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**Problems that ELT students faced while speaking in the  
classroom before and during the pandemic of Covid-19**

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Languages for the degree of

**LICENCIATURA EN LA ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to identify and analyze the issues that ELT students have experienced while speaking in English in their face-to-face and virtual classes before and during pandemic. It also explored their environment and how it affected their motivation to speak in class.

The study was carried out at a language department of a public university located in central Mexico. The participants were first year college students of this institution. It was qualitative research, therefore, the instruments used to collect data were a closed-ended questionnaire and an interview. The research findings have shown that most of the students experienced grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary and fluency problems while speaking in their English classes. Moreover, they considered that their teacher's negative feedback affected their motivation to participate but did not feel criticized or judged by their own classmates as the environment was respectful most of the time in face-to face classes and during virtual education. More results and implications are described within this thesis.

## CHAPTER I

### 1.0 Introduction

Speaking is one of the most crucial skills when learning and teaching a second language. It is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts (Chaney, 1998 as cited in Kayi, n.d. p.1). The process of developing this skill involves producing, receiving, and processing information shared with others (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997 as cited in Cunningham, 1999). It is also important to mention that there are subskills within speaking such as fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar.

In the English language teaching context, which is the area this research explored, speaking is a very important skill because students are being trained to become English teachers. Being a teacher involves acquiring teaching skills in order to offer meaningful learning to their class. Understanding the mechanics of the language and having fluent competence in speaking, reading, writing, and listening along with understanding phonology, grammar, and discourse improves the teacher's technical knowledge in English (Brown, 2000 as cited in Hernández, n.d). During the bachelor's degree in ELT, student-teachers have some teaching practicum after the seventh semester of the career: two courses to teach children (Enseñanza del inglés para Pre-escolar y Primaria), teenager and adults (Enseñanza del inglés para Adolescentes y adultos), professional practices and social service. Therefore, to speak fluently is essential for these student-teachers.

The present research focuses on investigating the difficulties ELT students face when they try to speak in English while they are in class and if those problems were the same when they were in a traditional classroom and virtual classes.

## **1.1 Rationale**

I became interested in this topic because of my professional practices at a CEBIS (Centro de Bienestar Social). Two students, who were attending their second semester in college, decided to join this project to take basic English courses. Both were around 18 years old, and their English level was A1 and A2 respectively. The classes took place in the afternoons from Wednesday to Friday for an hour, using Google Meet.

As we were having the sessions, I noticed that their speaking was quite poor whenever I asked them to participate in each task, along with the fact that they seemed to be reluctant to even share a simple opinion when I organized small debates about different topics from real life. They told me they were too scared to speak in English because they did not want to be judged by the other learner present in the class and that their lack of vocabulary and grammar acquisition prevented them to have a conversation. That gave me the idea to investigate why they felt that way and what I could do to help them improve their speaking performance to overcome their fears.

## **1.2 Location of Research**

This study was carried out at a language department of a public university located in central Mexico. This department offers two undergraduate programs: English language teaching (ELT) and French Language Teaching (FLT), a master's degree in ELT among other departments. The subjects included in the undergraduate program in ELT help students to develop their skills in teaching foreign languages, most specifically English.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The aim of this research was to identify and look deeply into some of the issues ELT students faced while speaking English during their English courses, explore their environment in the classroom and how it affected their motivation to participate. It also focused on students' English-speaking problems before and while they took virtual classes.

### **1.4 Aims**

The goals of this research are as follows:

- To find out how the classroom environment helps or hinder ELT students' participation.
- To explore the issues these students might have experienced in their classroom and in online courses.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

RQ1: Is the classroom environment good enough for ELT students to feel comfortable to speak in class? If so, how does this help them?

RQ2: Do students have problems when speaking in their English class? If so, what are those problems? Were they the same in the classroom and online?

### **1.6 Significance of the study**

The study may be relevant to ELT students. All results obtained in this research could help them identify the different issues they might face while speaking so they could know how to work on them properly to improve in their performance. For us as future teachers, it could be helpful to design teaching strategies that could motivate our students to achieve a good level of English speaking.

## **1.7 Context of the research**

The areas related to this investigation are the following: Speaking skill, speaking performances according to CEFR, speaking subskills: fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar, grammar learning, difficulties in fluency, second language learning, English language learning, motivation in students to do speaking tasks, attitude, and environment of the classroom.

## **1.8 Chapter conclusion**

In this chapter I provided background information about my research. The research aims, purpose of the study along with the research questions were presented briefly. In the following chapter, I will explain in detail the topics that will be part of the literature review.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of previous research on second language learning, focusing more on the speaking skill and subskills that students need to acquire and improve while learning the foreign language. The ideas are supported by different sources of information from different authors and experts on language acquisition and English teaching.

### **2.1 Second language learning**

Brown and Hanlon (1970 cited in Krashen, 1981, p. 5) explain that language acquisition is very similar to the process children use in acquiring first and second languages. It requires meaningful interaction in the target language-- natural communication--in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding. Several experts in the area like Stern (1983 cited in Tayebbeh et.al. 2015) distinguish three types of attitudes within second language learning. Attitudes towards the community and people who speak the L2, attitude towards learning the language concerned, and attitude towards languages and language learning in general. He states, "These attitudes are influenced by the kind of personality the learner possesses - for example, whether they are 'ethnocentric' or 'authoritarian'. They may also be influenced by the particular social environment/milieu/ within which the language learning process takes place" (p. 241) and can also be found either in monolingual or bilingual contexts (Ellis, 1985 cited in Tayebbeh et.al. 2015).

Moreover, many studies have been carried out and some theories have emerged to describe the process of language acquisition: the behaviorist perspective, the innatist, the cognitive, and the sociocultural perspective.

### **2.1.1 Behaviorist perspective**

Behaviorism has been addressed by Skinner, although it was not until 1940 to 1970 when this theory was more used. This suggests that students' learning has to do with the environment they are involved in. It introduces imitation and habit-formation, in addition, it is said that learners respond to the stimulus through teachers' rewards and punishments that lead to changes in their behavior and inherited factors are little influential. To support this idea, Williams (1999, cited in Miller et al. 2019 p. 1) states that students' behavior is the only dimension that teachers can look to for evidence of learning, and altering environmental factors in the classroom is the main strategy for promoting student learning. The classroom activities are focused on mimicry and memorization as the students learn all sentence patterns completely. However, Sarem and Shirzadi (2014) argue that it was a problem within behaviorist theory because, in the language, it was impossible to learn all sentences through imitation.

### **2.1.2 Innatist perspective**

Chomsky addressed in 1959 the behaviorism counterpart which was the innatist or nativist perspective. He claimed that children are naturally designed for languages as they develop throughout the years like any other biological function, defining it as Language Acquisition Device (LAD). It considers the human mind and the cognitive processes as essential parts within the language acquisition. Chomsky (2002 cited in Schimdt 2013) also mentions that

the intuitive linguistic knowledge is used unconsciously and automatically all the time to understand and produce language. Moreover, he addresses Universal Grammar, which states that all human beings inherit a universal set of principles and parameters that control the shape human languages can take, and which are what make human languages similar to one another, applying to all languages.

### **2.1.3 Cognitive perspective**

This perspective emerged in the twentieth century, in 1950 to be precise which Yilmaz, 2011 (p. 205) briefly mentions that the behaviorism's lack of explanation about how the mental processes work in humans made way for the cognitive psychologists to challenge the behaviorism's assumptions. According to Brown 2000 (cited in Sarem & Shirzadi, 2014) constructivists, like some cognitivists, argue that "all human beings construct their own version of reality, and therefore multiple contrasting ways of knowing and describing are all considered to be equally acceptable" (p. 63). This perspective focuses not only on acquiring the language, unlike the behaviorist, but also enables learners to create new knowledge building up to prior experiences and explores on what the learners already know about language and how that prior knowledge shapes their perception of it, which intervenes between stimulus and response.

#### **2.1.3.1 Piaget's theory of cognitive development**

Many previous studies regarding the cognitivism have been carried out to support the growth of its theories. Gillani 2003 (cited in Yilmaz, 2011) talks about that Piaget links the process of intellectual and cognitive development to biological acts in children, he claims they do not passively learn, but that according to Bransford et al. 2000 and Fox 2001 (cited

in Yilmaz 2011) they seek new stimulus in their environment out of pure nature in order to gain knowledge from it. Moreover, Fosnot 1996; Gillani, Holford, Jarvis, and Griffin 2003; Piaget 1970 (cited in Yilmaz 2011) mention Piaget assumed that human maturation makes way for several stages to manifest that also compound this cognitive development, which are: sensorimotor, pre-operational, concrete operational and formal operational stage. Subsequently, Mcleod (2021) describes each stage briefly.

The sensorimotor stage: Two-year-old children develop some reflexes that would help them explore all things surrounding them. Children focus more on body coordination and physical sensations and acquire the basics of the language. The second stage is the pre-operational, in which children from two to seven years old begin to influence their own thinking by how appearances are presented to them and are quite egocentric to the idea of believing that others view the world as they see it.

The third is the concrete operational stage from seven to eleven years old. Children are more open to others' view of their surroundings and not just their own, although abstract thinking is becoming an issue to them. Finally, the formal operational stage begins when children are eleven years old. They acquire a better abstract thinking and higher classification, which helps them to understand subjects that are more complex to improve their high reasoning.

However, children can also acquire a second language with the same proficiency as the first if they are exposed enough to it at their early ages before they reach the final stage of Piaget's theory of cognitive development. Abrahamson, 2012 (as cited in Ahmed, 2018) states that natural rates will be nonexistent if children are exposed to languages in the late stage, therefore making the acquisition of a second language harder for them. Slabakova,

2016 (as cited in Ahmed, 2018 p. 138) explains this to support the previous idea: “if language is not acquired by puberty, some aspects of the language such as the lexicon can be learned, but native like mastery of grammatical structure cannot be achieved”.

There are some cognitive factors that affect second language acquisition as well. Ahmed, 2018 enlists the following: memory, which is divided in two types according to Richard and Schmidt, 2002 (as cited in Ahmed, 2018) short-term and long-term memory. Short-term memory refers to the capacity of storing and using information temporarily for learning, reasoning, and understanding. Long term memory has the purpose of understanding, remembering, reprocessing, and building information of new language.

Another factor that is important to mention is attention and awareness. According to Roben DeKeyser, 1998 and Richard Schmidt, 2001 (as cited in Lightbown & Spada) “learners must pay attention at first to any aspect of the language that they are trying to learn or produce” (p. 108). This is because when children learn their first language, the knowledge is acquired implicitly, but when they begin to learn a second one, they require to have more cognitive effort (Robinson, 2013 as cited in Ahmed, 2018). Additionally, Leaver, 2005 (as cited in Ahmed, 2018) mentions this factor should be accompanied by an understanding of what is going on within learning:

1. Individuals must pay attention to the environment where they learn language elements.
2. Take into consideration as many aspects as possible of the language they hear and see.
3. Try to use as many senses as possible while learning a new language but also attempting practices or rehearsals. To support this idea only, Lightbown and Spada,

2013 assure that by doing practices and considering some experiences, will help the new information becoming easier to process for learners.

Lastly, forgetting is also mentioned as a cognitive factor that affects second language learning. Lever et al. 2005 (as cited in Ahmed, 2018) claims that forgetting can be essential to good learning because if a student forgets initial knowledge, she/he can learn it once again within a new context, thus combining it with traces of what was previously learned.

#### **2.1.4 Sociocultural perspective**

Vigotsky's sociocultural theory originated in 1978, which focuses on learners' development in human cognition through engagement in several social and cultural activities with other people. This engagement will help second language acquisition emerge due to the process of meaning-making (Mazlina et al. 2017). In addition to this idea, Brown and Campione 1996 (cited in Shuell, 2001 p. 1) state that "the acquisition of culturally relevant knowledge is a process in which the person becomes a member of a community of practice or community of learners", admittedly believing that individual learning is a mistake. Lantof, 2000 (as cited in Sarem & Shizardi, 2014 p. 70) mentions that the sociocultural perspective "focuses on the role of multilingual society" and that "interaction is a form of mediation through which learners construct new forms and functions collaboratively" (Ellis, 1999 as cited in Sarem & Shizardi, 2014 p. 70). That construction makes them negotiate not just meaning, but also role relationships along with learners' social and cultural identities. Within the interactions between learners, they need to comprehend each other while also involving themselves in a negotiation of meaning, which will significantly help the second language learning. Long, 1996 (as cited in Sarem &

Shizardi, 2014) defines the negotiation of meaning as “a process individuals provide and interpret signals of their own along with the interlocutor’s perceived comprehension which provokes adjustments to linguistic form, conversational structure and message content in order to achieve a final understanding” (p. 71).

Some studies, according to Lightbown and Spada (2013) have been carried out that showed how second language learners acquire language while doing oral activities with others.

Swain 1985 (as cited in Lightbown and Spada, 2013) thought learners must pay attention to how meaning is expressed when producing language. This hypothesis was influenced by the cognitive perspective. It is also mentioned that Swain worked alongside their colleagues to determine how second language learners co-construct more linguistic knowledge by doing production tasks.

Additionally, Lightbown and Spada (2013) state that “speaking mediates thinking, which makes individuals internalize” (p. 118). This internalization occurs when learners interact within their Zone of Proximal Development, helping students perform at a higher level due to the support offered by their interlocutor. The concept of ZPD will be explained below.

#### **2.1.4.1 Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)**

The ZPD concept originated during the last ages of 1920, but it was not carried out until 1934. Shabani et al. (2010) state that Vygotsky defined this term as the “distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 238). In other words, the ZPD takes special interest in how much knowledge a child can understand by their own and with others,

supporting more the idea of a guidance, thus making children able to learn meaningfully from someone else who is more experienced that would help them progress faster.

## **2.2 Speaking**

Speaking has been defined by various researchers and experts regarding language acquisition. Brown (2003) suggests that “Speaking is a productive skill that can be directly and empirically observed... speaking is the product of creative construction of linguistic strings” (p. 140). Harmer (2001, cited in Dueñas, Cardozo & Peña 2015) states that it is “the ability to utter words fluently which involves not only grammar rules, but the speaker conveys and understands the ideas and opinions in various contexts” (p.38). Moreover, speaking is also considered as a macro skill that helps people to communicate, taking special interest in the learners who are not native English speakers (Kamonpan 2010).

Furthermore, Tarigan (2008, cited in Laksana 2016) enlists four aims speaking focuses on that makes it relevant for English learners inside their classroom, which are namely:

- a) To inform: The speaker wants to share ideas, opinions, and knowledge about a fact to the hearer.
- b) To entertain: The speaker tries to get the listener’s attention by searching for some entertainment value that would make the conversation more interesting to him/her.
- c) To persuade: The speaker convinces the listener in doing a certain activity that picked his/her interest.
- d) To discuss: The speaker wants to talk about various topics that would require solution and planning.

Additionally, Brown and Yule (1983) mention language can be seen as having two functions: the transactional and interactional functions. The speaker in transactional function has the efficient transference of information as a main concern where the language is “message oriented”, the listener needs to have all the details of the message correct, so it is up to the speaker to make sure the things he/she says are as clear as possible to avoid future misunderstandings. On the other hand, human interactions are important within the interactional function of the language which are present in daily conversations with others. Brown and Yule (1983) suggest that these everyday conversations “appear to consist of one individual commenting on something which is present to both him and his listener... phrases and echoes of phrases appear more to be intended as contributions to a conversation than to be taken as instances of information-giving” (p. 3). For instance, the interlocutor and his/her recipient are invested in the negotiation of meaning, making it listener oriented. While this skill is being used in most of the aspects of daily life, it takes an important role in students’ learning, as it helps them achieve different aims and objectives. Srinivas (2019) additionally mentions that even though speaking is essential in learners, some teachers have underestimated it and kept teaching students the memorization of dialogues and repetition of drills as the most common speaking tasks.

### **2.2.1 Speaking performances in A2 level according to CEFR.**

Students continue their acquisition of the language by doing certain tasks they are expected to complete depending on their level. The common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) describes what it is required for students to achieve regarding speaking performances in English while presenting the information in a simple chart.

<b>Spoken interaction</b>	Students can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what they are trying to say. They can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.
<b>Spoken production</b>	They can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where they live and people they know.

**Table 2.1 Speaking**

As it can be noticed, the competences are simpler in this level considering that grammar acquisition includes topics learners will immediately relate to and have more contact with while practicing them in real life. Thus, making them express their ideas meaningfully.

Additionally, the CEFR states that A2 level learners can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters.

They also can describe in simple terms aspects of their background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.

The following rubric published by the Common Reference levels shows the skills students at this level should obtain in speaking performances.

	<b>RANGE</b>	<b>ACCURACY</b>	<b>FLUENCY</b>	<b>INTERACTION</b>	<b>COHERENCE</b>
<b>A2</b>	Uses basic sentence patterns with memorized phrases, groups of a few words and formulae in order to communicate limited information in simple everyday situations.	Uses some simple structures correctly, but still systematically makes basic mistakes.	Can make him/herself understood in very short utterances, even though pauses, false starts and reformulation are very evident.	Can answer questions and respond to simple statements. Can indicate when he/she is following but is rarely able to understand enough to keep conversation going of his/her own accord.	Can link groups of words with simple connectors like "and," "but" and "because".

**Table 2.2 A2 Speaking skills**

The speaking tasks at this level are basic as it is the beginning of the learning of English language. The students, however, are not required to master fluency or accuracy since they lack some vocabulary that with the passage of time will improve throughout their education.

### **2.2.2 Speaking subskills**

Speaking is a complex skill that needs more development of its subskills. Those subskills are behaviors students always use to achieve effective performance in their speech.

Katawazi et.al (2019 cited in Farisha et.al.,2021) additionally state that “the language subskills carry the ability of students to master the key basics in the language skills to help them learn a good language” (p. 2). These are presented as follows:

*Fluency:* Bailey and Byrne (2003; 1986 cited in International Journal of TESOL Education, 2018) define this term as “the ability to use the language quickly and confidently without too many hesitations or too many unnatural pauses to cause barriers in communication” (p. 1). Good fluency offers better English proficiency which makes it more impressive for the listeners due to the smoothness of the student’s speech almost as if he/she had native-like control over the language.

According to Lennon (1990 cited in Jong et.al; 2007) fluency can be divided in broad sense and narrow sense. The broad sense refers to oral proficiency in general, the narrow sense refers to temporal measures of speech (speaking ability).

*Pronunciation:* An understandable pronunciation is essential within communication, as it is a basic requirement to master in this competence. If mistakes are not corrected when the learner is starting to acquire the L2, it will be difficult for him/her to improve.

Pronunciation, according to Richards and Schmidt (2010) is defined as “the way a certain

sound or sounds are produced” (p. 478). It is the way and where the word and sentence stress are placed, it also explains how students use the pitch and intonation to indicate their construction of their meaning and feelings (Harmer, 2007 cited in Pourhosein & Banou, 2016).

However, students not only need to learn how to pronounce, according to Brown and Yule (1983), but also, need to listen to examples of carefully spoken English as they identify stressed words and intonation in taped read aloud material. They also discuss the fact that many courses have abandoned written read aloud texts to replace them with authentic conversations, radiobroadcasts, lectures, etc. which make students feel more motivated to speak the language and not simply utter repetitive written sentences.

There are two main features that belong to pronunciation that Prodanovska (2017) describes briefly. The segmental feature is mentioned, which are “sounds units of a language-phonemes which are divided into two main categories such as vowels, subdivided into monophthongs and diphthongs (and according to some authors and theories - triphthongs) and consonants...” (p. 780). Suprasegmental refers to more complicated language features, such as intonation, rhythm, stress, etc.

Pourhosein (2010 cited in Pourhosein & Banou, 2016) discusses the issue about students’ English ability. It can be judged while based on their pronunciation and analyzes if a student’s pronunciation is weak or not. Prayda (2015) states, based on the results on her research, that students have difficulties in pronouncing words because they do not achieve a good articulation of those words due to their own dialect and accent they are using while speaking. Morley (1994 cited in Pourhosein, 2016) affirms that “if a speaker has a heavy English accent, this may cause negative judgments about his/her personality and

competence” (p. 2). Most of the teachers avoid teaching pronunciation in their classroom which might be a mistake considering it is essential for the communicative competence. Pourhosein (2012 cited in Pourhosein & Banou, 2016) suggested that language teachers should incorporate activities that can reinforce students’ pronunciation in their English classes through various materials and tests.

*Rhythm:* Crystal (1985 cited in Cumming n.d.) defined the term as “an application of the general sense of this term in phonology, to refer to the perceived regularity of prominent units in speech. These regularities may be stated in terms of patterns of stressed v. unstressed syllables, syllable length (long v. short) or pitch (high v. low), or some combination of these variables” (p. 1). In earlier studies, this concept was explained as divisions of speech intervals. Ordin (2015) mentions that languages are classified within rhythm as stress-timed and syllable-timed. However, these classifications were proposed by Pike (1945 cited in Cumming n.d.) where he implies that a language can have two rhythm types.

Underhill (2005 cited in Lasi, 2020) suggests that when teaching rhythm and intonation, teachers should combine them both in real contexts and materials. When the student is at a beginner’s level, teachers can use authentic metrical texts such as nursery rhymes.

*Intonation:* It is the way students’ voice raises or lowers in pitch while they are speaking, and it could be also referred to as the melody of the sentence (Zulfugarova, 2018). The changes in intonation are created by pitch, sentence stress and rhythm. Levis (2012) defines intonation as the combination of several elements such as acoustic parameters, duration and intensity that are used to communicate discourse meaning, which also includes pitch.

Halliday (1967 cited in Levis, 2012) describes the primary domains, also named as the three Ts of intonation, that compound meaningful pitch briefly: Tone, tonality, and tonicity.

- a) Tone: It is also commonly known as “tune” and it is defined as intonation to communicate meaning at the end of a sentence.
- b) Tonality: It is divided in spoken phrases (e.g., if you leave now, don’t come back).
- c) Tonicity: It is the use of pitch to single out a word or syllable as informationally prominent (e.g., *HE’S ready versus He’s READy*) (p. 4).

Tone is the most important element within intonation as it determines the type of sentence uttered which might be a statement, question, command, or request. Zulfugarova (2018) asserts that “The nuclear tone is the most important part of the intonation pattern without which the latter cannot exist at all” (p. 19). This intonation pattern may consist of one syllable which becomes the nucleus; its tone determines the pitch of the rest of the pattern which is the tail. Thus, if the tone falls, the intonation pattern stays at a low pitch, if it rises; the pitch is high as well.

*Vocabulary:* Horny (1995 cited in Alqahtani, 2015 p. 24-25) defines this subskill as “the total number of words in a language; vocabulary is a list of words with their meanings”.

Without it, the communication cannot be achieved successfully. The term was also defined by Neuman and Dwyer (2009 cited in Alqahtani, 2015) as “words we must know to communicate effectively” (p.24). Learners must acquire a mastery in this skill in order to understand the whole language.

Moreover, Hornby (1995, cited in Alqahtani 2015) defines this mastery in vocabulary as the “complete knowledge or complete skill that makes someone an expert in a certain subject” (p. 26). Additionally, Rivers (1989 as cited in Alqahtani 2015) mentions that vocabulary mastery refers to the great skill in processing words of a language. This implies

that if learners want to increase their knowledge, they need to have some motivation and interest in studying the words of a language.

Lightbown and Spada (2013) discuss the way vocabulary is acquired in second language learners. Students are exposed to a smaller amount of sample words in the L2 than in the L1; therefore, the context is not helpful for them due to the lack of students' understanding of the foreign words. However, it is mentioned they can practice the language for their vocabulary to expand. Nation (2001 cited in Alqahtani, 2015 p. 22) mentions this aspect by describing the correlation between vocabulary knowledge and language use: "The skill of vocabulary enables language use and, conversely. Language use leads to an increase in vocabulary knowledge." The more students see, hear, and understand a new word, the learning will be easier.

*Grammar:* Chomsky (1957 p.13 cited in Dalil, 2013 p.7) defines grammar language as "a device of some sort for producing the sentences of the language under analysis". Moreover, Ur (1996) later mentions that the term can also be described as "the way words are put together to make correct sentences" (p. 75). Grammar is a system implicit that is often existent in a language that generates all sentences possible.

Grammar, just like vocabulary, is present and plays an essential role in all English skills (reading, listening, reading, and speaking). In oral production specifically, it gives students a larger control of expression and communication in real life. Puspa (2018) states that learners who are able to communicate better than others intuitively know the grammar system and the rules to make meaning. To support this idea, Ur (1991 cited in Puspa, 2018 p. 8) mentions that "grammar does not only affect how units of language are combined in

order to ‘look right’; it also affects their meaning”, thus having a good grammar acquisition makes misunderstandings disappear.

There is also a correlation between students’ grammar mastery and speaking ability, where it is stated that “there are three types of students at the classroom, where there are some students who have master grammar cannot speak well, in addition there are some students did not master grammar but can speak well, or even there are some students who master the grammar and also can speak well” (Puspa, 2018 p. 17), but that in general, basic knowledge of grammar is important for English beginners to acquire in their early learning.

### **2.3 Methods to teach speaking**

Teachers, according to Zardini and Barnabé (2013) “want their students to actually be able to use the language as correct as possible and with a purpose” (p. 29), they also state making students speak English is not an easy task, therefore, teachers have to be aware of the different methods and techniques in order to help them reach this objective. These techniques are based in various approaches which are supported by experts within ELT which are namely: Direct Method, Audiolingual Method, Natural Approach, Communicative Approach, Task-Based learning, and Project based learning.

*Direct Method:* Also known as Natural Method, it was introduced in France and Germany by many of its supporters in the nineteenth century and it was approved in both of these countries. Richards and Rogers (1986 p. 9-10) provided a brief list with the characteristics of this method in practice.

1. Classroom instruction was conducted exclusively in the target language.
2. Only everyday vocabulary and sentences were taught.

3. Oral communication skills were built up in a carefully graded progression organized around question-and-answer exchanges between teachers and students in small, intensive classes.
4. Grammar was taught inductively.
5. New teaching points were introduced orally.
6. Concrete vocabulary was taught through demonstration, objects, and pictures; abstract vocabulary was taught by association of ideas.
7. Both speech and listening comprehension were taught.
8. Correct pronunciation and grammar were emphasized.

As it can be seen, along with the audiolingual approach, this is a method that only uses the target language. It is strongly believed in the idea that using the target language in a real context inside the classroom gives students better chances of thinking and speaking in the foreign language (Mart, 2013 p. 182). Additionally, some advantages can be described in favor of this approach as it teaches the language the same way an individual acquire the first language and its emphasis on speech makes it more interesting to learners who need to hold real conversations in the target language.

*Audiolingual method:* This approach originated during World War II. According to Brown (2006), due to this conflict, Americans had the need to become orally proficient in both their allies and enemies' languages, therefore, the U.S. military began funding language courses that focused on aural/oral skills and implemented different tasks such as pronunciation, pattern drills and conversation practice. The courses were then commonly known as the "Army Specialized Training Program" or "Army Method". In later years, this approach turned out to be popular as it was adopted as the new methodology in various educational institutions. It was not until 1950 that it was renamed as the "Audiolingual Method."

Mart (2013) assures that the principal objective of the ALM is to improve students' speaking achievement by providing material to learners such as vocabulary and grammar patterns through dialogues which make them respond quick and correctly in the spoken language. These dialogues, according to Larsen-Freeman (2000 p. 45 cited in Mart, 2013 p. 64) "are learnt through repetition and such drills as repetition, backward build-up, chain, substitution, transformation, and question-and-answer are conducted based upon the patterns in the dialogue."

This approach possesses some main characteristics that describe it. Celce-Murcia (n.d.) states the ALM drew on the reform environment and the direct method, but the features added are from structural linguistics and behavioral psychology. Structural linguistics begins with describing minimal distinctive sound units such as phonemes, which then form into morphemes and finally develop into phrases/clauses and sentences (Bloomfield, 1933 cited in Celce-Murcia, n.d.). Meanwhile, in behavioral psychology, Skinner (1957 cited in Celce-Murcia, n.d.) assures that learning is based on students' repetitive verbal and nonverbal behaviors which they turn into fully learned habits.

Brown (2006 adapted from Prator & Celce-Murcia, 1979 p. 112) enlists them such as follows:

1. New material is presented in dialog form.
2. There is dependence on mimicry, memorization of set phrases, and over-learning.
- 3- Structures are sequenced by means of contrastive analysis and taught one at a time.
4. Structural patterns are taught using repetitive drills.
5. There is little or no grammatical explanation: grammar is taught by inductive analogy rather than deductive explanation.

6. Vocabulary is strictly limited and learned in context.
7. There is much use of tapes, language labs, and visual aids.
8. Great importance is attached to pronunciation.
9. Very little use of the mother tongue by teachers is permitted.
10. Successful responses are immediately reinforced.
11. There is a great effort to get students to produce error-free utterances.

Celce-Murcia (n.d.) additionally explains that teachers should be proficient in certain aspects of the language he/she is teaching, such as vocabulary, structures, among others since the learning activities and materials are controlled.

Britain also developed a similar method that arose from the audiolingual approach. Celce-Murcia (n.d.) defines that the *oral-situational method* is the “approach advocated organizing structures around situations (e.g., “at the pharmacy” or “at the restaurant”) that provided the learner with maximum opportunity to practice the target language” (p. 7). Its features are similar to the audiolingual method:

Spoken language is primary, the target language is only used in the classroom, all the language material is practiced orally, there is great effort to ensure the successful presentation of general and useful lexical items. This method also offers the introduction of new lexical and grammatical items to be practiced situationally (Celce-Murcia, n.d.).

*Natural Approach:* It was developed by Krashen and Tracy Terrell in the early 1980s who claim that its first principle is that comprehension precedes production. With this idea, they state that in order for the acquisition to occur, the learner has to understand messages.

Brown (2006) claims that Krashen and Terrell “felt that learners would benefit from

delaying production until speech "emerges," they should be as relaxed as possible in the classroom, and that a great deal of communication and "acquisition" should take place..." (p. 77).

This method aimed for the goal of acquiring interpersonal communication skills. Brown (2006) names some of them such as everyday language situations-conversations, shopping, listen to the radio, etc. Another principle mentioned in Krashen and Terrell (1983) states that production can emerge in different stages, showing the evolution of speech in learners. The first stage shows that there is a response presented by nonverbal communication which makes the speaking evolve in single words (yes, no, there, you, me, etc.), then students begin to produce combinations of two or three words until they can finally form phrases, then simple sentences and finally achieve a more complex discourse (p. 20).

*Communicative approach:* Also known as Communicate Language Teaching (CLT), it is one of the most popular approaches used in ELT. Richards and Rodgers (1986) state it originated from the changes in British language teaching during the late ages of 1960. According to Zardini and Barnabé (2013) this approach is "a way of teaching which is based on the principle that learning a language successfully involves communication rather than just memorizing a series of rules" (p. 31). They also claim that teachers are focused more on how students can experience a meaningful communication and not only paying attention to their mistakes.

Additionally, Bolen (2022) discusses that this method considers interaction and communication as an important part in achieving an effective second language learning. Students participate in daily situations in which they might encounter in the target

language. She also mentions some of the activities that are usually practiced within this approach, which are namely: Role-plays, interviews, group tasks and opinion sharing.

The following characteristics for CLT are offered by Brown (2006 p. 214) which he states become part of the definition of this method.

1. Classroom goals are focused on all of the components of CC and not restricted to grammatical or linguistic competence.
2. Language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes. Organizational language forms are not the central focus but rather aspects of language that enable the learner to accomplish those purposes.
3. Fluency and accuracy are seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques. At times fluency may have to take on more importance than accuracy in order to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use.
4. In the communicative classroom, students ultimately have to use the language, productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts.

*Task-based learning:* TBL was first developed in 1987 in Southern India. Prabhu (1987) was the main researcher to address this method. He defines the term “task” as “an activity which required learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allowed teachers to control and regulate that process...” (p. 24). Similarly, Skehan (2003 cited in Brown, 2006) defines a task as "an activity which requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning, to attain an objective" (p. 215). Students have the opportunity to achieve good proficiency under teacher’s guidance in order to make them interact communicatively.

TBL focuses on the students' concentration in the tasks they are doing while using the foreign language. Prabhu (1987) states that students can be first given simpler and more accessible tasks to complete with the teacher's help in order for them to see what they are asked to do. Later, learners will be given similar or "parallel" tasks to do on their own. Prabhu (1987) explains that this Parallelism "... also meant that some students could learn to do what was demanded of them by observing others meeting a similar demand, and the class as such could attempt to do a task without the teacher's guidance after the experience of doing a similar task with the teacher's help" (p. 24-25). Additionally, Lightbown and Spada (1999) state that tasks may be complex such as creating a school newspaper, or easier as a hotel reservation. These activities should also be similar to the ones students might encounter outside the classroom so they can be meaningful for them.

Willis (1996 cited in Bunyamin, 2017) suggests there are three stages within Task-based learning: Pre-task, task cycle and language focus. In the pre-task stage, the teacher introduces the topic and the task by using simple instructions so the students will understand better what they need to do. The task cycle or "during the task" stage, students carry out the activity using the target language as the teacher becomes the facilitator to help them in their grammar, pronunciation, and formulation of sentences (Safitri et.al. 2019). Additionally, dialogues and roleplays using the target language can be used as viable activities (Frost, 2004 cited in Safitri et.al. 2019) and sometimes students collaborate voluntarily with each other (Prabhu, 1987). Finally, in the language focus or "post-task" stage, students report their task to the classroom in the form of a discussion and the teacher gives feedback on word meaning context so they can perform better in future tasks. This

feedback, according to Prabhu (1987), shows students' level of success and gives the teacher an idea of the level of challenge they could achieve in the process.

In addition, Bunyamin (2017) states that tasks are considered useful to the students if they include certain features. These characteristics are offered by Ellis (2003 cited in Bunyamin, 2017).

- a) A task is a work plan.
- b) A task primarily focuses on meaning.
- c) A task is designed to use the language in real-world processes.
- d) A task can involve any of the four language skills.
- e) A task engages cognitive processes.
- f) A task has clearly defined communicative outcome.

Since students are involved in tasks that require problem-solving in a natural context inside the classroom, they can use the language to complete those activities more meaningfully, therefore, good acquisition will take place in their learning.

*Project based learning:* This method originated in the early ages of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with John Dewey as its principal author who outlined the concept “learning by doing” in his book written in 1897. Graaf and Kolmos (2007) defined PBL as “an educational strategy. A method to organize the learning process in such a manner that the students are actively engaged in finding answers by themselves” (p. 1). Students are referred to design, plan, and carry out an important project where they produce an elaborated and realistic output such as presentations, publications, etc. (Patton, 2012 cited in Hunafatul et.al. 2015). For the task to be completed, the teacher monitors the group by giving little guidance throughout the process so learners can develop their creativity and self-confidence on their own. In

addition, Thomas (2000 cited in Hunafatul et.al. 2015) gives students a chance to improve their English-speaking skills and makes them create their own meaningful learning.

There are four existing stages that compound PBL. According to Fauziati and Kriwas (2014; 1999 cited in Riswandi, 2018 p. 33), “starting the project or speculation, developing the project, reporting to the class, and assessing the project.” The teacher in the first stage provides the students a project topic based on the curriculum and discusses it with the learners. Then, the teacher organizes the structure of the project activity by doing group formation, role assigning, discussing methodology decision and information source so students can begin. The third stage consists of the learners now working on their task while discussing the problems they might encounter and resolving them with their peers for them to present their final product to the class. Finally, the fourth stage refers to evaluation. The teacher discusses with the students whether they achieved the main goal of the task or need improvement.

Fragoulis and Bell (2009; 2010 cited in Riswandi, 2018) state that project-based learning has advantages that support its use within successful English learning. They describe students are given meaningful learning due to interesting activities that engage them in the project, also it creates an optimal environment for students to develop their speaking. To support the idea, Humairoh (2014 cited in Hunafatul et.al. 2015) showed that PBL can be effective in teaching speaking. His students claimed that the method was easy to follow and interesting as it helped them to improve their performance and creativity in each presentation.

### **2.3.7 Possible issues students face while speaking in the classroom**

Speaking in another language that it is not the mother tongue can be challenging for students and there are some factors to consider within the exploration of the various problems students face while trying to communicate in class.

*Attitude:* It has been addressed by many researchers as they claim it is an integral part of students' speaking performance. Rubin and Thompson (1994 as cited in Rasheedha & Rajathurai, 2017) define attitude as "one of the key factors that influences success or failure for language learners" (p.436). It is mentioned that good attitude towards the second language learning influences achievement rather than achievement influencing attitude (Schibeci & Riley, 1986 cited in Sewbihon, 2020). This achievement is measured by the amount of effort a student puts into their learning, thus making them have the motivation to participate in more speaking tasks than other students and might try to look for solutions to solve their difficulties in the course of conversation.

*Environment:* Another factor that can affect students' speaking performance is the environment in which they are in. Rasheedha and Raiathurai (2017) address that "people outside the class may think that the students just want to show off when they speak English for daily conversation. The response that the students get makes them lose their self-confidence to improve their speaking. Since the students do not want to be rejected by the people around them, so they use their native language in daily conversation" (p. 436).

This also can happen inside the classroom with peers and teachers. It has a powerful influence on learners that can make them enjoy studying or not. A classroom presents different behaviors, and all students can perform differently. This is the place, according to

Bima and Sugeng (2021), where the students' communication improves and is cultivated. However, there are times where classmates also play an important role inside the class. They can judge the way a person is speaking English, exposing their mistakes to the rest of the peers and the teacher. It can discourage learners to participate or working in groups or pairs in fear that someone might criticize their accent or how bad they are structuring sentences. According to Bahadur's (2021) findings related to this point, a student can hesitate to speak if the peers mock him/her after they hear he/she is having a hard time pronouncing some words.

*Problems with speaking activities:* Furthermore, Ur (1996) describes four issues she had encountered beforehand that influenced in students' speaking performances in the activities which are namely *Inhibition, nothing to say, low or uneven participation and Mother tongue use. Inhibition* has the effect of making students being afraid of being criticized for making mistakes or simply make them feel shy due to the attention given by everyone in the classroom. On the other hand, if learners are not inhibited completely, they assure *they do not have anything else to say*, thus, losing all motive to perform.

Moreover, *low participations are frequent in larger groups* when the teacher asks every student to participate one by one and there is little time to do so. This can turn out to be a bad idea due to the fact that some students tend to speak more than others and if time runs out, the last ones will have less time to talk.

*Mother tongue use* happen when there are students who speak the same mother tongue in the class tend to use it because they find it easier and less exposed to mistakes. If they are working in small groups, it would be more difficult to make the less motivated students use the target language.

*Fear of committing mistakes and anxiety:* Foreign learners are often afraid of the way others think about them when doing social interactions. Aydin (2008 cited in Boudamoz & Outes, 2018) states that this fear can be “observed when foreign language learners feel incapable of making the proper social impression and it is an apprehension towards evaluations by others”. They are constantly worried in every oral performance they do within the target language classes, making all self-confidence decrease. There is also stated that negative evaluation by the peers or the teacher makes way for anxiety in students to arise. Horwitz and Cope (1986 cited in Tsiplakides, 2009) identify three elements that compound foreign language anxiety which are the following:

- a) Communication apprehension: Students who exhibit this factor do not feel comfortable speaking in the target language in front of others, due to their limited knowledge of it.
- b) Negative evaluation: Students do not consider language errors as a natural part of the learning process, but as a threat to their image, and a source for negative evaluations from the teacher or their peers.
- c) Test anxiety: This factor makes students believe and consider the foreign language process, especially oral production, as a test situation, rather than an opportunity for communication and skills improvement.

Even though anxiety in speaking is a common issue for students, teachers mostly they do not identify it as such and they consider that students do not want to engage in the speaking activities because they are just having a bad attitude towards the class (Gregersen, 2003 cited in Tsiplakides, 2009).

*Lack of Vocabulary:* Vocabulary plays an important role in speaking tasks. Without it, students are not able to communicate properly their ideas with others. It has been undervalued by teachers who prioritize syntax or phonology as central to linguistic theory

(Coady & Huckin, 1997 p. 1). It is also mentioned that real communication is based on suitable and adequate vocabulary learning rather than grammar learning only (Cook, 2013 cited in Khan et.al. 2018).

It has been demonstrated that foreign learners have issues while trying to communicate orally. Wilkins (1972 cited in Arévalo & Díaz, 2016) states that making meaning sometimes can be hindered due to little grammatical knowledge and the lack of vocabulary. Learners do not know how to combine the words to form good sentences and they often have struggles to use words and expressions to speak (Khan 2005 cited in Salmawati, 2020). In general, students often know what to say in their mother tongue, but when they try to translate the ideas in the target language, they get confused and do not use the right set of vocabulary needed to express themselves.

## **2.4 Chapter Conclusion**

Several areas related to second language acquisition have been reviewed in this literature review. Behaviorist, Innatist, Cognitive and Sociocultural perspectives were the main theories investigated to explain the process of language acquisition, taking special interest in their speaking skills.

The Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) was also mentioned to highlight the aims learners need to achieve when doing their speaking tasks according to the level investigated, which was A2. Additionally, speaking subskills were mentioned as the key basics of the language that would help students get a good language learning: fluency, pronunciation, rhythm, intonation, vocabulary, and grammar.

Teachers also need to look for methods that would help their students' speaking proficiency; therefore, approaches such as Direct Method, Audiolingual Method, Natural Approach, Communicative Approach, Task-Based learning, and Project based learning were explored. This chapter also discussed Attitude, Environment, problems with speaking activities, mother tongue use, fear of committing mistakes and anxiety and lack of vocabulary as the main issues researchers have encountered that hinder students' performances the most.

In the following chapter, the methodology will be described along with the subjects and the instruments that will be used to collect the information for this research.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.0 Introduction**

This research was about the difficulties that students from English basic levels encounter while speaking in the target language class, most specifically when they are asked to participate and do oral tasks either individually or in groups. Therefore, to collect the data it was necessary to carry out a short questionnaire and an interview.

In this chapter, I will explain the subjects of my research, the instruments used to collect data and the setting. I will also provide a description of how I went about collecting the information that helped me answer my research questions.

### **3.1 Setting**

This study was carried out at a language department of a public university located in central Mexico. This language department has two Bachelors' degree, one in English Language Teaching (ELT) and another in French Language Teaching where students are trained to become English and French teachers. They develop their language and teaching methods through four years of education.

This study was carried out at the undergraduate program in ELT. I chose this program because the English language is taught since the beginning of the students' first year of the career, so I considered the learners there could help me achieve my goal in this research.

### **3.2 Participants**

The participants of this research were first year college students whose ages ranged from 18 to 44 years old. Most of them were females. 18 students answered a questionnaire and 3 of

them were interviewed. Their English level was A2 due to the fact these students were taking basic English classes in their second semester of the career. Their English lessons were two hours from Monday to Friday. All of them were taking the class online due to the pandemic via Microsoft Teams.

### **3.3 Research Methodology**

This research was qualitative. The purpose of qualitative research is to analyze to great extent phenomena and issues individuals encounter in their lives. Aspers and Corte (2019) state that: “Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them...” (p. 142). This method is to mainly review the behavior, motivations, and attitudes of the participants. Their answers are being interpreted in a subjective manner, which makes it a very interesting way to carry out research because it can show a great variety of results.

In addition, this research is also considered a case study since an issue is being investigated in its real context: the difficulties that basic English level students have while participating in class. Unlike experimental researchers, the case study focuses more on the “natural” design and does not have to manipulate the participants to reach a satisfactory result. Moreover, Crowe et. al. (2011) explain that “The case study approach is particularly useful to employ when there is a need to obtain an in-depth appreciation of an issue, event or phenomenon of interest, in its natural real-life context” (p. 1).

### **3.4 Instruments**

The instruments used for this study were a short questionnaire with closed-ended questions and a small interview. Information about these instruments will be provided below.

#### **3.4.1 Questionnaire**

A questionnaire, according to Lavrakas (2008) is “the main instrument for collecting data in survey research. Basically, it is a set of standardized questions, often called items, which follow a fixed scheme in order to collect individual data about one or more specific topics” (p. 652). It is also organized in the same way for every single subject that will answer, and it can be considered as a written interview. One of the advantages of this instrument, especially now that there is a still existing pandemic, is that the researcher does not need to be present when the subjects answer the questions, making the collection data quicker at some point since in these cases, all students can answer at their homes in that instant.

This instrument also needs some requirements for it to function the way it is needed to. It has to be elaborated in a simple way that will make the participants able to answer correctly. By supporting this idea, Roopa and Rani (2012, p. 274) describe the main elements this instrument of research must have for it to be efficient. They state that a questionnaire should:

1. Be composed of a simple and a specific language.
2. Demand one answer on one dimension.
3. Yield a truthful and accurate answer.
4. Accommodate all possible contingencies of a response.
5. Have mutually exclusive response options.

6. Produce variability in response.

7. Minimize social desirability.

Additionally, they mention that when questions are formulated, they should be understandable to the participants and avoid complex and ambiguous words that might be confusing to them. If this is ignored, the people who is trying to answer the questionnaire would respond incorrectly and the results will lack the accuracy it is needed for the analysis in the future.

The questionnaire in my study was elaborated with 11 closed-ended questions that students had to answer according to their experiences while speaking in their English classes at the institution and in online sessions during pandemic. To collect the information needed, the Likert scale of Frequency was used, and the options students had to choose from were Always, Usually, Sometimes, hardly ever and never. The main purpose was to find out about the difficulties students had to face while attending school and now in online classes (See Appendix A).

The piloting phase for this instrument was quite successful as it showed me that students indeed had some difficulties in participating and I could observe the reasons they chose. However, some questions were slightly changed because they were not clear for the participants. These changes were made after I got some feedback from my professor.

### 3.4.2 Interview

The interview is a useful tool for qualitative research, as it helps the interviewer gather some deep information about a participant's experiences around a specific topic. Individual answers obtained from the questionnaire can be followed-up to further investigate them (McNamara, 1999 cited in ADJP Quad, 2016). Adhabi and Blash (2017) see interviews as consultations, which according to Sewell (n.d. cited in Adhabi & Blash, 2017) "attempts to understand the world from the subject's point of view, to unfold the meaning of people's experiences, to uncover their lived world before scientific explanations" (p. 88).

Kvale (1996) describes 12 important aspects of qualitative research interview as follows:

1. Life world: The topic of the qualitative research interview is the lived world of the subjects and their relation to it.
2. Meaning: The interview seeks to interpret the meaning of central themes in the life world of the subject. The interviewer registers and interprets the meaning of what is said as well as how it is said.
3. Qualitative: The interview seeks qualitative knowledge expressed in normal language; it does not aim at quantification.
4. Descriptive: The interview attempts to obtain open nuanced descriptions of different aspects of the subjects' life worlds.
5. Specificity: Descriptions of specific situations and action sequences are elicited, not general opinions.
6. Deliberated Naïveté: The interviewer exhibits an openness to new and unexpected phenomena, rather than having ready-made categories and schemes of interpretation.
7. Focused: The interview is focused on particular themes; it is neither strictly structured with standardized questions, nor entirely 'non-directive'.
8. Ambiguity: Interviewee statements can sometimes be ambiguous, reflecting contradictions in the world the subject lives in.

9. Change: The process of being interviewed may produce new insights and awareness, and the subject may in the course of the interview come to change his or her descriptions and meanings about a theme.
10. Sensitivity: Different interviews can produce different statements on the same themes, depending on their sensitivity to and knowledge of the interview topic.
11. Interpersonal Situation: The knowledge obtained is produced through the interpersonal interaction in the interview.
12. Positive experience: A well carried out research interview can be a rare and enriching experience for the interviewee, who may obtain new insights into his or her life situation. (pp. 30-31).

What makes this method of research different from a typical conversation is that the interviewer focuses more on gaining authentic answers as possible from the participant. Cohen (1976 cited in Jong & Jung, 2015) points out that a researcher is required to prepare the interview carefully, have much patience and significant practice.

The interview in this research had 7 questions based on the students' answers of the questionnaire (See Appendix B). For the interview, the students that had major problems in speaking while participating in their English classes were selected. After analyzing the questionnaire in depth, I contemplated 3 students to take part in the interview. The reason was mainly because most of their choices in each subsection were *Always*, *Usually* and *Sometimes* so, I considered their answers would be interesting to hear so I could know more about their perspectives, behaviors, and opinions regarding the issues they were facing in English oral proficiency.

### **3.5 Data Collection procedure**

To collect the needed data, the English teacher who was working in the basic levels was asked for permission to investigate her students via Messenger, explaining the aim of the

research. She agreed to help and provided me the link of the reunion organized in Microsoft Teams. Then, she gave me some time of her class to ask the students to answer the questionnaire.

A few days later, I entered in one of her English lessons online and proceeded to send the students the questionnaire via Google forms to the e-mails of the ones who were present that day, but before that, I introduced myself and explained what the questionnaire was about and how I wanted them to respond so the students could understand better what they were going to do. The teacher provided all of them a few minutes of her class to answer the instrument and whenever a student finished, I got notifications from my e-mail that showed me how many new responses I got.

The three subjects chosen were then contacted via the E-mail that was provided by them voluntarily in the questionnaire beforehand. I asked if they were willing to help me in the next part of the investigation. In addition, I explained to them the aim of the interview and how it was going to be carried out. A few days later, I got their responses telling me they agreed on participating. I then set the day with each student to meet virtually. The interviews were individually made in Google Meet, each one was audio recorded.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

After collecting the required data from the questionnaire, all the responses from the 11 closed-ended questions were first analyzed, written in Microsoft Word to get the data organized in a chart and then transferred the information to bar graphs in Microsoft Excel so I could get the percentages of all the students' answers.

The audios from the interviews were transcribed fully in Microsoft Word and translated to English because the conversations were in Spanish. Next, the texts were analyzed by choosing and separating some important answers in categories (Grammar issues, Lack of vocabulary, Environment, etc.) that can relate to the problems regarded in the first instrument for further analysis.

### **3.7 Chapter conclusion**

In this chapter, I explained the information about the setting, the participants (age, gender, and English language level), the research methodology where I provided information about qualitative research and case study. The instruments, questionnaire, and interview were also detailed, and their data collection procedure was thoroughly explored from the piloting phase to the final version and how I used those instruments to investigate my participants. Finally, I described the way I began the data analysis to get the results I got in order.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

### **4.0 Introduction**

In this chapter, I will show the results found in both of my instruments used for this research, the questionnaire, and interviews. All the information from the questionnaire is presented in charts and graphs, as for the data of the interviews, transcripts were obtained from the participants' answers about the topic at hand. These can be found in a word document titled "Questionnaire & Interview results doc". To report this data, the research questions and the objectives are provided below.

### **4.1 Aims and Research questions**

The aims of this research are as follows:

- To find out how the classroom environment helps or hinder ELT students' speaking.
- To explore the issues these students might have experienced in their classroom and in online courses.

It is also important to mention that the research questions helped in the development of the instruments used, having them as a guide to achieve what was needed to investigate throughout the questionnaire and the interviews. Those are as follows:

RQ1: Is the classroom environment good enough for ELT students to feel comfortable to speak in the classroom and in online classes? If so, how does this help them?

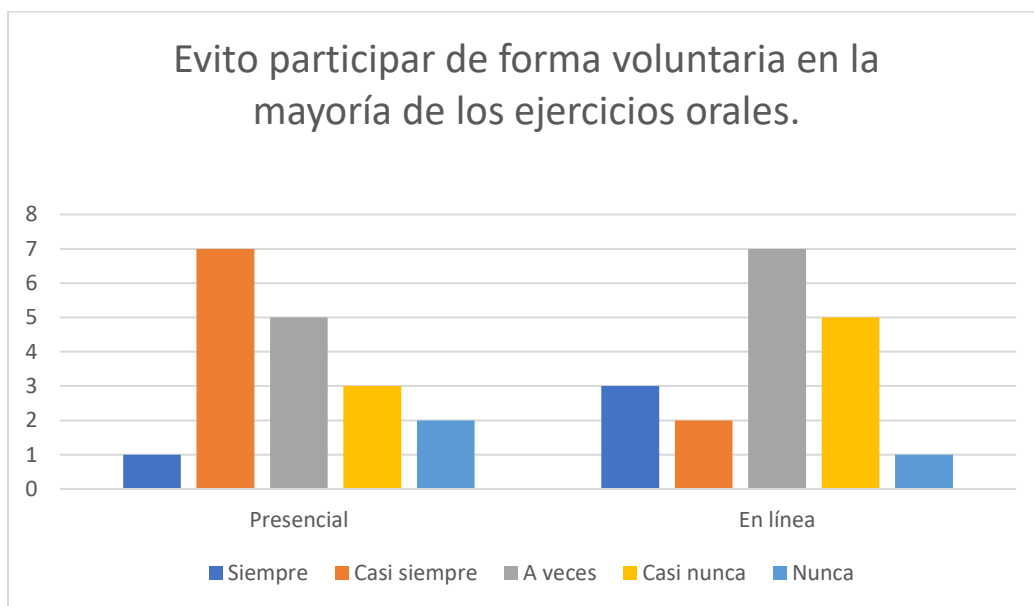
RQ2: Do students have problems when speaking in their English classes? If so, what are those problems? Were they the same in the classroom and online?

## 4.2 Classroom environment while students participate in class

In this section, the data is presented in graphs divided in two categories: face-to-face and online lessons with options chosen from *always*, *usually*, *sometimes*, *hardly ever* and *never*.

Questions 2, 8, 9, 4 and 10 helped to answer the first research question: Is the classroom environment good enough for ELT students to feel comfortable to speak in class? If so, how does this help them?

### 4.2.1 English learners' willingness to participate in the classroom



**Figure 4.1 Participation in class**

The data shown in figure 4.1, in the left graph about face-to-face classes, it is seen that 7 students (n=18) claimed they *Usually* avoid participating in English lessons followed by the option *Sometimes* (5 students). Moreover, *hardly ever* was chosen by 3 students and only 2 answered they *never* had this issue. On the other hand, the online class graph shows that 7 students *sometimes* do not participate on their own while 5 participants chose *hardly ever*. It seems that students participated slightly more in online classes at their home than at university before the pandemic.

In addition, the three interviewed participants shared several opinions about a question that was asked to them; they had to explain why they thought students do not participate in class, referring to both face-to-face and online classes. P1 shared this idea:

Creo que está esa mentalidad de que... eh, si te equivocas, el maestro te va a regañar o... o te va a decir que no o algo así, entonces yo siento que eso hace que nos cohibamos, lo cual hace que con otros maestros no quieras participar. Creo que en línea es más difícil participar, no ves a los alumnos o el profesor no los ve y no los escucha; entonces, hace como que la participación sea un poco más tensa, porque te sientes como de “ay no, nadie participa” o el profesor no le da la palabra a alguien.

I think we have this worry that... if we make a mistake, the teacher will scold us, or they will tell us we are wrong. So, I think that might be the reason we restrain ourselves from participating with other teachers. In online classes, participating is more difficult because the teacher does not see nor hear the students, so it makes participation more awkward since you feel like: “oh, no; no one is saying anything” when there is silence. (Questionnaire & Interviews results doc, p.8)

Similarly, P3 mentioned the following:

Por propia inseguridad. Es un idioma diferente entonces no es lo mismo hablar en tu propio idioma que en otro. Por otra parte, el miedo a equivocarse o igual no tener los conocimientos suficientes para responder, por ejemplo, que no se tenga el vocabulario suficiente.

I think it is because of the lack of self-confidence. Speaking in a foreign language is not the same as when you are doing it in your mother tongue. Also, it might have to do with the fear of making a mistake in front of the teacher or not having enough vocabulary to participate. (Questionnaire & Interviews results doc, p.9)

According to the comments of these participants, it can be noticed that one of the possible main reasons of students' poor willingness to participate is the teacher's negative feedback. Perhaps students feel insecure when the teacher emphasizes the errors they might find in learners' oral performances. These opinions are different from the results from the questionnaire, where most students suggested they had no problems in speaking when they were asked to do so.

Curiously, P2 answered differently from the previous student:

La mayoría de los alumnos no es que sean tímidos, sino que, bajo experiencia, les da flojera el querer contestar las preguntas, y dicen “ah, ¿por qué tengo que contestar si tenemos otros veintitantos alumnos más? ¿por qué siempre soy el que tiene que contestar?” y sí, debe de haber alguno que sí le dé penita el hablar, pero mayormente pienso que no quieren participar por flojera.

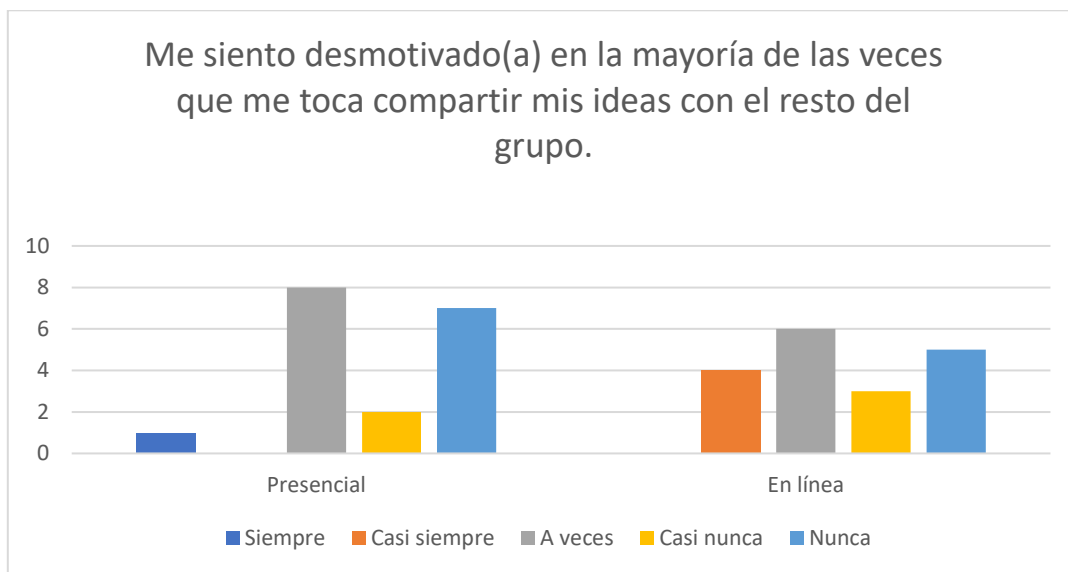
It is not that students are shy or anything; it is just that, speaking from my own experience, most of them are lazy to answer the questions and sometimes say “why do I have to answer? There are more

students in the class, why should I be the one speaking?”. Of course, there may be people who could be ashamed, but I believe it is mostly just laziness. (Questionnaire & Interviews results doc, p.9)

The students’ negative attitude may also be a strong reason for them to avoid participating in class. Nevertheless, most of them are probably reluctant to admit it.

#### 4.2.2 Lack of motivation in the classroom

In question number 8, students were asked if they do not feel motivated whenever they were asked to share their ideas about a certain topic in class.



**Figure 4.2 Motivation to speak in the classroom**

From figure 4.2, results from the left graph about face-to-face classes, it can be noticed that most students did not feel demotivated when sharing their thoughts with the group: 8 students chose *sometimes* and 7 *never*. Similarly, most students wanted to share their thoughts with the group since 6 chose *sometimes* and 5 chose *never*. It seems that most of the students in this group wanted to express their thoughts in class at times both face-to-face and in online classes.

Furthermore, the three interviewed students expressed how their motivation to speak was before and during the pandemic and answered if they considered that speaking in front of a screen was easier than when they had to participate in face-to-face classes.

P1 shared this opinion:

Hablar inglés en línea es mejor para mí ya que soy una persona muy penosa, entonces cuando me veían me ponía más nerviosa. El hecho de que nadie me esté viendo o sólo me estén escuchando, pues sí es como que, me da un poquito más de valentía para participar.

Speaking in online classes is easier for me. I'm a shy person, so if someone was watching me in the classroom, I used to get more nervous. The fact that people just hear my voice during these online lessons, gives me more courage to participate willingly. (Questionnaire & Interviews results doc, p.8)

Similarly, P3 stated the following:

Creo es más fácil participar en línea porque la profa llegaba a enfocarse más en ejercicios digitales que nos hacen hablar un poco, y eso lo hacía hasta ameno. También, a veces soy una persona muy insegura y tiendo a equivocarme muchas veces, entonces me da más seguridad no hablar directamente con una persona...

I believe speaking online is better for me as the teacher focuses more on several speaking activities online that turn out to be more dynamic than when we were at school. Also, I'm a shy person, that is why I make lots of mistakes, so it gives me more motivation if I do not speak in front of a person... (Questionnaire & Interviews results doc, p.8)

From these comments, it can be noticed that these students preferred to participate at home while taking online classes. It seems to be that not being seen by their classmates gives them more confidence and improves their attitude towards the teacher's dynamic speaking exercises.

Alternatively, P2 did not share the same thoughts as the previous participants:

Es mejor en presencial, porque en línea estás solo, lo cual lo hace aburrido, pero a la vez como que sientes que te están juzgando. Al no saber qué es lo que están diciendo los compañeros porque todos tienen los micrófonos apagados y con las cámaras apagadas, pues no sabes su reacción, lo cual es desalentador para mí.

I think speaking is better in face-to-face classes, because in online you are alone, which makes the class slightly more boring. It also feels like everyone is judging you because you do not know what the classmates are saying, and with their cameras and microphones turned off, you cannot see their reaction, which is less motivating for me... (Questionnaire & Interviews results doc, p.9)

This student suggests that online lessons are more boring than the face-to-face ones since he is alone all the time. It seems that it is important for this participant to see the teacher and students' face expressions.

#### 4.2.3 Pressure in students' speaking performances in pair or group tasks

In question number 9, the students were asked if the time the teacher gave them to speak about a certain topic was enough for them to share all the information they needed.

*Llego a sentirme presionado(a) al momento de hablar en inglés ya que el tiempo que se me da es limitado (ya sea que esto se haga en equipos o de forma individual)*

	Face-to-face classes	Online classes
<b>Always</b>	0	1
<b>Usually</b>	4	2
<b>Sometimes</b>	3	3
<b>Hardly ever</b>	5	8
<b>Never</b>	6	4

**Figure 4.3 Time limit in speaking activities**

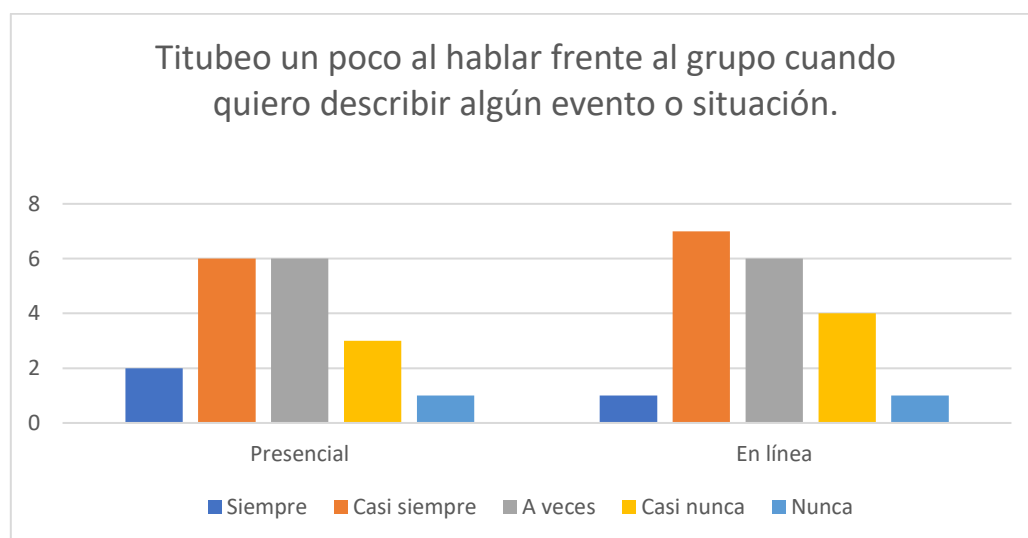
From figure 4.3, the findings about face-to-face classes, 6 students (n=18) said they never felt pressured whenever they spoke, and the time was not limited. Additionally, 5 participants selected *hardly ever*. According to the data in this graph, most students claimed there was no pressure in their performance and let them communicate the necessary information to fulfill the speaking task.

Similarly, the online classes graph shows that 8 students (n=18) *Hardly ever* felt they were under pressure to fully complete their speaking activities and 4 more participants chose *Never*.

The findings obtained suggest that students from this group believe the time they are given to speak in English is not limited at all, thus the pressure is almost nonexistent. It seems it does not affect negatively in their speaking proficiency in general, so this is not an issue that has concerned them.

#### 4.2.4 Students' stuttering in front of their classmates

In question number 4, the results show students' hesitation in their words while they are asked to speak in front of the classroom.



**Figure 4.3 Fluency problems**

The information obtained from the face-to-face classes shows that 6 students (n=18) usually stuttered and hesitated when they were trying to describe a specific situation and 6 more participants selected *sometimes*. According to what was obtained, an equal number of students agreed presenting fluency struggles in face-to-face classes several times.

Likewise, the results during online education appear to be similar. 7 students (n=18) claimed their speaking was not as fluent as it was before the pandemic. Moreover, 6 participants' answer was *sometimes*. This suggests that students kept having stutters

frequently during online classes, which have not improved nor changed since the last time they had their English lessons before quarantine.

#### **4.2.5 Students' oral proficiency before and during the pandemic**

In order to explore the students' speaking, the three participants were asked in the interview how well they considered their English proficiency before and during online education.

P1 answered:

Mi inglés ha ido mejorando a pesar de seguir en pandemia. Aun así, siento que me falta todavía armar oraciones y todo eso lo que hace que me trabe. Es una cuestión por la que no participo tan a menudo.

My communication in English has been improving despite the pandemic; however, I still have a hard time formulating the sentences correctly whenever I speak, making me be hesitant in my speech. That is why I participate occasionally these days. (Questionnaire & Interviews results doc, p. 8)

According to what this student said, she claims to have managed to improve her speaking.

However, she still struggles in making sentences of her own, which is the reason she avoids participating most of the time.

Moreover, P2 commented:

Siento que he mejorado, porque cuando era en modo presencial, normalmente en las clases me llegaba a trabar bastante. Creo que se debe principalmente a que varios compañeros te estaban viendo. Pero, hoy que tengo un vocabulario no muy extenso, aún me dificulta las cosas ya que es un obstáculo mayor para tener buena fluidez en las clases en línea.

I believe my English has improved slightly. Although, in face-to-face classes, I usually stuttered; I think it was mainly because my classmates were watching me at times, making it more complicated for me to speak. However, nowadays my limited vocabulary is still an obstacle for me to achieve fluent speaking in online classes. (Questionnaire & Interviews results doc, p.8)

Similarly, to the previous participant, this student states that he also noticed a small improvement in his speaking. He attributed his fluency issues before pandemic to the fact that his classmates occasionally watched him whenever he spoke.

Nevertheless, unlike the previous two student, P3 shared this information:

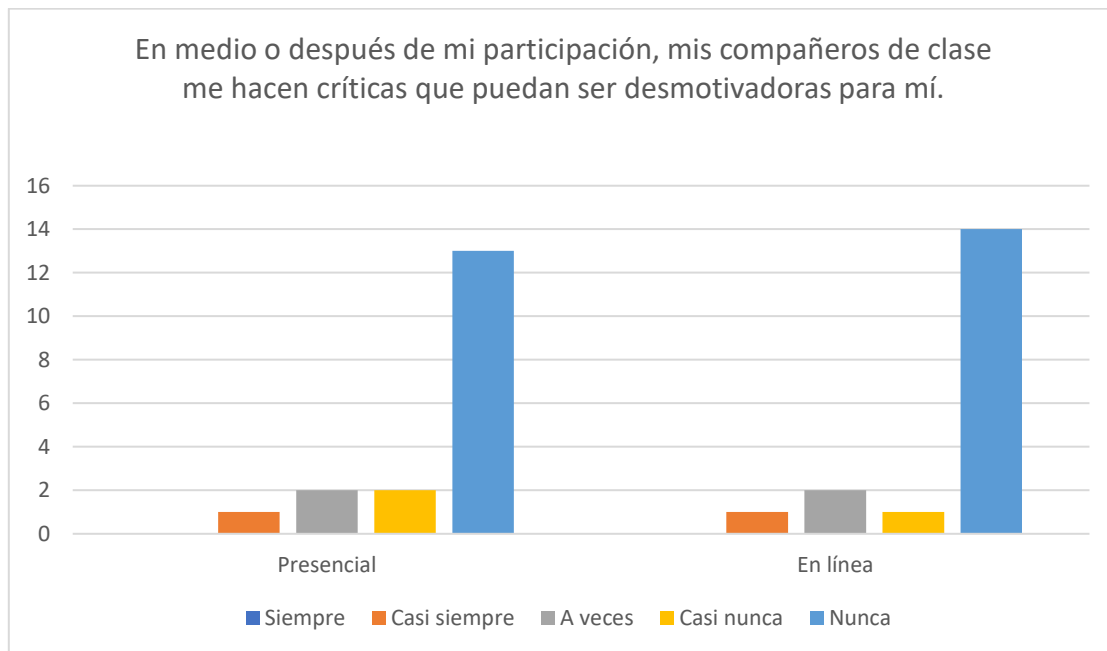
Pues mi inglés es regular. Es que, siento que no he mejorado tanto, la verdad. Me sigo atorando en al hablar debido a mi falta de confianza, no importa si es presencial o en línea. Pero, quisiera mejorar esa parte y estoy dispuesta en trabajar en mi fluidez. También la pandemia no me está ayudando, ya que creo el practicar inglés de forma oral con una persona directamente te ayuda a desenvolverte mejor con ellas, en lugar de decirlo frente a una pantalla.

My English is regular. I feel like I have not improved that much, to be honest. Yes, I still stutter and hesitate quite a lot because of the lack of self-confidence. It does not matter if it is online or in face-to-face classes. However, I would really like to overcome this issue and I am willing to improve my fluency, but the pandemic is not helping me. I believe practicing my English orally with others in real life makes you have a better performance, instead of just doing it in front of a screen.

According to this participant, she argues that her English has not improved as much as it was expected. Lack of confidence was a problem she had before and during the pandemic. This worries her, as she states that speaking in front of a screen is not helping her have a good English performance with others.

#### 4.2.6 Classroom behavior towards students' participation

In question number 10, students were asked if their classmates judge them or criticize them negatively whenever they are speaking in the target language.



**Figure 4.4 Bad criticism in students' speaking performances.**

As it can be seen from figure 4.4, 13 students (n=18) claimed their group *Never* judged them while they were speaking in class before the pandemic. Additionally, 2 more participants said criticism *hardly ever* occurred while 2 chose *Sometimes*. This graph seems to suggest most of the group of students did not feel criticized negatively by their classmates, inferring this was not the main reason they did not want to speak in class.

Similarly, the online class graph suggests that 14 students (n=18) chose *never*, 2 students suggested they *sometimes* had some bad comments from their group. It can be concluded that bad criticism is clearly nonexistent in this group.

The three participants of the interview shared some opinions. P1 stated the following:

En presencial creo cuando yo participaba, creo que sí, los compañeros son, como han estado en nuestro lugar, no es como que se burlaran de ti o se te quedaran viendo para que te apenes. Y en virtual siento que es igual. Incluso creo es más cómodo porque no es como que veas a tus compañeros o sepas lo que están haciendo, o si te están poniendo atención.

In face-to-face classes, when I participated, I think that because my classmates have been in our shoes, they never made fun of me or... never looked at me with the intention of making me feel ashamed. And regarding online classes, I feel it is the same. Also, I believe it is easier to be comfortable here since you cannot see what your classmates are doing, or if they pay attention to you.

Curiously, P2 mentioned something slightly different than the previous student:

En presencial, la gente solamente se quedaba algo callada. No había mucha diferencia comparada con las clases virtuales, pero sí llegaba a escuchar alguno que otro susurro. Los *shusheos* sí llegaban a afectar a la confianza y capacidad que he tenido, o los conocimientos que tenía. Había incluso compañeros que sólo hacían eso por molestar y causaban inseguridad. En línea todos tienen apagado el micrófono, ahí sí seguramente algunos dirán algunas cosas, pero uno no puede saber.

In face-to-face classes, people were sometimes quiet. It was not that much different compared to online classes, but I used to hear some whispers here and there. This affected my self-confidence at times; even some classmates did that to bother others on purpose. In virtual lessons, everyone has their microphones turned off. Of course, they probably say things behind my back, but I cannot be fully sure about it.

Similarly, P3 expressed:

En parte, todo mundo deja responder, escucha lo que tiene que decir alguien, pero siempre cuando hay un error o mala pronunciación, el profesor o los mismos compañeros tienden a corregir a esa persona que está hablando. En presencial sí había ruidos externos cuando era mi momento de hablar,

me distraía y hacía que me sintiera con un poco más de inseguridad, entonces cometí muchos más errores. En línea no me ha pasado.

In general, the group lets anyone speak in peace, listens to everything you have to say. There are times when they notice an important mistake you make and they tend to correct you, making you ashamed. In face-to-face classes, there were external noises whenever it was my turn to speak, it made me feel insecure and distracted, that is why I used to make more mistakes. In online classes this has never happened.

Based on what was shown, the interviewed students offered some similar results regarding their peers' behavior when someone was speaking in face-to-face classes. They claimed the whole group was quiet most of the time. Although, there were times they heard some whispers and weird sounds that would make them feel insecure in their performance.

However, when they talked about online classes, they assured all classmates are equally respectful. According to the three participants, the whole group had their microphones and cameras off, so this might be the reason why they never heard any kind of negative comments about their oral proficiency through a screen.

Some research that investigated a similar issue state that the less supportive environment during online classes is another factor that hinders students' learning and speaking.

Students feel lazy to give some support to their classmates and are made fun of whenever they tried to practice the language outside the lesson with their friends when they get together via other social media (Muhammad, et.al. 2022). E-learning limits greatly peer interaction as it is inefficient for students to practice with each other. Most learners had to face certain issues, such as insufficient communicative environments, where teamwork, collaboration and group meetings among learners is not enough to improve students' speaking skills. E-learning lacks interactive, collaborative, and social skills as it mainly focuses more on individual work (Tuyen & Lian, 2021).

Online environment has some disadvantages in live communication in large groups. One person should ideally speak at any one-time, fewer cues for turn-taking are present, and quick-side conversations are difficult. That is why non-verbal gestures are important so the students can pay special attention to the speaker, although this can make them uncomfortable. Teachers need to reassure them or ask them to speak in small breakout groups. Long periods of silence are present sometimes in online lessons, mostly when people think. However, students may also do not know when to talk or interject, or how to provide their own input (Müller, n.d).

Learners' lack of confidence and communication in online lessons make students have a hard time speaking or uttering words accordingly. The main reason is students' fear and reluctance to make mistakes; they can lack adequate vocabulary and practice which makes them have even more difficulty in being fluent in English. Also, the deprivation of language content makes students anxious and unable to speak, even if they have something to say. They are fearful of making grammatical mistakes and being laughed at by their peers. Teachers try to capture students' attention by engaging them in interesting and enjoyable activities to encourage them to speak, although this does not fully work as most of the learners are not used to this E-learning and it is tougher to get a response from passive learners without the assistance and support from their surroundings. (Ying et.al. 2021).

### **4.3 Students' struggles in their speaking performances before and during online education**

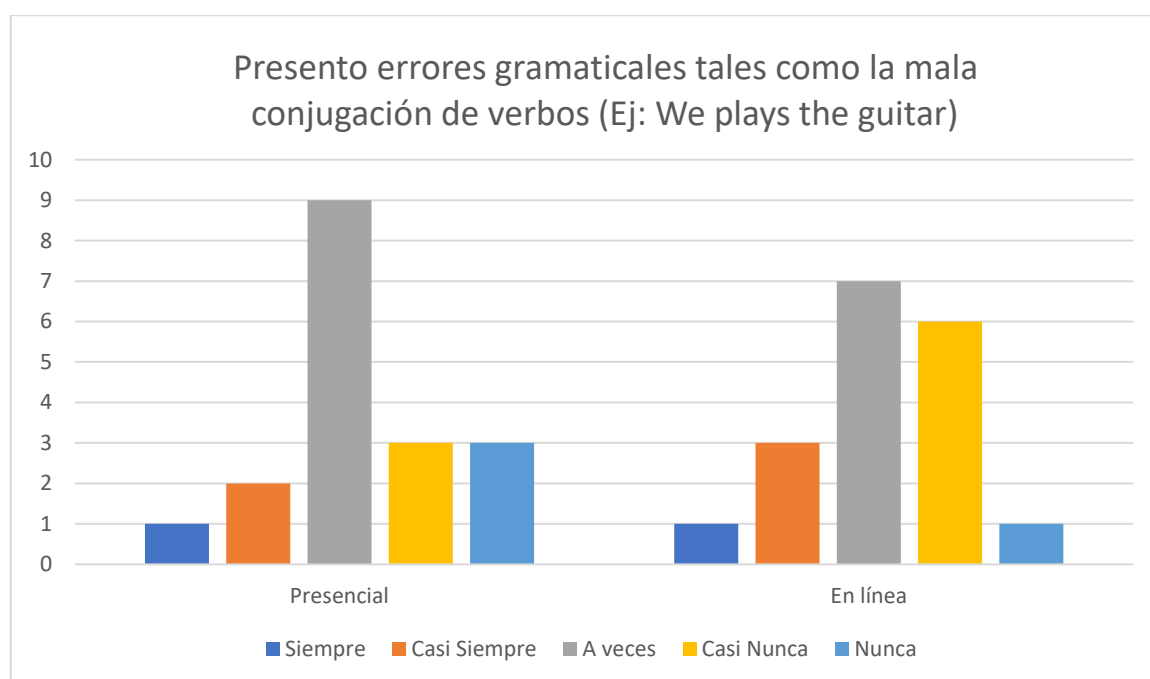
The results regarding students' speaking issues show the needed data to answer the second research question: "Do students have problems when speaking in their English classes? If so, what are those problems? Were they the same in the classroom and online?". This was

gathered from the same questionnaire applied to the participants on Google Forms.

Questions 1, 3, and 6 from this instrument helped to explore this area in depth.

### 4.3.1 Grammar mistakes in speaking performances

The following graph shows the results obtained from the closed-ended questionnaire in which each student had to choose several choices “Siempre, Casi Siempre, A veces, Casi nunca, Nunca” (*Always, Usually, Sometimes, hardly ever and never*). For question number 1, the participants were asked if they had grammar issues.



**Figure 4.5 Grammar issues**

As it can be seen from the figure 4.5; before the pandemic, 9 students (n=18) declared they *Sometimes* struggled with their grammar mistakes in their speech. Moreover, 3 more students chose *hardly ever*. It can be noticed that a big number of learners expressed they had trouble with grammar occasionally whenever they tried to formulate sentences of their own. Perhaps they simply did not fully understand the structure of those sentences.

Similarly, for online classes 7 students (n=18) expressed their grammar mistakes *sometimes* appeared, while 6 students chose *hardly ever*. Although this problem seems not to be so frequent, the data shows that students at times keep struggling in formulating sentences.

In the interview, most students had trouble structuring sentences correctly, P1 mentioned:

“Bueno, a veces se me llegan a dificultar las reglas gramaticales, eh, les llevo a entender, pero a la hora de emplearlas sí me cuesta un poco formular oraciones al momento de hablar”.

“Sometimes I have difficulties in learning grammar. I may understand them at first, but when I start to apply them orally, I find a hard time formulating sentences on my own. I encountered the same trouble in face-to-face classes as well”.

Moreover, P2 shared this opinion:

“Considero que no he tenido tantos problemas en la estructuración de oraciones. Sin embargo, hay ocasiones, no te diré que no, en las que he tenido una cuestión con los tiempos verbales. A veces quiero expresar presente, pero se me van unas palabras, las confundo y digo pasado o futuro”.

“I haven't had much trouble while I structured my sentences. However, there are occasions in which I have issues with verbal tenses. Sometimes I want to express the present tense, but I miss some words, I get confused and what I really say finally is past or future tense”.

Finally, P3 made this other comment:

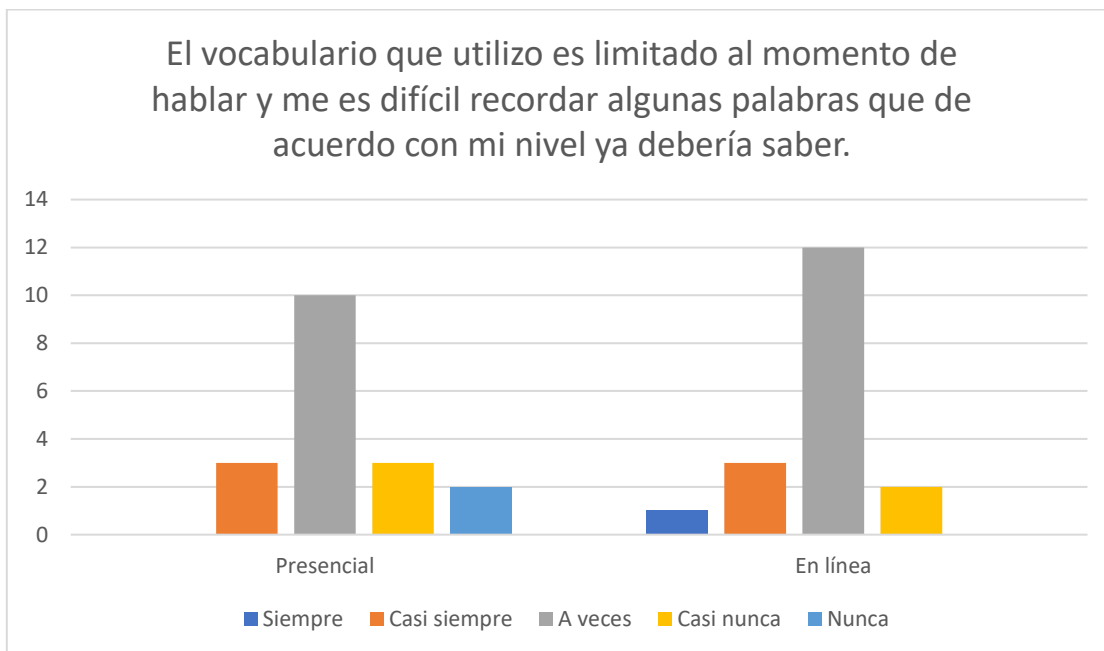
Sí, actualmente muchas veces tengo problemas en la gramática al momento de hablar, en parte porque no puedo arreglar lo que digo. Cuando escribes es más fácil porque ves esos errores antes que nadie y puedes corregirlos de inmediato.

Usually, I make grammar mistakes when I speak, especially because I cannot correct what I say. In writing it is easier since you see those mistakes before anyone notices and can correct them quickly.

It is important to highlight that, to achieve a good inductive approach in this area, students must not only see grammar formulas, but they also need to see some examples for them to notice how those sentences are structured. This will help them later to make their own sentences. This is what these students probably need to do to avoid grammar mistakes in their speaking.

### 4.3.2 Students' vocabulary struggles

The question number 3 of the questionnaire shows results about if the students have trouble in remembering vocabulary in their speech that they ought to know according to their level.



**Figure 4.6 Vocabulary limitations**

As it can be seen in figure 4.6 regarding the face-to-face classes, 10 students (n=18) chose they *Sometimes* had a limited vocabulary. 3 other students selected *Usually* as their answer.

According to what was obtained from this graph, most of the group claims they experienced a limited vocabulary when they spoke at times, thus making it difficult for them to remember some specific words they were supposed to know.

Similarly, the online class chart shows the following results. 12 students (n=18) selected *Sometimes*.

Moreover, for the interviews, the three participants were asked if they had a good repertoire in their vocabulary before and during pandemic. The three of them had similar opinions, for example,

P2 shared this opinion:

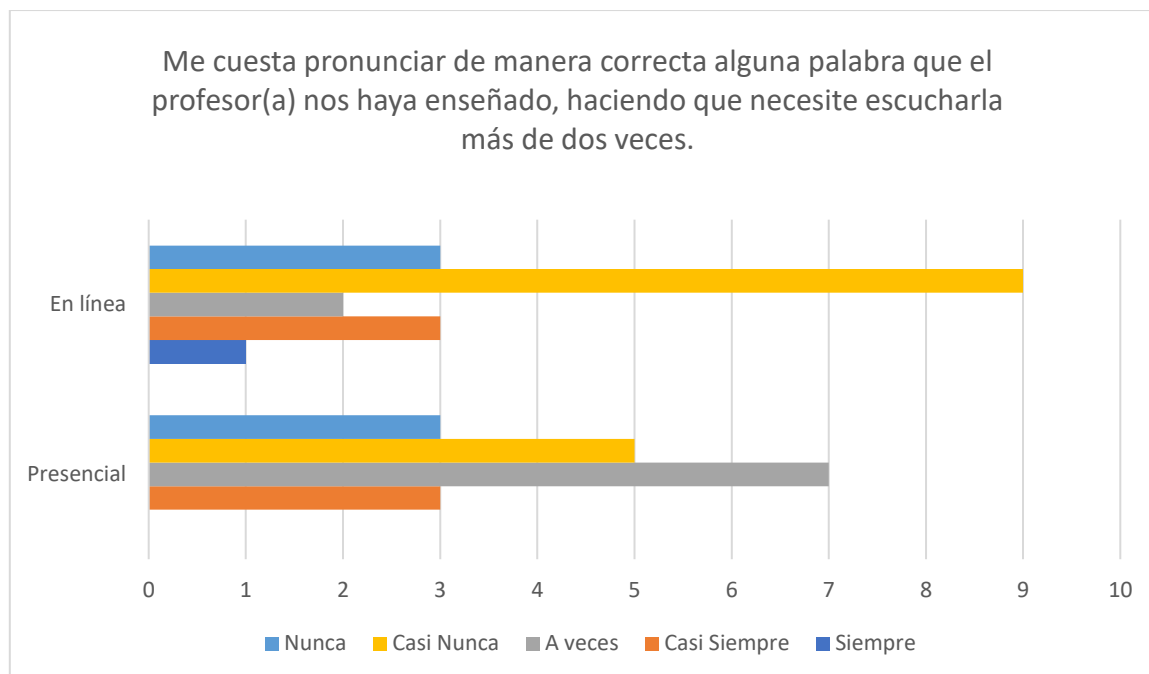
Actualmente sí considero tener buen vocabulario. Sin embargo, cuando quiero hacer algunas similitudes o algunos significados complejos o me quiero explicar, como lo hago en español, no lo puedo hacer mucho en inglés ya que no logro recordar las palabras exactas que quiero usar.

Right now, I think I have a good vocabulary. However, when I want to compare or I need to give complex meanings or I want to extend my speech, as I do it in Spanish, I simply cannot do it in English since I fail to remember the exact words to use.

The three participants' answers share similarities with each other regarding that all of them believe their vocabulary has been good before and during pandemic. However, they all also agree on facing some difficulties occasionally in remembering words that help them express a specific message.

#### **4.3.3 Pronunciation issues in students' speaking**

The next item shows the results obtained from question number 6 of the questionnaire. The participants were asked this time if they could not pronounce a word that their teacher gives them to repeat in class thus making them have the need to hear it more than twice.



**Figure 4.7 Struggles in pronunciation**

As it can be seen from figure 4.7, 7 students (n=18) stated they sometimes could not pronounce words correctly in face-to-face classes even after the teacher taught them. On the other hand, 5 more participants chose *hardly ever*.

However, the online class graph shows different results. 9 students (n=18) chose to say they *hardly ever* had issues pronouncing the words taught, making it not necessary to hear the word the teacher is showing them more than once. 3 students of the rest of the group in total said they *never* had pronunciation struggles during the online classes.

These results appear to suggest that the participants had less pronunciation issues in their online education than in face-to-face classes.

Nevertheless, in the interview, the three students had more pronunciation issues in online classes. P1 mentioned:

Sí me ha costado pronunciar un poco antes de pandemia y aún más en línea. Sí necesito que la palabra se repita. Ya cuando entiendo la forma en que lo dice la profesora, trato de imitar esa pronunciación lo mejor que puedo.

Yes, I have had some troubles in pronunciation before the pandemic, and even more in virtual classes. I need the teacher to repeat the word. When I finally understand the way the teacher utters it, I try to imitate that pronunciation the best I can.

Moreover, P2 made the following comment:

La pronunciación en inglés es más difícil porque las vocales o consonantes a veces se dicen diferente de cómo se escriben, haciendo que se me complique todo. Además, que este problema ha seguido en las clases en línea debido a que no tengo las ganas de practicar la pronunciación por estar solo en mi casa, aparte de que la conexión falla a veces.

Pronunciation in English is difficult for me since the vowels and consonants are pronounced differently from how they are written, making it more complicated. Also, this problem has been present in online classes as well, mainly because I do not want to practice the pronunciation since I am alone at home. The internet connection is bad at times as well.

Furthermore, P3 stated:

“Sí me cuesta pronunciar. Necesito volver a escuchar las palabras de parte de la profesora porque a veces el audio se distorsiona o no se escucha y eso hace que no pronuncie como debería. En presencial las escuchaba directamente”.

“I struggle in pronouncing. I need to hear the words the teacher says once again because there are times the audio does not work well, which makes me not pronounce the word as I should. Before the pandemic, I could hear the words directly to my face”.

From the information collected, it seems that this problem has been appearing in virtual classes. Two students out of three assure there are occasional connection and audio issues that hinder their understanding of what the teacher is saying.

#### **4.4 Chapter conclusions.**

In this chapter, the aims and Research Questions were provided and answered. The results talked about students' classroom environment when participating in face-to-face and virtual classes and explored if there was any motivation, stuttering or pressure in doing oral tasks. The data also showed learners' opinions about their oral proficiency before and during pandemic and explored how was their peers' behavior when there was someone else speaking. Moreover, it was explained that Grammar, Vocabulary and Pronunciation issues were the main struggles most students faced before and during online education.

The following chapter will explain the limitations of the study, further research, and the final conclusions.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter provides the findings obtained from the data analysis that helped answer the research questions. They will be explained in depth and summarized to show whether the aims were achieved successfully or not. The limitations of the study will be discussed and the difficulty in carrying out this investigation will be also shared.

### 5.1 Findings

The results obtained from the questionnaire and interviews helped answer the two research questions this investigation has. For the first question: *Is the classroom environment good enough for ELT students to feel comfortable speaking in the classroom and in online classes? If so, how does this help them?* The questionnaire data about students' motivation to participate has shown that most students usually avoided participating on their own in face-to-face classes. The same occurs in online lessons, but they try to speak slightly more. Moreover, the interviews show that the reasons for this poor willingness to participate are teachers' negative feedback and classmates' negative attitude towards them, especially in virtual lessons. This contrasts with the information questionnaire where students mention they had no problem in speaking when they were asked to do so.

Regarding the motivation in the classroom, the results of the questionnaire show that the students sometimes wanted to speak with their group in both face-to-face and virtual lessons. In the interviews, students expressed they felt more motivated to say something in class when they are at home rather than at school because they don't see their peers' facial

expressions and that makes them feel less judged as it gives them more confidence and improves their attitude in the tasks. A participant shared that he considered online classes more boring since he was alone at home, and it was important for him to see the teacher and students' reactions.

The pressure while students are speaking face-to-face, and online classes is almost nonexistent. The graphs show that students feel the time they are given to speak in the tasks is enough for them to complete them successfully.

About students' fluency, most of the group kept stuttering in their speaking in both face-to-face and online classes, indicating this problem has not disappeared. In the interviews, the participants explained that their speaking has improved slightly but they still find themselves having some struggles in their performance.

The data about students' behavior towards their peers' speaking shows that the whole group did not feel criticized whenever they spoke in face-to-face and virtual classes. The interviews show similar results stating that the group was respectful all the time before the pandemic, even though they sometimes heard sounds and whispers that would make them feel insecure. Nonetheless, in online classes, students most of the time had their microphones and cameras off, so no one could really hear if the group was being disrespectful towards someone's participation.

Regarding the second research question: *Do students have problems when speaking in their English classes? If so, what are those problems? Were they the same in the classroom and online?* Results show that students sometimes experienced grammar issues while formulating sentences in both face-to-face and online classes. In the interviews the students

expressed similar opinions, they had trouble in grammatical rules while they are structuring their sentences, assuring that correcting their grammar while speaking is more difficult as it is hard for someone else in the classroom not to notice the mistakes they make.

In addition, students sometimes experienced limited vocabulary in their oral performances before the pandemic. In virtual education, most of the group expressed they kept having this issue at times. In the interviews, the three participants commented that their vocabulary has been quite good before and during pandemic, but they faced some difficulties in remembering the exact words to express a specific message.

About pronunciation, it was one of the problems some students also had. Most students could not pronounce some words correctly in face-to-face classes even after the teacher taught them how to do so. In online classes, on the other hand, students faced less pronunciation issues. Moreover, in the interviews, most students expressed they had experienced bad audio connection during virtual classes that hinder their understanding in the teacher's speaking, making it more difficult for them to repeat orally the word they were being taught.

## **5.2 Accomplishment of Research aims**

The aims this research wanted to achieve were to find out how the classroom helps or hinders ELT students' participation in class and what were the specific problems these learners experienced in their classroom and in online classes. Both goals were accomplished since both instruments used showed some interesting data that could explore the comparison of how students' speaking was before and during pandemic and how the issues manifested themselves in this new reality of digital education. However, it could

have been better to obtain more information from a few other students, especially in the interviews, so this research would have new data to analyze and compare.

### **5.3 Limitations of the study**

The research was done during the COVID-19 pandemic; therefore, some issues were faced during data collection. Firstly, contacting the students online for the second phase of the study was difficult. Most were not interested, and others did not answer me via their E-mail, even though they said previously they wanted to be interviewed, and I could not reach them in another way. In the end, only three subjects could get interviewed.

Secondly, the questionnaire was hard to administer since it was also sent by email. I sent a link right a few minutes before their English class was over so they could answer it properly. However, they said they would answer the instrument later. Some sent the results to my E-mail the day after and others almost a week after. The answers could have been obtained faster if the questionnaire had been applied in their classroom at school.

### **5.4 Further Research**

Distance education will be the new reality for the institutions, as some are now having both face-to-face and online classes. It will be inevitable that more speaking issues and struggles emerge in the students' learning that would show us more interesting data to explore and let us find a proper solution. Therefore, deeper analysis on this topic is needed.

It would be best, for similar future investigations, to monitor more students in public and private schools through observations in their classroom in order to actually witness these learners' real behavior towards their participation in class and in front of a screen. More interviewed students would also be good so we can hear either similar or different

perspectives regarding their oral proficiency and how often they struggle achieving a good level of speaking in their English classes.

### **5.5 Personal reflection**

While this research was being carried out, some experiences emerged that helped me improve academically and personally during this process of investigation.

At first, the idea of investigating ELT students' English oral proficiency was not well formulated, as I had no idea how to develop it further. A teacher from the subject Research Seminar I tried to help me guide the research so it could be more specific since I attempted to make it too general. In Research Seminar II the new teacher helped me have a better approach, so from there, I began to correct the aims, research questions and first chapter.

The development was slightly complicated due to the still existent COVID-19 pandemic. The articles for chapter two were purely found via Internet in several journals, e-books, conferences, and online libraries. Fortunately, my thesis director helped me in offering some important material that I could work on so that it made my literature review slightly easier to write. Chapters 3 and 4 were written during the pandemic as well, so the process was equally tough. Despite this, the instruments were designed, piloted as requested, corrected, and then administered successfully to the right subjects.

The personal changes I have experienced are that I got some realizations about how different it has been for students to deal with their English-speaking issues during online classes comparing to the way they had to face them at school. The virtual education was something no one was prepared for as it requires other teaching strategies, particularly in

speaking. That made me think of solutions that would probably solve some of the issues and implement them in my teaching in the future.

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## APPENDIXES

### APPENDIX A

#### Problems that students face while speaking in an English lesson

##### Questionnaire

**Objetivo:** El objetivo del presente cuestionario es recolectar información acerca de las dificultades que los alumnos tienen al momento de hablar el idioma inglés, analizando así su desempeño general frente a las actividades orales dentro de sus clases tanto presenciales como en línea.

**Nombre:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Sexo:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Edad:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Semestre:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Nivel:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Instrucciones:** Tacha con una X o ✓ las casillas correspondientes que den respuesta a la pregunta en cuestión.

**Marcas: S = Siempre CS = Casi Siempre AV = Algunas veces CN = Casi Nunca N = Nunca**

Cuando hablo en la clase... (When I speak in class...)		Presencial					En línea				
		S	CS	AV	CN	N	S	CS	AV	CN	N
1.	Presento errores gramaticales tales como la mala conjugación de verbos (Ej: We plays the guitar)										
2.	Evito participar de forma voluntaria en la mayoría de los ejercicios orales.										
3.	El vocabulario que utilizo es limitado al momento de hablar y me es difícil recordar algunas palabras que, de acuerdo con mi nivel, ya debería saber.										
4.	Titubeo un poco al hablar frente al grupo cuando quiero describir algún evento o situación.										
5.	Hago pausas que pueden ser largas mientras utilizo muletillas como "Eh..." "Ummm..." así alargando mi participación.										
6.	Me cuesta pronunciar de manera correcta alguna palabra que el profesor nos haya enseñado, haciendo que necesite escucharla más de dos veces.										

7.	Cometo errores al usar un tiempo verbal no correspondiente a lo que quiero comunicar. Ejemplo: Quiero hablar en pasado pero mis palabras expresan el futuro.										
8.	Me siento desmotivado(a) en la mayoría de las veces que me toca compartir mis ideas con el resto del grupo.										
9.	Llego a sentirme presionado(a) al momento de hablar en inglés ya que el tiempo que se me da es limitado (ya sea que esto se haga en equipos o de forma individual)										
10.	En medio o después de mi participación, mis compañeros de clase me hacen críticas que puedan ser desmotivadoras para mí.										
11.	Mi confianza para con mis compañeros o amigos es limitada y me impide realizar con éxito algún ejercicio de discusión que se lleve a cabo en grupos o parejas.										

## APPENDIX B

### Entrevista

Gracias a los resultados arrojados por el cuestionario que se le aplicó a una serie de alumnos pertenecientes a una clase de inglés, se seleccionó a los participantes que aseguran que la mayoría de las veces tienen dificultades en el momento de participar de forma oral dentro de las sesiones de inglés.

1. ¿Cómo ha sido tu desempeño en la habilidad oral antes y después de la pandemia?  
¿Tienes un repertorio bueno de vocabulario?
2. ¿Tienes algún problema en la gramática o de pronunciación?
3. ¿Tus dudas en las clases en línea son resueltas de una manera eficiente? Ejemplo:  
que preguntes al profesor sobre la pronunciación de una palabra.
4. ¿Por qué crees que a los estudiantes les cuesta participar?
5. ¿Puedes describir un poco sobre el ambiente en tu grupo cuando alguien habla  
frente a todos?
6. ¿Alguien ha tenido alguna reacción negativa cuando has tenido algún problema al  
hablar? ¿Qué efecto tuvo en ti?
7. ¿Cómo es más fácil participar para ti? En presencial o en línea.