



EFL Students' Difficulties in Speaking: A Descriptive Study

Jenny Maribel Clavijo Navas

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: jenny.clavijo@casagrande.edu.ec,
Guayaquil, December 2022.

Proyectos de Investigación

Certifico que JENNY MARIBEL CLAVIJO NAVAS ha cumplido satisfactoriamente su investigación acción como pre-requisito de graduación de Magíster en Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros con Mención en la Enseñanza de Inglés. La investigación es parte del proyecto Perspective of EFL Students in Speaking cuyo objetivo general es determinar las dificultades que los estudiantes tienen en cuando hablan en inglés a través de la aplicación de una encuesta.

El proyecto se implementa en varios contextos y niveles de eficiencia en inglés diferentes. En este proyecto, cada participante aplica la encuesta en su contexto educativo. Las secciones de introducción, literatura y metodología (instrumentos y análisis de datos) son las mismas. Particular que comunico para los fines consiguientes.

María Rossana Ramírez Ávila

Coordinadora

Abstract

The present research work is a descriptive study; qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed to find the perspectives of 63 students who participated in this research. To gather data, a survey was applied as research instrument. It was divided into two sections, the first for linguistic data and the second for speech problems; a Google Form survey was applied as an instrument, with a reliability value of 0.912 for Cronbach's alpha. It is concluded that psychological factors impair students' performance in speaking English. Also, most problems students focus on are fear of making mistakes and lack of confidence. Motivation on the part of teachers is a methodology that gives good results at the time of learning, and it is a fundamental psychological element in reaching students' goals when seeking to achieve English language proficiency. This document will be a bibliographic reference for professionals dedicated to the education of the English language in search of descriptive studies that reflect students' behaviour when learning English to make decisions to improve their work in the classroom based on the results of this document.

Keywords: difficulty, perspectives, EFL, speaking.

Resumen

El presente trabajo de investigación es un estudio descriptivo, se analizaron datos cualitativos y cuantitativos para conocer las perspectivas de los 63 estudiantes participantes. Para obtener información, una encuesta fue aplicada como instrumento de investigación. La encuesta cuenta con dos secciones, la primera para los datos lingüísticos y la segunda para los problemas del habla; se aplicó como instrumento una encuesta de Google Form, con un valor de fiabilidad de 0,912 para el alfa de Cronbach. Se concluye que los factores psicológicos perjudican el rendimiento de los estudiantes al hablar inglés. Asimismo, la mayoría de los problemas en los que se centran los estudiantes son el miedo a cometer errores y la falta de confianza. Además, algunos estudiantes cometen errores al interactuar. La falta de confianza a la hora de hablar inglés hace que se sientan inseguros cuando tienen que comunicarse con personas que tienen un nivel avanzado, como ciudadanos americanos o docentes del área. Uno de los métodos más usados y con mayores resultados positivos es la motivación. Es un elemento fundamental para alcanzar las metas del estudiante cuando buscan lograr el dominio del idioma inglés. Este documento es un aporte bibliográfico para profesionales dedicados a la enseñanza del idioma inglés en busca de estudios descriptivos que reflejan el comportamiento de los alumnos en el aprendizaje del inglés, y tomar decisiones para mejorar su trabajo en el aula de clase en base a los resultados de este trabajo.

Palabras clave: dificultad, inglés, perspectiva, discurso.

EFL Students' Difficulties in Speaking: A Descriptive Study

Learning a foreign language is challenging for students in most educational contexts. According to Fonken (2018), teachers are often faced with overcrowded classes and students with little interest in learning a new language, making a predilection for the language even more complicated and impeding communication and effective expression of ideas and thoughts (Fonken, 2018).

Being English challenging to speak is the main reason people drop out of courses. It is evident that some students present learning difficulties that are not common in all languages; those studying Spanish, French, or any other language do not necessarily go through these situations. These are specific difficulties for those who are learning to speak English:

As revisited in the previous paragraph, English comes from a history that mixes Anglo-Saxon with influences from other languages and cultures. Thus, this does not differentiate it from Spanish only in writing but also in pronunciation (Banditvilai & Cullen, 2018).

Many English sounds are nothing like those existing in Spanish. In this way, everyone learning the language has difficulties; some people even have more difficulty learning than others (Chmutina & Sadler, 2021). The correct pronunciation makes many students still at the most basic levels feel unable to learn the language and thus drop out of school. This is more serious when comparing people who speak the language fluently (Nurullayevna, 2020).

In 2020, Ecuador was ranked 81st out of 100 evaluated nations, with a score of 46.57, considered a “very low” level of English, equivalent to an A1 level according to the Common European Framework (Bygate, 2021). At the regional level, this situation is replicated, being in Latin America the last place, so much work remains to be done in the educational and institutional context (Ramos & Romero, 2022).

Ecuador has an evident stagnation regarding the spoken fluency development of students of different educational levels nationally. International and local organizations, such as the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education, identify this problem. From actions such as strengthening the development of English in the curriculum from the secondary educational stage, learning the English language as a subject in schools and universities was mandatory for public and private institutions (Alvarez & Guevara, 2021; Ministerio de Educación, 2016).

Low participation rates, and fear of expressing themselves, among other causes, are characteristics of the existing problems among students who cannot express themselves fluently, give opinions or continue conversations, which limits the continuous language practice. Therefore, speech improvement is not achieved. For this reason, the main objective of developing this study is the analysis of students' problems with oral fluency.

To determine the causes and reasons for such difficulties in achieving success when speaking English, a survey was applied to identify and analyze this context in depth, specifically among high school students of the city of Macas, Ecuador. Addressing this problem locally allowed general and specific conclusions to be reached by understanding the causes and deepening the theoretical and contextual reasons.

Literature Review

Teaching Speaking Difficulties and Challenges

Some problems that frequently occur with EFL students related to pronunciation are the interference of their mother tongue, their low motivation to learn the language, and their insufficient knowledge of phonology and phonetic systems of the English language.

In addition, it was reported that phonetic ability was the factor that caused most of the problems in learning phonetics. It can be concluded that the opinion of difference in the sound system between English and the mother tongue and some factors, such as phonetic ability, mother tongue, previous learning of English pronunciation, instruction and motivation, also caused problems for students in learning phonetics in the English language pronunciation (Mejía, 2010).

Descriptive Studies about Speaking

Similar studies have used descriptive methodology to study the difficulties and challenges of speaking English as a foreign language. Chou (2018) claimed that various studies in countries of the Latin American region have deepened in identifying this problem at all academic levels of learning English in schools.

One study was carried out by Valenzuela et al. (2016), whose objective was to analyze the effect of teachers, the tools they use and the dependence on an educational level in learning English. Such a study was measured with a descriptive-correlational study, using the Oxford Placement Online Test as a pre and post-evaluative tool, selecting a sample of 132 students from the initial stages of learning the English language belonging to the University of Talca in Chile. These students were divided into three different courses to analyze the different results. The results indicated no significant differences between the help tools used in the student's performance. In this way, the study concluded that even with technological tools for learning, the teacher is the most essential variable to success in this area.

Another study of a descriptive-exploratory nature is the analysis of Difficulty Factors for learning English as a foreign language in students with low performance in English. It was carried out by Díaz (2014), revealing the impact of the factors of styles, anxiety, motivation and English language learning strategies, identifying a series of difficulties in achieving success in speaking a foreign language. How students perceived themselves in such areas was identified using interviews and focus groups.

The questionnaires used for the student sample were: Gardner's (AMTB), Horwitz's FLAS, Oxford's SILL, and Felder-Silverman's (ILSQ); it was found that behaviours and attitudes that differentiate students with good academic results when speaking English from those who have difficulties in learning this language. Students with difficulties experience more significant anxiety, use social and metacognitive strategies to a lesser degree, and negatively evaluate the teacher and the English course, having low levels of motivational intensity compared to those students who perform well.

It is also relevant to the descriptive-documentary study carried out by Torres et al. (2018). It was commissioned to analyze the context experienced by sixth graders learning to speak English during an academic year. The collected and investigated evidence allowed the analysis of exercises, activities, reading and writing of a sample of 100 students. It identified the importance of the teacher's role and its impact on the learning process of reading and writing the English language, in addition to determining the relationship between learning and its difficulties.

In the study carried out by Ceballos et al. (2014), it was determined the influence of self-esteem, level of socio-cultural, sex and geographic location in the learning of the English language. Furthermore, this study also measured the self-esteem of a sample of students, identifying sociodemographic variables and their competence to speak English, just as

Roldán (2016) determined in his study that some factors and challenges influence the process of learning English as a foreign language.

Use of Language

Communication has been inherent to humans since the dawn of humanity. When it is still impossible to use spoken language, people often acquire a peculiar way of communicating meanings, through gestures or other manifestations, with the primary desire to be understood and understand everyone around them. However, for communication to occur, there must be an understanding between the speaker and the listener. Consequently, it will only occur if the user makes a correct articulation and reproduction of the sounds of the language in use. Understandable conditions must make communication and understanding possible (Rabiah, 2015).

Language Components

Fluency

A speaker who can deliver a message that features a continuous flow of information at an appropriate rate, unmarred by multiple speech errors, is said to possess speech fluency, an area of communication mastery. Speech fluency is the product of mental skills, such as recall of procedural and declarative knowledge, and physical motor skills involving correct functioning and use of the vocal cords, tongue, mouth, and lips to produce speech (Tusing, 2018).

Speaking English fluently can seem like a difficult task. However, like anything, the most challenging thing is always to take the first step. Regardless of the level of English, confidence is always crucial. When speaking English, smile to make yourself look more confident; it might even help you make new friends. Also, make sure you breathe as you speak. If you are stuck in what you are saying, pause, breathe, and continue speaking more confidently (Cain & Dam, 2015).

Accuracy

Accuracy is a student's ability to produce statements without errors. Researchers have used several different measures of precision. Vercellotti (2012) indicated that accuracy had been measured by specific standards, such as past tense morphemes plural-s and target-like verbal morphology. However, Foster (2018) believed that specific measures are less sensitive to detecting differences and have used general accuracy measures, such as the percentage of error-free clauses or the number of errors per 100 words is another general measure used.

In subsequent studies, accuracy has been measured by considering the number of errors. For instance, Bygate et al. (2001) measured accuracy by calculating the incidence of error per t-unit; the fewer errors, the more accurate the language would be.

Phonology

Some theoretical phonologists have started analyzing sound symbolism—in particular, alternation patterns caused by sound symbolic principles—as a part of their phonological inquiry. This section reviews some of these studies and presents another argument that studies of sound symbolism are not as irrelevant as broadly assumed in theoretical phonology. Anderson (2001) explained that:

Phonology mentions the sound system of a language. The basic unit of phonology is the phoneme, an individual speech sound (such as /p/) that can often be represented by a single grapheme or letter (such as the letter *p*). There are exceptions, however, such as the sound /sh/, represented by two graphemes (*sh*). Each natural language has different possible sounds that can be combined to create words. Children's vocalizations are indistinguishable early in speech and language development, regardless of their linguistic environment.

Pronunciation

Pronunciation is a common term used in language teaching and learning to describe how expressions are articulated (Pennington, 2021). There are also controversies on the part of some teachers because they have a different view on aspects of speech, consonant and vowel phonemes that have been significantly modified (Don, 2020).

For a broader vision encompassing both the segmental and the suprasegmental in intonation and stress of words and sentences, everything mentioned creates a debate in the literature about the relative merits that must be considered as the main content of teaching. For example, for communication to exist, sounds must fit into continuous speech and emphasize words and expressions (Yates, 2017).

One of the main reasons to learn English is to express ourselves in that language and be understood. Pronunciation in English is something that native speakers generally do not worry about. However, it is a crucial concern for EFL students because they need to know the sequences of sounds used in speaking a given word, expression, or language (Bai, 2019; Marta, 2022).

Stress

Speech is a particular signal containing lexical and grammatical information, encompassing or referring to everything said. Prosodic information refers to how the information is expressed, and it depends on the speaker according to the speaker's emotional state. In addition, prosody is related to speech features whose domain is more significant than a phonetic segment, concerning syllables, words, phrases, sentences, and even more extended expressions, also known as suprasegmental features (Werner & Keller, 1994).

Methodology

Design

This is a descriptive study about EFL Students' Difficulties in Speaking. This type of research helps educators explore phenomena to events in the population, measure observable events, and identify causal effects. Descriptive research presents relevant aspects of a singularity so that educational policymakers, teachers, and school administrators can make decisions and solve problems in schools and classrooms (Loeb et al., 2019).

Citing author Lambert (2019), this study has the following contents:

- 1) Combines the theory of reference with the analysis of the results.
- 2) Analyze the information based on recorded data.
- 3) Selecting the target population should be intentional and appropriate for the study.
- 4) Use of qualitative tools

Qualitative and quantitative data are analyzed. This process involves collecting information to understand the population's perspectives. The results obtained have the aim of answering the following research questions:

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

Participants

Sixty-three students from a private university in Macas, Ecuador, participated in this study; 68.3% were female, and 31.7% were male. The age range is between 18 and 24 years old, corresponding to the first and eighth levels of the careers. As part of the survey, the demographic data showed the social class to which they belonged; according to them, 60.3% were middle class, and 39.7% were low-income.

Instrument

In order to answer the research questions, a survey (Appendix 1) was applied to obtain the results:

Demographic Survey

This section allowed a better understanding of some general characteristics of the participants, such as their age, gender, course, English level, and background.

Speaking Survey

Due to the students' English level, the survey was provided in English and Spanish. A Likert scale measured the attitudes and performance toward speaking skills, and other sections measured activities to practice English and perspectives toward pair work activities.

Data Analysis

This section covers the process of synthesis and analysis of the results. Considering that the data is collected through Google Forms, it is possible to download an Excel document containing a table with all student data.

The information collected in the survey was coded into an Excel spreadsheet to obtain descriptive statistics. The survey results are presented in tabular form with means, and irrelevant results were eliminated.

Ethical Considerations

The highest ethical standards must be respected when collecting, processing, and analyzing data. The research plan must describe the measures that will be taken to protect the participants who have provided data or samples as information concerning them (Smith, 2003)

This research strictly adhered to specific ethical guidelines. First, letters of consent were sent to the institution, and the authorities approved and provided the means to conduct the research (Appendix 2). Second, participants were informed about the study, its goals, and learning objectives. Third, data confidentiality was maintained throughout the process.

Results

This section focuses on describing and analyzing the results of the applied survey. The main aspects considered in this study were the students' perceptions of English difficulties when speaking activities in the classroom and the effectiveness of pairwork in performing speaking tasks. Additionally, it had open-ended questions to explore in depth the students' perceptions related to the research questions of this study.

In order to answer the first research question, the students answered a Likert scale format question. The criteria applied were the following: "Totally", "Much", "Sometimes", "Very Little", and "Any". The following table summarizes the average results from the collected data:

Table 1
Difficulties in Speaking

When I speak in English, I	Totally	Much	Sometimes	Very little	Any
Feel confident about the topic	19	25	38	13	5
Know what to say	13	14	48	17	8
Respond quickly	6	14	43	30	6
Look for words to respond correctly	17	35	24	17	6
Translate what I want to say	24	27	33	16	0
My pronunciation is clear	10	16	43	25	6
My speech is free of errors	5	11	49	27	8
I can say phrases	13	21	43	17	6
I can interact in a conversation	6	17	37	29	11
Feel embarrassed of making mistakes	22	25	30	17	5
I understand what the other person is saying	8	19	35	32	6
Speak without many pauses	5	16	32	35	13
Speak spontaneously	6	14	24	38	17
Consider you speak correctly	6	10	35	32	17
Have a good intonation of questions	10	13	41	22	14
Have a good intonation of sentences	11	13	35	30	11
Have a good pronunciation	11	11	35	33	10
Use word stress	11	13	37	27	13
Use sentences stress	8	14	37	27	14
The topics are interesting	19	17	40	19	5

Even though the survey was applied in English and Spanish, the students' answers were in Spanish; therefore, the researcher translated their answers. According to the results, the most outstanding results of the survey disclosed that students *could not speak English spontaneously*. Furthermore, 22% of the students *feel ashamed of making mistakes*, so 33% *translate what they want to speak*. Besides, 35% of them *look for words to answer correctly*. On the other hand, 43% of the students indicate *clear pronunciation*, and 49% *assure that their speech is free of errors*.

Only 8% of the participants indicated they *understood the other person's words*. Likewise, only 6% of the students *can interact in a conversation*. Regarding speaking components, 8% and 11% of the participants think they *have good pronunciation, intonation, and sentence stress*. From the open-ended questions, most students (90%) claimed that speaking in English is challenging because they lack vocabulary, grammar-knowledge and fear speaking *in front of their peers and teacher*.

To answer the second research question, the participants had to answer the established items in Table 2 and Table 3, which were divided into the following criteria: "Yes, I have done it", "I have not done it", "I would like to practice in class", and "I do not like this activity". The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
English Speaking Activities in the Classroom

Item	Yes, I have done it	I have not done it	I would like to practice in class	I do not like it
Fill in the space with the correct grammar	54	5	35	6
Write correct answers to questions to practice grammar	57	11	30	2
Practice specific vocabulary in writing an activity or topic from the book	56	16	27	2

Practice specific vocabulary orally of an activity or topic from the book	56	13	30	2
Oral practice with a vocabulary of personal interest	49	17	32	2
Written practice with a vocabulary of personal interest	52	14	32	2
Oral pair work activities in the classroom	56	16	25	3
Pair work in writing activities in the classroom	56	14	27	3
Pair work in general outside the classroom	54	21	22	3

According to the results obtained from the survey, the majority of students have performed activities related to *writing the correct answers to the questions to practice grammar* (57%), *orally practicing specific vocabulary of an activity or topic from the book* (56%) and *work in pairs in activities of writing in the classroom* (56%). On the other hand, only a few participants indicated that they had not done activities related to *oral practice with a vocabulary of personal interest* (17%), *practiced vocabulary in writing an activity or topic from the book* (16%), and *pair work in general outside the classroom*.

In general, only a few students do not like to perform the speaking activities from the survey, and therefore, only 6% of the participants do not like to *fill in the space with the correct grammar*. Regarding the results from the open-ended questions, most students (80%) indicated that they do not perform pair work *outside the classroom* because they do not have other places to practice the target language. Likewise, they indicated that *practicing grammar is essential for speaking*; however, they would like more activities where they can use the language authentically.

In order to gather data related to the type of activities students had in their English classes, they also had to answer the following criteria: Yes, No, I would like to, Dislike. The results are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3
Speaking activities in the classroom

Item	Yes	No	I would like to	Dislike
Created a short conversation	49	22	27	2
Made an oral presentation	65	13	17	5
Participated in a forum	51	32	16	2
Commented on a general topic	51	27	21	2
Created dialogues to practice with peers	62	17	19	2
Written a dialogue from ideas from the book	68	14	16	2
Practiced a dialogue about free ideas	70	11	14	5
Listen to my peers' recordings	68	13	14	5
Record audios	68	19	10	3
I have provided feedback on my peer's oral participation	40	35	22	3
Self-assess my oral participation	56	22	19	3
Used rubrics to provide feedback	43	32	21	5

The results revealed that learners do not use the activities proposed to practice English. Based on the results obtained, it is verified that 68% of the participants *have written dialogues from ideas from the book, listened to their peers' recordings, and recorded audio*. Similarly, 65% of the students surveyed indicated that *they had performed oral presentations*, 62% *had created dialogues to practice with peers*, and 70% *had practiced a dialogue about free ideas*.

On the other hand, 32% of the students stated that they *have never participated in a forum*, 35% *have never having provided oral feedback to their classmates due to their mispronunciation of some words*, and 32% *have not used rubrics to provide feedback*. Furthermore, 27% of the students indicated that they *would like to create short conversations*, 22% *would like to provide feedback on their peer's oral participation*, and 21% would like to *use rubrics to provide feedback*. From the survey, most students indicated they do not have

applied rubrics to self-assess themselves or their peers, which they would like to apply in their classroom to find and correct their mistakes.

Finally, to respond the research question 3, the survey consisted of 7 statements about the students' perspectives toward pair work. The criteria were divided from 5 "Totally agree", 4 "Agree", 3 "Neutral", 2 "Disagree", and 1 "Totally disagree". Table 4 displays the average of the findings.

Table 4
Perspectives on working in pairs

Item	Disagree	In disagreement	Indifferent	In agreement	Totally agree
Pairwork is useful to practice speaking	24	5	3	30	38
Pair work for speaking is difficult because the student who knows more dominates the conversation	24	13	17	25	21
It is advisable, although some pairs speak slowly	22	8	6	40	24
It is advisable, although some pairs do not pronounce correctly	25	6	11	41	16
The pair makes constant interruption	22	22	19	22	14
It takes too much time	24	14	21	29	13
It is good if I work with the pair I choose	24	10	11	27	29

According to the results obtained in the previous survey, 38% of the students surveyed agree that practicing with a partner helps improve speech, while 24% totally disagree.

Likewise, 29% of the students perceived that *it is good to work with the pair they chose*, and they indicated that *it is advisable to work in pairs, although some pairs speak slowly* (40%) and *although they do not pronounce correctly* (41%).

On the other hand, 29% of the students indicate that *teamwork takes too much time* because, according to the answers from the survey, it would not be the most practical strategy for speaking since each student takes a different time to read or write. In the same way, 25% of the students perceived that *it is not advisable to work in pairs because some pairs do not pronounce the words correctly*.

In the open-ended question, 63 students agreed that pronunciation is the principal difficulty in speaking. One of the respondents wrote *I know what people are talking about, but I limit myself to answering for fear of my pronunciation*. Only a few students stated they do not have trouble speaking in the classroom. Likewise, five participants stated that they *lack vocabulary* in English; 40 students mentioned that *they speak in English without fluency*. They also mentioned that *they always translate what they want to say from their L1 to English*. One participant wrote *I cannot speak fast; I need to find the answer, translate and say it*. Fifty students mentioned that they are afraid when they speak. Someone said *I am ashamed to be wrong, so I get frustrated speaking in English*.

Discussion

This study showed that the most practiced activities for students in their English class were to write the correct answers, practice specific vocabulary orally, and work in pairs in writing activities. According to Mejía (2010), these activities are mostly grammar and vocabulary based, which does help students to increase their speaking a little.

However, structured grammar activities are helpful because choosing between suggested options helps students build their memory cortex during the learning process. The obtained results from the survey demonstrated that speaking activities are not applied frequently during their English classes. The previous is in contrast with Mejía (2010), who

claimed that one of the speaking teaching principles allows students to be part of an active process involving communicative activities with constant practice.

This study also showed that pronunciation is students' most significant difficulty when speaking English. Don (2020), who stated that pronunciation is a critical skill that requires much preparation, corroborates the results. Thus, teachers must know pronunciation characteristics and the correct use of speaking strategies to help students improve their pronunciation. Likewise, the results that showed students need to look for words to respond correctly and need to translate what they want to say are aligned. Mejía (2010) supports this statement since he explains that if speakers do not know the right words and how to express these, it is practically impossible to fulfil the main objective of language, which is proper communication.

Finally, students' perspectives towards pair work are neutral. Díaz (2014) stated that pair work helps learners practice the target language to improve their speaking skills and lose their fear of speaking in English or making mistakes. Moreover, the students indicated that working in pairs represents an advantage because it allows them to develop oral skills. Rabiah (2015) supported these findings since he indicated that pair activities allow EFL learners to have authentic communication and increase correct articulation and reproduction of the sounds of the language in use. Working in pairs helps students adapt to the communicative approach. Nevertheless, some students perceived pair work as a disadvantage since they prefer to work individually because they think their partner will not make the same effort when performing speaking tasks.

Conclusion

Referring to the research results, it can be concluded that improving English speaking skills is a challenging process for most students. This study explored students' perceptions of

speaking in English in the classroom. EFL students are afraid of developing speaking activities in the classroom because of pronunciation factors. Most problems students face when performing speaking activities in the classroom are fear of making mistakes and a lack of confidence when speaking in front of the class. Some students make mistakes when presenting something in front of the class or interacting with more individuals using the English language; this is also due to the cultural background of shy people and the fear of expressing themselves in any language.

Regarding speaking activities, the students claimed they had applied some activities in the classroom. However, most of the tasks are grammar and vocabulary related, such as filling in the space with correct grammar and vocabulary practice, and this does not help significantly to improve their oral communication. Consequently, teachers must apply other authentic activities such as debates about current topics or topics the students like, oral presentations, and role-plays where they can use the language authentically.

Finally, students find beneficial pairwork tasks to improve their speaking skills, and they indicated they feel more comfortable and less anxious when performing these activities with their peers. Besides, the students are motivated to learn by performing pair work activities since they feel more supported and less challenged when working with their partners.

Limitations

This study presented two main limitations, the lack of technology and the time in data collection. Most of the survey participants did not have internet access. In addition, several of them needed to learn how to complete the survey, so they required individual assistance through the internet to help them with specific questions they needed help understanding. The second factor was related to data collection. Since the results were transferred to an Excel data sheet, the organization process for obtaining averages required additional time.

Recommendations

For future researchers, it is recommended to establish small groups of students to assist them virtually with their concerns about the survey. This process would help minimize the time spent working on attendance feedback. Additionally, getting students used to the online survey process might be a good strategy.

References

- Alvarez, C., & Guevara, P. (2021). EFL teachers' perceptions on using pedagogical modules in Ecuador: A focus group interview. *Chakiñan, Revista De Ciencias Sociales Y Humanidades*, 1(14), 42–56. <https://doi.org/10.37135/chk.002.14.03>
- Anderson, S. (2001). Phonology. *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 1, 11386-11392. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B0-08-043076-7/02982-X>
- Bai, B., & Yuan, R. (2019). EFL teachers' beliefs and practices about pronunciation teaching. *ELT Journal*, 73(2), 134-143. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccy040>
- Banditvilai, C., & Cullen, R. (2018). Problems and obstacles in learning English as a Foreign Language. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, 8(12), 1-6. <http://www.ijssh.org/vol8/977-ED3015.pdf>
- Bygate, M. (2021). The effect of task-based language teaching on writing skills of EFL learners in Malaysia. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, 6(3). <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2016.63022>
- Bygate et al. (2021). *Researching Pedagogic Tasks: Second Language Learning, Teaching and Testing*. Longman.
- Cain, S. L., & Dam, R. (2015). *Engaging parents using web-based feedback on child growth to reduce childhood obesity: a mixed methods study*. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12889-019-6618-3>
- Ceballos, K., Dávila, N., Espinoza, J., & Ramírez, M. (2014). *Factores que inciden en el aprendizaje del idioma Inglés en los alumnos de segundo año medio de la ciudad de Chillán*. http://repobib.ubiobio.cl/jspui/bitstream/123456789/1143/1/Ceballos_Parra_Katherine.pdf

- Chmutina, K., & Sadler, N. (2021). *How the English language dominates disaster research and practice of disasters*. <https://www.e-ir.info/2021/01/18/how-the-english-language-dominates-disaster-research-and-practice/>
- Chou, M. H. (2018). Speaking anxiety and strategy use for learning English as a foreign language in full and partial English-medium instruction contexts. *TESOL Quarterly*, 52(3), 611-633. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.455>
- Díaz, D. (2014). *Factores de dificultad para el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera en estudiantes con bajo rendimiento en inglés de la Universidad ICESI*. https://repository.icesi.edu.co/biblioteca_digital/bitstream/10906/76938/1/dificultad_a_aprendizaje_ingles.pdf
- Don, Z. M. (2020). The CEFR and the production of spoken English: A challenge for teachers. *The English Teacher*, 49(3), 77-88. https://www.melta.org.my/journals/TET/downloads/tet49_03_01.pdf
- Fonken, L. D. (2018). Matrix-Q Education: the 9+ levels of the learning process experience. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323497352_Matrix-Q_Education_The_9_Levels_of_the_Learning_Process_Experience_PT_ALGORITHM_MS_SKILLS_COMPETENCES
- Foster, S. (2018). *Cognitive task complexity and written output in Italian and French as a foreign language*. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1060374307000549>
- Kuiken, F., & Vedder, I. (2008). Cognitive task complexity and written output in Italian and French as a foreign language. *Journal of second language writing*, 17(1), 48-60. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2007.08.003>

Loeb, S., Dynarski, S., McFarland, D., Morris, P., Reardon, S., & Reber, S. (2017).

Descriptive Analysis in Education: A Guide for Researchers. National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.

Marta. (2022). *Why is English pronunciation so hard?*

<https://www.inenglishwithlove.com/blog/why-english-pronunciation-is-hard>

Mejía, E. (2010). *Avoiding vowel pronunciation interference of mother tongue in English through phonetic exercise*.

<https://repositorio.pucesa.edu.ec/bitstream/123456789/828/1/85049.pdf>

Nurullayevna, S. (2020). The key to effective communication is pronunciation. *European*

Journal of Humanities and Educational Advancements, 1(4), 5-7.

<https://scholarzest.com/index.php/ejhea/article/view/79>

Ministerio de Educación. (2016). *English as a Foreign Language for Subnivel Bachillerato*.

<https://educacion.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2016/08/EFL-for-Subnivel-BGU-final-ok.pdf>

Pennington, M. C. (2021). Teaching pronunciation: The state of the art 2021. *RELC*

Journal, 52(1), 3-21.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/00336882211002283>

Rabiah, S. (2015). *Language as a tool for communication and cultural reality discloser*.

<https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:brlevEUwH90J:https://osf.io/nw94m/download+&cd=2&hl=es-419&ct=clnk&gl=ec>

Ramos Trejo, M. A., & Romero Fernández, D. A. (2022). *Virtual teaching materials to improve speaking skills in the 2nd grade of the Urcuquí High School in the academic period 2021* (Bachelor's thesis).

Roldán, A. (2016). *Obstáculos en el aprendizaje de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera en dos grupos de población bogotana*.

<https://repository.udistrital.edu.co/bitstream/handle/11349/6611/Rold%E1nS%E1nchezGuiomarAndrea2017.pdf?sequence=1>

Smith, D. (2003). *American Psychological Association*.

<https://www.apa.org/monitor/jan03/principles>

Torres, G., De León, L. V., & Britton, A. (2018). Análisis de los problemas que influyen en el aprendizaje del idioma inglés en los estudiantes de sexto grado en la provincia de Panamá. *Revista de Iniciación Científica*, 4, 119-121. <https://doi.org/10.33412/rev-ric.v4.0.1833>

Tusing, K. J. (2008). Speech Fluency and Speech Errors. *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*.

Valenzuela, M. J., Romero, K., Vidal-Silva, C., & Philominraj, A. (2016). Factores que influyen en el aprendizaje del idioma inglés de nivel inicial en una universidad chilena. *Formación universitaria*, 9(6), 63-72.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0718-50062016000600006>

Vercellotti, M. L. (2012). *Complexity, accuracy, and fluency as properties of language performance: The development of the multiple subsystems over time and in relation to each other*. http://d-scholarship.pitt.edu/12071/1/Vercellotti_CAF_v3.pdf

Werner, & Keller. (1994). *Fundamentals of Speech Synthesis and Speech Recognition*. Chichester.

Yates, L. (2017). Learning how to speak: Pronunciation, pragmatics and practicalities in the classroom and beyond. *Language Teaching*, 50 (2), 227-246.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444814000238>

Appendix 1

Survey

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

Consent Letter from University

Available upon request.

Appendix 3

E-portfolio

Available upon request.