

El desarrollo de la habilidad oral en estudiantes de Telesecundaria Telesecundaria students' speaking skill development

Esteban J. B. Zárate Mejía ^a

Abstract:

Learning a second language is nowadays a necessity. It enables people from different mother tongues to establish a common ground for communicating. Particularly, for teenage students whose first language is Spanish, it has been a recurrent difficulty to articulate an understandable and purposefully oral speech in English as a lingua franca. Therefore, it was necessary to analyse the nature of the factors that hinder Telesecundaria students speaking skill development through a descriptive case study. 19 second-grade students were surveyed, interviewed, and observed to describe their opinions about the influence it had on the socio-affective elements present in the classroom learning environment where speaking activities are performed. Results revealed that a supporting learning environment enhanced students' speaking skill development. Such an environment required teachers to provide communicative activities and authentic teaching materials through which students can practice controlled speech. Such kind of discourse allowed students to experience low anxiety levels. Furthermore, a classroom environment that promotes trust and support will allow students to feel confident to speak in public in English. In conclusion, a supportive learning environment characterized by controlled speaking tasks that employ real-life material will allow Telesecundaria students to develop their speaking skills.

Keywords:

Secondary students, learning environment, speaking skill, speaking anxiety, socioemotional factors, teaching materials.

Resumen:

Aprender una segunda lengua es hoy en día una necesidad. Ésta permite a personas de distintas lenguas maternas establecer una base común para comunicarse. Particularmente, para los estudiantes adolescentes cuya primera lengua es el español, ha sido una dificultad recurrente articular un discurso oral comprensible y propositivo en inglés como lengua franca. Por lo tanto, fue necesario analizar la naturaleza de los factores que obstaculizan a los estudiantes de Telesecundaria el desarrollo de su habilidad oral a través de un estudio de caso descriptivo. Se encuestó y observó a 19 alumnos de segundo grado para que describieran sus opiniones sobre la influencia que tuvieron los elementos socioafectivos presentes en el ambiente de aprendizaje del aula donde se realizaron actividades de expresión oral. Los resultados revelaron que un entorno de aprendizaje propicio mejoraba el desarrollo de la destreza oral de los alumnos. Dicho entorno requería que los profesores proporcionaran actividades comunicativas y materiales didácticos auténticos a través de los cuales los alumnos pudieran practicar un discurso oral controlado. Este tipo de discurso permitía a los alumnos experimentar bajos niveles de ansiedad. Además, un entorno de clase que fomente la confianza y el apoyo permitirá a los estudiantes sentirse seguros para hablar en inglés en público. En conclusión, un ambiente de aprendizaje caracterizado por implementar actividades orales controladas donde se emplea material auténtico y se promueve la tolerancia permitirá a los estudiantes de Telesecundaria desarrollar su habilidad oral.

Palabras Clave:

Alumnos de Telesecundaria, entorno de aprendizaje, competencia oral, ansiedad oral, factores socioemocionales, materiales didácticos.

Introduction

The English language has been the most widespread means of communication around the world. It has been positioned as a lingua franca through which speakers from different mother tongues can establish contact (Mcdonough & Shaw, 2003; Shahidulla et al, 2001). Particularly, Speaking has been considered one of the

most important language skills since it facilitates communication between humans. Through speaking the human being communicates thoughts, feelings, and emotions. That is the reason why when "we speak to others we come to have a better understanding of our own selves" (Khaydarova & Muhammedov, 2019, p.60). However, this interchange process can be difficult to develop for EFL speakers. Commonly, EFL learners find it difficult to develop their speaking skills due to internal and external factors. Regarding the first ones, it can be

^a Esteban J. B. Zárate Mejía, Universidad Veracruzana | Veracruz | México, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6506-0811>, Email: eszarate@uv.mx

found personality aspects such as being afraid to express one's ideas due to being worried about everyone mock them (Arung, 2016). With respect to the second one, they are embodied in the learning environment which includes teaching techniques and classroom procedures. Regarding teaching techniques, they have traditionally privileged written aspects of the language over the spoken one (Mridha & Muniruzzaman, 2020). It has been emphasized students learn the language in "terms of vocabulary, grammatical structures, native speakers' accents, pronunciation, and less English-speaking practice" (Hasanah, 2017, p.2). This approach has also been employed for teaching English to Mexican Telesecundaria students. Therefore, they have not had enough opportunities to develop their speaking skills, resulting in reluctant students to speak in English inside the classroom. As a result, it is necessary to inquire about the reasons behind the lack of willingness to speak among Telesecundaria students. This research had the aim to explore the nature of the factors that hinder Telesecundaria students speaking skill development. Subsidiary objectives were to identify the kind of speaking activities implemented in class, as well as to describe students' opinion about the influence they have the classroom learning environmental and the social affective elements in the development of speaking activities.

Teaching English in a Mexican Telesecundaria

Telesecundaria school modality was created in 1968 by Alvaro Galvez y Fuentes, "El Bachiller", who was a lawyer, journalist and professor. It emerged from the necessity of covering the demand of graduated students from primary school who lived in small towns or rural areas that has a difficult access or present low demographic concentration by imparting classes through television at the secondary level. It is a teaching model that joins two modalities, distance teaching through TV classes and face to face teaching with a monitor teacher (Coordinación General @prende.mx, 2020; Martínez, 2014). More specifically, the Telesecundaria system is characterized by having television classes and one general teacher per group who impart every single subject in a school year. The general teacher, also called monitor or co-ordinator, clarifies and reinforces the subject explained through television by the tele-maestro (Sanchez, 2000). This general teacher is also in charge of teaching English.

In Mexico, teaching English has been mandatorily taught since 1926 in public secondary schools (Hernández & Cruz, 2021). The objective of teaching English is that students conclude the third year of secondary school with a B1 level English proficiency according to the Common European Framework for Reference. However, research launched by an organization named Mexicanos Primero (2015) revealed that only 3% of students graduated from

secondary school have the knowledge and skills required for that level (B1) and that 79% of the students have a level of total ignorance of the language. These results pose different questions such as: what is the reason why secondary students do not learn the language?; how is the English language teaching process in the secondary level?

Some answers can be found in the political and administrative educative decision that have a strong impact in the teaching practices. The Mexican educational model mentions that learning a foreign language is part of the competences for life (Ramírez, Pérez, et al., 2017). However, the praxis of the educational model in basic education, regarding English teaching, has no continuity. In primary schools where English is official since 2009, there are no English teachers nor lessons given. Only some schools offer occasional lessons to 5th or 6th graders. These circumstances impede the continuity and implementation of the educational model along the secondary level (Ramírez, Pamplón, et al., 2009).

Teaching speaking in an EFL context

When learning a second language it is important to achieve a good domain of the four basic skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. These four skills can be divided into two groups, passive or receptive skills and active or productive skills. Listening and reading are receptive while speaking and writing are productive. Particularly, speaking and writing due to their productive nature require that the students have an active participation (Manaj, 2015). The speaking skill consists in one's having the ability to produce appropriately the language in the oral way to convey a message (Alemán & Baquedano, 2015). In an EFL classroom, it is expected that students can perform discussions, debates, give oral presentations on their own, and short speeches. Nevertheless, in Telesecundaria schools, the teacher is sometimes the only member of the community of the target language. They commonly focus primarily on teaching the grammar rules of the language or pretend to teach speaking just by means of drill repetition, dialogue memorization or by reading a dialogue aloud in front of the class. Those practices provoke students find difficult to speak in real-life situations (Arung, 2016; Rao, 2019; Setiyadi, 2020). What is more, a good learning environment helps to improve the learning outcomes, provides the learner with care and support, inspires, and boost the learning spirit, and cultivates responsibility in the learner. Consequently, congenial and supportive environments for practising speaking without the fear of negative evaluation will provide students with opportunities to speak in English in the classroom, diminishing their demotivation and lose of interest in

learning the language (Mridha & Muniruzzaman, 2020; Wu & Wu, 2008).

Finally, learning material need to enhance students to develop their speaking skills. Especial attention should be paid to contextual learning materials as they may determine the quality of the teaching and learning process. They are referred to materials "that let the students process new information or knowledge in such a way that it makes sense to them in their own frames of reference" (Ampa et al., 2013, p.2). This type of material helps students to connect what they are learning to the life context in which the content can be used. Unfortunately, up to this day it may be difficult to find contextual textbooks in Telesecundaria schools in Mexico for teaching English. The most common teaching materials used in the English class are the English course book provided by the Mexican Ministry of Education (SEP). Those books contain exercises that students answer after watching the televised lesson. Moreover, bilingual dictionaries and teaching audio materials available on the Telesecundaria SEP website to complement the book activities are also employed. In fact, the speaking skill is taught through dialogue work and roleplays included in the textbook (Hernández, 2013). However, to be engaged in speaking skills development, students need to have access to contextual resources and activities that satisfy their learning needs.

Willingness to develop the speaking skill

To develop the speaking skill, it is required learners to be able to speak in the classroom. Students who participate in communicative classrooms have demonstrated to be strongly willing to speak in the foreign language. On the contrary, a lack of willingness to employ the target language delves into ineffective interaction and a lack of language production (Freiermuth & Jarrell, 2006). Therefore, what can be some of the reasons why Telesecundaria students are not willing to speak in the classroom? There are two possible aspects that teachers need to consider: anxiety levels that students face when speaking in a Foreign Language and socioemotional factors they experienced when participating in oral activities. Language anxiety refers to emotions and feelings such as fear and worry that students experience when they use a language different from their mother tongue to communicate (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Language anxiety may also come from the own perception that students have about their abilities. Salina et al., (2021) found in their research that students feel anxious when they must speak in front of others since they fear to be judged because of their pronunciation or the mistakes they may make.

Regarding socioemotional factors, they are related to student-teacher and student-student relationships. These

factors "pertain to social meditating activity and emotional interaction with others" (Brown, 2000, in Zarei et al., 2019, p.2). Socioemotional factors can be embodied in personality aspects such as shyness, talkativeness, taciturnity, among others. These aspects highly influence learner-learner interaction in the classroom. Therefore, it is necessary that speaking activities focus on meaning negotiation among students (Saeed et al, 2016). For instance, cooperative group discussions, artistic activities, social emotional wheels, talking in front of a mirror, practicing pronunciation, rehearsing with friends, and communicative tasks adequate to current students' language level. This type of activities helps students notice gaps in their language which enables them to work towards mutual understanding (Al-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2011). Additionally, socioemotional factors such as an atmosphere free of negative judges should be present in the language classroom (Gohar, 2022). In sum, negotiation meaning activities and a supportive environment will enable students to consider language as a tool for social interaction.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-method approach. It was characterized by the combination of at least one qualitative and one quantitative research component (Johnson, 2007, in Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). This approach provided a better understanding of the students' perceptions of the activities implemented in class, as well as the socioemotional and internal factors that influence/hinder their speaking skill development. Furthermore, to reach the research objective a case study design was adopted. Such design provided a framework for evaluation and analysis of complex issues (Heale & Twycross, 2018). Particularly, a descriptive case study allowed to understand what were the factors that hinder Telesecundaria students speaking development.

This research was developed at a semi-urban Telesecundaria located in the capital of the state of Veracruz. Despite this school is placed in a context where students can have access to technology, internet, smartphones, and school materials to work, classroom conditions are not favourable for EFL teaching. Students attended the class in the same classroom as they attended their other classes. Consequently, there was not any kind of material on the walls neither English' books nor English authentic materials at students' disposal.

Additionally, participants who were 19 second grade 13-to-15 years old students revealed that most of them had not taken a previous English course. Therefore, they showed great interest in the activities that involved competence, look for information through audios or reading, and writing activities. However, when they were asked to participate in speaking activities, they decreased

their participation, or they preferred to use Spanish instead of English. This fact motivated the researcher to analyse the nature of the factors that provoked these participants found difficult to develop their speaking skill. To achieve the research objective, three data collection methods were employed. First, observation, a method that "subjectively focuses on gathering information" (Hour, 2015, para 1), was used to describe the kind of speaking activities that were implemented during the classes. The observation was performed by the main teacher of the group while the English class was in progress through a structured observation guide. It encompasses four sections: planning and preparation, interaction (classroom environment), instruction, content knowledge and relevance. Each section has 5 aspects to be observed: teacher's behaviour, planning, preparation, knowledge, and attitude towards students. These aspects allowed the researcher to identify if the environment, materials, speaking activities and teacher's knowledge were appropriate for the English class. At the same time, the observation guide provided the teacher with information about what aspects were needed to be integrated to the lesson or improved and what were the outcomes of the class.

The second method employed was interview. This method is mainly employed to gather opinions, perceptions, and beliefs towards a topic with the purpose of discussing a situation related to the research (Mercado, 2013). In this research semi-structured interviews were employed to retrieve the perceptions of 9 students who willingly accepted to be interviewed when they had to speak English in the classroom, the way they felt and if they felt more comfortable using the cooperative learning strategy. The topics discussed in the interviews were awareness of the importance of speaking skill, learning environment, materials, levels of anxiety experienced when speaking in class and socioemotional factors.

A third method employed was a survey. This method is structured by a series of questions with the purpose of anonymously gathering information from respondents. Consequently, participants feel encouraged to respond truthfully (Nemoto & Beglar, 2014; Patten, 2016). In this research, a Likert-type questionnaire was applied to the 19 chosen students to better understand their perceptions about the speaking activities and learning environment. The questionnaire contained 37 statements with the following sections: awareness of the importance of speaking skill, learning environment, materials, levels of anxiety experienced when speaking in class and socioemotional factors. Each statement was answered to on a five-point scale with the alternatives of strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, and strongly agree. The statements were written in the

students' mother tongue to avoid misinterpretation in each item.

Finally, to make sense of the data gathered it was decided to employ the data triangulation strategy. This technique allowed the researcher to use multiple data sources in a single study including time, space, and persons. to "decrease the deficiencies and biases that come from any single method" (UNAIDS, 2010, para.14). The results from one method are used to improve, augment, and clarify the results of another method. As a result, this method increases the reliability and validity the study results (Noble & Heale, 2019). First, the numeric data obtained in the Likert scale was assessed through trend analysis under the proportional approach. This approach allowed the researcher to harmonize responses into fewer categories to show changes in percentages of approval or disapproval toward a statement at each time point which in turn reveal a prevalent trend within a user group (Wang et al, 2024). Then, to analyse the data from the interviews and observations directed qualitative content analysis techniques consisting in the description and interpretation of textual data by following a systematic process of coding were used (Assarroudi et al., 2018). In this work, the verbal discourse from the students in the semi-structured interview as well as the textual notes gathered from the observation guide were considered. The answers of every student and the notes were compared to find similar words, phrases or something that helped to understand the causes that hinder their speaking skill development. In sum, the information was arranged under four categories.

Results and discussion

Findings were ordered under four categories. These categories were: a) learning environment; b) learning materials; c) anxiety experienced when speaking English in class; d) socioemotional factors.

a) Learning environment

To know the students' perception about the learning environment, they were asked during the interviews if they felt comfortable and free to make mistakes in the class when they speak. They answered in a positive manner. However, in the survey some students expressed that they did not feel comfortable and free to make mistakes.

Figure 1. Students' answers regarding the learning environment

	Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo	De acuerdo	Totalmente en acuerdo
Me siento cómodo o cómoda en la clase de inglés.		2	3	11	2
Me siento con la libertad de cometer errores mientras hablo en inglés en clase.		2	5	7	4
Me siento cómodo o cómoda con los temas abordados en la clase de inglés.		1	1	14	2
Me gustan las actividades de hablar en inglés en pares o equipos durante la clase.		2	4	8	4
Me gusta trabajar solo o sola en clase.	7	3	5	1	2
Me gusta la forma en la que se evalúa la materia de inglés.	1		4	10	3
Me gusta tener trabajo en casa después de la clase para poder practicar lo que aprendí.	4	1	4	6	3
Me siento apoyado o apoyada por mi maestra mientras hablo en inglés.	1		1	8	8
Prefiero que la maestra hable en inglés durante toda la clase.	1	6	11		
No me gusta que la maestra use el español durante la clase.	7	3	5	2	1

Furthermore, students expressed that they preferred that the teacher spoke in both languages to create a better environment instead of just in English. Some of the interviewed argued that receiving instructions is easier for them if they were given in Spanish. "I feel that it takes us longer doing an activity if it is not explained to us in Spanish" (P3); "I like it when you first explain in English and then also in Spanish" (P2). Additionally, it was observed that the English teacher needed to give instructions in English and Spanish so that students were able to execute the corresponding activity. What is more, students were observed not to be ashamed when making a mistake during a speaking activity. What can be inferred from students' answers was that the EFL learning process dynamic could promote confusion and problems, which in turn might hinder the speaking skill development. Particularly, students may not be familiar with the English sounds, so they were not able to comprehend the messages posed by their teacher (Bashir et al., 2011; Hashim & Yunus, 2018).

b) Learning materials

Regarding to the materials and activities employed during the speaking practice, students expressed that they felt comfortable with materials, games, and activities that involved competence. When students were asked about their favourite speaking activity, they mentioned they enjoyed activities where they had to move and compete with their classmates: "I like when I win because I have fun and I learn"(P.4); "when we play, I don't get bored" (P9); "with the activity I felt that I had to speak to win (P7)". In contrast, during the survey several students mentioned *the round table* as the worst speaking activity. This activity was included in their schoolbooks as the product of the unit, and they had to debate about a topic stated in the book.

Figure 2. Students' answers about learning materials

	Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo	De acuerdo	Totalmente en acuerdo
Me gustan los materiales utilizados en las actividades para hablar en inglés.	1		3	11	3
Los materiales utilizados en las actividades para hablar en inglés son adecuados para mí.	1	1	3	8	5
Los materiales utilizados durante las actividades para hablar en inglés no son adecuados para mí.	6	6	4	1	1

It was also observed that students eagerly participated in communicative games. In contrast when they were asked to participate in a debate, most of the students showed reluctance to participate in it. From the results it can be inferred that student's engagement in competitive activities encouraged them to speak in English. This fact is also confirmed by Mubaslat (2012) who claims that games used for teaching English enhances students speaking skills because they have the combination of amusement and challenging at the same time. In contrast, academic activities such as a round table made students feel reluctant to speak. This situation was also experienced by university students from an international demonstration school in Thailand. They mentioned that were worried about making any mistakes when they participated in speaking activities in a large group (Ngamkaiwan, 2018).

c) Anxiety experienced when speaking English in class

It was observed that several students showed some facial gestures related to anxiety and fear when they had to speak in English in front of their classmates. However, those gestures of anxiety decreased or disappeared when they had to speak in pairs or in groups. Furthermore, during the interview they were asked to mention the feelings they experienced when speaking in English in front of their classmates. Some students said that fear, anxiety, nerves, embarrassment, and even that they felt like their hands sweat or their stomach hurt. Even more, according to the survey, students experienced anxiety when they had to speak using new vocabulary and, some of them felt that their classmates would make fun of them if they made mistakes.

Figure 3. Students' answers about anxiety experienced when speaking English in class

	Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo	De acuerdo	Totalmente en acuerdo
Siento ansiedad cuando me piden hablar en inglés en frente de mis compañeros.	2		3	9	4
Me cuesta hablar en inglés frente a mis compañeros porque pienso que se reirán de mí.	2	1	8	5	2
Mis compañeros se han burlado de mí cuando hablo en inglés.	6	4	5	2	1
Prefiero hablar en español durante la clase de inglés.	2	3	3	7	3
Siento miedo de hablar en inglés cuando tengo que usar nuevo vocabulario.	1	2	5	8	2
Siento miedo de hablar en inglés cuando tengo que hablar sobre temas que no son familiares para mí.	4		7	7	
No siento ansiedad ni temor de hablar en inglés frente a mis compañeros.	4	7	3	2	2
Siento menos estrés al hablar en inglés cuando la actividad es en parejas o en grupos.	2	1	5	5	5

Moreover, students agreed that speaking in pairs or in groups was less distressing for them. They mention that they felt more comfortable and confident speaking with their friends than in front of the class. In this way, it was easier for them to help and encourage each other to speak. These results coincide with the findings of a study developed among undergraduate students from a university located in Sarawak, Malaysia. It revealed that the ESL undergraduates experienced average level of speaking anxiety (Long et al., 2019). In general terms, it can be confirmed that language anxiety can have a negative impact on students' performance, abilities, and confidence to speak in English (Santos & Zárate, 2022).

d) Socioemotional factors

It was observed that most of the students did not feel judged by their classmates or teacher when they spoke English. It was noticed that teacher's comments on the speaking performance focused on encouraging students to speak in English rather than criticizing their pronunciation or grammar mistakes. Furthermore, in both the interviews and the survey, several students assured that they did not feel judged by someone when they were speaking in English. However, there were some students who felt that the teacher or their classmates were judging them when they spoke in English. Additionally, they preferred to maintain a neutral position about if they felt comfortable participating orally in class.

Figure 4. Students' answers about socioemotional factors

	Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo	De acuerdo	Totalmente en acuerdo
Siento que mis compañeros me juzgan cuando hablo en inglés.	3	5	7	1	2
Siento que mi maestra me juzga al hablar en inglés.	10	6	1	1	
Me siento seguro o segura al hablar en inglés frente a mis compañeros.	3	5	5	3	2
Me siento seguro o segura al hablar en inglés frente a mi maestra.	2		6	5	5
Me siento cómodo o cómoda al hablar en inglés cuando se me pide participar en la clase.	1	2	9	5	1

From the results it can be inferred that students appreciate teacher and peers' support. What is more, students who were willing to speak in English without the fear of negative evaluation can presumably possess initiative, self-control, and attachment (Vera et al., 2017; Winsler et al., 2014). As a result, students need to feel secure of not being judged by the teacher nor by their peers when they speak in English in public to develop their speaking skills. Otherwise, there would be at risk of suffering Language Anxiety (Bhanu & Kumar, 2023; Ganasan et al., 2022).

Conclusion

Telesecundaria students require a supportive learning environment for developing their English-speaking skills. To achieve this goal, teachers should use students' mother tongue (Spanish) at the same time the target language (English) when giving instructions. Furthermore, it is needed that the general Telesecundaria teacher select learning materials that are on the current language level of the students. Indeed, those materials should also be based on topics of students' interest. In this way they will be motivated to participate in the English lessons. Even more, learning activities should enhance students speaking skills. For achieving this goal, communicative and competitive games are considered as the most suitable options to promote the use of the language as it is learned. In contrast, more academic-oriented speaking activities such as debates or round tables might be avoided as they provoke Telesecundaria students not to be willing to speak in public, which in turn may delve into language learning anxiety. In this regard, speaking in public made these students to experiment fear, anxiety, nerves, embarrassment, and even that they felt physical sensations such as hands sweat, or stomach hurt. Another aspect that Telesecundaria teachers must consider is the need to create a supportive learning environment free of criticism and negative evaluation. In this way students will find their speaking skill development as a process of continuous improvement.

Despite having interviewed few students and surveyed just one group of 19 students, results obtained from this research can resonate to other Telesecundaria contexts around Mexico. It is of common knowledge that English teaching at Telesecundaria is most of the times neglected or reduced to answering textbooks activities. However, to develop oral proficiency in English it is necessary that activities, the learning environment, and socioemotional aspects suits to teenagers learning needs and contexts. In this way, Telesecundaria students will be able to develop their speaking skills purposefully.

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