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*The Effect of the Natural Approach as a Tool to Improve Oral Skills of Intermediate Level Students
at a Private Language Institution During the Second Bimester of 2017*

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ABSTRACT

This investigation entitled “The Effect of the Natural Approach as a tool to Improve Oral Skills of Intermediate Level students at a Private Language Institution During the Second Bimester of 2017” has been intended to evaluate the impact of the Natural Approach in the oral skills of adult students at a private language where the methodology is based on drilling. The activities used by the researcher were: English only, Amazing Race, Memory Card, Role Plays, and Actions Songs.

The researcher has demonstrated veracity on the Natural Approach activities to improve oral skills after applying instruments such as: observation, interview, questionnaires, pre-test, and post-test since the students improved, not only their oral skills but also their confidence when speaking the target language. As an unexpected result, there were no dropouts of participants during the bimester these activities were applied.

Chapter I

Introductory Framework

1.1 Background of the study

As Cooper (2016) points out learning a second language provides many benefits. Recent studies have shown that speaking a second language keeps the brain more active. Furthermore, English keeps the brain more active and facilitates communication when traveling abroad. What is more important, well-known companies around the world started out in countries where English is the first language or does business with these companies; therefore, this language is known as the language of business.

In Costa Rica, the English language has become an important requirement to get a job or apply for a promotion in transnational companies that have businesses in the country. It does not matter what people do for a living, there is always a better chance to find a position if the person is bilingual. That is the reason why many people during their adulthood are interested in learning English as a second language. As a response to that, there are currently many options in the market regarding teaching English to adults, but finding an option that actually fits people's needs is hard. It is common to hear that people quit learning English at language institutes because a lot of grammar is taught, and students feel they cannot actually get to speak. Clearly, students need to be able to understand and write the target language, but what they really find useful for their job is to be able to express neat ideas. They also want to be able to hold meetings and give clear speeches

The goals of learning English have been changing in the past few decades. In the past, students were taught to write and read a second language because that was what they needed, but what students currently want is to be able to hold a meeting in English with native speakers either face to face or over conference calls. Therefore, what teachers need to do in class nowadays is to make their students speak and include activities that better fulfill their students' needs so they can feel more comfortable when first going to an interview and performing at their jobs.

The researcher has been teaching at an English institute for over two years. And it has been very impressive how that institute has grown its population during that time. Actually, it could be said that the growth in population has happened as a consequence of their students' success and their references thanks to their own improvement. However, as any other teaching program, it has its strengths and weaknesses. What the investigator pursues then is to make one of these weaknesses a strength for the program to be even more successful.

This institute is a private language school that has been operating worldwide for about twenty-five years. This language institute provides English courses in the morning, afternoon, and at night, from Monday to Thursday. On Friday, they offer classes in the morning and on Saturdays, they offer classes in the morning and in the afternoon. Therefore, most students are adults who work and take the English course to either learn the language or improve it. The language school also has students who are teenagers and go to high school on weekdays, so they take English courses on Saturdays.

Most of the people who study there live in San Jose or Heredia. Some of them work and study at the same time. There is not a specific age to be able to study at this

institute; besides, there is a program for kids, but at the moment that program is only taught in private lessons since there is not enough demand of students for groups to be made.

This private institution has its own textbooks. There are six books to guide students through the process of learning English. Students are considered advanced students once they start the third book.

Each book has sixty lessons that have been designed to be taught in one hour. The institute also has its own audio exercises for the students to practice their listening skills. They have two types of courses: intensive and semi-intensive. If the students decide to take semi-intensive classes, they go to class three hours once a week, either on Friday or Saturday, but if the students decide to take the intensive mode, they have to go two hours twice a week. On the semi-intensive model, the book would be the guide for the following eight months, in which students would complete two or three lessons every session, and the sublevels last two months. On the other hand, the courses that students attend twice times a week last only six months and students work on one or two lessons each session.

The first one hundred and twenty lessons of the syllabus which correspond to the first two books are based on drills from the Situational Language Teaching Approach and the Audiolingual Method. This means that students attend classes for one year to perform drills mostly. That surprisingly seems to work for some students because once they get to more advanced levels, they are able to communicate; but in many other cases, they do not feel ready to convey a prompt message. The feedback the researcher has gotten from the students is that they need other kind of activities in order to feel more comfortable when

speaking in the target language; hence, they do not get bored of performing drills for one year.

The investigator has also noticed that students drop out the most during the intermediate level which is the time of the program when they have been drilling for over six months. Students by this time enunciate that they are tired of “repeating”; therefore, they demand exercises that allow them to express themselves because “they feel like they are not learning.” The size of the groups when the program gets started is of fourteen students and, on average, only half of them finish the first year.

Although this institute has succeeded in many countries including Costa Rica, it is evident that extra activities need to be added to the intermediate level in order to decrease school dropout during that level and to better prepare the students for prompt speech, since they will need this skill at the advanced levels and once the whole program is finished.

Based on that, the investigator has decided to apply activities from a specific approach in order to measure how successful these activities can be among students of the intermediate level. The researcher then intends to add activities from the Natural Approach in the classroom experience for the sake of determining whether those activities help the students of the intermediate level achieve their goals since drilling is apparently not enough.

1.2 Research question

The researcher has been evaluating different options on how to improve strategies in the classroom in order to improve the oral skills of the students, so they do not feel like they are only repeating after the teacher. Many questions arose when thinking on how to improve oral skills. Then, after reading about each approach to teach English as a foreign

language, the research question of this investigation was established. According to Duke University (2008), a research question must guide an investigation, and it should be about something the researcher knows and is interested in (para.1). The Natural Approach was chosen since it is a younger approach compared to the one being used at the institute. The following is the research question of this thesis: What are the effects of the Natural Approach on the oral skills of an intermediate level group at a private language institution during the second bimester of 2017?

1.3 Purpose and significance of the study

There are many reasons why international companies decide to invest money in a country, but definitely the English proficiency of the population is taken into account when making the decision of operating here or not. According to Arce (2016) our country has a low level of English as study by Education First showed in 2015. Costa Rica is considered a low proficiency country getting a score of 50.53 out of 100 (para.1). Galan (2016) mentions an investigation must set out the reasons for the usefulness and applicability of the results of the study, the objective importance of analyzing the facts they constitute, and the possibility of arriving at logical conclusions. Regarding this investigation, the researcher thinks that people who have decided to teach English must get involved somehow on this issue. Teachers should not assume that it is only the government's responsibility to improve Costa Ricans level of English. Researching in order to get conclusions about what activities can be applied in the classroom in order to make students communicate in the target language is a way the researcher has found to contribute to improve the level of English of our country, and definitely, by improving this Costa Rica can attract more companies to feel more positive about running their

businesses here. The consequences of having more transnational companies in our country are obvious. Costa Rican economy is going to be moved and the current unemployment rate will decrease.

Providing teachers with more and better resources to guide students when learning English is one of the main purposes of this study. The private language school where this investigation is taking place has been already teaching English in Costa Rican for several years. It currently has over 800 students, but the researcher has noticed a gap in the intermediate level. The researcher then will perform specific activities in order to make the process from beginner to advanced level a smoother and more successful path. Making this process a more successful one will help to improve those statistics about the English level in our country.

Teachers must always be updated and prepared to improve the learning-teaching experience. Therefore, teachers should be always investigating on methods to better fit their population needs. Evidently, the main aspiration of students when they start taking an English course is being able to speak. The researcher suggests that teachers must not stick to the book provided by the institute since this is not being enough for students to accomplish their goals. Students need to be able to fluently talk to a native American speaker in an English only environment when they get to the third book, and many are dropping out before getting there because they are complaining about “repeating a lot” even they feel frustrated once they get to the advanced level

The first and the second books are based on drills from the Audiolingual Method and the Situational Language Teaching. Now the researcher wants to introduce new specific activities during the class so students can also practice activities from the Natural

Approach. From this investigation results, teachers are going to be guided on what activities can be used after performing the drills. Testing the impact of the Natural Approach on oral skills will allow teachers to make decisions on using or not these activities at the institute.

This study aims to help the teacher and the student providing them with better tools to face real life situations that can be brought in the teaching-learning process. This study is significant because it is going to provide intermediate teachers with activities that will guide them when teaching the intermediate level on what activities can be used from the Natural Approach. According to the facts exposed before, the program at this language school is very friendly, but what the investigator seeks is to define that path between beginners and advanced students considering that intermediate students most of the times are not fully prepared to perform speaking activities at the advanced level or they simply drop out.

This investigation also has the purpose of determining how the affective filter can impact the student's performance, so during the application of the activities the affective filter will be monitored in order to analyze what students and teacher feel about it.

Learning a foreign language is a big achievement lot of people in our country currently have in mind. The issue is that in many cases students want to learn a foreign language but it is really hard for them to actually do it. Nowadays, it is easy to find students who want to learn English because they have to, instead of because they like it. So the researcher will investigate how a low affective filter can help students speak fluently. Sometimes, students even express they do not like the language and it is really stressful for them to speak the target language.

There will be specific strategies that can be applied by the teacher in order to lower the affective filter. Once the interest of the student is accomplished, then the acquisition of the language will be a smooth process in which the students are willing to enjoy the process until they can speak English fluently.

1.4 Objectives of the investigation

1.4.1 General objective

- To evaluate the impact of the Natural Approach on oral skills of intermediate level students at a private language institution during the second bimester of 2017

1.4.2 Specific objectives

- To identify the problems students face when performing oral skills
- To apply activities from the Natural Approach in order to improve oral skills
- To analyze how activities of the Natural Approach can help students communicate in a more accurate way

1.5 Limitations of the study

While working on this investigation, the researcher might find some limitations. As mentioned by Galan (2010) once the research is justified, it is necessary to raise the limitations within which it should be carried out. Not all studies have the same limitations. Each investigation is different and particular. Research projects can have limitations of time, territory, and resource constraints. Other limitations may be information or access to it or even inaccessibility to the population. The researcher must expose the limitations of the project in order to facilitate its feasibility.

In this case the main limitation the researcher might come across with is size of the groups. At this private institute, the biggest groups have fourteen students; therefore, the researcher will work with two groups at the same time. Besides, since teachers rotate every four months, it may happen that the researcher does not teach intermediate levels during the second bimester of 2017. In this case the researcher will work with groups at intermediate levels that are being taught by the researcher's co-workers. In case the researcher does not work there in 2017, there is a backup group that the researcher already has at a public high school. This group also needs to improve the oral skills and the activities from the Natural Approach can be applied.

Chapter II

Theoretical Framework

This chapter covers the five more relevant previous investigations related to this study found by the researcher. Also, it presents the most important theories on which this investigation will be based. The Theoretical Framework, as Barrantes (2007) mentions, has a main objective which is to locate the research among existent theories in order to specify in which current of thought the investigation is going to be written so that the researcher has a complete background to solve and achieve the general and specific objectives.

In the present chapter, the reader will find earlier investigations by Troitiño, D. M., & Hernández, A in 2015 named “Propuesta de actividades para el desarrollo de la expresión oral en inglés en la Escuela de Energía y Minas”; then, the investigation from Nirmawati in 2015 entitled “Improving Students’ Speaking Skills through Speaking Board Games of Grade VIII of Smp N 13 Yogyakarta in the Academic Year Of 2013/2014”. Besides, and investigation by the Centre for Modern Languages and Human Sciences, University Malaysia Pahang in 2010 which is entitled “English Communicative Events and Skills Needed at the Workplace: Feedback from the Industry.” The fourth investigation is by Temerova in 2007 “How to improve students’ communicative skills”. And the last one by Oradee in 2012 “Developing Speaking Skills Using Three Communicative Activities (Discussion, Problem-Solving, and Roleplaying).” Then, the main theories of this investigation are going to be organized into three sections: Language acquisition, Natural Approach, and Oral Skills.

2.1 Antecedents

In contradiction to the past, what students want to do nowadays is to be able to speak the target language since they want to be able to orally communicate in English with their co-workers, clients, and managers. Also people want to be able to communicate when traveling abroad either for business or on leisure. The first investigation found by the researcher that is relevant to this study is “Propuesta de actividades para el desarrollo de la expresión oral en inglés en la Escuela de Energía y Minas” by Dora Troitiño Días and Adela Hernández Días. The main objective of their investigation is to improve oral skills on beginner students at School of Energy and Mines. The authors mention that English has a special connotation as it is considered a universal language and intervenes in all spheres of society worldwide. Since this school is located in Cuba, they also mention that learning English in Cuba is a fundamental link in the educational system and its main purpose is to develop oral skills as well as the necessary knowledge to master this language since it is vital for learning and studying other subjects and specialties. The undergraduate vocational training has undergone a process of improvement and has tried to approach the particular task of each area of professional performance with the development of English language teaching for specific purposes.

On the investigation performed by Troitiño and Hernández, the definition of strategy can be found, which is also relevant to this investigation. They consider that the didactic strategy is the set of actions supported in techniques, means, methods, forms, and tasks of the teaching-learning process, and used to reach the proposed learning objectives. This aims to transform the current state of the student and brings it to the desired state of

learning through activities selected in the strategy. A didactic strategy is a proposal that supports constructive processes of knowledge, through authentic experiences and situations of learning - relevant and meaningful for the student - where the student can use the knowledge acquired for later transference in similar contexts, both academic and professional. This strategy constitutes a planned guide of actions to be carried out by the teacher and the student, in order to achieve the learning intentions established in a certain context of action.

The activities performed by the authors were: narrating daily routines, describing places and history facts, and debates. The activities contribute to a transfer of the real patterns of communication to the classroom, to promote interactive and realistic activities, in order to help the students to acquire confidence and motivation in the use of the language. Through the application of case studies, expositions, dialogues situations, among others, it was intended that students of the School of Energy and Mines will develop the ability of oral expression taking into account their study needs. The investigation by Troitiño and Hernández is relevant to this study for so many reasons. First, the main object of their investigation is to develop oral skills. Also, since the investigation clearly defined what a strategy is, it helped to clarify the steps needed to be taken when performing the activities. The conclusion of this investigation was unclear on specifying if this oral activities helped the students improve their skills. Therefore, the researcher looks forward to using some of these activities utilized by Troitiño and Hernández, but in this case the researcher wants to analyze the impact that these activities had on the ability of the students to communicate.

The second investigation found that is relevant to the researcher was “Improving Students’ Speaking Skills Through Speaking Board Games of Grade Viii Of Smp N 13 Yogyakarta tn the Academic Year Of 2013/2014” by Lia Amalia Nirmawati. What is important from this study is that Nirmawati focused her investigation on board games after observing that students were in need of different activities that make them practice their speaking. After noticing that students were only being prepared for the national examination, she wanted to prove what would happen if the students started practicing speaking when playing board games.

According to the researcher, the results of her study were that the use of speaking board games to practice speaking improved the students’ skills and help them accomplish a better understanding of the English language in particular areas. Additionally, there was enhancement among the students’ speaking skills in areas such as vocabulary, pronunciation, accuracy, and fluency which have a direct impact in the current thesis since it proves how relevant is to teach English through different activities, covering the most important areas of the language and assuring a prompt understanding of it without neglecting the various forms of learning within the classroom. When the researcher implemented the speaking board games, the students became more confident and bold when speaking English, objective that most of the learners intend to get to when studying a foreign language. The road is quite difficult and sometimes frustrating; this is where teachers must attend to the different needs of the students and create a more approachable and confident environment to ensure the student’s success beyond a final exam.

Another finding was that the implemented board games made the students participate more in the speaking activities, meaning that they not only improved their

English skills, but also get involved in different activities introduced by the researcher which makes the current thesis researcher understand how crucial it is to engage students to work on the foreign language learning in many varied ways. Nirmawati also mentioned, they could establish conversations using the expressions they had learned during the implementation in joyful ways, resource that easily convinces students how significant English is and how fun it can be to learn it. Finally, the researcher proved how the improvement was completed by demonstrating the students' average score which increased 2.29 from the average score of pre-test which was 10.11.

The investigation named “English Communicative Events and Skills Needed at the Workplace: Feedback from the industry by Centre for Modern Languages and Human Sciences University” by Malaysia Pahang in 2010 is relevant to the researcher because it is related to how important the mastery of English is in order to find a job. The author states that in 2006 the government of Malaysia reported that 45,000 college graduates were looking for a job because they could not speak English fluently. It was also reported that although engineers and scientists had more chance to get a job, companies were hesitating to hire them due to their poor proficiency in English. The importance of English as a foreign language is ratified on this study by this Malaysian university.

The participants were engineers from 10 multinational chemical companies in Malaysia. The survey questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A inquired about the demographic information of the engineers, background information of their experiences at their respective companies, and some basic information about the company they worked for. Section B aimed to investigate the oral communication skills used by the engineers and the communicative events they were involved in at their workplaces. The

task-based module, focusing on engineering workplace scenarios, included essential communication skills and communicative events as part of the activities.

Another investigation found that is relevant for this study is named “How to Improve Students’ Communicative Skills” by Lenka Temerová (2007). This investigation starts out by reaffirming the importance of English in today’s society. It mentions that English is one of the most important skills when looking for a job. Temerova (2007), who was concerned about the importance of speaking English around the world, mentions that people currently have to be prepared to communicate with their colleagues who are often English native speakers; therefore, being able to maintain a fluent conversation with a native speaker is the main objective of the author’s students. That was also why she decided to make her thesis about improving the oral skills.

The author mentions how nowadays students do not expect the teacher to know only the theory of the language but also a useful active knowledge. The difference between “speaking” and “conversation” is pointed out in her project. Speaking is explained as the ability to tell a story, give a speech, or a presentation. Conversation is what we do on daily basis which main purpose is to exchange information. What the author wanted to do is to perform communicative activities in order to improve students’ fluency. She also pointed out that motivation plays an important role for language learners since it influences the students’ willingness to participate. She expresses how important lowering the affective filter is. The author used activities such as information gap activities, discussions, role plays, simulations, and guessing games.

One of her conclusions is that pair work is useful since it makes easier to perform real-life situations. The author of this project also concluded that motivation was really

important for the students to communicate and participate. She states that students need to feel in a safe environment that avoids embarrassment or anxiety when performing.

The last but not the least research paper that the researcher found related to this investigation was *Developing Speaking Skills Using Three Communicative Activities: Discussion, Problem-solving, and Roleplaying* by Thanyalak Oradee (2012). The objective of her research was to study the oral skills of students using three communicative activities. This study was applied to 49 students of 11th grade at a secondary school in Thailand who were classified into high, medium, and low English proficiency level. The research instruments were eight lesson plans, an English speaking test, and a questionnaire. The findings of this study were that after using the activities mentioned, the speaking skill improved. The students' attitude towards using these activities was rated as good.

It is significant for this study to mention that according to Oradee (2012), teachers should perform activities that motivate the students to learn. She also mentions that communicative activities can be effectively used in the classroom in Thai context. The researcher intends to use those activities in the Costa Rican context to find out what the outcome is. She also recommends dividing the group into four groups since, as she mentions, this helps to learn the target language. Also, the author proposes that, to perform these activities, the teacher should act as an assistant to increase their effectiveness, and students should change the role from passive to active.

To sum up, it is evident that, not only in Costa Rica, but also around the world teachers are concerned on how to improve their students' oral skills. Besides, the Natural Approach has become more common when teaching English since that is what businesses

require since they need people to be confident and familiar with the language. Based on the investigations cited above, the researcher will utilize the authors' recommendations when applying activities and also will focus the analysis in adults in Costa Rica in order to find out if activities related to the Natural Approach are useful in our country.

2.2 Literature review

When doing a thesis, it is fundamental to assure that the researcher has full knowledge of the theories that support the investigation. As Barrantes (2007) points out, the theoretical framework is determined by the characteristics and necessities of the investigation. It is constituted by authors' postulates and investigations that have referenced to the topic in previous studies. This allows the researcher to have a vision of theories on which the scientific knowledge is funded.

For this specific investigation the researcher is going to develop three main theories that are strictly linked to the matter investigated. First, the researcher will present the theoretical frame of language acquisition. After, the researcher will show characteristics of the Natural Approach such as its antecedents, definition, principles, uses, and sample activities used. After that, the theory on oral skills will be established developing topics such as its definition, characteristics, and ways of teaching oral skills.

2.2.1 Language acquisition

Human beings are the only ones who have been able to utter words. Therefore, scientists have investigated how humans have this capacity. As Lemetyinen (2012) mentions, there is no other species known that can utter specific ideas. Even though, researchers have been investigating this subject for more than sixty years, the way

children learn their first language is still an unsolved puzzle. The first language acquisition theory was supported by Skinner, who was one of the pioneers of behaviorism in 1957. He stated that children learn language by connecting words with meanings that are positively reinforced with the communicative value. However, as Lemetyinen also points out this theory was disapproved by Noam Chomsky who proposed the theory of Universal Grammar which basically consists on the idea that humans have the innate biological capacity to sort grammar into categories such as noun or verb, and that simplifies language increase development in kids and during adulthood. Even though many scholars have been inspired by the Chomskian approach, later on the constructivist researchers proposed a more gradual process. They argued that when a child hears; for example, the conjugation in English for the third person a sufficient number of times, he or she will acquire sophisticated skills. Constructivist researchers point out the importance of linguistic input.

2.2.2 The Natural Approach

2.2.2.1 Antecedents

Throughout history scholars have developed different approaches on teaching languages. As stated by Richards and Rodgers (1999), the changes that teaching English has experimented are reproduced by the necessities of the students; for example, the step to oral proficiency instead of reading comprehension. In the 19th century, the approach based on the study of Latin was the one used when teaching foreign languages in schools. This approach was based on grammar rules and the oral skills were almost not practiced at all. That way of teaching foreign languages was known as the Grammar-Translation Method, whose most important goal was to understand reading in the target language and it was focused on reading and writing. Students were expected to be able to translate, and

the target language was taught through the students' native language. Since in the 20th century, oral communication started to be a necessity among Europeans, the development of speaking skills in that target language was introduced. That was how the Direct Method emerged.

According to Richards and Rodgers (1999), scholars at the end of the 19th century turned their attention to naturalistic principles of language learning and that is why some refer to the Direct Method as the "natural" method. This method, according to D. Larsen-Freeman (2011) has one basic rule which is not to translate. Also, the Direct Method intends that the students communicate in the target language; then, students need to learn how to think in English. The role of the student is less passive than in the Grammar-Translation Method. Students communicate in English as if they were in real situations. Therefore, the syllabus used in the Direct Method is based on real situations. Vocabulary is emphasized over grammar.

As reported by Richards and Rodgers (1999) the first English institute of The United States was created in 1939. Its director was Charles Fries who rejected the Direct Method and applied the principles of structural linguistics to language teaching. In accordance with Neuner (as cited in Alcalde, 2011), the Audiolingual Method is based on a series of new approaches of linguistic and psychological research in learning that took place during the 1930s and 1950s, mainly in the United States. It is clearly influenced by linguistic structuralism by Bloomfield, whereby the system of rules of a given language is no longer taken as the point of departure for language analysis, as was Latin, for example; but any language can combine a set of characteristic structures of its own and can be described from them. The basis of this method is the analysis of the spoken language and

the procedure is descriptive and inductive. The Audiolingual Method is based on performing drills and it was used during World War II since people who speak two or several languages in a short period of time were needed.

In the 1970s, as stated by D. Larsen-Freeman (2011) teachers began to wonder if students were actually learning the target language. Educators observed that their students could produce sentences, but could not use them appropriately outside of the classroom. Therefore, some changes on the way of teaching foreign languages were made. As Alcalde (2011) mentions, shortcomings of all the methodologies known at that moment revealed that none of them achieved the goal of learning to communicate in all senses, so the solution should be a mixture of elements from all of them; a method that could cover, through activities, texts, dialogues, and other exercises, all areas in which communication takes place. This is how a new methodology, known as the Communicative Approach appears in the eighties of the last century.

2.2.2.2 The Definition of the Natural Approach

As presented before, there have been many approaches throughout history when it comes to learning a foreign language. This research is going to be based in the Natural Approach, since the current approach used at the institute is based on the Audiolingual Method and students have been requesting different activities in order to improve their fluency. As reported by Gomez (2013), the Natural Approach was developed by Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Its aim is to promote the acquisition of naturalistic language in the classroom, with emphasis on communication and not much importance is given to grammar and explicit error correction of students. Efforts are also being made to make the learning environment as stress-free as possible.

Besides, Rhalmi (2009) states that this approach presents the language learning as a very similar process when humans learn their first language. The Natural Approach stands by the Communicative Approach and rejects the Audiolingual Method.

The goal of the Natural Approach is the development of communicative skills and it is primarily intended to be used with beginner students. It is presented as a set of principles that can be applied to a wide range of students and teaching situations, and the specific objectives depend on the specific context in which it is used. Terrell describes two basic principles of the approach: the focus of teaching is communication rather than its form, the production of speech comes slowly and is never forced. Early speech goes through natural stages such as yes or no responses, single word answers, word lists, short phrases, complete sentences, Gómez (2001). These principles give rise to classes where the teacher emphasizes interesting understandable information and situations of little anxiety. In the classes, great importance is given to the understanding of the messages in the foreign language and little or no importance is given to the correction of errors and to the grammatical rules. Knowledge of vocabulary is also of great importance and teachers use the Natural Approach to create situations in the classroom that are intrinsically motivating to the students. In addition, as Rhalmi (2009) points out, The Natural Approach and the Direct Method have some characteristics in common, but the main difference is that the Direct Method places emphasis on teacher monologues, direct repetition, and formal questions.

The Natural Approach sees communication as the primary function of the language; Besides Rhalmi (2009) states that:

What really distinguishes the Natural Approach from other methods and approaches are its premises concerning the use of language and the importance of vocabulary: Language is viewed as a vehicle for communicating meaning and messages. Vocabulary is of paramount importance as language is essentially its lexicon! This means that language acquisition cannot take place unless the acquirer understands messages in the target language and has developed sufficient vocabulary inventory. In fact it should be easier to reconstruct a message containing just vocabulary items than one containing just the grammatical structures.

Gómez (2009) also comments that although Terrell originally created the Natural Approach without relying on a particular theoretical model, his later collaboration with Krashen has meant that the approach is seen as an application to Krashen's model monitor language teaching. He outlined five hypotheses in his model.

- The Acquisition-learning Hypothesis. The Acquisition-learning Hypothesis indicates that there is a strict separation between the conscious learning of language and the acquisition of subconscious language, and that they can only lead to the acquisition of language use fluently.
- The hypothesis of the monitor. This indicates that knowledge is learned consciously. It can only be used to control production, not to generate new language. Monitoring output requires students to focus on the rule and have time for their application.

- The input hypothesis. This indicates that language is acquired by exposure to understandable information at a level a little higher than what the student can already understand.
- The hypothesis of the natural order. This indicates that the students acquire the grammatical characteristics of a language in a fixed order, and that this is not affected by the instruction.
- The affective filter hypothesis. This indicates that students should be relaxed and open to learning in order for the language to be acquired. Students who are nervous have more difficulty learning than those who are relaxed in class.

The Natural Approach, according to Rhalmi (2009) takes in to account these principles;

Teaching according to the Natural Approach focuses on communicative abilities, one of its objectives is to help beginners become intermediate, vocabulary is considered prior to syntactic structures. A lot of comprehensible input must be provided. Use of visual aids to help comprehension. Focus is on listening and reading. Speaking emerges later. Reducing the high affective filter by focusing on meaningful communication rather than on form of providing interesting comprehensible input. The techniques used in this approach are often borrowed from other methods and adapted to meet the requirement of the approach. These include: the Total Physical Response command drills, the Direct Method activities such as mime, gestures, and context which are used to elicit questions, and answers. Communicative Language Teaching group work activities where learners share information to complete a task.

2.2.2.3 The Role of the Student, Teacher, and Materials

In order to be clear about the methodological part of this thesis, the researcher must know how the students are going to behave when they are performing activities of the Natural Approach. According Richards and Rodgers (as cited in Ramírez, 2008) the student contributes in the learning process. This can be noticed when the activities are carried out in the classroom. The students manage the activities, they influence each other, and students are processors, actors, initiators, and problem solvers. The teachers' role and the student's role are related. This way, the characteristics of the interaction are defined. The teacher is a source of knowledge, a guide or a role model. There are several aspects that need to be taken into account for the teacher's role in the Natural Approach such as: the types of functions expected by the teacher, the control the teacher has on the learning process, and if the teacher is the one determining contents, and the patterns of interaction developed between the teacher and the student. The function of the materials are given by the objectives, the content, the activities, and the teacher's role. They could be a source of input. The Natural Approach involves activities from the Total Physical Response, the Communicative approach and the Direct Method.

2.2.2.4 Total Physical Response

According to CVC. Diccionario de términos clave de ELE (2015), the Total Physical Response (TPR) is a method of language teaching that combines speech with action and proposes to teach the language through physical activity. Developed by J. Asher, professor of psychology at San Jose State University, California, the method relates to the theory of memory in psychology. A connection to memory may be stronger if it is established through verbal repetition or through association with a motor activity. J. Asher

studied the coordination of speech and action in the acquisition of the first language and tries to adapt the characteristics of that process to the learning of the foreign language. In the acquisition of the first language, the child internalizes the linguistic code through the orders he/she receives and to which he/she responds through physical responses before beginning to produce linguistic responses. In foreign language learning, Asher points out that in many cases the meaning of the second language can be transmitted through actions and that adults, in their learning process, can respond to mandates through actions, observe others in their answers, and internalize the new language code.

The goal of the Total Physical Response is to develop oral competence in the second or a foreign language at initial levels. Emphasis is placed on developing understanding skills before teaching to speak, emphasizing meaning rather than form, and attempting to minimize stress in the learning process through physical actions and games. The method seems to be based on structuralist presuppositions of language. Asher considers the verb, especially the imperative verb, as the linguistic element around which the use and learning of language are organized. The underlying learning conception responds to behavioral approaches based on the stimulus-response model. Grammar is taught in an inductive way since the method requires that, at first, attention is centered on meaning. The basic linguistic unit and lexical- grammatical criteria are used in the selection of teaching elements. Exercises with imperatives and the execution of teacher orders are the basic activities that learners carry out in the classroom. Students have little influence on the content of learning; their basic roles are to listen carefully and respond physically to the teacher's mandates. Teacher's mandates play an active role because they direct the actions carried out by the learners. It is the teacher who decides the content,

presents the models, selects the support materials, and directs the interactions. The teacher is responsible for offering the best possible exposure to the language so that the learners can assimilate the basic rules and develop oral skills according to their own natural rhythm, correcting little mistakes at the beginning.

The Total Physical Response has some popularity, especially among proponents of the role of understanding in second or foreign language acquisition. However, its efficacy is doubtful about the type of statements it proposes in relation to the real needs of students. J. Asher proposes the use of this method in combination with others.

2.2.2.5 The Communicative Approach

Bearard (as cited by Beghadid, 2013) explains that the Communicative Approach developed after critiques to the audiolingual methodologies for language teaching. Its fundamental purpose is to establish communication, taking into account the needs of the student that determine what the student wants to develop (comprehension and oral expression) with the use of authentic documents of daily life for a better and faster acquisition of the language. The knowledge acquired will be used in real situations, respecting socio-cultural codes. Hence, the students will be the protagonists of their learning and will have the capacity of learning to learn, through communication and learning strategies. Also, to emphasize the idea of the protagonist role that corresponds to the student with respect to his own learning. Expansion of the concept of "autonomy" to respond to the idea that the student should be increasingly responsible in making decisions about his/her development as a person who learns a language. Besides, diversification of the teacher's role must be taken into account which is no longer just a model of linguistic

performance or someone trained in the necessary methodology to teach the language, but also a mediator who assumes the task of creating the right conditions to promote the characteristics and potential of the students and their willingness to learn English and different cultures and visions of the world.

2.2.2.6 The Direct Method

It is also called the Natural Method. According to Calzada (2012) it was very popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It emerges as a reaction to the Grammar-Translation Method. It is called a Direct Method because it tries to establish a direct connection between the foreign word and the reality it refers to. In other words, it associates the forms of speech with actions, objects, gestures, and situations, without the help of the mother tongue. Here, the teacher repeats a word pointing to the object many times as necessary until the student can reproduce it.

As Calzada (2011) also points out, this method focused its attention on the development of the four skills, starting with the oral skills, where oral expression becomes the basic one. Translation is eliminated as a teaching procedure. Errors are avoided at all costs, assuming that an error generates an incorrect habit. This method was based on the following principles and procedures: teaching in the classroom is done exclusively in the target language, only vocabulary and everyday structures are taught. Grammar is taught inductively. Concrete vocabulary is taught through demonstration, objects, and drawings. Listening and speaking are taught. Special emphasis is placed on pronunciation and grammar.

2.2.3 Oral Skills

2.2.3.1 Definition

The main purpose of this investigation is to improve the oral skills of the students. Oral communication is what most of students pursue when learning English. As Bailey, K. M. (2005) mentions, speaking is a productive oral skill. Speaking is based conveying a meaning. And that is exactly what the institutes are currently look looking for in Costa Rica. Bachman, Canale and Swain (as cited by Bailey, K. M., 2005) state that communication involves the capacity of using the language properly in different contexts. What the Natural Approach proposes is that we can learn a second or a foreign language if we naturally communicate in that language that is same way we have learned our first language. According to Pérez, P., & Roig, V. (2009). The first thing we have to guarantee in our educational practice is to facilitate the conditions that allow teachers and students to communicate in English. According to Swarhout (2009) there is formal and informal communication. As informal communication, we can mention face to face conversation, phone conversations, discussions that take place at business meetings. As formal communication Swarhout points out presentations at business meetings, classroom lectures, and speeches given at graduation ceremonies.

2.2.3.2 How to Teach The Oral Skills

Teachers are currently searching for the best way to improve their students' skills. According to Fernández (2008), in order to improve oral skills a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom is as important as its contents. Teachers are primarily responsible for the classroom environment, but students' attitude towards learning is equally important. It is easier to learn in a good environment. It is also important to recognize that every student

has specific skills and personalities. Teachers should not expect the same from everyone. Teachers should inform students that learning a language requires time, effort, and practice to keep them motivated in reaching their goals. It is important to work with activities based at this level because students feel comfortable not being exposed. It is also recommended to select interesting, attractive, and enjoyable activities that include everyday vocabulary. Students must participate in activities involving at least two areas such as reading and oral production, or writing and oral production. Teachers must encourage students to stay in touch with English by listening to the radio, watching television, reading magazines, books, and consulting the Internet. All of them help students increase their language level.

Chapter III

Methodological Framework

In this chapter, the strategies applied by the researcher will be explained. This part of the investigation is going to be divided into five sections. The first part refers to the research method which, as stated by Barrantes (2007), is the reasoning accepted to admit or reject a fact as true. Besides, in the second part, the selection and description of the population and participants will be illustrated in order to establish the environment and the specific characteristics of the participants which is relevant when analyzing the data obtained. The third part describes the activities the researcher will utilize that engage to a strategy to fulfill the objectives. The fourth part is about the data collection instruments.

Barrantes (2007) suggests observation as the most appropriate technique when working on a qualitative investigation; however, other techniques such as interviews, questionnaires and group activities can be used. The last part of this chapter explains the tactics the researcher manages in order to validate the instruments used when collecting data. According to Definición ABC (2010), the concept of methodological framework is directly related to research and; therefore, to science. The methodological framework is understood as the set of procedures that serve a researcher to carry out his/her activity. We could say that the methodological framework establishes the basic strategies on which a specific discipline is investigated. Besides, the research method chosen in order to address this investigation will be described.

3.1 Research method

There are two types of research methods: qualitative and quantitative. As mentioned by (Shuttleworth, 2008), the design of a qualitative research is the one widely used by scientists and researchers who study human behavior and habits. Qualitative research is generally considered to be a precursor to quantitative research, since it is often used to generate possible clues and ideas that can be used to formulate a verifiable and realistic hypothesis. Eisenhardt as cited by Martínez (2006) considers this a strategy aimed at understanding the dynamics present in singular contexts. The present investigation pretends to analyze and understand the opinion, testimonies, and experiences in a specific context that allows the study of the considerations, judgments, experiences, and visions of the people involved. For these reasons, the research method in this investigation is the qualitative one.

3.2 Selection and description of population and participants

In the second section of this chapter, a full explanation of the subject of the investigation is going to be provided. As stated by Barrantes (2007), the subjects are those physical or corporate people who are to offer the information. For the purpose of this investigation, the students are the subject. Then, it is going to be established which and how many participants are being analyzed. Also, the characteristics of the population and participants will be explained. The mission of the students in the present work is crucial because their skills, performance, and participation are then ones that allow the real analysis of the information obtained through activities and data collection instruments. This enriches the research process and allows the development of the investigation. Also, a description of the private institution where this investigation take place will be provided

3.2.1 Description of the institution

This investigation is taking place in a multinational private language school that has been operating around the world for over twenty five years. In Costa Rica, this institution started operating in 2012. This private language school has currently two locations. They currently teach English, Spanish, and Portuguese. The private institute provides English courses in the morning, in the afternoon and at night from Monday to Thursday, in the morning on Fridays, and in the morning and in the afternoon on Saturdays. Therefore, most students are adults who work and take the English course to either learn the language or improve it. The institute also has students who are teenagers that go to high school on weekdays and take English courses on Saturdays.

This private institute has its own text books. There are six books to walk students through the process of learning English. Students are considered advanced students once they start the third book. Each book has 60 lessons that have been designed to be taught in one hour each. The institute also has its own audio books. There are two types of courses at this institute: intensive and semi-intensive. If the students decide to take semi-intensive classes, they go to class three hours, once a week. That could be either on Friday or Saturday, but if the students decide to take the intensive mode, they have to go two hours twice a week. In the semi-intensive course, students work on two or three lessons every session. Every sub-level lasts two months. On the other hand, the courses that students have to attend two times a week last only six months, and these courses are subdivided into three sub-levels. On each session students work on one or two lessons.

3.2.2 Description of the population

There are about eight hundred students at the private institute. The students who assist to the private institute where this investigation is taking place are middle-class people. Most of the people who study there are people who live in San Jose or Heredia. And they are generally people who work and study at the same time. There is not a specific age to be able to study at this place. There is a program for kids but at the moment that program is only taught in private lessons since there are no groups available for kids.

3.2.3 Description of the participants

Through two years of experience in the English teaching field at that private institute, and after teaching beginners, intermediate, and advanced students, the researcher has chosen two groups of the intermediate level to develop the investigation. The reason why the researcher decided to work with the intermediate level is that students from that level have clearly expressed the researcher and their teachers in general their need for learning in an English only classroom. Also, the researcher has noticed that students are more self-satisfied in the beginner level, but when they start the intermediate level they get frustrated by drilling and it is in the intermediate level where students drop out the most.

The activities of the Natural Approach are going to be applied in two groups of the intermediate level. In total, the researcher is going to have twenty two students performing the activities; fifteen of them are male and nine of them are female. The age ranges from eighteen to forty five years old. None of them have special needs.

All of these students are strongly committed to improve their English skills since all of them pay for the courses by themselves, and they are looking forward to either having better jobs or getting promoted once they finish their studies. Although the students try to be motivated during the class, sometimes when they get to class they are exhausted after working all day long. They attend the intensive course in which they go to class twice a week

3.3 Implemented strategies

In this section, the strategy implemented by the researcher is going to be explained; therefore, future researchers may use any other strategies for further research of the Natural Approach. As mentioned by Gurtler & Huber (2007), there are many strategies when it comes to qualitative researching such as grounded theory, replication studies, triangulation methods, ethnographic research, study of case, phenomenological research, clinical research, focus groups, among others.

The researcher has chosen the grounded theory in order to develop this investigation. The grounded theory, according to Gutiérrez (2006), refers to a theory derived from data collected systematically and analyzed by means of a research process. As Gutiérrez mentions in this method, the data collection, analysis, and theory that will emerge from the investigation are closely related; furthermore, the analysis is the interaction between the researcher and the data. It is both art and science. It is science in the sense that it maintains analysis on the data. Creativity is manifested in the ability of the researcher to name categories and ask stimulating questions.

The second objective of this investigation is to apply the activities of the Natural Approach in order to improve the oral skills, and in order to carry out this objective the

researcher will apply a series of activities related to the Natural Approach. Gonzalez, Monroy, and Kupferman as cited by Barrantes (2007), group techniques are the set of procedures that are used to effectively achieve the proposed goals. The technique is the design, the congruent and unitary model that is formed based on different modes, from which it is intended that a group works, be productive, and reach other goals.

As group techniques, the researcher will apply activities from the Natural Approach such as: English only environment, amazing race, action song, role play, and pictures to learn vocabulary. It is relevant to mention that none of these activities are included in the intermediate level at the private institute where the investigation is taking place and the teaching approach is based on drilling.

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, the Natural Approach involves activities from the Total Physical Response, the Communicative approach and the Direct Method; therefore, the researcher will apply the following activities:

English Only Game: The objective of this activity is to speak the target language as much as possible. The group is split into two. If a member of group A speaks Spanish, group B gets a ticket. At the end of the bimester the group with more tickets is the winner.

The Amazing Race: In this activity, the objective is to apply action-based drills using the vocabulary list from the lesson so the students can brush up their oral skills by improving their vocabulary in a meaningful context. The group set during the English Only Game activity will participate in a contest. The first group that performs the action and rings the bell on the teacher's desk wins the race. Below you can find the instructions that will be given to the students,

1. Go to the front desk and ask one of the receptionists to write on this piece of paper “English is the universal language”, then bring the paper and ring the bell.
2. Find the teacher’s last post on Facebook, take a screenshot of it, send it to the teacher and ring the bell.
3. Bring a spoon and ring the bell.
4. Record a video of your group singing “Happy Birthday”, send it to the teacher, and ring the bell.
5. Put the puzzle together, ring the bell.
6. Fully color the picture according to the colors indicated in each part of the image. When the image is fully colored, ring the bell.
7. Arrange the members of your team from the oldest to the youngest person. Have somebody who does not belong to the team take a picture of you guys, send the picture to the teacher and have the youngest person ring the bell.
8. Write the names of the states on the map, bring it to the teacher, and ring the bell.

Action Song: Team A and team B are going to pick the chorus of one of their favorite songs and represent it to the other group through mimics.

Role Play: The objective of this activity is to use the expressions on the section called “Expressed yourself” as they are used in real life. Each group has to present a role play using at least seven expressions learned during the bimester.

Memory Card Game: As the book used does not have any pictures for the students to understand the meaning of words, a memory card game will be given to the students in order to match the words in the book with the right picture.

It is crucial to mention that since the researcher has observed that lowering the affective filter when learning English clearly impacts the students' performances when doing oral tasks in the target language, the level of anxiety is going to be observed and questioned throughout the development of these activities.

3.4 Data collection instruments

In order to accomplish the objectives set, the researcher must elect the appropriate instruments to acquire the data that will be analyzed later on. Albert as cited by Alfonso (2012) mentions that in the qualitative approach, data collection occurs completely in the natural and everyday environments of subjects and involves two phases or stages: initial immersion in the field and data collection for analysis for which there are different types of instruments. Barrantes (2007) mentions observation as the most appropriate instrument when developing a qualitative investigation; therefore, the investigator has decided to use observation as her primary instrument to collect data. Barrantes also mentions interviews, questionnaires, life stories, and group techniques as very useful instruments when working on a qualitative investigation. Taking into account the topic and the objectives to be reached the researcher has decided to utilize the instruments mentioned below.

3.4.1 Observation

Benguria, Martín, Valdés, Pastellides, and Gómez (2010) describe observation as a method of collecting information, but observation in addition to a method is a rigorous

research process which allows the researcher to describe situations, and it is; therefore, a scientific method.

The first specific objective of this investigation is to identify the problems students face when performing oral skills. As Barrantes (2007) points out that observation allows the researcher to obtain information about phenomena and events as they take place. Besides, the same author defines observation as a systemic process by which a specialist collects information pertaining to certain problems. Through observation the researcher pretends identify the main problems students have when performing oral skills. According to the Enciclopedia de Clasificaciones (2016), there are three types of observation: unstructured observation, structured observation, and participant observation. In this case the researcher is performing a participant observation since the researcher is also the teacher of the students. As it is mentioned in the Enciclopedia de Clasificación (2016), the participant observations comes from a researcher who joined a group and acted as another member of the group. What the researcher, who may or may not report on his/her research project, must achieve is that her/his presence does not influence in any way the group's activities, so that there are no distortions. It allows the person who performs it to have a high understanding of the group's behaviors and, at the same time, to record nonverbal behaviors. Ideally, the researcher should retain as much information as possible in order to avoid having to make annotations to the group.

Participant observation is going to be an instrument, not only used in order to reach the specific objective number one, which is to identify the problems students face when performing oral skills, but also to accomplish the two other specific objectives which are to apply the activities of the Natural Approach in order to improve oral skills and to

analyze how activities of the Natural Approach may help students communicate in a more accurate way. The researcher has decided to take advantage of this instrument because of her wide experience working with intermediate students and also because she has been, is and will be teaching the participants throughout the whole investigation; therefore, her comments on the students' performance are going to play an important role when analyzing the data.

3.4.2 Interview

For the researcher to develop the specific objectives number one and number two, which are to identify the problems students face when performing oral skills and apply the activities of the Natural Approach in order to improve them, an interview was applied to one of the most experienced teacher at the private institute. According to López & Deslauriers (2011) the interview has an enormous potential to allow the researcher to access the mental part of people, but also to their vital part through which one discovers their daily lives and the social relationships they maintain. In this context, the interview as a research instrument is sufficient to carry out the investigative process and in many cases its use is forced and frequently mandatory. Grawitz as cited by López & Deslauriers (2011) classifies interviews into five types: clinical interview, deep interview, interview of free answers, the focused interview or focused interview, the interview of open questions, and the interview of closed questions. For the purpose of the present research the interview applied was an interview of open questions in which according to López and Deslauriers pre-written questions are asked and a planned order is followed; also; the respondent is free to respond as he or she wishes, but within the framework of the question asked.

3.4.3 Questionnaires

Students will fill out a set of questions before and after performing the activities of the Natural Approach. The questionnaire that is going to be applied before performing the activities includes questions that are going to help the researcher deeply identify the problems students face when performing oral skills. After each activity, they will also have the chance to give their opinion by rating the activity, and also at the end of the questionnaire they will have opportunity to give extra comments in case they have the need to. Questionnaires are useful instruments when collecting data in qualitative investigations. On that matter, Rodriguez, Hoffmann, Mackdanz, & Hoffmann (2011) state that whenever the researcher seeks more qualitative information, the questions should indicate both the options offered to the respondent and the continuous range within which the responses will be sought. When expressing the options of the questions that seek qualitative information, the objective of the interviewer is the same as when searching for descriptive information: to give an answer to all the subjects that approach reasonably to the association that the consulted subject. There is no aspect of the questionnaire that is more decisive than the selection and preparation of response models. A questionnaire may contain one or more possible response models or any combination.

3.4.4 Pre and post tests

In order to analyze how activities of the Natural Approach can help students communicate in a more accurate way, the researcher will have the students talk about a random topic for as long as they can. They are going to do this before and after applying

the activities of the Natural Approach; therefore, the researcher can evaluate if the Natural Approach has an impact on the students when performing oral tasks.

3.5 Validation of instruments

Using the correct instruments in the investigation makes the research credible. Before applying any instruments, they were first previously approved by the tutor and then tested on a group that is not part of the participants in order to make sure that they clearly understood the questions. Since many questions only had two possible answers, the tutor advised the researcher to give more options so that the participants had more options to express their ideas. It is also important to mention that the instruments are written in Spanish, so that the researcher makes sure the students fully understand what they are being asked.

Chapter IV

Data Analysis

In this present chapter the researcher will analyze the data collected. This chapter is crucial to this investigation because it is going to allow the researcher to reach the objectives set at the beginning of the investigation; and after that, the researcher will make conclusions on chapter V about the analysis on this section. Also, the data collection instruments are going to be explained and the data collected will be organized. According to Barrantes (2007), it is difficult to speak of a strategy or procedure of data analysis, but three key tasks can be pointed out: data reduction, data transformation and obtaining results.

For the purpose of this investigation, five data collection instruments were chosen in order to reach the specific objectives; therefore, the researcher will subdivide this chapter into five sections. Each section refers to the analysis of each instrument. The researcher will start out with the analysis of the observations made. After, the researcher will analyze the interview, the questionnaire, group techniques, and finally the pre-test and the post test.

4.1 Observation

The researcher, before starting the present investigation, observed that students needed something else rather than drilling in order to burst their oral skills. The instrument the researcher used to organize her observation and make comments of the students' performance was a check list on which specific aspects were observed, such as the use of drilling, usage of the target language, students being able to understand their teacher, the

usage of visual aids and the material used during the class in general. After the observation, the researcher can mention that the class was based on drilling, students did not communicate in the target language, the teacher went back and forth from English to Spanish, and the material used in class did not have pictures for the students to understand the meaning of the words.

Besides, the students were always open to receive feedback and they were well-behaved. As it has been mentioned in the previous chapters, students drilled a lot. Students did not have the chance to get into a real conversation in the classroom since most of the time they were drilling. Students have even suggested to do extra activities involving more interaction.

4.2 Interview

Since the researcher is also the teacher of the groups, the researcher decided to interview the teacher who has worked the longest at the institute. For the purpose of this investigation, the researcher is going to call him “Mario”. Since he has been working there for a long period of time, the researcher decided to take in to account his thoughts on the didactic issues students might be facing in the intermediate level and some of the potential solutions.

This instrument was meant to help the researcher reach specific objectives one and two which are respectively to identify the problems students face when performing oral skills and to apply activities of the Natural Approach in order to improve oral skills. This interview has nine questions. The first five questions are intended to identify the problems

students face when performing oral skills and the last four to help the researcher choose the proper activities of the Natural Approach to be applied in the intermediate level.

For the first question, the interviewee was interrogated on his thoughts about the oral problems students face at the institute when they reach the intermediate level and how they could be fixed. He said that, in general, they need more vocabulary, and he also believes that a lot of them still think in Spanish, so they want to speak English thinking in Spanish. Mario mentions there is a lot of interference from Spanish and this is a difficulty for students to express their ideas in English. At this institute, students are allowed to speak Spanish for one year, including the intermediate level. Students translate a lot from Spanish to English during the beginning level, and they communicate only in Spanish. The methodology states that the intermediate level is intended to be the transition from Spanish to English. However, if the teacher does not encourage students to communicate in the target language, by the end of the intermediate level they would have been speaking Spanish for a year, which the researcher thinks is too much to help students communicate with a native speaker in the advanced level.

Mario comments in the interview that students need to be exposed to situations of real usage of the target language such as songs. Mario mentions that when students in general are in the intermediate level at this institute they can understand the structures, but sometimes it is hard for them to put them into and practice to use them in real life contexts. The opinion of Mario was taken in to account when selecting the activities the researcher is going to apply in her group.

When the interviewee was asked about his opinion about drilling, he said that when he started working at the institute it was really hard for him to get used to the

drilling based methodology because of what he was taught at the university; yet, he currently thinks teachers should not avoid approaches. Instead, they should embrace them all and try what best fits their students' needs. However, Mario states that drills are more useful in the beginner level than in the intermediate level because, at the beginning level, teachers need their students to learn how to make sentences, and he actually thinks drilling is a great tool for that, but in the intermediate level, more real situations are needed in order for the students use those sentences. The researcher agrees with teacher Mario; actually during this investigation on the Natural Approach the methodology based on drills of the institute is not going to be avoided at the institute. Nevertheless, the researcher will combine it with activities that will help students communicate in a more natural and relaxed way. Mario also considers that the use of drilling for a year is not a bad idea; though, he also thinks more than a year could be exhausting, but just as the researcher thinks, Mario feels students need to be exposed to more natural activities before reaching the advanced level.

Mario clearly knows what the affective filter is. He states he believes that, of course, emotions and anxiety can affect performance when learning a foreign language. In order to lower the affective filter, Mario mentions he tells them personal experiences when learning English since students see teachers as a role model. Teacher Mario tells his students how he improved his oral skills when learning English. He thinks that to make students feel more comfortable and relaxed in his classes, students realize that learning English is a process. One of the techniques from the Natural Approach Mario uses is not pointing out grammar mistakes when their students speak to him in the target language.

The methodology at the English school states that teachers should encourage students to speak English; however, since this level is the transition to the advanced level the class is managed in a bilingual environment; although, students do not translate anymore. Mario thinks that changing that aspect will bring a lot of benefits. Mario states that some groups might be ready to keep it in the target language and some others might not, but he certainly believes teachers must prepare activities to help them feel comfortable speaking in the target language. Mario points out that we have groups at the institute that speak a lot of Spanish in the intermediate level, and once they get to the advanced level they feel frustrated since they are not ready to be in an English only environment.

When speaking about some extra activities that could help students of the intermediate level improve their oral skills, teacher Mario mentioned encouraging students to speak the target language would definitely help them. Mario also stated that the TPR activities help students have better understanding of the target language since they are used in a real context such as songs or instructions which is something one uses in daily situations. Mario considers that role plays should be designed properly so students can recreate a real life situation. He comments that although role plays can help students to improve their communicative skills, sometimes teachers give situations to roleplay that do not match the situations students have to face when they need to speak English. Mario suggests to design activities according to each group's needs. He suggests topics such as asking information at an airport or being a tourist in another city.

Since the books at this institute do not bring pictures in order to explain the meaning of words, the last question was about it. Mario considers that pictures would be

useful at least for some of the words because there are some words that cannot be explained through pictures. Therefore, he considers that extra activities should be carry out with pictures in order to represent some of the vocabulary learned during the previous lessons. It is important to remember that there might be students for whom it might be easier to learn vocabulary by relating the new words to a picture and the methodology used at the institute does not contemplate them. As he mentions, if the students have a wider vocabulary, their ability to speak in the target language will improve.

4.3 Questionnaire

After observing the students and listening to their major concerns, the researcher designed a questionnaire to better understand her students' needs afterwards and activities for the sake of improving their oral. This tool will help the researcher reach specific objective number one which is to identify the problems students face when performing oral skills. Also, a set of questions were asked to students after applying every single activity, but these questions are going to be analyzed in section 5.4 along with the group techniques.

The first question was related to the reason why they are learning English. Students were shown six options which were: traveling, finding a job, getting a promotion, helping my children study, as a hobby, or another reason. The results are shown below

Figure 1

Figure 1 shows students' reasons to learn English

Source: Researcher's creation

As shown in the previous graph all the students are studying English for reasons related to their work. As stated by the researcher in previous chapters, it is the main reason people are currently learning English in Costa Rica. For this question, the researcher provided students with six options which were: to travel, to find a job, to get a promotion, to help my children do their homework and hobby. 12 Students out of 22 are studying English to get a promotion, 7 of them to find a job and 3 of them to help their children study. This data is strongly related to the second question in which students were asked to organize listening, speaking, reading, and writing from one to four in order of importance

when learning English. Being one, the most important and four, the less important in their opinion.

Figure 2

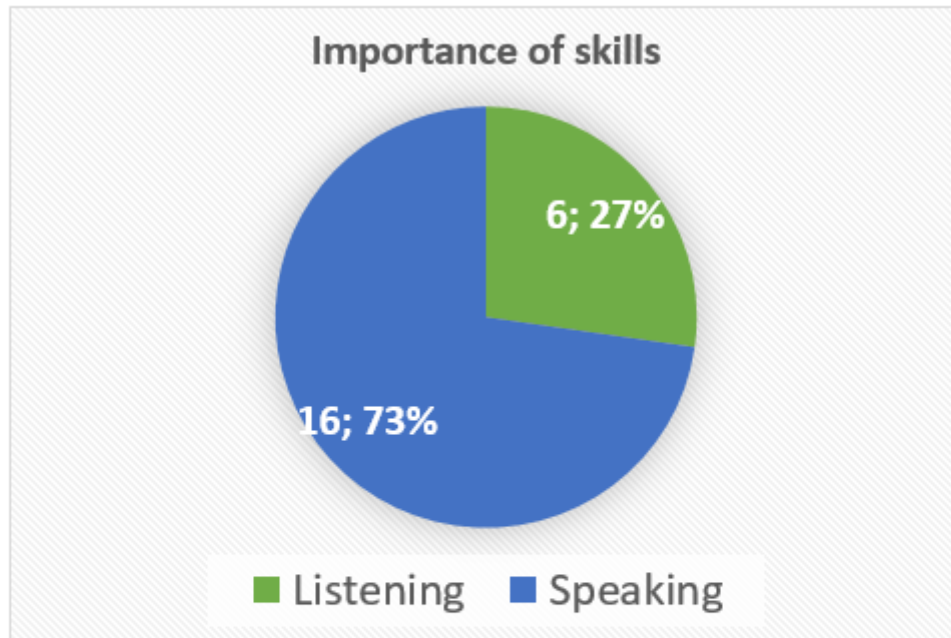


Figure 2 shows opinion of students on the importance of skills needed when learning English

Source: Researcher's creation

Figure 2 shows opinion of students on the importance of skills needed when learning English. 73% (16 students) expressed that speaking is the most important skill when learning English, then 27% of the students marked listening as one of the most important skills while 0% of them considered writing or reading as one of the most important skills. It is relevant to point out that we have 100% percent of the students

studying English for working reasons and 73% of them expressing that the most important skill when learning English is speaking, 27% expressed listening is an important skill. None of students marked writing or reading as the most important skill when learning English

Figure 3

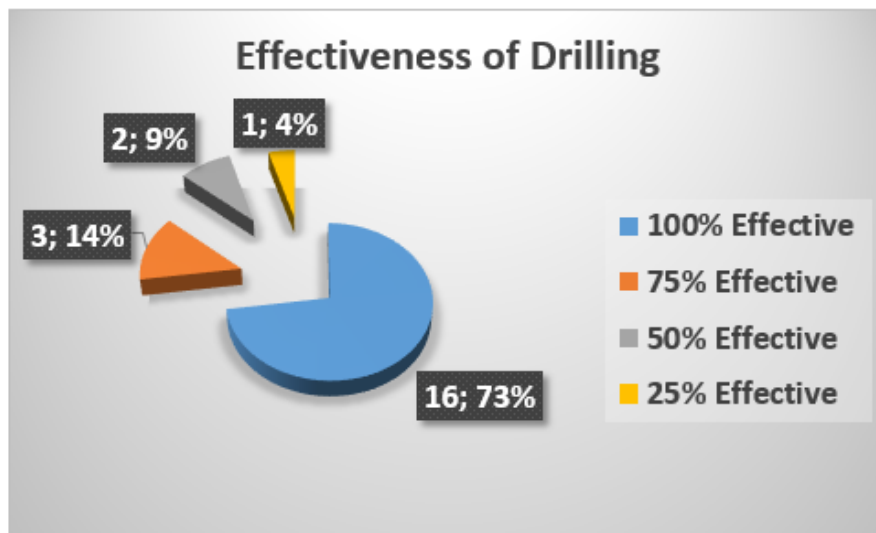


Figure 3 shows the students' opinion on the effectiveness of drilling when they need to communicate in English

Source: Researcher's creation

For question number three, students were asked their opinion on the effectiveness of drilling for communicating in English. There were given five options: 100%, 75%, 50%, 25%, and 0% effectiveness. Sixteen out of twenty two students which represent a 73% think that drilling is 100% effective when they have to speak English while three students consider drilling as 75% effective, two 50% effective, and 1 25% effective. That represents respectively 14%, 9%, and 4% of the participants.

In this question, students were requested to explain why they graded drilling as they did. Some of the comments related with the objectives of this investigation, they

consider that are that repetition allows them to memorize expressions quickly, improves their vocabulary, helps them improve their pronunciation. They also expressed that they find drilling helpful for the beginning level.

Figure 4

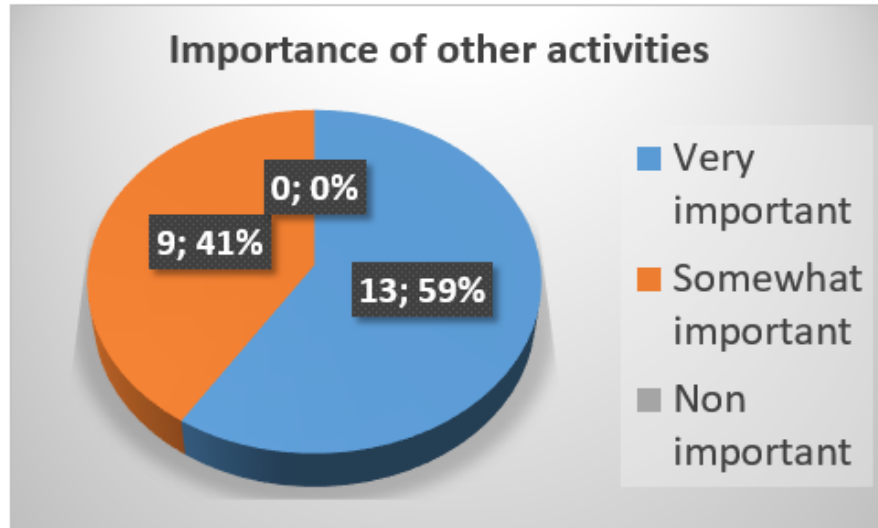


Figure 4 shows the opinion of students on having other activities rather than drilling

Source: Researcher's creation

In the previous paragraph, the researcher represents the students' thoughts on the importance of having extra activities to improve their oral skills. The participants were provided with three options. They could mark "very important", "somewhat important", or "not important". They were also given the option of writing the reasons why they had chosen that option. In this question, 13 students considered that having extra activities is very important. 13 students represent 59% of the participants. On the other hand, 41% of the students consider having extra activities as "somewhat important", while none of the students consider it "not important". Students comment that having different kind of oral activities could force themselves to learn more vocabulary. Also, they mentioned that

having other activities could put them in other type of panoramas to use the target language. Besides, they also said that doing different activities would help them think in English. They also think that by having other activities they can explore more learning approaches.

Figure 5

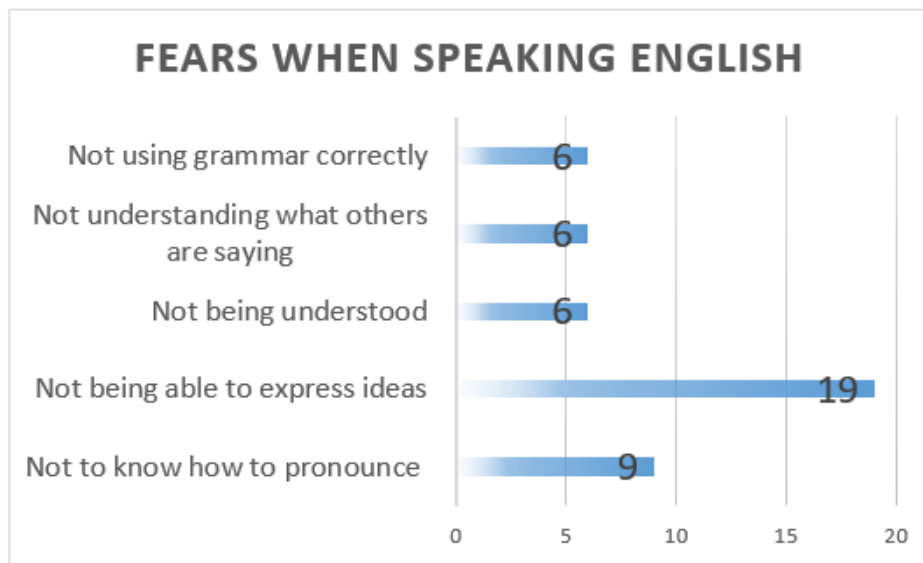


Figure 5 shows what students chose as their fears when speaking English

Source: Researcher's creation

For question five, the participants were asked about what made them feel anxious when speaking the target language. They were provided with eight options and they were instructed to select from one to three options. The options given were: not knowing how to pronounce, not being able to express ideas, not being understood, not understanding what the others are saying, not using grammar correctly, not having enough vocabulary, not

feeling anxious, and others. 86% of the students (19 people) chose “not being able to express ideas” being this option the most selected. Not knowing how to pronounce is found in the second place which was marked by 41% of the students (9 people). In the third position, there choices could be found. They were: not using grammar correctly, not understanding what others say, and not being understood. Each option was chosen by 27% percent of the participants (6 people).

Figure 6

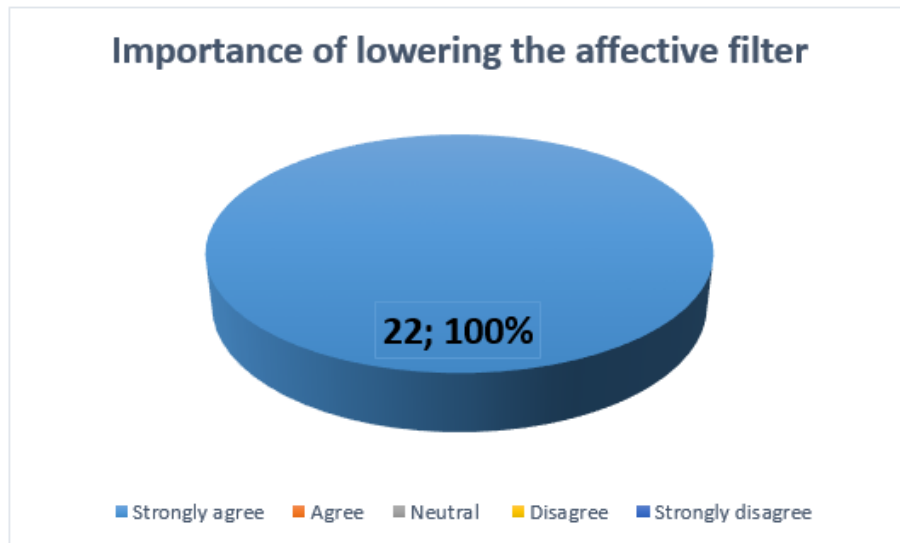


Figure 6 shows how much the participants agreed on the importance of lowering the affective filter

Source: Researcher's creation

For question number six, students were asked about their thoughts on the importance of lowering the affective filter in order to improve their oral skills. 22 students which represent 100% marked “strongly agree” to the fact that lowering the level of

anxiety can help them communicate better in the target language. Students commented the teachers can help lowering the affective filter by making the students feel more comfortable in the classroom. They also mentioned that teachers must be patient with students because not everybody can learn how to speak English at the same pace. Other students mentioned that activities in group are good for making them feel comfortable since they can practice the target language and get to know each other better. In general, students consider that the role of the teacher is crucial when keeping the level of anxiety low. They believe that the way the teacher corrects the students is important for the students to be confident when speaking in the classroom. Besides, they also believe that the role of the teacher is relevant to keep a good environment in the classroom.

Group Techniques

The students were asked a set of questions after each activity so the researcher could know the opinion of the participants. The questionnaires applied consisted of five questions. First, the researcher will show the results for the action song; then, the results of the English only environment; and finally the reader will find the figures related to the role play, amazing race, and memory game.

4.3.1 Action Song

Figure 7

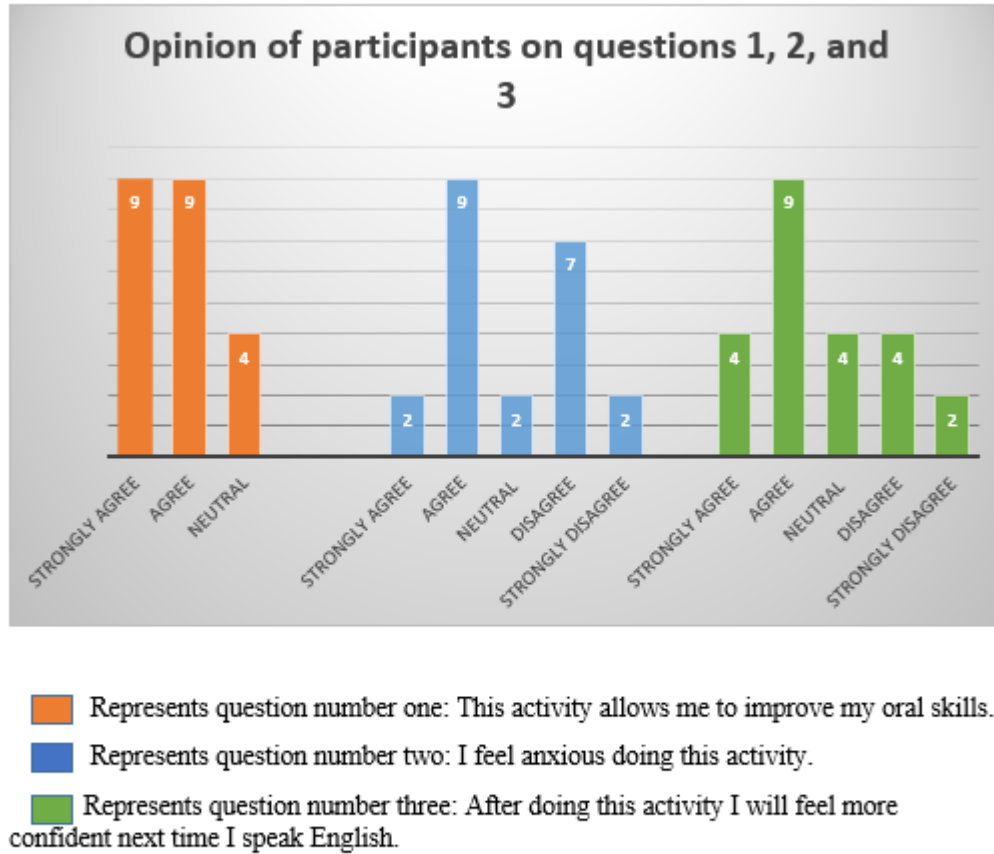


Figure 7 shows the opinion of the participants regarding the action song

Source: Researcher's creation

For the first question represented in the graph with orange bars, students were asked if this activity allowed them to improve their performance when communicating orally. 9 students strongly agreed, 9 agreed, and 4 of them disagreed

The second questions which is represented with blue bars was if they felt anxious when doing this activity. 9 people out of 22 which represents 41% of the students agreed with it. And the third question which is represented with green color was if that activity

was going to help them not to feel anxious next time they needed to speak English. In this question 41% of the students agreed.

Figure 8

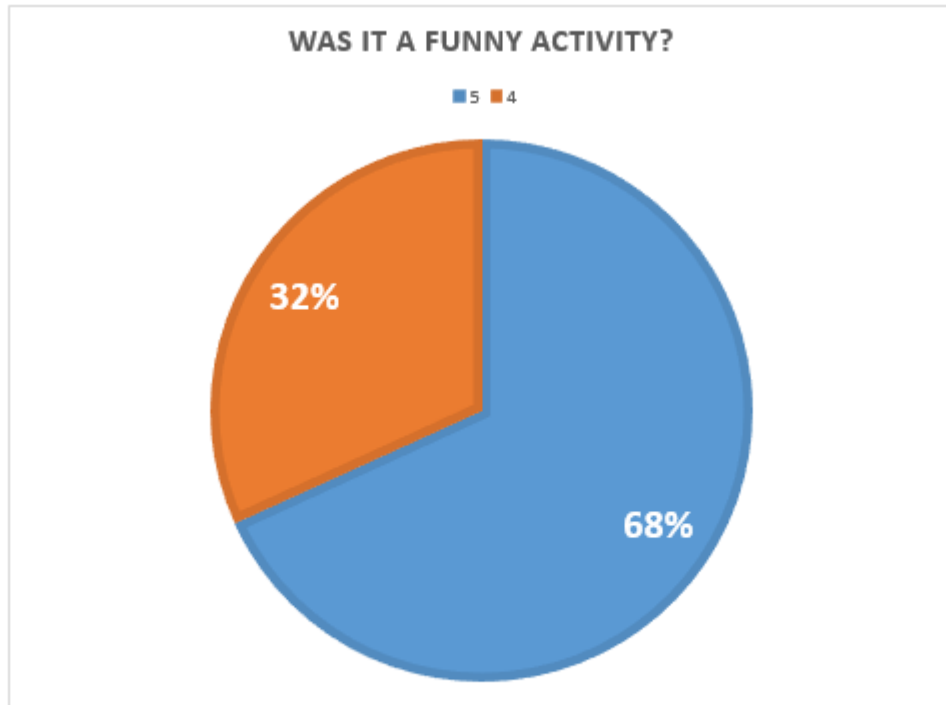


Figure 8 shows how fun the participants think the activity was

Source: Researcher's creation

For question number 5 students were requested to give their opinion on how fun the activity was by rating the activity from 5 to 1 being 5 the highest score. 15 participants (68%) rated this activity 5 and 7 participants (32%) rated this activity 4. Students commented that they think this activity will help them to improve their oral skills since singing and do mimics at the same time can help them to improve pronunciation and remember the lyrics. They also mentioned that next time they do this activity they would like to have more time to prepare it.

4.3.2 English Only

Figure 9

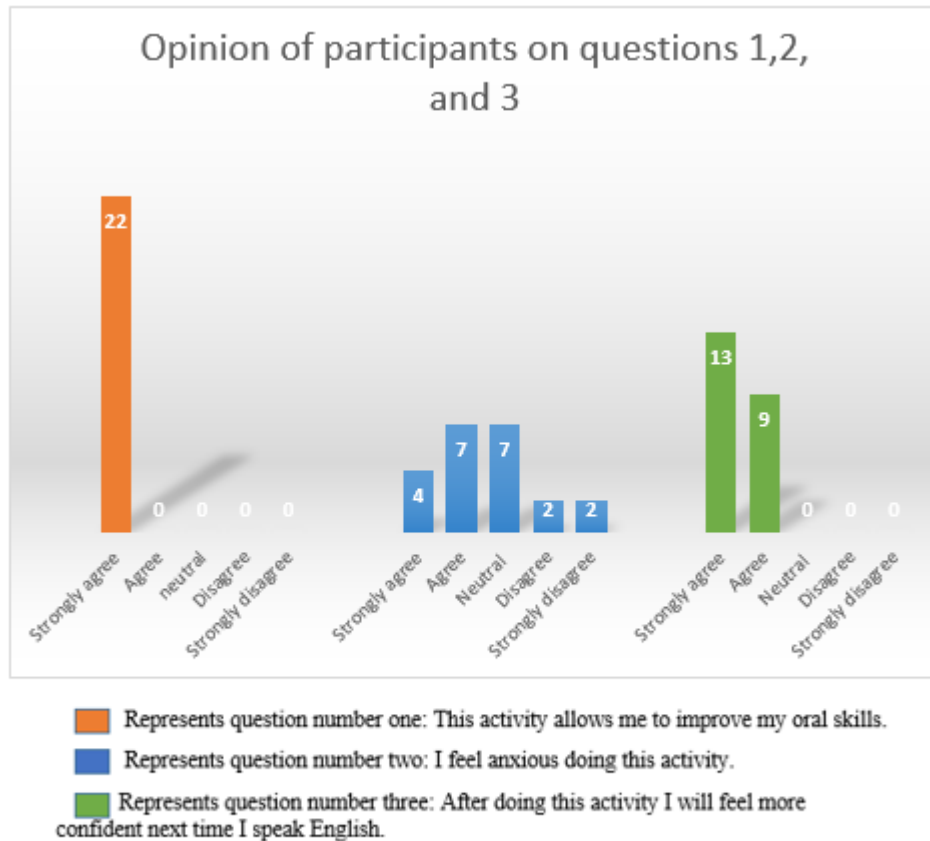


Figure 9 shows the opinion of the participants on questions 1, 2, and 3

Source: Researcher's creation

When students were asked if they thought the activity about speaking only English in the classroom could help them to improve their oral skills, 100% of them strongly agreed which is represented in figure 9 with the orange bar. When students were questioned if they felt anxious when doing this activity 30% of them (7 people) agreed, 30% were neutral, 20% of them (4 people) strongly agreed, 10% (2 people) disagreed, and 10% (2 people) strongly disagreed. These numbers are represented with blue in the graph.

Also, in green the researcher represents students' thoughts on this activity being helpful to make them feel confident when speaking English next time. It is shown in the graph that 13 students (60%) strongly agreed, and 9 (40%) agreed.

Figure 10



Figure 10 shows how fun the participants think the activity was

Source: Researcher's creation

Students were inquired to give their opinion on how fun the activity was by rating the activity from 5 to 1 being 5 the highest score. 11 (50%) rated this activity 5, and 9 participants (40%) rated this activity 4 while 2 of them (10%) graded it 2. Participants commented that keeping an English environment has been really helpful in their oral

skills. They also mention they would like to have more activities like these. Students also mentioned they would like to feel more confident when speaking the target language. Another relevant comment is that one of the students says that keeping the environment in English has been difficult for him/her, but he/she now feels more confident when speaking. One of the students remarks he/she would feel more confident if the class had short periods of time in Spanish in order to clarify questions.

4.3.3 Role play

Figure 11

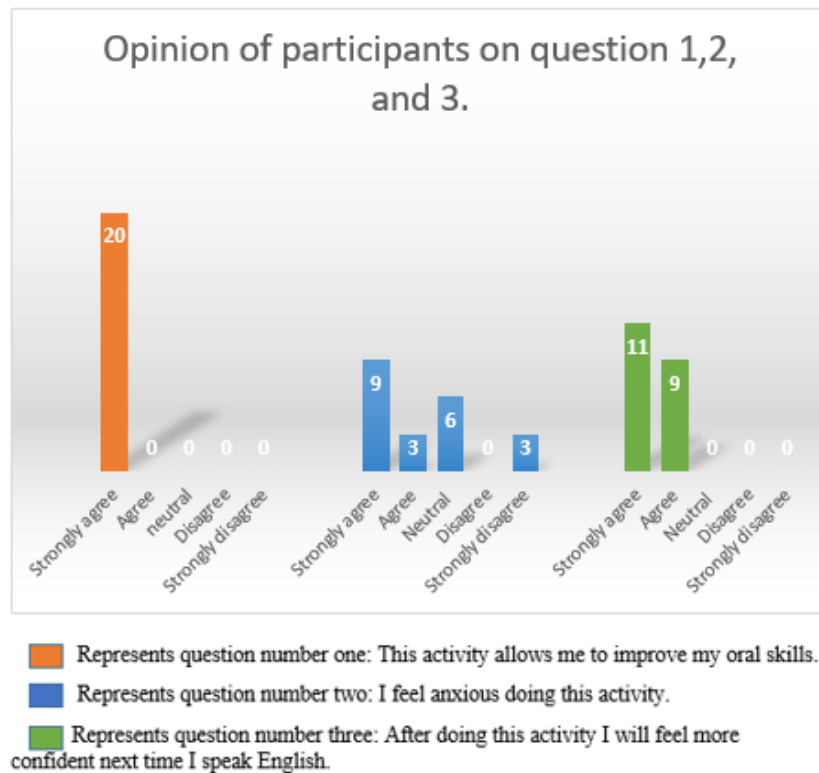


Figure 11 shows the opinion of the participants on questions 1, 2, and 3

Source: Researcher's creation

The day the participants performed a role play, 2 of them did not assist. 20 students (100% of them) strongly agreed that the activity helped them improve their oral skills. That digit is represented on the orange bar of the graph. For the second question, students were asked if they felt anxious doing this activity. 9 of them strongly agreed, 6 neither agreed nor disagreed, 3 agreed, and 3 strongly disagreed. That represents 43%, 29%, 14%, 14% respectively. And, for the third question they were asked if they thought this activity would help them feel more confident next time they needed to speak English. 11 of them strongly agreed while 9 of them agreed. That represents 57 and 43 percent of the population correspondingly and it is represented in the figure with green bars.

Figure 12



Figure 12 shows how fun the participants think the activity was

Source: Researcher's creation

In the figure above, the researcher shows the results obtained when the participants were asked their opinion on how fun the activity was by rating the activity from 5 to 1

being 5 the highest score. 100% of the students (20 people) rated this activity 5. Students noted that this activity had a lot of fun and they wanted to continue doing it. Actually, they mentioned that next time they would like to have extra material to use during the role play. Other students commented that they thought this activity would really help them to practice their oral skills since they got to show scenarios that could happen in real life.

4.3.4 Memory Card

Figure 13

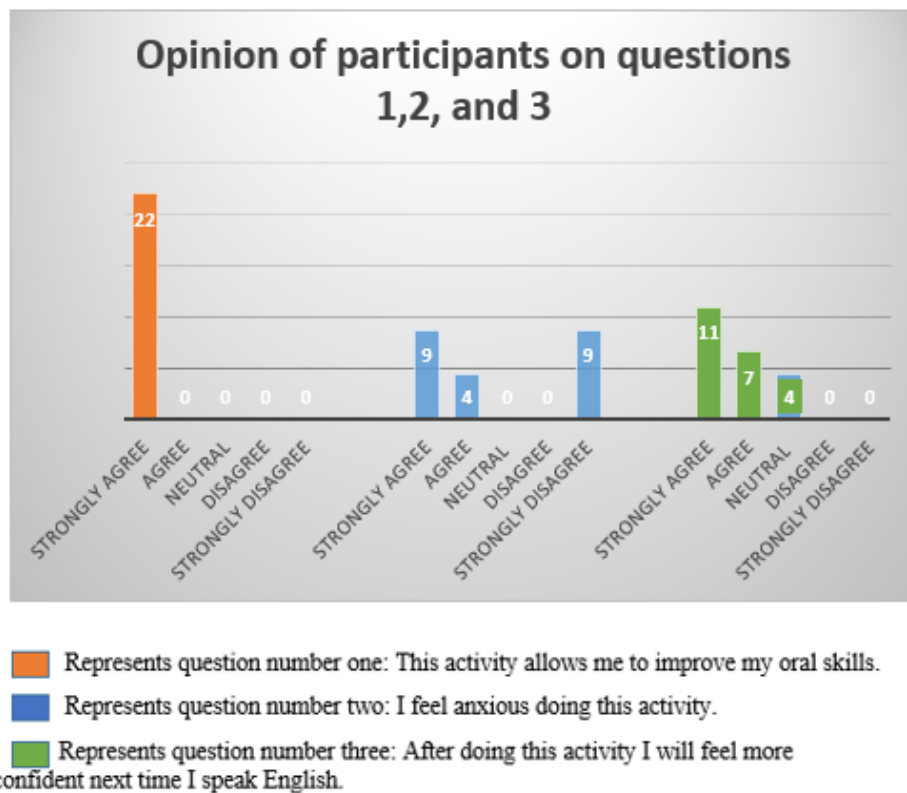


Figure 13 shows the participants' opinion on questions 1, 2, and 3

Source: Researcher's Creation

Figure 13 shows the students' opinion on the activity named Memory Card. 100% of the students strongly agreed that learning vocabulary through pictures would help them to improve their oral skills. Nine of the students, which represent a forty percent, strongly agreed they felt anxious while doing this activity, 2 of them (20%) agreed, and 9 of them strongly disagreed. And when they were asked if they would feel more confident next time they had to speak English after performing this activity 11 of them (50%) strongly agreed, 7 (30%) agreed, and 4 (20%) were neutral.

Figure 14



Figure 14 shows how fun the participants think the activity was

Source: Researcher's creation

For question number five students were requested to rate this activity from 1 to 5 on how fun the activity was, being 5 the best rate. 20 of the participants which represent a 90% rated this activity with 5 while 2 students (10%) rated this activity with 4. Students

commented that this activity helped them match the picture with the word so they learned and remembered vocabulary and they thought this could help them improve their oral skills. Also, another student commented that she/he would have liked to be able to speak a little bit more during the activity. They also commented that in order to speak you need to have a wide vocabulary and pictures make them burst their vocabulary. Some students did not comment about the oral skills; instead, they said they had a lot of fun playing this game and they felt they really had to be concentrated in order to match the words correctly.

4.3.5 Amazing Race

Figure 15

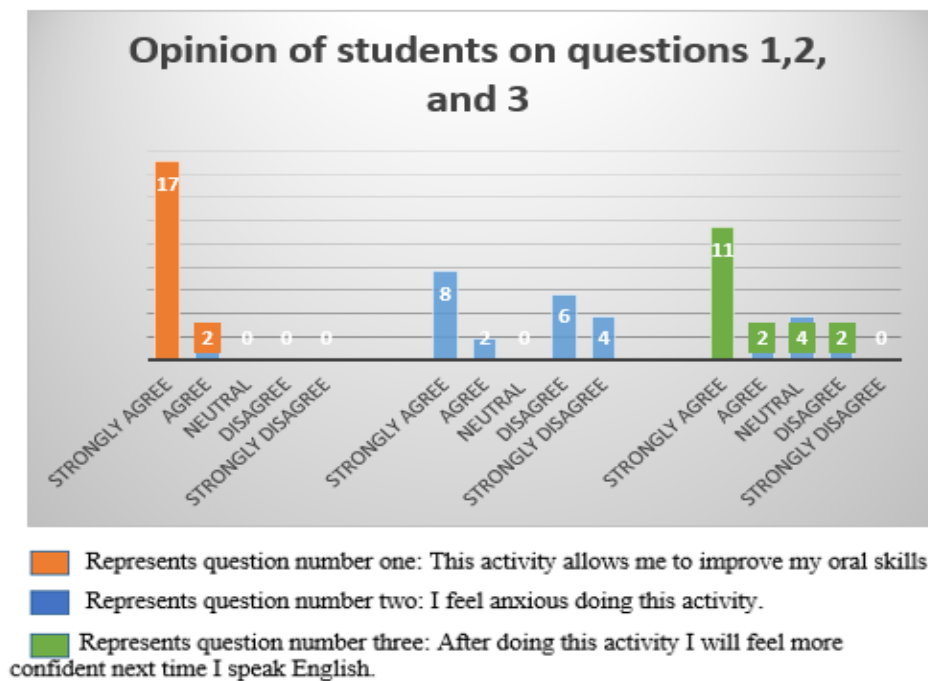


Figure 15 shows the opinion of the students on questions 1, 2, and 3

Source: Researcher's creation

Figure 15 shows the opinion of students about the activity called Amazing Race. The researcher wants to point out that this activity was applied to only 19 participants since not all of the participants showed up that day. 17 out of 19 students (90%) strongly agreed that this activity helped them to improve their oral skills. 2 students which represent 20% of them agreed. 8 students (40%) strongly agreed that they felt anxious when they did this activity, 2 of them (10%) agreed, 6 (30%) disagreed, and 4 of them (20%) strongly disagreed. For question number three, students were asked their thoughts on feeling more confident when speaking in English next time after performing this activity. 11 of the participants which in this case represent 60% of them strongly agreed, 2 of them (10%) agreed, 4 (20%) were neutral, and 2 of them (10%) disagreed.

Figure 16



Figure 16 shows how fun the participants think the activity was

Source: Researcher's creation

After doing this activity the participants were requested to rate this activity from 1 to 5 being 5 the highest score. They were asked how fun they thought the activity was. 17 of the students (90%) of them rated this activity with a 5 while only 2 of them rated this activity with 3. Some of the students commented this activity was really challenging since they had to follow the instructions, they had a certain period of time and they had to talk to their classmates in order to decide how they were going to develop every step. They also found that it was helpful to put together a map of the United States because they also learned geography and the name of the states. Participants commented that it will be important if next time this activity is applied, students have more time to learn about the states.

4.4 Pre and Post test

In order to evaluate students' progress, students were asked to give a small presentation before and after applying the activities, so that the researcher could evaluate if there had been any progress in the students' oral skills.

Figure 17

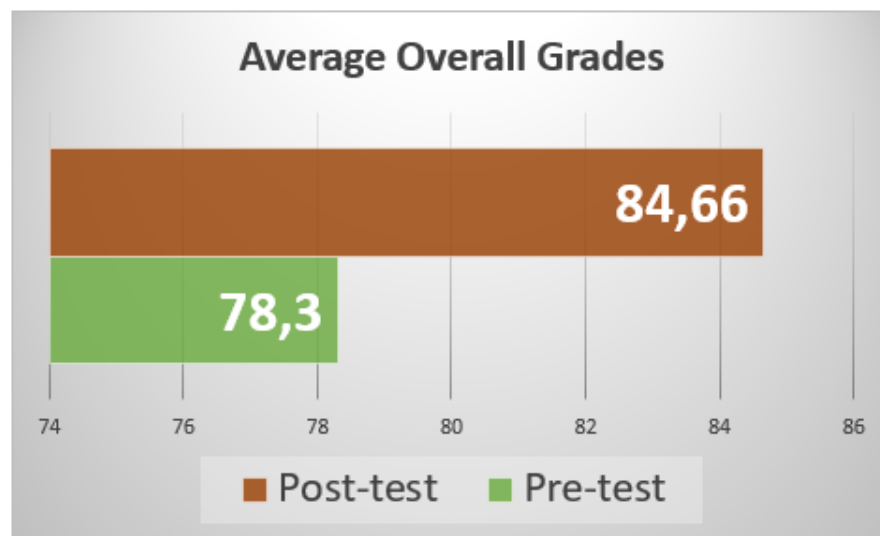


Figure 17 shows average overall grades students got before and after they did the activities taken from the Natural Approach

Source: Researcher's Creation

Before carrying out activities from the Natural Approach, the average overall grades of the students was 78.3 in a scale from 1 to 100. After the activities the same average increased in 6.36 points moving to 84.66. In the following graph the researcher explains the items she took into account to evaluate the students. What the researcher asked the students to talk about topics on the book for 2 minutes before and after the activities; therefore, she could grade the oral skills of every student.

Figure 18

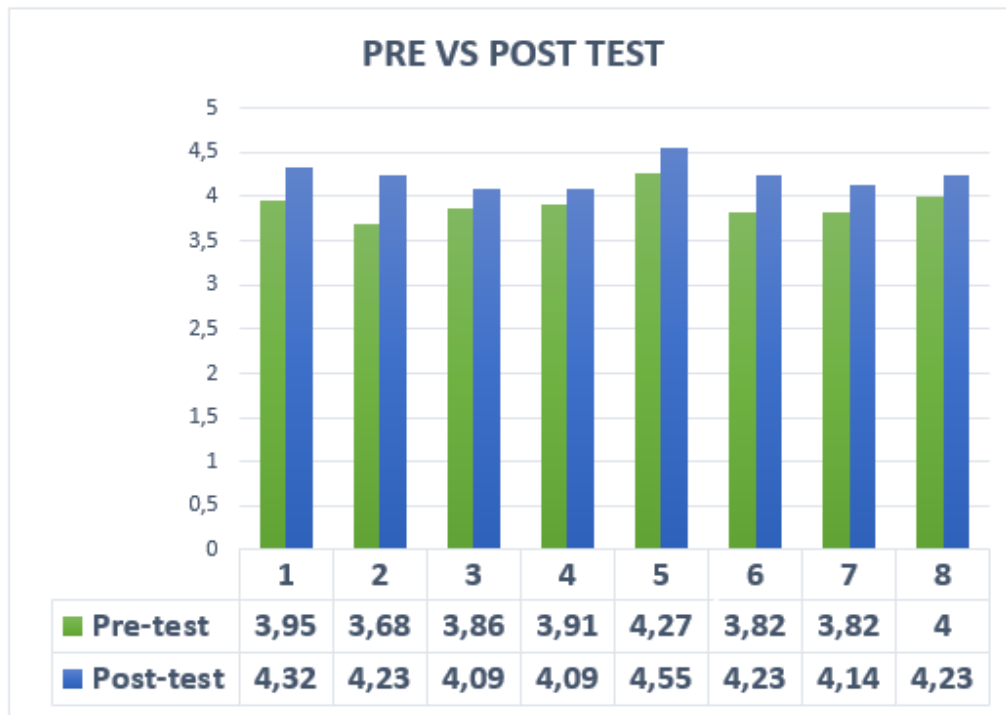


Figure 18 shows average scores participants got before and after the activities taken from the Natural Approach

Source: Researcher’s creation

In the graph above, numbers 1,2,3,4,5,6,7, and 8 represent the 8 aspects the researcher took into account in a rubric when evaluating the students before and after the activities from the Natural Approach. Students were scored from 1 to 5 being 1 the lowest and 5 the highest score. The blue bars represent the average score students got before the activities and the orange bars represent the average scores after the activities. Area number 1 was “student can fluently speak English”. The average before the Natural Approach was 3.95 and after 4.32. Aspect number 2 was “student communicates ideas correctly” and the average went from 3.68 to 4.23. Number 3 was “student used vocabulary properly according to its context. Here students started out with an average of 3.86 and ended up

with a 4.09. Aspect number 4 was “student uses grammar properly on which the average was 3.91 at the beginning and then 4.09. Number 5 was “student uses a clear voice and correct precise pronunciation of terms so that I can understand”. In this part students move from an average of 4.27 to 4.55. What the researcher evaluated in number 6 was “student speak clearly”. Here students started with an average of 3.82 and moved to an average of 4.23. The penultimate aspect was “student seems confident when speaking English”. The initial average was 3.82 and the final one was 4.14. The last aspect was “student understands the teacher’s instructions”, in which students started with an average of 4 and moved to a 4.23

Chapter V

Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Purpose of the conclusion

When the researcher started this investigation, a main objective was set to evaluate the impact of the Natural Approach in the oral skills of an intermediate level students at a private language institution during the second bimester of 2017. After setting the general objective the researcher set three specific ones which are: to identify the problems students face when performing oral skills, to apply activities from the Natural Approach in order to improve oral skills, and to analyze how activities from the Natural Approach can help students communicate in a more accurate way.

In order to reach those goals the researcher utilized five data collection instruments: observation, interview, questionnaires, and pre and post tests. Each of them was meant to reach specific objectives and the description of those instruments can be found in the previous chapter.

5.2 Conclusions

5.2.1 To identify the problems students face when performing the oral skills

This objective was crucial to fulfill the general objective of the present investigation. Identifying the problems students face when performing the oral skills permitted the researcher choose the activities that better fit her students' needs and to choose these activities according to their level. The first specific objective was accomplished by observing the students, interviewing a teacher, applying questionnaires, and doing a pre-test.

During the observation the most important aspect to highlight was that the lessons were based on drills and students were in need for more activities. Another important aspect observed by the researcher during her almost three years working at the private institute is that many students drop out when they get in the intermediate level and the feedback they have given is that they do not want to repeat anymore and they feel they are not learning by drilling and need more activities that make them able to communicate. This shows what was stated by the researcher on adding extra activities rather than only drilling.

Another important instrument that was utilized by the researcher, for the sake of identifying the problems students face when performing oral skills was an interview. This interview was applied to a teacher who has been working at this institute since it started. He mentioned that when students reach the intermediate level they lack vocabulary and they still think a lot in Spanish. He also mentioned that extra activities are important in order to encourage students to speak. Besides he thinks translation must be avoided and that it would be really helpful for the students to communicate in the target language. The teacher who was interviewed assisted the researcher on finding the right activities related to the Natural Approach for the intermediate level.

Applying a questionnaire to the participants complemented the observation and the interview really well to identify the problems student faced when performing oral skills. 16 of the students out of 22 said speaking is the most important skill when learning English. And it is peculiar that even though 73% of the participants think that drilling is 100% effective to learn how to communicate in English, 59% (13 people out of 22) consider other activities as “very important” and 41% of them (9 people out of 22) as

“somewhat important” This shows that students consider that extra activities are needed to compliment the drills done throughout the lesson. Data collected by the researcher shows on figure 6 in Chapter 4, that students are aware of the importance of lowering the affective filter, they expressed that the role of the teacher is crucial to do so. This might be seen as kind of obvious, but in the field not all the teachers take into account the affective filter when delivering the class.

To identify the problems students face when performing oral skills the students were tested by the researcher talking about a topic they are familiar with for at least two minutes. This test was done previous the application from the activities of the Natural Approach. In this test the researcher evaluated aspects such as fluency, accuracy, pronunciation and self-confidence. Students were evaluated from 1 to 5 being 5 the highest score. As a result of this test, the researcher found out that students need to improve their fluency since from all the criteria evaluated, fluency was the one that got the lowest score. The average score obtained by the students in this item was 3.68 out of 5. Also, one of the weaknesses students had according to the pre-test was accuracy since the average in these items was 3.86 in “student communicates ideas correctly” and 3.82 in “student speaks clearly”.

5.2.2 To apply activities from the Natural Approach in order to improve the oral skills

When doing this activity the researcher could not working with the drills that are in the teacher’s guide of the private institute, neither she intended to since teachers are supposed to follow their methodology and drills have been working for some of the

students so far. Instead what the researcher did was to keep on with the drills but adding extra activities from the Natural Approach.

Concerning this objective, the researcher chose activities from the Total Physical Response, Communicative Approach and Direct Method. Moreover, the researcher kept the environment English only, and encouraged the students to feel comfortable and relaxed during the class. Regarding the Total Physical Response the researcher applied two activities: Action Song and Amazing Race. For the Communicative Approach the students performed role plays, and for the Direct Method students played a memory game.

As described in chapter four, the students provided good feedback after each activity. And actually, the researcher observed that they were very enthusiastic when performing different activities. The majority of the activities were rated 5 or 4 on the entertainment of the activity, being 5 the highest score and 1 the lowest one. Actually only 2 students rated the activity Only English with 2 and 2 students graded the Amazing Race 3.

Besides, students were asked what they thought about each activity and determine if they had been helpful to improve their oral skills. On this one all of the students either strongly agreed or agreed. Only the Action Song had four students marking the option neutral. This fact showed students practiced their oral skills during the activities. Students commented that they had found really helpful doing them since they got to communicate in a more natural way.

After each activity, students were also asked about their level of anxiety during the performance of the activity. After the answers the participants provided and through observation, what the researcher could conclude was that some of them were anxious and

some of them were not and that activities were extremely related to their personalities. Students with more outgoing personalities seemed less anxious and shy students all the way around. However, all of them were willing to do the activities and all of them tried hard to keep it in the target language. It is necessary to mention that the participants of this investigation are adults and all of them are on the lookout for learning English. In other words, they are very good at drilling, but when the researcher brought activities that were not on the teacher's guide students were enthusiastic and willing to do them. Therefore, the researcher could conclude that these activities from the Natural Approach gave students the opportunity to think out of the box. In addition, it took students out of their comfort zone of drilling and made them face what speaking English really is.

Students were also asked if these activities would make them feel more confident they speaking English. Because of this and the observation of the researcher, it could be concluded that students got to practice their oral skills in different ways that they were not used to and they felt that it was a good practice for the development of their oral skills. Some of students commented they really had enjoyed the activities and they would have liked to keep practicing similar ones.

5.2.3 To analyze how activities from the Natural Approach can help students communicate in a more accurate way

To fulfill this objective, the researcher used three instruments: observation, pre-test and post-test. Before starting the application of the activities, students were evaluated through an oral test. For this test, the researcher had the students randomly choose a topic that they were familiar with from a box and talk about it for at least two minutes. While they were speaking the researcher evaluated aspects such as fluency, accuracy,

pronunciation, level of anxiety, and grammar. These aspects were handled correctly and led English learners to be able to communicate accurately.

In this test the average of the points obtained was 31.32 out of 40. The highest score students got was on pronunciation. On this item the average was 4.27 out of 5. The lowest average was on fluency whose average was 3.68 out of 5. The average overall grade was 78.3 on this pre oral test.

After these activities another test was applied to the students. This test was exactly the same as the pre-test. A group of topics familiar to the students were put in a box for the students to choose one randomly. The same items were evaluated by the researcher: fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, level of anxiety, and grammar. This time since students had already taken the test, they seemed less anxious and that was actually reflected on the points they got on confidence, they started out with 3.82 points average and for the post-test it increased 0.32 to obtain an average of 4.14.

For the post-test, students also increased 0.55 points on the lowest score they got in the pre-test, obtaining 4.23 in fluency this time. Besides, one of the weaknesses students had in the pre-test that was accuracy, students moved from 3.86 to 4.09 in “student communicates ideas correctly” and from 3.82 to 4.23 in “student speaks clearly”. This time, the pronunciation average score increased 0.28 points getting this time 4.55 out of 5. In every single item evaluated students, improved after the use of activities from the Natural Approach. Actually the average of improvement in every single item was 0.32 points. Besides, the total points obtained average moved from 32.32 points to 33.86 points. In fact, the average grade of the previous test moved up in 6.36; therefore, the average overall grade was 84.66

As a matter of fact, the oral skills of the students improved after the use of activities from the Natural Approach. But is also important to mention that students enjoyed these activities and were willing to do them; although, some of them can be considered childish. Actually, for the Action Song the researcher allowed them to choose the song they wanted to represent with mimics and they chose songs for kids. Also, students worked in teams and that helped them create a good environment in the classroom where they got to communicate their ideas.

In chapter 1 the researcher mentioned that at this institute the population tends to be reduced during the intermediate level and student have given feedback on being tired of doing drills. It is relevant to mention that this investigation started out with 22 participants and ended up with the same amount of students what means that none of them drop-out.

So it can be concluded that the activities from the Natural Approach help students to improve their oral skills such as fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, level of anxiety, and grammar. It can also be concluded that students enjoyed these activities and although some of them felt anxious when doing them the majority of them agreed they would help them to feel more confident next time they had to speak English. Besides, since none of the students dropped out and most of them gave good feedback the researcher concluded that these activities from the Natural Approach kept students motivated through the bimester.

5.3 Restatement of the research question

The general objective of this investigation is to evaluate the impact of the Natural Approach regarding the oral skills of intermediate level students at a private language institution during the second bimester of 2017. This general objective emerged after the researcher asked herself what the effects of the Natural Approach would be in the development of the oral skills of an intermediate level group at private language institution during the second bimester of 2017. For the researcher to answer this question several stages took place in this investigation.

First, the researcher studied the Natural Approach. Afterwards she chose the participants who were students of the intermediate level. Then, the researcher observed the participants, interviewed a co-worker, applied a questionnaire and a pre-test to the participants in order to identify the problems students faced when performing the oral skills. Once the researcher identified these problems, she chose activities from the Natural Approach in order to put them into practice with the participants. The activities the researcher carried out with her students were: Action song, English only, Amazing Race, Role Play, and Memory Game. These activities permitted the researcher fulfill the second specific objective which was to apply activities from the Natural Approach in order to improve the oral skills.

The researcher applied a questionnaire after each activity in order to get feedback from the students, so she could, not only observe their behavior during the activities but also measure in number the opinion students had about each activity. After doing the activities from the Natural Approach with the participants, the researcher did a post-test that evaluated the same items that had been evaluated in the pre-test to determine if the

students had had any improvement. That allowed the investigator to analyze how the activities from the Natural Approach could help students communicate in a more accurate way.

Consequently, the researcher could claim that the question stated at the beginning of the present investigation had been successfully answered, and that the Natural Approach had had a positive effect in the development of the oral skills of an intermediate level group at a private language institution during the second bimester of 2017, since according to the data collector instruments students improved their oral skills.

5.4 Unexpected results

Students who reach the intermediate level at this institute tend to leave the institute before starting the advanced level. As it was stated by the researcher in previous chapters groups in the intermediate level start out with 14 students and when getting to the advanced level have 6 students the most. The transition between the beginning and the advanced level sometimes is exhausting for the students, since what they have expressed is that they want to start having regular conversations and be able to give their opinions about different topics.

That feedback motivated the researcher to start the present investigation. However, the researcher did not expect that the students were going to get so engaged in the process throughout which none of them dropped out the course this bimester. The researcher started with 22 students and finished this investigation with the same amount of students.

5.5 Recommendations

Teachers, researchers, and students who want to investigate about the Natural Approach should take into account that this approach can be used to work with students at any age, even with kids. So it must be interesting to apply these activities with people of different ages to investigate what results can be found. Besides, the researcher recommends future investigators to evaluate the impact of the Natural Approach on listening and speaking at the same time, since the Natural Approach states that these skills are strongly linked. The researcher recommends to apply activities such as fill in the blanks, dictation, labeling activities.

Besides, it will be a good idea for future investigators to link rates of drop outs with the activities performed by groups and find out how the activities that students consider as fun can encourage students not to drop out.

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APPENDIXES

1. Action Song Questionnaire

Action song

Marque con una equis de acuerdo a su opinión personal.

1. Realizar las mímicas durante la canción me permite mejorar mi comunicación oral en el idioma inglés.

| | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| | Completamente de acuerdo |
| | De acuerdo |
| | Neutral |
| | Desacuerdo |
| | Completamente en desacuerdo |

2. Me sentí ansioso(a) a la hora de realizar esta actividad.

| | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| | Completamente de acuerdo |
| | De acuerdo |
| | Neutral |
| | Desacuerdo |
| | Completamente en desacuerdo |

3. Después de realizar esta actividad me sentiré más seguro (a) la próxima vez que tenga que hablar en inglés.

| | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| | Completamente de acuerdo |
| | De acuerdo |
| | Neutral |
| | Descuerdo |
| | Completamente en desacuerdo |

4. Del 1 al 5 (siendo 5 la mejor calificación), ¿qué tan entretenida le pareció la actividad?

| | |
|---|--|
| 5 | |
| 4 | |
| 3 | |
| 2 | |
| 1 | |

5. Comente alguna recomendación que usted considere importante a la hora de realizar esta actividad en futuras ocasiones siempre con vistas a mejorar su comunicación oral a la hora de hablar inglés.

2. Amazing Race Questionnaire

Amazing Race

Marque con una equis de acuerdo a su opinión personal.

1. Esta actividad me permite mejorar mi comunicación oral en el idioma inglés.

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Completamente de acuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | De acuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Neutral |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Desacuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Completamente en desacuerdo |

2. Me sentí ansioso(a) a la hora de realizar esta actividad

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Completamente de acuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | De acuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Neutral |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Desacuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Completamente en desacuerdo |

3. Después de realizar esta actividad me sentiré más seguro (a) la próxima vez que tenga que comunicarme en inglés.

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Completamente de acuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | De acuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Neutral |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Desacuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Completamente en desacuerdo |

4. Del 1 al 5 (siendo 5 la mejor calificación), ¿qué tan entretenida le pareció la actividad?

| | |
|---|--------------------------|
| 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

5. Comente alguna recomendación que usted considere importante a la hora de realizar esta actividad en futuras ocasiones siempre con vistas a mejorar su comunicación oral a la hora de hablar inglés.

3. Memory Card Questionnaire

Memory Card

Marque con una equis de acuerdo a su opinión personal

1. Aprender palabras mediante dibujos me permite mejorar mi comunicación oral en el idioma inglés.

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Completamente de acuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | De acuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Neutral |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Desacuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Completamente en desacuerdo |

2. Me sentí ansioso(a) a la hora de realizar esta actividad.

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Completamente de acuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | De acuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Neutral |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Desacuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Completamente en desacuerdo |

3. Después de realizar esta actividad me sentiré más seguro (a) la próxima vez que tenga que comunicarme en inglés

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Completamente de acuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | De acuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Neutral |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Desacuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Completamente en desacuerdo |

4. Del 1 al 5 (siendo 5 la mejor calificación), ¿qué tan entretenida le pareció la actividad?

| | |
|---|--------------------------|
| 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

5. Comente alguna recomendación que usted considere importante a la hora de realizar esta actividad en futuras ocasiones siempre con vistas a mejorar su comunicación oral a la hora de hablar inglés.

4. English Only Questionnaire

English Only

Marque con una equis de acuerdo a su opinión personal.

1. Comunicarme solamente en inglés en el aula me permite mejorar mi desempeño oral en el idioma inglés.

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Completamente de acuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | De acuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Neutral |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Desacuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Completamente en desacuerdo |

2. Me sentí ansioso(a) a la hora de realizar esta actividad.

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Completamente de acuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | De acuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Neutral |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Desacuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Completamente en desacuerdo |

3. Después de realizar esta actividad me sentiré más seguro (a) la próxima vez que tenga que comunicarme en inglés.

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Completamente de acuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | De acuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Neutral |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Desacuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Completamente en desacuerdo |

4. Del 1 al 5 (siendo 5 la mejor calificación), ¿qué tan entretenida le pareció la actividad?

| | |
|---|--------------------------|
| 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

5. Comente alguna recomendación que usted considere importante a la hora de realizar esta actividad en futuras ocasiones siempre con vistas a mejorar su comunicación oral en Inglés.

5. Role Play Questionnaire

Role play

Marque con una equis de acuerdo a su opinión personal

1. Realizar esta obra de teatro permite mejorar mi comunicación oral en inglés

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Completamente de acuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | De acuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Neutral |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Desacuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Completamente en desacuerdo |

2. Me sentí ansioso(a) a la hora de realizar esta actividad.

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Completamente de acuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | De acuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Neutral |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Desacuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Completamente en desacuerdo |

3. Después de realizar esta actividad me sentiré más seguro (a) la próxima vez que tenga que comunicarme en inglés.

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Completamente de acuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | De acuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Neutral |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Desacuerdo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Completamente en desacuerdo |

4. Del 1 al 5 (siendo 5 la mejor calificación), ¿qué tan entretenida le pareció la actividad?

| | |
|---|--------------------------|
| 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

5. Comente alguna recomendación que usted considere importante a la hora de realizar esta actividad en futuras ocasiones siempre con vistas a mejorar su comunicación oral en inglés.

6. Interview to the Teacher

1. What are the most common oral problems students have in the intermediate level?

How would you try to correct those problems?

2. What do you think about drilling as a technique when teaching English?

How do you perceive the application of drilling during a year?

3. What do you understand by lowering the affective filter in the classroom?
4. Do you think lowering the affective filter in the classroom is a good idea? If so, how would you do it?
5. What do you think about keeping an English only environment in the classroom in the intermediate level?
6. What activities from the Natural Approach could be performed in the intermediate level?
7. What do you think about using activities from the TPR such as Amazing Race or Action Song? Do you think they are good ideas to improve the oral skills?
8. What do you think about doing role plays to improve oral skills in the intermediate level?
9. What do you think would be the effect of using pictures to improve oral skills in the intermediate level instead of giving them the translation?

7. Initial Questionnaire

1. Por favor marque con una equis la razón por la que usted estudia inglés.

| | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Viajar |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Conseguir un trabajo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Obtener un mejor puesto donde trabajo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Ayudar a mis hijos a estudiar |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Hobby |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Otras |

2. Organice por orden de importancia los siguientes aspectos a la hora de aprender inglés, siendo 1 lo más importante y 4 lo menos importante

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Tener la capacidad de entender lo que leo. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Tener la capacidad de escribir. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Tener la capacidad de entender lo que dicen. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Tener la capacidad de hablar. |

3. Como calificaría usted el nivel de efectividad del primer libro basado en repeticiones a la hora de usted comunicarse oralmente con otra persona en inglés.

| | |
|--------------------------|---------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 100% efectivo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 75% efectivo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 50% efectivo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 25% efectivo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 0% efectivo |

Por favor brevemente explique su calificación. _____

4. A la hora de comunicarse oralmente qué tan importante considera usted que es realizar otro tipo de actividades diferentes a la repetición.

| | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Muy importante |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Más o menos importante |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Nada importante |

Por favor explique brevemente por qué eligió esa opción. _____

5. Cuando habla inglés, ¿qué lo hace sentir ansioso? Puede marcar hasta tres opciones.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> No saber pronunciar | <input type="checkbox"/> Me preocupo mucho porque la gramática esté correcta. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No poder expresar mis ideas | <input type="checkbox"/> No tener el vocabulario suficiente |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Que no me entiendan | <input type="checkbox"/> Otras _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No entender lo que me están diciendo | <input type="checkbox"/> No me siento ansioso. |

6. Bajar el nivel de ansiedad a la hora de hablar en inglés puede hacer que yo me pueda comunicar mejor.

| | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| | Completamente de acuerdo |
| | De acuerdo |
| | Neutral |
| | desacuerdo |
| | Completamente en desacuerdo |

Si usted marcó la opción “de acuerdo” o “completamente de acuerdo” por favor comente brevemente cómo cree usted que su profesor puede ayudar a reducir su nivel de ansiedad a la hora de hablar inglés.

7. Describa de una a tres actividades que considera usted le mejorarían su desempeño oral en inglés.

8. Class Observation Check List

| Criteria | Check | Comments |
|---|-------|----------|
| Students do drills. | | |
| | | |
| Teacher has a lesson plan. | | |
| | | |
| Teacher communicates in the target language with students. | | |
| | | |
| Students understand what the teacher says. | | |
| | | |
| Students communicate with the teacher in the target language. | | |
| | | |
| Students communicate to each other in the target language. | | |
| | | |
| There are visual aids to teach the lesson. | | |
| | | |
| There are activities for students to communicate in a natural way in the target language. | | |
| | | |
| Students use a book to work in class. | | |
| | | |

