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

Víctor Patricio Claudio Claudio

Guide: María Rossana Ramírez Ávila

Modality: Descriptive Study

Presented as Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of Magíster en Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros con Mención en la Enseñanza de Inglés. CES: RPC-SE-19-N˚.140-2020. Cohort 2020 - 2022 Author's email: victor.claudio@casagrande.edu. Guayaquil, February 2023.

Proyecto de Investigación

Certifico que Víctor Patricio Claudio Claudio 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. Está información nos servirá para realizar mejoras en el proceso enseñanza-aprendizaje del idioma inglés en nuestro contexto.

El proyecto se implementa en catorce contextos y niveles de eficiencia en inglés diferentes. 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

This descriptive study aimed to explore EFL students' difficulties in speaking skills at a Higher Technological Institute in Latacunga, Ecuador. The participants were 53 adult learners ranging from 21 to 50 years old who were enrolled in the Beginners and Elementary levels in the Languages Center. The instrument to collect the data was a demographic and speaking survey with multiple-choice, open-ended questions, and Likert scale options. The data was collected using Google forms, and the analysis was carried out through the SPSS statistical software. The reports displayed the mean and the frequency of the data compiled in each variable. The findings revealed that students have limitations to speak correctly because the main factor affecting their oral production is fluency. This issue is influenced by the pauses that students make when speaking. In addition, participants have practiced English filling in the space with correct grammar. Regarding pair work, students believed that it is useful to practice speaking. These findings could be beneficial to address future studies.

Keywords: EFL students, speaking difficulties, fluency, pair work

Resumen

Este estudio descriptivo tuvo como objetivo explorar las dificultades de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera para hablar en un Instituto Tecnológico Superior en Latacunga, Ecuador. Los participantes fueron 53 estudiantes adultos con edades comprendidas entre los 21 y los 50 años que estaban inscritos en los niveles principiantes y básicos en el Centro de Idiomas. El instrumento para recolectar los datos fue una encuesta demográfica y de habla con preguntas abiertas, de opción múltiple, y opciones de escala de Likert. Los datos se recogieron mediante formularios de Google y el análisis se realizó a través del software estadístico SPSS. Los informes mostraron la media y la frecuencia de los datos recopilados en cada variable. Los hallazgos revelaron que los estudiantes tienen limitaciones para hablar correctamente debido a que el principal factor que afecta su producción oral es la fluidez. Este problema está influenciado por las pausas que los estudiantes hacen al hablar. Además, los participantes han practicado inglés completando el espacio con la gramática correcta. En cuanto al trabajo en parejas, los estudiantes creen que es útil para practicar el habla. Estos hallazgos podrían ser beneficiosos para abordar futuros estudios.

Palabras clave: Estudiantes de Inglés como lengua extranjera, Dificultades para hablar, Fluidez, Trabajo en pareja.

Perspectives of EFL Students' Difficulties in Speaking

The English language has reached worldwide importance because it is the medium for international communication allowing speakers to communicate without boundaries. As a result, it is the language mostly used and common in different fields such as science, business, the internet, higher education, and tourism (Rao, 2019). Under those circumstances, there are many people around the world who want to learn English or improve their skills for either general or specific purposes, such as getting a better job, going abroad, and academic purposes, among others (Hayati, 2015). In fact, scholars who learn to speak English increase their career opportunities and can face more responsibilities and succeed in the upcoming world (Ministerio de Educación, 2016).

In Ecuador, since 2016, the objective of the English Language Curriculum has been to improve EFL learning by applying constructivist approaches to develop students' abilities to communicate and interact in a variety of situations (Ministerio de Educación, 2016). Similarly, students who are enrolled in advanced technician or higher technology careers have to reach the B1.1 or B1.2 level before graduating (Consejo de Educación Superior, 2016). In both cases, language learners have to reach the standards established by the (CEFR) Common European Framework of Reference for Languages for B1.

However, it is evident that students spend a long-time studying English going from school through university but they are still unable to communicate in English in real contexts (Akbari, 2015). As a result, the English proficiency level in Ecuador was scored as very low, ranking the country's English language competence in 18th position out of 20 countries in Latin America in 2021 (Education First, 2021).

Therefore, it is important to point out that English as a Foreign Language learners face different challenges in order to achieve learning outcomes. Wahyuningsih, and Afandi (2020) affirmed that it is harder to speak English, especially for beginner students. According to Suryani et al. (2020), the affective and cognitive are the main factors inhibiting students to develop their speaking skills. The ability to speak in another language is demanding for L2 learners, so several issues associated with emotional factors can affect student's oral performance such as higher anxiety, fear, low level of self-confidence, and nervousness (Burns & Hill, 2013; Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Hanifa, 2018; Tridinanti, 2018). On the other hand, the cognitive factors that inhibit students to speak are the lack of knowledge about grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, familiarity with the genre, and the topic (Suryani et al., 2020).

Consequently, L2 speakers could have a language acquisition barrier when they feel embarrassed to pronounce different sounds in the second language, uncomfortable in the classroom, or exhausted from their study schedules (Yule, 2010), and inhibition, lack of motivation, low participation, and overuse of the mother tongue in class (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). The teaching methods have influenced these factors because teachers have focused the teaching of the language on traditional grammar (Kurniawan & Sumani 2022). As a result, students feel demotivated to learn the language because of this old-fashion method (Kaur & Aziz, 2020). For this reason, teachers should analyze the obstacles that affect their student's performance to know how to deal with them and encourage the students to improve their skills (Tuan & Mai, 2015).

Burns (2017) highlighted that a competent speaker must be able to rapidly integrate several abilities, knowledge, and processes that result in a sociocultural, appropriate and coherent speech. Therefore, it is important for language learners to master the main components of

speaking, such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and accuracy (Hakim & Amri, 2021) in order to spontaneously understand and transmit ideas, opinions, and comments in a variety of communicative scenarios (Dueñas et al., 2015).

Several national descriptive studies have identified speaking difficulties in EFL students. For example, Coutinho et al. (2020) carried out an investigation to define the emotions that block Ecuadorian students from speaking English in the classroom, the results showed that different emotions such as making mistakes, fear of judgments, shyness, lack of confidence and anxiety hinder students from speaking English. Gonzalez et al. (2015) noticed that in the Amazon region of Ecuador students find it difficult to improve their speaking because of pronunciation and fear of making mistakes. Alcívar (2021) noticed that English language university students showed low speaking performance and deficient communicative competencies at the end of their studies; his study indicated that "students' speaking problems are related to anxiety, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, limited practice, pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and vocabulary" (p. 3).

While there has been much research on English language speaking challenges and difficulties occurring at all educational levels, few researchers have taken into consideration low speaking production in adults; whose mother tongue is not English and who attend Higher Technological Institutes. This descriptive study aimed to seek and examine the specific difficulties faced by L2 learners to develop their speaking skills by taking into account their opinions based on their experience.

Literature Review

This section gives an overview of the main theoretical concepts supported in previous research and literature analysis. Therefore, this part of the investigation contains the theory of

speaking teaching principles, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the speaking

components, and pair-work in speaking.

Speaking Teaching Principles

Teaching speaking is sharing knowledge with learners to enable them to produce speech

sounds according to the language patterns. Regarding English, teachers must develop and

employ certain methodological strategies to reach the desired learning outcomes (Marleni, 2019).

ThiTuyetAnh (2015) mentioned that "in particular, teaching speaking skills is quite challenging

as it has to comply with several principles" (p.49). Similarly, in their article, Oviedo and Mena

(2021) suggested that the main principles are to produce real communication, tolerate a learner's

mistakes, provide opportunities to develop accuracy and fluency, and learn the four basic

language skills. These principles are based on Communicative Language Teaching.

Students have to be connected with real-life situations. Therefore, the teacher has to take

into account interesting topics because, in this way, students express their ideas meaningfully

(ThiTuyetAnh, 2015). Additionally, teachers should perform speaking tasks such as information

gaps, problem-solving, and social monologues in order to encourage students to express their

ideas freely (Wang, 2014). In this way, students are encouraged to practice social interaction

directly (Kurniawan & Sumani 2022).

When students have to perform speaking activities, they often make mistakes along the

way. In fact, Wang (2014) argued that "it is possible for learners to make mistakes in face-to-

face communication" (p.111). This is not an obstacle because mistakes are part of the learning

process and especially when practicing speaking (Jatmiko, 2017). Therefore, the role of the

teacher is to be the facilitator, initiator, helper, advisor, and supporter (Ullah et al., 2021). Instead

of focusing on students' errors, teachers have to provide feedback through explicit correction,

elicitation, and repetition, which help to identify the students' mispronunciation, low accuracy, and fluency (Muhsin et al., 2016). However, negative feedback or correction all the time could demotivate students and discourage them from speaking (Tuan & Mai, 2015). This is relevant because motivation can affect the frequency of language use, eagerness to learn, goal setting, and achievement in learning which affects the success or failure of language acquisition (Kholifah et al., 2021).

Teachers must ensure that students have more opportunities to speak and develop speaking skills. Therefore, students must speak as much as possible individually, in pair work, and in group work. This will guarantee that students develop fluency and accuracy, which are part of the speaking components (Hakim & Amri, 2021). Fluency comes about when speakers are able to communicate comprehensibly without interruptions, and accuracy is the domain of language, intonation, and grammatical rules (Oviedo & Mena (2021). The responsibility of the teachers when working on accuracy is to correct pronunciation, vocabulary, and sentence structure through feedback and motivating students to express their thoughts regardless of their errors or mistakes (Suban, 2021).

Finally, students have to develop speaking along with the other skills (Kareema, 2020). The English language domain needs students to be proficient in productive and receptive skills, which involve listening, reading, speaking, and writing (Kareema, 2020). Likewise, language skills work together because learners receive information through listening and reading and produce words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs by speaking and writing (Sreena & Ilankumaran, 2019). In fact, communication occurs when someone can give and receive information when interacting with another person (Hakim & Amri, 2021).

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative Language Teaching is an approach to language teaching that aims to develop communicative and interactive competence for real-life situations. In particular, language learners have to integrate knowledge, skills, and attitudes applicable and transferable to everyday social relationships (Kasumi, 2015). The main objective of CLT in an EFL class is to allow students to interact and communicate in the target language by mediating, guiding, and facilitating. Therefore, the CLT activities must be related to the teaching topic and the teaching techniques, which are role play, interview, information gap, information transfer, and games (Rambe, 2017).

Speaking Skill Components

Speaking skill is an interactive process to produce meaning and interact through verbal communication. The main categories of speaking skills are accuracy and fluency (Derakhshan et al., 2016). Accuracy refers to the correct use of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (Wang, 2014), and fluency refers to the speaker's ability to speak quickly and confidently (Zyoud, 2016).

Accuracy

Accuracy is all about words and the complexity of the language system used by speakers to produce their speaking (Suryani et al., 2020). Therefore, accuracy refers to how able a language learner is to use vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation appropriately (Ilinawati et al., 2021). This means that accuracy is to integrate proper grammatical tenses, verb forms, manner of speaking, and vocabulary, to produce oral utterances.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary is a set of words or phrases belonging to a specific language. Vocabulary is a speaking sub-skill that plays an important role because it allows the speakers to transmit their

opinions, feeling, and thoughts (Lara et al., 2022). Therefore, vocabulary is fundamental in language learning, and learners have to acquire vocabulary rather than memorize it (Naeimi & Foo, 2015). Before students speak, they need support from the teachers giving background information to generate more ideas and deal with possible breakdowns in conversation (Wang, 2014).

Grammar

Grammar is the study of rules, functions, relations, and inflections to arrange words properly in a sentence. Additionally, grammar refers to the learning of phonology and orthography (Nasir, 2018). Furthermore, grammar goes beyond, and it covers, communicative competencies because language learners become familiar with situations and purposes encountered in the real world, going from interpersonal to transactional communication and giving meaning to the language (Rambe, 2017).

Pronunciation

Pronunciation is the way that the speaker turns symbols of language into sounds of speech by articulation, stress, and intonation. Articulation is the ability to produce speech sounds properly, stress is the pronunciation with a prominence of a word, phrase, or sentence, and intonation refers to the changing pitch of the tone from high to low and rising to fall (Huwari & Al-Khasawne 2019; Purba et al., 2020). In foreign language communication, it is important to pronounce words correctly so that the listener can understand the message and there is no misunderstanding between the speaker and the listener (Siregar, 2017). Therefore, teachers have to monitor students' pronunciation and practice in and outside the classroom because getting used to new pronunciation requires time and effort from students (Pourhosein 2011).

Fluency

According to different authors, fluency is the ability to produce oral utterances spontaneously and comprehensively to make the message understandable to the listener (Ayuni et al., 2021; Lopez et al., 2021). This occurs when the speaker is able to use the language patterns appropriately (Lara et al., 2022). Additionally, it includes an acceptable speed with few false starts and hesitations to maintain communication regardless of the speaker's limitations (Oviedo & Mena 2021; Suban, 2021).

Pair Work in Speaking

Generally, pair work is a technique to promote interaction and increase opportunities to speak English in class. Students benefit from the time because they maximize it to get involved in a greater variety of English-speaking activities to express what they really want to communicate (Jatmiko, 2017). The interaction occurs when students work face-to-face to communicate with one another with less teacher input (Achmad & Yusuf 2014). This means that learners can scaffold each other through verbalization to solve linguistic problems and construct new knowledge about the language (Storch & Aldosari 2012). In fact, the purpose of pair work in speaking is not only to make students proficient in the language but also communicative competent and critical thinkers (Govindasamy & Shah 2020).

Research Methodology

Design

This research is a descriptive study. "The purpose of descriptive studies is to describe individuals, events, or conditions by studying them as they are in nature. The researcher does not manipulate any of the variables but rather only describes the sample and/or the variables" (Siedlecki, 2020, p. 8). Thus, the main goal of this research work is to describe from EFL adult

learners' perspectives the most significant difficulties that they face when they speak in English .

Therefore, this descriptive work has included the collection and analysis of quantitative and

qualitative data to fulfill the objective.

    Quantitative research is a method to accurately measure numerical data divided into

categories or organized in ranks to determine the cause and effect between two variables through

mathematical, computational, and statistical procedures (Ahmad et al., 2019). In contrast, the

qualitative method is employed to gather information about experience, meaning, and

perspectives from the standpoint of the participant through interviews, surveys, and

questionnaires (Hammarberg et al., 2015).

    The following research questions will be analyzed in this study:

- What are students' difficulties to speak in English?

- What type of activities have students had in their English classes?

- What are students' perspectives of pair work?

Participants

    This descriptive study was addressed to 53 participants who were enrolled in the

Beginners 47.2% (n=25) and Elementary 52.8% (n=28) levels in the Language Center at the

public Cotopaxi Higher Technological Institute. According to the demographic survey, 43.4%

(n=23) were female while 56.6 (n=30) were male whose age was from 21 to 50 (n=53, n=35.91).

All participants were Ecuadorians (n=53), who speak Spanish 96.2% (n=51), English 1.9%

(n=1), French 1.9% (n=1) and they belonged to low-income 15.1% (n=8) and middle class

84.9% (n=45) socio-economic class. Participants access the Internet from home at 88.7% (n=47),

school at 7.5% (n=4), and workplace at 3.8% (n=2). The devices they use are: desktop 30.2

(n=16), laptop 28.3% (n=15), smartphone 39.6% (n=21, and tablet 1.9% n=1).

Instruments

The data was collected through a demographic and speaking survey designed in Google forms in English and Spanish to make it understandable for participants. The survey included multiple-choice, open-ended questions, and Likert scale options. The first section was the demographic survey which was useful to determine certain characteristics and backgrounds of the participants such as their institution, gender, age, nationality, socio-economic class, access to the Internet, access to technology, and language.

The second section was the speaking survey divided into four parts, which served for answering the research questions and guiding the study. The first part included two open-ended questions and twenty Likert scale questions about the difficulties that they face when speaking. Sections three and four aimed to recover the experience of students about the activities they have done to practice English and speaking through twenty-one multiple choice questions. Finally, participants answered seven Likert scale questions and two open-ended questions to share their perspectives about pair work.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data gathered from the survey were subject to analysis. First, the data was imported from Google forms into an Excel sheet to verify any duplicated responses. After this verification, the SPSS statistical tool served to create variables in the variable view sheet with the name, type, width, decimal, label, values, missing, columns, align, measure and role. It is important to highlight that the survey questions were placed as labels, the Likert scales assigned a specific value, and the measures were categorized into, scale, ordinal, and nominal according to the variable. The data from the survey were compiled in the data view sheet taking into account the corresponding variable in order to run the reports to obtain the mean and the percentage. The

data obtained were displayed on the output tab through tables which were reported in the results sections.

Meanwhile, the qualitative results were obtained from the open-ended questions that participants responded to which were transcribed in a Word sheet. The analysis of these data was carried out by recovering the own perspective of each participant which served to explore the English learning background and the advantages and difficulties of pair working. The process followed the next steps, open coding, axial coding, selective coding, and the broader categories.

Ethical Considerations

This research study was subject to compliance with the ethical principles to apply a descriptive study. According to Jenn (2006), it is necessary to design a protocol in order to agree with the contributors and collaborators. Therefore, the first step was to send a letter to the headmaster of the institution detailing the objective of the study and specifying the participants in order to get consent to collect the data. Agunloye (2019) mentioned that, participants have to be informed about the purpose of the study to know if they voluntarily want to or not participate in the research. In this case, it was necessary to arrange an online meeting where participants received all the information about the study. The participants for this study were adult learners who gave their consent to take part in the research freely. Finally, it ensured confidentiality and privacy to protect individuals' data.

Results

The data obtained from the instrument served to answer the three research questions *"What are students' difficulties to speak in English?"*, *"What type of activities do students prefer for speaking?"*, and *"What are students' perspectives of pair work?"*. The quantitative results were put into tables while the qualitative results were analyzed through axial coding. This

section of the study is to analyze the difficulties that students face when speaking in English, the

activities that they do during English-speaking classes, and their perspectives on pair work.

In order to gather data for the first research question *"What are students' difficulties to

speak in English?",* students answered 20 Likert scale questions on five scales which were *To a*

great extent (1), *A lot* (2), *Some* (3), *A little bit* (4), and *None* (5).

Table 1

Difficulties in Speaking

Items	Frequency	Mean
Feel confident about the topic	53	2.23
Know what to say	53	2.75
Respond quickly	53	2.81
Look for words to respond correctly	53	2.23
Translate what I want to say	53	2.32
My pronunciation is clear	53	2.96
My speech is free of errors	53	2.94
I can say phrases	53	2.81
I can interact in a conversation	53	3.13
Feel embarrassed of making mistakes	53	3.06
I understand what the other person is saying	53	3.00
Speak without many pauses	53	3.09
Speak spontaneously	53	3.23
Consider you speak correctly	53	3.28
Have a good intonation of questions	53	3.02
Have a good intonation of sentences	53	3.02
Have a good pronunciation	53	3.04
Use word stress	53	2.94
Use sentence stress	53	2.96

Items	Frequency	Mean
The topics are interesting	53	2.04

According to the data obtained, students face different difficulties to develop their speaking skills, especially communicative and interactive competencies as shown in Table 1. In fact, students consider that they do not speak correctly (M=3.28) because they neither can speak spontaneously (M=3.23) nor can interact in a conversation (M=3.13). The main factors affecting the development of speaking skills are, that students speak with many pauses (M=3.09) because they do not have good pronunciation (M=3.04), good intonation of questions (M=3.02) and sentences (3.02), and also, they do not use the word (M=2.94) or sentence stress (M=2.96). It is noticeable that students still feel embarrassed about making mistakes (M=3.06) and they do not understand what others say (M=3.0). All these factors are related to cognitive development which makes it difficult for students to improve their skills.

Meanwhile, the qualitative data showed that students have taken English classes at different levels such as school, high school, and even in university. The participants are adult learners (M=35.91) and they have gone back to study after a long gap as one of them mentioned "*It's been 10 years that I haven't practiced or spoken English*". Therefore, students face difficulties mainly in pronunciation, listening, and speaking which is evidenced in students' opinions "*It has been difficult for me to pronounce and listen*" while another student said, "*It is difficult for me to speak*".

Students realize the importance of speaking English because they mentioned that they would like to learn the language but they have some obstacles as one student pointed out "*I would like to learn but because of my job it gets complicated*". Unfortunately, students lack practice because they do not have a peer to practice with outside the classroom which is

evidenced in some comments provided by the students *"I have no one to talk to outside of class"* while others mentioned that the practice is only in the class with the professor or classmates *"I practice with my classmates and my teacher"*. It is evident that the practice of speaking does not go beyond the class because students are limited to practice only during school time.

In order to respond to the second research question "*What type of activities have students had in their English classes?"*, students answered two sets of questions based on the Likert scale. The first section was to explore the activities that students do to practice English. The scales for each question were divided into 4, *I have done them (1), I don't have done them (2), I would like to do it (3),* and *I don't like this type of activity (4)* and the results were put into Table 2.

Table 2

Activities to Practice English

Items	I have done them	I don't have done them	I would like to do it	I don't like this type of activity
Fill in the space with correct grammar	35	3	13	2
Write correct answers to questions to practice grammar	35	4	12	2
Practice specific vocabulary in writing of an activity or topic from the book	35	3	11	4
Practice specific vocabulary orally of an activity or topic from the book	30	12	8	3
Oral practice with vocabulary of personal interest	27	12	11	3
Written practice with vocabulary of personal interest	29	13	9	2
Oral pair work activities in the classroom	29	8	13	3
Pair work in writing activities in the classroom	31	9	11	2
Pair work in general outside the classroom	24	16	8	5

According to the data, the activities that students have had the most are filling in the space with correct grammar (n=35), writing correct answers to questions to practice grammar (n=35), and practicing specific vocabulary in writing an activity or topic from the book (n=35). The results also revealed that students had done pair work in writing activities in the classroom (n=31), practiced specific vocabulary orally of an activity or topic from the book (n=30) made written practice with the vocabulary of personal interest (n=29), and oral pair work activities in the classroom (n=29). However, fewer students have done pair work in general outside the classroom (n=24).

Meanwhile, in the second section, the collection of the data was addressed to explore the speaking activities related to oral practice. There were 12 questions for students to answer with 4 scales *Yes (1), No (2), I would like (3), I don't like it (4)*. The results are reported in Table 3.

Table 3

Speaking Activities

Items	Yes	No	I would Like	I don't like it
Created a short speech	26	10	16	1
Made an oral presentation	40	5	8	0
Participated in a forum	27	17	9	0
Commented on a general topic	29	12	12	0
Created dialogues to practice with peers	33	11	8	1
Written a dialogue from ideas from the book	34	9	10	0
Practiced a dialogue about free ideas	28	13	9	3
Listen to my peers' recordings	33	10	9	1
Record audios	20	17	13	3
I have provided feedback to my peers' oral participation	18	23	10	2
Self-assess my oral participation	29	15	9	0

Items	Yes	No	I would Like	I don't like it
Used rubrics to provide feedback	12	24	15	2

The table 3 shows the results of speaking activities. According to the students, they made an oral presentation to practice speaking (n=40). The dialogues they performed were written from ideas from the book (n=34) and free ideas (n=28), and then they created dialogues to practice with their peers (n=33). Students also participated in different activities such as self-assess their oral presentation (n=29), commenting on a general topic(n=29), and a forum (n=27)

Finally, students contributed to gathering information for the last research question *"What are students' perspectives of pair work?"* which had five scales *Totally disagree (1) Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4),* and *Totally agree (4)*. The overall measurement is displayed in Table 4.

Table 4

Students' perspectives toward pair work

Items	Frequency	Mean
Pair work is useful to practice speaking	53	3.55
Pair work for speaking is difficult because the student who knows more dominates the conversation	53	2.89
It is advisable although some pairs speak slowly	53	3.25
It is advisable although some pairs do not pronounce correctly	53	3.13
The pair makes constant interruptions	53	2.55
It takes too much time	53	2.70
It is good if I work with the pair I choose	53	3.34

The analysis of the data made it possible to determine that students consider pair work as useful to practice speaking (M=3.55) if they work with the pair they choose (M=3.34). Students also believe that pair work is advisable, although some pairs speak slowly (M=3.25) or some pairs do not pronounce correctly (M=3.13). There is a good match between the results above with the qualitative data because in the open-ended question, students agreed that the advantages of pair work are the feedback provided by each other, correcting mistakes, and collaborative work as one responder mentioned, *"This is how we help each other and correct the different pronunciation and writing errors"* while other participant said, *"The advantage is that, we lose the fear of making mistakes and we do it spontaneously"*. However, students face some difficulties when working in pairs because they do not know the vocabulary *"When people do not understand the vocabulary"*, different levels between students *"There are people who know more than you and sometimes you feel bad"*, and lack of interest *"Some participate and others do not collaborate"*, which they consider as disadvantages as pointed out by participants.

Discussion

This study was carried out to analyze the Perspectives of EFL Students' Difficulties in Speaking. The main findings served to respond to the three research questions which are described below:

The first research question was *"What are students' difficulties to speak in English?"* which was established to explore the challenges that students face when speaking in English. According to Tuan and Mai (2015), students find it difficult to communicate in the target language, and each student has their own problems. In this sense, students stated that they do not speak correctly because the main factor affecting their oral production is fluency since they speak with many pauses. In fact, hesitations and pauses obstruct speaking fluency, and the

speaker could feel depressed (Wang, 2014). This main factor made students limit their interaction in a conversation.

Additionally, students mentioned that pronunciation, intonation, and word and sentence stress of English words are difficult for them. These issues were also found in different studies such as the one carried out by Pourhosein (2011) who stated that non-native speakers are influenced by their native language on the sounds, rules, stress, and intonation which causes mispronunciation of words. Purba et al. (2020) reinforced this fact by arguing that it is difficult for English as foreign language learners to use the correct intonation to produce good communication. Regarding word and sentence stress, Huwari and Al-Khasawne (2019) mentioned that it is necessary that the speaker highlight the information to clarify the message for the listener.

The second research question was "*What type of activities have students had in their English classes?*". The results showed that students fill in the space with correct grammar and they write correct answers to questions to practice grammar. The results of previous studies support this finding because traditional English teaching methods applied at different educational levels are based on grammar teaching which does not permit students to develop communicative skills (Oviedo & Mena 2021). For this reason, teachers must incorporate single or combined methods when teaching to gain communication competence (Kurniawan & Sumani 2022).

In addition, the data revealed that students are limited to practicing written or oral-specific vocabulary based on activities in the book. This finding may be explained by the idea that students learn English as a school subject with minimal opportunities to practice the language for real-life communication (Suban, 2021). Kareema (2020) concluded that speaking skill is as important as the rest of the skills and it is recommended to identify activities in order

to have a successful speaking classroom. In fact, communicative activities help language learners

to improve their language competencies because of the dynamic of these activities (Lara et al.,

2022).

The third research question *"What are students' perspectives of pair work?" served* to

gather the students' perspectives of pair work. The principal finding was students considered that

practicing speaking through pair work is useful. In line with previous studies, pair work has a

positive impact on students because they improve their speaking skills and solves the lack of

practice (Jatmiko, 2017). A similar pattern of results was obtained by Govindasamy and Shah

(2020) who revealed the effectiveness of pair work because students feel encouraged to speak

confidently with their peers during speaking lessons.

Additionally, students claimed pair work is good if they choose the pair to practice.

However, Achmad and Yusuf (2014) suggested that students can choose more than one peer

because new pairs strengthen information sharing and improve speaking practice. Finally,

students believed they could work in pairs, although their peers spoke slowly or mispronounced.

In fact, Storch and Aldosari (2012) concluded that mixed proficiency pairs may work together

and experts or novices can reach L2 learning.

Conclusions

The findings of this descriptive study served to know the difficulties students face in

developing their speaking skills. This study was carried out by taking into account the own

perspective of each participant. As a result, it was possible to determine that students have

limitations in speaking correctly because the main factor affecting their oral production is

fluency because they speak with many pauses. This factor is also influenced by pronunciation,

intonation, and word and sentence stress. These cognitive issues have negatively influenced the

development of speaking skills. Consequently, the perception of students is that they do not speak English properly.

This study also explored the activities that students did to practice English. The main conclusion about this issue is that English lessons are mainly focused on grammar because students suggested they practice the language by filling in spaces with correct grammar and writing the right answers to questions. Regarding speaking activities, students performed dialogues and oral presentations based on their own ideas and from their books to practice with their peers.

Finally, students provided their perspectives about pair work. The main conclusion that can be drawn is that practicing speaking with a peer is beneficial to develop the competencies in this skill. In fact, pair work is advisable even if the pair speaks slowly or does not pronounce words correctly. Therefore, students can take advantage of it because they can improve their fluency, pronunciation, words, and sentence stress. Additionally, students have more opportunities to practice speaking.

Limitations

As with the majority of studies, the design of the current study was subject to limitations. The participants of this student were prison officers and that was the main limitation because they stay inside the jails for periods of 24 hours, therefore not all of the students attended the day when the explanation to fill out the survey was given. For this reason, it was necessary to record a video and share the link for students to watch when they have their rest days. Additionally, it was necessary to extend the term to one week to receive more answers in google forms in order to gather the data of every participant. During this period of time students who had hesitations about the survey received support to clear their doubts about the collection of data. Fortunately,

at the end of the week, every student participated in the survey which made it possible to continue with the study.

Recommendations

This study provides a good starting point for discussion and further research to explore and find solutions to EFL students' difficulties in speaking. However, it will be important that future research consider some recommendations arising from this study. Regarding participants and researchers, both could face some challenges. Therefore, online research requires them to have access to the internet. Adult participants could require adjustments in their schedule to receive the instructions and fill out the surveys because apart from studying they work. Researchers should give support to participants taking into account the limitations that they could face when taking part in the research. Meanwhile, the data obtained from this study could serve to guide future investigations. In fact, these data could be beneficial to the literature and also explore new research questions. Finally, it is necessary for upcoming researchers to go deeper into more factors affecting the lack of oral production among English language learners.

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Appendix 1

SPSS variable and data view sheets

Available upon request.

Appendix 1

SPSS output tab

Available upon request.

Appendix 1

Consent letter from Institute

Available upon request.