Universidad Casa Grande

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

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Modality: Descriptive Study

Abstract

EFL students have faced obstacles when learning the English language, especially the speaking skill, which demands more merits. This research study is focused on the difficulties that 8th, 9th, and 10th graders find when using English to communicate. The students in this project belong to a private high school in Ecuador. A survey was applied to 76 participants to collect data. The results demonstrated that students strive to communicate orally in English due to insufficient vocabulary knowledge, translation practice, unsuitable environment, and feelings of demotivation and inhibition. The students mainly developed grammar activities from their books in the classroom. In addition, they had the opportunity to create and practice dialogues with their peers orally. On the other hand, students found some negative aspects regarding the pair work, including different English knowledge and insufficient collaboration. Despite these drawbacks, pair work allows the participants to develop their speaking skills since they were able to interact with each other more confidently. This study offers a source of reference for future research in the teaching-learning field of English-speaking skills.

Keywords: Speaking skill, EFL students, speaking activities, pair work, demotivation, inhibition.

Resumen

Los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera han enfrentado obstáculos al aprender este idioma, especialmente la destreza del habla, la cual demanda más méritos. Este estudio se enfoca en las dificultades que los estudiantes de octavo, noveno, y décimo de básica encuentran al usar el inglés para comunicarse. Los estudiantes involucrados en este proyecto pertenecen a un colegio privado en Ecuador. Se aplicó una encuesta a 76 participantes para recolectar información. Los resultados demostraron que los estudiantes tienen dificultades para comunicarse oralmente en inglés debido al deficiente conocimiento de vocabulario, a la práctica de traducción, a un ambiente inapropiado, y a los sentimientos de desmotivación e inhibición. Los estudiantes principalmente desarrollaron actividades gramaticales de los textos en el aula. Además, ellos tuvieron la oportunidad de crear y practicar diálogos con sus compañeros oralmente. Por otra parte, los estudiantes encontraron algunos aspectos negativos sobre el trabajo en pareja, incluyendo diferente conocimiento del inglés e insuficiente colaboración. A pesar de estos inconvenientes, el trabajo en pareja les permitió a los participantes desarrollar sus habilidades del habla ya que fueron capaces de interactuar entre ellos con más confianza. Este estudio ofrece una fuente de referencia para futuras investigaciones en el campo de la enseñanza-aprendizaje de la destreza del habla en inglés.

Palabras clave: Habilidad de habla, estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera, actividades de habla, trabajo en pareja, desmotivación, inhibición.

EFL Students' Difficulties in Speaking: A Descriptive Study

English has become a worldwide language because it facilitates communication among people from different parts of the world. Hence, speaking more than one language is required to interact and connect within this globalized world (Ministerio de Educación, 2014). Indeed, learning English as a foreign language (EFL) goes beyond memorizing grammatical rules disassociated from the real purpose which is to communicate. Thus, learners must use English as a means of oral production and interaction to persuade, inform listeners, and make connections with people (Sayuri, 2016).

Although learning a new language implies acquiring listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, the oral language ability is used more than the others because it supports interaction with listeners (Rao, 2019). However, a study by Klimova (2014) revealed that speaking is tough to acquire and run because of two main features. First, this skill is performed live, producing speakers' fears due to the unease of making mistakes. Second, users cannot edit or change what they say because interlocutors react immediately to what others are saying and express their views without a script since speaking is generated in real-time without time to reflect on what to say.

Likewise, speaking skill is a means of learning, practicing, and understanding a new language, where grammatical knowledge, vocabulary according to the context, and correct pronunciation are the medium to convey ideas with contextual sense (Al Hosni, 2014). Nevertheless, grasping it is challenging because students face two significant issues, linguistic and non-linguistic factors. The first one belongs to the lack of vocabulary, grammar, fluency, comprehension, and pronunciation. Meanwhile, the second refers to psychological matters, such as anxiety, low self-confidence, shyness,

fear of being judged, and dread of making mistakes (Dalem, 2017). All the mentioned factors block oral language production and impede practice.

As an illustration, anxiety affects foreign language oral production because anxious learners are highly limited to speaking in English due to their emotional fears, which do not enable them to communicate orally. Generally, when students are nervous, they start trembling, sweating, and forgetting their ideas (Zhiping & Paramasivam, 2013). Furthermore, Horwitz et al. (1986) noted that nervousness is the uneasiness, tightness, fear, and edginess that block people from overcoming difficult situations due to the unknown results of a particular state.

Another factor that affects English speaking skill acquisition is that students do not have opportunities to use the language outside the classroom (Cuartas, 2014). Furthermore, a study by Rojas (2021) reported that in the EFL Ecuadorian context, learners are not exposed to scenarios that engage and help to practice English orally because they spend most of their time with their family, community, and friends where a Spanish-speaking environment prevails. Therefore, learning to speak English becomes slow and takes a long time to acquire. According to Khan et al. (2018), students cannot include new vocabulary words to communicate due to the lack of practice in English speaking. As a result, they forget the meaning and pronunciation.

Rosales and Gonzalez (2020) stated that the overuse of the mother tongue limits the students from getting in touch with the target language, reducing the opportunities for exposure to English and practicing speaking skills. Therefore, students learn more English when it is used most of the time and less when it is almost not practiced. In addition, excessive use of L1 tends to translate the information from the target language to L1, which does not help learners acquire English (Siham, 2018). On the contrary, too

much employment in students' native language causes more dependence and decreases the input and the chance to practice the L2 (Şener & Korkut, 2017)

The Ecuadorian Foreign Language Curriculum includes the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method, which promotes group and pair work tasks to facilitate learners' oral communication in L2 (Ministerio de Educación, 2016). However, it is a challenge to use such activities because when students join to work on a role-play, debates, and discussions, they use their mother tongue excessively, producing a dependence on the native language to the detriment of the English Language (Ghorbani, 2011) creating issues with English pronunciation, use of inappropriate vocabulary, false cognates, and the increase to the dependence to translates English into Spanish most of the time (Papaja et al., 2020)

The present descriptive study was held in a private high school in Gualaceo city, which aligns with local and national standards. Similarly, teachers follow the Ecuadorian curricula, which guide English teaching-learning. The participants for the survey are from grades 8th-10th, whose English level, according to CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), should be A2, but most do not get it.

The investigator has examined how learning oral language English is limited to doing it inside the classroom. Hence, there is no authentic input and output to develop this skill outside the class. Likewise, when students work in groups or pairs, they usually use their mother tongue because they cannot communicate in English or feel anxious about committing mistakes, which impedes English oral production. Besides, students who are better at English translate the instructions for those who do not understand. All these contexts have limited this challenging skill development in this institution.

Literature Review

To better comprehend the current study, this segment gives readers a short and straightforward overview of the theoretical foundation of speaking in EFL environments. Since this descriptive study focuses on speaking, this skill is defined first. Second, the importance of speaking when learning a foreign language is provided. Third, there is a description of the main speaking teaching principles. Fourth, the speaking components are mentioned together with a brief description. Fifth, the barriers EFL students face when developing speaking are explained in detail. Finally, pair-work in speaking is addressed.

Speaking

Speaking involves verbal and non-verbal language in different real-life contexts whose final goal is to share, convey, or exchange thoughts, feelings, and opinions (Nunan, 2003). Thus, speaking is the most helpful skill that English speaker users need to express their social, business, and academic ideas. Besides, it is a process where speakers build meaning through creating, producing, and delivering information to grasp people's understanding (Burns & Joyce, 2005). Also, speaking is a skill that deserves special attention as a first or second language since it is a fundamental means of learning a language. Through this skill, people can achieve social and professional goals. However, learning to speak demands more merits than learning other language skills (Bygate, 1987).

Importance of Speaking in EFL learners.

Since the objective of learning a language is to achieve communication, speaking has to be mastered by students (Syakur et al., 2020). Likewise, Leong and Ahmadi (2017) stated that speaking is critical because people are naturally prepared to speak before they read and write, and most of the time, humans use this skill to interact

with each other. Moreover, Qureshi (2007) pointed out that "without speech, a language is reduced to a mere script" (p. 10). Those, among other arguments, demonstrate the importance of developing this ability in students and not neglecting it, even though it is a considerable challenge for both the students and the teacher.

Speaking Teaching Principles

Developing speaking skills is the starting point for preparing students to use the language communicatively. Thus, speaking must accomplish the following requirements. First, learners must be exposed to meaningful activities that empower a speaking production based on real contexts. Second, equal student interaction inside the classroom improves understanding among speakers and listeners. Third, students require a stable atmosphere to participate without the fear of being criticized for making mistakes, where they feel supported and motivated to speak (Akhter, 2021).

Furthermore, speaking skill enables communication for the simple reason that when people talk, there is an interaction with the listener due to the need to inform others. Accordingly, a speaker becomes a listener and vice versa simultaneously because talking is not just saying words. Instead, it means to convey meaning to set up communication (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Finally, group work activities facilitate student-centered learning, providing opportunities to develop communication competence where students can work cooperatively to produce oral language by solving problems through critical thinking. Indeed, through this strategy, students can listen to opinions and arguments and negotiate (Meng, 2009).

Undoubtedly, teaching speaking is not just to produce some spoken words or isolated phrases but also means being immersed in the oral production to interact with the speakers. However, EFL students are worried about making mistakes and fearing criticism, low self-esteem, anxiety, usage of target language without a context, and a

learning process based on grammar structures (Baidawi, 2016), which become

challenges. To overcome such issues, Brown (1994) suggested following the speaking

principles:

- Offer students opportunities to practice fluency and accuracy altogether.

- Allow intrinsic motivation.

- Boost the use of the language in real contexts.

- Give feedback and corrections.

- Take advantage of the dual relationship between speaking and listening skills.

- Bestow students' opportunities to start oral communication.

- Stimulate students' strategies to be involved in speaking skills.

Moreover, collaborative speaking group and pair work enhance students'

speaking achievement because it positively affects oral production when learners face

anxiety, lack of self-esteem, or embarrassment (Zyoud, 2016). Indeed, Sae-Ong (2010)

remarked that pair work allows students to talk freely in English, fostering a unique

speaking environment. Also, team working is the cornerstone of cooperative learning

and a student-centered approach that facilitate meaningful communication among

learners.

Additionally, since Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) introduces

authentic communication, it is vital to consider its principles to support English oral

production. Hence, Richards (2006) stated some principles to achieve English-speaking

production. They are the following:

- Language is a tool for social interaction, where speakers can communicate
  using real contexts.

- Expose learners to situations that they have already known.

- Students' mistakes are allowed because the most crucial is to use the target language.

- Bear in mind that speaking, reading, and listening are connected.

- Grammar rules have to be deduced from the context.

Speaking Components

Speaking is a complex language skill and involves EFL students working on the requirements or components to perform the oral production, which includes grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, pronunciation, and fluency (Harris, 1974, as cited in Kurniati et al., 2015). Besides the mentioned elements, Rahman and Deviyanti (2012) added accuracy as a crucial aspect to consider during the speaking performance.

Grammar.

Apsari (2018) stated that grammar is the system of rules and structures that help users organize sentences to convey a precise meaning. The structures include understanding the function of words inside sentences to join them using appropriate connectors. Thus, students can quickly and accurately transfer feelings and thoughts by grasping grammar and English structures. On the other hand, if learners do not know those rules, there will be much wordiness without sense.

Vocabulary.

Kiliç (2019) pointed out that vocabulary is the set of words learners must master to communicate and express ideas straightforwardly according to specific contexts. Therefore, there is a crucial correlation between speaking proficiency and vocabulary knowledge (Khan et al., 2018). In other words, the number of words speakers use or domain will help them express their thoughts easily without hesitation. Accordingly, learning and acquiring vocabulary is essential in learning English as a Foreign Language because knowing new English words will allow people to express themselves

with less effort. Also, communication cannot be held without vocabulary, so it plays a crucial role in the interaction between speakers and listeners (Dakhi & Fitria, 2019).

Comprehension.

Comprehension of spoken language occurs when a person can initiate and respond to the speech (Kurniati et al., 2015). Accordingly, comprehension is a strong indicator of people's progress in speaking. Furthermore, since the demand for communication using the English language between non-native speakers rather than between native and non-native speakers has increased, comprehensibility has become a fundamental element of oral skills worldwide (Howlader, 2010). Hence, this speaking component has to be enriched and accomplished in the EFL classroom.

Pronunciation.

According to Pourhosein (2012), the correct pronunciation is paramount in the learners' communicative competence and increases self-esteem and confidence. Indeed, inaccurate pronunciation decreases self-confidence and increases anxiety, generating pronunciation anxiety, a feeling of uneasiness that faces students due to an undesirable self-perception about pronunciation.

Namaziandost et al. (2018) claimed that "pronunciation… involves wider dimensions of spoken language such as speed of speech, tone, pausing patterns, intonation, and even the utilize of our complete bodies as supplementary devices for getting spoken messages across" (p. 85). In other words, pronunciation allows the production of English sound systems that must be clear for speakers and listeners to ensure communication flow among them (Pratiwi et al., 2021). Gilakjani (2011) study revealed that pronunciation comprises three suprasegmental features: stress, intonation, and rhythm.

First, "stress is the relative emphasis that may be given to certain syllables in a word, or certain words in a phrase or sentence" (Himadri, & Sharma, 2018, p 115). Thus, stress is like an accent in the syllables that will be louder for stressed than non-stressed ones. Second, in the speech of an utterance, the intonation is noticed, which can be either rising or falling in the speaker's voice. Therefore, it helps to change the function of a statement produced by the speaker, either affirmative or negative sentences, questions, or exclamations. Also, speakers can express the level of their moods, attitudes, and reactions (Wongsuriya, 2020). Finally, rhythm is the regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables and pauses (Celce-Murcia, 1994).

Fluency.

Speaking fluency is the ability to keep talking spontaneously without hesitation. Also, a fluent speaker has the opportunity to produce and receive language at an appropriate pace (Ho, 2018). Furthermore, Fillmore et al. (1979) specified that fluent English speakers mean that they can first talk lengthy without stopping a lot. Second, they will structure sentences with semantic coherency. Third, they will use the correct phrases, words, and expressions in different contexts. Finally, they will express what they are saying with elegance by using their creativity and imagination.

Accuracy.

Accuracy measures the ability to correct usage and application of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation in delivering a speech. Consequently, an accurate speaker can produce oral English with free error speech (Mart, 2012). In other words, speaking accurately means producing the target language based on its rules system (Skehan, 1996).

Speaking Difficulties

Several studies have shown that EFL students face difficulties developing speaking competence. The main factors affecting students' speaking skills are linguistic and non-linguistic (Clement & Kruidenier, 1983). In addition to those aspects, Hawa et al. (2021) attested that mother tongue use is another issue that can cause speaking barriers to EFL students.

Linguistic Factors.

According to Hanifa (2018), linguistic factors affect the EFL learners' previous knowledge because they impede their linguistic competence. Students usually struggle to generate ideas when they are asked to speak about unfamiliar topics. Consequently, it is essential to propose exciting and well-known themes for the students to achieve good speaking quality. Moreover, conceptualization, formulation, and articulation of the spoken language are involved in this factor (Levelt, 1989).

Likewise, some linguistic difficulties that students have to deal with when developing their oral skills, such as problems with grammar structures, limitations of vocabulary, and wrong pronunciation (Foppoli, 2009). Furthermore, Mahripah (2014, as cited in Leong & Ahmadi, 2017) stated that vocabulary, syntax, semantics, and phonology are some linguistic components that impact EFL students' speaking skills. In addition, all these elements can affect understanding, causing embarrassment and hesitation when students are asked to speak**.**

No-linguistic Factors.

Zayed and Al-Ghamdi (2019) explained that the no-linguistic or affective element significantly impacts the accomplishment or failure of learning any foreign language because it belongs to the emotions and learners' personalities. In other words, the learning process is supported if students have a positive attitude toward learning L2. Otherwise, a negative perspective becomes a barrier to the target language acquisition.

Al Nakhalah (2016) considered lack of motivation, shyness, low confidence, fear of mistakes, and anxiety as part of the affective component. Furthermore, Arifin (2017) asserted that even though conversation inside the classroom is the key to achieving language skills, students prefer to avoid talking due to inhibitions towards verbal participation.

The Overuse of Mother Tongue Language.

Using the mother tongue in excess in the EFL environment causes a low performance of oral English production since students, instead of trying to use the English language, often transfer their L1 to the target language. In addition, the excessive use of L1 reduces the English interaction among students causing dependency on the mother tongue (Hawa et al., 2021).

Likewise, Al Hosni (2014) pointed out that it is a disadvantage for the students to share the same mother tongue in the classroom because they find it easier to communicate with each other using their language to prevent mistakes. Indeed, the lack of exposure to the target language is another significant barrier to achieving oral communication.

Pair-work in Speaking

Pair-work is a method that allows students to increase their participation and language use. This technique can be immersed in a countless number of activities, and it can work to develop reading, writing, and speaking skills (Harmer, 2001). In this scenario, interaction becomes the most significant element for L2 learners, and interactive language activities are essential to achieving communication (Curtain & Dahlburg, 2010). Besides, L2 students must express themselves orally to achieve the target language based on the cognitive learning theory and second-language acquisition theory. Thus, while students work cooperatively, their language use increases and their

language experiences become more meaningful for them. Therefore, teachers must provide students with opportunities that multiply interpersonal communication (Lombardi & Oblinger, 2017).

Furthermore, Jones (2007) explained that pair work enables more student interaction than individual or group work, where there are not enough opportunities for every group member's participation. Hence, it is crucial to apply pair-work activities when teaching L2 students speaking skills. That is why it is necessary to carry out a teaching speaking procedure divided into three steps: before, during, and after. In the first step, "before," the students are divided into pairs while the teacher gives them instructions about the activity they will do. In the second step, "during," the teacher monitors the student's performance and helps them when necessary. In the last step, "after," the teacher gives the students feedback to allow them to talk about their performance (Harmer, 2001). Moreover, students have to be paired, considering their knowledge about the proposed topics so they can support each other and complete the assignment (Alfonseca et al., 2006).

Methodology

Design

This research is carried out based on a descriptive study modality which involves collecting data about the object of study to interpret and report it correctly. Since this method includes gathering and analyzing information properly (Kurtz & Mayo, 2012), it is useful to develop this project successfully Furthermore, Bloomfield and Fisher (2019) pointed out that a descriptive study follows the steps needed to answer the proposed research questions. The authors mentioned that researchers become architects who have first to state the problem object of study, then set up the research questions, and finally answer critical questions, such as what are the research questions?

What are the variables? Where and when will the data be collected? And what will be the setting object of study?

This study uses the survey as the primary tool of collecting data that helps researchers determine the difficulties participants face when speaking in English. As a result, data from the surveys enabled them to answer research questions (Koh & Owen, 2000). Hellerstein (2008) argued that quantitative data are numbers collected over a specific study based on a unit of measure that will be uniform to warrant meaningfulness. Therefore, statistical methods will help organize and classify the collected data. Besides, Knoke (1982) stated that there are two kinds of quantitative data discrete and continuous. The first one follows patterns of integer numbers. Contrary, the second one includes fractions and decimals.

The present descriptive study tackles the following research questions:

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

2. What type of activities have students had in classes?

3. What are students' perspectives of pair work?

Participants

This descriptive study involved seventy-six students who belong to a catholic high school in Gualaceo, Azuay- Ecuador. Hence, 25 participants were tenth graders, 26 ninth graders, and 25 eighth graders. There were thirty-three males, forty-one females, one preferred not to say the gender, and one no binary. Students' ages ranged from 12 to 15 years old. Concerning the participants' language, seventy-five students spoke Spanish and one student speak Spanish and English. Furthermore, seventy-five participants were Ecuadorian, and there was one American student. According to the students' points of view, seventy of them belonged to the middle class. Five belonged to the high-income, and one to the low-income. Additionally, all participants had internet

access from home; 88.2% had smartphones, 63.2% laptops, 44.7% desktop computers, and 27.6% tablets. Regarding English proficiency, 8 participants considered themselves as beginners, 44 in a basic level, 20 in an intermediate level, and 4 in an advanced level. In the English classes, the students have practiced the four language skills, but most of them found it difficult to express themselves orally in English.

Instruments

A survey was used to answer the research questions and gather students' information in the institution lab, the link was placed on the computers in advance. This survey consisted of two parts, the demographic and the speaking perspectives. The first considered the students' age, gender, language, ethnicity, nationality, social-economic class, English proficiency level, access to technology and the internet, and the device students use to connect to the internet. The second was about the speaking perspectives, which consisted of twenty-one questions mixed between multiple-choice, open-ended, and Likert scale options. The questions were in English and in Spanish to avoid misunderstanding.

Data Analysis

To answer the proposed research questions, the data from the forms was transferred into an Excel spreadsheet to analyze and code. Then, the document was uploaded to an SPSS program to get the means from the data and displayed in tables with the corresponding description under them. Regarding the qualitative analysis, four open questions were formulated to know students' perspectives on English learning background, why learners cannot speak English outside classes, drawbacks/benefits of working in pairs, and other challenges and limitations students have to speak in English.

To analyze the qualitative data, the investigators used the grounded theory (GT) approach, which gives the foundation to collect, synthesize, research, and conceptualize

data for theory construction based on grouping the compiled information using the open coding step (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Thus, this descriptive study formulated five categories or codes: English learning background, struggles in Speaking, English activities, English Speaking activities, and Students' perspectives towards pair work. Then, using the axial code, which sets up the relationship between categories, the five categories mentioned earlier give rise to the last category: Factors that interfere with the correct speaking skill development.

Ethical Considerations

Ravid (2019) highlighted some ethical considerations that researchers must contemplate when planning a study to protect participants' rights. In this scenario, researchers must inform participants about the survey and guarantee their confidentiality. Likewise, parents or legal guardians must provide consent for minors. Moreover, if the study is carried out in a school, the researcher must have permission from the supervisors.

The researcher asked for permission from the institution to conduct this research. Also, since students were under 18, their parents were informed and consented to apply the surveys. Furthermore, students' identities stayed anonymous. In addition, the researchers explained to the participants the study's objective to obtain reliable answers.

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Results

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The purpose of this section is to respond to the three research questions which have to do with the students' difficulties in speaking in English, the speaking activities participants developed, and their perspectives toward pair work. Quantitative results are presented in tables through the means with the corresponding interpretation, as well as a brief description of the quantitative data as demonstrated bellow:

Intending to achieve the results of the first research question, "What are students' difficulties in speaking in English?" participants' answers were collected in a Likert scale format with five different options, which were labeled as *Great extent* (5), *A lot* (4), *Some* (3), *A little bit* (2), and *None* (1).

Table 1.

Difficulties in Speaking.

When you speak in English, you…	Mean
feel confident about the topic	3.82
know what to say	3.01
respond quickly	2.51
look for words to respond correctly	3.59
translate everything you want to say	3.70
your pronunciation is clear	2.78
your speech is free of errors	2.92
say phrases	3.33
can interact in a conversation	2.67
feel embarrassed about making mistakes	3.37
understand what the other person is saying	2.91
speak without many pauses	2.93
speak spontaneously	2.58
consider that you speak correctly	2.59

have a good intonation of questions	3.07
have a good intonation of sentences	3.14
have a good pronunciation	2.87
use word stress	2.84
use sentence stress	2.87

According to the results, students felt confident with the topic developed in the speaking classes (3.82). It shows that topics were not a significant barrier. Furthermore, students could say phrases (3.33) and understand what others say (2.91). However, students looked for words to answer correctly (3.59) and translated everything they wanted to say (3.70). Consequently, they found it difficult to interact in a conversation (2.67) and speak spontaneously (2.58). In addition, students felt embarrassed about making mistakes when they spoke English in class (3.37).

Qualitative data demonstrated that most participants started learning English in first grade, while the minority began to study English in high school. Moreover, outcomes informed students struggle to master their listening and speaking skills. They find difficulties trying to understand audios in English. They stated, *"I have difficulties understanding certain words because they sound similar." "My greatest difficulty has been listening to English because I do not understand." "My difficulty is listening to the audios since it is difficult for me to understand them and respond."* Regarding speaking skills, students said, *"I do not pronounce the words well and do not know their meaning." "I have difficulties when I speak because it is difficult for me to speak fluently."*

Based on the information about students' English usage, the answers evidenced that most learners did not speak English outside the classroom since they did not need to talk in English to interact with people around them. Thus, one student answered, *"I do not need to speak English because everything I interact with is in Spanish."* Besides, even when students enjoy English, they have no one to speak English with. One student wrote, *"I have no one to talk to in English outside the class. Sometimes I try to watch movies in English. I love listening to music in English."*

In contrast, 21 students use English in different situations because they use it to communicate with their family members who live in the United States. *"Sometimes I talk to my cousins from the United States because they do not know much Spanish,"* a student reported. Likewise, learners use English during their leisure time. For instance, one student affirmed, *"I use English to talk to my Minecraft friends from other places."*

To answer the second research question, "What type of activities have students had in classes?" two Likert scales were completed by the students. The first scale illustrated the English activities that participants did in their classes. That information is evidenced in Table 2 with the standards, *I do not like this type of activity, I would like to do it*, *I have not done it*, and *I have done it.* Meanwhile, the other Likert scale gathered data about participants' speaking activities in class. Thus, in Table 3, the results are displayed with the mean using the scale *I do not like* (1), *I would like* (2), *No* (3), and *Yes* (4):

Table 2.

English activities.

Items	I do not like this type of activity	I would like to do it	I have not done it	I have done it

Fill in the space with correct grammar.	1	15	1	59
Write the correct answers to questions to practice grammar.	1	18	7	50
Practice specific vocabulary in writing activity or topic from the book.	5	9	4	58
Practice specific vocabulary of an activity or topic from the book orally.	8	13	11	44
Oral practice with the vocabulary of personal interest.	5	19	18	34
Written practice with the vocabulary of personal interest.	6	18	11	41
Oral pair work activity in the classroom.	2	11	10	53
Pair work in writing activities in the classroom.	3	6	5	62
Pair work in general outside the classroom.	4	23	30	19

Table 2 reveals the results of English activities carried out by the participants in the class. In agreement with their answers, pair work in writing is the main activity they practiced. Also, learners used to do activities including filling in the space with correct grammar and practicing specific vocabulary in writing activity or topic from the book.

Furthermore, participants were involved in oral pair work activities in the classroom.

However, most did not have the opportunity to work in pairs outside the classroom.

Table 3.

Speaking activities.

In English class, have you…	Mean
created a short speech?	3.11
made an oral presentation?	3.32
participated in a forum	3.05
commented on a general topic?	3.46
created dialogues to practice with peers?	3.36
written dialogue with ideas from the book?	3.51
practiced a dialogue about free ideas?	3.43
listened to your peer's recording?	3.33
recorded audios?	3.28
provided feedback on your peers' oral participation?	3
self-assessed your oral participation?	3.32
used rubrics to provide feedback?	3.25

Concerning speaking activities, Table 3 testifies that participants wrote

dialogues with ideas from the book (3.51). Likewise, they commented on a general

topic (3.46). Additionally, students created conversations to practice with their peers

(3.36), using free ideas (3.43).

Finally, a Likert scale was applied to answer the third research question, *"What*

are students' perspectives of pair work?" The standards used for this scale were *Totally*

agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2), and Totally disagree (1). The results are

provided in Table 4:

Table 4.

Students' perspectives toward pair work.

Item	Mean
Pair work helps practice speaking	2.51
Pair work for speaking is difficult because the students who know more dominate the conversation	2.91
It is advisable, although some pairs speak slowly	2.64
It is advisable, although some pairs do not pronounce correctly	2.84
The pair makes constant interruptions	3.17
It takes too much time	2.99
It is good if I work with a partner, I choose	2.70

Table 4 highlights the participants' perspectives regarding pair work when

practicing speaking. A low average of students considered pair work is useful to

practice speaking (2.51) and they found it difficult because pairs make constant

interruptions (3.17). Furthermore, there were few students who thought working in pairs

could take too much time (2.99). In the item that mentioned that students who know more dominate the conversation, a low score was obtained (2.91). Additionally, the students demonstrated a negative attitude towards the perspectives that pair work is advisable although some classmates speak slowly (2.64) and do not pronounce correctly (2.84). Concerning the item of choosing the partner to work with, a low average was found (2.70).

Beyond those results, the open-ended question reported some disadvantages of working in pairs. For example, some students claim that there is always a classmate who does not work hard enough. *"One of the most frequent difficulties is that the other member does not work and do the tasks, so I have to insist,"* declared a student. Another student wrote, *"What is most complicated for me is that in the end, I do the work alone without any contribution from my partner."* Likewise, participants mentioned complications related to different English levels among classmates. Hence, a learner said, *"Sometimes my partner does not understand English, and we cannot understand each other." "When working in pairs, my classmates speak English, and I do not understand what they say. Thus, I better start bothering them."* another student pointed out.

However, some positive aspects of pair work were found. Most students agreed that working in pairs allowed them to give and receive feedback. A student expressed, *"An advantage is that you know your partner, and you can give each other feedback without making us feel bad."* Another participant claimed, *"The advantage is that my partner helps me, and I help him, even though I do not know much English."*

Furthermore, students said that working in pairs allows them to share ideas, give opinions, and learn something new. For example, a student answered, *"I do not have*

*difficulties working in pairs because we can work, comment, and provide opinions or example*s."

Discussion

The outcomes demonstrated that students struggled with both linguistic and no-linguistic elements when they spoke in English, including a lack of vocabulary knowledge, a tendency to translate everything they wanted to say, and a feeling of embarrassment when speaking. Those difficulties resulted from deficient exposure to meaningful activities, unequal student interaction, and an unsuitable environment (Akhter, 2021).

Likewise, the results proved that learners faced problems when trying to understand what other people say, which implies that their listening ability is also affected. Therefore, Meng (2009) suggested group activities that involve solving problems through critical thinking. These allow students to develop communicative competence where participants can produce oral language, listen to opinions, and negotiate the meaning.

Moreover the dual relation between speaking and listening skills is essential to strengthening both language abilities. Concerning speaking activities, students prefer to write dialogues with ideas from the book. However, Richards (2006) pointed out that speakers can communicate with each other using real context and being exposed to familiar situations. Sometimes topics from the book do not match the student's real life. Indeed, Brown (1994) suggested increasing the use of the target language in authentic contexts to achieve communication. Also, results showed that students commented on a general topic.

Nevertheless, allowing intrinsic motivation is beneficial to overcoming students' difficulties in speaking. In this scenario, students' intrinsic motivation cannot be

guaranteed by commenting on a general topic. Finally, learners created dialogues to practice with their peers using free ideas. To expand this type of interaction in the classroom, the instructor has to allow students to make mistakes, emphasize fluency and accuracy, teach grammar rules from context, and connect speaking, reading, and listening skills.

Concerning the students' perspective toward pair work, participants did not consider pair work a good technique to improve speaking skills. They found difficulties when working with a partner with a lower English level or who did not participate efficiently. Hence, they preferred to choose their partners. When pairing students, the teacher has to consider students' abilities to help them complete a task successfully (Alfonseca et al., 2016).

In contrast, participants also mentioned that working in pairs allows them to give and receive feedback, to feel less nervous, and to interact more with their classmates by sharing ideas, giving opinions, and learning from each other. As stated by Lombardi and Oblinger (2017), it is crucial to boost students to increase their language experiences by providing them with opportunities to work cooperatively. In addition, working in pairs facilitates more communication than individual and group work (Jones, 2007).

Conclusion

Speaking is a complex skill that demands teachers' and students' time and effort. In addition, a suitable atmosphere that aids learners in achieving oral communication is necessary. However, many factors, such as linguistic and no-linguistic issues and an inadequate environment, negatively affect speaking development and trigger students' difficulties in improving their oral skills. This study evidences that learners lack vocabulary knowledge to translate what they want to communicate and have trouble understanding what others say. On the other hand, learners are immersed in a feeling of

embarrassment that inhibits them from talking in English. Additionally, students feel demotivated to use English because they do not need to speak English to interact in authentic contexts.

Besides, this study indicates that students perform some activities, including writing dialogues with ideas from the book, commenting on a topic, and creating discussions to practice with their peers using free ideas. The last task specifies classroom interaction, which is beneficial for learners.

Participants have a neutral attitude towards pair work because they found advantages and disadvantages. Students stated that there are classmates who participated inefficiently and had a different English level. Yet, they felt more comfortable interacting among themselves without or with less anxiety. Therefore, this technique in the classroom is worthwhile, even though it means some complications for certain students.

Limitations

During the development of this study, the researcher had to deal with some complications. First, a consent note was sent to the students' parents because participants were under 18, but some parents gave their consent almost at the time of answering the survey. Second, the researcher had to accommodate the students in specific places because some computers did not work. Also, the researcher took much adding the link of the survey on the computers. The researcher did this task very carefully because all students from the institution used the lab. Therefore, the link of the survey was placed on the computers a day before its application. Third, since the participants were teenagers, some of them bothered their classmates and asked the same questions to the teacher. Thus, the researcher clarified that the assignment was individual and explained that it was mandatory to answer the survey

consciously**.** Finally, it was a little complicated for the researcher to apply the survey because the participants were not her students. Hence, the help of the other researcher was essential.

Recommendations

For further study, it is necessary to consider some practical tips. First, the researcher must design a schedule with all the activities and dates. Sometimes the plan can be flexible as long as all the activities are accomplished without any excuse. Regarding the application of the surveys, the researcher should be free of other activities, including personal or professional tasks, to avoid interruptions. Also, it would be easier to give instructions if the students were divided into smaller groups.

Moreover, managing time well when developing a study is crucial because some activities deserve more time. Furthermore, it is recommendable to have a personal meeting with parents in advance and obtain their permission the same day. For a deeper study on the topic, the researcher can apply other data collection tools, including interviews, observations, and focus groups.

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