
Original

Sistema de ejercicios para desarrollar las habilidades de pronunciación en alumnos de cuarto grado de la escuela primaria Amado Estevez Pou de Bayamo

A System of Exercises to Develop the Pronunciation and Vocabulary Skills on Fourth Graders at “Amado Estevez Pou” Elementary School in Bayamo

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Abstract

This article is aimed at working out the shortcomings that have been taking place in the teaching learning process of speaking, especially the development of the pronunciation and vocabulary skills on fourth graders at “Amado Estevez Pou” Elementary School in bayamo To attain the pursued aim, its authors offer a system of pronunciation and vocabulary exercises derived from songs to solve the described problematic situation. The exercises were designed with the main purpose of developing the former linguistic skills on the graders subject of study. The authors paid a special attention to the application of theoretical, empirical, and statistical methods that



made possible to collect real and scientific information from the object and scope of research, including the subjects who were made up of students from class 1. Among the theoretical methods applied were: Analysis -synthesis, Induction – deduction, .and the Systemic Approach; among the empirical methods: Observation, Interview, Survey, and Pedagogical Test. The Statistical method, especially the Descriptive – statistics was also used. The authors reach generalized conclusions and offered suggestions to extend its application if necessary. The system of exercises proved to be effective as it is evidenced in the outcomes.

Keywords: skill, pronunciation; vocabulary; development; exercises

Resumen

El artículo está dirigido a resolver una problemática presente en el proceso de enseñanza aprendizaje de la expresión oral, en particular el desarrollo de la pronunciación y el vocabulario en el cuarto grado de la escuela Primaria “Amado Estevez Pou” en Bayamo Sus autores ofrecen un sistema de ejercicios derivados de canciones para solucionar la situación problemática. Para el logro de los resultados, los autores aplicaron métodos teóricos, empíricos y estadísticos que hicieron posible compilar la información real del comportamiento del objeto y campo de investigación, incluyendo los sujetos implicados en ella perteneciente al grupo 1. Entre los métodos teóricos se emplearon: Análisis -síntesis, Inducción – deducción y el Enfoque Sistémico y entre los empíricos: Observación, Entrevista, Encuesta y Prueba Pedagógica. El método Estadístico utilizado fue la Estadística – Descriptiva. Los autores arriban a conclusiones generales y ofrecen sugerencias para su introducción en la práctica pedagógica. El sistema de ejercicio probó se efectivo evidenciado en los resultados.

Palabras claves: habilidad; pronunciación; vocabulario; desarrollo; ejercicios



Introduction

The teaching of English in Cuba is an essential part of any curriculum at the different levels of education, thus contributing to the harmonic formation and development of the new generations.

In the Cuban System of Education, English as a foreign language is taught from third grade on. In all the levels special emphasis is laid on the development of speaking skills, although this foreign language is taught focusing its attention on the development of the four main language abilities.

The main goal to attain in teaching English since the Elementary Education is the comprehensive formation of the pupils personality and the development of the communicative competence.

The teaching of English in Fourth grade helps to acquire knowledge, and develop habits and skills, which allow pupils to express themselves in English, especially by asking and answering questions as basic forms of holding communication. Fourth graders at Amado Estévez Pou Elementary School in Bayamo show a poor level of development of the speaking skills, especially pronunciation and vocabulary. Taking into consideration that speaking is the main objective of the level to develop, the main attention should be given to help pupils chiefly articulate vowel and consonant sounds as more accurate as possible, to intone questions and answers correctly, make blending, contractions, and attain an adequate rhythm. And they should also command the vocabulary taught in every unit, so that they set up the proper conditions for achieving an acceptable speaking enhancement and pave the way for accomplishing communication. Considering the systematic learning controls held by the teacher involved in the teaching learning process of the English subject and especially the speaking one, the methodological assistance held by the municipal supervisor of the level and by other specialized people, the initial diagnosis held at the beginning of the course, and the contests developed at school, the authoress could realized the existence of shortcomings that actually affected the



learning of the English subject, particularly the development of speaking skills, and still more specific pronunciation, among which were:

- Poor discrimination of vowel and consonant sounds which scarcely exist in Spanish.
- Inadequate articulation of vowels and consonants present in the words as part of the vocabulary.
- Incorrect use of intonational patterns for asking and answering questions.
- Inadequate use of stress to produce an acceptable rhythm.
- Very limited vocabulary to express simple ideas.
- Inability to interact with others using the communicative functions studied in class.

The researchers observed a contradiction between the real learning state, concerning the poor development of the pronunciation and vocabulary skills, and the desired one, so they mainly focused their attention on how to develop speaking skills on fourth graders at Amado Estevez Pou Elementary School from Bayamo. Such a problem was present mainly in the teaching-learning process of speaking.

In order to give solution to the problem under research, they decide to elaborate a system of exercises to develop pronunciation and vocabulary skills through songs on fourth graders at the Elementary School object of research. Within the teaching learning process of speaking, the authors aimed their attention particularly at the most sensitive affected areas of speaking; that is, the development of the pronunciation and vocabulary skills. The fundamental practical contribution of this research work consists of putting on the hand of teachers a system of exercises and elaborated in correspondence to the system of content of the fourth grade to contribute to the development of the pupils' pronunciation and vocabulary skills.



The research that made possible the present article entails a very high social significance, since by means of the proposal, pupils are going to develop their speaking skills, especially their pronunciation and vocabulary, by means of which they will be able to attain a more accurate oral expression to favor the development of the communicative competence which, at the same time, it will favor the comprehensive formation of the pupil's personality, which is the major goal to accomplish by the National System of Education..

The elaboration of the research urged the authors to assume pedagogical, psychological, didactic and linguistic fundamentals. However, taking into account that the article is mainly addressed to a linguistic issue and the main problems lay on linguistic and didactic aspects, the authors are mainly going to focus their attention on the linguistic and didactic fundamentals, as they are mainly concerned with the development of the pronunciation and vocabulary linguistic skills for the elaboration of the proposal, to give solution to the insufficiencies observed in both language components.

From the linguistic point of view, the authors highly take into account what stated by Acosta (1996) concerning the linguistic skills, as he considers that they are closely related to the language components pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and their subskills. So he proposes .within pronunciation: to articulate sounds accurately, blend sounds and words together in speech, stress syllables and words properly, make all necessary pauses, emotions through intonation means, and establish sound-grapheme correspondences.

Within vocabulary: to use a general or specific vocabulary; to group words as to their meaning as; to select the proper word according to the context; Another linguistic fundamental is that of the Communicative Approach to the teaching of English in Cuba, which in turn becomes one of the linguo-didactic ground of the investigation. This approach is supported on the principles and



processes proposed by Wilkins (1983, cited by Acosta 1997). They are: Know what you are doing; the whole is more than the sum of the parts; the processes are as important as the forms; to learn it, do it; mistakes are not always mistakes.

Another important aspect to be regarded is the Speech-acts theory. It has to do with the functions and uses of language. For Richards (1988) speech acts are classified in several ways according to the function they perform in communication. It guides English teachers to the immediate objective of language teaching: the communicative function. The theory expresses what the students should learn to do with the language. In deciding what functions, topics and situations are most likely to be relevant to the learners' needs. Speaking is taught, consequently, on the basis of the functions which become the immediate teaching objectives.

According to Nunan (2003) teaching speaking is to teach English learners to: produce the English speech sounds and sound patterns, use word and sentence stress, intonation patterns and the rhythm of the second language, select appropriate words and sentences according to the proper social setting, audience, situation and subject matter, organize their thoughts in a meaningful and logical sequence, use language as a means of expressing values and judgments. Speaking is a form of conveying meaning; it is a part of the language person's ability to express ideas, so that others can understand the message. It is the most useful way man uses to express his knowledge, ideas and feelings and it is the main means used to establish relationships among people.

Speaking is dynamic, expressive and innovated and it is very important the accent, rhythm, intonation, and pronunciation. Pronunciation and vocabulary are significant constituents of the spoken form of the language to attain a correct and understandable communication. Finocchiaro (1983) considers that pronunciation is more than a matter of consonants, vowels and diphthongs. For her pronunciation is considered to be made up of individual sound,



stress, intonation, and rhythm all of which are closely interrelated. As to Antich (1986) pronunciation can and should always be integrated into all aspects of language teaching and reinforced in all classes.

From the didactic viewpoint, it is indispensable to start by taking sides on the particular didactic principles, which constitute essential methodological grounds that govern the teaching learning process of English, and consequently, the speaking skills development, as well as pronunciation and vocabulary. González (2009) regards those principles explained as follows: The conception of teaching language as a means of communication also known as communicability; consideration of the students' mother tongue; the leading character of practice; and consideration of the social and cultural aspects of the language.

Recent pedagogical authors have also aimed their attention at the didactic developmental conception. The conception of a developmental teaching learning process assumed by the current Cuban Elementary Education and also shared by the authors of this article presented by Pilar (2000) who defends the idea that learning is a complex, multidimensional, social, individual process that undergoes the individuals' life. To be lasting, learning should be meaningful; it should depart from the students' attitudes, motivations, interests, and previous experience, so that the content gets a determined meaning to them. It should also be interactive, participating, and collaborative, mainly characterized by the communication activity enhancing reflection, evaluation, and self-evaluation. This idea had been also supported by Castellanos (1999). Enrique cited by González (2009), establishes several requirements to make teaching English at the Elementary school be developmental. Such requirements are also assumed by the authors of the present article in their research.



Speaking, as a major language skill is made up of operations or subskills. Developing speaking requires knowledge of the language system, skills in the mastery of language skills, and skills in its functioning as speech (communicative skills). In both of them pronunciation and vocabulary have a great participation, since in learning a language as a means of communication, the learner must assimilate its components (pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar) and use them in speech. Learning to speak requires much practice in the functions and forms of the language. The aim of the teacher is to develop the linguistic and communicative skills integrally and progressively until free and spontaneous speech is attained.

At present, English is taught at the Elementary school with the main purpose of familiarizing and making the students conscious of the characteristics of the English language as well as eventually developing their communicative habits and skills with emphasis in the oral ones, so pronunciation and vocabulary play a paramount role to have pupils express orally about themselves, their family, and habitual actions they do at home, at school, and in their community. Language learning only takes place when the students are actively performing in the language; that is the reason why, the teacher's main function is to design the kinds of activities that will encourage students to learn from each other.. These activities motivate and stimulate pupils to participate in the lesson. Teachers should prepare the activities they want to do in order to do it successfully.

Songs can be successful as a learning activity; they should form part of the course, because they keep the lesson lively and interesting. Songs demand sharply energy-focused concentration, and learners will stretch their energies to the full enjoying and learning from them because they are naturally motivated. They also help to contribute to ease the process of learning and teaching. The use of songs is very important to develop oral skills, as they urge pupils to use the foreign



language correctly and adequately, since they offer a very authentic material to reproduce and serve as source of imitation practice to develop the speaking skills, especially pronunciation and vocabulary.

In all teaching, the four skills are themselves part of the subject matter. They emphasize the need to try out the techniques which integrate all four-language skills and which offer the students some challenging and enjoyable tasks while learning English as a foreign language, especially for improving pronunciation and vocabulary by means of songs.

Population and sample

The research that originates this article was held at the elementary school Amado Estevez Pou in Bayamo. Therefore, the Population is made up of 40 pupils taken from fourth grade and the sample consists of 20 pupils from class 01 that represent 50%. There is only one teacher of English at school who at the same time stands for the population and sample of the investigation, representing 100% .from the population. The class was selected intentionally as it was the most problematic class of the two.

Analysis of the results

The process of research demanded the use of theoretical, empirical and statistical methods. However, in order to know the real situation before and after the application of the proposal, the authors mainly relied on the empirical methods such as observation, especially to class; survey, to pupils; interview, to the teacher of English in fourth grade; and the pedagogical test, in its initial and final versions, as a way to find out the current pupils' learning state concerning the development of pronunciation and vocabulary skills, as well as the teaching learning process of speaking in the English lesson. Generally speaking, the analysis of the results in the first



diagnosis permitted to assert that pupils showed inadequate levels of development of pronunciation and vocabulary skills affecting the speaking skill.

For assessing the real development of pronunciation and vocabulary skills before the application of the proposal, the researchers gave pupils a diagnostic test consisting of questions and answers about personal information, family, colors and school objects and activities. For such a purpose they made use of the following indicators and levels.

- Articulation of sounds (vowel and consonant)
- Intonation (Questions and answers)
- Rhythm (The recurrence of stresses within the utterances).
- Vocabulary Range.(The number of words they mastered to express simple ideas about the topics involved)

The levels of the development of both linguistic skills on the pupils subjects of research assumed by the researchers were: High, Mid, and Low.

The application of the first pedagogical test showed that pupils actually had serious difficulties at speaking English, since their pronunciation was really poor and the vocabulary range was very limited to express their ideas about the requested issues, Other questions asked in the survey also permitted to know that they were not so much interested in the subject, therefore, there was a lack of motivation for learning English.

In order to give solution to the problematic situation found out by the initial diagnosis, and go ahead with the research process to attain at least a partial fulfillment of the expected results, considering that the research is not completely ended yet, it was necessary to elaborate and apply part of the system of exercises derived from a number of songs selected according to the content of the units involved.,



Methodology for the application of the proposal

The proposal made up of songs and their exercises were intended to be given to pupils from fourth grade at Amado Estvez Elementary school in Bayamo, as a way to develop the pronunciation and vocabulary skills. The songs proposed were taken from a website in correspondence to the content of the grade object of study; especially the skills under investigation, the communicative functions of the grade in general, and above all the pronunciation aspects to teach, as well as the vocabulary engaged in the selected unit. . Among other reasons the authors also took into account pupils' interests and motivation, as well as their learning necessities.

The proposal comprises seven songs; that is the 58.3% of the total number of units in the grade, taking into consideration that there other songs that are used in the grade which better match the other units out of the ones worked in the present paper. The criterion for the choice of these songs and units obeys to the fact that these units are taught in the first semester of the course, something that propitiates the application of the proposal, and the gathering of the results, so that the researcher could analyze, tabulate, compare, and get to conclusions to finish the work properly.

The system of exercises and songs are supported by the use of the video, so that pupils can watch and listen to the song as long as they work with it. The exercises are mainly intended to develop pronunciation and vocabulary; therefore, the authors paid more attention to the pronunciation and vocabulary skills suggested in the syllabus of the grade, mainly focused on the sounds and words suggested by the syllabus and methodological guidelines.

The proposal is organized so that every song contains about several exercises that go from the recognition level to the reproductive one. The exercises pretend to prepare pupils for facing the new vocabulary of the song; to understand the text of the song by giving them a comprehension



task, to fill in the gaps just by listening to the song without looking at the lyrics, to look up meaning of words according to context; to read aloud the lyrics after her so that they become familiar with the pronunciation of the words under study and other new ones; to dwell upon the most difficult sounds, especially the vowel and consonant sounds, as well the prosodic elements of the language, such as intonation, stress, and rhythm, by having pupils sing along the song after the video, so that they imitate the correct pronunciation of the singers.

The exercises are organized taking into account the methodological components such number and name of the unit, the exercise, its objective, communicative function, subskill to work , level of assimilation, teaching aid to use, time for the exercise, heading, procedure and evaluation. The system of exercises do not only contribute to give solution to the problematic involved, but also to strengthen other skills such as listening , reading and writing, as well as other personality areas; for instance, qualities, values, feelings, knowledge; but above all pupils' interest and motivation for learning English. At the same time, the proposal can also allow pupils become familiar with the culture of English speaking people, taking into account that the songs are authentic materials and provide original models to imitate native pronunciation.

For holding the analysis of the effectiveness of the system of exercises intended to develop pronunciation and vocabulary skills, a so far final pedagogical test was given to pupils similar to the initial one, but this time it was attached to the content taught so far. Pupils had to reproduce certain sounds present in words and sentences used for asking and answering questions on the communicative functions studied in the units under teaching. In the same way they also had to ask and answer questions in order to check not only intonation and rhythm, but also the mastering of the vocabulary reached so far. Both skills of the language were assessed by having them speak



briefly about a topic dealing with the communicative functions studied along the first term of the course.

The indicators and evaluating scale were the same as the ones used for the analysis of the initial pedagogical test. The outcomes achieved can be observed in the following chart, whose objective was to illustrate the quantitative results obtained after the application of the final pedagogical test so far.

Indicators	Students	High	%	Mid	%	Low	%
Articulation	20	12	60	4	20	4	20
Intonation	20	10	50	5	25	5	25
Rhythm	20	9	45	6	30	5	25
Range of vocabulary	20	11	55	5	25	4	20
General outcome	20	10,5	50	5	25	4,5	25

As it can be observed in the chart, the quantitative analysis allowed to assert that the number of pupils tested in each indicator is significant, due to the changes they made in terms of pronunciation and vocabulary to express themselves orally in a free way according to the topic..

However, the application of the proposal allowed the authors of this research and article to state the following outcomes from the qualitative point of view.

- Adequate articulation of vowel and consonant sounds, bringing forth an approximate pronunciation of the words involved in the vocabulary of the units under study.



- Satisfactory use of intonational patterns for asking and answering questions, not only of the ones present in the song but also of the ones used within the communicative functions studied along the course for speaking.
- Adequate rhythm use, as they got the skill of stressing the necessary words within an utterance in or out of a song.
- Accepted use of blendings at the time of repeating or reproducing short utterances, favoring rhythm and fluency in the speech act.
- Adequate range of vocabulary as they could use the necessary words to talk about the topics involved in the selected units.

The conclusion drew from the instrument applied, particularly the final pedagogical test so far allowed the authors asserting that the application of the system of exercises derived from them, as a way to develop the pronunciation and vocabulary skills actually seemed to be effective, considering that most of the pupils from the class object of study at the school object of research changed their learning status, as more than the fifty percent of them got a higher level as compared to the initial state; therefore, the authors of this investigation think that they successfully reached the desired goal, for most of the pupils developed the pronunciation and vocabulary skills.

Conclusions

1. Pronunciation and vocabulary were the two linguistic components that actually showed shortcomings that encouraged its authors to find out a solution to the problem, and served as the main source for the elaboration of the present article.



2. The authors of the article and research fulfilled the objective of the work, as the pupils involved in this process from the school object of research actually developed the pronunciation and vocabulary skills and therefore, the speaking skill.
3. The article demanded the application of scientific methods that made possible compile the necessary theoretical information about the teaching learning process of speaking and especially the development of pronunciation and vocabulary.
4. The present article as a result of the process of research provides a system of exercises and a set of songs that do not only develop pupils' pronunciation and vocabulary, but also their interest and motivation toward the English subject at the Elementary school.

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