Improving English Oral and Public Speaking Skills in the Classroom

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Abstract

This paper describes the implementation of different techniques in the English class. Those techniques are taken and adapted from the methodology of Toastmasters International Club. The authors have adapted this methodology in order to improve their students' English performance, which has proven to be effective in the foreign language classroom. Therefore, this paper details Toastmasters techniques in two groups of the Pacific Regional Center of University of Costa Rica: freshmen from the Major of English with Business Management Training and juniors from the English Teaching Major. The authors developed different techniques depending on the students' level and course objectives and have concluded that this methodology can provide valuable resources to improve English in the classroom.

Keywords: English, foreign language learning, foreign language teaching, public speaking

Resumen

Este documento describe la implementación de diferentes técnicas en la clase de inglés. Dichas técnicas son tomadas y adaptadas de la metodología empleada en el Club Internacional de Toastmasters. Los autores han adaptado la metodología de dicho club para contribuir en el

mejoramiento del desempeño de sus estudiantes en el idioma inglés, lo cual ha probado ser efectivo en el contexto del aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera. Por lo tanto, este artículo detalla las técnicas del club de Toastmasters en un grupo de primer ingreso de la carrera Inglés con Formación en Gestión Empresarial y un grupo de tercer año de la carrera de Enseñanza del Inglés, de la Sede del Pacífico de la Universidad de Costa Rica. Los autores desarrollaron distintas técnicas de acuerdo con el nivel del estudiantado y los objetivos de curso concluyendo así que esta metodología facilita valiosos recursos para el mejoramiento de la producción oral en el aula de inglés como lengua extranjera.

Palabras clave: inglés, aprendizaje de lengua extranjera, enseñanza de lengua extranjera, habla en público

Introduction

Speaking in a foreign language might be one of the hardest things to accomplish; anxiety, self-confidence, fear to speak, among others, are aspects that contribute to increase this difficulty. In fact, Krashen (2009) states "how affective factors relate to the second language acquisition process" (p. 30), these factors, continues the author, can be placed into three main categories: motivation, self-confidence and anxiety (Krashen, 2009). Therefore, everything teachers can implement to overcome these obstacles in the classroom and help their students improve their language skills is always welcome.

In addition to this, based on the researchers' experience and observations, it is possible to say that public speaking is one of those tasks that causes more fear and hesitation in students. Particularly, when that public speaking must be done in a language that is not the speaker's native language, the situation gets more critical since more fears arise.

Regarding this matter, the coming lines will deal with different techniques developed in Toastmasters International Club, an organization that helps people learn about public speaking. These techniques can be applied in the English class as well, providing tools to help students to overcome possible fears to speak in public through the careful planning of organized speeches and evaluations. Therefore, it is the objective of this paper to apply the techniques of toastmasters in the English class in order to help students enhance their oral and public speaking skills.

Theoretical Framework

What is Toastmasters International Club? Toastmasters International Club began in the United States in 1924 as a series of speaking clubs created by Ralph C. Smedley. According to Toastmasters International official web side (n. d.), this international organization focuses its job on training people in communication and leadership development. In addition, it has

over 345,000 members attending one of the 15,900 clubs located in 142 countries. Furthermore, the methodology of Toastmasters consists of training people on public speaking by means of weekly meetings distributed in different sections: table topics, prepared speeches and speech evaluation.

Overall, the Toastmasters International club's mission is to empower individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders under the values of integrity, respect, service and excellence and, as it is stated in its official website, to "provide a supportive and positive learning experience in which members are empowered to develop communication and leadership skills, resulting in greater self-confidence and personal growth" (Toastmasters International, n. d.).

This document aims to show the results of implementation of the Toastmasters techniques in two different English learning groups with the purpose of improving oral skills through public speaking as well as other inherent subskills in a foreign language such as fluency, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation.

Toastmasters and language learning. Based on Toastmasters methodology, several benefits can be pursued in the field of foreign language instruction such as impromptu speaking enhancement, confidence increase, vocabulary improvement and feedback giving. To accomplish this, the Toastmaster's club organizes their meetings in the following sections:

Meeting Sections

Table topics. Impromptu speaking is developed through a section called *table topics*. This section consists of a series of questions participants have to answer spontaneously in no less than a minute and no more than two and a half minutes. If the speaker does not accomplish the time frame, he or she will be disqualified and will not have the chance to be selected as "best table topics speaker"; the point is for the speaker to develop a response spontaneously without digressing the topic.

The topic of the questions is based on the theme for the meeting, the speakers are chosen randomly at the time to ask the questions; there is no in-advance preparation, that is why it is the impromptu section. In this section, participants are not forced to participate until they feel ready; however, they are constantly encouraged to try.

When table topics questions are finished, the audience has some time to provide written feedback to participants for them to improve; in addition, the audience can vote on small pieces of paper that had been previously distributed, in order to select the best table topics speaker of the day.

Prepared speeches. During the prepared speeches part, speakers present the speeches they have prepared in advance, in a time period of 4 to 6 minutes, depending on the type of speech they are in charge of developing. The speeches presented by the speakers would be changing as the speaker improves so that he or she can have the opportunity of having a new challenge every time. According to Dluglan, 2008, there are different types of

prepared speeches a toastmaster (or a non-toastmaster) can develop:

- The icebreaker: The first speech of the Toastmasters program is about introducing yourself to your peers, providing a benchmark for your current skill level, and standing and speaking without falling over.
- Organize your speech: Introduces the basic concepts of organizing a speech around a speech outline.
- Get to the point: Clearly state your speech goal, and make sure that every element of your speech focuses on that goal.
- How to say it: Examines word choice, sentence structure, and rhetorical devices.
- Your body speaks: Shows how to complement words with posture, stance, gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact.
- Vocal variety: Guides you to add life to your voice with variations in pitch, pace, power, and pauses.
- Research your topic: Addresses the importance of backing up your arguments with evidence, and touches on the types of evidence to use.
- Get comfortable with visual aids: Examines the use of slides, transparencies, flip charts, whiteboards, or props.
- Persuade with power: Discusses audience analysis and the different forms of persuasion available to a speaker.
- Inspire your audience: The last of ten speeches, this project challenges the speaker to draw all their skills together to deliver a powerful inspirational message (Dluglan, 2008).

The selection of the speech organization depends on each speaker's level. Someone previously assigned evaluates each speech. After every speech, the audience has a minute to provide written and anonymous feedback. It is important to mention that the feedback must be concentrated mostly on aspects of public speaking such as voice, body language, confidence, topic management, among others. When all speakers have participated, the audience can vote for whom they think was the best speaker; in this scenario, only speakers that accomplished the time frame qualify.

Evaluation. The next section of the meeting is the evaluation part. At this moment, every evaluator is introduced, one at the time. Each evaluator has from one to two minutes to present his or her feedback to the speaker assigned. As it occurs with the speakers, evaluators get feedback from the audience and have the possibility to be chosen as the best evaluator of the session as long as they stick to the time period established.

Equally important in this section is to keep in mind that evaluations should be constructive and indicate areas that are in need of improvement as well as those that were good and would be nice to see again. All in all, the purpose of the evaluation is for the speaker to want to speak again.

In addition to the previous sections, a series of roles are taken by the participants; these are explained as follows:

Roles

Ah-Counter: The person in charge of this position should take notes all around the meeting in order to point

out speakers' overuse of words and sentence fillers.

Timer: This person in responsible for taking the time in each of the activities developed by the speakers.

Topicsmaster: This is the person in charge of preparing and delivering the topics for the table topics section of the meeting.

Grammarian: This is the person in charge of taking notes regarding the good and effective use of the language. Besides pointing out mistakes or language use problems, this person can and should point out some outstanding and interesting phrases used by the speakers as well as the use of the "word of the day".

Toastmaster: This person is the one in charge of the meeting. He or she has to direct and host the whole session.

Speaker: This is any member of the club who prepares a speech and presents it in front of the club to be evaluated.

Table topics speaker: In charge of responding a question during the table topic section. There are table topic speakers as there are questions to respond; also, the speaker is chosen by the topicmaster at the time this specific section is developed.

Evaluator: This is the person in charge of providing verbal and written feedback to some of the participants of the meeting.

General Evaluator: This person is in charge of providing a general evaluation at the end of the meeting. This person has to consider aspects related to organization, participation, punctuality and the flow of the meeting to offer his or her feedback to the group (Toastmasters International, n. d.).

Aspects to consider when learning a second or foreign language

When learning a foreign or a second language, there is a series of aspects to take into consideration such as motivation, sociocultural background, language exposure and practice of the language.

Practice and exposure. Part of the exposure consists of what is known as linguistic input, this, according to Corder (1967) as mentioned in Bahrani (2013), "refers to what is available to be utilized by language learners for SLA which should be differentiated from intake which is that part of the input which is comprehended by the language learners" (p. 1376). So, input is pretty much any piece of linguistic information a person is exposed to, then, depending on his or her the level of interest or comprehension, the person will understand or internalize certain information that would be the linguistic intake that will eventually be used to communicate ideas or thoughts and that will be known as linguistic output. Linguistic output is perhaps the most relevant aspect of all since it is the one that will let us know what the speaker is actually able to do with the language.

Another important aspect is interaction. It is a key element in terms of linguistic skills' development. Exposure is not enough, even though Becker (2007) considers that it helps learners to get in contact with the target language so they can get input. If we want learners to really improve their skills, they should be able to put into practice what they learn, to help them use their intake to produce output.

According to Scarino and Liddicoat (2009), "language classrooms are fundamentally interactive, however, the nature and quality of the interaction varies according to the way in which it is understood and constructed" (p. 38). Most of the time, this so called interaction will depend on the objective the teachers aim for, nonetheless, there is no way to deny the necessity for interaction learners have. It is very difficult to learn a language by mere exposure. Interaction, as pointed out by Scarino and Liddicoat (2009) "is purposeful, people do not talk in order to use language: they use language in order to talk. Therefore, people need to have something to talk about and someone they wish to talk about these things with" (p. 38). So, it is necessary to give learners the chance to interact the way the want to do it, to explore their interests and share them with others in order to guarantee a real interactive communication process, because, as mentioned by Scarino and Liddicoat (2009), "if the purpose of interaction is solely to use the target language, and any target language use is unproblematically seen as "learning", then the sorts of learning through which interaction can be developed are necessarily limited and superficial" (p. 38).

Public speaking skills: Definition and examples. In almost any field that a person decides to work, there are many chances of ending up speaking in front of others. Sometimes you have to talk to one or two persons; however, sometimes, depending on specific tasks assigned, you may have to speak in front of an audience, which is without a doubt a nerve-wracking experience. Public speaking, according to Petek

(2014) is defined as the "spoken text in monologue which is (fully) prepared in advance and is therefore to contain no repetitions, distracting pauses, fillers, false stars, self-repairs etc." (p. 125).

No matter how prepared a speaker is, he or she will always feel anxious in front of an audience. This person needs to strengthen his or her public speaking skills. These skills not only involve the organization of a speech. When it comes to public speaking, here are several aspects to take into consideration. For example: the use and quality of the voice, gestures, posture, diction, self-confidence, movements, anxiety level, the use of visual aids, the topic to be developed and the audience to be faced.

If a speaker is able to consider all of those aspects when having to speak in public, he or she can surely deliver an effective speech. However, public speaking requires practice. The more a person is exposed to these situations, the more he or she will be able to increase his or her abilities.

Relevance of effective public speaking skills. Any person, regardless his or her occupation or his or her position might eventually have to communicate with others in an oral way, they might have to defend their opinions, give messages or be in charge of a group of people. All of these situations require the person to have effective public speaking skills. According to DeVito (2015), "public speaking will provide you with training in a variety of personal and social competencies" (p. 3). Learning about public speaking skills, continues the author, might help you to improve in terms of researching, supporting arguments, persuading, and organizing ideas and messages and above all,

it will bring you more self-confidence and self-assurance.

It is well known that practice makes perfect. It's hard to think that anyone would be able to present a perfect speech in front of an audience at first, this is a process that is built little by little, "speakers aren't born effective; they make themselves effective. Through instruction, exposure to different speeches, feedback, and individual learning experiences, you can become an effective speaker" (De Vito, 2015, p. 3). This is true. There is always a place to start; this is why the educational system should be in charge of providing people with the chance to learn and to improve this as well. The more confident a person is, the more attention he or she will be able to capture from others.

Impromptu speaking. According to Henderson (1982), impromptu speaking "is a relatively simple formal speaking exercise of a limited duration of time and with limited formal preparation" (p. 76) In fact, Impromptu speaking situations are the most common situations any person may run into. Some of them might be a conversation on a bus, a telephone conversation, a casual conversation at the elevator or even the oral interaction you may have when helping someone on the street.

The most difficult part of impromptu speaking and yet the most interesting one is the fact that the speaker usually does not have too much time to prepare it. The speaker has to be quick and effective. Toastmasters International (n. d.) provides a five step formula that consists of:

- Listening to what we are told or asked to that we can reply according to what we are requested.

- Wait and pause before answering. That can help us organize our ideas better.
- Confirm or repeat the question or questions in order to make sure what the topic to be developed is.
- Being enthusiastic when speaking, try to stick to the topic you were asked without overthinking it.
- Conclude our participation by giving an emphasis to our main point. Always be positive and make eye contact with our interlocutor and provide a kind smile.

Methodology

Creswell (2003) refers to different types of studies. First, qualitative research, which takes place in natural settings, it enables the researcher to develop a level of detail about the individual and place to be highly involved in the actual experiences of the participants. Additionally, based on Creswell (2003), this type of investigation uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic. The data collection methods involve active participation and sensitivity to the participants in the study. It looks for the involvement of the investigator with the individuals under study. Also, it is fundamentally interpretative, that is, the researcher makes an interpretation of the data. This includes developing a description of an individual or setting, analyzing data for themes or categories, and finally making an interpretation or drawing conclusions about its meaning personally and theoretically.

Based on those aspects, it is possible to refer to this study as qualitative since it involved an interactive process

with the participants of both groups trying to present them with new ideas and techniques to improve their oral and public speaking skills. The process per se demanded researchers to be close to the participants at all times observing their reaction and guiding them into the process.

Nonetheless, this research is quite particular since the phenomenon addressed is relatively new. Toastmasters club and its techniques have been around for many years but their implementation in foreign language learning is not common. Actually, at least in the case of Costa Rica, it has not been documented yet; therefore, its development

in the classroom will be helpful in providing instructors new ideas to enhance their students' speaking skills.

Population

The implementation of Toastmasters techniques was developed with two different groups denominated Population A and Population B, both from the Pacific Regional Center of Universidad de Costa Rica.

For a better understanding of these populations, the following chart summarizes their characterization:

Chart 1
Population characterization

CHARACTERISTIC	POPULATION A	POPULATION B
Major	English with Business Management Training	English Teaching
Level	Freshmen	Juniors
Course	Integrated Linguistic Skills I	Communication & Pronunciation Techniques I
Number of students	29: 19 women and 10 men	22: 16 women and 6 men
Ages	17 to 22 years old	22 to 55 years old
Length	8 weeks	8 weeks
Techniques and roles developed	Table topics. Roles: topicsmaster, grammarian, timer and ah- counter	All
Instrument	Open-ended surveys: one after the first session, one after the last one.	Open-ended surveys

Procedure

The process was managed differently with each group since they both had different linguistic levels; the former was composed mostly by beginners and the emphasis was put on table topics whereas the latter was a high intermediate group who reproduced the whole session. These differences did not cause any problems in the data; however, it is necessary to highlight them in order to demonstrate how the techniques can be modified according to the students' needs and course objectives.

Open-question surveys were used so that the participants could offer better and more extended ideas when answering. The idea was to understand the possible benefits students could have obtained from participating in this activity as well as receiving participants' feedback in relation to the activity per se in terms of what they would change, and the way they would improve it, among others.

Population A. Most of these students obtained their high school degree the year before the study took place, which makes them a very young population, most of the students were 17 and 18 years old. Moreover, 5 out of the 29 students had never studied English before entering the university, all the rest had taken English, especially in primary school and high school. Precisely, it is because of the level of this group, that only table topics were implemented, since the purpose was to improve the speaking skill by providing them with more confidence at the time to express themselves in public.

To accomplish the technique's purpose, the group participated in table topics sessions during 8 weeks. Each session lasted from 30 to 40 minutes. At first, the questions were asked by the instructor, based on the topics covered in class; as the classes progressed, students were encouraged to prepare the questions.

Additionally, students played the following roles: timer, ah-counter and grammarian; however, because of the level of these students, the grammarian would focus on the use of the word of the day whereas the instructor would take note on language use and provide individual feedback to participants.

Equally important is to point out that even though answers must take one minute minimum, students were allowed to do less than that as long as they did their best to reach the minute, keep track on their own time and take note on their own progress.

Population B. This group was composed by 22 students, 6 men and 16 women, whose ages ranged from 22 to 55; however, most of them were between 20 and 22 years old. The group developed complete Toastmasters' sessions during 8 weeks, 2 hours per week. In those sessions, students played different roles and participated actively in each of them. At the beginning the topics were selected by the instructor but after the second week, students started to select the topics based on their interests and needs. At the end of the process, students evaluated it by using an instrument they were provided with.

Analysis and discussion

Because of the different levels in both groups, the information of each instrument will be analyzed separately.

Population A. Firstly, when asked how they felt before knowing if they could be selected to answer a question, most of the answers were directed to feelings related to lack of confidence. The students claimed to feel: nervous, anxious, scared, embarrassed, restless, even panicked at not knowing what to say. Although there were responses such as *prepared*, *fine* and *relaxed*, these were minimum.

In addition, during the first session, eight students who were called to speak, declared the following responses to the question: *how did you feel at the time to be called?*

Responses after first class:
Nervous
Relaxed
Afraid to make mistakes
Bad. I didn't know how to express what I wanted to say
I think I just made fool of myself
Surprised
Easy
Prepared
Embarrassed

On this occasion, 75% of the students selected indicated that they had difficulties to speak for one minute, which is the minimum amount of time required to answer table topic questions; in fact, not all of them managed to accomplish it whereas only 25% expressed they had no problems with completing the amount of time required. Moreover, when asking these people what aspects they considered influenced in their difficulty to complete the time, they mentioned: lack of vocabulary, imagination, fear to speak in public, ignorance on the topic and the difficulty to put into words what they had in their minds.

Indeed, knowing the perception of the speakers is important since it would provide an idea of students beliefs towards the activity and their own learning. In this case, all the students except for one, indicated that they would like to participate in the future because they consider they can be corrected as they practice. Also, they consider that by finding themselves forced to speak, they must improvise and improve aspects such as vocabulary and pronunciation at the time they lose their fear to speak in public.

Fortunately, 90% of the group thought their ability to speak improved after the development of table topics in their English class, the other 10% either did not notice any remarkable improvement or did not respond the question.

Moreover, students included other aspects in which they noticed improvement after participating in table topics; these are fluency, impromptu speaking, public speaking and language fillers decrease. Clearly, students were able to perceive benefits in their own learning and identify progress in their speaking ability.

Finally, for this analysis it was important to know students' appreciation when concluding the technique in order to know if they gained any confidence at the time to speak. In this opportunity, two people answered they still felt nervous and afraid by thinking they could be selected to

participate whereas the rest claimed they felt calm, familiarized, more confident and relaxed because that was a way in which they could overcome their fears. Regarding aspects they would recommend, they suggested the implementation of more illustration such as power point slides for them to picture ideas first, to provide a list of vocabulary in advanced so they would use it in the following session and to control participation as well as to extend the activity a little longer so more students had the possibility to intervene in one session.

Population B. *Participation in the activities.* All of the students participated in the activities developed; they all played at least one of the roles that are part of a regular Toastmasters' session. In fact, 100% of them participated as speakers of prepared topics, 100% participated as table topic speakers, 81,8% took the evaluator role, 27,2% participated as table topics master, 18,8% of them worked as grammarian, 31,8% as ah-counter and only 27,2% worked as timer.

When asking the participants about their favorite role, most of them (54,5%) agreed on the speaker role since they say that it gives them the chance to develop or improve their speaking skills as well as their fluency when speaking in front of their classmates, it also gives them the chance to be evaluated by others which is beneficial for their improvement. Another aspect that is mentioned by the participants is the fact that by facing an audience they can minimize their fear to speak in public.

In addition, 31,8% of the participants preferred the evaluator role since it gives them the chance to grade other people to help them improve their skills. This role can also prepare them for their job as future teachers. They considered it is a funny role and they do not feel as much pressure as they might feel in other roles. Finally, it gives them the chance to help others by providing them with positive feedback.

Also, 9,09% of the participants considered that the table topic speaker role was best for them since they felt that not knowing what topic they had to develop was more interesting . Indeed, that gave them the chance to improve their impromptu speaking skills. Finally, 4, 5% of the participants chose the timer role as their favorite since they did not have to talk much.

Influence of the activities on participants' level of confidence. When asking participants if the participation on toastmasters' activities had some sort of influence on the level of confidence, 86,3% of them considered that they helped them to improve it whereas 13,6% of then said that their participation on the activities did not have any influence on their level of confidence.

The ones that considered that his or her level of confidence improved due to their participation in the activities previously described confessed that now they feel less nervous when speaking in front of others, some feel more confident and they have learned to concentrate more on what they have to do, they learned not to worry that much about the audience. Some participants even feel that due to the level of confidence they have gained their pronunciation also improved since they can articulate better if they do not feel too nervous. Some participants also said that their anxiety levels have

decreased and that they have been able to improve their body language, their movements and their eye contact.

Participants were also asked if they believe that their classmates have improved their level of confidence due to the participation in Toastmasters' activities and a 100% of them agreed on that. They say that their classmates look more confident, they are able to speak more fluently and it seems that they feel more confidence with their audience. Many of them consider that by looking at their classmates' presentation it is evident they are more careful in terms of what they do and the way they do it. Now, they look more natural and they are able to manage stress in a better way.

Influence of the activities on participants' English level. When asking the students if the participation in the activities had some sort of influence on their English level, 86,3% considered that their linguistic level improved whereas only 13,6% of them said that their level did not improve. The ones that considered they had some linguistic improvement said that the aspect that improved the most was their fluency (72,7%), 49,9% considered that vocabulary and their pronunciation were the aspects that got more benefits from participating in Toastmasters' activities. Finally, 31,8% of the participants confessed their grammar was the aspect with more improvements. It is interesting to see that most of the participants considered that their fluency improved since that is basically one of the main objectives of Toastmasters International. Part of speaking in public implies self-control, self-confidence and conviction when delivering a speech.

Definitely, a convincing speech is fluent and well structured, and that is precisely obtained from constant practice and interest, that is what most of the participants did during the process.

About the positive aspects of the activities based on the participants' point of view. The activities, according to the students, are interesting and motivating since they give them the freedom to express themselves freely without feeling the pressure of a teacher constantly evaluating their progress; it is a friendly environment in which nobody is forced to talk or to participate, everyone moves at his or her own pace. It is a process that allows people to improve not only their linguistic skills but their public speaking and their confidence.

Some said that it was the first activity they had developed in an English class that clearly generated a positive impact in the students. It was something evident and easy to understand. It is amusing, inclusive, motivating, and it involves the whole class without necessarily ending up following the structure of a typical class. It is a way to learn without stress and restrictions. It is also a process that "rewards" effort and improvement. Every week, the participants recognized the best table topic speaker, the best speaker and the best evaluator and it was evident that everyone was working harder and harder to be the best, it was not a competition against any other but themselves.

All of the participants said that they would strongly recommend these activities to any English student and since they were all English teaching students, they all said that as future

teachers they would like to put them into practice with their own students since they consider that they are good to improve students' linguistic level as well as to promote the integration of the group and their learning. It is something positive since it allows students to be free and creative when constructing their own learning.

About the aspects participants would improve in this type of activities.

Some of the recommendations participants gave to these activities was for example giving students the chance to choose the topics they want to develop since that could motivate them more. That is one of the reasons why the instructor decided not to choose the topic but to give students the chance to do it so they could come out with what really called their attention.

They also recommended the implementation of the activities in every oral communication course they had since it is very beneficial. At the same time, some others consider that the evaluators should not be as nice as they usually were; however, it is important to remember that Toastmasters International aims for growth and improvement in a positive way. The idea is to foster participants' skills with a positive approach that would give them the chance to know what they are doing right and wrong but not in a destructive way.

Another aspect to improve, according to the participants is the inclusion of the shyest students since they are the ones that need to participate more to improve their level and their public speaking skills. It is necessary to look for different ways to include them even more.

Finally, some students recommended to have people talking spontaneously since it is necessary to help them face any possible linguistic situation. In real life, nobody can prepare any speech, when one has to talk there is no other way but to talk. So, more real life training is necessary in this type of activities.

Conclusions

Based on the students' answers when developing these techniques in the English class, it is possible to conclude that they are highly helpful when it comes to improving their speaking skills. Toastmasters' techniques can be applied to different levels according to the context and the course objective; in fact, they can be modified depending on language purposes.

For instance, for language beginners, one of the aspects that both teachers and learners need to work on is confidence. The fear to speak in public plays an important role and it keeps students from participating; therefore, improving their confidence level by using techniques like the ones described in this study would be a great way to help them in this process. In this scenario, it would not be necessary to develop the whole session with all its components, but the instructor might decide which activity would be more useful; in this case, developing only the table topics section has proven to be effective.

On the other hand, more advanced levels can take advantage of all the sections of a regular Toastmasters meeting: they have more developed skills, they are not as afraid to speak in front of their peers and they possess more linguistic resources; therefore, a class with more

components has demonstrated to be more enriching for higher levels. Nonetheless, in both cases, it is important to pay more attention to the amount of lexicon students possess so activities can be planned accordingly; clearly, this was a recommendation from both groups that is necessary to pay attention to.

Undoubtedly, speaking in another language is a difficult task, it is completely natural for learners to experience feelings of anxiety and fear when having to express themselves publically in a foreign language; therefore, techniques that contribute to make students feel more confident through time are worth trying.

This methodology can be used the way it was previously described in a language class or it can be adapted in terms of the characteristics of the population it is being used with; in general terms, it is quite simple and it does not require the teacher to invest a lot of time or resources when planning it and it will give students the chance to interact and to be in charge of their learning process.

In sum, there is a variety of uses and combination of activities we can give to this methodology in order to improve the students' competence as well as performance in the classroom and real life.

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Appendix I

Questionnaires for group A

FIRST DAY

The implementation of *table topics* as a technique to develop the speaking ability in university students

Dear student:

This instrument intends to know your opinion after having participated in the first implementation of table topics in the classroom.

Gender   ( ) F   ( ) M   Age: _____

1. What is your opinion on the implementation of table topics developed today?

_____

2. How did you feel at not knowing if you'd be selected to participate?

_____

3. Were you selected to answer a question?

( ) Yes   ( ) No.   (If not, go to question # 7).

4. How did you feel when called to talk?

_____

5. Did you have problems in completing the time of participation required?

( ) Yes   ( ) No

6. If so, specify what kind of problem.

_____

7. If you didn't participate this time, would you like to be selected in the future?

Yes ( )   No ( )   Why? _____

LAST DAY

The implementation of *table topics* as a technique to develop the speaking ability in university students

Dear student:

This instrument intends to know your opinion after having participated in the different sessions of table topics. Check the option you feel more identified with.

Gender   ( ) F   ( ) M   Age: _____

1. Did you participate as a *table topics speaker*?

No ( )   Yes ( )   Once ( )   ( ) between 2 and 5 times

2. Do you consider that after the implementation of table topics:

( ) your ability to express yourself orally improved
( ) your ability to express yourself orally is the same as before
( ) your ability to express yourself orally got worse

3. Besides oral expression, did you notice any improvement, as minimum as might seem, in any other aspect? You can check more than one option.

( ) fluency
( ) impromptu speaking
( ) public speaking
( ) reduction of language fillers (*hum, huh, eh,* etc)
( ) other. Specify: _____

4. As sessions progressed, how did you feel at knowing you could be selected to speak?

5. What was your favorite part of table topics?

( ) the activity as a whole
( ) huh counter
( ) the word of the day
( ) the impromptu factor –not knowing the question or who this might be directed to-
( ) all of the above
( ) Other: _____

6. What was your least favorite?

( ) the activity as a whole
( ) huh counter
( ) the word of the day
( ) the impromptu factor –not knowing the question or who this might be directed to-
( ) all were pleasant
( ) Other: _____

7. Would you like to develop this activity in any future courses?

Yes ( )   No ( )

8. Use the following space to express your opinion freely about the implementation of t*able topics* as a technique to improve oral skills in english students, from your own experience. You can add recommendations for its implementation in the future.

Thank you!

Appendix II

Instrument used to evaluate the effectiveness of Toastmasters' techniques on group B students at the end of the process.

Dear student:

This instrument intends to know your opinion after having participated in the different sessions in which Toastmasters International Club techniques were applied.

Gender ( )   F ( ) M   Age: _____

1. What roles did you have during the session in which Toastmasters techniques were used? (you can choose more than one)

Speaker _____
Table topic speaker ___
Evaluator_____
Table Topics master ___
Grammarian ___
Ah counter_____
Timer _____

2. What was your favorite role and why?

_____
_____

3. Did the participation in this type of activities have some sort of influence in your level of confidence when speaking in public?

Yes _____   No _____   Why? _____

4. Did the participation in this type of activities have some sort of influence in your classmates' level of confidence when speaking in public?

Yes _____   No _____   Why? _____

5. Did the participation in this type of activities have some sort of influence in your English level?

Yes ____   No ____   Why? _____

6. Did the participation in this type of activities have some sort of influence in your classmates' English level?

Yes ____   No ____   Why? _____

7. Which do you consider are the most positive aspects of this type of activities?

_____

8. Would you recommend these activities to other English students?

Yes ____   No ____   Why? _____

9- What would you improve in these activities?

_____

10. Would you use these techniques in your future classes as an English teacher?

Yes ____   No ____   Why? _____

Thank you!