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Recibido: 13/05/2022 | Aceptado: 20/09/2022

**The development of speaking skills in English in high school students**  
**El desarrollo de la expresión oral en Inglés en estudiantes de enseñanza media**

María de los Angeles Olivera Amaro. *Licenciada en Educación Lenguas Extranjeras (Inglés).*  
*Profesor Instructor. Universidad de Granma. Bayamo. Cuba.* [[moliveraa@udg.co.cu](mailto:moliveraa@udg.co.cu)] .

**Abstract**

The research was developed with ninth grade students at “Pedro Veliz Hernández” Junior High School, in Yara. It is applied a system of exercises to achieve an effective communication in English language through the development of speaking. In this sense, it was applied an initial and a final pedagogical test to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposal. The research has been sustained by the use of theoretical methods such as analytical-synthetical, inductive-deductive, as well as statistical technics.

**Key words:** speaking; english; abilities; exercises; communication.

**Resumen**

La investigación se desarrolló a estudiantes del noveno grado de la Secundaria Básica “Pedro Véliz Hernández” de Yara. Se aplicó un sistema de ejercicios para lograr una comunicación efectiva en lengua inglesa a través del desarrollo de la expresión oral. En este sentido, se aplicó una prueba pedagógica inicial y una final para evaluar la efectividad de la propuesta. Esta investigación ha estado sustentada en el uso de métodos teóricos como el analítico-sintético, inductivo-deductivo, así como técnicas estadísticas.

**Palabras Clave:** expresión oral; inglés; ejercicios; comunicación.



## Introduction

Language has been the main means of communication of humanity throughout the history of society. Language all over the world has undergone constant changes. Attention has been focused on form rather than on psychological factors. It seems there has not been a strong conception about communication and teaching.

In fact, the problem of teaching communication is closely related not only to linguistic but also to psychology and pedagogy. These three sciences lead to an integrated approach to the teaching of communication.

Oral expression is a stone corner in schools all over the world. Teachers, students and parents are responsible when speaking, and it is when the role of the teacher becomes important at the time of helping in the construction of the new generations on socialist convictions, as well as the moral code.

In fact, the students need to communicate in the foreign language to perform general functions in society: to fight for peace, to improve science and economy. So, the teachers' task is not only to teach communication, but also, to use it for the sake of humanity. Education and communication forms a unity, for they complement one to each other. Education is an aim and a condition, communication is a means for it. Only the correlation of knowledge, habits and abilities can provide a higher level of verbal activity. In fact, it is very important for the Cuban National System of Education to have the students who know perfectly well how to communicate themselves and understand other people while they are talking in English.



So, language is taught as a verbal activity in a unit of knowledge, habits and abilities. The students learn the language as a system and acquire habits in using the language components as a means of communication. The treatment of speaking is used for developing pronunciation, habits and skills, while reading and listening are closely connected with pupils' abilities to pronounce correctly what they read and listen to. Thus, speaking is the most important part during the lesson

There are many scientific works, which offer important suggestion to improve the teaching role in the educational system. Many thinkers have said that the lack of manners, wars, and implementation of old rules, have been the cause of the insufficiency of the language.

Several authors have investigated the topic, for example, (Antich, 1986 and 1988); (Abbot, G, 1989); (Byrne, 1989); (Acosta, 1996, 2005 and 2009); (Addine Fernández, 1998); (Álvarez de Zaya, C, 1996); (Barnes, D and Todd, F, 1997), whose contributions have been based on techniques and procedures to the learning of speaking. Nevertheless, there are still problems on the use of speaking at the time the students communicating each other. For example: students make mistakes at pronouncing some words; fluency is not achieved at the time they speak; there are limitations in the use of the grammatical resources in the construction of oral messages; the students show limitations in the vocabulary that block the appropriate communication in the foreign language.

That is why, this article aims at the elaboration of a system of oral communicative exercises to develop speaking skills on ninth grade students in Pedro Veliz Junior High School.

### **Materials and Methods**

For the development of the research a population of 180 students from ninth grade at "Pedro Véliz Hernández" High School from Yara municipality were taken. As sample, 36 students were taken, which represented 100% from total.



The research began with a study from the analytical-synthetic method to characterize the teaching learning process of the speaking skill in ninth grade. The bibliographical revision, the analysis of content, the observation of lessons, surveys and result of the pedagogical test were used to corroborate scientifically the problematical mention and the application of oral system texts and exercises in the English lessons.

For the fulfillment of this research was taken into account different kinds of exercises which are directed to get their specific objectives for the speaking skills, the aspects it covers, the characteristics of the exercises, the factors taken into account for the selection of the exercises, and other additional explanations that are important to all the professionals, especially, the seventh grade teachers that are going to put the set into practice.

In ninth grade, the methodological treatment of the content are made upon the basis of the presentation of the communicative functions in a situational- communicative context that reflex the meaning and use of those function, as well as the linguistic structure through which they are expressed. It is very important to take into account the age, psychological characteristics and the possibilities the students have in this grade.

The diagnosis of the current state of the problem was based on initial pedagogical test, observation of lectures in classroom and surveys to the students.

### **Analysis and discussion of the results**

With the objective of finding out the main problems students have with respect to an adequate use of the speaking skill, an initial pedagogical test was applied to them taking into account the following aspects: fluency, pronunciation, listening, grammar, and vocabulary. After having analyzed them, the following data was obtained:



In fluency, 4 students (11, 1%) were evaluated of high; 13 students (36, 1 %) were evaluated of mid, while 19 students (52, 8 %) were evaluated of low.

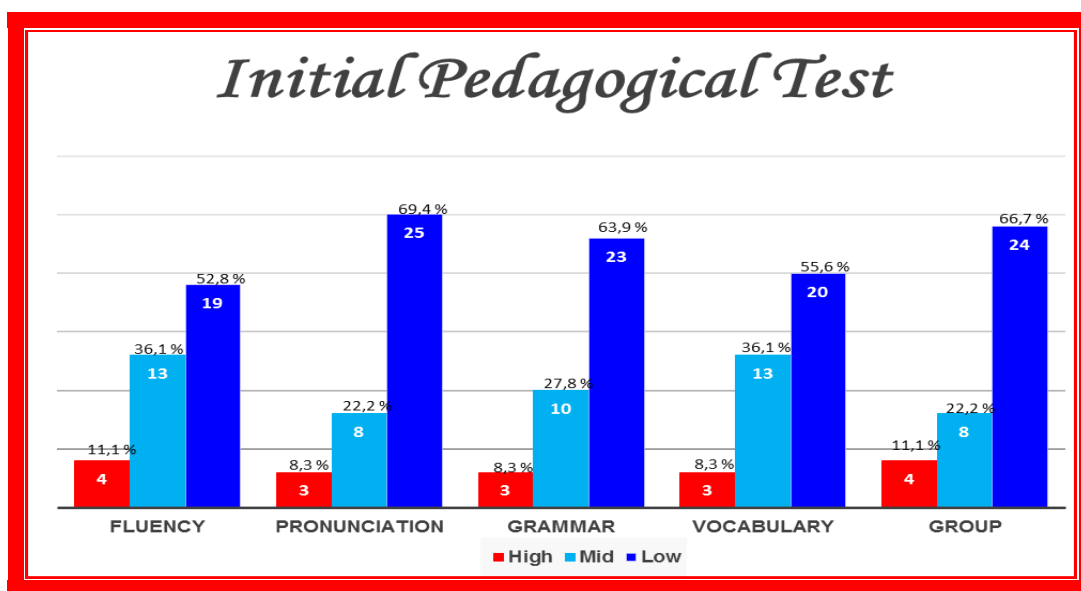
According to pronunciation, 3 students (8, 3 %) got the highest mark; 8 students (22, 2 %) were evaluated of mid; and 25 students (69, 4 %) got a low level.

When analyzing the grammatical aspects, just 3 students (8, 3 %) were evaluated of high; in addition, 10 students (27, 8 %) were mid; and 23 students (63, 9 %) got a low level. Nevertheless, when the authoress analyzed the vocabulary used, 3 students (8, 3 %) got the highest mark; 13 students (36, 1 %) were mid; while 20 students (55, 6 %) were evaluated of low.

At analyzing the results of the group under investigation, 4 students (11, 1 %) were evaluated of high, 8 students (22, 2 %) were evaluated of mid, and 24 students (66, 7 %) were evaluated of low. The group was evaluated of low.

These results showed clearly the limitations of the students regarding the speaking skill. This is a vivid prove of the existence of this problem.

Fig. 1



Results of the initial pedagogical test.



The application of the different exercises to deal with speaking skills will be fitted to the characteristics of the teachers and the students of the school.

*Exercise 1*

Unit 1: Summer Vacation.

Lesson 3

Objective: To develop the speaking skill by practicing interrogative sentences in a dialog about daily activities in order to reproduce it orally.

Level of assimilation: Recognition.

Communicative Function: Asking for and giving information about daily activities.

Time: 10 minutes.

Method: Discussion.

Evaluation: Oral.

Organization: Pair work.

Heading

Select the correct word to complete the dialogue about habitual actions, taking into account the underlined words. Be ready to act them out.

A: \_\_\_\_\_ does Becky study? (Where/ When)

B: Becky studies in the National Library.

A: \_\_\_\_\_ does Becky study? (When? / Which?)

B: She studies every day.

A: \_\_\_\_\_ does Becky study there? (Why? / What?)

B: Because she wants to become a lawyer next year.



A: \_\_\_\_\_ Becky consults important literature about law? (How often/ What usually)

B: She usually consults important literature about law.

A: \_\_\_\_\_ is her scientific adviser? (Who / Which)

B: Dr. Martin.

Steps to follow:

After copying the exercise on the board, the teacher will ask the students to work in pairs in order to complete the dialog by asking questions about habitual actions taking into account the underlined words. This activity will be evaluated and recorded. The teacher will register the most striking mistakes for a later correction, once they have finished their tasks. The teacher will also consider pronunciation, intonation and fluency for evaluating them.

### *Exercise 2*

Unit 1: Summer Vacation.

Lesson 4

Objective: To develop the speaking skill by asking and giving personal information in an interview.

Level of Assimilation: Production.

Communicative Function: Giving personal information.

Time: 10 minutes.

Method: Discussion.

Evaluation: Oral.

Organization: Pair work.

Heading



Work in pairs. Interview your partner and have your partner interview you. Be ready to act it out by asking questions about:

1. Name.
2. Address.
3. What she/he usually does after school.
4. What she/he does in the free time.
5. When she/he goes to the library.

*Steps to follow:*

After copying the exercise on the chalkboard, the teacher will ask the students to work in pairs in order to interview themselves. The teacher will register the most striking mistakes for a later correction; once they have finished their tasks. The teacher will also consider pronunciation, intonation and fluency for evaluating them.

### *Exercise 3*

Unit 1: Summer Vacation.

Lesson 8

Objective: To develop the speaking skill by talking about daily activities in a monologue form.

Level of Assimilation: Production.

Communicative Function: Asking for giving information about daily activity.

Time: 10 minutes.

Method: Independent work.

Evaluation: Oral.





Organization: Individual work.

Heading

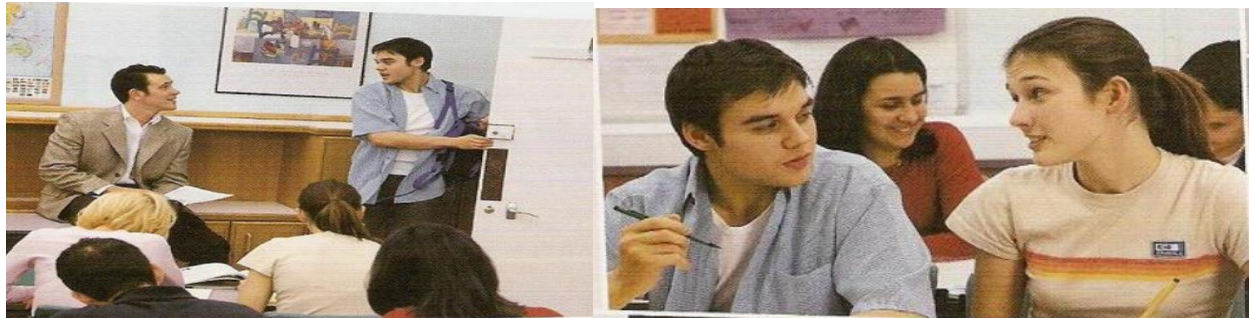
Make an oral report about actions you usually do on weekends. Use frequency adverbs.

1.-



Hints: visit, grandpa, house, breakfast

2.-



Hints: go to school, study, every day,

Steps to follow:

After copying the exercise on the board, the teacher will ask the students to make an oral report about their habitual actions on weekends. This activity could be evaluated as an independent work. The teacher will register the most striking mistakes for correcting them later, once they have



finished their exposition. The teacher will also take into account pronunciation, intonation and fluency when evaluating them.

*Exercise 4*

Unit 1: Summer Vacation.

Lesson 2

Objective: To develop the speaking skill by reproducing an informal dialog dealing with daily activities.

Level of Assimilation: Reproduction.

Communicative Function: Talking about daily activities.

Time: 10 minutes.

Method: Discussion.

Evaluation: Oral.

Organization: Pair work

Heading

Orlando and Silvia meet at the gym. Practice the conversation with your partner. Then act it out.

Silvia: Hi, Orlando.

Orlando: Hello, Silvia. How's life?

Silvia: Pretty good. How about you?

Orlando: Terrific. Silvia, what do you usually do after classes?

Silvia: I usually go to the gym. What about you? Do you always go to the gym?



Orlando: No, not every day, but often.

Silvia: I have to go now. Good to see you.

Orlando: Ok. Bye. Good to see you, too.

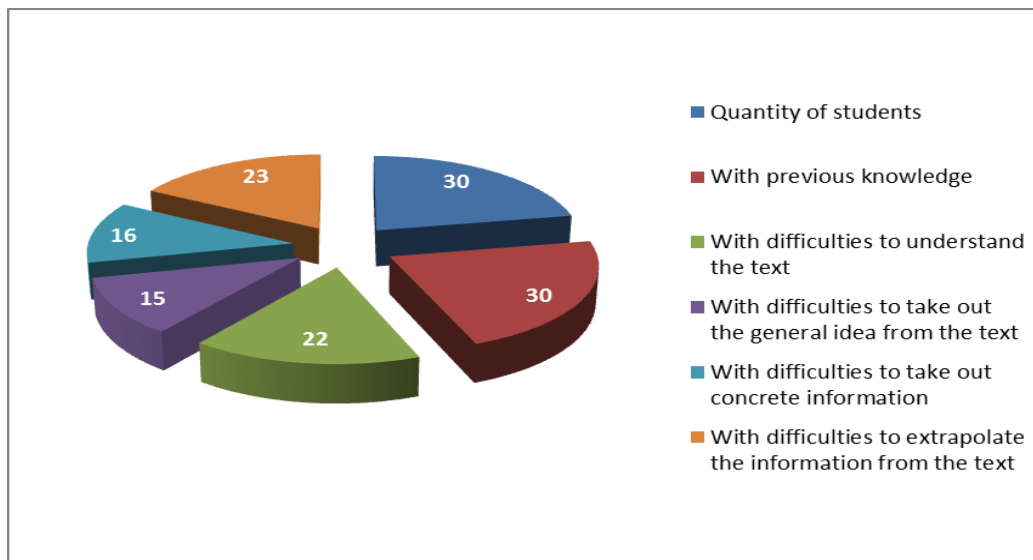
Steps to follow:

After copying the exercise on the chalkboard, the teacher will tell the students they have to work in pairs in order to practice the conversation to act it out later. The teacher will register the most striking mistakes for a later correction, once they have finished their tasks. The teacher will also consider pronunciation, intonation and fluency for evaluating them.

Whit the purpose of evaluating the development of the oral expression in the select sample a final pedagogical test was applied.

Eight lessons were observed in order to evaluate the development of the ninth grade students' speaking skills. In Figure 2 the obtained results are showed.

**Fig. 2**



**Results of the observation of English lessons.**

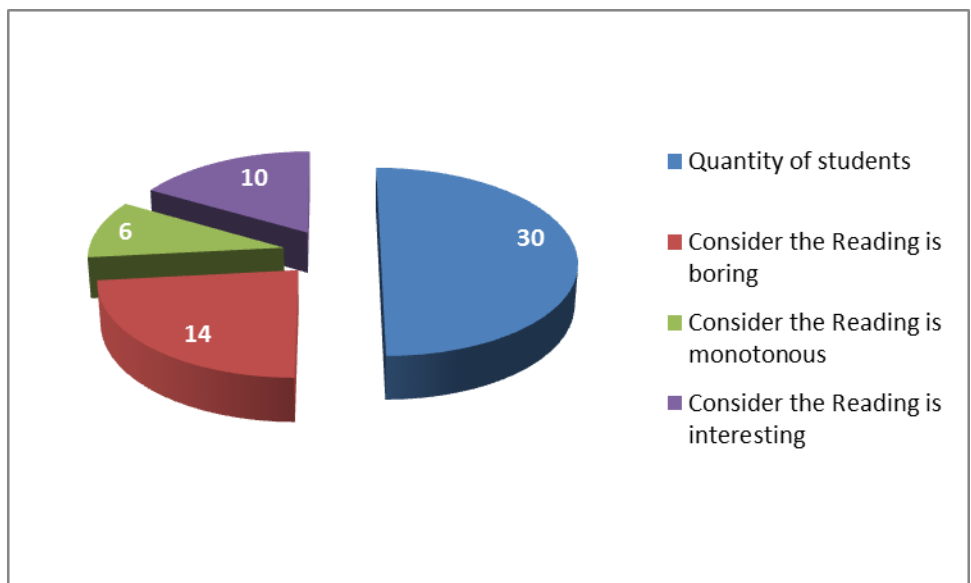


It was observed that in general the students had motivation at the time of speaking in the English lessons. However, 15 students (41,6%) faced serious difficulties in oral performance, 12 students (33,3 %) had problems using the language, 22 students (61,1 %) had problems in developing oral skills, when they used them in different activities, and finally 24 students (66,6 %) presented some difficulties in improving speaking skills, when they use varied exercises.

*Surveys to the students.*

The application of a survey to the sample of thirty- six (36) students allowed to inquire about their level of satisfaction with the English subject, as well as their opinion about the speaking skills treated in their lessons related to the ninth grade syllabus.

**Fig. 3**



**Results of the student's survey.**

The survey to the students let the researcher to obtain the following results:



1. 14 students (38,8%) said that the speaking lessons are boring, 12 (33,3%) said they are monotonous and 10 (27,7%) said they are interesting.

2. 15 students (41,6 %) said that the exercises were not varied.

The analysis of the survey applied to the students demonstrates that only 27,7% of them found interesting the speaking lessons.

Positive results were achieved after application of the system of exercises

The exercises and activities cannot be imposed to the oral interaction and not all the units must have the same kinds of exercises, but those that are related to the main linguistic skills.

The oral communication must contribute to develop the vocabulary and to reinforce the grammatical structures that are worked in ninth grade syllabus. Besides, they must allow the integration of speaking to other skills such as: listening, reading and writing.

## **Conclusions**

The results of the initial diagnosis proved that there were serious difficulties in the ninth grade students' speaking skills.

1. The elaboration and implementation of the system of exercises taking into account the outcome of the initial diagnosis and under the basis of communication that appear in ninth grade syllabus allowed to develop their speaking skills.

2. The results obtained after the final pedagogical test showed the ninth grade students at Pedro Veliz High School develop their speaking skills in English and achieve an effective communication in this foreign language.



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