Oral Communicative Competence: Explicit Teaching and Systematic Practice in Portuguese L1 Classes–Impact of a Program Implemented in Middle School

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Abstract

Oral language skills support not only the oral communicative competence itself but also reading skills. However, the development of oral communicative competence has not received the same attention in research as reading or even writing has. The main goal of this study was to examine the effect of the oral skills training program "Communication and Oral Expression: speaking, listening, and reading in middle school" on 7th-grade students' oral communicative competence (verbal, paraverbal, and non-verbal skills). Possible effects on students' vocabulary knowledge were also considered. This quasi-experimental study design, involving an experimental and a control group, comprises a sample of 122 students from two public middle schools located in the North of Portugal, with ages ranging from 11 to 16. Verbal, paraverbal, and nonverbal skills were taught and practiced for seven months. These skills were assessed four times (pre-test, two intermediate measures, and post-test). A vocabulary test was administered as a pre-test to check students' vocabulary knowledge, being also assessed at the end of the intervention program (post-test). Multivariate and univariate analyses of covariance tests showed a significant and large effect of the group on students' oral communicative performances at the end of the intervention, after controlling for the effect of the pre-test results. The results of a Mixed ANOVA showed that there was a significant improvement in the experimental group concerning vocabulary knowledge. These results highlight the importance of practicing speaking skills within educative settings for the development of children's oral communicative competence and vocabulary knowledge.

Keywords: Explicit Teaching of Oral Skills, Vocabulary Development, First Language Learning

Introduction

Language acquisition begins naturally and spontaneously at a very young age within the family. Its learning and development, both leading to the acquisition of knowledge, are not limited to this environment. They also depend on the contribution of social interaction in various communicative contexts, notably within the microcosm of society, which is the school (and preschool) environment. The school plays a central role in creating opportunities for the development of children's linguistic repertoire, regardless of their original contexts (Monteiro & Viana, 2021).

Oral communicative competence currently constitutes an integrative and holistic concept. In a broad sense, it encompasses knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable effective information transmission in diverse contexts, guided by sociocultural rules (Cassany et al., 1994; Celce-Murcia, 2008; Hymes, 1972; Rosales-López, 1994a). It is "an ability to act effectively in certain types of situations, supported by knowledge, but not being limited to it" (Perrenoud, 1999, p. 7). This competence involves knowing how to use oral language in different contexts and complements verbal communication skills with paraverbal and non-verbal ones (Monteiro et al., 2013; Monteiro & Viana, 2021, 2022; Rosales-López, 2013).

The most recent guidelines from the Ministry of Education for the 7th grade – Portuguese 1st language (Martins et al., 2017; Ministério da Educação, 2018) – emphasize the practice of speaking skills, along with writing and reading. However, the explicit teaching of oral communicative skills in the classroom has not received the attention it deserves and requires (Monteiro, 2020). In this sense, the program "Communication and Oral Expression: speaking, listening and reading in middle school – 7th grade" (COE–7) was designed to help teachers develop students'oral communication skills. It is an original program but strongly inspired by the program "Comunicación y Expresión Oral: Hablar, escuchar y ler en Secondary" authored by Maria Pilar Núñez Delgado (2001). COE–7 presents itself as an innovative proposal due to the selection of texts and activities specially designed for 7th-grade students, closely aligning with the curricular learning outcomes and the student's profile (Ministério da Educação, 2018), Furthermore, COE–7 integrates analysis and textual production scripts, as well as instruments for evaluating students learning and content mastery, which allow the implementation of self-regulated learning strategies in practice.

In this study, the conceptual framework of the program will be briefly described, as well as the results of the quasi-experimental study carried out to verify its impact on students' oral communicative skills and vocabulary.

The term "competence" is, due to its nature, complex to define. However, recent research conducted in the field has brought very relevant contributions to the clarification of this multidimensional construct, particularly in the educational context, where attention is beginning to be directed towards the explicit teaching of oral communication skills.

Therefore, considering the concept of "oral communicative competence," it becomes relevant to understand the term "competence" based on the sociolinguistic dimension of Hymes (1972), which places competence in the field of performance. This refers to the concrete use of language in specific communication contexts, governed by sociocultural norms. Later, this concept was expanded by the contributions of Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983), who first added strategic competence to the concept (i.e., the effective use of verbal and non-verbal strategies to compensate for communication problems or deficits). Subsequently, a

discursive competence was added (i.e., the knowledge that the speaker-listener must combine grammatical forms and meanings in a unified way, using cohesion at the level of linguistic form, and coherence at the level of meaning). This year, Savignon (1983, p. 22) supports that being successful in communicative tasks also depends on students' "knowledge of the paralinguistic and kinesic features of language – intonation, facial expression, gesture."

In the field of Education, the concept of competence extends to the syllabus, recommending the implementation of a competence-based teaching and learning process in schools. Competence does not only imply the use of knowledge; it is depicted as "an ability to act effectively according to a certain kind of situation, supported by knowledge, but not being limited to it" (Perrenoud, 1999, p. 7). This also encourages us to consider the skills and the attitudes of students.

The beginning of the 90s promoted new approaches to teaching and learning languages, grounded in a constructivist conception. Oral interaction started to be stimulated, appealing to prior knowledge and text manipulation (Bachman, 1990; Coseriu, 1992; Rosales-López, 1992, 1994b, 1994a). The theoretical framework developed by Bachman (1990) encompasses "both knowledge, or competence, and the ability to implement, or execute, this competence in appropriate contexts of communicative language use" (p. 84). This conception of linguistic competence is shared by Eugenio Coseriu (1992) when he emphasizes that it corresponds to the knowledge of the language that speakers apply when speaking. Coseriu's focus is the effective use of language – individual speaking that corresponds to expressive knowledge, and which consists of knowing how to apply pertinent factors in communication that are appropriate to the subject, the interlocutors, and the situation that shape each communicative act. In fact, as Humboldt (1990, p. 65) established in literature, language is *enérgeia*, not *érgon*, meaning that language is activity, not a completed work. Speakers are, in fact, creative when they demonstrate how to adapt language to the situational context, which takes us to the real meaning of oral communicative competence – the capacity to use language effectively in different situations (Monteiro et al., 2013, 2020; Núñez-Delgado, 2002, 2003).

As in other specific areas where oral interactions occur, knowledge of the context is crucial for students to become more competent in communication (Archer, 2000; Rosales-López, 2013), Therefore, a comprehensive process of understanding different contexts is necessary so that students have the opportunity to develop their verbal, paraverbal and non-verbal communicative skills (Cassany et al., 1994; Monteiro et al., 2013; Monteiro & Viana, 2021; Rosales-López, 2013; Savignon, 1983). These skills must be developed alongside with reading, writing, and grammar so that students' training can be fully implemented throughout their educational journey. This should be based on active pedagogical methodologies and strategies that promote their development (Dumais, 2016). Just as students practice reading and writing at school, they must have the opportunity to improve their oral communication skills.

Currently, there is undeniable recognition of the potential of learning oral language skills for the development of vocabulary, writing, and reading (Cadime et al., 2017; Capovilla et al., 2004; Connor et al., 2018; Ripoll et al., 2014; Skoczylas et al., 2016). It is also important to highlight the fact that students develop an awareness of their discursive abilities, becoming capable of self-regulating their learning. Systematic observation by teachers is, therefore, fundamental, as monitoring learning proves to be an essential source of information for diagnosing learning difficulties and for pedagogical intervention. According to a recent systematic review of oral communication skills training programs (Monteiro, 2020), empirical

evidence, both national and international, is limited when it comes to L1 oral skills teaching and learning. Most interventions are implemented in preschool and elementary school.

Communicative competence is effective when individuals put their skills into practice in various communicative contexts. This requires setting clear objectives for students to comprehend oral statements and interact in different classroom situations. In this regard, promoting and developing oral communicative competence in classes is crucial, encouraging students to deliver speeches in different scenarios and monitoring their progress. Observing oral performances consumes a significant amount of class time and can be challenging to carry out and analyse (Dumais, 2016). Therefore, this monitoring can be facilitated by the existence of instruments that encompass different components of communication, including verbal, paraverbal and non-verbal aspects (Dumais, 2015; Lomas, 2002; Monteiro et al., 2013; Monteiro & Viana, 2021). This, in turn, reflects positively in students' performance in terms of interaction and oral communication skills.

The development of the student's oral expression depends considerably on the school providing an environment that respects the turn and welcomes the voice, differences, and diversity. In this sense, the program "Communication and Oral Expression: speaking, listening, and reading in middle school – 7th grade," which is presented in the following section, aims to provide teachers with a set of strategies and materials to support their pedagogical action in the field of oral communicative competence (OCC).

Communication and Oral Expression: Speaking, Listening, and Reading in Middle School – 7th Grade (COE–7)

The Program's Structure and Description

The COE–7 program aims to help students acquire and develop speaking skills in a guided and sustained manner (Ministério da Educação, 2018, pp. 5–6). This skills include: planning texts while considering the objectives of the communication; using language fluently, correctly, and naturally in formal situations; expressing points of view and opinions, and giving presentations; respecting the conventions that regulate discursive interaction in situations with different levels of formality; using mechanisms to control discursive production based on feedback from interlocutors; self-regulating oral presentations based on criteria previously agreed upon with the teacher.

The COE–7 seeks to achieve, in a motivating, active and integrated way, the objectives recommended by the Ministry of Education (2018) for the field of orality, including: paying particular attention to the planning of information; understanding different communicative intentions in oral situations and knowing how to use them critically, not only in daily interactions but also in the production of speeches in formal contexts, including argumentative presentations; producing oral texts, according to specific categories and genres, progressively increasing the complexity of their different dimensions and characterizations.

According to its structure, the didactic program includes two blocks: Block I – Programming; Block II – Didactic Units. Block I presents the contents, objectives, and performance descriptors for the 7th-grade L1 Portuguese class. It also includes summary tables for the 13 thematic units, determining the concepts, strategies and attitudes that are practiced in different content domains – oral and written comprehension or expression, literary education, and verbal and non-verbal communication systems. Block II brings together the activities and assessment

instruments for each of the didactic units: 1) Presentation; 2) Most frequent communication difficulties; 3) Oral communication; 4) Oral texts; 5) Expressive reading; 6) Verbal and non-verbal language; 7) Spontaneous conversation and interview; 8) Literary dialogue; 9) Debate; 10) Oral narrative; 11) Oral description; 12) Oral presentation; and 13) Oral argumentation.

These units allow students to promote reflection on the importance of oral language for social relations; activate all the skills that make up oral discursive and communicative competence (receptive and expressive language) – debates, interviews, dialogues, oral presentations, etc. They work on expressive reading and address aspects that affect communication through oral language, such as pauses, intonation, clarity. Additionally, they serve to assess progress and difficulties that have not been overcome, and often provide instruments for self-regulation and evaluation of learning. Throughout the program, assessment is conceived as integral to the development of language learning, assuming a procedural approach due to students' different learning styles and rhythms. In this sense, each unit offers various instruments for self-regulation and leaning assessment, such as: How do I evaluate myself as a speaker? (Appendix A); Grid for self- and heterovaluation of reading (Appendix B); Planning the oral presentation (Appendix C); and GOAOCC: Grid for Observation and Assessment of the Oral Communicative Competence (Appendix D) (Monteiro et al., 2013).

To evaluate the impact of CEO–7 on students' oral communicative competence, and vocabulary, a quasi-experimental study was conducted. The methodology and results will be subsequently outlined.

The Implementation of the Program COE – 7

The empirical study conducted to evaluate the impact of the program will be presented next. This study has the following objectives:
(1) to analyse the impact of COE–7 on students' oral communicative competence (verbal, paraverbal, non-verbal skills, and total OCC), during the intervention (M2, M3, M4), while controlling the effects of the pre-test (M1);

(2) to analyse the impact of COE–7 on students' vocabulary, specifically word definition.

The following section describes the methodology that was followed.

Methodology

Participants

As previously mentioned, to evaluate the impact of CEO–7 on students' oral communicative competence, a quasi-experimental study was conducted using a convenience sample, consisting of 122 students from the 7th grade in two public middle schools in Northern Portugal. The experimental group (EG) comprised 67 students, while 55 belonged to the control group (CG). The experimental group is composed of 35 male students (52.2%) and 32 female students (47.8%). The control group comprises 28 female participants (50.9%) and 27 male participants (49.1%). Differences in gender distribution between groups are not statistically significant (χ^2 (1) = 0.120, p=0.729). The mean age of the children was 12 years old (SD=0,84), with ages ranging between 11 (13.9%) and 16 (0.8%) years old. Groups are equivalents in terms of age [t = - 1.916, df=120, p=.058, CI 95% $Mdif$ [- 0,01; 0,62], d = 0.34].

Instruments

The assessment of students' oral communicative competence was carried out using GOAOCC (Appendix D) (Monteiro et al., 2013). This instrument is used to assess verbal skills, which include knowledge of the theme, vocabulary, argumentation, coherence; paraverbal skills, covering fluency, expressiveness, tone, pace; and non-verbal skills, encompassing eye contact, gesture, and posture.

Students' vocabulary was evaluated using the vocabulary subtest from the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (Simões et al., 2003). This subtest comprises 30 items, each consisting of orally presented words that the children are required to define as comprehensively as possible. The response to each item is scored with 2, 1, or 0 points.

Procedure

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee for Research in Social and Human Sciences (REF. CEICSH 110) at the University of Minho and by the school boards involved. Written informed consents from all the students who participated in the study were previously obtained from their parents or legal tutors. Sixty-seven students followed the program CEO–7 alongside their regular curricular content. The program was applied to 7th-grade students and took place in L1 Portuguese classroom, from October 2018 to May 2019. The program intervention was structured in 20 sessions (each lasting 90/100 min.) conducted by the teacher, following an infusion approach. The units were distributed during the academic year as shown in Table 1:

	1st Trimester	2nd Trimester	3rd Trimester
Didactic units			
	Unit 1	Unit 4	Unit 3
	Unit 2	Unit 6	Unit 5
	Unit 7	Unit 8	Unit 9
	Unit 10	Unit 13	Unit 12
	Unit 11		
Text genre			
	Narrative	Poetic	Dramatic
Number of sessions			
	8 sessions	7 sessions	5 sessions

Table 1: Distribution of didactic Units

Before implementing the program, training was provided to participating teachers, aiming to not only explain the theoretical rationale of the program but also how GOAOCC functions. To ensure methodological rigor, support for teachers continued throughout the didactic intervention.

Students from both groups were required to conduct individual presentations lasting four minutes each. The assessment of students' oral communicative competence performance using GOAOCC took place, for both groups, at four moments: Moment 1 (M1) – beginning of the school year (pre-test, 1st week of October); Moment 2 (M2) – end of the 1st trimester (last week of November); Moment 3 (M3) – end of the 2nd trimester (last week of March); Moment 4 (M4) – end of the 3rd trimester (post-test, first week of June). Before these individual presentations performed during the intervention program, students learned about successful and unsuccessful presentations behaviour. Therefore, GOAOCC was introduced, and its three components were

explained. The presentations were monitored beforehand, and oral communicative competence was assessed by the teacher, on a self-selected topic, to evaluate students' verbal, paraverbal, and non-verbal skills.

Before conducting any statistical analysis, various tests were performed to check various assumptions and ensure that the data were suitable for inferential statistical analysis. Formal tests to analyse the assumption of normal distribution were not conducted. The literature suggests that with large samples, significant results can be obtained even with small deviations from normality. Therefore, it is advisable to observe the values of the skewness and kurtosis coefficients as an alternative (Field, 2009). Z-Tests were calculated for skewness and kurtosis, resulting in values lower than 3.29, the limit specified as a reference for medium-sized samples. This conclusion indicates that the sample follows a normal distribution (Field, 2009; Kim, 2013). Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of verbal, paraverbal and non-verbal communication skills.

			Mean	SD	Skewness	$SE_{Skewness}$	$Z_{Skewness}$	Kurtosis	$SE_{Kurtosis}$	$Z_{Kurtosis}$	Min-Max
Verbal	EG	M1	2.71	0.74	0.096	0.293	0.328	-0.137	0.578	-0.237	1,00 - 4,50
		M2	2.94	0.79	-0.174	0.293	-0.594	-0.427	0.578	-0.739	1,00 - 4,25
		M3	3.18	0.78	-0.460	0.293	-1.570	-0.177	0.578	-0.306	1,25 - 4,50
		M4	3.37	0.85	-0.625	0.293	-2.133	1.074	0.578	1.858	1,00 - 5,00
	CG	M1	3.15	0.94	0.791	0.322	2.457	-0.574	0.634	-0.905	2,00 - 5,00
		M2	3.26	0.63	0.944	0.322	2.932	0.534	0.634	0.842	2,00 - 5,00
		M3	3.19	0.77	0.352	0.322	1.093	0.988	0.634	1.558	1,50 – 5,00
		M4	3.03	0.81	0.986	0.322	3.062	0.241	0,634	0.380	2,00 - 5,00
Paraverbal	EG	M1	2.91	0.84	0.597	0.293	2.038	-0.148	0.578	-0.256	1,50 - 5,00
		M2	3.15	0.97	0.154	0.293	0.526	-0.672	0.578	-1.163	1,00 - 5,00
		M3	3.21	0.89	0.193	0.293	0.659	-0.424	0.578	-0.734	1,00 - 5,00
		M4	3.35	0.99	-0.136	0.293	-0.464	-0.151	0.578	-0.261	1,00 - 5,00
	CG	M1	3.22	0.87	0.566	0.322	1.758	-0.333	0.634	-0.525	2,00 - 5,00
		M2	3.15	0.54	0.151	0.322	0.469	0.429	0.634	0.677	2,00 – 4,50
		M3	3.31	0.73	1.038	0.322	3.224	0.782	0.634	1.233	2,00 - 5,00
		M4	3.08	0.65	0.888	0.322	2.758	0.585	0,634	0.923	2,00 – 4,75
Non-Verbal	EG	M1	2.57	0.84	0.815	0.293	2.782	0.273	0.578	0.472	1,30 - 5,00
		M2	2.55	0.81	0.017	0.293	0.058	0.097	0.578	0.168	1,00 - 4,70
		M3	2.83	0.76	0.783	0.293	2.672	0.821	0.578	1.420	1,00 - 5,00
		M4	3.15	1,03	0.001	0.293	0.003	-0.361	0.578	-0.625	1,00 - 5,00
	CG	M1	3.21	0.94	0.503	0.322	1.562	-0.535	0.634	-0.844	2,00 - 5,00
		M2	3.09	0.84	0.146	0.322	0.453	-1.024	0.634	-1.615	2,00 - 4,70
		M3	3.20	0.97	0.489	0.322	1.519	-0.676	0.634	-1.066	2,00 - 5,00
		M4	3.18	0.99	0.583	0.322	1.811	-0.946	0,634	-1.492	2,00 - 5,00
Total score	EG	M1	2.76	0.72	0.429	0.293	1.464	-0.208	0.578	-0.360	1,54 - 4,63
		M2	2.96	0.76	-0.140	0.293	-0.478	-0.421	0.578	-0.728	1,00 - 4,35
		M3	3.16	0.72	-0.231	0.293	-0.788	-0.461	0.578	-0.798	1,54 - 4,63
		M4	3.34	0.88	-0.458	0.293	-1.563	0.605	0.578	1.047	1,00 - 5,00
	CG	M1	3.17	0.87	0.928	0.322	2.882	-0.381	0.634	-0.601	2,00 - 5,00
		M2	3.04	0.73	0.318	0.322	0.988	-0.361	0.634	-0.569	2,00 - 4,67
		M3	3.22	0.73	0.867	0.322	2.693	0.814	0.634	1.284	1,88 - 5,00
		M4	3.04	0.73	1.052	0.322	3.267	0.271	0,634	0.427	2,00 – 4,78

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for the verbal, paraverbal, non-verbal components and total score

Considering the non-equivalence of the groups in the pre-test, for all variables under study, a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted to assess the effects of the CEO–7 program on students' oral communicative skills. The OCC total score was analysed independently using a univariate analysis of covariance (ANCOVA).

For this test, the values of partial eta-squared (η_P^2) were calculated as a measure of effect size, considering the following reference values for interpretation: small effect, $\eta_P^2 > 0.01$; medium effect, $\eta_P^2 > 0.06$; large effect, $\eta_P^2 > 0.14$ (Cohen, 1988). The results of the three subscales (verbal, paraverbal and non-verbal) were used as dependent variables in each of the

assessments carried out throughout and at the end of the intervention, with the students' performance in the pre-test (M1) incorporated as a covariate. All assumptions required for the execution of MANCOVA and ANCOVA were analysed and met.

In terms of assessing students' vocabulary, the vocabulary subtest from the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-III) (Simões et al., 2003) was conducted by a psychologist and was administered at only two points in time: the pre-test and post-test, corresponding to the beginning and end of the school year. In the analysis of the vocabulary variable, 3 participants were excluded (2 students from the CG and 1 student from the EG), who did not take the test in the post-test. The sample is the following: EG (n=66) and CG (n=53). Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for vocabulary.

		Mean	*SD*	*Skewn.*	*EP$_{Skew}$*	*Z$_{Zkew..}$*	*Kurt.*	*EP$_{Kurt}$*	*Z$_{Kurt.}$*	*Min-Máx*
EG	Pre-test	20,41	9.30	-0.136	0.295	-0,461	-0.731	0.582	-1,256	2-40
	Post-test	27,06	9.75	-0.239	0.295	-0,810	-0.515	0.582	-0,885	3-48
CG	Pre-test	20,55	7.37	0.408	0.327	1,25	-0.309	0.644	-0,480	7-38
	Post-test	19,06	9.17	0.160	0.327	0,489	-0.061	0.644	-0,095	0-42

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of the scores obtained in the WISC-III subtest

The independent samples T-test confirms that there are no statistically significant differences between the groups in comparison [$t = - 0.880$, $df=117$, $p > .05$, 95% *CI Mdif* [-3.24; 2.97], $d = 0.02$], concluding that the experimental group and the control group are equivalent. Considering this result, to assess the effect of the intervention on students' vocabulary, a mixed-design analysis of variance was performed, with pre and post-test measures of vocabulary values. The values of partial eta-squared (η_p^2) were calculated as a measure of effect size, based on the reference values mentioned before, for their interpretation. All assumptions required for the execution of this type of analysis were examined and met.

The results are summarized in the following section, first those concerning oral communicative competence, and then vocabulary.

Results

Oral Communicative Competence

Considering the second assessment (M2) of the OCC, conducted at the end of the fist trimester, multivariate tests revealed statistically significant differences between groups in terms of the set of the three components of the OCC (*Pillai's Trace* = 0.069, $F (3, 115) = 9.171$, $p = 0.041$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.069$). However, univariate tests showed no statistically significant differences between groups for any of the three individual components of the OCC ($p > 0.05$). ANCOVA results for the variable "total score" are also not significant. In short, the groups only differ by a combination of the variables that make up the OCC, but not when we observe the individual effects of the variables.

As with the results obtained in the M2 of OCC assessment, in M3 (end of the second trimester), MANCOVA results do not show statistically significant differences between groups in the combination of verbal, paraverbal, and non-verbal oral communication skills (*Pillai's Trace* = 0.011, $F (3, 115) = 0.409$, $p = 0.747$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.011$). The univariate tests of covariance revealed

that there are no statistically significant differences between the groups in terms of any of the three components of the oral communicative competence. The same goes for the variable "total score."

At the end of the intervention, 3rd trimester (M4), corresponding to the post-test, the MANCOVA tests revealed that there was a significant effect of the group on students' oral communicative performances at the end of the didactic intervention (M4), after controlling for the effect of the pre-test results (*Pillai's Trace* = 0.0193, F (3, 115) = 9.196, $p < 0.001$, η_p^2 = 0.193).

The univariate covariance tests corroborate this result, as there were statistically significant differences between the groups in the three components of oral communicative competence (see Table 4).

	EG EMM (CI)	CG EMM (CI)	*F* (df)	*p-value*	η_p^2
Verbal skills	3.49 (3.33; 3.64)	2.88 (2.72; 3.05)	25,637 (1, 117)	< 0.0001	0.180
Paraverbal skills	3.44 (3.29; 3.60)	2.97 (2.79; 3.15)	13,860 (1, 117)	< 0.0001	0.106
Non-verbal skills	3.37 (3.22; 3.52)	2.91 (2.74; 3.08)	14,889 (1, 117)	< 0.0001	0.113
OCC Total score	3.48 (3.34; 3.62)	2.87 (2.72; 3.03)	31,158 (1, 119)	< 0.0001	0.207

Table 4. Results of univariate analysis of covariance – Post-test (M4)

The effect size is large for verbal skills, and moderate for paraverbal and nonverbal skills. Regarding the variable "total score," statistically significant differences were observed between the groups, after controlling for the effect of the performances in the pre-test, complemented by a large effect size.

Vocabulary

Multivariate tests report a significant effect of time (*Pillai's trace* = 0.055, F (1,117) = 6.829, p = .010, η_p^2 = 0.055), indicating an increase in vocabulary between the pre- and post-test.

A statistically significant group effect was also observed, indicating that performances on the "vocabulary" variable differ between the experimental group and the control group (F(1, 117) = 8.658, p = .004, η_p^2 = .069). The results also demonstrate a significant interaction effect between time and group (*Pillai's trace* = 0.127, F (1, 117) = 16.997, $p < .0001$, η_p^2 = 0.127) (Figure 1).
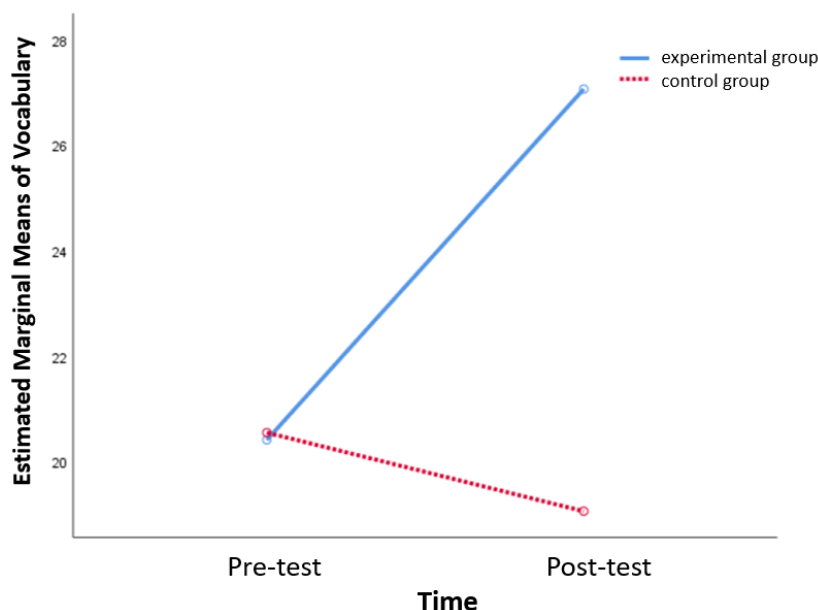
Figure 1: Graph of the interaction between time and group

The graph reveals an increase in vocabulary averages for the experimental group, represented by the steep slope of the solid line, contrasting with the slight decrease in average vocabulary values in the control group. Contrast tests confirm that only in the experimental group does the vocabulary level increase significantly from the pre-test to the post-test, as can be observed in Table 5.

	Time a	Time b	Mean difference a-b	Std. Error	Sig.(a)	95% Confidence Interval for Difference(a)	
						Upper Bound	Lower Bound
EG 1		2	-6,652*	1,318	.000	-9,262	-4,041
	2	1	6,652*	1,318	.000	4,041	9,262
CG 1		2	1,491	1,471	-313	-1,422	4,403
	2	1	-1,491	1,471	.313	-4,403	1,422

a.   Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni

Table 5: Test of Contrasts for Vocabulary

Discussion and Conclusions

Regarding the first objective, which was "to analyse the impact of COE–7 on students' oral communicative competence (verbal, paraverbal, non-verbal skills, and total OCC), during the intervention (M2, M3, M4), while controlling the effects of the pre-test (M1)", the experimental group did, in fact, show significant improvements in the three components of oral communicative competence (verbal, paraverbal and non-verbal skills) and in the total score at the end of the intervention (M4). Furthermore, the effect size was large in the verbal component and moderate in the paraverbal and non-verbal components, which is very relevant, considering the seven-month intervention period. Since these are behavioural skills, their development takes time, as highlighted by Mattheoudakis et al. (2014). This means that the effect of the program tends to only occur in the medium or long term. Núñez-Delgado et al. (2008) even consider that an academic year can be a short period to observe progress in discursive

competence, which is in line with the conclusions obtained in the systematic review of didactic intervention programs conducted at the beginning of the study (Monteiro, 2020).

The results of the present study are also consistent with those of previous studies that show the benefits of practicing oral skills in the classroom in developing the communicative competence of adolescents of similar ages (11 to 14 years old) when learning their mother tongue (Núñez-Delgado, 2002; Núñez-Delgado et al., 2008). This trend is also observed in learning non-native languages, particularly in an immersion context (Fisher & Frei, 2018; Short et al., 2012), as well as in studies conducted with preschool children (Fricke et al., 2013; Haley et al., 2017; Van der Veen et al., 2017).

Concerning the second objective, which was "to analyse the impact of COE–7 on students' vocabulary, specifically word definition," students showed significant improvements in terms of vocabulary between pre and post-test. The results do, in fact, point to a considerable effect, corroborating conclusions from studies (Ford-Connors & Paratore, 2015; Teberosky & Jarque, 2014) that report the contribution of oral language practice to the enrichment and development of vocabulary. Explicit teaching and associated practice could prevent or bridge the differences observed in language repertoire among children from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Hart & Risley, 2003).

Based on the research findings, it can be inferred that two main themes emerge. The first points to the feasibility of the adopted curricular infusion, which enhances the utility and educational value of this program and the materials it includes. The second theme directly stems from the obtained results, which can be considered promising. This suggests that CEO–7 could serve as a valuable resource for explicitly teaching oral communication skills.

At this point, it is also important to highlight that teachers viewed the program as an added benefit for conducting activities that promote oral language. Students, on the other hand, responded very positively to the different proposals offered by COE-7, highlighting an increased sense of confidence during oral interactions. Despite the systematization introduced in students' communicative competence, the diversity of proposals makes it possible to cater to the variety that characterizes typical classrooms. Considering the flexibility allowed, the program "Communication and Oral Expression: speaking, listening, and reading in middle school – 7th grade" could potentially serve as a model for designing other interventions.

Limitations and Further Research

There are some limitations to this study. On one hand, the sample used in this investigation was selected for convenience. On the other hand, the teachers (OCC evaluators) were different, although everyone was aware of the assessment criteria.

Furthermore, future research could consider analysing the ideal frequency and duration of sessions, as well as the didactic intervention itself. It could also explore other variables that may contribute to the development of oral communicative competence, conduct longitudinal studies, and perform the OCC assessment based on the observations of two independent teachers, among other approaches.

The results from future research will help expand the empirical evidence of the benefits of explicitly teaching oral communicative skills and systematically practicing them, thereby

contributing to the development of more competent citizens in terms of oral communication and in the social domain.

Acknowledgements

Appendices

Appendix A

How do I evaluate myself as a speaker? (Unit 2)

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Ever
1. I articulate words well.					
2. I adapt the tone of voice to the interlocutor and the space.					
3. I shout or speak in too high a tone.					
4. I gesture a lot when I speak.					
5. I follow secondary topics and deviate from the central theme.					
6. I choose the right words to say what I want.					
7. When the conversation seems not to be progressing, I intervene with new data.					
8. When my ideas are confused, it's difficult for me to express them in an orderly way.					
9. I repeat the same idea countless times so as not to give up the floor.					
I talk nonstop and forget to give others time to give their opinion.					
10. I'm an inhibited person, so I avoid talking.					
11. I tend to agree with others and not say what I think.					
12. I use speech articulators to organize my ideas.					

Appendix B

Grid for self- and heterovaluation of reading (L.) (Unit 5)

CATEGORIES		Teacher	Students			
		L.1	L.2	L.3	L.4	L.5
TONE	Inaudible					
	Normal					
	High					
ARTICULATION	Deficient					
	Problems with sounds					
	clear					
INTONATION	Monotone					
	Natural and pleasant					
	Forced					
SPEED	Excessive					
	Slow					
	Proper					
PAUSES	Inadequate					
	Adequate					

Appendix C

Planning the oral presentation (Unit 5)

		Topics
STEP 2 **Planning** **of the written text**	**Introduction** Theme presentation (1 paragraph)	- -
	Development Development of the theme, concise and objective way.	- - - -
	Conclusion Summary of the above aspects (1 paragraph), highlighting the most relevant aspects of personality.	- -

Appendix D

GOAOCC: Grid for Observation and Assessment of the Oral Communicative Competence (Monteiro et al., 2013)

		GOAOCC - Grid for Observation and Assessment of the Oral Communicative Competence															

20__ / 20__   School : _____   **GRADE ___   CLASS ____**

Oral task:

N.°	Name/Code number	Verbal skills 60%				SUBTOTAL	Paraverbal skills 30%				SUBTOTAL	Non verbal skills 10%			SUBTOTAL	TOTAL	Assessment
		Theme knowledge	Vocabulary	Argumentation	Coherence		Fluency	Expressiveness	Tone	Pace		Eye contact	Gesture	Posture			
1		G	S	S	S	3,25	S	I	I	G	2,75	F	S	S	2,33	3	SATISFACTORY
2						0,00					0,00					0	
3						0,00					0,00					0	
4						0,00					0,00					0	
5						0,00					0,00					0	
6						0,00					0,00					0	
7						0,00					0,00					0	
8						0,00					0,00					0	
9						0,00					0,00					0	
10						0,00					0,00					0	

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