



Trabajo de Fin de Máster

# Improving speaking skills through the use of a blog

BLOG: SPEAKING TREASURE

Máster Universitario en Profesor/a de Educación Secundaria Obligatoria y Bachillerato, Formación Profesional y Enseñanza de Idiomas



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## **Abstract**

This research aims to improve the speaking skills of students at the same time that they develop their learning competences. Even though the time devoted to the English language is not lower in Spanish high schools than in other European countries, the mastery of speaking skills among students in Spain compares very badly with the level of those who study in a foreign country.

The methodology followed in this study differs from the traditional one in an English classroom, trying to motivate students through the use of a blog and applying a new methodology based on treasure hunt. The blog includes materials and activities chosen to create topics of discussion in the classroom, thanks to which students are supposed to make use of their speaking skills at the same time that the teacher provides feedback to them.

The study is divided into four different categories which include: (i) the importance of integrating ICT and new teaching methodologies into the classroom, (ii) the theoretical framework on the speaking skill in Spanish high schools, (iii) using a blog to improve speaking skills, and (iv) the analysis of the results obtained.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2.1. ICTS IN EDUCATION.....</b>	<b>2</b>
2.1.1. E-LEARNING .....	3
2.1.1.1. TREASURE HUNT.....	4
2.1.1.2. WEBQUESTS.....	4
2.1.2. WEB 2.0.....	5
2.1.2.1. WIKIS .....	6
2.1.2.2. FORUMS .....	7
2.1.2.3. PODCASTS .....	7
2.1.2.4. MOOC .....	8
<b>2.2. BLOGS .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.3. INTEGRATING SPEAKING SKILLS.....</b>	<b>10</b>
2.3.1. THE CASE OF SPEAKING SKILLS IN EDUCATION.....	11
2.3.2. HOW TO TEACH SPEAKING SKILLS .....	12
<b>2.4. OBJECTIVE.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>3. METHOD.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>3.1. STUDENTS AND SCHOOL SETTING .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>3.2. OBJECTIVES .....</b>	<b>16</b>
3.2.1. GENERAL OBJECTIVES.....	16
3.2.2. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES .....	16
<b>3.3. CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>17</b>
3.3.1. CONCEPTUAL CONTENTS.....	17
3.3.2. PROCEDURAL CONTENTS .....	17
3.3.3. ATTITUDINAL CONTENTS .....	17
<b>3.4. BASIC COMPETENCES.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>3.5. METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>3.6. MATERIALS.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>3.7. SPACES .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>3.8. TIMING .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>3.9. DEVELOPMENT.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>3.10. BLOG: SPEAKING TREASURE .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>3.11. ASSESSMENT .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>4. RESULTS.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>4.1. ANALYSIS OF THE STUDENTS' INITIAL QUESTIONNAIRES .....</b>	<b>31</b>

<b>4.2. ANALYSIS OF THE STUDENTS' FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>5. DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>6. CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>7. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER IMPLEMENTATION .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>ANNEXES.....</b>	<b>50</b>



## 1. Introduction

Hatch (2011), Konsbruck (2009) and Fernández Prieto (2001) remark that technology has become an essential aspect of daily life for most human beings in recent years. The social changes which have taken place in the last decades are directly associated to the evolution of technology, which has affected mainly all sectors and services, especially education.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has gained trust among teachers who know that they need to be at the vanguard of change and innovation. However, many teachers are still unwilling to introduce the use of new technologies into the classroom.

On the other hand, speaking is not always paid enough attention and some teachers prefer to focus on other skills such as writing and reading. According to Rubio and Martínez Lirola (2008), the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS) holds that speaking is the most neglected skill in Spain and only the 20% of speakers of the English language would be able to have a conversation in their second language (p. 51).

Consequently, new teaching strategies should be implemented so that students become better at using their oral abilities. Acquiring and exhibiting fluency and a correct pronunciation are essential in order to become communicatively competent.

This paper aims to complement both the use of ICTs and the teaching of speaking skills into the classroom by following a methodology which distances from the most traditional ways of teaching a second language. In order to do so, a didactic unit which includes the use of new technologies in order to improve the oral abilities of students will be implemented.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1. ICTs in education**

Universal education is included among the main objectives of many countries in the world. However, it is directly associated to the fact of providing everyone with effective learning at any time, something which is not easy. At this point, the importance of ICTs is obvious and a growing number of educators believe that new technologies can be a useful tool so as to achieve this goal. (Haddad, 2007, p. 4)

UNESCO (n.d.) also mentions the importance of ICTs in education in order to guarantee universal access and opportunities for everyone. Then, the association focuses on promoting the use of new technologies at the same time that they enhance the importance of improving learning conditions.

According to Haddad (2007), the main problem related to the introduction of new technologies in the learning process has to do with the fact that we still think that education is limited by barriers of space and time. Consequently, it is necessary is that we think ‘radically and differently’ (p. 4).

Trucano (2005) also mentions that there is an open debate about the advantages and disadvantages of ICTs in education. As he states, ‘the impact of ICTs as a learning tool is still unclear’ (p. 1) and, despite the positive opinions of users, there are a lot of factors which should be taken into account in order to consider its effectiveness.

Barba and Capella (2010) agree to say that we tend to consider new technologies to be amusing, motivating and innovative. Nevertheless, innovating without a realistic reason will not automatically improve the quality of the teaching process nor the results



of a didactic unit. As Kaur (2011) states, technology is a great tool in order to improve the teaching and learning results provided that it is used rightly (para. 1).

### **2.1.1. E-learning**

Electronic learning, often known as e-learning, is referred to the use of virtual spaces which have an educational purpose. Thus, the introduction of methodologies focused on the use of new technologies is an essential element for the success of e-learning teaching strategies. In the last years, e-learning has had an important impact on education and, as a direct consequence, the number of teachers willing to introduce this method into their classrooms has also increased. In order to do so, it is necessary to design, put into practice and evaluate a didactic plan by which students have access to the different materials provided by the teacher. (Area & Adell, 2009, p. 7).

García-Peñalvo (2005) writes about a technological and pedagogical duality when defining the term e-learning. Technologically speaking, it is essential to use electronic devices which let the student to have access to the virtual space where the learning process is expected to take place. Regarding the pedagogical perspective, all the information and materials included in these virtual spaces should have a clear educational purpose (para. 5).

Cabero (2006) focuses on the reasons why the expectations related to the success of e-learning have not been achieved. As he states, experts paid too much attention to technological issues, whereas pedagogical aspects such as contents, methodology and the roles of the teacher and the students were not taken into account (p. 4).

The following pages aim to introduce two teaching strategies which have gained popularity among educators in the last decades (Treasure hunt and Webquests).

### **2.1.1.1. Treasure Hunt**

According to Adell (2003), treasure hunts are one of the most common and interesting e-learning teaching strategies both for teachers and students. It consists of a series of questions which students will be able to answer after visiting some of the websites provided by the teacher. Although some of them may include a final question, it is not always necessary to do it since the objective of each treasure hunt does not necessarily need to be the same (p. 1).

Hernández (2005) claims that treasure hunt activities are motivating and flexible enough so as to be considered an excellent option among those teachers who are interested in introducing ICT use in the classroom. These activities are normally easy but their complexity will always be affected by the competence of the students when using new technologies and dealing with the acquisition and management of new information (para. 5).

### **2.1.1.2. WebQuests**

Dodge (1995) and Yoder (1999) define WebQuests as activities in which almost all the information used by the students comes from the Internet. As MacNeill (n.d.) states, WebQuests are a great tool in order to promote the autonomous work of students and improve their abilities when working on the Web.

March (2003) states that:

Real WebQuests facilitate meaningful use of the Web for educational ends. Activities that point students only to encyclopaedic briefs, textbook digests, or worse – word searches and colouring books – do not take advantage of Internet

resources that are interactive, media-rich, contemporary, contextualized, or of varied perspectives (p. 44).

Authors such as Descy (2003) and Williams (2004) point out the importance of scaffolding in order to create successful WebQuests. McKenzie (1999) emphasizes that it is necessary in order to guide students throughout their work but he clarifies that the most important work is still done by them (para. 11).

### **2.1.2. Web 2.0.**

Selwyn (2008) defines Web 2.0 as all the applications which allow for interaction between users, creating the so called 'social software' in which people are able to share information by creating and collaborating (p. 4). However, the appearance of Web 2.0 in education systems has led to a wide range of different opinions. While some expect that the potential of Web 2.0 may result in a new way of understanding education, others believe that its use is not appropriate so as to be included in the learning process of students, claiming that the acquisition of knowledge could be affected.

Hargadon (2009) stands up for the introduction of Web 2.0 in educative centres and describes it as 'a logical extension of the attempts that so many educators have made to use the Internet to connect, collaborate, and create since the first days of bulletin boards and listserves' (p. 3).

As stated by Selwyn (2007), the vulnerability and the high risk of students who have not been taught to use the Web appropriately are some of the reasons which often provoke that educators decide not to include the use of Web 2.0 applications as part of their didactic programmes (p. 13).

Continuing with applications which may be useful for teaching purposes, the following sections focus on Wikis, forums, podcasts and MOOCs.

### **2.1.2.1. Wikis**

The word wiki ('quick' in Hawaiian) was first coined by Ward Cunningham to describe flexible webpages focused on content rather than on format. These webpages allow users to upload and edit all the information which can be found on the site. Consequently, collaboration plays an important role in order to produce meaningful materials which can be improved and shared by the community. (Parker & Chao, 2007, p. 58)

Wikipedia is one of the most popular and clear examples of successful wikis. All the information which can be found on this online encyclopedia has been written by its community of users, although there is an ongoing debate which focuses on the value of this source for educative purposes. (University of Delaware, 2008)

Chao (2007) and Reinhold (2006) admit that despite the advantages of wikis and the growing interest of educators who are willing to introduce them into their classrooms, the popularity of these tools in education has not supposed an important transformation yet.

As Augar, Raitman and Zhou (2004) explain, wikis include two states. The first one (read) is the general overview of the webpage and its contents for any visitor. Besides, the second state (edit) appears when a user wants to modify any of the contents which appear on the site (para. 5).

### **2.1.2.2. Forums**

Forums are generally described as discussion boards which enable users to interact and exchange information related to a specific topic. Communication and collaboration between users of the community is a key factor in order to make the most of these online tools. (Santosa, Yeo and Lin, 2005; Cyprus, 2010)

Recent studies (Holmes, 2004; Kaur, 2011) also suggest that communication skills can be improved thanks to online forums. According to O'Neill, Duplock and Willis (2006), student responses on a forum are often well crafted since they have more time to think about what they are going to post and they can also look for additional information which may be useful.

Yu (2002) defended online forums as they helped students to show their opinions freely and without feeling embarrassed or inferior to other people who could interfere in a physical classroom.

Forums are divided into different sections which include the forum itself, the categories in which threads are grouped according to the topic dealt, the threads which users can see and the replies posted in each topic. (Crystal Nielsen, 2008, p. 3)

### **2.1.2.3. Podcasts**

As Bull (2005) explains, a podcast is an audio which is uploaded to the Internet so that any user can download and listen to it at any time. Normally, a podcast includes different files which share a common theme and that is the reason why these files are normally edited before being published, trying to include all the most relevant information about the topic. (Lee & Chang, 2007)

Podcasting has been proved to have a lot of benefits for students. That is the case of those who prefer listening rather than taking notes, since they will be able to take advantage of this tool after a lecture has been finished. Additionally, students who attend classes may find distractions which do not let them understand some of the course related contents correctly, whereas those who prefer to listen to these contents later will be able to focus on the information without much difficulty. (McKinney & Page, 2009)

On the other hand, Bell, Cockburn, Wingkvist and Green (2007) mention the main disadvantage of podcasts, which is the absence of visual contents. Nevertheless, they also mention the importance of using podcasts as an alternative to face-to-face lessons or as a way of summarizing the most relevant aspects of the contents studied in the classroom (p. 2).

#### **2.1.2.4. MOOC**

The acronym MOOC stands for Massive Online Open Course. The main characteristics of these free courses are that there is a high number of students and all of them have access to a collection of materials and resources which can be freely used. (McAuley, Stewart, Siemens and Cormier, 2010)

According to Russell and Klemmer (2013), MOOCs are different to other e-learning tools since the materials are always available and the collaborative work of the community of students is an effective way of improving their learning process (para. 5). However, the number of research related to MOOCs use in education is not high enough so as to evaluate them in depth.

Yuan and Powell (2013) mention the most relevant issues related to MOOCs. According to them, the lack of a business model by which these courses could become a source of income may be a problem in the future (p. 3). Besides, MOOCs are sometimes considered to be a method of instruction which depends on the instructor rather than on the interaction of students.

The quality of the courses is also called into question since MOOCs often lack structure and students are too self-dependent in their digital skills. Finally, the assessment criteria followed in most MOOCs, in which students have to answer multiple choice questions or review another student's work, has also caused some concern among those who think that these students may not take the work as seriously as they should.

## **2.2. Blogs**

Since a blog was created to put into practice the didactic unit included in this paper, this section pays attention to the main characteristics of this application. Paquet (2003) defines blogs or weblogs as websites in which the author posts the contents which every user will be able to see (p. 1). These contents, which tend to include hyperlinks to other websites, are uploaded regularly and visitors can add and submit comments. Besides, blogs are free virtual spaces thanks to which anyone can have access to them without having to pay anything.

However, Downes (2004) claims that blogs are not only personal journals since they become something else 'in the hands of teachers and students' (p. 18). Ferdig and Trammel (2004) reflect upon the advantages of using blogs in education, which help students to acquire a better mastery of content, increase their interest, promote their participation and create different learning perspectives.

Focusing on education, Lara (2005) defines edublogs as the evolution of the traditional teacher webpage in which students were often given instructions about that they had to do (para. 5). Thus, the term is directly associated with the objective of improving the learning processes of students by building new knowledge.

Interaction is a key benefit for those blogs which have educative purposes. The importance of sharing ideas and information is essential in order to increase the acquisition of knowledge. (Duffy & Bruns, 2006; Williams & Jacobs, 2004)

Nonetheless, Barrs and Horrocks (2014) mention that blog use differs from one school to another depending on their objectives, and they also clarify that the involvement of students and teachers is not always the same (p. 3).

### **2.3. Integrating speaking skills**

Burns and Joyce (1997) describe speaking as the action of producing an oral message taking into account the context in which it takes place. Torcky (2006) claims that learners must develop their linguistic, discourse and pragmatic competences at the same time that they show fluency if they want to master the speaking skills of a language.

There are important factors which must be taken into account in order to ease communication. The first one is to consider speaking a face-to-face act in which the participants are normally physically present. The second aspect to consider about speaking is that it is interactive and all the participants contribute to the communicative act. Finally, speaking occurs in real time, so spontaneity plays a role in the preparation, organization and production of the messages built by the participants. (Torcky, 2006)



As maintained by Van Lier (1995) there are some relevant differences between spoken and written communication. Speaking is spontaneous and the participants in a conversation do not have the same time to prepare their message as they would have in a written conversation. Additionally, spoken language focuses on aspects such as intonation, stress and pronunciation whereas written language includes punctuation in order to be cohesive and coherent.

Nunan (1989) points out that speaking can have both transactional and interactional purposes. The first one focuses on the transmission of information by one of the participants, while the interactive purpose of speaking tries to establish a social interaction between the participants. However, Kingen (2000) acknowledges that both types are often combined in order to facilitate communication between the speakers.

### **2.3.1. The case of speaking skills in education**

Since Grammar Translation Approach started to dominate language teaching in the nineteenth century, vocabulary and sentence patterns received more attention than other linguistic aspects related to the learning process of a language, such as communication and the improvement of speaking skills. (Ketabi & Shahraki, 2011, p. 726)

In the last decades, the Communicative Method started to pay more attention to the communicative functions of language. Hymes (1972) claimed that it was necessary to teach and learn everyday English so as to become fully competent at a language, which meant that learners should focus on other aspects different from form too.

As Fang (2010) states, teaching speaking skills is really useful for students since they also improve their listening skills, learn new lexicon and gain confidence when they have to communicate in the target language (p. 112).

However, Nunan (2003) claims that people consider speaking to be more difficult than other skills mainly because it is a productive and spontaneous ability in which the speaker does not have enough time so as to correct the errors which may be included in a message. Gass and Selinker (1994) confirm that Spanish learners may find it more difficult to learn and improve their speaking skills due to shyness and the difficulties found when trying to produce sounds from a different language.

Richards (2008) mentions that the lack of communicative strategies and the poor level of pronunciation are some of the most common problems found by learners. These issues are often caused by the little importance given to speaking skills, which are not normally evaluated, the teachers' limited knowledge and the few opportunities in which students can actually practise their speaking skills into the classroom.

### **2.3.2. How to teach speaking skills**

Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin (1996) mention some of the most common traditional methodologies to teach speaking skills, which include focused-production tasks such as minimal pair drills, contextualized sentence practice and reading of short passages or dialogues, among others.

As Wallace, Stariha and Walberg (2004) defend, it is important that students are given the chance of practising their oral skills in the classroom (p. 10). In addition, teachers can also help them not to feel shy and be able to overcome the problems which may arise when they are asked to communicate in the English language. Regardless the importance of making the most of the time in the classroom, Dinapoli (2000) argues that the interaction between teacher and students is almost nonexistent in most cases.

Moreover, and focusing on methodology, Nunan (2003) states that error correction is not always the best option when students are using their oral skills,

emphasizing that they should not be interrupted by teachers. Moreover, a crucial aspect to create meaningful conversations between students is negotiation of meaning, thanks to which students are able to ask for clarification when they do not understand a message or part of it.

Finally, Nunan (1989) stresses that communicative tasks let students work on the production of spoken messages in the target language, helping them to improve their oral skills at the same time that they focus on meaning rather than on form. Thanks to this type of activities, students can interact and produce conversations which will teach them aspects that are not usually included in textbooks.

## **2.4. Objective**

This paper aims to design a blog which offers enough resources to students who want to improve their speaking skills. In order to do so, information on common mistakes, short texts, dialogues and audiovisual material will be used so as to make students understand the importance of becoming better speakers and more autonomous learners of a target language at the same time that they are encouraged to develop their oral abilities in terms of pronunciation, stress and intonation.

Additionally, another objective of this study is to make students acquire and connect both new and background knowledge. That is why British and Spanish cultural contents will be introduced within the different materials that will appear on the blog.

The results will be focused on the interest and motivation of the students who take part in the study, as well as on their performance and improvement of their speaking skills. Then, it will be possible to consider the success or failure of this experiment, taking into account its limitations for future implementation.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Students and school setting

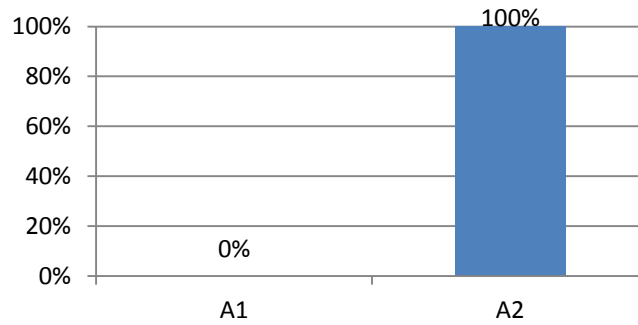
This didactic unit is thought to be implemented in a high school in La Vall d'Uixó, which is a town located in Eastern Spain, in the province of Castellón. It is part of the autonomous Valencian Community and it has a population of nearly 32.000 inhabitants. There are three high schools in La Vall d'Uixó, which are Honori García High School, Botànic Cavanilles High School and Benigasló High School.

The high school chosen to implement this didactic unit is Honori García High School, which has 31 classrooms equipped with projectors, three computer labs, two science labs, one technology workshop and a music classroom. There are 67 teachers in the staff and 676 students who are divided into Secondary Education (464 students), A-Levels (125 students) and Vocational Training (87 students).

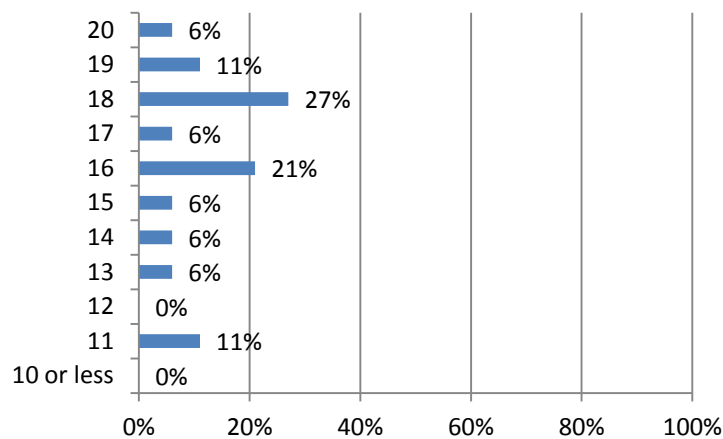
Last years have been difficult for the centre because it was affected by *aluminosis* and the previous building had to be demolished. However, a new one was built and, despite all the complaints by teachers, students and parents, this new structure is supposed to remain until a new educative centre is built in the next years. Even though the community has had to overcome these difficulties, the centre has enough facilities so as to offer the best opportunities for students.

The methodology will be followed in one of the classes of students in the fourth year of Secondary Education (4th ESO C). There are 18 students in the class, including 9 boys and 9 girls. Eleven of these students have already got their A2 certificate in the English language, although the rest of the students in the class are also believed to have the same level, as it is shown in the first questionnaire included in this study (annex 1).

As it is shown in Figure 1, all the students in the class were able to pass a certification test by which they showed that they have a Basic English level (A2) according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Figure 2 shows the results of this test.



**Figure 1: English level test**



**Figure 2: Test results**

There is one student with Asperger Syndrome who follows the exact same contents as the rest of his classmates. Although he may be distracted in some occasions, he does not find any difficulties when working in the classroom and teachers only have to take into account that he may need some more minutes to finish activities.

Two of the students are retaking the academic year and there are two people who still have to pass the English subject from the previous course. Despite the difficulties

which may arise during the course, the level of the class is good and they show interest in the contents which are taught by the teacher. Thus, the atmosphere is excellent in order to work on the contents and they always try to participate and improve their knowledge.

The performance of the didactic unit will take place in the third term of the academic year in order to take advantage of the knowledge gained during the course. Hence, the work of the students will be considered in the final evaluation of the subject, according to the criteria stated in this didactic unit.

## **3.2. Objectives**

### **3.2.1. General objectives**

✚ To be able to express ideas by making a correct use of their speaking skills in the English language.

✚ To use and extend their background knowledge related to the socio-cultural factors of the target language and connect it with their knowledge in the mother tongue.

✚ To be able to understand oral messages at the same time that they focus on linguistic elements.

✚ To foster individual and group work so as to become more autonomous and critical learners.

### **3.2.2. Specific objectives**

✚ To produce verbal communication.

✚ To use the ICT as a new tool in their learning process.

✚ To watch videos and listen to audios in order to get information and pay attention to the use of English.

- ✚ To read texts focusing on oral objectives.
- ✚ To reflect upon the importance of pronunciation, stress and intonation.

### **3.3. Contents**

#### **3.3.1. Conceptual contents**

- ✚ Pronunciation, stress and intonation.
- ✚ Pronunciation of verbs in the simple past.
- ✚ Vocabulary related to celebrities, cities, festivals, food, hobbies and landmarks.

#### **3.3.2. Procedural contents**

- ✚ Practising pronunciation, stress and intonation.
- ✚ Working in groups.
- ✚ Interacting with others.
- ✚ Participating in the blog.
- ✚ Describing pictures.
- ✚ Using background knowledge.

#### **3.3.3. Attitudinal contents**

- ✚ Students show interest in improving their speaking skills.
- ✚ Students show interest in learning new socio-cultural aspects and acquiring new knowledge.
- ✚ Students become aware of the importance of pronunciation, stress and intonation in English.
- ✚ Students understand the necessity of working and collaborating in groups.

### 3.4. Basic competences

✚ **Competence in linguistic communication.** Students are required to make use of their speaking skills in order to interact and communicate with others.

✚ **Competence in processing information and the use of ICT.** Students need to develop digital skills by which they are able to access the blog and work on the activities chosen.

✚ **Learning to learn.** The teacher will provide feedback to the students, who are supposed to understand their needs and focus on those aspects which need to be reinforced. Two of the most important aspects to achieve this goal are motivation and confidence.

✚ **Autonomy and personal initiative.** Students are supposed to work on their own in order to do a final project. The role of the teacher does not necessarily need to be as active as before.

✚ **Social and civic competence.** Group work and cooperation are important aspects in the daily routine of students. They are asked to work together in order to achieve the objectives of the unit.

✚ **Cultural and artistic competence.** The use of background knowledge can be a very useful tool in order to do the different activities proposed by the teacher. Students are required to link their previous knowledge to the contents being learnt.

### 3.5. Methodology

The activities performed in class follow a communicative approach by which the teacher encourages students to participate and use English orally. The motivation and active collaboration of students are crucial factors in order to achieve the main objectives of the study.



Along the different sessions, the teacher will introduce specific topics related to celebrities, cities, festivals, food, hobbies and landmarks. The students will be asked to follow the instructions in the blog, which include describing pictures, reading short texts and answering questions, among others. Short dialogues will be introduced so as to practise the use of every day English and other materials such as videos and sounds will be used to introduce and reinforce the topics and the activities.

By paying attention to the activities, students will learn new socio-cultural aspects at the same time that they develop their speaking skills and learn new contents which can be helpful in their future as English speakers.

Finally, students will have to do a final project in which they will talk about a specific topic in groups of three people. A treasure hunt method will be followed and students will be given hints so that they know the contents which should appear in their final presentation. Special attention will be paid to the use of spoken English in terms of pronunciation, stress and intonation.

### 3.6. Materials

✚ **Computers.** The computer in the classroom will be used by the teacher in order to show the materials, whereas the devices in the computer lab will be used by students in some sessions.

✚ **Dictionaries.** They can be very useful in order to look for vocabulary items which students do not understand or to check how a word is pronounced.

✚ **Notebooks.** Students may be asked to take notes if the teacher considers it to be necessary.

✚ **Photocopies.** Short texts and other activities which can be found on the blog will also be given to the students as photocopies.

✚ **Recorder.** The teacher will use this device in order to record both sessions and be able to analyse the oral skills of students.

✚ **Questionnaires.** There are two questionnaires which students have to complete. One of them will be introduced at the beginning of the first session and another one will appear at the end of the last session.

The initial questionnaire (annex 2) focuses on the opinion that students have about the use of new technologies for both personal and educative purposes before the activities in the didactic unit are implemented. Besides, it also pays attention to the learning of language skills, examining which are the most difficult ones for students.

The final questionnaire (annex 3) analyses the students' opinion about the use of new technologies and its usefulness when teaching speaking skills. It is a way of evaluating and considering if the objectives included in the didactic unit have been completely achieved or not after it is introduced.

### 3.7. Spaces

✚ **Classroom.** The sessions will take place in the general classroom of the subject. There is a computer and a projector which can be used to show the materials to the students.

### 3.8. Timing

This didactic unit will be implemented in 3 different sessions of 55 minutes. The sessions will not be consecutive in order to give the students some time to prepare the tasks which they are asked to do. During this time, students will be taught the contents at the same time that they practise their oral skills. Additionally, students will have to do some work at home in order to prepare the final presentation. They can also use the blog so as to and ask doubts if they do not understand some of the contents taught in class.

### 3.9. Development

#### ✚ First session

ACTIVITY	OBJECTIVES	TIMING
Initial questionnaire	Learn what the students know about new technologies in education. Discover their problems related to English language skills.	5 minutes
Introduction to the class	Explain the use of the blog. Show the teacher's expectations.	5 minutes
Brainstorming	Learn what the students know about the United Kingdom.	10 minutes
Reading	Focus on pronunciation while reading short texts related to the United Kingdom.	10 minutes
Error correction	Correct the words which were not pronounced correctly.	5 minutes
Common errors	Analyse the most common errors regarding pronunciation.	5 minutes
Pronunciation	Show the students the importance of pronunciation. Learn the pronunciation of regular verbs in the simple past. Explain some basic aspects of pronunciation.	10 minutes
Pre-task	Create materials which can help students to improve their pronunciation.	5 minutes

**Table 1: First session**

The first session will be devoted to pronunciation skills. First of all, students will have to complete the initial questionnaire in order to know their opinion about the use of new technologies in the classroom and the main problems related to the learning process of the English language. In the next five minutes, the teacher will show the blog to the students, who will be able to see the different contents included on it.

Then, a brainstorming will serve so as to introduce some of the contents and learn the students' knowledge about the United Kingdom. In order to do so, pictures related to this place will be shown in class. Next, the students will be asked to read six short texts thanks to which the teacher will be able to focus on the pronunciation errors made by the students before providing them with feedback and the correct pronunciation of these words.

After that, special attention will be paid to the most common errors when dealing with English pronunciation. A list of words and the correct pronunciations will be provided so that the students are aware of the importance of focusing on this aspect. Later, the teacher will place emphasis on the pronunciation of other linguistic elements such as regular verbs at the same time that the blog is used to introduce videos and other visual materials which may be useful for the students.

Before the end of the class, the teacher will ask the students to work in groups of three. At home, they will have to follow the instructions found on the blog. There are some activities in which they will have to use online dictionaries so as to check which words are pronounced differently, they will be given clues about different topics and they will have to choose one of them. Next, each group will write an essay which will be corrected by the teacher. In the last session, the essays will be read in class and the students will be asked to pay attention to their pronunciation.

 **Second session**

ACTIVITY	OBJECTIVES	TIMING
Introduction to the class	Show the teacher's expectations.	5 minutes
Reading	Focus on stress and intonation while reading isolated words and sentences.	10 minutes
Dialogues	Focus on stress and intonation while interacting with other classmates.	10 minutes
Error correction	Correct the errors related to stress and intonation.	5 minutes
Common errors	Analyse the most common errors regarding stress and intonation.	5 minutes
Stress and intonation	Show the students the importance of stress and intonation.  Explain some basic aspects of stress and intonation.	15 minutes
Writing correction	Explain the mistakes made.	5 minutes

**Table 2: Second session**

The second session will be focused on stress and intonation. First, the students will have to read isolated words in order to check the importance of stressing syllables correctly. Additionally, they will be asked to read dialogues in pairs so that they can interact and use real English conversations to improve their intonation. All the materials

will be included on the blog and, afterwards, the teacher will explain and correct the errors made by the students.

Then, the teacher will mention some of the most common mistakes related to stress and intonation. A list of words and examples will be provided in different sentences and they will be useful to show the necessity of acquiring knowledge about the basic concepts of stress and intonation.

Finally, the teacher will give each group the corrected version of the essays which they had been asked to do after the first session. Even though these compositions will not be assessed in the final evaluation, since they are supposed to be materials used to be read in class in order to focus on oral abilities, the teacher will use the last minutes of the session to explain some of the mistakes made by the students.

 **Third session**

ACTIVITY	OBJECTIVES	TIMING
Introduction to the class	Show the teacher's expectations.	5 minutes
Contents review	Analyse the most important theoretical concepts related to pronunciation, stress and intonation.	15 minutes
Short texts	Focus on pronunciation while reading short texts related to Spain.	10 minutes
Error correction	Correct the words which were not pronounced correctly.	5 minutes

Dialogues	Focus on stress and intonation while interacting with other classmates.	10 minutes
Error correction	Correct the errors related to stress and intonation.	5 minutes
Final questionnaire	Know the opinion of the students about the contents and methodology followed in the three sessions.	5 minutes

**Table 3: Third session**

The last session will be focused on all the different contents studied in the previous sessions, which include pronunciation, stress and intonation. First of all, the teacher will review the most important aspects related to the contents of the didactic unit. New materials will be introduced thanks to the blog and the students will be able to reinforce the knowledge acquired in the previous sessions.

Next, each group will have to read the essays written after the first sessions and all the students will be asked to read one of the paragraphs. Then, the teacher will mention some of the errors made and the class will discuss the corrections provided by the teacher, which will be specially linked to pronunciation issues.

Later, new dialogues will be introduced and, in pairs, the students will be told to read them aloud. The teacher will correct the mistakes associated to stress and intonation, although pronunciation will not be put aside.

Finally, the students will have to complete the final questionnaire in which they will be able to express their opinion about the methodology and the contents introduced in the three sessions of the didactic unit.

### 3.10. BLOG: SPEAKING TREASURE

The blog is called Speaking Treasure and it can be found at <http://speakingtreasure.blogspot.com.es/>. The use of the word ‘speaking’ is due to the fact that the contents included on the blog focus on the improvement of oral skills; at the same time, ‘treasure’ is a reference to the implementation of a treasure hunt game thanks to which students will have to look for information and prepare an oral presentation.

Figure 3 shows an overview of the blog’s homepage, in which students can find the different contents related to pronunciation, stress and intonation which will be studied in the different sessions. This overview includes the blog’s title, a list of tabs in which the contents are organised, the latest posts and a chat room thanks to which visitors can send messages.

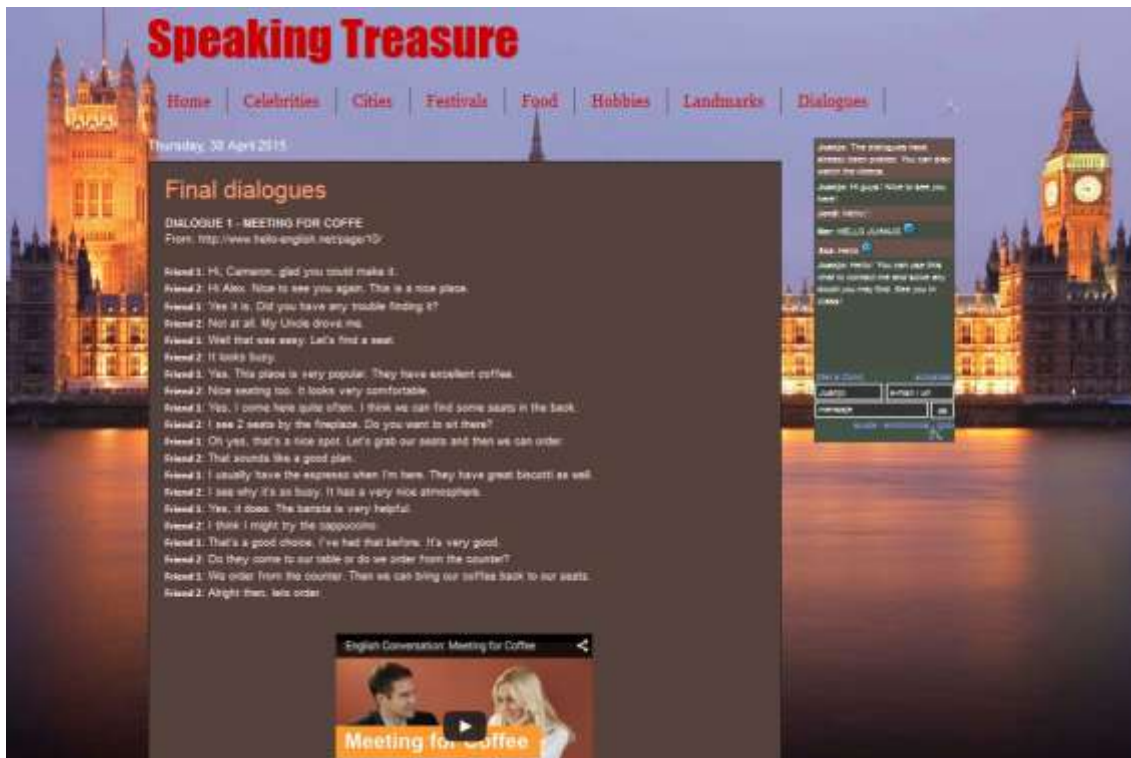


Figure 3: Blog’s main page



Figure 4 is a screenshot of the blog's title and the different tabs which include the contents studied in class.



Figure 4: Blog's title and tabs

As it is shown in figure 5, all the labs (celebrities, cities, festivals, food, hobbies and landmarks) include the shorts texts which students were asked to read in the first session, the treasure hunt instructions which they have to follow in order to prepare a similar text and the final texts written by the students.

The texts written by students had been corrected before they were posted on the blog since the assessment did not focus on writing skills. Consequently, these written compositions were not included in the assessment of this didactic unit.



Figure 5: Cities lab

The last lab, dialogues, includes both the first and final dialogues which students were asked to read in class before and after having studied the contents. As figure 6 shows, each dialogue includes a video which students can watch if they want to listen to native speakers performing the conversations.

Thursday, 30 April 2015

## Final dialogues

**DIALOGUE 1 - MEETING FOR COFFEE**  
From: <http://www.hello-english.net/page/10/>

Friend 1: Hi, Cameron, glad you could make it.  
Friend 2: Hi Alex. Nice to see you again. This is a nice place.  
Friend 1: Yes it is. Did you have any trouble finding it?  
Friend 2: Not at all. My Uncle drove me.  
Friend 1: Well that was easy. Let's find a seat.  
Friend 2: It looks busy.  
Friend 1: Yes. This place is very popular. They have excellent coffee.  
Friend 2: Nice seating too. It looks very comfortable.  
Friend 1: Yes, I come here quite often. I think we can find some seats in the back.  
Friend 2: I see 2 seats by the fireplace. Do you want to sit there?  
Friend 1: Oh yes, that's a nice spot. Let's grab our seats and then we can order.  
Friend 2: That sounds like a good plan.  
Friend 1: I usually have the espresso when I'm here. They have great biscotti as well.  
Friend 2: I see why it's so busy. It has a very nice atmosphere.  
Friend 1: Yes, it does. The barista is very helpful.  
Friend 2: I think I might try the cappuccino.  
Friend 1: That's a good choice. I've had that before. It's very good.  
Friend 2: Do they come to our table or do we order from the counter?  
Friend 1: We order from the counter. Then we can bring our coffee back to our seats.  
Friend 2: Alright then, lets order.

English Conversation: Meeting for Coffee

Meeting for Coffee

0:00 / 2:22

**DIALOGUE 2 - ASKING DIRECTIONS**  
From: <http://www.hello-english.net/page/11/>

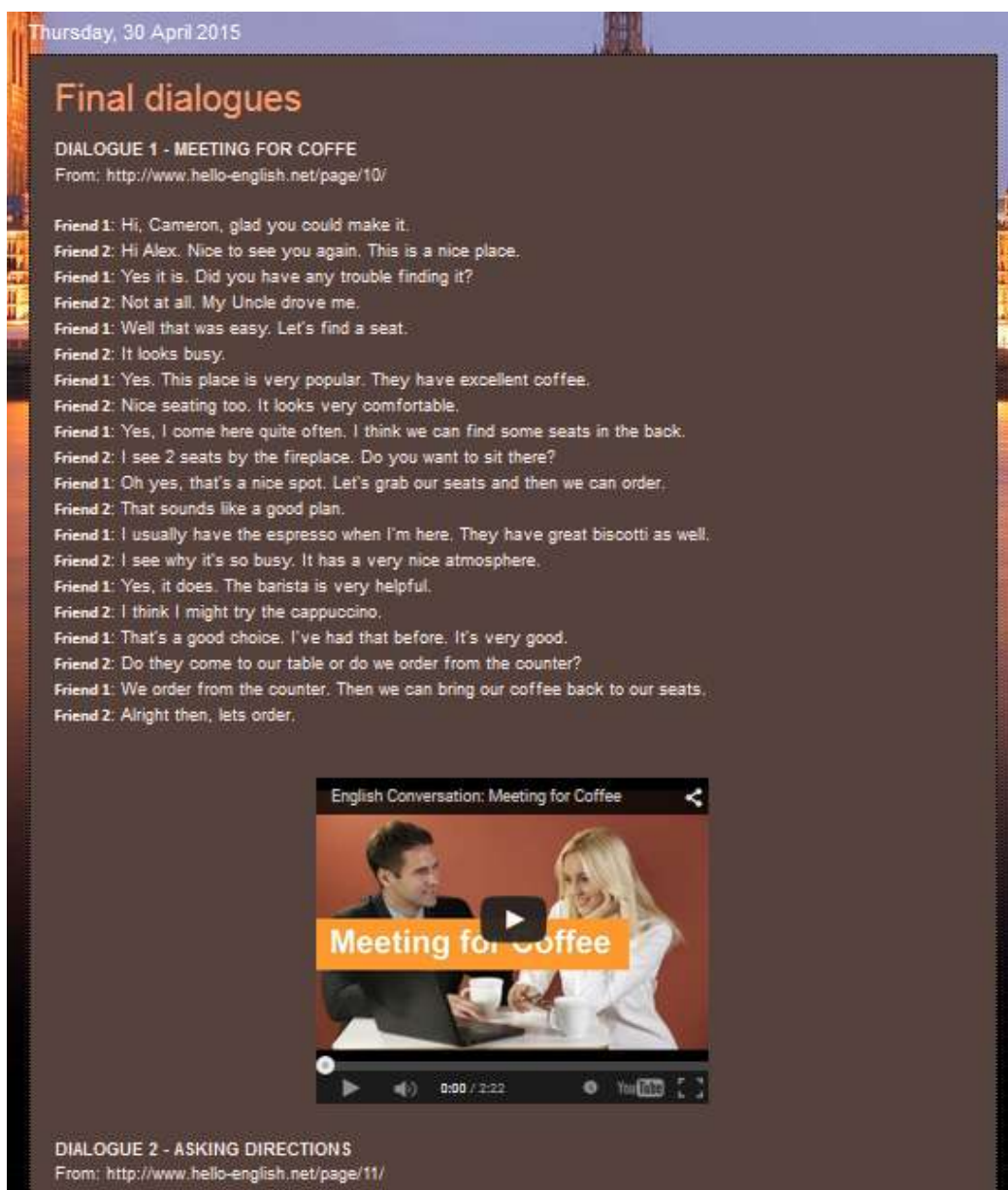


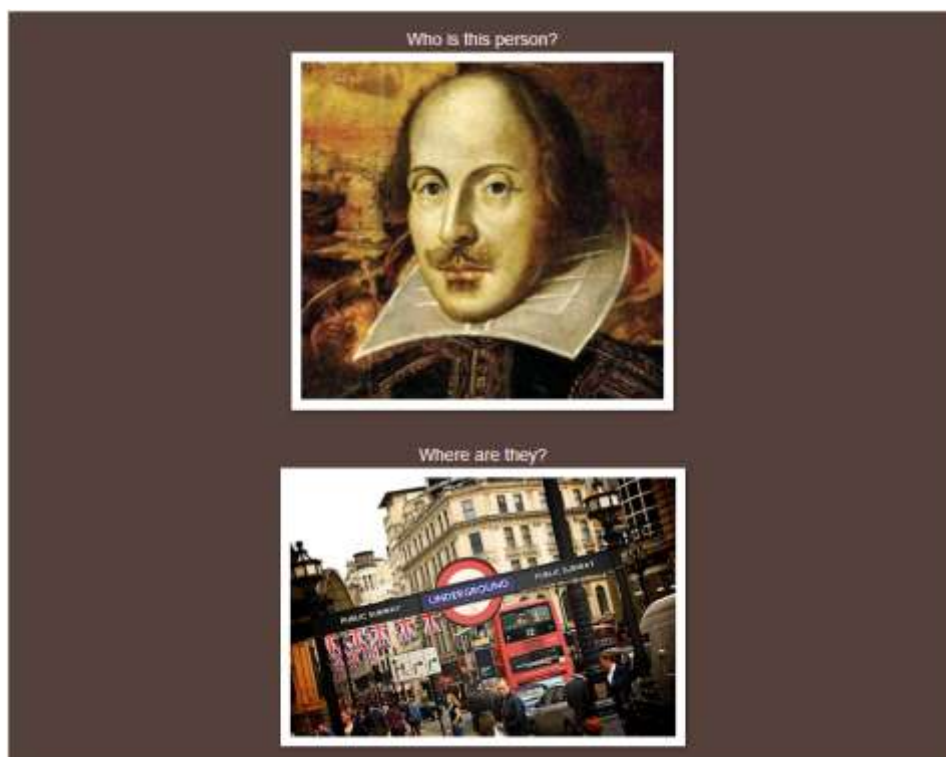
Figure 6: Dialogues lab

The blog also includes a chat (figure 7) which allows students to ask for doubts and communicate with other classmates and the teacher.



**Figure 7: Chat**

All the contents explained in each session will appear on the blog, so students will be able to check them at any time after the class finishes.



**Figure 8: Brainstorming for the first session**

### 3.11. Assessment

Special attention is paid to the three aspects studied in the sessions, which are pronunciation stress and intonation. Additionally, other aspects such as interest, evolution and participation are also taken into account in order to assess students.

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor
Pronunciation	There are no pronunciation mistakes.	There are few pronunciation mistakes.	There are some pronunciation mistakes.	The oral message is incomprehensible.
Stress	The student masters stress perfectly.	The students makes few stress mistakes.	There are some mistakes related to stress.	The student does not stress any syllables correctly.
Intonation	The student's intonation is perfect.	The student's intonation has few mistakes.	The student makes some intonation mistakes.	The intonation is not correct.
Interest and motivation	The student is highly motivated.	The student is often motivated.	The student is not always motivated.	The student does not show any interest.
Evolution	The student has clearly acquired new knowledge.	The student has learnt some new contents but not all of them.	The student has acquired little knowledge.	The acquisition of knowledge is not enough.
Participation	The student participates both in class and on the blog.	The student often participates in class or on the blog.	The student does not participate in class or on the blog.	The student does not participate.

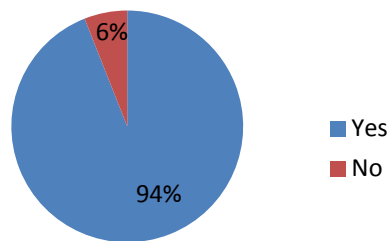
**Table 4: Assessment rubric**

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Analysis of the students' initial questionnaire

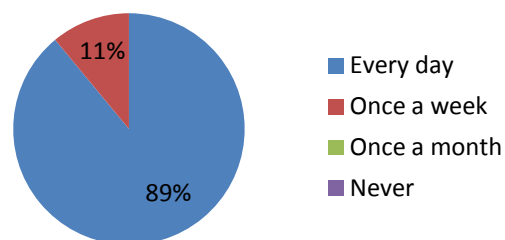
The initial questionnaire must be completed at the beginning of the first session. It focuses on the importance of introducing ICTs into the classroom and the problems found by the students when dealing with English skills. The questionnaire helps to know their opinion about the use of new technologies as a learning tool and the necessity of the students to gain oral abilities.

Figure 9 shows that almost all the students in the class are interested in new technologies, so the implementation of ICT could be seen as a motivational element.



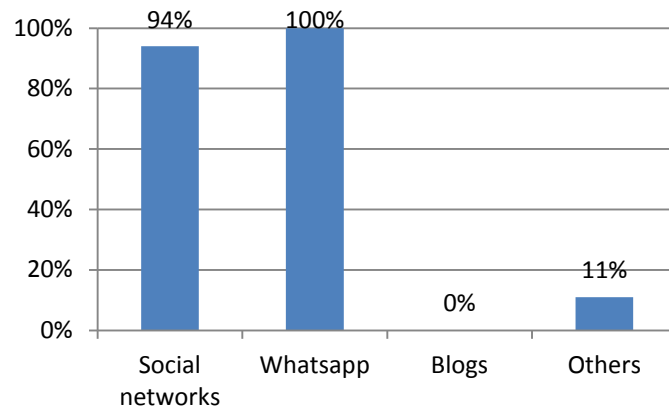
**Figure 9: Interest in new technologies**

As it can be seen in Figure 10, the 89% of the students use the Internet almost every day, while the 11% of the students in the class connect once a week. This means that most of them are already familiarized with the use of new technologies.



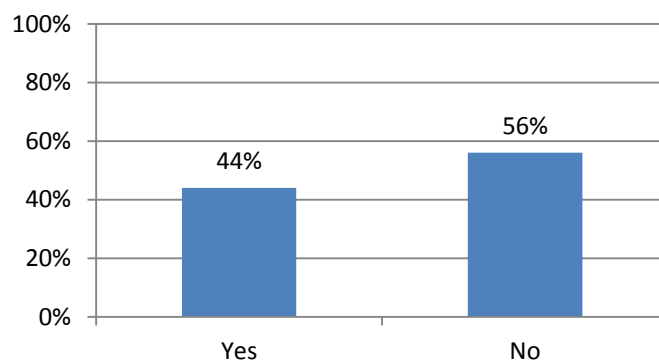
**Figure 10: Internet frequency**

Social networks (94%) and Whatsapp (100%) are the two most common applications among the students in the class. This can be seen in Figure 11, which also shows that the 11% of the students also have other applications (Youtube) among their preferences. It is surprising that there are no students who have blogs among their preferences.



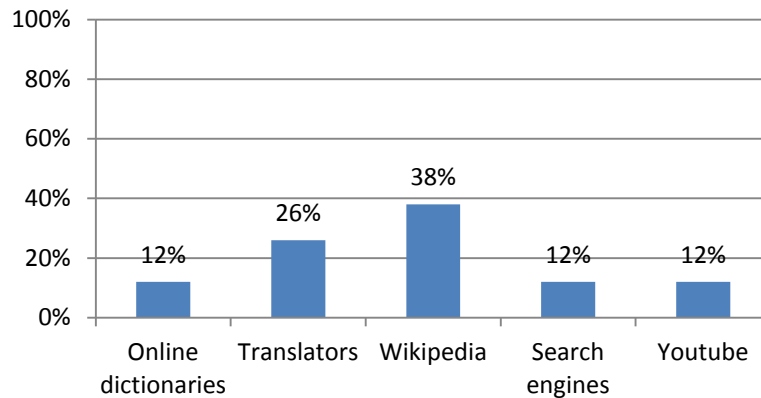
**Figure 11: Application preferences**

Figure 12 shows the difference between those students who use the Internet as an alternative tool in their studies. The 44% of the students in the class use the Internet in order to study and complement their learning process. In contrast, the 56% of the students do not use the Internet for studying purposes.



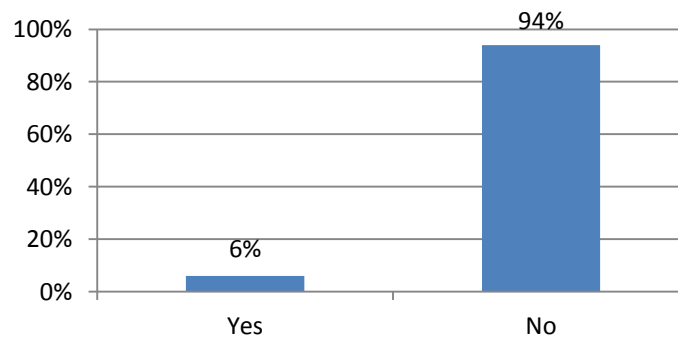
**Figure 12: The Internet to study**

Figure 13 shows the preferences of those students who use the Internet to study. Wikipedia seems to be the students' main resource (38%), but they also use translators (26%). There are other options used by some students, including online dictionaries, search engines and Youtube (12%).



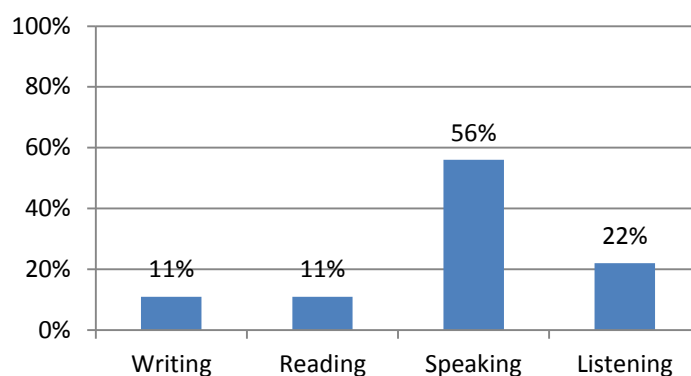
**Figure 13: Study preferences**

Figure 14 focuses on e-learning teaching strategies related to the introduction of new technologies into the classroom. It shows that only the 6% of the students in the class have previously heard about WebQuests and Treasure Hunt. Thus, it can be interesting to implement one of these methods in order to make them understand new learning strategies which are different from the traditional methods to which they are used to.



**Figure 14: WebQuests and Treasure Hunt**

The students admitted that they find more difficulties when they have to speak in English than when they have to perform a task related to any other skill. Figure 15 shows that the 56% of the class has speaking problems, whereas the rest of students have problems when listening (22%), reading and writing (11%). This data helps to understand the importance of paying more attention to speaking skills in the classroom.



**Figure 15: Skill difficulties**

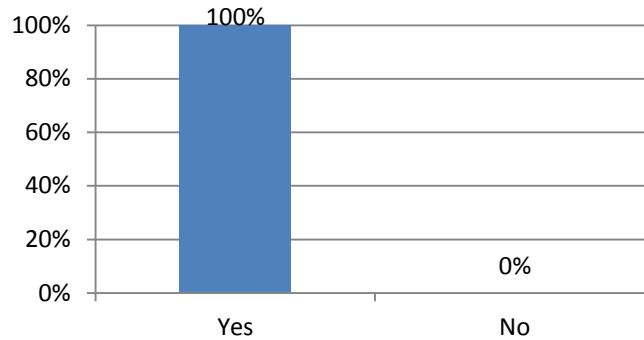
#### **4.2. Analysis of the students' final questionnaire**

This questionnaire was completed by the students after the implementation of the didactic unit. The use of the blog and the contents and methodology followed by the teacher cannot be considered as being appropriate before knowing the opinion of the students at the end of the last session. Thus, the main objective of this questionnaire is to reflect upon the opinion of the students after having performed the activities included in the didactic unit.

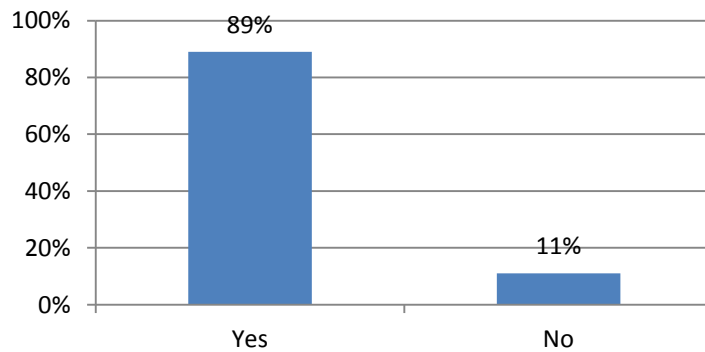
Figures 16 and 17 (page 35) pay attention to the students' opinion about new technologies after the blog has been used to introduce the different contents. Figure 16 clearly shows that all the students consider new technologies to be useful in the learning process. Additionally, figure 17 shows that the majority of them (89%) will be using this resource in the future, whereas, as we have previously seen, only a 44% of the



students admitted using ICTs before the implementation of this didactic unit (figure 12, page 32).

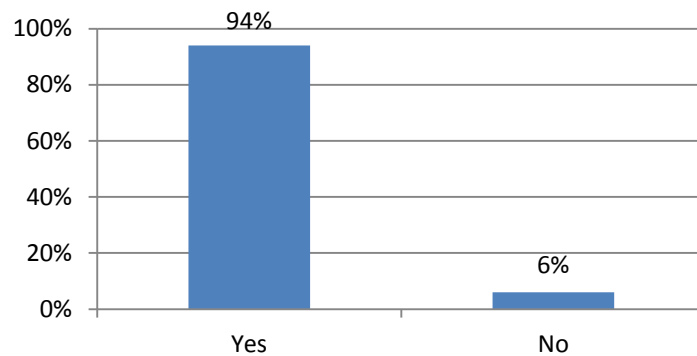


**Figure 16: New technologies improve the learning process**



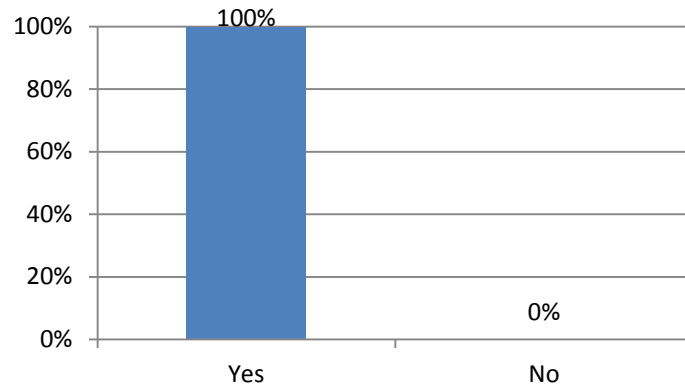
**Figure 17: New technologies as a learning tool**

According to figure 18, treasure hunt is also considered to be an innovative way of learning and the 94% of the students in the class have a positive attitude towards implementing this methodology in future sessions.



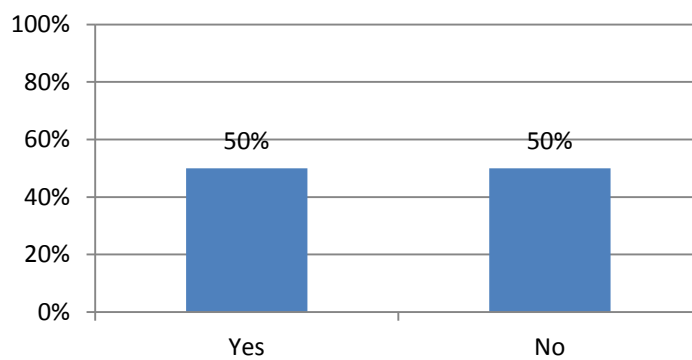
**Figure 18: Treasure hunt as a new methodology**

In addition, figure 19 reflects upon the fact that the students consider the activities performed to be useful in order to improve their oral abilities. All of them think that the contents taught by the teacher helped them to learn new speaking aspects by which they will be able to communicate in more competently.



**Figure 19: Improvement of speaking skills**

Finally, the questionnaire tries to analyse if the students consider the blog as a learning tool itself. Half of the class considers that the blog and the contents which appear on it can be seen as learning applications which may be useful for them in order to acquire new knowledge in the future (figure 20).



**Figure 20: Discovery of new learning tools**

## 5. Discussion

The initial questionnaire was focused on the usefulness of using ICTs in the classroom. Although the students understand the importance of new technologies in order to achieve the objectives of the class, there is a majority of them who admitted not using them for educational purposes even though they surfed the net daily. As a result, they acknowledged that they preferred to use new technologies so as to communicate with other people rather than to improve their learning process.

Those who claimed that the use of ICTs was helpful when acquiring new knowledge also indicated that Wikipedia and online translators were the tools that they preferred when they needed to look for information online.

It was also interesting to note that none of them visited blogs in order to solve their doubts or practice the theory studied in class. This was a very attractive aspect since they would need to follow the instructions on the blog in order to fulfil the activities required by the teacher.

Additionally, the class also asserted that they did not know what treasure hunts or webquests were. Then, it was stimulating to introduce one of these methodologies into the classroom since it would allow the teacher to know if the students found it to be more motivating and challenging than the methodology which they usually followed in class.

Although each student chose a different option after being asked in which skill they usually found more problems, it was obvious that the speaking skill created more learning obstacles for most of them. Since the activities included in the didactic unit

were totally focused on oral skills, it was intriguing to consider whether they would end up being useful or not.

Besides, the final questionnaire was filled in at the end of the last session and it tried to show that the students had change their opinion about some of the aspects mentioned in the previous sessions. For example, all the students admitted that new technologies can be a very useful tool in order to teach students and learn new contents.

They also supported the idea of working with ICTs in the future so as to become more proficient learners and be able to find the information they need about any aspects related to the learning process of the English language or even to any other subject which they may course in the coming years.

Treasure hunt seemed to be an effective method so as to reach the main goal of the didactic unit, which tried to improve the speaking skills of the students. This teaching method, as well as the use of a blog, helped the students to feed more encouraged when working on the activities.

Half of the class denied the fact that they had learnt new learning tools after the didactic unit had been implemented, something which was surprising because they had previously admitted that the use of the blog had helped them and that they had discovered new ways of working autonomously. Perhaps, this may be due to the fact that they did not consider the blog as a learning tool itself as they may be often considered to be place for sharing and discussing other types of materials.

Finally, both the results of the activities and the opinion of the students in the questionnaire showed that they had improved their speaking skills. Then, the contents

included in the didactic unit can be considered as appropriate and correct because they helped the students to acquire new knowledge and enhance their oral abilities.

## **6. Conclusion**

Taking into account the results of the questionnaires and the performance of the students in the three sessions during which this didactic unit was implemented, it can be concluded that the use of the blog and the methodology followed were successful. The resources, materials and activities chosen helped to create a working atmosphere which contributed to the acquisition of new knowledge and the improvement of oral abilities which students had previously admitted to be one of the main weaknesses in their learning process.

On the one hand, the use of new technologies in order to introduce theoretical and practical contents helped to increase the interest and motivation of the students in the class. Moreover, the general opinion of the students changed since they discovered that ICTs can be a very useful learning tool if the materials chosen are suitable.

On the other hand, the students also showed big interest when they discovered the methodology which they should follow in order to complete one of the main activities in the didactic unit. As it can be observed in the first questionnaire, they were not accustomed to treasure hunts and it was a new approach to their learning process.

It was contributing to observe their effort and the quality of the work done not only in class but also when they were asked to worked at home. The results proved that traditional methods are not always the most effective ones in order to achieve some of the objectives in the learning process.

In conclusion, the students were able to acquire new knowledge and improve their speaking skills at the same time that they understood the importance of innovating in the classroom and including new methodologies and materials which helped them to work both autonomously and in groups.

## **7. Limitations and further implementation**

The implementation of this didactic unit was not easy because the amount of time available was too limited. Even though the final outcomes can be considered as positive, three sessions may not be sufficient so as to consider that the methodology and the contents are appropriate and useful enough for the students.

Moreover, the participation of the students was affected by this time restriction. Their level of English was not a setback and they were very participative in all the different sessions. However, they did not show the same interest when they were asked to participate on the blog.

Additionally, it would have been interesting to post both the recordings of the sessions in order to compare and realise about the knowledge gained by students after the contents were explained in the classroom.

Consequently, I strongly believe that the results could have been even better if there was more time in order to introduce new contents and implement the didactic unit throughout the whole academic year. In this case, the students would also be able to build a more complete opinion regarding the advantages and disadvantages of using ICTs in the classroom and the importance of acquiring and improving speaking skills.

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**Annexes**

Annex 1: English level questionnaire.....51

Annex 2: Initial questionnaire.....54

Annex 3: Final questionnaire.....55



## Annex 1. English level questionnaire

Choose the correct option to complete the following sentences.

1. My brother ... a teacher.

- am
- is
- are

2. Sandra doesn't ... to the radio.

- listen
- listens
- listening

3. ... you play tennis?

- Do
- Does
- Are

4. John is ... football at the moment.

- plays
- playing
- play

5. ... you living in Cambridge this year?

- Do
- Are
- Did

6. This is ... computer.

- mine
- my
- me

7. If I work hard, I ... pass my exams.

- will
- am going to
- am

8. Have you cleaned the car ...?

- still
- already
- yet

9. Pablo has ... doing his homework for hours.

- been
- being
- be

10. When I got to the meeting, it ... already started.

- has
- have
- had

11. I hate pizza now but I ... to like it.

- did
- used
- use

12. I'm ... lunch with Taka tomorrow.

- going to
- having
- having to

13. I'll come and see you ... I'm in town.

- until
- since
- when

14. When Fadi ..., we'll start the film.

- will arrive
- arrive
- arrives

15. ... did you leave your job?

- What
- Why
- Who

16. I've been a student ... a year.

- for
- ever
- since

17. How ... people do you work with?

- many
- much
- some

18. London is ... expensive than Beijing.

- very
- more
- much

19. You ... eat so many cakes.

- shouldn't
- couldn't
- can't

20. How ... do you eat in a restaurant?

- often
- long
- old

## Annex 2. Initial questionnaire

Valora los siguientes aspectos marcando la casilla adecuada.

1. ¿Estás interesado/a en las nuevas tecnologías?

- Sí  
 No

2. ¿Con qué frecuencia utilizas Internet?

- Todos los días  
 Una vez a la semana  
 Una vez al mes  
 Nunca

3. ¿Qué tipo de aplicaciones utilizas? Puedes marcar varias opciones.

- Redes sociales  
 Whatsapp  
 Blogs  
 Otras (especificar): \_\_\_\_\_

4. ¿Haces uso de Internet para estudiar?

- Sí (especifica los sitios web que más visitas): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
 No

5. ¿Has oído hablar de las WebQuests y las Cazas del Tesoro?

- Sí  
 No

6. ¿Qué habilidad lingüística te causa más dificultades?

- Comprensión escrita (Reading)  
 Expresión escrita (Writing)  
 Comprensión oral (Listening)  
 Expresión oral (Speaking)

### Annex 3. Final questionnaire

Valora los siguientes aspectos marcando la casilla adecuada.

1. El uso de las nuevas tecnologías ha ayudado a mejorar el proceso de aprendizaje.

- Sí  
 No

2. Haré uso de las nuevas tecnologías para mejorar mis conocimientos lingüísticos.

- Sí  
 No

3. He mejorado mis habilidades orales gracias a estas sesiones.

- Sí  
 No

4. La metodología aplicada me ha parecido adecuada.

- Sí  
 No

5. He conocido nuevas herramientas que pueden ser útiles para mi aprendizaje.

- Sí  
 No