Innovative Didactic Activities to Develop Senior High School Students’ English Speaking Skills

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ABSTRACT

Didactic activities are used by teachers to achieve meaningful learning and to enhance and develop skills in foreign language learners. To overcome the language problems detected at Luis Vargas Torres School in Esmeraldas City, this research aimed as the main objective to analyze the contribution of some innovative didactic activities using technology to develop the students’ communicative speaking skills. The study was designed as a mixed type, with a descriptive approach, and was carried out from December 11, 2023, to January 19, 2024. The sample was composed of 24 students in their third year of Senior High school. The techniques used were a pre-test, a post-test, and a documentary study to design the activities to use during the research. The results of the pre-test showed that 50% of the sample did not pass the test because of problems with fluency, accuracy in pronunciation and grammar, and comprehension; but after the activities using technology, the post-test showed language improvements in most of the students. The technological tools used were the Internet, with worksheet pages and videos, YouTube, and smartphones with the WhatsApp and Messenger applications, all of which respond to TELL (Technology Enhanced Language Learning). It is concluded that the activities designed proved that they cater to social interaction purposes and serve as oral reinforcement of language fluency, accuracy, and course content since they helped to consolidate previous pieces of knowledge that were not fully mastered.

Keywords: innovative didactic activities; senior high school students; english speaking skills; technological tools

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Actividades Didácticas Innovadoras para Desarrollar las Habilidades de Habla en Inglés de Estudiantes de Bachillerato

RESUMEN

Las actividades didácticas son utilizadas por los docentes para lograr un aprendizaje significativo y para mejorar y desarrollar habilidades en los estudiantes de idiomas extranjeros. Para superar los problemas de idioma detectados en la Escuela Luis Vargas Torres en la ciudad de Esmeraldas, esta investigación tuvo como objetivo principal analizar la contribución de algunas actividades didácticas innovadoras utilizando tecnología para desarrollar las habilidades comunicativas de habla de los estudiantes. El estudio se diseñó como un tipo mixto, con un enfoque descriptivo, y se llevó a cabo desde el 11 de diciembre de 2023 hasta el 19 de enero de 2024. La muestra estuvo compuesta por 24 estudiantes de tercer año de bachillerato. Las técnicas utilizadas fueron un pretest, un post-test y un estudio documental para diseñar las actividades a utilizar durante la investigación. Los resultados del pretest mostraron que el 50% de la muestra no aprobó la prueba debido a problemas de fluidez, precisión en la pronunciación y gramática, y comprensión; pero después de las actividades utilizando tecnología, el post-test mostró mejoras en el lenguaje en la mayoría de los estudiantes. Las herramientas tecnológicas utilizadas fueron Internet, con páginas de trabajo y videos, YouTube, y teléfonos inteligentes con las aplicaciones WhatsApp y Messenger, todas las cuales responden a TELL (Tecnología para el Aprendizaje de Lenguas Mejorado). Se concluye que las actividades diseñadas demostraron que atienden a propósitos de interacción social y sirven como refuerzo oral de la fluidez, precisión y contenido del curso, ya que ayudaron a consolidar conocimientos previos que no estaban completamente dominados.

Palabras clave: actividades didácticas innovadoras; estudiantes de bachillerato; habilidades de habla en inglés; herramientas tecnológicas
INTRODUCTION

Didactic activities are considered techniques used by teachers to achieve meaningful learning and to enhance and develop skills in foreign language learners. “These activities can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval, or use of the new language. Didactic activities are necessary tools for developing communication skills” (Hedge, 2008, p.18). They can also refer to the various teaching approaches and methods used to facilitate the development of speaking skills in students.

All the same, innovative didactic activities emphasize active learning, interaction, and practice opportunities that enable students to improve their oral communication abilities. Many authors and theoreticians have supported the idea that when one masters a language, it is because that person can speak it, to talk in that language (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Krashen, 2003).

In 2007, Harmer put forward a variety of techniques and tasks for instructing oral communication. For instance, collaborative exercises and information gap tasks enable the teaching of this skill by encouraging learners to interact through question-and-answer exchanges, as well as mixed and mingled activities. Additionally, different activities like explaining and illustrating, describing, and organizing, identifying similarities and variances in images, roleplaying, dramatizations, debates, interviews, storytelling, conducting surveys, and group work could also be employed. All these activities have proved to be good, but much more so now that there is the Internet, which allows us to do all those activities (Núñez, 2022, unpublished manuscript; Russo & Cabrera, 2021), but with the support of tools that belong to the Digital Era, an era to which all our students belong.

One important step has been what is called Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL), which refers to the use of computers as a technological innovation to display multimedia as a means of complementing the teaching method of any language teacher. “TELL is not a teaching method but rather an approach that can be used alongside a teaching method to help teach” (Kuning, 2019, p.54). Many technological tools can be utilized in the classroom to create innovative didactic activities. To use sound (audio), it is easy to find radio broadcasts, recorded playback of speeches, or recorded storytelling. For movies, that combine video and audio, the teacher can use short films, interviews, or
even full-length feature movies (according to the student´s language level). If it comes to images, there are charts, paintings, or photos. And there is an enormous quantity of already-made texts (oral or written), such as essays, magazines, articles, emails, chatting, and books. Many of those websites offer materials for free.

The research presented here had two important theoretical supports. On one hand, the study used Classroom Action Research (CAR), which involved planning, actions, observation, and reflection (George, 2023). The investigation focused on senior high school students to encourage them to be more involved in free speaking activities and motivate themselves to improve their speaking skills. On the other hand, based on Vygotsky's Sociocultural approach theory and two fundamental concepts he developed: the culture-specific tools, and the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky’s, 1978).

The innovative activities used took into consideration Vygotsky’s definition of the more knowledgeable other (MKO), who in this study was the teacher, i.e., someone who has a higher level of ability or greater understanding than the learner, regarding a particular task, process, or concept. At the same time, he emphasized the role of social interaction in the development of mental abilities, for example in speech and reasoning, which was the main idea behind this study with the peer interaction, who provided guidance and modeling to enable their colleagues to enhance the speaking skills within their zone of proximal development (the gap between what a child can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance) (Vygotsky’s, 1978). So, Vygotsky’s theory, which encourages collaborative and cooperative learning between students and teachers or peers, became an effective educational strategy.

At Luis Vargas Torres Senior High School, the learners finish every academic course with limited vocabulary and mechanical mastery of some basic structures. The result is seen every day: the students are afraid of speaking because they do not want to make mistakes in public and they do not have enough resources to speak the language with fluency and accuracy. The effects of this problem can branch in many ways. But at present, as it was said, many technological tools are in English, which
allows students to interact with computer apps, most of the time using the Internet (Livingstone, 2011).

Not being able to speak English reduces the students’ opportunities to access English-speaking environments, so they can miss better academic and professional opportunities in their lives since it is not very likely that they will ever go to study at an English-speaking university or work abroad. The authors have noticed that our students face many problems with fluency and accuracy. According to those undesired effects, the scientific question was set as follows:

How can didactic activities using technology benefit the process of developing English-speaking skills for third-year senior high school students at Luis Vargas Torres, in Esmeraldas City? As such, this research aimed as the main objective to analyze the contribution of some innovative didactic activities using technology to develop the student's communicative speaking skills at that specific senior high school. To do that, it was necessary to diagnose their English-speaking skills at the aforementioned institution, so as to design and put into practice specific innovative didactic strategies using technological tools and, finally, evaluate the students' progress in their speaking skills after applying the activities in the classroom instruction.

**METHOD**

This investigation was carried out at Luis Vargas Torres Senior High School, in Esmeraldas City, Ecuador, from December 11, 2023, to January 19, 2024.

The investigation followed a mixed approach. The quantitative part gathered information about the student’s overall language proficiency level (fluency, accuracy, vocabulary range, and grammatical correctness) so that their mastery of the speaking skills could be measured before (pre-test) and after (post-test) the introduction of the independent variable. The qualitative part, through a documental analysis, helped design a set of innovative didactic activities that would enable the students to improve their speaking skills. The research design was pre-experimental, with an exploratory scope.
The population under study was 92 students who were in their third year at the senior high school. The sample, intentionally selected, was composed of 24 students, belonging to one group of that school. They were identified, for ethical issues, with the letter “S” (student) and the number assigned for the research, so they went from S1 to S24.

The theoretical methods used were induction, deduction, analysis, and synthesis. The techniques and instruments used were a pre-test and a post-test to measure the students’ English language proficiency level. The pre-test gave the results of the language level before the activities were designed and introduced, while the post-test showed how much was achieved with the innovative activities used in the classroom.

For the documentary study, a data collection form to gather the information needed to design speaking activities was used. The documents to review were books, journal articles, and theses.

The quantitative data obtained was taken to the Excel program to be tabulated, and then tables and figures were created to show the results better. The qualitative data was written down as text in Word for Windows.

**Results**

The first objective designed was to diagnose the student’s communicative speaking skills. The pre-test applied measured four language dimensions in oral communication: fluency, pronunciation, comprehension, and grammar. The results obtained are shown below.

Table 1 computes the results obtained according to the grades each student achieved in each dimension. As can be seen in the table, there were nine students (37.5%) that scored 3 grades in fluency, pronunciation, comprehension, and grammar; while four students (16.7%) scored 2 marks in fluency, pronunciation, and grammar and 15 obtained 2 in comprehension. Eleven students (45.8%) scored 1 in fluency, pronunciation, and grammar. However, the results in the database show that not all those students coincided in the same range, something that is shown below, in Figure 1.

**Table 1**
Pre-test results according to the four dimensions assessed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dimension</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n=24.

Source: Pre-test applied.

The results mentioned before could be misleading because they did not show how each student scored as a whole. The test results, measured on a scale of 0 to 10 for each learner, are presented in Figure 1. It is possible to see that only 12 students (50%) gained between 7 and 10 grades, which is a “pass” on our scale (but none of them obtained 10). Eight students (a third of them) achieved between 5 and 6.9 marks. Those students are very likely to advance properly when applying the innovative activities planned in this research. A more worrying case is those who were classified between 0 and 4.9 grades, for they showed more gaps and learning problems than the others.

**Figure 1**

*Final pre-test results, according to the grades taken by each of the students assessed.*
With a clear picture of the student’s language level, the documentary study was used to select the technological tools that could be applied in the school and then design innovative didactic activities to help students improve their English Speaking Skills.

**First day using technological tools**

Place: Laboratory

The first activity developed was using the Internet and the liveworksheets.com website. The interactive worksheets on this platform provide a range of features, such as multiple-choice questions, fill-in-the-blanks, matching exercises, and much more.

**Activity 1**: to consolidate the use of the verb “to be” in affirmative and negative sentences.

**Communicative function**: Describing different statuses such as occupation, nationality, color, or physical appearance.
The worksheets selected were these:

![Worksheet Image]

Example of possible answers:

![Worksheet Image]

**Instructions:**

- Complete the gaps with the correct answers using affirmative and negative sentences with the verb *to be*. Follow the example given.

- Compare your answers with the classmate sitting next to you. Be ready to tell the teacher and compare those answers with the rest of the class. (The teacher pays close attention to the speaking subskills, and the correct use of *to be*).

- Finally, the teacher makes the students concentrate on the communicative function for which *To Be* was used here, sentence by sentence.

**Activity 2:** to consolidate the use of verbs to talk about things done regularly.
**Communicative function:** Talking about daily habits and routines.

### My Daily Routine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>wake up</th>
<th>walk to school</th>
<th>exercise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sleep</td>
<td>play with friends</td>
<td>play games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brush my teeth</td>
<td>eat breakfast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>go to bed</td>
<td>go to the shop</td>
<td>eat dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brush my hair</td>
<td>wait the dog</td>
<td>tidy up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Instructions:

- Think of sentences in which you could use all the actions mentioned in the worksheet. In all cases, use different names or pronouns. For example: Martha, Fred and his son, I, she, Nelson, my grandparents.

- Then, record a WhatsApp voice message and send it to a classmate. He/she will later tell the class one of your sentences, so try to speak loudly and clearly.

(The teacher pays close attention to the speaking subskills, and the correct use of the verbs, especially if there is third person singular).

### Activity 3: to consolidate the use of the verb To be to talk about age (the authors have detected the Spanish interference of using the verb To have when talking about how old a person is)

**Communicative function:** Saying how old a person is.

### Instructions:

- Look at the pictures and answer the How Old...? question about each person. Remember you must use the verb to be (is/are) according to the pictures and the information given. Question 5 is for you. Which form of To be do you use?

- Then, exchange notebooks with the classmate sitting next to you. Read out loudly what he/she answered. Do you agree with him/her responses? Finally, score yourselves.

- Using your cellphone, send a picture to the teacher with your score.
Second day using technological tools

Place: Laboratory.

The first activity designed for this day was with the use of mobile phones and the WhatsApp application.

Activity 4: to practice the simple present tense (emphasis on the third person singular, a problem area detected in the pre-test applied).

Communicative function: Talking about daily habits and routines.

- Groups of three students each were formed (for this paper we identified them as A, B, and C in each academic trio).

- The students were given the picture below.
Instructions:

- Select five of the activities or routines shown in the picture you usually do every day. Then,

- Send a WhatsApp voice message to a classmate (Student A would send it to B, student B would send it to C, and student C would send it to A). In the message, you must tell the selected classmate the 5 things you do every day.

- The corresponding classmate would take down notes about those activities and then send a message to the other student in that trio, telling him/her about the activities his first classmate had told him/ her. It was important to focus on the form of the verb when reporting in the third person singular. The Teacher writes one example on the board: Ronald plays soccer every day at 1 pm / Ronald plays soccer at 1 pm every day.

- Finally, some academic trios were checked in front of the whole class, to verify the language correctness and fluency. But to check in a more personalized way, the students sent their voice messages to the teacher.

Activity 5: To foster mastery of the simple present tense, especially the verb in the third person singular (based on our pre-test results).

Communicative function: Asking and talking about daily habits and routines.

Using the Internet as the central technological tool, the website liveworksheets.com (https://www.liveworksheets.com/w/en/english-second-language-esl/904794) was chosen, since it allows teachers to create customized worksheets. The second activity was designed as follows:

Instructions:

- Look at the worksheet on the Internet. Complete it using the logic of the activities that are done according to the time of the day.

- Then, ask your partner: What do you do in the morning/ afternoon/ evening / at night?

- Report to another colleague what your partner said. E.g. Tony eats dinner in the evening.

After about 8-10 minutes, students are paired off and they speak to a colleague. They both must agree if the activities are at the correct time of the day.
- Finally, the teacher checks as many students as time allows. Emphasis must be placed on the correct use of the English language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Morning</th>
<th>Afternoon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afternoon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Third day using technological tools**

The following activities were with the use of YouTube and were selected according to the contents the students have received. The students were informed that the lesson was based on very nice videos on YouTube.

**Place**: Laboratory.

**Activity 6**: To practice saying what you can and can’t do (modal verb “can”).

**Communicative function**: Expressing ability in present.

**Instructions**:

- The students were asked to remember some things they could or couldn’t do.

- Then the activity was explained: they would watch a video and had to take notes of the activities the people in the video could or couldn’t do.

Link to the video: https://youtube.com/watch?v=6r3NdUC5p5g
The video should be played twice. Then, they were asked to talk about the notes they had taken.

After that, and because it’s a musical video, they were asked to sing the song (which is according to their language level. For example: She can sing a song- She can dance- He can catch a ball).

The activity was motivating, and the students could practice speaking.

Activity 7: To practice the future with “will” and to rehearse the family member relationships.

Communicative function: Talking about future events (another problem detected in the pre-test).

Link to the video: https://youtube.com/watch?v=QYIMxEOjEM

Instructions:

- First, the teacher asked some of the best students how many people lived in their houses and asked what the specific relationship was with each of them.

- Then explained they would watch another video and that they should do two things: write down the family member mentioned and what each of them would do to make a snowman come to life.

- This video was played two times. Then the questions were checked. As usual, there was a special interest in pronunciation and the fluency of what was answered.

- Finally, the video was played again, and they were asked to sing the song. That gave them extra speaking practice.
Fourth day using technological tools

For this activity, media using TELL (Technology Enhanced Language Learning) was used, and Messenger. TELL was selected because it allows the students to get access to all the technologies available for the enhancement of English learning. For this lesson, they were allowed to view something happening around the world: the eruption of a volcano.

Link: https://www.abc.net.au/btn/high/tourist-volcanoes/103161262 (movie= video plus audio.

Topic: Volcanos).

Place: Laboratory.

Activity 8: To practice speaking from notes taken down from a real video online.

Communicative function: Talking about things that happened in the past.

Instructions:

- First, they were asked to mention some of the volcanoes we have in Ecuador; then they had to explain the dangers of an active volcano. That way they remembered some words related to that natural process but at the same time they spoke.

- They were asked to connect to the link, but with some very clear questions in mind: Where did this volcano have its eruption? – What happened to the population around the area?

- The video was played twice. Then, the questions were answered. Many students participated because some got part of the information, whereas others got some other parts.
- After that, they were asked to prepare a summary of the video and be ready to send their parents, through Messenger, some of the ideas of what they had gathered.

- They recorded the Messenger audios and sent them. Then, using the loudspeakers in the lab, some of the messages were reproduced. The students oversaw saying what was said and what was omitted.

The teacher checked the speaking skills.

After five weeks of using the innovative didactic activities with the inclusion of technology (there were 10 days without lessons for Christmas and New Year), the post-test was applied. The results were motivating, as can be seen in Table 2.

Most of the students improved their grades. The first detail to observe is that one of the students was graded 10 points, something that did not happen in the pre-test. Of the four learners who had obtained just between 0 and 4.9, two of them were able to move to the next scale and only one who had gotten between 5 and 6.9 remained in that level. The other 7 achieved the “pass” in the post-test. In the pre-test, only two students had taken 8 points, but now there were eight who showed progress, as well as the one who got 9 points and who was previously assessed as 8. The only weird result was one student who had obtained 8 points in the pre-test but only got 7 points in the post-test.

### Table 2
*Post-test results, according to the grades taken by each of the students assessed.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Failed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 0- 4.9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 5- 6.9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scored 7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scored 8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scored 9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scored 10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Post-test applied
Table 3 shows the comparison of the exact results obtained by each student in the pre-test and the post-test.

This information confirms the benefits of the innovative didactic strategies used:

**Table 3**

*Comparison of the individual results in the pre-test and the post-test.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Pre-test</th>
<th>Post-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>Scored 7</td>
<td>Scored 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>Between 5- 6.9</td>
<td>Scored 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>Between 0- 4.9</td>
<td>Between 0- 4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>Scored 8</td>
<td>Scored 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>Between 5- 6.9</td>
<td>Scored 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S6</td>
<td>Scored 7</td>
<td>Scored 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S7</td>
<td>Scored 7</td>
<td>Scored 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S8</td>
<td>Between 0- 4.9</td>
<td>Between 5- 6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S9</td>
<td>Scored 7</td>
<td>Scored 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S10</td>
<td>Between 5- 6.9</td>
<td>Scored 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S11</td>
<td>Scored 7</td>
<td>Scored 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S12</td>
<td>Between 0- 4.9</td>
<td>Between 5- 6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S13</td>
<td>Scored 7</td>
<td>Scored 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S14</td>
<td>Between 5- 6.9</td>
<td>Scored 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S15</td>
<td>Scored 9</td>
<td>Scored 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S16</td>
<td>Between 5- 6.9</td>
<td>Scored 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S17</td>
<td>Scored 7</td>
<td>Scored 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S18</td>
<td>Scored 7</td>
<td>Scored 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S19</td>
<td>Between 5- 6.9</td>
<td>Scored 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S20</td>
<td>Between 5- 6.9</td>
<td>Between 5- 6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S21</td>
<td>Scored 7</td>
<td>Scored 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S22</td>
<td>Between 0- 4.9</td>
<td>Between 0- 4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S23</td>
<td>Scored 8</td>
<td>Scored 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S24</td>
<td>Between 5- 6.9</td>
<td>Scored 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pre-test and Post-test applied

**DISCUSSION**

The analysis of the results obtained in the process of assessing the contribution of some innovative didactic strategies based on technological tools designed with the use of technological tools to
develop students' communicative speaking skills at Luis Vargas Torres Senior High School is presented below.

The first step in that process was to diagnose the student's communicative speaking skills at that institution through a pre-test. It was possible to find that, as a global score, 50% of the students got the “pass” (scores between 7 and 10 grades), 33.3% obtained between 5 and 6.9 marks, and 16.7% had deficient scores (only between 0 and 4.9 grades). However, if the individual dimensions assessed are analyzed, it is possible to see that only 37.5% of the students obtained the 3 grades granted for fluency, pronunciation, comprehension, and grammar, not coinciding with the global results obtained per person.

Our findings coincide with the study of Asratie et al. (2023), who also utilized a pre-test for their study. In their research, and to confirm our hypothesis, the learners who had learned through educational speaking technology had enhanced their speaking performance compared to the students who learned conventionally. They realized that the students who learned through educational speaking technology were fluent, coherent, and accurate in their speech, rich in lexical resources, used a variety of grammatical ranges, and better in pronunciation. Besides, the students have positive perceptions of using educational speaking technology tools. Consequently, our study recommends researchers, teachers, and students to make use of educational technology and to go in line with the state of the art.

Side by side with our study, there is the research carried out by Silva (2018) at Ambato High School. Silva also thinks that teachers should use a wider range of techniques to promote communication in the classroom, as students prefer interactive tasks, and not merely to follow a rigid textbook.

Our thoughts are also backed by the constructivist idea of Vygotsky's theory. Vygotsky (1978) asserted that the role of language is the establishment of communication through social interaction, something that for him is the fundamental contributing factor to students' language development as all languages have a social origin. By playing our role as teachers, we make real Vygotsky's zone of
proximal development (1979) because no one is better prepared to influence students’ learning than the teacher.

Under the documentary study, the activities designed using technological tools included the use of resources on the Internet (liveworksheets.com website, an interactive platform with lots of worksheets), mobile phones, and WhatsApp (as Sasabone et al. (2022), who also, just like we did, used Classroom Action Research) and Messenger applications, YouTube videos, all of which respond to TELL (Technology Enhanced Language Learning). No other resources could be used because of the limitation of resources and time at the school. However, as will be shown below, the use of innovative didactic and communicative activities designed contributed to achieving good results, something that coincides with Silva’s investigation (2018).

As to the tools and resources used, our study also coincides with that of Parveen (2016) and Doan and Phi (2022), who had good results with applications like Messenger and WhatsApp from cellphones, and with videos. However, we could not use podcasts, as Ramli and Kurniawan (2017) and Eshankulovna (2021) did, because of the payment needed to use them. But as Eshankulovna (2021) did, our activities included smartphones and videos.

Although it was also impossible to use Vocaroo.com and Voicethread.com, as Merino et al. (2021) did, nor the technological tools Kahoot, Quizziz and Quizlet used by Núñez (2022) or other applications such as Padlet and Edmodo (Russo & Cabrera, 2021), our students were allowed to record themselves and check their speaking, as an important part of the innovative activities used in the present study.

The results of the post-tests were most stimulating, for most of the students obtained better scores than in the pre-test. In the pre-test, 50% of the 24 students had failed the test. In the post-test, that percentage lowered to only 20.8% (5 out of 24). The only surprising result was a student who had obtained 8 points in the pre-test but only got 7 grades in the post-test.

Our results are backed by the conclusion of Merino et al. (2021) when they asserted that using online tools to practice speaking enhances students’ self-confidence, motivation to speak, and awareness of acceptable speech features.
Two of the apps that can be more commonly used are WhatsApp and Messenger. In that sense, our study is aligned with the one of Sasabone et al. (2022), who concluded that utilizing WhatsApp as an educational technology tool improves students' speaking skills.

This research proved that the use of activities based on technology in teaching speaking improves students’ fluency and accuracy, enlarges their lexical resources, and reinforces the grammatical structures previously studied. So, it can be stated that these innovative activities have had a positive impact on learners’ speaking skills at the institution where the study was carried out.

CONCLUSIONS

The study presented here confirmed the contribution of some innovative didactic activities using technology to develop the students’ communicative speaking skills at a senior high school in Esmeraldas City.

A diagnosis was made on the students’ communicative speaking skills, which demonstrated their low level of fluency, pronunciation, comprehension, and grammar, something that demanded an innovative didactic intervention to the English class. Some innovative didactic activities based on technologies were designed based on the students’ learning needs and were introduced into the English language teaching learning process for five weeks. They were mainly focused on using available tools, such as the Internet with YouTube videos, Smartphones with WhatsApp, and Messenger, with the TELL Approach. These activities, which accomplished social interaction purposes and oral reinforcement, were used with the teachers’ monitoring in an active learner’s centered class.

The remarkable students’ language improvement obtained demonstrated that activities based on technologies in teaching speaking increase fluency and accuracy, apparently easing anxiety and apprehension by helping build confidence among students. These activities also provided the learners with an opportunity to engage independently, giving opportunities for self-paced interactions, privacy, and a safe environment among partners, where mistakes were corrected, and exact feedback was given by both, teacher, and students. There is no doubt that technology has become an important weapon for the teacher in this Digital Era.
BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES


