Perspectives EFL Students' Difficulties in Speaking: A Descriptive Study

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Abstract

This descriptive research describes the speaking skills difficulties and different strategies applied in an EFL classroom in a private school in Ecuador. The study collected quantitative and qualitative data from the participants' responses obtained from a survey. The participants were 59 first-baccalaureate students with A2 English level whose ages ranged between 15 to 17 years. Results demonstrated that students have a good intonation of questions with a mean of 2.17 and good intonation in sentences (2.29). Moreover, it is noticeable that learners develop their strategies and activities inside and outside the classroom. Students applied the pair-work activity outside the classroom (2.59). The interaction facilitated them to develop the skill in a real-life context. Most of the time, students applied the pair-work activities whose perspectives showed great use of this technique (1.68). Teachers and researchers could have the opportunity to consider this study as a guide to establish a better curriculum that could focus on students' actual knowledge and concerns to help them to improve in their speaking skills.

Keywords: Speaking skills, speaking strategies, speaking difficulties, EFL, descriptive study.

Resumen

Esta investigación descriptiva determina las dificultades en el habla y las diferentes estrategias aplicadas en un aula de inglés como lengua extranjera en una escuela privada en Ecuador. El estudio recopiló datos cuantitativos y cualitativos de las respuestas de los participantes obtenidas de una encuesta. Los participantes fueron 59 estudiantes de primer bachillerato con nivel de inglés A2 cuyas edades oscilaron entre los 15 y los 17 años. Los resultados demostraron que los estudiantes tienen buena entonación de preguntas con una media de 2,17 y buena entonación en oraciones (2,29). Además, se nota que los alumnos desarrollan sus estrategias y actividades dentro y fuera del aula. Los estudiantes aplicaron la actividad de trabajo por parejas fuera del aula (2.59). La interacción les facilitó el desarrollo de la habilidad en un contexto de la vida real. La mayoría de las veces, los estudiantes aplicaron las actividades de trabajo por parejas cuyas perspectivas mostraron un gran uso de esta técnica (1,68). Los maestros e investigadores podrían tener la oportunidad de considerar este estudio como una guía para establecer un mejor plan de estudios que podría enfocarse en los conocimientos y preocupaciones reales de los estudiantes para ayudarlos a mejorar sus habilidades para hablar.

Palabras clave: Habilidad oral, estrategias orales, dificultades del habla, EFL, estudio descriptivo.

Perspectives EFL Students' Difficulties in Speaking: A Descriptive Study.

English is known as the world language for communication everywhere. Rao (2019) mentioned that practical English skills help people to succeed in fields like education, business, or tourism. English is the lingua franca used everywhere (Akcay et al., 2015). It is demonstrated that English has a crucial role in many aspects of the daily routine as an interaction channel among a great number of learners, especially when students start learning English earlier (Kannan, 2009).

Early exposure to the English language is necessary, as learners acquire better the language at an early age (Hashim & Yunus, 2018). Although learning English as a second language in a Hispanic country needs conscious and hard training, it is necessary to scaffold the language knowledge and develop skills to support learners in enhancing their communicative competence (Contreras & Chapetón, 2016). Students should participate in real speaking moments with various opportunities to express opinions and points of view to develop oral fluency and accuracy.

Second language acquisition involves the four essential skills of conscious development: writing, listening, speaking, and reading (Herrell & Jordan, 2019); however, in the majority of cases, these skills are not developed in the same form. For instance, speaking is known as one of the most valuable and interactive skills to communicate in English (Lopez et al., 2016). Speaking is one of the most effective skills to develop genuine communication with many people around the world; however, if it does not receive proper training for practicing in natural interaction, it could be a trouble for the learners.

Students require a well-developed speaking skill to interact with their peers. In the speaking activity, many things should be considered, not only the ones related to what is spoken or what language is used, but also the interaction and how it could have a meaningful result. Heriansyah (2012) mentioned that speaking is not an easy skill to achieve because learning to speak a foreign language requires more than knowing its grammatical and semantic rules. Notwithstanding, this skill is one of the most neglected skills in language instruction (Koran, 2015). For this reason, in many times, learners have some troubles with it.

Learners advance slower in speaking. Richards and Rodgers (2001) mentioned that learners sometimes face some problems in acquiring ESL speaking skills knowledge. One of these issues is that students speak slowly, and it takes too long to compose utterances, so, learners cannot participate actively in conversations due to a lack of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation knowledge. Heriansyah (2012) mentioned that lost interest on the topic may result in heightened anxiety when students have little control over communication. In these contexts and it could provoke negative academic consequences (Krashen, 2002). In the current time, it is more complicated to teach students in virtual sessions; teachers develop their classes properly, but students do not feel so sure to speak in public (Moore & Hodges, 2020).

It is a little difficult to get students attention and teaching to increase interaction through the virtual mode. Nevertheless, learning via the internet is the best alternative way to learn English due to the pandemic situation. Al-Qahtani (2019) stated that new technology and powerful internet connections provide a wide range of opportunities for the development of educational processes and enhance language skills. However, there are

some gaps in the educational community about the internet connection for students. Many times, Ecuadorian families have a big constraint at the time to get a proper connection to receive their classes.

In his descriptive study, Alcivar (2021) stated that majority of students find the speaking skills as difficult and challenging objective to develop effectively. His research aimed at exploring the speaking difficulties faced by EFL students at two different universities in Ecuador. Results indicated that students' speaking problems were related to anxiety, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, limited practice, pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and vocabulary. Outcomes demonstrated that pair-work was fruitful to develop oral competencies. Conversely, learners mentioned that one disadvantage of pair-work activity was that the students with higher proficiency tended to have a sense of superiority.

English is used by 1.4 billion native and non-native speakers (Milne, 2019), which means that 20% of the world's population can communicate in English everywhere from the Americas to Asia, to Africa and Europe. Unfortunately, in Ecuador, the outcomes are not so positive. Ecuador obtained the lowest level of English in Latin America. It was placed in rank 93 with a low proficiency level in 100 countries (Education First, 2020). The results display that it is required to design and develop suitable strategies to motivate English learners to develop their English skills.

With the primary objective of improving these results and increasing students' English level, the ministry of education guaranteed high-school graduates reach at least B1 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), by the teaching of the four skills: reading, listening, writing and speaking by the conscious

construction of learners' communicative abilities and competences (Ministerio de Educación, 2014). This model was built some years ago, but there is a different reality these days. Hence it is necessary to modify the established guidelines and develop some strategies to improve in their communicative skills.

The present descriptive study was applied in a private high school in Guayaquil City. This private school is working with the International Baccalaureate program. The sample was fifty-nine students from the first Baccalaureate who according to the (CEFR), all learners are in the A2 level.

Literature Review

This study analyzes the main concepts of the literature for the speaking skill development and compares them with the results found on this research. This section explains what Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) involves, also the speaking teaching principles, and the speaking components: comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, fluency and pronunciation.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Speaking is one of four language skills that plays an important role in the context of global communications, and it requires interactive activities to be correctly developed (Darmawan et al., 2020). In some cases, students face speaking skills troubles, and to solve these constraints, Richards and Rodgers (2001) suggested that the application of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach could be the key to help for improving the speaking skills of English learners.

CLT provides the learners some more opportunities to participate in activities (Faicán & Guncay, 2011). The authors referred to an active process where the learners interact among them. It is often accompanied by scenes like role plays or simulated scenarios to be closer to real-life situations. In teaching speaking, it is necessary using techniques to improve this skill, like using pair-work activities. Budden (2006, as cited in Wulandari et al., 2019) said that role-playing is an activity of speaking when the learner puts him/herself into someone else or put him/herself in an imaginary situation. It is also useful working in pair, since it promotes speaking and exchange of meaning (Zohairy, 2014).

Speaking Teaching Principles

The aim of teaching a foreign language is to make students able to communicate well through the development of spoken interaction in real contexts (Ministerio de Educación, 2016). Speaking is a highly complex and dynamic skill that involves the use of several simultaneous processes: cognitive, physical, and socio-cultural. A speaker's knowledge and skills have to be activated rapidly in real-time (Sim & Pop, 2016). The authors also mentioned that learning languages helps students realize their dreams. It opens doors to future careers, employers, and organizations worldwide.

For the majority of EFL learners, the English task is their only opportunity to practice the second language. According to Ramadan (2019), the researcher should consider the following principles when teaching and developing speaking in his/her students.

1.- Creating realistic situations to help the students practice and use the second language in a real-life situation. The teacher should introduce a common language at first.

2.- Engaging all students at teaching speaking time, the facilitator should see the classroom as a community where the learners could establish oral communication with other members and not only with the teacher.

3.- Supporting the qualities of spoken language. Sometimes teachers use different ways to communicate; they need to be sure people understand them. Non-verbal language also speaks.

4.- Personalizing speaking topics. Strategies should make speaking in English more accessible for students. Teachers could select some topics that could be related to their students' real-lives and interests to increase the development of their natural learning.

5.- Creating an unfearful class. Many students are afraid of speaking in class, are too shy, or do not want to make mistakes. The facilitator's mission is to create a social environment-class where learners feel happy, relaxed, and motivated to speak without any hesitation.

6.- Planning different and various types of speaking activities to design two types of activities: students' vocabulary and grammar practice, and the other where they can speak freely.

Speaking Components

According to Vanderkevent (1990 as cited in Riska, 2020) there are three components in speaking.

1.- The Speakers. This term is related to people who produce the sound. They express opinion or feelings to the hearer.

2.- The listeners. These people receive or get the speaker's opinion or feeling. If there are no listeners, speakers will express their opinion by writing.

3.- The utterances. The utterances are words or sentences, which are stated by the speakers to express the opinion. If there is no utterance, both of the speakers and the listeners will use a signal.

In her doctoral work, Torky (2006) expressed that there are five components of speaking skill: Comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency.

A.- Comprehension. For oral communication, it certainly requires a subject to respond to speech as well as to initiate it. It is required to have a level of understanding to achieve this phase. Krashen (2002) mentioned the comprehensible input in the form of the input hypothesis, a necessary condition to move from stage 'i' to stage 'i+1', where 'understanding' means that the acquirer is focused on the meaning and not on the form of the message. The acquisition happens when the student understands and comprehends the language context 'i +1'. This will automatically occur when communication is successful (Ministerio de Educación, 2016).

To increase comprehension, the students increase receptive language skills when they comprehend stories and work with peers. Moreover, learners scaffold expressive language skills when they tell stories and use vocabulary (Hill, 2020). These language types are cognitive abilities such as vocabulary, grammar, sequences, and phonological processes. Receptive and expressive language are interrelated, but receptive skills develop earlier (Marchman & Dale, 2018).

The understanding of the role of interaction in the classroom context in enhancing the speaking skill comes from the understanding of its main types: teacher - learner interaction and learner-learner interaction, where negotiation of meaning and the provision of feedback are highlighted (Pourhosein et al., 2011). It means that the classroom interaction involves the action where verbal ideas and exchanges are maintained and increased by the learners and teachers. If this model is followed in a short period of time, there will be good English speakers ready to communicate with other people around the world.

B.- Grammar. It is considered a direct and decisive influence on pedagogical grammatical learning processes, and many other foreign language teaching areas (Newby, 2003). There is a controversial belief that Communicative Language Teaching does not include any rule or structure. However, Spada (2007) expressed that the thought that "Communicative Language Teaching means an exclusive focus on meaning" is a misconception. This wrong belief eclipsed the attention that grammar is only partly proper since although CLT syllabuses are organized and connected with their correspondent and useful points.

Grammar in language describes how words can change their forms and can be combined into sentences in that language (Harmer, 2001, as cited in Prima, 2015). Thus, from the statements above, the function of grammar is to arrange the correct meaning of sentences based on the context; besides, it avoids misunderstanding in each communicator, so students can manipulate the structure and distinguish the appropriate grammatical form from the inappropriate one (Heaton, 1978). It means that with a proper grammar acquisition, students also learn the correct way to gain expertise in oral and written form.

C.- Vocabulary. Vocabulary acquisition is a significant part in a foreign language learning as the meanings of new words that are often emphasized, whether in books or classrooms. A good management of this can be a meaningful tool for the learner (Alqahtani, 2015). The vocabulary is also central to language teaching, and it has relevant importance to a language learner. The author also expressed that without having enough vocabulary, a person cannot communicative effectively or express their ideas in both oral and written form.

Vocabulary means the appropriate diction which is used in communication (Sardi et al., 2017). Authors – Sardi et al also mentioned that having limited vocabulary is also a barrier that precludes learners from learning a language. It is also stated that without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed (Wilkins, 1972, as cited in Lewandowski, 2018). Based on this explanation, the researcher concluded that without mastering vocabulary sufficiently, English learners will not be able to speak or write English properly.

D.- Pronunciation. It is the way for students to produce clearer language when they speak. It deals with the phonological process that refers to the component of the grammar. The pronunciation is made up of the elements and principles that determine how sounds vary and sound pattern in a language (Morley, 1991). Pronunciation is the knowledge of studying about how the words in a particular language are produced clearly when people speak (Ministerio de Educacion, 2016). It means that in speaking, pronunciation plays a vital role in order to make the process of communication easy to understand.

According to Fraser (2000), the institutions should provide teachers with courses and materials to improve their pronunciation. The author expressed that second language

education research should not be concerned with the significance of English pronunciation instruction but with pronunciation instruction methodology and strategies to be applied. Good pronunciation leads to learning while bad pronunciation promotes great difficulties in language learning (Pourhosein, 2012, as cited in Pourhosein, 2016).

The objective of the pronunciation instruction is not just to ask questions to the students to pronounce like native speakers. Instead, intelligible pronunciation should be the real purpose of oral communication (Pourhosein, 2012). This means that the students want to change the way of pronouncing English words, they have to change the way they think about those words' sounds. This is true for individual sounds and the more significant parts of speech, such as syllables, stress patterns, and rhythm.

E.- Fluency. Fluency could be defined as the natural language use occurring when a speaker engages in meaningful interaction and maintains comprehensible and ongoing communication despite limitations in his or her communicative competence (Richards, 2009, as cited in Iswara et al., 2012). In other words, the speaker can read, understand and respond in a language clearly and concisely while relating meaning and context.

Fluency in speaking is the aim of many language learners. Signs of fluency include a reasonably fast speed of speaking and only a small number of pauses and "ums" or "ers" (Tinitana, 2016). These signs indicate that the speaker does not spend a lot of time searching for the language items needed to express the message.

There are some moments where the learner intends to say sentences, and it may not be very comprehensible to the listener. This probability is supported by the argument that "accuracy and fluency do not operate in complete independence from each other" (Housen

& Kuiken, 2009, p. 469), but they work in a complementary manner to maximize EFL learners' speaking proficiency. Nevertheless, most studies have treated fluency and accuracy as separate components. Crowther et al. (2015) mentioned that segmental, word stress, rhythm, and speech rate as proper examples of fluency were divided by categories.

Methodology

Research methods are defined as specific procedures for collecting and analyzing data to find specific solutions in an investigation. When planning the research methods, it is necessary to decide two different aspects: What type of approach will answer the research questions, and how the researcher will analyze the data.

Design

Planning a research study takes some steps to follow; the first is to choose a specific design. The study types are observational and interventional. McCombes (2019) stated that a descriptive study aims to accurately describe a population, situation, or phenomenon. It can display the answer to the *what*, *where*, *when*, and *how* questions. A descriptive research design can apply a massive variety of research methods to investigate one or more variables. This study design is the simplest of the observational part (Aggarwal & Ranganathan, 2019). It is considered that the researcher cannot control or manipulate any of the variables but only observes and measures them with quantitative and qualitative data.

In this descriptive study, the researcher used a speaking survey whose objective was to collect data. It included items to get demographic information and students' perspectives related to speaking. The survey was taken in English and Spanish to avoid generating some

mistakes or misunderstandings in participants. The survey´s link was sent by email, and also by WhatsApp. Additionally, some Zoom sessions where shared with the students to get accurate answers. With the objective to know and understand the students' perspectives from this survey, this descriptive study looked to response these research questions:

Research questions:

1.- What are students' difficulties in speaking in English?

2.- What type of activities have students applied in their English classes?

3.- What are students' perspectives towards pair work for speaking?

Participants

The participants of this research were fifty-nine students who were first-year of baccalaureate students of a private high school in Guayaquil, The participants were: twenty-six females, and thirty-two males whose ages ranged from 15 to 17. All of them were teenagers.

There was one student who is a North American citizen, the rest of the group was Ecuadorian. Thirty-four of the students are catholic, eleven of them are Christians, six of them are evangelistic, three of them are Jehovah's Witnesses, and four of them do not have any religion. All the students consider themselves as "mestizo". Their economic status ranges from the middle incomes to the high class status. All the participants have internet connection in their houses with their own wi-fi.

Instruments

The instrument applied in the study was a speaking survey questionnaire. The survey was based on specific questions to get students' opinion on learning English. The speaking survey was a Likert-scale already validated and adapted from Viteri (2019). Finally, the survey was prepared in a Google Forms format and sent to the participants via email, and WhatsApp to be completed online. The survey was a blended document between a demographic and a speaking strategy survey that was designed to answer the three research questions.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed and displayed the data in a table. After that students' responses were registered in an excel worksheet to present the results. Every table shows the means obtained. Some students were confused at the beginning, but the researcher developed some Zoom sessions to explain learners a little better about the survey fulfillment. The survey was sent to 78 students, 59 of them freely completed the survey.

Ethical Considerations

As a requirement to develop the descriptive study in the institution, it was necessary to present a document (Appendix A) to the school authorities to inform about the study´s objective and the aims of the survey (Appendix B). Some days after that, the investigator received the consent letter (Appendix C). Students were minors, parents gave the permission to let their children participate in the study. The information of the participants was protected all the time. Their personal information was replaced by specific codes that represented the needed information. Since the beginning, students had the opportunity to see a reminder of their voluntary participation in the survey fulfillment.

Results

This section presents the results of the data collected through the survey to answer the three research questions. They were: What were students' difficulties in speaking in English? What type of activities have students had in their English classes? What were students' perspectives towards pair work for speaking? The investigator gave the items specific codes that the survey implemented to make the results more accessible to understand. The codes are:

1.- To a great extent.

2.- A lot.

3.- Some.

4.- A little bit, and

5.- None.

Table 1.

Results of students' difficulties at speaking in English.

ITEMS:	MEAN
Feel confused.	4.10
Feel confused for not knowing what to say.	3.46
Feel anxious to respond quickly.	3.59
Feel anxious trying to look for words to respond correctly.	2.49
Feel anxious because you cannot translate what you want to say.	3.51
Feel afraid of making mistakes in pronunciation.	2.67
Feel afraid of making grammar mistakes.	2.86
Translate everything I want to say.	3.41
Can´t structure a sentence.	3.27

Can´t continue the conversation because of lack of vocabulary.	3.69
Feel embarrassed about making mistakes.	3.24
Are not confident enough to speak in English.	3.46
Don´t understand what the other person is saying.	4.17
Speak without many pauses.	3.36
Speak spontaneously.	3.29
Consider you speak correctly.	2.90
Have a good intonation of questions.	2.17
Have a good intonation of sentences.	2.29
Have a good pronunciation.	2.68
Use word stress.	2.71
Use sentence stress.	2.68
Can interact with the interlocutor.	2.92

As it is shown in the previous table, the results present the current situation that students experiment when they speak in English. To answer the first research question, learners' answers demonstrated that they think they have a good intonation of questions with 2.17 as mean. With a mean of 2.29, they also think they have an excellent intonation of sentences. Additionally, results demonstrated that learners feel anxious to respond correctly with a mean a 2.49. Besides this, with a mean of 2.67 students feel afraid of making mistakes in pronunciation a lot. There is a correlation among these results, students do their best in the intonation of questions and sentences; for this reason, they feel afraid to do a bad job and their anxiety increases. Nevertheless, results also demonstrated that

students feel confused with a mean of 4.10, and with a mean of 4.17 expressed that they do not understand what the other person is saying. It means that they do their best in the intonation of words, but their understanding is low. They do not have the appropriate English level to interact with their partners.

To explain the results of the second research question, the researcher provides codes to the items in the Likert. Results are displayed in Table 2.

1.- Always.

2.- Frequently.

3.- Sometimes.

4.- Hardly ever.

5.- Never.

Table 2.

Results of the type of activities that students had in their English classes.

ITEMS:	MEAN
Fill in the space with correct grammar.	3.81
Write correct answers to questions to practice grammar.	3.86
Practice specific vocabulary in writing of an activity or topic from the book.	3.52
Practice specific vocabulary orally of an activity or topic from the book.	3.20
Practice of technical vocabulary in writing.	3.22
Practice of technical vocabulary orally.	3.05
Oral practice with vocabulary of personal interest.	3.32
Written practice with vocabulary of personal interest.	3.37

Oral pair work activities in the classroom.	3.27
Pair work in writing activities in the classroom.	3.42
Pair work in general outside the classroom.	2.59
Created a short speech.	3.15
Made an oral presentation.	3.66
Participated in a forum.	3.59
Commented on a general topic.	3.39
Created dialogues to practice with peers.	3.30
Written a dialogue from ideas from the book.	3.00
Practiced a dialogue about free ideas.	3.20

As a general view, it is demonstrated that most of the results are in the range of (sometimes = from 3.00 to 3.99). The exception with a mean of 2.59, students used to work in pairs outside the classroom before the pandemic. Moreover, students practice their oral with guidelines written from books (3.00), or applying specific practice of vocabulary (3.00), or even using their free ideas (3.20) in little dialogues which improve their fluency. They improve their oral interaction with some vocabulary of interest (3.32). Students make comment on general topics with a mean of 3.39, also participate in forums with a mean of 3.59, and made oral presentations with a mean of 3.66. On the other hand, it is noticeable that learners sometimes practice the blank space's fulfillment using the correct grammar with a mean of 3.81 and write the correct answers to questions to practice grammar with 3.86 as mean.

To explain the results of the third research question, the researcher provides codes to the items in the Likert. Results are displayed in Table 3.

1.- Totally agree.

2.- Agree.

3.- Neutral.

4.- Disagree.

5.- Totally disagree.

Table 3.

Results of students' perspectives towards pair work for speaking

ITEMS:	MEAN
Pair work is useful to practice speaking.	1.68
Pair work for speaking is difficult because the student who knows more dominates the conversation.	2.12
It is advisable although some pairs speak slowly.	2.22
It is advisable although some pairs do not pronounce correctly.	2.31
The pair makes constant interruptions.	2.92
It takes too much time.	2.95
It is good if I work with the pair I choose.	2.34

Results mention that students totally agree about pair work is useful to practice speaking skills with a mean of 1.68. Despite understanding the importance of practice the skill, they agree that is difficult because the one who knows more the language, is the one who domains the dialogue with a mean of 2.12. Additionally, students agree with a mean of

2.95 that practicing speaking takes too much time, and results show that most of the students agree in the pair makes constant interruptions with a mean of 2.92.

Table 4.

Results of students' perspectives towards pair work. It is good if I work with the pair I choose.

ITEMS:	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Totally agree	18	31%
Agree	15	25%
Neutral	17	29%
Disagree	6	10%
Totally disagree	3	5%
Total	59	100%

Outcomes demonstrate that 31% of students totally agree about working better with a partner which they chose. On the opposite side, students with a 5%, totally disagree about the idea of working better with a partner, which they do not choose to do the pair work activity.

Table 5.

Advantage/difficulty do you have when working in pairs.

ADVANTAJES	DIFFICULTY
We share our opinions and get a general opinion of different topics and subtopics.	If you and your partner does not have enough knowledge, It could look like a wasting of time. Anyone manage the topics or vocabulary.

We can practice the pronunciation without fear of being wrong, compared to when I really have to speak English.	When the other person doesn't work. I don't like when people do not collaborate in the activity.
The work will be will be more efficient because we know what we need to do.	I am shy with new people, and sometimes this makes the activity longer. I do not like to take the first step into the conversation.
I think an advantage of working in pairs is that I can feel comfortable if it is a person that I know well.	A difficulty could be in the case that the person who is my pair is not responsible.

As a general result, it is noticeable that students have advantages and also difficulties in their learning. One of the most significant advantages stated for the learners was that students have to overcome their fears and beginning to communicate with their partners. On the other hand, a minimum part of the group stated that the lack of vocabulary knowledge is a difficulty to develop the pair work activity.

Discussion

The findings confirmed some issues that students have when speaking in English. These results are described in the following questions:

Research question 1: *What are students' difficulties in speaking in English?*

Results show that students have a good intonation when they ask questions and pronounce the statements. It means, their intonation and pronunciation is very comprehensible and understandable to maintain conversation between partners and with the teachers. Similar as stated by Pourhosein (2012), who mentioned that the objective of the pronunciation instruction is not just to ask questions to the students to pronounce like native speakers, instead, intelligible pronunciation should be the real purpose of an effective oral communication. Fraser (2000) said that institutions should provide teachers with courses

and materials to improve their pronunciation with English pronunciation instruction methodology and strategies to be applied.

Despite of having good intonation and pronunciation, students feel afraid to make mistakes. Students work consciously for their improvement, but in many cases the lack of vocabulary is a big issue against their improvement. Sardi et al. (2017) commented that having limited vocabulary is a barrier that precludes learners from learning a language. Moreover, some students feel anxious looking for the words to answer correctly. Good training and is essential as mentioned Contreras and Chapetón (2016), students should participate in real speaking moments with various opportunities to express opinions and points of view to develop oral fluency and accuracy.

Research question 2: *What type of activities have students applied in their English classes?* Results have demonstrated that students are constantly practicing and doing activities in their classrooms. The most significant result is relating to the pair work application, and how it is helpful to increase the interaction inside and especially outside classrooms. When CLT is applied in interactive activities students have more opportunities to develop their oral skills. Faicán and Guncay (2011) expressed a similar opinion about to development of an active and communicative process where the learners interact among them. It must be often accompanied by scenes like role plays or simulated scenarios to be closer to real-life situations. Students have trained their oral interaction constantly, and as a consequence of this, their fluency has increased considerably. It occurs when a speaker engages in meaningful interaction and maintains comprehensible and ongoing communication despite limitations in his or her communicative competence (Richards, 2009, as cited in Iswara et al., 2012).

On the other hand, the lower results have been found in activities like the fulfillment of blank spaces with correct grammar or answer some questions with the correct grammar. Grammar is important and necessary for improving. One of the grammar function is to arrange the correct meaning of sentences based on the context; it also avoids misunderstanding in each communicator, so students can manipulate the structure and distinguish the appropriate grammatical form from the inappropriate one (Heaton, 1978).

As results demonstrate, some activities focus on the grammar context. Moreover, there are some activities focused on pair work that learners can develop outside classroom. It is noticeable that students are likely to develop this type of activity outdoors with a mean of 2.59. Likewise as Ramadan (2019) mentioned that creating realistic situations to help the students practice and use the second language in a real-life situation. Additionally, students improve their activities creating short dialogues. Hill (2020) mentioned that learners scaffold expressive language skills when they tell stories and use vocabulary.

Research question 3: ***What are students' perspectives towards pair work for speaking?*** In the survey results, it is demonstrated that students understand the pair work activity, and feel motivated to practice it in a great extent. Student apply the activity as a component for interaction and communication to develop their dialogues and speeches. The students communicate orally while creating their own dialogues and conversations for mastering all communicative competence components (Faicán & Guncay, 2011). As it was demonstrated in results, pair-work takes a lot of time to be mastered, learners mentioned that it helped them to improve in the interaction, despite partners could have different knowledge level in their practice, students did their best possible. It is also useful working in pair, since it promotes speaking and exchange of meaning (Zohairy, 2014). Finally, a

fifty –six percent of the group, agreed or totally agreed about a better pair-work development when the student chooses his/her partner. All learners have their opinions about doing pair-work activities. For the majority it is an advantage, but the rest of them it could be difficulty.

Conclusion

This descriptive study was developed to know the speaking difficulties that learners present in their English classes. The ability to speak English correctly provides participants of this study with many advantages in their learning process. Students have a good intonation of questions and sentences in general. Despite this good intonation, they also feel afraid to make mistakes; most of them care about their learning progress substantially. It is noticeable that students have close contact with technology overcoming all the possible issues related to connection troubles or lack of technology.

Results showed that most of the students are adapted to do their activities outside the classroom. It is beneficial for them, their speaking competencies are not just related to the school classroom, but they can apply this knowledge in a natural context interacting with different people. It is noticeable that students practice and apply speaking activities to communicate with each other. Pair work is a helpful activity to interchange ideas, even though there is always somebody who dominates the conversation; usually, the person that has a better proficiency. Obtaining a good interaction demands hard work and takes a lot of time training, as demonstrated in the results. It is worth it.

As a general conclusion, this study reflected that students consciously do their activities to improve their learning. Although, it is necessary to mention that at the

beginning of the study, there were some students who were not so committed to the research, but finally, their attitude positively changed. Results were focused on their speaking difficulties, strategies applied, and also their attitudes.

Limitations

One of the main limitations observed at the beginning of the study was the lack of commitment which some learners demonstrated in the fulfillment of the survey. Another limitation presented in the study was the lack of understanding that students had before, and during the sessions created to explain the directions to follow. Many of them did not attend the sessions, and others were distracted.

Recommendations

The researcher considers giving some suggestions related to this study. It would be recommendable to share the results with participants and let them know what the competencies are. Besides this, it is recommendable to explain and share these types of research with colleagues and co-workers to implement this methodology in the school context for obtaining a better academic diagnostic from our students. Finally, it would be recommendable to design a curricular plan with activities focused on improving the lowest scores and encourage students to improve their speaking skills.

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Appendixes

Appendix A.

Letter for the School

Available upon request.

Appendix B

Perspectives about Speaking in English

Available upon request.

Appendix C

Authorization from the school

Available upon request.