CLASS DISCUSSIONS BASED ON CULTURAL ASPECTS TO FOSTER THE SPEAKING SKILL AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This research study arose from the lack of opportunities students had to communicate and express their ideas regarding the content they had already learned using English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Speaking as a linguistic component in EFL is one of the most important skills in this context as it enables students to have better interaction and communication. This qualitative participatory action research study aimed at exploring the contributions that class discussions based on cultural aspects have on eleventh graders from Jorge Eliécer Gaitán High School in Florencia, Caquetá. Each intervention process in this research was developed using Argawati's (2014) cycle; the cycle was composed of three guidelines: greeting, main activity, and closing. The class discussions were conducted following the 'group investigation' method to give students more opportunities for participating and exchanging ideas. The surveys, field notes, and audio-tape recordings were the instruments to gather the data during the intervention. The findings suggest that it is beneficial to use class discussions based on cultural aspects in EFL to promote students' participation, and thus, evidence significant progress in the EFL speaking skill. Besides, class discussions based on cultural aspects make EFL learners be constantly practicing, requesting information, sharing ideas, and concluding regarding the cultural aspects, fostering a meaningful development of their speaking skill.

Keywords: class discussions, cultural aspects, culture, EFL speaking skill.

АНОТАЦІЯ
Аудиторні дискусії навколо культурних аспектів у формуванні навичок мовлення серед учнів старших класів

Це дослідження виникло через відсутність у студентів можливостей спілкування та вираження своїх ідей щодо змісту, який вони вже вивчали, використовуючи англійську мову як іноземну (EFL). Говоріння як лінгвістичний компонент в EFL є одним із найважливіших навичок у цьому контексті, оскільки воно дозволяє студентам краще взаємодіяти та спілкуватися. Це дослідження, побудоване на спільних діях, спрямоване на вивчення внеску класних дискусій, заснованих на культурних аспектах, одинадцятикласників середньої школи Хорхе Еліесера Гайтана у Флоренсії, Якета (Jorge Eliécer Gaitán High School in Florencia, Caquetá). Кожен процес втручання в цьому дослідженні був розроблений з використанням циклу Аргаваті (2014); цикл складався з трьох

рекомендацій: вітання, основна діяльність та завершення. Обговорення в класі проводилися за методом «групового дослідження», щоб дати студентам більше можливостей для участі та обміну ідеями. Опитування, нотатки та аудіозаписи були інструментами для збору даних під час роботи. Результати свідчать про те, що використовування обговорення в класі на основі культурних аспектів EFL є корисним для сприяння участі студентів, і, таким чином, свідчить про значний прогрес у мовленнєвих навичках EFL. Крім того, класні дискусії, засновані на культурних аспектах, дають можливість учням EFL постійно практикуватися, запитувати інформацію, обмінюватися ідеями та робити висновки щодо культурних аспектів, сприяючи значущому розвитку їхніх мовленнєвих навичок.

Ключові слова: класні дискусії, культурні аспекти, культура, навички мовлення EFL

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the most important skills in the EFL context as it enables students to have better interaction and communication. According to Mart (2012), "speaking is being capable of speech, expressing or exchanging thoughts through using language" (p. 91). However, speaking is not a simple process since it requires much effort for those who are learning a second or a foreign language; especially when it refers to English (Sharma, 2018). Having said that, it is necessary to recognize the importance of implementing strategies that help students to enhance the ability to communicate orally. For that reason, this research study sought to foster the EFL speaking skill in students at a state school.

This study arose from the lack of spaces students had to communicate and express their ideas orally regarding the content they had already learned. In Jiménez's (2015) words, the root of the problem is that "the learning environment which includes the teacher's methodology and classroom environment in which the absence of an EFL speaking social context does not provide a natural content to stimulate communication" (p. 221). In the same vein, Bueno et al. (as cited in Rocío, 2012) pinpoint that although speaking is a very difficult skill for students, teachers tend to neglect this skill in the classroom spending more time teaching grammar, writing and reading just by tradition. Having this in mind, this research study aimed to provide opportunities in which students enhance the EFL speaking skill in the classroom; this

was done using class discussions as a strategy to foster this productive language skill. This article first presents the literature review and theoretical framework in which we based on research study. Then, it describes the methodology implemented, including the research context, research design, procedures, and instruments. Later, it relates the results and discussions in which we present relevant data that supported our research. Lastly, it reports the conclusions and add some recommendations for further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section is devoted to review different studies concerning class discussions, culture, and the EFL speaking skill which are the constructs used in this study; this literature review is carried out to demonstrate the applicability of the constructs of this study in EFL contexts, whether regional, national, or international.

In relation to class discussions and the EFL speaking skill, Argawati (2014) conducted a classroom action research study to prove and describe how discussions can improve the students' speaking skill. To this respect, Argawati (2014) argues the use of class discussions is a good strategy to enhance the speaking skill in a foreign language. Furthermore, students can have the chance of using English between them confidentially, and at the same time, they are able to acquire new vocabulary. In terms of the speaking skill. The author points out that speaking is the most difficult skill to tackle since this is a means to both expressing ideas and making reflections on someone or something. Argawati's (2014) study findings revealed that class discussions generate a positive impact on helping students to increase their willingness to communicate orally. Moreover, class discussions expand not only the vocabulary and the motivation in students but also their speaking skill. In this way, it is possible to assert that class discussions have positive changes which make students able to have better oral production in their EFL interactions.

In the same line of thought, concerning the EFL speaking skill development through class discussions, La'biran (2017) conducted an action research study concerning the implementation of class discussions to help students improve their speaking skill. Accordingly, the author highlights the importance of practicing speaking skill in the classroom since this ability allows people to have interaction and exchange of verbal expressions. Besides, La'biran (2017) claims that the use of

class discussions encourages students to express their ideas and to be active in class. The study was conducted in a high school from Salaputti, Tana Toraja through pre and post oral tests as data gathering. The findings of the study reflected that the use of class discussions as a strategy to improve the speaking skill was useful for improving students' progress during the intervention. Moreover, the author concluded that class discussions as a teaching strategy enhance students' speaking skill and increase their learning outcomes. Finally, this study provides our research study with meaningful insights regarding the benefits that class discussions have in the development of participants' EFL speaking skill.

In relation to class discussions based on cultural aspects, Yildirim (2017) developed an exploratory research study to analyze the differences in class participation between international and American students. The author affirms that class discussions aid students to increase their involvement in the classroom as culture in this study was seen as a relevant component in the participation of the discussions. Consequently, Yildirim (2017) states that mastering a foreign language not only implies learning vocabulary and grammar but also the cultural aspects that have a wide range of uses for oral communication. The findings reflected the need of raising awareness of the different cultural aspects immersed into the classroom since this influences the development of class discussions, and at the same time in learners' oral participation and proficiency. Also, Yildirim (2017) found culture as a resource that can either make students more or less participative in the classroom. For that reason, the researcher suggests using class discussions focusing on stereotypes and cultural differences to create an integrated learning environment.

About the EFL speaking skill and culture, Rolong et al. (2018) carried out an action research study to improve students' speaking skills, reduce anxiety and mental blocking using local culture. Rolong et al. (2018) pinpoint that using local culture refers to the facts that surround students. This is an important aspect in the process of learning a foreign language since it helps students to foster the development of their language skills through creative and familiar content. Moreover, in terms of the EFL speaking skill, the authors claim that everything learned in the classroom (vocabulary, grammar, etc.) is essential when using this skill for having real-life interaction with others. The study was carried out at a high school with interviews as data-gathering instruments. In their findings, Rolong et al. (2018) highlighted the use of activities related to students' context and places in which they are immersed

as this is relevant to promote the use and development of their EFL speaking skill. Also, the researchers make the invitation to lay aside the usual books used for EFL learning and implement students' cultural background as the content of classroom-based activities.

Concerning the implementation of culture through customized lessons which favor the development of the EFL learning, Oviedo and Álvarez (2019) conducted an action research study to explore the benefits of using cultural content into the EFL learning processes. This was done by creating lesson with the purpose of developing the four language skills. Furthermore, the authors argue that one of the most valuable pedagogical activities for teaching English is the use of strategies that meet students' needs or likes. This involves the understanding of the concept that learning a language develops differently in each student. For that reason, the authors express the importance of joining language and culture to have more meaningful communication in EFL learning. Regarding Oviedo and Álvarez's (2019) findings, the authors identified that developing cultural understanding allows students to talk about aspects that they already know or even some aspects they are still learning; in other words, integrating culture into the EFL learning encourages students to have active participation during this process.

To conclude, this literature review concerning our constructs is useful and significant due to the fact that it provides relevant information for having a wider panorama of the theoretical and practical implications of our research inquiry. Moreover, the review process helps us to understand that the current research field is relevant at a regional, national, and international level.

AIM OF THE ARTICLE

The aim of the research is to analyze and estimate the efficiency of various methodological techniques that allowed the development of the students' speaking skills.

Class Discussions

Class discussions as one of the main constructs that shaped this study, is integrated into the participative methods to enhance the students' oral production. In relation to this, Ewens (1986) claims that this method "is one in which the instructor and a group of students consider a topic, issue, or problem and exchange

information, experiences, ideas, opinions, reactions, and conclusions with one another" (p. 77). Theseaspects generate certain benefits that encourage students' development as Gugglberger et al. (2015) could identify in their research study; it was evidenced that class discussions make students more participative since they can talk about affairs that are meaningful for them. Therefore, "with more practice in their oral communication skills, students will feel more comfortable in speaking. This oral practice and confidence in speaking should help to improve their speaking proficiency" (Tsou, 2005, p. 47). Thus, class discussions allow students to be active in the classroom environment, provoking significant progress regarding the oral production.

The development of oral production in students is essential when learning a foreign language, and to fulfill the different aims during this process is necessary to practice in the classroom; it means, to have a persistent interaction. In words of Hanum (2017) "interaction is needed in the classroom activity. It helps the teaching and learning process run smoothly and it can increase learners' communicative" (p. 1). Hence, discussions enable "people enter into an interaction with a schema based on an accumulation of cultural and social knowledge and structural experiences" (Jones, 1999, p. 249). In other words, through class discussions teachers can promote spaces where students can interact with each other to handle topics linked to their background.

In this line of thought, class discussions face students to a collective agreement in which they are able to exchange several ideas through language. In this sense, across this strategy, students "are involved in negotiating, initiating, planning, and evaluating together. They are given the responsibility of creating a «learning community» where all students participate in significant and meaningful ways" (Garside, 1996, p. 218). Class discussions expose students to work together following cooperative learning which helps in one or another way the oral production. Therefore, "the discussion among students within cooperative learning situations promotes more frequent oral repetition of information" (Johnson, 1991, p. 15). In brief, the use of class discussions as a teaching strategy promotes not only the improvement of a skill but also the promotion of community learning.

To conclude, this research study portrays class discussions as a strategy in which students can promote interaction and at the same time, cooperative learning within the classroom. Moreover, class discussions can achieve a powerful influence

on students' production since they persuade students to a variety of experiences that entail common issues. In this way, students can evidence the cooperation in the classroom and share knowledge reciprocally to improve either their EFL speaking skill or their social interaction.

The EFL Speaking Skill

Speaking skill as the second construct to mention in the current study is an important aspect of the linguistic approach to master effective communication. Kaddour (2016) claims that "speaking is an interactive process of communication which is the basis of all human relationships within language learning" (p. 4). Therefore, for the communication between people the development of oral production is vital when learning a language. Having said that, it is necessary to emphasize the fact that speaking skill comprehends a set of sub-competencies that help people to have better proficiency. Consequently, Bahrani and Soltani (2012) state that individuals "should try to avoid confusion in the message because of the faulty pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary" (p. 25). All in all, speaking as an interactive process in language covers a variety of factors that increase the interaction level in the community.

In the same way, focusing on speaking as a skill to handle during the process of learning a foreign language, it can be said that this process comprises a variety of challenges for students. For that reason, Rao (2018) argues that the main issue of learning EFL is to practice it effectively and proficiently since students must tackle topics regarding grammar and vocabulary to have the possibility of interacting with each other. In other words, "speaking does not cover just knowing the linguistic feature; linguistic feature of the message expanding oral communication requires more than memorized vocabulary and grammatical comprehension" (Derakhshan et al., 2016, p. 178). However, "teachers do not facilitate situations for real practice in speaking" (Derakhshan et al., 2016, p. 178). Thus, it is evidenced that the EFL speaking skill comprehends a wide range of sub-skills which need to be fostered by students in real contexts; it means, students need to immerse in spaces in which they can practice the foreign language.

Learning speaking skill as one of the main goals of teaching a foreign language, exposes both students and teachers to seek strategies to have progress in communicative competences. In fact, "along with the rise of the communicative era, oral communication has been considered as the ultimate goal of language learning and its adequate development has become the point of interest of both teachers and

learners" (Sim & Pop, 2016, p. 265). For that reason, it is necessary to have spaces of discussions in which students can support their oral proficiency since "having learners form discussion groups can be another strategy for encouraging learners to become more motivated contributors to the speaking activities" (Kürüm, 2017, p. 16).

Conversely, students can lose the motivation of speaking if they do not have a chance to express their idea orally in the classroom (Sim & Pop, 2016). Having said that, learning speaking skills through class discussions can also aid students not only to foster their linguistic features but also to encourage them to have a continuous process.

In summary, the current study establishes speaking as a way of sharing knowledge through language to have efficient processes of communication. Besides, this skill plays a relevant role during the process of learning a foreign language since students can feel more motivated when they are exposed to use this skill in the classroom. Consequently, fostering the EFL speaking skill through innovative strategies must become one of the main purposes of teaching a foreign language. For instance, strategies such as discussions in the classroom support the aim since it linked students with their oral skills. In short, to tackle the speaking skill in the classroom is a necessity for the EFL community.

Cultural Aspects

Regarding cultural aspects as a basis of this research study, this can be defined from different points of view. To this respect, Lebrón (2013) pinpoints that "culture is the unique characteristics of a social group; the values and norms shared by its members set it apart from other social groups and is influenced by conscious beliefs" (p. 127). Having this in mind, it is possible to assert that culture generates an overview of people's thoughts and behaviors. In the same line of thought, Guo (2013) defines culture as "an abstract term that defines a broad range of activities in which individuals express themselves. Culture is important because it tells us in different degrees what we are expected to think, say, and behave in typical life situations" (p. 506). Hence, culture is an important aspect of having a better understanding regarding people's thoughts and their different behaviors into society.

On the other hand, language is one of the aspects which is immersed directly into the culture since this is innate in each social group. Goldstein (2015) affirms there is a close relationship between language and culture, specifying that in the labor of teaching a foreign language, culture plays a significant role which cannot

be omitted in the classroom. It is said, "language is culture – culture is language. Culture and language are intertwined and shape each other" (Trosborg, 2010, p. 2). Likewise, talking about the way that people use language whether visual, spoken or written Kramsch (1998) claims that "through all its verbal and non-verbal aspects, language embodies cultural reality" (p. 3). In other words, although language works with plenty of varieties through verbal and non-verbal expressions, each one of them can reflect its own cultural aspects from a social group. In brief, during the process of teaching a foreign tongue, it is important to recognize that culture cannot work isolated from the language itself due to it takes part in the culture's development.

In the same vein, culture not only embodies language but also involves a set of characteristics that are part of people's identity, and this influences the learning process in one or another way. Talking about this issue, Altugan (2015) defines cultural identity as "individuals nature and nurture which includes their experiences, talents, skills, beliefs, values and knowledge, in other words, who they are, what their status is in their family, school, work, environment and country" (p. 1160). In other words, culture and identity are essential components for people's development because "cultural identity is an important effect on learning" (Altugan, 2015, p. 1161). For that reason, working on topics out of context in the foreign classroom is a risk, and Goldstein (2015) affirms that the problem with the material which is far from learners' context "is that it may be far removed from our students' world and could even alienate a learner" (p. 8). Thus, it is important to emphasize on the fact that identity as a branch of culture has a big impact on the different processes carried out by EFL students in and out of the classroom.

To sum up, this research study takes culture as a wide construct which includes a series of features such as language and identity, both as elements that influence EFL learning processes. Furthermore, culture plays an important role in students since it allows them to contextualize the learning process through a reality immersed in their daily life. It means that the use of local aspects helps students to acquire knowledge and makes the classes more participative and significant. All in all, culture does not work alone because it is an integral concept which involves a variety of elements that encourage students to have better development in their learning process. It means culture needs to go hand to hand with elements such as language and identity to accomplish the teaching goals.

The aforementioned constructs shape the theoretical basis for the development

of this study. The different literature resources reveal the necessity of implementing those categories in the EFL context.

METHODOLOGY

This research study was carried out following a Participatory Action Research (PAR) method. In accordance with Kindon, et al. (2008), PAR "is a collaborative process of research, education, and action explicitly oriented toward social change." (p. 90). In the same line of thought, McTaggart (1991) claims that through PAR "individuals and groups agree to work together to change themselves, individually and collectively. Their interests are joint by an agreed thematic concern." (p. 172). In other words, PAR provides a range of strategies for both teachers and students during the learning process to identify difficulties and work together on tackling them.

At the same time, this study was conducted through a qualitative design (Creswell, 2013), since it allows to "explore a wide array of dimensions of the social world, including the texture and weave of everyday life, the understandings, experiences and imaginings of our research participants ... and the significance of the meanings that they generate" (Mason, 2002, p. 1).

In this sense, the participatory action research following a qualitative design generated significant methodological and practical procedures for the development of this study. Accordingly, for the purposes of this research study, we decided to design and implement the following data collection instruments: surveys, field notes and audio-tape recording; these helped us to collect information before, during and after the interventions.These data collection tools were implemented to register students' responsiveness, opinion, beliefs, and progress in relation to our research concern which was related to the implementation of class discussions based on cultural aspects to foster the EFL speaking skill.

Furthermore, the information is presented and analyzed in accordance with the qualitative research approach and PAR research design. This was done with the purpose of providing our research study with consistency, reliability and coherence among the research structure, information collected, research approach, data analysis procedures, findings, and pedagogical implications.

Moreover, this study was carried out following the PAR process proposed byJames et al. (2008) which contains four phases; those are diagnose, act, measure
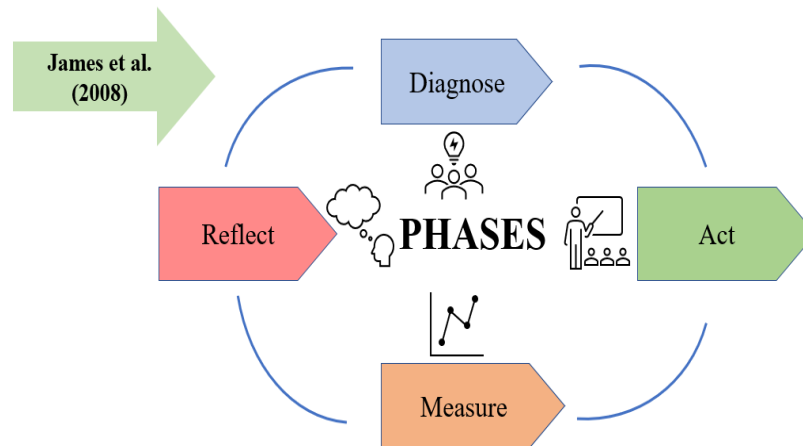
and reflect (See Figure 1).

Figure 1.

PAR process in this research study (James et al., 2008).

In this vein, the first phase dealt with the recognition of the problem and concerns the process of identifying eleventh graders weaknesses, likes, and preferences regarding the EFL speaking skill and the cultural background; this was done by raising questions and collecting data through the Likert scale and the community visit. Considering the evidence presented in the results of the Likert scale implementation, we established the following research question to guide the research study:

What are the contributions of class discussions regarding cultural aspects in the development of the EFL speaking skill among eleventh graders at Institución Educativa Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in Florencia, Caquetá?

The second phase had to do with the actions that we took for developing the class discussions. In this sense, we selected the cultural aspects following students' concerns. Likewise, we established the order to follow during the class discussions, and at the same time, we designed and applied the material that supported students' knowledge. Thereby, we selected and implemented the data instruments for collecting the evidence.

In the third phase, we organized the information that we collected each week through the data instruments. In this way, we transcribed and selected the main information from the audio-tape recording, and we categorized and graphed the data to carry out the analysis. Finally, the fourth phase was oriented to reflect and interpret the data to explore the contributions that class discussions offered to students. The development and implementation of the aforementioned phases were meaningful for

tackling our research concern and answering the research question.

The participants involved in the development of this research study were 10 eleventh graders at Jorge Eliécer Gaitán High School in Florencia-Caquetá (six girls and four boys in the range of fifteen and seventeen years old). We could not involve more students in the study since this region was highly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and we had to change our teaching model from face-to-face to online environment in a region where internet connection is unstable and not all the students have access to it as reported by Rojas-Bahamón, Aguilar-Cruz, & Arbelaez-Campillo (2020).

Pedagogical Intervention

The participants involved in the development of this research study were 10 eleventh graders at Jorge Eliécer Gaitán High School in Florencia-Caquetá (six girls and four boys in the range of fifteen and seventeen years old). We could not involve more students in the study since this region was highly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and we had to change our teaching model from face-to-face to online environment in a region where internet connection is unstable and not all the students have access to it as reported by Rojas-Bahamón, Aguilar-Cruz, & Arbelaez-Campillo (2020).

For the development of the different stages of the intervention, we considered the Content-Based Instruction (CBI) approach, this supported the purpose of this research since it encourages the use of the language as a means for including participants' content of interest such as their culture. Besides, CBI is "An approach in which the teaching is organized around the content. Likewise, the principles of Content-Based Instruction are heavily rooted on the principles of communicative language teaching since they involve an active participation of students in the exchange of content". (Villalobos, 2013, p. 71).

In the same vein, "it involves the teaching of academic subject matter and second language skills. The students, thus, receive curricula information and do their academic tasks in the TL and, at the same time, acquire the L2/TL in a very natural way" (Madrid & García Sánchez, 2001, p. 115). Furthermore, Madrid and García Sánchez (2001) point out that CBI is the most effective approach to increase the students' language proficiency as it considers their needs and interests linking the previous information of the students with the new one. In brief, the focus of CBI during the intervention encouraged the use of the target language for communicative purposes through interesting content supporting the achievement of the goal in this study.

Accordingly, Figure 2 portrays an example of the activities implemented and Table 1 presents the pedagogical design implemented.

Table 1.

Pedagogical design.

Stages	Interventions	Data Collection Instruments
Contextualization	**1st Intervention**	•Surveys
Exploration		•Field Notes
Acting	**2nd Intervention**	•Audio-tape Recording
	1st Class Discussion	
	3rd Intervention	
	2nd Class Discussion	
	4th Intervention	
	Final Class Discussion	
Reflecting	**5th Intervention**	

Figure 2.

Sample of the activities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

As this is a qualitative participatory action research, it is necessary to implement appropriate data analysis procedures to validate the data we collected from the pedagogical intervention. For instance, we agree with Patton's (2002) ideas who claim that qualitative researchers always aim to "transform data into findings" (p. 432). In this respect, we followed Glaser and Strauss' (1967), and Freeman's (1998) grounded theory approach which allowed us to find salient patterns from the data collection instruments. As these commonalities emerged, it was necessary to establish research categories and subcategories which contributed to answer our research question.

We organized and codified the data implementing Freeman's (1998) procedure for data analysis. According to the author, for developing research categories of analysis, it is necessary to go through four steps. The first step is *naming*; this procedure implies giving names to the data which is transform into codes. The second procedure consists of *grouping* the names for constructing research categories. The third procedure consists of implemented Dezin and Lincoln's (2005) data triangulation procedure to identify the salient patterns and f*inding relationships* among them. And the last procedure is to *display the data*, setting the relationship between categories and subcategories (See Table 2).

Table 2.

Research categories of analysis

Research Question	Categories	Subcategories
What are the contributions of class discussions regarding cultural aspects in the development of the EFL speaking skill among 11th graders at Institución Educativa Jorge Eliecer Gaitán?	Class discussions as a means for fostering students' communication.	Promoting self-confidence to encourage students to speak in EFL. Co-constructing a speech to speak in EFL. Speaking in EFL about previously discussed ideas.
	Cultural aspects as the vehicle to promote students' speaking in EFL	Pondering upon the relationship between my previous and the new cultural knowledge. Co-constructing cultural understanding during the process of the class discussion.

After establishing the research categories and the corresponding subcategories, we triangulated the data among the three data collection tools as a means of ratifying and validating the evidence we found while developing this project; triangulation of data implies taking "different perspectives on an issue under study" (Flick, 2009, p. 445). Given these points, we explored each category and its subcategories by providing finding, excerpts and samples supported with literature to answer our research question.

Class discussions as a means for fostering students' communication.

This category deals with the incidences that class discussions have in the process of fostering eleventh graders' speaking skill. As Prayoga (2018) states that a class discussion "is used as exercise to improve student's self-confidence and a speaking skill in learning English … By doing group discussion, students could share issues, opinions and making conclusions to the audiences or outsides group and discuss it in English" (p. 40). in the same line of thought, Harizaj (2015) highlights that class discussions "promote speaking, language acquisition and an active learning… Developing discussion, students develop speaking skills, acquire fluency and develop positive effects towards friendship" (pp. 231-232). In this respect, the following subcategories arouse: *Promoting self-confidence to encourage students to speak in EFL, Co-constructing a speech to speak in EFL and Speaking in EFL about previously discussed ideas.*

Promoting self-confidence to encourage students to speak in EFL.

This subcategory deals with eleventh graders' opportunities to foster their self-confidence to speak in the target language. In this respect, Prayoga (2018), Han (2007), and Harizaj (2015) agree that the process of generating a class discussion requires a preparation to foster students' confidence to speak in EFL. The authors further assert this is done in small group sessions and this is generally seen as an informal talk in which students are able to practice the target language without pressure increasing their self-confidence. Correspondingly, Han (2007) highlights that increasing students' self-confidence also represents an improvement on students' English speaking development. This can be evidenced in the surveys conducted after each one of the class discussions which demonstrated that most of the eleventh graders were more likely to speak in English as they felt more confident (See Figure 3). That is to say eleventh graders' confidence helped them to open a wide range of opportunities to participate generating the improvement of the EFL speaking skill

(See Table 3).

Table 3. Students' responses to the statement "*I felt comfortable and active to speak in class during the class discussions*".

Intervention 2	Intervention 3	Intervention 4
100% totally agreed	67% totally agreed	90% totally agreed

There is also more evidence of how eleventh graders' self-confidence was directly related to their commitment to speak in the class discussions. The following excerpts from the field notes demonstrated: "The class discussions make students talk actively and with confidence since they are adding more information that was not required. At the same time, it is evident that students are speaking in English without worries of making mistakes, something different from the beginning as they used to speak in Spanish to not make mistakes in the foreign language" (Researchers' field notes).

Moreover, it is noticeable in the last audio-tape recording in which eleventh graders made comments at the end of the last discussion expressing that there was a self-confidence improvement during the development of the class discussions: "Al principio tenía miedo a equivocarme como 'ay no qué pena decir una palabra mal enfrente de todos' ... Pero ahora ya uno se conoce con los otros, con los demás, entonces ya uno dice que equivocarse no importa, igualmente uno aprende. Uno no nace sabiendo eso. [At the beginning I was afraid of making mistakes like 'Oh no, what a pity to say a wrong word in front of everyone' ... but now we know each other, so we can say that making mistakes does not matter, likewise we can learn. We are not born knowing everything]" (Audio-tape recording transcript).

Thus, considering the aforementioned evidence, we can state that class discussions are beneficial for improving not only eleventh graders' speaking skill, but also their self-confidence to be able to express their ideas. In this way, it has been substantiated what Prayoga (2018), Han (2007), Argawati (2014), Steinert (1996), and Harizaj (2015) assert regarding class discussions and their benefits on students' feelings and attitudes when speaking.

Co-constructing a speech to speak in EFL.

The current subcategory is concerned with eleventh graders' preparation in small groups to contribute to the discussions using the EFL. In accordance with

Han (2007), Brewer (1997), and Lee (2009) class discussions encourage students to create small groups to have a previous preparation for supporting the discussions with concise arguments since "the more they knew about the subject matter, the more they were likely to contribute to discussions, and these participants often spent extra hours reading course materials to prepare for discussions" (Lee, 2009, p. 153).

In this sense, for co-constructing their speech, eleventh graders had to read the material that we gave them for brainstorming their ideas to gather precise and helpful information for discussing. In this respect, Florez (1999), and Harizaj (2015) state that for the development of effective discussions, it is better to use 'brainstorming' as a learning strategy to concrete ideas from the target topic. The effectiveness of this learning strategy can be evidenced in the survey that eleventh graders responded to since the majority concluded that brainstorming helped them to achieve the setting goals (see figure 3).
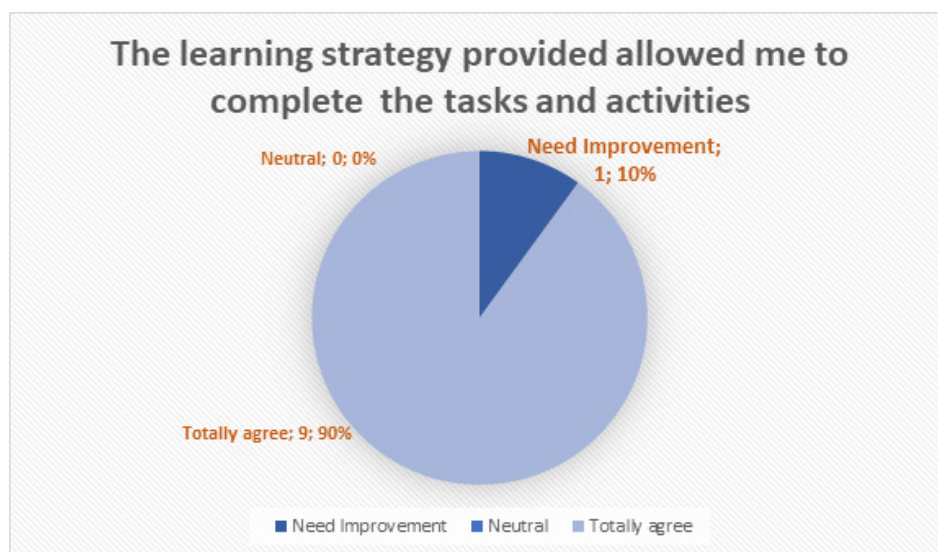

The learning strategy provided allowed me to complete the tasks and activities

Neutral; 0; 0%

Need Improvement; 1; 10%

Totally agree; 9; 90%

■ Need Improvement   ■ Neutral   ■ Totally agree

Figure 3. Eleventh graders' perceptions towards the learning strategy

Furthermore, it is possible to evidence the influence of class discussions on students' willingness to seek relevant information for co-constructing succinct ideas that helped to express themselves, this is evidenced in the following excerpt from researchers' field notes: "The students are expressing interesting points of view. It is evident that they were looking for more information about the cultural aspects, and they are expressing the reasons why they wanted to have a previous preparation which was about selecting the best information from the flyers and other resources. The

mentioned reasons by students are the necessity of expressing and defending their points of view, the benefit of selecting the relevant information for discussing, to explore the topic deeply to have a better contribution for the main ideas "(Researchers' field notes).

In this line of thought, it is evidenced in the audio-tape recording how class discussions enhance eleventh graders' motivation to prepare themselves for giving opinions and points of view based on real and meaningful information. "Una de las causas que hacían como que uno investigara más o tal vez tradujera algo que quisiera hablarlo en inglés es el hecho de saber más de ese tema ... Uno siempre trata de defender la tierra de uno y uno busca hacerlo en inglés. Siendo así, esto lo motiva a uno a tratar de investigar y hablarlo o compartirlo en inglés a los otros compañeros. [One of the reasons that made me seek more information or maybe translated something that I wanted to express in English is the fact of knowing more about that topic ... Everyone always tries to defend the place where they live and tries to do it in English. Plus, it motivates us to try to seek and speak or share it in English with the other classmates.]" (Audio-tape recording transcript).

All in all, the previous evidence demonstrates that co-constructing the speech by means of small groups strategies such as brainstorming ideas helps eleventh graders to support their arguments to speak during the class discussions.
Speaking in EFL about previously discussed ideas.

This category is related to eleventh graders' EFL speaking skill progress taking into account the benefit of using previously discussed ideas, during the development of the class discussions. To this respect, Scheidel and Crowell (1964), Shabani (2013), and Brookfield and Preskill (1999),agree on the fact that class discussions are a linear process which have a progress, and the previous discussed ideas are part of students' improvement in the class discussions. In other words, the previously acquired knowledge helps students to enhance their EFL speaking skill throughout the class discussions development (Shabani, 2013). It can be evidenced in the final survey when eleventh graders after the process of discussing the previous ideas appraised their EFL speaking progress; the statistics demonstrate the significant progress that eleventh graders had during the development of the class discussions (See figures 4 and 5).

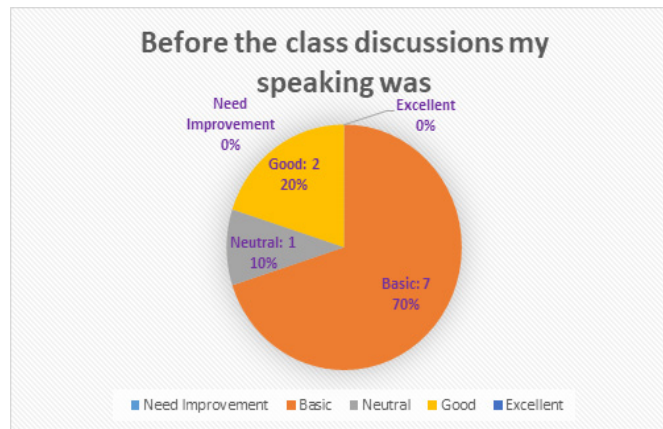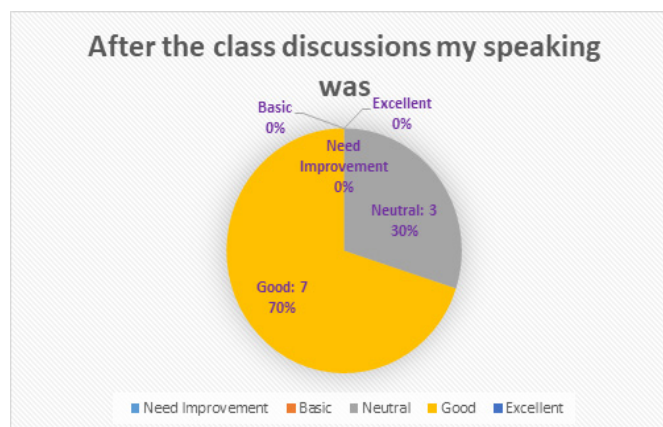Figure 4. Eleventh graders' perceptions towards the speaking level

Before the class discussions my speaking was

- Need Improvement 0%
- Excellent 0%
- Good: 2 20%
- Neutral: 1 10%
- Basic: 7 70%

■ Need Improvement ■ Basic ■ Neutral ■ Good ■ Excellent

Figure 5. Eleventh graders' perceptions towards the speaking level

After the class discussions my speaking was

- Basic 0%
- Excellent 0%
- Need Improvement 0%
- Neutral: 3 30%
- Good: 7 70%

■ Need Improvement ■ Basic ■ Neutral ■ Good ■ Excellent

In the same vein, the researchers' field notes reflect the role that the previously discussed ideas played on eleventh graders' speaking skill during the process of the class discussions. "This is the last class discussion, and it is interesting to see how students have improved the speaking level as they are speaking more fluently, and they are not making so many mistakes regarding pronunciation. Moreover, it is noticeable that students are using the vocabulary seen in the previous discussions, therefore, it is important to highlight that the use of the previously acquired vocabulary has helped the participants to express better their ideas" (Researchers' field notes).

In this sense, the evidence demonstrates that eleventh graders had a progression in their EFL speaking skill through a process in which the previously discussed ideas were taken into account to enhance their participation in the class discussions. That is to say, the background that eleventh graders co-constructed during the sections of the class discussions had a positive effect on their speaking skill development.

Cultural aspects as the vehicle to promote students' speaking in EFL

The second category is regarding the use of cultural aspects to encourage eleventh graders to speak in EFL. In this respect, Álvarez and Bonilla (2009), and Basalama (2018) point out that students' own culture exposes them to participate or interact in the EFL classroom since culture is the means of engaging students into a collaborative and dialogical space. In other words, culture promotes EFL students' participation and "the more students participate, the better their speaking ability will be" (Hadisaputra & Adnyani, 2018, p. 14). Having this in mind, the following subcategories have arisen: *Pondering upon the relationship between my previous and the new cultural knowledge andCo-constructing cultural understanding during the process of the class discussions.*

Pondering upon the relationship between my previous and the new cultural knowledge.

The current category is related to the benefit of connecting eleventh graders' previous knowledge to the new one since it is the gap to find a relationship between the knowledge and the ideas in discussion. Compliant with Foster et al. (2009) the new cultural knowledge must have a connection with students' prior knowledge or with what they already know to enhance the communication between students. In other words, the use of new knowledge in relation to students' previous knowledge is a powerful factor in facilitating comprehension while communicating ideas. Indeed, "the more they have background knowledge about a topic, that is, the more they become familiar with a topic, the more they can talk about it, and the more their speaking ability improves" (Shabani, 2013, p. 31). It can be proved through eleventh graders' responses to the weekly survey how the previous or familiar knowledge upon the discussed topic helped them in one or another way to be motivated to participate in class (See Table 4).

Table 4. Students' responses to the statement "*I was encouraged to take part in the classes since the cultural aspects presented familiar topics regarding my region*".

Intervention 2	Intervention 3	Intervention 4
67% totally agreed	50% totally agreed	90% totally agreed

In the same way, the researchers' field notes showcase how the previous knowledge influenced eleventh graders' responses upon the selected topics: "It is the time of presenting the topics to discuss in the following weeks, and the participants are reacting in different ways taking into account the background knowledge that they have in regard to the mentioned topics. Some of the participants are mentioning certain characteristics of each cultural aspect, and it shows the influence that their cultural previous knowledge can have in the development of the discussions" (Researchers' field notes).

Consequently, eleventh graders' previous knowledge played an important role during the EFL learning process as they reflected and established a relationship between their prior knowledge and the new one; this goes in accordance with Ausubel and Fitzgerald's (1961) ideas which establish that individuals learn meaningfully when they can relate previous knowledge with a new one. Therefore, eleventh graders enhanced their participation level and at the same time their speaking had significant progress.

Co-constructing cultural understanding during the process of the class discussions.

This category is based on eleventh graders' co-constructing cultural knowledge processes during the development of the class discussions as it was crucial for fostering the EFL speaking skill. In this sense, co-constructing allowed eleventh graders to integrate their background cultural knowledge during the oral interchange in the class discussions. Therefore, the EFL speaking skill was a means of co-constructing new knowledge. To this respect, Cakir (2006), and Hardman and Hardman (2016) assert that the construction of the cultural understanding requires the use of the language to have access to others and own cultural knowledge. That is to say, "knowledge construction is a process of collective thinking; a process that is simultaneously personal and social that requires group cognition ... because knowledge is constructed precisely through negotiating personal and shared understandings" (Öztok, 2016, pp. 154-156).

Those ideas are evident in the researchers' field notes as during the observation we noticed the progress of eleventh graders' speaking skill through the co-construction of knowledge based on group opinions: "How interesting is seeing the participants' speaking with confidence about the cultural aspects sharing concrete ideas; the ideas reflect a mix of opinions constructing the cultural knowledge taking into account not

only their personal opinion but those that their partners gave. Thus, it is noticeable that students did an excellent job working in groups and interchanging opinions during the class discussions" (Researchers' field notes).

Accordingly, eleventh graders' audio-tape recording reflected the opportunity that the class discussions gave them to co-construct knowledge and understanding about the different cultural aspects interchanging information orally: "Entonces pues yo quise aprovechar la oportunidad, dar mi opinión acerca de este nuevo lugar turístico que fue donde me crié para que mis compañeros lo conocieran y se animen a visitarlo ... me di cuenta que en clases así donde uno participa, investiga y hacer cosas así aprende y practica, fue más un espacio de convivencia. [Then I wanted to take advantage of this opportunity and give my opinion about this new tourist place which was the place where I grew up to make my partners know it and encourage them to visit it ... I realized that in this kind of classes where someone can participate, research and practice things like this someone learns; it was more a space of coexistence.]" (Audio-tape recording transcript).

In brief, the class discussions allowed eleventh graders to develop a process of constructing cultural understanding using the EFL speaking skill through collaborative learning classes in which they interchanged ideas and developed a process of co-constructing cultural awareness and understanding.

CONCLUSIONS

Having concluded the data analysis procedure, we can assert that class discussions based on cultural aspects contribute to the development of the EFL speaking skill. First, there is an improvement of self-confidence to speak in EFL since they have the opportunity to talk among peers. Second, the cultural aspects encourage students to relate the prior knowledge to the new one promoting the use of the EFL speaking skill in a meaningful way. Finally, the class discussions inspire students to co-construct a speech to be able to participate.

In terms of promoting the use and development of the EFL speaking skill, it is possible to affirm that the process of developing class discussions improves eleventh graders' self-confidence to express their ideas while interacting among peers; this interaction enables participants to co-construct a speech regarding the topic proposed, involving their prior knowledge with the exploration of a new one. As a

result, during the whole process of the three class discussions, eleventh graders were able to actively participate and evidence a significant progress in the development of their EFL speaking skill.

Concerning the cultural aspects, including cultural content in the class discussions anchored on eleventh graders' reality demonstrated to be highly beneficial. Therefore, these cultural aspects enabled eleventh graders to reflect on their cultural background while relating it to the new cultural knowledge they were exploring; this involved a process of co-constructing cultural awareness and understanding. Consequently, going through this process encouraged eleventh graders to speak in EFL to express what they knew and what they wanted to know in relation to the culture. This resulted in a meaningful learning of the cultural aspects, and constant practice and progress of the EFL speaking skill.

Given these points, the class discussions based on cultural aspects are a successful strategy for improving the EFL speaking skill as it contributed with a substantial progress in eleventh graders' EFL speaking skill. This progress was evidenced through eleventh graders' need of looking for the linguistic resources to express their ideas, thoughts, and beliefs regarding the cultural aspects and co-constructed knowledge in a spoken way. Consequently, eleventh graders were constantly practicing, requesting information, sharing ideas, and concluding regarding the cultural aspects, fostering a meaningful development of their EFL speaking skill.

Consequently, we suggest EFL teachers to provide this kind of strategy to students, allowing them to practice the EFL speaking skill based on their background, cultural realities, and identities. Besides, it is important to have a sequence in the development of the class discussions as it guarantees a significant progress in students' EFL speaking skill. Thus, if the process is carried out in an organized and practical way considering students' learning needs, it will ensure successful results during and after the implementation of the class discussions.

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