



*Tercera Convención Científica Internacional UCLV 2021
Central University "Marta Abreu" of Las Villas
"Best Practices for the Implementation of Impromptu Speech as a Classroom Activity in the
Teaching of English as a Foreign Language"*


**I SIMPOSIO INTERNACIONAL “DESARROLLO HUMANO,
EQUIDAD Y JUSTICIA SOCIAL”**

**Best Practices for the Implementation of Impromptu Speech as a
Classroom Activity in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language**

*Buenas Prácticas para la Implementación del Discurso Improvisado
como Actividad Didáctica en la Enseñanza del Inglés como Lengua
Extranjera*

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Abstract:

University learners continue to have difficulty at speaking English language confidently and correctly. Impromptu speech is an activity that requires students to produce orally with little or no preparation. However, there is not extensive research about practices to implement it in the EFL classroom. Therefore, this paper is aimed at identifying best practices for the implementation of impromptu speech as a classroom activity in English as a foreign language university courses. A Delphi study allowed to identify a number of best practices, including practices related to speaking skills, including accuracy and fluency; confidence, motivation and practice; and impromptu speech as a classroom activity, including the structure of the speech and other relevant aspects.



*Tercera Convención Científica Internacional UCLV 2021
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Abstract:

Muchos estudiantes universitarios tienen dificultades para utilizar la lengua inglesa correctamente y con seguridad. El discurso improvisado es una actividad didáctica que requiere que los estudiantes se expresen oralmente sobre determinados temas con poca o ninguna preparación, pero existen pocas investigaciones sobre buenas prácticas para su implementación como actividad didáctica en la clase de inglés como lengua extranjera. Por tanto, el objetivo de este trabajo es presentar mejores prácticas para la implementación del discurso improvisado como actividad didáctica en cursos de inglés como lengua extranjera a nivel universitario, para ello se realizó un estudio Delphi. Se identificó una lista de buenas prácticas que se pueden tener en cuenta para la implementación del discurso improvisado en el aula de inglés como lengua extranjera en la educación superior; estas prácticas están relacionadas con el desarrollo de habilidades de expresión oral, la precisión y la fluidez, la motivación, la importancia de la práctica, entre otras.

Keywords: *English as a foreign language; Impromptu speech; Speaking skills; Confidence*

Palabras Claves: *Enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera; Discurso improvisado, Habilidades de expresión oral, Confianza*



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1. Introduction

In today's globalized world, learning English have become a necessity for all professionals. That is why higher education institutions in non-English speaking countries offer English instruction programs to their students as part of their curriculum. Among the many language skills that tertiary students develop in this kind of programs are public speaking skills, which allow them to be more successful, not only in the academic context, but also when they pursue their careers after graduating.

When learning English as a foreign language (EFL), many learners and teachers worry about the development of speaking skills, and speaking confidence becomes a powerful asset for learners to develop their fluency. Thus, in any foreign language context, confidence goes hand in hand with the ability to convey oral messages. In general, "Confident students speak more and participate in communications" (Derakhshan et al. 2015, p. 520). Both speaking production and confidence need to be aligned to have successful academic and professional development. Throughout the years, many teaching strategies and activities have been implemented in the EFL classroom to enhance speaking skills, promote confidence, and thus, fluency.

Although many university EFL learners have been exposed to English since early years in previous educational levels, they still seem to struggle to speak correctly, fluently, and confidently. López Montero and Salas Alvarado (2019) emphasized that factors like anxiety and stage fright appear when learners have to express orally. Unfortunately, if they are not in a comfortable or supported setting, their speaking skills will be hindered, representing a severe problem in terms of performance.

Impromptu speech has been said to improve EFL learners' speaking skills, confidence, and nonverbal communication in higher education (Yu-Chih, 2008; Suthiwartnarueput, 2017; El Mortaji, 2018; Miranda, 2018; López Montero & Salas Alvarado, 2019; Sekkal, 2020). Although most studies showed evidence of the use of impromptu speech for the improvement of speaking skills or confidence, just few made reference to how this activity can actually be implemented in the classroom in order to contribute effectively to the development of speaking skills, confidence and participation of learners. That is why, it is important to explore best practices that improve EFL



Tercera Convención Científica Internacional UCLV 2021
Central University "Marta Abreu" of Las Villas
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learners’ speaking skills through the implementation of impromptu speech as a classroom activity. Thus, this study set out to answer the following research question: What practices are best for the implementation of impromptu speech as a classroom activity in EFL university courses?

2. Methodology

This study was aimed at determining best practices for the implementation of impromptu speech as a classroom activity in EFL university courses. To that end, a three-round Delphi study with 7 experts from Costa Rican higher education institutions was carried out. A Delphi study involves compiling different experts’ beliefs or impressions of a point of interest for later arrival to an agreement/consensus (Dell’Olio et al., 2018; Iriste & Katane, 2018). According to Skulmoski et al., (2007), the Delphi method is particularly useful “when the goal is to improve our understanding of problems, opportunities, solutions, or to develop forecasts.” (p.1).

Participants

In this study, an expert was considered as a person with experience in implementing impromptu speech in the EFL classroom. Participants in the study were selected based on the suggestions made by Iriste and Katane (2018). Thus, inclusion criteria included experience in higher education, level of academic education, and familiarity with impromptu speech activities, among others. A questionnaire was designed to select the experts. A total of 18 participants answered the expert selection questionnaire, but only 7 participants continued providing data in all rounds of the study. This can be considered as a good sample size for a Delphi study since the sample size in Delphi studies has been variable, for example, Rowe and Wright (1999) reported that some Delphi studies included from 3 to 98 experts.

Data collection

Round 1. The first round involved a set of 10 open-ended questions for the experts to give their opinions in an extensive way about the following topics: students’ speaking skills, learners’ confidence, and impromptu speech in the EFL classroom. The process of collecting the data took over two weeks, including a reminder after the first week.



Tercera Convención Científica Internacional UCLV 2021
Central University "Marta Abreu" of Las Villas
“Best Practices for the Implementation of Impromptu Speech as a Classroom Activity in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language”

The answers were classified into categories to organize and provide a coherent structure to the data compiled, so as to facilitate its use and analysis in a systematic and effective way.

Round 2. For the second round of this study, the experts received a list of statements compiled from their answers in Round 1 together with a scale. The participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they believed that the given statements represented best practices, using a scale that contained the following categories: agree, disagree, or needs changes. Also, there were spaces provided for participants to write the reasons for disagreeing or for needing changes. This stage took 3 weeks to complete. Based on the data obtained, a list of statements was made, grouped into 3 categories: accepted practices, areas of disagreement, and additions.

Round 3. In this round, the experts reviewed a table containing the list of best practices. They were asked to confirm their agreement with the provided statements (best practices), consider and analyze the areas of disagreement, as well as the other experts' reasons for disagreeing, and answer on emergent practices. It took only one week to gather responses.

Data analysis

Data was analyzed under the principles of content analysis. Data obtained in the first round was analyzed using Nvivo 1.0 (released in March 2020), a qualitative data analysis software. Data was categorized and labeled, and also repeated ideas were eliminated. From this analysis a number of statements were formulated, the so-called practices, which were used in subsequent rounds until consensus was reached. In rounds 2 and 3, content analysis was carried out manually.

3. Results and Discussion

A number of practices were identified and categorized into three groups: best practices for enhancing speaking skills of EFL university students, best practices for enhancing confidence, and best practices for implementing impromptu speech as an EFL classroom activity. All practices were formulated in the form of statements.



Tercera Convención Científica Internacional UCLV 2021
Central University "Marta Abreu" of Las Villas
“Best Practices for the Implementation of Impromptu Speech as a Classroom Activity in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language”

There were 16 best practices related to the enhancement of speaking skills through the implementation of impromptu speech as a classroom activity that were accepted. These practices addressed the contribution of impromptu speech to develop fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, grammar, coherence, etc. For instance, the accepted practice in this study related to the way impromptu speech helps to develop accuracy and fluency was supported in previous studies. López Montero and Salas Alvarado (2019) found that students identified a great percentage of fluency improvement and some progress on pronunciation and grammar. In a similar line, El Mortaji (2018) stressed that there were many speaking components, besides confidence, that needed to be taken into consideration at the time of giving feedback. Also, there were other elements related to public speaking that were essential to analyze. The idea that fluency contributed to improve not only public speaking skills but also confidence confirmed the results from López Montero and Salas Alvarado (2019). Both authors mentioned that the students become fluent in public speaking by working on their self-confidence which is gained through practice and students' interest. It involves an ongoing process that allows learners to develop their abilities to speak in public and also sound convinced of what they are saying. Suthiwartnarueput (2017) addressed the fact that fluency and accuracy were imminently developed because of the constant exposure of individuals to the language. All in all, fluency, public speaking, and confidence are elements that overlap, having an impact on the others when using impromptu speech in the EFL classroom.

Best practices for enhancing confidence in EFL university students were identified. There were 9 best practices related to the enhancement of confidence that were accepted. These group of practices addressed issues such as overcoming nervousness, developing learners' autonomy, providing adequate feedback, providing enough practice, maintaining good communication between learners and teacher, etc. For example, Suthiwartnarueput (2017) and López Montero and Salas Alvarado (2019), in their results, observed a correlation among grammar, pronunciation, and nonverbal communication improvement as a result of increased confidence. Hence, the statement “Impromptu speech develops and improves confidence in students, considering



Tercera Convención Científica Internacional UCLV 2021
Central University "Marta Abreu" of Las Villas
“Best Practices for the Implementation of Impromptu Speech as a Classroom Activity in the
Teaching of English as a Foreign Language”

pronunciation, vocabulary, and structures”, which was formulated in this study, had great weight and support from what is found in the literature.

Then, the statement “Practice also helps to overcome nervousness for future scenarios” was also considered in other studies. For example, according López Montero and Salas Alvarado (2019), learners alleged that their level of self-confidence improved due to the participation in constant impromptu speeches. The effects were that students then felt less afraid when speaking in public, felt more concentrated, and felt less overwhelmed that much about the rest of individuals. As it was mentioned before, a process takes time, it is not reached overnight. When students are learning a foreign language, the activities practiced in the classroom help to gain knowledge about a skill. In this case, impromptu speech helps students to improve speaking skills and surrounding elements for eventual situations.

Furthermore, the statements “Confidence can increase if appropriate teaching techniques are used and adequate feedback is given” and “Practicing every day and getting feedback from the teacher helps to detect students’ improvement” were taken as best practices related to confidence. El Mortaji (2018) addressed the situation of feedback because in the results of his study, continual feedback was crucial alongside with the rubric to evaluate the speeches. “The teacher’s constructive feedback using the weekly goal-setting strategy proved to be very effective and rewarding. Indeed, thanks to the weekly provided feedback, each student had his/her own goals to achieve on a weekly basis” (El Mortaji, 2018, p. 93). In other words, feedback provides students with a moment to work on areas of opportunities.

Sixty three best practices for implementing impromptu speech as a classroom activity in EFL university students were identified and accepted. These practices were related to content, assessment, non-verbal communication, classroom environment and management, etc. Some practices addressed the content in terms of topics which ranged from giving personal information to giving a goodbye speech to a departing employee. Another group of practices were related to the timing within the lesson. Henderson (1982) believed that before the impromptu activity itself, there should be preparation activities for students to avoid being overwhelmed. Having said this, the practice of “It



Tercera Convención Científica Internacional UCLV 2021
Central University "Marta Abreu" of Las Villas
“Best Practices for the Implementation of Impromptu Speech as a Classroom Activity in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language”

can be applied after having completed practical exercises and activities” was reinforced by Henderson’s study. Also, the statement “Preparation time can also be under the control and guidance of the teacher” was in line with Henderson’s ideas (1982) when he stated, “The choice of time is at the teacher's discretion.” Lastly, there was agreement with the idea “It is important to set a time limit for the activity.” In fact, Henderson (1982) mentioned the benefits of establishing a limit which are that students have an order for delivering the speech, and they learn to go straight to the point.

The seven experts agreed with the idea that students should have a checklist in order to assess each other’ performance. Other practices were related to the classroom environment. Thus, a good environment was considered as fundamental to deliver impromptu speech, and respect among peers was highly remarked. This kind of practices is supported in previous studies, for example, El Mortaji (2018) found that having a supportive learning environment aided learners to feel more confident with each other, to be more receptive to feedback, and to avoid stage fright. While López Montero and Salas Alvarado (2019) reported that impromptu speech should promote shyer students’ participation. In this regard, confident individuals can start the speech, so the rest of the class can be ready when it is their chance (Henderson, 1982).

The identified practice “Motivating students’ active participation is an effective practice” had been indirectly addressed by some studies (Henderson, 1982; El Mortaji, 2018; Suthiwartnarueput, 2017; López Montero & Salas Alvarado, 2019). Also, the idea “Hands on activities in different scenarios work as practice for later impromptu speeches” was fully accepted by the experts.

Finally, a group of practices emerged that were not addressed in the available literature on the topic. Thus, they were considered as emerging practices that can serve as a starting point for future investigations.

4. Conclusions

This research used the Delphi method to identify a number of best practices for implementing impromptu speech as an EFL classroom activity in higher education,



Tercera Convención Científica Internacional UCLV 2021
Central University "Marta Abreu" of Las Villas
“Best Practices for the Implementation of Impromptu Speech as a Classroom Activity in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language”

mainly best practices for speaking skills development, promoting confidence, and implementing impromptu speech as a classroom activity.

Research about impromptu speech is scarce, so it is a good idea to have more studies about it. Further investigation on best practices for improving speaking skills and for increasing confidence when implementing impromptu speech in the EFL classroom is needed. Even though the results, findings, and conclusions of this study provided positive ideas for implementing impromptu activities in the EFL classroom in university courses, it is important to carry out research to determine their effectiveness and consider larger populations to allow for generalizations in a wider EFL learning and teaching context.

Limitations

The primary limitation of the research was that investigations about impromptu speech were limited to the development of speaking skills in general. Another limitation was the small number of participants with experience in the topic and the willingness to cooperate until the end of the study. At the beginning, 18 participants agreed to be part of the sample and replied in the first round, but only 7 of them continued cooperating until the study was completed.

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Tercera Convención Científica Internacional UCLV 2021
Central University "Marta Abreu" of Las Villas
“Best Practices for the Implementation of Impromptu Speech as a Classroom Activity in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language”

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