you think participation in Speaking activities could be fostered or somehow improved?

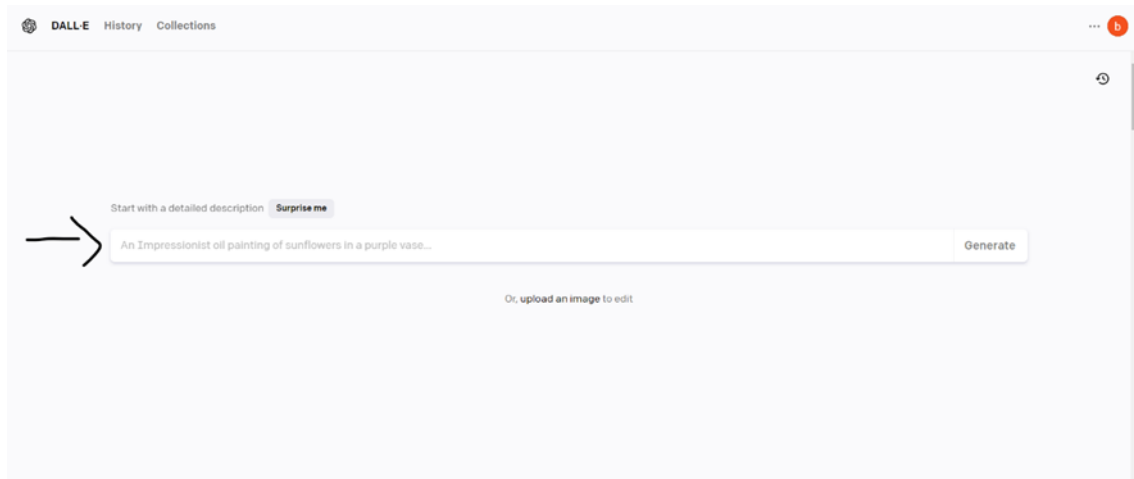
- Organization of small groups or work pairs to prepare small, simple and guided speaking situations (we have already started this in 1st ESO this year).
- Creation of flexible groups so that we can address their difficulties in the process of acquiring speaking skills.
- Creation of debates through topics of interest for the students, so that they are enthusiastic about speaking, giving their opinions, disagreeing... (we already do this in class, when the topics allow it according to the level of the students).
- Exhibition and explanation of small projects (we already do it in class) with topics of interest for the students according to their tastes, preferences, etc.

6. According to you, what do you think about oral/speaking activities?

These types of activities are very important because without them, a language has no meaning whatsoever. Everything that is communicated comes through oral comprehension and oral production. This should always be the starting point for learning a foreign language. From these skills, the student learns to have self-confidence through what he hears, without having to see it in writing to understand it. This is one of the points I try, at all times, to make my students understand so that they have confidence in themselves and their listening skills and are encouraged to practice speaking.

APPENDIX 2

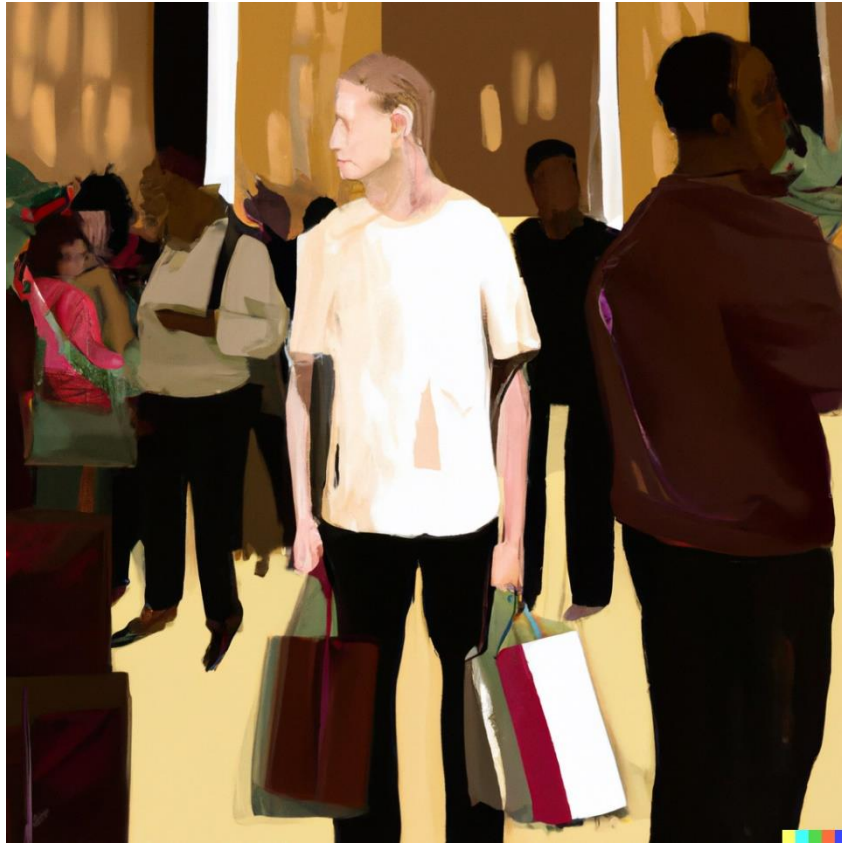
This is the layout of the DALL-E website, and the arrow is pointing towards where the command ought to be written:



I have used 10 images, which will be described and discussed in class. So, these are related to several daily-life or quotidian activities:







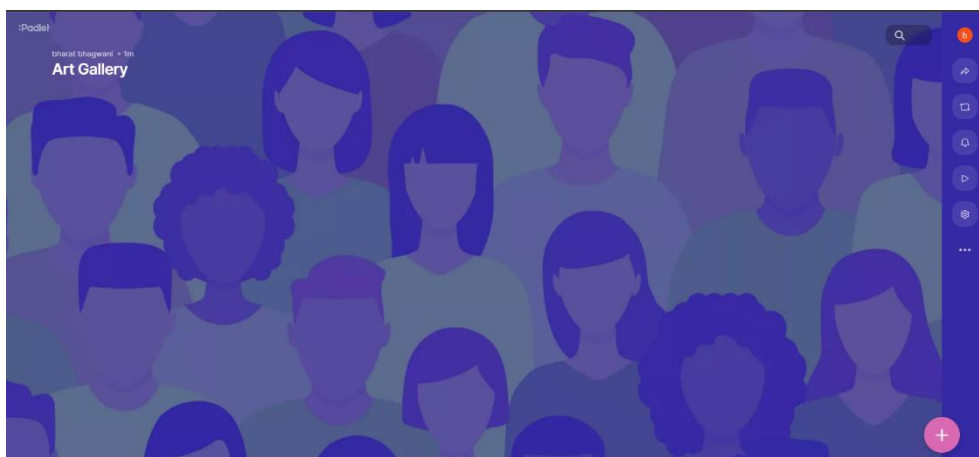






These images represent what this app is capable of and there are infinite commands or ideas that can be inserted here and designed by this “machine”. Afterwards, I totally recommend students to check on similar examples on the website and intake some type of inspiration. Undoubtedly, students can take real-life pictures as well, but this serves as a process to enhance and boost their interest in art and the use of new technological advances.

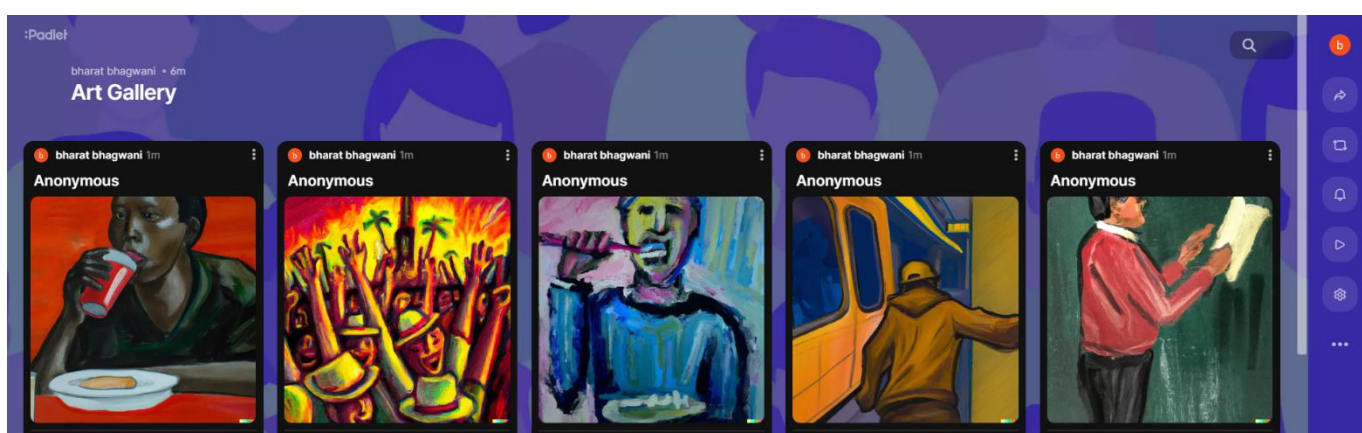
As aforementioned, these images will be sent to me and will be uploaded by me on a mural or virtual gallery. I have decided to elaborate an online art gallery and each single creation will be posted on this page known as: <https://es.padlet.com/>. This is the mural I will be using:



The tables have turned and now it is their time to shine. I have created a fictional yet online sample with the pictures a class in the future might send me. If you click the following link, you will see how I wish to carry out this activity in a school where the use of technology is allowed:

<https://padlet.com/bhartu99/art-gallery-7w9xsr2ijm0tp8cx>

This is one of the screenshots of how it looks if you have issues with Internet that day but if you are able to access it, you can add your own picture:



Voila, this is where this activity ends. The duration or timing of this particular one may vary from two sessions to three sessions depending on the creativity, participation and motivation students put into it. At the end of the day, this is an experiment which may be a hit or a miss. They might like it or hate it, but they will extract or seep a valuable lesson into their minds: “Practice makes perfect.” Incorporating enjoyable and interactive methods into language teaching has proven to be an effective strategy for enhancing student engagement and motivation. By incorporating a variety of engaging activities, such as games, multimedia resources, and creative exercises, students can develop their language skills in an engaging and stimulating environment.

This single activity has touched upon every skill and sometimes teachers tend to do many activities, and these lack quality. Thus, less is more sometimes. The final message is to keep on trying and talking in English until being able to converse with a person. It might seem hard at the beginning but step by step, you will achieve your dreams.