Empowering Learners: Online Radio Broadcasts to Enhance the Students' Speaking Skills

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Abstract
The speaking skill is one of the most challenging skills to develop in the Content and Language Integrated Learning Classroom (CLIL) since it requires the student to have enough confidence and language proficiency to communicate their ideas and opinions about a topic effectively. Noticeably, students lack opportunities to talk in the classroom and use the language. As a result, the student doesn't experience the language nor improve their oral skills. Therefore, it is imperative that schools take into consideration the use of ITC resources, such as online radio sources, because they might be useful tools wherein students can participate actively and enhance their speaking skills vastly. A quasi-experimental study was carried out in an Ecuadorian High school. The objective of this study was to measure the influence of critical thinking interviews during an online radio broadcast transmission on the students' oral skills. 10th graders studying Social Studies were assigned to this study. From this group, 10 students were part of the treatment group and 10 in the control group. Treatment participants were interviewed in pairs four (4) hours per week for two months on questions related to the social studies topics such as culture, gender, human rights, ethnicity, and others during the radio broadcast transmission in the English language. Data was collected by means of a speaking pre-test and post-test based on a rubric measuring four parameters: Grammar, Vocabulary, Pronunciation, and Fluency. Results were processed through SPSS software and analyzed based on the literature review. Findings demonstrated that there was a significant and positive impact on the treatment participants' speaking skills.
Keywords: online radio broadcast, communicative skills, critical thinking interview, learning autonomy, English speaking context.
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1. Introduction

Application of the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach has increased worldwide based on the necessity of using the English language to talk about diverse topics. However, most students have low language proficiency due to the lack of opportunities to interact in the classroom. In the study conducted by Calle et.al (2012) some relevant findings on foreign language proficiency level are described. These researchers tried to identify the reasons for the low English literacy performance of graduating high school students. A total of 168 English language teachers participated in this study. The investigation revealed that poor English literacy performance of high school students was due to "the use of traditional teaching strategies, the deficiency of interaction among students in the target language, and the teachers misunderstanding when applying communicative strategies" (p. 9).

Additionally, the CLIL approach becomes a challenge because it requires the student have enough confidence and language proficiency to communicate their ideas and opinions about a specific topic using a foreign language. Poor lexical proficiency level, lack of self-confidence, motivation, anxiety or opportunities to talk in the classroom might be just some of the causes that can negatively influence the students' oral skills.

In consideration of these challenges, research about innovative teaching methods to enhance English speaking skills is important and necessary. The main goal of this study is to provide an innovative way to expose students to the foreign language communication in real contexts to improve the speaking skills. As a result, students might be more motivated to use and explore this delightful language through meaningful scenarios. In this way, the research question was established:

-        To what extent does the implementation of critical thinking interviews during an online radio broadcast transmission influence the students' oral skills?

2. Literature Review

2. 1 Multiliteracies: Background

The Multiliteracies Approach is concerned with linguistic diversity and multimodal forms of linguistic expression and representation. This approach is often associated with the New London Group (NLG), a group of researchers focused on the changing needs of literacy pedagogy and responding to the necessities of the current society. The New London Group (1996) claims that methods and strategies must respond to the different modes in which students operate. There is also the need for new skills to operate successfully in the changing literacy

and increasingly diversified social environment. Therefore, literacy involves more than a set of traditional conventions to be learned through technological formats. New literacies enable people to negotiate meaning in technological settings and engage students' values and identities (Jewitt, 2008).Hence, English teachers must have the appropriate skills, strategies, and insights to navigate rapidly changing views of literacy successfully to support their students' achievement.

2.2 Content and Language Integrated Learning Approach (CLIL)
Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is an approach that emerged in Europe, but, due to its benefits, has been included in the Ecuadorian curriculum. This is an approach in which a foreign language is used as an instrument in the learning of a content subject. In the publications of the Ecuadorian English curriculum of 2016, CLIL is defined as "a model used to integrate the learning of language with cultural and cognitive aspects…." (p. 345). According to Coyle (2015), CLIL is founded upon four principles: "a) content: progression in knowledge and skills; b) communication: interaction and language used for learning; c) cognition: cognitive engagement, thinking and understanding; and d) culture: self and other awareness/citizenship" (p.5). Furthermore, the communicative competence development is essential in this approach because communication refers to the use of language in order to learn and mediate ideas, thoughts, and values; at the same time, communication allows the analysis of the students´ understanding of content and language acquisition. Cook (2001) states the importance of producing and remembering new words through oral production. He stresses that: A speaker of English knows not just what a word means and how it is pronounced but also how it fits into sentences. Teaching cannot ignore that the student has to learn not just the meaning and pronunciation of each word, but how to use it. Therefore, Coyle (2015), explains that the development of communication in the CLIL classroom represents "the cement of content and cognition components since language is needed by individuals to share and demonstrate understanding and comprehension of the content" (p.3).

Hence, the application of the CLIL approach requires careful attention to new methods, techniques, and strategies that can result in successful learners. Expanding new teaching pedagogies in the classroom could include promoting multimodal innovative techniques alongside traditional activities (Sewell & Denton, 2011) and using technology for specific and meaningful goals (Rhodes & Robnolt, 2009).

2.3 Radio Broadcast in the English language classroom
In recent times, the influence of online radio has been underestimated in Ecuador, especially in the educational field. According to Uttar (2013), radio broadcasting is an innovative and interactive pedagogical tool in which a host or radio broadcast guides learners through the activities of a lesson. Learners can participate actively in the lesson by singing, reading, writing, answering questions and solving problems in ways that ensure active learning. Thus, this media resource offers the possibility of being used successfully in education because it is low cost and available worldwide; besides, "the television and radio are not just mechanical devices for creating worlds of illusions, but are avenues of creating new language with new powers of expressions" (Gowen, 2009, p. 93).

There is evidence suggesting the usefulness of the radio application in the classroom. Odera (2011) explored the use of school radio broadcast to help teachers and pupils to learn and improve both written and spoken English in Kenyan primary schools. The participants who took part were English teachers and seventh graders. The programmers included music, songs and drama, and good points that relate to the syllabus. The results indicated that radio broadcast lessons helped both the teachers and students to improve mastery of the contents and understand grammar structures and phrases. The application of this resource helped students to acquire new words and improve their pronunciation. Also, teachers claimed that it was evident that these primary children who used mix language (Kiswahili, English and vernacular) in the English lessons changed the way they talk after listening to radio presenters. Thirty percent (30%) of teachers said that students enjoyed the radio lessons, because they were well-prepared and provided interesting and enjoyable learning experiences. Those same teachers observed that the program helped participants to improve the spoken English language skill. Therefore, radio might provide an interesting environment wherein students can learn and acquire interesting content knowledge as well as be able to use the language in authentic settings.

Gowon (2009) carried out research titled The Effects of Television and Radio on Speaking and Writing Skills of Senior Secondary School Students. Results indicated that both television and radio have a positive influence on the speaking skills of students, although no effect on their writing skills was indicated. On the other hand, Choudhury (2014) examined the problems of English teaching and learning with regards to the Hajong speakers of Assam and suggests that "the problems as investigated clearly indicate the need to improve the condition of English teaching¨ and that radio would surely "prove better and make the teaching-learning process creative as well as effective and would solve the problems if properly applied by trained teachers" (p. 482). Bates (1984) explains that the use of radio lessons motivates the English learners, if this tool is used properly to enhance the language skills. Similarly, Heininch, Russell, Molenda, and Smaldino (2002), recognize the value of

radio and suggest its use to increase and improve learners' imagination and listening skills. Correspondingly, Anton (1999), exposes that "English and language arts teachers will be able to use radios to reinforce listening, writing, and speaking skills" (p. 1).   In this way, foreign language teachers can provide students with an opportunity to listen to authentic English language and practice their communicative skills. Subsequently, society demands that EFL teachers develop innovative strategies and methods which enable significant learning among 21st century students. In that way, students might be motivated to acquire both content and the English language.

3. Methodology

3.1 Setting and Participants

This quasi experimental study was carried out in the city of Cuenca at Tecnico Salesiano High School. The study involved 10th graders whose English level was A2. Their age range was from 13 to 15 years old. All participants voluntarily agreed to take part in the study. The participants were part of the Social Studies class, a CLIL subject. Treatment participants were interviewed in pairs four (4) hours per week for two months in a radio program on questions related to the social studies topics such as culture, gender, human rights, ethnicity, and others during the radio broadcast transmission in the English language.

3.2 Instruments

Data was collected by means of a speaking pre-test and post-test and these were applied to both the treatment and control groups based on a rubric following four parameters: Grammar, Vocabulary, Pronunciation, and Fluency. Results were processed through SPSS software and analyzed based on the literature review.

3.3 Materials

Participants were asked a series of critical thinking questions about Social Studies topics in order to manage the interviews. Topics were taken from the Social Studies book for tenth graders.

3.4 Procedure

3.4.1 Before the treatment

An oral pre-test was applied to measure the students' speaking skills proficiency level. This test was applied to the control and the experimental group. To apply this assessment instrument, the researcher used an adapted model from the standardized rubric from the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) which measures the speaking level.

3.4.2 Treatment

The application of the radio broadcast interviews was from May to July 2018 for two months using the Online Nico Radio. A radio section was created with the name "Lifetime Radio Show" to transmit the Social Studies interviews. Treatment participants were interviewed in pairs. At the beginning of each radio broadcast session, the host introduced the participants in the English language. Then, each participant had to answer to critical thinking questions related to topics such as cultural identity, human rights, ethnicity, etc. which had previously been discussed in the classroom. So, participants had previous knowledge about the topics presented in the radio broadcasts.

3.4.3 After the treatment

Concluding the treatment, the researcher applied an oral post-test which was exactly the same as the pre-test to evaluate whether the students' oral skills had improved after the application of critical thinking interviews during online radio broadcast transmissions.

3.5. Results

3.5.1 Data analysis

The data obtained in the pre-test and post-test results were processed through SPSS software to obtain the statistical descriptors (mean, median, and mode), and tendency lines. Then, results of the control and treatment were compared to assess the impact of critical thinking interviews in a radio broadcast on the participants´ speaking skills. Statistical tables and figures were used for the representation of data.

3.5.2 Tests

3.5.2.1 Control Group: Pre-test and Post- test results.

These speaking tests were graded under four sub kills: Grammar, Vocabulary, Pronunciation, and Fluency, where each of them was graded out of 2.50 points. In the pre-test, these students' grades ranged between 3 and 5.5 out of 10, and in the post-test, these students' grades ranged between 3.5 and 6 out of 10. The lowest score in the pretest was 3 out of 10 and the highest score was 5.5 out of 10. In contrast, in the post-test, the lowest score in the pretest was 3.5 out of 10 and the highest score was 6 out of 10. See Figure 1.

3.5.2.2 Treatment Group: Pre-test and Post-test results
In the same way, speaking tests were graded under four parameters: Grammar, Vocabulary, Pronunciation, and Fluency, where each of them was graded out of 2.50 points. In the pre-test, these students' grades ranged between 4 and 6 out of 10, and in the post-test grades ranged between 5.5 and 9 out of 10. In the case of the treatment group, the lowest score in the pre-test was 4 out of 10 and the highest score was 6 out of 10. On the other hand, the lowest score in the post-test was 5.5 out of 10 and the highest score was 9 out of 10. See figure 2.
3.5.2.3 Statistical Descriptors
In Table 1, we can see that there was a substantial increase in speaking performance among all the participants of the treatment group. These participants mainly improved in all the speaking sub skills. Although they improved in vocabulary and grammar, they obtained higher results in fluency and pronunciation.

4. Discussion

Findings demonstrated that there was a significant and positive impact of the radio interviews on the treatment participants' speaking skills. Therefore, radio broadcasting applied to education offers many opportunities for CLIL learners, and teachers can integrate this type of technology into the curriculum as an innovative teaching method. In this study, results demonstrated that students involved in radio broadcasts improved their vocabulary and grammar knowledge, and, to a higher level, the pronunciation and fluency sub skills. As can be seen, students acquire both content and the English language more significantly in oral or productive contexts. Gondová (2013) claims that selection and planning topics for a CLIL classroom require careful attention as these topics should be based on communicative competencies. Additionally, radio is a great digital tool to enhance the speaking skills. Bates (1984) explains that the proper use of radio in subject lessons motivates the English learners and it enhances the language skills. Similarly, Heininch, Russell, Molenda, and Smaldino (2002), highlight the value of radio and suggest its use to increase and improve learners' imagination and listening skills. Consequently, foreign language teachers should take advantage of this resource to reinforce both content and the English speaking skills; as Anton (1999) mentioned: "English and language arts teachers will be able to use radios to reinforce listening, writing, and speaking skills" (p. 1).

5. Conclusion

Teachers should learn innovative techniques not only to apply these resources in their classrooms, but to also have an influence in their educational community by creating a context in which the English language can be learned more easily, encouraging students' autonomy in using the language and motivating learners to get involved with authentic English – speaking material. Bedjou (2006) states that "radio programs on every aspect of life are available, making the medium particularly useful for content-based foreign language instruction" (p. 28). Furthermore, radio recordings can serve as a form of immediate feedback. In this case, students and teachers might include the recordings in their portfolios to monitor the student's progress. Therefore, this study leaves open new doors for further research in the linguistic context.

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Notes

Table 1. **Statistical Descriptors (mean, median and mode)**

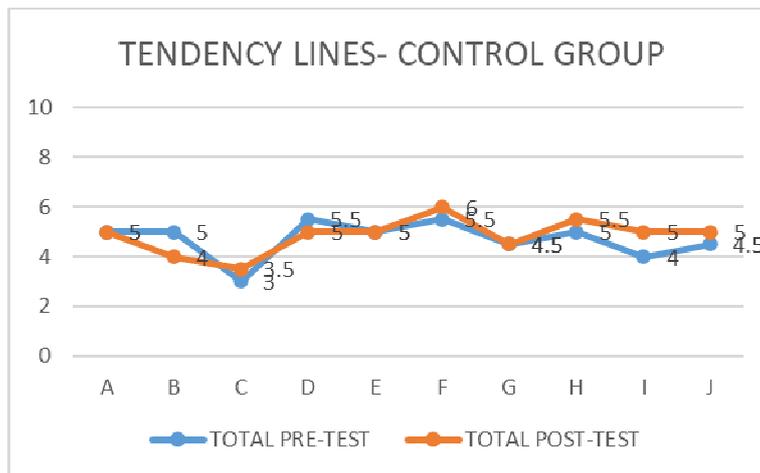| STADISTICAL DESCRIPTORS	CONTROL GROUP		TREATMENT GROUP	
	PRE-TEST	POST-TEST	PRE-TEST	POST-TEST
MEAN	4,7	4,85	4,6	6,57
MEDIAN	5	5,5	4,5	6,25
MODE	5	5	4,5	5,5

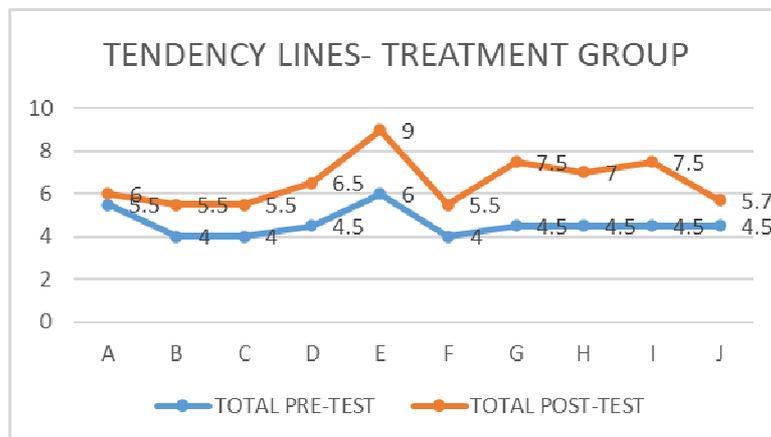Figure 1. **Tendency Lines - Control group (Pre-test- Post-test)**

Figure 2. **Tendency Lines- Treatment Group (Pre-test and Post-test)**