

DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING



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

Mayra Alejandra Lazo Tapia

Guide: María Rossana Ramírez Ávila

Presented as Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of Magister en Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros con Mención en la Enseñanza de Inglés. CES: RPC-SE-19-N°.140-2020. Cohort 2020 – 2021 Author's email: mayra.lazo@casagrande.edu.ec
Cuenca, September 20th, 2022.

Proyecto de Investigación

Certifico que Mayra Alejandra Lazo Tapia 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 in Speaking cuyo objetivo general es conocer desde la perspectiva de los estudiantes sus dificultades al momento de hablar en inglés. Esta información nos servirá para realizar mejoras en el proceso enseñanza-aprendizaje del idioma inglés en nuestro context.

El proyecto se implementa en varios niveles de eficiencia en inglés. En este proyecto, cada participante desarrolla la recolección de datos en un contexto educativo diferente. Las secciones de 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

Communication is essential for human beings, since, thanks to it, we can express what we feel or need. In addition, it is very important within society and thus people are able to integrate and relate in a world full of different cultures. Therefore, learning to speak English is a boundless challenge for students. This descriptive study was conducted in the city of Cuenca through a survey sent in Google Forms. Items in the survey had a Likert scale, which was applied to 70 students. The results obtained in this study were analyzed in a program called SPSS. They indicated that students' speaking problems are related to anxiety, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, pronunciation, grammar rules, and lack of vocabulary. The speaking activities they did in classes included recording audios, making oral presentations, and pair-work. Students had positive perspectives about pair work. They agreed this is advantageous to develop oral competencies. However, they mentioned that one disadvantage of pair-work is that the students with higher proficiency are the ones who speak more. This descriptive study is useful for EFL teachers who want to help students overcome the speech barriers mentioned in this study.

Keywords: speaking, speaking difficulties, EFL students, oral communication

Resumen

La comunicación es esencial para el ser humano, ya que gracias a ella podemos expresar lo que sentimos o necesitamos. Además, es muy importante dentro de la sociedad y así las personas pueden integrarse y relacionarse en un mundo lleno de culturas diferentes. Por lo tanto, aprender a hablar inglés es un reto sin límites para los estudiantes. Este estudio descriptivo se realizó en la ciudad de Cuenca a través de una encuesta dirigida en Google Forms con una escala de Likert, la cual fue aplicada a 70 estudiantes. Los resultados obtenidos en este estudio fueron analizados en un programa llamado SPSS. Indicaron que los problemas de los estudiantes para hablar están relacionados con la ansiedad, el miedo a equivocarse, la falta de confianza, la pronunciación, las reglas gramaticales y la falta de vocabulario. Las actividades de expresión oral que realizaban en las clases incluían la grabación de audios, la realización de presentaciones orales y el trabajo en parejas. Los estudiantes tenían perspectivas positivas sobre el trabajo en parejas. Estuvieron de acuerdo en que es ventajoso para desarrollar las competencias orales. Sin embargo, mencionaron que una de las desventajas del trabajo en parejas es que los estudiantes con mayor competencia son los que más hablan. Este estudio descriptivo es útil para los profesores de EFL que quieran ayudar a los estudiantes a superar las barreras del habla mencionadas en este estudio.

Palabras clave: hablar, dificultades del habla, estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera, comunicación oral

DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING

EFL Students' Difficulties in Speaking: A Descriptive Study

Today, learning English has become a necessity that people have because if somebody wants to travel, have a new job opportunity, or study abroad, he/she has to know the language in order to go beyond and communicate with almost everybody. "The English language has become an international language. Among nations, it serves as a lingua franca. It is spoken, learnt and understood even in those countries where it is not a native's language." (Qureshi, 2007, p.2).

The skill that is more indispensable at the time of communicating with other people is speaking. As Qureshi (2007) said:

"Language is a tool for communication. We communicate with others, to express our ideas, and to know others' ideas as well. Communication takes place, where there is speech. Without speech we cannot communicate with one another. Without speech, a language is reduced to a mere script" (p. 10).

Researchers have shown that pair work helps students to speak in a better way. Mulya (2016) wrote "The use of pair work technique in teaching speaking was found to be an effective technique for the EC students in improving their speaking performances" (p. 74). It would be interesting to try to find some reasons why students do not speak English despite having this subject usually taught since the age of 5. The students have some problems with this skill due to the fact that most of the time they have all the ideas in their heads and those ideas are in their mother tongue.

The difficulty is the moment they have to say the words in English. They feel scared embarrassed, and they do not want to make mistakes in front of their classmates. It is one of the biggest challenges that teachers have to face inside the classroom. Al Nakhalah (2016) cited "The primary reason of fear of mistake is that students are afraid of looking foolish in front of other people and they are concerned about how other will see them" (p. 101). For this

DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING

reason, it is important and necessary to try to look for some catchy strategies to make students feel engaged at the moment of speaking.

Bahrani and Toltani (2012) said “One way to tackle this problem is to find the root of the problem and start from there” (p. 26). These activities should be based on the students’ likes or needs and in that way; they will also motivate learners to speak in a freely way even though they make mistakes.

Another important aspect is that the teacher should not correct all the time when the student is speaking or stop him/her to make clarifications. Gumbaridze (2013) pointed out “Inadequate and undue correction destroys the natural flow of speaking practice and it can be misleading or debilitating just at the very moment when students try to activate a foreign language” (p. 1661). It is better to let them feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions. It will create a friendly environment between the students and the speaking skill.

According to the survey that has been applied to a group of 70 students in a private high school in Cuenca, the results demonstrated that there are some troubles at the time of producing communication. For this reason, this study aims to analyze these difficulties found during the survey application.

Lately, several authors have endeavored to identify what problems students encountered when they have to speak. Many researchers have carried out descriptive studies exploring speaking struggles. For instance, Putri et al. (2020) said “Many learners lack the necessary vocabulary to get their meaning across, and consequently, they cannot keep the interaction going” (p. 119). In addition, Pratiwi and Prihatini (2021) stated “It is also about the motivation of the students' itself in speaking class. They do not think that learning or speaking English is important skill to be mastered” (p.43). Moreover, Jaelani and Zabidi (2020) highlighted “Most students find it difficult because of internal factors, namely feeling anxious and afraid of incorrect pronunciation. This is of course related to external factors

DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING

such as; do not have good pronunciation, lack vocabulary, and do not master grammar” (p. 52).

On the other hand, according to the national context, there are few descriptive studies about students’ speaking problems. Alcívar (2021) wrote “Similarly, students are reluctant to speak, they do not feel confident enough and felt fear of making mistakes and being exposed to their classmates’ comments and teacher correction” (p. 22). In relation to pair work, Ocaña (2021) said “Results show that the majority of students prefer working in groups in order to decrease the level of speaking anxiety” (p. 11-12).

Literature Review

This section gives a brief overview about speaking and its components with the aim of leading to a better understanding of the variables in this study. First, there is a definition of the speaking skill. Second, speaking teaching principles are presented. Third, the speaking components (fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, pronunciation, comprehension, stress, and intonation) are listed and explained briefly. Finally, similar research conducted to explore speaking difficulties that EFL students face are summarized in the last part.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the difficulties EFL students have when they want or try to speak in English. In some cases, people say that they can understand English when they read or when they listen to it, but they cannot speak it. It will be interesting to try to find an explanation for this situation. It is necessary to have a clearer idea about what activities students prefer, to improve their speaking role in class. Bahrani and Soltani (2012) mentioned “One way to encourage such learners to begin to participate is to help them build up a stock of minimal responses that they can use in different types of exchanges” (p. 27). Teachers have to make their students feel motivated to make them do their best at the moment of speaking in front of the class.

Speaking

DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING

According to Kayi (2006), it is an important aspect of learning and a process in which learners generate and exchange meanings through verbal and nonverbal symbols, depending on the circumstances. Speaking is not a game of memorization or repetition. Instead of useless talks, kids' communication abilities should be developed. Knowing vocabulary and grammar rules is not enough.

In addition, Hussain (2017) wrote:

“Speaking is the most important skill because this is one of the abilities that is needed to perform a conversation. English speaking is not an easy task because speakers should know many significant components like pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension” (p. 35).

Speaking Teaching Principles

One of the most important teaching principles is motivation. It is in many cases the key to success during the oral production. Thituyetanh (2015) said “That is the effort to involve students in the lesson that they can feel inspired enough to speak” (p. 59). As a result, learners may have a strong urge to speak a foreign language. Qamar (2016) claimed “Motivating students to learn includes not only stimulating them to see the value of what they are learning, but also providing them with guidance from an activity how to go about learning it” (p. 296).

But not only motivation is needed. In terms of communication, it is indispensable the teachers' role. Koran (2015) said “Thus, another important function of teachers is to provide opportunities for learners by encouraging them to use English not only in the classroom but also in their daily interaction with their classmates” (p. 406).

Another aspect to be considered, is the level of difficulty of the speaking activities. Thituyetanh (2015) wrote “Teachers should give appropriate level of difficulty, not too difficult nor too easy for students may feel bored” (p. 50).

DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING

Confidently, teachers must use different oral approaches to help students strengthen the lack or weak communication in English. Qamar (2016) alleged “This bonding as a team gives the motivation to continue the process of learning even outside the classroom” (p. 295). Hence, Thituyetanh (2015) stated “They need to talk and to give their own opinions in English in meaningful contexts so that they can develop their ability to produce language in real life or to use it as a means to do other jobs” (p. 49).

Speaking Components

Nazarova (2021) mentioned that speaking has three components: speakers, listeners, and utterances. These components allow students to develop, express, and receive opinions or sentiments. Harris (1974), on the other hand, believed that speaking has five components: comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency.

Fluency

Language fluency is one of a variety of terms used to characterize or measures a person’s language ability. It is also related to the speed or velocity people have at the moment of expressing. Nazarova (2021) wrote “Signs of fluency include a reasonably quick speed of speaking and only a small quantity of pauses and “ums” or “ers” (p. 267). To know if somebody is fluent, Binder et al. (2002) said “It’s not just about saying the correct words. It’s also about achieving a useful pace or speed of performance” (p. 2).

Accuracy

Lan (1994) said that “Accuracy refers to the use of correct forms where utterances do not contain errors affecting the phonological, syntactic, semantic or discourse features of a language” (p. 2). Derakhshan et al. (2016) stated that “Accuracy consists of using vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation through some activities” (p. 178).

Speaking accuracy lies on acceptable pronunciation, correct grammar and appropriate word choice. To have a good accuracy speaking level, it is necessary to have an acceptable

DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING

pronunciation, correct grammar, and appropriate word choice (Firman, 2012.) Guato (2022) stated “Accuracy is the second dimension that refers to how learners use the target language in speech and writing and gauging the quantity of unconventionality from the standard, it also has a solid relationship to the linguistic norm” (p. 25).

Vocabulary

Vocabulary is an important speaking component as Dakhi and Fitria (2019) said “Nothing can be done without the vocabulary. It is the basis for communication.” (p. 16). It is necessary to mention the way people get new vocabulary during the language acquisition. For instance, Celik (2003) said that “The introduction of new vocabulary can be carried out through the use of realia, pictures, mimicry, contrast, enumeration, explanation, translation, and so on” (p.363).

Dang and Webb (2020) highlighted “Good vocabulary teachers should be aware that knowing a word involves knowing its form (spoken form, written form, and word parts), meaning (form and meaning, concepts and referent, association) and use (grammatical functions, collocations, constraints of use” (p. 215).

Pronunciation

Pronunciation states on how understandable a person is at the time of speaking and it is the primary medium through which we bring our use of language to the attention of other people. Laroy (1995) said “We need to learn to perceive the sound of a new language in its own right, as if we were hearing it, like babies, for the first time” (p. 10).

This is not indispensable to focus on pronunciation just to make students sound like native speakers of English. Celce-Murcia et. al (1996) mentioned “A more modes and realistic goal is to enable learners to surpass the threshold level so that their pronunciation will not detract from their ability to communicate” (p. 8).

Stress and Intonation

DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING

These elements refer to speaking production. Yangklang (2013) said “One major reason why foreign speakers of English have difficulties with pronunciation is due to the lack of the stress knowledge of the new language being learned” (p. 446). So, stress is an important aspect of English pronunciation. Regarding to intonation, it is the music of speech that is a crucial factor in speaking (Yangklang, 2013). Harmer (2007) as cited in Yangklang, (2013) mentioned that in addition, intonation plays a crucial role in spoken discourse because it indicates when speakers have finished the points they want to make to the people, continue with a turn and announce agreement or disagreement.

Speaking Activities

When teaching Speaking, it is necessary to focus on designing activities that go with the students' necessities such as their level, age, and background. Kayi (2006) highlighted “ESL teachers should create a classroom environment where students have real-life communication, authentic activities, and meaningful tasks that promote oral language” (p. 1-2). For instance, Al-Garni and Almuhammadi mentioned that their research results showed that EFL students perceive CLT activities as motivating. In addition, students feel more motivated when they engage in communicative activities that help them improve their fluency, pronunciation and performance in communicating in English. They feel more confident when interacting with each other in communicative activities such as class discussions, games, pair/group work, role plays and group oral presentations (Al-Garni & Almuhammadi, 2019).

Sirisrimangkorn (2018) suggested the inclusion of project-based learning focusing on drama to improve the speaking skill. He alleged that by using this activity, the learners' autonomy is developed and the research skill is improved. Moreover, critical thinking is another activity proposed for some authors. Caesar (2021) established that involving critical thinking activities to teach speaking skills plays an important role in improving students'

DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING

speaking. These activities provide apprentices with additional opportunities to consistently practice and demonstrate in front of teachers and other students when they express their thoughts on specific topics. Other issues of engaging critical thinking include improving students' confidence and developing public speaking skills.

Regarding to pair work, Achmad (2014) said, “Pair-work is more efficient than group or whole class discussion as every student gets the opportunity to speak, especially for introvert students who are irresolute to talk in front of the whole class or teachers” (p. 155).

After identifying students' oral production problems, this paper aims to explore and identify specific difficulties encountered by English language learners in oral language. This study addresses the following research questions:

- What are students' difficulties in speaking in English?
- What type of activities students prefer for speaking?
- What are students' perspectives of pair work?

Methodology

Design

This is a descriptive study with qualitative and quantitative data analysis. According to Loeb et al. (2017), a descriptive study labels the world or phenomenon—recognizing patterns in data to answer questions about who, what, where, when, and to what extent.

This research tries to look for some explanations and answers to the research questions (What are students' difficulties in speaking? What type of activities students prefer for speaking? What are students' perspectives of pair work?). This study attempts to make a description of the most important or difficult barriers students have to face at the time of speaking English as a second language.

Most of the students do not want to speak inside and even worse outside the classroom. There must be some reasons why students do not want or like to speak English.

DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING

Motivation is one of them. The teachers have to make the students feel motivated to speak and use the language in real situations and also make them conscious of the benefits of speaking in English.

Participants

Data was gathered by applying a survey to third high school students from two classes: A and B. They were 70 students in total, 23 women and 47 men. They live in Cuenca. They were from the same academic year. They belonged to a private institution in Cuenca. Participants' average age was 17. They have a middle socioeconomic status. Spanish was the participants' L1.

Besides, students had a different English level: 1.4% advanced level, 54.3% intermediate level, 40% basic level, and 4.3% beginner level. According to the results obtained from the survey, the majority of the students had access to the internet from home and high school. Moreover, they use smartphones, tablets, and laptops most of the time to surf the internet and practice English.

Instrument

The survey was done in Google Forms and its format was in English and Spanish because of the level of the students. It was answered in a Zoom meeting because at that time there were online classes. The survey consisted of two sections. The first section had to deal with demographic information and the second section was a Likert-type questionnaire. In addition, there were open-ended and multiple-choice questions. The second section had four parts: the first part had twenty-two questions which were about students' attitudes towards speaking. The second part consisted of eleven questions related to activities to practice English. The third part showed seven questions about speaking activities. The last part concerned students' perspectives towards pair work.

Data Analysis

DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING

Once the survey was applied, it was reviewed to obtain students' results about speaking skills. Since the survey was conducted on Google forms, the first step was to download the excel document which included the table with all the data gathered from students. Then, the document was exported to the SPSS program to get descriptive statistics and finally, the results from the survey were displayed in the tables with the means and a different process was taken in order to classify the open-ended questions.

Ethical Considerations

This survey had followed some ethical standards. First, the principal's permission was needed to apply the survey to the students. The answers were anonymous. It is necessary to be honest, clear, and reflexive in analyses. Likewise, Moore and Llompart (2017) said "Whichever way data is stored, it is imperative to keep it backed up, absolutely always!"

Results

The outcomes are shown in the tables below, and the survey was used to identify students' speaking difficulties, interesting speaking activities that students use in class, and the perspectives of working in pairs to improve students' speaking skills.

According to the first research question, what are students' difficulties in speaking in English? Results were collected using a Likert scale. The scales were great extent (5), a lot (4), some (3), a little bit (2), and none (1). Therefore, the following table summarizes the most important results of the first study problem.

Table 1

Difficulties in speaking

When you speak, you	Mean
Feel confident about the topic.	3.53
Know what to say.	3.24
Respond quickly.	3.06

DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING

Look for words to respond correctly.	3.69
Translate what I want to say.	3.56
My pronunciation is clear.	3.39
My speech is free of errors.	3.00
I can say phrases.	3.79
I can interact in a conversation.	3.46
Feel embarrassed of making mistakes.	3.56
I understand what the other person is saying.	3.73
Speak without many pauses.	3.16
Speak spontaneously.	3.07
Consider you speak correctly.	3.03
Have a good intonation of questions.	3.54
Have a good intonation of sentences.	3.46
Have a good pronunciation.	3.46
Use word stress.	3.34
Use sentence stress.	3.21
The topics are interesting.	3.53

Results indicate that students face some problems when speaking in English.

According to the survey, the students have problems to speak in English when they have to use or say certain phrases to communicate (3.79). It means they can understand what the other person is saying (3.73) and then they have the necessity to try to look for words to respond correctly (3.69) and make a better conversation. Another aspect to be considered is that students feel that their speech is not free of errors (3.00) so, it makes them consider they do not speak correctly (3.03) and they are not able to respond quickly (3.06). This can cause

DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING

anxiety in the students because of their beliefs, which most of the time are just assumptions they have as a result of their fear.

On the other hand, according to the open-ended questions referring to the speaking difficulties, some students agreed that they have problems using the different verb tenses, grammar rules, vocabulary, as well as lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes on pronunciation. One of the applicants wrote, “I think that the formation of my sentences is incorrect and I am afraid of making a mistake.” In regards to fluency, a student wrote, “When I already have an idea of what I am going to say, at the time of speaking I forget the ideas and start translating in my head every single word, and finally, I get stuck.” Another issue mentioned by participants was the lack of vocabulary. One respondent expressed, “I don't know enough vocabulary to speak” and another student wrote, “I have problems when choosing the right words to express myself; most of the time I use the same words and it gets confusing for another person.” Finally, one participant said, “I can understand what people tell me in English, but I do not know how or what to answer.”

The second research question is: what type of activities students prefer for speaking? This refers to the activities that students perform in the classroom and they find interesting to do to practice and improve the speaking skill. In this section, the scales were: Yes (4), I would like (3), I don't like it (2), and No (1). The results are shown in table 2.

Table 2

Speaking activities

ITEM	Yes	No	I would like	I don't like
Created a short speech.	47	8	12	3
Made an oral presentation.	54	3	9	4
Participated in a forum.	40	19	10	1

DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING

Commented on a general topic.	49	8	12	1
Created dialogues to practice with peers.	50	5	13	2
Written a dialogue from ideas from the book.	45	9	14	2
Practiced a dialogue about free ideas.	45	8	13	4
Listen to my peers' recordings.	39	13	14	4
Record audios.	58	4	6	2
I have provided feedback to my peers' oral participation.	22	27	13	8
Self-assess my oral participation.	35	18	15	2
Used rubrics to provide feedback.	41	15	11	3

The speaking activities that students enjoy doing the most are recording audios since 58 respondents reported that. On the other hand, 54 students expressed that they have made oral presentations. So, it is clear that these are the most developed activities in this group. Furthermore, another activity practiced in class is creating dialogues to be practiced with peers. Most of the time, working with peers is beneficial for students because they feel more confident between them. The results show that 50 participants prefer doing this to improve the skill. Moreover, 49 applicants indicated that commenting on a general topic is a good way to practice speaking. Likewise, 47 students had created short speeches to improve this skill. In addition, two groups of 45 students agree that writing dialogues from ideas from the book and practicing a dialogue about free ideas, are also good ideas at the moment of speaking practice in class. According to the use of rubrics to provide feedback, 41 respondents have done it to train speaking in class. Nevertheless, the negative response lies in providing feedback to students' peers' oral participation, just 22 members have taken part on it.

In the third research question, what are students' perspectives of pair work? the students answered based on their personal opinion. These were about the activities they

DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING

use in the classroom to improve their oral communication in groups. Participants had to choose the options using the following scales: totally agree (5), agree (4), neutral (3), disagree (2), and totally disagree (1). The responses are presented below in table 3.

Table 3

Students' perspectives towards pair work for speaking

ITEM	MEAN
Pair work is useful to practice speaking.	3.21
Pair work for speaking is difficult because the student who knows more dominates the conversation.	2.80
It is advisable, although some pairs speak slowly.	3.07
It is advisable, although some pairs do not pronounce correctly.	2.99
The pair makes constant interruptions.	2.40
It takes too much time.	2.70
It is good if I work with the pair I choose.	3.27

Many students agree that pair work is useful to practice speaking (3.21) but a large majority coincided that working in pairs is good if they are the ones who choose their pair. The average score for this item is 3.27. An important aspect to be taken into account is that the students' concern is that working in pairs is difficult because the student who knows more, dominates the conversation (2.80). They also consider that pairs' interruptions (2.40) can be a barrier at the moment of speaking in pairs, besides some of the students speak slowly (3.07).

According to the open-ended questions, participants distinguished some good points and some disadvantages. Some students believe that pair work is good because they feel more confident talking with peers instead of the teacher. They also precise that they are in the same level, so they can understand each other better.

DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING

Referring to the positive aspects, a respondent wrote, “One advantage is that you can share ideas and correct a mistake.” Someone replied, “It is a much more entertaining and effective way to learn.” Another positive aspect according to a participant is that there may be immediate error correction.

In regard to the disadvantages, some applicants clarify that it is not a good idea to work in pairs due to the lack of responsibility of some students. This happens because they do not have a good relationship with all the members in the class or because sometimes the pairs do not want to work. To conclude, a student wrote, “It is simply not possible to work as a couple because sometimes the pair is distracted or not interested in doing anything.”

Results exposed that students have difficulties at the time of speaking because they do not know the different verb tenses, knowledge of grammar, the lack of vocabulary, and they do not want to speak because of the fear of making mistakes. In relation to the activities, they usually record audios, make oral presentations, create dialogues to practice with peers, and write and practice dialogues about free ideas or ideas taken from the book. Pair work had a good acceptance by the students to improve speaking and even more when they choose their peers; even though, sometimes students do not want to work responsibly.

Discussion

Results from previous studies and outcomes from the survey are compared and contrasted in this section. Unquestionably speaking is the most important skill because we need of this to perform a conversation and speaking is not just producing sounds or saying words. Oral communication has to deal with some components such as grammar, vocabulary, fluency, grammar, pronunciation, and comprehension (Hussain, 2017).

This descriptive study revealed that students had problems at the moment of speaking because they are afraid of making mistakes. Besides, they feel anxiety because they cannot respond quickly. This result is similar to what Al Nakhalah (2016) found. It is concluded that

DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING

the main reason for the fear of failure is that students are afraid of looking thoughtless in front of others. Learners are worried about what others will think of them. Another similar study was related to pronunciation. Students said that in some cases they did not want to speak because they felt they do not have a good pronunciation. Jaelani and Zabidi (2020) stated that most students feel that the difficulties arise from internal factors; that is, they feel anxious and afraid of mispronunciation.

On the other hand, there is a study which stated a new aspect of students' speaking difficulties. It was about motivation. The study revealed that learners need to be motivated in the speaking class; otherwise, they think that learning or speaking English is not an important skill to be mastered Pratiwi and Prihatini (2021).

With regard to speaking activities, this study showed that the activities that students prefer the most are: recording audios, making oral presentations, and creating dialogues and practicing them with peers. This is similar to the Al-Garni and Almuhammadi's (2019) study. The results show that students feel more motivated when they engage in communicative activities that help improve fluency, pronunciation and performance in English. They are more confident when interacting with each other in communicative activities such as class discussions, games, pair/group work, role plays and group oral presentations Almuhammadi's (2019).

Results verified that learners have optimistic perspectives towards pair-work for oral production. Pupils were sure that pair work helps them feel more confident when talking with their peers rather than with the teacher. Achmad (2014) agreed in his study which showed that pair work is more productive than group or class discussions because each student has a chance to speak, especially introverted students who are hesitant to be in front of the class or the teacher.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that EFL students find speaking skills challenging. They need time, practice, and perseverance to master this skill. This study shows a diversity of oral communication problems. When students engage in conversation, they cannot respond spontaneously because they do not know what to say. They mentioned that this factor arose because they felt nervous when speaking English and they did not find the right words to respond and continue with the speech. They reported that they understand what other people are saying, but they do not know what to say.

Based on the results of this study, they showed that the difficulties in speaking are caused by emotional, linguistic, and social factors. First, students are hesitant to speak since they lack confidence and feel fear of making mistakes and being exposed to comments from classmates and teachers error correction. Moreover, they do not feel motivated either because they think they do not have a good level of English or because they cannot find a way to express themselves fluently.

Second, the linguistic components that limit their communicative skills are pronunciation, lack of vocabulary, grammar rules, and knowledge of verb tenses. These factors do not allow them to communicate freely and in a smooth way. Third, in relation to the social factor, students do not have opportunities to practice the language because Ecuador is a Spanish speaking country.

Likewise, the speaking activities that the students performed in the classroom according to this study are recording audios, making oral presentations, and creating dialogues to practice with peers. Regarding to pair work, the majority of student agreed that this is beneficial for their speaking practice and learning.

Limitations

DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING

This study had some drawbacks that should be considered when doing future researches. First of all, the survey was taken in a virtual mode. One of the main problems was the internet connection. Some students had very weak internet connection at the moment of taking the survey. It took more time and it caused discomfort in the students. Second, I had to ask the teacher of that hour a permission to apply the survey because I was not their teacher. Moreover, the research instrument was limited to one (survey). Nevertheless, it is necessary to implement other means of collecting data and ensure more accurate results. Finally, the pandemic has limited the personal contact with students, so it was a little difficult to let them intervene when they had some doubts or comments without distracting their classmates.

Recommendations

As a recommendation for this sort of research is to use different tools and methods to collect data, such as measuring instruments or observational methods. Further research on oral language production will contribute to the development of slight speech projects that can help and support students to overcome the oral language problems identified in this study.

References

- Achmad, D., & Yusuf, Y. Q. (2014). Observing pair-work task in an English speaking class. *International Journal of Instruction*, 7(1), 151-164.
<http://journal.unnes.ac.id/sju/index.php/elt>
- Al Nakhalah, A. M. M. (2016). Problems and difficulties of speaking that encounter English language students at Al Quds Open University. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, 5(12), 96-101.
- Alcívar Calderón, V. E. (2021). *EFL Students' Difficulties in Speaking: A Descriptive Study* (Master's thesis, Universidad Casa Grande. Departamento de Posgrado).
<http://dspace.casagrande.edu.ec:8080/handle/ucasagrande/2713>
- Al-Garni, S. A., & Almuhammadi, A. H. (2019). The effect of using communicative language teaching activities on EFL students' speaking skills at the University of Jeddah. *English Language Teaching*, 12(6), 72-86.
- Bahrani, T., & Soltani, R. (2012). How to teach speaking skill. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 3(2), 26-27
- Binder, C., Haughton, E., & Bateman, B. (2002). Fluency: Achieving true mastery in the learning process. *Professional Papers in special education*, 2
- Caesar, Y. C. (2021). *Involving critical thinking activities to teach speaking skills to EFL students (a descriptive study at Foreign Language Development Institute in Indonesia Boarding School)* (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Islam Negeri).
https://eprints.walisongo.ac.id/id/eprint/14328/1/SKRIPSI_1703046043_YUNIAR.pdf
- Celce-Murcia, M., Brinton, D. M., & Goodwin, J. M. (1996). *Teaching pronunciation: A reference for teachers of English to speakers of other languages*. Cambridge University Press. 1-429

DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING

- Celik, M. (2003). Teaching vocabulary through code-mixing. *Council of International English & Literature Journal (ACIELJ)*, 57(4), 361-369.
- Dakhi, S., & Fitria, T. N. (2019). The principles and the teaching of English vocabulary: A review. *Journal of English Teaching*, 5(1), 16
- Dang, T. N. Y., & Webb, S. (2020). Vocabulary and Good Language Teachers. In *Lessons from Good Language Teachers* (pp. 203–218). Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108774390.019>
- Derakhshan, A., Khalili, A. N., & Beheshti, F. (2016). Developing EFL learner's speaking ability, accuracy and fluency. *English Language and Literature Studies*, 6(2), 177-186.
- Firman, F. (2012). Improving The Students' Speaking Accuracy Through “Lse 9.0 Software Version”. *Exposure*, 1(2), 166-184.
- Guato Guamán, N. M. (2022). *Communicative Language Teaching Approach and Strategies to develop Speaking for students with a B1 level* (Master's thesis, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador).
- Gumbaridze, J. (2013). Error correction in EFL speaking classrooms. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 70, 1662
- Harris, D. (1974). *Testing English as a Second Language*. New York: Mc. Graw. Hill Book Company.
- Hussain, S. (2017). Teaching speaking skills in communication classroom. *International Journal of Media, Journalism and Mass Communications*, 3(3), 14-21.
- Jaelani, A., & Zabidi, O. W. (2020). Journal of English Language Teaching Junior High School Students' Difficulties of English Language Learning in the Speaking and Listening Section. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 6(1).
<http://journal.unnes.ac.id/sju/index.php/elt>

DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING

- Kayi, H. (2006). Teaching speaking: Activities to promote speaking in a second language. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 12(11), 1-6.
- Koran, S. (2015, April). The role of teachers in developing learners' speaking skill. In *Conference: 6th International Visible Conference on Educational Studies and Applied Linguistics* (pp. 400-416).
- Lan, L. S. (1994). Fluency and Accuracy in Spoken English---Implications for Classroom Practice in a Bilingual Context. *The English Teacher*, 23, 2
- Laroy, C. (1995). *Pronunciation*. Oxford University Press.
- Loeb, S., Dynarski, S., McFarland, D., Morris, P., Reardon, S., & Reber, S. (2017). Descriptive Analysis in Education: A Guide for Researchers. NCEE 2017-4023. *National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance*.
- Moore, E., & Llompart, J. (2017). Collecting, transcribing, analyzing and presenting plurilingual interactional data. In *Qualitative approaches to research on plurilingual education / Enfocaments qualitativus per a la recerca en educació plurilingüe / Enfoques cualitativos para la investigación en educación plurilingüe* (pp. 403–417). Research-publishing.net. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2017.emmd2016.638>
- Mulya, R. (2016). Teaching Speaking by Applying Pair Work Technique. *English Education Journal*, 7(1), 74-86.
- Nazarova, F. (2021). The main components of teaching speaking skills efficiently. *InterConf*. 271. Retrieved from <https://n9.cl/vzeczp>
- Ocaña Ramos, D. E. (2021). *Speaking Anxiety in Young EFL Ecuadorian Students* (Master's thesis, PUCE-Quito).
- Pratiwi, D. S., & Prihatini, C. (2021). Problems and difficulties of speaking at Muhammadiyah Lampung University students in covid pandemic. *Journal of English Education and Linguistics*, 2(1), 40-49.

DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING

- Putri, S. A., Amri, S., & Ahmad, A. (2020). The students' difficulties factors in speaking. *J-Shelves Of Indragiri (JSI)*, 1(2), 115-129.
- Qamar, M. B. (2016). The impact of learner's autonomy on teaching oral skills (speaking skills) in an EFL classroom. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 7(2), 295-296.
- Qureshi, I. A. (2007). The importance of Speaking Skills for EFL Learners. *Department of English, Alama Iqbal Open University, Pakistan. Psycholinguistics*, 10.
- Rao, P. S. (2019). The importance of speaking skills in English classrooms. *Alford Council of International English & Literature Journal (ACIELJ)*, 2 (2), 6–18.
- Stevick, E. W. (1978). Toward a Practical Philosophy of Pronunciation: Another View. *TESOL Quarterly*, 12(2), 145–150. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3585605>
- Thituyetanh, N. (2015). The key principles for development of speaking. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, 3(1), 49-53.
- Thornbury, S. (2000). Accuracy, fluency and complexity. *Readings in Methodology*, 16, 139-143
- Yangklang, W. (2013). Improving English stress and intonation pronunciation of the first year students of Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat university through an E-learning. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 91, 444-452.

DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING

Appendix 1

Survey

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

Authorization letter

Available upon request.

Appendix 3

Authorization survey

Available upon request.