

The Link Between Argumentative Discourse and Spoken Fluency

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to analyze the effectiveness of the systematic instruction of argumentative discourse in assisting English as a second language (ESL) students of the University of Costa Rica (UCR) in developing spoken fluency at a B2 level in LM-1361, Communication and Pronunciation Techniques II. For this purpose, 21 former LM-1361 students were surveyed and 2 course instructors were interviewed. The findings of this study suggest that the instruction of argumentative discourse in LM-1361 through the use of class discussions, impromptu debates, and persuasive speeches has allowed a number of third-year ESL students to successfully overcome basic spoken fluency issues such as limited vocabulary, double utterances, and blank mind.

In the last two decades, economic sectors such as Information Technology and Services have shown a continuous growth in Costa Rica (Avendaño 2017). Job profiles in these sectors often require applicants to be proficient at speaking English, a requirement that nearly two thirds of Costa Ricans do not fulfil (Sánchez 2018). A number of scholars have proposed several approaches to assist English as a second language (ESL) students in developing spoken fluency. One of these, the indirect approach, aims at developing ESL students' spoken fluency by maximizing their output with spontaneous conversations (Nazara 2011). Based on this approach, it can be theorized that techniques as debates and persuasive speeches, which require speakers to adapt to unpredictable situations, might be effective to develop ESL students' spoken fluency.

No previous studies on the correlation between the instruction of argumentative discourse and ESL students' development of spoken fluency have been conducted in the School of Modern Languages at University of Costa Rica (UCR). Therefore, the objective of this study is to analyze the effectiveness of the systematic instruction of argumentative discourse in the course LM-1361, Communication and Pronunciation Techniques II, in assisting ESL students of the UCR to reach a B2 level in spoken fluency, according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages. In this light, this study attempts to answer the following questions: How effectively has the systematic instruction of argumentative discourse in LM-1361, Communication and Pronunciation Techniques II, been at assisting ESL students of the University of Costa Rica in developing spoken fluency proficiency at a B2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages?

- I. What spoken fluency issues still arise among former LM-1361 students?
- II. What techniques do fourth-year ESL students consider to have helped them develop spoken fluency in LM-1361?

- III. How do assessment practices implemented in LM-1361 assist ESL students in developing spoken fluency?

Review of the Literature

The mastering of English spoken fluency has become a main priority for non-native English speakers in the last two decades. Not only does knowing English facilitate travelling to other countries and browsing information on the internet, but also it increases the chances of people to become employed. In the last twenty years, jobs that require the mastery of English fluency have proliferated in Costa Rica's economy (Sánchez, 2018). Nevertheless, most applicants for these kinds of jobs fail to show an adequate competence in English spoken fluency (Villalobos, 2018). In order to understand the nature and limitations of second language spoken fluency instruction, an extensive examination of literature on this field was conducted. The consulted literature revealed a number of trends regarding English spoken fluency: definitions, challenges for English as a second language (ESL) students to master spoken fluency, recurrent spoken fluency issues among ESL students, causes of poor spoken fluency, strategies to master spoken fluency, assessment practices to measure and improve students' spoken fluency, limitations of most public high schools at developing English spoken fluency on students in Costa Rica, and the importance of spoken fluency. However, the review of the literature will only focus on the three most relevant trends to understand spoken fluency: common causes of spoken fluency problems among ESL students, strategies to master spoken fluency, and spoken fluency assessments.

The causes of poor spoken fluency are numerous and substantial. Gan (2012) observed that ESL students with a limited oral vocabulary repertoire, on average, find difficult to speak fluently because the vocabulary they use for writing and the one they use for speaking are different (p.49). To illustrate, Kamil and Hiebert claimed that vocabulary can be divided into two

categories based on the way the human brain processes information: print vocabulary and oral vocabulary (as cited in Fitriani, 2015, p.5). Print vocabulary comprises words that a person has learned through reading and writing while oral vocabulary includes words that have been learned by speaking and reading aloud (p.5). Khan argued that speakers are likely to make mistakes when they use print vocabulary to formulate sentences for the first time (as cited in Fitriani, 2015, p.5). Another cause of a deficient spoken fluency is insufficient language input (Gan 2012), which hampers ESL students' ability to join impromptu conversations. Evans and Green learned in a study conducted among first-year ESL college students that novice ESL learners frequently encounter difficulties in speaking about topics beyond their expertise (as cited in Gan, 2012, p.47). Nazara (2011) acknowledged that speaking is "a social multi-sensory speech event, whose topic is unpredictable" (p.30). Gan (2012) has observed that improvising is so challenging for novice ESL students that they tend to sacrifice grammar, fluency, or pronunciation to focus on content (p.50). High levels of anxiety might also affect the spoken fluency of ESL students. Lawrie (as cited in Fitriani, 2015, p.2) argued that negative emotions such as stress might obscure individuals' speech. Similarly, Spielberg emphasized that anxiety might disrupt cognitive functions such as learning and speaking (as cited in Fitriani, 2015, p.6). He observed that anxious ESL students often forget their ideas and struggle to fluently make logical connections. To sum up, most spoken fluency problems are often caused by limited oral vocabulary, insufficient language immersion, and high levels of anxiety.

The literature consulted reviews several teaching strategies to facilitate ESL students' mastery of spoken fluency. According to Kroeker (as cited in Nazara, 2011, p.32), three strategies widely used for this purpose are the indirect approach, the direct approach, and the indirect plus approach. Dornyei and Thurrell (as cited in Nazara, 2011, p.32) explained that the indirect approach is a semi-structured speaking strategy that allows upper level English students to master

spoken fluency by encouraging active participation in spontaneous oral exchanges. This approach derives from the belief that students can only master spoken fluency by having impromptu, meaningful conversations (p.32). Al Hosni (2014) emphasized that language input is not enough to master spoken fluency, but students of a second language need to take part in genuine conversations since “the processing of comprehension is different from the processing of production” (p.23). Without practicing output, which is the application of knowledge acquired through input, students will hardly master spoken fluency because to efficiently formulate meaningful sentences by discriminating information learned through input is a complex task (p.23). To illustrate, Kirsner (2011) estimated that most people become capable of articulating one word every two seconds in their second language after a few hundreds of practice hours, which significantly contrasts with the average production of 2.5 words per second in their first language. He observed that second language spoken fluency “does not intersect with first language performance until somewhere between 10,000 and 100,000 hours of practice” (p.124). The second teaching strategy for mastering spoken fluency is the direct approach. According to Dornyei and Thurrell, the direct approach aims to systematically teach pronunciation, grammar, and spoken fluency by analyzing discourse and the process of second language acquisition (as cited in Nazara, 2011, p.32). Sayer (as cited in Nazara, 2011, p.32) claimed that in this kind of approach, students are required to use techniques such as recording and transcribing their own speeches to identify and correct frequent mistakes that they make when they speak. The last teaching strategy for mastering spoken fluency is the indirect plus approach. Nazara (2011) explained that this approach develops spoken fluency by “highlighting specific language input and exposure to real speaking with consciousness-raising time in systematically sequenced activities” (p.33) In this approach, techniques that encourage language input and output are fundamental to assist students in developing spoken fluency. Some examples of techniques that

maximize language input and output are to study abroad and to speak with native speakers (Mora and Valls-Ferrer, 2012, p.620). Nevertheless, few students have the opportunity of employing these techniques. Other alternatives to develop spoken fluency in a second language are watching videos and listening to music in the target language (Bahrani 2011). In brief, the indirect approach, the direct approach, and the indirect plus approach are the most common strategies employed to assist second language students in mastering spoken fluency.

The assessment of spoken fluency has been evolving through the juxtaposition of scholars' different notions of the nature of spoken fluency. Ginther (2013) claimed that fluency is one of the most challenging speaking micro skills to assess for language instructors (p1). According to Browne and Fulcher (2017), “[spoken] fluency is as much about perception as it is about performance” (p.37). Davies (as cited in Browne and Fulcher, 2017, p.38) stressed that language instructors often misunderstand the concept of fluency as some of them think that second language students become fluent when they achieve a native-like speaking performance. He argued that this perception was flawed because even among native speakers of a language, spoken fluency skills are not homogenous (as cited in Browne and Fulcher, 2017, p.38). For Koponen and Riggenbach, spoken fluency is the ability to make speech “flow like a river” (as cited in Browne and Fulcher, 2017, p.38). Fluent speech has to be “smooth and effortless in its passage from mind to articulation” (as cited in Browne and Fulcher, 2017, p.38). Koponen and Riggenbach emphasized that a correct pronunciation is part of spoken fluency because effective articulation involves clear and accurate oral production (p.38). Ginther (2013) believed that to effectively assess spoken fluency, instructors should have at hand “a method for elicitation” such as rating scales and undergo a training process for learning to accurately analyze speech, (p.1). Rating scales for language analysis comprise qualitative descriptions of students' speaking macro and micro skills arranged in a hierarchical order (Ginther, 2013, p.3). According to Ginther

(2013), the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages is one of the most frequently used frameworks to analyze language acquisition. It provides a series of charts that standardize descriptions of language proficiency levels for macro skills and micro skills. These descriptions are arranged in six tiers that start with A1 (language breakthrough), at the bottom of the hierarchy, and finish with C2 (language mastery), at the top (Ginther, 2013, p.4). In addition to employing a rating scale to measure spoken fluency, instructors have to design assessments to generate suitable conditions in which students can demonstrate their language skills without feeling stressed. Hitherto, the most effective assessment to measure spoken fluency skills is direct tests, which assist instructors in evaluating student's "speaking skills in actual performance" (Ginther, 2013, p.1). Originally, direct tests comprised oral proficiency interviews that course instructors conducted with students. These interviews included a series of topical questions that increased in difficulty as the interview advanced, with the objective of measuring students' speaking skills depth. However, this kind of assessments were constantly criticized by academics in the past because students did not speak to average people in these kinds of interviews but to examiners, which might have caused nervousness and anxiety on students (Ginther, 2013, p.2). Nowadays, direct tests have evolved into speaking assessments that make students have conversations in pairs or groups to create more natural speaking environments where students can be evaluated (Ginther, 2013, p.2). In short, this section discussed definitions of spoken fluency, the most common framework used to measure this micro skill, and the most influential assessment practice used to create suitable conditions for analyzing students' spoken fluency.

To conclude, limited oral vocabulary, insufficient language immersion, and high levels of anxiety are usually the major causes of spoken fluency issues among ESL learners. The indirect approach, the direct approach, and the indirect plus approach are the most common strategies currently employed to assist ESL students in mastering spoken fluency. Additionally, scholars'

different notions of the nature of spoken fluency have led to the creation of several methods to assess spoken fluency; one of these methods is to use rating scales such as the Common European Framework of Reference for languages to evaluate the performance of ESL students in direct tests, which are spoken interactions among two or more students supervised by course instructors.

Methodology

The objective of this study is to analyze the effectiveness of the systematic instruction of argumentative discourse in assisting English as a second language (ESL) students of the University of Costa Rica (UCR) in developing spoken fluency at a B2 level in LM-1361, Communication and Pronunciation Techniques II. The study was conducted during the second semester of 2019.

The participants of this study were a group of 21 fourth-year students and two course instructors of LM-1361, the last third-year oral course on the curriculum of B.A in English and B.A in English Teaching of UCR. One of the goals of this course is to assist ESL students in developing spoken fluency through the instruction of argumentative discourse (see Appendix A). The students selected for this study had already enrolled and passed LM-1361; thus, they were expected to have developed spoken fluency proficiency, at least, at a B2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages. The experts for this study were two current instructors of LM-1361 who had been teaching English as a foreign language oral courses at UCR for more than eight years.

Two instruments were designed to gather data from the participants, a survey for the students and an interview for the experts. The survey for students was divided into three sections that comprised scales, checklists, and questionnaires. In the first section, the students were required to explain to what degree common oral production issues such as hesitation, fillers, and

blank mind still hampered their spoken fluency proficiency. Additionally, they had to cite the possible reasons why those issues had not been overcome yet. In the second section, the students had to indicate the level of frequency in which they used out-of-class techniques to ease the process of mastering spoken fluency and explain whether or not in-class teaching techniques in LM-1361 had assisted them in developing spoken fluency. In the last section, students assessed the effectiveness of debates and persuasive speeches in honing their spoken fluency in LM-1361, and they had to self-assess their current spoken fluency proficiency. The experts' interviews consisted of seven open-ended questions that aimed at gathering the course instructors' perspectives regarding the most common issues affecting their students' spoken fluency and the strategies and evaluations currently used in LM-1361 to assist ESL students in the process of mastering spoken fluency.

In this context, former LM-1361 students' current spoken fluency proficiency will be analyzed through a study of past literature and views of ESL university instructors. Henceforth, the findings of the data collection process are revealed.

Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study is to analyze the effectiveness of the systematic instruction of argumentative discourse in LM-1361, Communication and Pronunciation Techniques II, to assist English as a second language (ESL) students of the University of Costa Rica in developing spoken fluency proficiency at a B2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages. This section aims at analyzing the data collected from students and course instructors during the second semester of 2019 to determine the possible causes of unresolved spoken fluency issues still affecting former LM-1361 students and the role of teaching strategies and assessment practices implemented in LM-1361 to assist ESL students in developing spoken fluency.

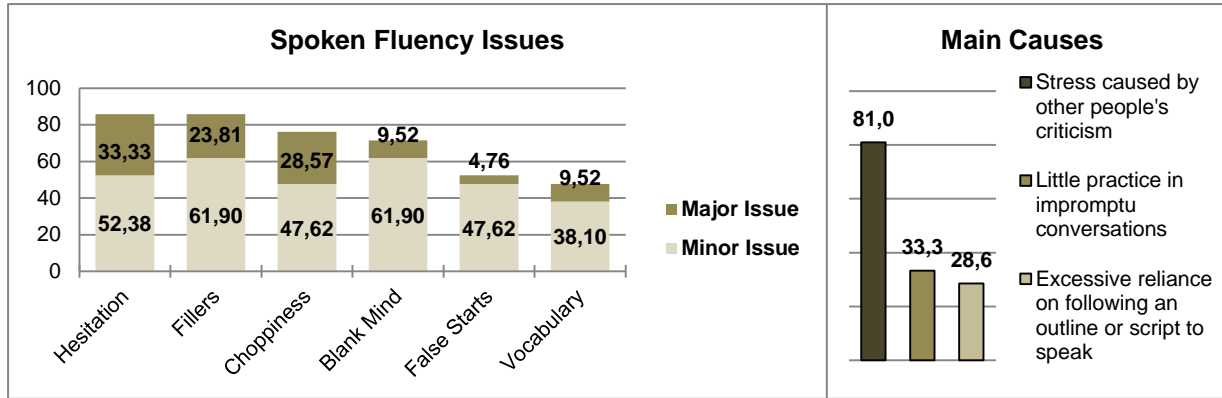


Figure 1. Common spoken fluency issues among former students of LM-1361 and their main causes.

Figure 1 displays unresolved spoken fluency issues that hindered former LM-1361 students' spoken proficiency from mastering spoken fluency and the possible causes of those issues. As can be seen, a staggering number of students reported some difficulty to master spoken fluency across six kinds of issues. However, four of these seem to be more prevalent among those students. Over four fifths of the participants acknowledged that they constantly hesitated and unconsciously used fillers in spoken interactions. Nearly three quarters of the participants expressed that both their speech was choppy and sluggish and that their mind sometimes went blank. These findings correlate with C. González's perception that some LM-1361 students have flawed speaking performances. She has observed that LM-1361 students often use a number of fillers and words with no lexical value when they speak, which limits their fluency and, thus, the delivery of their message; these fillers are "like," "so," and "yeah" among the most English-proficient students while among the least English-proficient students, fillers are typically interjections (personal communication, October 22, 2019). González also points out that some of her students often go blank and make false starts because they "memorize their discourse, which results in relatively more fluent speech until they forget a word or key phrase and then their fluency plummets, for they need to retrace their steps and repeat entire phrases and ideas to recall

the forgotten word or phrase. This results in [. . .] double utterances” (personal communication, October 22, 2019). According to Gan (2012), these issues seem to be normal for ESL learners because speaking, theoretically, is an impromptu activity (p.50). He argued that improvisation is so difficult for novice ESL students that they often sacrifice grammar, fluency, or pronunciation to focus on content (p.50). On average, most former LM-1361 students claimed that the previously mentioned issues did not distort their speech. In other words, they were minor issues. However, for a remarkable number of these students, choppiness, fillers, and constant hesitation were major issues. For example, one third of the participants reported that constant hesitation disrupted their spoken fluency, and almost one fourth of them emphasized that their speech was still extremely choppy and imprecise. These spoken fluency issues could arise after individuals experience overwhelming emotions since slightly over four-fifths of the participants claimed that they had been unable to master spoken fluency so far because of stress caused by other people’s criticisms of their ideas and spoken performances. Lawrie (as cited in Fitriani, 2015, p.2) supported this notion he argued that stress might cloud people’s thoughts, thus obscuring their speech and often driving them to forget their ideas. Similarly, Spielberg (as cited in Fitriani, 2015, p.6) believed that individuals’ speech is highly vulnerable to anxiety. What remains unknown is whether or not stress might be a direct consequence of students’ poor language immersion and overreliance on the use of outlines and scripts to speak since only about one third of the participants viewed these two as major causes of their limited spoken fluency. Overall, Figure 1 suggests that stress hampers the spoken fluency of most former LM-1361 students to some degree because it might lead students to constantly hesitate, use fillers, articulate choppy sentences, and forget ideas.

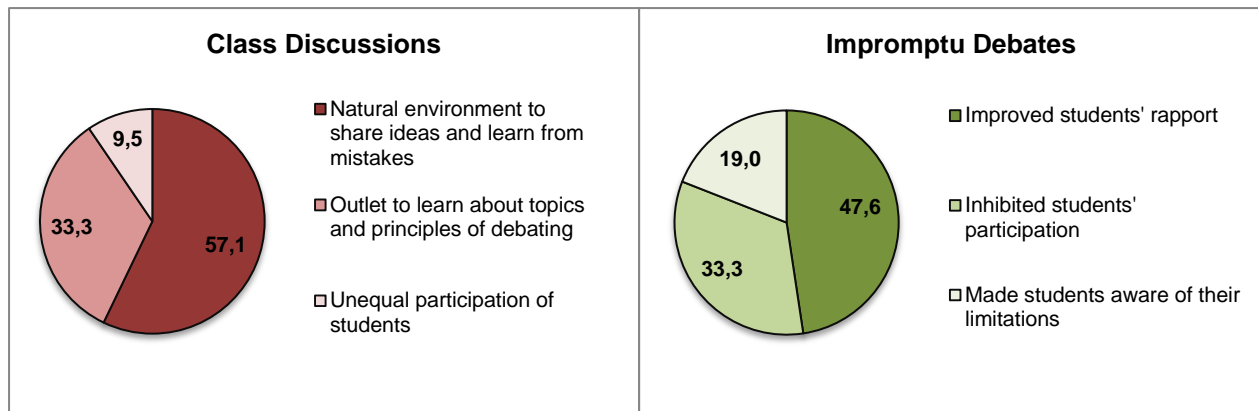


Figure 2. Degree of usefulness of impromptu debates and class discussions for assisting LM-1361 students in developing spoken fluency.

Figure 2 shows the role of class discussions and impromptu debates in ESL students' development of spoken fluency in LM-1361, Communication and Pronunciation Techniques II. A striking number of the participants, over four fifths, believed that class discussions were an effective technique to develop students' spoken fluency: for almost three fifths of the participants, class discussions were an outlet to naturally share their ideas in public while for one third, class discussions were a means to learn about contentious topics and the principles of debating. In addition, González observed that class discussions allowed students to receive feedback from their classmates and to increase language input because, during this kind of activities, students often had to analyze samples of persuasive speeches and attempt to recreate them (personal communication, October 22, 2019). González's description of the methodology employed during class discussions in LM-1361 correlates with the direct approach described by Dornyei and Thurrell, which aimed at systematically instructing pronunciation, grammar, and spoken fluency by making students analyze discourse (as cited in Nazara, 2011, p.32). Based on the participants' perception of class discussions and González's description of their methodology, it might be inferred that this technique was useful to help a number of students overcome spoken fluency issues such as false starts, blank mind, and limited vocabulary, issues that a remarkable

number of former LM-1361 students viewed as minor issues or no issues at all by the time they had passed LM-1361 (see Figure 1). In contrast to the participants' widespread acceptance of class discussions as an effective technique at assisting ESL students in developing spoken fluency, the participants' attitude toward impromptu debates was ambivalent. Half of the participants reported that impromptu debates helped them develop rapport, and one fifth explained that impromptu debates challenged them to speak without memorizing excerpts of their speeches, which allowed them to discover their speaking limitations. However, one third expressed that impromptu debates inhibited their participation because unpredictable confrontations caused them stress. Even though stress was perceived as the main cause of the rise of spoken fluency issues among former LM-1361 students in Figure 1, the assertion that impromptu debates were not a useful technique to assist students in developing spoken fluency because they caused stress might be misleading. According to R. Rojas, despite causing stress, impromptu debates remain as one of the most effective techniques to assure that students develop spoken fluency because they push students to adapt to unpredictable situations: "Most students are afraid of making mistakes, so they memorize their speech; as a consequence, they do not learn to be spontaneous; [. . .] this phenomenon rarely happened during unevaluated impromptu debates because students had to discuss controversial topics that they had not had time to rehearse beforehand, so they had to quickly come up with counterarguments for their peers' statements" (personal communication, October 28, 2019). In this light, impromptu debates do not always worsen students' spoken fluency proficiency but seems to break the boundaries that restrain students from mastering spoken fluency. Just like González had explained in Figure 1, some LM-1361 students hesitated, made double utterances, and forgot ideas in spoken interactions because of memorizing speech (personal communication, October 22, 2019). From Rojas' point of view language students are unlikely to develop spoken fluency if they rely on memorization to speak

because they would not be able to recognize and overcome their speaking limitations: “When [students] have to talk without preparing anything is when [they] notice their problems with vocabulary and structure and their inability to speak in thought groups” (personal communication, October 28, 2019). Similarly, Al Hosni (2014) emphasized that students will hardly develop spoken fluency by being only exposed to language input, but they also need constant practice in authentic conversations, the goal of an indirect approach (p.23). In general terms, both class discussions and impromptu debates have been effective techniques to assist LM-1361 students in developing spoken fluency despite the fact that some students experienced stress because of impromptu debates.

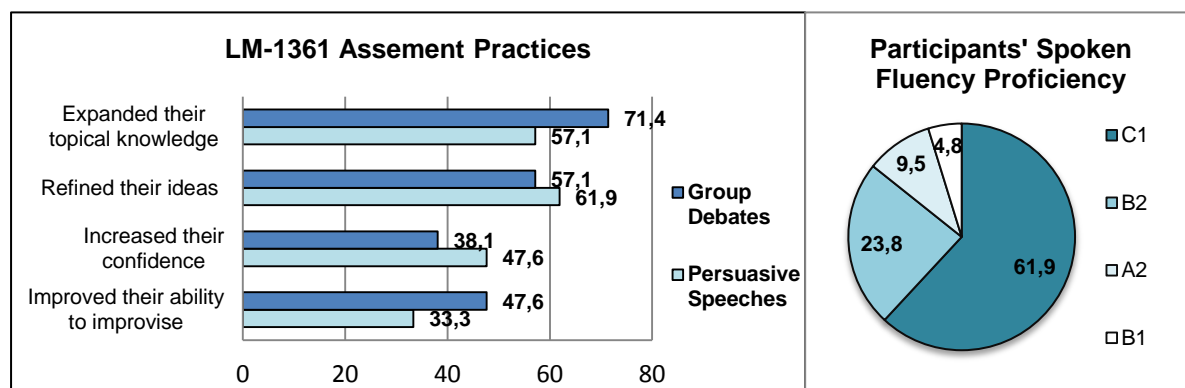


Figure 3. Assessment practices of LM-1361 and participants' spoken fluency proficiency.

Figure 3 reveals the contribution of group debates and persuasive speeches to ESL students' development of spoken fluency in the course LM-1361 and the spoken fluency proficiency of the participants by the time they had passed that course. On average, almost three fifths of the participants reported that group debates and persuasive speeches had been effective evaluations for expanding their topical knowledge and refining their ideas with accuracy and depth; a lower percentage of students, around two fifths on average, claimed that group debates and persuasive speeches increased their confidence and improved their ability to improvise. Taking into consideration that a number of former LM-1361 students discovered some of their

speaking limitations during unevaluated impromptu debates (see Figure 2) and received feedback from their classmates in class discussions as stated by González, some LM-1361 students might have been driven to do intensive research on topics beyond their area of expertise in order to overcome spoken fluency issues such as hesitation and blank mind. According to Rojas, these issues usually arose because of students' superficial understanding of complex topics (personal communication, October 28, 2019). Her observation is correlated with Koponen's and Riggensbach's definition of spoken fluency. They described it as the ability to make speech pass so smoothly and effortlessly from mind to articulation that it flows like a river (as cited in Browne and Fulcher, 2017, p.38). From Rojas' perspective, this ease to clearly think and articulate complex ideas that Koponen and Riggensbach defined as spoken fluency could barely be achieved if speakers do not have a complete knowledge of the topics they have to discuss. To understand the connection between group debates/persuasive speeches and students' development of accuracy and depth of ideas, González explained that these evaluations helped students realize that "not only are there different types of speech, which implies different delivery styles, but also that fluency is defined differently according to the objective of the speech. Fluency is not necessarily fast speech speed; it is sounding natural in specific contexts [. . .] [and using] oral skills, including fluency, purposefully and mindfully" (personal communication, October 22, 2019). The area in which a fewer number of participants reported improvement through persuasive speeches and group debates was improvisation; one third of the participants argued to have boosted their improvisation through persuasive speeches and almost half of them through group debates. Even though these percentages seem rather low, they are still significant because most ESL learners find it difficult to master improvisation (Gan 2012, p.50). Rojas argued that some LM-1361 students might have learned to improvise through impromptu debates and persuasive speeches because in these assessments students had to adapt to the reactions of their

audience (personal communication, October 28, 2019). Approximately 95 percent of the participants claimed to have reached spoken fluency at a B2 or higher level by the time they had passed LM-1361 which supports the notion that group debates and persuasive speeches complemented teaching techniques such as class discussions to further develop LM-1361 students' spoken fluency. In brief, group debates and persuasive speeches were effective assessment practices in developing LM-1361 students' spoken fluency because they allowed students to expand their topical knowledge, refine their ideas, increase their confidence, and improve their ability to improvise.

Conclusion

The results of this study reveal that the systematic instruction of argumentative discourse in LM-1361, Communication and Pronunciation Techniques II, has been effective at assisting ESL students of the University of Costa Rica in developing spoken fluency at a B2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages. Approximately 95 percent of the participants reported to have reached spoken fluency at a B2 or higher level by the time they had passed LM-1361. Spoken fluency issues such as constant hesitation, fillers, choppiness, blank mind, double utterances, and limited vocabulary were in most of the cases minor issues that might be a consequence of stress and anxiety. The majority of the participants claimed that most of these issues had been moderately resolved in LM-1361 through the implementation of class discussions, impromptu debates, and persuasive speeches. These teaching techniques and assessment practices allowed a number of students to naturally share their ideas in public, expand their topical knowledge, develop rapport, become aware of their speaking limitations, refine their ideas, and learn to improvise.

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Appendix A

UNIVERSITY OF COSTA RICA
School of Modern Languages
B.A. in English and B.A. and *Profesorado* in English Teaching
Professors: Alvarado / González / Rojas

COURSE OUTLINE
II semester 2019

Name: Communication and Pronunciation Techniques II	Requisites: LM-1351; LM-1352; LM-1354 or LM-1353
LM -1361	Co-requisites: None
Credits: 4	Type: Plan de Estudios B.A. in English and B. A. and Profesorado in English Teaching
Schedule: 6 hours / week (in-class work) 12 hours/week (out-of-class work)	16 weeks
Level: Third Year	Cycle: II semester

I. DESCRIPTION

LM-1361 is a required third-year course for the majors of “Bachillerato en Inglés” and “Bachillerato en la Enseñanza del Inglés.” It focuses on the production of persuasive and argumentative academic discourse. It aims at improving the students’ fluency and accuracy in oral production and listening skills. Emphasis will be placed on developing critical thinking skills.

II. GENERAL OBJECTIVE

Students will become aware of the importance of being skillful speakers who can do effective critical analysis of ethical issues.

III. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

At the end of the course, the students should be able to:

- produce English at a normal pace when confronting the use of different types of discourse (persuasive, argumentative, justifying, convincing, counter-argumentative, and others);
- use appropriate English intonation, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammatical structures in their oral performance;
- transcribe key words and sentences from the topics studied using IPA 2005 (the

International Phonetic Alphabet);

- interact confidently in persuasive and argumentative contexts as an active participant and as a receptive and analytical listener;
- participate effectively in debates presenting arguments for and against controversial topics;
- discriminate between solid arguments and fallacies or emotional appeals;
- cite the updated sources used to obtain reliable information on various topics.

IV. CONTENTS

A. Discourse Theory: Persuasive Strategies

1. Persuasive Speeches
2. Group debates

B. Phonological Theory

1. Initial and final consonants, and consonant clusters
2. Stress, rhythm and intonation
3. Adjustments in connected speech (linking, deletion, phrasing, pausing and blending)

V. METHODOLOGY

This course will be run as a workshop in which students will be required to participate actively. Impromptu speeches, persuasive discussions and pronunciation practices will be regularly carried out in class.

VI. EVALUATION

Quizzes (minimum 4)	20%
Prepared persuasive speech	15%
Group debate	15%
Exam I (persuasive speech)	25%
Exam II (group debate)	25%

Appendix B

Data Collection Instrument for Students

The following survey aims to analyze the effectiveness of the systematic instruction of argumentative discourse in helping English as second language students of the University of Costa Rica to master spoken fluency in LM-1361, Communication and Pronunciation Techniques II. All the answers are confidential and only for research purposes.

I. Spoken Fluency Issues

A. At what degree do you still need to overcome the following issues to master spoken fluency?

Spoken Fluency Problems	No Issue	Minor Issue	Major Issue
Constant hesitation			
Fillers			
False Starts			
Choppiness			
Blank Mind			
Insufficient vocabulary to express your ideas about specific topics			

B. What do you consider to be **the major cause(s)** of your spoken fluency problems?

Little practice in impromptu conversations	
Stress caused by other people’s criticism of your ideas and oral performance	
Excessive reliance on following an outline or script to speak	

II. Strategies

A. How often did you use the following techniques for mastering spoken fluency in LM-1361, Communication and Pronunciation Techniques II?

Out-of-Class Techniques	Rarely	Often
Rehearsing before debates and speeches		
Watching movies/videos in English		
Speaking with native English speakers		
Recording yourself while speaking about a topic		

B. How effective were the following techniques at helping you master spoken fluency?

In-Class Techniques	Not Useful	Useful
Class discussions		
Small impromptu debates		

Briefly explain why those techniques were useful or not useful for helping you master spoken fluency.

III. Assessments

A. How did the following evaluations help you master spoken fluency in LM-1361?

Contribution to Spoken fluency	Persuasive Speeches	Group Debates
Improved your ability to improvise		
Expanded your knowledge about different topics		
Increased your confidence		
Refined your ideas with accuracy and depth		

B. In terms of stimulating students to master spoken fluency, what deficiencies did you notice in the evaluations of LM-1361?

C. Select **the statement** that best describes your current spoken fluency proficiency.

C2	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.	
C1	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skillfully to those of other speakers.	
B2	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	
B1	I can deal with most situations likely to arise while travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	
A2	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	
A1	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	

Adapted from the CEFR spoken interaction self-assessment grid

Appendix C

Data Collection Instruments for Experts

The following interview aims to analyze the effectiveness of the systematic instruction of argumentative discourse in assisting English as a second language students of the University of Costa Rica to develop spoken fluency in LM-1361, Communication and Pronunciation Techniques II. All the answers are confidential and only for research purposes.

I. Spoken Fluency Issues

- A. What are some of the most common spoken fluency issues among LM-1361 students?
- B. What do you consider to be the main causes of those issues?

II. Strategies to Master Spoken fluency

- A. What pieces of advice do you give students to overcome those issues?
- B. What teaching techniques do you use in class to assist students in developing spoken fluency? Have you noticed significant improvements?

III. Effectiveness of Assessments

- A. How do persuasive speeches and debates assist students in developing spoken fluency?
- B. What deficiencies in terms of stimulating students to develop spoken fluency have you noticed in those evaluations (speeches and debates)?
- C. What should be the average profile of a student that has passed LM-1361 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages? Justify your answer.

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C2	Can express himself/herself spontaneously at length with a natural colloquial flow, avoiding or backtracking around any difficulty so smoothly that the interlocutor is hardly aware of it.	
C1	Can express himself/herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly. Only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder a natural, smooth flow of language.	
B2	Can produce stretches of language with a fairly even tempo; although he/she can be hesitant as he or she searches for patterns and expressions, there are few noticeably long pauses.	
B1	Can keep going comprehensibly, even though pausing for grammatical and lexical planning and repair is very evident, especially in longer stretches of free production.	
A2	Can make himself/herself understood in very short utterances, even though pauses, false starts and reformulation are very evident.	
A1	Can manage very short, isolated, mainly pre-packaged utterances, with much pausing to search for expressions, to articulate less familiar words, and to repair communication.	