

## Original

### A SYSTEM OF LANGUAGE GAMES FOR IMPROVING THE SPEAKING SKILL IN TENTH GRADERS AT MICAELA RIERA OQUENDO SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL IN MANZANILLO

Un sistema de juegos de idiomas para mejorar la habilidad de hablar en el décimo grado en el Preuniversitario Micaela Riera Oquendo de Manzanillo

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#### ABSTRACT

This research contributes to the necessity of improving the speaking skill in tenth graders at Micaela Riera Oquendo Senior High School in Manzanillo. It addresses its attention to a system of language games that may improve the above mentioned skill by fixing the linguistic content once the linguistic material of each unit has been presented throughout the English lessons. It is important because it helps to develop the teaching learning process of English oral skills at this level, that is, the language games elaborated guarantee a more effective approach for drilling the linguistic material, so that the students may improve the speaking skill in a practical and dynamic way. The novelty consists on the implementation of the system of language games to develop the process of communication in the foreign language.

**KEYWORDS:** speaking skill; tenth grade; language games;dynamic

#### RESUMEN

La presente investigación contribuye a la necesidad de mejorar la habilidad del habla en los estudiantes de décimo grado del IPU: "Micaela Riera Oquendo" de Manzanillo. Centra su atención en un sistema de juegos del lenguaje que desarrolla la habilidad antes mencionada a través de la fijación del contenido, una vez que el material lingüístico de cada unidad ha sido presentado en las clases de inglés. Es importante porque contribuye al desarrollo del proceso de enseñanza aprendizaje de las habilidades orales en este nivel, o sea, los juegos elaborados garantizan un enfoque más efectivo para la ejercitación del nuevo material lingüístico, por lo que los estudiantes desarrollan la habilidad del habla de forma práctica y dinámica. La novedad

consiste en la implementación del sistema de juegos para desarrollar el proceso de comunicación en la lengua extranjera.

**PALABRAS CLAVES:** habilidad del habla; décimo grado; juegos del lenguaje; dinámico

## **INTRODUCTION**

The teaching of the English language is one of the priorities in the Cuban Educational System and has become a necessity at every educational level, as a consequence of the evolving Cuban economic model and subsequent opening to the world, as well as the social need of university students to demonstrate English language proficiency. Currently, university graduates in Cuba are required to demonstrate an appropriate level of these language skills.

English is taught from third grade on. Special emphasis is laid on the formation and development of listening and speaking in all levels, although this foreign language is taught focusing its attention on the development of the four aspects of verbal activity. (Listening, speaking, reading, and writing)

The work centers its attention on the improvement of speaking in tenth grade, and the fixation of the new content through the application of language games, taking into account that this form of consolidating the knowledge already acquired by the learners does fit the students average age at this level in which they feel the necessity of getting together and develop activities in teams or groups.

“Games are effective tools for learning because they offer students a hypothetical environment in which they can explore alternative decisions without the risk of failure. Thought and action are combined into purposeful behavior to accomplish a goal. Playing games teaches how to strategize, to consider alternatives, and to think flexibly”(Martinson, B. 2008: 478).

In the teaching learning process of English at Micaela Riera Oquendo Senior High School in Manzanillo the four aspects of verbal activity are taught, but there must be an emphasis in the speaking skill to achieve the development of listening, reading and writing.

It is necessary to consider the application of methods and procedures to enhance students' interests for learning the language because the objective reality in this school demonstrates that there is a low level of interest for learning English, thus, this affects the development of oral and written communication.

Studies have confirmed that the syllabus at this level is divided into three units, but any of them contains at least a proposal of a language game for improving the speaking skill. There is just a suggestion in the methodological guidelines that orients teachers to create activities of this kind.

Also, exercises need more precision to contribute to the improvement of the four aspects of verbal activity; reproductive ones prevailed, so students are not always motivated to study the language in a practical and dynamic way. On the other hand, teachers devote most of their time to the writing skill.

The analysis of this situation permits to consider the following limitations in tenth grade:

- The students are afraid of making mistakes when speaking.
- It is difficult for them to find the correct grammar and vocabulary to express freely.
- They have problems when pronouncing different words and expressions within a sentence, and the intonation is not always correct.
- They sometimes do not understand what the teacher or their classmates say.

In order to give a solution to these limitations, a varied bibliography is studied. The following authors are consulted: Rogova, G.V. (1986), Canale, M. and Swain, M. (1980), Finocchiaro, M and Brumfit, C. (1983), Antich de León, R. (1986), Giovannini, A. (1996), Byrne, D. (1989), Leontiev, A. N. (1975), Vigotsky, L. S (1978), among others.

As a result of this study it is significant to say that games can involve all the basic language skills, i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and a number of skills are often involved in the same game (Lee, S. K.1995).

Games add interest to what students might not find very interesting. Sustaining interest can mean sustaining effort (Thiagarajan, S. 1999; Wright, A. & Buckby, M. 2002). After all; learning a language involves long-term effort.

The variety and intensity that games offer may lower anxiety (Richard-Amato, P. A.1988) and encourage shy learners to take part (Uberman, A. 1998), especially when games are played in small groups.

After the analysis of this situation, the authors of this work decide to carry out the research giving an answer to the following question: how to improve oral expression in tenth graders at Micaela Riera Oquendo Senior High School in Manzanillo?

For this reason, the teaching learning process of English oral skills in tenth grade at this school is where the research is developed. The objective is to design a system of language games for the improvement of the speaking skill.

## **POPULATION AND SAMPLE**

For the development of the research it is taken a population of 206 students from tenth grade and seven (7) English teachers at Micaela Riera Oquendo Senior High School in Manzanillo.

The sample is taken intentionally; it constitutes 30 students from group # 5, it represents the 14,7 % of the population.

The methodological guidelines for tenth grade offer important suggestions for the successful improvement of the English lessons. However, there have been many practical transformations due to the implementation of the video-lessons that do not permit an appropriate development of the speaking skill. That is why, the ways and methods that teachers need for the successful instruction and education of the students depend on their creativity.

In an interview to the English teachers who have enough experience in both, working at the intermediate level and teaching in tenth grade, they know very well the abilities of the language they must teach in this grade, they point out that the four abilities are quite important, but speaking is the outstanding one. Finally, they affirm that listening and writing are the most difficult ones, but they insist that speaking is still more polemic to master because it is the one learners are more demanded to cope with.

The 100% of the teachers say that language games are really useful for the development of students' abilities. They all consider that they almost never develop them in the lessons because they do not have enough time to create them, and the methodological guidelines do not suggest activities of this kind. One of the teachers (14, 3%) states that language games are useful to develop the speaking skill; when he once used a board game in class, the students were really motivated for learning.

*Observation to seven lessons:*

No	Indicators	Quantity of lessons	%
1	The students express spontaneously	0	0
2	They pronounce correctly	1	14,3
3	There is afraid of speaking	6	85,7
4	An appropriate vocabulary is used by students	4	57,1
5	There is creativeness and independence	1	14,3
6	The teacher corrects the students' pronunciation and grammatical mistakes	2	28,6
7	The teacher uses language games or any other dynamic activity	1	14,3
8	The teacher uses motivating teaching aids	1	<b>14,3</b>

It is applied a survey to know the students' opinions about the development of skills in the English lessons. Nine students (30%) state they do not like the English lessons very much because they hardly ever understand what it is written or orally expressed; besides, it is very difficult for them to speak. Nineteen students (63, 3%) consider that their teachers rarely correct their mistakes when speaking. Seven students (23, 3%) are afraid of speaking in front of the class because they do not want the rest to make fun of them, if they mispronounce words or expressions.

On the other hand, 23 students (76, 7%) want to develop language games in the lessons. Fourteen students (46, 7%), prefer the ones to develop speaking, meanwhile five (16, 6 %), the ones to develop reading, Four (13, 3%), those for listening, and seven of them (23, 3 %), prefer games for writing. The majority (21 students, 70%) want to develop games in teams.

The system of language games is supported by the theory of knowledge, in which activity social relations and the communication that can be achieved through language games are inseparable categories. In the process of teaching and learning the English language, communication is a complex process. That is, the student is able to communicate during the games to find himself the steps to follow in the process of satisfying his needs and objectives.

For the development of the games methods from the different levels of assimilation are used, all of them are prepared taking into consideration contexts that contribute to the development of the logical thinking, and of course, to the students' speaking skill. They are suggested to be used in the drilling lessons, although they can be used and adapted to any other context.

The system contains 10 games. There are games for each unit of the syllabus. Their structure is reflected in the following game:

Unit # 1: All about you.

Game #1: Guessing the classmates.

Objective: To practice the grammar and vocabulary studied.

Skill: Speaking.

Class organization: Teams.

Communicative functions:

- Identify people.
- Introduce yourself.
- Giving personal information.

Linguistic content: Present of be, simple present, the use of the indefinite article (a / an).

Language: Hello... I'm..., I live... My mother is a... Are you...? Yes, I am. No, I'm not. Brother. Grandfather. Phone number. I live in...

Level of assimilation: Reproductive.

Procedure:

- Give five students a card with the name of a classmate and some personal information about him / her. Ask them to come and sit at the front of the class facing the others.
- Divide the class into teams. Team A and team B and select one of the five students to read the content of the card without saying the name.
- Tell the teams their task will be to identify the classmate through a conversation. If they identify the classmate, they should greet and introduce themselves.
- If they identify the wrong person, the other team is in turn.
- The winners will be the ones who identify the correct classmate and they ask and answer questions using a correct pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar.

Example:

**Card #1**

**Classmate:** Robert Rodriguez

**Personal information:** I'm 16 years old. I live in an apartment with my mother and grandfather. My phone number is 23574563

**Card #2**

**Classmate:** Maria Gonzalez

**Personal information:** I'm 17 years old. My mother is a teacher. I don't live with her. My brother is an accountant.

Student 1: I'm 16 years old. I live in an apartment with my mother and grandfather. My phone number is 23574563.

Team A: Are you Robert Rodriguez?

Student 1: Yes, I am.

Team A: Hello. My name's....

Student 1: Nice to meet you.

Team A: Nice to meet you, too.

For the evaluation of the system of language games it is applied an initial pedagogical test to confirm the current state about the development of the speaking skill in the sample.

The following Indicators are used:

- Pronunciation.
- Correct use of grammar.
- Appropriate use of vocabulary.

To evaluate each indicator it is taken into account the following criteria:

Correct pronunciation: when students articulate sounds correctly, make a good use of blendings and the necessary pauses; they also express different communicative purposes with the appropriate intonation.

Correct use of grammar: when they express using correctly affirmative, negative and interrogative sentences, as well as the correct use of verbal forms according to the tense.

Appropriate use of vocabulary: when they use correctly the vocabulary studied in class and some other words and expressions looked in dictionaries.

Taking into consideration these indicators, the students are placed in three (3) levels:

High: Students who express orally using an appropriate pronunciation, they use correctly the grammar and vocabulary.

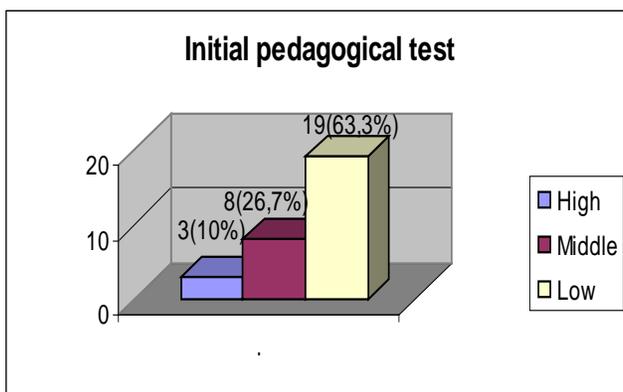
Middle: Students who express orally using an appropriate vocabulary, but have some pronunciation and grammatical problems that do not affect the process of communication.

Low: Students who express orally using a poor vocabulary and have serious pronunciation and grammatical problems.

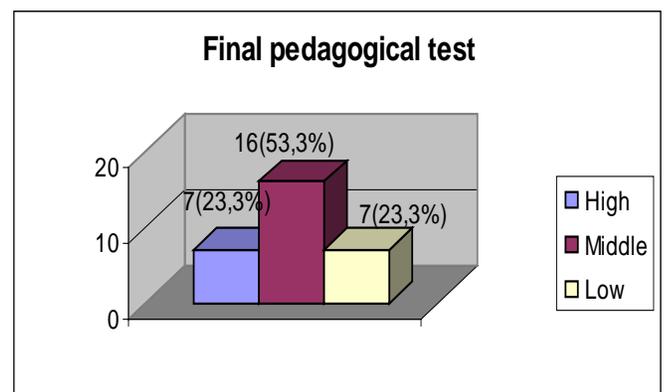
### ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

With the application of the system of language games the students of the sample have suffered significant changes taking into account the criteria used to evaluate the indicators previously stated.

Graphics #1, #2 and #3 show these results:

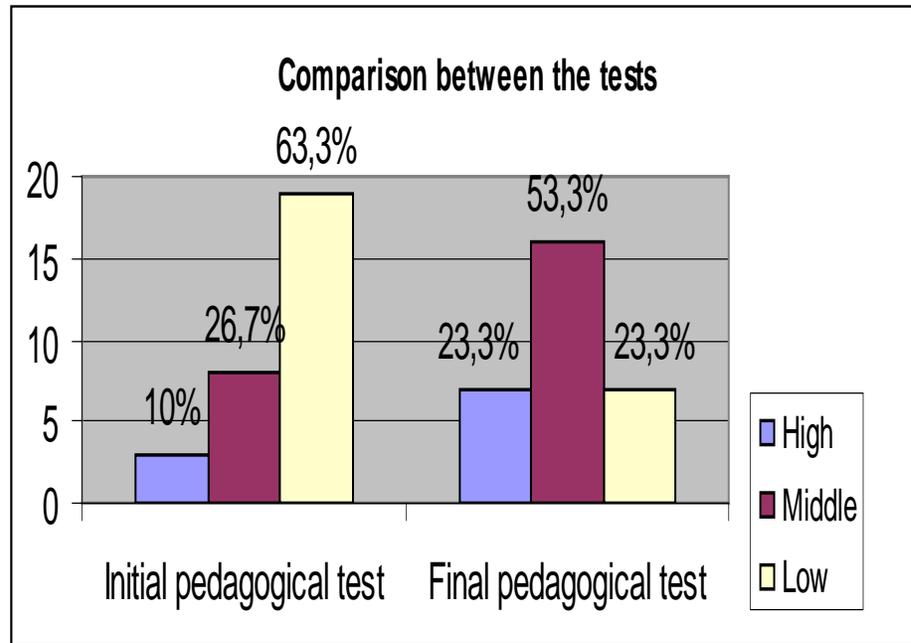


Graphic # 1



Graphic # 2

These results corroborate the effectiveness of the system of language games because at the time of making a comparison between the two tests, it can be stated that it has been favoured the development of the speaking skill in the students of the sample; they also are significant.



Graphic # 3

Generally speaking, the 95% of the games applied have got a high level of acceptance because during their application there has been an active participation, all the students have exchanged information either orally or written, and they have used the language in different contexts. In addition, it has been guaranteed dynamism in the lessons and favoured the fixation of the new linguistic material, so the development of the speaking skill in the foreign language has taken place in an active and practical way.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. The analysis of the theoretical foundations is suitable to support the system of language games for the improvement of the speaking skill in the teaching learning process of English in tenth grade.
2. The diagnosis applied corroborates the low level of development of the speaking skill in tenth grade at Micaela Riera Oquendo Senior High School in Manzanillo.
3. The elaboration of the system of language games improves the students' speaking skill in a practical way.
4. The results of the proposal confirm its effectiveness after the application of the final pedagogical test and making a comparison with the initial one.

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