ARTICULO DE INVESTIGACIÓN ORIGINAL

WEBSITE FOR ASSESSING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN ORAL PRESENTATIONS OF ARCHITECTURE STUDENTS

SITIO WEB PARA EVALUAR LA COMUNICACION INTERCULTURAL EN LAS PRESENTACIONES ORALES DE ESTUDIANTES DE ARQUITECTURA

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Abstract

Introduction: Modern society which is characterized by globalization, mobility and cooperation, demands the use of English for professionals to communicate in different contexts. At Central University Marta Abreu de Las Villas, students of Architecture are involved in international collaboration projects where English is spoken as lingua franca for intercultural communication. In addition, it is evidenced that they have difficulties in oral communication when presenting their project designs in this context due to intercultural differences. **Objective:** the overall aim of this research is to provide Architecture students with a website to assess

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intercultural communication in oral presentations of their project designs in English.

Methodology: This research is supported by the dialectical-materialistic method in its chiefly qualitative approach. Thus, the *research methods* used were: from the theoretical level, the *Historical-Logical, Induction-Deduction*; *Analysis-Synthesis and Abstraction.* From the empirical level, *Participant observation, Document analysis*; *Individual In-depth interviews, Group interview* to students*, Surveys to students* and *Statistical and mathematical methods* like *percentages and frequency analysis.* **Results:** The web site comprises didactic materials, methodological orientations and the criteria to assess intercultural communication to develop effective oral presentations about Architecture project designs.

Key Words: architecture project designs; assessing intercultural communication; oral presentations; website

RESUMEN

Introducción: La sociedad moderna, caracterizada por la globalización, la movilidad y la cooperación, demanda del dominio del idioma inglés para la comunicación de los profesionales. En la Universidad Central de Las Villas los estudiantes de Arquitectura participan en proyectos internacionales donde el idioma inglés se erige como lengua franca para la comunicación intercultural.

Objetivo: proveer a los estudiantes de Arquitectura de un sitio web para la evaluación de la comunicación intercultural de las presentaciones orales de sus proyectos de diseño en inglés.

Métodos: Esta investigación está sustentada en el Método Dialéctico – Materialista y en su metodología cualitativa. Los métodos utilizados del nivel teórico fueron: Histórico-Lógico, Inducción-Deducción, Síntesis-Análisis y Abstracción. Del nivel empírico: Observación Participativa, Análisis de documentos, Entrevista Individual a profundidad, Entrevistas grupales y encuestas. Métodos estadísticos y matemáticos.

Resultados: El sitio web contempla materiales didácticos, orientaciones metodológicas e indicadores para evaluar la comunicación intercultural

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para desarrollar presentaciones orales efectivas sobre el diseño de proyectos arquitectónicos.

Conclusiones: Se evidenció en este trabajo que los estudiantes presentan dificultades en la comunicación oral de los proyectos arquitectónicos dadas las diferencias interculturales. Asimismo, existen insuficiencias de carácter bibliográfico en la asignatura Inglés IV y el diseño del sitio web logró alcanzar una mejor comunicación intercultural.

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Palabras clave: comunicación intercultural; evaluación; presentaciones orales; proyectos de diseño arquitectónico; sitio web

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, modern society places challenging demands on individuals in their professional lives as a result of the globalization process that imposes a fundamental change in the way of approaching business and workplace success. People with different cultural backgrounds are engaged in highly competitive and fast changing businesses, and to succeed in this context they need to use the language for effective and clear intercultural communication.

Thus, Cetin Köroğlu, Z. (2016) stated with reason that communicative competence without cultural awareness is not enough to ensure global communication. In this regard, intercultural communication has gained importance in recent years.

activity within the professional environment in which intercultural communication should be carefully considered, is oral presentations. Directors, managers, salespeople, consultants, architects, and business personnel are regularly required to give oral presentations about their projects and ideas, sometimes, in multicultural settings. However, when they are asked to give a presentation to an audience from a different culture there are intercultural factors that can/might hinder the success of the presentation.

University students as future professionals are also constantly involved in giving oral presentations in academic settings such as practical lessons, seminars, scientific events, term papers presentations, thesis dissertations, etc. and they have to show their knowledge of a given

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content as well as the oral communication skills and progress.

Since English is considered the language for international communication, and the language for disseminating information on science and technology, it is the one selected in Cuban Higher Education for training competent professionals in a foreign language. In academic settings, intercultural communication should be linked to the students´ academic identity, understood as "expert knowledge" within a relative specialized field.

Students of Architecture at Central University "Marta Abreu" of Las Villas (UCLV), on which we have focused our research, should be able to communicate in English effectively since they are involved in some international collaboration projects with Belgium, Germany and Switzerland where English is used as a lingua franca. It has been evidenced that they have difficulties in relation to the intercultural awareness necessary to carry out oral presentations about their project designs to succeed in academic and professional contexts. They have to describe structures and other graphic elements using a specific language that might affect

intercultural communication due to contextual differences among cultures. When giving oral presentations about project designs, students and professionals often face problems related with intercultural communication in respect to the content of the presentation that is expressed in a graphic code and should be explained using the appropriate language for describing and communicating that content.

In the case of content explanation the difficulties are focused on describing particular details related to the context of the selected construction site. Also some contextual specifications related to the climate, location, environmental protection policies of our country, construction materials are used. They also face problems related with the language used for describing graphs and diagrams, terminology accuracy, voice and intonation to emphasize the main points of the presentation as well as other non-verbal elements such as the use of space and time management.

On one hand, a lack of instructional materials for teaching the technical language and the strategies for giving effective oral presentations could be evidenced in the context of the

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teaching and learning process of English IV (English for Specific Purposes) in Architecture studies. Those materials should include the topics related with Architecture projects design and planning, the use of the appropriate language for graph description as well as non-verbal language strategies and visual aids to develop effective oral presentations.

On the other hand, in oral presentations about project designs Architecture students generally used PowerPoint Office program to produce most professional overheads, and made a computer-based presentation while working with AutoCAD and Sketch up programs to design their projects. Thus, the use of ICT is an important element to prepare, present and assess oral presentations about project designs.

Therefore, it is considered necessary to design some materials in an interactive environment to enhance student's self-assessment and to help them to develop effective oral presentations in a multicultural environment.

Thus, the previously described situation led to the following scientific problem:

- How to assess intercultural communication in oral presentations in English of Architecture students?
- The overall aim of the present research is:
- to provide Architecture students with a Website to assess intercultural communication in oral presentations of project designs given in English.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the teaching and learning process, teachers and students need to be systematically informed about the process of development of language skills and the importance of intercultural communication when describing project designs in oral presentations. The process that gives both agents the necessary feedback about these aspects is precisely the assessment process, which also allows them to judge the information for making the decisions about improving their practices. Thus, teachers and learners demand assessment as a mean of evaluating their projects and charting future needs and goals.

In fact, over the recent years there has been an increasing focus on the importance of assessment to help

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students take control of their own learning process and ensure learning quality in Higher Education. Language teaching programs in Cuba's Higher Education System are undergoing substantial changes in relation to assessment policies to guarantee learning improvement and, consequently, better professional communicative performance in different areas of knowledge.

On the other hand, intercultural communication, as we conceive it, can be defined as interpersonal communication where people with different cultural references intervene to perceive themselves, having to overcome some personal and/or contextual barriers in order to communicate effectively. (Rodríguez and Varela, 2019)

Since our languages courses are aimed at developing intercultural communication as part of communicative competence in a foreign language, it should be systematically assessed as an integral part of the courses.

According to Borghetti, (2017) there are many reasons for assessing intercultural communication. First, if its development is one of the educational aims of language learning and teaching, it appears logical enough to assess language students' intercultural learning as well. After all, in education generally, teaching involves assessment, and teachers have to monitor and improve the goals, methods and practices of their instruction in light of their learners' attainments. In other words, the assessment of intercultural communication can be an assessment for autonomy as far as it encourages learners to assume responsibility for their intercultural learning.

Then, it is necessary to specify the kind of knowledge and skills that need to be assessed. To do so; university students need to be categorized in terms of intercultural requirements. According to Annie Aarup Jensen et al. (1995), such classification is divided into three categories:

Students to whom intercultural competence is seen as a core competence.

Students to whom intercultural competence is part of their professional life.

Students to whom intercultural competence is an additional competence to the traditional professional life.

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According to these authors, students of Architecture would belong to the last group, to whom intercultural competence is an additional one to the traditional professional life. For them, this competence will contribute to a better language proficiency.

This research work is intended to develop a website to assess intercultural communication based on formative assessment (Black & William, 1998; Allah& Pilgrims, 2000; Boston, 2002; cited by Pérez J. 2007).That is, learning assessment that provides different procedures to develop effective oral presentations in multicultural settings to help students know their strengths and weaknesses in this kind of activity.

In addition, websites are increasingly common on the educational scene. The use of ICT in education lends itself to more student-centered learning settings. But with the world moving rapidly into digital media and information, the role of ICT in education is becoming more important. According to Cabero (2001; cited by Yusuf, 2005, Al-Ansari, 2006), "the flexibilization time-space accounted for by the integration of ICT into teaching and learning processes contributes to increase the interaction and reception of information. Such possibilities suggest changes in the communication models and the teaching and learning methods used by teachers, giving way to new scenarios which favor both individual and collaborative learning".

Those advantages are being taken into consideration for the design of the website proposed in this work. A great deal of research has proven the ICT benefits to innovate, accelerate, enrich, and deepen skills, to motivate and engage students, to help relate school experiences to work practices, create economic viability for tomorrow's workers, as well as strengthening teaching and helping schools change (Davis and Tearle, 1999; Lemke and Coughlin, 1998; cited by Yusuf, 2005, Al-Ansari, 2006).

METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach chosen for this research is in correspondence with the problem to be solved in this study and the general aim to be fulfilled: to provide Architecture students with a Website to assess intercultural communication in oral presentations of students of Architecture project designs' given in English to succeed in academic and

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professional contexts. To accomplish this aim, it is necessary to carry out a pedagogical intervention in the context of the teaching and learning process to introduce changes in the way students perceive and develop the assessment process of intercultural communication in oral presentations of their project designs given in English from a formative perspective.

Taking into consideration the interests, circumstances of the scenario, and the participants of the research, the use of a qualitative methodology was chosen. This is a method of inquiry in many different academic disciplines, traditionally in social sciences. As the study carried out in this work is related with this area of knowledge and focused on the assessment of foreign language learning at Central University "Marta Abreu" of Las Villas, this methodology is considered to be the most suitable for the accomplishment of the research purposes.

The sample chosen for this research involves professors and students from Architecture studies at Central University "Marta Abreu" of Las Villas, mainly those who participated in international collaboration projects

with countries such as a Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, and the Netherlands, among some others where English is spoken as a lingua franca for international communication.

The setting selected for this study is English IV (English for Professional Purposes) which is delivered in 32 class hours of the second semester to Second-Year Architecture students in Cuban universities. The general aim of this course is the mastery of English language according to students' professional needs. It also aims to further develop English language skills required by students to communicate effectively in their future professional career. The textbook suggested for those students is At Your Pace IV *Stretch your Wings* designed by a group of Cuban specialists. The author of this research selected this context since she had developed most of her professional and educational practice teaching English for General, Specific: Academic and Professional Purposes in Architecture studies.

Sample Selection and Description

A group of 20 students and 8 professors from Architecture studies

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were intentionally selected to compose the sample of the research following these criteria:

For students:

- proficiency level

- academic year

- participation in international collaboration projects (4th and 5th year students)

For teachers:

- subject specialists

- academic rank

- years of experience in teaching Architecture

- participation in international collaboration projects

- rank or position in the faculty direction

The Head of the Foreign Languages Department and the head of the discipline English for Technical Sciences were also included here because they were considered key informants in this research work.

This research work had all the support and collaboration from the Faculty authorities and staff in providing all the necessary information in respect to the topic.

Table 1 Description of the sample

Students	Professors	Faculty authorities
-Students who studied in second year whose proficiency level was high and those who were low-proficient in order to compare their views and perspectives about intercultural communication. -Students from fourth and	-Subject specialists, who teach in 2nd year, where English IV is also taught. -Professors who have participated in international collaboration projects. -Professors with main academic rank to find out	- Dean of the faculty - Head of Architecture studies - Head of the Architecture Department. - 2nd year coordinator teacher –International collaboration projects

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fifth year who participated in international collaboration projects.	about their meanings in respect to the need and importance of intercultural awareness and concern when delivering an oral presentation in multicultural environments	leaders

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Research methods used

a) From the Theoretical Level:

☞ *Historical-Logical* aimed at evaluating the progression and tendencies related to the domain and field of study.

☞ *Induction-Deduction*; *Analysis-Synthesis and Abstraction*: in order to process and evaluate collected data to establish then, the corresponding generalizations and conclusive considerations in needs diagnosis, to arrive at conclusions.

b) From the Empirical Level:

☞ *Observation*

Participant observation: to gain a closer insight into students'

practices, motivations and emotions.

● To observe students' communicative performances while delivering oral presentations in class taking into consideration intercultural communication and awareness.

● to observe students' communicative performances, taking into account the criteria for assessing intercultural communication in oral presentations.

☞ *Document analysis:* with the purpose of finding out what is regulated in the educational policy

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in relation to the teaching and learning process of English IV in Architecture studies, taking into consideration the aspects included in the research domain.

In-depth interviews:

- *Interview to professors and Faculty authorities who have participated in international collaboration projects*: in order to know their experiences in managing intercultural situations in academic contexts such as lectures, seminars and oral presentations, focusing on different elements that are related with the effectiveness of oral presentations.

- *Interview to subject specialists who have not participated in any international collaboration project*: to consider other pedagogic influences related to the development and presentation of project designs with an intercultural perspective throughout the teaching and learning process.

- *Group interview*: to explore issues related with students perspectives and views about

how to give an effective oral presentation, the relevance of intercultural communication and awareness in this context. Also, it was carried out to explore their understanding of the criteria for evaluating students' communicative performance and students' needs related with strengths and weaknesses when planning and giving oral presentations about project designs. The same form used for interview to professors and Faculty authorities was used for this group interview, but the aim here was to confront opinions.

- *Surveys*

- *Survey to students who have participated in international collaboration projects abroad* with the aim of considering students' perceptions, experiences and meanings of the intercultural elements that might affect oral presentations when addressing a foreign audience.

- *Survey to students who have not participated in international collaboration projects abroad*

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with the purpose of considering their apprehensions and understanding about giving effective oral presentations to foreign audiences and to know their concerns in respect to the planning process of project designs in English

All the above-mentioned methods were put into practice in order to explore the actual situation in respect to the problem situation presented in this work.

Results analysis

The website designed for this research, comprises instructional materials, methodological orientations, and the criteria for assessing intercultural communication in English oral presentations of Architecture students for making decisions to improve oral communication. It also contains the instruments to carry out the assessment process: assessment sheets and rubrics.

The website has an instructional and a technological design. The first one has to do with the publication of instructional materials, which are supported on the communicative language approach to English

language teaching. This approach demands the contextualization of the linguistic contents in authentic tasks related with real-life situations. Those tasks go beyond the classroom limits and involve a change of attitudes and behaviors in favor of the process of delivering oral presentations in multicultural environments.

The technological design is the platform that will support the website using ICT. For this design Joomla platform was used. It ensures high security and user-friendly environment to make sure students can easily access the website resources.

For the website instructional design some specialists and authorities from the Construction Faculty were consulted to find out about the most important issues affecting the process of designing an architectural project. Also, the results of the document analysis of ESP syllabus, English IV textbook, as well as the information from interviews and surveys to students and professionals were considered relevant data for the elaboration of instructional materials.

As the instructional design has to do with the process by which instruction

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is improved, the analysis of learning needs and systematic development of learning materials using technology and multimedia tools was essential. It is important to draw attention to the fact that the main learning module of this website relies on the web quests together with some other materials such as, scientific articles, lectures about architecture, recordings. The web quests contain all kinds of resources: videos, recordings, images, crosswords, discussion forum and some others. The instructional materials were intentionally selected since the objectives of the book *Stretch Your Wings* devoted to English IV (ESP) did not meet the professional needs of students of Architecture.

As the website will be published in an interactive platform in the local network, the opportunities of interaction through e- mail, forums is enhanced to assess students' performance when delivering an oral presentation.

When visiting the website as registered users, the students can access all functions that appear in the home page which includes an introduction to the Website with an image of the famous Buckingham Palace and the Big Ben in London. A list with eleven options is provided in the banner:

| HOME | VIDEOS | LINKS | IMAGES | READINGS ON ARCHITECTURE | RECORDINGS | ORAL ASSESSMENT | FORUM | INTERACTING | BOOKS IN THE LIBRARY | CROSSWORDS |

1. **Home**: it is the site home page.

2. **Videos:** provides some videos of oral presentations and academic videos.

3. **Links:** to pages of interest such as Mail, Intranet and Mp3.

4. **Images:** links to images that are of Architecture students' interest as they can serve as examples for their project designs.

5. **Readings on Architecture**: provides some reading materials according to different topics they have dealt

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with in Architecture studies.

6. **Recordings:** provides the listening materials for solving the different exercises of the web quests located in the section.

7. **Oral Assessment**: provides different instruments for assessing oral presentations such as assessment rubrics, criteria, and check lists among some others.

8. **Forum:** provides some controversial topics about Architecture to be discussed with other users.

9. **Interacting**: provides some exercises to perform in pairs and groups to develop oral skills.

10. **Books in the Library**: provides a list of books related with Architecture studies that can be found in the Library of Construction faculty.

11. **Crosswords:** provides a group of crosswords related to learning content to work with on the site. This is a very attractive activity for students because arouses their curiosity and interest in learning some vocabulary about different topics related with Architecture.

On the left column, students can find the site main menu with different web quests that contain a variety of exercises, which are programmed to obtain an evaluation in correspondence with their answers for the users to develop communicative language skills.

The webquest as a research activity integrates the four language skills as well as the academic ones. Scherba N. (2019) highlights the potential of WebQuests as self-instruction and distant learning tools. WebQuests provide practical, manageable classroom strategies to scaffold a change in practice. (Murphy, C. ; Abu-Tineh, A.; Calder, N. and Mansour N. 2019)

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Its instructional strategy effectively integrates technology into teaching and learning. The results of the research suggest that this strategy may have a positive impact on collaborative working skills and learner attitudes. The web quests designed in this course contain an introduction, doable and interesting tasks, a conclusion that brings closure to the quest reminds the learners about what they have learned, and encourages them to extend the experience into other domains.

The resources are available for students in the website, so they do not need to waste time looking for information in the web. The teacher previously selected the appropriate resources for students to complete the tasks.

The description of the process is clearly stated in tasks orientation since activities were designed according to the students' proficiency level. As evaluation is an important component for students and teachers to assess intercultural communication in oral presentations of project designs, there

is a section with plenty of rubrics, checklists and assessment sheets for students to know the variety of instruments that might be used to gather information about the effectiveness of oral presentations. It is the role of the teacher to suggest the most appropriate instrument to be used in classes to cover the necessary and most completed information in relation to the effectiveness of oral presentations as well as the intercultural factors.

The webquests included in the website are: Entertainment or environment, Building and structures, World´s most famous structures, Home sweet home, Itapu Dam, Louvre Pyramid, The Thames Barrier, Construction of bridges, The truth about being an architect. The tasks are mainly of multiple-choice, short responses and open- ended response formats. Their completion requires reading, listening and writing strategies. They follow the principles of complexity gradation and collaborative work (role play, group work).

Table 2 Description of webquests

Webquests	Content	Question types	Resources

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Entertainment or environment? A community debate	Decisions made in towns in respect to building new projects on unused lands	Multiple- choice: Matching Filling in blanks open- ended response	Video (commentary of a reporter about the controversy about the construction of an Amphitheater or an entertaining park)
Buildings and Structures	Well-known structures build throughout the history in the world	Multiple-choice: Matching Writing descriptions	Pictures of famous structures build throughout the history in the world
World´s most famous structures	Most famous structures worldwide	Multiple-choice: Matching Writing descriptions	Pictures of world´s most famous structures
Home sweet home	Different kind of houses´ designs all over the world	Multiple- choice: Matching Filling in blanks True or false Writing descriptions	Pictures of different kind of houses designs all over the world Listening material(comments of people who live in houses with different kind of designs)
Itaipu Dam	Description of a dam located in South America that it is been considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Modern Word	Multiple- choice: Matching Filling in blanks	Listening material (lecture about Itaupu Dam)
Louvre Pyramid	Description of a glass pyramid designed by one of the most famous architects of the 20th century in	Open- ended response Multiple- choice: Matching	-Reading material about Louvre Pyramid -Listening material (architect´s comments about

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	France.	Filling in blanks short response	The Louvre Pyramid)
The Thames Barrier	Description of The Thames Barrier, built to protect London from flooding	Multiple- choice: Filling in blanks Matching	Video(a tourist guide talking about The Thames Barrier)
Underground houses	Description of a very peculiar design of house which is not visible at first sight	Multiple- choice: Filling in blanks Matching	Listening material(a radio talk show about houses of the future)
Construction of bridges	Peculiarities of different kind of bridges as well as the constructive characteristics of the Clifton Suspension Bridge in Bristol	Multiple- choice: Filling in blanks Matching	Listening material(lecture about the Clifton Suspension Bridge in Bristol)
The truth about being an architect	Architecture as a great profession and a horrible business	Multiple- choice: Filling in blanks Matching open- ended response	Video (commentary about Architecture as a great profession and a horrible business)

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

All these webquests also include tasks to be fulfilled through pair or group work for developing oral presentations of project designs. This way, the instructional materials are preparing students for developing oral communication skills.

In the website, students can find a search section which corresponds to the site search engine, and there is a Login Form box with the option to authenticate the user. Students can also find My PPT Presentations with a link for students to download their own oral presentations.

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On the right column, students can find the Intercultural Information Menu with cultural characteristics of the countries involved in collaboration projects with Cuba where English is spoken as a lingua franca for intercultural communication. Some information that distinguishes each country is provided in relation with main architects and architecture of main buildings. Images of main architectural trends and movements and also images of the cities and universities involved in collaboration projects with Construction faculty are shown. Those universities are Kassel, Lausanne, and Catholic University of Leuven.

Finally, students can find another menu with several Information *submenus. Architecture Vocabulary* provides some information about the appropriate terminology to develop effective oral presentations about project designs and some *English-Spanish glossaries*, to which students can access to prepare oral presentations. *International Collaboration Projects* provides some information about the universities and the projects with Belgium, Germany and Switzerland.

Evaluating my Oral Presentation provides the criteria and some rubrics to assess oral presentations of project designs according to different assessors: students, peers and teachers. *Methodology for Project Designs* provides some methodological orientations for Architecture projects design in English. *Architecture Interesting Facts* provides images of Architecture curiosities, some information about The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World and the Modern Era, along with the dates they were constructed. In *Oral presentations* submenu users could find the methodology for giving effective oral presentations.

This way, meaningful and engaging learning experiences are strategically generated for students using ICT to enhance students learning.

The following picture shows the home page of the website with its different components.

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Conclusions

Students showed limited knowledge in the use of English as a lingua franca for international communication, cultural knowledge in relation with the countries involved in international collaboration projects and a lack of the appropriate vocabulary and useful language for giving oral presentations about their project designs in English in multilingual environments.

The designed website comprises instructional materials, methodological orientations, the criteria as well as assessment sheets and rubrics that helped Architecture students to assess intercultural communication in English oral presentations in multicultural settings.

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