The development of oral communication in A1 learners through picture description strategy in English classes

El desarrollo de la comunicación oral en estudiantes de A1 a través de una estrategia de descripción de imágenes en clases de inglés.

O desenvolvimento da comunicação oral em alunos A1 por meio da estratégia de descrição de imagens nas aulas de inglês

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Resumen

Este estudio tiene como objetivo explorar y comprender las perspectivas de los estudiantes de inglés de nivel A1 sobre el uso de la estrategia de descripción de imágenes para mejorar la comunicación oral en las clases de inglés como lengua extranjera en la unidad educativa pública Teodoro Wolf, ubicada en la Provincia de Santa Elena, Ecuador. El estudio se llevó a cabo utilizando un método cualitativo para recopilar datos a través de entrevistas con 28 participantes del noveno año EGB, salón 'B' quienes fueren escogidos al azar. Se aplicó un cuestionario con 5 preguntas abiertas para conocer las percepciones de los estudiantes sobre el uso de la estrategia de descripción de imágenes en las clases de inglés como lengua extranjera. Los resultados revelaron que la mayoría de los estudiantes de nivel A1 tienen una percepción positiva de la estrategia de descripción de imágenes, ya que les ayuda a mejorar su habilidad de comunicación oral. Los participantes también encontraron que el uso de recursos visuales es un recurso efectivo para hacer que el aprendizaje del idioma sea una experiencia más agradable, estimulando la imaginación y promoviendo la habilidad de hablar. Además, los resultados sugieren que la falta de confianza al momento de comunicarse en inglés es un problema común entre los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera. A menudo, los estudiantes se sienten avergonzados o tienen miedo de ser juzgados al hablar frente a los demás. Este miedo puede llevar a la ansiedad y afectar su capacidad para comunicarse efectivamente. Los profesores pueden proporcionar oportunidades para practicar la expresión oral regularmente, crear un ambiente de apoyo y aliento que permita a los estudiantes cometer errores y brindar retroalimentación adecuada. Se necesita más investigaciones sobre el impacto de PDS en otras habilidades lingüísticas y explorar su potencial para diferentes grupos de edad y contextos.

Palabras Claves: descripción de fotos; desarrollo oral; estudiantes nivel A1; perspectivas; comunicación efectiva.

Abstract

This study intends to explore and understand the A1 level English learners' perspectives about the use of picture description strategy for improving the oral communication in EFL classes at Teodoro Wolf public high school located in the Province of Santa Elena., Ecuador. The study was conducted using a qualitative method to gather data through interviews with 28 participants of 9th Year EGB.

Classroom 'B' who were randomly chosen. A questionnaire with 5 opened questions were applied to know the learners' perceptions about the use of picture description strategy in EFL classes. The findings revealed that the majority of A1 learners have a positive perception of the picture description strategy, as it helps them to improve their oral communication skill. Participants also found that the use of visual aids is an effective resource to make language learning a more pleasant experience, stimulating the imagination, and promoting speaking skill. Also, the results suggest that the lack of confidence at the moment to communicating in English is a common issue among EFL learners. EFL learners often feel embarrassed or afraid of being judged when speaking in front of others. This fear can lead to anxiety and affect their ability to communicate effectively. Teachers can supply opportunities to practice speaking regularly, create a supportive and encouraging environment that allows learners to make mistakes and provide proper feedback. Further research is needed to investigate the impact of PDS on other language skills and to explore its potential for different age groups and contexts.

Key Words: photo description; oral development; A1 level students; perspectives; effective communication.

Resumo

Este estudo pretende explorar e compreender as perspectivas dos alunos de inglês do nível A1 sobre o uso da estratégia de descrição de imagens para melhorar a comunicação oral nas aulas de inglês como língua estrangeira na escola pública Teodoro Wolf, localizada na província de Santa Elena, Equador. O estudo foi realizado utilizando um método qualitativo para coleta de dados por meio de entrevistas com 28 participantes do 9º ano da EGB. Sala de aula 'B' que foi escolhida aleatoriamente. Foi aplicado um questionário com 5 questões abertas para conhecer a percepção dos alunos sobre o uso da estratégia de descrição de imagens nas aulas de inglês como língua estrangeira. Os resultados revelaram que a maioria dos alunos A1 tem uma perceção positiva da estratégia de descrição de imagens, pois ajuda-os a melhorar a sua capacidade de comunicação oral. Os participantes também constataram que o uso de recursos visuais é um recurso eficaz para tornar a aprendizagem de línguas uma experiência mais agradável, estimulando a imaginação e promovendo a habilidade de falar. Além disso, os resultados sugerem que a falta de confiança no

momento para se comunicar em inglês é um problema comum entre os alunos de EFL. Os alunos de EFL muitas vezes se sentem envergonhados ou com medo de serem julgados quando falam na frente de outras pessoas. Esse medo pode levar à ansiedade e afetar sua capacidade de comunicação eficaz. Os professores podem oferecer oportunidades para praticar a oratória regularmente, criar um ambiente de apoio e encorajamento que permita aos alunos cometer erros e fornecer feedback adequado. Mais pesquisas são necessárias para investigar o impacto do PDS em outras competências linguísticas e para explorar o seu potencial para diferentes faixas etárias e contextos.

Palavras-chave: descrição da foto; desenvolvimento oral; Alunos do nível A1; perspectivas; comunicação efetiva.

Introduction

Learning English as a foreign language has become a great resource for communication worldwide (Ministerio de Educacion, 2016). According to Rao (2019), English has gained great relevance in educational, professional, and economic fields. Teachers use many strategies to develop students' English skills in the educational field. These strategies provide learners with a good opportunity to practice the language in the classroom actively (Priyadharshini, 2021). However, students often have some issues as nervousness and lack of confidence at the moment of speaking. They prefer using Spanish (L1) than English (L2) to interact, and it is a big challenge to pronounce their first words in their second language.

Throughout the years, English has earned speakers who have found in this language the opportunity to meet the lingua franca in diverse countries (Sing, 2017). Every country has its diversity and uniqueness to show worldwide, and users, through language learning, have discovered their benefits and richness to implement in every stage when it could be required. Business, international commerce, and the possibility of connecting the global world in one language have observed that English users acquire this language in different forms to achieve their goals of obtaining cultural learning and vision when a language is internalized. Marenus (2023) mentioned some specific words from Gardner´s 1983 book "Frames of Mind," referring to the multiple intelligences and their definitions at the learning time about the development of how people can learn from their intelligence type, which mays differ individually based on genetics or experience.

The majority of researchers encourage students to be part of their classes when they are teaching their sessions; however, many learners often do not feel motivated to participate in conversations, and their vocabulary knowledge needs to be more significant to use it in an interaction when they need it (Ariffin, 2021). There are also stages where the teachers stay in their traditional teaching and spend much time explaining grammar structure instead of giving them opportunities to develop different skills, such as oral production or indistinct interaction. For this reason, it is required to implement multiple intelligences and use an appropriate strategy to promote students' oral interaction.

Gamboa-Gonzalez (2017) stated that learning is a complex process, and visual aids are a beneficial help in stimulating the new knowledge of a foreign language. Moreover, Wright (1989 as cited in Ogoño, 2022) claimed that the resources must include pictures. Verbal language is only a part of how we usually get meaning from contexts. To update an effective learning process, the researcher applies a study to develop A1 learners' oral communication. Describing picture strategy is a suitable technique that shows new ways to motivate students to increase their oral interaction and improve their performance (Rosado & Vaca-Cardenas, 2023). The actual situation in the institution makes researchers look for new strategies to implement new concepts and insights for students who sometimes do not feel a passion for their learning. This is why reviewing some similar literature to this study could be a ray of light for students to learn more effectively to create their concepts.

Kano and Fardyansyah (2015) developed their work in a seventh-grade students' group. There were 37 participants in this research. The researcher used three instruments in the study: observation, questionnaire, and test. The data of the study was collected mixing both methods, quantitatively and qualitatively. The study talked about the students' speaking progress after implementing describing pictures in teaching speaking. The results showed how learners improved their motivation to learn and the positive stimulation in their oral communication. Lavalle and Briedmaster (2017) implemented picture descriptions to enhance communication skills with eighth-grade learners of English in Chile. Twenty adolescents from 13 to 14 participated in the study, and results suggested that the interaction of learners with different pictures and images improved their abilities for better interaction and understanding of their activities and fluency of their speech.

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In the local context of Ecuador, there was similar research at Casa Grande University in Guayaquil City. Ogoño (2020) used pictures description facilitated by PowerPoint presentations. The study was applied in a public high school in Machala. The sample was 35 students. The researcher implemented action research to draw some perceptions during the class. The results showed that the students improved on their oral communication due to the use of the new description picture. This study aims to explore and understand the A1 learners' perspectives about the use of picture description strategy for improving the oral communication in English classes.

JUSTIFICATION

Effective communication is a fundamental skill in today's globalized world. For language learners, developing oral communication skills can be a challenging task, particularly for those at the A1 level. Picture description strategy has emerged as an effective technique for improving oral communication skills in A1 learners. This strategy involves using visual aids such as pictures, diagrams, and charts to help learners describe and discuss various topics. This study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the development of oral communication in A1 learners through picture description strategy and their perspectives about it. The researcher used a qualitative study and applied an interview to get students perspectives focused on their experiences using picture description. By examining the benefits and challenges of using visual aids in language learning activities, the researcher hopes to provide language teachers with useful insights and recommendations for improving their teaching practice.

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

- To know the A1 learners' perspectives about picture description strategy in EFL classes.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- To apply an interview in a group of students to gather qualitative data.
- To understand the specific difficulties that learners face at the moment of communicate in English.
- To identify the benefits of applying picture description strategy in EFL classes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The primary objective of learning a new language is to communicate with others in a real context (Ramirez-Lizcano & Cabrera-Tovar, 2020). This section involves readers to understand this article better. In this stage of the work, it is demonstrated how learners have the capacity to develop their oral communication effectively when they have the appropriate vocabulary to express what they think, feel, and see. One of the strategies that increases learners' oral communication is the picture description (Henriquez et al, 2017).

Oral communication

Fernandez (2019) mentioned that the word 'Communication' has its root from the Latin word "communicare" that means to 'share', 'to impart 'and 'to make common'. It may be defined as an exchange of facts, ideas, opinions or emotions between two or more people. "Communicating with others or expressing our ideas is part of human nature. Thus, language is seen as a tool for communication, and as such, speaking skills mean a lot for the learners of any language" (Lavalle & Briesmaster,2017, p.1).

Communication is mainly divided into four types: written, visual, audio- visual, and oral communication. This study is focused on the oral communication.

Oral communication is a process whereby information is transferred from a sender to receiver by a verbal means which can be supported by visual aid. Receiver could be an individual, a group, or even audience (Elhussien, 2020, p.29).

Speaking and listening skills have a key role in the oral communication. Even though, English is improving the four skills consisting of mastering receptive skills (reading and listening) and the knowledge of the productive skills (speaking and writing) within a specified word level and relevant grammatical structure. Thus, before teaching in the classroom, it is suggested that the teacher has to know the materials needed and the conditions required for teaching in the class. Furthermore, teaching English using images immersed in a lesson plan is an essential and alternative way of education because it contains pre-teaching, process-teaching, and post-teaching, which can help the learning process run effectively. A teacher also has to know the appropriate

The role of visual aids in improving oral communication skills.

Murni (2018) pointed out that "picture can be used as a stimulus for a creative activity because it is a real object which is very helpful for teaching the meaning of some words or for stimulating the students' activity especially in conversation class" (p.11). The use of visual aids in the learning process promotes learners' imagination and their interest in acquiring a foreign language. Previous studies evidenced the improvement of the oral communication using pictures. In many cases, pictures all called as visualization materials. Golubeva et al. (2021) mentioned that visualization materials found in books are applied to activate learners' perception and understanding of new ideas and concepts, which will increase the ability to develop critical thinking. In their article the authors saw these materials as powerful tools with a high potential implemented to improve education quality. Even though, in some cases these materials reduce the inclusive participation of many learners (Piper et al., 2019).

The picture is suitable for teaching-learning activities. In many cases, the researcher wants to give an exciting way to teach using images for learning. This interaction will make the students understand and guide them accurately in their knowledge to produce their language. Every picture is usually prepared to be used by learners to gain the required interest of the student. It is a crucial point to develop his/her motivation in the learning of new concepts. Some writers classify the pictures that are used as teaching aids in different types: pictures of individual person and objects and situational pictures in which persons and objects are "in action."

Nowadays, algorithms combine image features, textual information, or training based on labels, which reminds us of a semantic problem (Weedmark, 2021). The author stated that before the training phase, it is required first to determine the problem statement, access to data set and clean the data to be presented to the model. Some models are based just on image features. Like those algorithms that use manually gathered images, they are limited by the number of object categories stored in their databases or by the accuracy of their textual annotations (Landao, 2022). The

situation is trying to connect the images with their language acquisition and production, and the photos training have given meaningful results in students learning.

The image produces a dialogue that is developed when the observer, who sees the image discovers its importance (Colorado, 2014). This importance goes along with its meaning. It is also individual because each person can feel diverse sensations in the interaction with the pictures. At this time, the picture has sent different messages to observers who are supposed to develop their best sense at looking at every image. While traditional photographs are tools rather than memories, it is possible to create a photographic image analogous to memory (Kirby, 2021).

The benefits of using picture description strategy in language learning.

In a previous study conducted by Romero (2020), the results demonstrated that picture description strategy not only increased learners' fluency, but the findings also showed that it can improve learners' interaction, organization of ideas and vocabulary. The use of authentic pictures evoked positive feelings, raised their willing to learn, shared and expressed what they saw successfully. The use of picture series in teaching speaking was effective to improve students' oral communication. This fact was evidenced in the research conducted by Mailani and Farhana (2018). The previous researchers stated that this technique provides some advantages such as: the acquisition of meaningful vocabulary, the development of learners' speaking ability, and the increasing of the interaction in EFL classes.

In teaching and learning English, a teacher should be creative to find out specific techniques of education so that the students can easily understand the material of the subject they teach. One of the methods is using a picture, which is used as the learning media. Based on the Competence-Based Curriculum and KTSP, picture media have proved to be effective and encourage the students in the learning process that is purposed to improve their skills in English subject, especially in conversation. Pictures can be employed for very creative use in communicative language teaching. Using photographs is intended to be the technique of teaching aid and constitute the material from which language can be generated.

METHODOLOGY

The study was qualitative research focused on qualitative data to examine A1learners' perspectives related to picture description strategy in their language learning process. Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. […] [It] involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. […] qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3).

In qualitative research, the investigators can notice that outcomes are always a surprise. It is unrelated to a question or answer, but could bring expected or unexpected results. One of the advantages of this perspective is the possibility of finding the truth in one situation; it should hold across all others because they are equally representative of the single definable reality. However, what it means to be true from one perspective could be false for different people (Maxwell, 2021). The instrument applied in this study was a questionnaire. Questionnaire is a list of questions that several people are asked so that information can be collected about something (Cambridge dictionary ,n.d.) The interview was conducted virtually through a Google forms. It had 5 open questions that gathered the learners' perspectives based on their experience in the development of the oral communication through picture description strategy in EFL classes. The interview was helpful and valuable because it demonstrated A1 learners ´concerns and positive and negative aspects lived when they try to communicate in the EFL classes. The chosen instrument was an effective strategy that helped the researcher to catch all the details at the moment of collecting the information.

The sample was selected by convenience. "Convenience sampling is selecting participants because they are often readily and easily available" (Taherdoost, 2016). According to the author this non-probability sampling technique is least expensive, time consuming and most convenient. Due to these reasons, the interview was carried out with 28 young learners, 72% were female and the 28% were male, among 12 and 13 years old from 9th year EGB, classroom 'B' of Teodoro Wolf public high school in the Province of Santa Elena, Ecuador.

Results and Discussion.

The interview was validated by three experts previously: two of them in the English area and a doctor with experience in methodology of investigation. The evaluation obtained a score of 8.2 according to The Alpha of Cronbach method, validating the questionnaire applied in the interview.

Figure 1

What are some specific difficulties that you have at the moment of communicating in English?
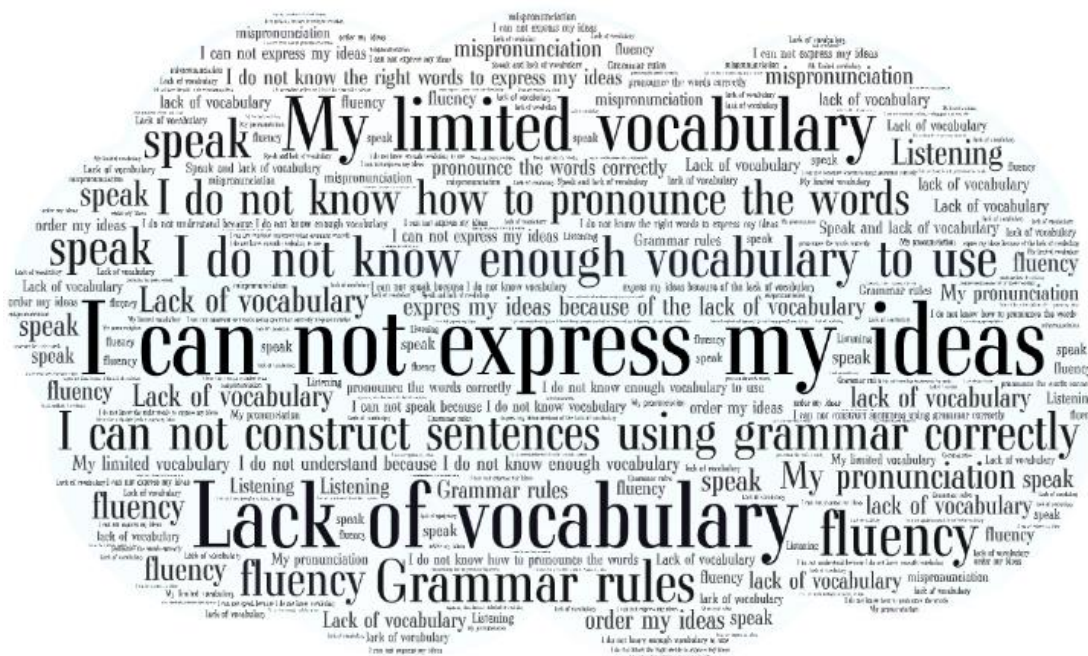
Note. The figure presents the specific difficulties that A1 learners have at the moment of communicating.

According to the results, most of the A1 learners claim that the difficulties they have at the moment of communicating are related to the lack of vocabulary, the fluency, the grammar structures and rules, and mispronunciation of the words. These issues affect the learners' oral communication development and create a linguistic barrier in the regular learning process.

Figure 2

How often do you communicate in English with your classmates?

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Note. The figure shows the frequency that A1 learners use English for communicating with their partners in the EFL classes.

Regarding to the use of English in the classroom, a large number of learners occasionally communicate in English during the EFL classes. However, it can be observed that there is a significant number of students who indicate that they rarely or usually communicate in English during the classes.

Figure 3

How confident do you feel when you communicate in English in your EFL classes?
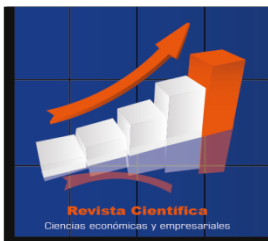
Note. The figure indicates the way A1 learners' feel when they communicate in English.

Regarding to the results, almost of the A1 learners state that they feel nervous and do not feel confident when they communicate during the EFL classes because they are afraid of being judged when they make mistakes. Learners consider that they need more time to practice English in class, just a few of the learners feel confident when they communicate in classes.
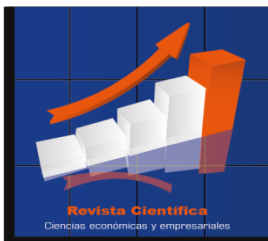
Figure 4

Do you think that using pictures and visual aids help you to improve the oral interaction in class? Why? Why not?

Note. The figure displays the diverse reasons why A1 learners think that using pictures and visual aids help them to improve the oral interaction in EFL classes.

Regarding to the learners' perspective on the development of oral communication through the use of pictures and visual aids, a diversity of opinions is observed. The majority of participants indicate that this strategy has been very useful during the EFL classes. Some of them mention that pictures help them to learn and memorize words and new vocabulary easily and the EFL classes are more engaging because they feel more motivated watching colorful pictures related to the new topics. Some students claim that looking at pictures stimulates their imagination, increase the understanding of the meaning of the words, and promotes speaking practice among peers.

Figure 5

What are your favorite visual aids/materials in your EFL classes?
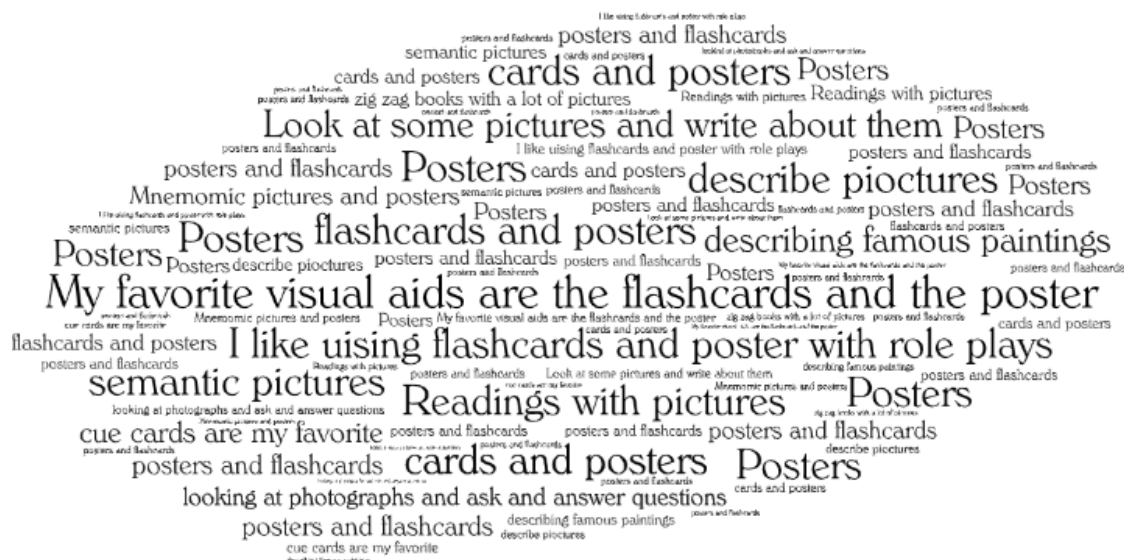
Note. The figure demonstrates the A1 learners' favorite visual aids and materials in EFL classes.

The favorite visual aids and material are whiteboards, graphics, flashcards, posters, and cards. A1 learners prefer describing images of situations that increase the use of new vocabulary in real context. These materials have increased in certain way the A1 learners' confidence in their oral ability, although they still experience nervousness in some cases. Additionally, learners express that sometimes teachers have to explain certain topics or instructions in their native language (Spanish), so that everyone can understand, which they consider a limitation. They also mention that they do not receive feedback from the teachers on tasks with images until after the presentation, which can affect their performance and motivation.

The use of visual tools, such as whiteboard, graphics, flashcards, and posters has proven to be beneficial for the learning process, although the importance of immediate feedback from the teacher to motivate students is highlighted.

Conclusions

This research has revealed valuable results related to A1 learners' perceptions about their development in the oral communication and the effectiveness of picture description as a learning strategy in EFL classes. The fact that the majority of the learners prefer using Spanish (L1) as a communication language poses challenges in promoting the effective use of English in the classroom. The lack of confidence at the moment of communicating in English, evidenced by the

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low number of students who feel confident when they communicate with their peers during the EFL classes, represents a significant obstacle in the learning process.

However, the results suggest that picture description as a pedagogical strategy has significant potential for improving students' oral communication skills. Most participants consider that this methodology is highly effective, and those who have used it highlight improvements in oral practice and an increase in confidence. The use of visual tools, such as whiteboard, graphics, flashcards, and posters has proven effectiveness in this process, although the importance of immediate feedback from the teacher to maintain student motivation is emphasized.

These findings underline the importance of consider the lack of confidence when English is used in the classroom and point to picture description as a promising strategy for improving oral communication skill.

Recommendations

Based on the insights gathered from A1 learners' perspectives on the picture description strategy and the development of the oral communication, the researcher highly recommends that EFL educators consider selecting and incorporating suitable visual aids into their teaching methodologies, such as flashcards, hands outs, posters, cards, and graphics. By incorporating these materials into their lessons, EFL instructors can achieve different pedagogical objectives, including the acquisition of new vocabulary, grammar structure, prompt discussion, encourage critical thinking. improving learner engagement, facilitating understanding, and enhancing retention.

Educators also have to provide structured feedback that focuses on oral communication skill, involving constructive feedback on pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary usage, and grammar. A1 learners will be benefited significantly from regular feedback to track their progress and identify areas for improvement. Following these recommendations EFL educators will be able to create a more comprehensive and tailored approach to using picture description strategy, ensuring that A1 learners not only improve their oral communication skills, but also develop a positive attitude towards learning English.

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