Open Your Mouth & Mind: Developing Oral Skills with Sense

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Abstract. The principal concern that each university has is to form professional people that could be able to face challenges, solving problems, and providing solutions within a specific context and it could be in a labour or professional situation. In order to get this objective many universities include at least a second language in the curricula and in most cases the language studied is English. Nevertheless, as any professional professor knows, the hardest aspect in the English teaching process is to improve the oral competence. At this point the present work intends to develop the English student competence focus on their technical development. Thus, the methodology to support this goal is through a series of classroom activities that show a new approach to get students of Informatics Engineering can speak in English considering what they are interested on. The activities were registered by a direct individual observation, a writing daily and recording classes in which there is an evidence of the individual progress of each one of the students, who got to send a clear message in an oral way, in spite of grammar errors, since this paper does not regard to work on grammar in order to get communication. At the end of this project the results showed that the students felt more confident to express their ideas in an oral form having as an effect the improvement of the student language acquisition by working on a real context like the professional field.

Keywords: Classroom Activities, Learning-Teaching Process, Oral Communicative Competence, Professional Field.

1. Introduction

During all the times people have had the need to communicate effectively. This communication has been through many different skills such as writing, listening, reading, or speaking. A person who can get to integrate all those abilities becomes a competent person from the point of view that he or she is able to be understood by others at the moment to send any kind of message. It is important to mention the term *competent* is used in this paper due to the fact that people try to use this word to show the importance to fit the necessary qualities from a person. On the other hand, it is well known that English has got to be the first language used everywhere for many reasons; as a result English is used in many different channels of communication, magazines, books, airports, journals, academic papers, cases in point. So, it is impossible to be apart from this reality and people must learn this language in order to expect and extend their possibilities to get a much better job and consequently more economic, social, cultural, and academic benefits.

Based on the previous information mentioned and referring about professional aspect, it is justifiable the need to promote an English learning teaching process with specific purposes focused on the oral skill with the purpose to break linguistic barriers that make easier for the students to be introduced inside their future workable field and in this way to get the student find a real application to their knowledge in an actual context, and taking into account the established by the European framework . Students from Universidad Politecnica de Puebla (UPPue) present a serious problem at the moment to express their ideas in an oral way, even in high levels, in spite of studying nine levels of English, they have not developed neither the oral skill nor meaningful learning. Therefore, the general objective of this paper is to develop the English oral competence in students of first semester from a cognitive-constructivist focus by means of activities related to the professional area, and in this way to provide to the students the necessary tools for expressing in an oral way.

2. Academic Background

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Some studies about this theme have been proposed around the world. For instance, in Singapore the Nnyang Technological Institute (Poon 1991) stated that their students had showed a similar problem that was found in this work. Students from that country learnt English as a second mother language (Chinese mandarin is the first one); however; they demonstrated a limited capacity at the moment to interact in formal situation such as formal interview to get a job. In this case, the institute made some implementations like the use of dictionaries and libraries. In addition, they created some activities just as oral reports, comparisons, descriptions, letters, meetings, interviews, and oral presentations.

On the other hand, in the English department of Cienfuegos a University in Cuba some studies were performed during the courses of the 2001. The general objective of this study was to propose a change in the curricula in order to get an effective learning by means of a systematic homework system. This strategy looked for a communicative development competence which could help students in their professional life.

Moreover, in the University of Camaguey in Cuba a research was carried up with law students. This project was focused on develop the oral ability based on the social, academic, and work demands (Gerard & Nardín, 2010). The most relevant point about the methodology proposed was that it tries to make students independent and be conscious about their academic progress.

All these studies have a similar profile which fit with the project that is proposed in this paper. The need to improve an English communicative competence is each time more necessary. It is not the intention to mention that the other abilities are less important. The point is to clarify that a great percentage of people use speaking to communicate and sometimes the short practices that student have within the classroom make them be afraid to express their ideas, feelings, propositions, and so on.

3. Methodology

The present research was designed based on a qualitative and quantitative research due to its characteristics of observation and the results analyzed and interpreted by using graphics and charts. It was conducted in the Universidad Politecnica de Puebla which is located in Puebla City (in Mexico). This University counts with very special characteristics one of them is that it is surrounded for large green fields. In fact, it is far away from air and noise pollution, these conditions benefit students to keep focus on their studies.

The participants who were considered for this paper are studying Informatics Engineering in a first semester. The age range varies from 17 to 20 years old. The total number of the class is 28 students from which 15 of them are boys and 13 are girls. It is worth mentioning that three groups were formed taking into account the criterion supported by their level of language knowledge, and in that way there was a lower, intermediate, and high level. The participants were submitted an interview at the beginning and at the end of the course, as well as they were given a questionnaire in order to know what they though and think about learning English. Hence, the instruments used were journals, interviews, questionnaires, observation, and semi structure observation. It is important to say that all the materials utilized in class consisted of glossaries, videos, and models from the teacher within the informatics area context where the student faced on real situations like job interviews or process descriptions.

4. Results

The experimental phase of this project consisted of the applications of a series of different activities and it was found that the results of the questionnaire and interviews applied had changed drastically due to the fact that students at the end of this course they showed a considerable oral advance which was projected with a high self confidence at the moment to communicate orally. Students corrected some pronunciation mistakes when they presented the last interview at the same time vocabulary use was higher in primary the use of technical vocabulary. On the other hand, it can be said that the most relevant result was on the lower level students, there was a considerable advance in the oral expression and it was really satisfactory to try out this kind of results since this can be considered to be a meaningful learning. See the graphs below.
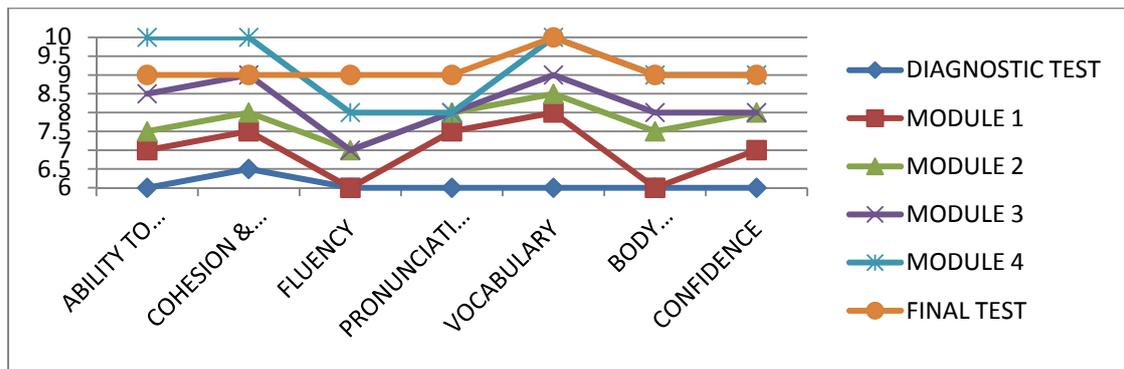
Graph 1: Advance in students with low level of English
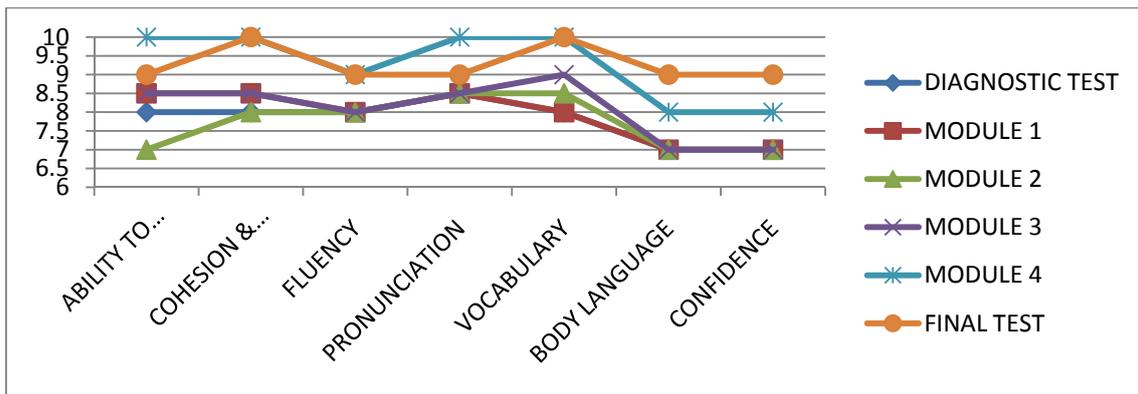
Graph 2: Advance in students with intermediate level of English
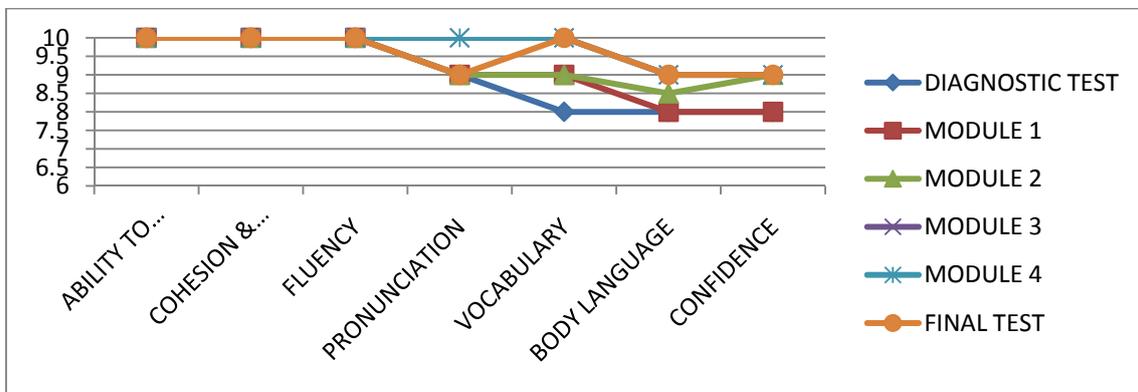
Graph 3: Advance in students with high level of English

5. Conclusions

In short, the activities performed during this entire project provide the necessary tools to the students to develop their oral competence as well as their own construction knowledge related to their work area and generating a high self confidence at the moment to be corrected. A positive impact has been reflected which has been connected to the new way of learning got during this course related to the way of English learning, activities and oral performance. There was an aspect that had not been considered during the investigation, but when this was concluded it was interesting to realize how the rate of failed people was less than in other courses, in such a way that it might represent an alternative way for evaluating. As a conclusion, what it is true is that as close as these aspects could be integrated, the results will be much better.

6. Referencias

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