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Applying the ESPIT Model to Foster Spoken Production of Participants from the Academic Improvement Strategic Plan

Aplicando el modelo ESPIT para mejorar la producción oral de participantes del plan estratégico de mejoramiento académico

Mise en place du modèle ESPIT pour améliorer la production orale des participants du plan stratégique d'amélioration académique

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Abstract

In a distance learning environment, English teachers encounter the need to make substantial adaptations to their teaching methodology, considering all the variables that can intervene in such context. At Universidad Estatal a Distancia (Distance State University, UNED) in the English Teaching Major for First and Second Cycles, students who require extra practice and teaching guidance due to low linguistic performance can be part of a successful project called Academic Improvement Strategic Plan (PEMA in its Spanish acronym). In order to help PEMA participants enhance their oral production, researchers designed a methodological model called ESPIT. The article presents the theoretical framework that supports the design of the ESPIT model; which acronym stands for **E**ngaging myself, **S**haping my knowledge, **P**erforming my skill, **I**ntervening my production, **T**ransforming my linguistic profile, its main features and structure, the description of the teaching experience, its results and finally the conclusions.

Keywords: English teaching, feedback, linguistic improvement, methodology, oral skill.

Resumen

En un ambiente de educación a distancia, las personas docentes de inglés enfrentan la necesidad de hacer cambios substanciales a su metodología de aprendizaje considerando muchas variables que podrían intervenir en tal contexto. En la Universidad Estatal a Distancia (UNED), en la carrera de Enseñanza del Inglés para I y II ciclos, el estudiantado requiere práctica y guía extra debido a su desempeño bajo lingüístico, pueden ser parte del proyecto exitoso llamado Plan Estratégico de Mejoramiento Académico (PEMA). Con el fin de ayudar a los participantes de PEMA a mejorar su producción oral, los investigadores diseñaron un modelo metodológico llamado ESPIT (cuyas siglas representan **E**ngaging myself, **S**haping my knowledge, **P**erforming my skill, **I**ntervening my production, **T**ransforming my linguistic profile). El artículo presenta el fundamento teórico que respalda el diseño del modelo, sus características principales y estructura, la descripción de la experiencia de enseñanza, sus resultados y, finalmente, las conclusiones.

Palabras clave: destreza oral, enseñanza del inglés, mejoramiento lingüístico, metodología, realimentación.

Résumé

Dans le cadre de l'enseignement à distance, les enseignants d'anglais sont confrontés au besoin de faire des changements notables aux méthodologies d'apprentissage en prenant compte plusieurs variables qui interviennent dans ce contexte. En ce qui concerne, l'Université de l'État à Distance (UNED), dans la filière de l'Enseignement de l'Anglais pour les cycles I et II, les étudiants qui requièrent pratiquer et un guide supplémentaire dû à leur faible performance linguistique, ils peuvent faire partie du programme réussi nommé Plan Stratégique d'Amélioration Académique (PEMA en espagnol). Afin d'aider les participants au PEMA à améliorer la production orale, les chercheurs ont conçu un modèle méthodologique appelé ESPIT -en anglais **E**ngaging myself, **S**haping my knowledge, **P**erforming my skill, **I**ntervening my production, **T**ransforming my linguistic profile- (dont les sigles signifient: Engagement avec moi-même, Façonner mes connaissances, Développer mes compétences, Intervenir ma production, Transformer mon profile linguistique). En outre, cet article présente le fondement théorique qui donne support au modèle ESPIT, ses caractéristiques principales, sa structure, la description de l'expérience d'enseignement, les résultats et finalement, les conclusions.

Mots-clés: compétence orale, enseignement de l'anglais, méthodologie, feedback.

Introduction

In a distance learning environment, English teachers encounter the need to make substantial adaptations to their teaching methodology, considering all the variables that can intervene in such context. Undoubtedly, students are immersed in a learning and teaching reality that requires deep analysis and constant observations. At Universidad Estatal a Distancia (Distance State University, UNED), in the English Teaching Major for First and Second Cycles, students who require extra practice and teaching guidance due to low linguistic performance can be part of a successful project called Academic Improvement Strategic Plan (PEMA in its Spanish acronym).

Since 2018, this project has helped from 30 to 35 students advance in the courses and be more proficient in their language profile through individual one-hour-per-week sessions with an English tutor from the major. As a secondary objective of the project, when PEMA students finish their Major, they are eventually more equipped to teach the language more effectively to children. Besides, as part of the requirements to obtain the bachelor's degree in this major and be hired in public or private schools, students must obtain a B2 in the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), including an oral examination from certified testers.

As part of the continuous observations to PEMA students when receiving individual sessions with tutor Marcela Castro Barrantes, this group of researchers concluded that it was necessary to identify a teaching methodology that could help students improve even more their speaking skill. However, after examining various teaching methodologies, this group of researchers discovered that it was necessary to establish a model that could respond to the students' personal and linguistic needs and could perfectly fit in a personalized distance language learning context such as PEMA.

This article intends to present the experience and outcomes of applying an original English teaching model named ESPIT (which acronym stands for **E**ngaging myself, **S**haping my knowledge, **P**erforming my skill, **I**ntervening my production, **T**ransforming my linguistic profile) to five PEMA students in the first two quarters of 2021. Firstly, the article presents the theoretical framework that supports the design of the ESPIT model, its main features and structure, the description of the teaching experience, and its results. Lastly, the researchers provide key recommendations to apply the model in personalized language learning contexts.

Humanistic Learning

From a humanistic perspective, before starting any language training session, the instructor needs to acknowledge the learners' emotional state. Each individual has preconceived positive or negative feelings regarding learning experiences and these feelings have a direct effect on the learner's performance. For this reason, it is necessary for an instructor to identify the learners'

preoccupations, expectations, and goals. According to Delgado, «Mediating between knowledge and learning is an art»¹. By embarking in an attentive and critical analysis, the instructor can identify the true motivations for a learner to be part of a language lesson. Scholars have classified learners' motivations into two main categories: intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Chinambu & Jiménez explain that «Extrinsic motivation involves making a specific action driven by external forces or in order to receive an external reward»². Learners may be learning a language to satisfy their family's desires, get a job promotion, and/or upgrade their financial situation. On the other hand, «Intrinsic motivation incites action for the pure enjoyment of it and produces pleasurable and fulfilling sensations». Undoubtedly, the latter type of motivation deals with accomplishing personal learning goals without the need of receiving any sort of external compensation and the instructor does not have to cope with negative preconceived feelings. To ensure a humanistic learning environment, instructors must promote opportunities for interacting with the learners and identifying their motivations and true reasons for learning a language.

Learners' Autonomy

In an enriching and meaningful learning experience, the instructor has to encourage the learners to examine particular feature(s) of spoken language that go(es) a little beyond their current linguistic level. To enhance the learners' autonomy during the execution of tasks that enable them to shape their linguistic performance, Arnold & Brown, (cited in Chinambu & Jiménez³), suggest applying various learning strategies, inviting learners to visualize the rewards of completing a task, emphasizing on cooperative learning and learners' desires, organizing content-based activities focused on their interests, and expressing observations for them to keep improving their performance, avoiding the exclusive use of numerical evaluations.

According to Benson (cited in Nunan⁴), autonomy deals with «The capacity to control one's own learning». That is to say, the learner establishes the route for meaningful learning to take place. To do this, Nunan⁵ suggests instructors to apply the following principles to foster autonomy in the classroom: be actively involved in the students' learning, provide a range of learning options and resources, offer choices and decision-making opportunities, support the learners, and encourage reflection. In an autonomous context, learners have the possibility to express where they want to go in the learning process and provide essential information for the instructor to plan the upcoming lessons based on their decisions. Autonomous learners are guided to analyze knowledge. This ability can be encouraged in autonomous learners through critical and analytical observations on language features that need to be reinforced.

¹ Alvaro Delgado, «Pedagogical Mediation and Learning», *Revista de Lenguas Modernas* (19), 513-522 (2013): 520.

² Mauli Chinambu & Mónica Jiménez, «Fomenting Intrinsic Motivation in a Costa Rican EFL Setting», *Revista de Lenguas*, 21, 299-323 (2014): 304.

³ *Ibíd.*

⁴ David Nunan. Nunan, D., *Practical English Language Teaching* (New York: McGraw-Hill 2003), 290.

⁵ *Ibíd.*, 294-296.

Distance Learning Contexts

When planning EFL classes, instructors must consider the pedagogical model established in the institution where they work; that is to say, the series of elements that intervene in the educational context and clearly define how learning has to take place. In face-to-face educational contexts, learners have the possibility to have regular interactions with the instructor, participating in a variety of in-class activities that promote the application of new learned language features. In these face-to-face educational contexts, learners have to complete out-of-class short assignments or projects to complement in-class formal preparation. In such context, learners rely on the instructor's decisions and the learning process is based on previously defined educational programs or course outlines.

On the other hand, in distance education, learners only have occasional meetings with the instructor. Learners are asked to work on assignments or projects that demand more preparation time and planning, and in many cases, the face-to-face meetings are mainly used for clarifying doubts and formulating questions. Singularly, in a distance learning context, learners experience more independence to define their learning style and can apply individualized strategies that can help them obtain their learning goals. Faibisoff & Willis argue that «By definition, distance education relies on students to accept responsibilities for the success of their program and not to depend on the presence of an authoritarian professional educator»⁶. Learners are expected to be responsible individuals that make wise decisions when organizing their time based on the demands of the educational program and self-evaluate their performance.

Specifically, when defining the pedagogical model of UNED⁷, the University Advisor Committee explains that the methodological conception has to offer learners the tools to construct their own teaching-learning process, offering the scenario for learners to become protagonists of their learning experience (UNED, 2005). Contrary to traditional face-to-face educational contexts where the tutor would be the main actor, determining what needs to be learned, in a distance-learning educational context, learners are the core of the learning experience. According to the epistemological principles at UNED, learners are active individuals who construct continuous representations and internal processes as a result of their relationship with physical and social backgrounds. Besides, learners self-regulate their learning process, making decisions to accomplish the established learning goals (UNED⁸).

⁶ Sylvia G. Faibisoff & Deborah Willis, «Distance Education: Definition and Overview», *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1987) 27(4), 223-232, doi:10.2307/40323650-229

⁷ Universidad Estatal a Distancia (9 de julio del 2005). *Modelo Pedagógico*. San José, Costa Rica. 6.

Linguistic Performance

Linguistic competence and linguistic performance are two terms that tend to relate to one another, yet they look for a different purpose. When assimilating a foreign language, a learner might display certain language performance that does not necessarily imply showing linguistic competence. In short, performance deals with the «doing» with the language while competence involves «knowing» about the language.

Chomsky's competence/performance distinction has been traditionally understood as a distinction between our *knowledge of language and how we put that knowledge to use*⁹.

Productive Skills

When it comes to language learning, there are two types of skills: receptive and productive skills. Receptive skills are mostly related to developing abilities of reading and listening comprehension. Productive skills, on the other hand, aim at developing speaking and writing abilities. In language teaching, the four skills are described in terms of their direction. Language generated by the learner (in speech or writing) is referred to as productive. Language directed at the learner (in reading or listening) is called receptive¹⁰. The most obvious approach to analyzing interlanguage is to study the speech and writing of learners, or what is also called «learner language». Production (speaking and writing) data is empirically observable and is hypothesized to be reflective of a learner's underlying production competence, revealing developmental changes of linguistic forms over time¹¹.

Speaking

Speaking is the productive aural/oral skill. It consists of producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning. This particular skill comprises aspects like correct pronunciation of phonemes, accuracy, fluency, stress, intonation patterns among others.

Harmer points out two interesting scenarios when dealing with students and speaking¹².

Getting students to speak in class can sometimes be extremely easy. In a good class atmosphere, students who get on with each other, and whose English is at an appropriate level, will often participate freely and enthusiastically if we give

⁸ *Ibíd.*

⁹ John Collins, *Retrieved* (USA: Wiley, 2007) 880-895, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-9991.2007.00108.x>

¹⁰ David Nunan, *Practical English Language Teaching* (New York: McGraw- Hill, 2003), 48.

¹¹ Douglas Brown, *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching: A Course in Second Language Acquisition* (United States of America: Pearson, 2014), 243.

them a suitable topic and task. However, at other times it is not so easy to get students going. Maybe the class mix is not quite right or perhaps we have not chosen the right kind of topic.

Teachers need to provide students with plenty of opportunities where they can expose themselves to different speaking events, learning activities, conversational strategies that will successfully provide them with meaningful interaction.

Feedback

When learning a foreign language, mistakes necessarily occur. As Brown states, «L2 learning is a process that is just like first language learning in its trial-and-error nature»¹³. Therefore, feedback provided by teachers or tutors is relevant in the learning process because, with the instructor's help, the student will become aware of his/her areas to improve. This awareness will help the student make his/her own decisions regarding mistakes and improvement.

As Hallie Edgerly, Jesse Wilcox and Jaclyn Easter explain, «it isn't the giving of feedback that causes learning gains, it is the acting on feedback that determines how much a student learns»¹⁴. Giving students an opportunity to show evidence of their learning, providing effective feedback, and giving students an opportunity to continue learning are essential parts of the feedback loop.

As a matter of fact, the instructor may recur to a variety of feedback techniques when providing feedback, depending on the moment and aim of the lesson. Some of these strategies are explicit correction, recast, clarification, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and repetition. In fact, the combination of such ways of providing feedback enriches the language learning process. As Espinoza claims, «It is imperative to analyze the context in which mistakes are made, the student's level and the corrective feedback technique implemented in order to provide students with the best corrective feedback practices, and thus to internalize the correct utterance»¹⁵.

Consolidation of Skills

Learning a foreign language takes time, effort, discipline, willingness to relearn, endless chances to practice and desire to keep improving. According to the Common European Framework of References, a learner needs a great range of hours to consolidate the different proficiency levels.

¹² Jeremy Harmer, *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (Pearson, 2014), 345.

¹³ Douglas Brown, *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching: A Course in Second Language Acquisition* (United States of America: Pearson, 2014), 249.

¹⁴ Hallie Edgerly, Jesse Wilcox and Jaclyn Easter Creating a Positive Feedback Culture: Eight Practical Principles to Improve Students' Learning, *Science Scope*, (USA: NSTA Press, 2018) 41(5), 43-49, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44843360>

¹⁵ Luis Espinoza L. & Jose Rodríguez, Corrective Feedback in Conversation Courses at CEIC, Alajuela Site, *Revista de Lenguas Modernas*, n.º 24/ 295-316 (2016), 309.

Cambridge English Language Assessment estimates that learners typically take the guided learning hours, shown below, to progress between levels. «Guided learning hours» means time in lessons as well as tasks you set them to do. You will notice that it takes longer to progress a level as learners move up the scale. Of course, learners will vary in how long they take depending on many factors. This means that many learners will follow more than one course to progress from one level to the next¹⁶.

C1	Approximately 700-800
B2	Approximately 500-600
B1	Approximately 350-400
A2	Approximately 180-200
A1	Approximately 90-100

As it is shown in the previous information, learning a foreign language is definitely a great deal of investment. Students who take the challenge to become proficient in English must never forget that in order to transform their initial proficiency level, they must never stop learning, reinforcing, reviewing and exposing themselves to new opportunities where they can use their learned vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar structures and linguistic features.

After having chances to interact with their facilitators or instructors, being guided and corrected by them and encouraged to improve their performance by means of extra practices and reinforcement exercises, students must self-reflect about their specific areas of improvement and self-regulate themselves by committing to a plan of becoming better speakers.

Development

The ESPIT Model

The investigators designed an original English Teaching Model called ESPIT which explores five specific stages to ensure meaningful and enriching learning to students whose context is a distance learning modality. In every stage, the learner is encouraged to self-reflect and analyze his/her learning experience by developing a variety of purposeful activities.

The letters of its name stand for the following stages:

- **E**ngaging Myself
- **S**haping my Knowledge
- **P**erforming my Skill
- **I**ntervening my Production
- **T**ransforming my Linguistic Profile

¹⁶ *Introductory Guide to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for English Language Teachers*, (Cambridge University Press 2013), 4, GuideToCEFR.pdf (englishprofile.org).

Stage 1: Engaging Myself

The learner needs to set up his/her emotional state. Before embarking in a learning experience, it is essential to identify the preconceived feelings, goals, expectations, and desires that the learner manifests. To do this, the instructor can stimulate the learner to express his/her thoughts through an open and honest conversation.

In this stage, the instructor can ask the learner questions regarding some aspects concerning humanistic learning and learning motivations such as personal goals, expectations, motivation, challenges, and others.

If the instructor identifies negative feelings towards the learning experience that is about to start, he/she needs to be prepared to explain the importance of addressing the topic for meaningful learning purposes, the instructor needs to naturally link and transfer the learning experience to real-life communicative contexts. Undoubtedly, the instructor has to acknowledge the learner's feelings and identify the possible causes of these emotions that are taking place. Subsequently, the instructor can channel the conversation to explore the impact of affective commitment to attain the authentic goals of the learning experience.

Stage 2: Shaping my Knowledge

The learner intends to scaffold in his/her speaking skill. After engaging himself/herself in an open conversation in the previous stage, the learner is taken to examine particular feature(s) of spoken language that go(es) a little beyond his/her current level. Likewise, based on previous personalized evaluations and self-assessment techniques, the instructor can address specific language feature(s) that the learner needs to reinforce through deeper analysis and further learning activities that respond to the learner's personal interests.

The instructor can develop a variety of tasks that invite the learner to apply intrinsic motivation strategies and activities that fit in a distance learning environment.

When planning these tasks, the instructor needs to ensure that the learner can apply various learning strategies. More specifically, the activities respond to previously identified meaningful goals and the learner's interests. The learner participates in independent and individualized exercises that require him/her to go beyond his/her linguistic level. These activities encourage the learner to work in collaboration with the instructor.

Stage 3: Performing my Skill

The learner needs to show his/her oral skills through performing different didactic activities based on real-life situations. To accomplish meaningful learning, he/she needs to complement his/her formal education and apply new learning in a

variety of simulated contexts. After receiving instruction on new language features (grammar structures, vocabulary, phonics, etc.), analyzing samples, and working on controlled exercises, the learner can perform orally using the new input in scenarios that resemble real English-speaking contexts.

The instructor can identify situations that suit the target language and design activities or tasks that are accurate representations of these situations. During the «performing my skill» stage, the learner is invited to perform in these concrete real-world speaking activities and, with guidance, improve the necessary language skills to efficiently participate in these oral contexts.

The instructor can guide the learner by setting up and/or eliciting different methodological and didactic activities that will be content-based and totally related to their interests where they can evidence their oral productive skills. To do this, the instructor can have previously applied questionnaires to identify the learner's interests and learning goals and with this input, design concrete and meaningful activities.

In these questionnaires, the instructor can invite the learner to answer questions regarding favorite things, experiences, preferences, expectations, and others. With this information, the instructor has the possibility to get to know the learner better and establish engaging and meaningful contexts that can be used to develop activities to attain specific language goals.

Some examples of these oral activities are: interviews or conversations, impromptu/ argumentative/ persuasive speeches, discussions, and case studies.

Stage 4: Intervening my Skill

The learner is guided by the instructor based on the evidence of learning. During and after the «Performing my skill» stage, the learner receives effective feedback since it is proven that it can be a very powerful tool for enhancing student learning. Treating errors is a complex practice that requires analytical observation from the instructor, and he/she has to make decisions in regards to the most effective method or technique to use at a specific moment during the session.

Depending on the identified error, the instructor can use cueing, discrimination exercises, questioning, among others. Choosing a feedback method depends on the stage of the session, the type of activity, the type of error, and the learner's personality.

Besides, the instructor has to keep in mind that providing feedback cannot overlap the learner's performance or affect the learner's motivation. The instructor must avoid interrupting the flow of the learner's performance with observations on every single error. On the contrary, providing feedback is a technique used by the instructor to help the learner improve his/her skills and acquire all the necessary tools to efficiently communicate in real-life scenarios, avoiding misunderstanding and confusions. In order to provide specific

observations on language performance, the instructor will review the recorded evidence and take notes on the learner's errors. The instructor will hand in a written report that contains these observations. With this report, the learner will have the chance of self-correcting in the last stage of the ESPIT cycle.

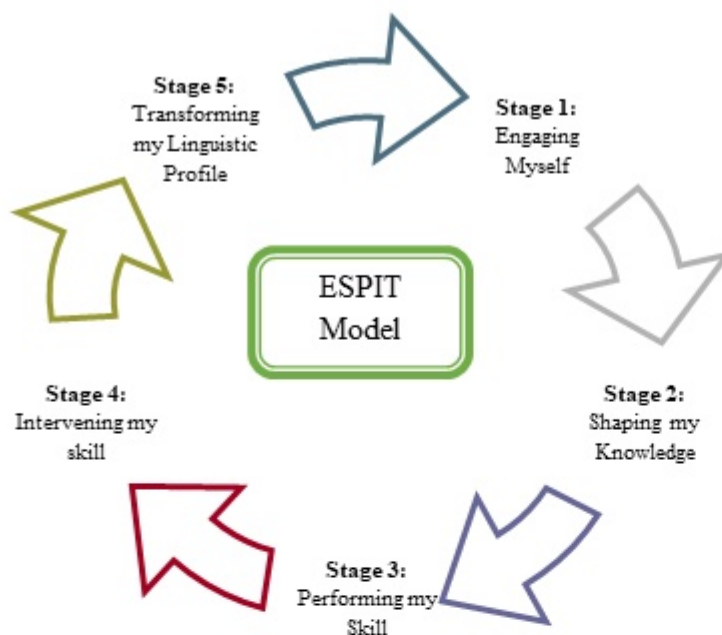
The following is a complete list of various effective methods or techniques to provide feedback:

- Not immediate feedback: the instructor ignores the mistake and makes a written summary of the errors to share at the end of the learner's participation.
- Formative feedback: the instructor uses compliments while providing sincere feedback to encourage the learner to keep on doing his/her best.
- Praise indicated: the instructor writes or tells the learner how well he/she is doing.
- Recast: the instructor repeats the phrase/sentence with a question intonation to create doubt, so the learner has the chance to improve him/herself by rephrasing the idea correctly.
- Elicitation: the instructor elicits the correct answer from the learner by the completion of an utterance or ask questions to elicit correct answers.
- Error type indicated: the instructor tells the learner what type of error he/she has made, whether it is a spelling, subject-verb agreement, tense, etc. without fixing the mistake for him/her.
- Location indicated: the instructor tells the learner to look for the error on a particular part of his/her job.

Stage 5: Transforming my Linguistic Profile

The learner needs to advance on his/her language areas. To achieve this, he/she will have a second chance to self-evaluate, self-correct and self-improve his/her oral skills. In this stage, the instructor provides remedial and complementary practice for the learner to work on during the session. The learner is given a second opportunity to use the same language features that he/she had to improve in the previous stage to demonstrate that he/she has advanced linguistically. To finish the ESPIT cycle, as shown in Figure 1, the learner is invited to self-reflect upon his/her learning experience by answering a set of questions included in a Google Form related to motivation, development of learning activities, ways to improve language skills, and favored feedback techniques.

Figure 1
The five stages of the ESPIT model



Source: Arley, Brizuela and Castro, 2022.

Methodology

Qualitative Research and the Case Study Approach

Qualitative researchers focus on natural settings; therefore, qualitative research is sometimes called 'naturalistic inquiry'; nothing is predefined or taken for granted. Shimahara, representing the general view, claims that ethnography; for example, is the study of events as they 'evolve in natural settings' or 'contexts in process'. Another way to make the point is that qualitative researchers want those who are studied to speak for themselves. Qualitative research, then, has the aim of understanding experience as nearly as possible as its participants feel it or live it.

There are different methods or approaches that are part of the qualitative design; the most common are Grounded Theory, Ethnography, Narrative Research, Phenomenological-Historical method, and the specific Case study research, which is the one selected for the purpose of this article.

The Case Study method has evolved over the past few years and developed into a valuable research method. As the name suggests, it is used for explaining an organization or an entity. This type of research method is used within several areas like education, social sciences and similar data. The case studied can be simple or complex, a child, a classroom, or a group of professionals, among others.

Therefore, this research considers the Case study approach because it aims at gathering data from a group of five university students from the English Teaching Major for I and II Cycles at UNED and who are part of an educational initiative to help them improve their academic performance. By implementing the methodological ESPIT model, a five-stage- and very structured model, the researchers intend to gain understanding on how the model enhances the development of the oral production of the selected five participants.

PEMA stands for UNED's «Plan Estratégico de Mejoramiento Académico» and its participants are chosen students, who are already in the Major and had not displayed the expected academic oral performance in the different courses of the study plan. The selected students committed to the plan by signing a document called «Compromiso» to actively participate in all PEMA sessions and complete all the required assignments. Tutor Marcela Castro met with these students in one-hour synchronous sessions once a week to monitor, practice, encourage and propose activities that would help them to improve the language contents that needed improvement in their English oral performance.

The selected students received a code nickname for confidentiality purposes to identify them in this article. Table 1 provides a detailed description of the participants, their topics of interest as well as their main focus on language content. All this information was obtained from previously applied digital questionnaires and was considered when planning and designing their individualized sessions; in other words, the activities for each class were theme-based on the identifiable topics of interest.

Table 1
Information about participants

Student	Gender	Age	UC	Topic of interest	Language content
ESPIT - 01	M	33	San José	Science fiction, video games, anime	Final consonant sounds, TH sounds
ESPIT - 02	M	30	Limón	Sports, Beach, Marvel superheroes	Final consonant sounds
ESPIT - 03	F	48	Palmares	Harry Potter, old English rock music, The Cupcake War	Word forms, past modals for speculation, possibility, etc.
ESPIT - 04	F	38	Cartago	Make-up, Instagram	Preposition collocations
ESPIT - 05	F	26	Cañas	The Crown, The Big Bang Theory, Yoga	Pronunciation of plurals, possessive and third person

Source: Arley, Brizuela and Castro, 2022.

The ESPIT Model was first applied during week five of the second term 2021, specifically the week from July 5th to 8th, 2021 and the second time during week eight July 26th to 30th. Before classes started, each student was asked about her/his likes and preferences through a questionnaire in Google Forms in order to contextualize the sessions and the activities.

Motivation, the skills and/or language content that each student needed to work on were taken into account to plan each session. To obtain this information, researchers considered feedback, observations, and evaluations of students' performance during previous PEMA sessions, following Edgerly & Easter's¹⁷ recommendation: «Throughout the learning process, the teacher makes decisions about where to go in instruction based on the evidence of learning provided by the student».

During ESPIT session one, each student was asked the same two questions in the «Engaging myself» stage regarding their personal goal to be part of the session and their level of motivation to learn the topic. All students expressed that they were considerably motivated at the beginning of the class.

In the second ESPIT session, the questions used in the first stage were related with the language aspects that required improvement. For the second stage, «Shaping my knowledge», the content was introduced by having the students start talking about the topic that had been chosen from those related to their likes, including the skills and contents for improvement. For example, Student ESPIT-03's lesson plan combined «Harry Potter» and word forms. Therefore, the student was able to practice word forms while talking about her favorite movie. One interesting downside encountered was with Student ESPIT - 04, who answered that her favorite TV series was «The Crown»; however, after all activities were planned in relation to it, the student mentioned not having the time to watch it. On the contrary, this same student displayed a more positive attitude and even a better performance when the second session was based on the series «The Big Bang Theory». Based on this case, investigators concluded that it was absolutely relevant to obtain true answers about students' likes and preferences.

Likewise, information from previous sessions were also included. For instance, Student ESPIT - 03 shared the desire of visiting London someday, so even though this piece of information was not part of her answers in the questionnaire of likes, aspects related to London were included in the plans, as well as features about yoga were part of sessions for Student ESPIT- 05. Moreover, during this stage, the tutor offered some language explanations to set up the content of the class and reinforcement practices like an activity in which ESPIT Student - 04 used a big chart with collocations with prepositions to practice. Then, these same phrases were included in the context of wearing makeup, so the student could use the prepositions studied before in the context of interest. Another example is an

¹⁷ Hallie Edgerly, Jesse Wilcox and Jaclyn Easter, Creating a Positive Feedback Culture: Eight Practical Principles to Improve Students' Learning. *Science Scope*, 41(5), 43-49, (USA: NSTA Press, 2018). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44843360>

activity assigned to ESPIT Student 05 in which after reviewing the pronunciation of the final consonant -s in the third person singular verb forms, the student had to describe characters from the TV series *The Big Bang Theory*. These exercises helped all students to shape their knowledge, connect to their prior one, review key language aspects, as well as essential vocabulary.

During the third stage of the ESPIT Model, called «Performing my skill», students had the chance to produce oral content with no interference correction or help from the professor. Having enough practice, they were supposed to be able to produce and perform an activity related to the previous exercises. For instance, they answered some personal questions using the target contents. As an example, Student ESPIT - 05's performing task consisted of a set of phrases that required to be completed extensively. These phrases had the intention to make the student speak, but at the same time use prepositions, as this was the target content practiced through the session. Some of these phrases were: «In the past I was accustomed...» and «I admit I am fed up...». Consequently, the learner included the corresponding preposition while developing answers freely and spontaneously. In this way, the language production was not completely controlled, but at the same time, the student was expected to use prepositions in the answers.

After the first set of sessions, it was concluded that it was necessary to make some changes regarding timing because during the first sessions, there was not enough time for the «Intervening my skill» stage. Therefore, the structure of the ESPIT Model was split up into two sessions, considering the first session for the stage of «Engaging myself», «Shaping my knowledge», and «Performing my skill». Whereas in the second set of sessions, the agenda focused on a short warm-up and then developed the «Intervening my skill» stage, which began with the analysis of the production displayed during the «Performing my Skill» stage from the previous class. In this sense, the tutor played specific minutes of the recording so that the student could identify by himself/herself the mistakes that the instructor had already found. Besides playing the recording specifically in the minute where the mistake occurred, the instructor encouraged the student to identify his/her mistake and correct it. By doing so, students were encouraged to develop their self-awareness and metacognition that would help them shape their learning. As part of this stage, the instructor also provided students with repairing strategies to have them reinforce the weak language aspects that will eventually help them transform their production.

In table 2, some consistent sample language mistakes (in bold) from students 01,03 and 05 are displayed. These mistakes were made by students during their performance stage and based on this information, the tutor had to select a teaching strategy that would require the student to use the language content in further exercises.

Table 2
Language Mistakes from Students

Student	Mistake	Strategy
ESPIT Student - 01	-if you want to feel that excited feeling -When everybody star dying... -... yeah I enjoy it --- (past) -... movies you have enjoy ... the most -A movie that I haven't enjoy ...	There is a constant mistake in pronouncing the -ed ending in past forms that was addressed by reviewing the three main pronunciation rules of pasts, providing a controlled reading activity and then responding to a short video.
ESPIT Student - 03	-it must have been love -I shouldn't have put attention -tell me what could it have happened	In order to improve the use of past modals, the student looked at some pictures and provided answers to the question: What should he have done?
ESPIT Student - 05	-regarding the four skill -she doesn't like to cook she prefer ... -he doesn't have social intelligent /because he try to speak with -in some episode / in some season -the person talk like that -the guy give him - and she's give the rabbit... -in some occasion ... -if a person are going	After explaining and reviewing the third person singular ending, the tutor shows a chart with the pronunciation rules. As practice, the student read sentences with blanks to add the -s ending and made emphasis on the pronunciation. To conclude, the student described her two sons individually, so she practiced the target structure in a less controlled activity.

Source: Arley, Brizuela and Castro, 2022.

Once each student was exposed to the pieces of the recording and was able to identify and correct mistakes, some of the mistakes that were considered necessary to address were chosen for the practice activities in the last stage called «transforming my linguistic profile». A concrete example is when Student ESPIT - 04 was trying to avoid double negatives in sentences, and when she was fixing some negative quotes during the performing section, she made other types of mistakes. Therefore, during the «intervening my skill» stage, though she was able to hear herself doing a great job regarding double negatives, she was also making subject-verb agreement mistakes when omitting the correct verb form with 's'. So, the new consistent mistake was considered when planning the «transforming my linguistic profile» stage. Finally, during this stage, the students participated in activities that helped them improve their weak points shown through the session.

Before each class was over, students were provided with a list of extra activities and links that they could work on their own to reinforce the topics studied during the ESPIT model class. Hopefully, by providing these extra activities, students would keep on working on their particular linguistic needs and continue searching for other ways of better improving their performance.

As part of the «transforming my linguistic profile» stage, a self-assessment instrument was applied to the students. In this instrument, they were asked to share their insights in regards to the learning experience that was planned by the investigators to help them improve their linguistic skills through the application of the original model ESPIT. Specifically, after applying the second session, they were asked to fill in a *Google Form* that contained questions regarding motivation, selection of learning activities, challenges for improvement, feedback techniques, learning goals, personal interests, and controlled activities.

Finally, on September 30th, students were gathered in a *Focus Group* to collect their perceptions about key aspects of the sessions. The *Focus Group* dealt with topics regarding complications and benefits of learning English in a distance context, level of engagement to participate in the sessions, the selection of meaningful contexts, the selection of target contents, methodologies applied to provide feedback from the tutor, and the impact of receiving feedback to improve oral skills. To develop this *Focus Group*, investigators Brizuela and Arley took turns, one asking questions, while the other was taking notes. To avoid the collection of biased information, investigator Barrantes was not present in the session since she had been the instructor developing the ESPIT sessions.

Conclusions

From the students' answers obtained from the self-assessment instrument, investigators concluded that all students were motivated to continue with their learning process, felt satisfied with the selection and development of the learning activities, felt challenged to continue improving their language skills, and considered the feedback techniques applied by the instructor to be very effective. When they were asked to express how motivated they were to start the lesson, students expressed they felt very well because their interests were considered. Students confirmed that establishing the learning goal was important because they focused on the tasks and knew in advance what they were going to attain. Moreover, students claimed that planning the lessons based on their interests was a marvelous idea because they felt highly motivated to practice. Besides, all students agreed that all the controlled activities were very effective for the production task and receiving feedback was extremely useful. When they were asked about which feedback techniques they preferred the most, they selected when the teacher asked students to identify their mistakes, repetition, and taking notes. Finally, when they were asked if the activities helped them to transform their linguistic performance after receiving feedback from their instructor, they claimed they felt more confident to keep interacting in English and felt challenged to continue seeking for more opportunities to practice.

Finally, in the *Focus Group*, students identified as benefits of learning English in a distance learning environment, saving money and time, avoidance of weather or traffic complications, time management, and interaction to practice their skills. However, some complications students mentioned in regards to learning English in a distance education were the lack of feedback, connectivity problems, minimum contact with the tutor and peers, and learning difficulties.

In contrast, concerning students' perception about PEMA sessions, they expressed they felt more engaged and motivated to participate than in their regular classes since their interests, preferences, and needs were considered. A very interesting point that all students agreed on was their emotional state when participating in the «performing my skill» stage. All students claimed that having the possibility to express their ideas freely on particular topics of interest without being interrupted made them gain more confidence and fluency. Moreover, students expressed that the instructor provided very effective and specific feedback, without making them feel uncomfortable and this helped them remark their linguistic weaknesses and encourage them to pay closer attention to these linguistic features in the future.

From the findings obtained from the teaching experience when applying the ESPIT model and the students' insights from the *Google Form* and the *Focus Group*, the investigators can conclude that from a humanistic learning approach, English teachers have to encourage learners to express their motivations and true reasons for learning a language, plus acknowledge their personal interests and hobbies. The information that can be collected from open conversations or other instruments to collect data is extremely valuable and necessary to customize personalized sessions with learners who evidence difficulties to perform in English in regular classes. Following Nunan's recommendations to promote autonomy, the English teacher has to be actively involved in the students' learning process, apply a great variety of learning options and resources, invite learners to make choices and decisions to keep improving their linguistic abilities, provide emotional support to learners, and devote time to encourage reflection.

Undoubtedly, English teachers who work in distance learning education have to remind learners that they have to be responsible individuals who make wise decisions when organizing their time, considering their personal obligations and they need to be constantly self-evaluating their performance. Moreover, regarding the focus on English teaching, it is necessary to place more emphasis on the application of activities that promote linguistic performance and productive skills, especially considering that real-life communication lies on human interaction contexts and learners need to have more opportunities to use the target language in similar contexts than memorizing factual information. To promote learners' active participation in such activities, the English teacher should plan activities in which learners are invited to speak freely and enthusiastically based on topics of interest. When learners participate in oral activities that demand the use of knowledge that is beyond their current English level, mistakes and errors eventually appear. In such contexts, the English teacher should apply feedback strategies that accord with the learning objective.

In this sense, at different moments, the English teacher has to apply feedback strategies that can help learners acknowledge their weaknesses but encourage them to keep improving. Finally, after receiving effective feedback, students should be given the opportunity to transform their initial proficiency level; that is to say, to ensure meaningful learning, the English teacher should not finish a class cycle without providing a chance for students to keep reinforcing and reviewing the learnt language features.

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