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Influence of Professional Internships on developing Speaking Skills A2 level

Influencia de las prácticas profesionales en el desarrollo de habilidades de expresión oral en el nivel A2

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ABSTRACT

English has become an indispensable tool in the tourism sector, driving universities to strengthen their academic offerings. This effort includes increasing the hours dedicated to language instruction and incorporating professional internships to enhance students' language skills and promote bilingualism. However, many students begin these internships without adequate preparation, and their progress is often not evaluated upon completion. This study examines the impact of internships on the development of English-speaking skills in A2-level students from the Tourism program at Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí. The research involved 45 seventh-semester students whose language proficiency corresponds to A2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference, currently interning at various tourism companies. Using a mixed-methods approach, quantitative data was collected through surveys, complemented by qualitative insights gathered from open-ended questions. The findings reveal significant improvements in fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, and confidence in English communication after participating in the internships. Additionally, the study identified benefits and challenges faced by students when applying the language in real workplace settings. Based on these results, educational and professional recommendations are proposed to enhance the

linguistic preparation of A2-level students, emphasizing the critical role of internships in their professional and academic development.

Keywords: professional internships, speaking skills, A2 Level CEFR

RESUMEN

El inglés es una herramienta indispensable en el sector turístico, lo que ha impulsado a las universidades a reforzar su oferta académica. Este esfuerzo incluye un aumento en las horas dedicadas a la enseñanza del idioma y la incorporación de prácticas preprofesionales para fortalecer las habilidades lingüísticas de los estudiantes y fomentar el bilingüismo. Sin embargo, muchos estudiantes comienzan estas prácticas sin una preparación adecuada, y frecuentemente no se evalúa el progreso alcanzado al concluir las mismas. Este estudio examina el impacto de las pasantías en el desarrollo de las habilidades de expresión oral en inglés de estudiantes de nivel A2 de la carrera de Turismo de la Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí. La investigación incluyó a 45 estudiantes de séptimo semestre, cuya competencia lingüística corresponde al nivel A2 según el Marco Común Europeo de Referencia, quienes realizan prácticas en distintas empresas turísticas. Con un enfoque de métodos mixtos, se recopilaron datos cuantitativos mediante encuestas y se complementaron con percepciones cualitativas obtenidas a través de preguntas abiertas. Los hallazgos revelan avances significativos en fluidez, precisión, vocabulario y confianza al comunicarse en inglés tras participar en las pasantías. Además, se identificaron beneficios y desafíos experimentados por los estudiantes al aplicar el idioma en contextos laborales reales. A partir de los resultados, se proponen recomendaciones educativas y profesionales para mejorar la preparación lingüística de los estudiantes de nivel A2, destacando el papel crucial de las pasantías en su desarrollo profesional y académico.

Palabras clave: prácticas preprofesionales, habilidades lingüísticas, nivel A2 MCER

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INTRODUCTION

Education has undergone continuous evolution, constantly seeking innovative methods that enrich students' learning experiences. Within this evolution, the integration of professional internships has emerged as a valuable resource to strengthen practical skills and apply theoretical knowledge in real work environments. This pedagogical approach not only provides a platform for professional immersion but also represents a unique opportunity for the development and refinement of language skills, particularly in the realm of oral expression in English. This background forms the basis of the article.

In recent years, there has been a significant shift in language teaching, increasingly focusing on students and their learning processes rather than solely on teachers and their instruction. This approach has spotlighted how students process new information and the strategies they employ to comprehend, learn, or recall it—a fundamental aspect in the realm of foreign language learning (Hismanoglu, n.d.). Furthermore, Ellis (2005) highlights that consistent exposure to the target language in structured and meaningful contexts is essential for the acquisition of communicative competence, which aligns with the opportunities provided by professional internships.

In Ecuador, tourism is a vital and growing sector of the economy, where the ability to communicate in English is an essential skill for tourism students. This research examines how professional internships not only provide valuable work experience but also play a critical role in enhancing English communication skills at an A2 level. According to Gass and Mackey (2015), meaningful input, interaction, and opportunities for output are fundamental components of second language acquisition, making internships an optimal environment for language development. Moreover, the professional development of students pursuing tourism careers at a national level is crucial. When combined with improved English language skills, it becomes a gateway to sustainable destination development and broadens employment opportunities within the sector. Among the key strategies to be implemented in this study are social strategies and metacognitive strategies. Burešová's work (2007) highlights the importance of a student-centered approach to language teaching. This approach could serve as a foundation to consider how professional internships can foster a student-centered environment, promoting the use of social strategies to enhance English oral expression skills. Additionally, methodologies such as the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT) (Alamri, s. f.), Cooperative Learning (Felder & Brent, 2007), and Community Language Learning (Ali, 2018) are mentioned, emphasizing the significance of effective communication and social cooperation in language learning. These concepts inspire ways in which internships can be designed to encourage cooperation among students and the development of oral expression skills.

Literature Review

Building upon reflections from Lejarreta, Garay, and Romero (2012), the significance of social strategies in the specific context of this study becomes evident. The effective implementation of these strategies can have a substantial impact on the development of language skills, particularly for A2-level tourism students during their professional internships. The primary objective is to enhance English communication through the practical application of these strategies, fostering students' linguistic advancement and fluency throughout their internship experiences.

Burešová (2007) highlights that social strategies, when utilized in student-centered environments, play a crucial role in developing language skills by promoting interaction, collaboration, and communication among learners. These strategies are especially impactful in professional contexts, where students engage in authentic interactions. Moreover, Burešová underscores that these strategies not only enhance fluency and communicative competence in English but also contribute to more effective and enduring learning. By applying language in real-world situations, students can experience meaningful practice that reinforces their learning outcomes.

Key social strategies, such as cooperation, empathy, and interaction with native speakers, are directly associated with the development of communicative competence in a foreign language. Their implementation enables students to communicate more effectively in professional settings. Additionally, these strategies align with active learning methodologies, encouraging interaction among peers, practical language use, and intercultural understanding. This engagement deepens students' connection to the learning process and motivates them to actively pursue their linguistic development.

The effectiveness of social strategies is well-supported by evidence from various studies, which demonstrate their ability to improve language skills and facilitate effective communication in foreign language contexts. These findings reinforce the importance of integrating social strategies into professional internships, particularly for students aiming to enhance their oral communication skills in English.

Metacognitive Strategies Applied in Professional Internships

In recent years, there has been a significant shift in language teaching, focusing on strategies that enhance student autonomy and self-regulation. Raoofi (n.d.) highlights the critical role of metacognitive strategies in second language learning, emphasizing their impact on students' ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their progress. The effective integration of these strategies holds immense importance in honing language skills during professional internships. By incorporating these strategies into the research, an insightful analysis emerges of how the understanding and regulation of the learning process influence students' linguistic development.

It's significant to apply these strategies at every stage—preparation, execution, and post-analysis—as their consistent application throughout could significantly amplify their effectiveness. These strategies, centered on awareness and regulation of learning, establish a robust framework to enrich students' internship experiences. Beginning from the initial planning phase through subsequent assessments, fostering awareness of the learning process, setting clear objectives, engaging in self-reflection, and meticulous documentation can be implemented to actively enhance English language proficiency.

This strategic integration not only fortifies students' language prowess in practical work settings but also nurtures self-regulation and critical reflection—vital skills for effective and enduring learning in the dynamic field of tourism. Leveraging tools such as heightened awareness, structured planning, thorough evaluation, introspective analysis, and detailed documentation can significantly enhance the learning experience and provide invaluable insights into assessing the impact of both metacognitive and social strategies on students' language competencies throughout their internships.

The study by Nosratinia, Saveiy, and Zaker (2014) emphasizes the interrelationship between self-efficacy, metacognitive awareness, and the use of language learning strategies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, which is relevant to my investigation on the impact of professional internships on language skill development. This study provides a valuable perspective on how students' self-confidence and awareness of their cognitive processes can influence the effectiveness of language learning strategies. Findings from this research suggest that strengthening students' self-efficacy and metacognitive awareness can positively impact their ability to use language learning strategies during professional internships, potentially enhancing their linguistic performance in a real work setting.

This indicates that understanding and promoting self-efficacy and metacognitive awareness may be important considerations when designing internship programs aimed at improving English language skills for students in the tourism field (Nosratinia, Saveiy, & Zaker, 2014).

Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT),

According to Alamri (n.d.), the predominant approach in language education worldwide is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which enables students to express themselves and engage in collaborative activities during classes. Communicative teaching has brought about significant changes in language teaching and learning methods, focusing on developing communicative competence and teaching the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This approach is recognized for fostering active student participation in interactive and authentic classes, thus stimulating their interest in learning. Furthermore, communicative teaching has been widely adopted in schools, universities, and other language institutes globally, becoming a universally utilized educational approach. Its primary goal is to enhance students'

communicative competence, prioritizing comprehension and effective language use in real-life situations.

As per Miguel (n.d.), the CLT approach tends to be a student-centered language teaching practice that is situation-oriented. Within these situational practices, teachers typically develop activities related to the communities and societies where students live. With these familiar backgrounds and a grasp of vocabulary and sentence application, students are more likely to share their thoughts with peers. Additionally, while situational speaking practices may not emphasize grammar and sentence translation accuracy, they enable students to enhance their comprehension, language usage, and communication skills.

Under this argument, the CLT approach provides a dynamic framework that fosters student engagement and active participation in the language learning process. By centering instruction around real-life situations and contexts relevant to students' lives, CLT creates an immersive learning environment where language acquisition occurs naturally. Pre-professional practice settings such as travel agencies, cruise terminals, airports, restaurants, and bus terminals play a crucial role in facilitating meaningful interactions and collaborative activities that encourage students to communicate authentically.

Moreover, the emphasis on student-centered learning in CLT empowers learners to take ownership of their language development. Rather than passively receiving instruction, students become active participants in constructing their understanding of language usage and cultural nuances. Through hands-on activities and authentic communication tasks, they are better equipped to navigate diverse linguistic situations and engage confidently in real-world interactions.

Furthermore, the situational focus of CLT promotes language fluency and communicative competence by prioritizing meaningful communication over grammatical accuracy. By providing opportunities for students to express themselves freely and creatively, CLT nurtures their language skills in a supportive and interactive learning environment. As a result, students not only acquire linguistic proficiency but also develop the confidence and proficiency to effectively communicate in a variety of social and professional contexts.

Cooperative Learning Approach.

Modern pedagogical approaches, such as cooperative learning, emphasize active participation and collaboration among students. Felder and Brent (2007) highlight that cooperative learning not only enhances knowledge retention but also improves communication and problem-solving skills, making it an essential strategy for language acquisition. The idea that students learn more by actively engaging in a task rather than passively observing and listening has long been recognized by both cognitive psychologists and effective educators. By its very nature, cooperative learning entails active student involvement. Furthermore, cooperation enhances learning in multiple ways. Students experiencing difficulties tend to persist more when

working in teams compared to when they work individually. Conversely, high-performing students, when tasked with explaining and clarifying concepts to their peers, often uncover gaps in their understanding and proceed to fill them in.

Additionally, when students collaborate, they exhibit increased involvement in group discussions, demonstrate a higher level of discourse, engage in fewer interruptions when others are speaking, and offer more intellectually valuable contributions. Collaborative work fosters an understanding of the common goal of the group and the importance of assisting and supporting each other's learning. Consequently, students are motivated to provide information, cues, reminders, and encouragement when their peers seek assistance or demonstrate a need for support (Gillies & Boyle, 2010).

Collaborative approaches, such as cooperative learning, prove to be effective tools for. Among the key strategies to be implemented in this study are social strategies and metacognitive strategies. Burešová (2007) highlights the importance of a student-centered approach to language teaching, emphasizing how social strategies can foster effective communication and enhance language learning. Student collaboration not only fosters more active participation and higher-level discourse but also promotes a deeper understanding of concepts and intrinsic motivation to learn and assist others. These group dynamics can be particularly beneficial for A2-level students, providing them with a supportive environment and the opportunity to practice their language skills authentically. Consequently, internships that incorporate collaborative approaches have the potential to enhance the oral expression skills of A2-level students significantly.

Community Language Learning

Ali (2018) provides a detailed description of the Community Language Learning method, an educational approach centered around group dynamics and counseling. This method draws inspiration from Carl Rogers' ideas on education and emphasizes the importance of allowing students to express their feelings and experiences not only about the language but also about the learning process. In this approach, students are seen as a group in need of guidance rather than a traditional class.

In a study titled "A Pilot Case Study of a Student Learning Community", the dynamic and diverse nature of this learning community and its participants has been observed. In terms of focus, the primary goal of participating in the community is to enhance English speaking skills by discussing everyday topics. This study provides an initial insight into how a learning community can influence the development of specific language skills at an A2 level, highlighting the importance of defined roles, leadership, and language practices in the learning process (Hooper, 2020).

In light of Ali's (2018) detailed exploration of the Community Language Learning method, which underscores the significance of group dynamics and counseling in educational approaches, there arises a compelling prospect for its application within the realm of professional internships

for students pursuing tourism studies at ULEAM. By embracing this method, students can harness the supportive environment and collaborative ethos of a learning community to bolster their English-speaking skills in real-world contexts encountered during their internships. Encouraging participants to engage in discussions on everyday topics related to the tourism industry not only fosters language proficiency but also cultivates a deeper understanding of the nuances of communication within the field. Moreover, this approach aligns with the ethos of the learning community, where students are viewed as a cohesive group in need of guidance and support rather than mere participants in a traditional classroom setting. Integrating the principles of the Community Language Learning method into the framework of professional internships offers a promising avenue for enhancing language acquisition and fostering holistic professional development among tourism students at ULEAM.

Oral expressions

According to De las Casas et al. (2022), oral expression, as a linguistic skill, is an essential component of the communicative approach, requiring activities that foster effective communication. This skill integrates phonological, lexical, and morphosyntactic aspects, along with extralinguistic elements such as communication strategies, gestures, and proximity. Additionally, psycholinguistic constraints, including memory and anxiety, and interactive discourses play a significant role. These elements collectively suggest that oral expression is best understood as a form of interactive communication.

The study of oral expression in a second language frequently emphasizes fluency, accuracy, and complexity as key indicators of proficiency. (Arbaoui, 2023) underscores the importance of these components, asserting that task-based instruction effectively supports their development through structured and communicative activities. Research in this field typically focuses on four main areas: (i) establishing theoretical models for spoken language development, (ii) researching effective evaluation methods for oral English, (iii) exploring the characteristics and patterns of oral expression, and (iv) enhancing teaching methodologies.

Moreover, scholars have highlighted the relevance of communication strategies, individual differences, and the balance between fluency, accuracy, and complexity in oral expression. Despite these efforts, much of the existing research has primarily targeted freshmen and middle school students, leaving the needs of college students underexplored. Fewer studies have assessed the current state and critical issues of students' oral proficiency, particularly in higher education, with a predominant focus on fluency, accuracy, and complexity.

Skehan (1996) affirms that fluency, accuracy, and complexity are fundamental indicators of oral proficiency. Crookes and Wigglesworth further suggest that communication validity can be evaluated by examining grammatical accuracy in learners' oral expressions. According to Jiang and Zhou (2022), a comprehensive assessment of spoken language ability should also include dimensions such as accuracy, richness, coherence, fluency, appropriateness, and flexibility.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study applies a non-experimental design, focusing on observing and measuring variables without direct intervention. It employs a mixed-methods approach, as described by Hernández, Fernández, and Baptista (2003), which combines qualitative and quantitative methodologies, allowing for an integrated analysis throughout the research process. This methodology leverages the advantages of both approaches, despite adding complexity to the study design.

Research Design

The independent variable of the study is participation in professional internships, while the dependent variable is the development of English oral expression skills for A2-level students in the tourism field. These variables are explored through qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques.

Data Collection Techniques

Quantitative Analysis:

- Statistical analysis was conducted using descriptive and inferential techniques.
- Metrics such as means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions were utilized to evaluate the extent of improvement in speaking skills.
- Surveys with Likert-scale questions measured participants' self-assessment of fluency, vocabulary, and confidence.

Qualitative Analysis:

- Thematic analysis was employed to analyze responses to open-ended questions, identifying recurring themes and insights into participants' language development during internships.
- Data were coded and categorized to extract meaningful narratives reflecting students' experiences.

Population and Sampling

The study involved a sample of 41 participants (14 males and 27 females) aged 20–23 years, predominantly of Hispanic descent, with 95% from Manabí province, Ecuador. A heterogeneous composition was ensured by including participants from cities like Manta, Portoviejo, and other regions. Most participants come from lower-middle-class backgrounds, with 98% having attended public schools. Economically, many families rely on incomes near the minimum wage, with 5% of participants holding part-time jobs.

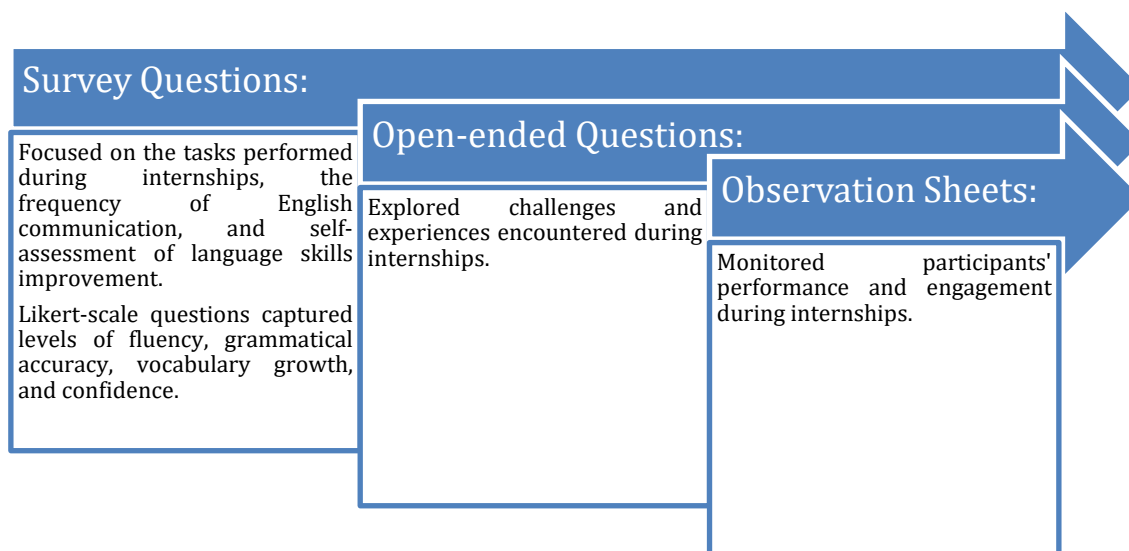
All participants demonstrated A2-level English proficiency and engaged in pre-professional practices in tourism-related settings, such as travel agencies, cruise terminals, airports, and museums.

Ethical Considerations

Prior informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring voluntary participation and confidentiality of responses. Ethical guidelines on data handling, anonymity, and privacy were rigorously followed. Participants retained the right to withdraw at any stage without repercussions.

Illustration 1

Instruments of the study



The instruments used in this study are demonstrated in Illustration 1, which provides a detailed overview of the tools employed for data collection and analysis. These instruments include surveys with Likert-scale questions to measure fluency, vocabulary, and confidence, open-ended questions to explore students' experiences and challenges, and observation sheets to assess performance and engagement during internships.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents a detailed analysis of the survey responses, illustrating the impact of professional internships on various dimensions of language learning. The findings are organized into two key areas: (1) the independent variable—participation in professional internships, and (2) the dependent variable—development of English oral expression skills. The results not only highlight the effectiveness of internships as a pedagogical tool but also identify challenges that require attention to optimize learning outcomes. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of how professional settings can support second language acquisition and align with theoretical perspectives on active and contextualized learning.

Table 1
Independent Variable Results

Dimension/Item	Most Frequent Response	Other Observations
Q1: Hours dedicated to professional internships	16 hours per week (60%)	30% dedicate 20 hours 10% dedicate 10 hours
Q2: Tasks involving English communication	Customer service (50%)	Managing reservations (30%) Assisting in tourism activities (20%)
Q3: Interaction with native English speakers	Weekly (40%)	Monthly (35%) Never (25%)
Q4: Contribution of internships to English communication skills	Significant or intensive (70%)	Moderate (20%) Minimal (10%)
Q5: Level of supervision received for improving English skills	Significant (50%)	Moderate (30%) Minimal or none (20%)

Table 2
Dependent Variable Results

Dimension/Item	Most Frequent Response	Other Observations
Q6: Fluency in oral English before starting internships	Fair (35%)	Poor (40%), Good (25%)
Q7: Improvement in grammatical accuracy	Agree (60%)	Strongly agree (25%) Neutral (10%) Disagree (5%)
Q8: Vocabulary expansión	Agree (65%)	Neutral (20%) Disagree (15%)
Q9: Increase in confidence when communicating in English	Agree (35%)	Neutral (10%) Disagree (20%)
Q10: Challenges encountered while enhancing oral skills	Nervousness interacting with native speakers (50%)	Limited technical vocabulary (30%) Listening comprehension difficulties (20%)

This study highlights the significant role that professional internships play in developing English oral expression skills for A2-level students in the tourism sector. The findings

demonstrate that internships provide students with meaningful opportunities to enhance their fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, and confidence in real-world contexts. These outcomes align with theoretical perspectives, such as those of Gass and Mackey (2015), who emphasize the importance of interaction and output in second language acquisition, and Skehan (1996), who underscores the value of task-based approaches in promoting communicative competence.

Students reported notable improvements in their language skills, particularly when exposed to tasks that required active use of English, such as customer service and reservations management. However, challenges such as limited interaction with native speakers and insufficient supervision highlight areas for improvement in internship design. Addressing these gaps can further optimize the learning experience and maximize the potential benefits of internships.

The integration of social and metacognitive strategies, as discussed by Burešová (2007) and Raofi (n.d.), proved to be instrumental in fostering self-regulation and active engagement among students. These strategies not only enhanced language development but also encouraged students to approach their learning with greater confidence and autonomy.

In conclusion, professional internships represent a valuable pedagogical tool for bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. By refining internship programs to include more structured support, increased interaction with native speakers, and targeted feedback, educational institutions can further empower students to succeed in both their academic and professional pursuits. Future research should explore the long-term impact of internships on language proficiency and their potential application across different educational and cultural contexts.

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