# THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH THE PEDAGOGY OF LARGE GROUPS AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ICT TOOLS

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**Abstract**. The present study collects the data from the research carried out in the Department of Foreign Languages of the National Autonomous University of Honduras from the "Representations of the teachers of English I on the development of oral production" This research aimed to strengthen the competencies of university teachers to innovate in their daily teaching practice. The study focused on teaching oral production in large groups using ICT-mediated tools. The educational intervention implements in four English I section with 50 students per section. The findings show the practice of interaction and oral production from anywhere and anytime, more oral skills practice out of class, development of an authentic language in a real context. The most relevant results have been the achievement of strategies for the development of Oral skills and interaction in the pedagogy of large groups. It also made it possible to carry out an educational innovation that demonstrated that Oral skills can be developed in numerous classes achieving the didactic objectives. The results show that oral skills can be worked both inside and outside the classroom with the guided and didactic use of technological tools for language teaching.

**Key words:** Oral production, large group pedagogy, hybrid classrooms, ICT tools

# EL DESARROLLO DE LA PRODUCCIÓN ORAL A TRAVÉS DE LA PEDAGOGÍA DE GRANDES GRUPOS Y LA IMPLEMENTACIÓN DE HERRAMIENTAS TIC

**Resumen**. El presente estudio recoge los datos de la investigación que se llevó a cabo en el Departamento de Lenguas Extranjeras de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras, a partir de las "Representaciones de los profesores de Inglés I sobre el desarrollo de la producción oral". Esta investigación tuvo como objetivo fortalecer las competencias del profesorado universitario para innovar en su práctica docente cotidiana. El estudio fue enfocado en la enseñanza de la producción oral en grupos grandes y el uso de herramientas mediadas por las TIC. Se aplicó la metodología de investigación-acción. La intervención educativa se llevó a cabo con cuatro secciones de inglés I con un número de 50 estudiantes

por cada sección. Los hallazgos muestran práctica de interacción y producción oral desde cualquier lugar y momento, mayor cantidad de práctica oral fuera de clase, desarrollo de un lenguaje auténtico en un contexto real. Los resultados más relevantes han sido la implementación de estrategias para el desarrollo de la habilidad oral y la interacción en la pedagogía de grandes grupos. Asimismo, permitió llevar a cabo una innovación educativa en la que se demostró que la producción oral se puede desarrollar en clases numerosas logrando los objetivos didácticos. Se evidenció que no solo se pueden trabajar la producción oral dentro del aula de clases sino también fuera de la misma con el uso guiado y didáctico de herramientas tecnológicas para la enseñanza de idiomas.

**Palabras clave:** Producción oral, pedagogía de grandes grupos, clase hibrida, herramientas TIC

## Introduction

Currently, the National Autonomous University of Honduras implements the use of technology to innovate its teaching practices through the Directorate of Educational Innovation and the Executive Directorate of Technology Management, in accordance with the technological programs and competencies set forth in its Educational Model of the IV Reform. Despite significant advances in technology and educational innovation, English teachers in the Department of Foreign Languages still experience limitations that prevent their didactic practice from reaching the development of language skills in their students, especially those concerning oral production.

The teachers of the Language Department of the UNAH are faced each period with overcrowded classes where the development of oral production becomes a challenge for teachers in the area of foreign language teaching. This problem of large language classes is common at UNAH, reaching a number of 50 or more students. Given this situation, the question arises: How can the language teacher involve each of the students to develop oral production in the classroom in a period of time of fifty minutes a day and in a reduced space that prevents mobilization? These factors drastically diminish the achievement of linguistic objectives. The above is even more marked in traditional classroom teaching where oral production has been one of the most neglected competencies in language classes (Cassany, Luna & Sanz, 1994); that is, when teaching grammatical and metalinguistic postulates regarding reading and writing, teachers focus on being able to comply with the contents assigned for the academic period in these areas, and do not always have the time to evaluate oral production individually and offer detailed feedback.

In order to seek new alternatives that allow the development of oral production, a project was conducted with two English I class with about 100 students during the third academic period 2019 at UNAH. This project was carried out in hybrid mode with the implementation of technological tools, specifically Audacity, Vocaroo, Present.me, Thinglink, Youtube, Padlet, WhatsApp, SoundCloud, Zoom integrated into a MOODLE platform on the site tareavirtual.com, through the use of mobile devices. This virtual environment provided the student with the opportunity to develop, in addition to the other language skills (reading, writing and oral comprehension), oral production and interaction. This work by the student was done outside the time and space used in the classroom through the Moodle platform installed in the domain tareavirtual.com. The use of ICTs spontaneously incorporated into the daily lives of students, as in the case of communication through social networks, information search, and installation of applications on their mobile devices, facilitated the implementation of this pedagogical innovation in language teaching with web tools that develop oral production.

### Large group pedagogy

the notion of "large group" pedagogy can be named in different ways: "large groups", "overloaded classes", "overcrowded classes", "large classes", "numerous classes". These designations mark the difficulties associated with teaching them in overcrowded classrooms.

Some authors, when referring to "large groups" in teaching, express that we speak of a large group when, in a given teaching/learning situation, the number of students can become an obstacle to communication, DAH (2002). According to Anzieu and Martin (1997), a large teaching group has between 25 and 50 people. However, for Dioum (1995) a large group is from 45 to 50 students per class. On the other hand, for Peretti (1987) the notion of a large group is so complex that it is not satisfactory to rely solely on the quantitative variable to define it. In addition to the number, it is important, if we want to define the large group, to consider many other variables: age and level of the students, the subject taught, the teaching conditions.

If the aforementioned criteria are taken as valid, in the UNAH, teachers face large groups in each of their classes. Large classes present university teachers with a problem that they have to face with innovative teaching methodologies as well as ingenious evaluation methods. The issue of the pedagogy of large groups was first raised in March 1984 with the APFA (Association of French Teachers in Africa). They decided to meet in a specialized workshop to lay the foundations for reflection on the teaching of French with large classes, a phenomenon that is very common in the vast majority of large African cities. The main objective of the workshop was to find a methodology that would help them solve the problems they faced daily in their classes in relation to the number of students, time, and the space where the educational activity is carried out. In that workshop, teachers highlighted the following objectives for working with large group pedagogy:

- Optimize working time

- Optimizing the workspace

- Optimizing learning for students

- Optimize student interactions

- Allowing the teacher to play his or her role

- Adapt pedagogy to the objective conditions of the educational system

- Help the teacher to better manage his or her class

- Encourage all students, despite their large numbers, to actively participate in learning activities by organizing the class into subgroups with appropriate techniques.

The interest of the Pedagogy of the great essentially relies on teamwork which presents multiple and multiform advantages for the student and the teacher. In addition to the pedagogical difficulties of working in large groups in relation to language teaching,*studies*also show that the time dedicated to oral practice in the classroom is insufficient, since the amount of time necessary for students to develop oral skills is not provided (Donato and Brooks, 2004), (Flewelling and Snyder, 2005), (Llisterri, 2007), (Polio and Zyzik, 2009). This is due to the emphasis placed on the teaching of grammatical postulates, the valuing of skills related to reading and writing, and to achieve participation of all students. With the current numbers of students per classroom, it is not

possible to dedicate time for everyone to intervene so that the teacher can verify the oral skills of each student. To this we must also add the beliefs of the teaching staff.

### *Hybrid Mode*

An alternative presented by large group pedagogy is to appropriate technology to teach in hybrid or b-learning mode. With the proper implementation of technological tools, the student's oral production is not affected by the limitations of the classroom. The hybrid class offers a number of face-to-face meetings and the rest are conducted online through the use of a virtual platform where students can consult the materials used in class, do their work, and interact with their classmates. Students are responsible for their own learning, and each must learn to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning, which requires participation, since the teacher's role is that of a facilitator of learning, in charge of creating a structured and organized environment, setting goals, planning tasks, selecting materials and assigning adequate time to perform tasks (Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

Graham (2006) presents hybrid learning as the convergence of two archetypal learning environments. On the one hand, there are the traditional face-to-face learning environments that have been used for centuries, on the other, there are the distributed learning environments that have begun to grow and expand exponentially along with the expansion of the technological possibilities of communication and distributed interaction. Graham says that in the past these two learning environments have remained largely separate because they constitute different combinations of methods and media and have targeted different audiences. Currently, and having explored both environments separately, both their benefits and limitations, it is possible to combine them and take advantage of them without having to give up either of them. Dziuban and Hartman (2004) consider that this combination optimizes both environments.

The hybrid class constitutes a possibility of continuity in the teaching-learning process since it can be seen as the expansion and spatiotemporal continuity (face-to-face and non-face-to-face, synchronous and asynchronous) in the learning environment. As Duart puts it, "This formative modality is defined by the intertwined use of presence and non-presence in the classroom. Hybrid environments go beyond the complement of face-to-face with virtuality, and the complement of virtuality with face-to-face, it is about the integration of both modalities.

The hybrid language class provides resources for the student to learn at his or her own pace and time, and if there are deficiencies in this mode of learning, these are improved by adding face-to-face encounters. This is why a new scheme is being developed where the inclusion of face-to-face sessions enhances the mix to further optimize the teaching of languages virtually. (Ferreira and Morales, 2008).

Students are responsible for their own learning, and each must learn to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning, which requires active participation, since the teacher's role is that of a facilitator of learning, in charge of creating a structured and organized environment, setting goals, planning tasks, selecting materials and assigning adequate time to perform tasks (Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

Nieves (1996) conducted research with a group of students in a hybrid classroom and analyzed students' oral and listening skills. When comparing the hybrid class with a face-to-face class, he found superior results in the learning of students in hybrid classes and concludes by saying that they obtain greater fluency in their oral production by having to write more in the virtual field.

There are some advantages to developing oral production in a hybrid classroom with appropriate technological tools.

**Table 1**
*Advantages in developing oral production in a hybrid classroom with appropriate technological tools*

| Professor | Student |
|---|---|
| 1. Time is unlimited<br>2. Participation of all students<br>3. The student does it from any space<br>4. real-life conversational situations<br>5. personalized and instantaneous correction<br>6. Innovative methodologies<br>7. Dynamization in the classroom<br>8. Individualized evaluation<br>9. Facilitates autonomous work<br>10. Motivates the student to learn<br>11. Encourages creativity | 1. There are no time limitations of the sessions in hours and minutes. Students can take their time when speaking, which allows anxiety to be reduced.<br>2. Each student can go at his or her own pace, not dictated by the different learning styles the teacher encounters in the classroom.<br>3. The student's sense of embarrassment when making a mistake is less with a computer than in the classroom. |

Within the hybrid classroom are ICTs that allow the inclusion of new areas in the learning process through the use of Web tools. Today there is a wide variety of technological platforms and applications that favor communicative and collaborative approaches.

The International Commission on Education for the 21st Century of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) states that to learn and work successfully in an increasingly complex, information-rich and knowledge-based society, students and teachers must use ICTs to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world, emphasizing four pillars of learning: learning to live together, learning to know, learning to do and learning to be. Technology stimulates creativity, provides specific solutions for different learning styles and problems, and contributes to globalization.

**Method**

The research carried out is framed within the field of language didactics and, within this field, it is circumscribed to the development of oral production competence and the implementation of technological tools. The study was mixed; the data collection tools were the following: interviews by means of questionnaires administered to English I students of the language department of section 1301. Discussion groups were also held. The questionnaire was designed and validated in the field by specialists to collect information by questioning English language learners. The purpose of this instrument was to learn about the technological resources used by students (computers, mobile devices, internet access). Knowing who could record and publish a video or audio on the Internet. To know what level of English they brought from their public or private schools.

Taking into account the objectives pursued by the pedagogy of large groups combined with the hybrid classroom, the project currently described was carried out with the clear objective of making the most of technological resources for the development of oral production outside the classroom. For this purpose, two morning English I classes were selected. From the first day, the teaching-learning and evaluation methodology was explained to them; it was explained that the class would be conducted in hybrid mode, and it was asked if everyone had access to mobile devices and computers with internet access. They were told what this modality consisted of and the objective of working with it as a project to develop oral production.

Each class was divided into two large groups. One group would come to the classroom for two days while the other group worked on the virtual platform. The next two days alternated. Each group was divided into subgroups of 5 members who made video and audio presentations in which they simulated real situations of everyday life, especially related to the descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference A1 level (greeting, introducing themselves, introducing others, talking about themselves, their daily activities, among others). A WhatsApp group was created to assist students in real time with any concerns students might have and to send some assignments through this same medium and maintain communication. This group was enormously helpful as there was help from the students.

In the first week of class the students were socialized with the page tareavirtual.com, website with which they would work, then the students were trained in the different web tools (Moodle, Audacity, Vocaroo, Present.me, Thinglink, Youtube, Padlet, WhatsApp, SoudCloud), and Zoom. Training in these tools was done with guided work in the language lab, then put into practice with group work, using mobile devices to record audio and video, using computers to edit them, and then publishing these productions. The primary objective of this educational intervention was to put into practice the applications of technological tools that favor the acquisition of oral production.

At the end of this project in the language class for the development of oral production with the use of technological tools, a previously designed questionnaire was requested to validate the hypothesis if the technological tools contributed to the development of oral production in the language class. The data collected were of mixed order. Basically, the questionnaire aimed to collect information on the availability and ability to use the Internet by students, to obtain percentages of how many students owned mobile devices, or computers with Internet access, the time spent using the Internet, their impressions on the use of web tools that were implemented in their language class. This questionnaire was available on the internet to be filled out by each student who took the class. The questionnaire was filled out by all the students who took the class (99 students), and the methodology for data analysis was mixed.

Prior to the implementation of this project, first, several technological resources were explored to make sure that they could be used to develop oral production in e-learning. These tools included: Moodle, Vocaroo, Soundcloud, Youtube, Thinglink, Presentme, Padlet and Whatsapp.

The educational use of these tools was previously piloted in an innovation project carried out in the teacher training course "From Theory to Practice" given by the Department of Educational Innovation.

**Table 2**

*Role of tectological tools and activities developed for the practice of oral production*

| Technological tool | role | activity |
|---|---|---|
| TareaVirtual.com | Mastery to which students would attain. | If used. Students had no difficulty gaining access. |
| Moodle | Virtual platform where the course would be installed with user access and password for each student with their respective resources and activities. | If used.<br>Each student used his or her UNAH account number as a user. |
| Audacity | Platform for audio editing and recording | If used.<br>The students used *Audacity* to conduct dialogues in pairs where they had to introduce themselves to each other, and then send the audio via WhatsApp with the goal of everyone listening to each other and giving feedback. |
| Vocaroo | Web site for online audio recording. | If used.<br>The students used Vocaroo to record the alphabet while spelling their name, to say the numbers and their age. Once they recorded the message, they posted it to the tareavirtual.com website where the teacher reviewed it and gave them oral feedback on pronunciation. It should be added that this is a resource that offers very good possibilities for constant communication with students. |
| SoundCloud | Site to store audios and share them through links or integration. | If used.<br>Unlike Vocaroo, it allowed to store files for a longer period of time. |
| Youtube | Site to publish videos for sharing and embedding in other sites. | If used.<br>The English I class created its own YouTube channel for students to upload their presentations either individually, in pairs or in groups. Each student recorded his or her daily routine, then published it. We all had access to the presentations, students could hear each other learn from their own mistakes and from each other. |
| Thinlink | To publish interactive images with integrated audio and video. | Used.<br>Thinglink to talk about family, students presented a picture of their family and described each of their family members through audio. |

| Introduce me to | To make Powerpoint presentations online | Students were asked to make a presentation describing a favorite character and then uploaded it to the site, and the other students commented on each presentation. |
|---|---|---|
| Padlet | Interactive walls | Here we worked with the theme of countries and nationalities, the students elaborated a mural where each one contributed a little bit of each country about their customs, typical dishes, language. Here they worked in small groups to carry out the activity and then presented it in a single group. |
| WhatsApp | Social network for type communication, text, image, video, audio. | If used, especially to maintain communication with the group. Although it allows audio and video sharing, it was preferred to integrate them into Moodle for grading purposes. |
| Zoom | It is a free to use application. It works as a means of communication through the Internet. It allows chat, call and video call sessions. | Allowed the participation of up to 500 students |

All the tools used are free and easy to use, they facilitated communication, student participation allowing connection and relationship with people regardless of physical location, time, or number of students in a context characterized by openness, knowledge sharing, social networking and collaboration.

It should be noted that today's platforms include tools for audio recording. There are very advanced components for speech production that include real-time conversation and audio chats.

Researchers such as (Blake, 2008; Blake and Zyzik, 2003; Donaldson and Haggstrom, 2006; Salaberry, 2000) agree that virtual language teaching through the Internet offers a good learning environment, with advantages such as flexible scheduling and accessibility to study materials. Creating oral production tasks to be carried out virtually allows the student to speak without the limitations that are present in a face-to-face classroom. There are a number of advantages:

1.  There are no time limitations of the sessions in hours and minutes. Students can take their time when speaking, which allows anxiety to be reduced.
2.  Each student can go at his or her own pace, not dictated by the different learning styles the teacher encounters in the classroom.
3.  The student's sense of embarrassment when making a mistake is less with a computer than in the classroom.

## Results

This project implemented strategies of large group pedagogy for the development of oral production and interaction that allowed for an educational innovation in which it was demonstrated that it is possible to work with large classes and achieve the didactic objectives, in the case of languages specifically the development of oral skills not only inside, but mostly outside the classroom with the guided and didactic use of technological tools in language teaching.

The implementation of technological tools made it possible to develop a transversal learning process (languages-technology), which at the same time made it possible to learn technical technological language.

The students were able to develop autonomy, thus working on one of the competencies suggested by the educational model of the UNAH. This in turn allowed for more time to be spent practicing oral proficiency outside of class. The work was more dynamic and interactive for the students, who became more active agents in their learning. This work outside the classroom allowed for co-help, and co-evaluation.

In terms of oral production, the acquisition of authentic competencies in a real context was achieved. By taking place outside the classroom, barriers of time and fear of speaking in front of the class were broken down. There was more time to practice, and feedback.

In terms of large group pedagogy, it was achieved: Optimize work time, optimize work space, optimize learning for students, optimize student interactions; on the other hand, help the teacher to better manage his class and the division of labor to be able to attend small groups effectively.

## Discussion and conclusions

A hybrid classroom with the right tools provides opportunities that a traditional classroom cannot. They can increase student motivation and also foster students' creativity and learning styles.

The tasks proposed for the development of oral production led to self-criticism. This is because the student can analyze his own learning process from small activities.

The use of technological tools promotes the student's autonomous work in oral skills. It does not depend on time or on the physical and synchronous presence of the teacher.

ICTs allow the inclusion of novel areas in the learning process through the use of tools.

ICTs produce a change in which the center of learning is located in the learner. The user becomes the organizer of his or her own learning process in which he or she plans his or her own objectives, manages and even evaluates this progression thanks to the autonomy provided to the user by ICT.

The teaching of a language and its efficiency depends partially on the ability to understand the methodology being used and the effects it can have on the students and

their needs. If, on the one hand, the student's primary need is to communicate orally, then opportunities must be provided for the student to develop this skill, focusing on language as a means of communication, with the purpose that the student has something to say when he or she needs to say it.

On the other hand, the student must be guided to seek his own growth as a learner of the language and his own opportunities, to be aware of his responsibility in this instruction process and to develop autonomy, since it is he who will receive the benefits of this learning process.

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