Perspectives EFL Students' Difficulties in Speaking: A Descriptive Study

Author: Erving Stalin Alomoto Quinde

Guide: Maria Rossana Ramirez Avila

Proyectos de Investigación

Certifico que Erving Stalin Alomoto Quinde 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. Las secciones de introducción, literatura y metodología (instrumentos y análisis de datos) son las mismas.

Particular que comunico para los fines consiguientes.

María Rossana Ramírez Avila

Coordinadora de Titulación

Abstract

This descriptive study aimed to determine EFL learners' speaking difficulties from their perspective. The study included quantitative and qualitative data collected through a speaking survey. Forty-three students participated in the study; 27 females and 16 males, whose ages ranged from 13 to 41 years old, from a university, a high school, and a language school. Most of them were at a basic level, a few with a beginner and intermediate level. Results showed that most of the students feel confused when they speak spontaneously. They want to speak fluently, but they confuse the language so they become nervous when they speak in English. A mean of 3.88 showed that students feel afraid of making grammar mistakes, the lack of practice prevents students from being accurate when they speak. Additionally, a mean of 3.65 indicates that students are worried about mispronouncing words. Based on the findings, it is concluded that learners need to apply speaking strategies to improve their oral interaction. It is recommended that teachers consider the best teaching strategies to support learners' during their learning development.

Keywords: Speaking strategies, Speaking difficulties, Speaking Skills, EFL.

Resumen

Este estudio descriptivo tuvo como objetivo determinar las dificultades del habla de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera desde su perspectiva. El estudio incluyó datos cuantitativos y cualitativos recopilados a través de una encuesta oral. Cuarenta y tres estudiantes participaron en el estudio; 27 mujeres y 16 hombres, cuyas edades oscilaron entre los 13 y los 41 años, de una universidad, una escuela secundaria y una escuela de idiomas. La mayoría de ellos tenían un nivel básico, algunos con un nivel principiante e intermedio. Los resultados mostraron que la mayoría de los estudiantes se sienten confundidos cuando hablan espontáneamente. Quieren hablar con fluidez, pero confunden el idioma, por lo que se ponen nerviosos cuando hablan en inglés. Una media de 3,88 mostró que los estudiantes sienten miedo de cometer errores gramaticales, la falta de práctica impide que los estudiantes sean precisos al hablar. Además, una media de 3,65 indica que los estudiantes están preocupados por pronunciar mal las palabras. Sobre la base de los hallazgos, se concluye que los alumnos deben aplicar estrategias de habla para mejorar su interacción oral. Se recomienda que los profesores consideren las mejores estrategias de enseñanza para apoyar a los alumnos durante su desarrollo del aprendizaje.

Palabras clave: Estrategias para hablar, Dificultades para hablar, Habilidades para hablar, EFL.

EFL Students' Difficulties in Speaking: A Descriptive Study

English is a common language that many people speak worldwide. It is the language for international communication recognized by the EFL learning environment (Shen & Chiu, 2019). English spreads over different cultures and places, becoming the language to develop education with high-quality standards. Developing learners' English communication will help individuals achieve their objectives. This means teaching English can be gratifying because learners have many opportunities for their personal and professional development.

According to Ecuadorian education authorities, secondary graduates require to reach a minimum of B1 at the end of high school (Ministerio de Educación, 2016). They need to build up learners' competence in listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills (Council of Europe, 2018). University students must get a B1 level corresponding to international language standards before their graduation (Consejo de Educación Superior, 2016).

Ecuador was placed in rank 93 with a low proficiency level in 100 countries (Education First, 2020); it is the lowest level of English in Latin America. One of the problems is the lack of a communicative approach, which simulates real communication where the students become engaged in their lessons to achieve the goals into the curriculum (Ministerio de Educación, 2014).

Roeders (1997, as cited in Viteri, 2019) stated that to enhance education; active learning techniques should be applied. The use of active learning stimulates higher thinking skills and increases learner motivation. Likewise, meaningful activities allow students to develop creativity and active participation to transfer their learning to real situations (Ministerio de Educación, 2016). They are essential tools for training

individuals to overcome their challenges and improve speaking skills to achieve proficiency. Among the four skills, speaking is a complex skill because it is complicated to acquire but, speaking well provides the speaker with many advantages.

Some studies have indicated that students have many reasons for not developing speaking skills (Al-Eiadeh et al., 2016). Some of those causes are confusion, embarrassment, deficiencies of English learning in prior educational levels, difficulties in pronunciation, limited vocabulary, fossilization, lack of confidence, anxiety due to inaccurate utterances, grammatical issues, misunderstanding questions among others in speaking, and for this reason, these authors reported the benefits of changing the syllabus, adding teaching principles, and how to assess students productively.

Additionally, Harmer (2007, as cited in Hossain, 2015) suggested combining language features in communication. For instance, learners can use spontaneous speaking to talk about any topic and combine it with turn taking conversation to perform a structured dialogue. This combination of characteristics provide English learners with endless opportunities to express their feelings, thoughts, cultural identities while enhancing the communicative competence in the second language. Rashtchi and Khoshnevisan (2008) added how native speakers manage the language in context. The Council of Europe (2018) considered conversation as a macro-functional basis of the Common European Framework of References.

A descriptive study performed by Indrawati (2019) had the purpose of knowing students' problems in English teaching and learning the speaking skill to provide solutions to these issues. The researcher applied a descriptive survey with a quantitative approach. The sample populations were 66 students and a teacher. The problems detected were: fear of mistakes, anxiety, shyness, lack of confidence. On the other hand,

Suharyati (2016) applied a descriptive study about students' strategies in learning

English speaking. The sample was 39 students, and the researcher used a questionnaire.

This study indicated that the dominant strategies applied by students were compensation

strategy (42.05%), memory strategy (29.91%), and cognitive strategy (28.21%). It

showed that these strategies help students to achieve speaking skills in the English

language.

In Ecuador, there are no descriptive studies about difficulties in speaking.

However, there are studies where the implementation of innovation is intended to

improve speaking fluency and self-confidence. For example, Sánchez (2019), carried

out a study, the sample population was 20 participants with an A2 level (CEFR). The

students worked and assessed the work of their classmates. The application of this

investigation had positive results in students' fluency level. Other research carried out

by Viteri (2019) used dialogues to promote speaking in students. The study included

forty participants with an A1-A2 English proficiency level. The instruments applied

were surveys, dialogues, pair work, and dialogues to improve students' oral production.

This action research raised students' speaking skills.

The population for this descriptive study were the second and third semester of a

public university, 9th graders of a private high school and some students from one

language school. These institutions are in Guayaquil. They have different English

levels.

Literature Review

This section explains the main concepts for this descriptive study. Moreover,

this section analyzes the literature, issues and studies for speaking skill development.

The essential parts are the conception of speaking, the importance of this ability,

speaking teaching principles, CLT in speaking and the speaking components: fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, phonology, and stress, rhythm and intonation.

Speaking

The speaking skill has been recognized worldwide as one of the essential skills to be developed as a means of effective communication (Al-Eiadeh et al., 2016). Since communication is the principal objective proposed in the current Ecuadorian English Curriculum (Ministerio de Educación, 2016), the speaking skill needs to be mastered by learners. Additionally, Hossain (2015) expressed that speaking is important if we want to ask for something to have it done, find out information, ask and give instructions. The speaking skill is a process where the learner builds and shares meaning through verbal and non-verbal symbols in various contexts. Still, some English language teachers have continued to teach speaking just as a repetition of drills or memorization of dialogues (Ramadan, 2016).

The Importance of Speaking

Speaking is needed to perform an oral conversation. However, speaking is difficult because speakers should have enough ability of the language to communicate with others. People cannot accomplish their goals without using the correct language to communicate (Rao, 2019). Pourhosein (2016, as cited in Leong & Ahmadi, 2017) stated that speaking is pivotal in people's interaction. Richards and Rodgers (2001) said that in traditional methods, speaking skill was ignored in the classrooms where the priority was on reading and writing skills.

The current world requires good communication skills for the learners so that they need to enhance their abilities in speaking to interact in real-life situations (Rao,

2019). Speaking helps learners to develop their vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation correctly while expressing their personal feelings, opinions, and ideas. Speaking reinforces interpersonal skills when it is appropriately used in social interactions.

Speaking Teaching Principles

Teaching speaking is a process to shift knowledge to increase the students' ability to communicate with others. The aim of teaching speaking is the learners' development of spoken interaction in real contexts (Ministerio de Educación, 2016). Teaching speaking has some principles as a guide to teach correctly. Brown (2001) proposed seven principles for teaching speaking.

1. Use techniques that cover the learner's necessities. The application of meaningful strategies or techniques helps students to develop their accuracy and fluency in speaking.

2. Give intrinsically motivating techniques. Providing interesting techniques stimulate learners to participate in class.

3. Stimulate the use of authentic language in meaningful contexts. Providing appropriate and authentic language settings gives the students the possibility to develop L2 in any context.

4. Provide appropriate feedback and correction. Giving feedback makes students comprehend while analyzing and amending their mistakes.

5. Consider the natural connection between speaking and listening. Speaking and listening are integrated skills that can reinforce each other through comprehension.

6. Allow learners to start oral communication. To develop communicative competence, students must open dialogs, suggest themes, ask questions, and interact with others.

7. Promote the development of speaking strategies. These strategies help students to practice the language in class and beyond.

These speaking teaching principles have demonstrated to be very supportive in teaching the English language.

Speaking Components

Speaking components help learners to communicate ideas or thoughts in an appropriate form. According to Harris (1974, as cited in Kurniati, 2015), the components are grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, comprehension, and fluency. Grammar is needed for students to organize a sentence appropriately in a conversation (Hossain, 2015). It helps learners to gain expertise in a language both in oral and written form. Vocabulary means the appropriate wording which is used in communication (Ministerio de Educación, 2016). When learners have limited vocabulary, they cannot communicate with peers effectively. Pronunciation is the knowledge of studying how the words in a particular language are produced (Gilakjani, 2016). It is a specific way that people speak words.

Comprehension for oral communication requires a person to start a speech and another to respond (Ministerio de Educación, 2016). The communication results when these two people understand what they are talking about. Fluency is the ability to read, express, or write smoothly, efficiently, and meaningfully without making needless silences that affect the speed and natural development of communication (Rishi, 2014).

In other words, the speaker can read, understand, and respond in a language clearly and concisely while connecting meaning and situation.

Speaking fluency.

Fluency is to speak slowly at average speed without hesitation, repetition, and the use of harmonious speech (Kusumawardani & Mardiyani, 2018). Speaking fluency is the ability to talk for a long time with some intervals, creating comprehensible, correct, and semantic sentences and using appropriate words in different situations where the language use is creative and imaginative (Fillmore, 1979, as cited in Yang, 2014). This term refers to the aptitude to use the language naturally when writing or speaking. Fluency is one of the essential elements of speaking that holds the correct use of the language acquired by the learners (Sánchez, 2019).

When speakers are fluent they can talk effortlessly without making unnecessary pauses or using fillers that affect the speed and normal communication flow (Rishi, 2014). It is a wise idea that language patterns be previously familiar to the learners, it helps them to be fluent (Sheppard, 2015). To enhance fluency in English, speakers should use the language in authentic communication. Automaticity and speech production speed may not always make a speech comprehensible for listeners (Crowther et al., 2015, as cited in Albino, 2017).

Speaking accuracy.

Speaking accuracy involves adequate pronunciation, accurate grammar, and suitable vocabulary. Speaking accuracy specifies "the extent to which the language produced conforms to target language norms" (Yuan & Ellis, 2003, p. 2). Accuracy is students' capacity to express sentences in a correct grammar form, as part of oral

proficiency (Srivastava, 2014, as cited in, Dután, 2019). It includes attracting learners'
attention to how to use the language appropriately. According to Kusumawardani and
Mardiyani (2018), accuracy is the basis of fluency, enhancing an individual's linguistic
competence.

Pronunciation.

Pronunciation is producing sounds of speech to express a message (Dalton &
Seidlhofer, 1994, as cited in Tlazalo & Basurto, 2014). Possessing the right
pronunciation when communicating in a foreign language is essential to transmit the
proposed statement precisely, avoiding misunderstandings (Fattah, 2006). But a good
pronunciation is producing the correct sounds; it tries to help learners understand what
they hear to make the process of communication easy to understand. Gilakjani (2016)
stated that pronunciation is learned by repeating sounds and improving them when
produced erroneously. When L2 students learn about pronunciation, they need to
overcome many problems and correct the errors resulting from their native language.
Teachers need to include activities that emphasize pronunciation fluency and activities
that emphasize accuracy to produce sounds appropriately.

Phonology.

Phonology describes the schemes and patterns of speaking sounds in a language
(Yule, 2017). Phonology studies the mental system to represent and process speech
sounds in a specific language (Eulitz, 2007). For this reason, besides knowing the
sounds of a language, it is necessary to understand how these sounds are articulated
when producing sentences. Grimaldi (2018) indicated that phonology involves
integrating speech properties into mental representations exposed to categorical
processes. According to Pennington (1996), understanding the language's phonology

can help students perceive the linguistic differences in vowel and consonant sounds like pen and pan. Phonology tells us what sounds are in a language, how they can combine into words, and explains why specific phonetic characteristics are pivotal to identify a word.

Stress, rhythm and intonation.

Stress makes emphasis on certain sounds in words, phrases, and sentences. It is the degree of force used in producing a syllable (Crystal, 2008, as cited in Gilakjani, 2011). Stress is used to describe the point in a word or phrase where tone changes, vowels are extended, and volume is augmented (Yangklang, 2013). For example, in the word 'orange', the stress is on the first syllable. Rhythm is about how individuals use a combination of stressed and unstressed words. Sentences have strong and weak beats. Intonation is how the tone of a speaker's voice upwards (a rise), downward (a fall) goes up or down as they talk. Banshaw (1994, as cited in Ukam et al., 2017) stated that stress and rhythm determine the pronunciation of sections in English more than the skill to articulate individual sounds.

Communicative Language Teaching in Speaking

CLT focuses on developing the student's communicative competence (Richards, 2006), using the second language within social contexts (Freeman, 2000; Hiep, 2007). Moreover, to create significant learning, CLT practices are authentic and based on real-life situations (Alwazir & Shukri, 2016). In CLT's teaching and learning process, learners are expected to communicate orally while mastering all communicative competence components. Teachers are the motivators, facilitators, and advisers during students' speaking performance. Learning activities in CLT apply a variety of language actions without focusing on the form of grammatical patterns. It distinguishes non-

communicative activities that only concentrate on grammatical structures (Harmer, 1998, as cited in Al- Banna, & Juni Bayu, 2015).

Methodology

According to Glass and Hopkins (1984, as cited in Gongera & Okoth, 2012), descriptive research implicates collecting data that describes events, and then organizes, tabulates, represents, and describes the data collection. A non-experimental, cross-sectional, descriptive survey-type research design (Angenscheidt, 2017). Given that attitudes cannot be directly measured, it was decided to resort to measuring opinions as an indicator of the participants' attitudes (Hernández et al., 2010).

Descriptive statistics used data collection and analysis techniques. It combined quantitative and qualitative data focused on specific research questions and methods, differentiating descriptive research from other research. A descriptive study was conducted, including conceptual and operational descriptions of the variables used in the study.

Design

The descriptive research's objective intends to describe a situation or event's characteristics in a population where the data is collected and subsequently analyzed to generate a hypothesis about a particular issue (Nassaji, 2015). This study mixes methods to establish a better understanding of the results. According to Zegwaard and Hoskyn (2015), mixed methods research (quantitative and qualitative data collection methods) has become essential in work-integrated learning research. Using data from both methods, Cameron (2018) argued that triangulation strengthens the overall research findings, which is the key advantage of a mixed-methods design.

Pickell (2019) mentioned that quantitative data is called statistical and is typically structured in nature – meaning it is more rigid and defined. This type of information is measured using numbers and values, making it a more suitable candidate for data analysis. Quantitative data is concise and close-ended. Quantitative data can be obtained through tests, experiments, surveys, market reports, and metrics. On the other hand, qualitative data is non-statistical, but it is unstructured or semi-structured. Qualitative data are obtained through texts and documents, audio and video recordings, images and symbols, interview transcripts and focus groups, and observations and notes.

In this study, the researcher applied a survey. It included items to get demographic information and students' perspectives about speaking. It was presented in English and Spanish to avoid any misunderstanding in participants. This survey is better described in the instruments section. Considering these factors and in order to know the real impact on students from this survey, the present study looked to answer these research questions:

Research questions:

- 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?

Participants

The population of this research were twenty-two participants who were second semester and third semester students of a public university in Santa Elena, nine students of 9th from a private high school in La Libertad, and twelve participants from a

language school who are in an A1 level from two provinces in Ecuador: Guayas and

Santa Elena. There were forty-three participants: twenty-seven females, and sixteen

males whose ages ranged from 13 to 41. Most of them were teenagers and young adults.

There was one student from Venezuela, all the others were Ecuadorian. Twenty-

four of the students are catholic, seven of them are Christians, two of them are

evangelistic, two of them are Jehovah's Witnesses, and eight have no religion. All the

participants belong to "mestizo" as a racial group. Their socioeconomic status is divided

into two parts. Twelve students belong to low incomes and thirty-two participants to the

middle class. One of the students did not have an internet connection. Another forty-two

participants have the Internet in their houses.

The sample of this research was students who accepted to answer the form

freely, each participant received a link to develop this survey at the time of finishing

their online lessons. After a brief explanation of the security and data protection for this

research, the participants were asked to participate in the study.

The link was sent by email, WhatsApp, or using the Zoom video platform's chat

room, the researcher explained the objective and purpose of this study. From the

students that answered, one participant repeated twice, and two others repeated the

survey three times, and the author did not consider the answers that were duplicated or

repeated. For this reason, results report the answers of 43 participants who contributed

to their perspectives.

Instruments

There are three main kinds of instruments that are used in descriptive studies. In

this case, a survey has been used to gather data and as the main instrument to answer the

three research questions. The Speaking survey was a mixture between a demographic and a speaking strategy survey. In its first part, the survey allowed the researcher to better understand the participants' general characteristics, such as their age, gender, course, language, ethnic group, English level, and background, access, and technology knowledge.

The second part of the survey was also in English and Spanish to avoid any misunderstanding in participants. The speaking survey was a Likert-scale already validated (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 with two tables, (3 and 4) with seven questions each one. The fourth part, is the last section with open ended questions which helped the researcher to see the advantages or difficulties when working in pairs, challenges, and difficulties or limitations in speaking which are shown in Table 5. The survey was prepared in a Google Forms format and the participants completed the survey online.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the collected data in a table, and with specific software, the researcher ran the descriptive statistics and looked for some duplicate data. After that, an excel data sheet with the students' responses was generated to show the survey results. Some participants got confused and took the same survey more than once. That is why there were some duplicate answers. The results were revised. The survey was sent to 90 students; however, only 43 participants answered the survey.

It was difficult to gather the total amount of all participants due to the fact that was voluntary and not mandatory. The amount of the students in the course was minimum and reduced because of the COVID pandemic situation, not all students were willing to participate. For this reason, the researcher collected the data from the three different institutions.

Ethical Considerations

As this descriptive study was implemented in three different institutions, the participants were informed about the aims of the survey (Appendix A). The researcher sent a letter to the institution authorities indicating them about the descriptive study (Appendix B). After that, the teacher received the consent letter (Appendix C) from the institution where the students were minors. The researcher prepared a document (Appendix D) to students´ parents to get their approval. The information of the participants was protected all the time. Their names and personal information do not appear anywhere. Instead of that, codes that represent the information were assigned.

With the other two institutions, the researcher also talked to the students and explained to them about the survey. As they were adults, it was not necessary to ask for a consent letter from their parents, but it was a requirement to converse with the institutions about the work to do. In this online conversation the authorities of the university knew that the students just needed to fulfill a survey (Appendix A) to participate in this study. The information of the participants was protected all the time. Besides this, in the survey students had the opportunity to see a reminder of their voluntary participation.

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:

Research question number one: What are students' difficulties in speaking in English? Results demonstrated that most of the students feel confused when they speak spontaneously with a mean obtained of 2.44, reflecting that students want to speak spontaneously, but they confuse the words. The same mean of 2.44 was obtained in the item that mentions that they feel they speak correctly and that doubt provokes nervous students at the speaking time. It is noticeable that students feel afraid to make grammar mistakes with a mean obtained of 3.88, which means that the grammar skills are also affected by the lack of practice. Unfortunately, students still feel afraid about making pronunciation mistakes with a mean obtained of 3.65, which means that students do not feel sure to pronounce English words. Finally, Table 1 shows the results of this section.

To understand the survey´s answers in Table 1, the specific codes have been written here 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.

Results of the students' difficulties at speaking in English.

Items:	Mean

Feel confused.	2.63
Feel confused for not knowing what to say.	3.00
Feel anxious to respond quickly.	3.07
Feel anxious trying to look for words to respond correctly.	3.53
Feel anxious because you cannot translate what you want to say.	3.30
Feel afraid of making mistakes in pronunciation.	**3.65**
Feel afraid of making grammar mistakes.	**3.88**
Translate everything I want to say.	2.93
Can´t structure a sentence.	2.67
Can´t continue the conversation because of lack of vocabulary.	3.26
Feel embarrassed about making mistakes.	3.56
Are not confident enough to speak in English.	3.26
Don´t understand what the other person is saying.	3.16
Speak without many pauses.	2.65
Speak spontaneously.	**2.44**
Consider you speak correctly.	**2.44**
Have a good intonation of questions.	2.71

Have a good intonation of sentences.	2.72
Have a good pronunciation.	2.58
Use word stress.	2.49
Use sentence stress.	2.65
Can interact with the interlocutor.	2.51

Research question number two: What type of activities have students had in their English classes? Results demonstrated that most of the students have their pair work in general outside the classroom with a mean of 2.95, which represents that participants, in a few cases, do their job after classes; in this way, they can practice and prepare tasks a little better. Additionally, results show that students hardly ever practice specific vocabulary in writing activity or topic from the book with a mean of 2.98, which means that students sometimes focus their learning on writing activities such as fulfill activities from the book. On the other hand, a mean of 3.40 shows that oral pair work activities are sometimes developed in the classroom. Finally, results demonstrate the participants wrote answers correctly with a mean of 3.83, which means that the teaching-learning process is almost frequently focused on improving their grammar skills.

To understand the survey´s answers in Table 2 and in Table 3, the specific codes have been written here to check how students responded to each item related to when the participants do their activities in English: 1.- Never. 2.- Hardly ever. 3.- Sometimes 4.- Frequently, and 5.- Always.

Table 2.

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

Items:	Mean
Fill in the space with correct grammar.	3.09
Write correct answers to questions to practice grammar.	**3.83**
Practice specific vocabulary in writing of an activity or topic from the book.	**2.98**
Practice specific vocabulary orally of an activity or topic from the book.	3.07
Practice of technical vocabulary in writing.	3.05
Practice of technical vocabulary orally.	3.00
Oral practice with vocabulary of personal interest.	3.09
Written practice with vocabulary of personal interest.	3.12
Oral pair work activities in the classroom.	**3.40**
Pair work in writing activities in the classroom.	3.26
Pair work in general outside the classroom.	**2.95**

In table 3, results with a mean of 3.14 demonstrate that students create some dialogues to practice with their peers. Also, a mean of 3.12 shows that students practice conversations about free topics in their classes, which means that they interact to improve their speaking. Unfortunately, a mean of 2.49 reflects that the study

participants hardly ever have the opportunity to comment on general topics or

participate in a forum with a mean of 2.12, which means that the lack of exposure to the

language affects its proper development.

Table 3.

Results of the speaking activities done by the students.

Items:	Mean
Created a short speech.	2.70
Made an oral presentation.	2.86
Participated in a forum.	**2.12**
Commented on a general topic.	**2.49**
Created dialogues to practice with peers.	**3.14**
Written a dialogue from ideas from the book.	2.95
Practiced a dialogue about free ideas.	**3.12**

Research question number three: What are students' perspectives towards pair

work for speaking? Results demonstrated with a mean of 4.12 that pair work is useful to

practice speaking. This result shows that students agree that interacting with a partner is

beneficial to learn a language. Moreover, the results also show with a mean of 3.91 that

it is advisable to work in little groups, although some pairs speak slowly. To conclude,

it is necessary to mention that with a mean of 2.86, students disagree in the action when

the couple makes constant interruptions. Students do not like when partners do not

respect their turn to talk.

To understand the survey´s answers in Table 4, the specific codes have been written here to check how students responded to each item related to when the participants do their activities in English: 1.- Totally disagree. 2.- Disagree. 3.- Neutral. 4.- Agree, and 5.- Totally agree.

Table 4.

Results of students' perspectives towards pair work for speaking

Items:	Mean
Pair work is useful to practice speaking.	**4.12**
Pair work for speaking is difficult because the student who knows more dominates the conversation.	3.21
It is advisable although some pairs speak slowly.	**3.91**
It is advisable although some pairs do not pronounce correctly.	3.58
The pair makes constant interruptions.	**2.86**
It takes too much time.	3.35
It is good if I work with the pair I choose.	3.49

To reinforce research question number three about the students´ perspectives, Table 5 presents the open-ended questions results that the participants answered when they fulfilled the study´s survey.

Table 5

Perspectives Survey – Open-Ended questions

Question 1	Answers	Total
What other advantage/difficulty do you have when working in pairs?	None.	11
	We learn from each other.	8
	The interaction is an advantage to develop the Speaking skills.	6
	I am afraid to talk or I feel nervous of making mistakes.	6
	Some partners do not want to pronounce any word during the activity.	5
	The pronunciation is not correct, so it is not possible to interact with the partners.	4
	The fear of being mocked for the lack of knowledge.	2
	Sometimes the times are not enough to complete the task.	1
	Total	**43**
Question 2	Answers	Total
What other challenge/difficulty/limitation do you have when you speak in English?	The lack of a good pronunciation.	13
	None.	6
	The necessity to get a better fluency.	6
	Listening is one of the hardest challenges to accomplish.	5
	Learning and improving the speaking skills through practice.	4
	Learners need to translate most of the words.	3
	Feel confused about what word to use.	3
	Due to the lack of practice, I forget everything what I learn.	2

	It's difficult for me to organize all my ideas in my head.	1
	Total	**43**

Discussion

This study is an attempt to know EFL students' difficulties in speaking. The findings confirmed some issues that learners have in learning the English Language. These results are described in the questions below with their respective answers:

Question 1: *What are students' difficulties in speaking in English?* Results show that most students feel confused when they talk spontaneously. Likewise, they think they speak correctly, but they have some doubts while speaking. To avoid or overcome difficulties when using this skill, Viteri (2019) suggested using pair work, dialogues, and oral productions to promote speaking in students. Also, this study revealed that other students feel afraid to make grammar mistakes. Harris (1974, as cited in Kurniati, 2015) affirmed that grammar is needed for students to organize a sentence appropriately in a conversation. Another difficulty is that some students do not feel sure to pronounce in English and make mistakes. Research performed by Fattah (2006) affirmed that having the correct pronunciation is pivotal to transmit the message and avoid misunderstandings.

Question 2: *What type of activities have students had in their English classes?* According to the findings, most students develop oral pair work activities in the classroom. Other participants of this study agreed that they write correct answers to questions to practice grammar. In table 3, the results demonstrate that students create some dialogues to practice with their peers. Viteri (2019) used dialogues to promote speaking in students. Other students practice conversations about free topics in their

classes to interact and improve their speaking. Then, meaningful activities allow learners to develop creativity and participate actively to transfer their learning to real situations (Ministerio de Educación, 2016).

Question 3: *What are students' perspectives towards pair work for speaking?* Results of the perspectives demonstrated that learners prefer pair work to practice speaking. Likewise, learners think that it is advisable to work in little groups with their peers. Indrawati (2019) understood students' issues in English teaching and learning speaking skills and proposed some solutions to these problems. Suharyati (2016) showed that using some strategies helps students to achieve speaking skills in the English language. Students agreed that by working in pairs, they learn from their peers, so it is an advantage for them. The lack of good pronunciation is a problem. Garita et al. (2019) stated that possessing the right pronunciation when communicating in a foreign language is essential to transmit a message, avoiding misunderstandings.

Conclusions

This descriptive study pretended to know the speaking difficulties that students have had in their English classes. The ability to speak skillfully provides learners with many advantages. They can put words together in a meaningful way to reflect thoughts, opinions, and feelings to transmit them orally. This study indicates that the main issue for students is the fear to speak English correctly. Most learners think that they do not have good pronunciation, so they prefer to continue using their native language to avoid mockery. It does not allow them to enhance their communicative competence.

This study's surveys revealed that some difficulties are related to students' grammar mistakes while speaking and pronunciation in the English language. To overcome these difficulties, they create some dialogues to practice with their peers,

practice conversations about free topics to interact and improve their speaking. These strategies help students improve fluency, autonomy, and communication in English. Therefore, they prefer to work in pairs and small groups to practice speaking. It is advantageous because they learn from their peers to improve pronunciation and other speaking skills. By using the correct strategies, techniques, and methods, students can develop communicative competence.

Limitations

One of the principal limitations to accomplish this study has been the problem caused by the COVID19 pandemic. It has changed students' priorities respecting to academic preparation and said by the participants of the study that they become tired of their studying system. They preferred to talk about their health more than their studies. Participants' lack of interest extended the time of data collection. This fact complicated the study accomplishment. The lack of responsibility that students made the researcher looking for other participants in other institutions. Not all the students understood the whole questions of the survey, through WhatsApp meetings, and asynchrony sessions explanations were given.

Recommendations

For the next research, it would be recommendable that this type of study could have the opportunity to be considered as a model for future investigations. Also, it is essential to give clear instructions to the participants with the objective to fulfill all the requirements and make students not lose interest in participating in the study. Another recommendation to promote speaking skills is encouraging students to apply different communicative strategies to make their learning meaningful and useful for implementing in their real-life context. Developing interaction in small groups is very

recommendable because it enhances students' communicative approach. The teacher can help learners with specific feedback and using some motivational devices and technological tools. It is necessary to read and understand students' points of view about their weaknesses and strengths to make the subsequent studies more reliable.

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Appendix A

Perspectives about Speaking in English

Available upon request.

Appendix B

Consent letter.

Available upon request.

Appendix C

Approval from institution.

Available upon request.

Appendix D.

Consent Letter from Parents.// Carta de Consentimiento de los Padres.

Available upon request.