



Communication Games: Their Contribution to Developing Speaking Skills

Hernández-Chérrez Elsa

Universidad Técnica de Ambato, Ecuador, eda.hernandez@uta.edu.ec

Hidalgo-Camacho Cynthia

University of Cuenca, Ecuador, cynthia.hidalgo@ucuenca.edu.ec

Escobar-Llanganate Paulina

Unidad Educativa Gral Eloy Alfaro Delgado, Ecuador, pauliescobar37@yahoo.com

The current work was based on a project that aimed to enhance the English-speaking skill development in tenth graders of a public high school in Ambato, a city of the Andean Region of Ecuador. The population involved 145 students who were surveyed to detect their impression about the use of Communication Games in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Additionally, a pre-test was used to determine the students' English level before implementing certain games selected from a handbook created especially for this study. After that, a post-test and an exit survey were used to measure the effects of communication games. It was found that students consider using games in the classroom beneficial for their learning. Likewise, it was evident that communication games contributed significantly to the students' oral production, which showed an increased level of vocabulary, more accuracy and fluency, and a more relaxed interaction with their peers and their teacher, after the intervention.

Keywords: English speaking skills, communication games, EFL teaching, constructivism, motivation

INTRODUCTION

English is considered a language that influences commerce, science, politics, technology, and cultural relations (Zarei, Pourghasemian, & Khalessi, 2019). Indeed, in several countries English is considered the lingua franca not only for academic, but for occupational purposes too. As Jenkins & Leung (2017) stated, people worldwide use English as a contact language which allows them to communicate with individuals who use different first languages. Consequently, the requirement of English language learning has increased over the last 25 years and it is expected to continue increasing because of the ongoing globalization process (Crystal, 2012). As a result, many studies have been developed to find ways to make EFL learners' learning easier.

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Didactics

The teaching / learning process involves the educator, the learners, and the knowledge. As Díaz (2015) has stated, didactics is the science that pays close attention to how all of them interact. Each element plays an important role and according to Torres & Argentina (2009), these elements are:

- The student, who is protagonist of the educational labour. Consequently, educational institutions should adapt its characteristics in benefit of learners, considering their evolutive age, individual characteristics, interests, needs, desires and aims.
- The teacher, who is the person that plays different roles in the educational process, counsellor, facilitator, guide, advisor, and companion of students. Mainly, the teacher is a source of information and motivation, who serves as a mediator to facilitate the learning. In addition, by providing students with the proper stimuli according to their particularities and possibilities.
- The objectives, which guide the teaching/learning process. They are set by the educational system, the institution, the level of students, the type of course, among others. There are also specific objectives that are expected to be achieved in a short term, for example, those proposed for a specific class.
- The content, which is normally covered by achieving objectives set by the educational institutions.
- Methods and Techniques, which show how the educational objectives will be achieved by students. Finding the right methods and techniques is crucial to engage students and make them the protagonists and the creators of their own learning.
- Geographical, economic, cultural, and social environment in which the educational centre operates. This information is crucial to design a teaching plan that is suitable for the learners.

There has been an evolution on language didactics, the purpose of teaching a foreign language, and on how it has been taught and learned over the years. Before this century, there were two main approaches. One focused on language use, and the other on its analysis and the grammatical rules. At the end of the 19th century the Direct Method, the Reading Approach, Audiolingualism and the Situational Approach were introduced (Celce-Murcia, 2001). The Communicative Approach first appeared in the 1970's thanks to the studies of linguists such as Hymes and Halliday, as a response to previous approaches and regarding the language as a way of communication of real meaning (Hymes and Halliday, 1973). Nowadays, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) seems to be the approach most widely used in educational contexts because it is focused on the learner and on experiences, which promotes interaction in the class and students' self-reflexion on knowledge (Richards, 2006). Furthermore, Astuti & Lammers (2017) and Alamri (2018) agreed that Communicative Language Teaching help teachers in the task of stimulating the learning of a target language and its four main skills.

Motivation and EFL learning

When talking about learning and developing language skills, it has been proven that motivation plays an important role. As mentioned by Madasa, Darmi & Baharun (2017),

it is imperative to find the learners' needs, demands and interests. For instance, the necessity of English, success and interest on the English Culture are some of the internal factors that motivate students to learn this language (Song, & Kim, 2017). Getting to know students and what they expect is important because, although personality and motivation are closely related, EFL teachers should promote activities to develop language skills (Islam, 2017). Sample (2015) also highlights the importance of the nature of activities and the social goals students have.

A study carried out in Turkey revealed that the students' perception of their EFL classes is that teacher overuse course books, and lack fun activities (Arda, & Doyran, 2017). In a different context, Borjian (2015) interviewed 76 public school EFL teachers in Mexico, finding that learners lack interest in learning, believe the language is too complicated; and methods and curricula are overly traditional. Locally, Cirocki, Soto, Encalada & Cuenca (2019) reported a study of the motivational strategies proposed in EFL teaching in Ecuador. It concluded that students felt they should be exposed to more diverse motivational strategies, which can promote autonomous learning, and positive self-evaluation. Hidalgo and Villacís (2020) also suggest that fostering autonomous learning in a safe environment not only motivates students, but also fully develops their potential. This information is important because it points to teaching context sharing similarities that need to be paid attention to. Since learners who lack motivation are less likely to achieve their learning goals (Vibulphol, 2016), it is the teachers' responsibility to provide students with opportunities to engage in the teaching/learning process.

Teaching teenagers in the EFL classroom

Besides the types of activities used in the teaching/learning process, there are other important aspects to be considered, such as students' personality, attitude and age. Age is an important factor when choosing suitable activities and resources, classroom management and ways to motivate them.

Haycraft (2012) affirms that teenagers are more difficult to manage, motivate and engage in learning. In fact, teachers need to have control and have the respect from these groups, without being aggressive nor too calm. Getting this balance can be tricky because teenagers are developing physically, mentally and socially, which can make satisfying them challenging. Once they feel comfortable and interested, the group will be easier to manage. One way to help them gain confidence is to offer them activities they will enjoy. Interactive activities such as group-work, pair-work, role-plays, discussions and games are considered motivating and a fun way to take pleasure in performing in a foreign language (Ochoa et al., 2016; Sevy-Biloon, 2018b), as well as to improve one's ability in language learning (Fadhli et al., 2020).

Philips (2013) has stated that communication games help EFL students learn in an enjoyable and rewarding way, while developing cooperation, positive competition and the skills to be a good loser. Fajariyah (2009) designed an action research to measure the impact of games on speaking proficiency, finding that students' speaking skills were better and learners seemed to be more actively involved in classwork when using games. Ulviana (2011) and Salazar & Villamil (2012) also noticed an increase in students'

interest and involvement during lessons that had communication games in them. These agree with Harmer (2015), who explained that Communication Games are designed to foster communication among students, whether it is solving a puzzle, drawing a picture, or giving answers to proposed questions. Also, with Silsüpür (2017) who evidenced that games reduce negative feelings during the teaching/learning process. Furthermore, Hadfield (2014) added that communication Games can be utilized as a diagnostic tool for the teacher to notice areas of difficulty and do something about them.

In addition to all the already mentioned advantages of Communication Games, Talak-Kiryk (2010) declared that there are other benefits in using them in the EFL classroom, such as the development of a phonologic conscience and auditory perception, creativity, and memory to retain series of words. This means that communication games improve fluency and vocabulary acquisition while developing other cognitive skills, as well. As for categorization, Wright et al., (2006) proposed a clear variety oto be used in class:

- Pictures Games to compare and contrast pictures, as well as to consider differences and similarities and possible relations between them.
- Psychology Games that encourage visual perception, imagination, and memory.
- Magic Tricks; Sound Games; Card and Board Games that can be adapted from traditional games for language teaching.
- Word Games to practice spelling, meanings, word use in sentences, words in contexts, and grouping according to grammatical use.
- True-False Games for analysis.
- Memory Games.
- Guessing and Speculating Games.
- Story Games.
- Question and Answer games, among others.

Communication Games are the perfect strategy to develop listening and oral skills within the FL teaching/learning process because they emphasize the ludic and creative use of the language while stimulating and developing speaking through interaction and socialization. Likewise, when playing communication games, students are expected to express ideas, formulate questions and responses and negotiate meaning, while they develop other skills such as listening, reading, and writing, as well as sub skills with varied types of actions and activities (Bailey et al., 2004 & Lackman, 2010). Nevertheless, it is important to remember that for games to have an educational value, it is necessary to have a proper plan which contains scaffolding and feedback to keep students motivated (Iaremenko, 2017).

Speaking skills

The main goal of an EFL classroom is to foster communication and oral expression is crucial for it (Efrizal, 2012). In this respect, Saville-Troike (2016) affirmed students need to know how to express fluently and accurately, making use of good pronunciation, as well as intonation, using non-verbal gestures, showing that they are listening. Although different strategies have appeared to expand speaking skills; different studies

have shown that issues such as inhibition, lack of participation, use of mother tongue, among others, are found in EFL classrooms (Tuan & Mai, 2015).

Brown (2014) added that it is very common to find linguistic and psychological issues that affect oral expression. Among the linguistic aspects, it is common to see EFL learners speaking in slow rhythm, pausing, using too many fillers, lacking organization of ideas or complete sentences, making grammatical errors regularly, and not using enough vocabulary or reduced forms of the English language, such as contractions, proper pronunciation, and intonation. Identically, psychological aspects affect oral production in a negative way because students who are afraid to make mistakes in front of their classmates and teacher will not speak in class. This could be a result of the students' lack of confidence or inadequate techniques used by the teacher to motivate students. In this respect, Richards (2005) summarized some of the things that affect students' speaking:

- Curriculum and evaluation that do not focus on oral production.
- Activities proposed that are not encouraging communication and interaction.
- Big groups, which makes participation of all the learners difficult.
- Teachers' attempts to engage learners are not appropriate.
- Limited opportunities to use the language outside the classroom.

Certain level of deficiency in English speaking skills has been identified at Unidad Educativa General Eloy Alfaro Delgado. As demonstrated in previous studies (Rojas, & Villafuerte, 2018; Sevy-Biloon, 2017a; Fajardo, 2018; Villafuerte, Rojas, Hormaza, & Soledispa, 2018), this may be caused by the daily use of standardized books that contain excessive grammar rules and very little spaces created for oral production or the lack of interactive activities. As a result, the idea of this research was built upon research works and literature that have demonstrated that fun and games should not be left out of the teaching/learning process (Jabbarova, 2020). In point of fact, recreational activities are beneficial in the classroom because they promote self-confidence and natural interaction (Dewi, Kultsum & Armadi, 2017; Kostikova, 2017; and Lin, Hwang, Fu, & Chen, 2018). Communication games can be used as a strategy to promote English speaking while developing accuracy, fluency, interaction, and coherence, which is why it is necessary to implement them as part of EFL class.

METHOD

Aim of this study

This study aimed to determine the effect of using communication games to develop speaking skills of high school tenth grade students at Unidad Educativa General Eloy Alfaro Delgado, a high school located in Ambato, a city of the Andean Region of Ecuador. In this regard, the answers to the following questions were sought:

- To what extent do Communication Games stimulate the development of English-speaking Skills of teenagers?
- What is the perception of these EFL 10th graders towards the use of Communication Games in the teaching/learning process?

Subjects

The sample consist of a total of 145 tenth graders, who are part of two groups from the morning schedule, and other two groups from the afternoon schedule at Unidad Educativa General Eloy Alfaro Delgado, in the last academic year.

The survey, the pre-test and the post-test were applied to the entire population, because of its size, which is detailed in table number 1:

Table 1
Population

Class	Male	%	F	Female	%	F	Total	%		
Group A	22	59	0,33	7	15	41	0,33	5	37	100
Group B	18	47	0,33	6	20	53	0,33	7	38	100
Group C	18	53	0,33	6	16	47	0,33	5	34	100
Group D	20	56	0,33	7	16	44	0,33	5	36	100
	78			26	67			22	145	

Groups of students from the morning and the afternoon schedules

Quasi-experiments, like the one in this research, are generally considered to be somewhere between correlational studies and true experiments. The present research work was done by using different instruments such as surveys, a pre-test and a post-test conducted to measure the dependent variable: speaking skills development before and after intervention, which involved communication games for tenth grade EFL classes (independent variable).

It was a one group pre-test- post-test design, which means the study did not have a control group, but only an experimental one whose speaking skills were measured before and after the treatment (Reichardt, 2009; Alasuutari, Bickman & Brannen, 2008). One group pre-test- post-test design has been useful in several studies on foreign language teaching making quantitative data visible for researchers (Prayoga, 2018; Masruddin, 2018; Sánchez, Hernández, Fernández, Díazm& Bastian, 2019; Senel, 2018; and Öztürk 2019).

Once the quantitative data was collected from the pre-test and post-test scores, it was analyzed and combined with the qualitative data obtained from the exit survey that gathered the opinions of students about the use of communication games.

Data collection instruments

Four instruments were applied in this study: a survey before the proposal, a pre-test before and a post-test after intervention to measure the outcomes after implementing communication games in the EFL classroom, and finally an exit survey was used to discover whether students' perceptions about the use of those activities had changed afterwards.

Surveys

A survey consisting of 10 questions was used to discover the expectations and perceptions students had about their EFL classes and the use of communication games. The survey was designed using a Likert scale (definitely yes, probably yes, not sure, probably no, definitely no).

After the period of implementation of communication games in the EFL Classes, an exit survey was applied, which contained the same questions to see if the perceptions of students have changed with the new methodology. This allowed the researchers to verify the hypothesis and prove that the use of communication games was not only accepted, but also preferred by these learners.

Pre-test and post-test

Data collected in intervention programs are often limited to two points in time: before and after the treatment. That is to say, pre-tests and post-tests are used (Alessandri, 2017). Since speaking tests measure oral production, the pre-test and the post-test had the same structure, open questions that involved students' interaction among them and with the teacher.

These tests provided teachers with an opportunity to give students meaningful feedback while measuring their speaking skills with a rubric which included a scoring guide to evaluate performance with the following criteria: vocabulary, accuracy, fluency, interaction, and coherence (Serna, 2016).

A pre-test was used to identify the initial level of the English-speaking skills on tenth graders, before the implementation of Communication Games in their classes. Then, the Post-test was applied after the implementation of Communication Games to confirm whether these games fostered the development of their English-speaking skills.

Data Collection and Analysis

1. The population was analysed and given a survey to know the perceptions and expectations students had about their EFL classes and communication games.
2. A speaking test was used to assess students' oral performance, before the use of communicative games in the classroom.
3. After the pre-test, the teacher proposed different communication games in each EFL class as a technique to develop students' speaking skills.
4. The group was subjected to the post-test.
5. The data was tabulated and the class scores, before and after intervention, were compared.
6. The hypothesis that communication games positively influence the development of speaking skills of EFL learners on this study was verified using the Chi-squared test and the Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS).
7. An exit survey was used to reveal how students felt after the implementation of communication games in their EFL classes.
8. The quantitative data and the qualitative data from the exit survey and the tests were analysed and compared to finally confirm the hypothesis.

The data collection plan was created by the researchers who first identified the questions that had to be answered in this research work (Moser, 2018).

- What for? To achieve the main objectives of this research project
- Who are going to be the unit of analysis? Tenth graders
- What aspects are going to be treated? Communication Games - English Speaking Skill
- Who is going to carry out the research? The researchers
- Where? At Unidad Educativa General Eloy Alfaro Delgado
- Which instruments will be used? Pre-test / Post-test / Surveys
- In what context? EFL lessons

The data collection plan can be seen in the following table:

Table 2
Data collection and analysis

Stage	Aims	How?
Pre-research	To identify the problem during the teaching/learning process	Observation
	To identify the technique used and the difficulties found by teachers when teaching speaking	Survey
	To identify students' speaking proficiency level	Pre-test
Research Implementation/ Proposal	To make a proposal to enhance the development of the English-speaking skill.	Handbook with twelve activities: 1. Chit chat 2. Computer dating 3. Habits and hobbies 4. Put it together 5. Looking for a job 6. Yuppies 7. The recipes game 8. Shopping lists 9. Eyewitnesses 10. Guess 11. Holiday Quiz 12. Souvenir Shopping
	To implement the proposal	Lesson plans with warm up, presentation, practice, and production for the activities proposed in the handbook.
Post Research	Identifying students' speaking proficiency level and satisfaction after the intervention	Post-test and exit survey

FINDINGS

This study was carried out to find out the perceptions of students towards the use of communication games in the EFL classroom and analyze whether these activities stimulate the development of English-speaking Skills of teenagers.

The following data contains the students' perception before and after intervention. The answers belong to two of the ten questions proposed in the initial survey, and the answers to the same questions, from the exit survey.

Table 3

Students' opinions about how beneficial to the English learning process communicative games are

Students' Response	Before intervention		After intervention	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Definitely Yes	92	63,5%	95	66%
Probably Yes	29	20%	50	34%
Not Sure	10	6,9%	0	0%
Probable No	8	5,51%	0	0%
Definitely No	6	4,2%	0	0%
No Answer	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL	145	100%	145	100%

Table 4

Students' perceptions, before and after intervention, on whether there is use of communication games in the classroom during the english learning process

Students' Response	Before intervention		After intervention	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Definitely Yes	7	4,82%	101	70%
Probably Yes	10	6,9%	44	30%
Not Sure	15	10,34%	0	0%
Probable No	33	22,8%	0	0%
Definitely No	80	55,2%	0	0%
No Answer	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL	145	100%	145	100%

After the students answered the questions from the initial survey, they took a pre-test, which showed the low proficiency of the tenth graders evaluated with a rubric with the elements: Range, Accuracy, Fluency, Interaction and Coherence. After intervention, students were evaluated again, which gives us the post-test results. The interpretation is described as follows:

Table 5

Pre-test and post-test results analysis and interpretation

Rubric Components	Pre - test	Post - test
Range	0,86	1,71
Accuracy	0,67	1,55
Fluency	0,71	1,62
Interaction	0,78	1,67
Coherence	0,61	1,50

Note: Rubric score to equivalent points, as follows: 0,0 -0,6 unacceptable; 0,7-0,9 beginning – attempted; 1,0 -1,3 developing – fair; 1,4 -1,7 accomplished – good; 1,8 - 2,0 excellent.

For the verification of the hypothesis, the T-student test and the mean of the results obtained in the tests were used. Hernandez-Sampieri (2014) define the T-student as a statistical test that evaluates two different groups in a significant manner considering their means. The SPSS Statistics corroborated the verification of the hypothesis, with the following results:

Table 6
Paired samples statistics

	Mean	N	Typical Deviation	Standard error
Par 1 Pre-test	,7260	5	,09711	,04343
Post-test	1,4300	5	,07176	,32209

Table 7
Paired samples correlations

	N	Typical Deviation	Standard error
Par 1 Pre-test and Post- test	5	,0976	,005

Table 8
Paired samples test

	Related differences					T	gl	Sig. Bilateral
	Media	Typical Deviation	Standard error	95% confidence range				
				Inferior	Superior			
Par 1 Pre-tes Post te	0,70400	0,3130	0,01400	-,74287	-,66513	- 50,286	4	,000

DISCUSSION

Table 3 shows that after intervention, there was a slight increase in the number of students that consider the use of communication games in the classroom beneficial for their learning; however, the 4,2% of students who considered that the use of games was not helpful before intervention, disappeared. Evidently, the use of communication games changed the attitude towards EFL, as it has also been found in similar studies (Yolageldili & Arikan, 2011; Al-Bulushi & Al-Issa, 2017; Alfi, 2015).

Table 4 shows that 55,2% of the students expressed that the teacher did not use Communication Games in the classroom before intervention. This fact suggests teachers might not have fully acknowledged of the importance of these communicative activities to improve speaking skills, which is not surprising because the integration of gaming culture with school culture is expected to require a great effort on the part of all the parts involved. As Klopfer et al. (2009) states, schools need to take risks to innovate and teachers need to be trained to do so. After intervention, 70% of students affirmed their teacher was using communication games to encourage learners to interact in English during their lessons. This also means that teachers accepted innovated their methodology and started using more adequate techniques such as using communication games, which benefits greatly when integrating them more regularly into the educational process (Burgos et al., 2007).

The data represented in table 5 makes evident that there was improvement in the five components assessed with the rubric used for Speaking evaluation. The scores in the

post-test were higher and consequently, the mean was higher too. This demonstrated the usefulness of Communication Games to enhance the English-speaking skill. The gathered data displayed a pre-test average score of 3,64; while the average score in the post-test was 7,14 after intervention. This significant increase in the post-test score demonstrated the effectiveness of Communication Games in the EFL classroom. It is necessary to remember that general performance in the speaking test was not the only improvement. Students' participation was more spontaneous and relaxed, which leads to a wider vocabulary learning, correct short sentences production, and better pronunciation (Urrutia & Vega, 2016). In other words, learners acquire knowledge better when they are not encountering explicit teaching (Taheri, 2014). In the same vein, Zhu (2012) thinks that while English is being taught traditionally, students try to remember rules and English words; but when they are actively taking part in games, their interest and motivation is higher, and their opportunities to practice their basic listening and speaking skills are more. which also proves that

The statistics results presented in tables 7, 8 and 9, which are described with the support of the SPSS Statistics, confirmed that post-test the scores are higher than the pre-test scores. The contrast mean test confirmed that there is an existent correlation between the two means, with a 0,976. The associated inference is significant. Considering the values of the means, the standard error mean is 0,01400 and the value of the significance (2-tailed) equals 0,000; values lower than 0,005, leads to conclude that, the null hypothesis is rejected, consequently, the alternative hypothesis is assumed: Communication Games enhanced the development of English Speaking Skill in tenth grade students of Unidad Educativa General Eloy Alfaro Delgado

The support of the SPSS Statistics and the Chi-Squared test revealed a significance of 0,05 and a reliability of 95%, in 30 cases the frequency is lower than 0,5. Although the hypothesis was already verified with the T-Student test used with the results of the pre-test and the post-test, the Chi-Squared test was also used to corroborate the confirmation of the hypothesis. The symmetric measures showed that the approximate significance level is 0,33 which is the same of the Chi-Squared test. Consequently, it can be concluded that communication Games do enhance students' English-Speaking skill development.

Finally, according to the results found in the exit survey, students are now interested in continuing using Communication Games in the English classroom. When they were asked why, students indicated that they feel they speak English better and more when they have communication games in the lesson. Similarly, the results of a study done in Indonesia also indicated that using communicative games increased students' confidence (Fithriani, 2019). As it was said by Mahmoud & Tanni (2014), games involve students in communication and learning in a way that they actually enjoy, and that builds their confidence.

CONCLUSION

Although the importance of the use of communication games in the EFL classroom is usually neglected, the results in this study, as well as what has been found in other

published research works, have confirmed that the use of communication games in the EFL classroom benefit the development of students' speaking skills. Chen (2005) suggests that using games in the EFL classroom is becoming more frequent because the competition stimulates students' engagement in the target language.

As previously mentioned, one of the factors that negatively affect EFL learners' oral expression is the fear to make mistakes in front of their classmates and the teacher. However, this study showed that such an issue could be overcome using communication games. Students performed spontaneously and showed more self-confidence when speaking in English and felt more satisfied with their oral participation in class. In fact, when their oral production was evaluated after the use of communication games, as part of the teaching/learning process, interaction increased and students showed more confidence, and better levels of accuracy and fluency and wider vocabulary.

The results were highly satisfying in terms of improvement of speaking skills. Additionally, there was an obvious change in students' perspectives of the use of communication games; however, there was the limitation of the number of participants. The results of a population of 145 students cannot be generalized. Further studies should be carried out to provide a broader picture of the influence of Communicative Games in EFL Classrooms.

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