Trabajo de investigación presentado como requisito parcial para

optar al título de:

Licenciada en Lenguas Extranjeras

Ángela María Quiroz Tabares

Universidad de Antioquia

Escuela de Idiomas

El Carmen de Viboral, Colombia

2023

Opportunities and Challenges that the use of Universal Design for Learning Brings to the Enhancement of Fourth Graders' Speaking Skill at a Public Institution in Rionegro - Antioquia

Ángela María Quiroz Tabares

School of Languages, Universidad de Antioquia

Teaching Practicum and Research Advisor

Natalia Arias Patiño

Magister in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

Thesis Advisor

Carolina Herrera Carvajal

Magister in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

El Carmen de Viboral

June 2023

Abstract

This action-research aimed to analyze challenges and opportunities that the use of Universal Design for Learning can bring to the enhancement of fourth graders' speaking skill. It was conducted in a public school in Rionegro, Antioquia with 20 fourth graders. Action strategies included presenting students' multiple means of representation of the content, engagement and action and expression by means of stations. Data gathering instruments included teacher's journal, surveys, interviews, and students' artifacts. Findings referred to opportunities related to Vocabulary and Syntax growth through Multiple Means of Engagement and the Creation of Cooperating Work through Action and Expression. Moreover, findings showed challenges related to Students' not Progressing in Speaking Skill and the Students' Ages as an Obstacle for Knowing what to Choose when Options were given.

Keywords: Universal Design for Learning, speaking skill, vocabulary, syntax, phonetics.

Título en español: Oportunidades y retos que el uso del Diseño Universal de Aprendizaje aporta a la mejora de la competencia oral en estudiantes de cuarto grado.

Degree requirement

This action research project is submitted as a requirement to obtain a bachelor's degree in foreign language education (English- French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, El Carmen de Viboral, Colombia.

Acknowledgments

First, I want to express my gratitude to the teachers Natalia Arias and Carolina Herrera, who guided me in this process in the best way and have accompanied me in all the difficulties that I have faced.

Second, I thank my community of three classmates: Kelly, Brenda and Kevin, who have advised me and accompanied me in this process from the beginning and have helped me in everything I have needed.

Third, I feel very grateful to the teachers of the educational institution who have given me their support and welcome. Also, I would like to thank my children without whom this project would have never been possible.

Finally, I feel grateful to myself for not giving up and showing me that it was possible to change something and learn many things from this process.

Table of Contents

Preface

I am a student of foreign languages teaching program from a public university in Antioquia, Colombia. I am a teacher interested in analyzing the advantages and challenges that Universal Design for Learning must enhance oral skills. The desire for this research arose from my interest in understanding and respecting the differences in each world within the class by means of providing students with different ways to present the content, to motivate them, and to present what they learn. All this to have a meaningful learning in English from an early age, they can relate to and feel comfortable with. This research study was carried out from August 2022 to June 2023. As a pre-service teacher, I conducted the project in a public school in Rionegro, Antioquia and I was assigned to observe a group of 20 fourth graders. This project is aimed primarily at teachers seeking to implement new strategies for a more meaningful and valuable learning process for each student in learning English as a Foreign Language.

Ángela María Quiroz Tabares

Rionegro, Antioquia, June, 2023

Description of the Context

The institution where this action research project was carried out was a co-educational public school located in "El Tablazo," Rionegro, Antioquia. This school's mission is to promote the integral and inclusive education of students, to develop competencies in basic skills, citizenship and labor skills that allow the formation of socially and ecologically conscious people who project themselves and participate in the development of their context. As for its vision, the school wants to be recognized as an educational organization that allows the integral development, human quality, respect, and tolerance hence, from their being and doing, they contribute to the industrial and touristic development of the region, valuing and protecting their social, natural, and technological environment.

Concerning the class, it was a fourth-grade English class that takes place five hours per week. The main guidelines for the development of the objectives, contents and competences for the school year are based on the Basic Learning Rights (Derechos Básicos de Aprendizaje) by Ministerio de Educación Nacional (MEN). The class was based upon lexical syllabus and the methodology was vocabulary, translation based and repetition, which involved activities such as looking up words of different subjects in the dictionary.

Participants in this study included 20 students and my cooperating teacher (CT). The students were 8 girls and 12 boys, whose ages ranged from 8 to 11 years old. Most students' economic situation was average, students were usually the children of butlers, and three of them were Venezuelans. They liked to learn English with internet games and outdoor games and in teamwork as alone activities (Student's Interview, March 06, 2023). Regarding my CT, she holds a bachelor's degree in Elementary School with Emphasis in English (CT, personal communication, March 11, 2023).

The major problem that I observed in this class was that English proficiency level was basic and students' exposure to English pronunciation patterns and speaking situations was limited.

Statement of the Problem

This fourth-grade students did not have the opportunity to produce and communicate simple sentences orally in the English language, for the same reason, children could not develop their potential to communicate in the foreign language and they did not have the opportunity to express ideas and thoughts verbally. Not practicing the oral skills can hinder their capacity to communicate orally later in their academic life.

As Chomsky (2018) explains in the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) "a child does not need to be taught language formally, but simply needs to be exposed to adult speech" (Chomsky, 2018, p. 5). Taking this into consideration, if children are not immersed in the language they are intended to learn, they cannot develop their potential to communicate in the language. Consequently, children would not be given the opportunities

to develop their capacity to naturally learn from imitation and repetition. Contrastingly, if children have enough input to imitate and repeat, they will end up producing the target language, thus, their potential is naturally enhanced.

Adding to the above, as children advance in their school years, it will be more difficult to develop oral skills if they only focus on copying and reading at this initial stage. To illustrate this, students only learn vocabulary through the use of the dictionary, i.e., by translating words. In addition, they repeat the pronunciation of each word many times but then forget it easily (Classroom observation, February 2023). Accordingly, if students are given choices to learn and practice vocabulary and pronunciation and produce simple sentences to express their own ideas through different activities, considering their preferences and learning styles; the changes of them to produce orally in a more significant manner are higher.

Finally, the excellent opportunity to make the most of students' eagerness to share experiences, feelings and ideas is wasted if oral activities are unused. As evidence, during all the classes observed and taught, I witnessed students approaching me and using time of the class to express how they feel and share experiences with me and their classmates, yet they expressed ideas in Spanish (Class observation journal and teacher journal). Considering that it is a language class, children should be given the possibility to voice their ideas, thoughts, and experiences as a motivating factor to use the language they are learning and produce spoken language.

In conclusion, children need to develop their potential to acquire a foreign language through imitation and repetition. In like manner, oral skills are something they need to

develop from an early age to avoid communication problems at higher levels. Additionally, children and any human being need to express their ideas and thoughts to others orally as well. In this context the employment of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) locates the problems of access to education with the design and presentation of educational products, rather than in the students, and is a way to think about planning classrooms and lessons in ways that do not just fix barriers but remove them. (Michela, 2018, p.3). This approach allows students to face the content in diverse ways giving them more involvement with the language and possibilities to choose among different options. Furthermore, they start gaining some awareness about their learning styles at this early age and use the language to express ideas. Regardless of whether children have a specialized English teacher, children could acquire speaking skills through many other strategies that also suit their needs and preferences.

<div align="center">**Theoretical Background**</div>

In the following theoretical background, I introduce information about Universal Design for Learning as a method to increase children's speaking skill in English. Firstly, I will give a definition of the concept of UDL within education. Secondly, I present the three principles that support UDL. Thirdly, I will explain how this teaching method can be implemented in the classroom. Fourthly, I provide some advantages and challenges of using this approach to the teaching of English. Fifthly, I provide a definition of Speaking skill and the four dimensions that constitute oral communication. Finally, I link UDL to the development of oral proficiency in English.

The first concept on which this research is based is Universal Design for Learning. This method, within the teaching of a second language, focuses primarily on providing opportunities for each learner to acquire meaningful language learning according to his or her way of learning. To expand the definition of this concept, according to Commonwealth of Learning (COL) (2021)

> UDL is a set of principles for curriculum development that aims to give all students equal opportunities to learn. UDL provides a blueprint for creating instructional goals, methods, materials, and assessments that work for everyone—not a single, one size-fits-all solution, but rather flexible approaches that can be customized and adjusted for individual needs. (p.18)

For a better understanding "this approach is based on goals of successful learning for every student, which are pursued through differentiation of education and practices of joint learning" (Swanson, Ficarra, & Chapin, 2020; Van Boxtel & Sugita, 2019, as cited by Galkienė et al., 2021).

The UDL framework is based on the following three principles: Multiple means of representation to support the ways in which we assign meaning to what we see and recognize, multiple means of action and expression to support strategic ways of learning and multiple means of engagement to support affective learning (Israel et al., 2014). The first principle consists of the 'what' of learning. Some students require different ways in which content should be presented to them either because of disabilities or because they grasp information more quickly with specific visual or auditory tools. Giving students different options allows them to better connect the information and make it understandable to all. The

second principle is the 'how' of learning. Students similarly need different means to express

what they know. Students with disabilities have different ways of expressing themselves

than other students. Some may feel better at speaking and others at writing, etc. In addition,

each student expresses himself or herself at a different pace, in a different order, and with

different strategies. The third concept is the 'way' of learning. Like the previous two

principles, students are not engaged and motivated with their process in the same way. They

all have different ways of working, whether individually or in teams, and there are many

variations that can influence their behaviors. It is necessary to provide options for

participation where everyone feels engaged and motivated (CAST, 2011). To summarize, an

effective way to implement universal learning design is based on presenting the content

being taught in different ways, providing them with different ways to demonstrate what they

have learned, and motivating them according to their preferences and tastes.

According to the three principles mentioned above, three areas assigned to the

realization of each principle were created where the teacher can find ideas to adapt to the

specific cases of their students. The process of education starts with the formulation of a

clear goal that determines the intended goal. Considering the differences in students'

cognitive processes, the UDL approach requires a flexible goal, which allows attaining it

with the help of various learning ways and strategies of assignment solving. Following

these guidelines, the teachers model education based on neurocognitive processes

(Galkienė, 2021).

Regarding the strategies that can be used The Teaching Excellence in Adult Literacy

(TEAL) Center (2020) explained the importance of improve ways of delivering instruction

through a variety of materials such as songs, games, teamwork, videos, podcasts, PowerPoint presentations, teaching materials, etc. Similarly, give instructions both orally and in writing to engage learners aurally and visually. In addition, you can teach a variety of learning styles and incorporate movement into learning. Finally, provide flexible assessment opportunities allow students to demonstrate their learning in multiple ways, including visual and oral presentations, rather than just written assessments.

Similarly, according to Commonwealth of Learning (COL) (2021) some of the advantages of the implementation of UDL into the classroom are that it "reduces or eliminates the need for individual accommodations, increases flexibility and options for all students and helps focus attention on concrete and specific course outcomes" (p. 28).

On the other hand, Smith (2004) also mentions that the use of UDL allows all students, with or without disabilities, to benefit from the different teaching methods used by teachers. For example, teachers can start to identify students' strengths, needs and preferences through brain networks; adjust for curriculum barriers by maximizing multiple options of expression and engagement and finally, recognize the benefits of technologies to present content in different ways.

Lastly, the same author mentioned above adds that "Universal Design for Learning requires that instruction and assessment approaches are flexible enough to automatically include alternatives, making them accessible and appropriate for individuals with diverse backgrounds, varied learning approaches, abilities and disabilities" (p.26).

On a different note, the second concept on which this research focuses is students' oral production, specifically speaking skills. According to Ruiz (2019) "speaking is

considered as one of the most important abilities to develop in a second language acquisition process" (p. 7). In the same order she explains that "to achieve real fluency, we need to speak and be able to communicate in different situations" (p. 7). Finocchiaro (1994) argues that "childhood is the most favorable period to lay a firm foundation for oral fluency" (as cited by Tunku Mohani et al., 2015, p. 5). Moreover, the Ministry of Education (2012) informs that "the overall aim of the English Language Curriculum is 'to equip pupils with basic language skills to enable them to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts that is appropriate to the pupils' level of development" (as cited by Tunku Mohani et al., 2015, p. 3).

Complimenting on oral skills in children Peck (1978, as cited by Ruiz, 2019) explains that teachers should consider the needs and interests of the children so that meaningful lessons are presented as children tend to learn more through songs and stories and a variety of materials such as crafts, puppets, costumes, etc. should be used. Children need to use language for authentic communication even more than adults.

Regarding the 'Dimensions of Oral Communication', Lazaraton (2001) explains that "since the appearance and spreading of the communicative approach in language teaching and learning, developing speaking abilities as contextualized socio-cultural activities have become more and more important in the classroom" (as cited by Ruiz, 2019, p. 15). In fact, she proposes that there are four dimensions that constitute oral communication:

1. Grammatical competence that includes syntax, orthograph, phonology and vocabulary.

2. Sociolinguistic competence refers to the different rules of interaction and social meanings.

3. Discourse competence is composed by the coherence and cohesion of sentences and texts.

4. Strategic competence connotes diverse compensatory strategies to be used in difficult situations. Learners' ought to cultivate and work out all these abilities to achieve a high oral level in English combining both fluency and the traditional accuracy. (pp. 15-16)

As a conclusion, Universal Design for Learning can be seen as an opportunity to increase oral production in children. UDL provides different learning options considering the interests and motivations of the students, and increasing oral skills through this method allows, as Peck (1978) said, to implement different materials always involving the students in the process. Finally, considering the time limit of this research, that the participants were children and that they were beginners learning the target language, I focused only on the grammatical competence that includes syntax, orthograph, phonology and vocabulary; and strategic competence that connote diverse compensatory strategies to be used in difficult situations.

Research Question

What opportunities and challenges can the use of Universal Design for Learning bring to the enhancement of fourth graders' speaking skill at a public institution of Rionegro - Antioquia?

Objectives

General Objective

To analyze challenges and opportunities that the use of Universal Design for Learning can bring to the enhancement of fourth graders' speaking skill.

Specific Objectives

1. To determine the way in which this group of students learn and what they know regarding speaking skill at the beginning of the process and then offer appropriate choices to enhance their learning process.

2. To evaluate speaking skill in different activities considering students' learning styles.

3. To establish what are the opportunities and challenges when UDL is applied in English classes.

Action Plan

To answer the research question of this project, three actions were developed during a period of three academic months. The first action was based on multiple means of standing for the content so that students could interpret, understand, and enjoy each topic in diverse ways and rhythms. Students were able to see different topics through songs, rhymes, poems, stories read-aloud and monologues. The second action was based on multiple means of engagement so that students could have different forms of participation in class where they felt comfortable and motivated. This was done with the help of different games that involved the four skills and that were related to their interests, preferences, and daily life. The third action was based on multiple means of actions and expressions where students were able to show in diverse ways what they had learned during the weeks through

written work, teamwork, participation in games and final oral presentations. In addition, the three actions were reinforced by vocabulary that students could always be using in class, such as complete sentences in English and constant feedback of pronunciation patterns.

Data were collected through memos, focus group, student artifacts, audio recordings, a diagnostic and a final task. Memos were written and coded weekly. Student artifacts were analyzed and corrected. Voice recordings of the diagnostic, groups, and final assignment were transcribed, coded, and analyzed.

Development of Actions

The development of the three actions was based on the three principles of Universal Design for Learning. The first action performed was to show the content of the topics in diverse ways. For example, for each week a separate way of showing the content was used, through songs, rhymes, poems, stories (presented orally) and monologues. In addition, visual aids such as flash cards, examples written on the board, drawings, pronunciation samples and repetitions and acting practice or examples through the body were used in the introduction of each topic. On the other hand, the instructions for each activity were given orally and in writing, verifying that the students understood what was to be done.

For the development of the second action the students had the opportunity to learn the content in diverse ways so that in some of all the activities the students' showed satisfaction of having been able to say complete sentences in English. For example, in several classes we played games that students usually like very much such as 'hot potato', running to point to an object, drawing and then talking about their drawing or acting out

actions and then guessing. These types of games motivated students to take part more during class and to try to learn more of the topics seen in class. A different strategy was an exercise that was very well received by the students, which was to review a topic through stations. In this exercise the students enjoyed it very much since in each station they had different options such as drawing, organizing information, playing on the computer, listening exercises related to the subject matter or talking to me and their classmates in English. For each station there was always a leader, so all students had the opportunity to teach and guide their classmates when they changed stations. In addition, they had the opportunity of working in teams and individually.

Finally, for the third action, students had the opportunity to show what they had learned in unusual ways. On several occasions students just wrote complete sentences describing, for example, their daily routine or their likes and dislikes. On another occasion, students had to do an oral presentation, individually and in pairs, they had the possibility to learn what they wanted to say. Finally, because the students were too embarrassed to go out in front of their peers, the last two oral production activities were one-on-one with me. In these two opportunities the students had time to draw what they wanted to say, then each one individually said some complete sentences orally just by looking at their drawings.

Data analysis

The data was analyzed following the five stages proposed by Burns (2010): collecting the data, coding the data, comparing the data, developing interpretations, and communicating the results. In the first stage, I gathered data collected during the research such as memos, student artifacts, focus groups, students' questionnaire, and audio

recordings. In the second stage, I started to collect codes to convert them into categories and find the repetition of these categories. In the third stage, I compared the data from all the instruments to construct interpretations. Finally, a report was presented with the most recurrent categories during the process which helped to find the opportunities and challenges necessary to answer the research question.

Findings and Interpretations

This study aimed to increase students' oral production through Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The analysis of the data resulted in two opportunities and two challenges. One the one hand, the first opportunity relates to increasing and improving vocabulary and syntax using multiple means of engagement. The second opportunity refers to peer support for oral activities due to the multiple means of action and expression they had. On the other hand, the first challenge was that the students at that age were not yet clear about what to decide and what their preferences were. The last challenge was that not all students made the same progress despite using the three principles of Universal Design for Learning. In the following paragraphs I explain each of the above findings.

Opportunities

Considering Multiple Means of Engagement by means of Stations Increased Students' Vocabulary and Syntax

Data analysis showed that the exercise of practicing the topics through stations, where students could find different activities to practice the language, increased students' vocabulary, and improved syntax of the learned sentences. This increment could be evidenced in the diagnostic activity and in the final task. The diagnosis showed that, "the

students are fully capable of expressing themselves in Spanish, but it was difficult for them to recall or use words in English." (Diagnosis, March 3rd - 6th, 2023). Contrastingly, the final task showed that:

> Most of the students used English all the time to communicate and understand the order of sentences. In addition, almost all students understood what they meant to say in English. They all understood how to say their daily routine in English and how to express their likes and dislikes with verbs, animals, or food. (Final Task, May 02, 2023)
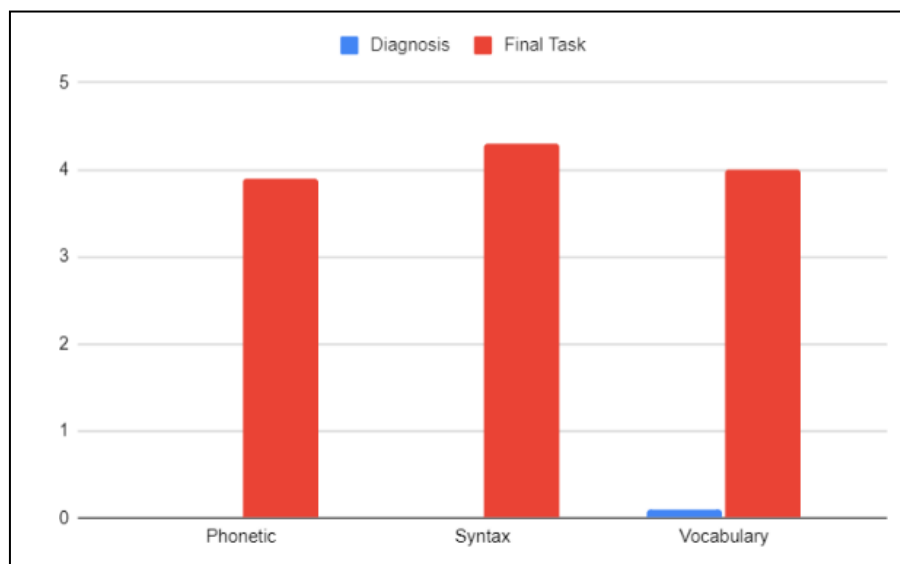
Figure 1

Students' Oral Proficiency Performance in each Presentation
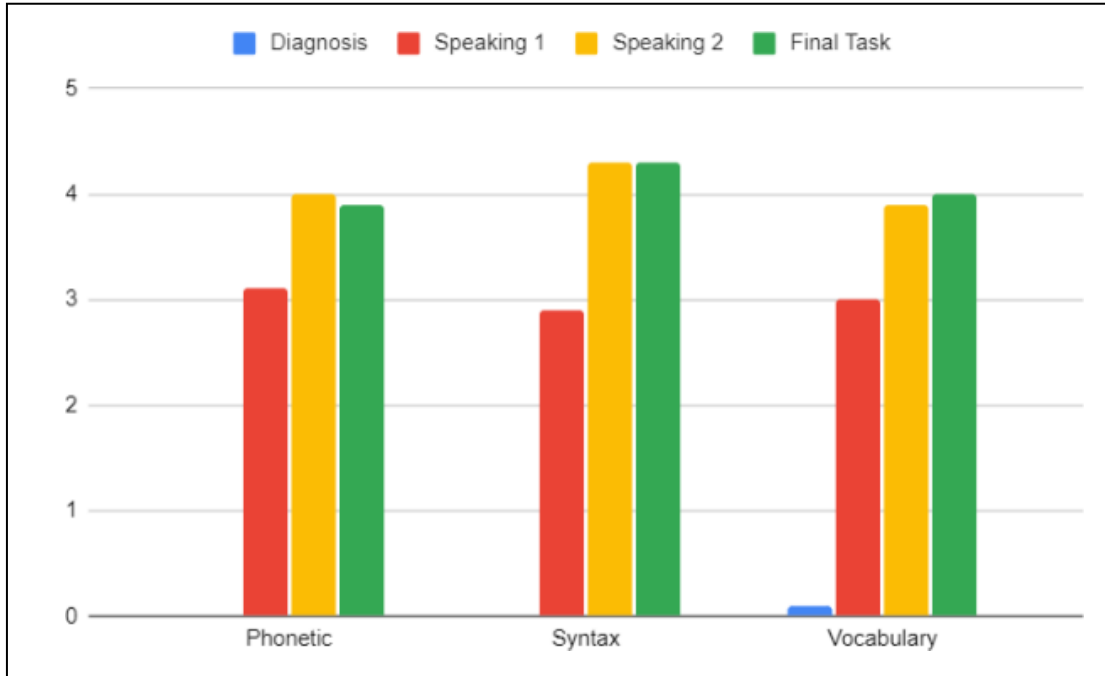
Note. Specific performance of the students in each of the oral presentations of the process in the aspects of vocabulary, syntax, and pronunciation.

Figure 2

Students' Oral Proficiency Performance at the Beginning and End of the Process

Note. General performance of the students at the beginning and at the end of the process.

Moving forward, in one of the classes where stations were used, the students'

performance was the following:

The activity consisted of completing sentences in pairs. In this activity the students

completed sentences very well. The next sentence was to organize the complete

sentences and although some students still had difficulties, they helped each other and

were able to do it. The next one was an online game where they related the image

with the word, in this phase the students finished very quickly and continued playing

again to continue practicing. In the last phase the students said complete sentences

orally and the students identified and understood what their partner was saying.

(Research Memo, April 18th, 2023)

During the interview, students also reported how using stations enhanced their

engagement and language acquisition:

Profesora: ¿Cuál de todas las actividades o juegos te ha gustado más? ¿Por qué?

Alumno 1: Cuando hacíamos cuatro grupos, teníamos que completar palabras en
inglés con el verbo, el pronombre y el complemento.

Alumno 2: Cuando hicimos cuatro grupos, cuando escuchamos, cuando miramos en
el ordenador y las juntamos y ordenamos las palabras.

Profesora: ¿Sentías que tenías opciones dentro de las clases de inglés? Para hacer
los deberes, cómo se presentaban los contenidos, etc.

Alumno 3: Sí, en la actividad de las estaciones, cuando describimos la rutina diaria
o el tiempo libre, podíamos elegir. O con el cuento o la rima[1] (Students' Interview,
May 3rd, 2023).

In sum, the evidence presented above demonstrated that, in fact, offering students

the principle of Multiple Means of Engagement helped them improve their vocabulary and

syntax acquisition in the foreign language. This principle allows language learners to

engage with the language in diverse ways, such as through reading, writing, listening, and

---

[1] Teacher: Which of all the activities or games did you like the most? Why?
Student 1: When we were in four groups, we had to complete words in English with the verb, pronoun and
complement.
Student 2: When we made four groups, when we listened, when we watched on the computer and put them
together and arranged the words.
Teacher: Did you feel you had choices within the English classes? For homework completion, how the
content was presented, etc.
Student 3: Yes, in the activity of the stations, when we describe the daily routine or free time, we could
choose. Or with the story or rhyme. (My translation).

speaking, which can help reinforce their understanding of the language. Overall, Multiple Means of Engagement can help language learners develop a more comprehensive and well-rounded understanding of the language, which can ultimately lead to more effective vocabulary and syntax acquisition (CAST, 2011).

Giving Students Multiple Means of Action and Expression Gave Them the Chance to Help each other to Enhance Speaking Skill

The data collected evidenced that providing students with Multiple Means of Action and Expression opened spaces for students to help each other to improve speaking skill. On separate occasions, I observed students supporting one another providing answers, clues, examples, among others. As evidence of the above, during one of the activities where students had to say a rhyme using the images their classmates where holding, about a daily routine verbs, I could observe that "even if it was only with one word, the student who had each image knew very well what the classmate in front of him had to say, so he helped him with the pronunciation" (Research Memo, March 21st, 2023). In another class, "although it was only an exercise to practice the pronunciation of single words, it was a good exercise because the teams helped each other in pronunciation to win. Several students got a smiley face for their team thanks to good pronunciation" (Research Memo, March 27th, 2023). Then, with respect to the stations, which was a positive thing for them, it was also possible to appreciate how it helped students work better in class, as reported in the memos.

This activity of the stations is working better and better. The leaders always take their leadership position and do their job very well. In addition, since they repeat the

content 4 times, at the end they know very well the topic they had to deal with at the station and help their classmates much more. (Research Memo, April 18th, 2023)

The role of classmates in the enhancement of speaking skill was also evident during the performance of the different speaking activities. For instance, when describing the kinds of food, they prefer and the activities they like to do, I could observe the following.

Everyone always tried to use the pronoun, the words 'like,' 'love,' 'dislike' and 'hate' and the vocabulary to talk about food and actions they perform. The pronunciation of the four words was quite easy for them to remember. However, the pronunciation of some actions was difficult to remember, so some students turned to the students who remembered these words more easily to review and correctly say them in their oral presentation. (Second Speaking activity, April 24th, 2023)

In summary, working in groups and supporting each other could help students enhance speaking skill as providing alternative modalities for expression, "flexible rather than fixed grouping allowed better differentiation and multiple roles, as well as provided opportunities to learn how to work most effectively with others" (CAST, 2011, p. 31). By providing Multiple Means of Action and Expression, an environment was created where students could help each other, practice pronunciation, and reinforce their oral English skills. Teamwork, interactive activities, and repetition of content proved to be effective in improving students' oral production.

Challenges

Having all Students Progress in Oral Production of English Was not Possible despite the Implementation of the Three Principles of Universal Design for Learning

Data collected revealed that despite the implementation of the three principles of Universal Design for Learning, not all students were able to increase their speaking skill in English. Specifically, according to Commonwealth of Learning (COL) (2021) "UDL is a set of principles for curriculum development that aim to give all students equal opportunities to learn" (p. 18). The following pieces of data demonstrate that, although students were given Multiple Means of Representation, Engagement, Action, and Expression, not all of them exhibited improvement. Namely, the goal of having the totality of students improve in their language learning was not met. The first evidence consists of the first speaking activity that the students had telling their daily routine in English. Although it was the first speaking and students were asked to manage little content some others did not do it, as seen in the following reflection from the Speaking Activity

> In general, most students knew how to say their daily routine with the correct order of the sentences and their pronunciation was incredibly good and fluent. However, in this first oral activity there were 3 or 4 students who did not learn all the verbs of the daily routine or confused one verb with another. In addition, they were not able to use complete sentences using the pronoun, verb and complement even though it was always with the pronoun 'I' and even though the complement was only 'in the morning', 'in the afternoon' or 'in the night'. (First Speaking Activity, March 29th, 2023)

During the second oral presentation, where the students had already worked a lot on pronouns and many verbs, through different activities, there were still some students who were not able to say what they liked to do in their free time in English.

> In this second oral activity, most students said what they liked to do in their free time and what foods they liked and disliked. They used complete sentences and the vocabulary worked on in class. However, there were some students who spoke in isolation or only remembered a little food vocabulary. Indeed, there was one student who did not make the presentation because he said he did not know how to say everything in English and only said the sentence: 'I like to play soccer'. (Second Speaking Activity, April 24th, 2023)

During the final task, there were still 2 or 3 students who failed their final oral presentation because they used little vocabulary, their pronunciation was not good, and the order of words was sometimes not correct.

> Most students used English throughout their recent oral presentation, with varying levels of fluency. While many could understand and express themselves well, some found it difficult to speak quickly or use long sentences. Some students still struggled with English communication, as they had trouble remembering what to say, forming complete sentences like their peers, and pronouncing certain words correctly. (Final Task of Presentation Speaking Activities, May 2nd, 2023)

In addition, a comparison between the average that each student scored according to all the grades collected during the process showed that the performance of a few students was low compared to the rest of the group.

Figure 3

Average of each Student Performance in all Oral Activities
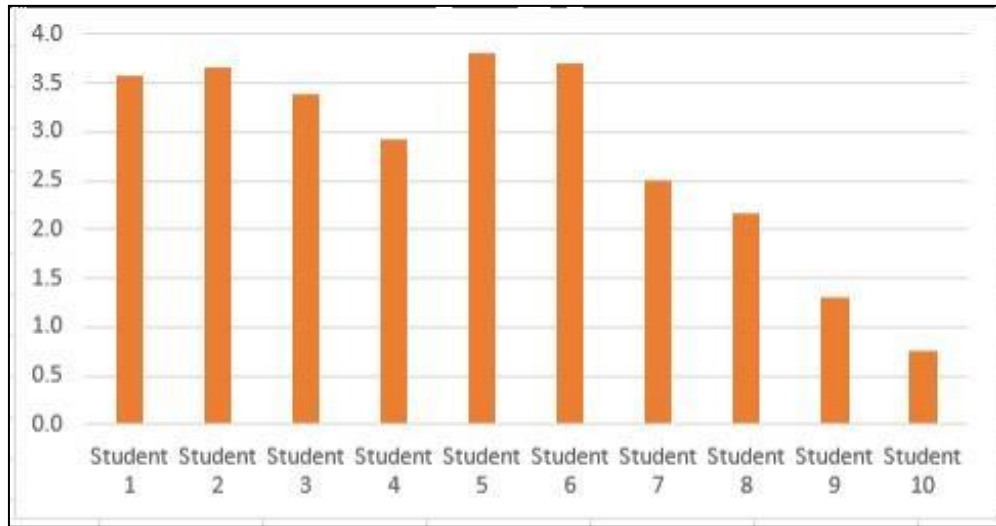
Note. Axis A represents the rating scale to assess student performance and axis B represents the student being assessed.

Hence, although the principles of Universal Design for Learning were applied the results showed that some students still faced challenges in their speaking skill in English. There may be several reasons for this, such as pronunciation difficulties or the need for more individualized support. It is important to continue to evaluate and adjust teaching strategies to address the specific needs of each student and promote further progress in their speaking skill.

Giving Students Different Options Was Challenging at their Age Given that They Were

not very Aware of Their Preferences and Learning Styles

Data showed that students had difficulties both knowing how they learn and

knowing what to choose when given different options, for example, when choosing how to

present what they had learned. First, with respect to their learning styles, different results

were gathered on visual, auditory, and kinesthetic at the beginning and at the end when

surveys were collected.

Figure 4

Comparison of the Learning Styles Questionnaire in Interview 1 and Interview 2

Note. The numbers show the number of faces collected for each item presented in each
visual, auditory, and kinesthetic session.

These results could be since the students identified the way they learn better during

the implementation of Universal Design for Learning; instead, these results could also

suggest that students became more confused about their learning style, despite the

implementation of this model focused on offering students' different means to access and

practice information. It seemed like they were still not clear about which way they learned.

Second, it could be seen that in the initial diagnosis and in the final activity students had trouble knowing what to choose. During the diagnosis I observed that "students were able to choose an oral activity, but they took a very long time to decide, even more, they made their minds on different occasions" (Diagnosis, March 03rd, 2023). Correspondingly, there was not a major change in the Final Task, which made clear that "even though students had different options to present information, for instance a song, rhyme or story; almost all students selected to do a monologue" (Final Task of Presentation Speaking Activities, April 24th, 2023).

In sum, children's ability to appropriately choose among different options during UDL implementation is challenging due to their lack of knowledge about their own preferences and learning styles, feelings of isolation from the variety of options, and the emotional concerns associated with making different choices. This finding highlights the importance of providing additional guidance and support to students so that they can understand their own learning preferences and styles. This would help them make more informed decisions when selecting learning options and maximize their knowledge acquisition process.

Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this research was to analyze what opportunities and challenges were encountered while implementing Universal Design for Learning to increase students' speaking skill. From the analysis of the data, I was able to conclude that the implementation of UDL principles helped students increase their vocabulary and syntax in addition to allowing students to help each other while increasing this skill. Contrastingly, the

implementation of this design was also a challenge because despite increasing all the principles not all students were able to increase their oral production and, the age of the students was seen as an obstacle to give them options since it was difficult for them to decide and know how they learn.

This research project carries two implications for teachers' practices in this context. First, the implementation of the UDL may work better with older students. However, if one wanted to apply the design also with children it would be necessary for students to initially know what their learning styles are in order that they can better understand and know what to choose when presented with options. Second, teachers should be open to exploring and implementing more strategies or methodologies beyond the three principles of UDL, in case these principles fail to engage all students, they can have an extra resource to help all students achieve their learning goals.

Furthermore, for teachers who pursue to implement Universal Design for Learning to increase speaking skill, it is recommended that they also consider how to practice and increase the other three skills in language practice. This is because focusing on increasing only one skill may have consequences in the future, such as students having difficulty writing or understanding readings on the topic they have already worked on. It is necessary then, that students are constantly engaging in all four skills but with the goal of increasing one of them.

Finally, this project provides a starting point in the application of Universal Design for Learning in a foreign language classroom to improve language acquisition. Future research could focus on further investigating the implementation of Universal Design for

Learning within foreign language instruction. This method could be useful to increase vocabulary, grammar, or other language skills as well. Contrastingly, one could see the usefulness of UDL as a method for better classroom management or for a better way for students to be evaluated.

Reflection

Most of my academic process was frustrating for me because I was never sure that teaching was for me. As I began my practicum as an English teacher, I was very nervous and felt that I still had a long way to go to become a good teacher. Also, I thought that working with children would be too challenging for me, however, the practicum gave me a different perspective on all these thoughts. Currently, I feel that it was the best practice I could have had despite all the obstacles. Surely with much more practice I can become a great teacher of English to children.

My experience in the teaching process was very pleasant and I learned incredible things with the children. I discovered along the way different strategies that I could implement according to the needs of the students, and I also learned different strategies for group and time management. The best of all was that I gave knowledge to my students, and I was learning a lot of things about my career at the same time thanks to them. Also, the project that I implemented was something that I would have always wanted my teachers in school to have done.

Regarding the research project, I feel that it was a very organized process. I was able to collect all the information I needed in the established times. Even though the project had so many parts and it been stressful to be implementing the classes and doing the project at the same time, I believe that I would not have been able to complete many things if it had

not been for the collection and analysis of that data. It became evident how much progress

the children made in speaking English and how motivated they were to start each class.

References

Burns, A. (2010). *Collaborative action research for English language teachers.*

Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

CAST. (2011). Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.0. Wakefield, MA:

Author.

Galkienė, A & Individual Authors (2021). *Universal Design for Learning in our classroom.*

Erasmus. https://www.ulapland.fi/loader.aspx?id=3fd297f9-3187-414a-bdc2-

e5f09bb905ed

Institución Educativa Antonio Donado Camacho. (2020). Proyecto Educativo Institucional

(PEI). Rionegro, Colombia

Israel, M., Ribuffo, C., & Smith, S. (2014). Universal Design for Learning:

Recommendations for teacher preparation and professional development (Document

No. IC-7). University of Florida, Collaboration for Effective Educator,

Development, Accountability, and Reform Center.

http://ceedar.education.ufl.edu/tools/innovation-configurations/

Michela, E. (2018). *Universal Design for Learning: Teacher Planning for Technology

Integration.* In A. Ottenbreit-Leftwich & R. Kimmons, The K-12 Educational

Technology Handbook. EdTech Books.

https://edtechbooks.org/k12handbook/universal_design_for_learning

Ministerio de Educación Nacional. (2016). Derechos Básicos de Aprendizaje de Inglés.

Colombia Bilingüe. https://www.englishtimevalle2020.com/wp-

content/uploads/2020/10/DBA-TRANSICIO%CC%81N-Y-PRIMARIA.pdf

Ruiz Nieto, P. M. (2019). *How to motivate and improve the English-speaking skills of*

students of the academy teach & play from a very early age and throughout the

teaching and learning process. [Unpublished master's thesis, Universidad Nacional

Abierta y a Distancia]. Universidad Nacional Abierta y a Distancia Repository.

https://repository.unad.edu.co/bitstream/handle/10596/28020/pmruizn.pdf?sequence

=1&isAllowed=y

Teaching Excellence in Adult Literacy (TEAL). (2010). *Universal Design for Learning.*

https://lincs.ed.gov/sites/default/files/2_TEAL_UDL.pdf

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL). (2021). *Universal Design for Learning.*

https://oasis.col.org/colserver/api/core/bitstreams/3de35508-cd1c-4827-bd41-

abf3948af486/content

Tunku Mohani, T. M. et al. (2015). Developing the Speaking Skill among ESL Elementary

Learners. *The Asian Journal of English Language & Pedagogy, Vol. 3*, p.161-180.

UKEssays. Chomsky's Critical Period for Language Acquisition.

https://www.ukessays.com/essays/english-language/critical-period-for-language-

acquisition-english-language-essay.php?vref=1

UK Essay Experts. UKEssays. (2018). *Chomsky's Critical Period for Language*

Acquisition. https://www.ukessays.com/essays/english-language/critical-period-for-

language-acquisition-english-language-essay.php?vref=1