

El Uso del Inglés con Fines Específicos (ESP) para Mejorar las Habilidades Orales en Estudiantes de Nivel A2

The Use of the ESP to Improve Speaking Skills in A2 Level Learners

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INFORMACIÓN DEL ARTÍCULO

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RESUMEN

Hoy en día, el uso del inglés se ha convertido en un requisito clave en entornos académicos y profesionales. Según el Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las Lenguas (MCER), los estudiantes de nivel A2 se clasifican como Usuarios Básicos que requieren apoyo para desarrollar eficazmente las cuatro habilidades principales: comprensión auditiva, lectura, expresión oral y escritura. Entre estas, la expresión oral suele representar el mayor desafío. En consecuencia, esta investigación tiene como objetivo examinar cómo el enfoque de Inglés con Fines Específicos (ESP, por sus siglas en inglés) puede utilizarse como estrategia pedagógica para mejorar las habilidades orales en estudiantes de nivel A2, alineando las tareas de aprendizaje con las necesidades reales del ámbito profesional y académico. El estudio aplica un enfoque de métodos mixtos, que incluye revisión de literatura, análisis deductivo e inductivo, y recolección de datos mediante pre-test y post-test, encuestas de percepción, entrevistas semiestructuradas y rúbricas evaluativas alineadas con los criterios del MCER. Los materiales y actividades se adaptaron para simular la comunicación en el lugar de trabajo, enfatizando el vocabulario específico y actividades como juegos de roles. Los resultados demuestran mejoras significativas en fluidez, pronunciación, uso de terminología técnica y motivación estudiantil, evidenciando que el enfoque ESP constituye una estrategia pedagógica efectiva para el desarrollo de competencias comunicativas orales en contextos técnicos y profesionales.

Palabras clave: Inglés con Fines Específicos, habilidades orales, estudiantes A2, tareas comunicativas, motivación



ABSTRACT

In today's globalized academic and professional settings, proficiency in English has become an essential requirement. According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), A2-level learners are classified as Basic Users who require continuous support to effectively develop the four core language skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Among these, speaking often represents the greatest challenge. Consequently, this study aims to explore how the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approach can be implemented as a pedagogical strategy to enhance the oral proficiency of A2-level students by aligning learning tasks with authentic academic and professional needs. The research employs a mixed-methods design, integrating literature review, deductive and inductive analysis, and data collection through pre- and post-tests, perception surveys, semi-structured interviews, and evaluation rubrics aligned with CEFR standards. The materials and activities were adapted to replicate workplace communication, emphasizing domain-specific vocabulary and interactive tasks such as role plays. The findings reveal notable progress in fluency, pronunciation, use of technical terminology, and learner motivation, demonstrating that the ESP approach constitutes an effective pedagogical strategy for fostering oral communicative competence in technical and professional contexts.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes, oral skills, A2 learners, communicative tasks, motivation

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, mastering the English language has become a fundamental tool for academic and professional development. As the most widely spoken international language, English plays a fundamental role in higher education institutions, particularly for students preparing to enter competitive labor markets. For this reason, educational systems around the world, including Ecuador, have adopted the reference of languages the Common European Framework (CEFR) as a standard for teaching, evaluating, and certifying language proficiency. The CEFR outlines six levels of language competence—A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2—grouped under the categories of Basic, Independent, and Proficient Users. These levels serve as guidelines for educators in developing curricula and instructional practices aligned with learners' real needs.

Among these levels, A2 is considered a basic but foundational stage. Students at this level are expected to produce simple connected phrases and interact in routine contexts requiring direct exchange of information. However, helping learners reach these outcomes presents significant challenges, especially in the productive skill of speaking. The CEFR (2020, p. 130) defines A2-level speaking users as individuals who have a basic language repertoire that enables them to deal with cotidianous situations with predictable vocabulary. Moreover, they express specific needs of daily routine and possess "a limited repertoire of short, memorized phrases covering predictable survival situations."

Despite these descriptors, many A2 students struggle with fluency, vocabulary recall, pronunciation, and confidence when speaking. Teachers often encounter additional obstacles such as low motivation, high anxiety, and lack of relevant instructional materials. As noted by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), language instruction becomes more effective when it is directly related to the learners' needs, especially in professional or academic settings.

In this sense, an effective approach that support these issues is English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The ESP focuses on teaching English tailored to the specific learner's fields, such as electricity, software development, or gastronomy. This approach utilizes real-world tasks, specialized vocabulary, simulations, and role-plays that

align with the communicative demands of students' future careers. According to Trujeque-Moreno et al. (2021), ESP provides learners with targeted linguistic tools that allow them to participate meaningfully in academic or work-related interactions. In the Ecuadorian context, where technical and vocational education is gaining prominence, integrating ESP into language classrooms can help bridge the gap between language learning and professional application.

This study is conducted in a High Technological Institution, located in Imbabura, Ecuador. The institution attends students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and academic disciplines to explore technical studies. In addition, English is a mandatory component of their academic programs, often required for graduation and job placement. The research specifically examines the implementation of ESP-based speaking activities in A2-level English courses. These activities are adapted to each student's field of study and designed to enhance their ability to communicate in realistic professional scenarios.

The mixed methods approach is applied in this research, combining quantitative data from pre- and post-tests with qualitative insights from interviews and student surveys. According to the instruments such as speaking rubrics, task-based evaluations, and reflective questionnaires allow the researcher to analyze both linguistic improvement and students' perceptions of the learning experience. This methodology aligns with Creswell and Creswell (2018), who argue that mixed methods provide a more comprehensive understanding of complex educational phenomena.

Previous studies reinforce the value of context-based instruction. Cabrera Chávez, Campoverde López, and Bonilla Tenesaca (2025) found that authentic, work-related experiences such as internships improve speaking performance in A2 students by increasing their exposure to professional discourse. Similarly, Khaferi and Bektashi (2020) emphasized the importance of designing ESP curricula that reflect the communicative needs of the target context.

The present research aims to demonstrate the impact of ESP on the speaking proficiency of A2 learners by analyzing how the use of field-specific materials and communicative tasks enhances oral interaction. Students engage in simulations such as giving technical instructions, describing procedures, or partici-

pating in mock client conversations. These activities are aligned with a CEFR-based speaking rubric that evaluates fluency, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and interaction.

In sum, this study is grounded in the theoretical principles of ESP and CEFR proficiency descriptors. It responds to a pressing pedagogical need: how to effectively develop speaking skills in Basic Users using meaningful and engaging strategies. By incorporating ESP into the A2 English classroom, educators can offer students not only linguistic competence but also confidence and preparedness for real-life communication in their chosen fields

METHODS

To accomplish the objective of this study, a non-experimental design was selected. This approach focused on observing and measuring the impact of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction on the speaking skills of A2-level learners without manipulating variables. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, which combines quantitative and qualitative techniques to allow a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of ESP in enhancing oral communication. This method permits the researcher to gather objective data on students' progress while also exploring their live experiences and perceptions regarding the relevance of ESP content (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Research Design

The independent variable was English for Specific Purposes (ESP), implemented through contextualized speaking activities and materials related to students' academic fields, such as electricity, gastronomy, and software development. The dependent variable was speaking skills, evaluated according to CEFR descriptors using a structured rubric (Council of Europe, 2020). The study was conducted at the Language Center of Instituto Superior Tecnológico 17 de Julio during the first academic term of 2025.

Procedures

The study was conducted over a period of six weeks. In Week 1, a pre-test and an initial diagnostic survey were administered. From Weeks 2 to 5, learners participated in weekly ESP-based speaking tasks, focusing on real-life communication relevant to their fields. In

Week 6, students completed a post-test, a final survey, and participated in semi-structured interviews. This timeline ensured that data was collected before, during, and after the intervention, allowing for accurate comparison and analysis.

Description of the Instruments

Pre-test and Post-test: Students performed oral tasks related to their career paths. These included describing technical processes, giving instructions, or role-playing professional interactions. The same kind of activity was applied before and after the ESP sessions to measure improvement.

Speaking Rubric: A CEFR-aligned rubric was used to evaluate five aspects: fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, use of ESP vocabulary, and interaction. Each criterion was scored from 0.5 to 2 points, depending on the level of performance.

Student Surveys: Likert-scale questions (ranging from 1 to 5) were used to collect students' self-perceptions regarding motivation, confidence, task relevance, and improvement in speaking. The surveys also included open-ended questions that asked students to reflect on the learning experience.

Semi structured Interviews: The interviews were conducted with selected students to search for their opinions about the materials of ESP and how the lessons relate to their careers and improve their knowledge. In this sense, interviews followed a flexible guide, allowing for spontaneous student responses.

Population and Sampling

The population consisted of approximately 250 A2-level students enrolled in English classes at the Language Center. A sample of 15 students was selected through stratified random sampling, ensuring that students from all 10 academic majors were represented. Selection criteria included: Active enrollment in the A2 English level, no previous experience with ESP instruction, availability throughout the intervention and signed informed consent to participate voluntarily.

Data Collection and Compilation

The statistics was collected following a structured scheme. The Pre-test and post-test results were recorded on printed score sheets, and surveys were admi-

nistered digitally and in print. The interview audio was recorded (with consent) and later transcribed. All responses were labeled using student codes to protect their identity and ensure confidentiality.

Data Entry and Coding

Quantitative data were entered into spreadsheets and reviewed for accuracy. Qualitative data (interview transcripts and open-ended survey responses) were manually coded into categories such as motivation, vocabulary acquisition, fluency development, and confidence. This helped organize the findings for thematic analysis.

Descriptive Analysis

According to the results of the test and the answers survey were analyzed by using descriptive statistics, which also included frequency, percentage, and average scores. These results provided insight into general tendency in learners' performance and attitudes before and after the application.

Thematic Analysis

Open-ended responses and interview transcripts were analyzed to identify recurring themes, such as students feeling more confident, more motivated, or better prepared to communicate in their field of study. This helped the researcher understand the learners' views beyond test scores (Nowell et al., 2017).

Comparative Analysis

For each of the five rubric categories, a contrast was made between pre-test and post-test scores. This analysis highlighted the areas that showed the most improvement and helped measure the effectiveness of the ESP strategy on speaking skills.

Triangulation and Integration

To ensure the reliability of the findings, the triangulation was used by combining results from tests, surveys, and interviews. For example, students who showed improvement in test scores also reported increased confidence in interviews. This integration of data gave a more complete picture of the impact of ESP instruction (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

Ethical Considerations

The Language Center coordinator granted permission to carry out this research with A2-level students. To each participant was given a consent form where was explaining the purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of the study. Students were informed that they will not have consequences if they withdraw any time they want. All data were collected confidentially, and students' names were not used in the analysis or publication. Audio recordings were made only with the written consent of the participants.

RESULTS

This section presents an in-depth analysis of the results obtained from the implementation of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) speaking activities with A2-level learners. The analysis is based on quantitative data collected through a CEFR-aligned speaking rubric and is supported by interpretative discussion grounded in contemporary research on second language acquisition, ESP pedagogy, and communicative competence development. The results are organized into descriptive, comparative, and interpretative subsections to provide a comprehensive understanding of how ESP instruction influenced students' oral performance.

The quantitative analysis of the pre-test and post-test results reveals a clear improvement in students' overall speaking performance after the ESP-based instructional intervention. The evaluation rubric assessed five core components of oral communication—fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, and interaction—each of which is essential for effective spoken communication at the A2 level. As shown in Table 1, the mean total score increased from 5.83 in the pre-test to 7.33 in the post-test, representing an overall gain of 1.50 points, equivalent to a 26.4% improvement. This increase indicates that the majority of students moved closer to meeting the CEFR descriptors for effective basic oral communication, particularly in predictable professional contexts. Such findings are consistent with research suggesting that structured, contextualized language instruction promotes measurable gains in oral proficiency among lower-level learners (Ellis, 2017).

Table 1
Mean Pre-test and Post-test Scores by Speaking Criterion (n = 15)

Speaking Criterion	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Mean Gain	Percentage Increase
Fluency	1.20	1.50	+0.30	+25.0%
Pronunciation	1.40	1.80	+0.40	+28.6%
Grammar	1.27	1.50	+0.23	+18.4%
Vocabulary (ESP)	1.37	1.80	+0.43	+31.7%
Interaction	0.60	0.73	+0.13	+22.2%
Total Score	5.83	7.33	+1.50	+26.4%

The descriptive data indicate that improvement was not limited to a single component of speaking but rather distributed across all assessed criteria. This pattern suggests that ESP instruction supported holistic oral development rather than isolated linguistic gains. According to Nation and Newton (2009), speaking development is most effective when fluency, accuracy, and lexical control are addressed simultaneously through meaningful communicative tasks, a principle that was reflected in the ESP activities implemented in this study.

Comparative Analysis of Speaking Criteria

A closer examination of each speaking criterion reveals differential levels of improvement, highlighting the specific areas in which ESP instruction had the strongest impact. Fluency demonstrated a 25% increase, indicating that students became more capable of producing continuous speech with reduced hesitation and greater automaticity. This improvement can be attributed to repeated opportunities for oral production in simulated professional scenarios, which encouraged students to prioritize message delivery over form. Research by Skehan (2018) emphasizes that task repetition and goal-oriented communication play a crucial role in developing fluency, particularly for learners at basic proficiency levels.

Pronunciation showed a notable improvement of 28.6%, suggesting enhanced intelligibility and phonological control. The use of role-plays, dialogues, and profession-related simulations exposed learners to frequent spoken input and output, facilitating phonological noticing and self-monitoring. According to Derwing and Munro (2015), pronunciation development is more

effective when learners focus on intelligibility in meaningful contexts rather than isolated drills, which aligns with the ESP-based instructional design of this study.

Grammatical accuracy increased by 18.4%, reflecting gradual but meaningful progress. While grammar gains were smaller compared to other criteria, this outcome is expected given the developmental nature of grammatical acquisition at the A2 level. Learners at this stage rely heavily on memorized structures and formulaic language, and substantial grammatical restructuring typically requires longer exposure (Larsen-Freeman, 2015). Nevertheless, the observed improvement indicates that ESP tasks provided sufficient opportunities for learners to practice grammatical forms in context, reinforcing accuracy through use rather than explicit instruction alone.

Vocabulary exhibited the highest improvement rate at 31.7%, confirming the effectiveness of ESP in expanding learners' lexical repertoire. The consistent use of field-specific terminology enabled students to acquire and apply vocabulary that was directly relevant to their academic and professional interests. Research by Coxhead (2018) highlights that vocabulary learning is significantly enhanced when lexical items are repeatedly encountered in meaningful, domain-specific contexts, a condition that was clearly met in this intervention.

Interaction, although showing the lowest absolute scores, improved by 22.2%, indicating increased learner participation in spoken exchanges. Interactional competence involves turn-taking, responding appropriately, and maintaining simple conversations, all of which are challenging for A2 learners. However, the

improvement observed suggests that ESP activities fostered a more supportive communicative environment, reducing anxiety and encouraging participation. According to Galante and Thomson (2017), task-based interaction helps learners develop pragmatic awareness and conversational confidence, even at lower proficiency levels.

To avoid excessive data redundancy and improve readability, individual learner progress was summarized using aggregated indicators rather than full individual listings. Table 2 presents the distribution of improvement ranges observed among participants based on their total pre-test and post-test speaking scores. This approach allows for a clearer interpretation of overall learner progress patterns while maintaining analytical precision. All participants demonstrated positive gains, confirming that the ESP-based intervention had a consistently favorable effect across the sample.

The distribution shown in Table 2 reveals that the majority of learners (53.4%) achieved improvement rates above 30%, indicating substantial development in speaking performance following the ESP intervention. Students who demonstrated gains above 40% were primarily those with lower initial proficiency, suggesting that contextualized instruction may be particularly effective for learners who initially experience greater

difficulty in oral communication. This pattern supports research indicating that task-based and needs-oriented instruction often yields higher relative gains among lower-level learners due to increased relevance and reduced affective barriers (Ellis, 2017). At the same time, learners with higher initial scores also showed consistent, albeit more moderate, improvement, reflecting a ceiling effect commonly observed in short-term pedagogical interventions.

Importantly, no participant exhibited stagnation or regression in speaking performance, which reinforces the pedagogical value of ESP as an inclusive instructional approach. The universal positive trend observed across the sample suggests that aligning speaking tasks with students' academic and professional contexts can enhance engagement and sustain effort throughout the learning process. These findings align with motivational models of second language acquisition that emphasize the role of goal relevance and perceived usefulness in promoting sustained learner progress (Al-Hoorie, 2018). Consequently, the aggregated analysis of individual improvement provides strong evidence that ESP-based instruction supports equitable speaking development among A2-level learners while maintaining feasibility for classroom implementation and academic reporting.

Table 2
Distribution of Individual Improvement Levels in Total Speaking Scores (n = 15)

Improvement Range (%)	Number of Students	Percentage of Sample
0–10%	2	13.3%
11–20%	3	20.0%
21–30%	4	26.7%
31–40%	4	26.7%
Above 40%	2	13.3%
Total	15	100%

Interpretative Integration of Results

The overall findings suggest that ESP-based instruction provides an effective pedagogical framework for enhancing speaking skills at the A2 level. By situating language use within authentic, profession-oriented scenarios, students were able to practice speaking in ways that mirrored real-world communicative demands. This contextualization appears to have reduced cognitive load and speaking anxiety, allowing learners to focus on meaning construction rather than linguistic form alone. Research on situated learning supports this interpretation, arguing that knowledge acquisition is more effective when embedded in realistic contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Furthermore, the balanced improvement across fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and interaction suggests that ESP tasks facilitated integrated skill development rather than fragmented learning. This outcome aligns with usage-based theories of language learning, which posit that repeated meaningful use of language leads to gradual restructuring of linguistic competence (Bybee, 2010). The results of this study therefore provide empirical support for the claim that ESP instruction is particularly suitable for learners in technical and vocational education, where language is best learned as a tool for professional communication rather than as an abstract system.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the effectiveness of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as a pedagogical strategy for improving the speaking skills of A2-level learners in a technical higher education context. The findings indicate that ESP-based instruction produced consistent improvements across all evaluated components of oral proficiency, including fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, and interaction. The overall increase in post-test scores demonstrates that contextualizing language instruction around learners' professional and academic needs facilitates more meaningful oral communication and supports the development of communicative competence at the basic user level. These results confirm that purpose-driven language instruction enhances learner engagement and promotes measurable speaking gains within relatively short instructional periods (Long, 2015).

The analysis also revealed that all participants benefited from the ESP intervention, with particularly strong relative improvements among learners with lower initial speaking proficiency. This suggests that ESP instruction contributes to a more inclusive learning environment by reducing affective barriers and increasing learners' confidence in using English for real-world purposes. From a pedagogical perspective, the findings support the integration of ESP-oriented speaking activities in technical and vocational education programs, as such activities bridge the gap between language learning and professional application. Although the limited sample size restricts the generalizability of the results, the study provides valuable evidence of the effectiveness of ESP as a practical and learner-centered approach for fostering oral communicative competence in A2-level learners and highlights its potential for broader application in similar educational contexts.

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