



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

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Proyectos de Investigación

Certifico que Luisa Fernanda Jaramillo Crespo ha cumplido satisfactoriamente su investigación descriptiva como pre-requisito de graduación de Magíster en Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros con Mención en la Enseñanza de Inglés. Su investigación es parte del proyecto PERSPECTIVES OF EFL STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING cuyo objetivo general es determinar las dificultades que tienen los estudiantes al hablar en inglés como lengua extranjera.

En este proyecto, cada participante reporta los resultados de una encuesta tomada en un contexto educativo diferente. La metodología (instrumentos y análisis de datos) es el mismo. Particular que comunico para los fines consiguientes.

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Abstract

This study aimed to describe EFL students' difficulties in speaking skills in a private high school in Guayaquil, Ecuador. The sample involved 54 tenth-graders with a range from B1 to B2 English level, who answered a Likert type scale applied as an instrument to know students' current academic situation and their perspectives about advantages and disadvantages of second language learning. Students answered the questions sent via email and WhatsApp groups. Then the data collected were checked and analyzed in an excel worksheet and finally processed in a specific statistic program where results were found. Outcomes in the study showed means and frequency related to speaking difficulties, which displayed that students could improve their language. Students also answered questions about using activities applied in the classroom, where findings showed that learners worked consciously about pair activities and speaking language development. Finally, their perspectives were determinant to know their fears and concerns about their language acquisition and development. Since findings are significant for EFL teachers, researchers, and students who can find this study valuable and beneficial for subsequent investigations to probably adapt it in curriculum and teaching practices of the English language.

Keywords: Speaking skills, EFL, descriptive study, difficulties, perspectives.

Resumen

Este estudio tuvo como objetivo describir las dificultades de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera para hablar en una unidad educativa privada en Ecuador. La muestra involucró a 54 estudiantes de décimo grado con un rango de nivel de inglés B1 a B2, quienes respondieron una escala tipo Likert aplicada como instrumento para conocer la situación académica actual de los estudiantes, sus perspectivas, ventajas y desventajas del aprendizaje de una segunda lengua. Los estudiantes respondieron las preguntas enviadas por correo electrónico y grupos de WhatsApp. Luego, los datos recopilados se verificaron y analizaron en una hoja de trabajo de Excel y finalmente se procesaron en un programa estadístico específico donde se encontraron los resultados. Los resultados del estudio mostraron medias y frecuencias relacionadas con las dificultades del habla, lo que mostró que los estudiantes podían mejorar su idioma. Los estudiantes también respondieron preguntas sobre el uso de actividades que aplicaron en el aula, donde los hallazgos mostraron que los estudiantes trabajaban conscientemente sobre las actividades en pareja y el desarrollo del lenguaje hablado. Finalmente, sus perspectivas fueron determinantes para conocer sus miedos y preocupaciones sobre la adquisición y desarrollo del lenguaje. Dado que los hallazgos son significativos para los profesores, investigadores y estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera, quienes pueden encontrar este estudio valioso y beneficioso para investigaciones posteriores, probablemente lo adapten en el plan de estudios y las prácticas de enseñanza del idioma inglés.

Palabras clave: Habilidad oral, EFL, estudio descriptivo, dificultades, perspectivas.

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

The English language is known as the lingua franca for establishing the interaction among people throughout some variations as culture, traditions, regions, and distinctive aspects proper of its location (Rao, 2019a). English has got the common qualities; it has been accepted as the global language among different languages that look for appropriate communication. In the EFL context, English as a Second Language (ESL) is traditionally applied to use or study English by non-native language speakers in an English-speaking learning environment (Nordquist, 2019). The author expressed that English in this context is used to connect people through a common language that is English.

English is a helpful bridge that makes most people could communicate with each other through oral communication. Speaking is the most important skill to develop when a person acquires a foreign language (Rao, 2019b) it is a helpful skill who allows interaction worldwide. The author mentioned that speaking is essential in learning a new language among the four essential language skills. In this twenty-first century, the entire world has become more accessible for better communication across the globe as a whole.

Learners cannot ignore English since it is the most significant common spoken language. Learning the English language requires constant training, patience, and effort (Nishanthi, 2018). There is the sensation that it is impossible to achieve fluency or mastery over the English language, but to get good results after a focused and an organized preparation is what current learners need to encourage themselves to spread their knowledge everywhere (Ministerio de

Educación, 2016a). Unfortunately, in many cases, learners do not know what to improve in their language acquisition (Burns et al., 2016).

English's improvement is given by training each of the four skills: writing, reading, listening, and speaking; they are tools for achieving effective communication (Sadiku, 2015). Nevertheless, not all the skills are developed at the same level, neither at the same time. Communicative skills are not produced in the same way (Ramos, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to reinforce and emphasize the skill that could require specific training. In most cases, the most needed skill to develop is speaking, which is very important in second language learning. Despite its importance, speaking has been overlooked in schools and universities (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017).

Regarding a second language, speaking is considered more diligent than reading for two reasons. The first is that not everyone likes to read or write; speaking occurs progressively. As a second point, in the majority of cases, people who talk feel tight at that point for not speaking accurately mainly because of their lack of vocabulary to express themselves. Speaking cannot be altered or reviewed if what is learned at that moment is understandable (Council of Europe, 2018). It is a priority to develop speaking skills to improve fluency in learners from different institutions who do not obtain the required level before high school graduation (Escudero et al., 2020).

Many studies have been conducted to determine speaking skill acquisition and development through articles and research by different entities and researchers. Safitri et al. (2020) demonstrated in their study in a university in Indonesia that students had problems speaking due to inadequate knowledge of the language, making them feel unconfident to talk.

Learners were not adapted to work with the speaking. Researchers implemented task-based learning through action research for fifteen students who participated in this study. The findings displayed that task-based understanding helped learners improve their speaking skills in three evaluated components: accuracy, vocabulary, and comprehension.

In the Ecuadorian context, some researchers also investigated speaking skill improvement. In their studies (Bonifaz (2020), Mendoza (2020), and Rivera (2020) mentioned the considerable speaking skill improvement in the interaction, fluency, and better understanding in their students when speaking to each other. They implemented practical training of self-regulation as a principal strategy to make learners reflect on their knowledge. It was also supported with some pieces of motivation (Davila, 2020). Students could notice the importance of the interaction with partners in the class (Lessard-Clouston, 2018). Since learners could see their progress, they participated more in speaking interactions.

On the other hand, there is a great number of students who see their speaking skill learning as the biggest challenge in their institutions in Ecuador. Students' problems when speak in English vary from the lack of vocabulary, anxiety, demotivation, or feel afraid of making mistakes. Many reasons to take into consideration might be lack of confidence in terms of anxiety about making errors as stated by Boonkit (2010). Students felt anxious to communicate in English in front of their companions or instructors (Tóth, 2011). A large portion of the students felt uncomfortable with their talking

Related to anxiety, Thornburry (2005, as cited in Indrianty, 2016) stated that lack of vocabulary, grammar failures, fears of mistakes are some aspects that become speaking harder to obtain, resulting in an anxiety sensation when it is the speaking time. Numerous students cannot

communicate in English and would prefer not to interact in the target language because of their low certainty to express themselves among others in English (Mahdi, 2015). The author stated that students fear making errors because their companions would laugh at them. The students have striven to cope with learning speaking problems, but their attempts have not been as an example or successful.

To understand the students' necessities, it was necessary to collect quantitative and qualitative data, as the required information through a speaking survey to determine the factors that make the speaking skill a hard challenging to develop. This study took place in a private institution located in Guayaquil. According to tests at the school year beginning, participants belonged to the 10th grade with a low B1 English proficiency.

Literature Review

In this section, the literature review explains the main concepts corresponding to theories and professional practices that identify and analyze students' problems during speaking skills development. Additionally, this part of the study presents the CLT approach, the principles of speaking skills, its importance, and also different components like fluency, accuracy, and phonology, pronunciation, sound, stress, and rhythm among others.

Peng (2019) established the difference between EFL and ESL to focus on a specific context of studies. The author expressed that "EFL is regarded as English as a Foreign Language, and ESL is called English as a Second Language. Before distinguishing EFL from ESL, there must be differences between "foreign language" and "second language." (p. 33). On his part, Yoko (2011 as cited in Peng, 2019) defined that

"EFL refers to those who learn English in non-English speaking countries. (E.g., Japanese people who learn English in their country are EFL learners). And ESL refers to those who learn English in countries where English is used as a tool for communication and is formally spoken (E.g., Hispanic people who are learning English, are ESL learners)."

Speaking

Oral interaction has allied to different technological tools that motivate learners to do a better job to support and enhance the capacity for oral expression, facilitating organization, autonomy, and independence to be prepared for the future (Ministerio de Educación, 2016b). Speaking is a productive skill that students need to develop to communicate fluently among different speakers. Barrionuevo et al., (2020) stated that speaking is a practical but complicated skill to acquire that involves more than just pronouncing words and emitting some sounds.

Speaking skills are needed for expressing one's ideas and opinions as well as for interacting with others (Rao, 2018). Brown and Yuke (1983) stated that speaking is the skill that the students will be judged upon most in real-life situations. A little priority has been given to the important language elements such as the phonological, morphological, semantic, and syntactic aspects, it makes learning a challenge for students who want to acquire speaking skills (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017).

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach reflects a particular model, or research paradigm, or a theory based on the primary function of language use that is the effective and meaningful communication (Richards, 2006). CLT is defined as the primary goal for

learners to develop interactive competence among users (Celce-Murcia, 2002). The authors mentioned that a quality of CLT is that allows to establish a confident communicative ability for expressing in front of others. Krashen (1982) mentioned that acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language in a natural communication where speakers are concerned not with the form but with the message they are transmitting.

In the traditional methods, the facilitators ignored the speaking skill implementation in the classrooms, but collocated the emphasis on reading and writing skills (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). For instance, in the Grammar-Translation method, reading and writing were necessary, but speaking and listening skills were not of great significance. On the other hand, communicative interaction looks for the capacity to start and manage conversations, little dialogues, ask and answer questions, and interact with others (Brown, 2006). Experience and results demonstrated that communicative language teaching (CLT) approach emphasizes the communication process (Dornyei, 2009, as cited in Yucailla, 2020).

Teaching Speaking Principles

Many students believe that speaking a language is the same than knowing the language; therefore, their view of learning a language is related to how they speak and develop a correct pronunciation of the language. Nunan (2003, as cited in Araya-Cortés et al., 2014) mentioned the language success is measured in terms of carrying out a conversation in the target language.

According to Brown (2001), some important principals for teaching speaking are:

Focus on fluency and accuracy (depending on lesson/activity objective).

Use intrinsically motivating techniques based on student goals and interests.

Use authentic language in meaningful contexts.

Provide appropriate feedback and correction.

Optimize the natural link between listening and speaking.

Give students the opportunity to initiate oral communication.

Develop speaking strategies.

Speaking Components

It is a priority for learners acquiring the most accurate knowledge about the foreign language and its different components. Authors stated their own versions of the speaking components according to their investigations. This section presents the most relevant aspects of each one.

Fluency.

Fluency talks about the ability to speak communicatively, fluently, and accurately; it refers to express oral language freely without interruption (Prima-Sari & Br-Sembiring, 2019). The author mentioned that the main objective is to help students speak in a natural way. The teacher does not correct immediately, because excessive correction interferes with the flow of conversation (Pollard, 2008, as cited in Daddi, 2016).

Accuracy.

Accuracy refers to how learners use the language system correctly, including grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Accuracy is often compared to fluency when it is referred to as a learner's level of speaking or writing (Ministerio de Educación, 2016c). For instance, A learner might be fluent (make their meaning clear) but not accurate (make many mistakes). In the classroom, language manipulation activities can help develop accuracy (Yu, 2013). These

include controlled practice, drills, the study and application of grammar rules, and activities that help students 'notice' their own mistakes.

Pronunciation.

English learners have difficulties with pronunciation because of the lack of vocabulary knowledge (Small, 2005 as cited in Yangklang, 2013). Pronunciation is crucial for learning English as an international language, but it is often marginalized by the teachers due to their own lack of required phonetic and phonological knowledge. Pronunciation for the English language as an International Language closes the gap between phonetics, phonology, and pronunciation (Low, 2015). Pronunciation helps the reader to understand better the English language.

Phonology.

In the phonology study, the supra-segmental feature receives less attention than segmental phonology (Zhang, 2006). The reason is that phonology teaching commonly starts with the sound systems, after that, it delves into stress, rhythm, and finally, intonation. Sometimes, when the prosodic features' learning comes up for discussion, the learners would have become bored and have lost interest or felt overwhelmed (Ukam, 2015).

Stress, rhythm and intonation.

Stress is applied to describe the point in a word or phrase where pitch changes, vowels are lengthened, and volume increases. It is significant in conveying meaning in phrases and sentences. For instance: A syllable (expo'rt) it as a verb, but if it is stressed the first syllable ('export), it becomes a noun (Harmer, 2007 as cited in Yangklang, 2013).

Rhythm is closely tied to how speakers place stress on syllables. In unstressed syllables, the vowels are reduced in stressed syllables and the vowels are more extended and louder (Reinard, 2016). Rhythm, in English, comprises stressed and unstressed syllables, reduced function words, and features of connected speech (Gilakjani, 2017). The connected address alone includes contractions, blends, and reductions and linking words and phrases, assimilation, dissimilation, and deletion to create the overall stress-timed design in English.

Intonation is an essential factor in speaking skill learning and development of the language. Intonation plays a vital role in spoken discourse since it signals when speakers have ended the points they wish to tell to people, carry on with a turn and indicate an agreement or a disagreement (Harmer, 2007 as cited in Yangklang, 2013). If an interlocutor speaks in English with flat intonation, this may sound boring and uninteresting. Using the wrong intonation can therefore give offense. Consequently, it is essential to practice intonation as usual activity.

Pair-work in speaking.

According to Curtain and Dahlburg (2010, as cited in Ministerio de Educación, 2016d), interaction is significant to language development for second-language learners, and interactive language tasks are essential. Students should receive enough opportunities for interaction and building interpersonal communication. Both cognitive learning theory and second-language acquisition theory affirm that learners must express themselves orally to acquire language. The implementation of the Pair-work is a resource in the interactive classes since it promotes the conversations and exchange of information among learners (Zohairy, 2014).

One of the challenges that students can face when applying Pair-work could positively help weak students who feel motivated when they practice their exercises (Svärd, 2007).

Unfortunately, pair-work could be harmful for those who do not know what to say or what to express. There are different experiences that students and facilitators can live through pair-work activities, many of them positive and other negative (Naude et al, 2014).

In conclusion, this section presented theories that illustrate authors' findings, perspectives of their work, and helpful details that connect with the researcher's paper to connect with students' knowledge, experiences, and subsequent improvements.

Methodology

Design

The present investigation is a descriptive study aimed to describe learners real-life situations about their English language academic knowledge and development. A descriptive study aims to describe a population, condition, or phenomenon. It normally displays the answer to the *what*, *where*, *when*, and *how* questions rather than *why* questions (Nassaji, 2015). Descriptive research utilizes quantitative or qualitative research methodologies in the same study.

The study can involve collecting quantitative data that are tabulated in a numerical forms, such as scores on a test or the number of times a person chooses to use a specific feature of a multimedia program (Mutakinati et al., 2018). They can also describe categories of information such as gender or patterns of interaction when using technology in a group situation. Some phenomena can also emerge from qualitative studies, case studies, observational studies, interviews, and portfolio assessments that perfectly combine with the quantitative research. In this descriptive study, the questions to be addressed were:

Research questions

1. What are students' difficulties in speaking in English?
2. What type of activities have students had in their English classes?
3. What are students' perspectives towards pair work for speaking?

Participants

All the fifty-four participants belonged to a private institution who were in tenth grade of Middle School. The 59.9% of them were boys and 48.1% girls. All of the students were between thirteen to fifteen years of age being their nationality Ecuadorian, except two of them who were Venezuelan. According to the students' perspective, 98.1% were middle class and 1.9% belonged to the upper class. The 98.1% of the students had access to internet at home and 1.9% accessed to internet provided by the municipality. The use of technology shows that 88.9% used a computer, 6.1% used smartphones, and 5% used a tablet. The 98.1% speak Spanish, and 1.9% speak both English and Spanish at home. All of the students defined as Christian Catholics. When they had to describe their ethnicity, they were not really sure about it.

Instruments

To answer the research questions, a speaking survey (Appendix A) was applied as instrument to collect data. This survey was divided in two specific parts. The first one was prepared to collect the participants demographic information where the researcher better understood some general characteristics of the students, such as their age, gender, course, language, ethnic group, English level and background, access and knowledge about technology.

The second part had a Likert-scale validated by Viteri (2019). This part of the survey was subdivided in four parts. The first one measured the attitudes and students' performance towards speaking skill with 22 questions. The second part consisted of 11 questions regarding activities to practice English. The third part involved activities related to speaking in seven questions. The fourth part asked students' perspectives towards pair work with seven questions. The survey was applied in English and also in Spanish to avoid students misunderstandings. It was taken in Google Forms format and sent to the students for the different channels of online communication.

Data Analysis

The information gathered from the survey was analyzed, coded, and entered into an Excel worksheet. Then, the document was exported to a specific SPSS program to get descriptive statistics, frequency, and means of the answers. Results from the survey were displayed in tables. The information was checked to avoid duplicate data. This survey format was sent to a total of 54 students who freely answered the survey.

Ethical Considerations

First, the institution where the study took place was previously informed about the investigation (Appendix B). After that, the institutional approval was obtained by email to apply the survey (Appendix C). According to the law, consent from the students' tutors is rendered to comply with the established rules and regulations (Appendix D). Finally, after obtaining the consent, participants were informed about the steps to follow to start applying the survey.

Results

This section presents the results of the data collected through the survey to answer the three research questions. The research questions were: What are students' difficulties in speaking in English? What type of activities have students had in their English classes? What are students' perspectives towards pair work for speaking? the researcher found that participants answered the items as follows:

To understand the survey's answers in Table 1, the specific codes have been written to check how students responded to each item related to when the participants speak in English:

- 1.- To a great extent.
- 2.- A lot.
- 3.- Some.
- 4.- A little bit, and
- 5.- None.

Table 1.

Students' difficulties at speaking in English Results.

Items:	Frequency	Mean
Feel confused about the topic.	54	4.26
Feel confused for not knowing what to say.	54	3.81
Feel anxious to respond quickly.	54	3.50
Feel anxious trying to look for words to respond correctly.	54	2.81
Feel anxious because you cannot translate what you want to say.	54	3.83
Feel afraid of making mistakes in pronunciation.	54	3.17
Feel afraid of making grammar mistakes.	54	3.06

Translate everything I want to say.	54	3.61
Can't structure a sentence.	54	4.31
Can't continue the conversation because of lack of vocabulary.	54	3.91
Feel embarrassed about making mistakes.	54	3.63
Are not confident enough to speak in English.	54	3.80
Don't understand what the other person is saying.	54	4.06
Speak without many pauses.	54	2.94
Speak spontaneously.	54	2.78
Consider you speak correctly.	54	2.67
Have a good intonation of questions.	54	2.26
Have a good intonation of sentences.	54	2.15
Have a good pronunciation.	54	2.52
Use word stress.	54	2.65
Use sentence stress.	54	2.63
Can interact with the interlocutor.	54	2.37

Research question number one: What are students' difficulties in speaking in English?

As general results, it is noticeable that students have a good knowledge of the English language, and their speaking difficulties are minimum as demonstrates the results in Table 1. As a first part, the most significant outcomes display that students have good sentences intonation; the main obtained was 2.15. Students also have good intonation of questions with a mean of 2.26. Both results show that students intonation is confident and natural. Results show that students have a good pronunciation with a mean of 2.52. Finally, in the item about the interaction with the interlocutor, the mean obtained was 2.37, which has concordance with the results previously

mentioned. As a second part, students just a little bit agree with the following statements: Do not understand what other person is saying with a mean of 4.06. With the item feel confused for the topic, the mean obtained was 4.26, and with the item cannot structure a sentence, the mean obtained was 4.31. This means that students are able to establish a communication with other people, and also can understand topics without confusion, and finally, the can write sentences with a proper structure.

Research question number two: What type of activities have students had in their English classes? To understand the survey's answers in Table 2, the specific codes are:

- 1.- Always.
- 2.- Frequently.
- 3.- Sometimes
- 4.- Hardly ever, and
- 5.- Never.

Table 2.

Activities that students had in their English classes Results.

Items:	Frequency	Mean
Fill in the space with correct grammar.	54	2.22
Write correct answers to questions to practice grammar.	54	2.28
Practice specific vocabulary in writing of an activity or topic from the book.	54	2.07
Practice specific vocabulary orally of an activity or topic from the book.	54	2.31
Practice of technical vocabulary in writing.	54	2.35

Practice of technical vocabulary orally.	54	2.46
Oral practice with vocabulary of personal interest.	54	2.28
Written practice with vocabulary of personal interest.	54	2.67
Oral pair work activities in the classroom.	54	2.65
Pair work in writing activities in the classroom.	54	2.65
Pair work in general outside the classroom.	54	3.17
Created a short speech.	54	2.67
Made an oral presentation.	54	2.24
Participated in a forum.	54	3.37
Commented on a general topic.	54	2.35
Created dialogues to practice with peers.	54	2.85
Written a dialogue from ideas from the book.	54	2.80
Practiced a dialogue about free ideas.	54	2.28

Results demonstrate that students frequently are involved in different activities that make them improve in their classes. In the item for practicing specific vocabulary in writing an activity or topic from the book, the mean obtained was 2.07. Students also filled in the blank spaces with correct grammar with a mean of 2.22. Learners also made an oral presentation, the mean obtained was 2.24. Additionally, results show that students frequently practice specific vocabulary orally of an activity or topic from the book with a mean of 2.28, with the same mean, the item practiced a dialogue about free ideas. With a mean of 2.31, students showed they practice specific vocabulary orally from the book's activity or topic. It is noticeable that students

practice and develop English activities during their school year. Results demonstrate that activities in classes have been beneficial for learners to develop their English skills. On the other hand, students also work with activities outside the classroom with fewer frequencies, but still good. They apply for pair work in general outside the school classrooms with a mean of 3.17, and finally, the lowest scored activity mean was the participation in a forum item with a mean of 3.37.

Research question number three: What are students' perspectives towards pair work for speaking? To understand the survey's answers in Table 3, the specific codes are:

- 1.- Totally agree.
- 2.- Agree.
- 3.- Neutral.
- 4.- Disagree, and
- 5.- Totally disagree.

Table 3.

Students' perspectives towards pair work for speaking Results.

Items:	Frequency	Mean
Pair work is useful to practice speaking.	54	1.98
Pair work for speaking is difficult because the student who knows more dominates the conversation.	54	2.74
It is advisable although some pairs speak slowly.	54	2.06
It is advisable although some pairs do not pronounce correctly.	54	2.33

The pair makes constant interruptions.	54	3.28
It takes too much time.	54	2.53
It is good if I work with the pair I choose.	54	1.98

Results demonstrate that students perspectives toward pair work for speaking are positive and significant for obtaining a proper speaking skills development. Students results show they totally agree that pair work is useful to practice speaking with a mean of 1.98. With the same mean the item: it is good if I work with the pair I choose. Both items refer about how the interaction is meaningful with people, and if the pair is selected for him/herself, the activities will be more easy going to develop. Nevertheless, there are some items that look less motivational to work, but results are still in a good scale. These are: the item it is advisable although some pairs speak slowly obtained a mean of 2.06; and the item if the pair makes constant interruptions, the mean obtained was 3.28. This mean that students continue working even though conditions are not the best.

Concerning to the open-ended questions, some students answers display their perspectives about the following questions: What other advantage/difficulty do you have when working in pair? What other challenge/difficulty/limitation do you have when you speak in English?

Working in pairs advantages: Some students responses were:

- *An advantage is that we improve our English level a little bit by practicing every day.*

- *An advantage is when my pair helps, we can finish the activity really fast and it does not take so much time.*
- *Advantages: 1-mutual knowledge 2-Improve oral practice Disadvantages: I think there are no disadvantages when you work in pairs.*
- *A great advantage is when you have a good relationship with the other person so you could talk about the topic and help each other, and there is any problem, but it is beneficial for my learning.*

Working in pairs disadvantages: Some students responses were:

- *A difficulty is when the pair does not want to work and I have to do all because the other person does nothing about the topic or does know nothing about the homework.*
- *It is difficult to have good communication when you do not know your partners.*
- *Bad communication, if I work with a person that I did not choose.*
- *I personally think sometimes it can be difficult if the pair does not work and does not want to collaborate to do the task.*

Challenges/ difficulties/ limitation when students speak in English:

- *The difficulty is the time for organizing the work effectively to expose it well.*
- *At the beginning, it is hard to establish a dialogue or conversation.*
- *I have a difficult at the time to talk because I sometimes get stuck in some words while talking.*
- *In some case the lack of confidence is our worst enemy.*

Students expressed their opinions and perspectives demonstrating despite having some difficulties, they continue with their practice for improving their English speaking competencies.

Discussion

The current descriptive study is an attempt to know EFL students' difficulties in speaking. The findings showed the students' answers that described the questions and their respective answers. Additionally, in a general view, students develop their English speaking skills without any significant issues. Students work hard for their improvement, and most of the time, their interest in learning makes the researcher assign them some extra work.

Question 1: *What are students' difficulties in speaking in English?* Results

demonstrated that students have a good intonation of questions and good intonation of sentences (Reinard, 2016). These items determine that students take care very much of their speech intonation. Harmer (2007, as cited in Yangklang, 2013) mentioned that intonation plays a vital role in the spoken discourse since it signals when speakers have ended their intervention, what they wish to tell people, and indicate a specific point of view. Results also showed significant results concerning good pronunciation and the interaction with the interlocutor, which students have during their classes. Similar statements were stated by Low (2015).

The findings determine that students give great importance to accurate pronunciation to improve the interaction between partners. In a similar way, it was mentioned in (Ministerio de Educación, 2016c). Likewise, as expressed by Brown (2006) mentioned that communicative interaction looks for the capacity to start and manage conversations, little dialogues, ask and answer questions, and interact with others. Krashen (1982) expressed that acquisition requires

meaningful interaction in the target language in a natural communication where speakers are concerned not with the form but with the message they are transmitting.

Results show that students' intonation is confident and natural. Prima-Sari and Br-Sembiring (2019) expressed that language need to flow naturally. Something similar was stated by (Ministerio de Educación, 2016c). Finally, students disagreed with the items "Do not understand what other person is saying" and "feel confused for the topic." Students are able to establish a communication with other people (Svärd, 2007), and also can understand topics without confusion (Naude et al, 2014), and finally, they can write sentences with a proper structure (Yu, 2013).

Question 2: *What type of activities have students had in their English classes?* Results show that most students practice specific vocabulary in writing or vocabulary of an activity or topic from the book and fill spaces with correct grammar. In traditional methods, the speaking skills were ignored and did not have a great significance (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Students frequently practice specific vocabulary orally of an activity or topic from the book. Barrionuevo et al., (2020) expressed that speaking is more than pronouncing words and emitting sounds. Additionally, Rao (2018) mentioned that speaking are needed for expressing and interacting with others.

Students also got good results in the item about the dialogue practicing free ideas. Similar ideas were stated by (Zohairy, 2014). Students experience and results demonstrated that the communicative language teaching approach emphasizes the communication process (Dornyei, 2009, as cited in Yucailla, 2020). Additionally, results show that students have worked on activities related to oral practice with a vocabulary of their interest (Naude et al, 2014). These

activities are also valuable for their learning development. Curtain and Dahlburg (2010, as cited in Ministerio de Educación, 2016d) stated that interaction is significant to language development for second-language learners, and interactive language tasks are essential.

It is noticeable that students practice and develop English activities during their school year to develop their required skills as stated by (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Results demonstrate that activities in classes have been beneficial for learners to develop their English skills. On the other hand, students also work with activities outside the classroom with fewer frequencies, but still good users. Celce-Murcia (2002) mentioned that a quality of communication establishes a confident ability for expressing everywhere. Learners apply for pair work in general outside the school classrooms. Zohairy (2014) mentioned that pair work is a resource that promotes the interaction and information exchanging.

Question 3: *What are students' perspectives towards pair work for speaking?* Results demonstrated that learners prefer pair work to practice speaking; also, they think pair work is better if they work with the pair they choose. Naude et al (2014) mentioned that pair work experiences could be positive or negative. A participant of the study mentioned that *“A great advantage is when you have a good relationship with the other person so you could talk about the topic and help each other, and there is any problem, but it is beneficial for my learning.”* On the other hand, a different participant also mentioned that a disadvantage could be if there is *“bad communication, if I work with a person that I did not choose.”* Other participant said *“In some case the lack of confidence is our worst enemy.”* It is a challenge that teachers and students also need to manage.

Students could notice the importance of the interaction with partners in the class (Lessard-Clouston, 2018). Since learners could see their progress, they participated more in speaking interactions. A participant mentioned that *“An advantage is that we improve our English level a little bit by practicing every day.”* Pair work practicing is advisable, although some pairs speak slowly, or if the couple makes constant interruptions. Naude et al. (2014) mentioned that there are different experiences that students and facilitators can live through pair-work activities. A participant mentioned that a disadvantage could be *“It can be difficult if the pair does not work and does not want to collaborate to do the task.”*

Svärd (2007) noted that some students who apply pair-work could positively help weak students who can feel motivated when practicing their exercises with gifted students. It is advisable, although some pairs do not pronounce correctly. A participant said that *“An advantage is when my pair helps, we can finish the activity really fast and it does not take so much time.”* However, a difficulty presented is *“The difficulty is the time for organizing the work effectively to expose it well”* mentioned a participant of the study.

Conclusions

This study aimed to know the speaking difficulties that second language learners have related to their activities in their English classes. The group of students who participated in this investigation has been a great group of learners, and the questions asked in the survey have been essential to demonstrate students' knowledge. The speaking difficulties found in the study let the researcher know that these difficulties can be improved by preparing some helpful strategies based on interaction and motivation. The implementation of pair work allows learners to help

their partners who still struggle with their speaking skills. Motivation is essential to enhance students' increasing learning.

Students' ability to speak and interact in English facilitated the implementation of the activities and proper interaction. These learning strategies and activities were implemented inside and outside classes to help students improve fluency, autonomy, and communication in English. Even though some difficulties at working in pair could appear, learners prefer to do pair-work and small groups to practice dialogues and little speeches. Students are able to express their perspectives and opinions clearly. In this way, they increase their knowledge and help other students who progress a little lower. Speaking is usually the most challenging skill to develop; however, it is demonstrated that all learners can acquire this skill with effective practice and enough interaction.

Limitations

The main limitation to accomplish this study has been the COVID19 pandemic. It has varied some students' priorities concerning their assignments. Students appreciate working with their activities, but they would like to go back to face-to-face classes. The speaking difficulty detected in some participants is the lack of confidence and the lack of vocabulary, which sometimes avoid developing their fluency at the speaking time. Something impressive to mention is when students choose their partners to work, their tasks go faster, and the working environment is more comfortable to develop the activities. Additionally, it is noticeable when the task has been done for students chosen for the teacher to work in a group. The result is different. Nevertheless, in most cases, their work is practical and very polished.

Recommendations

It is recommendable to give clear instructions to the students for effective fulfillment of the survey. Another recommendation is to promote speaking skills to encourage learners to implement different activities in and outside the classroom. The use of pair-work activity is very recommendable to develop the oral interaction for the learning. It enhances students' communicative approach. Finally, it is recommendable to apply this type of investigation and implementing it in formal education to establish some guidelines for fostering improvements in subsequent research.

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Appendix A

Perspectives about Speaking in English

Available upon request.

Appendix B

Letter for the School

Available upon request.

Appendix C

Consent Letter from School

Available upon request.

Appendix D

Letter Sent to Parents

Available upon request.