



UTMACH

FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS SOCIALES

**CARRERA DE PEDAGOGÍA DE LOS IDIOMAS NACIONALES Y
EXTRANJEROS**

**SYSTEM OF AUTONOMOUS ACTIVITIES AS CONTRIBUTION TO
SPEAKING SKILL DEVELOPMENT OF THIRD-SEMESTER STUDENTS
FROM PEDAGOGY OF NATIONAL AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES
DEGREE**

**RAMOS JARAMILLO ALEX XAVIER
LICENCIADO EN PEDAGOGIA DEL IDIOMA INGLES**

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LOZANO ZUMBA CRISTHEL ESPERANZA

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Dedication

Success is the sum of small achievements in the face of various daily and extraordinary adversities; and it is those people who are present on this path who bring light in those moments of darkness. That is why it is important for me to deeply thank and dedicate this paper to all those people who continue to give me the necessary support and believe in my potential without expecting anything in return and without giving relevance to the differences encountered.

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To all the crew of the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree, both teachers and students, from whom I have learned inside and outside the classrooms. It is no coincidence that our paths came together, and from this point of closure of one of the best stages of my life I can say with certainty that our vocation and vision are going to contribute to the construction of a quality education for the benefit of society and the eternal search for truth.

Resumen

La ejecución del presente estudio tiene como objetivo contribuir al desarrollo de la expresión oral en inglés de los estudiantes del tercer semestre de la carrera de Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros en la Universidad Técnica de Machala durante el periodo académico ordinario 2024-1. Las dificultades que aparecen durante la producción de la expresión oral y que afectan el proceso de los estudiantes de inglés como idioma extranjero pueden estar relacionadas al desconocimiento de estrategias y recursos adecuados, los cuales son vastos y de fácil acceso hoy en día. La propuesta implementada en el grupo de estudio conformado por 28 estudiantes fue un sistema de actividades basado en el enfoque del aprendizaje autónomo. Se usaron métodos teóricos como el hipotético-deductivo y el sistémico y métodos empíricos como la medición, la observación no participante y la prueba pedagógica con el fin de recopilar, medir y analizar los datos relevantes de la investigación. Lo cual permitió corroborar que la propuesta implementada contribuye significativamente al desarrollo de esta habilidad del grupo de estudio. Se recomienda aplicar el sistema de actividades propuesto en poblaciones más grandes y que se encuentren cursando estudios similares de tercer nivel.

Palabras clave: proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje, expresión oral, aprendizaje autónomo, autonomía del estudiante.

Abstract

The aim of the present study is to contribute to the development of oral expression in English of students in the third semester of the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the regular academic period 2024-1. The difficulties that appear during the production of oral expression and that affect the process of the students of English as a foreign language can be related to the lack of knowledge of adequate strategies and resources, which are vast and easily accessible nowadays. The proposal implemented in the study group of 28 students was a system of activities based on the autonomous learning approach. Theoretical methods such as hypothetical-deductive and systemic and empirical methods such as measurement, non-participant observation and pedagogical testing were used in order to collect, measure and analyse the relevant research data. This allowed us to corroborate that the implemented proposal contributes significantly to the development of this skill of the study group. It is recommended that the proposed system of autonomous activities be applied to larger populations belonging to similar third-level studies.

Keywords: learning-teaching process, speaking skill, autonomous learning, learner autonomy.

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Introduction

The use of the English language has become from a complementary tool in an indispensable one due to its relevance in a variety of purposes, among them the spreading of knowledge, human relations, cultural exchange and professional preparation. Due to the high level of functionality of the mastery of this foreign language, in relation to the needs of a globalized world, its implementation in the programs of the different levels of education in Ecuador described in Art. 39 of the Organic Law of Intercultural Education and in Art. 118 of the Organic Law of Higher Education is unquestionable.

Ministry of Education, within the national curriculum, established the exit profile of Ecuadorian high school graduates. It is projected that the students, at the end of the last year of high school, should manifest a B1.2 level in English language proficiency based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Consequently, the professionals in education of this foreign language must reach at least a B2 level as a requirement to obtain a third level degree.

Achieving mastery of English language requires effective management of four key linguistic skills: two receptive skills which are reading comprehension and listening comprehension, and two productive skills which are writing and speaking (Barreiro, 2007 as cited in Garro, 2019). Regarding to these linguistic skills, it emphasizes that the two skills that present the greatest difficulties when learning or teaching English as a foreign language are speaking and listening (Chamorro et al., 2020).

In different parts of world, when a person is preparing for a speciality at the university level, he or she faces specific challenges for which does not demonstrate the required competence. The proper management of the speaking skill is no exception, the difficulties that appear during

the production of oral expression and that affect the process of English as foreign language students may come from an incomplete training in this area during the previous educational levels, the lack of motivation of the student towards the language or for not recognizing the appropriate strategies and resources which are vast and easily accessible nowadays (Islam et al., 2022).

The methodology for the teaching-learning of English has been evolving with the passage of time and the emergence of resources coming from the global technological advancement, making the attempt to take advantage of the characteristics, strategies and techniques of traditional methods and decentralize the leading role of the teacher during the educative process.

Among the variety of advances in the teaching-learning methodology of the English language, the autonomous learning approach stands out by maintaining the objective of giving students the main role in their learning, allowing them to empower themselves with knowledge and become effective and independent learners. This approach overcomes the barriers of traditionalist methods which emphasized the sole participation of the teacher and evoked the development of student memorization (Martinez & Moreno, 2007).

As professionals in training in the educational field, specifically in the languages area, we must seek to promote autonomous learning for the benefit of a new generation of students who have a wide range of resources to turn to; at the same time, we must accurately and nimbly recognize the transformation of the teacher's functions aligned to this approach.

This motivated the researcher to situate himself in the environment of the third semester of the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala to identify the weaknesses that exist within the teaching-learning process of one of the two skills that are considered hard to master (speaking) and thus be able to contribute to the training of future teachers in English as foreign language.

In the third semester of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala, during the research, the following **limitations** related to speaking skill were observed:

- Students who demonstrate a high level in English language participate in several occasions during the class session.
- Most of the students do not actively participate orally during the class session.
- Students frequently resort to the mother tongue to express their ideas orally.
- Repeatedly, teacher provides general positive feedback after students' oral intervention, such as "Good job", "Excellent", "Sounds great" or "Good point of view".
- The activities to be carried out during the class session that involve student oral participation are proposed entirely by the teacher.

This leads to the following **research question**

How to contribute to the English-speaking skill development of the students of the third semester of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the ordinary academic period 2024-1?

Considering the **object of study**, which is the teaching-learning process of the English language in the Pedagogy of National and Foreign languages at Universidad Técnica de Machala.

Among the **possible causes** of the problem are:

- Students present a low level of oral expression in English.
- Class time is insufficient for the development of oral expression in English.
- There are not enough opportunities to interact in English and develop the speaking skill.
- Students feel insecure in expressing themselves orally in English.

The **general objective** of the research is to contribute to the development of speaking skill in English of the students of the third semester of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the ordinary academic period 2024-1.

This objective is delimited in the **field of action**, autonomous learning.

Based on the above, the current research has the following **specific objectives**:

- To systematize theoretically the importance of autonomous learning in the development of speaking skill in English.
- To diagnose the level of speaking skill in English of the students of the third semester of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the ordinary academic period 2024-1.
- To implement the system of autonomous activities to contribute to the development of speaking skill in English of the students of the third semester of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the ordinary academic period 2024-1.
- To evaluate the impact generated by the system of autonomous activities in the development of speaking skill in English of the students of the third semester of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the ordinary academic period 2024-1.

And it is developed based on the following **scientific hypothesis**: If a system of autonomous activities is implemented in English classes, it will contribute to the development of speaking skill of the students of the third semester of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the ordinary academic period 2024-1.

Based on the hypothesis, the **variable** to measure is **speaking skill** in English. It is the ability that the human being has to communicate orally where components such as grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation, discourse management and interactive communication are used to achieve the exchange of messages effectively (University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, 2019).

This is an applied-proposal research with a cross-sectional scope due to its duration, and it is developed under a quantitative methodological paradigm. The present study was developed from an experimental design with pre-test and post-test with a single group, using empirical methods as diagnostic evaluation, measurement and indirect observation; and theoretical methods such as analytical-synthetic, historical, hypothetical-deductive that will allow the collection and analysis of data during the research process.

The **importance** of the present research lies in the incentive of the student's autonomy in the development of speaking skill in English through the implementation of a system of autonomous activities, which allow students to better understand their weaknesses and lead to the effective development of their speaking skill.

The **practical contribution** of this research is the system of autonomous activities in English classes that offers a better support during the development of speaking skill in English of the students of the third semester of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the ordinary academic period 2024-1.

The structure of the research consists of: **Chapter I** where the importance of autonomous learning in the development of speaking skill in English is going to be systematized theoretically; **Chapter II** where the methodology applied to develop the research is going to be described; **Chapter III** which describes the proposal and how to implement it; **Chapter IV** where the analysis

and discussion of results are showed, ending with the **conclusions, references** section and **annexes**.

Theoretical systematization of the importance of autonomous learning in the development of speaking skill in English

This chapter will delve into the importance of autonomous learning in the teaching-learning process of the English language in the development of speaking skill in this language; and consists of three sections that are the historical background that describe the evolution of the object and field of research, the conceptual bases of the research, and the contextual background in the development of oral expression of third semester students of the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree.

1.1 Historical background of learner autonomy in the teaching-learning process of the English language

The teaching of English in the context of a foreign language has undergone great changes favouring the development of methodologies that can be adapted to the contemporary era in which it is developed. In its beginnings, the predominant method in this process until 1940 was the Grammar-Translation which focused on grammatical rules, vocabulary, sentences out of context, and was applied in translation exercises for the development of reading and writing skills.

During the following years, the Direct Method was proposed. This is focused on using the foreign language during the entire learning session, on teaching vocabulary and sentences that could be used in everyday life, and prioritizing speaking skills; the teaching the grammatical rules of the language was incorporated into the class in an inductive manner. This advance was considered a relevant change because it questioned the traditionalist teaching in which teachers played the leading role, and opted for theories in which the student ceased to be a simple receiver

of information and became the centre of learning, allowing him/her to manipulate and experience the new knowledge (Richards & Rogers, 1986).

The emergence of the term autonomy related to education was a relevant factor in contributing to this role transformation in higher education. Knowles (1973), through the characterization of adult learners at the university level, turned the attention of experts in education towards the quality of the student to be able to interfere in a positive way in his own learning, and although his study did not focus on the mastery of foreign languages. He based the approach that this type of students can assume an active role in their learning, turning them into more independent and autonomous educational agents.

Years later, in 1981, Holec would address for the first time the concept of learner autonomy to the field of foreign language teaching-learning, providing definitions that are still valid today and characterizing this quality by highlighting the ability of a student to direct his or her objectives and to be responsible for making decisions to achieve them (Jimenez and Vieira, 2021). This allows highlighting the benefits of placing the student at the centre of the educational process.

The impact of this premises continues to have an effect on the learning of English as a foreign language, due to the fact that nowadays in the national context this process is guided by the guidelines of the Communicative Approach where the student constantly intervenes through participation in class, either with the teacher or among students (Ministerio de Educación, 2023)

Currently, some research conducted in contexts where English is not the mother tongue continues to consider it relevant for the student to have a high level of autonomy during the learning process of this language in order to achieve effective teaching. As in the case of the work of Sakrak-Ekin and Balcikanli (2019) called *Does autonomy really matter in language*

learning? in which the possible relationship between the level of autonomy of students of English as a foreign language and academic excellence in language learning in a university context is investigated quantitatively.

In another research conducted the same year, which is entitled *Language learner autonomy in tertiary context: teacher's beliefs and practices*, the beliefs, practices and constraints related to learner autonomy of three hundred and fifty-nine teachers in a university program in Saudi Arabia were examined by using the questionnaire technique; where some of the teachers explained that achieving learner autonomy is an ideal goal for the English language acquisition process (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019).

Huyen and Cang (2021) in their research, explored the practices that Vietnamese students who are learning English as a foreign language engage in developing their autonomy in relation to speaking skill. It identifies that the students were able to set their learning objectives in relation to the speaking skill and with the help of the researcher determine the actions and resources for their fulfilment.

Melvina (2021), in his investigation entitled *Learner autonomy and English proficiency of Indonesian undergraduate students*, denotes that learner autonomy remains a relevant point in order to achieve language proficiency. The study aimed to investigate the relationship between these two variables in the context of non-native English-speaking undergraduate students.

The most recent study by Treesattayanmune and Baharudin (2024), entitled *Learner autonomy and interaction in English language learning among Thai EFL undergraduate students*, aimed to explore the autonomy of Bangkok public university students in the context of learning English as a foreign language. Aiming to investigate whether there is a significant difference in

the overall interaction and different levels of learner autonomy, allowing to recognize its influence during language learning.

The information was exposed during the historical background section of the present research suggests that learner autonomy is still relevant to achieve the effectiveness of English language learning, but that it still remains to be investigated which proposals will be effective to encourage this feature in relation to the speaking skill. In addition, it must be considered that today there is a variety of useful tools that can be accessed without difficulty to improve our skills, a fact that did not appear in the early years of the immersion of this term in the learning of English as a foreign language.

1.2 Conceptual bases of autonomous learning in the development of speaking skill in English

This section describes the conceptual bases involved in the encouragement of learner autonomy in the teaching-learning process of the English language for the development of speaking, providing the definitions that support the development of the research and its practical contribution.

1.2.1 Characterization of the teaching-learning process of English at the university level

Education at university level is considered a great investment for the economic development of society; therefore, educational programs are encouraged to provide the necessary competencies for future professionals to be functional members of the national system; obviously, their processes must be constantly subjected to research in order contribute to the achievement of excellent results (Figueroa, 2013).

The teaching-learning of the English language has been incorporated into the branches of study offered by various universities at the national level; so important is its use that in some institutions they appear as third-level degrees and options for majors, differentiated only by the nomenclature used among the offerings of the educational establishments.

In this level of education, the acquisition of the language is developed through a series of skills for the assimilation and understanding of the theory that encompasses the composition of the language, in order to be able to employ this knowledge in the development of the linguistic skills present in effective communication (Intriago et al., 2019).

In this context, several approaches are used in order to achieve the objectives according to the curriculum for each degree program. The communicative approach, which allows focusing the training process on the ability to communicate effectively, avoids the memorization of content. The task-based learning approach (task-based learning) where the activities are specific for students to use the language meaningfully. The lexical approach allows students to gain a deeper understanding of the composition of words and collocations.

The autonomous learning approach encourages student autonomy through activities partially guided by the teacher's expertise. Problem-based learning allows the development of student's critical thinking through the resolution of real situations in order to keep in mind that knowledge must help us to face everyday situations in a natural way (Torres & Asqui, 2023).

With the help of the approaches that have been developed and implemented during the teaching-learning process of this language, the range of opportunities for quality education in this field is vast. Despite the fact that in Ecuador the use of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) model has been regulated during the last few years, a mixture of different

characteristics of methods and models from the first years of teaching this language in the national territory is still resorted to (Villafuerte & Mosquera, 2019).

Students who develop at this educational level show the advantage of being able to take part consciously in their learning process, so that they are capable of deciding which are the most relevant contents, of contributing truthful information that can generate a change in the way the teacher develops his class, and of making decision about the action to be taken for the benefit of their learning (Knowles, 1973).

1.2.2 Characterization of the student's autonomous learning in the development of speaking skill

In the conceptualization of autonomous learning, it can be identified that the term causes discussion and confusion because autonomy is considered as an idea which evokes controversy as well as a relevant point of discussion among modern philosophy entities with diverse interpretations. Although in Sieckmann's work he refers to the legal field, it is stated that autonomy is the power to decide on the actions to be performed and those that one does not want to perform (Sieckmann, 2008).

From a general perspective of the term, the dictionary of the Real Academia Española de la Lengua defines autonomy as a condition that a human being possesses to develop in any field without the need to depend on someone else; and the Cambridge Dictionary defines the term as the ability of people to make decisions without being under the control of another (Cambridge Dictionary, nd; RAE, nd).

Through the contribution of Little (1991) which differentiated between what autonomy is not and what it is. It can be stipulated that it does not refer to going through the educational process alone, independently or without the help of any teacher; in his study it is pointed out that

it is necessary to forget the misconception that autonomy is synonymous with making the decision to learn without a guiding teacher. And Little provides a momentary definition of the term, referring to it as a student's capacity to achieve critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action within his or her learning process.

Contributing to the clarification of misinterpretations of the term, Carson (2010, as cited in Ivone and Jacobs, 2022) identifies some myths of what learner autonomy means. One of them is that students develop this autonomy without any teacher support; another one is that any teacher help will harm the development of student autonomy; or that students with a low language level or younger students are not able to develop their autonomy, and it was even believed that autonomous students were those who study alone and without help of any classmates.

Learner autonomy focuses on the power of students to contribute to the development of classes, providing the teacher with opinions regarding what is studied, how it is studied, when and for how long a topic is studied. Furthermore, it is considered as the characteristic of the student that allows him to identify his weaknesses, allowing him to address these shortcomings by making good decisions about what should be done to strengthen these ones (Ivone & Jacobs, 2022).

Within the development of English-speaking skills, the teacher sometimes fails to provide meaningful feedback due to several factors, but none related to his or her competence or professionalism. Therefore, the teacher should encourage learner autonomy to create an environment of educational cooperation and maintain the motivation to correct the shortcomings that students demonstrate when they are practicing this skill in class.

The teacher provides technical and psychosocial support to encourage the learner autonomy of the group. When referring to technical support, it is mentioned that the teacher will provide adequate knowledge so that students can identify their needs, set their objectives, plan their actions, and provide a range of learning strategies that will serve as a guide to correct what they believe to be pertinent. As for psychosocial support, teacher will be able to maintain the motivation to solve problems, he must also find a way for the student to be aware of the mistakes, and of course he must have qualities such as being understanding, supportive, patient and tolerant (Luelmo del Castillo, 2020).

Teachers in the development of the learner autonomy become facilitators by helping in the inconveniences presented by students, he is also a counsellor when students need him, and the teacher becomes a resource available for the support during the whole student's learning process.

The dimensions of learner autonomy to which the current study will direct its attentions are: the learner's ability to evaluate his performance in practicing speaking skill in English, the learner's ability to be able to set his own learning goals in relation to the weaknesses encountered, the learner's ability to select strategies and resources to improve these weaknesses, as well as the time spent on strengthening them during his development of speaking in English.

1.2.3 The orientation of autonomous learning approach

It is inevitable to avoid the idea of the incorporation and accessibility of the different resources provided by technological progress to the student training. In the teaching-learning of the English language, it has taken a fundamental role for its implementation in the last decade, promoting new perspectives and adapting approaches to the current trend and the needs of the group of students to whom the acquisition of the language is directed (Burbat, 2016).

The advancement of technological innovation has significantly enhanced the development of autonomous learning. This approach requires students to adopt a critical mindset, actively plan and assess their learning, and continuously reflect on and monitor their progress throughout every stage of this process (Iuliana, 2023).

The autonomous learning approach has prominence in areas such as pedagogy, where students acquire knowledge and develop skills through their competence of reflection and selection based on their needs. In this approach it is possible to identify the inclination towards the use of different resources that are available online, as well as directed and interactive activities that seek the adequate management in relation to languages (Shvaikina et al., 2024).

This approach emphasizes the development of self-learning capacity, metacognitive skills and self-regulation. It promotes the use of appropriate tools to foster an investigative spirit in students. In addition, it seeks to establish effective processes that allow individuals to reach a level of autonomous competence, benefiting them in their academic goals (Weepiu & Collazos, 2020).

In the process of developing autonomous learning, the role of the teacher is fundamental. Thanks to his experience and knowledge, the teacher can provide the resources and guidance necessary for students to develop their skills. Through his guidelines, the provision of appropriate materials and the monitoring of academic progress, this approach can be effectively integrated, maximizing the benefits for the learning goals for the educational process (Gomez et al., 2019).

1.2.4 Characterization of speaking skill in English language teaching-learning

The ability of oral expression is considered as one of the ways that human beings have to communicate their thoughts, ideas or feelings; also, to share opinions in reactions to some event.

This skill is indispensable for the interaction between student and teacher because it is through its use that the learning phenomenon in the classroom can be organized, executed and evaluated (Cruz, 2020).

Through the skill of speaking a person can express what he thinks, demonstrate his knowledge, share his likes and dislikes, and can externalize what he feels at the moment, in such a way that the person who is listening him can understand what he wants to manifest, evoking an oral exchange of both sides (Wahyuni & Utami, 2021).

For the development of this skill it is necessary to place the practitioner in situations in which they can use their knowledge to perform naturally. This practice should be guided by real situations that are useful in relation to how to reach orally (Mandasari & Aminatum, 2020).

Karpovich et al. (2021) state that there are two main ways of performing the speaking skill, in the form dialogue and monologue. In monologue, practitioners require prior instruction and preparation time before producing this skill; while in dialogues form this occurs spontaneously. In a dialogue, the exchange of ideas with the participation of another person is needed; unlike in a monologue, where a partner is not needed.

The development of speaking skills in English involves elements such as pronunciation, fluency and interaction, grammatical range and control, and lexical range and control. Since speaking is the human being's ability to communicate effectively, the management of these elements is necessary for effective interaction and message exchanges.

Regarding the aspects involved in this process, through the review of the structure of the Cambridge B1 Preliminary assessment system, it is identified that in the section of speaking elements as grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation, interactive communication and discourse management are measured in order to portrait the level in speaking skill; allowing to establish

the measurements that will provide reference data for the current research (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2024).

The speaking skill in English is the ability that the human being has to communicate orally where components such as grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation, discourse management and interactive communication are used to achieve the exchange of messages effectively.

When referring to grammar and vocabulary, the aspects of accuracy and variety of grammatical usage and appropriate vocabulary are considered. A good pronunciation requires a correct articulation of sounds, stress, intonation and rhythm when producing oral expression in English. Interactive communication refers to the candidate's ability to interact effectively with the interlocutor, the ability to initiate, maintain and close exchanges, to ask and answer questions; and to manage the conversation, collaborating appropriately with other part.

The discourse management component enables the speaker to organize his ideas in a coherent and cohesive way, it includes the ability to produce a continuous and connected discourse, manage the flow of the conversation, and structure responses and contributions in an efficient way (University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, 2019).

For an efficient monitoring of the development of oral expression in English, important elements of this skill must be considered such as vocabulary because without a vast one it is complicated to share what we think; grammatical rules to achieve an adequate level of grammar; pronunciation that helps in the emission and reception of the message; discourse management which is related to content or understanding that allows contextualizing the conversation and avoid misunderstandings; and interactive communication that refers to expressing an idea without long interruptions or deviations from the topic (Bohari, 2019).

Through a review on Universidad Técnica de Machala's digital repository, it is observed that since the implementation of the new curriculum of the degree in Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages in 2016, only 19 researches from the degree have been proposed and were applied at the higher education level. Only twelve of them were aimed at contributing to the strengthening of the shortcomings that have been found out in the different semesters of the degree.

Allowing to evidence that exists a lack of researches carried out using the approach of autonomous learning to contribute in the development of oral expression, considering that the current context grants a range of resources to achieve effectiveness in the acquisition of the English language.

1.3 Contextualization of the speaking skill in English of the third-semester students of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the ordinary academic period 2024-1

The current research was carried out at the Universidad Técnica de Machala where the degree in Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages is offered. The degree's objective is to train teachers capable of working not only in the basic and medium levels of our educational system, but also in Institutes and National and International Organizations that require expert personnel in the teaching of English.

The curriculum is made up of eight regular academic periods, in which the subject of English is studied during seven of those eight semesters in its different levels based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. According to the curriculum of the degree, at the end of the third semester, it is expected to master B1 level contents. In addition, in

the fourth regular academic period, students will begin their community service, which involves aiding in the area of English to institutions that do not have sufficient staff for the subject.

Council of Europe (2020), in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, stipulates the following competences for a learner mastering level B1:

- I can manage in almost all situations that arise when I travel where the language is spoken.
- I can participate spontaneously in a conversation that deals with everyday topics of personal interest or that are relevant to daily life (e.g., family, hobbies, work, travel, and current events).

In the development of speaking in English, difficulties are identified for English language learners; therefore, the learner needs to practice specific elements to improve this skill such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, discourse management, and interactive communication; so, the contributions added to this field will be of great benefit to future languages teaching professionals.

1.3.1 Current state of speaking skill in English of third-semester students of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages Degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the regular academic period 2024-1

This section will describe the initial diagnosis of the state of the speaking skill in English of the third-semester students of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages Degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the regular academic period 2024-1, which was obtained through the application of the diagnostic instruments (non-participant observation guide and pedagogical test) to 28 students who comprise the population chosen for this research.

Indirect observation guide.

In order to characterize the development of speaking skill in English classes of the third-semester students of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages Degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the regular academic period 2024-1, an indirect observation guide (see Appendix A) was used to identify some of the student's limitations during the class session.

On the day the non-participant observation guided was applied, thirty of thirty-one students attended to English class. It is possible to establish that during the development of the class the following observations are presented:

- Different activities involving the use of English language are carried out during the class session.
- Students who demonstrate a high level of English participate constantly during the class session.
- Most of students do not actively participate orally during the class session.
- Students frequently resort to the mother tongue to express themselves orally.
- Repeatedly, teacher provides general positive feedback after students' oral intervention, such as "Good job", "Excellent", "Sounds great", or "Good point of view".
- The activities to be carried out during the class session that involve student oral participation are proposed entirely by the teacher.

The findings during the indirect observation show that despite the fact that the teacher clearly presents the objective of the session, develops various activities to promote the use of the language, uses digital resources; approximately twenty percent of the total number of students actively participate orally during the activities proposed by the teacher, showing a high level of

language proficiency, specifically in the skill of speaking. On the contrary, the remaining eighty percent of the group shows reluctance to engage in oral participation.

The students who did not engage orally in the class session, when asked to participate, resorted to their mother tongue to ask for a repetition of the question and answered it in the same language, showing an acceptable level of listening skills but a low level of speaking. In addition, they did not answer the question adequately or simply did not participate waiting for the students with a higher level in English skills to answer.

Although the teacher, after each student participated, gave positive feedback with phrases such as “Good job”, “Excellent”, “Sounds great”, or “Good point of view” increasing the confidence of the language learner, it may not be enough for the students to improve their English-speaking skill and a contribution is needed to recognize which dimensions of this skill require more attention and practice.

Pedagogical test.

After applying the pedagogical test (see Appendix B) to 28 students corresponding to the population, the following data were obtained in relation to the established dimensions of speaking skill in English:

Dimension 1: Grammar and vocabulary.

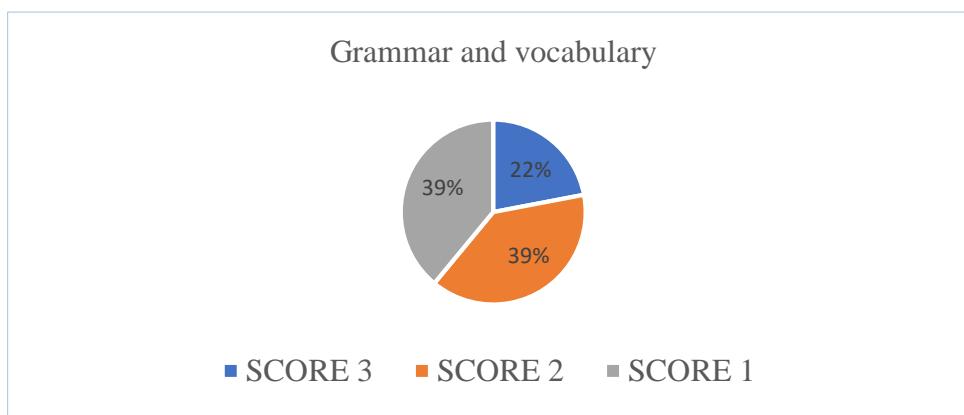


Figure 1
Results from pedagogical test in the grammar and vocabulary dimension.

Six students representing 22% of the population demonstrate excellent, varied and accurate use of grammar and vocabulary in their oral participation making very few errors in their responses. Eleven students representing 39% of the population demonstrated an adequate use of grammar and vocabulary with few errors that did not affect the comprehension of their answers. On the other hand, eleven students representing the other 39% of the population demonstrated a very limited use of grammar and vocabulary making frequent errors that impede the comprehension of their answers.

Dimension 2: Pronunciation.

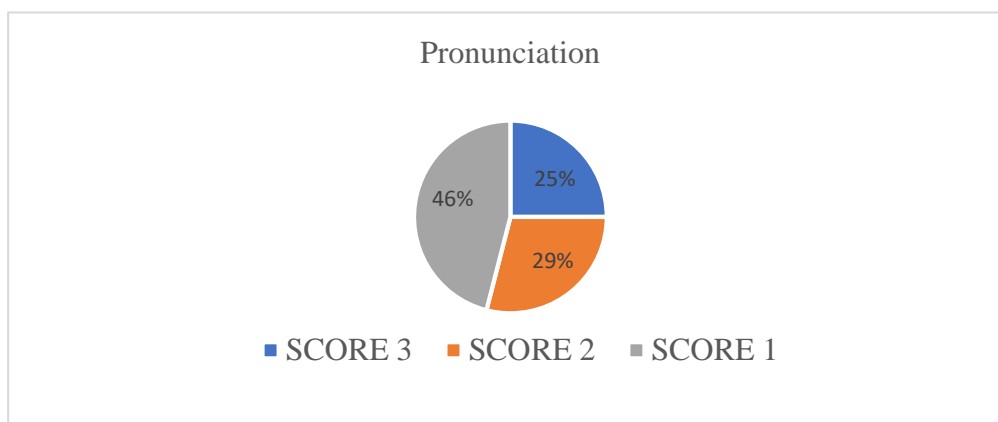


Figure 2

Results from pedagogical test in the pronunciation dimension.

Seven students representing 25% of the population demonstrated excellent, clear and accurate pronunciation with very few or no errors in their oral production. Eight students representing 29% of the population demonstrate generally clear pronunciation with a few errors that rarely hindered comprehension. On the other hand, thirteen students of the whole population demonstrated problems of pronunciation with many errors that impede the communication during their oral participation.

Dimension 3: Discourse management.

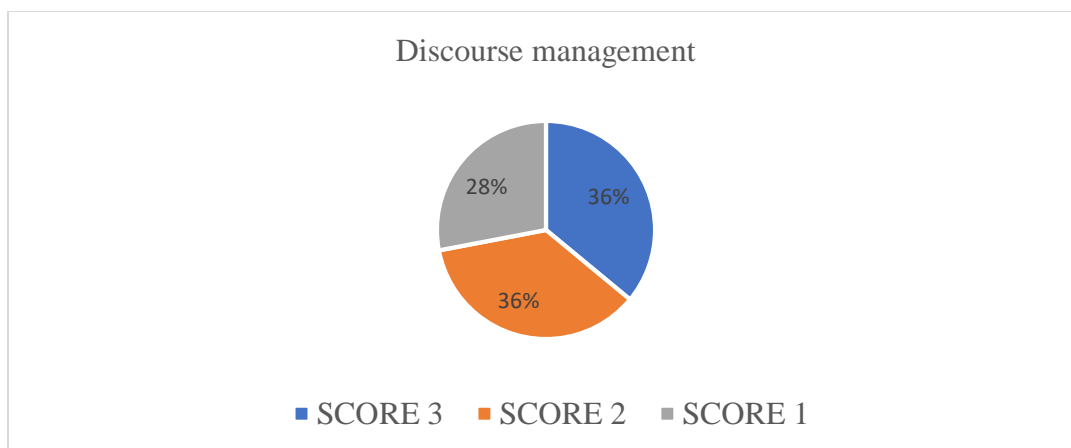


Figure 3

Results from pedagogical test in the discourse management dimension.

Ten students representing 36% demonstrated a very well organized and coherent speech in which ideas flowed naturally and logically without unnecessary pauses. Other group of ten students from the population demonstrated a generally coherent speech with some pauses and repetitions, but easy to follow. Finally, eight students that represent 29% of the population demonstrated not being able to produce coherent speech, providing disorganized ideas and difficult to follow the thread of the conversation.

Dimension 4: Interactive communication.

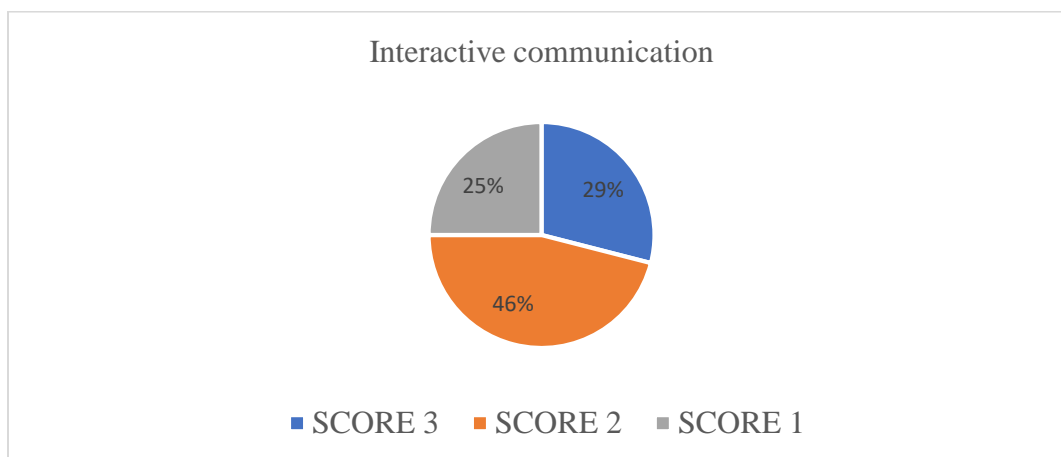


Figure 4

Results from pedagogical test in the interactive communication dimension.

Eight students representing 29% of the population demonstrated excellent interaction participating actively and naturally, responding and encouraging the interviewer's participation. Thirteen students that represent 46% of the population demonstrated adequate interaction, responding to the questions in a relevant manner, but with some difficulties. On the other hand, seven students obtained the lowest score in this dimension demonstrating not being able to interact effectively, and did not respond adequately to the questions.

General analysis.

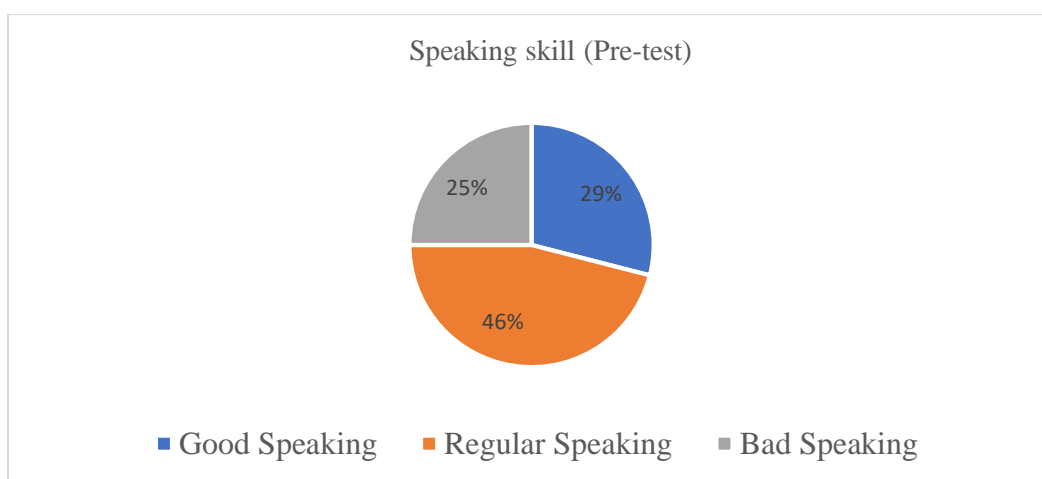


Figure 5

General diagnosis of the levels of speaking skill of population.

In obtaining the scores of the students who took the pedagogical test, a Good, Regular or Bad scale was used to identify the current state of the student's speaking skill in English, this is defined as the oral ability to effectively exchange messages. The results showed that eight students representing 29% of the population denoted a "Good speaking" level after scoring between 10 to 12 on the pedagogical test. Thirteen students representing 46% showed a "Regular speaking" level after scoring between 5 to 9 on the pedagogical test. Finally, seven students demonstrated a "Bad speaking" level after scoring between 1 to 4 in the pedagogical test.

With the help of the pedagogical test, it is possible to identify the initial state of the students' speaking skill in English, which shows that 71% of the whole population would benefit

from a significant contribution in relation to this skill. This justifies the usefulness and need of contributing, through a system of activities that encourages learner autonomy, to the development of speaking skill in English of the third-semester students of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages Degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the regular academic period 2024-1.

Methodological structure for the study of the development of speaking skill in English

In chapter two, corresponding to the part of the description of the methodology carried out during the present research, the paradigm chosen by the researcher will be defined, as well as the type of research guiding the work. In addition, the participant population, methods and techniques selected for data collection and analysis will be specified. This will provide the reader with relevant information for the understanding of the study in progress.

2.1 Type of methodological design

In research, the design refers to the model selected by the researcher to ensure effective control over the variables being measured on it. This study employs a single-group pretest-posttest design; which is “un diseño pre-experimental en el cual el efecto de una variable independiente se infiere de la dependencia entre el pre-test y el post-test de un solo grupo” (Mejia et al., 2018, p 55).

Measurement will be carried out in two stages during the research, before and after implementing the proposed intervention; the former will be to obtain the diagnosis of the population related to speaking skill in English and the latter will be to obtain the results of the implementation the system of autonomous activities in order to determine its effectiveness in the variable to measure.

Despite the fact that the pre-experimental design generates disadvantages and unfavourable opinions in the scientific community, this type of design benefits and is highly recommended for studies in which it is necessary to solve situational problems, as is the case faced by students in the third semester of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages Degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the regular academic period 2024-1 in relation to the speaking skill in English.

2.2 Methodological Paradigm

Deroncele (2020) stipulates that paradigms within the field of scientific researches are a resource of great relevance to the people involved, because the selection of a paradigm or having a predominant paradigm will influence the way data from the object of study is collected and analysed.

The current research is carried out from a quantitative paradigm, in which the effectiveness of the system of activities will be reported through the numerical representation obtained during the application of the research instruments, methods and techniques in the participant population.

Rahman (2017) states that the quantitative paradigm is one that focuses on measuring and obtaining numerical data in relation to the different variables found in the social sphere, this type of paradigm generally focuses its attention on the management of the quantities present in a research.

2.3 Type of research

Ferreyra & De Longhi (2014) state that the different types of research are aligned and arise from the objectives, interest, motivation and expertise of the researcher. In other words, the type of research to be used should be based on the needs and motives for conducting the study, which is determined by the person in charge based on his skills and competences.

The ongoing study is an applied-propositional type of research with a cross-sectional scope due to its duration. This type of study “se centra en la resolución de problemas en un contexto determinado, es decir, busca la aplicación o utilización de conocimientos, desde una o varias áreas especializadas, con el propósito de implementarlos de forma práctica para satisfacer necesidades concretas” (Departamento Universitario y Obrero Campesino UC, 2024). The aim’s study of

applying specialized knowledge practically to address specific needs is underscored by this definition.

2.4 Population

The selection of the population considered the accessibility and the level of openness with the group with whom will work. Arias et al. (2016) mention that the research population is defined in relation to the problem and the objectives of the study. The participant population consists of 28 students in the third semester of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages Degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the regular academic period 2024-1, among which there are 17 women and 11 men with different levels of proficiency in the speaking skill in English.

According to the curriculum of the degree, it is stipulated that by the end of the current academic period, the third-semester students must reach a B1 competence level based on Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; furthermore, for the next semester this group will begin its community service programme in the area of English; therefore, they are an ideal group to benefit from the improvement of the speaking skill in this language.

2.5 Methods and Techniques

There is a variety of methods which in turn can be categorised on a theoretical and an empirical level, and depending on the needs of the study they are evolved at different stages of the study. The methods and techniques used during the research for data collection and subsequent analysis will be described.

2.5.1 Theoretical methods

Hypothetical-deductive method

This method is used because the starting point is the establishment of a hypothesis in order to make inferences in relation to the results. In this type of method, hypotheses are used to refute

or corroborate information by drawing conclusions that must be confronted with the facts (Reyes et al., 2021).

The characteristics of this type of method are relevant for its selection because it allows an approximation of a favourable outcome based on the collection of information during the literature review and problem statement stage.

Systemic Method

This type of method proposes the global vision of the elements working in correlation in order to obtain beneficial results. The characteristics of this type of method are used in this study for the creation of the theoretical systematization and the proposal for improving the speaking skill of this research.

2.5.2 Empirical methods

Measurement

Scholars recognise that the application of an inappropriate approach to measurement in a study can lead to inappropriate data. Thus, it is important for the researcher to develop appropriate measurement instruments (Mendoza & Garza, 2009). In the current research this method will be used to summarise and obtain numerical data on the variable to measure.

Non-participant observation

It is considered that in order to carry out a non-participant observation it is necessary for the researcher to be physically separated from the population and to capture the characteristics of their actions in a natural state. For the ongoing study, non-participation observation was chosen in order to establish characteristics without our presence causing negative or positive effects on the population or the way in which the class is developed.

Pedagogical Test

Rodriguez (2007) states that pedagogical tests are applied at certain times in order to gather information on specific aspects of the students or population; they must be adapted and correspond to the level of the group to be evaluated.

In order to quantitatively characterise the current state of the speaking skill in English of the third-semester students of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages Degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the regular academic period 2024-1, a pedagogical test was used which is an adaptation of the speaking part in the Cambridge Press test called B1 Preliminary. The pedagogical test was graded using the rubric established by the researcher based on the table of scores described for this Cambridge test.

2.6 Data collection

This section will describe the collection and analysis of quantitative data through the instruments used during the research. For this process a consistency matrix is used to describe the relevant aspects of the methodology issue in relation to the operationalization measurement variable, a rubric for scoring the pedagogical test that was applied as a pre-test and post-test, accompanied by a scale that allows researcher to diagnose the level of speaking skill in English of the third-semester students of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages Degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the regular academic period 2024-1.

2.6.1 Consistency Matrix

Table 1
Consistency Matrix

Scientific Problem	General Objective	Hypothesis	Variable to Measure	Dimensions	Indicators	Instruments	Measurement
How to contribute to development of speaking skill in English of third-semester students of Pedagogy of National and Foreign	To contribute to development of speaking skill in English of third-semester students of Pedagogy of National	If a system of autonomous activities is implemented in English classes, it will contribute to development of speaking skill of the	Speaking skill in English. It is the ability that the human being has to communicate orally where components such as grammar and	-Grammar and vocabulary. -Pronunciation.	-Variety and accuracy in the use of grammar structures. -Variety and accuracy in the use of vocabulary. -Clarity and precision in	-Pre-test -Post-test	Score: 1, 2 or 3. Level of Speaking: -Good speaking (10-12 total score). -Regular speaking (5-9 total score).

Languages degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the regular academic period 2024-1.	and Foreign Languages degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the regular academic period 2024-1.	third-semester students of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the regular academic period 2024-1	vocabulary, pronunciation, discourse management, and interactive communication are used to achieve the exchange of messages effectively (UCLES,2019)	-Discourse management. -Interactive communication.	pronouncing of words. -Well organised ideas. -No long pauses during the conversation. -Answer according to the question. -Add and suggest relevant points to the conversation.	-Bad speaking (1-4 total score).
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2.6.2 Development of research instruments

In order to investigate the development of the speaking skill in English of the third-semester students of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the regular academic period 2024-1, it was proceeded to the elaboration and use of different research instruments, carefully designed to evaluate and identify each dimension of this skill that needs to be strengthened.

Arias et al. (2016) stipulates that the benefit from a non-participant observation guide is to take notes and characterise the variable to measure in a natural state without bad or good effects due to the presence of researcher. This is the reason for using this type of method at the beginning of the study in order to characterise relevant points related to development of the English class and to choose the best way to implement the proposal of a system of autonomous activities.

The speaking part from the Cambridge B1 Preliminary test is used, which was adapted so that it is not too long in relation to the time needed to answer it. The test consists of fourteen questions which encourage students to express themselves orally according to their competences. This allows the results to be examined and analysed systematically, helping to ensure that the research would be rigorous and accurately grounded.

2.6.3 Data analysis

In order to contribute to the development of speaking skill in English, it is established that work must be done in four dimensions: grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation, discourse management, and interactive communication; for which a rubric has been created and used to obtain the scores from answers to pedagogical tests applied to the students, accompanied by a scale that determines the general measurement of the variable under studying.

Table 2
Adapted scale for measuring variable under studying

Dimensions	Score		
	3	2	1
Grammar and Vocabulary	Excellent, varied and accurate use of grammar structures and vocabulary. Very few mistakes.	Adequate use of grammar structures and vocabulary with few errors which do not affect comprehension.	Very limited use of grammar and vocabulary. Make errors frequently which impede comprehension
Pronunciation	Excellent, clear and precise pronunciation of words and variation of stress. Make few errors that do not impede comprehension.	Pronunciation generally clear with a few errors which rarely hinder comprehension.	Pronunciation very difficult to understand, with many errors that impede communication. Use of mother tongue.
Discourse Management	Very well organised and coherent speech. Ideas flow naturally and logically without unnecessary pause.	Generally coherent speech with some pauses and repetitions, but easy to follow.	Unable to produce coherent speech. Ideas are disorganised and it is difficult to follow the conversation.
Interactive Communication	Excellent interaction, participates actively and naturally, responding and encouraging the interviewer's participation.	Adequate interaction, answers questions in a relevant way, but with some difficulties.	Unable to interact effectively. Does not respond adequately to question.
Good Speaking 12 - 10		Regular Speaking 9 – 5	Bad Speaking 4 – 1

The following Interval scale was used for the general analysis of the speaking skill in English of third-semester students of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages Degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the regular academic period 2024-1:

- Good Speaking: students who scored between 10 and 12 points on the pedagogical test.
- Regular Speaking: students who scored between 5 and 9 points on the pedagogical test.
- Bad Speaking: students who scored between 1 and 4 points on the pedagogical test.

Everything described above to identify the level of speaking of the students was designed, developed and used in order to provide reliable data for the measurement and interpretation of the variable under studying; this will allow to observe the changes produced on it after implementing the system of autonomous activities described in the next chapters.

System of autonomous activities to contribute to the development of speaking skill in English

This chapter describes the author's proposal to contribute to the development of speaking skill in English of third-semester students of the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the academic period 2024-1. This chapter deals with the theoretical foundations that support the way in which it is designed and implemented the system of activities that encourages learner autonomy.

3.1 Theoretical foundations of a system of autonomous activities to contribute to development of speaking skill in English of third-semester students of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the academic period 2024-1

In order to contribute to development of speaking skill in English of third-semester students of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the academic period 2024-1 by implementing a system of autonomous activities, it is essential to understand the definitions and foundations of what a system is and what it consists of.

A system of activities is understood as a structured set of actions and tasks designed to achieve specific objectives within the teaching-learning process. The conception of a system of activities is based on educational theories that highlight the importance of the way in which these are organised, as well as keeping the characteristic of being coherent in the implementation of pedagogical issues. According to Vygotsky (1934), a system of activities implies a dynamic interaction between the student, teacher and different learning environments, where each activity builds on the previous one, facilitating the cognitive and social development of the student.

Ausubel (1963) points out that a well-designed system of activities facilitates the assimilation and retention of new knowledge by relating it to previously learned concepts. Ausubel emphasises the relevance of prior organiser and cognitive structures in the learning process suggesting that activities should be presented logically and hierarchically. Therefore, a system of activities not only provides clear guidance for students, but also ensures cumulative and structured learning, allowing students to build on their existing knowledge effectively.

From the perspective of Leontiev's activity theory, human activity is the core of psychological development. A system of activities involves a series of goal-oriented actions, where each action is motivated by a specific desire or need. This approach highlights the importance of intentionality and motivation in carrying out educational activities, emphasising that a well-designed system must consider the individual interests and needs of students in order to be effective.

A key aspect of a system of activities is its ability to foster learner autonomy. According to the authors and their self-determination theory, students are more motivated and engaged when they have control over their learning and can make informed decisions about their activities. A system that promotes autonomy provides students with opportunities to self-assess, to set their own goals and select appropriate learning strategies and resources. This not only improves academic performance, but also develops self-regulation and self-efficacy skills (Deci & Ryan, 1935).

A system of activities must be flexible and adaptable to meet diverse educational needs and contexts. Dewey (1916) argues that education should be relevant and meaningful to learners, adapting to their experiences and environment. An effective system, therefore, includes mechanisms for continuous assessment and feedback; allowing for real-time adjustments and

improvements. This dynamic and adaptive approach ensures that educational activities are relevant and effective, providing a solid foundation for long-term learning.

3.2 Description of the system of autonomous activities to contribute to the development of speaking skill in English

3.2.1 Characteristics of the system of autonomous activities

Based on what has been stipulated, the system of autonomous activities must possess some characteristics that supports its functionality and generate a positive perspective in relation to its application. The current system of autonomous activities to contribute to development of speaking skill in English of third-semester students of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages at the Universidad Técnica de Machala highlights the following qualities:

It is personalised and adaptable as it considers the varying levels of proficiency in speaking skills within the study group. It is practical because the activities are based on guided by the reality of the learners, evoking a natural student participation.

It is reflective, encouraging students' self-assessment in order to diagnose specific areas for improvement and take the necessary steps to achieve their objectives. It is motivating, it helps students to develop their intrinsic motivation by giving them a more participatory role in the learning process.

It is flexible, executing the activities inside or outside the classroom; allowing to take advantage of the time of each session without interruptions and adapting to the individual contexts of the population. It is inclusive, allowing each of the students to participate in all the activities and benefit from it, and avoiding that none of them being left out of the activities.

3.2.2 General objective of the system of autonomous activities

This system's general objective is, aligned to the research's one, to contribute to the development of speaking skill in English of the third-semester students of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the regular academic period 2024-1.

3.2.3 Elements of the system of autonomous activities to contribute to the development of speaking skill in English

The current system of autonomous activities to contribute to the development of speaking skill in English is consisted of the following components:

Components.

This system of autonomous activities is developed on the basis of the qualities that a student who is using the autonomous learning approach to their English language studies should have, these activities when are related to the speaking skill of the group are described as follows:

Component 1: Identification of weaknesses in speaking.

This refers to the learner's ability to identify the specific dimensions of speaking skills in which they are deficient.

Component 2: Goal setting

This refers to the learner's ability to set personalised, clear and achievable objectives which will enable effective and reliable progress in relation to their speaking skill.

Component 3: Selection of resources and strategies.

This refers to the learner's ability to choose appropriate resources to guide their progress towards positive outcomes in their speaking skill in English.

Activities.

This represents the set of actions that will be carried out to achieve the overall objective of the current research. These actions are developed through the autonomous learning approach and are described as follows:

Activity 1: Audio-visual recording.

Activity 2: Explanation of the four dimensions of speaking skill.

Activity 3: Self-assessment.

Activity 4: Definition of objectives.

Activity 5: Presentation of the list of recommended resources.

Activity 6: Development of the personalised action plan.

Objectives.

This represents the goals that are expected to be achieved at the end of the implementation of the system of activities developed in each of the three components previously mentioned. The planned objectives for the activities that make up the system that will contribute to the development of study group's speaking skill in English are as follows:

-To encourage learners to identify areas of weakness in their speaking skill in English.

-To encourage learners to set clear and achievable aims to guide their progress in relation to their speaking skill.

-To provide students with a variety of useful tools and strategies for their progress towards reaching B1 level in their speaking skill.

Resources.

This element represents the set of tools to be used to carry out each proposed activity. Teacher is considered as part of resources used for the students to perform effectively during the execution of the system of autonomous activities.

The following table is the general outline of the system of autonomous activities to contribute to the development of the study group's speaking skill:

Table 3
Elements of system of autonomous activities

Components	Activity	Objective	Resources
Component 1: Identification of weaknesses in speaking.	Activity 1: Audio-visual recording. Activity 2: Explanation of the four dimensions of speaking skill. Activity 3: Self-assessment.	To encourage learners to identify areas of weakness in their speaking skill in English.	-Cell phone. -Student voice. -Questions from B1 Preliminary test. -Whiteboard. -Markers. -B1 Preliminary test marks scale. -Audio-visual recording.
Component 2: Goal setting	Activity 4: Definition of objectives.	To encourage learners to set clear and achievable aims to guide their progress in relation to their speaking skill.	-Student's perception. -Results of the self-assessment. -Pens. -Notebook.

Component 3: Selection of resources and strategies.	Activity 5: Presentation of the list of recommended resources. Activity 6: Development of the personalised action plan	To provide students with a variety of useful tools and strategies for their progress towards reaching B1 level in their speaking skill.	-Chat GPT. -Teacher. -List of recommended resources. -WhatsApp. -Student's perception. -Paper sheet.
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Source: Own elaboration

3.3 General orientations of the system of autonomous activities to contribute to the development of the speaking skill in English

This section will describe the general orientations for the implementation of a system of autonomous activities to contribute to the development of speaking skill in English of the third-semester students of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the regular academic period 2024-1.

It will be implemented during the last half of semester so that the results obtained individually serve as a basis for the achievement of the objectives in relation to the dimensions that must be improved for a B1 level of competence in speaking as established by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; in addition to providing the necessary tools for better development in the community service practices that the study group will carry out in the following academic period according to the curriculum belonging to the degree.

Recognising that the autonomous learning approach allows the student to be the protagonist of their educational process by encouraging their autonomy within it, the autonomous activities

proposed for the system to be implemented are designed to be carried out inside and outside the classroom; thus, allowing to take advantage of the normal time of the sessions and the different tools that technological progress allows us to use when learning this language.

Activities proposed for the system are planned to be carried out sequentially. They are activities that were designed not to interrupt the lesson plans of the study group, but rather to provide an additional input to the lesson they normally receive during the week. They were planned to be performed in different interventions respecting the sequence and are described as follows:

Component 1. Identifying weaknesses in speaking.

Activity 1: Audio-visual recording

Objective: to encourage learners to identify areas of weakness in their speaking skill in English.

Instruction: Student will record a video answering questions according to the level they are required to reach.

Procedure:

Stage 1

The benefits of being aware of what our oral production is like through audio-visual recording are recognised.

Stage 2

It is proceeded with audio-visual recordings of students while answering questions of which they had no prior knowledge but related to their reality.

Resources:

-Mobile phone.

-Students voice.

-Questions from B1 preliminary test.

Activity 2: Explanation of the four dimensions of speaking skill.

Objective: to encourage learners to identify areas of weakness in their speaking skill in English.

Instruction: Teacher will present and explain the four dimensions of speaking considered in the B1 Preliminary test.

Procedure:

Stage 1

The four dimensions that are graded in the speaking part from B1 Preliminary test are presented and explained by the teacher, so that students are aware of the specific areas to be considered in speaking skill performance.

Stage 2

Students are encouraged to ask the necessary questions to clear up doubts about what has been explained and to be aware of what is involved in oral production.

Resources:

-Whiteboard

-Markers.

-Teacher.

-Grading scale from B1 Preliminary test.

Activity 3: Self-assessment

Objective: to encourage learners to identify areas of weakness in their speaking skill in English.

Instruction: Learners will carry out a self-assessment about speaking performance on audio-visual recording.

Procedure:

Stage 1

The audio-visual record is reviewed individually to obtain quantitative results based on the scale provided.

Stage 2

Students are aware of their strengths and weaknesses in their oral production, enabling them to recognise these ones from the scale describing B1 performance in speaking.

Resources:

-Teacher

- Grading scale from B1 Preliminary test

-Audio-visual recording.

-Notebook.

-Pen.

Component 2. Goal setting.

Activity 4: Definition of objectives.

Objective: to encourage learners to set clear and achievable aims to guide their progress in relation to their speaking skill.

Instruction: Students will set achievable objectives according to their weaknesses in order to improve their speaking skill.

Procedure:

Stage 1

The results from self-assessment are analysed individually to determine which dimensions need to be worked on.

Stage 2

Personalised objectives are set which allow the student to stay motivated in their language learning process.

Resources:

- Student's perception.
- Results from self-assessment.
- Notebook.
- Whiteboard.
- Teacher.
- Markers.
- Pens.

Component 3. Selection of resources and strategies.

Activity 5: Presentation of the list of recommended resources.

Objective: to provide students with a variety of useful tools and strategies for their progress towards reaching B1 level in their speaking skill.

Instruction: Teacher presents a list of recommended resources that students can use to improve their speaking skill.

Procedure:

Stage 1

A list will be generated to provide learners with a wide range of resources, strategies, materials and techniques that contribute to the improvement of the specific areas of their oral production in which they are deficient and that are useful in relation to their objectives.

Stage 2

The list generated by the teacher on the basis of his or her experience is detailed, and then, it is sent to the students so that they can benefit from its availability.

Resources:

-Teacher.

-Chat GPT.

-WhatsApp.

Activity 6: Development of the personalised action plan.

Objective: to provide students with a variety of useful tools and strategies for their progress towards reaching B1 level in their speaking skill.

Instruction: Students will create a personalised action plan to achieve the objectives set out in Activity 4.

Procedure:

Stage 1

Appropriate resources are selected from the list given to students in relation to the objectives set as an outcome of activity four.

Stage 2

The list generated by the teacher on the basis of his or her experience is detailed, and then, it is sent to the students so that they can benefit from its availability.

Resources:

- Student's perception.
- List of recommended resources.
- Paper sheet
- Pens.

Implementation of the system of autonomous activities to contribute to the development of speaking skill of third-semester students of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree during the regular academic period 2024-1

This section will describe the implementation of the system of autonomous activities to contribute to the development of speaking skill of third-semester students of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree during the regular academic period 2024-1. In addition, the results on the variable to measure after implementing the proposed system will be detailed using quantitative data to verify the hypothesis.

4.1 Description of the implementation of the system of autonomous activities to contribute to the development of speaking skill in English

In order to carry out the study, permission to observe her class was arranged with the subject teacher and the days on which the interventions could take place were established; an initial oral exchange was held with the students to organise the development of the interventions.

The implementation of the system of autonomous activities to contribute to the development of speaking skill was carried out through different interventions, and took place during the final part of the English B1.1 lessons received by the students on June 19th, July 9th and July 16th. The activities comprising the system involved student participation both inside and outside the classroom; and were implemented as follows:

Intervention 1

The first intervention took place on Wednesday 19 June 2024 in the English B1.1 lesson from 7:00am to 9:00 am. It began with a dialogue with the study group about the importance of being aware of our oral production and it was indicated that a good option to notice specific issues is the audio-visual records. In addition, an oral exchange was held to establish the advantages of

spontaneous interviews rather than a prepared presentation which can be memorised and does not give the opportunity to demonstrate our speaking skill in social interaction.

The first activity from the proposed system, which consists in the audio-visual recording of the students answering some questions taken from the speaking part of the Cambridge Preliminary test for B1 qualification, was developed individually allowing the student's performance to be natural and without the student locating under the pressure of being assessed.

The recordings were carried out normally, allowing each student to express themselves orally according to their thoughts, ideas, preferences, routines and reality for two minutes. Once the audio-visual recording process was completed individually, each recording was sent directly to the participating student via the WhatsApp in order to maintain confidentiality between the researcher and the student.

Intervention 2

The second intervention took place the following class session on Tuesday 9 July from 9:00 am to 11:00 am. At the beginning of the second intervention with the group, through the use of dialogue, the importance of the audio-visual record of performance in relation to the development of speaking skill was recalled.

The second activity was developed with the help of traditional resources such as the whiteboard, markers and the teacher's voice, which made it possible to explain the key concepts of the four dimensions of speaking considered for the present study: grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation, discourse management and interactive communication.

Then, teacher provided some exemplification of specific errors in relation to each dimension for a better understanding of the theory, such as the situation in which a student pronounces the word "develop" with stress on the last syllable instead of stressing the second one

to refer to the action, and the same way with other words which would indicate that the student reflects weakness in the pronunciation dimension.

Researcher gave each student the scale that Cambridge Press test provides free of charge to assess the speaking part from their B1 Preliminary Test. This scale aided understanding of the dimensions of speaking, enabling students to be aware of how to self-asses their audio-visual recording through points and description of competences.

In this second intervention, the necessary indications were given to carried out the activity number three of the current system, which is the self-evaluation of the audio-visual record of the student. This activity was completed by the students at home, for the development of this autonomous activity the video and scale provided were used in order to self-diagnose the weak areas of each student. At the end of these three activities, students identified the dimensions of their speaking skill in which they should improve or to which they should pay more attention during their oral production.

Intervention 3

The third intervention took place on Tuesday 16 July between 9:00 am to 11:00 am. The intervention began with questions to the students to know if there were any difficulties in understanding the subjective self-assessment of the previous activity. After that, the teacher proceeded to explain that an objective within our area which is the teaching-learning of the English language begins with an infinitive verb, and that in relation to the development of the following activity “to improve” will be used; which means to get or make something better and that in our context this verb would be related to improving the dimension in which we are demonstrate weaknesses.

Activity four was developed individually with the help of identifying weaknesses as a result of the three activities previously carried out. Students set their goals using the following lexical chunk that the researcher established “to improve” + the dimension in which they identified weaknesses, for example: “to improve my discourse management”. Students set one to four objectives according to their self-diagnosis, allowing them to define their goals and symbolically placing themselves at the beginning of their improvement.

For completing activity number five which was developed within this intervention, the researcher generated a list of resources, strategies, techniques and materials that can be used for the improvement of each dimension of speaking. To create this list, sources as Chat GPT, knowledge and essential experience in the field of English language teaching were used to select the most effective resources to contribute to students’ aims.

At the beginning of this fourth activity, the researcher sent via WhatsApp a document containing this list. He proceeded to describe how it was structured. The file was divided by objectives related to each dimension, meaning that students who set the goal “To improve my pronunciation” were directed to the corresponding section to visualise all the resources, strategies, techniques and materials they could use to achieve this kind of goal.

Activity six, the elaboration of the personalised action plan, which concludes the system autonomous activities to contribute to the development of oral expression, was developed in the last part of this intervention. Once, the individual objectives had been established and the list of recommended resources had been provided, the researcher gave the students a paper sheet (see Appendix C) to be completed at home.

The students elaborated their personalised plan to be executed by completing this paper sheet that consisted of questions related to which dimensions of speaking they showed weaknesses

and in which strengths. They wrote the previously established objective, and selected the resources, strategies, techniques and materials appropriate to their area to be improved, as well as estimated how many hours per week they would dedicate to the improvement of these weaknesses.

The researcher clarified that the execution of the action plan developed depended on the reality and time availability of each student, establishing that once the action plan was developed and after the students had carried out the appropriate actions according to their objectives, the post-test would be taken in the next session, which is after 8 days, for a reference of the benefits from the implemented system.

4.2 Results obtained after the implementation of the system of autonomous activities to contribute to the development of speaking skill in English of third-semester students of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree

This section will describe the results obtained after the implementation of the system of autonomous activities in relation to the speaking skill of the students who make up the population. This system consisted of the implementation of activities that contribute to the development of the speaking skill of the study group, it was developed on the basis of the autonomous learning approach; and the effectiveness of the system was measured quantitatively by means of a post-test which was the same pedagogical test applied as pre-test.

This process was carried out in this way in order to show whether there are changes in the variable to measure through true data and to allow a reliable analysis of the results obtained after the implementation of the system in order to corroborate or discard the hypothesis put forward in the current research. The results of each dimension of speaking plus the general analysis in relation to this skill of the population are presented.

Dimension 1: Grammar and vocabulary.

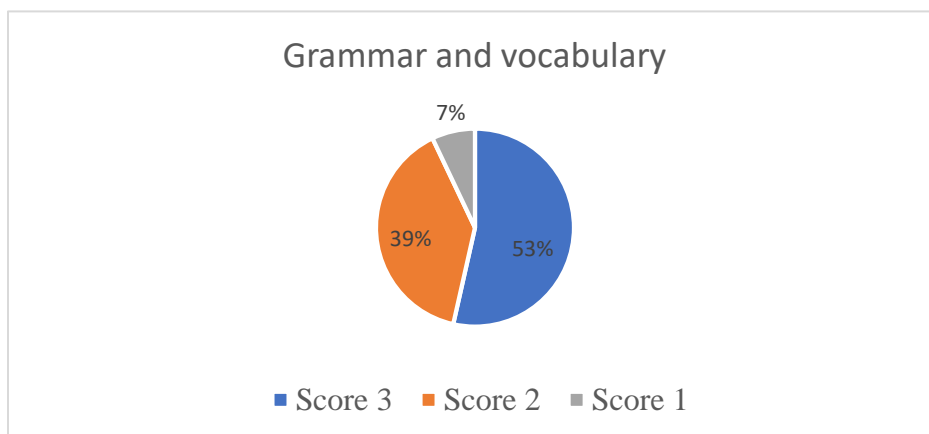


Figure 6

Results from post-test in the grammar and vocabulary dimension.

The highest percentage represent those students who scored highest in the grammar and vocabulary dimension, these students demonstrated excellent, varied and accurate use of grammar structures and vocabulary in their speaking and made few or no error in the exchange of ideas orally. This indicates that in this group were added those students who invested effort and time to investigate the resources available to improve this area of speaking skill.

The group of eleven students, representing 39% of the whole study group, demonstrated in their oral production an adequate use of grammar structures and vocabulary used in their answers, and made few errors which did not affect the comprehension of their speaking. One of the improvements in this area was the use of the correct term to indicate the name of the degree they are studying, exchanging the word “idioms” for the word “languages”.

On the other hand, two students, representing 7% showed no improvement; their speaking demonstrated a very limited use of grammar structures and vocabulary; in addition, they made frequent mistakes that prevented them from understanding their ideas. This may indicate that they have not yet found adequate strategies and tools to address their weaknesses in this dimension, requiring better monitoring and support from the teacher.

Dimension 2: Pronunciation

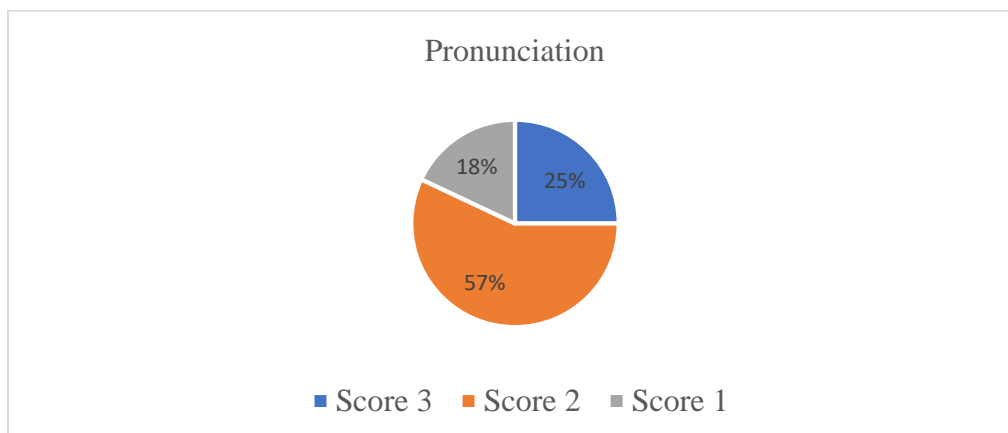


Figure 7

Results from post-test in the pronunciation dimension.

The highest percentage represented those students who scored two out of three points in the pronunciation dimension, these students demonstrated generally clear pronunciation with a few errors that rarely hindered comprehension. The number of students who scored highest in this area showed no change from the pre-test, with the same number of students demonstrating excellent, clear and accurate pronunciation with few or no errors. On the other hand, there was a reduction in the overall percentage of students whose oral production denoted very difficult to understand pronunciation with several errors that impede communication. The most frequent error among these learners was the interference of their mother tongue in the pronunciation of sounds of words when expressing themselves in English.

Dimension 3: Discourse management.

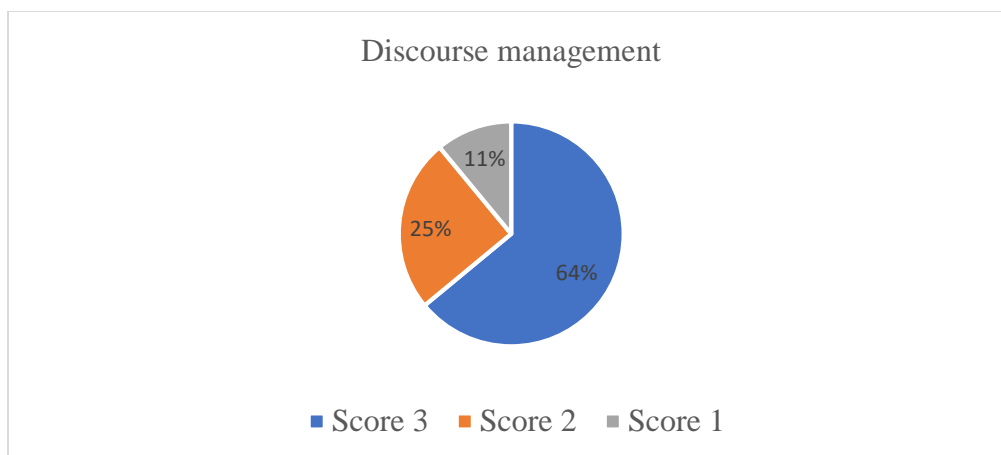


Figure 8

Results from post-test in the discourse management dimension.

The group of 18 students representing 64% of the whole group demonstrated a great improvement in their discourse management, this group during their speaking demonstrated a very well organised and coherent speech in which their ideas flowed naturally and logically without unnecessary pauses. The 25% of the group during their oral production showed a generally coherent speech with some pauses and repetitions, but easy to follow; with more practice time and use of the tools provided they can improve smoothly in this area. Finally, the number of students who demonstrated in their speaking that they are not able to produce coherent speech decreased to 11%. This group who scored the lowest in this dimension responded to questions with disorganised ideas, making it difficult to follow the thread of the conversation.

Dimension 4: Interactive communication.

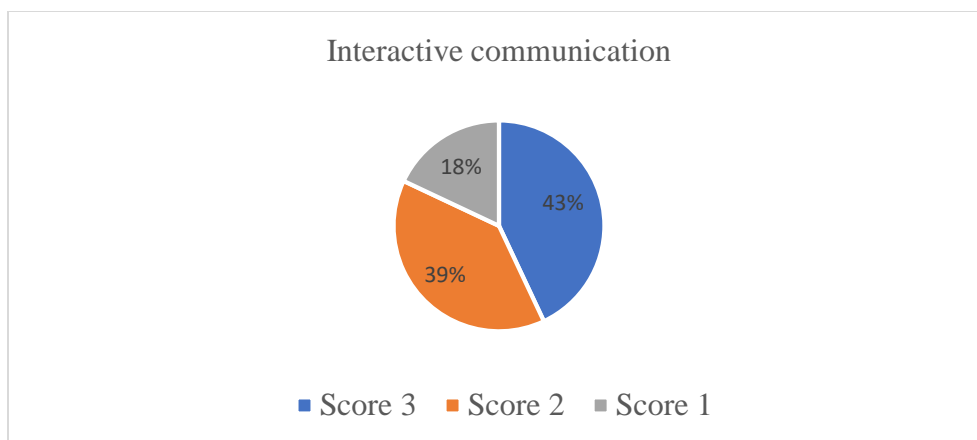


Figure 9

Results from post-test in the interactive communication dimension.

The majority of the group representing 43% scored highest in this area. These students demonstrated excellent interaction during their speaking, participated actively and naturally in their answers, and encouraged the participation of the interviewer. The students who scored two out of three points, representing 39% of the group, demonstrated adequate interaction and answered to the questions with relevant ideas but with some difficulties which encouraged less interviewer participation.

On the other hand, there was a decrease in the overall percentage of the lowest rated students by pre-test. This group of students demonstrated during their oral production that they are not able to interact effectively, giving short answers or simply did not answer the question, and sometimes asked the interviewer to move on to the next question.

General analysis.

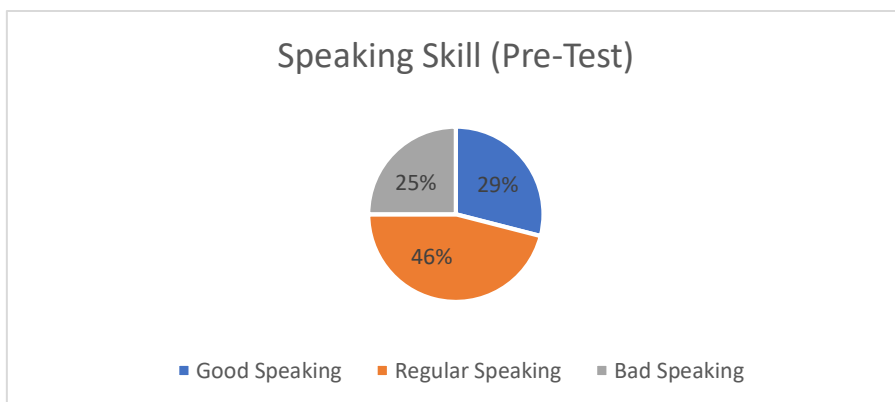


Figure 5

General diagnosis of the levels of speaking skill of population (pre-test)

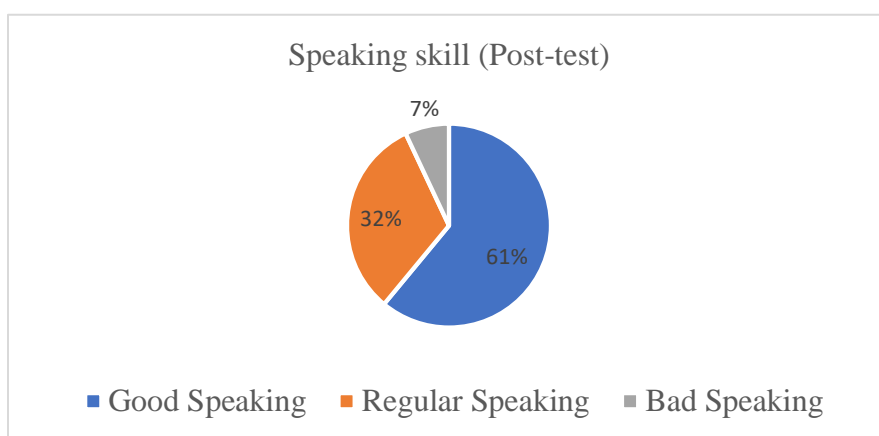


Figure 10

General diagnosis of the levels of speaking skill of population(post-test)

The results from the pre-test allow a quantitative comparison to be made with those obtained after the application of the pre-test which will show whether there is an increase or decrease in the total percentage of students who during the oral exchange of messages denote a level of good speaking, regular speaking or bad speaking.

The percentage representing those students who scored between 10 and 12 on the pedagogical test used as post-test and whose oral production showed a level of "Good Speaking" increased significantly. This shows that those who demonstrated a level of "Regular Speaking on

the pre-test selected adequate resources to achieve their goals established within their personalised action plan, working on their weaknesses and improving their responses during the post-test.

On the other hand, there was a reduction from 25% to 7% in the percentage of students who demonstrated that their oral production is at “Bad Speaking” level; this evidenced an improvement in those students who worked on their weaknesses and managed to break away from this group and reach a “Regular Speaking” level along their performance in the post-test. The students who still remained at “Bad Speaking” level require more practice in this skill and a personalised explanation for a better understanding of the areas to improve and the effective use of the resources provided by the teacher.

4.3 Hypothesis testing

Scientific hypothesis: if a system of autonomous activities is implemented in English classes, it will contribute to the development of the speaking skill of third-semester students of the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the regular academic period 2024-1.

H0: The implementation of a system of autonomous activities in English classes **does not contribute significantly** to the development of speaking skill of the third-semester of the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the regular academic period 2024-1.

H1: The implementation of a system of autonomous activities in English classes **contributes significantly** to the development of speaking skill of the third-semester of the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the regular academic period 2024-1.

The critical value for the chi-squared statistic is determined by:

$$\chi^2 (1-a) * (r-1) (c-1)$$

$$\text{Degree of freedom: } DF = (r-1) (c-1) = 2$$

Margin of error

$$a = 0.05$$

Value scale of the Pre-diagnosis and Post-diagnosis

Table 4

Value scale of the Pre-diagnosis and Post-diagnosis

Research Instrument	Good Speaking	Regular Speaking	Bad Speaking	Total
Pre-Test	8	13	7	28
Post-Test	17	9	2	28

Source: Own elaboration

Observed Frequencies

Table 5

Observed Frequencies

Research Instrument	Good Speaking	Regular Speaking	Bad Speaking	Total
Pre-Test	8	13	7	28
Post-Test	17	9	2	28
Total	25	22	9	56

Source: Own elaboration

Expected frequencies

Table 6

Expected Frequencies

Research Instrument	Good Speaking	Regular Speaking	Bad Speaking	Total
Pre-Test	$28 * 25 / 56 = 12,5$	$28 * 22 / 56 = 11$	$28 * 9 / 56 = 4,5$	28
Post-Test	$28 * 25 / 56 = 12,5$	$28 * 22 / 56 = 11$	$28 * 9 / 56 = 4,5$	28
Total	25	22	9	56

Source: Own elaboration

*Chi-squared (x2)***Table 7**
Chi-squared (x2)

Research Instrument	Good Speaking	Regular Speaking	Bad Speaking	Total
Pre-Test	1,62	0,36	1,39	3,37
Post-Test	1,62	0,36	1,39	3,37
Total	3,24	0,72	2,78	6,74

Source: Own elaboration

*Compare Chi-square static:***Table 8**
Compare Chi-square static

Chi-square	Critical Value
6,74	5,99

Source: Own elaboration

The verification of the scientific hypothesis was carried out through the chi-square results, comparing the value obtained with the critical value equivalent to 5.99. The premise of measurement is that if the value obtained by chi-square is higher than the critical one, the null hypothesis is rejected and the scientific hypothesis is accepted. On the other hand, obtaining a value lower than the critical value indicates that there is insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis.

Under the chosen level of significance, the data demonstrated that the implementation of the system of autonomous activities in English classes **contributes significantly** to the development of speaking skill of the third-semester of the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the regular academic period

2024-1. This will benefit the academic training of future professionals in the area of English as foreign language, specifically in the development of their speaking skill.

4.4 Analysis and discussion of results

This section will provide an analysis of the results of the research, focusing on the changes that were evidenced between the initial diagnosis and the data from post-test which was carried out after the implementation of the system of autonomous activities to contribute to the development of the speaking skill in English of 28 third-semester students of the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages degree at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the academic period 2024-1.

The development of oral expression is a crucial consideration issue for students who are training in the field of Pedagogy of English as Foreign Language, adequate and competent preparation in relation to the objectives expected about different levels of this skill contributes significantly to proficiency in this language.

The results of the chi-square analysis suggest that the implementation of the system of autonomous activities proved to have a positive and significant effect on the development of the speaking skills of the participant group. After the intervention of the proposal it was possible to notice a considerable increase in the percentage of students who were at the level of “Good Speaking” and a marked decrease in the percentages corresponding to students with a level of “Regular Speaking” and “Bad speaking”.

These findings are consistent with the hypothesis that an autonomous approach where learners play a leading role by taking greater responsibility for their own learning can lead to improvements in speaking proficiency (Huyen & Cang, 2021). The significant increase in the group of students with a “Good Speaking” level suggests that the system not only contributes to

the development of speaking skill but also promotes learner autonomy for effective progress within this skill.

The evidence from this research is consistent with the previous study by Borg & Alshumaimeri (2019) which stipulates that achieving learner autonomy is an ideal goal for the process of English language acquisition, arguing that by being aware of the specific areas of weakness, these shortcomings can be better addressed, resulting in significant progress towards proficiency in this case in speaking.

The benefit and relevance of the autonomous learning approach lies in its aim to train learners who are able to assess and correct those aspects that hinder the effectiveness of their learning process; allowing them to improve, through constant review, planning, monitoring and evaluation of their training, the way in which manage and solve these problems rather than just completing the activities proposed during the class (Cárcel, 2016).

The effectiveness of the system of autonomous activities as contribution to the development of speaking skill lies in factors such as increased learned motivation because it is believed that those who have the autonomy to manage their own learning may feel more motivated and committed to their progress; and adaptability because learners can tailor the system to their own needs and pace of learning, making this process a more personalised and effective experience.

However, it is pertinent to mention that for the generalisation of the results, the system of autonomous activities needs to be applied to a larger population and additional assessment methods need to be added. These findings can serve as a basis for future researches to promote autonomous learning and speaking development with bigger populations but with similar characteristics.

Conclusions

The research carried out in the context of the third-semester students of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the regular academic period 2024-1 allowed us to recognise that in order to contribute to the development of the group's speaking skill, it is necessary to implement various proposals which focus their efforts on promoting learner autonomy. This is a compelling reason to state that the proposed system of autonomous activities constitutes a significant contribution to the development of this skill.

The theoretical systematization of autonomous learning has been shown to have a significant influence in the development of speaking skill in English. The scientific literature reviewed highlights that autonomy in learning allows students to take control of their educational process, and is strongly linked to improvements in English language skills.

The initial diagnosis of the third-semester students of the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the regular academic period 2024-1 reflected a variation in the levels of the participant's speaking skill, allowing us to identify that pronunciation is the weakest area of the most of 28 students. In addition, it corroborated the need for a proposal to help address the different shortcomings during the oral production of the population.

The implementation of the system of autonomous activities to contribute to the development of speaking skill in English required rigorous planning in order to carry out the interventions smoothly; a relevant factor was the time allocated for the execution of the personalised action plan, which spanned 8 days before re-measuring this skill through the pre-test. The structure of the system activities provided flexibility and adaptability, fostering learner autonomy in continuous and contextualised language practice.

The evaluation of the impact of the system of autonomous activities showed positive and significant results that contributed to the development of the speaking skill in English of the third-semester students of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages at the Universidad Técnica de Machala during the regular academic period 2024-1. Through results of the post-test it was identified that the dimensions in which students improved after the interventions were grammar and vocabulary and discourse management. It is inferred that the students feel more motivated and aware in relation to the improvement of their weaknesses, which suggest long-term benefits in the development of this skill and in their academic training.

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Appendix A

Non-participant observation guide

Aim: To recognize how the study group's English B1.1 lesson is developed focusing on their speaking skill and elements that are available during the session.

Subject	English B1.1		
Author:	Alex Ramos		
Date:			
N° Participants:			
Questions	Yes	No	Details
Is the objective of the class presented?			
Is the English language used to express orally during the lesson?			
Are a variety of activities involving the use of the English language carried out in class?			
Are digital resources used during the lesson?			
Do students have mobile phone in class?			
Does the teacher propose all the activities to be carried out during the lesson?			
Is the oral participation of students constant?			
Does the teacher provide feedback on pupil's oral participation?			

Appendix B

Pedagogical test

B1: Preliminary Speaking Test

Part 1 (2–3 minutes approx.)

Phase 1

Interlocutor Good morning. Introduce the interview.

 What's your name?

 Where do you live/come from?

Thank you.

(Interlocutor asks the following questions)

Where do you work or are you a student?
What do you do/study?

Back-up prompts

Do you have a job? / Do you study?
What job do you do?
What subject do you study?

Thank you.

Phase 2

How do you get to university every day?

Back-up prompts

Do you usually travel by car?
(Why?/Why not?)

What did you do yesterday evening?

Do you think that English will be useful

for you in the future?

(Why?/Why not?)

Thank you.

Part 4

Use the following questions, as appropriate:

What do you do when you want to relax? (Why?)

Do you prefer to relax with friends or alone? (Why?)

Is it important to do exercise in your free time? (Why?/Why not?)

Is it useful to learn new skills in your free time? (Why?/Why not?)

Do you think people spend too much time working/studying these days? (Why?/Why not?)

Select any of the following prompts, as appropriate:

- **How/what about you?**
- **Do you agree?**
- **What do you think?**

Thank you.
That is the end of the interview.

Appendix C

Autonomous activity

Personalized plan action

Objective: To recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the students' oral expression in order to elaborate a personalized plan for the improvement of this skill.

- 1) Based on the given rubric from Cambridge Test B1 Preliminary, what is the strongest dimension from your speaking skill?
- 2) Based on the given rubric from Cambridge Test B1 Preliminary, what is the weakest dimension from your speaking skill?
- 3) Do you have other weaknesses in your speaking skill?
- 4) What are your aims related to improve your speaking skill?
- 5) Based on your aims, elaborate a personalized action plan in order to achieve them.

DIMENSION TO IMPROVE	STRATEGIES, ACTIVITIES, RESOURCES OR MATERIALS	TIME PER WEEK