

THE BENEFITS OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE USING SPEAKING TASKS IN TEACHING SPANISH FOR THE PROFESSIONALS

Cristina Pardo-Ballester

Iowa State University (UNITED STATES)

Abstract

This mixed-method research study examines the speaking proficiency of Spanish learners with the Virtual Oral Interview Classroom-based Exam (VOICES), a free oral assessment tool for students and teachers, and the American Council Teaching Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) for assessing their oral ability. Students' oral proficiency was assessed at the beginning and end of the semester via the OPI, and oral performance was assessed during the middle and at the end of the semester with VOICES. During the semester, learners practiced with structured and communicative output activities with the purpose of developing communicative competence. Using active learning as a pedagogical approach and reflective practice based on Schön's principles (1987), Spanish instruction was focused on conscious awareness, scaffolding, autonomous and meaningful communication as a way to improve the performance of oral tasks. The study employs the convergent design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) that entails the collection of qualitative and quantitative data sets to provide a better understanding of the best practices for teaching and assessing speaking. Participants in this study were 13 undergraduate students at a large public university in the Midwest of the United States and one instructor. They were enrolled in an intermediate Spanish conversation course designed for professionals. The use of active learning and reflective practice contributed positively to building a comfortable and engaging learning environment.

Keywords: Active learning in Spanish, students' reflective practice, speaking performance, speaking proficiency.

1 INTRODUCTION

In order to retain students in classes, instructors in universities are not only encouraged to teach online, but they are also asked to modify their curriculum with more authentic tasks and functional language so students are better prepared for the workplace (Trede, Mackling & Bridges, 2012). Students appreciate authentic tasks because they can develop skills associated with their chosen profession that approximate what they could do in their careers (Meyers & Nulty, 2009). Spanish Grammar and Conversation for Professionals (SPAN 303B) is a required core course that fits into the scope of the Languages and Cultures for Professionals program at a large public university. At the completion of the course, one of the learner's objectives is to be able to demonstrate speaking and listening proficiency equivalent to the American Council Teaching Foreign Languages (ACTFL) intermediate mid/high level. Improving language proficiency is a desired objective in any language course, but in the language learning process there are skills that require longer time to see linguistic progress and therefore one cannot observe an improvement in a short time period (Muñoz, 2006).

This paper explores the affordances and constraints offered by 'reflective practice' based on Schön's notion (1987) for L2 learners' speaking skill development and progress. Using active learning as a pedagogical approach, Spanish instruction was focused on conscious awareness, scaffolding, and autonomous and meaningful communication as a way to improve the performance of oral tasks. Following Darhower's (2008) definition of linguistic affordance, in this study affordance is defined as "any discursive move that provides linguistic information to a learner, or that intends or appears to activate a learner's awareness of specific language structures and/or lexical meaning" (p. 50). Using data quantitative and qualitative data, the study analyzed the speaking ability in the context of participants' reflective practice.

The study answers the following research questions:

- 1 After completing the course, do students meet the proficiency speaking level established as the learning objective?
- 2 Are students' language learning needs met after the Spanish course is finished?

- 3 What affordances does the use of reflective practice in a Spanish course for professionals provide for the development of learner speaking skills?
- 4 What constraints does the use of reflective practice in a Spanish course create for the development of learner speaking skills?

This paper starts with a brief review of literature on reflective practice and active learning as a pedagogical approach for exploring the affordances and constraints based on learners' awareness of reflection entries as a medium of self-assessment of their speaking skill development.

1.1 Reflective Practice

The work of John Dewey and Donald Schön is about learning by doing as well as targeted reflection based on the individual's experience and learning (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1987). Dewey (1933) adopted the concept of "experimental learning" (p.579) and contributed to the idea of reflection in learning, stating that experience alone was not enough and that it was vital to reflect on the experience to actually learn from it. For Dewey, reflection takes place as 1) a deductive activity that focuses the recourse on existing knowledge and experiences and 2) as inductive activity, which leads to new insights and conclusions (Dewey 1933).

Donald Schön's reflection concept builds on Dewey's theory. Schön (1987) described *reflective practice* as the habit of reflecting in and on practice. According to Schön (1987) we reflect on an experience in two ways: *reflect-in action* and *reflect-on action*. *Reflect-in-action* refers to the thoughts we have when we are performing an action. For speaking, *reflect-in-action* is important because students can react spontaneously during an oral task implementing the necessary changes in order to improve their oral performance. *Reflect-on-action* is the process or reflection we have after finishing an action. This process is also important to build self-awareness of their own learning.

The reflection entry can result in changing students' approach to instill confidence when speaking Spanish and to learn about strategies on how to be better prepared for next time they have to perform an oral task. Included reflective exercises in the syllabus empower students to take more responsibility for their learning and consequently improve their oral performance.

1.2 Active Learning

Active learning is the opposite of the traditional lectures where students listen and work individually (McKeachie and Svinicki, 2006). An active learning approach requires students to interact between and among themselves such as in pairs, small groups, or the whole class to reach a goal. Students are responsible for their own learning when collaborating with each other; that is, active learning is a student-centered approach. Bonwell and Eison (1991) defined active learning as "anything that involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing" (p.19). McKeachie and Svinicki (2006) explained active learning from research in cognitive psychology. People will remember a new concept when they talk about it and not by listening or repeating something. Therefore, students cooperate with each other toward a common goal by explaining a concept to someone else or resolving a problem together. In active learning, students solve problems by applying knowledge; they make inferences and find evidence to support their opinions (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

Here is a sampling of active learning practices that have been shown to work effectively (McKeachie and Svinicki (2006) at the college level:

- 1 Discussion: Referring to a movie, a reading, a presentation or a role-play, the instructor will ask a why question and give enough time for them to think. Discussions can vary with factual, problem or interpretation questions.
- 2 In pairs: students think individually for a few moments about a problem or question posed by the instructor. Then they pair up with another student to discuss their answers followed by sharing their responses with the class.

In second language teaching, developing communicative competence is a desired outcome. Therefore, language instructors use structured output activities (i.e., information gap and jigsaw activities) to practice specific linguistic features as well as communicative output activities (i.e., role plays, discussions, problem-solving, and debate tasks) to promote negotiation. These activities actively engage students in the learning process by collaborating in pairs and group work. Within the Spanish conversation for professionals course, these types of activities are practiced with the goal of increasing students' communicative competence.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research design

This semester-long study was conducted in Spring 2019 within the fifth semester of college Spanish. The learning outcomes for this course are based on the Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st century as described by ACTFL. The outcomes are focused on the abilities that students develop to use the language in real-life situations. The study employed the convergent design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) that entailed the collection of qualitative and quantitative data sets to provide a better understanding of the best practices for teaching and assessing speaking. The qualitative data set includes focus groups, participants' reflection entries for the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) and Virtual Oral Interview Classroom-based Exam (VOICES), self-evaluations for the OPIs, teacher's notes, students' evaluations, and open-ended questions in an online survey. The quantitative data set consists of the OPI participants' scores from the tester and from participants (i.e., self-evaluations).

2.2 Participants

Thirteen participants were recruited from an intermediate Spanish conversation course for professionals who were undergraduate students at a large public university in the Midwest of the United States. All participants were native speakers of English and ranged in age from 18 to 28 years old, with the mean age being 19. There were 6 female and 7 male participants. One American instructor was teaching the course with more than twenty years of teaching experience.

2.3 Materials and instruments

This study explored two types of speaking tasks: VOICES and the ACTFL OPI for assessing their oral ability. The purpose of these tasks is to assess how well students are able to speak in Spanish. These tasks are very different as described below.

VOICES is a free online tool for oral assessment developed by Michigan State University. It was used in class for practicing Spanish speaking. The test is composed of four random situations and each situation is followed by a question. The prompt for each question is given in written English with a 60 second wait time for preparation. Then learners have two minutes to answer each task. If they are not satisfied with their answers, they can redo them. Students practiced oral Spanish with this test twice a semester, during the middle and at the end of the semester. These oral assessments were to practice presentational communication. Learners were directed to speak clearly and to test that the oral file had good quality.

The OPI is a real conversation with a real person asking open-ended questions. With the learner's answers, the tester develops other questions, making adjustments and clarifications accordingly. A role-play is also part of the OPI for intermediate and higher levels. The tester assigns a role and puts the learner in a situation that she may encounter outside the classroom. This oral test evaluates speaking and listening skills in terms of interpersonal communication, which is understood as two-way communication with active negotiation of meaning between individuals. The interview takes approximately 20 minutes. For this study, students are given the opportunity to self-evaluate their speaking after writing a reflective entry.

Both situational tasks from VOICES and OPI have more differences than similarities. One difference is that VOICES does not adapt to students' oral ability when a situation is given and the OPI situation or role-play will be chosen according to the student's oral proficiency. Another difference is that in the OPI a spontaneous and meaningful dialogue is expected involving exchanged information. In the VOICES task, the situation is to present information. It is only one-way communication by telling a story without opportunity of active negotiation of meaning. A similarity is that both use the same topics. For example, living on campus versus off campus or asking questions from a friend were topics of the VOICES tasks and these topics are possible during an OPI.

The online survey was created in Canvas, the online platform used to teach the Spanish course. Students were asked questions about their background information and their language learning needs.

Two focus-group interviews were conducted to gather students' learning experiences and perceptions with the speaking tasks completed in the Spanish course (OPI, VOICES, communicative and structured output activities). They were moderated by the researcher of this study using a semi-structured interview protocol that outlined the sequence of questions.

Reflection entries were created in Canvas and students were asked to reflect on their experience after completing the OPIs and the VOICES assessments. Students were given instructions and guiding questions to write a paragraph. They were asked to share their experiences.

The material and data set from the teacher includes: Power Points for three weeks, the activities used in class during those three weeks, handouts for homework, and data from an informal interview after teaching each class during those three weeks. The questions from the interview were focused on the activities used that day in class to obtain information about her teaching style (i.e., meaningful communication, scaffolding, recasting her students' sentences, and motivating her students to participate). She was also asked about students' performance during oral presentations. The researcher of this study asked the instructor of the Spanish course for students' evaluations at the end of the semester to obtain more information about the speaking tasks performed during the semester.

2.4 Data collection

Per suggestions and flexibility of the Spanish instructor, most data collection took place during class time. Participants completed a background survey the first week of classes. During the first two weeks, students completed the first OPI (i.e., pre-OPI). While the instructor was teaching, students were allowed to go outside one by one to complete their OPI. During weeks 12-13, students completed their final OPI (i.e., post-OPI). The idea of assessing learners' speaking ability at the beginning and end of the semester was to provide longitudinal data about their speaking development and progress. During week 7, students completed their first four VOICES tasks and during week 12, they completed their last four VOICES tasks. The instructor of the course decided to complete these speaking tasks in class using a laptop cart with a built-in microphone connected to Wi-Fi. During week 8, the focus-group interviews were conducted by the researcher and during class time with a total of two hours and forty minutes. The focus-group interviews were transcribed and analyzed. During the first focus-group interviews, the researcher explained the OPI guidelines and different rankings. After clarifying any questions that arose from students, they were asked to listen to their pre-OPI, which was shared previously using a cloud storage, and to self-assess their speaking by giving a level from Novice Low to Advanced High. They also needed to explain why they thought they were at a specific level. Once they were done evaluating themselves, the researcher projected questions about their perceptions (i.e., performance, confidence and comfort) of oral communication and the use of VOICES. During the second focus group, the researcher explained the difference between structured and communicative output activities. Then, students were asked about the types of activities they completed in class, type of instruction and preparation received, and their perceptions of their ability to engage in meaningful communication. Students self-assessed their post-OPI outside of the classroom and uploaded their evaluation to the cloud. The researcher also evaluated the instructor's lesson plans for weeks 5, 6 and 9 and interviewed the teacher after each class in order to gather more data from the teacher's perspective.

Reflection entries were completed outside of the classroom, but learners had a due date to submit them in Canvas. As soon as they completed an OPI or the VOICES assignments they wrote the reflection. Learners submitted a reflection after each of the two OPIs and the two VOICES. Even though these reflections were part of the course requirement, they were not graded for quality. As long as it was submitted, all students received full credit for each reflection. This arrangement was intended to prevent participants writing what they think the instructor wants to hear. A total of 52 reflection entries were analyzed.

To sum up, quantitative data collection included pre-and post-test scores based on the OPI, pre-and post-test scores based on self-evaluation OPI as well as questions from the online survey. Qualitative data collection included focus-groups interviews with 13 students, self-reflections, students' evaluations, and teacher's notes.

2.5 Data analysis

This mixed methods study was based on the analysis of quantitative data (i.e., test scores from OPI) and qualitative data (i.e., reflection entries, focus groups, teacher's notes, and open-ended questions in an online survey). The scores from pre- and post-OPIs and self-evaluation OPIs were entered in IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) 26.0. T-tests on the OPIs assessments determined whether there were differences between the pre- and post-assessments and whether students' spoken ability improved over a period of 15 weeks.

The open-ended questions from the online survey, reflection entries, and data from focus groups were coded manually in Microsoft Word using a two-columns table for descriptive and theme coding.

Descriptive coding (Wolcott, 1994) was used to identify the key categories in the data. Theme coding was used to reduce any overlapping codes and ensure are inclusive to all participants (Charmaz, 2006). Teacher's notes were used to provide evidence of what participants think or say they do in class (Chapelle, 2005) and to add more contextual information. The analysis entailed the classification of discourse features as well as affordances and constraints using principles of reflective practice, which will help us to see the improvement and development of speaking skills. Triangulation of the data obtained from different resources help us interpreting and corroborating the results of this study (Creswell, 2015).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Research question 1: Proficiency speaking level

To assess listening and speaking proficiency in Spanish, descriptive statistics were used for the pre- and post-OPI scores as well as for the pre- and post-self-evaluation OPIs. In addition, a pair-sample t-test was conducted to compare the means between the pre- and post-tests. The numbers of the minimum and maximum columns indicated the proficiency levels that the tester and participants reported after evaluating each OPI test: 1.3 means a proficiency level of novice high, 2.1 intermediate-low level, 2.2 intermediate-mid level, 2.3 intermediate-high, 3.1 advanced low; (see Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for OPIs.

		<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
Pair 1	Pre-OPI	13	2.15	.26	1.3	2.3
	Post-OPI	13	2.27	.25	2.1	3.1
Pair 2	Self-evaluation for Pre-OPI	13	1.80	.41	1.3	2.2
	Self-evaluation for Post-OPI	13	2.16	.05	2.1	2.2

The mean score for the pre-OPI was 2.15 and on the post-OPI 2.27, showing a slight improvement of 0.12 decimals. A list of minimum and maximum scores in every category is provided in Table 1. The Pearson correlation coefficient determined the relationship between the pre- and post- for both pairs of OPI test scores. There was no correlation for the pair 1 ($r=.346$ $N=13$, $p=.247$). The same was true for Pair 2 ($r=.329$, $N=13$, $p=.272$).

Table 2. T-test for pre- and post-OPI test scores.

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
Pre-OPI Post-OPI	-.1231	.3004	-1.477	12	0.165
Self-evaluation for Post-OPI Self-evaluation for Post-OPI	-.3538	.4059	-3.147	12	0.008

The two-tailed probability for the pre-OPI and post-OPI test scores was not low ($p=0.165$), indicating that there is a .165% possibility that the value of t did not happen by chance alone. Likewise, the two-tailed probability for the self-evaluation pre-OPI and self-evaluation post-OPI test scores was low ($p=0.008$), indicating that there is a .08% possibility that the value of t happened by chance alone. The results from the OPI test scores that came from students evaluating themselves reported that they considered their speaking proficiency to have improved from the beginning of the semester compared to the end of the semester ($t(12) = -.3538$, $p<.05$). The self-evaluation for pre- and post-OPI test scores was statistically significant ($p<.05$) indicating that there is a change between the self-evaluation pre-OPI and the self-evaluation post-OPI. However, there was no significant difference for the pre-OPI and post-OPI test scores.

3.2 Research Question 2: Language learning needs

In the online survey participants were asked to share their language learning needs. In week 1 of the semester, students stated that their needs were the following: speaking practice (i.e., in and out of class, and in formal and informal contexts), listening practice (i.e., with Spanish native speakers), more confidence speaking Spanish (i.e., formal or informal, with others or in front of the class), more comfort speaking Spanish, and more grammar and vocabulary when speaking.

In week 8 during the first focus group, students responded to questions related to their performance, confidence and comfort with speaking and listening to Spanish. Other questions were related to the challenges in the course, participants' pride, and their thoughts about the VOICES tasks. The categories of coding showed that the needs of some participants were successfully reached. For example, some learners stated that learning more vocabulary and grammar provided them with opportunities to improve in communicative tasks. More importantly, they indicated that reviewing grammar and vocabulary provides confidence in speaking Spanish. It should be noted that the instructor's teaching style (e.g., giving compliments when performing well in Spanish or encouraging them to try) provided comfort and a safe environment for speaking. Nevertheless, class presentation, role-plays, participating in class, the OPIs and VOICES tasks were the most challenging activities performed in class because these were spontaneous communications. For some learners the most effective learning moments to develop speaking were participating in class or during the OPI. They were also proud of their oral presentations. Four participants recognized their progress, but they still did not feel confident performing in front of the class.

Data from the second reflections of the OPIs showed that participants were more confident during the second OPIs and therefore, they felt that they performed better during the second time. As participant #11 demonstrated by her reflection:

"I felt way more confident with my Spanish this time around. My answers were way more complex and I could actually come up with answers for the role play portion. I was also able to ask questions that were relevant and would respond to her answers. I felt like the conversation flowed a lot better this time and I was way less nervous. I did need to ask for clarification a couple times but it was nothing compared to last time." (#11, reflection Post OPI)

Teacher's notes for weeks 5, 6, and 9 corroborated some of the results from the focus groups and students' evaluations. In week 5, students gave presentations and worked with communicative activities. Presenters did not encourage much participation by asking structured and predictable questions with only one predetermined answer. The communicative activities prepared for this week allowed students to practice the language with role-plays in situations that resemble real settings at work. The instructor introduced the activity and made sure that they understood that they needed to resolve a problem in a company (e.g., selecting candidates for a job). Before the role play started, the instructor had students brainstorm as a class what vocabulary, grammar and expressions they could use. After preparing the activity, they performed their skits to the class followed by feedback on grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation from the instructor. By giving feedback, the instructor helped learners understand how the language is used within a communicative activity. In week 6, students gave pairs presentations as individuals and in pairs, and they also worked with grammar and vocabulary worksheets including writing an essay. During presentations, the instructor reported that some of the questions asked by presenters allowed for opinions, but others were predictable in the form of drills in which one participant asks a question and another gives an answer. The instructor reported that when reviewing homework, she gave feedback by recasting the students' sentences. In week 9, students worked in class with vocabulary, readings and grammar. The answers were required to give answers no longer than one sentence. Participants had already written sentences at home for homework. In class, they participated by reading these sentences aloud followed by a response from the instructor. With these types of review, participants worked with presentational language.

Students' evaluations collected in week 14 corroborated results from the focus groups and teacher's notes. The quotes selected were focused on comments in speaking. In general, we can learn that students appreciated the OPI tests, but some indicated they were not happy with the VOICES tasks. They also felt that their instructor did a very good job helping them to feel comfortable and confident speaking the language. Some anonymous students felt they needed more speaking activities instead of reviewing homework:

"One of the best things about this class were the OPI interviews. This class did help to advance my language skills and foster confidence in my abilities...Voices felt like a waste of time... More

time could have been spent in class communicating in Spanish and less reviewing the homework...”

“Voices activities were not enjoyable or functional and were not good representations of ability with speaking”

3.3 Research Question 3: Affordances

Three affordances were discovered during VOICES reflections: reserving time for planning, practicing the language by redoing the task, and ensuring a safe environment. Another affordance - conscious awareness- was found with the OPI reflections and self-evaluations. Almost all participants reported that they did better during the second VOICES and OPIs (as reported in their reflections), with the exception of two participants for the OPI and four for VOICES who did not see any improvement after completing the tasks. For those participants who felt their speaking was improved, they reported this was largely due to advance knowledge of the format and expectations. In general, participants commented on their need to work on broadening their vocabulary to better enable them to converse in a wide range of settings and situations.

3.3.1 One minute planning

During the VOICES reflections, we found that participants appreciate having one minute to plan their answers after listening to the English prompt. Participants used a metacognitive strategy by planning what to say. Participants reported planning in English and then translating those ideas in the target language. Therefore, they were also using the cognitive strategy of translating. The use of both strategies helped them to accomplish the tasks, as described by the participants’ quotes:

“VOICES is different than the traditional OPI because of the nature of it. There is more opportunity to prepare for responses because of a 60 second wait time. This wait time helped me think of my answer in English and transition to my answer in Spanish.” (# 3, Pre VOICES)

“In order to make this assessment easier, I tried to take my time reading the prompt and planned what I was going to say in English first. This way, I already had all my responses and only had to translate them to English in my head when it came time for me to respond.” (# 8)

Surprisingly, at the end of the semester when they completed the VOICES tasks for the second time, some learners did not want to take the extra minute and they went right into the speaking portion. They did not want to plan the activity in their heads because in the real world (i.e., a real conversation) there is not a lot of time to ponder what someone would like to say, and they were interested in evaluating their true ability to communicate spontaneously.

3.3.2 Practice the language

Practicing the language with VOICES helped learners to use metacognitive strategies and be aware of their speaking. By monitoring their speaking when listening to their performance, they double-checked and self-verified their speaking in order to decide if they needed to redo the task. Self-evaluation was another metacognitive strategy used by the participants. By self-judging their performance, they could feel more confident to solve the random situations. Some of their strategies are described in the following quotes:

“I felt that VOICES tested my ability to use known vocab to navigate new complex situations where I may not be familiar with vocab... There were many words that I wanted to use in English that I had not learned in Spanish causing me to rethink my statements. VOICES also gives the opportunity to redo a response. This opportunity allowed me to use a more complex structure and accurate vocabulary after attempting to speak the first time.” (#3, Pre VOICES)

“While speaking, my Spanish was accurate for the most part. I had struggled to think of what was grammatically correct and made some errors. However, when I made the errors, I recognized a few and was able to correct myself.... I noticed I had said a few words and verbs repeatedly and tried to get myself to think of other ways to say things to change it up.” (# 5, Post VOICES)

3.3.3 Safe environment

The fact that written prompts were in English was an advantage for participants because they did not have to understand the listening portion as it is common while interacting with another person. They felt more comfortable and confident during the second VOICES.

"This form of OPI testing felt very different than testing the first. I believe I felt this change because I was not in the presence of another human but rather, a computer. It is more casual and less intimidating to speak. With that said, I felt this time around I was able to speak more efficiently. (#5)

"I really do like the idea of the VOICES test and how it eliminates the pressure of talking to an actual person, and how I get a minute to gather my responses" (#7)

"During my first prompt I am fairly sure that my performance was not solid. I was not too confident when asking questions and I believe it shows. However, during my second prompt I was much more confident ..." (#12)

3.3.4 *Conscious awareness*

Participants *reflected in and on practice* having an opportunity to be consciously aware of their output and improve it in their second round or third round. Self-evaluation was a way to rethink about the appropriate vocabulary and grammar. These reflections are reflected in the following quotes:

"While I know the general rules for indicative and subjunctive tenses, the irregular verbs trip me up when I switch tenses and cause me grief. I spend a lot of time thinking about the conjugations and forget to focus on the vocabulary." (#3, Post VOICES)

"My pronunciation and vocabulary were influenced by my first language, English, and I was also required to repeat my answers for better comprehension. I was able to ask a few appropriate questions about setting up an appointment but also struggled using the correct vocabulary when doing so." (#10, self-evaluation OPI)

3.4 **Research Question 4: Constraints**

Three constraints were discovered with VOICES: issues with technology, time limit, and location. Some participants had issues with the website because it was not working properly. Some participants felt that working in class did not help them because they felt anxious working around their peers. These constraints are represented in the following quotes from VOICES:

"The only part that went bad was issues with technology where it wouldn't take one of my responses, but other people had it worse, but besides that it wasn't too bad of a test." (#1, Pre-VOICES)

"I got very anxious because more classmates started coming back in and I was the only one left talking which made me nervous. ...I know my nerves often get the best of me when I have to do any type of quiz or test..." (#7, Pre VOICES)

"...it was easy to get distracted by the other people talking around you and the timer ticking down. I liked the OPI interview more because there was interaction from a person communicating with you, you didn't have a time limit..." (#13, Pre-VOICES)

4 **CONCLUSIONS**

The results of this study suggest that there was not a significant difference between the pre- and post-OPI according to the OPI tester. The majority of participants were at the intermediate mid or high level at the end of the semester and therefore reached the course-learning objective. The exceptions were two participants who attained the intermediate-low proficiency level at the end of the semester and another participant who exceeded to the advanced-low level. These findings appear to be in line with Muñoz (2006) that stated that speaking requires longer time to see a linguistic change, and it is difficult to see development in short time. These findings are also in line with Pardo-Ballester (2018) for the two participants who advanced to the next level. The results of this study also yield some support to the importance of the speaking and listening instrument (i.e., OPI vs. an automatic test). To assess the language and see an improvement within a short period of time, the critical role of scaffolding, negotiation of meaning, and authentic and spontaneous communication during the OPIs was essential for developing participants' oral skills.

The findings from the participants' self-evaluations (i.e., pre- and post-OPI) demonstrated a statistically significant difference. Participants felt that their language proficiency improved from one level to the next, except for two who perceived that they were at the same level as their pre-OPI and one participant who felt had done worse in the post-OPI. Looking into the qualitative data from the results, we found

that participants' perceptions of their proficiency level is connected to the level of comfort and confidence when performing the interview. Most of them felt at ease during the post-OPI and they felt their speaking improved. These results match studies in motivation and confidence in using the target language for communication and the job of the instructor helping them to take risks when speaking (Dörnyei, 2010; Yashima et al., 2004).

The active learning pedagogical approach gave strong emphasis to developing and using communicative skills inside the classroom. More importantly, knowing participants' needs from the beginning of the semester gave the instructor a better understanding of participants' affective factors, thereby addressing their concerns and helping them build their confidence and comfort in speaking. Some students commented in student evaluations that they would have rather worked with more communicative activities and spent less time reviewing homework. However, results from the focus groups, reflections, and online survey demonstrated that they needed grammar review and vocabulary for developing their speaking skills and to feel more confident when communicating in Spanish. Nation & Chung (2009) claims that receiving meaning-focus input (i.e., comprehensible input gained through listening and reading) and meaning-focused output (i.e., learning through speaking [e.g., role plays] and writing) are effective resources for learning vocabulary. Following their claims, it can be argued that students sometimes contradict themselves with their language needs, with what they do in class, and with what they think they should do in class. This contradiction is in line with Chapelle (2005) stating that evidence from research should not only come from students. Participants of this study reported improvement in their speaking and perceived the process of practicing grammar and vocabulary as beneficial (or detrimental). Their oral communication improved due to higher level of confidence and comfort.

Results from reflections showed the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies, and through these participants built their ability and regulated their own learning processes. More importantly, being able to listen to their OPIs and self-evaluate themselves help them see their progress from one task to the other. Self-monitoring by participants could lead to autonomy and language learning. Self-evaluations showed that most participants are quite realistic of what can and cannot do in Spanish. It seems logical to incorporate reflections and self-evaluations into language learning with the aim of providing opportunities for students for further learning.

REFERENCES

- [1] Schön, D. A. *Educating the reflective practitioner: Toward a new design for teaching and learning in the professions*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1987.
- [2] Creswell, J.W., & Plano Clark, V.L. *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. (3rd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011.
- [3] Trede, F., Macklin, R., & Bridges, D. "Professional identity development: a review of the high education literature". *Studies in Higher Education*, vol. 37, 365-384, 2012.
- [4] Meyers N.M., & Nulty, D.D. "How to use (five) curriculum design principles to align authentic learning environments, assessment, students' approaches to thinking and learning outcomes". *Assessment and Education in Higher Education*, vol. 34, 565-577, 2009.
- [5] Muñoz, C. (ed.) *Age and the rate of foreign language learning*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2006.
- [6] Darhower, M. "The role of linguistic affordances in participation in a bilingual telecollaboration". *CALICO Journal*, no. 26, 48-69, 2008.
- [7] Dewey, J. *How we think: A restatement of the relation of reflecting thinking to the educative process*. Boston: Henry Holt, 1933.
- [8] McKeachie, W.J. & Svinicki M. *McKeachie's Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 2006.
- [9] Bonwell, C. C., & Eison, J. A. *Active learning: Creating excitement in the classroom* (ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Reports No 1. Washington, DC: The George Washington University, School of Education and Human Development, 1991.
- [10] Anderson, L.W., & Krathwohl, D.R. *A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing*. Abridged Edition. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2001

- [11] Wolcott, H. F. Transforming qualitative data: Description, analysis, and interpretation. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994.
- [12] Charmaz, K. Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006.
- [13] Chapelle, C. "Interactionist SLA theory in CALL research." CALL Research Perspectives. (Ed. Joy L. Egbert and Gina M. Petrie), 53-64, Mahwah, NJ.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005.
- [14] Creswell, J. W. Educational research: Planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research (5th ed.) Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2015.
- [15] Pardo-Ballester, C. "La evaluación de la destreza oral: Una comparación entre cursos "híbridos a distancia" y "presenciales ALAO". Hispania, vol. 1, no 4, 2018.
- [16] Dörnyei, Z. "Researching motivation: From integrativeness to the ideal L2 self." Introducing applied linguistics: Concepts and skills (Ed. S. Hunston, & Oakey, D.),74–83, Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2010.
- [17] Yashima, T., Zenuk-Nishide, L., & Shimizu, K. "The influence of attitudes and affect on willingness to communicate and second language communication". Language Learning, vol. 54, no.1, 119–152. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9922.2004.00250.x, 2004.
- [18] Nation, P. & Chung, T. "Teaching and testing vocabulary" The handbook of language teaching. (Ed. Long. M. H. & Doughty C.), 543-559, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.