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Enhancing Oral Fluency with the Describing Picture Strategy in Chilean Higher Education

Mejorando la Fluidez Oral con la Estrategia de Descripción de Imágenes en la Educación Superior Chilena

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Abstract

This action research centered on features of oral fluency among Chilean higher education students, focusing on the 'describing picture strategy' innovation. Set in the context of the Advanced English II course, the study determines the effects of the strategy in boosting oral fluency. The intervention of this investigation was enhanced by integrating technological tools such as a projector and a computer, which provided a dynamic and interactive learning environment and contributed to positive outcomes in speech rate and repairs. However, the results also highlighted other indicators, such as hesitation, where participants showed similar results. While this research points out the strategy potential in this specific Chilean context, it also emphasizes the challenges of generalizing the findings due to its unique cultural, technological, and pedagogical particularities. This study wraps up with the recommendation of adopting a holistic approach to fluency development; it also suggests further research, especially in exploring the long-term effect of the strategy and its adaptability to different educational settings.

Keywords: Chilean higher education, English language teaching, oral fluency, picture strategy

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Resumen

Esta investigación-acción se centró en las características de la fluidez oral entre estudiantes Chilenos de la Educación Superior; se enfocó en la innovadora "estrategia descriptiva de imágenes". Ubicado en el contexto del curso de Inglés Avanzado II, el estudio determina los efectos de la estrategia para impulsar la fluidez oral. La intervención de esta investigación mejora con la integración de herramientas tecnológicas como un proyector y un computador, lo que proporcionó un entorno de aprendizaje dinámico e interactivo, el cual contribuyó a los resultados positivos en la velocidad del habla y las reparaciones. Sin embargo, los resultados también destacaron otros indicadores, como la vacilación, donde los participantes mostraron resultados similares. Si bien esta investigación señala el potencial de la estrategia en este contexto chileno específicamente, también enfatiza los desafíos de generalizar los hallazgos debido a las particularidades culturales, tecnológicas y pedagógicas únicas del entorno. Este estudio concluye con la recomendación de adoptar un enfoque holístico para el desarrollo de la fluidez y sugiere realizar más investigaciones, especialmente para explorar el efecto a largo plazo de la estrategia y su adaptabilidad a diferentes entornos educativos.

Palabras clave: educación superior chilena, enseñanza del inglés, estrategia de descripción de imágenes, fluidez oral

Introduction

Contemporary global competition dictates that English fluency is no longer a mere linguistic skill but a major factor in school and career success in a person's life (Rao, 2019). This skill becomes a challenge for 15 college students undertaking the Advanced English II course at a Chilean university. The course uses Communicative Approaches with parameters provided by the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2020), to give learners the necessary communication ability. In describing the pictures, they often speak slowly, pause frequently, and use many fillers. These characteristics hinder smooth communication. Unless such issues are solved, they can jeopardize their prospects in an increasingly competitive world. This situation raises an important research question: How does the describing picture strategy (DPS) develop Business Administration students' speaking fluency at a Chilean higher education institution?

The study looks to determine any changes in speech rate, pauses, breakdowns, and repairs before and after the strategy implementation. The literature also suggests that picture description is one of the strategies for enhancing fluency. Ho (2018) indicates its multiple benefits while Kano and Fardyansyah (2015) focus on its motivational aspects. Pratiwi and Ayu (2023), Sahruni et al. (2023), and Ayu (2020) discuss its broader pedagogical implications (see the elaboration in the next section).

Describing pictures aids in the retention of vocabulary and in spontaneous speaking, which is a speaker's key to oral fluency. The strategy encourages close observation and structured expression and follows the principles of Communicative Language Teaching

(CLT) by giving top priority to real-life communication. The benefits of DPS in ELT are expounded as increasing cognitive engagement, building confidence, and language skills application in use, hence making learning livelier and more effective (Sahruni et al. (2023), and Ayu (2020); Pratiwi & Ayu, 2023). This technique caters to diverse students' needs, proactively enhancing the learning atmosphere, and ensuring a comprehensive approach to language acquisition.

Theoretical Framework

The Importance of Speaking Skills and the Cultural Factors in EFL Instruction

Communication is a fundamental aspect of human interaction that enables people to convey messages, express feelings, share information, and build relationships. However, effective communication goes beyond merely exchanging words and requires conveying thoughts and ideas concisely and convincingly. This is where speaking skills play a vital role.

Speaking English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is a complex skill, often seen as the most challenging among the four language abilities (Nunan, 2003). When students communicate in English, they must organize and express their thoughts with appropriate vocabulary and grammar. Harmer (2015) suggests that speaking fluently requires knowledge of linguistic structures and the ability to assimilate new linguistic information quickly. This skill is multifaceted, with paralinguistic elements like eye contact, facial expressions, and body language playing a crucial role in the conversation (Thornbury, 2007). Moreover, how one speaks often becomes the primary criterion for evaluation in many situations. McDonough et al. (2013) emphasize that individuals are frequently judged "at face value" based on their speaking abilities, underscoring the importance of conveying information effectively and articulating thoughts and emotions. This premise is especially pertinent given the global prominence of English worldwide. As Crystal and Potter (2020) note, English has become the lingua franca in various fields, from computer coding and international business to higher education, making proficient speaking skills in this language even more essential.

Additionally, speaking skills are crucial for participating in classroom activities, workplace communication, and public speaking with audiences. Developing strong speaking skills is also important to improve cognitive skills, memory, creativity, confidence, and social skills (Rao, 2019). Ultimately, the importance of speaking skills lies in their ability to enable effective communication, facilitate successful interactions with others, and open opportunities for personal and professional growth (Adhelia & Triastuti, 2023).

Speaking skills are influenced by cultural elements, in this case, Chilean. The strong emphasis on politeness and indirect communication in the Chilean culture most often manifests as people speaking around the point to avoid some form of confrontation or offense. In the educational context of the study, this cultural trait can affect how students express themselves in English during the teaching and learning processes, often becoming much more hesitant or elusive. Some studies into intercultural communication inform such influence in language learning and language use in ways that require language instructional practices to acknowledge cultural influences on development seriously (Byram et al., 2001; Dewey, 2012)

The context's cultural aspects impact the development of speaking fluency, as students might not prefer speaking directly or assertively. Recognizing and addressing these cultural norms and expectations is essential for effective speaking instruction. By doing so, educators can create a learning environment that respects and incorporates these cultural factors and encourages more active verbal participation. For example, the teacher can design activities that progressively build confidence, allowing speaking skills to be practiced suitably (Sharif et al., 2017).

Speaking Fluency

Speaking fluency is so multi-dimensional that its features make it hard to define it in detail (Foster, 2020). Traditionally, fluency has often been mistakenly associated with a fast speech rate. Indeed, Fulcher (2003) views that, with such a misconception, learners get the impression that talking fast is speaking fluently. Santos and Ramirez-Ávila (2022) clarify that true fluency combines this essential factor with the speech rate, including pauses, repetitions, and corrections.

According to Segalowitz (2010), fluency consists of three components: speed, breakdown, and repair. Speed refers to word articulation rates but must be checked against clarity and coherence. Breakdown incorporates silent and filled pauses, including the speaker's instances of hesitation and thinking time that intervene through the smooth flow of conversation. Repair refers to the speaker's error management through repetitions and corrections.

A closer inspection of speaking fluency revisits the notion of speed combined with a natural flow of speech and clear articulation. The breakdown elements, like pauses, inform about the speaker's need to gather thoughts or overcome hesitation, which are natural parts of speech. Effective repair strategies, for example, self-correction, show how well the speaker can manage and improve the speech in real-time (Kormos, 2006; Tavakoli & Skehan, 2005).

These dimensions, embedded into the language classroom, promote a more holistic approach to enabling students to develop the ability to speak quickly, smoothly, and accurately

(Derwing et al., 2008; Nation & Newton, 2009). Our research focus is improving English oral fluency by addressing all these critical components, which are: speech rate, hesitation, pauses, and repairs.

By attending to these small details of fluency, a teacher is far more likely to assist students in achieving true fluency. It would suggest a fluent speaker who is articulate, confident, less hesitant, and more natural in repair mechanisms. Ultimately, this shapes higher effectiveness in communication skills required for personal and professional success (Goh & Burns, 2012; Thornbury, 2007).

Strategies and the DPS to Teach Speaking

The describing picture strategy (DPS) has been generally acknowledged as one of the methods that works towards enhancing the oral fluency of an EFL learner. Ho (2018) states that DPS confers multiple benefits beyond language acquisition. The strategy works on improving fluency and caters to different learning profiles; therefore, it is an inclusive pedagogical tool. According to Kano and Fardyansyah (2015), the DPS's motivational attributes include differentiation and scaffolding increasing students' interest and motivation. This is crucial in language learning since keeping students' interest and participation is important if effective learning outcomes are to be achieved. The DPS's efficacy in creating an interactive and supportive learning environment in which both linguistic competence and confidence can be developed is further supported by Sahruni et al. (2023), Ayu (2020), and Pratiwi and Ayu (2023). Teaching and learning English require the use of effective and proper strategies. Various theories and empirical studies provide a theoretical foundation for understanding strategies, approaches, and techniques to ensure successful English teaching and learning. Furthermore, incorporating strategies into the teaching-learning process makes students more aware of their significance. They also become more independent, autonomous, and lifelong learners (Benson, 2013; Oxford, 2017).

DPS is a language teaching strategy using visual aids or pictures to encourage learners to describe in English what they see. This strategy is based on the premise that visual stimuli can enhance language learning and improve English language learners' speaking skills (Pratiwi & Ayu, 2023). DPS involves showing learners a picture and then encouraging them to engage in a discussion or presentation about the picture.

Wahyudin (2017) suggests that the preparation and procedure stages for describing pictures can make pupils more active and ensure no boredom in the classroom. Describing pictures is one of the most important and successful ways to enhance students' speaking skills based on preparation and procedures. Then, rather than simply memorizing, this oral practice might lead to genuine communication. Multiple other studies explore the advantages of using pictures in teaching speaking. Goh and Burns (2012) present a framework for

teaching speaking that integrates pictures with varied techniques and strategies. They argue that pictures can be a powerful tool for developing speaking abilities, as they can help learners visualize and organize their thoughts and provide them with a context for discussion and expression.

Sahruni et al. (2023) investigated the effect of using DPS on high school students' speaking ability in Indonesia. The study revealed that engaging students in describing pictures in detail significantly improved their speaking fluency in English. The researchers highlighted that DPS triggered motivation on students to express themselves and provided guidelines to improve speaking fluency through practice. The researchers concluded that using DPS could be an effective strategy for teachers to promote speaking proficiency in their language learners. While this study focuses specifically on the use of DPS in Indonesian high schools, it provides valuable evidence for the potential effectiveness of DPS in developing speaking proficiency across similar educational contexts.

Studies have also shown that providing interactional feedback during picture description tasks can contribute to developing speaking fluency (Goh & Zhang, 2019). Feedback on fluency-related aspects, such as encouraging smoother speech flow or providing guidance on appropriate pausing, can positively impact learners' speaking fluency development (Goh, 2008).

Methodology

Type of Study

This action research study applies a systematic and reflective approach to challenges in speaking fluency of the students undertaking this course, focusing on speech rate, pauses, hesitation, and repairs. As Burns (2010) and Mills (2007) outline, the action research cycle consists of the teacher-researcher identifying these problems, and then planning interventions, implementations, and observations of their effects. The subsequent steps are collecting data and reflecting on the results.

In this study, a pre-intervention oral assessment was conducted using pictures the students had to describe to establish a baseline for their fluency indicators (speech rate, hesitation, pauses, and repairs) contained in the analytic rubric. This diagnosis then informed the planning of sessions using Chamot's CALLA (Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach) model, which allows cyclical and adaptable teaching. The intervention consisted of five sessions with structured picture description activities that gradually built-up confidence and proficiency following the CALLA model procedure: preparation, display, exercise, assessment, expansion activities, and evaluation. The qualitative data about the

students' performance and class engagement were gathered through observation and reflection, noted by the teacher-researcher in a diary. Then, a post-intervention assessment on speech rate, hesitation, pauses, and repairs using different pictures occurred. Also, a focus group discussion elicited their views about the DPS, defining its benefits and challenges.

Participants

A sample of 15 Chilean higher education students aged 20–45 in their third year of Business Administration was initially selected for the study. However, only 11 participants were included since four dropped. The students were part of a mandatory 72-hour, 14-week Advanced English II course, with a syllabus aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2020), targeting a B2 level after progressing from A1 to B1. This convenience-type sample was chosen based on the teacher's pre-existing student group, as Nikolopoulou (2022) and Creswell (2012) described. The institution assigned all participants to the teacher-researcher.

The study adhered to ethical standards, obtaining informed consent from participants and ensuring their anonymity and confidentiality. Participants could withdraw at any time. The relevant institutional review board approved the research, and data were securely stored with restricted access.

Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

Analytic Rubric to Assess Oral Fluency

Using an analytic rubric in this study was pivotal for assessing oral fluency. As Brookhart (2018) emphasizes, analytic rubrics are particularly beneficial during the learning process due to their ability to list multiple characteristics or criteria for evaluation. This allows for a comprehensive skill assessment, examining it from various perspectives. In this study, the analytic rubric was structured to score performance levels ranging from "excellent" to "needs improvement," with scores assigned from 4 to 1 (Excellent = 4; Good = 3; Satisfactory = 2; Needs Improvement = 1).

The rubric specifically focused on evaluating speech rate, pauses, hesitation, and repairs, with descriptors based on the number of words, fillers, pauses, and repairs per minute. The maximum attainable score on this rubric was 16, providing a clear benchmark for students to understand their performance and areas for improvement. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze these fluency indicators, and the study utilized descriptive analysis to compare results before and after the intervention.

Pre- and Post-Intervention Speaking Assessment

The pre-intervention test required students to describe a picture within 1 to 1.5 minutes. The teacher-researcher assessed their oral performance by using an analytic rubric. The findings showed that the learners struggled with oral fluency since most spoke slowly and paused constantly to find the words to complete the task. Hesitations were also present during the performances, where fillers and repeated words indicated a lack of confidence in their proficiency. Additionally, their speech was frequently interrupted with silent and filled pauses, which jeopardized its smooth flow; and repairs in the form of self-corrections and repeated attempts to express ideas clearly regarding the picture. In terms of speech rate, hesitation, pauses, and breakdowns, the findings made it clear that the students were striving to achieve oral fluency. A pedagogical intervention was required to address these specific issues in this context. The post-intervention assessment used the same speaking task but with a different picture, emphasizing speaking fluency based on speech rate, hesitation, pauses, and repairs.

Creswell (2012) highlights that quantitative data can be categorized, counted, and measured. The DPS rates derived the mean and mode of the data. Begun (2018) notes the importance of variables like intervention strength in research. As Dawson (2009) suggests, a simple interval scale calculation was used in the study to analyze the participants' results in improving their oral fluency. The teacher-researcher crafted a rubric for assessing oral fluency, which was subsequently sent to professors and colleagues from Chilean universities for validation. Based on their invaluable feedback, the instrument underwent refinements before being introduced to participants.

Employing a quantitative method, data were collected and analyzed using measures of central tendency, specifically the mean, mode, and standard deviation. Calculations concerning the frequency of certain fluency issues, like pauses, hesitations, and repairs, were also done to find common patterns. Descriptive statistics gave a full and detailed summary of the overall performance. These comprehensive techniques provided insight into participants' oral fluency in such a way that showed their improvements and the intervention's effectiveness. The participants mentioned feeling more motivated and interested in learning the EFL. Teamwork and reflection in this process guaranteed an appropriate and trustworthy judgment with relevant findings into the DPS's effects on oral fluency.

Instructional Design

To tackle the participants' lack of speaking fluency, we as the researchers referred to the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) model developed by Chamot in 2005. This model includes learning strategies in content-based and academic activities. It is cyclical, both teachers and students can recycle through former instructional phases if

necessary. We used the CALLA model in planning our sessions with the DPS. Figure 1 shows the CALLA's six steps of instructional design.

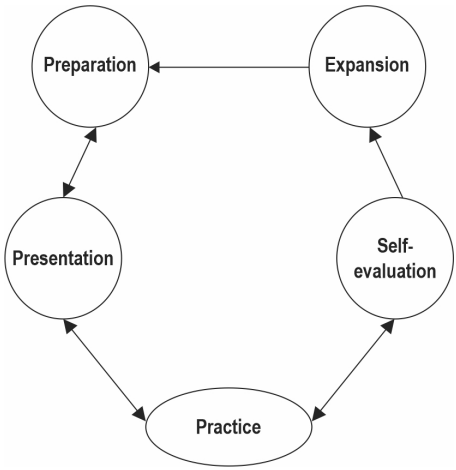

Figure 1. *CALLA Model of Cognitive Strategy Instruction*

Source: Nejad and Mahmoodi-Shahrebabaki (2015).

During the intervention, using Chamot's model ensured that our sessions were systematically set up to make the learning process as effective as possible. The CALLA model was thoughtfully combined with the DPS throughout each phase to enhance cognitive engagement and language development. This would promote oral fluency and make students more autonomous and strategic in language use. This model allowed us to promote a supportive and safe learning environment. CALLA's cyclical nature allowed adjustments and improvements through constant observation and student feedback so that our instructional strategies remained responsive to the participants' different needs. This methodology proved to be a key to deeper and more meaningful learning for our students, tailored to help them succeed in and out of the classroom.

The eight-session action plan intervention enhanced oral fluency through the DPS. Following Chamot's CALLA Model (2005), the sessions incorporated vocabulary about sustainability and steadily built student's confidence and proficiency. Table 1 provides a summary of the activities implemented during the intervention, including the description of the pre- and post-intervention oral tests, structured practice sessions, and feedback mechanisms to tackle the key fluency indicators: speech rate, hesitation, pauses, and repairs.

Table 1. *Action Plan*

Date	Activities and Procedures	Time	Objective
May 17th	– Preparation: Vocabulary for describing pictures and global sustainability was presented. – Display: Previous knowledge is compared against the model shown. Stages for describing pictures were analyzed and inferred by the students. – Exercise/Assessment: Descriptions of pictures were prepared and presented to classmates. Students gave Peer feedback on the vocabulary used and **speech rate**. – Expansion: Descriptions of pictures were prepared and presented to classmates based on the previous feedback. – Evaluation: Metacognition took place and students received general feedback from the teacher. **Observations**: Speech rate and vocabulary usage were the main problems, so the next session will include specific vocabulary exercises and more practice before the description of the picture to increase speech rate during that task.	**80'**	SO1: To analyze participants' results on their oral fluency, aspects of speech rate, hesitation, pauses, and repairs; before and after the intervention with the describing picture strategy.
May 23rd	– Preparation/Display: Vocabulary for describing pictures and global sustainability was elicited. – Display: Previous knowledge is compared against the model shown. Stages for the students to describe, analyze, and infer pictures. – Exercise/Assessment: Classmates' preparation, presentation, and description of pictures. Students gave peer feedback on the vocabulary used and hesitation. – Expansion: Classmates' preparation, presentation, and description of pictures based on the previous feedback. – Evaluation: Metacognition took place and students received general feedback from the teacher. **Observations**: Students frequently hesitated and used the filler "em", "and", therefore, a timed speaking activity will be introduced before describing a picture, together with spontaneous speaking, to reduce hesitation and build confidence	**80'**	

Date	Activities and Procedures	Time	Objective
May 24th	– Preparation/Display: Vocabulary for describing pictures and global sustainability was elicited. – Display: Previous knowledge is compared against the model shown. Students described, analyzed, and inferred pictures. – Exercise/Assessment: Classmates' preparation, presentation, and description of pictures. Students gave peer feedback on the vocabulary used and pauses. – Expansion: Classmates' preparation, presentation, and description of pictures based on the previous feedback. – Evaluation: Metacognition took place and students received general feedback from the teacher. **Observation**: Frequent and inappropriate pauses hindered the student's smooth flow of speech. Next session, the description of pictures will be recorded to count pauses and identify when they make them. They will receive/give immediate peer feedback on pausing patterns.	**80'**	
May 30th	– Preparation/Display: Vocabulary for describing pictures and global sustainability was elicited. – Display: Previous knowledge is compared against the model shown. Students described, analyzed, and inferred pictures. – Exercise/Assessment: Classmates' preparation, presentation, and description of pictures. Students gave peer feedback on the vocabulary used and pauses. – Expansion: Classmates' preparation, presentation, and description of pictures based on the previous feedback. – Evaluation: Metacognition took place and students received general feedback from the teacher. **Observation**: Students are aware of the moments in which they make inappropriate pauses but still make too many due to a lack of confidence. More real-time speaking practice will take place with the target vocabulary before they perform the describing picture strategy exercise.	**80'**	

Date	Activities and Procedures	Time	Objective
May 31st	– Preparation/Display: Vocabulary for describing pictures and global sustainability was elicited. – Display: Previous knowledge is compared against the model shown. Students described, analyzed, and inferred pictures. – Exercise/Assessment: Classmates' preparation, presentation, and description of pictures. Students gave peer feedback on the vocabulary used and repairs. – Expansion: Classmates' preparation, presentation, and description of pictures based on the previous feedback. – Evaluation: Metacognition took place and students received general feedback from the teacher. **Observation**: Self-corrections and repeated attempts were covered; however, more confidence in their pronunciation is needed not to repeat the same ideas/words they already conveyed.	**80'**	

Source: Own work.

Finally, we highlight that the successful attainment of the study's objectives can be attributed, in part, to the cooperative endeavors of the students during the tasks, wherein they collaboratively provided mutual support and feedback. In alignment with the specific objective, the evaluation stage was meticulously designed to critically analyze the participants' oral fluency indicators, emphasizing speech rate, hesitation, pauses, and repairs. The evaluation unfolded in two primary phases:

1. Pre-intervention Assessment: Before implementing the describing picture strategy, an assessment was conducted to gauge participants' baseline oral fluency furnishing a lucid understanding of their initial performance metrics and potential areas necessitating enhancement.
2. Post-intervention Assessment: A parallel assessment occurred after the intervention employing the describing picture strategy. This phase was instrumental in discerning the strategy's tangible impact on the participants' oral fluency dynamics.

To understand the DPS's effects on oral fluency, we compared the pre- and post-intervention assessment results. This comparison shed light on the indicators of speaking fluency in which learners could improve and revealed the areas requiring further research.

Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter presents the research findings from the pre- and post-intervention speaking fluency rubric used to rate the participants' descriptions of pictures. The results of both speaking presentations were analyzed to compare participant's speaking fluency. The analysis is presented according to the specific objective stated in this study.

The arithmetic mean, mode, and standard deviation (SD), measures of central tendency, were used to analyze the participant's results regarding the indicators of their oral fluency (speech rate, breakdowns, and repairs) before and after the intervention with the DPS. The maximum score in the rubric to assess students' fluency was 16 points, where *excellent* corresponded to 4 points, *good* (3 points), *satisfactory* (2 points), and *needs improvement* (1 point). The participants' scores are presented in Table 2

Table 2. *Participant's Global Scores in the Pre- and Post-Intervention Tests*

Participants' Fluency Level				
Participants	**Pre-intervention test Total score: 16**		**Post-intervention test Total score: 16**	
	Total Score	**Percentage of Achievement**	**Total Score**	**Percentage of Achievement**
1	8	50%	11	69%
2	9	56%	11	69%
3	6	38%	9	56%
4	7	44%	10	63%
5	8	50%	9	56%
6	8	50%	8	50%
7	7	44%	9	56%
8	6	38%	9	56%
9	8	50%	10	63%
10	7	44%	11	69%
11	7	44%	11	69%
Mean	7	46%	10	61%
Mode	8	50%	11	69%
Standard Deviation	0.92		1.07	

Source: Own elaboration

Upon scrutinizing the data in Table 2, there is a discernible enhancement in participants' speaking fluency following the intervention. In the pre-intervention assessment, none of the

participants reached the general minimum passing score of 10, signifying a universal need for fluency augmentation. Scores during this phase oscillated between 6 and 9, translating to achievement percentages from 38% to 56%. In contrast, in the post-intervention, 55% of the participants achieved scores of 10 or higher ranging from 8 to 11, and achievement percentages between 50% and 69%.

The arithmetic mean of the scores ascended from 7 (46% achievement) in the pre-intervention to 10 (61% achievement) in the post-intervention, accentuating the intervention's potency. The mode increased from 8 to 11, and the corresponding achievement percentage leaped from 50% to 69%. Delving into the standard deviation, the pre-intervention test registered a value of 0.92, indicating a relatively tight cluster of scores around the mean. This suggests that most participants had similar fluency levels before the intervention. In the post-intervention, the standard deviation increased slightly to 1.07, indicating a broader spread of scores. This could be interpreted as participants experiencing varied levels of improvement, with some benefiting more than others from the intervention.

The data underscores the positive impact of the describing picture strategy on participants' oral fluency. While the overall fluency levels have been bolstered, the nuanced change in the post-intervention standard deviation suggests a diverse range of individual improvements.

This highlights the importance of personalized approaches and further investigations into specific fluency indicators for a more comprehensive understanding.

Analysis of Participant's Fluency Level: Speech Rate

An analytical rubric was used to evaluate the participants' observed speech rate, accounting for the four degrees of expertise listed in Table 3.

Table 3. *Participant's Speech Rate Levels*

	Excellent	**Good**	**Satisfactory**	**Needs Improvement**
	4	**3**	**2**	**1**
Speech rate	Produces from 150 words per minute up	Produces between 126-149 words per minute	Produces between 100 and 125 words per minute	Produces less than 99 words per minute

Source: Own work.

Based on Table 3, it can be said that according to this criterion results, participants were required to produce 150 words per minute while describing the picture related to

sustainability (assigned randomly); however, there was not a significant difference in terms of points assigned with the rubric, as it can be seen in Table 4 and Figure 2.

Table 4. *Participants' Speech Rate (Words Per Minute: WPM)*

Participants	Words Per Minute		
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Difference
1	43	45	2
2	38	55	17
3	33	37	4
4	20	31	11
5	70	86	16
6	33	37	4
7	23	17	-6
8	42	45	3
9	32	30	-2
10	24	38	14
11	34	65	31
		Average	9

Source: Own work.

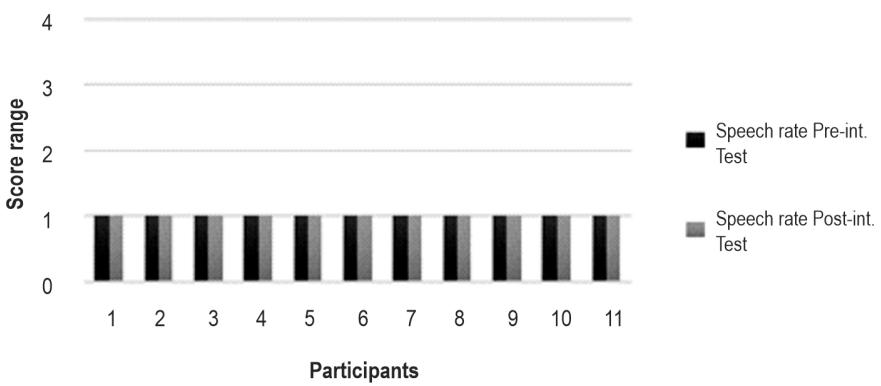

Figure 2. *Participants' Speech Rate (Words Per Minute)*

The speech rate had no difference in the analytic rubric during the pre- and post-intervention assessment. Therefore, the presentations' recordings in both assessments were transcribed and analyzed for a more detailed analysis. This analysis concentrated on the number of words the participants produced per minute (WPM).

The analysis indicates a change in speaking fluency from pre- to post-intervention. The average WPM during the pre-intervention test was 35.9, while the average WPM in the post-test increased to 44.9. Thus, there was an increase of 9 words a minute on average, showing how the participants had changed their speaking fluency. Results show different performances for different learners. Five of them increased their WPM significantly during speech ranging from 14 to 31 words. On the other hand, two participants decreased from 6 to 2 in WPM. Four participants increased their WPM by a small margin, ranging from 2 to 4 words. These individual differences underline the complexity of speaking fluency development and the requirement to consider different learning profiles.

Although improvement in the speech rate, not all the participants got the same results because of the learners' different individual needs. Therefore, the participants who showed improvements received reinforcement and encouragement to keep practicing with DPS. For those with a slight or no increase, targeted support was offered during the class, like additional rehearsal to master vocabulary and more opportunities for self-correction during their performances.

Analysis of Participant's Level of Hesitation

Four levels of mastery in an analytic rubric were used to compare results in the participant's level of hesitation, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. *Participant's Level of Hesitation*

	Excellent	**Good**	**Satisfactory**	**Needs Improvement**
	4	**3**	**2**	**1**
Hesitation	The speaker speaks confidently and naturally with no distracting hesitations or fillers that show hesitation.	The speaker hesitates or uses fillers that show hesitation 3 to 5 times.	The speaker has hesitations or use of fillers that show hesitation 6 times up.	The speaker is uncertain and hesitates or uses fillers that show hesitation more than 6 times.

Source: Own work.

The pre-test scores obtained by the participants with the analytic rubric ranged from 1 to 2, with 4 being the maximum score. The distribution of participants' scores revealed that most participants (10 out of 11 equals 91%) achieved a score of 2 (Satisfactory), representing a moderate level of hesitation while one participant achieved a score of 1 (9%), indicating a higher level of hesitation. No participants achieved the maximum score of 4.

The scores obtained in the post-test also ranged from 1 to 3. The analysis demonstrated an enhancement in hesitation levels after the intervention. Most participants (82%) achieved 3 as a score, indicating reduced hesitation. Two participants (18%) worsened their scores from 2 to 1, reflecting a significant increase in hesitation. One participant maintained a score of 2. Again, no participants achieved the maximum score of 4 (see Table 6 and Figure 3).

Table 6. *Participants' Levels of Hesitation*

Participants	Participant´s level of Hesitation		
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Difference
1	2	3	-1
2	2	3	-1
3	1	3	-2
4	2	3	-1
5	2	1	1
6	2	1	1
7	2	3	-1
8	2	3	-1
9	2	3	-1
10	2	3	-1
11	2	3	-1
		Average	-1

Source: Own work.

The analysis of hesitation in both tests demonstrated improvements in speaking fluency among participants. The majority achieved higher scores in the post-intervention test, indicating reduced hesitation levels.

Analysis of Participant's Level of Pauses

Another indicator of the rubric to assess fluency was the pauses, where the participants were required to speak confidently and naturally with pauses of no longer than 2 seconds during the performance. The respective rubric considered four levels of mastery, as shown in Table 7.

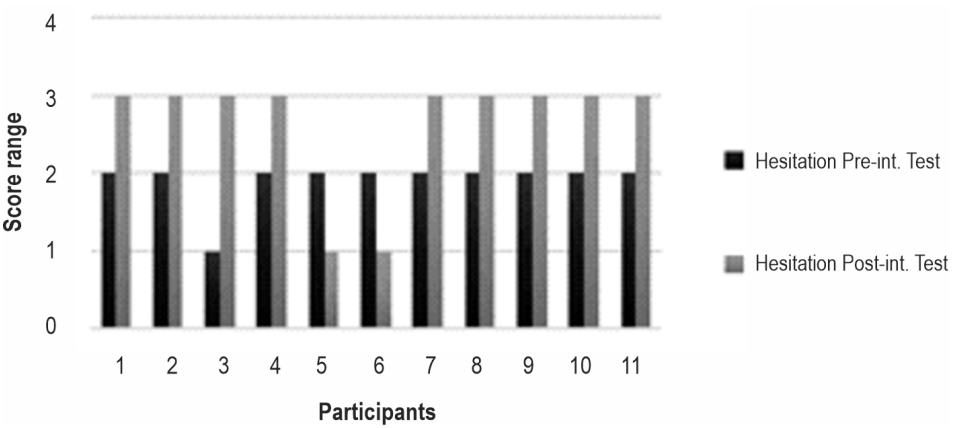

Figure 3. *Participants' Level of Hesitation*

Source: Own work.

Table 7. *Participant's Level of Pauses*

	Excellent (4)	**Good (3)**	**Satisfactory (2)**	**Needs Improvement (1)**
Pauses	The speaker speaks confidently and naturally with pauses of no longer than 2 seconds during the performance.	The speaker produces 3 to 5 pauses of more than two seconds during the performance.	The speaker produces 6 to 9 pauses of more than two seconds during the performance.	The speaker makes more than 10 pauses of more than two seconds during the performance.

Source: Own work.

Among the pre-intervention test scores, the lowest score achieved was 1, indicating a low number of pauses, while the highest score achieved was 3, representing a higher number of pauses. The pre-intervention test scores obtained by the participants ranged from 1 to 3, with 4 being the maximum score. The distribution of scores revealed that five participants (45%) achieved a score of 1, indicating few pauses during speech. Five participants (45%) got 2, indicating moderate pauses. One participant (10%) got 3, representing higher pauses. No participants achieved the maximum score of 4.

In the post-intervention test scores, the analysis demonstrated improvements in the participants' pause levels. Three participants (27%) got 1, indicating fewer pauses. One participant (10%) scored 2, suggesting consistent pauses. Seven participants (64%) got 3,

indicating higher pauses. Again, no participants achieved the maximum score of 4. Table 8 and Figure 4 show the participant's performance regarding pauses.

Table 8. *Participants' Level of Pauses*

Participants	Participant's Level of Pauses		
	Pre-Test	Post Test	Difference
1	2	3	1+
2	3	3	0
3	1	1	0
4	1	3	2+
5	2	3	1+
6	2	2	0
7	2	1	1-
8	1	1	0
9	2	3	1+
10	1	3	2+
11	1	3	2+
		Average	-1

Source: Own work

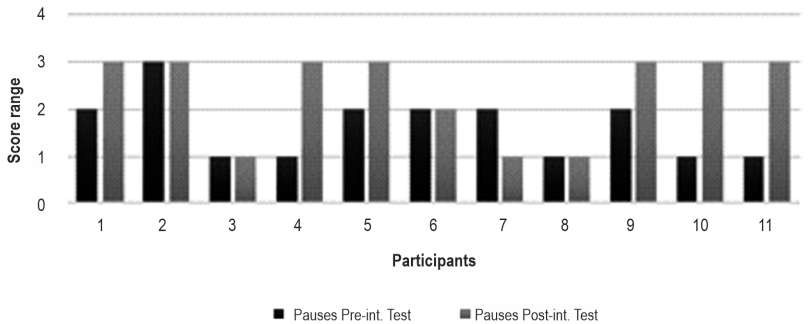

Figure 4. *Participants' Level of Pauses*

Source: Own work.

The data gathered reveal key insights into the participants' speech patterns. The post-intervention showed a discernible impact with many participants exhibiting reduced hesitations. However, individual variations underscore the intricate nature of speech hesitation. While the overarching trend suggests improvement, the nuances in individual

outcomes emphasize the multifaceted challenges in achieving consistent oral fluency. These findings validate the action research's objective and potentially mitigate speech hesitations through targeted interventions.

The analysis of pre-intervention and post-intervention test results revealed the participants' performance and improvements in pause levels. While some participants showed a decrease in the number of pauses after the intervention, others maintained consistent or increased levels. This suggests the complexity of addressing pause levels in speaking fluency development. Further research and instructional approaches can focus on targeted strategies to reduce pauses and promote fluent and continuous speech.

Analysis of Participant's Level of Repairs

This indicator of the analytic rubric analyzed the participants' repair levels during the pre-intervention and post-intervention tests. According to Kormos (2006), repairs are the speaker's ability to manage and correct themselves when speaking in real time to maintain communication clarity and coherence. Effective repair strategies such as self-correction and rephrasing show that a speaker can be fluent, even with a linguistic challenge (e.g., limited vocabulary, incorrect grammar usage, pronunciation errors, or difficulty recalling words). Also, this is one main skill related to giving fluency feedback in L2 speaking because it influences the speaker's awareness of language, that is, whether they can monitor and adjust language use. Repairs considered four levels of mastery in the rubric, as shown in Table 9.

Table 9. *Participant's Level of Repairs*

	Excellent (4)	**Good (3)**	**Satisfactory (2)**	**Needs Improvement (1)**
Repair	The speaker's ideas flow efficiently with no repairs.	The speaker makes 3 to 5 repairs during the performance.	The speaker makes 6 to 9 repairs during the performance.	The speaker makes more than 10 repairs during the performance.

Source: Own work.

In the pre-intervention test, the participants´ scores ranged from 3 to 4, showing their moderate repair skills. No participant got the maximum score of 4. In the post-intervention test, scores were in approximately the same range: most participants scored 4, indicating an enhancement in their ability to repair their speech. This gain means an increment in the repair skills that conform to the fluency of conversation. The lowest score in the pre-

intervention test was 2, a sign of moderate repair skills, whereas the maximum was 3. On the contrary, the lowest score in the post-intervention test was 3, showing increasing repair skills, whereas the maximum score was 4.

According to the obtained results from the analysis of pre- and post-intervention tests, there is a significant increase in repair scores. Most participants could achieve a higher repair level of 4 after the intervention. This shows that repair-skill development is important for overall speaking fluency. Such development allows speakers to communicate clearly and effectively even when the speaker makes a mistake, and the intended meaning is unclear. Table 10 and Figure 5 introduce the participants' performance concerning the repairs.

Table 10. *Participants' Level of Repair*

Participants	Participant's Level of Repairs		
	Pre-Test	Post Test	Difference
1	3	4	-1
2	3	4	-1
3	3	4	-1
4	3	3	0
5	3	4	-1
6	3	4	-1
7	2	4	-2
8	2	4	-2
9	3	3	0
10	3	4	-1
11	3	4	-1
		Average	-1

Source: Own work.

The data showed how the participants handled speech repairs before and after the intervention. Speech repair is an important indicator of speaking fluency since it maintains a natural flow in oral interactions through self-correction and rephrasing. In this respect, the intervention positively affected the participants, resulting in an observable enhancement in their speech repair ability. Before the intervention, many of the participants showed problems regarding fragmented and hesitant speech. After the intervention, their strategies of repair had become significantly better. The improvements now allowed smoother and more fluent speech, a critical feature of fluency.

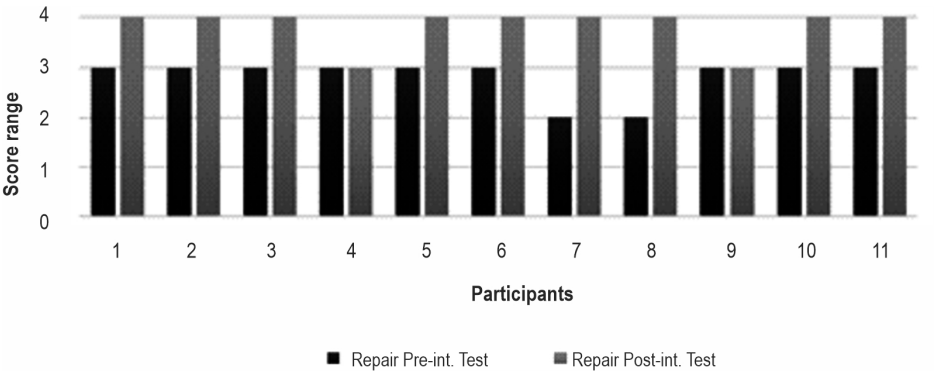

Figure 5. *Participants' Level of Repair*

Source: Own work.

These individual differences underscore the complexity involved in speech repairs, whereby each participant takes a unique personal learning process toward fluency. These variations suggest that personalized approaches are essential in addressing specific needs. Overall, the results confirm that action research was effective in helping the participants improve their ability to self-correct and enhance speaking fluency.

Conclusions

This action research showed the effectiveness of the DPS in enhancing oral fluency among Chilean Higher education students. Its findings revealed improvements in speech rate and repair mechanisms after the intervention, while hesitation and pause levels showed mixed results among participants. The results underscore DPS as a valuable pedagogical tool for fostering speaking fluency, highlighting its potential to motivate learners and tackle diverse leaning needs in English language teaching.

An in-depth analysis revealed a significant enhancement in participants' repair mechanisms post-intervention. However, the data also illuminated certain domains, such as hesitation, where outcomes varied among participants. This granular nature of the data, echoing the complexities inherent in language acquisition (e.g., managing cognitive load, balancing fluency and accuracy, overcoming hesitation, and lexical retrieval speed), serves as a testament to the intricate nuances of the learning process. Furthermore, the Chilean cultural context, which values, politeness, and indirectness, plays a pivotal role in speaking instruction (Byram et al., 2001; Dewey, 2012). Recognizing these cultural norms, as emphasized by Thornbury (2007) and McDonough et al. (2013), is crucial for effective language instruction.

The DPS emerged as a potent pedagogical tool to improve fluency and cater to diverse learning profiles. It emphasizes its motivational aspects through differentiation and scaffolding, echoed by many in the academic community. However, every research endeavor has its limitations. A notable constraint in this study was the innovative nature of the strategy for the specific Chilean context. Incorporating technological tools, such as projectors and computers during the intervention emerged as significant assets, enhancing the delivery and engagement. Yet, the unique cultural, technological, and pedagogical nuances of the Chilean context mean that results cannot be broadly generalized. Thus, given the positive outcomes associated with the DPS, there is a compelling case for its integration into mainstream EFL curricula. Future research could delve into its long-term effects, potential adaptations for different learner profiles, and its applicability in diverse educational settings.

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