

# Encouraging Teenagers to Improve Speaking Skills through Games in a Colombian Public School<sup>\*</sup>

Motivación de adolescentes para mejorar su expresión oral mediante el juego en un colegio público colombiano

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Our project was implemented with tenth grade students of a public school located in the Usme Zone in Bogotá. We decided to develop this action research project because we were concerned about our students' difficulties when attempting to speak English. They felt inhibited with activities that involved oral interaction mainly because they were afraid of criticism and jokes about what they said. To develop our project we used video recordings, the teacher's journal and questionnaires answered by the students. The results showed that students felt better, free and confident when they participated in oral tasks, particularly during games. We saw collaboration, solidarity and interaction among them. In addition, they were relaxed and happy at the time they had to perform in small groups.

*Key words:* Oral communication, games, motivation, adolescents, teenagers

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El mejoramiento de las habilidades lingüísticas a través del juego se adelantó con estudiantes de grado décimo de un colegio público ubicado en la localidad de Usme, en Bogotá. Se decidió desarrollar este proyecto de investigación-acción porque las dificultades de los estudiantes para hablar en inglés eran preocupantes. Estos se sentían inhibidos en las actividades que involucraran interacción oral, principalmente porque sentían temor ante las críticas y las bromas acerca de lo que dijeran. Para el desarrollo del proyecto se utilizaron videograbaciones, el diario de profesor y cuestionarios que respondieron los estudiantes. Los resultados mostraron que los estudiantes se sintieron mejor, libres y seguros cuando participaron en actividades orales, particularmente en juegos. Así, se observó colaboración, solidaridad e interacción entre ellos. Además, estuvieron motivados y contentos a la hora de actuar en grupos pequeños.

*Palabras clave:* comunicación oral, juegos, motivación, adolescentes

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## Introduction

The students of English at the Federico García Lorca School had the ability to communicate their ideas in writing. Furthermore, they were able to understand

commands and simple instructions through listening exercises. Additionally, they could read and comprehend basic texts. However, we saw that they had difficulties with their speaking production because they looked apathetic and inhibited in activities which involved oral skills. Many of them felt afraid of being criticized and humiliated in front of their partners. As a result, they avoided being part of this kind of activities. For this reason, we considered it necessary to implement an innovative and action research project that fostered the development of the oral ability.

## Research Questions

Our main question was this one: How can games encourage teenagers to improve speaking skills? To account for this query, we posed two sub-questions, namely:

- What kinds of games can we use to improve students' speaking skills?
- What happens to students' oral production when they are engaged in games?

## Context

In 2006 when we carried out the present study, our school community was made up of a principal, 2,600 students and 86 teachers. The teaching staff included 4 coordinators, one psychologist, one phonoaudiologist, and 13 teachers of the English area. The school was divided into three locations: one for pre-school, another for primary and the last for high school.

Nowadays the Federico García Lorca School is organized according to the educational laws, and it has its own curriculum. Our curriculum is everything that involves the teaching-learning process in a school, including government policies, institutional guide-lines, the pedagogical principles it follows, institutional emphasis, study plans, resources, needs, the zone context, assessment and evaluation.

Our curriculum consists of some fundamental components: needs analysis, the teaching learning program, objectives, implementation and interpretation of programs, assessment and evaluation. All of these are related to the pedagogical model that takes into account the students' education as its main goal (inside a socio-economic context where students' needs, likes, differences and interests are very important to the development of the teaching-learning process).

The School Institutional Project (PEI)<sup>1</sup> is called "Values as the core of human growth". Our mission is to help students to become committed to society, to changing our reality through the use of science, philosophy, technology and values in a responsible way (PEI, Federico García Lorca, 2009). At the same time, our school vision aims at improving the students' way of living in order to produce men and women with the capacity to lead construction processes and transformation of the community.

The PEI of Federico García Lorca has a studies plan in the process of improvement which takes into account the philosophy and principles of the cultural-historic model. This studies plan has its areas of fundamental knowledge established by the Ministry of Education via Law 115 (Ministerio de Educación Nacional [MEN], 1994), and others enacted during the last few years related to programs and cross-curricular projects. The studies plan includes the workings of the different areas (we work in humanities), which is divided into Spanish and English.

In regard to English, it is taught in our institution as a foreign language. In first and second grades, English is studied according to the communicative approach method, emphasizing the acquisition of new vocabulary related to the context in which students find themselves. In third, fourth and fifth grades we continue with the same method, but with a special emphasis on the reading and writing processes related to short narrative texts (descriptions, simple sentences, etc.). In high school, English is studied based on the four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. We see different levels of complexity with regard to the syntactic and semantic components from sixth to eleventh grade. We try to use English in the class most of the time. In tenth and eleventh grades, we try to teach students strategies to help them get good results in the ICFES Exam (a university entrance exam).

It's important to say that in our institution we do not follow an English text, so our methodology is based on games, workshops, songs, role play, grammar guides, etc. Fortunately, we have different materials to develop our classes with such as theatre, library, audiovisual rooms, support texts, books, videos, cassettes, posters, flash cards, tape recorders, etc. All these aids help us to better develop the teaching-learning process.

In addition, it is important to say that we evaluate the four skills daily via different kinds of activities during the class. Unfortunately, English does not occupy an important place in the community in which our school is located, so it is difficult to involve each one of the members in the pedagogical process. Besides, the hours allotted for the English lessons are not sufficient for developing the best strategies to learn a foreign language.

## **Participants**

This project was carried out at the Federico García Lorca School, in the afternoon shift, with group 1007. There were 20 girls and 20 boys from 14 to 18 years old in this group. They belonged to the first and second socioeconomic level in Colombia. We faced many obstacles in developing this project, such as the number of students in the class, the arrangement of the classroom, the number of hours available to teach the language (which could not all be devoted to oral work), and perhaps even the syllabus itself, which could discourage us from giving adequate attention to the spoken language.

Consequently, it was not easy to provide effective oral practice under these conditions, especially in the large classes. This was why it was important to have a clear understanding of the wide range of strategies and games through which spoken language can be practiced. They were, in a sense, an attempt to accommodate language learning to the unfavorable environment of the classroom.

Taking into account the aforementioned reasons, our students had difficulties expressing their ideas orally. Another problem our students had when trying to express their ideas orally was when they did not know the meaning of each word. This created interferences among students when trying to communicate effectively.

To solve some obstacles and develop the students' speaking skills it was important to generate opportunities for students to use the foreign language in a fun and comfortable way.

## **Methodology**

This was an innovative and action research project because, as Markee (1997, p. 46) concluded, curricular innovation is "a managed process of development whose principal products are teaching (and/or) testing materials, methodological skills, and pedagogical values that are perceived as new by potential adopters". From this point of view, the project we described here was an action research project because it consisted of the implementation of activities focused on oral games for promoting the development of students' speaking skills. We can also say that in our school this kind of project had never been carried out, and in that way it was an innovation.

In addition, as this was the implementation of games in order to explore the possibility of solving a problematic aspect, namely the low level of students' speaking participation, this project was also research. Burns (1999) stated that action research is a process that implies the participation and collaboration of each one of the members of a given community by showing evidences which may provide different changes in a specific situation.

## **Techniques for Collecting Data**

We used different techniques in order to develop our project. They were video recordings, teacher's journal, and questionnaires. We chose them to provide validity and reliability to our action research.

### **Video Recording**

We used video recordings because we wanted to analyze the features of students' oral production in games as well as to record students' impressions, feelings, and attitudes towards the games applied during the lessons in which the data were collected.

Cunningham (1985), in Hubbard & Power (1999), states that "video is a natural choice for data collection". We considered video recording an invaluable tool in an action research project because that consists of a free selection in which we could examine not only the student's linguistic patterns, but the role of body language, facial expressions and many other things that are happening at the same time while the action research activities are taking place.

### **Teacher's Journal**

About journals, Wallace (1998, p. 62) argues that "they have been written to be read as public documents". Journals must have a process of composition and can be written during or after the teaching activity is over. The teacher's journal shows impressions, descriptions and processes in students' work while the research activities are being carried out. Thus, we used the teacher's journals in order to register the details related to our research questions.

### **Questionnaires**

With regard to questionnaires, Cárdenas (2006) stated that questionnaires and interviews can be used to elicit many different kinds of data. We used questionnaires and an interview to inquire into people's knowledge, opinions, ideas and experiences. For that reason, we thought a questionnaire was a useful instrument for collecting data. The teacher needs to pay attention to the way in which he/she writes the questions; they can not be complex or ambiguous or they cannot ask about more than one topic at a time; furthermore, questionnaires can be closed or open according to the needs of the project or the teacher's purposes.

We used questionnaires because, thanks to them, we could learn in a written way how students felt after the game applications, and in which games they felt more confident and free to speak with fluency. Additionally, these three techniques helped us to work under the triangulation principles for validating data. In connection to this, Burns (1999) stated that when different research techniques are used in the same problematic situation and we obtain the same results, the investigation is valid. We also followed Silverman (1993, cited in Burns, 1999) when he argued that triangulation helps us to see if different research techniques in collecting data produce similar results with regard to the same investigation question. In the process of collecting the data, Elliot & Edelman (in Burns, 1999) asserted that triangulation is a research method that involves three participants with their different points of view: the teacher, the students, and a participant observer. We considered that triangulation was to help us gather and analyze data in a less subjective way.

## **Stages to Develop the Project**

First, we asked for permission of our students' parents with a consent form; in this way, we knew which students we could observe and from then on, the evidences from these students could be collected and analyzed. Second, we diagnosed our students' attitudes and impressions in terms of speaking through a questionnaire (see [Appendix 1](#)). After that, we applied a questionnaire in which we asked students about the activities they preferred to carry out in the English class (see [Appendix 2](#)). Next, we selected and organized the games according to the students' level and their interest, taking into account a coherent sequence of topics and structures from simple forms to complex ones. Afterwards, we applied the games and at the same time kept a teaching journal (see [Appendix 3](#)). We also video recorded our students during speaking activities (see [Appendix 4](#)), and applied questionnaires at the end of the class (see [Appendix 5](#))<sup>2</sup>. Then, we analyzed the data in order to assess the progress of our students' speaking skills and learn about their impressions.

## **Literature Review**

For the development of our project, we studied some important aspects about the speaking skills, games and motivation. In order to do it, we explored different theories, explained below, that are related to these topics.

### **Speaking Skills**

Every language has two kinds of skills. The first one is the receptive skill which involves two aspects: understanding and reading; and the second one is the productive skill, which involves writing and speaking.

Bygate (1987) stated that "speaking is a skill which deserves attention as much as the literary skills in both native and foreign languages". When students speak in a confident and comfortable way, they can interact better in real daily situations. Because of this, the purpose of this project was to encourage the development of fluency in spoken English. It's even for students with elementary English language abilities. For us, developing fluency implies taking risks by using language in a relaxed, friendly atmosphere –an atmosphere of trust and support. Speaking fluently, of course, involves speaking easily and appropriately with others.

To develop this project, it was not necessary to concentrate on particular aspects such as the differences between key sounds with basic stress forms and intonation

patterns or to master grammatical items. The main idea was to focus on those general oral items to communicate in a foreign language. Therefore, the idea was to invite our students to talk to each other by using games as the main strategy. Being in a classroom learning a language is essentially a social experience and should be memorable. In part, this is because of the relationship forged during a time of being and learning together. In fluency work, our aim was to make learners less conscious of their vulnerability in the target language by challenging them to become interested in participating.

Along with this, Byrne (1984, p. 9) stated that "The main goal in teaching the productive skill of speaking will be oral fluency: the ability to express oneself intelligibly, reasonably, accurately and without undue hesitation (otherwise communication may break down because the listener loses interest or gets impatient). To attain this goal, the students had to move from the stage where they merely imitate a model or respond to cues to the point where they could use the language to express their own ideas". Taking into account Byrne's concept, we used fun and interesting games in our project in order to motivate and help students move from the imitation stage to the production stage.

### **Games and Motivation**

Keeping in mind that our 10<sup>th</sup> grade students felt afraid of speaking during the classes, we considered games as the best motivation to help them speak in an appropriate atmosphere. The games also provided them with opportunities for free expression. According to the idea mentioned above, Mora & Lopera (2001) stated that "games and fun activities have always been one of everybody's favorite things to do in a class, both for teachers and students".

We think that motivation plays an important role when we apply a game, not only to get students' concentration but also to produce better learning conditions. During the game atmosphere the teacher has to influence the whole class in an active and positive way.

As we know, teenagers are apathetic and difficult to be motivated. For this reason, this project intended to find a way in which students could find it easy and fun to speak English. The use of games is the strategy we chose to develop the students' speaking skills.

Before talking about the role of games to improve the student's speaking skills, we introduced some definitions of game. A game is an activity of sport involving skill, knowledge or chance in which a person follows fixed rules and tries to win against an opponent. According to Collins COBUILD English language Dictionary (1987), it is a contest played according to rules and the winner is recognized by skill, strength or luck. It is an activity engaged in for amusement. It can also be defined as the manner of playing in a contest, a situation that involves rivalry or struggle. In addition, a game can be defined as an enjoyable activity with a set of rules or terms against each other (Webster's New Dictionary, 1994).

Certainly, games can be related to language learning. Language games can add fun and variety to conversation sessions if the participants are fond of games. In addition, games are especially refreshing after grammar activities. Also a game is a wonderful activity to break the routine of classroom drills by providing relaxation while remaining within the framework of language learning. A game can in fact be stimulating and entertaining.

In the same way, according to this, Byrne (1984, p. 99) stated "the maximum benefit can be obtained from language games if they form an integral part of a program, at both the practice and production stages of learning. Used in this way, they provide new and interesting contexts for practicing language already learnt – and often for acquiring new language in the process".

One of the purposes is to introduce an element of competition in the English class. But we agree with Byrne (1984, p. 99) when he stated, "We do not wish the students to become excessively competitive, but we want to recognize that the competition provides a valuable force to a purposeful use of language". This is because we are looking for students to develop their speaking skills by avoiding a frustrating situation in the classroom.

Some procedures mentioned by Byrne, which can be taken into account for playing games are the following:

First, choose games on the basis of their suitability in terms of the language the students practice. Second, prepare the games carefully beforehand. Third, explain to the students the purpose of and rules for the games. Fourth, give students one or more opportunities to practice before the games are played. Fifth, involve as many students as possible, dividing the class into teams. Sixth, if games are played in teams, points should be awarded for each correct answer and the scores written up on the board. (1984, p. 100)

For the development of our project, we chose the following classification of games provided by Wright, Betteridge & Buckby (1984):

- *Picture Games*: Most of these games involve the learners in the relative free use of all language at their command. They involve comparing and contrasting pictures, considering differences or similarities and possible relations between pictures.
- *Psychology Games*: These games let us work with the human mind and sense. They involve telepathy, visual perception, characters, imagination and memory. They also encourage the students' concentration and language use.
- *Magic Tricks*: Language can sometimes be exemplified in a concise and memorable way through a magic trick. These tricks always attract attention and invite comments.
- *Sound Games*: Sound effects can create in the listeners an impression of people, places and actions. There is a demand for the listeners to contribute through imagination. This inevitably leads to individual interpretations and interactions as well as the need to exchange points of view and to express ideas and opinions.
- *Card and Board Games*: These games can be adaptations of several well-known card games and board games like snakes and ladders.
- *Word Games*: These games are used for spelling, meanings, using words for making sentences, words in contexts and word for categorizing according to grammatical use. Students, in many cases, have to communicate in full sentences, give new ideas and argue at the same length.
- *True-false Games*: In these games someone makes a statement which is either true or false. The game is to decide which it is.
- *Memory Games*: These games measure the players' ability to remember different events which, in turn, leads to discussion, in which opinions and information are exchanged.

- *Caring and Sharing Games*: These games pretend to encourage students to trust and get interested in others. They have the participants share personal feelings and experiences with other class member.
- *Guessing and Speculating Games*: In these games someone knows something and the others must find out what it is. There are many games and variations based on this simple idea.
- *Story Games*: These games provide a framework for learners to speak as well as write stories and share them with classmates.

For our project we chose three kinds of games: caring and sharing, guessing – speculating, and story games because we think these games are useful in order to encourage the students' participation, and develop the students' speaking skills taking into account the games' characteristics and our pupils' behavior when engaged in games.

There are certain studies conducted in various classrooms that can help us better explain our interest in games. In her study about interacting in English through games, Ariza (2001) conducted a project with second grade students in order to encourage oral participation in English through the use of games. This project intended to help shy and slow students improve their oral production. Through the implementation of this project she could conclude that role plays and dramatizations are good activities for developing speaking in a fun and interesting way because these help students to use the language in communicative situations that are related to their lives.

In her study, "Growing self-esteem and discovering intelligences through oral production," Ochoa (2002) noticed that there was a big lack of security and self-confidence in her students. They expressed via different data-gathering instruments their fear when speaking in front of the class. At the end of the project, Ochoa concluded that self-confidence is a factor that really influences the way students learn and perform their activities inside the classroom. The experiences students live inside the schools have to be meaningful for their lives. The creation of a good atmosphere inside the classroom is important for getting participants to develop a communicative competence.

Mora & Lopera (2001), in their project called "Games in the classroom: more than just having fun", stress that game and fun activities have always been one of everybody's favorite things to do in class, both for teachers and students since games can contribute to the development of a series of skills and competencies. They think that games in a classroom are useful and even necessary. Games promote socialization, group work, and the creation of values; it implies mutual respect and cooperation.

In fact, what we intended to do in our project was to use games as the best way to motivate students' speaking production by following a systematic process in which we could observe the learners oral progress during the project application.

## **Pedagogical Design**

Our project was focused on encouraging teenagers to improve speaking skills through games by taking into account that our students didn't speak fluently or freely because they felt afraid of their partners' jokes. Besides, many of them were very shy and nervous about expressing themselves in front of the class. To avoid students' difficulties related to the speaking skills, we chose some kinds of games; they are story games, caring- sharing and guessing and speculation games.



We implemented our project with three lessons. The first one was based on a story game, the second one on a caring and sharing game, and the last one on a guessing and speculative game. For the development of each game we designed a lesson plan (see [Appendix 6](#)). It followed the scheme of a topic, strategy (name of game) objective, resources, warming up and activities (procedures to develop the game).

The class was divided into three important moments. First, the warm-up in which the teachers broke the ice with a fun activity by presenting the general topic to the class. Second, the instructions and rules of the game were given to students and the game was carried out (during this part students had the chance to speak even more). Third, students filled out a questionnaire in which they registered some impressions about the game played during the English class.

## Data Analysis and Results

As was described in the "Techniques for Collecting Data" section, three techniques were applied in order to get information for solving the research questions. These were questionnaires, teacher's journals and video recording. We decided to use three kinds of games to develop our project. These were comparison games, story games and guessing and speculative games.

During the implementation of the project, William was in charge of developing the activities with students while Esperanza was taking notes for the teacher's journal. At the same time, another teacher (Maria Luz Capador) was video recording the class.

Taking into account students' opinions about difficulties with regard to the English language skills (see [Appendix 1](#)), we asked them which English language skills they considered difficult to put into practice and why. The results are shown in [Table 1](#).

As the results show, the majority of the students considered that speaking is the most difficult skill to develop. In connection with this, we found some interesting impressions such as the following:

To talk, because English is spoken in one way and written in another way. (Student 1) Of course to speak, because one usually memorizes the things as they are written, I mean as it is in Spanish. (Student 2) To speak and read; speaking because it produces shyness and reading because I am not attentive in class. (Student 28)

**Table 1. Students' responses to the question "Which language skills do you consider difficult to put into practice?"**

Skill	Students	Percentage
Listening	1	3%
Speaking	27	82%
Reading	0	0%
Writing	3	9%
No answer	2	6%

The second question of the diagnostic questionnaire gave us information about how often students used English in oral communication during the class. This can be seen in [Table 2](#).

**Table 2. Students' responses to the question "How often do you speak English during the class?"**

Item	Students	Percentage
Always	2	6%
Almost always	1	3%
Sometimes	25	76%
Never	5	15%

From the results shown in Table 2 we could infer that the majority of our students just sometimes spoke English, and an important number of students never participated or spoke English during the class.

With question 3 we wanted to know what factors interfere in the students' speaking skill when the class was taking place. The results are presented in [Table 3](#).

**Table 3. Students' responses to the question "What factors interfered in your speaking skill or made it difficult to speak during the English class?"**

Item	Students	Percentage
Fear of humiliation	5	15%
Lack of vocabulary	16	48%
Shyness	9	27%
Put it in practice	1	3%
Didn't answer	2	6%

According to the table above, we could see that there were three important causes which interfered or disturbed the students' oral participation. These were the lack of vocabulary, shyness, and fear of being humiliated.

It should be noted that in the diagnostic questionnaire, when we asked students about favorite strategies to employ for developing the English class, 58% of the students expressed that they preferred games and highlighted advantages of playing them. This is evidenced in the following testimonies:

To express, to avoid the shyness and to use the vocabulary. (Student 17) We would like to learn English but not in a boring way. We felt confident to express better the English language and if we make mistakes it doesn't matter, we lose shyness. (Student 15) To develop the language more in students and their capacity of surpass the shyness. (Student 21) Ok. I consider that I lost the shyness, it helps us to feel more confident to develop our speaking and our English in general. (Student 29)

In addition, when we asked them about the importance of games during the English class, some of them said the following:

The games would help us to express ourselves and of course to understand much more. (Student 19) Yes, because with games is funnier and when we play we learn to speak by learning vocabulary. (Student 27) Yes, because we integrate each other by thinking in the game, we forget the shyness and we pay more attention in class. (Student 30)

After the first game was over, we gathered some opinions by using the questionnaire shown in [Appendix 5](#) about how they felt during the class. The following testimonies evidence the positive effect games had on students:

Funny because is another way to have a class and to learn more. (Student 1) Excellent! I liked too much the activity, we smiled too much, I mean we enjoyed the class a hundred percent. We learnt to complete a story and we did it in spite of we didn't know the whole text. (Student 2) Good, because we weren't in a stressful environment. (Student 16) Fine. I enjoyed the class, I participated, I was close with my partners, and I learnt. (Student 19) Good, because I could say words in English and because I felt more confident to speak. (Student 26)

After examining the information gathered through the three different techniques — questionnaires, video recording and teacher's journal—, we found one category and two subcategories as shown in [Figure 1](#).

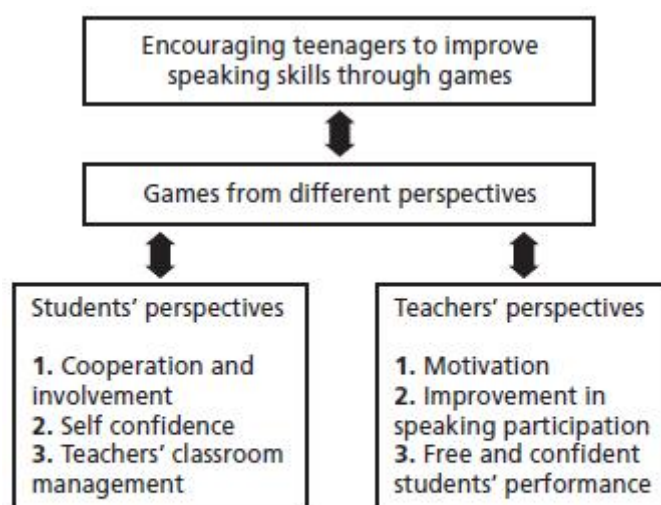


Figure 1. Categories drawn from data analysis

### Games from Different Perspectives

This category offered us the opportunity to realize how games could be useful for the participants of our study. Among the games mentioned in the literature review we chose three kinds: caring and sharing, guessing and speculation, and story games. We considered these to be the most appropriate ones for encouraging students to improve their speaking skill. We could observe that students tried to improve their oral participation when they were involved in the games. For example, when we asked students "What does a forest have?" a student answered

with the following words: "flowers, sun, animals, rivers" (Video recording, file 4). Another student answered "azul, verde [blue, green], blue, red" (Video recording, file 6) when the teacher asked about the color of the dwarfs in the fairy tale "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs".

We wanted for students to construct short phrases by asking, "Can you say the complete title for the short story?" To this question, a student provided the answer. After this, the students in groups had to organize some phrases of the story in a chronological and coherent way. We noticed that students needed to speak in Spanish in order to communicate their ideas about the story: "Esta es la primera, esta es la segunda, esta es..." [This is the first, this is the second, this is...] (Video recording, file 13). When they had to perform in front of the whole class, they used English for presenting their story organization.

The students' opinions above gave us some evidences about the important role of games for improving the speaking skills.

### **Students' Perspectives**

Under this category we placed the student's perspectives or opinions about the role games played in the development of speaking skills during the English class. When asked about it, we found the following patterns as the most important aspects in the implementation of this innovative and action research: cooperation, involvement, self-confidence, knowledge of vocabulary, better English understanding, improvement of pronunciation and speaking, and an English class environment that was more fun, as shown in [Table 4](#).

**Table 4.** Students' opinions when asked about the role games played in the development of speaking in the English Class

I consider that games during the English class permit...

Item	Students	Percentage
Not to speak much in English	1	1.56
To learn vocabulary	7	10.94
To overcome shyness	12	18.75
To help to understand English better	5	7.81
To learn more	15	23.44
To get the students interest	2	3.13
Students' integration	4	6.25
Self-confidence to express him or herself	6	9.38
To be evaluated during the class	1	1.56
To improve the speaking of English	6	9.38
More concentration	1	1.56
To have fun in class	1	1.56
To learn to pronounce	1	1.56
To develop creativity	2	3.13

In regard to the information obtained from the students' opinions, we established three subcategories that embraced what they thought about games as promoters of speaking:

1. *Cooperation and involvement:* Taking into account the percentages shown above, we could observe that we achieved integration because students worked with each other while participating in the different games; they helped each other in order to understand English better. In addition, students were involved in the activities because the games were always motivating for them.
2. *Self-confidence:* We could notice that self-confidence was one of the most important aspects mentioned by students after the games were developed. Besides, the percentages presented in Table 4 showed that students overcame their shyness considerably. Finally, they expressed their being able to develop their creativity by performing different roles during the story game.
3. *Teacher's classroom management:* Students admitted that they learnt more English thanks to the fun activities we implemented in class and to the teacher's management during them. Also, students manifested that they

could learn new vocabulary. All of this helped them improve their speaking skill.

### Teachers' Perspective

At the time we implemented the games we observed that the good atmosphere we promoted as well as students' motivation made it possible for students to speak and perform in a freer and more confident way. In addition, the students who didn't like to speak or participate during the English classes lowered their tension and anxiety and thus took part in the games (See in [Appendix 3](#), observation 6, comment 6).

In connection with this category, three subcategories emerged:

1. *Motivation*: At the time we implemented the games we observed that a good atmosphere and motivation made it possible for students to speak and perform more freely and confidently. Students looked motivated and happy because they had the opportunity to share with others. For example, during the story game, "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", students were actors and they could perform by saying words or short phrases related to the main characters' characteristics.
2. *Improvement in speaking participation*: The students who did not like to speak or participate during the English classes lowered their tension and anxiety and thus took part in the games. They were enthusiastic with the activity and used some short sentences in order to introduce the characters and the dramatization. All in all, most of the students, including those who were usually shy and apathetic, participated happily in the activity.
3. *Free and confident students' performance*: When the teacher used jokes and mimicry in order to explain vocabulary or events, students felt comfortable and motivated (See some observations recorded in the teacher's journal, in [Appendix 3](#)). They felt free and confident to make other jokes as well.

### Conclusions

Games have been and will always be an important part of learning a second or foreign language. We have pointed out the importance of using games in the English learning process. Games are motivating and exciting experiences for students to develop the speaking skills in a fun and comfortable way. Besides, we noticed that games helped students to believe in themselves, thanks to the creation of a good atmosphere inside the classroom.

Through this innovative and action research project, we implemented some kinds of games: caring-sharing, guessing and speculative games and a story game. They encouraged students to communicate orally and to gain confidence in speaking. In addition, during the process of implementation, students overcame their fear of making mistakes and perceived speaking as a natural process when they were playing. The majority of students could express and communicate orally without the pressure of time or constant evaluation.

In our research questions, we also aimed at describing what happened with students' oral production when engaged in games. In fact, students took part in the activities in a free, comfortable and motivating way. As a consequence, they learnt more vocabulary, short sentences, and pronunciation. They managed to get the messages across while playing, though in some cases students mixed Spanish and English expressions to communicate their ideas or feelings.

On the other hand, our project let us reflect on our pedagogical practice and look for new alternatives to encourage oral communication among the learners through games. The problems of the lack of an interactive and communicative context and speaking skills were addressed during implementation of the games. Our students had the opportunity to be active participants throughout the course of the project. At the time students played games, they interacted with others thus improving their oral production in English.

Finally, we consider that games, in general, encouraged teenagers to improve their speaking skills, especially when these included group work, motivation and competition. Also we discovered that games are more than a function in the classroom; they helped our students to perform better, to feel confident and free in order to improve their English speaking skills.

## **Further Research**

For the purpose of our study, we chose and implemented just three of the ten kinds of games provided by Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby (1984). Based on our findings, we consider it necessary to take into account the area of encouraging teenagers to improve speaking skills through games and the complete classification of games listed by these authors for future research studies. Equally important for researchers in another project would be to keep in mind not only encouraging students to speak in a confident and free way through games, but also to approach them with the knowledge of particular oral English features such as fluency, pronunciation, and intonation. Additionally, it would be useful to do further research into the use of games for creating a good atmosphere in which students have the opportunity to work on teams by helping and collaborating with each other.

## **Recommendations**

First of all we recommend for further researchers to have enough time to develop each one of the games, at least four times, in order to get better results. Also, we suggest organizing groups of students from the first class so that the teacher researcher can focus on specific aspects to monitor in each class. We think that these groups must have students with different English levels (high, medium and low) in order to look for the possible changes in students' speaking skill. Finally, we recommend the use of different visual aids (pictures, flash cards, etc.) in order to develop even more the ability to speak in a free, comfortable and motivating way.

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<sup>1</sup> PEI = Proyecto Educativo Institucional (School Institutional Project).

<sup>2</sup>In the questionnaires, data were gathered in Spanish to ensure students' understanding. The instruments and the information collected through them were translated by the authors for the purpose of this publication.

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## **Appendix 1: Questionnaire to Diagnose Students' Attitudes and Impressions about Speaking**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear student,

We ask you to answer the following questions sincerely:

1. Which of the following English language skills do you consider difficult to put in practice and why? (Listening, speaking, reading and writing).

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Mark with an (x) the answers for questions 2 and 3.

2. How often do you use oral English during the class?

- a. Always
- b. Almost always
- c. Some times
- d. Never

3. What factors interfere in the students' speaking skill or make their oral performance difficult during the English class?

- a. Fear of humiliation
  - b. Lack of vocabulary
  - c. Others
- 
-

d. Which ones?

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## **Appendix 2: Questionnaire Used to Inquire about Strategies Preferred by Students in the English Class**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear student, We ask you to answer the following questions in a sincere way:

1. What strategies do you prefer to develop in the English class? Mark the answer(s) with an (X).

- a. Classes in which teacher is the person who speaks most    b. Individual workshops  
c. Work in groups    d. Games

2. You consider that games in the English class permit:

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3. Would you like games to be an essential part during the English classes? Why or why not?

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## **Appendix 3: Sample of a Teacher's Journal Entry**

Class No. 1

Date: October 6<sup>th</sup>

Game: Story Game

Topic: Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs Story.

Objective: To observe the students' oral participation thanks to a game based on a short story.

Line	Observation	Comments
1	William started the class with a warming up by showing different feelings: happiness, sadness with regards to Snow White. He asked questions about colors, adjectives and nouns.	The students were timid and nervous they were worried they didn't participate.
2	Teacher made jokes related to colors about to Colombian soccer teams.	Students felt better and they made other jokes as well.
3	The teacher used mimics in order to be understood by students for asking some questions.	Students could understand the questions easier.
4	Students had to participate in groups of 8 in order to performance a short story.	Students looked motivated and happy because they had the opportunity to share with others.
5	Students dramatized the short story with characters and some elements of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.	Students were enthusiastic with the activity and they used some short sentences in order to introduce the characters and the dramatization.
6	All the groups participated in the dramatization in a free and confident way.	Most of the students including whose are usually shy and apathetic participated in the activity happily.

#### Appendix 4: Sample of a Teacher's Journal Entry

Class No. 1

Date: October 6<sup>th</sup>

Game: Story Game

Topic: Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs Story

Objective: To observe the students oral participation thanks to a game based on a short story.

File	Speech Acts	Comments
1	The teacher asked: Who is the character?	Students understood the question but they couldn't say the name in English.
2	Students answers: " <i>Blanca Nieves</i> " [Snow White]	
3	The teacher asked: What does a forest have?	Students named words without constructing phrases.
4	Students answered: flowers, sun, animals and rivers.	
5	The teacher asked: Who are with Snow White with? Students answered: <i>los enanitos</i> [the dwarfs].	They answered with the word in Spanish.
6	The teacher asked: What colors are the Dwarfs? Students answered: " <i>azul... verde</i> "... blue, red... " <i>amarillo</i> " [yellow].	At first they mentioned the colors in Spanish but then they did it in English.
7	The teacher asked: How do you say " <i>madrastra</i> " [stepmother] in English? Student answered: <i>Madastra</i> .	He didn't know the word in English.
8	The teacher asked: How do you say " <i>bruja</i> " in English A student answered: "Witch".	She knew the word in English.
9	The teacher asked: How do you say " <i>príncipe</i> " in English? Two students answered: Princess and prince.	Two students tried to say the word prince correctly.
10	The teacher asked: Can you tell the complete title for the short story?	By taking turns some students could say the title of the story with some difficulties.
11	A student answered: Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.	
12	The teacher asked for students to do groups in order to organize coherent phrases about the story.	When students were working in groups they spoke in Spanish trying to organize the phrases the best they could.
13	Students tried to do it by using: " <i>Esta es la primera</i> " [This is the first] " <i>Esta es la segunda</i> " [This is the second] " <i>Esta es...</i> " [This is...].	

### Appendix 5: Questionnaire Used to Find Out Students' Opinions at the End of the Lessons

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear student, Taking into account the activities developed today, answer the following questions in a sincere way:

1. How did you feel during the English class?

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2. Did you like the game developed today? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_

Why?

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3. When did you have the chance to express yourself orally during the English class?

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4. Do you consider that the game promoted your partners' participation during the class? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_

Why?

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5. Do you consider that the game motivated students' oral participation today?

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6. Would you like for the teacher to continue using games during the English class in order to motivate students' participation? Yes \_\_\_ No\_\_\_

Why?

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**Appendix 6: Lesson Plans Used to Encourage Teenagers to Improve Speaking Skills through Games**

## Lesson Plan 1

Time: 85 minutes

Course: 1007

Topic: Talking about "Snow White and Seven Dwarfs".

Strategy: Story game.

Objective: To develop the speaking skills by using the story "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs".

Resources: Pictures of the Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs story.

### Warming up:

We will show students some pictures in which Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs appear. Then we will ask student for their names and characteristics by trying to speak in English the best they can.

### Activities:

- We will divide the group into three small groups.
- We will give the students some sentences about the most important events of the story in order to be organized in a chronological way.
- Students, in groups, will retell orally the story in front of the whole class.

## Lesson Plan 2

Course: 1007

Time: 85 minutes

Topic: Likes and Dislikes

Strategy: Caring and Sharing game "Let me know about you".

Objective: To develop the speaking skills through the game "Let me know about you".

Resources: Photocopies of the chart (game) dices, pictures and counters.

### Warming up:

We will talk about Juanes and Juan Pablo Montoya "Likes and Dislikes".

We will ask students if they know the famous people shown in the pictures and some details of their lives: Who is he? Who are they? Where have you seen him / her? What does he or she do? What do you think they like or don't like to do in their free time?

### Activities:

- We will divide the class in groups of three students. Then, we will give each group a photocopy of the game. The game consists of a chart in which the students will solve some personal questions about likes and dislikes by taking turns.
- To develop the game students will throw the dices, in order to move their chips advancing according to the number given by the dice? In each space students will get and specific Yes, No, WH questions that they have to answer.
- Examples: Do you like music? What kind of music do you like? Do you like to read? What is your favorite book?
- After the game is over, each group will choose the best speaker player to represent it, in a whole class competence. The chosen student is going to answer two more questions in order to win points for the final score of the game. After that, we will organize new groups of 12 people, in which each group is going to decorate a specific place (restaurant, mall, video, and store) with materials given by the teachers. They will perform like people who are commonly in these places. Students have to use Yes, No, WH and questions to ask and answer for likes and dislikes.

### **Lesson Plan 3**

Time: 85 minutes

Course: 1007

Topic: describing and talking about objects.

Strategy: guessing and speculating game.

Objective: to develop the speaking skills through the game describing and talking about objects

Resources: 20 objects

#### **Warming up:**

We will give students an object by saying it is not... and each one of them is going to use the same

structure but changing the final word: It is not a cat. It is not a beautiful dog.

#### **Activities:**

– We will divide the whole class in small groups of four students.

– We will give each group a different object: Ruler - square - triangle. After that, one student of the group will say the real name of the object, the second one will change the real name for another creative word, the third one is going to say an imaginative use of the new object, and the fourth one will say another use of the object.