

Interactive Teaching Strategies to Develop Oral Expression in a Foreign Language

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Oral expression is crucial for effective communication in a foreign language that repeatedly generates difficulties for its development, as observed in the French Teaching Bachelor (LEF), where an unsatisfactory level in this skill is registered. Given this situation, the objective is to identify the attributes of role-playing, simulation, debate, and metacognition strategies to promote oral expression in virtual environments based on an educational intervention with situated activities. Methodologically, the study is from a quantitative perspective with a descriptive scope and longitudinal design. The results point to the attributes as triggers of oral expression to reach the B1 level of proficiency and increase the performance of activities with systematized patterns. In conclusion, such strategies represent an innovative methodology for teaching a foreign language with cognitive and metacognitive skills for interaction.

Keywords: interactive teaching strategies, oral expression, communication activities, virtual environments

INTRODUCTION

The teaching-learning process of foreign languages involves the development of communicative competence regarding knowledge, skills, and attitudes for the interaction and negotiation of meanings (García, 2020), according to its social nature (Portal-Camellón et al., 2019), linguistic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic levels (Cerezo et al., 2019). In this close relationship, the last three levels show difficulties between the speakers as the study context does. In fact, one problem in the LEF Bachelor is poor performance in oral expression, reflected in the departmental exam results during the 2020-2021 period.

In this context, the research aims to identify the attributes of interactive didactic strategies to foster oral expression in students of Meta Language IV of the LEF, taking into account the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) descriptors to make speeches (Council of Europe, 2003). In this point, some authors propose working on didactic procedures to improve the performance of oral production (Portal-Camellón et al., 2019; Morales, 2021) through activities, techniques, or methods, guiding a significant learning process in a systematic and structured way (Gordillo et al., 2018). Those procedures are classified as teaching and learning strategies. The first is the activities, resources, and methods teachers plan to achieve their purposes (Blanquiz and Villalobos, 2018). The second is the group of activities and materials for the educational task execution to acquire knowledge (Maldonado-Sánchez et al., 2019). That is why, in foreign language learning, specific strategies for new linguistic knowledge in interactive environments are necessary to achieve language practice in natural contexts. Besides, Carrillo et al. (2017) pointed out interaction as a task where speeches are organized with sense and meaning according to conversational elements, using comprehension and production didactic procedures like

linguistic, sociolinguistic, discursive, and strategic competencies (Escobar et al., 2017; SáMartinez-Iglesia and Iglesias-Montero, 2018; Becerra et al., 2019; Muschietti, 2019; Valdez-Esquivel and Pérez-Azahuanche, 2021). It is worth mentioning that the latter is a fundamental principle for the interaction approach so that students collectively generate adequate communication strategies and resources (Garrote, 2017). Even though oral expression is one of the first activities a speaker faces in his mother tongue or a foreign language (Cruz, 2020), the actors of the curricula do not privilege its importance. In fact, studies carried out on oral expression development have proven that the levels of this communicative competence do not meet the training expectations; being the didactic intervention a methodology to accomplish desired goals in communicative situations (Marcos and Garrán, 2017; Cruz, 2020; Medenu, 2020; Martín, 2021).

In terms of teaching, research on oral expression in foreign languages has also established the communicative approach as a theoretical perspective to foster oral competency in an interactional environment (Carrillo et al., 2017), and even more, in emergency remote teaching, where procedures and techniques must be adapted to encourage that skill virtually (Flores-González and Flores-González, 2020). In this sense, the most common strategies are simulation, debate, role-play, and metacognition.

Role-play is a didactic strategy in which students assume real-life roles during training. It is a playful task with a certain freedom of performance without a script following rules and conditions (Cobo and Valdivia, 2017). In a foreign language, it allows pupils to practice linguistic, cultural, and strategic knowledge, and due to its playful nature, it denotes the interest and motivation to learn autonomously in the communication assignment (Moreno, 2017).

Simulation is very similar to role-play or dramatization. It makes students practice their knowledge and skills to interact in a hypothetical situation with others (Orozco et al., 2020), favoring linguistic elements acquisition and collaborative work promotion in an interactive context (Angelini et al., 2017).

According to Vásquez et al. (2017), the debate is an active methodology to privilege critical, rational, and logical students' thinking through verbal and social activities, giving a point of view on a controversial topic and from a pragma dialectic perspective. Its purpose is to activate the students' previous knowledge for constructing a new one. In the case of oral expression, it is a tool to demonstrate the knowledge acquired in the foreign language, developing reception skills such as active listening, as well as oral and written comprehension, and increasing attitudinal aspects such as motivation, respect, and active participation (Puertas, 2020). Finally, metacognition is primarily for linguistic knowledge and the pragmatic processes that make students aware of their learning processes for accomplishing required chores (Valenzuela, 2019).

In general, role-play (Macias, 2017; García, 2020; Estacio, 2022), simulation (Angelini, 2021), and debate (Del Moral, 2017) favor receptive and productive skills, contributing to increasing creativity and participation in a more natural way. Further, research shows that to communicate successfully in a foreign language, students require appropriate metacognitive abilities to meet their learning and communication objectives (Vargas and Aguilar, 2021).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present study follows a quantitative approach (Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2018) with a descriptive scope and longitudinal design. Its objective is to identify the attributes of interactive didactic strategies (role play, simulation, debate, and metacognition) to promote oral expression in students of Target Language IV from LEF and, in this way, contribute to an active learning methodology for such competency. Regarding the above, this hypothesis arises: the didactic strategies with an interactive approach promote students' oral expression only if each one contains specific attributes.

SAMPLE

There is a focus group of 26 students (total population) from Target Language IV, belonging to the LEF Bachelor from Benemerita Universidad Autonoma de Puebla. The sample presents various problems in oral expression and has to accredit their subject with a B1 level of the CEFR.

DATA COLLECTION

In this longitudinal study, data collection was in different phases (cohorts) during spring 2022 to identify the attributes of the didactic strategies.

TABLE 1
PHASES OF DATA COLLECTION

Number	Phase	Follow-up
I	Pre-treatment	Cohort 1
II	Treatment	Cohort 2
III	Post-treatment	Cohort 3

During the pre-treatment, all students took a standardized test to measure their initial oral expression level and compare it with the post-treatment. Meanwhile, in the didactic intervention, various activities focused on the interaction approach were developed as an active learning methodology using the following strategies:

Roleplay. It focuses on a structured interview to estimate students' oral expression through standardized rubrics by providing personal information and talking about themselves spontaneously with a degree of confidence. Said activities were: introducing themselves in pairs, giving personal data from PowerPoint presentations to a group of exchange students, asking and giving information from relatives, speeches about hobbies, and peer recording conversations about their favorite artists, sports, or activities.

Simulation. It evaluates students' ability to respond and adapt to daily life communicative situations (respecting sociolinguistic codes such as greetings, turn-taking, and courtesy) by eliciting or confirming information. In this case, the simulation activities center on academic exchanges (interviews), conversations about jobs (digital video CV, job interview), the dramatization of the francophone world (imaginary francophone character), purchase and sale of daily consumption products (personification of the receptionist and client), scheduling for an invitation (museum, party, going to the movies, camping, and trip).

Debate. It assesses an oral presentation clearly and accurately by stimulating personal reflections and structuring their speech without difficulties considering the morphosyntactic level and activities like outlining a topic and presenting it as a group, listening to the radio, explaining the advantages and disadvantages of an addressed subject, and discussing on various issues in forums or videoconferences.

Metacognition. It appraises linguistic competence for the appropriate use of the lexicon, morphosyntactic rules (grammar), and pronunciation in a foreign language. In this research, metacognitive scaffolding activities focus on recognizing and displaying vocabulary from various sources (videos, documentaries, and podcasts) and self-assessing speeches (detecting grammar and pronunciation errors) in the recorded reports.

Finally, in the post-treatment, the standardized test was applied again to know if the students obtained level B1 and identify the attributes that promote change or improvement.

**TABLE 2
ANALYSIS MODEL**

Phases	Instruments	Purpose
I. Pre-treatment	Standardized test to measure oral expression	Measure the sample's initial oral expression level before the treatment
II. Treatment	Activities based on Role-play, Simulation, Debate, and Metacognition to encourage oral expression in virtual environments, evaluated with standardized rubrics based on the CEFR	Identify the attributes of each strategy to foster oral production at the B1 level
III. Post-treatment	Standardized test to evaluate the oral expression	Estimate the sample's spoken expression level after the educational intervention and corroborate the strategies' plausibility

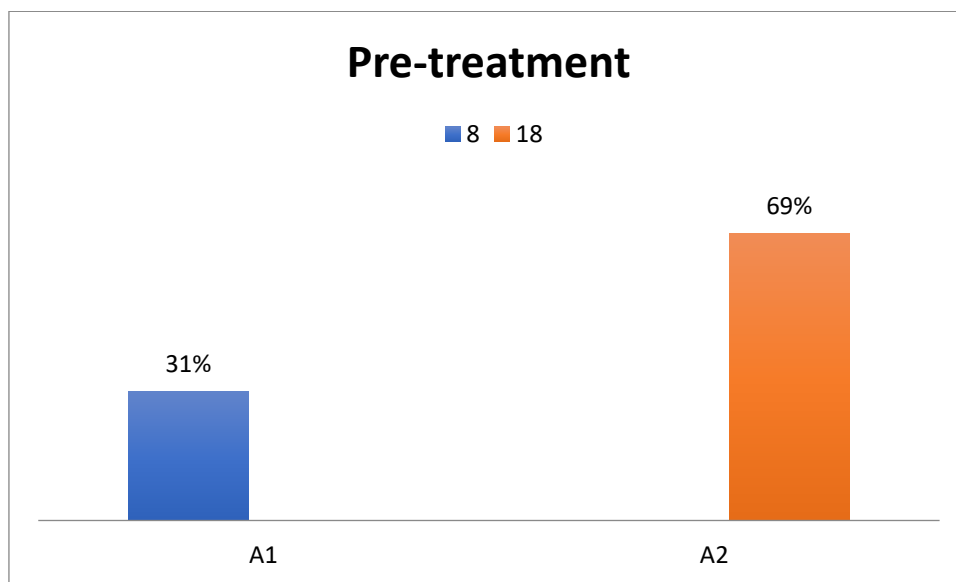
RESULTS

The findings are presented in four sections: pre-treatment, treatment, post-treatment, and a comparative table.

Pre-Treatment

The phase corresponds to the first cohort of the research to know the initial students' proficiency level.

**FIGURE 1
PRE-TREATMENT**

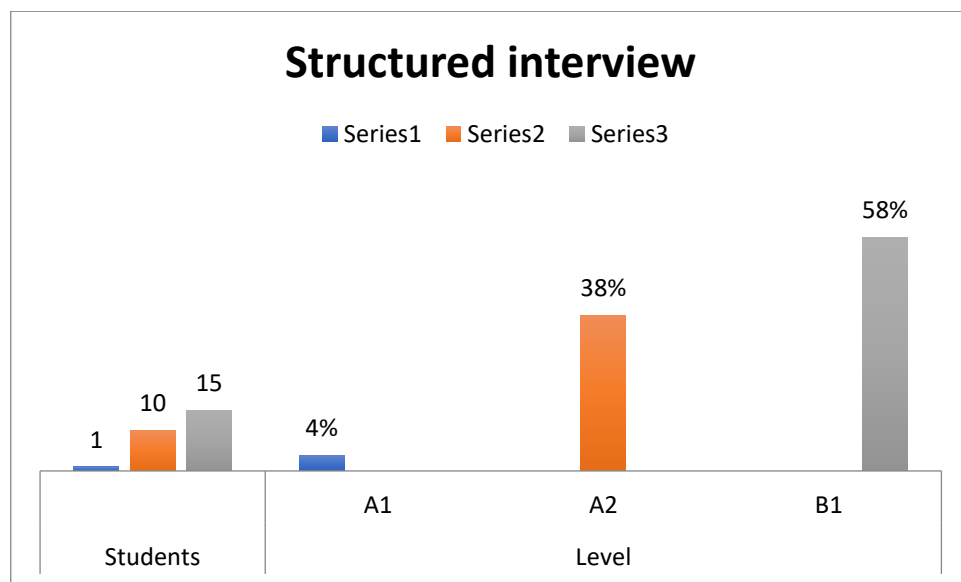


The graphic shows that the sample(100%) is A2+, below the required level. It is because in a virtual modality, the practice of oral expression is not enough, and if it is, it is done traditionally, without strategies to report aspects of their personal and professional life spontaneously. It coincides with the studies of Morales (2021), who mentions that teaching oral production in foreign languages is limited to structural patterns, favoring memorization and repetition that does not promote the natural language to express oneself in authentic contexts. Also, the findings indicate that students need to experience communication situations in an environment similar to the natural one through simulation (Maffey, 2021) even though they have difficulties adopting positions for or against, formulating a proposal or solution to a problem, showing the need to involve strategies for solid arguments (Ochoa and Calle, 2020). Finally, the absence of a suitable and enough lexicon given the registers created difficulties in structuring speeches.

Treatment

The second cohort corresponds to the treatment, where the characteristics of the didactic strategies to develop oral expression are analyzed.

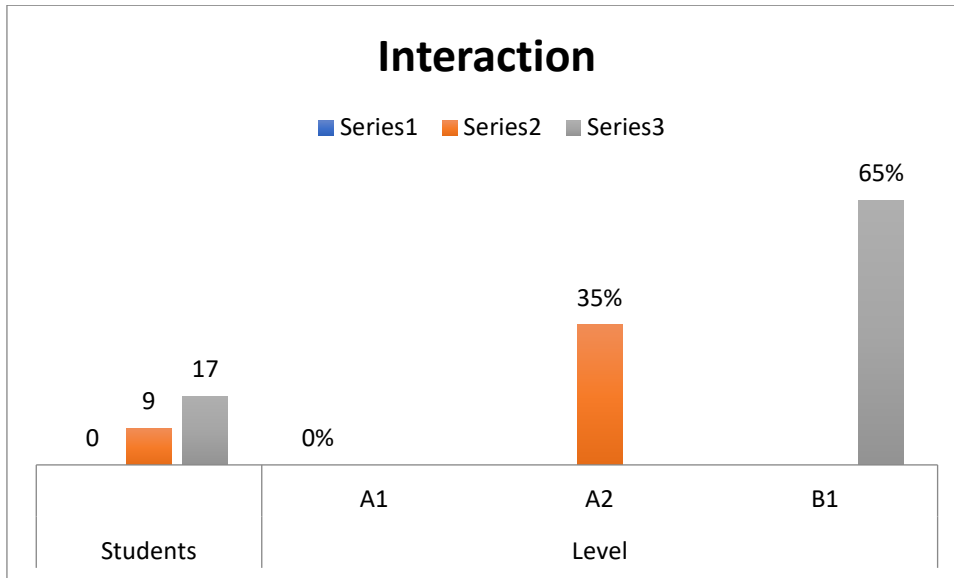
**FIGURE 2
GUIDED INTERVIEW USING ROLE-PLAY**



After its implementation, 58% of the students reached level B1, 38% A2, and 4% A1, respectively. Despite promoting an active methodology in a different educational modality, only one student remained at the same proficiency level due to rote and repetition patterns (total physical response method).

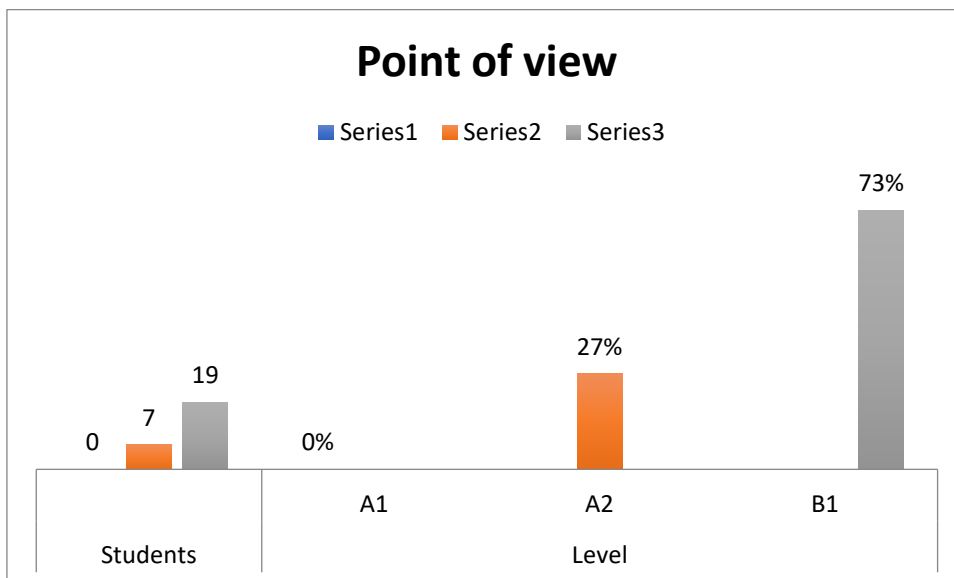
These outcomes also show that the attributes of this strategy highlight a role to interact with peers emotionally and creatively in a virtual-confident environment, where elements examine the dialogue significantly through a series of expressions for everyday situations.

**FIGURE 3
INTERACTION THROUGH SIMULATION**



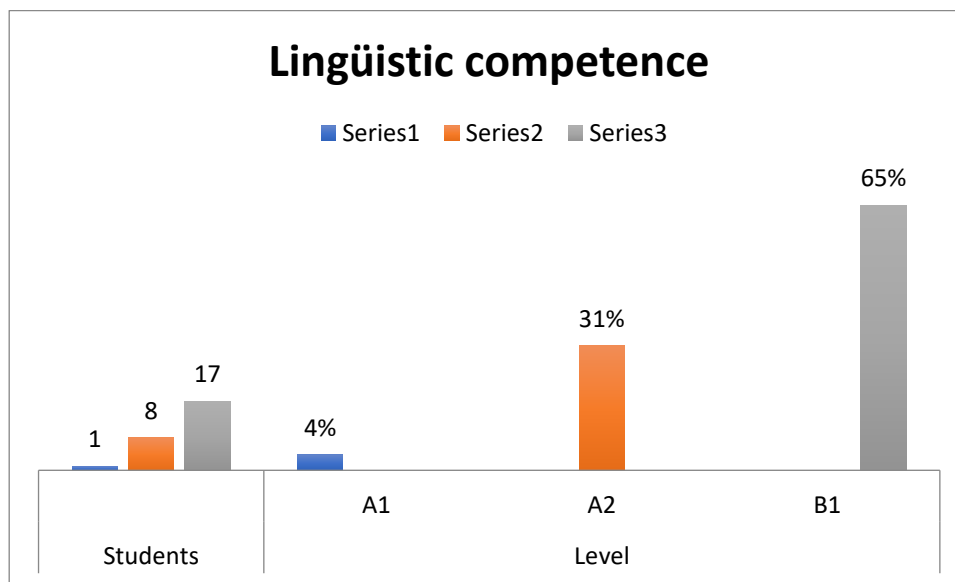
Simulation allows 100% of the sample to reach an immediate level, which indicates its plausibility to work on oral expression because of real-communicative imitations in hypothetical situations, where the role and performance make students use linguistic skills correctly to develop interpersonal and socio-affective relationships, using verbal and nonverbal language in final and enabling tasks. In this case, students answered questions on various topics, thanks to the enrichment of vocabulary in hypothetical interactions, since simulation in foreign languages permeates critical thinking (Angelini et al., 2017).

**FIGURE 4
GIVING POINTS OF VIEW USING THE DEBATE STRATEGY**



Debate lets participants examine a topic, organize ideas, and argue a point of view. in this case, its use contributes to the oral expression of 100% of the sample, including the increase of one proficiency level, by promoting active, contextualized, and non-rote learning. finally, its attributes are the use of expressions to introduce solid and compensating arguments to maintain a conversation and techniques to structure ideas or topics.

FIGURE 5
FOSTERING LANGUAGE SKILLS WITH THE METACOGNITIVE STRATEGY

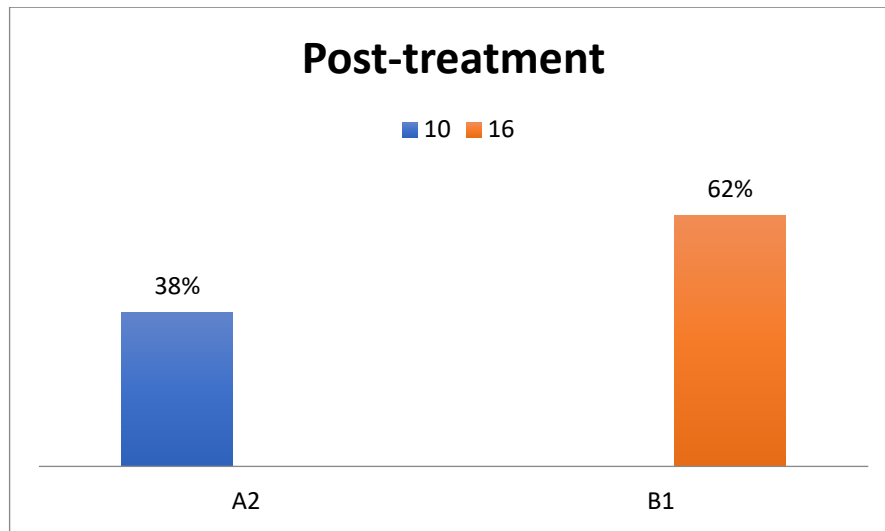


As can be seen, metacognition allows 99% of the sample to obtain a higher level of language proficiency, coinciding with the studies by Bonilla (2018), who states that oral expression requires the learner's awareness to fulfill communication goals. However, only one student remained at the same level due to his absence and poor participation in oral interactions. Actually, during the educational intervention, the characteristics of this strategy are monitoring, self-assessment, and self-regulation of oral expression activities to favor the retention and retrieval of information.

Post-Treatment

It is the third cohort of the research to determine the final participants' proficiency level.

FIGURE 6
POST-TREATMENT PHASE



The post-treatment presents evidence for the educational intervention, suggesting that role-play, simulation, debate, and metacognition strategies are plausible since 100% of the sample obtained a higher level, as seen in the comparative table.

Comparative Table

The table corroborates the hypothesis, which implies that the students applied the didactic strategies under the interactive approach taking into account their attributes for improving oral proficiency.

TABLE 3
ORAL EXPRESSION LEVEL IN THE PRE-TREATMENT VS POST-TREATMENT PHASES

Students	Pre-treatment	Post-treatment
1	A1	A2
2	A2	B1
3	A1	A2
4	A2	B1
5	A1	A2
6	A2	A2
7	A2	B1
8	A1	B1
9	A2	A2
10	A2	B1
11	A2	B1
12	A1	A2
13	A2	B1
14	A2	A2
15	A2	B1
16	A2	B1
17	A2	B1
18	A2	B1

10	A1	A2
20	A1	A2
21	A1	A2
22	A2	B1
23	A2	B1
24	A2	B1
25	A2	B1
26	A2	B1

As can be seen, the four interactive didactic strategies, considering their attributes, promote the development of oral expression, highlighting that active learning methodologies are necessary to generate a communication space with multiple interaction possibilities, especially in virtual modalities.

DISCUSSIONS

The difficulties and limitations students present in their oral expression are of the utmost importance for language teaching-learning didactics. At this point, the findings become crucial since they reveal the strengthening of oral production through the application of simulation, role-play, debate, and metacognition strategies under an interactive approach to reach a satisfactory meta-level (Carrillo et al., 2017). Moreover, previous studies establish those procedures as a fundamental factor in interaction to generate collaborative work, active learning, and authentic and natural communication (Marcos and Garrán, 2017; Plasencia, 2018; Saras, 2020). Such benefits are found in this research because participants demonstrate meaningful learning through linguistic and socio-affective skills in conversations.

Moreover, the educational intervention shows that role-play is not limited to rote standardization and training by repeating a conversation in traditional schemes (Araujo, 2017; Plasencia, 2020). Contrarily, it represents an innovative methodology focused on an interactive oral exercise to promote spontaneity and confidence in practicing cognitive and pragmatic elements (Araujo, 2017; Moreno, 2017; Macías, 2017; Cuitiño et al., 2019; Martínez, 2019). Regarding simulation, it stands out as an interaction strategy for the systematization of opinions in dialogues, using linguistic attributes according to the register; with precise grammatical structure; respecting the social norms of courtesy, exchange, and negotiation of ideas, as confirmed by Morales (2021). Concerning debate strategies, a clear, structured, and understandable discourse takes place by implementing its argumentative and discursive attributes, delimiting the main points of a topic, and issuing a personal reflection. Therefore, its fundamental purpose is to exercise a wide range of skills, abilities, and competencies to defend points of view, evidencing motivation and interest in practicing it, as indicated in research by Tremblay(2017) and Sanchez (2017).

According to the outcomes, the attributes of metacognitive strategies such as retention and information retrieval, self-assessment, and feedback make students aware of their performance, which favors the delimitation of lexical fields, as pointed out by Bonilla and Diaz (2018). This process encourages the immediate correction of pronunciation errors and the appropriate use of vocabulary respecting the context, promoting students' reflection and introspection on their oral competence level (Hargis et al., 2017; Hsin-l and Tzumin, 2021).

Finally, metacognitive strategies contribute to oral production improvement and learning autonomy, a fundamental characteristic of virtual modalities. In general, the proposal leads to the following contributions:

- The identification of interactive didactic strategies and characterization of their attributes as guides to promote oral expression in virtual environments
- Development of an innovative methodology to deal with emerging remote teaching situations
- An educational intervention prototype (treatment) with dynamic activities framed by interactive didactic procedures, implemented in a virtual modality with the possibility of obtaining significant results for spoken language

- The implementation of a self-regulated and motivating learning environment for the virtual teaching-learning process

However, as in any study, there are limitations. In this case, one of them is the excessive use of artificial practices with the same interaction pattern. That is why the teacher's work is crucial to give variability to the activities and use of didactic strategies based on solid didactic planning. Another limitation is the small study sample. However, the proposal presents an educational intervention that can be applied in other contexts and analyzed from another perspective. Referring to the future lines of research derived from this study, some of them are the implication of cognitive structures for oral expression; the dynamics of interaction in the classroom; socio-affective development from interaction in class; diversification of interaction media in foreign languages; challenges of the competency-based approach; situational simulations in academic contexts, among others.

Finally, although the main objective is to describe the attributes of the didactic strategies that enable oral expression, the results allow us to glimpse a possible association between those strategies and the proficiency level, which constitutes the next phase of this research to deepen the knowledge of the phenomenon.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results, the following conclusions are derived. In the first place, the study confirms the hypothesis that underlines didactic strategies with an interactive approach as promoters of a student's oral expression only if he considers their specific attributes. Indeed, its identification enables prototype activities to be implemented in virtual environments, directly contributing to oral competencies. Then, this study establishes an active-innovative learning methodology to provide solutions to a common foreign language teaching-learning problem like the lack of strategies for communication. Last but not least, the research confirms that a traditional methodology does not favor oral expression; on the contrary, the application of interactive didactic procedures with activities matching the student's learning styles in self-regulated environments makes possible the development of this little-taught skill.

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