

**The use of voice message boards to improve accuracy in the simple past tense through  
awareness-raising strategies in A2 adult English learners**

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awareness-raising in A2 learners**

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Autonomous Learning Environments

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This research report is the result of my own work and includes nothing that was done in collaboration with others.

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(Signature)

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**ABSTRACT**

This Action Research project was conducted with six pre-intermediate adult students during a three-month period and it is intended to help students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting improve speaking accuracy in the simple past tense by means of awareness-raising strategies through an online discussion board. Learners used the discussion board to hold synchronous face-to-face interactions and later they listened to their partners' conversations in order to make comments about their performances in terms of accuracy in the simple past tense in an embeddable online forum (which is a third party application that allows the embedding of an external application into a main operating system) that involved students reflecting on their own mistakes and setting up action plans to improve accuracy in future interactions. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected to analyze the trends of improvement or fossilization in the use of the simple past tense and to observe if the self and peer correction strategies improved students' speaking accuracy during the implementation process. The findings revealed that the implemented technology successfully promoted improvement of speaking accuracy in authentic interactions.

**Keywords:** Speaking accuracy, voice message boards, awareness-raising strategies, self and peer correction, simple past, fossilization.

## RESUMEN

El proyecto de investigación acción fue realizado con seis estudiantes adultos de inglés de nivel pre-intermedio durante un periodo de tres meses cuyo propósito fue el de ayudar a los alumnos a mejorar su precisión gramatical en el pasado simple por medio de auto corrección y corrección a través de los compañeros de conversación. El medio que se utilizó para implementar las estrategias se hizo a través de un foro de discusión virtual. Los estudiantes utilizaron dicho foro para sostener conversaciones sincrónicas y al término de estas ellos escuchaban los diálogos de sus compañeros para hacer comentarios respecto a la precisión gramatical en el pasado simple. Por otro lado, se utilizó un foro escrito con la intención de hacer reflexionar a los estudiantes acerca de sus propios errores y al mismo tiempo para que ellos mismos crearan sus respectivos planes de acción con la intención de mejorar la precisión gramatical en futuras interacciones. Se recolectaron datos cuantitativos y cualitativos para analizar las tendencias en cuanto a mejoramiento o estancamiento de la precisión gramatical del pasado simple durante todo el proceso. El proyecto también sirvió para notar si las estrategias de corrección ayudaron a mejorar la precisión gramatical durante las conversaciones en el transcurso del proceso de implementación. La investigación fue particularmente útil en cuanto a la implementación de Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación (TICs) en el contexto de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) para el mejoramiento de la precisión gramatical en interacciones auténticas.

**Palabras clave:** Precisión gramatical en conversaciones, foros de discusión virtual, auto corrección y por medio de los compañeros de clase, pasado simple, fosilización.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**Chapter 1:**

**Introduction.....8**

Statement of the question..... 8

Research questions..... 12

Research objectives.....12

Rationale.....12

**Chapter 2:**

**Theoretical framework.....15**

Speaking accuracy..... 15

Awareness-raising strategies.....26

Voice message boards.....35

**Chapter 3:**

**Research design.....41**

Type of study.....42

Researcher’s role.....44

Context..... 45

Participants.....45

Data collection instruments.....46

**Chapter 4:**

**Pedagogical intervention and implementation.....53**

**Chapter 5:**

**Data analysis and findings.....69**

**Chapter 6:**

**Conclusions, pedagogical implications and further research.....97**

Conclusions.....97

Pedagogical implications.....105

Limitations.....108

Further research.....110

**References.....112**

**Appendices.....118**

    Appendix A : Invitation Letter Sample.....118

    Appendix B : Consent Form Sample.....120

    Appendix C : Pbworks™ Platform Screenshot.....121

    Appendix D : Survey Screenshot.....122

    Appendix E : Voice Message Board Voxopop™ Screenshot.....123

    Appendix F : Teacher’s Journal Sample Screenshot.....124

    Appendix G : Students’ Online Forum Sample Screenshot.....125

    Appendix H : Rubric Sample.....126

    Appendix I : Transcript Samples .....127

    Appendix J : Paradigm Model Chart .....132

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Statement of the problem**

It has been argued that learners who are in the process of acquiring a new language must go through a learning process where they have to construct accurate grammatical structures gradually from simple structures to more complex ones (Krashen, 1990). In this process, learners begin the acquisition process by naturally retrieving words from their intake, then, they seek to convey meaning without paying much attention to grammar patterns; later, students identify parts of the structures and finally, they can manipulate the concepts to negotiate meaning naturally. However, there is a point after the elementary level of instruction (A2 Basic user according to the Common European Framework Reference, 2001) where learners' accuracy while speaking remains static for a long time, or in worst cases, for a lifetime due to the lack of awareness and as a consequence this affects their oral production.

This critical situation generally happens somewhere between the stages of getting their message across and the understanding of the grammatical structures. In other words, students who are transitioning between elementary and pre-intermediate levels (A2 and B1 Basic user according to the Council of Europe, 2001) struggle to find a balance between expressing their thoughts and producing accurate full-length utterances while they are conveying meaning. Learners in most of the cases tend to reach a learning plateau (“a learning phenomenon where progress appears to cease or slow down for a significant period of time before once again increasing”) (Federal Aviation Administration, p. G4) at an early stage since they do not know how to correct their own oral language production because they have never been previously trained for that purpose at their former schools



and/or universities' English classes. As a consequence, they start fossilizing key structures including the past tenses during the pre-intermediate stage of their learning processes. Fossilization, according to Brown (2007) is “a normal and natural stage for many learners where there is a relatively permanent incorporation of incorrect linguistic forms into a person’s second language competence” (p. 270). This generally happens even if the learner understands the concept, but he/she is also aware that they are constantly committing the same error repeatedly.

This phenomenon was clearly observed in my pre-intermediate level students from the Skills 1- 3 Block at the Centro Colombo Americano North (CCA) branch in the Adult English Program (students 16 years old and older). The students from this course had just finished a Basic 6 level (CEFR A2), which is the first level of instruction at the CCA. Most of the learners had been exposed to four course book units about using the simple past tense during the last two months before learners started the new course with me as their instructor. The learners knew a limited number of verbs in simple past (in regular and irregular forms) and they tended to overgeneralize the verbs by adding an “ed” ending to most of the irregular verbs. Other times, students would use verbs in present tense to compensate for the verbs in past they did not know, as observed in the conversation transcripts (see Appendix I). Students also omitted auxiliary verbs in the past tense whenever they tried to construct negative statements and questions. Students would also confuse the past tense verb TO BE (was/were) and they would use them incorrectly in question forms. This problem generally continued with most of the learners throughout the rest of the remaining courses because of the lack of the implementation of awareness-raising strategies in order to improve accuracy during different communicative events.

The issue at hand emerged from observing Skills 1, 2 and 3 students perform in previous courses I had taught before. Generally, when students reach a higher level of proficiency in the CCA's Adult English Program (AEP), I have noticed that most of them still struggle in structuring accurate utterances in the past simple tense when they are interacting in different speaking tasks and even in their written assignments. Other teachers who have taught the same courses have also observed this problem with their students. In my particular case, I tend to write in a note pad exactly what the students say and then I write their errors on the board so they correct the mistakes in order to raise awareness, but this exercise has had little long-term effect in my students speaking performances because they tend to make the same mistakes again in later interactions.

The Action Research project was implemented in the Skills 1 to 3 Block, that is, the first component of the pre-intermediate level which according to the CEFR it is considered at the beginning of the B1 level of proficiency. Three essential principles are at the core of the CCA's AEP, which aim at developing in the students' proficiency levels. They are (a) language, (b) learning and (c) communication. Language refers to the linguistic skills such as grammar and vocabulary that serves as a support system for communication. Communication is the means that creates social bonds between speakers and, learning relates to the implementation of learning and speaking strategies that the speaker will resort to in order to convey and negotiate meaning effectively. Students must meet most of the competencies stated in the CCA AEP exit profiles in order to pass to the following course. As part of the aims of the program pre- intermediate level is to incorporate the simple past tense to narrate short stories and personal anecdotes throughout the three-month course.

As a teaching and learning support system, teachers at the CCA AEP employ

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) such as computers, Internet connection and Web 2.0 tools in order to help their students enhance their communicative and linguistic abilities. Many teachers at the Centro Colombo Americano use asynchronous tools such as VoiceThread™ and Voxopop™ to support learners as they practice pronunciation and accuracy-based tasks. Learners prepare and complete written exercises and later record their work using these discussion board tools. As a follow-up activity, other students post comments and follow-up questions about their partners' stories or opinions and finally, the teacher assess their work by leaving a final message to each one of the speakers in the discussion board.

The goal of this action research study is to enhance students' learning processes through technology by using a voice message forum called Voxopop™ to help my learners enhance accuracy in the oral production when they used the past tenses. I employed the voice message board to help my learners raise awareness of their most common mistakes in order to improve accuracy in the oral production when they employ the simple past tense through awareness-raising strategies in paired communicative events. This way, students are able to consolidate their linguistic competencies to improve their performance in the speaking skills when narrating their anecdotes. I also used an online embeddable forum called Nabble™ so students could write down their impressions about other partners' performances in terms of accuracy as soon as they finished with their speaking task.

As learners used the discussion board more, they would listen to other partners' interactions and then later on they would write comments and read their partners' observations and impressions about their performances in the online forum. The aim of this procedure was for students to avoid fossilization of the simple past in the subsequent

recording sessions. According to Brown (2007) competence is the initial step in order to acquire a concept; in other words, the learner has to understand the morphological aspect of a grammatical form before they actually produce accurate utterances in an authentic context. On the other hand, performance is the concrete manifestation of or realization of competence, which is the main focus of this action research project.

### **Research Question**

What are the effects of the voice message forum Voxopop on the speaking accuracy of past tenses for A2 adult learners?

### **Research Objectives**

#### **General Objective:**

To investigate the extent technology can help in improving linguistic abilities of A2 adult learners.

#### **Specific Objective:**

To analyze the effectiveness of using the self and peer-correction via the voice message forum Voxopop™ to raise awareness strategies for increasing accuracy in the use of the simple past tense of A2 adult learners.

### **Rationale:**

Language learners are affected by mistakes made during conversation events because speech acts are spontaneous actions. Some students may feel self-conscious when they take part in a communicative event because believe that their second/foreign language speaking skill should be accurate at all times when they try to convey meaning with other speakers (Scrivener, 2005). According to Krashen (2003), there is barely any time to edit the accuracy mistakes committed while speakers are trying to convey meaning because they

are more concerned about getting the message across rather than paying attention to grammatical structures; however, this situation generally happens in authentic face-to-face dialogues where there is no time for this type of feedback. Therefore, the research project aimed at enabling students to raise awareness of their most frequent accuracy mistakes while they were using the simple past tense in both synchronous (i.e., as in the classroom) and in asynchronous settings. The purpose of the voice message board was to serve as an “accuracy mirror” to my students’ oral skills. They were also expected to keep track of their own progress for later reflection, setting up and if they considered it appropriate, they implemented an action plan to improve later performances. The expected outcome of the implementation stage was for learners to improve the accuracy of the simple past tense as they detected their own errors (and their partners’ as well) during authentic communicative events as they started to avoid their most frequent mistakes.

## **Chapter 2- Theoretical Framework**

In the previous chapter it was stated that students need to raise awareness of their own grammatical mistakes while they are interacting with others and an approach to help them improve this aspect of language is by using a voice message board. To understand the rationale of this action research project, there has to be a clear explanation of each of the constructs that this work constitutes of. The constructs which support this research project are the following: speaking accuracy, awareness raising strategies and voice message boards. First, I will examine the role of accuracy in the speaking skills and its relationship with progress or fossilization. Second, I will explore how awareness raising strategies influence the improvement of speaking accuracy especially in the usage of the simple past tense. Finally, I will explain how the voice message board Voxopop™ can become a useful tool in order to enhance speaking accuracy in the simple past tenses by means of the awareness raising strategies.

### **Speaking Accuracy**

According to Platt, Richards and Weber (1985) speaking, also known as utterance, is defined as “what is said by any one person before or after another person begins to speak” (p.303). Hatch (1992) went further into the definition and he described the speaking skill as a highly contextualized, environment-dependent, interactive and unplanned performance based on the speakers’ competencies. One of the key elements of the speaking skill is grammar which Platt et al (1989) refer as “a description of the structure of a language and the way in which linguistic units as words and phrases are combined to produce sentences in a language”(p.125). Odlin (1994) refers to grammar as an “internalized system, that is, mental structures that guide everyday linguistic behavior” (p.5). Buck, Byrnes and

Thomsom (as cited by Ommagio, 1993). argued that grammar has a direct connection with accuracy which refers to “the acceptability, quality and precision of the message conveyed” (p.17) The Common European Framework to Languages (2001) states that the balance between the speaking skill and grammatical accuracy will determine a speaker’s level of proficiency in terms of competence and performance. Therefore, it is important to develop in students not only the skill of conveying meaning with others by means of keywords and developing fluency but it is also relevant to help them construct their ideas employing accurate grammatical structures.

Chomsky (1965) was the first theoretician to distinguish between the terms competence and performance. Competence refers to the speaker/listener’s actual knowledge of the language in terms of the four skills (speaking, listening, writing and reading) and the four sub skills (phonological, lexical, grammatical and social function of the target language). It is in these two core aspects of acquiring a foreign language where all the aforementioned authors agree that speakers must resort to their competencies in order to convey and negotiate meaning with others spontaneously; this is what is known as speaking performance and this is the ability that most English language learners strive to attain in order to communicate with others.

Speaking a foreign language requires non-native speakers accomplish certain levels of speaking proficiency in terms of competence and performance in order to be understood by others for various purposes in different contexts or domains (Common European Framework for Languages, 2001). However, students’ declarative knowledge (what they already know) of a foreign language is highly influenced by the approach taken to learn English, especially when they are exposed to the language in a country where English is not

spoken. According to Scrivener (2005) English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is the case when non-English speakers learn L2 in a non-English speaking country. Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hills and Pinca (1978) affirmed that EFL is taught as a general school subject but it does not play any essential part in a non-English speaking country's social life. Therefore, EFL learning processes tend to be slower than those who interact with an ESL context.

Cummins (1979) divided the communicative competence into two dichotomies that determine the approach that language lessons have historically been delivered. The first one is called cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) which is also known as context-reduced proficiency. The other competence is known as basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) or context-embedded competence. The first concept refers to the analysis of surface grammatical structures and its main purpose is to produce planned written language. The second model aims at unplanned communication skills employed by the speaker to communicate with others in authentic real-life situations. According to Cenoz and Jessner (2000), the CALP or BICS approach for developing English proficiency in students in European schools have had either a negative or a positive effects depending on the type of exposure or immersion students have had with the English language and the degree of spoken interaction that students experienced throughout their school years. This exposure and interaction in the English language determines the students' success or failure in acquiring EFL during their primary and secondary education. In Colombia, 93% of primary, secondary and tertiary public educational establishments adopt a traditional teaching-centered CALP approach to teaching and learning including in the EFL area and only two to four hours a week are devoted to the English classes. In the case of private



bilingual institutions, the BICS approach to English learning has been adopted (Ministry of Education, 2009).

According to Scrivener (2005), in traditional school or university settings, students are expected to understand and identify decontextualized grammatical structures without ever using them in authentic conversations. Most of these educational institutions still use English teaching methods as the Grammar Translation method or the Audio-Lingual approach. Students' linguistic competencies are measured in terms of writing short sentences and answering discrete-point questions. There is a great deal of teacher dependency since the traditional approach to learning is to listen to the teacher passively and to take notes from the information he/she delivers. The students will later try to memorize the facts from their notebooks to pass a quiz or an exam.

At the end of the school year or term, students are assessed through paper and pencil tests to prove if they have learned the target structures taught during the term. Brown (2007) stated that EFL learners will most probably comprehend limited concepts, but are also likely to produce them inaccurately in almost any tense and aspect. Another consequence of this type of teaching according to Brown (2007) is that the washback effect tends to be negative because students' main purpose is simply to pass the exam and therefore they will not remember nor use the concepts after they had taken the test.

In the traditional Colombian schooling system, there are barely any end-of-term progress tests designed by the public or private local school districts that measures students' actual speaking performance in the foreign language. Students are generally expected to become competent in how the foreign language grammar works and there is little interaction among students in the foreign language in authentic communicative events on a

regular basis. In addition, like the traditional teaching and learning context described by Scrivener (2005), the traditional classroom environment anywhere around the world include some distinctive characteristics of conventional teaching such as the transmission of knowledge from the teacher to the students and the teacher's control over the course content and learners' actions inside the classroom environment. In contrast, learners generally take notes and practice grammar and vocabulary passively through their textbooks.

These descriptions are distinct characteristics of the CALP approach to language learning and it is still used today in many educational institutions including Colombia (Ministry of Education, 2009). As a consequence, most of the EFL learners tend to have extrinsic or instrumental motivations in order to pass the exams and/or the English course (Harmer, 2007). On the other side of the continuum, the current trend indicates that many foreigners are learning how to speak English for business and traveling reasons (Crystal, 2003). Therefore, these students are immersed in BICS oriented type of language learning. One of the most popular BICS-oriented approaches is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

According to Scrivener (2005) CLT is characterized by exposing the students into meaningful and highly contextualized communicative events where they are to convey and negotiate meaning with their counterparts. The teacher's role in a CLT setting is to facilitate learning through various constructivist techniques such as scaffolding, contextualization and eliciting and also to foster communication among students. For these reasons, CLT in essence resembles the BICS approach to language learning because the learners have to engage in meaningful spontaneous interactions. However, Scrivener (2005) states that it is

vital to keep a balance between fluency and accuracy during the lessons depending on the nature of the speaking task (controlled practice versus free practice activities) which is also part of the CCA philosophy and the focus of this study.

The learners who took the Skills 1, 2 and 3 block enrolled to the English course which is based on the CLT approach to language learning. Throughout the length of their English language studies in the Skills block, learners developed certain speaking abilities such as fluency and accuracy. Platt et al (1989) labeled fluency in second and foreign language learning as “a level of proficiency in communication” (p.107), whereas accuracy was described as “ the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences but may not include the ability to speak fluently” (p.107). In English as a Foreign Language courses (EFL) at the CCA, learners are expected to develop a number of competencies in specific domains throughout different speaking tasks in order to be considered capable speakers according to their proficiency levels (Common European Framework for Languages, 2001). One of these competencies is called the grammatical competence where other specific linguistic sub-categories of sentence-level rules such as tenses, aspects and sentence structuring fall into. It is in these specific aspects of grammar is what the intervention of the Action Research project intends in order to improve students’ accuracy in the simple past tense while they are exchanging utterances in authentic spontaneous conversations with their speaking partners.

In general terms, adult learners who are trying to learn English as a Foreign Language in language schools experience their own problems depending on their learning and personal backgrounds. Han (2004) noticed that some adult learners still struggle in employing the required sub-competencies involved in the speaking performance during

regular conversation tasks and they start to fossilize errors or mistakes. According to Selinker (as cited in Han, 2004) Fossilization is “a phenomenon of non-progression of learning despite continuous exposure to input, adequate motivation to learn, and sufficient opportunity to practice” (p.14). Han (2004) stated that fossilization generally hinders students’ progress and motivation since they are constantly being inaccurate in specific grammatical features of the second/foreign language even after ending their secondary or tertiary studies for various reasons. The reasons for fossilization include: the absence of corrective feedback, quality of input, lack or absence of universal grammar, lack of understanding, processing constraints, failure of parameter resetting, learning inhibiting learning, automatization of faulty knowledge, lack of sensitivity to input, change in emotional state, natural inclination to focus on content not form, avoidance, satisfaction of communicative needs, lack of acculturation, and will to maintain identity. Many of these problems originate when students are exposed to traditional approaches to EFL or they have some of these problems embedded in their cognitive styles and/or personalities (Brown, 2007).

Han (2004) also identified other key issues that adult learners encounter during their second language acquisition process and they somehow affect learning rates and outcomes. Scovel (1988) calls this uncertain learning phase as the critical period. Some of the effects that these critical periods include the lateralization stage in which the neurological processes in the adult learner lose plasticity compared to younger learners and it has been proven that learning rates diminish in speed especially after puberty. This is another reason why some learners have problems producing accurate full-length utterances even if they have been studying a language for quite some time. Another stage of the critical period is

students' reaching a learning plateau (where learners' slow down their learning processes) or a phenomenon known as "backsliding" (where learners' earlier learning stage mistakes resurface). Furthermore, Brown (1996) confirmed this by stating that "progress is not achieved in a series of discrete stages but rather in bursts and backslides and overlapping usages, the question of how such volatile system of knowledge might be represented in the mind is indeed a live one" (p. 4). In other words, learners will not totally acquire a concept; they might forget how to implement it appropriately later on their learning process; therefore, students are likely to reach a learning plateau stage or at the worst case leading to fossilization.

Han (2004) concludes that these learning problems are a natural part of language learners' learning processes and these issues are normally detected in learners who are at an intermediate level of instruction and who are starting to develop a more consistent interlanguage. According to Harmer (2007) interlanguage is the learner's version of a language depending on his/her developmental stage. At the interior of the learning/acquisition transitional stage, students make a great effort to convey meaning with others and at the same time they are dealing in producing accurate full-length utterances.

Krashen (1990) distinguished between learning and acquisition: learning occurs in a conscious fashion, that is, in formal learning environments such as the classroom settings where as acquisition is what the learner can actually perform by using the foreign the language. This indicates that students who are studying English as a foreign language have to go through a process where they consciously learn the target language's grammar structures in order to convey meaning by means of what they have acquired through conscious practice and interaction but at the same time there is a gap between

understanding a concept and using it accurately in authentic contexts.

### *Approaches in teaching accuracy*

The approaches in teaching accuracy and the system in which learners are exposed to grammar will be essentially established by the type of syllabus design the learners' textbooks enclose or the way the courses' syllabuses have been designed. Historically, grammar was initially taught based on the order of complexity of the grammatical structures such in the case of the Grammar-translation method where the grammar rules were explained by the teacher and a list of vocabulary was provided so the students had to memorize (Harmer, 2007). In other methods, the syllabi were set up to "build" the language from simple grammatical concepts to more elaborated and complex ones. For instance, in the grammar-based syllabi from the Audiolingual era, it was common to start an English course by teaching the verb "to be". Later, students were taught to use the simple present tense in terms of the Subject + Verb + Complement pattern and so forth (Harmer, 2007).

After the Audiolingual method, other systems organized the grammatical items based on situations and social functions through a functional- situational syllabi system where communicative functions were developed depending on the most frequent social contexts as well as on the context where the grammatical structures are used (Harmer, 2007). These methods were mainly focused on the on the accurate construction of surface level grammar.

In order to teach grammar in a pedagogical context, Odlin (1994) suggested taking into account four considerations in order for learners to subsume grammar into their cognition: time, learner independence, fossilization of knowledge and expert guidance. Time refers to the number of hours, months or years the learners will need to internalize various grammatical forms including wait-time for students to process their responses

during teacher- student interactions. The outcome will also depend on such factors such as learning context (ESL/EFL), students' background knowledge of the foreign language, learning style, culture, methodology, etc.

Thornbury (2000) coincided with Odlin (1994) about accuracy will highly depend on learners processing the information of both lexis and grammatical structures they had previously internalized because students need time to organize their ideas before there is any output. He also stated that as students need to be exposed to multiple communicative events, which implicate structured fluency, to convey meaning with their speaking partners. Moreover, Omaggio (1993) hypothesized that accuracy should be stimulated in proficiency-oriented instruction. This way, the learners are able to progress equally in terms of language precision and coherence and this will reflect in both fluency and accuracy. Terrel (as cited in Lee & Van Patten, 1991) also agrees that students should have plenty of opportunities to produce the target structures through controlled, semi-controlled and freer practice activities. As evidence of learners acquiring a target structure, Terrel suggests that two conditions must be met: a) the speaker has to convey meaning through a particular structure and b) the grammatical forms the speaker employs to communicate with others must be structured coherently in order to be understood clearly by the listener. Swain (2005) claims that learners will eventually notice new linguistic feature and with constant recycling they will eventually have access to this knowledge and ultimately upgrading their speaking skill.

Thornbury (2000) also mentioned the importance of the methods used to present grammatical structures during the lessons. He distinguished three approaches to teaching grammar: deductively, inductively and through texts. In the deductive approach, teachers mainly explain the grammatical rules and instruct learners to follow the grammar models to

reproduce similar sentences. In the inductive approach, teachers encourage students to notice the target structure in a context and they have to draw their own conclusions on how it works. Finally, in the last approach, teachers use written or listening texts usually from the students' textbooks in order to detect the target structure and then complete some exercises based on the examples. For this Action Research project, the last two approaches were applied to enhance learners' accuracy of the simple past tense.

It is essential for students to subsume the new grammatical forms meaningfully and there is evidence that teachers in Colombia are striving to incorporate these new approaches for teaching grammar. For instance, there have been a number of studies in the Bogota public school system. In one of the studies, Gutierrez (2005) helped her ninth grade learners to develop oral skills through communicative and interactive tasks such as talking about their favorite music, photo stories about the students' lives, and the final task was aimed for students to share their ideas about Maloka, technological-oriented museum in which students interact with the displays after going on a field trip there. The researcher concluded that by lowering the affective filter through meaningful tasks students are able to perform more and better in terms of quality and quantity. Another conclusion she reached was that it is also important to provide learners with conversation models so they could follow accurate linguistic patterns. Finally, she concluded that self and peer assessment was important in order to raise awareness of the speakers' strengths and weaknesses among others correct usage of different grammar tenses and aspects.

In another study, Peña and Onatra (2009) engaged their seventh grade learners to interact in class by using Task-Based Learning (Willis, 1996) in a public school in Bogota where the school's curriculum mainly aimed at the reading and writing skills. They took



into account their students' needs and interest as well as integrating these into the school's curriculum. In their conclusions, they highlighted the importance of learning through mistakes, providing learners thinking time to process the target structures, teaching students how to use certain speaking strategies to maintain their conversations and finally, the importance of talking to others and with others to enhance students' speaking performances.

These two studies demonstrate that there is a need for students to reflect on their own speaking production as well as their peers' in terms of improving fluency and accuracy as well as competence and performance. Another important point is that learners needed some processing time prior to engaging in communicative events in order to enhance their performances. During this thinking period, students were able to prepare the speaking tasks; they also resorted to a wide range of cognitive, meta-cognitive and socio-affective strategies that eventually help them produce more accurate utterances as well as achieving a sense of self-confidence during the different communicative events.

### **Awareness-raising strategies**

#### ***Error correction***

According to Edge (1989) there are two types of inaccuracies. The first one is called a "mistake"; this is when a speaker makes a small "slip of the tongue" and corrects him/herself instantly. The speaker is aware of the rule, but he/she did not produce the correct form when he/she was speaking. Generally, mistakes are corrected by the same speaker or from time to time by the listener. Error, on the other hand, is caused by the speaker's ignorance of the rule. It is necessary to explain the rule to the person in order to understand what he/she did wrong. Burt and Kiparsky (as cited in Ommagio, 1993)

distinguished two types of learner error: the first type is called local errors and the second type is called global errors. In the first type of error, students tend to make mistakes at the surface grammatical structuring level. For instance, learners might say: “My father work” rather than “My father works”. Global errors, on the other hand, are the errors that interfere with the general meaning of what the speaker is trying to convey, and as a result, the listener will be confused and will not comprehend the speaker’s message and this will lead to a communication breakdown. Burt and Kiparsky (as cited in Ommagio, 1993) agreed that it is the teacher’s job to focus on the global errors during the class time and the local errors should be left alone. Cotter (2009), on the other hand, insists that students should be trained to self-correct local errors in order to find a balance between fluency and accuracy.

When students make either global or local errors, it is advisable for the teacher to intervene and help raise awareness about the type of errors that students made. According to James (1998), “correcting is a metalinguistic act, since it is a comment on language” (p.236). He states that there are three uses of correction: (a) feedback on students’ mistake so they are able to correct themselves, (b) giving explanation on their error if students do not know why they committed an error, and (c) scaffolding the erroneous concept in order for the learner to correct the mistake themselves. When a student corrects the error or mistake, he/she is “remediating” the error or mistake. When the student starts self-correcting and avoiding errors is because there is an evidence of language awareness.

### *Self- correction*

Krashen (1990) proposed a hypothesis that involved monitoring language production during the learning stage. Learning means to consciously understand surface structural patterns of language such as grammar and lexis so while learners are trying to

construct full-length utterances they monitor their oral production. If they are aware they committed a mistake, they eventually edit or self-correct it until they gradually acquire the accurate grammatical structure. Krashen (1990) has admitted that the Monitoring Hypothesis does not have a significant contribution in accuracy even though this is a conscious process because speakers are more focused on meaning rather than form during communicative events. However, he says, in some aspects of grammar it could still make a difference since the speaker is able to raise awareness of a concurrent mistake so he/she can make the respective corrections and therefore acquiring the correct form through self-monitoring. Krashen (2003) advises speakers not to over-monitor their production because this will interfere with authentic communication. He also claims that to use the monitoring strategy successfully three conditions must meet:

1. The learner has to know the grammar rules in order to monitor their accuracy.
2. The learner has to think about the target structure all the time.
3. The learners must have enough time to employ the monitoring strategies and this rarely happens..

Krashen (2003) argued that meeting the three conditions is difficult since learners focus more on meaning than form; however, he points out that it is still possible to improve certain surface structures as long as the students do not over monitor and the strategy does not interfere with communication. He has also noticed that students' "careless errors" are usually not self corrected basically because they have not acquired the concept even if they consciously know the rule and they have practiced it through years of repetition. He argues that some learners are better monitors of their own language production than others because they take their time to process the grammar

rule before they speak or they are aware of the rule and they instantly correct their mistake as they speak. They generally correct simple features of grammar which are easy to remember and use; therefore, self-correction is quite limited to a few grammar structures, not all of them. However, message –oriented speakers are not concerned of local errors and hence they will not correct them or they do not know how to monitor their utterances during free speech acts. When speakers are trained to self-correct, they will do so from time to time or they will speak slower than usual, but this compromises fluency and authenticity. Consequently, people who tend to correct themselves constantly will focus more on form rather than meaning because they have been formally trained for this purpose. As a conclusion, self-correction is not perfect, it does not occur all the time and it is not always done correctly due to speaker’s lack of confidence or over confidence.

Cotter (2009) stated that “self-correction demonstrates comprehension of and responsibility for the language. It builds awareness of the language, in turn leading to more self-sufficient speakers. It makes students more confident speakers too. With the large effect of these positives, teachers should want to strive towards students who can correct themselves” (para. I). Cotter (2009) also argued that the student who is aware of correcting his/her own errors will eventually make the necessary changes in order to apply them in real-life conversations in future interactions and this is a direct evidence that the student is absorbing the target structure. Cotter’s (2009) affirmation aligns with Krashen’s learning and acquisition hypotheses (1990) since learners are most likely to commit errors when they are initially exposed to the new target structures when they spontaneously speak with others. When learners constantly self-correct their mistakes,

they will be able to be conscious of what works and what does not work when they are experimenting with new forms. Once they confirm what really works, then they will use the form time and time again until they have acquired it, and as a result, they will feel confident in employing the models in any contexts. This learning strategy is one of the distinct features of what Bandura (1995) calls self-efficacy which “refers to beliefs of one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations” (p. 2). However, Krashen warns (2003) self-correction is not perfect, students who are not teacher dependent will benefit from it because they are free to correct their own mistakes when the conditions above meet. As positive effects, the speakers’ accuracy will be refined and polished making it sound and feel more natural in an authentic context. On the other hand, students who come from a traditional background will find it difficult to cope with self-correction because they expect their teachers to correct them every time they detect an error in their speech.

Liu (2009) studied the influence of self-repair in his intermediate Chinese learners when they conveyed meaning with other speakers. He found that the intermediate students tend to self-correct more than his advanced learners in three different domains of discourse. These domains are called same information, different information, appropriateness and error repair. Same information repairs refer to the repetition of what the speaker has already said. For instance: “He is capa- capable” or “And and my parents can...can buy me anything I want to have...” The intention of same information repairs is for the speaker to have some time to think what the speaker is going to say next. Different information repairs aim at correcting errors in content when the speaker feels he/she is giving the wrong information. For example, “I can

learn more from a good music, no from a good film”. Appropriateness repairs are intended to correct when the message was not clearly stated or if it was ambiguous. For instance, “I will go to super I will go shopping”. Finally, error repairs address to correct surface level grammatical, functional or lexical errors. For example: “Yesterday I go... went to the movies”.

Liu (2009) discovered through his study that Chinese intermediate English learners tend to focus more on local errors rather than global errors, opposite from their advance student counterparts. He also found that the frequency of correcting errors in intermediate learners was greater than the advanced learners. While intermediate students corrected themselves once every nine words, advanced learners did repairs every sixteen words. The researcher also discovered that both intermediate and advanced English learners tend to correct more to different information type of errors and error repairs than the rest of the error categories. These findings suggest that as learners convey meaning more effectively, they tend to neglect accuracy.

Servetti (2010) studied the effects of self- correction through Collaborative Learning (CL) in two Italian high schools. In one of the schools, students were to revise their classmates’ tests in order to detect inaccuracies in the use of the simple present and present continuous tenses, whereas in the other institution, the students’ work was first corrected by the teacher so students would correct the tests themselves as a homework assignment. During the CL error correction process, students had to work in groups of four and they were required to indicate where their partners’ errors were in terms of accuracy in different tests. The purpose of this CL work was to help their peers to raise awareness on their most frequent errors. Later on during a plenary session, students

were required to correct their own errors while they were being tape recorded. The students had to explain why they had chosen to use an incorrect structure and then peers would encourage the student to correct the erroneous grammatical form. At the end of the school term, the teacher noted that students' subsequent tests had dramatically improved in terms of the accuracy of the simple present and the present continuous tenses.

The outcomes of students' self-correction process by the end of the implementation stage concluded that students who reflected more about their most concurrent mistakes were most likely to start refraining them as they raised more awareness in the proper structuring of grammatical forms. On the other hand, learners who tried to correct their own errors were prone to ignore or correct structures that were actually right and they tended to commit the same errors in future tests; therefore, helping students raise awareness of their own errors through CL proved to be more effective and meaningful than the traditional approach.

The two studies concur that it is important for the teachers to allow their students to correct their own errors as they will gradually start to adjust the proper grammatical structures into their speech and it is also significant to allow learners to correct their classmates in order to consolidate grammatical structures.

### ***Peer correction***

Porter (as cited in Allwright and Bailey, 1991) discovered that some students sometimes intervened to correct their partners' utterances but this case was not very usual in authentic communicative events. In other cases, peers would mislead their counterparts by "correcting" their partners' accurate utterances and as a result, students would learn

inaccurate target structures. Porter (as cited in Allwright and Bailey, 1991) also affirmed that it is essential for teachers to train learners how to provide feedback to their speaking partners without increasing the affective filter. Nation and Newton (2009) believe that teachers should not be correcting students because this practice discourages students from taking risks and creating new constructions of ideas through new concepts but if other classmates do the correction, both partners will raise awareness of the errors they usually commit.

According to Gass and Mackey (2007), when there is a communicative event, the listeners generally provide the speaker with some sort of feedback in order to understand the speakers' ideas. The most common one regarding accuracy is called a recast. A recast occurs when the speaker makes a grammar mistake while uttering and the listener repeats the utterance in a correct way without changing the speaker's intended meaning. For instance, this is an example taken from one of the voice message conversations:

**Person A:** Why did you went there?

**Person B:** Why did you go there?

**Person A:** Go, yes.

Recasts benefit learners by raising speakers' awareness of their most frequent slips while he or she is negotiating meaning with others. However, in order to have positive recasts the non-native speakers need to be performing with a more proficient speaker in order for the listener to realize the speakers' mistakes similarly as Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development where student learns from a teacher or a more competent learner's guidance.

Gass and Mackey (2007) also denoted that peer correction does not always come



from the listener noticing their partners' mistakes. Sometimes it is the speaker who wants to question their correctness and asks the listener for assistance; this is called Language-Related Episodes (LRE). This is another example taken from another recorded interaction:

**Person A:** Yesterday I eat chicken. "Eat" or "ate".

**Person B:** Ate

**Person A:** OK, "ate" chicken.

LRE are extremely useful for students to clarify a concept that is nearly to be acquired but it still needs to be practiced further. Additionally, Brown (2007) refers to other types of peer corrections such as "repair" (through the peer's feedback on the mistake) and "repetition" (the peer will repeat the speaker's mistake so he/she can correct it).

Huynh (2003) used a peer-correction technique called "The mistake buster" with his Vietnamese students. The technique trained students to identify and correct their own mistakes. He stated that it is important to choose a mistake category in order for students to focus on that particular aspect of language throughout the lesson because as students identified and corrected their own mistakes, they would eventually raise awareness and started to avoid them. The initial step is to engage learners to identify the errors that are embedded in short sentences written on the board. After students identify the mistakes, they do the same but the errors are included in written paragraphs and in longer texts. The second step is for students to read a written text out loud and their classmates have to raise their hands when they hear the mistake and learners will correct the errors they had previously detected. At the end of the process, students were trained to use the technique when they were engaged in communicative events and to peer-assess their partners' written texts.

O'Dowd and Ware (2008) conducted another study on corrective peer feedback on accuracy in English and Spanish students by means of weekly asynchronous discussions. The students were to provide their speaking partners with specific information about their most common mistakes by employing two different approaches to feedback in order to raise awareness of their most frequent discourse errors in different language domains such as pragmatics, linguistics and socio-cultural awareness. One approach was called e-tutoring where the students had to indicate to their partners' where all their partners' language related mistakes were made. Every time they identified one of them, they also offered advice on how to improve these aspects. The other method was called e-partnering in which the learners voluntarily provided their peers with feedback about their mistakes and they would also provide suggestions to their partners only if they were requested.

The research showed that the group that used the e-tutoring approach to peer-correction did not always provide the most accurate feedback about their second language learning partners' mistakes because they did not possess enough background knowledge of their own native tongue and they were more concerned about understanding what their partners were trying to convey. On the other hand the group that employed the e-partnering approach only corrected their partners in two situations: when their second language partner asked them to or when the native speakers needed to resort to recasts, Language-Related Episodes (LRE) and/or peer-repair in order to clarify what their partners tried to express.

The two studies show that it is important to train students to use peer correction strategies in order to raise awareness in accuracy during communicative tasks. To do this, students should be aware how the grammatical features work and it is recommendable for students to intervene when they detect their partners' errors without compromising

authenticity. Another relevant aspect to take into account is that peer correction in terms of grammatical structuring happens at specific moments of a conversation especially when the production of coherent ideas is hindered by inaccurate sentence construction and the listener needs to mediate in order to help the speaker to convey the intended meaning. Finally, there is a great importance in the collaboration among learners in order to raise awareness in improving surface level grammatical accuracy in order to avoid fossilization.

### ***E-learning and Computer Mediated Communication***

Dudeny and Hockley (2007) define e-learning as “learning that takes place using technology, such as the Internet, CD-ROMs and portable devices like mobile phones or MP3 players” (p.136). Within the e-learning domain, teachers are starting to employ Computer Mediated Communications (CMC) to help their learners to enhance their linguistic skills in both classroom and outside the classroom settings. CMCs can be categorized into “synchronous” and “asynchronous”, meaning that they could be used in real-time (as in chatting, text-messaging or video-conferencing) or in delayed interactions respectively (as in e-mail exchange). CMCs have the advantage of involving many users at the same time either in synchronous or asynchronously no matter the type of communication is involved (transactional or interactional). They also have the potential to enhance the quantity and quality of language since CMCs provide users the advantage of anonymity if students are to communicate with people outside their schools or universities, rehearsal and/or repetition in all the linguistic skills since there is no pressure from peers to produce language immediately, teachers and/or time to interact. Teachers are able to choose the type of CMC according to the tasks’ needs and to the instructional objective.

According to Khalsa, Maloney- Krichmar and Peyton (2003), among the benefits of

CMCs students will find authentic sources and resources, interact with a wide range of people, they have equal learning opportunities, they also have individual attention from peers and tutors, they have freedom of expression, their individual learning styles and paces are respected, they can access the materials at any time, they are able to work in collaboration with others and they will build technological literacy throughout their learning process. Khalsa et al (2003) also suggested that teachers can employ CMC technology into blended learning in order to benefit their students inside and outside the classroom context or as a way to supplement in-class tasks.

Dodigovic (2005) declared that Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) and the Internet match many of the Second Language Acquisition principles no matter the school of thought they come from. For instance, James (1998) suggested that technology can help learners raise awareness of their own errors (as well as their partners') and this feedback can eventually lead to learning depending on the tool the learner uses for the matter. For instance, teachers use the Word™ "insert" command to assess their students' written work. Moreover, Kern (1996) proclaimed that CMCs help students develop what Vygotsky denominated the "zone of proximal development" since students are constantly learning from their social interactions and at the same time from the collaboration from more knowledgeable peers. As a consequence of these interactions, learners benefit from each other in cognition and language usage (Vytgosky, 1978).

### ***Voice discussion boards***

Opp-Beckman and Kieffer (2004) defined voice discussion boards as Web 2.0 applications in which users post voice messages regarding any topic. Piskuric (2002) strongly believes that voice message boards can also be used for a variety of purposes such

as sharing experiences, communicating with others, and as a way to ask questions in order to solve problems. Maeroff (2004) states that the message boards are mainly used as extensions of discussions triggered by readings, conversations or listening tasks done inside the classroom but are maintained as small group independent asynchronous work. Generally, voice message boards are used asynchronously where the host starts the discussion and other participants will join in by leaving their comments and/or questions throughout a given time frame and it is the students' task to listen and to reply their speaking partners' comments. The host or teacher will also monitor, expand and conclude the interactions. In English language teaching, voice message boards are mostly used to engage students in asynchronous conversations with other classmates, users or learners around the world about any given topic usually prepared by the teacher beforehand and they are usually threaded chronologically (Hubbard, 2004).

Holliday (as cited in Hubbard, 2004) affirmed that "synchronous tasks should be goal-oriented, with a minimum of possible outcomes" (p.58). Holliday's affirmation was a determinant when the teacher chose the topics for each conversation tasks during the implementation stage because students had to discover new information about their speaking partners' lives and at the end of the lesson students would share with the rest of the class their findings. In terms of pre-speaking tasks, Pellettieri (as cited in Hubbard, 2004) declared that it is important for the students to prepare their interactions beforehand in order to get more value from their conversations through the voice message board.

Thornbury (2005) concurred with Pellettieri about the actions students have to make in the form of pre-speaking activities before engaging into any conversations. He calls these tasks awareness-raising activities. In these activities, students first have to pay attention to

the linguistic features that they are going to need before the actual interaction. He also mentions that learners need to notice the most salient features of language that they are going to resort to during the speaking tasks as well as the noticing the absence of other features like the vocabulary they will be using during the interactions.

Cantor Barragan (2009) conducted research investigating how discussion boards can help students enhance learning autonomy and interaction in foreign language blended courses. She found that most students felt that discussion boards provided them with a space to express their ideas freely in a foreign language since they were able to participate as much as they pleased and at their own pace. Learners also noticed that the discussion board allowed them to listen to their partners' points of view and to respect them even if they did not agree; they would generally answer back to their comments with respect. Another distinctive feature of participating in the discussion board was that grammar accuracy was not taken into account for assessment purposes. As a consequence, participation increased since the main aim of the discussions was for students to interact as much as possible at their own time outside the traditional classroom setting.

Cantor Barragan (2009) also asked students about the effect of the voice discussion boards and their autonomous learning processes. They reported that it helped increase self-directed learning strategies due to the amount of research they had to conduct about the topics prior to each discussion. During this meta-cognitive phase, students had to resort to their dictionaries to look up new words as well as organizing their ideas before they posted their comments. Finally, at the end of the interaction process the students needed to assess their own performances as well as their peers.

McDonald (2008) conducted research for one year on the use of discussion board to

foster departmental communication and collaboration to coordinate academic actions between the members of the English as a Foreign Language department at a private university in Japan. He discovered that teachers used the discussion boards to plan and report exam results, to talk about purchasing decisions and technical issues in terms of employing CALL software in their daily teaching practice. McDonald also found that most of the postings were replied by department members and that teachers would categorize talk groups according to the topic at hand. The teachers reported that they considered the use of the discussion boards extremely useful in terms of saving time in face-to-face meetings, collaboration among teachers dramatically increased and finally, it empowered the teachers thinking to state all of their ideas without the dominance of some teachers and getting emotional in controversial discussions. As a conclusion, the teachers involved in the study recommended the use of discussion boards in different academic settings to enhance students' performances outside the classroom.

These two studies demonstrate that there is a sense of autonomy and freedom when users utilize voice message boards. Students are able to interact with others without feeling anxious or self-conscious and they are also able to contribute with feedback on their partners' comments. Discussion boards also have an advantage in terms of being flexible in adapting the course contents into each discussion and they also foster the employment of meta-cognitive strategies so learners can perform better during the asynchronous interactions. The tool also provides a space for self and peer assessment because students can reflect upon their own and their classmates performances and suggest ways to improve their future performances.

### CHAPTER 3: Research Design

This chapter will describe each one of the elements involved in the Action Research process. First, it will identify the type of methodological approach used for the project and the reasons why this approach was chosen. Then, it will describe the teacher's role during the entire research process. Later, it will provide a brief account of the context where the research project took place as well describe the profile of the participants. Finally, it will depict each of the data collection tools used to gather evidence of students' progress throughout the entire implementation stage. Together, these descriptions will help delineate the course of the Action research project and their relationship with its outcomes. Table 1 indicates the essential information regarding all the aspects mentioned above which in turn it will be explained in detail later on.

Table 1  
*Research Design Framework*

<b>Type of study</b>	Action Research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007)	
<b>Context</b>	Centro Colombo Americano Bogotá North Branch	
<b>Participants</b>	Adult English Program. Skills 1 to 3 (pre-intermediate course). Between 20 and 40 years old professionals from different careers.	
<b>Data collection instruments</b>	<b>INSTRUMENT</b>	<b>IMPLEMENTATION STAGE</b>
	<b>Online surveys</b> (Wallace, 1998) <b>Diagnostic Test</b> (Brown, 1994)	Pre/while/post stages
	<b>Artifacts: Voice Message Board.</b> (Voxopop, 2007)	While stage
	<b>Students' Logs/Comments</b> (Nabble, 2005)	While stage
	<b>Rubrics</b> (RubiStar, 2000)	While stage
	<b>Research journal</b> (Blogger, 1999)	Pre/while/post stages
	<b>Transcripts</b> (Burns, 1999)	Post



### **Type of study**

The type of study used to conduct this inquiry process was action research since the aim of the inquiry process aims to the improvement of the conditions surrounding a specific context. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008) action research is an approach to qualitative analysis which aims at “examining and interpreting data in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge” (p.1). More specifically, according to Sagor (2000) action research “is a disciplined process of inquiry conducted by and for those taking the action. The primary reason for engaging in action research is to assist the actor in improving and/or refining his or her action” (p.1). In this quote Sagor refers actors as those people involved in both the teaching and learning actions, which are obviously the teacher and the students within a learning context.

He refers to a seven-step process for inquiry (p.4).

1. **Selecting a focus:** During the initial step, the teacher has to detect a problem within his educational context. To do this he/she has to explore the context where he/she is working by observing his/her learners behaviors and discern a common pattern of learner difficulty.
2. **Clarifying theories:** The next step is for the teacher to identify the beliefs that researchers in the field have to say about the topic. It is essential for the researcher to resort to literature to find the necessary support to construct his/her solution to the problem at hand.
3. **Identifying the research questions:** The teacher/researcher needs to set up concrete questions in order to solve his/her problem within his/her context and

population. The researcher has to define the constructs from both the problem and the solution to conduct the inquiry process.

4. **Collecting data:** The teacher needs to take action or intervene in order to systematically and gradually transform the learning context. He/she also has to gather the necessary information to make his/her research valid and reliable to the eyes of others. He/she will register the data by means of specific tools and artifacts.
5. **Analyzing data:** Triangulation of the information gathered is a must in order to find patterns which eventually will lead to facts.
6. **Reporting results:** The teacher needs to notify other fellow colleagues about his/her findings in order to involve other teachers to implement his/her idea into their respective contexts and populations.
7. **Taking informed action:** The final step involves the teacher planning the “next steps”; in other words, to arrange what he/she is going to do next in order to improve the implementation process.

This Action Research procedure was chosen since it is a small-scale investigation that aims at identifying and solving a problem at hand within a specific teaching context and participants (Burns, 2010). It also helped to reflect about teaching practices especially with the implementation of a voice message board, given that using self and peer correction is innovative and the implementation process needs to be constantly revisited for improving its procedures and to enhance its efficiency. The methodology followed was also evaluative as it needed to analyze results indicating either progress or fossilization of each students’ oral production of the simple past tense. At the same time, it required to interpret the reasons why each student obtained different results from the solution offered in this study.

**Researcher's role**

According to Pine (2008), teachers do not only deliver concepts to their learners; they are also able to generate knowledge through Action Research by taking into account their valuable experience in the teaching field as well as the knowledge they have gathered in their area of expertise. To achieve their aims, teachers need to take risks in order to know first hand what is occurring in their teaching contexts and to create original solutions for their own issues. Therefore, the teacher/researcher needs to adopt various roles to support learners through the implementation process and to maintain coherence in each step of the implementation process.

During the inquiry course of action, the researcher adopted various roles depending on the stage of the implementation process. Before each implementation session, the teacher designed the tasks that he thought could help students internalize the target grammar, he also provided students with conversation models and pop quizzes so learners could become more aware of the verbs in the simple past tense; these were generally done prior to the implementation process. Training was another essential role that the teacher/researcher took in order to teach learners to employ the different monitoring strategies during the communicative tasks in both synchronous and asynchronous learning environments. For this procedure, the teacher instructed learners in the use of the different Web 2.0 tools such as the project's platform (a wiki created in pbworks™), the use of the voice message board (Voxopop™), and the forum where learners posted their assessment of their partners' performances for the post tasks (Nabble™). During the process, it was also vital to observe students' reactions, problems, and progresses in order to detect continuous patterns of the application of the monitoring strategies, improvement of accuracy in the past

simple and continuous tenses and more efficient ways to use the Web 2.0 tools during and after the implementation process.

### **Context**

The research study was conducted at the Centro Colombo Americano (CCA) North branch. The CCA is a prestigious Colombian private English school which offers four different English programs according to the learners' profiles. The action research project was implemented in the Adult English Program (AEP) which is aimed to student older than 16 years old.

### **Participants**

The participant population belonged to a pre-intermediate level of English (CEFR B1 level). According to the initial survey, most of them are young professionals that need to learn English as a working or academic requirement and personal interest. Most of them have had exposure to the foreign language at the institution for the last six months or they have taken other English courses during different periods of time. Before students signed up for the courses, they were exposed to traditional methods of English language teaching; these are generally done through text translations and/or grammar analysis. Students also had a very limited exposure to limited exposure to communicate in authentic situations where they convey and negotiate meaning with others in English.

Another factor to bear in mind is that in the Colombian education system students attend schools that essentially use Spanish as the only means of communication among learners and teachers including in the foreign classes. In Colombia, English is mainly taken as a foreign language and its general aim is to expose students to the most popular foreign language in the world and to introduce students to an English speaking culture.

### **Data collection instruments**

It is necessary to compile information by means of data collection tools in order to validate findings throughout the Action Research process. This section describes each one of the instruments employed to gather relevant information in order to explain the relationship between the rationale behind each tool and the development of this project.

- **Surveys:** According to Wallace (1998) a survey “is a method of getting information on certain selected topics from a number of people” (p.260). Sagor (2000) states that the greatest advantage of survey is that they “provide a great deal of information quickly” (p. 107). During the research project, there were three surveys conducted (entry, mid and end of cycle surveys) that had the purpose of detecting students’ perceptions of their current state of their accuracy when they were using the past tense as well as the progress they noticed they had achieved at the end of the process. Finally, learners reflected and concluded if the intervention process during the project had helped them enhance accuracy through the monitoring strategies practiced throughout the three-month course.
- **Artifacts:** Valcarcel Craig (2009) defined artifacts as “items that are readily available in the research setting, relate to the setting of the action research, and inform the inquiry and provide insight into the situational milieu” (p. 154). Artifacts in the Action Research process are essential to find evidence of trends or patterns related to the research questions and objectives. They are generally represented as concrete evidence of students’ progress such as portfolios, notebooks, tests, quizzes, grades and so forth. For this Action Research project the principal artifact used was the students’ speech acts done through the voice message board.

These interactions were the main evidence of students' systematic improvement or proof of fossilization in the use of the past tenses.

- **Research journal:** Brock, Yu and Wong (as cited in Wallace 1998) affirmed that journals “are an excellent tool for reflection and they provide an effective means of identifying variables that are important to individual teachers and students” among other advantages (p.62). Sagor (2005) suggests that keeping a teacher’s journal “will allow you [the teacher] to understand the significance of unanticipated events as well as enable you to share this learning with others” (p. 108). The reflections described the researcher’s impressions of the implementation process, students’ progresses, difficulties and action plans.
- **Diagnostic and post tests:** According to Brown (2010) a test is “a method of measuring a person’s ability, knowledge, or performance in a given domain” (p. 3). There are several types of tests that are administered depending on the evaluation criteria; for this particular action research project there were two types of tests used during the implementation process. The first test to be conducted was the diagnostic test during the first day of the three-month process in order to detect problems in students’ accuracy of the past tenses. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) point out that diagnostic tests serve the purpose of spotting particular “strengths, weaknesses and difficulties that a student is experiencing” (p. 419). At the end of the implementation stage an achievement test was handed out. Brown (2010) also mentions that an achievement test exclusively evaluates if instructional objectives have been met. During the last class of the three-month cycle, the same test was

conducted to see up to what extent students improved accuracy of the past tenses by using the monitoring strategies.

- ***Learners' reflection log:*** Sagor (2000) stated that journals help students to reflect on their own learning process. Burns (1999) affirms that student journals “can usefully pinpoint areas of difficulty in learning, in both a general and an individual sense” (p. 133). During the implementation process, students used a forum to detect and reflect upon their particular problems using the past tenses after they have commented on their partners' performances. Later, they set up their own action plans to improve their performances. They used Nabble™ a third-party application forum that is embedded in the course's platform (pbworks™).
- ***Transcripts:*** According to Burns (1999) transcription is useful because the researcher is able to examine students' performance more thoroughly and consequently, noticing patterns more clearly and closely. The transcripts from the voice message board's (Voxopop™) conversations intended to demonstrate two aspects: the first one was to notice if students have actually improved speaking accuracy of the past tenses and also to see they peer and self-corrected each other in order to raise awareness of their mistakes so they could improve accuracy in future interactions.
- ***Rubrics:*** According to Bucknam, James and Milenkiewicz (2008) rubrics “are written guidelines by which students' work is assessed, articulating the standards for how students' work is judged and allowing for the cross-tabulation and inclusions of multiple viewpoints in the analysis” (p. 91). This tool determined the students' overall performances during each one of the speaking interactions done through the

voice message board. The teacher presented the rubrics before each implementation so students took the standards into consideration before the speaking tasks.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The following procedures were taken during the pre, while and post stages to collect data throughout the implementation process.

#### **Pre-stage**

The following were the tools used in the pre-stage:

1. Invitation letters (Appendix A)
2. Consent forms (Appendix B)
3. Pbworks™ Platform (Appendix C)
4. First survey (Sample) (Appendix D)
5. Diagnostic test through the voice message board (Sample) (Appendix E)

The tools used for the pre-stage were previously designed and set up in a wiki (pbworks™). These instruments were utilized at the Centro Colombo Americano's Audio Visual Multi Media Laboratory (AVM lab) after students had completed the consent forms, they proceeded to answer the initial survey by means of a web site that creates them (encuestafacil.com). The survey answers indicated students' beliefs of their accuracy when constructing full-length utterances in the simple past tense as well as what they thought about the use of technology in order to improve their accuracy as they interacted with other classmates. Later, they took the diagnostic test by through the voice message board used for the entire implementation process. During the speaking task, students were to speak about their childhood memories with a partner for a period of ten minutes. The results aimed at detecting the problems students had in employing the past tenses as well as noticing



whether students were using self and peer correction strategies to improve speaking accuracy in the use of the past tenses.

### While stage

Table 2 shows how the implementation stage took place according to the dates each activity, the type of task that was executed and the final product that was expected from each session.

Table 2  
*Research Project Timeline*

DATE	TASK	PRODUCTION
May 25 <sup>th</sup> , 2010	<b>Topic: Traveling Experiences</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Task preparation</li> <li>2. Task implementation</li> <li>3. Peer monitoring task</li> <li>4. Self-assessment task</li> </ol>	<b>Students:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conversations and comments in the voice message board</li> <li>• Self-assessment reflections and action plan in the forum.</li> </ul> <b>Teacher:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journal entry</li> <li>• Check patterns</li> </ul>
June 10 <sup>th</sup> , 2010	<b>Topic: A Vacation Trip</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Task preparation</li> <li>2. Task implementation</li> <li>3. Peer monitoring task</li> <li>4. Self-assessment task</li> </ol>	<b>Students:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conversations and comments in the voice message board</li> <li>• Self-assessment reflections and action plan in the forum.</li> </ul> <b>Teacher:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journal entry</li> <li>• Check patterns</li> </ul>
June 22 <sup>nd</sup> , 2010	<b>Topic: My Accident</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Task preparation</li> <li>2. Task implementation</li> <li>3. Peer monitoring task</li> <li>4. Self-assessment task</li> </ol>	<b>Students:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conversations and comments in the voice message board</li> <li>• Self-assessment reflections and action</li> </ul>

		<p>plan in the forum.</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journal entry</li> <li>• Check patterns</li> </ul>
July 12 <sup>th</sup> , 2010	<p><b>Topic: My unforgettable experience</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Task</li> <li>2. Task implementation</li> <li>3. Peer monitoring task</li> <li>4. Self-assessment task</li> <li>5. Fill out mid-term survey</li> </ol>	<p><b>Students:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conversations and comments in the voice message board</li> <li>• Self-assessment reflections and action plan in the forum.</li> <li>• Mid-term survey</li> </ul> <p><b>Teacher:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journal entry</li> <li>• Check patterns</li> </ul>
July 23 <sup>rd</sup> , 2010	<p><b>Topic: My VIP</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Task preparation</li> <li>2. Task implementation</li> <li>3. Peer monitoring task</li> <li>4. Self-assessment task</li> </ol>	<p><b>Students:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conversations and comments in the voice message board</li> <li>• Self-assessment reflections and action plan in the forum.</li> </ul> <p><b>Teacher:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journal entry</li> <li>• Check patterns</li> </ul>
August 10, 2010	<p><b>Topic: My Dilemma</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Task preparation</li> <li>2. Task implementation</li> <li>3. Peer monitoring task</li> <li>4. Self-assessment task</li> </ol>	<p><b>Students:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conversations and comments in the voice message board</li> <li>• Self-assessment reflections and action plan in the forum.</li> </ul> <p><b>Teacher:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journal entry</li> <li>• Check patterns</li> </ul>

The instruments applied during the while stage the instruments used were the following:

1. Teacher's journal (Appendix F)
2. Students' online forum (Appendix G)
3. Mid-term survey (Sample) (Appendix D)
4. Rubrics (Appendix H)

Throughout the implementation stage, the teacher kept a journal that helped him reflect upon the Action Research process: the participants' reactions, plans and impressions of the actual outcomes. The students' reflection logs showed the learners comments on their partners' mistakes during the previous interactions. Finally, the mid-term survey indicated if students felt they were improving accuracy in the use of the past tenses.

### **Post stage**

The artifacts involved in the post stage included:

1. Final survey (sample) (Appendix I)
2. Final test (Sample) (Appendix E)
3. Rubric (Sample) (Appendix H)
4. Transcripts (Appendix I)

During the final stage of the implementation process, learners spoke once more about their childhood memories as they did during the first day of the cycle. This final test served the purpose of showing concrete evidence whether the learners actually improved their accuracy in the past tenses during the three-month process as well as to perceive if they increased the use of peer and self-correction during the conversations. At the end of the lesson, students completed the final survey where they stated their last impressions of their improvement.

#### **CHAPTER 4- Pedagogical intervention and implementation**

As soon as the researcher has identified the problem within his/her context, he/she will consider a pre-planned number of procedures he/she will follow in order to find a solution. During the implementation stage, it was essential to train learners in the use of awareness-raising strategies before they could use them in the recording sessions. The following are the steps taken in order to conduct the pedagogical intervention and implementation process.

##### **Awareness-raising strategies used during regular lessons**

During the regular class time, the learners were to employ an array of strategies in order to raise awareness of their own mistakes while they were interacting with other students. The teacher used the following techniques throughout each session so learners could apply them when they conveyed and negotiated meaning through the online message board. These were the strategies used to train students to self and peer-correct each other:

- **Substitution tables:** This strategy was chosen because it was necessary for students to organize the Subject + Verb + Complement patterns in their utterances.
- **The book's grammar charts:** Students were able to see and understand the grammar structures from their textbooks.
- **How to use their fingers to monitor accuracy:** This strategy also helped students keep count of each grammatical pattern
- **Silent conversations:** Students were able to see in a written text if they were using the other strategies in a "spontaneous" interaction.

##### ***Substitution tables:***

According to Scrivener (2005), drawing grammar tables or charts on the board are

very useful especially when students try to notice and understand grammar patterns. During regular class time, students wrote short sentences that were either affirmative or negative statements or Yes/No or WH questions. They had to be written out from left to right, the sentence had to be divided into smaller parts and each part was labeled according to part of speech it corresponds. The following table shows an example:

Table 3  
*Substitution Table*

<b>Did</b>	<b>John</b>	<b>buy</b>	<b>the book</b>	<b>?</b>
	<b>your friends</b>		<b>the magazine</b>	
<i>Auxiliary Verb "Did"</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Verb in Past Participle</i>	<i>Complement</i>	
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	

The rationale behind the substitution tables like any other learning strategy has to be explained to the learners beforehand so they will know how to use them, and most importantly, how they will link them later on with future strategies. Scrivener (2005) suggests that students record the structures in their notebooks so they can follow the models when they write their own examples.

***Grammar charts:***

Once the students familiarized themselves with the substitution tables, they had to know how to transfer that information into their course book's grammar charts. Students broke down the information given in their charts into smaller bits of information. Then they subdivided the information drawing horizontal lines between

the subject and the main verbs. They also drew another line between the main verb, and the complement. They also labeled the parts of the sentence by using their own conventions such as abbreviations. They also drew vertical lines if they noticed any differences in the affirmative and negative statements as well as in the “yes/no” and information questions.

During the preparation stage prior to the communicative event, the students resorted to their course books’ grammar charts to remember the structures and they also had a visual reference of the concept they were about to practice. Since the students worked on the grammar tables on their own before the online interactions, they were ready to produce the target structure and it was much easier for students to monitor their accuracy.

***Finger correction (visual stimulus):***

According to Scrivener (2005), using fingers as visual stimulus to correct mistakes was initially used as a teacher correction technique. Finger correction is quite useful once the students become aware that there is a grammatical pattern to follow when they are speaking. This technique originated from the “silent way” methodology that was developed during the 1970’s, its distinctive trademark is the Cuisenaire rods. Among their many uses, the rods can be used to show how grammar structures are formed. Each rod comes in different size and color and they represent a part of speech. These patterns can be transferred to the student’s fingers. Each finger represents a part of speech. Students already know the grammar patterns because they have used them before in the substitution tables and their grammar charts.

***Silent conversations:***

A silent conversation is a “conversation” done through writing. This conversation was carried out in pairs or in groups of three. There were only two important instructions for students to follow during the activity. First, students could not talk to one another, and second, students could not only “speak” to one another through the written word. Students were expected to interact as spontaneously as possible to reflect nuances of a “natural” conversation. This meant that they had to interact as spontaneously as possible resembling a “natural” conversation. During the activity, the students “spoke” for ten minutes and at the end of the activity the teacher collected their papers and posted them against the wall for peer analysis and correction.

After correcting their own conversations, students assessed their own work. They reflected on what their most common mistakes were, which ones were the most frequent and how they were going to tackle those problems in order to improve accuracy when they interacted with their classmates during the online conversations. Throughout this process, the learners became more aware of structuring coherent full-length sentences whether they were interacting with others.

### **Web 2.0 tools used during the implementation stage**

The pedagogical intervention and implementation stage of this action research project took place during a three-month period. During this phase, there were a total of eight recording sessions where the students used the voice message board to conduct their interactions. All the implementation stage tasks were arranged and saved in a wiki in order to keep track of students’ process, progress and reflections in an orderly fashion. According to Dudeney (2007) a wiki is a collaborative Web 2.0 application where users are able to construct, modify or delete information in a collaborative manner. However, for the purpose

of the present research, the wiki's principal function was to keep each of the sessions' procedures and content organized and it was not used as a collaborative tool as such. The wiki can be consulted in the following web page: <http://bertcolombo.pbworks.com/Higher-Ground>.

The following figure is a sample of one of the wiki's sections.

**Figure 1. Classroom Project Platform**

In this lesson you are going to talk with your partner about a nice **vacation trip** you had in your life. Think about the hotel you stayed at, the places you visited, the activities you did there and special anecdotes that happened there. Remember to use the simple past and past continuous tenses during the conversation. Don't forget to ask questions to your partner about their trip. Click [here](#) to start.

**Activity 2**

After you have finished recording your conversation, listen to a conversation from other partners and try to detect your partner's mistakes when they use the past tenses. Tell them what their error was, but do not correct them.

**For example:**

**Your partner:** I go to Cartagena last year.  
**You:** You said "I go to Cartagena last year. Is that correct?"

**Activity 3**

Later, listen to your partner's comments and correct your errors in a notebook.

**Activity 4**

Think about your problems when you used the past tenses. What were they? Which verbs do you need to study more? Are you omitting any auxiliary verbs (e.g. did) Are you constructing complete and correct sentences using the past continuous (e.g. I **was staying** at an expensive hotel in Cartagena). Write your reflections [here](#).

The pedagogical approach adopted to conduct the entire implementation process was done through Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and the support of a Web 2.0 tools such as Voxopop™ (voice message board) and Nabble™(an embeddable online forum where students posted their peer correction comments). According to Levy (as cited



in Browne and Fotos, 2004), CALL is defined as “the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning” (p.3). Schrum and Solomon (2007) defined Web 2.0 tools refer to the interaction, collaboration, creation and sharing of information in real time between users through sophisticated digital software applications such as blogs, wikis, photo and video sharing sites. The importance of CALL and Web 2.0 tools such as pbworks™, Voxopop™ and Nabble™ in English language learning is invaluable since it supports learning processes and enhances autonomy at the same time if properly used.

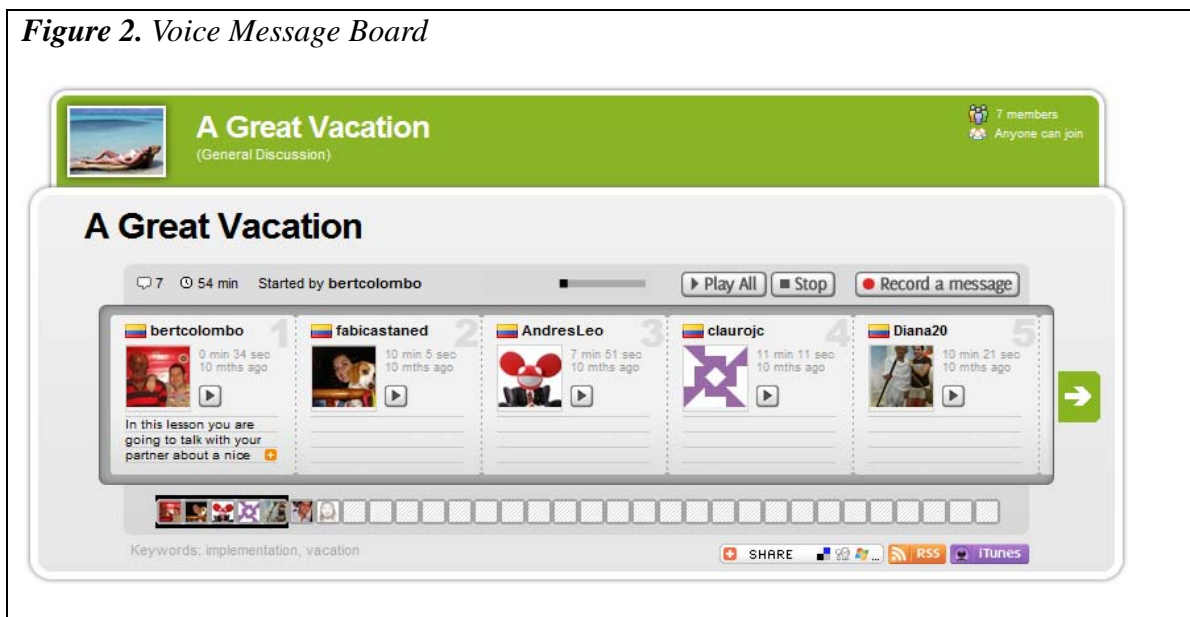
Each session was based on the course book’s topics, particularly the lessons that were directly addressed in the use of the simple past tense. In each interaction, the teacher provided the instructions for the activities and later the students needed to hold conversations in the simple past tense in its affirmative, negative and question forms by using the voice message board Voxopop™ which was also embedded in the wiki.

#### **Procedures followed before each recording session**

Before and during each session, students had to go through a set of procedures in order to complete the different tasks. At the beginning of the process, learners rehearsed each task in class by following the language models that varied according to the textbook’s content and, vocabulary and by the awareness-raising strategies given by the teacher during the face-to-face interactions so students could apply them spontaneously during the main speaking task. Later, the students practiced the target language covered in class and they also needed to implement the respective peer and self-corrections techniques in order to complete their virtual tasks. According to Saslow and Ascher (2006) providing students with thinking time will make them feel the need to experiment with the new language items

in context in order to start mastering the target structures. As soon as they were finished, they recorded their conversations in the voice message board for future assessment in an asynchronous fashion by their peers through their reflection logs. The following figure is an example of the voice message board:


*Figure 2. Voice Message Board*



The Web 2.0 tools used did not only serve the purpose of keeping students' speaking progress through the voice message board, but also worked to raise awareness of their partners' accuracy through peer assessment. Each class member assessed their peers' work by indicating what their errors were by means of the online forum. They commented on their peers' most frequent errors to help learners raise awareness of the sources of their errors in order to take the respective actions to improve their accuracy during communicative events. The following figure is an example of the online forum:

**Figure 3. Students' Online Forum**

**Adriana** May 25, 2010; 09:14pm Re: My first reflection [Reply](#) | [Threaded](#) | [More](#) ▾

 1 post

My reflections about "Your traveling experiences" activity that we're doing in the morning are:

- I forget the simple past of verbs.
- I don't pronouns well the words in English.
- I don't think in English when I speak English, I think first in Spanish and then I translate my ideas to English.

I observed the same errors in the conversation of my classmates, only in the Maritza's group I listen good structure and better pronunciation than the rest of groups.

These errors are very common for me and I think about:

- I need more activities for to memorize de verbs in their three forms simple past, past participle and present.
- I need more activities and exercise for learn to use present progressive, "ever" and "already".

Before each of the implementation session, the participants prepared their conversations by reviewing the grammar models and the topic's vocabulary. Later, students rehearsed the conversations with a different speaking partner than the one they interacted with during the actual communicative event using the voice message board in order to implement the awareness-raising strategies.

As soon as the students finished rehearsing, the group went to the AVM lab to conduct the interactions, later they listened to other pairs' conversations and took notes and analyzed the problems all of the students had when they used the past tenses. These cognitive strategies (Oxford, 1990) helped both speakers and listeners enhance awareness through their own and their partners' mistakes. Finally, they wrote their comments in the online forum for the other classmates to read so they could create an action plan to overcome their problems in future interactions. Brown (2007) stated if there is a direct link between awareness and action the student will become autonomous enough for setting up achievable learning goals. As a result, the learner will become aware of his/her own

shortcomings, learning style and the strategies he/she may use to overcome challenges. Finally, the learner will eventually take action by means of the strategies to attain the planned learning goals.

### ***Face-to-face sessions***

During each lesson, the teacher presented the teaching content according to the textbook's structure. The units' topics covered throughout the implementation stage focused on the use of the simple past tense. The textbook's topics were taken from the textbook Top Notch 2 (Saslow & Ascher, 2006) and adapted in a way where students were able to use the past tenses during each conversation session. The following were the units' themes used for each implementation session interactions: *Unit 1-* Greetings and Small talk; *Lesson 4-* Ask about a person's experiences, *Unit 3-* Staying at Hotels; *Lesson 4-* Choose a Hotel, *Unit 4-* Cars and Driving; *Lesson 2-* Describing an Accident, *Unit 7-* Psychology and Personality; *Unit Wrap-up*, *Unit 8-* Enjoying the Arts; *Lesson 4-* Discuss Your Favorite Artist; *Unit 10-* Ethics and Values; *Lesson 3-* Express Personal Values.

During each lesson, the learners were trained to use different monitoring strategies such as following models, interpreting their textbooks' grammar charts, identifying mistakes and giving peer feedback with different stimuli, repetitions and recasts so they could make use of them during the online communicative events. The teacher also provided students with language models so they could enhance accuracy and they also prepared the vocabulary they needed for the task. After preparing the conversation, students went to the multi-media lab to have the conversations through the voice message board Voxopop™.

### ***Virtual learning environment***

Barajas (2003) defined Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) as the blend of face-

to-face and distance learning interaction between learners and a tutor. This is the approach taken in order to enhance accuracy awareness by means of a voice message board since students had to record their interactions with the message board in a synchronous fashion and then they would write comments in the online forum in an asynchronous manner.

During their communicative interventions, students employed the awareness-raising strategies previously practiced in class as well as the vocabulary and the verbs in past tense and to use the language models as a guide. At that moment, the teacher did not remind the students to employ peer correction because this seriously compromised authenticity in the speaking activities (Krashen, 2003).

After learners had finished their interactions, students were assigned to listen to one conversation made by another pair of students at home or in any other setting as they peer correct their partners' performances by means of the voice message board. During this asynchronous task, students detected the errors by their partners but they would not correct them. They would simply were to "echo" their classmates' errors so that later on the original speakers correct their own errors by following the thread. After that task, students wrote a short reflection in the online forum describing their progress, problems and action plans to improve their accuracy in the use of past tenses. At the end of the process, the teacher listened to each of the conversations in order to give students feedback of their performances through rubrics which indicated how much they progressed during each interaction. The rubrics were designed by the teacher according to what he believed it was important for students to achieve through the voice message board such as surface-level accuracy in the past tenses (See Appendix H).

#### **Session-to session description**

There were a total number of eight recording sessions and each one lasted for ten minutes. During the **first day of class**, the teacher explained to the students the purpose of the research study and he distributed the invitation letters and the consent forms. After they had read and signed them, the teacher took them to the multi-media laboratory in order to complete the first survey and to conduct the initial test which consisted of getting students to talk about their childhood memories. It was never mentioned to the students to use the past tenses during the interaction in order not to compromise authenticity nor validity of the test. There were problems with the microphones and the proceedings in using the message board, four students did not understand the instructions and they did not record their conversation so they had to start all over again. One pair of students did not manage to record anything since they stopped their recording every two minutes to listen to what they had recorded. Other two groups did not save their recordings and one group did not verify if their microphone was on and they interacted without registering what they were saying. As an action plan for the future sessions, the teacher decided to make sure the microphones were on and properly plugged before any other activities during the rest of the implementation stage and he made the rules and instructions clear for students. During their initial test it was confirmed that all of the students in the Skills 1 course had problems structuring accurate full-length sentences in the simple past tense. It was also identified that most of the students did not know the simple past of many verbs in past tense, about half of them used the simple present tense to express their ideas from the past, they also confused the past tense verb to be “was/were”, and they mispronounced the regular verb “ed” endings.

The **first recording session**, was conducted during the sixth day of class of the first

cycle (Skills 1), the students first looked up for the words they needed to use during the conversations in their dictionaries and then they rehearsed with a partner what they were going to say. The teacher also reminded them to use the self-correction strategy that they used in previous lessons such as the use of “I mean” every time they noticed they made a mistake in the use of the past tenses. Once they were at the AVM lab, students talked about one meaningful traveling experience with one their partners main aim of the conversation was to introduce the topic using the present perfect tense. While students were interacting in pairs, the teacher noticed that most students had problems producing accurate sentences in both the present perfect and the simple past tenses and they were not using “I mean” to self-correct their errors. This was later confirmed when the teacher listened to their conversations. There were logistical issues during the first recording sessions; for instance, there was a problem with one group’s microphone because it was damaged and one pair of students did not interact much because they argued that “they had not much to say” However, they were instructed to expand the conversation by asking follow-up questions. Once the communicative event was over, the students were instructed to write their comments in their online reflection log; however, most students did not have enough time to write their comments of their partners’ performance in the forum due to time constraints.

As an action plan for the following pedagogical intervention, the teacher decided to be more explicit in the training of the peer-correction strategies such as repetitions and recasts. He also chose to train them on how to use substitution tables, to interpret their textbook’s grammar charts and to use their fingers to keep track of accuracy each time a new grammar concept was taught and as a way to control accuracy during the upcoming communicative events. He also decided to reassign speaking partners to two students who

did not seem to like the implementation activity and he finally concluded not to teach regular lessons for the rest of the implementation sessions in order for his students to have enough time to undergo the entire intervention sessions' procedures.

In the **second recording session**, students had to discuss a memorable vacation trip. After they had prepared for their conversation by using the vocabulary covered in the textbook's unit, they went to the multi-media lab to hold their conversations. The teacher decided to leave the same partners working together in order to facilitate coding during the data analysis stage. The students were instructed to check the microphones and to do a sound check so they would not have any surprises after they interacted (such as if the microphones were working, if there was internet connection and so on). These time students were able to speak for the entire ten minutes and they were also able to save the recording without any problems. After the recording, students were assigned to listen to other conversations from other pairs and to take notes on their mistakes using the simple past tense. Then, they wrote their comments in the online forum. The teacher noticed that some students were not following the grammar models for the task and to address this issue the teacher decided to be more demanding on the use of the conversation models that are written in their textbooks. Another aspect that was also considered was for students to write more comments regarding the usage of simple past tense. There were some comments that were aimed at vocabulary or they were too vague.

By the **third recording session** students were starting the Skills 2 course. During that session they shared their experiences about a road accident. They followed all the pre-stage procedures (preparing vocabulary from the textbook's unit and rehearsal) before they went to the AVM lab. There were no problems in this session in particular because the



students were already familiar with the mechanics of the exercise and the microphones were already checked. The teacher instructed the learners to use a hand signal (visual stimulus) when they heard their partner produce an incorrect verb in past (they had to put their thumb backwards in order to indicate his peer that he/she needed to use the verb in the past tense). During the activity, none of the speakers used the hand signal because they argued that they felt it was silly to do and they were not aware of using the technique once they were engaged in the conversations. This behavior indicated that using a visual stimulus is not the most appropriate manner to peer-correct mistakes during the speaking interactions since listeners were not paying attention to all the grammar mistakes their partners' committed. On the other hand, students were focusing more on the meaning of the message rather than surface level grammatical structuring.

At the end of the activity, the students did not have time to write their comments in the forum so the teacher left this task for homework. When the teacher checked the forum, only two students had left comments for their classmates to read and from this response the teacher inferred that students had issues in being autonomous when they had to write comments on the forum. From there on, the teacher decided to time each activity so the students had enough time to write their comments. He also chose to quiz his learners to check if they had studied and learned some verbs in the past in order to verify if the problem lied in learning the verbs or if they had problems using the verbs in spontaneous communication.

In the **fourth recording session**, the students shared a happy, sad, funny, or embarrassing experience during their lives. After the students did all of the pre-stage activities, the students went to the AVM lab. During the session, the students worked on

their own without the teacher's intervention in terms of using the wiki, the voice message board and the online forum. They completed all the conversations and there was plenty of feedback in the forum. The students also completed the mid-course survey. The teacher noticed that some students practiced their conversations with their partners once more before they recorded their conversations even after they had already done so with another partner in the classroom before going to the lab. This became something standard for most of the students for the remaining sessions. This showed that students were more conscious of the importance of rehearsing before any speaking task to feel more confident before they perform.

For the **fifth recording session** the students started the Skills 3 course. The session's topic aimed at talking about a very important person in the students' lives. The learners had already prepared their vocabulary at home and the teacher left on the board a series of grammar models that showed the construction of sentences in affirmative, negative and question forms. When students practiced their conversations, most of them resorted to the models in order to monitor accuracy but they did not use them to peer and self correction. This showed that students were more aware of the importance of constructing accurate full-length utterances in order to enhance communication with their counterpart.

The students who had been in the course from the beginning or during the second month did not encounter any problems during the classroom and multi-media laboratory procedures. Only the four new students stated that they felt a little overwhelmed of the use of the wiki, the voice message board and the online forum but the teacher helped them during the entire process and they were also supported by their more experienced

classmates. They also completed the initial test and to answer the survey. When they were recording their conversations, the teacher noticed students looking at their notebooks in order to follow the grammar models. At the end of the session, students wrote their comments about their peers' performances using the past tense. The following day, students reported that they had read all of their partners' comments including the ones they had not read from previous sessions.

In the **sixth and final recording session**, the learners had to talk to their partners about an ethical issue. The students had absolutely no problems during the complete process. They were completely autonomous in terms of going over the pre- activity procedures as well as using the technological tools involved in the implementation. Learners also practiced what they were going to say before the interactions. They also wrote their comments in the forum, they did the final test, which was about their childhood memories and they completed the final survey. At the end of the session the students and the teacher reflected upon the process; Students affirmed that the voice message board helped them raise awareness of the most concurrent errors students made while they were exchanging information with others during the speaking tasks. They also informed the teacher that they noticed that many of the errors their partners made during the speaking activities were the same as the ones they usually do when they speak to others. Regarding the online forum, students felt that their partners' comments helped them raise awareness of their most frequent errors and it also helped them to set action plans to improve accuracy and the use of the simple past verbs.

## CHAPTER 5- DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In this chapter the data collected will be analyzed in order to answer the main research question and explain the findings during the enquiry process will be reported. The researcher will also present a thorough analysis of the categories that emerged from the concepts during the previous chapter.

As soon as the data has been gathered after the implementation stage, the researcher needs to make sense out of it. In order to do this, Corbin and Strauss (2008) state that the researcher has to organize the data and analyze it thoroughly from different perspectives to see what really happened during the process as well as its final outcomes. At the end of the analysis process, the researcher will continue by explaining every phenomenon that occurred as if he were telling a story where there are characters, a theme and a plot (Sagor, 2005); this means that the data will be studied thoroughly and interpreted through the light of the findings until a story line is developed.

### **Data Analysis Approach**

The approach taken to conduct the analysis stage of this Action Research project will be a combination of frequency counts (Norton, 2009) and grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) since this research study tries to demonstrate quantitatively the degree of progress or fossilization that each of the five students underwent during the implementation stage in terms of constructing accurate utterances in the simple past tense and it will also explain qualitatively the phenomenon behind the numbers. Sagor (2005) suggests that one approach to data analysis is to observe any changes in students' performance in order to detect if they have achieved the expected outcome during the process and observations which are mainly carried out in a quantitative mode. However, the researcher needs to

know the reasons why the target was either hit or missed. Therefore, a qualitative approach to data analysis was employed as a complement to interpret the numerical scores shown in the frequency counts and to explain the reasons why these numbers emerged.

### **Data analysis sources**

The main source of the data stemmed from students oral performances in paired conversations through the use of a voice message board which recorded students' authentic speaking interactions. The topics discussed were about the participants' life experiences and the students had to apply the strategies practiced during the regular lessons in order to raise awareness of their inaccuracies whenever they used the simple past tense. Learningtimes.net (nd), defines voice discussion boards as "web-based threaded message boards in which users click message titles to hear messages and speak into a microphone to post messages" (para.1). The message board captured students' communicative events which served as evidence of the students' progress in terms of improving accuracy especially in the use of the simple past tense throughout the three-month course.

This approach for improving accuracy was particularly important since learners had to employ awareness-raising strategies such as self-correction and peer correction practiced during regular class time, so they could notice their most frequent mistakes and at the same time they had to gradually avoid them. The voice message board was also utilized as a monitoring tool in which students identified their partners' most common mistakes when they structured full-length utterances. This information helped them reflect if their partners' errors were similar or different to theirs.

The students' interactions carried out through the voice message board eventually produced transcriptions of each one of the paired conversations. Transcribing is the process

of representing oral interaction in a written format (Wallace, 1998). The transcriptions revealed up to what extent learners improved accuracy of the simple past tense throughout the entire implementation stage as well as the number of times students used self and peer correction explicitly during each one of their interactions to correct the inaccurate use of the simple past tense.

The way the information was treated in the transcripts was the following: (a) each of the students' utterances were divided in clauses and each clause was highlighted according to hits (correct utterance at a clause level), misses (incorrect utterance at a clause level), and the use of awareness-raising strategies (self-correction and peer correction). Each of these features was assigned a color, (b) each type of error was labeled with abbreviations in order to identify the most frequent type of mistakes made by each student, (c) the information in the transcripts was later transferred to different MSExcel™ charts with the intention of detecting patterns of progress or fossilization in each students use of the past tense and to see the frequency of the types of awareness-raising strategies used in all the conversations.

Another source of data used in the implementation stage was the students' online forum comments that were done through an embeddable online forum called Nabble™ where they reflected upon their own and their classmates' speaking performances in terms of the proper use of the simple past tense. These comments somehow were designed in a way to resemble learning logs which was the initial intention from the researcher. Wallace (1998) described logs as notes that any participant of the research process writes about any significant event during the lesson. The learning logs helped learners raise awareness of their own most frequent mistakes when they used the simple past tense and most of the students started self-correcting these errors as they interacted with their partners. The online

forum also facilitated evidence of students' awareness in the accuracy of the past tenses, and at the same time, it provided their speaking partners with comments about what they needed to improve for future interactions.

A third source of data came from three students' surveys which were administered once a month. Mertler (2009) describes surveys as short questionnaires that gather impressions and opinions of people about a determined topic. The information in the surveys revealed students backgrounds, expectations and assessment of the system used to improve accuracy. This information was relevant because some of their answers contrasted with the implementation's final outcomes based on their beliefs in terms of improvement, their individual performances inside and outside the classroom and the actual results from their performances throughout the process.

A teacher's research journal was an additional source adopted to gather impressions of the learners' attitudes toward the project, their reactions, their questions and overall the insights of their performances throughout the inquiry process. According to Wallace (1998), journals are public documents which register impressions and feelings of the researcher toward the inquiry process. The online journal provided information in terms of the teacher's perception of each of his students' performance levels, learners' credibility in the system used to improve their accuracy and, also to register which students took action outside the classroom setting to improve their future performances. The researcher used such information to reflect and plan the subsequent steps to follow in order to enhance learners' performance through the voice message board as well as to think of strategies to develop accuracy before they engaged interaction. The learning journal can be consulted in the following web page <http://sabajeda.blogspot.com/>.

A final source of information used by the researcher were rubrics to assess the participants' performances during the distinct online speaking tasks. James, Milenkiewicz and Bucknam (2008) affirmed that rubrics are "written guidelines by which students' work is assessed, articulating the standards for how student work is judged". This artifact provided the learners and the researcher information about of each of the students' performance quality in each one of their interactions through the voice message board and as a reflection tool to set up action plans to improve future performances. A sample of the rubrics can be seen in Appendix H.

The following table summarizes the kind of analysis to be described in the subsequent sections of this document.

Table 4  
*Data Analysis Methods to be followed during this Study*

<b>Data collection Instrument</b>	<b>Nature of data</b>	<b>Analysis Method</b>
<i>MSExcel Chart Data</i>	<b>Quantitative</b>	Frequency Counts
<i>Teachers' Journal</i>	<b>Qualitative</b>	Grounded Theory
<i>Students' Online Forums</i>	<b>Qualitative</b>	Grounded Theory
<i>Students' Surveys</i>	<b>Qualitative</b>	Grounded Theory
<i>Transcripts</i>	<b>Qualitative</b>	Grounded Theory
<i>Rubrics</i>	<b>Qualitative</b>	Grounded Theory

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

### **Qualitative Analysis Procedure**

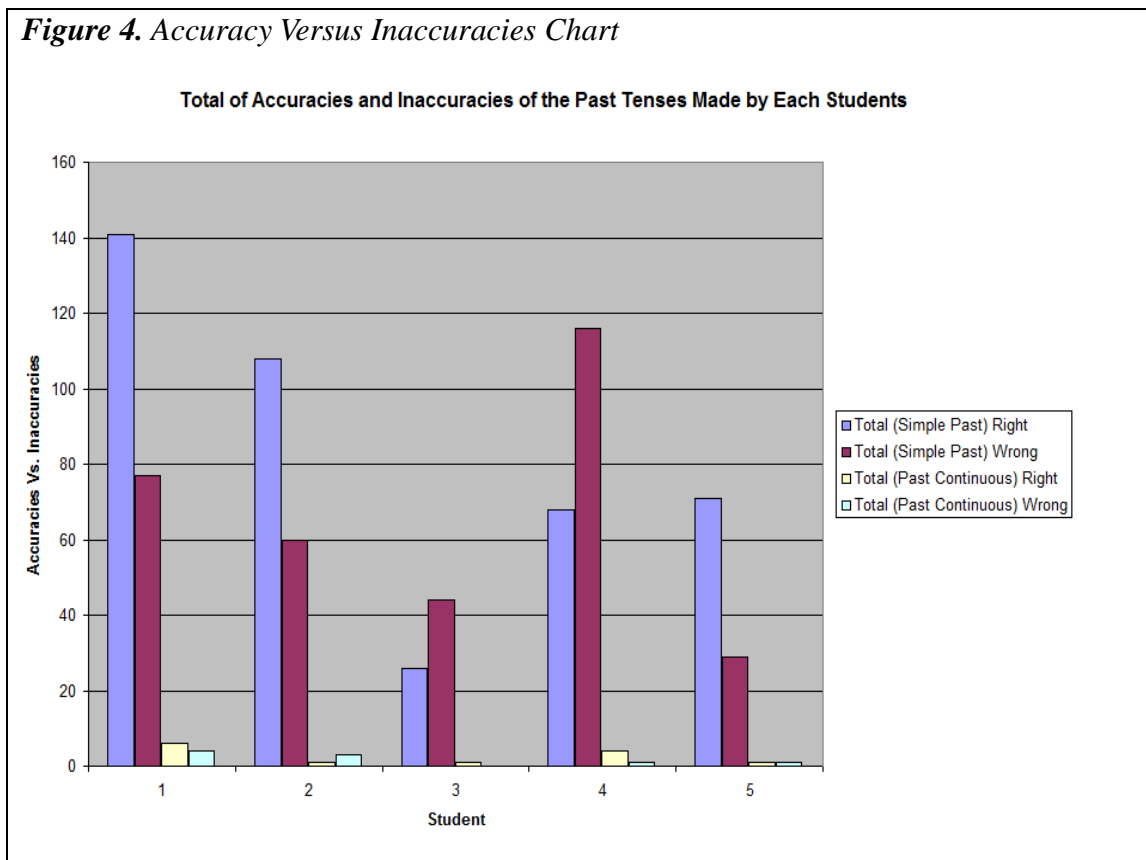
Since this Action Research project required the use of two different approaches to data analysis, it was necessary to initially gather quantitative data from students' oral production that would represent students' progress in terms of the accuracy of the simple past tense during face-to-face interactions. Norton (2009) proposes the use of descriptive



statistics whenever there is “an observation study which includes counting” (p. 135). Among the descriptive statistics methods, there is one that best suits this Action Research project which was to apply frequency counts “to display results in a summarized form” (Norton, p. 137). Therefore, the first step taken to analyze the data came from the transcripts which were represented in the MSEXCEL™ charts. The researcher turned the numbers which depicted hits and misses into bar graphs in order to notice each of his students’ performance levels throughout the eight conversations and to discover which were the most salient errors made when they constructed utterances in the simple past tense. This information provided a clear description of the process as well as the final outcome of the solution for students to improve their accuracy in the use of the simple past tense.

#### **Analyzing Quantitative Information**

The following figure shows the students’ overall performance in terms of accuracy during the eight conversation sessions. The figures on the left represent the number of the correct and incorrect utterances made by the students at a clause level during the entire implementation process.

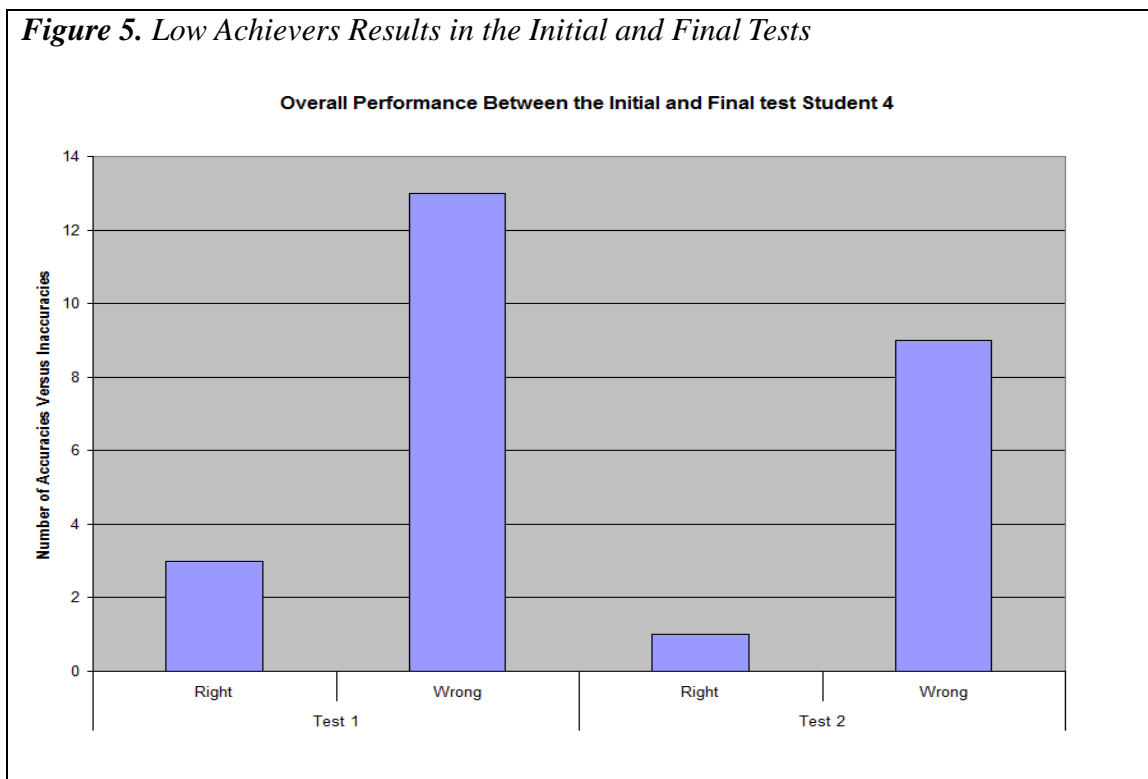
**Figure 4.** Accuracy Versus Inaccuracies Chart

The graph in figure 4 shows that three out of five students (Students 1, 2 and 5) benefited from the system used to improve their speaking accuracy using the simple past tense at the end of the eight recording sessions, whereas the remaining two (Students 3 and 4) fossilized the simple past tense. The rate of accuracies and inaccuracies from all the conversations were taken into account in order to see the effect of the voice message board in the progress or fossilization of the simple past tense in each of the students during authentic interactions for the duration of the three-month implementation stage. A further discussion of this aspect will be presented in the following pages.

On the other hand, not all the students profited from the system due to two main reasons: (a) they did not follow the instructional procedures carried out by the teacher-

researcher, and (b) they felt the need to convey messages without considering grammatical accuracy. Figure 5 portrays one of these cases.

**Figure 5.** *Low Achievers Results in the Initial and Final Tests*



### **Qualitative Analysis Procedures**

After the preliminary data analysis was completed, attention was turned to interpreting what had happened during the entire implementation process. To do this, it was necessary to start using the Grounded Theory principles (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) to triangulate the data that proceeded from each source by comparing, contrasting and interpreting the phenomenon that had occurred throughout the pedagogical implementation phase.

Corbin & Strauss (1990) suggested a three-step approach in order to discover the core categories: the first step requires the researcher to do “open coding” or in other words, to “dissect” the data with the intention of discovering the most salient concepts that emerge

from the data. The next step involves “axial coding” which is reconstructing the data in different ways to see the information that emerged from the data from different perspectives in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the phenomena. Finally, the final step is “selective coding” where the final category (or categories) is (are) chosen and validated.

The first step that Corbin & Strauss (1990) suggested in order to start open coding is to raise questions about what it is expected to be found during the inquiry process, later it is essential to make comparisons from the data in order to find a focus and answers to the initial open coding questions. To answer the questions, the data was analyzed from the triangulation of the three students’ surveys, the observations from teacher’s journal, the students’ rubrics, and the comments made by the students in the online forum. These comparisons will explain the results shown in the MSExcel™ charts. Sagor (2005) defined triangulation as the cross-examination of data that will “corroborate evidence to establish validity and reliability” (p. 81). The information that these sources showed were labeled in with the purpose of finding connections and patterns that would indicate students’ progress or fossilization in the use of the past tense as well as knowing what awareness-raising strategies students used the most during the entire implementation process.

The concepts that surfaced from this analysis were the following: the implementation of verbs in the past tense (regular and irregular), accuracy, improvement, self-correction, peer correction, awareness, fossilization, backsliding, learning strategies and autonomy. It was also necessary to find the properties and dimensions of each one so in the next stage they could be grouped into categories. The following figure shows how the concepts emerged from the MSExcel™ chart:

**Figure 6. Emerging Concepts Chart**

**NUMBER OF TIMES CONCEPTS EMERGED IN EACH OF THE STUDENTS' PROGRESS CHARTS (MSEXCEL)**

Student	xxxx Verbs in past tense	Self- correction	Peer correction	Awareness	Improvement	Fossilization	Accuracy	Learning Strategies	Autonomy	Pronunciation of the ED endings	Backslide
1	17	3	8	6	11	6	13	5	4	3	2
2	10	2	4	0	5	8	10	7	1	2	1
3	13	1	13	0	5	16	7	2	5	2	1
4	8	0	13	0	3	6	12	4	1	1	1
5	8	1	8	1	4	4	5	2	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>

After finding the concepts from the open coding stage, then all of them were related amongst each other in order to group them into concrete categories. The approach used to find the categories was through a paradigm model where the causal conditions, the phenomenon, the context, the intervening conditions, the action strategies and the consequences of each concept were thoroughly analyzed (see Appendix J).

At the end of the analysis, the concepts were grouped the following way according to the most salient features identified in the conversation transcripts: verbs in past tense, improvement, backsliding and fossilization into the accuracy category. The concepts of self-correction and peer correction were clustered in the awareness category and finally autonomy subsumed learning strategies into a single unit. All of these categories and sub categories had particular properties in common and they were also related with the Action Research question and they were validated by verifying the categories with the data sources as well. Figure 7 depicts how the concepts developed into categories, which are shown in

the different color boxes. The gray boxes were turned into the accuracy category, the blue boxes became the awareness category, the green boxes were labeled as the autonomy category and finally, the orange boxes emerged as the fossilization category.

**Figure 7. Emerging Categories Chart**

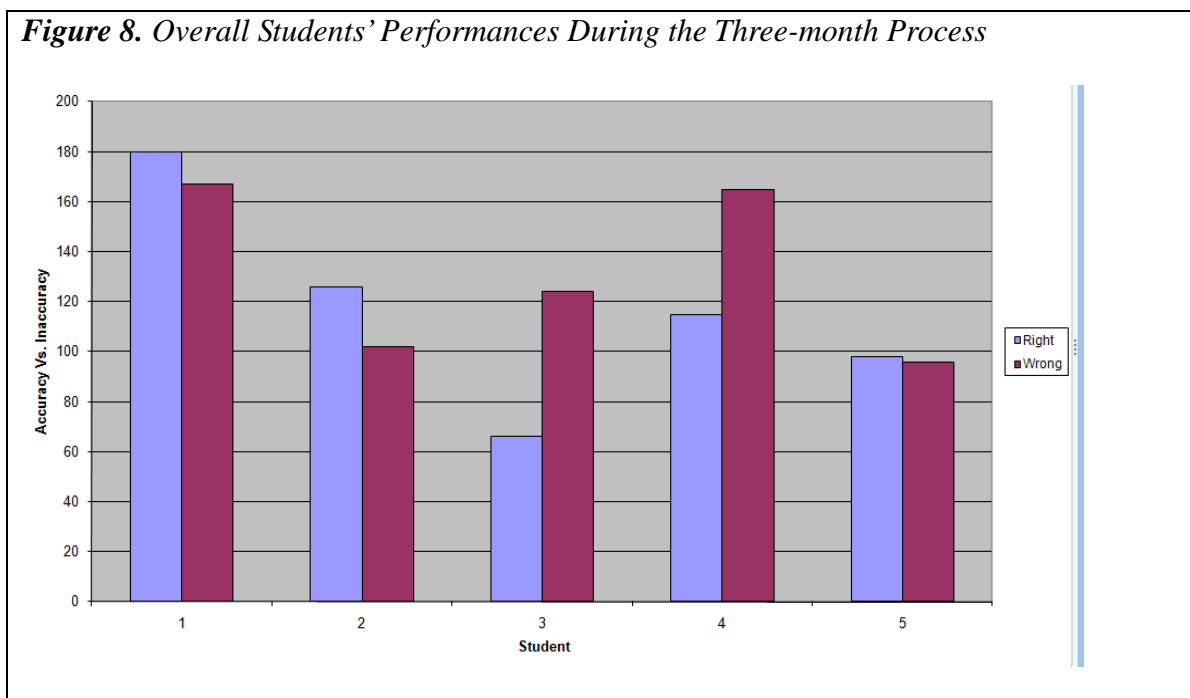
**HOW CATEGORIES EMERGED FROM THE CONCEPTS**

Student	xxxx Verb s in past tense	Self- correction	Peer correction	Awareness	Improvement	Stagnation	Accuracy	Learning Strategies	Autonomy	Pronunciation of the ED endings	Backslide
1	17	3	8	6	11	6	13	5	4	3	2
2	10	2	4	0	5	8	10	7	1	2	1
3	13	1	13	0	5	16	7	2	5	2	1
4	8	0	13	0	3	6	12	4	1	1	1
5	8	1	8	1	4	4	5	2	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>

The final data analysis stage was selective coding where a single core category emerged from merging all the three main categories, namely: (a) accuracy improvement or fossilization, (b) increasing awareness in the use of the simple past tense and (c) learner autonomy development. The relations within these categories will show that the core category which emerged from this study was labeled as: **“Awareness-raising of the accuracy of the simple past tense through the voice message board Voxopop™”** in which a) the awareness-raising strategies bridge the gap between grammatical imprecision and the students’ progressive improvement of the accuracy of the simple past tense, b) the voice message board Voxopop™ serves students as a mirror in order to reflect about their most frequent mistakes when they speak using the simple past tense and c) the autonomous

use of the voice message board and other self-access materials will eventually lead to the development of the accuracy of the simple past tense.

Figure 8 shows the overall students' performance throughout the three-month process. Each graph depicts all of the categories combined and explained above.



The numbers on the left show the number of accurate and inaccurate utterances made by each student. Considering all of the factors from figure 7 that influenced each of the students, there was some progress with students 1, 2 and 5. On the other hand, students 3 and 4 showed strong signs of fossilization due to lack of grammar awareness and attitude towards the system.

### Analyzing Quantitative Data

#### Accuracy Improvement or Fossilization

After having transcribed all their eight recorded interactions, it was necessary to identify the number of accuracies and inaccuracies they made at a clause level in each of

their utterances. These included affirmative and negative statements as well as question forms.

To identify each mistake the following linguistic features were considered:

- Subject + Verb agreement
- The correct pronunciation of the regular verbs ED endings
- The correct use of irregular verbs (including the verb TO BE)
- The use of auxiliary verbs in negative statements and question forms
- The correct use of the verb TO BE in the past tense when students formulated questions
- The construction of predicates
- The use of verb forms
- The use of conjunctions
- The correct use of the verb TO BE + gerunds in the past continuous.

In order to recognize the number of errors made in each of these linguistic features, the accuracies (hits) were highlighted by using green and inaccuracies (misses) by using red. Later, it was necessary to label all the type of mistakes they committed taking into account the linguistic features above and finally they were counted and transferred this information into a MSEXCEL™ chart.

As a result of this process, it was noticed that the most salient mistakes were the following:

- Subject + Verb agreement
- The correct pronunciation of the regular verbs ED endings
- The correct use of irregular verbs (including the verb TO BE)



- The construction of predicates

And to a lesser degree:

- The use of auxiliary verbs in negative statements and question forms
- The correct use of the verb TO BE in the past tense when students formulated

The following is an excerpt taken from Student 1 during the initial test. This will indicate the high number of inaccuracies made during part of the conversation. The red highlights indicate inaccuracies and the green ones accuracies.

(S1, initial test)

“When **I was child** **I like** (pronunciation) softball in my college. **I take part** in competition (pronunciation) **when competition in interschool but no but no other college no only only competition with other class** but **I was champion**. **My team was champion** (laughs). **Was champions** eeh twice twice in my secondary but twice (laughs). **When you finish the school??**”

This sample is a good representation of what the rest of the students did during the initial test. They were inclined to use the present simple tense to construct full-length utterances, they also were very repetitive in using the few irregular verbs they already knew, they did not conjugate the subject pronouns with the verb TO BE in past and they would confuse WAS and WERE. Finally, they did not use the negative auxiliary verb DIDN'T and they also omitted the auxiliary verb DID when they asked questions.

In order to overcome their accuracy problems, during the following three months the students were involved in six conversation sessions and a final test. As a result, there were positive and negative results in terms of the accuracy of the simple past tense

depending on the each student's individual performance. As an example, the following excerpt shows how Student 1 improved the accuracy of the simple past tense when the participant conveyed meaning with the speaking partner. This is a typical example of those students who successfully followed the procedures during the course.

(S1, final test)

*"I will talk about my holiday in the far family eh (pauses) thank you (laughs) I always remember my holidays because I loved to go far with my family eeh when I was child I traveled very far with my family in June and July I stayed eeh in this place for fifteen years fifteen days (laughs) sorry fifteen days maybe I I liked it because the park had a lot of animals and there were some cows and birds and (pauses) and chickens I loved the life animals and and I was eeh very happy because I went mm with all my family my sister my brother and my father and I eh met there with my relatives my cousins my other relatives and I rid a horse".*

In the previous excerpt, Student 1 had more dexterity in using the affirmative statements in the simple past tense. This phenomenon also happened with Student 2 and Student 5 to a lesser degree. They were more aware of structuring accurate S+V+C patterns and they also knew more irregular verbs in the past tense and they were pronouncing the regular verbs ED endings.

Despite of these advances, not all the students were able to raise awareness in the construction of accurate full-length utterances in the simple past tense. In the cases of students 3 and 4, their conversations were quite similar throughout the entire process. This is a sample of the initial test from one of these students:

(S4, initial test)

St 4: Me neither, **I don't don't dance when I stay in in this place? I go to travel all time.**

St Y: Did you go there with your family or did you go with friends?

St 4: Yes, **yes go with my family** eh the grandparents grandparents they have a house in in (pause) **I forget...** near. Honda.

In the following sample the same student presented the same signs of fossilization during the final test three months later:

(S4, final test)

St 4: OK I tell you one history (story) for for many years ago

St Z: UUUU

St 4: (laughs) **Fifteen years ten years ago I forget wallet** in an eh five six dias six days after eh **one person call me** at my house **and told me** eh that eh **my ID my other eh credit cards and (unclear) eh he he had and and and then this person eh give me the directions where he can return my documents.**

Although this student improved in terms of structuring S+V+C patterns, the student still had problems using the past tense irregular verbs and pronouncing the regular verb ED endings. This shows that Student 3 and 4 still were unaware of the proper use of the verbs in the past tense when they narrated their anecdotes. These were the students who stated in the first survey that in their opinion was more important to get the meaning across without caring about accuracy. Such lack of awareness has a direct influence in the improvement of accuracy of any target structure and as a consequence, some learners tend to fossilize basic grammatical structures at an early learning stage.

The information from the students' accuracy "hit" and "misses" in the MSExcel™ chart was later compared with the students' comments in the online forum, the speaking tasks' rubrics, and the teacher's research journal. During this triangulation stage, the results of their speaking performances portrayed in the rubrics were contrasted in order to notice if the outcomes of each of their speaking performances were influenced by the following aspects: a) their attitudes towards the system which were manifested in the surveys, b) their autonomous study habits evidenced in their self-study portfolios and work done in the course's learning community, c) the action plans that they had established in their online forum, d) the practice and use of the awareness raising strategies during regular class time as well as in the recording sessions and finally e) by comparing each data collection tools' information.

In order to understand why some students improved the accuracy of the simple past tense and others did not, it was important to understand their beliefs about the matter. The first survey demonstrated that for most of the students, accuracy was an important linguistic feature since the 67% considered that it was vital for them to structure accurate utterances when they interact with others. The remaining 33% considered that conveying meaning without caring about grammatical accuracy was more important to them. This data indicated the students' pedagogical beliefs and attitudes towards the system employed during the three-month course and its relationship with each individuals' final outcomes.

In most of the teacher's journal entries, it was noticed that there was a group of learners who did more independent work than others such was the cases of students 1, 2 and 5. This work was mainly focused on different grammatical structures and vocabulary practice; however, most of the students' work was aimed at improving the usage of the

simple past tense in authentic communicative events. On the other hand, those students who did not make an extra effort to practice learning new verbs in the past tense and in doing exercises that were intended to improve the construction of the simple past tense in their different forms did not make significant progress in the accuracy of this tense.

According to Han (2004) fossilization generally hinders students' progress and motivation since they are constantly being inaccurate in specific grammatical features of the second/foreign language. The reasons he mentioned for students to fossilize surface grammatical structures also validated in this study through the analysis of the students who did not show significant progress are: (a) failure of parameter resetting, (b) earning inhibiting learning, (c) automatization of faulty knowledge, (d) lack of sensitivity to input, (e) change in emotional state, (f) natural inclination to focus on content not form, (g) avoidance, and (f) satisfaction of communicative needs. Such was the case of Students 3 and 4; who presented two of these types of problems. They showed a failure of parameter resetting; which means that they had problems accepting the approach proposed throughout the course since it moved a little bit away from the Centro Colombo Americano's Adult English Program's (AEP) regular class procedures and lesson design. The other cause of their fossilization in the past tenses was the lack of sensitivity to input because they hardly ever prepared their topics before they recorded their conversations in the online forum or if they did, they completely forgot how to use the strategies while they interacted with their speaking partners.

Another problem these students 3 and 4 encountered was the change in emotional state in terms of not being totally motivated to learn from the system as they felt that it was not necessary to go through all the steps of the process in order to improve their linguistic

skills. For instance, in the first survey all of the students wanted to improve the accuracy of the simple past tense by means of the system but the final survey showed that only 50% felt that they partially improved in this aspect of the foreign language throughout the entire process. The teacher's journal demonstrated that students' beliefs and attitudes toward the system varied according to the learners' study habits, levels of autonomy and self-assessment quality.

An additional prominent problem was that these students had a natural inclination to focus on content and not in form since it was their basic need to communicate with others due to their idea of becoming "spontaneous" English language speakers. This statement was shown in the first survey which points out that 17% of the population at the beginning of the course thought that grammatical structures should not be as important as conveying meaning.

After having analyzed all the data, the project's final outcomes showed that students who devoted more time to independent study of the verbs past tense verbs were also consistent about following the grammar models and internalizing target structures through continuous recycling. For instance, students 1, 2 and 5 brought to class more independent work than others (worksheets and online activities) and they also applied the self and peer correction strategies constantly and were more successful than students 3 and 4 who were more intermittent in employing the strategies offered by the teacher and those who were also used to a more traditional approach to learning English as a foreign language. The rubrics corroborated that the improvement in the accuracy of the simple past tense originated from the awareness students had when they used this tense in their conversations.

The transcripts supplied valuable information about the learners' evolution respecting speaking accuracy especially in the use of the simple past. Although none of the learners totally solved the problem of speaking accuracy, most of them were able to construct accurate full-length utterances in the past tenses following the S+V+C patterns. At the end of the process, students 1, 2 and 5 were also able to follow grammar models by consciously adopting samples given by their teacher during regular class time and most of them internalized the models so they were able to interact spontaneously in the different communicative events. For instance, they would look at the models in a substitution table provided by the teacher on the board or they would look at the grammar charts from their textbooks. At the end of the course, most students were able to construct accurate full-length utterances in affirmative statement, but they had more difficulties creating negative statements and questions.

In terms of students using the verbs in the simple past tense, half of the students were more accurate at the end of the three-month implementation stage. At the beginning of the course, the teacher provided students with a list of verbs in past and he instructed his students to study them at home depending for the upcoming lesson's topic. The students who actually reviewed the list and who constantly recycled the verbs in speaking and writing tasks were more successful in implementing the verbs during the online activity. The others who disregarded the teacher's approach were more concerned in conveying meaning at the expense of accuracy. This shows that student autonomy is a key factor in learning progress and in achieving learning outcomes.

#### **Increasing awareness in the use of the simple past tense**

The awareness category emerged from the transcripts, the students' progress chart and

the MSExcel™ charts that indicated how much each student decreased the number of mistakes when they constructed utterances in the simple past tense. The data analysis revealed that two students did not improve accuracy (students 3 and 4) (in reference to constructing accurate utterances in the simple past tense) due to their lack of interest in following the system and as a result, they were the students who tended to fossilize errors in the simple past most and eventually did not show any significant progress at the end of the three-month course.

During the implementation stage, three out of five students managed to raise awareness of the most frequent mistakes they were making with the surface structures of their sentences of the simple past tense in the foreign language. The instruments revealed that the students who decreased the number of mistakes in using the simple past tenses in face-to-face interactions were more aware of what they were saying and they tended to self and peer correct their partners more than the ones who did not.

The information about students' awareness process also demonstrated that people who read their partners' comments in the online forum and took them into account were most likely to show improvement in their accuracy of their grammatical competence in the accurate use of the simple past tenses especially when they uttered affirmative statements. Another finding was that students tended to self-correct more during face-to-face interactions and they peer corrected more in the online forum since they were more aware of their most frequent mistakes while they interacted with others but at the same time they did not want to interrupt the conversation when they detected their partners' errors since this would compromise the authenticity of the communicative event.

The following are examples of students' progress in using the awareness-raising



strategies between the first and the final tests. This excerpt illustrates the lack of error correction treatment of a student during the initial test:

(S5, first conversation session)

*St 4: Me neither, I don't don't dance when I stay in in this place? I go to travel all time.*

*St Y: Did you go there with your family or did you go for work?*

*St 4: Yes, yes go with my family eh the grandparents grandparents my husband they have a house in in (pause) I forgot near.*

In this excerpt, the student was trying to convey meaning without paying attention to accuracy due to the lack of training. However, as most of the students used the strategies more, they became more aware of modifying their inaccuracies with the correct forms. This excerpt shows how the same student used the awareness raising strategies to overcome her problems at the end of the implementation.

(S5, final test)

*“Niece, yes. And ehh we visit visited the San Felipe castle and many other places famous there and we had a bad anecdote because the first day when we come sorry came in the hotel my mother eh went down in the in the in the ehh oh my God I forgot in the floor because we we went to see the show and the line is off and my mother don't didn't see the....”*

Since the student was trained in awareness-raising strategies during the three-month course, it became evident the learner became more aware of the most salient mistakes in the past tense, as a result, it was easier to recognize and correct them as the conversation progressed.

Evidence from this study supports Krashen's (1990) statement that students become aware when they commit a mistake, they generally tend to edit or self-correct it until they gradually acquire the accurate grammatical structure. He also argued that in some aspects of grammar the speaker is able to raise awareness of a concurrent mistake so he/she can make the respective corrections and therefore acquire the correct form through self-monitoring.

Krashen (1990) also claimed that to use the monitoring strategy successfully three conditions must meet:

- The learner has to know the grammar rules in order to monitor their accuracy.
- The learner has to think about the target structure all the time.
- The learners must have enough time to have communicative events where they are able to employ the monitoring strategies.

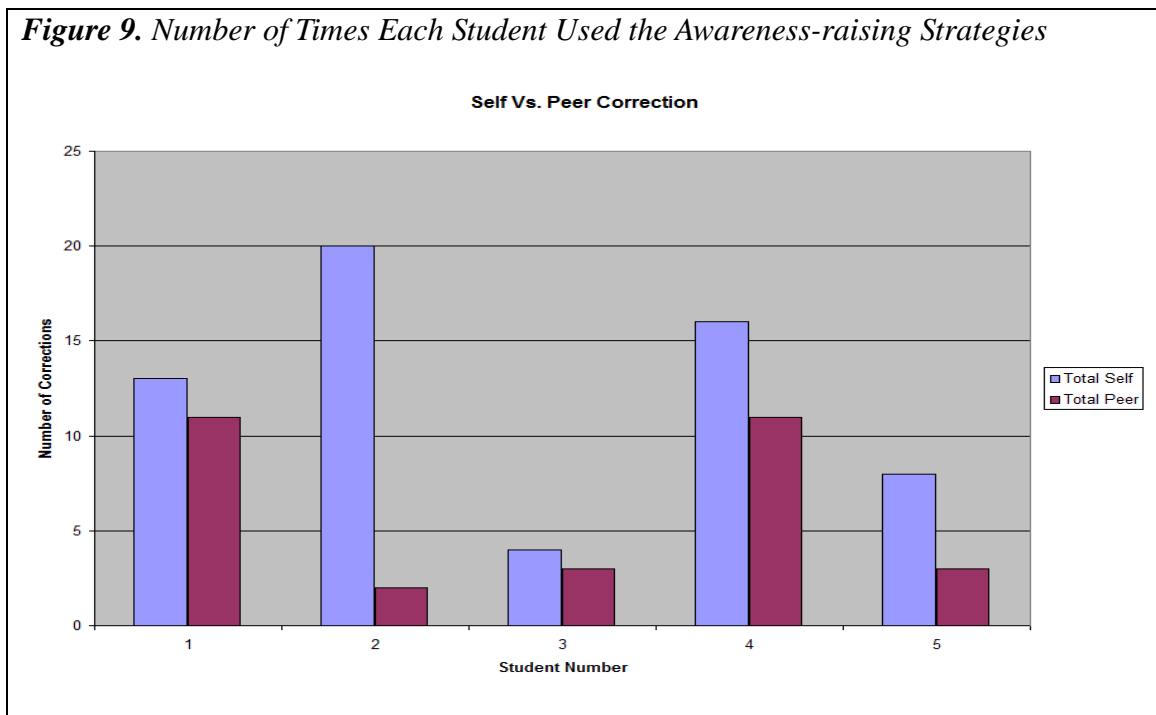
The evidence in the data analyzed demonstrated that three students met these conditions in order to raise awareness of their accuracy of the simple past tense. The data suggests that if students are provided with enough opportunities to use the target structures, to employ awareness-raising strategies such as self and peer correction from the very beginning of their learning process and they also have the chance to self-assess as they listen to themselves and to receive feedback from peers then they will be likely to meet the three conditions that Krashen (1990) mentioned.

In addition, the study findings revealed that the transcripts determined the effectiveness of the participants' peer correction through written comments in the online forum. The mid-term and final survey results indicated that most of the students read their partners' feedback in the online forum about their most common mistakes when using the past as

well as other aspects of the language, but only three out of four students took the comments into account. Some of the students became very sensible in detecting mistakes and provided their partners with an action plan, others would simply point out the mistakes their partners did and a few would focus in other aspects such as pronunciation or vocabulary usage. The students who read and wrote more comments in the online forum benefited more than those who occasionally did (or who never did so).

Only one student admitted having read all of their partners' comments and took them into account for creating the personal action plan to overcome problems. Some of them sometimes read them and took into account their assessment and a few of them rarely read the comments. The students who were conscious about what their major mistakes made the respective changes through self-correction until they internalized the verbs and started to use them spontaneously.

Another meaningful finding was that during the communicative events among peer-correction and self correction, the latter was the most concurrent method employed by the students to regulate speaking accuracy during face-to-face interactions. However, they would rarely correct their partners whenever they detected obvious grammatical mistakes such as the wrong use of irregular verbs; they preferred to use the online forum to do this task since they believe that it is impolite to interrupt a speaker in the middle of the conversation. The rest of the students, were more concerned about negotiating and conveying meaning more than checking on their partners' speaking accuracy. The next figure depicts the use of awareness-raising strategies and shows which strategy was used the most during the eight recording sessions. The figure shows that students preferred self-correction over peer correction during the speaking tasks.

**Figure 9.** Number of Times Each Student Used the Awareness-raising Strategies

### **Learner autonomy and language awareness development**

Throughout the course, students were to complete a series of homework assignments from their course's textbook. Most of them did not comply with the assignments because they argued that they did not have enough time to do them on weekdays and even weekends. This was a usual trend with most of the students; however, two of them (Students 1 and 2) were more constant in doing their homework assignments and additionally, they did a significant number of independent work outside the classroom setting. Students were also to write additional reflections and comments about their own as well as their partners' oral performance in the online forum and they were regularly studying the verbs in the past tense. The following excerpt depicts that some students were more reflective in their comments than others:

(S2, online forum, first reflection after conversation 1)

*“I listened my conversation 5 days ago , and I remember that my principal error is with the verbs in past tense, I need to study a lot those past tenses because that are very important for a good communication in the past tense. I need to learn the irregular verbs study, memorize and practice them all the time”.*

In the subsequent days, Student 2 focused on using those verbs in the writing and speaking tasks. The student also requested for worksheets that could help in the use of regular and irregular verbs in context. This helped the student raise awareness of the most frequent errors and finally started to improve future speaking performances.

The researcher also noticed that Students 1 and 2 were making extra efforts in order to improve the use in the simple past tense. The following comment was written towards the end of the three-month course and was taken from the teacher’s journal. It exemplifies the students’ progress levels and its relationship with their attitudes and autonomy.

(Teacher’s comment, research journal, reflection after conversation 6)

*“I have seen that there has been a positive and negative performance patterns depending on the students' believes and attitudes towards the system and their autonomy. I have noticed that some students help themselves in order to overcome their problems in terms of accuracy using the simple past. Curiously, the three students who were new at the Colombo at the beginning of the process did better than the ones who had taken other courses with other teachers before they started taking the Skills 1-3 courses with me. That means that only Student 1, Student 2 and Student 5 (up to some extent) were the ones who had faith on the system and they learned from their partners' comments in the online forum plus they did a lot more than the others outside the*

*classroom such as doing all their home work assignments and doing some independent work in the online community I set up at the beginning of Skills 3. However, Student 3 and Student 4 who started taking the English course three or six months before felt that the system was not too reliable in terms of learning from their peers' comments in the online forum. They thought that it was better that the teacher to intervene in the error correction stage rather than peers”.*

In the triangulation made between the students' online forum and the teacher's journal, the autonomy category emerged from the students' and the teachers' comments about what learners did after class in order to improve accuracy of the past tenses. They also referred to the learning strategies (another salient concept identified) they employed during the course to improve their performance in terms of the accuracy of the simple past tense. Two of these strategies was studying the verbs in past tense and writing some examples of the verbs in context; the other strategy was to use the textbook's grammar charts as well as the substitution tables in their notebooks in order to construct accurate full-length utterances.

According to Brown (2007), autonomous students tend to take the initiative of their own learning process, they are also able to choose the learning strategies that fit in their learning styles and they become more aware how to become better learners and to improve their linguistic skills. He also stated that there is a direct link between autonomy, awareness and action. If a student is autonomous enough he/she will set up achievable learning goals. The learner will be aware of his/her own shortcomings, learning style and the strategies he/she may use to overcome problems. Finally, the learner will eventually take action by

means of the strategies to reach the learning goals.

It was also noticed during the data analysis stage that students with a higher degree of autonomy (such in the cases of students 1, 2 and 5) were more likely to have a more significant progress in improving the accuracy of the simple past tense outside the classroom setting than the others and, at the same time they raised more awareness of their most frequent problems while using the simple past tense than those who did not do most of their homework assignments and independent work through the course's learning platform. Ellis (1994) stated that there are certain factors which will determine each one of the students' learning rate and outcomes such as methodology, pedagogical beliefs, attitude, aptitude, cognitive style, personality, motivation, age and so forth. This explains why some students improved awareness in the use of the simple past tense more than others since each of the participants of the study have their own learning styles that helped or hindered their learning processes; they also implemented different learning strategies to tackle problems that emerged during the course of the implementation stage with diverse outcomes and finally, learners' attitudes, beliefs and intentions to learn the language had a definite effect on the improvement of the surface level grammatical accuracy.

As examples of the paragraph above indicate, the teacher noticed that two students (students 1 and 2) were more autonomous than the other ones since they constantly requested for extra material usually accessed the course's learning community and downloaded exercises and shared links to web pages in order to practice the past tense. The final survey demonstrated that 60% of the students said that they usually did independent work on their free time. 20% said that they sometimes did independent work on their free time and the remaining 20% said that they did not have time to do this for various reasons.

The teacher's research journal indicated that one student was not very constant, but occasionally worked on his/her own. The other two students (students 3 and 4) hardly ever or never did anything outside the classroom in order to practice the accuracy of the past tenses. In terms of using the online forum in an autonomous manner, all of the students wrote comments about their own performances (as well as their partners') after they finished recording most of the conversations. However, the quality of the comments varied depending on the student. Some of them wrote thorough and meaningful comments while others wrote brief and/or meaningless observations that did not help very much for those students who read them. Most of them did not expand their comments outside the classroom because they argued that they did not have the time to do it. This data was later compared with the students' final survey which its tabulation indicated that 80% of the students read most of the comments in the online forum and took them into account in order to improve their accuracy of the simple past tense in future conversations. This shows that even though not all of the comments were elaborated accurately, students still could read them on their free time; therefore, there was some degree of students' autonomy in order to reflect of their own learning processes.

### **Other unexpected findings**

The inquiry process also supplied data that was not initially taken into account for the Action Research project such as (a) students' mispronunciation of words, (b) use of various speaking strategies to maintain a conversation, (c) improvement in fluency mainly because most of them recycled plenty of new vocabulary and (d) the expansion of their conversations and the eventual increase of their language ego. These issues could be also analyzed in further studies.



## **Chapter 6: Conclusions, Pedagogical Implications, Recommendations & Further Research**

This final section will portray the overall outcome of the research study above seen through the light of the core category supported by three subcategories surfaced in the data analysis stage. These categories were: accuracy improvement or fossilization, increasing awareness in the use of the simple past tense and learner autonomy development, which merged into a core category named “**Awareness-raising of the accuracy of the simple past tense through the voice message board Voxopop™**”. As a general conclusion from the core category, it is essential for the teachers to train their students to become aware about their most common mistakes through awareness-raising strategies in order to improve accuracy and one approach to this is by using the voice message board Voxopop™ as a self and peer assessment instrument. However, it is relevant for students to set up their action plans on their own after they have detected the frequent sources of errors and to constantly work on them in an autonomous fashion. In the subsequent section, the researcher will provide the specific conclusions that specifically address each supporting category. He will also consider and explain the pedagogical implications obtained from the inquiry process and provide readers with recommendations for further research studies to be conducted by ELT teachers.

### **Accuracy improvement or fossilization**

- 1) The study showed that three out of five students (students 1, 2 and 5) improved their accuracy when they were constructing full-length utterances in the simple past tense. To achieve this aim, they followed models through strategies such as substitution tables, interpreting grammar charts, using their fingers to keep track of

Subject + Verb + Complement patterns and in participating in the “silent conversation” interactions to assess their own progress. The repetition of the use of these strategies helped students automatize the grammatical structures and they were likely to commit fewer errors at the end of the three-month process. On the other hand, those students who did not follow the strategies were more concerned about conveying meaning at the expense of accuracy. These students (students 3 and 4) showed significant signs of fossilization.

Although conveying meaning is the main purpose of authentic communicative events -especially when learners are just beginning with their foreign language process-, grammatical accuracy will become an essential factor as they become more skillful in using the second language. This will lead learners to upgrade their grammatical competence and as a result speakers are likely to become more efficient in getting their messages across because their ideas are more organized. Willis (1996) suggested that in the Task-based Learning approach’s planning phase it is important for learners to prepare the target language and vocabulary before any communicative event; this will give students to use proper and accurate language while they interact with their peers.

- 2) As it was mentioned above, recycling of grammar models is a key aspect in order to improve accuracy. This happened with students 1, 2 and 3 who generally looked at models on the board, textbook or notebooks. The learners internalize grammar models when they constantly follow and recycle them; this is especially true for students who believe that grammar is an important linguistic feature that they must master in order to become proficient speakers. Moreover, learners also notice

significant progress when they are mostly accurate when they construct full-length utterances. According to Ericsson and Charness (as cited in Segalowitz, 2003) massive and permanent practice is a key factor for adult learners to automatize and master target structures, vocabulary, pronunciation among other linguistic skills and sub skills just as children do in order to learn their first language since automatization has a great impact in long-term memory and retrieval of concepts.

- 3) The five students in this study improved the construction of affirmative statements. It was important to recycle and to quiz students' knowledge of the regular and irregular past tense verbs in order to improve this aspect. Nevertheless, they found it difficult to improve the construction of negative statements and questions since there was a strong L1 interference. Knowing more and new irregular verbs, pronouncing regular verbs -ED endings, using the proper past time expressions and using the auxiliary verbs in negative statements and question forms are the key elements for students to become accurate when they use the simple past tense. However, in real practice, it is easier for students to construct accurate affirmative statements rather than negative statements and question forms due to L1 interference since foreign speakers tend to make wrong transfers or overgeneralizations. Brown (2007) argued that children learn their first language systematically, that is, they learn single words first then they cluster together two, three and more words gradually until they have created a complex and structured linguistic system. In the case of adult learners, Harmer (2007) mentions that the syllabi of any language course are set up according to grammatical, functional or

situational contexts were learners gradually learn the basic aspects of a second or foreign language and they steadily progress into more complex concepts.

- 4) Students who underwent this process considered that the comments made by their classmates were very useful in terms of helping them raise awareness of their most concurrent mistakes without needing the constant presence of a teacher during communicative tasks. The students were also able to compare previous speaking performances from their partners as well as from themselves. Since the feedback given to their peers was mainly formative, students could realize what they needed to work more on. Harmer (2007) affirmed that, speaking performance is traditionally assessed through teachers' comments, marks or grades and reports. A distinct feature of this type of assessment is that they mention a general description of the students' overall performances. Another alternative approach for speaking assessment is mentioned by Purpura (2004) in which he points out that students' oral performances are graded by specific descriptors that are embedded in rubrics or checklists. The online voice message board Voxopop™ offers yet another alternative to detect students' progress or fossilization through a quantitative approach; though counting and classifying "hits" and "misses" in accuracy and knowing what type of errors they are committing is time consuming, this tool provides teachers certainty about their students' actual performance and their needs because they are able to identify each of their students' most common errors and to help their students prepare action plans to tackle the problems that hinder them to progress in structuring accurate full-length utterances. This data would also

complement the information in the students' final performance assessment regardless if this is done through the traditional or alternative approaches.

- 5) Students found the voice message board extremely practical since it has the potential to “mirror” their actual oral performances. Learners were able to listen to themselves and become more objective when they assessed themselves and at the same time when they set up action plans to overcome their own problems. Voice message boards are useful tools for students because they can realize what they have improved or what they still need to work on. The recordings will reflect exactly what students did during their interactions; therefore, students can detect their most concurring errors and they can also notice if they have advanced in constructing accurate full-length utterances. According to Biensenbach-Lucas (2004) students also benefit from voice message boards in the following ways: a) it builds positive interdependence, b) it promotes interactions, c) it creates individual accountability, d) it helps develop social skills and e) it fosters self-evaluation. On the other hand, teachers also profit in using voice message boards. For instance, Doering and Beach (2002) discovered that teachers a) build stronger interpersonal relationships with their students, b) the voice discussion boards enhance communication among teachers, c) it helps teachers to plan and develop follow-up activities so students can continue learning outside the classroom setting and d) it involves them in a self-reflection process because voice discussion boards can be used as teachers' journals.

#### **Awareness in the use of the simple past tense**

- 1) Students who benefited from the project became more aware of their most salient mistakes and learned to detect them as they spoke and they also managed to correct many of these errors. During the process, it was evident that self-correction was more used than peer correction during the interactions. However, each type of awareness-raising strategy had its own moment and space. For instance, self-correction was more utilized in the face-to-face interactions whereas peer correction was employed in a written manner in the online forum. Self-correction was more purposeful when students detected errors in the wrong use of the irregular verbs, mispronunciation of the regular verbs ED endings whereas peer correction was more utilized after students listened to their partners' discussions and they wrote comments in the online forum. Klink (1987) found that students would employ different repair strategies such as self-initiated self-repair, other-initiated self-repair and other-initiated other-repair depending on the interactions' circumstances. These awareness-raising techniques have the purpose of re-structuring or re-organizing speakers' grammatical, lexical and pronunciation inaccuracies. She also noticed that students would resort more to self-initiated self-correction rather than other-initiated self-repair and other-initiated other-repair.
- 2) Learners can benefit from listening to themselves interacting with others since they can identify their most frequent errors and progresses. This input generates awareness in some students and forces them to take action in order to overcome their own individual problems. Moreover, learners are able to spot their own errors and reflect if they are similar to theirs and they can diagnose the issues their partners have when they are using the past tense. Donato and McCormick (cited in

Saint-Leger, 2009) affirmed that “increased awareness triggered by the self-assessment process encourages learners to take greater responsibility for, and thus contribute more actively to, their own learning” (p. 170).

- 3) Students during the process had a chance to listen to themselves plenty of times and this helped them become aware of their most frequent errors. They were also becoming more skillful in constructing accurate full-length utterances as they started to avoid common grammatical errors. Krashen (2003) stated that there are three main conditions to monitor language productions: a) the learner has to know the grammar rules in order to monitor their accuracy, b) the learner has to think about the target structure all the time, and c) the learners must have enough time to have communicative events where they are able to employ the monitoring strategies. Krashen’s conditions to monitor their own language production during speaking interactions may be met by some students as long as they have the opportunity to listen to themselves perform in order to raise awareness of their own linguistic problems. Taking constant action in order to overcome them is another key element to raise awareness in accuracy.
- 4) The awareness-raising strategies are employed differently according to each of the students’ beliefs about learning a foreign language, their intentions and motivations. Therefore, those learners who wanted to go beyond conveying meaning just for the sake of being understood started to take into account the awareness-raising strategies to improve their accuracy without neglecting fluency and compromising authenticity used the awareness-raising strategies in different ways and in different moments during the interactions. Teachers should foster training students to employ

these awareness-raising strategies in order to avoid the fossilization of target grammars as students increase their proficiency levels. Chamot (1999) considers that strategy training should be explicit during regular lessons because learners are able to experiment with various strategies and they can also understand more about the way they learn according to their individual learning styles. Scrivener (2005) argues that accuracy should be taught during controlled practice activities since the teacher usually intervenes whenever he/she detects a student committing an error; therefore, the awareness-raising strategies should also be exercised at that moment because learners are able to distinguish their own and their partners' errors as they are practicing the target structures (Oxford, 1990).

- 5) For students, providing peer correction to students in the online forum was more practical than leaving their comments in the voice message board, since learners thought that it was difficult to identify the student who left a comment in the message board. Moreover, it was easier for students to read the comments and they could refer to them any time they wanted to. The impact that the students' comments in the online forum were especially valuable for those students who really wanted to find a balance between fluency and accuracy because they could compare recent comments with older ones and then conclude if they were improving or fossilizing their usage of the simple past tense. From the teachers' point of view, the information that the teacher collected from the discussion boards and the online forums would either confirm or contradict the his perceptions of some of his students' oral performances since it was difficult to distinguish each one of the students' performance in a regular speaking task. This helped the teacher



become more objective when he planned and developed assessment through the rubrics. According to Mansourian (2008) keeping a learning journal is beneficial for both students and teachers since students are constantly reflecting upon their own learning practices and behaviors from their own point of view whereas teachers are able to see and understand how their own students perceive their learning processes.

### **Learner Autonomy**

- 1) There is a direct connection between autonomy and language awareness in the sense that those students who devoted more time to work on their action plans by doing independent work became more aware of their linguistic needs and they gradually started correct themselves and later they eventually avoided their most frequent mistakes as they interacted with others (such in the cases of students 1, 2 and 5). In terms of learner autonomy, Kelly (as cited in Swchienhorst, 2003) stated that “in the context of language learning, learners need to be made aware of their underlying construct system and be confronted with their attitudes to and beliefs about language, learning and language learning” (p. 165). Scrivener (2005) also referred to the importance of students to undertake their own language learning processes without being too teacher dependent. This means that it is necessary for the teacher to help (through training) students realize the importance of taking charge of their learning autonomously by becoming aware of their own individual needs and to gradually facilitate the prescription of the solutions for their own linguistic problems.
- 2) Autonomous learners tended to be more disciplined in the use of the awareness-raising strategies and, at the end of the process they employed them in order to

experiment and/or improve new concepts in different forms, pronunciation and vocabulary items. This resulted in the improvement of their overall speaking performances not only in the usage of the simple past tense, but in other linguistic aspects of the English language as well. Bandura (1995) stated that self-efficacy is when a person becomes dexterous in any given task and he/she believes that he/she will be successful performing the same tasks in different times and contexts because he/she will be using the strategies that have worked for them time and time again until it becomes a natural ability.

- 3) Collaboration was another essential feature in using the voice message board because students would comment on their partners' performances and at the same time, they would suggest their peers what the correct grammatical forms were as well as recommending them with strategies of tips to improve the usage of the simple past tense. Since there was plenty of input from all of the students, learners were able to identify their most common mistakes based on their partners' comments. According to Vygotsky (1978) collaboration is fundamental between classmates since it increases the "zone of proximal development", that is the enhancement of a new concept by means of the guidance of a more knowledgeable person. This person does not necessarily need to be a teacher, but a student who is more skillful in using certain concepts. Chamot (1999) and Oxford (1990) also believe that learners can apply different learning strategies whenever they consider necessary.

### **Pedagogical implications**

The initial purpose of this research project was to enhance students speaking

accuracy through a voice message board. Therefore, it was important to support linguistic competence first and then help them become aware of their most frequent mistakes in order for students to perform more accurately in their conversations. The approach taken to improve accuracy was done through Krashen's (1990) monitoring hypothesis resembled in awareness-raising strategies such as self and peer correction. It was originally planned for students to adopt these strategies and adapt them to their learning styles. In some cases, this did not happen due to the students' pedagogical beliefs and motivations to learn a foreign language.

For those students who benefited from the approach (students 1, 2 and 5), it was clear that constant practice inside and outside the classroom and the preparation of the speaking tasks before they recorded their interactions were key elements in order to improve accuracy as O'Malley and Chamot (1990) argued, and it also helped them recognize what their most frequent errors were as they spoke to others. Moreover, those students who developed the awareness-raising strategies became more sensible in the construction of accurate utterances in the simple past tense and as a result, they conveyed meaning more efficiently than those who largely relied on delivering their messages through key words and disorganized construction of utterances. Krashen (1990) suggested that some students' main communication goal was not just to convey meaning, but they also want to be accurate in the act. If learners had time to correct themselves as they spoke to others and if they are aware of the grammar rules of the tense and aspect, then this would probably happen (as cited in Baker and Prys-Jones, 1997). Swain (2005) suggested that students who produced the target language may notice their own shortcomings as they interacted with other speakers. Students' output may also indicate whether they are

experimenting with new linguistic aspects of the language and it provides learners with some reflection time about their own language production.

From these conclusions, it could be said that the implications for helping students to enhance speaking accuracy in the past tense should start from the teacher by encouraging them to follow the linguistic models and its direct impact on the improvement or fossilization of any tense and aspect of a target structure. This is illustrated by referencing Ellis's (1994) studies as to the importance of developing meaningful frequency in order for learners to internalize the grammar rules as well as for conveying meaning with others. Krashen (1990) also pointed out that the language that learners subconsciously assimilate will eventually become in the intake. Another consideration is that it is also essential to train students to raise awareness of their speaking accuracy through self and peer correction so students avoid fossilization of target structures thus this indicates that input and reflection are key factors for raising awareness on accuracy. Dewey (as cited in Ferreira Barcelos, 2003) stated that learning is a continuous reflection process where the experiences lived in the past will modify the future actions. Therefore, the same experience should produce better outcomes in the future (Ferreira Barcelos, 2003) and this was shown in the students who constantly reflected about their linguistic problems and progress. However, to reach this point, students must take actions on their own to better their actual performance levels by setting up and accomplishing action plans. According to Brown (2007), autonomous students tend to take the initiative of their own learning process, they are also able to choose the learning strategies that fit in their learning styles and they become more aware how to become better learners and to improve their linguistic skills.

Teachers should employ voice message boards on a regular basis (every two or three

weeks) in their classes in order for students to listen to themselves perform and realize what their most frequent problems are (as well as their partners') during major speaking tasks and also, in order to set up action plans to overcome their issues. The voice message board would become the "performance mirror" that helps them become conscious of their learning process and hence Krashens' (1990) Monitoring Hypothesis would be happening because the adult students would be regularly paying more attention to grammar forms in an asynchronous fashion and as a result, this will have a positive effect in authentic face-to-face interactions.

In addition, the voice message boards can foster asynchronous collaborative learning since classmates are helping the other students become aware of their own inaccuracies and they could even give advice to their partners' about what strategies to follow to improve their accuracy. Voice message boards are also reflection tools where learners can think of their own learning processes by diagnosing their problems as well as setting up action plans. From the teachers' perspective, voice message boards can assist teachers to examine closely each of their learners' oral performances and he or she can identify learners' strengths and weaknesses in this skill. James (1998) suggests that technology can help learners raise awareness of their own errors (as well as their partners') and this feedback can eventually lead to learning depending on the tool the learner uses for the matter. On the other hand, teachers can also benefit from the voice message boards because they can listen to each of their students' actual speaking performances separately and detect progress levels or fossilization. Sometimes teachers are not able to listen to all of their students perform in a single lesson during communicative events so the voice message boards allow them to see a wider and deeper scope of what each of their students English

look like.

Voice message boards can also help teachers detect other different aspects of language from their students' face-to-face performances such as pronunciation, stress and intonation, upgrading grammar and vocabulary, the use of speaking strategies, and interaction/performance levels. For those reasons, the voice message boards can be converted into a useful teaching and learning tool due to their versatility. The information provided from these linguistic aspects through transcription can be turned into numbers by counting its frequencies and then transferred to Excel charts the progress or fossilization of each learner. Therefore, these aspects from the speaking skill can become measurable. Finally, another useful application of voice message boards regards its use as a research instrument where the researcher keeps a register of his/her students' speaking performances so they could be revised later on and they could be even used as a researcher's log or journal since the message boards' entries are ordered chronologically.

In conclusion, voice message boards could be useful learning and teaching instruments to improve accuracy if properly used. Learner training is an essential factor as well as students taking action after they have reflected upon what is needed to improve their grammatical competence. It is also important for teachers to use these tools at specific periods of the learning process such as in important speaking tasks so students are able to notice their own performances.

### **Recommendations**

If this Action Research project were to be repeated once more, there would be certain aspects to be considered:

- It is of utmost importance that students follow the strategies that the teacher proposes in order to enhance a greater degree of accuracy so it is relevant for the teacher to monitor each pair or speaking groups during the interactions to see if they are actually applying them and if they are doing this correctly. It is also important for the teacher to collect some samples of these regular class time speaking task interaction to verify if their regular in-class performances are the same or different than the interactions done through the voice message boards.
- It is necessary to get students to keep a self-study portfolio in order to see how much independent work they are doing by their own initiative. This data collection tool will provide the researcher with valuable information about the relationship between autonomy and accuracy improvement.
- Teachers need to encourage students to listen to their interactions in the message boards more than once throughout the entire process so learners can compare recent interactions with previous ones so they can notice how much they have progressed during a determined lapse of time.
- Teachers need to encourage students to write more reflections in the online forum as well as their actions plans. This information can be turned into “customized” rubrics to see if each student is reaching the objectives of their own action plans or not.
- Since students have to prepare their conversations before recording the conversations in the message boards and the recorded interactions are a bit time consuming, it is recommended to allow students to write their reflections in their own free time due to time constraints in the recording sessions as part of their homework assignments.

**Limitations**

There were a few limitations during the Action Research study. For instance, the number of students varied between the first and the third month. In the first month, there were twelve students who started the Skills 1 course but only five of them finished the last course three months later. The remaining seven students dropped out for different reasons such as changing class schedules due to work duties, another student had to postpone the course because she had family issues, two of them did not like the system used since they were accustomed to the AEP regular procedures and two of them failed the course due to exceeding the number of absences. Another constraint was that not all the students recorded all eight sessions; three of them missed one of them. A final limitation was that the microphones sometimes did not work so students could not record their conversations or they had to repeat them once they found out that the message board was not recording.

**Further Research**

During the inquiry process some unexpected questions emerged that could be useful for future research.

1. To what extent does a self-study portfolio affect students' linguistic abilities?
2. What is the effect of voice message boards on the improvement of pragmatic competence?
3. What is the effect of a voice message board in the improvement of pronunciation?
4. What is the effect of the voice message boards on the use of speaking strategies?
5. Can voice message boards be used as online journal for teachers and/or researchers?



The idea that was used throughout the study could be used in different proficiency levels as well as different linguistic and learning aspects. This Web 2.0 tool has a lot to offer as well as language skills, learning strategies, and collaborative learning opportunities to be researched. Since this is an instrument that can be flexibly used in different areas, it is worth continuing exploring it deeper in order to benefit both learners and teachers in their learning processes and professional development respectively.

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**Appendix A. Invitation Letter**

**INVITACION**

Bogota, 18 de Mayo de 2010

Estudiantes del bloque Skills 1 a 3  
Centro Colombo Americano  
Sede Norte  
Ciudad.

Respetados estudiantes:

Me permito invitarlos a participar de manera voluntaria en una investigación que tiene como objetivo averiguar cual es el efecto de la aplicación de estrategias de monitoreo en la producción oral, mejorando el uso de los tiempos pasados a través de una tabla de mensajería virtual, es decir que usted va a ser entrenado para monitorear y auto corregir sus propios errores en el uso de los tiempos pasados por medio de una herramienta digital que se utiliza para grabar mensajes. Se espera que al final de la implementación de intervención pedagógica usted haya mejorado la precisión gramatical en los mencionados tiempos gramaticales.

Durante el proceso, me encargare en entrenarlo(a), aplicando estrategias de monitoreo y auto corrección para que se empleen durante seis actividades de conversación en el salón de multimedia de la institución y luego seis actividades de monitoreo por medio virtual durante el transcurso de los tres meses que dura el bloque de Skills 1 al 3, es decir, se implementara el sistema dos veces por curso (mes) en los temas que se relacionen con la utilización de los pasados.

La implementación del sistema no traerá ningún riesgo físico o psicológico ni se tendrá en cuenta para su evaluación final de cada curso. Sin embargo, los beneficios que traerán en el desempeño oral cuando utilice los tiempos pasados serán enormes, porque va a poder dominarlos aun más que ahora. Usted podrá retirarse de la implementación cuando lo desee sin tener consecuencias negativas en su evaluación final durante los cursos de Skills 1 a 3. La información que se extracte durante el proceso y el resultado de la investigación serán totalmente confidenciales. Solamente el investigador, su profesora (que a su vez es su tutora) y el jurado que esta a cargo de evaluar la investigación tendrán acceso a los datos pertinentes.

Cualquier duda al respecto puede acercarse a la señora Josephine Taylor Directora de esta sede o a mí para responder cualquier inquietud nos encontraran en la oficina de coordinación de esta sede.

La razón de esta investigación es porque actualmente me encuentro cursando una maestría en Ambientes Autónomos de Aprendizaje en la Universidad de la Sabana en tercer semestre. La Universidad me exige como requisito para que me gradúe presentar un trabajo final de investigación y en este momento estoy a punto de iniciar la fase de implementación y recolección de datos.

Agradezco la colaboración prestada a la presente y espero contar con ustedes,

Cordialmente,

**JORGE HUMBERTO OJEDA MERCHAN**

Docente en Ingles y supervisor en la sede norte del Centro Colombo Americano.

**Appendix B. Consent Form**

**AUTORIZACION**

**Por favor encierre uno de las dos opciones.**

1- Confirmando que he leído y entendido la información en la carta de invitación para la investigación que se va a realizar y en el cual yo he sido invitado(a). También he tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas respecto al mismo al profesor/investigador:

**SI NO**

2- Entiendo que la participación en la investigación es totalmente voluntaria y que estoy libre de retirarme en cualquier momento sin dar motivos: **SI NO**

3- Estoy de acuerdo en tomar parte de la investigación mencionada anteriormente:

**SI NO**

**Nombre del participante:**

**Firma:**

**Numero de Cedula:**

## Appendix C. Pbworks Project Platform

In this lesson you are going to talk with your partner about a nice **vacation trip** you had in your life. Think about the hotel you stayed at, the places you visited, the activities you did there and special anecdotes that happened there. Remember to use the simple past and past continuous tenses during the conversation. Don't forget to ask questions to your partner about their trip. Click [here](#) to start.

### Activity 2

After you have finished recording your conversation, listen to a conversation from other partners and try to detect your partner's mistakes when they use the past tenses. Tell them what their error was, but do not correct them.

**For example:**

**Your partner:** I go to Cartagena last year.

**You:** You said "I go to Cartagena last year. Is that correct?"

### Activity 3

Later, listen to your partner's comments and correct your errors in a notebook.

### Activity 4

Think about your problems when you used the past tenses. What were they? Which verbs do you need to study more? Are you omitting any auxiliary verbs (e.g. did) Are you constructing complete and correct sentences using the past continuous (e.g. I **was staying** at an expensive hotel in Cartagena). Write your reflections [here](#).

**Appendix D. Survey Sample Screenshot**

\*1. De 1 a 5 (1 siendo la minima calificacion y 5 la maxima). ¿Cree que usted que ha aprendido los verbos en pasado simple por medio de las conversaciones en Voxopop?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

\*2. De 1 a 5. ¿Piensa que usted puede combinar los pasados simple y continuo mientras que conversa?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

\*3. De 1 a 5. ¿Usted detecto algunos errores en el uso de los verbos en pasado simple y continuo?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

\*4. De 1 a 5. ¿Usted ha leído los comentarios de sus compañeros en la plataforma de Higher Ground?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

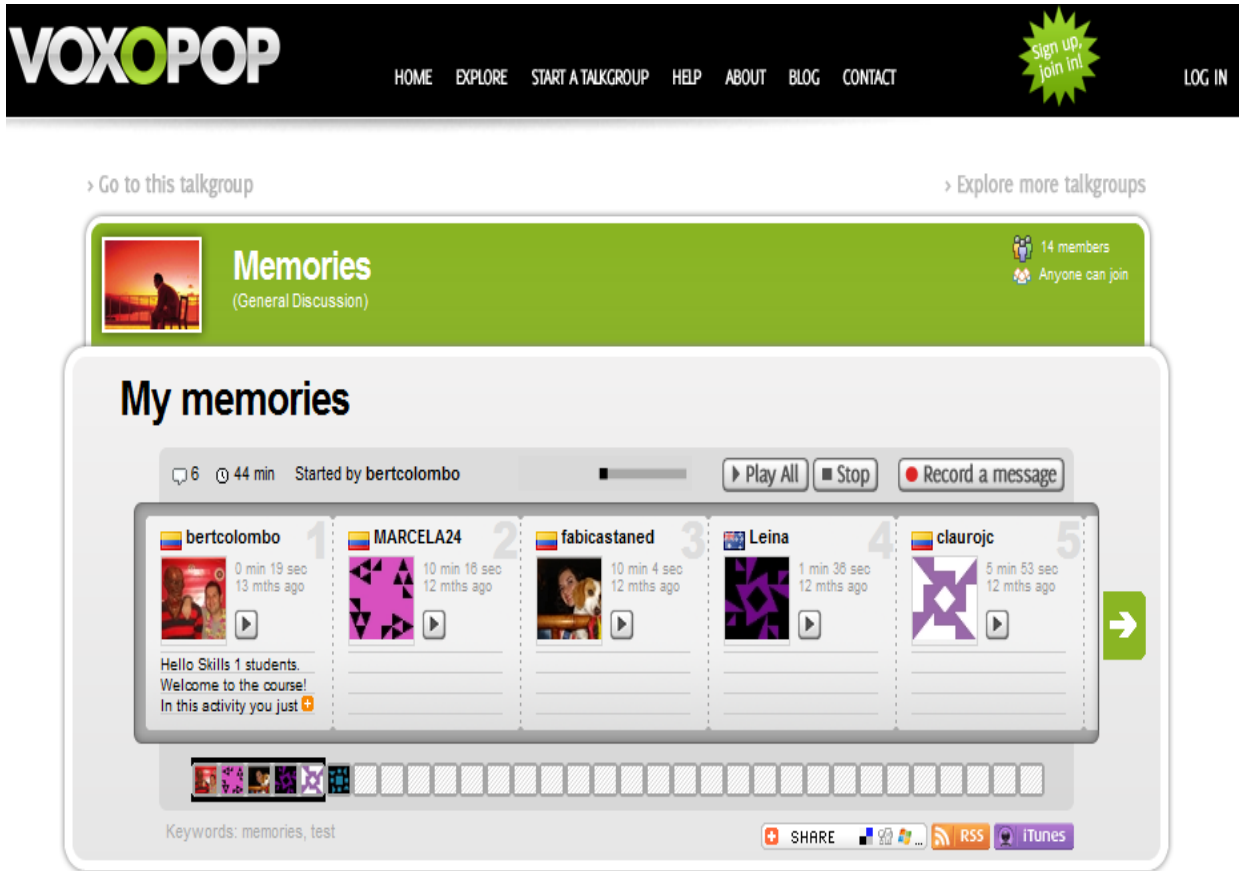
\*5. De 1 a 5. ¿Cree que los comentarios de sus compañeros le ha ayudado a mejorar el uso de los pasados simples y continuos?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

\*6. De 1 a 5. El uso de Voxopop fue facil.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

### Appendix E. Voice Message Board Screenshot




**Appendix F. Teacher's Journal Screenshot****Sixth Intervention and Final Test**

Retrieved from Google images on August 11, 2010

Today was the last day I implemented. At the beginning of the lesson, I instructed the students to take some notes of the vocabulary they needed to use during their conversations as well as writing the verbs in past tense. When we got to the multimedia lab, students automatically paired up with their usual partner and they rehearsed what they were going to say for a few minutes. Later, they recorded their conversations and saved them; there were no setbacks since I prepared the computers, the platform and the microphones 10 minutes before the class started.

While they were interacting, I noticed that they were enjoying the conversation (it was about a personal dilemma). Some of them actually used the grammar models without me telling them to see them. After they had finished, they saved the conversations in the discussion board and I instructed them to fill out the final survey. When I told them to work with their partners to talk about their childhood memories, they said that they had already made that chat before, but I reminded them that the first one was the initial one. As homework, I assigned them to listen to their two test in order to compare their performances so they could assess themselves.

Posted by Jorge Ojeda at 5:57:00 PM 0 comments 

Labels: Implementation stage

## Appendix G. Students' Online Forum Screenshot

[Michael Jimenez](#) Jun 11, 2010; 7:47am Re: My second reflection [Reply](#) | [Threaded](#) | [More](#) ▾ ☆



In reply to [this post](#) by bertcolombo

Actually i think the conversation was really good, the mistakes of Juan Pablo and Javier was small and little ones, i remember the guys have some problems with the tense of the verbs in past and make questions always was hard, but i think this message was really fun and good.

[Jose Pedro](#)

Jun 11, 2010; 7:48am Re: My second reflection

[Reply](#) | [Threaded](#) | [More](#) ▾ ☆



In reply to [this post](#) by bertcolombo

May be we try to talk more quickly, to connect the ideas, and we have to use new vocabulary to explain the main ideas, however it was nice and funny.

[Johanna Mendez](#) Jun 11, 2010; 7:48am Re: My second reflection

[Reply](#) | [Threaded](#) | [More](#) ▾ ☆



In reply to [this post](#) by bertcolombo

Diana and Michael

I note some wrong words, mainly in the use of the verbs as where do you go in last va.. did

in are was going is not correct

get a lot of photos, maybe is better took a lot of pictures

and finally in this question how old did you have...

thanks,,

bye

>Johanna



**Appendix H. Rubric Sample**

**Oral Presentation Rubric :**

**Teacher's Name:** Jorge Ojeda

**Student's Name:**

CATEGORY	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Below
<b>Accuracy</b>	You hardly ever made mistakes when you used the simple past and the past continuous tenses.	You constructed accurate utterances using simple past and the past continuous tenses most of the times.	You constructed basic structures in the simple past and the past continuous tenses with some difficulty.	You are constantly having problems structuring accurate utterances in simple past and the past continuous tenses.
<b>Self-correction</b>	You are correcting your own mistakes all the time as you speak and you always reflect upon your own progress in terms of accuracy in the online forum.	You are correcting your own mistakes most of the times as you speak and you usually reflect upon your own progress in terms of accuracy most of the times in the online forum.	You sometimes correct your own mistakes as you speak and sometimes you reflect upon your own progress in terms of accuracy in the online forum.	You hardly ever or never correct your own mistakes as you speak and you do not reflect upon your own progress in terms of accuracy in the online forum.
<b>Peer-correction</b>	You are correcting your partner's mistakes all the time as they speak and you always comment upon your partners' progress in terms of accuracy in the online forum.	You are correcting your partner's mistakes most of the times as they speak and you usually comment upon your partners' progress in terms of accuracy most of the times in the online forum.	You sometimes correct your partner's mistakes as they speak and sometimes you reflect upon your partners' progress in terms of accuracy in the online forum.	You hardly ever or never correct your partner's mistakes as they speak and you do not reflect upon your partners' progress in terms of accuracy in the online forum.
<b>PASS</b>				
<b>FAIL</b>				

**Comments:**

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## Appendix J. Transcripts

### TEST 1: MY MEMORIES

Student 1: Hi X

Student 2: Hi Y

S1: What did you do when you child?

S2: When I was a child I played (pronunciation) with my sister and my brothers and I went to the park I I studied (pronunciation) at the college

S1: And where where did you life?

S2: I like played (pronunciation) the basketball and I liked (pronunciation)eeem go to the cinema and...

S1: Where did you live when you child?

S2: I lived with my parents in my house eeh I live with (pause)

S1: OK. And I was child I life to play with my sister and my brother and went to shopping with my mother in the shopping center and then went to dinner in at the good restaurant.

S2: And where did you live when you have a seventeen years?

S1: I was seventeen I live in Bucaramanga I studied (pronunciation) at Nuestra Señora del Pilar college and sometimes I worked (pronunciation) and in the hospital in the in the turn of pharmacy (pause)

S2: And and emm where where do you went where do you where do you (unclear) in your holidays when you are a child?

S1: I went to farm family farm in in close to Malaga Santander I amazing farm ahh the farm had horses and cowns (pronunciation) and chickens and like food farm and my brother and my father and mother like all farm and activities as as riding (pronunciation) horses, and other things about farms and nature (pronunciation)

S2: And what is your favorite your favorite what is your favorite horse when you was a child? (laughs)

S1: When I was child I like (pronunciation) softball in my college. I take part in competition (pronunciation) when competition in interschool but no but no other college no only only competition with other class but I was champion. My team was champion(laughs).Was champions eeh twice twice in my secondary but twice (laughs).

When did you finish the school?

S2: I finish the secondary School in Bogota eh in Gimnacio Cundama. No is a popular college (laughs) and in no more.

S1: Did you go dancing school? (translates into Spanish)

S2: Ah, no. Don't exist in my school because I studied (pronunciation) with only girls and don't exist (laughs)

S1: Ah, OK. My college is the same only girls but is the crazy

S2: Ah, Yes?

S1: The girls are crazy crazy but is good for for education

S2: Uh-Huh

S1: Is good but is difficult for university? when you meet other boys

S2: Yes (laughs) and (pause) eeh (pause)

S1: Who's who's (pronunciation) did (unclear) better friends in your child?

S2: (laughs) I I I had a four better friends eh two girls and two boys and yes? I stay speaking I speak with them with them and and they are the my best friends of all the (unclear) (laughs)

S1: My best friend I was child I don't know them in this moment, no I move to Bogota one years ago. I I didn't touch contact with them. I don't know them in this moment

S2: What did what what what what were your favorite movies when you were a child?

S1: The first movie I watched (pronunciation) when I child I E.T (laughs) in the cinema with my brother very good I I like the E.T for all time until today (laugh) but then I was seventeen years old I saw hmm El rey Leon or other movie I so good. What what (pause) what kind of food is your favorite in was child? or what food for you

S2: Ee ee when I was a child I don't like the soaps (laughs) and I (laughs) and I don't like eeh eeh the some fruit I don't like the guayaba (laughs) I don't remember (unclear) (laughs) and I like the the hamburger eeh hot dogs and now I eat very (unclear) health heathy food and and and no more. What what is your favorite food when you was a child?

S1: I was a child I like fruits and and healthy fruit. My mother give me salads and other other fruits mm but today I like (unclear). Yes and.. (recording stopped)

### Final Test

Student 1: Hi X

Student 2: Hi Y

S1: I will talk about my holiday in the far family eh (pauses) thank you (laughs) I always remember my holidays because I loved to go far with my family eeh when I was child I went to visit my family in June and July I was eeh in this place for fifteen years fifteen days (laughs) sorry fifteen days maybe I I liked it because the park had a lot of animals and there were a cows (pronunciation) and birds and (pauses) and chickens I loved the life animals and and I was eeh very happy because I went mm with my all family my sister my brother and my father and I eh met there with my relatives my cousins (pronunciation) my other relatives and I (pause) I how do you say montar? (pause)

S2: Rid, rid (pronunciation)

S1: I rid a horse I rid a horse all time and yes all time I I liked too much eeh this activity eeh I went to the lake near

S2: Lake?

S1: Lake near to farm and I swam (pronunciation) in the in the morning

S2: Where was the farm? Where was the farm?

S1: EEh the farm was near to Malaga Santander the weather was cold and you had to wear eeh jacket and jacket and other jacket (laughs) but the food was very delicious and I ate all time (unclear) maybe and ah when ah my family went to the farm my grandfather and my grandmother and I had eem conejo? Rabbit (pronunciation) and ovejo I don't say ovejo but I ate eh meat in my vacation all time. I loved (unclear) remember remember?

S2: And how how old were you in this moment?

S1: MM All my (unclear) eh was when my grand grandmother died (pause) I was very sad moment but the farm is a very very beautiful place for rest and fun

S2: And the farm exist eeh today?

S1: Yes the farm is eeh on my family but in in five years ago I didn't go because I didn't have time eh the last vacations I went to Bucaramanga but the farm eeh is five or six hours from Bucaramanga the way was very very bad then I was I didn't have time. How about you Fabiola what was your ehh the most important (unclear) about your childhood?

S2: Anyway OK when I was maybe eleven years I went to Cali with my parents and we

went mmm with th... how do you say novios? No bueno sister's boyfriend

S1: Your brother-in-law?

S2: My brother-in-law to Cali he he lived he lived here and eeh when when we was we were there eeh we went to Maria's a beautiful house and eeh we we were we were we went we went to zoologic zoologic? zoologic to to Cali and...

S1: Zoo

S2: Zoo Cali

S1: Is very very famous zoo

S2: Yes is beautiful you can find a lot of eh kind of animals and species (pronunciation) and I don't remember fish in the in the pool? oh no only

S1: No. You see aquarium (pronunciation) maybe aquario

S2: But is very is very it's very

S1: Big?

S2: No (laughs) big no is very (pause) no (laughs)

S1: Is very small? I think is very huge

S2: Not when I was there. Is very small no I don't know (laughs) and what more. We we went to Buena Buenaventura and Ladrilleros and Juanchaco

S1: What kind did you eat?

S2: What kind what of food? (laughs)

S1: What kind of food

S2: In Cali ate a lot of chontaduro

S1: Yuck. Do you like chontaduro?

S2: And fish. No I don't like chontaduro

S1: The chontaduro smell very bad yes?

S2: What?

S1: The smell

S2: Yes yes and and no is very is very (unclear) but I don't like and I we we ate eeh eeh fish in Buenaventura and Ladrilleros but Buenaventura is a is a town very very poor was a town very very poor you you see a lot of child poor and family poor you see

S1: Did you (unclear) to dance salsa?

S2: Yes but I I was a pues I was a child and I I don't like in this moment to dance (laughs)

S1: In this moment in this moment

S2: But now yes (laughs)

S1: OK and what more eeh

S2: We went to to the river of Cali Pance? Pance?

S1: Pance

S2: I don't remember yes river Pance and we ate ahh my mother preparate (made up word) to made me a sancocho (laughs) in the in the

S1: Sancocho valluno

S2: Yes in the river and we we we was we was here for for a five fifteen fifteen days

S1: OK thank you Y.

## Appendix J. Paradigm Model

ELEMENT	DESCRIPTION
<p><b>Causal Conditions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students used a series of <b>awareness</b> raising strategies throughout the three courses during the speaking tasks such as self-correction and peer correction (analyzing grammar charts, using substitution tables, using finger correction, doing “silent” conversations). The idea was for learners to raise <b>awareness</b> of their most frequent mistakes while they were using the simple past tense whenever they used affirmative and negative statements as well as question forms (<b>Accuracy</b>).</li> <li>• Students prepared their conversations (<b>Autonomy</b>) before they headed to the multi-media lab. In this process, students looked at the textbook’s grammar charts and/or their substitution tables from their notebooks in order to remember the structuring of the simple past tense (affirmatives, negatives and questions) (<b>Accuracy</b>). They also looked up in their dictionaries in order to find the keywords they needed in order to tell their anecdotes.</li> <li>• During the recorded interactions, students had to use the <b>awareness</b> raising strategies such as self and peer correction. They also had to use their textbook’s grammar charts or their substitution tables in their notebooks in order to enhance <b>accuracy</b> of the simple past tense (affirmatives, negatives and questions).</li> <li>• After they finished their recordings, students would listen to other partners’ conversations and they had to take note of the most frequent mistakes their partners did using the simple past tenses (affirmatives, negatives and questions) (<b>Accuracy</b>) and later they would comment about their findings in the students’ online forum (<b>Awareness</b>).</li> <li>• As homework assignment, all of the students had to read their partners’ comments in the online forum (<b>Autonomy</b>) in order to notice what their most frequent mistakes were using the simple past tense (affirmatives, negatives and questions) during the interactions (<b>Accuracy</b>). They also had to listen to their own recordings so they would detect their own errors (<b>Autonomy</b>) and they were supposed to write a reflection in their online forum about what they noted and to set up an action plan in order to improve their performances in future interactions (<b>Awareness</b>).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Phenomenon</b></p>	<p>Most of the students improved (<b>Awareness</b>) the speaking <b>accuracy</b> of the past tenses by using a voice message board</p>
<p><b>Context</b></p>	<p>The implementation stage occurred at the CCA north branch with five Skills 1, 2, 3 level students (CEF A2/B1). All the recorded interactions took place at the CCA’s AVM lab after students prepared the topics in the classroom (<b>Autonomy</b>). The students used the voice message board to interact with a partner about some of their anecdotes. While students</p>

	<p>talked to their partners about their anecdotes they were to follow the models from the grammar charts and the substitution tables in order to develop the <b>accuracy</b> of the simple past tense (affirmatives, negatives and questions). The properties of the phenomenon were the following:</p> <p><b>AUTONOMY</b>  <b>Properties</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• System</li> <li>• Beliefs 1</li> <li>• Beliefs 2</li> <li>• Commitment</li> <li>• Frequency</li> <li>• Use of tools</li> <li>• Action plan</li> <li>• Risk-taking</li> </ul> <p><b>ACCURACY</b>  <b>Properties</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structuring</li> <li>• Length</li> <li>• Improvement</li> <li>• Fossilization</li> <li>• Backslide</li> </ul> <p><b>AWARENESS</b>  <b>Properties</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-correction</li> <li>• Peer correction</li> <li>• Error avoidance</li> <li>• Beliefs</li> <li>• Assessment method</li> </ul>
<p><b>Action Strategies</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conversation preparation (<b>Autonomy</b>)</li> <li>• Awareness raising strategy training (textbook’s grammar charts, substitution tables, finger correction, “silent” conversation) (<b>Awareness</b>)</li> <li>• Awareness raising strategies (self-correction, peer correction) (<b>Awareness</b>)</li> <li>• Listening to the conversations in the voice message board (<b>Autonomy</b>)</li> <li>• Writing comments in the online forum (<b>Awareness</b>)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Consequences</b></p>	<p>As a result of this process, most of the students actually improved <b>accuracy</b> of the simple past tense especially in the affirmative statements</p>



	<p>because they had reached a high degree of <b>awareness</b> of surface grammatical structure of the simple past tense (<b>Accuracy</b>). On the other hand, a few of these students (2 out of 5) did not improve surface structuring of the past tenses (<b>Fossilization</b>) due to two factors 1) lack of interest of the system used and 2) lack of <b>autonomy</b> when they had to do their homework assignments and independent work in the course's learning community.</p>
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