THE USE OF VOICE MESSAGE TO INCREASE ORAL COMMUNICATION SELF-EFFICACY BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

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Abstract

According to Sadoux (2013) speaking skills in language learning involve challenges beyond the classroom and students’ motivation; challenges such as conversation practice. This is true especially in Foreign Language learning contexts where most all of materials are limited to the classroom. However, Kukulska-Hulme (2006) claims that mobile devices have opened the door for many learning resources which allow us to have information anywhere and anytime.

This study uses the WhatsApp platform for implementing a quantitative descriptive study for increasing oral communication self-efficacy and opportunities for communication beyond classroom. Oral communication self-efficacy is defined in this study as the belief of how one can have conversations with a native speaker.

Sixteen native Spanish students and sixteen native English speakers participated during a month time period by exchanging and recording conversations. At the end of this time frame, they answered an oral communication self-efficacy survey. Results showed that voice message is a tool that increases oral communication self-efficacy and offer opportunities for practicing speaking beyond the classroom.

Keywords: Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL), oral communication, self-efficacy, voice recording message.

1 INTRODUCTION

Every year, there are many language students who are not able to hold conversations with native speakers even after they have taken English and Spanish courses for years. There are many factors that could affects why language students avoid speaking in the target language; for example, Horwitz et al. (1986) found evidence that perfectionism in pronunciation affects speaking performance; many language students prefer not to speak if they do not say the words correctly.

Another evidence by Cui & Huang (2008) says that due to the large groups of students in the class, there are not enough opportunities for each student to speak in the classroom. Additionally, there are more activities on-line for writing, reading, and listening skills but not many for speaking and conversation which allow learners to practice in order to improve it.

This study focused on conversation practice and a student’s confidence as factors which affect speaking performance. Khatib & Maarof (2015, pg. 99) claims that “speaking is a productive skill that challenges students’ capability to perform a task”. That definition involves confidence in being able to do it; and also capability or the belief that someone can do it. Generally speaking, it is about self-efficacy which is defined by Bandura (1977) as the belief of how one can perform a task by oneself.

Considering Kukulska-Hulme & Shield’s (2008) point of view that mobile learning is a promising technique for language learning, this study will generate an understanding of how technology can increase oral communication self-efficacy in language students by going outside of the classroom walls. That is one of the best moments and places to examine the use of technology in language learning.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 The social constructivism theory

Self-efficacy was originated by Bandura’s social cognitive theory (1982), which states that external environments and the behaviours of others affect an individual’s outlook. Through observation and social interaction, individuals formulate their self-judgment of their competence in performing a specific task. This self-judgment leads the individual to decide on the amount of effort to invest in completing
the task or to abandon it even before attempting it (Bandura 1977, 1982). On the other hand, Vygotsky (1978) asserted “The social constructivist theory attempts to improve social interactions between students to construct and share knowledge,” in order to learn materials anytime, anywhere and in mixed formats has the capability to reinforce deep student learning enhancement and to permit students to develop their own knowledge (Blehch, 2014).

2.2 Mobile assisted language learning (MALL)

MALL is defined by Chen (2013) as the formal or informal learning of a foreign language with the assistance of mobile devices. Nowadays, MALL is a trendy topic, because it allows students to use and record audio files that then can be shared and listened to for multiple purposes including pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary.

In this study, oral communication self-efficacy is defined as the capability to speak with a native speaker. As it was previously mentioned some language students avoid speaking in the target language. They have their own reasons but most of them are related to the lack of oral communication self-efficacy (OCS). Students need to increase OCS, being able to say, “I can, I can speak English with a native speaker.” Also students find it difficult to have conversations because most of the speaking is exclusively in the classroom and there are not many opportunities for continuing after or outside of class. Technology is a great tool and it opens new platforms for practicing speaking outside the classroom.

The first studies related to self-efficacy and the MALL were carried out by Bouffard-Bouchard et al. (1991) They found evidence that self-efficacy is a factor that affects self-regulation in English speaking activities. Later, Huang & Chang, 1998; Pajares & Valiante, 1997; Pajares, Miller, & Johnson, 1999. Schunk (1990) whose findings of self-efficacy are related to success of the students. Students with low self-efficacy for learning may avoid tasks while others who think they can they are more likely to participate. Chih-Yuan et al. (2015) investigated the effects of self-efficacy and self-regulation on student achievement in a context-aware learning environment. They used an innovative global positioning system (GPS) sensor-based mobile learning system to facilitate English learning of different plants on campus. Forty-one university students participated in the study, divided into high and low groups of self-efficacy and self-regulation. The results showed that both self-regulation and self-efficacy were significant predictors of learning achievement in the mobile context-aware learning (MCL) context.

McIntosh, Braul, and Chao (2003) designed an asynchronous voice conference activity to enhance students’ speaking and listening skills in two English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classes. The students completed listening assignments and discussed the topics through audio recordings. Survey results showed that the students were enthusiastic about the peer-to-peer asynchronous interaction. For the majority of the students, experience with asynchronous conference was enjoyable given the advantages of being able to listen to them and notice their own mistakes. Although responses were mostly positive, there were some students who expressed their discomfort in sharing recordings with others and in relation to the time delay in responding.

From other perspectives, Ashiyan and Salehi (2016) investigated the use and effect of mobile applications such as WhatsApp on school work and out of school work in eighty learners. The data showed evidence about WhatsApp as a learning platform used by the groups in order to improve the accessibility of learning materials and the performance of learning activities. Consequently, four main factors that motivated the researcher in the creation of a WhatsApp group are mentioned in the following:

1. By establishing a WhatsApp group, the students could communicate with their teacher and classmates, transmit data, and assist learners in order to help them with their doubts or feedback.

2. The researcher groomed a positive social atmosphere in order to build a feeling of belonging and community through WhatsApp groups.

3. The students were able to share information. By creating a dialogue, the students worked as a team.

4. The WhatsApp teams applied the learning platform in order to increase the accessibility of learning materials and activities.
3 METHODOLOGY

The prime objective of this quantitative research is to describe the use of voice messages for increasing oral communication self-efficacy for conversational speaking practice with native speakers. The sample of this study comprised of sixteen English foreign language students and sixteen English speakers. Neither group had previously used voice recording message for practicing oral communication with native speakers. Learning students are in the second semester of The English language degree in the University of Quintana Roo, Cozumel Campus. Sixteen native English speaker were invited to practice Spanish conversations with native Spanish speakers. Learners are living in different countries: The United States, Canada, and Mexico. In this study, language level, age, and gender were not considered as factors because the focus is on increasing their confidence in their oral communication self-efficacy and creating opportunities to practice speaking beyond the classroom.

The two following questions guided this study:

1. Do students increase Oral Communication Self-efficacy (OCS) by using voice recording message?
2. Do voice recording message help to practice oral communication with native speakers beyond the traditional classroom?

In order to answer these research questions, the researcher adapted and modified Shih-hsien Yang’s (2012) instrument named Mobile Attitude Survey (MAS) and Mobile Self-efficacy Survey (MSS) which he used to investigate the students’ attitudes and self-efficacy toward the m-learning. However, for this study and its purposes was adapted into a Mobile Assisted Language Learning, the first five questions were an attempt to determine how confident they feel in using voice recording message for practicing speaking and the intent of the last five questions was to determine any increase in oral communication self-efficacy. The instrument is named Mobile Assisted Language Learning Attitude and Self-efficacy Survey (MALLAYSS).

3.1 Voice message activity

Using a topic guide created by the researcher the learning activities lasted for five weeks. Based upon this guide, students were asked to exchange one to three minutes of voice messages, three times each week. It was not mandatory to answer simultaneously but they have to speak in both English and Spanish. The basic operation of this activity was to set a platform where anyone can practice speaking, interact, and exchange ideas beyond the classroom learning in order to develop Oral Communication Self-efficacy.

3.2 Results

Ten items were used in order to describe if voice message helps to increase Oral Communication Self-efficacy beyond the classroom. A Likert scale was used as follows: 1 = Completely agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Somewhat agree, 4 = Neither agree nor disagree, 5 = Completely disagree.

1. In the WhatsApp environment, with a voice message, I can communicate with a native speaker.

This statement was focused to describe, if the participants feel confident with a voice message to communicate with a native speaker. The results reveal that 65.63% completely agree, 21.88% agree, and 12.50% somewhat agree. Generally speaking, this tool creates an environment where language learners can interact and have conversations with a native speaker. Nobody disagreed. Technology can be used for academic purposes. Pen pals were very famous in the old days; nowadays; mobile devices offer a synchrony and asynchrony environment just as Kukulska-Hulme (2006) mentioned that they are potentially available anywhere and anytime.

2. In the WhatsApp environment, using voice messaging, I feel it is helpful for practicing speaking and listening skills.

Pollard (2015) claims that technology offers opportunities to communicate outside the classroom, his studies are related to the use of technology for motivation and opportunities for practicing in order to succeed in their language goals. In this study the majority of the participants showed 68.75% completely agree, 28.13% agree and only 3.13% somewhat agree. But nobody disagreed or marked that it is not helpful. Using voice messaging offers advantages for
language learning; especially for those skills where the participation of every student is not possible due to the large numbers of students in language classes.

3 In the WhatsApp environment, I can use a voice message independently without anyone’s help.

In this study, participants were not digital natives; Voice messages were used for practicing speaking with native speakers for their first time. Despite this, results reveal that they used it independently as follows: 56.25% completely agree, 28.13% agree, 12.50 somewhat agree, 3.13% neither agree nor disagree. According to Church & De Oliveira (2013) WhatsApp has advantages like simplicity, accessibility, and natural language among others. That study might explain why nobody had trouble in using it.

4 In the WhatsApp environment, I feel confident that I can find a convenient time to use a voice message to communicate with a native speaker.

Vaca et al. (2017) also found evidence that WhatsApp is a powerful tool to develop oral communication and students can practice anytime. In this activity, it was not mandatory to answer simultaneously. It was an asynchronous task where participants had to wait patiently for an answer. Generally speaking, it seems that almost everybody feels confident to set a time and send a message; 50% completely agree, 31.25% agree, and 18.75% somewhat agree. According to Church & De Oliveira (2013) WhatsApp has advantages like simplicity, accessibility, and natural language among others. That study might explain why nobody had trouble in using it.

5 In the WhatsApp environment, with a voice message, I feel confident because I am communicating in both English and Spanish.

While studying another language few realized that they were becoming bilingual. This activity used both languages, English and Spanish, and by doing this task, participants gained confidence. 53.13% completely agree, 34.38% agree, 9.38% somewhat agree, and only 3.13% neither agree nor disagree. It is not easy to express ideas in different languages, but it helps to practice different ways to communicate the same message.

6 In the WhatsApp environment, with a voice message, I feel more relaxed and comfortable speaking with a native speaker.

There are some students who get anxious when they have to interact with native speakers. Somehow, this activity emphasizes not to give any feedback or correct mistakes in order to create a relaxed environment as Mwakapina (2016) points out that students are more likely to participate when they are relaxed and WhatsApp allows a friendly environment. Another study by Han & Keskin (2016) WhatsApp showed that it helps language learners to release their anxiety. In this research 35.48% expressed feeling more relaxed and comfortable speaking with a native speaker, while 51.61% agree, 6.45% somewhat agree, 6.45% neither agree nor disagree but nobody marked disagreement.

7 In the WhatsApp environment, with a voice message, I feel confident because I can understand what a native speaker is saying.

Understanding a native speaker seems to be a big challenge for students, because they listen to their teachers and colleagues everyday. Generally speaking, 28.13% reveal that they completely agree understanding what a native speaker is saying by using a voice message. 56.25% agree, 9.38% somewhat agree, 3.13% neither agree nor disagree, only 3.13 showed they completely disagree. It might be because in the voice message there is not any help of body language, gestures, and other characteristics of face to face communication.

8 In the WhatsApp environment, I feel confident without worrying about my pronunciation.

Worrying about pronunciation is a common issue, as it was mentioned before students prefer not to speak frequently and as a consequence students do not develop speaking fluency. In this question; generally speaking, participants seem to feel confident, they do not worry about pronunciation. 25% completely agree, 46.88% agree, 15.63% somewhat agree, 9.38% neither agree nor disagree, only 3.13 completely disagree, one participant still worried. The activity was implemented for five weeks, which was enough for most of the participants. However, it could have been applied for two more weeks to get better results.

9 In the WhatsApp environment, with a voice message recording, I feel confident without worrying about my speaking mistakes.

Sometimes language learners know how to use grammar correctly, but when they speak they can make error or fossilizations. This is when someone repeats the same mistake as a habit,
even when they know how to use it appropriately. This study reveals that participants feel confident using voice message: 25% completely agree, 40.63% agree, 28.13% somewhat agree, 6.23% completely disagree. The activity was implemented for five weeks, which was enough for most of the participants; however, it could have been applied for two more weeks to get better results.

In the WhatsApp environment, I feel a voice message can enhance my confidence to speak in a different language.

In general terms this activity helped the participants since 46.88% mentioned, that they gained confidence to speak in English and Spanish, 31.25% agree, 18.75% somewhat agree, 3.13% neither agree and disagree, but nobody completely disagreed. For many years speaking was practiced in speaking clubs, speakers’ corners, and in the language classes, but now technology allows to practice beyond the classroom which lets participants in this study increase their oral communication self-efficacy.

4 CONCLUSIONS

It seems that technology is helping us to face challenges in language learning such as: the number of students in the class, time to listen and practice with every student, and lack of speaking practice with others. Voice recording messages are providing more opportunities to communicate with native speakers. This study showed that WhatsApp is a friendly platform to speak in a different language. Mobile devices provide opportunities for practicing conversation skills by reducing the barrier of space and time.

Teachers are charged with correcting students’ mistakes; however, sometimes it is useful to have activities and let them make mistakes in order to develop confidence. Being flexible and creating opportunities for practicing to develop oral communication self-efficacy, gives the chance to say, “I can speak in a different language, I can speak without worrying of making mistakes, I can speak without worrying about my pronunciation, I can speak with a native speaker.” Speaking is a skill that needs to be practiced frequently in order to gain fluency and improve it, but it is also necessary to develop Oral Communication Self-efficacy.

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