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SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES  
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**UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH:**

“A DIAGNOSTIC STUDY OF TARGET LANGUAGE SPEAKING PROBLEMS. CASE OF: ADVANCED INTENSIVE ENGLISH I, INTERMEDIATE INTENSIVE ENGLISH I AND READINGS AND CONVERSATION I STUDENTS AT THE FOREIGN LANGUAGES DEPARTMENT, UES, SEMESTER II, 2015”

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to identify the main target language speaking problems that students face in the courses of Intermediate Intensive English I, Advanced Intensive English I and Readings and Conversation I at the Foreign Languages Department in the University of El Salvador during the semester II, 2015. Thus professors have a better understanding of these students' speaking problems in order to improve the communication process at the Foreign Languages Department, at University of El Salvador. The methodology involves a quantitative method regarding the instruments and its analysis. The type of study is descriptive and exploratory. The intended results showed the oral problems students from these courses face and at what degree these problems affect students' speaking performance. The sample was large to provide reliable information about their oral problems. Once the speaking problems are identified, the professors will be in a better position to solve the communication process inside the classroom.



## INTRODUCTION

In today's world, learning English as a second language has become an important and useful tool due to the fact that opens many doors to different cultures and job fields that demand mastering the four language skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing) which are crucial to obtain all the necessary knowledge to become competent and proficient in the language. However, many English as a foreign language learners' face many obstacles during their learning process mainly in the speaking area.

There are several oral communication problems that learners are facing nowadays, for instance: Interference of mother tongue (L1), lack of vocabulary knowledge, grammar as a stumbling block, inadequate pronunciation and intonation, few opportunities to speak English in class, lack of exposure to the target language, poor input environment for spoken communication outside the class, among others. As a result of these problems, many of them do not achieve a satisfactory level of communicative competence. This level is ultimately achieved when the learner masters a set of sub skills in regards to speaking. Some of these sub-skills are pronunciation, intonation, accuracy and fluency that will help them to overcome oral communication problems in the target language.

In the Foreign Languages Department of the University of El Salvador, courses such as Intermediate Intensive English I, Advanced Intensive English I and Readings and Conversations I are designed to promote the communicative competence by integrating the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), so at the end of these courses they will be able to reach the A2 or B1 proficiency level according to the Common European Framework guidelines. Indeed, in these courses the students take an active role inside and outside the classroom by getting involved in different activities that are effective to improve their speaking skill.

In contrast, there are some factors or obstacles that still have a negative influence in regards to reaching an ideal development of the students' speaking skill. As Professor Cesar Guzmán, Coordinator of the English Major at the Foreign Languages Department (FLD) of the University of El Salvador (UES), mentioned that one oral communication problem students face is the limited vocabulary students have due to the students' reading habits and

the fact that they do not practice the language. He also mentioned that the Foreign languages Department does not know for sure what the factors that interfere the most in the EFL students' proficiency are, and the Foreign Languages Department would like to find out what these factors are.

This research aims to identify the different oral communication problems students of a second language are facing in the Intermediate Intensive English I, Advanced Intensive English I and Readings and Conversation I courses during the semester II, 2015, in order to propose possible strategies, methodologies and techniques, to overcome them as a way for improving the quality of their oral proficiency in the target language.

This report contains ten parts arranged in the following way: The first chapter provides the statement of the problem, historical framework which accounts all the previous studies, similar topics regarding target language speaking problems in the experts' points of view, description of the problem, the main objectives of this research, research questions, rationale, which shows the importance of our research and finally delimitation of the problem that provides the context of this research. The second chapter includes important theories applied in our research. In addition, this chapter includes the main elements of communicative competence, also five different oral communication problems that many English as a foreign language students' are facing during their learning process.

In the third chapter, the type of study is explained. This study is a descriptive and exploratory type of research that helped us to get the richest and thorough amount of information. Then, in the next chapter, the research design is presented. In chapter five, the population and sample are designated. In chapter six, the data gathering process includes a plan how the researchers organized the information, as well as the major instrument to gather the data. In chapter seven, the data analysis is introduced with their procedures and the data base that researchers applied to study the data. Then, the major findings and conclusions that helped us to answer the research questions are described in a detailed manner. Finally, we included some useful recommendations for the support and reinforcement of the teaching-learning process.

## **I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

### **A. HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK**

Several studies have been carried out in the last five years in the field of English as second language learning and the complexity of mastering the speaking skill. Many researchers attempted to investigate the factors or obstacles that interfere in the achievement of oral proficiency in different English as foreign language contexts. These previous studies provided clear evidence that there are several oral communication problems that most of the English foreign language learners' are facing, which really are challenging during their learning process.

The following articles and studies expose the importance of the speaking skill and show a close observation and analysis of different oral problems students face as well a set of different activities which promotes the development of the speaking skill.

In 2010, Alireza Jamshidnejad researched about the construction of oral problems in English as a foreign language context. Her main objective was to investigate the nature of oral problems in foreign language learning and communication in order to provide a means of being more familiar with the complexities of problem-construction in an EFL context. This research was based on a systematic approach, which classified the main sources of oral communication problems in three groups: communicator based problems, meaning creating problems and contextual problems.

As the study was developing, the researcher investigated how the participants' oral communication problems were influenced by their own perceptions, the interlocutors' perceptions and the second language context itself. The study took place in an English language department. The sample was chosen in a target language Persian undergraduate students' of English literature and translation class and one post-graduate student in TEFL. These students had an upper-intermediate level in English and most of them had taken reading, writing, grammar, and conversation courses previously in the last three years. Besides them, four language teachers were chosen as well as part of the research sample.

The study applied a qualitative approach by conducting an interview to the students and teachers regarding the experience they had while they were facing several oral communication problems in those courses. In the case of the teachers' interviews, the perceptions concerning their students' speaking performance were mentioned too. These interviews were audio-recorded and analyzed by using a thematic analysis which emphasizes on the process of encoding qualitative information which the researcher carefully reviews later. The data obtained was used to develop different codes that were useful for organizing and describing the data in a detailed way.

Among the results, the researcher found in the first group "Communicator based problems" referred to the target language users' perceptions of the ideal target language speaker in which one teacher pointed out that being fluent in target language communication was way more important than being proficient in the rest of the macro-skills (listening, reading and writing). Whereas the students mentioned that pronunciation, intonation, the idioms' knowledge and sentence structure are fundamental aspects of the ideal self-target language speaker.

Another important result during the interview was focused on the perception of other interlocutors in target language communication. The participants mentioned that the fact of feeling embarrassed in front of an interlocutor of the opposite gender caused that they made mistakes constantly and that forced the speaker to increase their oral proficiency level. Indeed, the participants' perceptions of their interlocutor significantly can influence their pattern of interactional moves in L2 communication (Morris & Tarane, 2003: 325; Sato, 2007: 201). The interlocutors' status as a native or non-native speaker seemed to have a big impact on the participants' speaking performance in the target language. The participants claimed that speaking with a native speaker was way more difficult because they kept thinking that they won't comprehend their message.

Under those circumstances, the over-thinking about the interlocutors' comprehension whenever they were evaluated their oral skill even in front of an audience had also an influential effect on their performance, causing anxiety or stress in their learning process. Besides that, the fear of speaking in front of others may discouraged EFL

learners' to keep practicing their speaking skill, especially if the interlocutor played the role of a proficient target language speaker.

In the second group “Meaning- creation problems” emphasized on those obstacles that every EFL students' had to deal with when they are trying to make their message intelligible. In this point, the students mentioned that they forgot words or expressions easily, also the lack of production of grammar sentences correctly or not even trying to transfer meaning using complex-compound sentences affected them at the moment they managed to convey their messages accurately and fluently. The last group “Contextual problems in l2 oral communication”, the main obstacles focused on the setting were the participants had a few exposure to the target language because they lived in a country where English is not spoken. Provided that, these students manifest there are few chances to practice the L2 even if they have attended English courses previously, which lead that they do not feel satisfied with their level of English.

Then, the researcher found out another challenge that referred to the lack of opportunities to talk about their L2 oral communication problems in educational contexts. In this case, the topic of discourse might affect the ease of language use attributed to the speaking activities that teachers provided by focusing more on everyday topics rather than for academic purposes. For that reason, they would like to search for opportunities to keep developing and expand their oral skill.

In 2013, Sey Danisia Najarro, Francisca Antonia Raimundo, et. al. researched about the English oral proficiency level required by the main hotels of San Salvador, El Salvador, during 2012-2013. The study took place in the main hotels of San Salvador, El Salvador: Real Intercontinental, Crown Plaza Hotel, Sheraton Presidente, Marriot Courtyard and Holiday Inn. The purpose of this study was to discover the oral English proficiency level required from applicants who wants to work in the main hotels of San Salvador, find out the measurement instruments used by hotel recruitment staff to determine the applicants' oral proficiency level as well as to explore the different positions in which applicants are placed according to their oral proficiency level.

This research collected the data through a questionnaire that contained open and closed questions aimed to know the requirements to be hired in the main hotels in San

Salvador and the hiring process. Another instrument they administered was an interview directed to two candidates that wanted to work in a hotel but had not been hired for different reasons. The chosen sample were seventeen people. All of them were chosen in the hotels mentioned previously. Two of them were selected from the administrative staff that was in charge of selecting bilingual personnel.

A qualitative approach was employed in this study. In fact, this project is merely descriptive and exploratory and it contained content collected from interviews and questionnaires and qualitative research is a method of investigation that includes subject interviews and detailed case studies (Elsevier, 2005). The researchers' findings were that the recruitment staff administered an interview to the applicants. Basically, the recruitment staff look for experienced people regarding the areas they are interested in. For instance, positions for a front desk agent, bell boy and purchasing manager should have at least an intermediate English level of oral proficiency. In a different manner, positions for a front desk supervisor or a receptionist must have an advanced level of oral proficiency.

Applicants explained to the researchers that they could not get the job positions for the following reasons: lack of experience in the receptionist area and their English oral proficiency level was lower than the 50% in the administrator assistant position, so they could not be hired. For that purpose, it is really essential to learn English as a second language not only for becoming oral proficient in the language, but also to fulfill the requirements that different companies demand, in this case, the hotels' field.

Arely Alberto Acosta, David Alexander Perez among other researchers made a study regarding the oral proficiency level required by the main call centers in El Salvador during 2011-2012 which main objectives were to find out what is the oral proficiency level required from candidates who wanted to work as call center agents' in the main call centers in El Salvador, identify which are the different levels of oral proficiency according to the ACTFL proficiency guidelines for speaking and to explore the measurement instruments used by call center's recruitment staff to determine the applicants' oral proficiency level. This study took place in the following call centers from San Salvador, El Salvador: Stream Global Services, Sykes, Teleperformance, Heliocentric, Atento, Benson and Transactel.

The researchers addressed the people who are learning English as a foreign language and are currently working in a call center, the people whose application was denied, the managers and operations supervisors of some of these call centers. The type of study that was applied in this investigation was based on a descriptive and an exploratory research. The instruments that they conducted were a key informant who is a person that has a background knowledge regarding this issue or the intervention being evaluated. A focus group, which is a form of qualitative research, was created for this study. They asked the participants about their perceptions, beliefs and attitudes towards the purpose of the study. This group were represented by ten people who worked already in Transactel, Stream and Atento and finally an individual interview which seek to find out why some of the participants did not fill the requirements to get the job in these call centers.

The researchers' findings and conclusions were that according to the ACTFL and the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) the applicants should have at least an advanced oral proficiency level (85%) in order to be hired in the different call centers, the lack of experience, background, computer skills among other aspects that the recruitment staff takes into account. The recruitment staff provided some feedback to those applicants who were not hired, for instance: they advised them to practice their oral skill with a native speaker, pay attention to the pronunciation and intonation, attend extra English courses, find useful technological resources to improve their listening skill, etc. Finally they suggested that several educational institutions should provide more training and strategies to the applicants so they can develop their oral skill successfully.

In 2012 Zhengdong Gan made a study the Understanding L2 Speaking Problems: Implications for ESL Curriculum Development in a Teacher Training which took place in an academic institution in Hong Kong. This paper reports the result of a study that aimed to identify the problems with oral English skills of ESL (English as a second language) students at a tertiary teacher training institution in Hong Kong.

In this research, semi-structured interviews were conducted to all the participants. Each interview, conducted in English or Chinese depending on the interviewee's preference, ranged in length from approximately 40 to 60 minutes. Each interviewee was

asked to describe their English speaking experience as English language learners' during their under graduate programme. The interview centered on the difficulties with speaking in English that the participant had experienced as an undergraduate during the English Major programme. Although following a pre-determined structure, the author was able to ask probing questions to gain a fuller understanding of the issues under discussion (Gillham, 2005). All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The results of the study lead the researchers to question the effectiveness of the knowledge- and pedagogy-based ESL teacher training curriculum. They also point to a need to incorporate a sufficiently intensive language improvement component in the current teacher preparation program.

The research study "The Relationship between Learning Strategies and Learning Styles in the Development of English Students' Oral Proficiency At the University of El Salvador, School of Arts and Sciences, Foreign Languages Department during the academic years of 2012 and 2013" conducted by Julia Zarceño, Yamileth Tobar, et. al. The study's required data was gathered with the administration of a questionnaire and a test. The questionnaire contained 17 closed questions related to the use of six learning strategies in oral English proficiency that were appropriate to the developmental level of the learners participating in the study.

Moreover, a test designed by Rebecca Oxford was administered with the purpose of identify students' learning styles. Both instruments requested social demographic information of the participants. After administering the questionnaire, the information was compared with the students speaking evaluation grades. Data was analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) in order to discover the relationship between the learning strategies students use, students' learning styles and their speaking proficiency. A deep analysis of the data gathered was made in order to determine if there exists a positive or negative relationship between the variables under study: namely, oral proficiency, learning strategies and learning styles. This study permitted to know that learning strategies help to improve students' oral proficiency if they are used according to their own learning style. Thus, the investigation demonstrated that strategies used by



Reading and Conversation I students were not related to students' own learning style that is the main reason why they got low grades in their oral evaluations.

In the research "*The effectiveness of the communicative activities applied by teachers of Readings and Conversation I and II that facilitates the development of oral fluency*" (2011), speaking is defined as "the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of context" (Chaney, 1998, p. 13). Speaking is a crucial part of a second or foreign language learning and teaching. Despite its importance, for many years, teaching speaking has been undervalued and Oxford language English teachers have continued to teach speaking just as a repetition of drills or memorization of dialogues. However, today's world requires that the goal of teaching speaking should improve students' oral skill that will lead them to express themselves. Alejandrina Torres, Susy J. et. al (2011) aimed their research to let teachers know if the communicative activities they have used in the subjects of Readings and Conversation I and II (2011), at the Foreign Languages Department, UES, have been useful to help students to develop fluency in the speaking skill. The researchers identified which communicative activities from the ones mentioned in the syllabus, have been useful for the development of oral fluency.

An effective communication is the main goal of every foreign language learner. The oral ability of a foreign language seems to be more problematic for the majority of students. It is closely connected with an internal uneasiness that appears during the personal interaction face-to-face. However, it can quite effectively be taken care of by improving English oral skill. Teachers have often claimed that fluency is a difficult concept to define. According to Derwing et al. (2004), the difficulty in achieving a definition lies in the fact that fluency encompasses many aspects of language. Realizing the difficulties involved in arriving at a precise definition of fluency. Doctor Jack Richards, in a recent online publication entitled "*Communicative Language Teaching Today*", defined fluency as "natural language use occurring when a speaker engages in meaningful interaction and maintains comprehensible and ongoing communication despite limitations in his or her communicative competence".

Fillmore's (1979) first kind of fluency is also defined as "the ability to fill time with talk. A person who is fluent in this way does not have to stop many times to think of what to say next or how to phrase it". As Fillmore stated, this fluency will depend on a range of factors including having quick access to and practiced control of many of the language's lexical and syntactic devices, being able to decide readily when it is appropriate and efficient to use them. Brumfit (1984) sees fluency as "the maximally effective operation of the language system so far acquired by the student". This definition suggest that fluency can be measure by looking at the speed and flow of language production, the degree of control of language items, and the way language and content interact.

The English language has become a major medium for communication across borders globally and is seen nowadays as the medium of communication not only for business but also for academic purposes. Karahan (2007) describes English language as "the leading foreign language enjoying prestigious position in many countries, including Spanish speaking countries. English is neither a national nor an official language in Latin America, but is the most widely taught foreign language at all stages of educational system (p. 1)". Many learners of a foreign language usually do not like or are afraid of speaking in the target language, and most of the time they exhibit a passive attitude in class, since they do not have the opportunity to express themselves naturally and spontaneously (Eckard & Kearny, 1981). "Learn how to interact productively with their peers, to speak confidently in class discussions, to listen strategically, to read with comprehension, and to write well-structured and coherent texts" (Cotter, 2007).

Oral presentation skills are increasingly important in a world where people are judge on their ability to present their ideas in a coherent and articulate way in a range of situations (schools, workplace, and society) this means, be fluent when expressing ideas and thoughts plus the ability to speak and understand English quickly and easily without translation. Fluency means that you can be easily understood and understand at the same time. In fact, you speak and understand instantly (Hoge, n, d.).

Li (1998) cited by Farooqui (2007) showed that students are reluctant to actively participate in class. Students still considers the teacher as the authority figure. The findings of Chowdhury (2001), (also cited by Farooqui) explains that students are facing themselves

to a new world, since they received passive grammar translation method where the teacher is the center of the class; they encounter themselves with new experiences that in some cases could be frustrating. Students are reluctant to speak inside and outside classroom in the target language. They feel afraid of using English outside class, and in some way, they are unenthusiastic to use English inside classroom. Farooqui (2007) illustrated this situation presented in the English classroom, she investigated how private universities in Bangladesh are helping students to acquire communicative skills and also to improve methodology in order to teach English in all the private and public universities throughout the country.

Brown (2000) quoted by Larsson & Olsson (2008) stated that “students need to play a significant role when it comes to motivation, in the sense that when they see that there is a possibility for their needs to be fulfilled, they become motivated. Students’ perceptions of their need of improving their oral skills, and also of the usefulness of the class for achieving that goal may have had a strong influence in their levels of participation in class activities.” Cotter (2007) argues that as students learn to use English in the setting, they should also be involved in learning about how language works. They should be asked to reflect on various aspects of language, to develop a common critically in terms of effectiveness, meaning and accuracy. “Someone who speaks well would similarly understand when to use different grammar points” Cotter (2007).

White (2004) explains that language is an integral part of learning, and oral language has a key role in classroom teaching and learning. “It helps to encourage creativity, understanding, and imagination; it is a means of solving problems, speculating, sharing ideas and making decisions; language builds friendships and enhances motivation through social interaction”.

Students not only need to be well prepared in English skills, they need also use them to build social relationships that allow them to interact with each other. An argument that supports this view is found in Gutierrez (2005) who stated: “learners often need to be able to speak with confidence in order to carry many of their most basic transactions. It is the skill by which they are most frequently judged, and through which they make or lose friends” (p. 3). This quote addresses the importance of real interaction which gives the learners the opportunity to demonstrate what they can do with the foreign language.

Thus, Victor Castrillón (2010), in his research project about students' perceptions about the development of their oral skill in an English as a foreign language, focuses on observing and analyzing the development of oral skills in 4<sup>th</sup> semester students from the Professional Development Program for Teachers of English (PDPTE) Colombian Program, specifically those students from the Oral Skills course I. Castrillón (2010), aimed his research at the understanding on how the English course facilitates the acquisition of oral skill throughout the different activities provided by the teacher and the way in which students' motivation affects their participation in class. This study showed that students tended to participate more in those activities in which there was a previous reading or research about the topic involved, some of the activities that students liked the most were defending and stating opinions (debates). The study also revealed that the use of authentic material in the class was a trigger for students' participation. According to Castrillón' findings every activity regarding discussions, opinions and sharing ideas is important for the development and motivation of those students.

## **B. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM**

Throughout the years, the use of the English language has expanded all over the world. In today's world, a large percentage of English users from different countries employ the language effectively as a medium of communication. Staab (1992) stated that oral language is important not only as a vital communication tool that empowers us in our daily lives, but also as a valuable way to learn. Many English as second language learners choose to study this language in order to become proficient specifically in the speaking area since it is essential for them to develop an oral ability to communicate effectively in different contexts.

Indeed, oral proficiency or an ability to be able to communicate efficiently in English with both native and non-native speakers is perceived by a great majority of language learners all over the world as an ultimate goal of their learning. However, many of them seem to be unaware of the simple fact that speaking in a way that is both accurate and appropriate is probably the most difficult skill to develop as it involves mastery of different aspects of linguistic and non-linguistic features of language (Pawlak, Waniek- Klimczac et. 2011) for instance, the use of a good amount of vocabulary, colloquial expressions, pronunciation, and intonation, good grammar knowledge among other aspects that help us to convey the message accurately, fluently and spontaneously in any situation. In order to achieve all these aspects, most of the English as a foreign language students' have to face several challenges throughout the English courses they are enrolled as they have to strive to reach an adequate level of oral proficiency.

The Department of Foreign Languages is not an exception regarding the different oral communication problems students face during courses such as Intermediate Intensive English I, Advanced Intensive English I and Readings and Conversation I, while they are trying to be efficient in the speaking area. Despite that the syllabus from these courses foster the development of a communicative competence and task-based learning which

provides an opportunity to students to use the target language in an authentic and meaningful way inside and outside the classroom so that one day they will be prepared to be in charge of helping other students to develop their oral competence. Still, there are some factors such as grammar as a stumbling block, inadequate pronunciation and intonation, attitude to the language, few academic activities to use the language outside the classroom that are affecting the students' English learning process.

In particular, English as a foreign language learners' often do not feel encouraged to speak English. The results from learners lack of exposure to authentic English language environments that allow them to use English for communication and expression and the fact that they are not exposed to the native-English language cultures (Oradee, 2012) are making students reluctant to use the target language as they don't show interest to learn the language or are afraid of committing mistakes.

In order to address this issue, the research team decided to interview five professors from the Department of Foreign Languages, University of El Salvador (UES), whom pointed out that some of the problems regarding oral communication that students face are the lack of vocabulary, few knowledge of colloquial expressions, lack of motivation to attend extracurricular courses that will help them to improve their speaking skill, the way students speak is based on books, among other oral communication weaknesses that they show along in their English major coursework.

Collectively, these important opinions, the own experience of the researchers as well as some previous studies provided the team a clear evidence that is necessary to conduct this study in order to find out why this issue still affects many students every semester. The researchers pursued to accomplish the following objectives: Identify what are the different speaking problems perceived by the students as well as to establish a comparison regarding the opinions among groups in order to present insights for instance strategies, methodologies, activities and recommendations for the Department that may contribute to strengthen their oral competence.

## **C. OBJECTIVES**

### **GENERAL OBJECTIVE:**

To identify the target language speaking problems students of Advanced English I, Intermediate Intensive English I and Readings and Conversation I face at the Department of Foreign Languages, UES, semester II, 2015.

### **SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:**

To diagnose the oral problems that affect Advanced English I, Intermediate Intensive English I and Readings and Conversation I students' speaking performance in order to achieve a high level of communicative ability.

To establish a general and an individual comparison regarding the main target language speaking problems between the Advanced English I, Intermediate Intensive English I and Readings and Conversation I groups.

To suggest possible activities, strategies, methodologies or techniques for Advanced English I, Intermediate Intensive English I and Readings and Conversation I students so as to improve students' oral communication in their learning process.

## **D. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

What are the most common speaking problems of Intermediate Intensive English I students as perceived by themselves?

What are the most common speaking problems of Advanced Intensive English I students as perceived by themselves?

What are the most common speaking problems of Readings and Conversation I students as perceived by themselves?

What are the most general speaking problems that students from these courses perceived by themselves?

Do Intermediate Intensive I, Advanced Intensive English I and Readings and Conversation I groups have similar opinions?



## **E. RATIONALE**

For many students that learn English as a second language, oral ability becomes of such a great importance. However, even with the importance of a good development of the speaking skill, students still complain about problems regarding their discourse. In the University of El Salvador every year many students enroll in the Department of Foreign Languages, these students are required to fulfill the different goals or objectives included in the syllabus from the curricula to teach Advanced English I, Intermediate Intensive English I and Readings and Conversations I courses. So at the end of those courses students should be able to develop a communicative skill that will vary from being able to speak with confidence to improve the students' critical thinking.

Despite these goals can be verified successfully through the implementation of an oral proficiency test at the end of the courses, not all the professors would be completely satisfied with the results. In fact, Professor Ricardo Gamero, Head of Department of Foreign Languages at UES, considers that "If the Department decide to make students take a standardized test that somehow measures the students' oral skill, the results would not be completely satisfactory". In the same way, Professor César Guzmán, Coordinator of the English major in the same department, added to the previous statement that "There are a lot of factors that interfere in the level of proficiency that our students get at the end of the major. The results would not be that positive because the majority of students do not reach an advanced level at the end of the major, the results would vary a lot".

Professor Guzmán also thinks that one communication problem students face is the limited vocabulary students have, that is because students do not read or they do not practice the language. He also said that even though there are different projects, such as "Cursos de Nivelación Académica para los Estudiantes Del Area de Desarrollo de Habilidades" not all the students are motivated enough to attend these courses that probably will help them to become more skillful in the target language.

Professor Fidel Navidad, a TEFL expert at UES, mentioned that “What affects more to the students while developing their speaking skill is probably pronunciation”. Here the researchers realized that each of these professors pointed at one specific oral problem while teaching to the students. While one teacher said that students have a limited vocabulary, other teacher thinks that pronunciation has a great importance since it helps not to confuse the message.

There are different problems to work on. As you could read problem is not only one but a series of problems related to each other and as a whole they should be unified, so the professors know exactly how many problems there are, and to what degree these problems are affecting the students. Thus, it is fair to say that generally students do have to struggle in order to reach the ideal or a high level in the development of their speaking skills.

Taken the Department of Foreign Languages authorities’ perceptions about their students’ speaking skill, and the own researchers’ experience of being students that faced different oral problems while taking the previously subjects, the researchers have done this new study in order to have a better understanding of the major reasons why students still do not feel confident with their level of English. The importance of this research aimed at finding out those problems, exposed them and suggest possible ideas, methodologies and activities that can be helpful to improve the teaching-learning process.

The researchers presented a diagnostic study of those problems and recommended ways or activities in order to prevent those problems. Ideally this project have benefit many students and Professors involved in the teaching-learning process and can be used as a reference to some other researchers who are developing a similar research.

## **F. DELIMITATION OF THE PROBLEM**

It is very common that learners or students of English as a foreign language are taught the four English macro skill that are regarding the abilities of listening, reading, writing and speaking. In this study, the researchers have planned to focus on the productive skill of speaking. The study involved some definitions and perceptions about the ideal development of this skill in the teaching-learning process. While reading some researches about EFL students' in different countries, it was proved that most of those studies pointed out that EFL students' cannot and for some different reasons, master the speaking skill as they are supposed to do.

After reading those problems and to narrow this research project, the researcher planned to make a diagnostic study regarding the possible oral problems that influence on the students' learning experience that make them to stop mastering a good oral proficiency level of English.

By own experience, it is common to listen students complaining about their level of oral proficiency at the Department of Foreign Languages. Taking this into account, the researchers thought about doing a pre-researcher with some teachers that have a key role at the FLD, so they gave the research team a glance at the most common oral problems students faced while taking the target language courses of the English major. A short interview was conducted to the teachers that provided the researchers with more helpful information to narrow the research topic as well as the oral problems students have in common or as individuals. It is worth to mention that this project has been a diagnostic study that ideally can be taken helpful to the teachers' staff.

The research was carried out at the Department of Foreign Languages at the University of El Salvador, with all groups of Advanced Intensive English I, Intermediate Intensive English I and Readings and Conversation I during the semester II, 2015.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Throughout the history, foreign language education has been changing in the way languages are taught. Traditional approaches were based on a teacher center environment which provides students few opportunities to take an active role in their learning process. Later on, facilitators took another position regarding the innovation and improvement of foreign languages teaching approaches, techniques and principles moving from develop learners' reading skills to become proficient in the target language. It is important to describe in a brief way nine teaching approaches that had developed through the decades and are useful for the reinforcement and support of English foreign language education.

### **The Grammar Translation Method**

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, foreign language education was based on memorizing grammatical rules and vocabulary and translating texts from the mother tongue to the target language. This approach was known as “the classical method”, which main objective focused on learning Greek or Latin as the main role of education. Many educators adopted this approach for teaching foreign languages. The purpose of this method was to improve the reading skills of the students so they could become highly intellectual persons. As a result, not all the students were able to speak proficiently because they learned it but they did not know how to produce the language in everyday speech.

As years went by, the classical method adopted another conceptualization during the 19<sup>th</sup> century as “the grammar translation method”. This new approach attempted to change the perspective of second language teaching by using English, French and Italian in the classrooms as the main modern languages and continue using the features from the classical method regarding the development of reading ability of the students in the target language. In today's world, this approach is still used but in more isolated contexts.

## **The Direct Method**

A decade later, the necessity to develop oral proficiency increased in second language learning. A new approach took some similar aspects of the series method created by the French Frances Gouin in 1880, which involved the ability to link the learners' experiences directly to the target language and teaching the language without including grammatical features. It could be taught inductively where topics are based on problem-solving learning in which students can make inferences from the complex to the general knowledge. In addition, foreign language teachers' provide a communicative context in which learners can practice their listening and speaking skills not only in the classroom, but also in real life situations.

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this approach started to decline in the USA and Europe. Most professors returned to the grammar translation method or to a method where they could emphasized the reading skills in a teacher-centered context.

To summarize this approach, Richards and Rodgers (1986: 9-10) considered four principles of the Direct method:

- 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 traded progression organized around question-and-answer exchanges between teachers and students in small, intensive classes.
- 4) Grammar was taught inductively.

## **The Audio-Lingual Method**

During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the direct method decreased completely in the USA, but not in Europe. Many schools and universities in Europe continue developing the foreign language education with native-speakers, so students did not have the need to travel to other countries to practice their oral skills. However, the USA was the exception for developing an ineffective foreign language instruction. Many educational institutions considered the reading approach more useful than the communicative approach. In effect the Coleman Report (1929) encouraged foreign language teachers' to apply a reading-based approach which lead that many teachers returned to the Grammar Translation Method (1930-1940).

This method changed drastically with the outbreak of World War II in which the armies had the need to become orally proficient in the language of their allies and their enemies. Therefore, the USA military founded the “Army Specialized Training Program” (ASTP) or “the Army Method”. This approach consisted on intensive foreign language courses that focused primarily on developing a communicative competence. Definitely it was a success in second language learning since many aspects from the direct method were adapted to this new approach. It also focused on how foreign language students' learn the language naturally and spontaneously without using their native tongue. Later, in the 50s' the Army Method became known as “the Audio-Lingual Method”.

The Audio-Lingual Method was also supported by linguistic and psychological theories such as the behaviorism (Skinner, 1957), the theory based on how humans acquire a new language by being exposed to the context, and the linguistic theory of structuralism that states that human speech is present in all human's genetics and requires the appropriate stimuli for the development. (Ferdinand De Saussure, 1916).

Briefly, is important to mention some characteristics of the Audio-lingual method stated by Prator and Celce-Murica (1979):

- 1) New material is presented in dialog form.
- 2) There is dependence on mimicry, memorization of set phrases, and overlearning.
- 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.

### **Community Language Learning**

During 1970 teachers adopted a different position regarding language teaching. A new method arose considering language structure, affective and interpersonal features of learning a second language. The main objective of this new method was focus on changing the roles of teachers and students: The teacher acted as a counselor who pays attention to the students' needs, while the student is a collaborator, working in a group with the teacher's help facilitating language learning in a context where everyone can interact and express their feelings and emotions resulting from second language acquisition.

Charles Curran (1972) stated that the "Counseling- Learning Model" of education should be emphasized on the sense that learners are a community, not a class. Even though there is not a syllabus or textbooks to follow, it is expected that at the end of the course the students acquire complete autonomy by achieving fluency and accuracy in the language.

### **Suggestopedia**

Another important approach referred to Suggestopedia. It was founded by the Bulgarian George Lozanov (1979). Basically, this approach focused on how learning takes place through the acquisition of new material in a relaxed context making sure that students feel comfortable. Lozanov mentioned that music was essential to his method. Baroque music offered the kind of "relaxed" concentration that led to "super-learning". (Ostrander and Schroeder, 1979: 65).

But, not all educators agreed with this method in second language teaching because they claimed that learners just received input by listening music, whereas other essential aspects of language acquisition were being ignored. Scovel also criticized (1979) the method, he thought that "Suggestopedia is an attempt to teach memorization techniques and is not devoted to the far more comprehensive enterprise of language acquisition."

## **The Silent Way**

During the 60s, The Silent Way was first introduced by the Egyptian Caleb Gattegno in his book “Teaching Foreign Languages in Schools: The Silent Way” in 1963. This method focus on more cognitive aspects than affective.

Mergel pointed out (1998) that “learning is a matter of acquiring information and reorganizing existing internal cognitive structures called schema to either accommodate new information or change previously stored information”. Thus, Caleb Gattegno based his approach on problem-solving, here learners can develop their critical thinking as well as transfer their knowledge to new situations.

Richards and Rodgers (1986:99) remarked three aspects of this language- teaching method:

- 1) Learning is facilitated if the learner discovers or creates rather than remembers and repeats what is to be learned.
- 2) Learning is facilitated by accompanying (mediating) physical objects.
- 3) Learning is facilitated by problem solving involving the material to be learned.

Moreover, Jerome Bruner introduced a new educational theory during 1960 known as: “Discovery Learning” based on Gattegno’s approach. This theory focus on how learners relate on his or her schema in order to discover new facts and relationships to be learnt with the purpose of developing autonomy and responsibility. Still, this approach has some disadvantages, one of them states that the teacher is too distant and the learners are not able to solve all their problems. Students still need the teachers’ guidance for achieving their academic goals in the target language.

## **Total Physical Response**



As years went by, the English James Asher (1977) implemented a new approach known as the “Total Physical Response”. This method is based on associating language with verbal and physical aspects. The method follows closely the principles of child language acquisition. Asher stated that “children listen to their parents’ commands before they speak”. This listening is related to physical actions such as moving, grabbing, and looking which are designed for the comprehension of basic items.

Asher noticed that in many foreign language courses, students felt over-anxious. Considering this, he developed a method where teachers could provide a lot of input through listening and acting in an interactive teaching context. “The instructor is the director of a stage play in which the students are the actors”. (Asher, 1977:43).

Nevertheless, the Total Physical Response has some restrictions. This method can only be developed with beginners and intermediate students since in those levels learners have a low oral proficiency. One way to improve the students’ proficiency is by applying a communicative language method where they can overcome their communication difficulties.

### **The Natural Approach**

During 1980s, Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell settled that learners developed their oral skills until speech arose. In this case learners were exposed to the target language, however they were not forced to speak until they felt ready, without receiving grammar instruction. This method is used primarily in the beginners and intermediate levels.

Krashen and Terrell defined three important stages:

- 1) The preproduction stage is the development of listening comprehension skills.
- 2) The early production stage is usually marked with errors as the student struggles with the language.
- 3) The last stage is one of extending production into longer stretches of discourse, involving more complex games, role play, open-ended dialogs, discussions, and extended small group work.

By way of contrast, the natural approach received several critics because not all the foreign language students' developed their oral skills faster than other students; this method only focuses on the general aspects of the conversation, not in the language structures. Taken this into account, foreign language students' should receive as much as comprehensible input as possible in order to acquire the language.

It is important to remark that teachers should take a balanced approach by considering some aspects from each of these methods and the implementation of a new approach known as "Communicative Language Teaching" where the students can develop their oral skills in different contexts with confidence and autonomy.

### **Communicative Language Teaching**

Between 1970 and 1980, an idea of introducing a new interactive approach was developed leading to a new conceptualization about what learning a language means. This approach emphasized the development of an effective communicative competence as the ultimate goal of language learning. Foreign language educators' started questioning teaching methodologies that were based only on repetition and memorization (Brown, 1972; Rivers, 1964). This new approach was recognized as a system of expression of meaning, knowledge about how language could be analyzed, internalized and taught in a different perspective by including in the English as a foreign language curriculum design (syllabuses, assessment and textbook writing) different language functions based on authentic and meaningful communication activities as the main objective in foreign language education.

According to David Nunan (1991 a: 279) The Communicative Language Teaching is characterized by the following aspects:

- 1) An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
- 2) The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.
- 3) The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language but also on the learning process itself.

- 4) An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
- 5) An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activation outside the classroom.

Without a doubt, this new curriculum adopted an emphasis on meaning and communication as a source of human interaction which involves unpredictability and creativity in the way ideas are expressed, enabling speakers use the language correctly in a variety of sociocultural contexts, leading them to the achievement of a high language proficiency. Taking this into account, the most important aim while teaching a second or foreign language should focus on helping learners to become skillful in the language. "Language proficiency is not an one-dimensional construct, but a multifaceted modality, consisting of various levels of abilities and domain". (Carrasquillo, 1994, P.65).

Up to this point it is essential to address the following question. How English as a foreign language students' become proficient in the language? To answer this question, first is important to make a distinction between competence and performance. According to Chomsky (1965) an idealized competence is referred to one's implicit or explicit knowledge of the system of the language. While individual performance focuses on one's actual production and comprehension of language in specific instances of language use.

Definitely, these distinctions helped us to realize that in order to reach an adequate oral proficiency level in the target language, learners have to assimilate the information first and then produce the language as a communicative tool for social interaction by including the following elements known as "micro-skills" that makes oral communication more effective. Those elements are: fluency, discourse function, non-verbal features, register as well as the correct use of strategic devices (pauses, fillers, collocations) among others.

All these elements require that students comprehend and manipulate the language in different contexts. Students will be able to reach an adequate communicative competence which refers to the ability to function in a truly communicative setting; that is, dynamic exchange in which linguistic competence must adjust itself to the total informational input, both linguistic and paralinguistic, of one or more interlocutors. (Sandra Savingnon, 1970).

Although this concept involves writing, it states that a good competence interlocutor knows how to make choices according to different real life situations.

Furthermore, learning a target language can become a complex task because it requires more than the knowledge of grammar rules. As Campbell and Wales (1970) stated *“The degree to which a person’s production or understanding of the language is appropriate to the context in which it takes place is even more important than is grammatically”*. At the same time Hymes pointed out that native speakers’ command of the language is described in terms of communicative competence that referred to the aspect of our competence that enable us to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts. (Cited in Brown, 1994, 227). Considering this, communicative competence has to do with the following elements (Richards, Platt and Weber, 1985).

1. Knowledge of grammar and vocabulary
2. Knowledge of speaking’ rules (knowledge how to behave as an interlocutor)
3. Knowledge how to use and respond to different types of speech acts such as requests, apologies, thanks, and invitations
4. Knowledge how to use language appropriately.

Likewise, Canale and Swain (1980) incorporated four major components based on the use of appropriate linguistic system and the functional aspects of communication which help learners improve and achieve a high communicative competence:

1. **Grammatical competence:** Refers to the ability to use effectively the grammatical features and rules of language, vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence formation processes in order to apply them in several sociolinguistic contexts. This competence is based on the development of skill and knowledge suitable for recognizing different utterances that are grammatically accurate.
2. **Socio-linguistic competence:** The ability of using appropriately socio-cultural rules, utterances naturally and in meaningful contexts with purposes of interaction, norms of convention, state of participants, among others. Learners are aware of the

cross-cultural differences so they could adjust their language to the context they are surrounded.

3. **Discourse competence:** This important component involves the ability to combine forms and meanings in order to process stretches of discourse with accuracy and cohesion. Another essential element that is related to the surrounding discourse refers to intonation which describes the variation of pitch in spoken language that helps us to express emotions and attitudes. “Intonation within discourse means that the wider context of conversation or monologue, is taken into account and enable us to see how intonation conveys ideas and information” (David Brazil, 1980).
  
4. **Strategic competence:** This last component points out to the person’s ability to keep a conversation going without breaking down the communication that might be affected by the lack of grammatical knowledge, communication and socio-cultural patterns. It is worth to mention that communication strategies or devices can be drawn to compensate for gaps in the knowledge of the target language, are important both for beginners and quite advanced learners, since difficulties in expressing the intended message are bound to occur at all levels of proficiency. (Faucette, 2001).

These communication problems can be solved by trying to paraphrase, use of circumlocution, physical gestures and regularity of speech that may interfere the affective side of the speakers. “Regularity of speech rhythm varies widely according to context, as it may bring factors such as the relationship between the speakers, their confidence, nervousness, etc.” (Kelly, 2002).

Indeed, the extent to which speakers have mastered these components features is responsible for their differential success with communication (Cf. Brown, 1994: 227-228). Besides that, is important to mention that these aspects helped to the development of oral proficiency through applying communicative interactive approaches in the classroom such as **The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and**

**Common European framework (CEFR)** which can be useful because learners are engaged in tasks that require meaningful interaction with educators. Also, educators themselves focus on a learner-centered environment that lead to opportunities so students can track their proficiency level as well as how efficiently they have learned the language and even more get in touch with new cultures. These are both the main goals of foreign language instruction.

Many foreign language learners' from different cultures and backgrounds enroll everyday in several majors that require not only the domain of listening, reading and writing skills, but also having a basis to produce the second language accurately and in a proficient way. Despite they spent years developing another language competences, they have experienced during their learning process several communication difficulties such as vocabulary shortage, lack of exposure to the target knowledge, few activities where learners use the language in an authentic and meaningful way, among others. For that reason, this research is intended to identify and observe these difficulties in order to propose solutions to the Foreign Languages Department.

According to the article “Understanding L2 speaking problems: Implications for ESL curriculum development in a teacher training institution in Hong Kong” by Zhengdong Gan (2012) there are five obstacles that influence negatively in the development of English as a foreign language students' oral performance.

**1) Inadequate vocabulary:** When we refer to vocabulary, it means that the language emerges first as words. The coining of new words never stops nor does the acquisition of words. In this simple sentences, (David Wilkins 1972, pp. 111-112) summed up the importance of vocabulary “without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary *nothing* can be conveyed”. Later on, this point of view was improved in the course book (Dellar H. and Hocking D, *Innovations LTP*, 2000) “If you spend most of your time studying grammar, your English will not improve very much. You will see most improvement if you learn more words and expressions. You can say very little with grammar, but you can say almost anything with words.”!

Indeed, learning vocabulary phrases, colloquial expressions and idioms are essential for becoming proficient in the language and also plays an important role for second language acquisition. Swan and Walter (1984), wrote that “vocabulary acquisition is the largest and most important task facing the language learner”. Limited vocabulary knowledge can be a crucial problem for English as a foreign language students’ that may be caused by the lack of vocabulary knowledge and expressing ideas inaccurately and without cohesion (discourse competence). Usually, foreign language learners’ do not have enough time to process their thoughts and they tend to use pauses or fillers to enhance the clarity of the message as well as expressing meanings in different contexts (socio-linguistic competence).

One problem found in spoken grammar refers that native speakers tend to use their idiomatic and colloquial expressions in everyday speech. In our context, many teachers focus pretty much on the writing form but not in the speaking ability, turning difficult for learners to make themselves understood whenever they are establishing a conversation with native-speakers. Scott Thornbury in his book “How to teach grammar (1999)”, stated that “the best model of English for this type of learner may be a kind of neutral English without marked regional or cultural features, or without a strong bias to either the spoken or written form”.

**2) Grammar as a stumbling block:** Another important factor that influences negatively in oral communication is how English learners’ use their grammatical competence in everyday speech. In this case, most of them are facing several problems, such as the tendency to switch tenses unconsciously, and low knowledge of grammar rules even if they sound grammatically accurate. Students claimed that do not have time to self-correct and consequently they make mistakes. Regarding this, Krashen (1982) monitor hypothesis has always been criticized because in some foreign language learning contexts, not all the students are exposed to a language-enriched environment where they can have enough time to convey their ideas in order to acquire proficiency in the language.

Selinker (1974) also considers that some language rules may cause an interlanguage problems, which is described as an intermediate system located somewhere between the

learner's native language and the target language. As a result, language transfer errors always take place because of contextual guessing and recurring patterns in their mother tongue, and the rate of delivery to produce their speech in a short length generated by the lack of fluency and the disorganization of their output (clustering).

**3) Imperfectly learned pronunciation and intonation:** The importance of pronunciation in learning a new language is not based on getting a native speaker accent, mostly pronunciation focus on achieving fluency in our speech even though it can become a complex task, many foreign language learners' tend to mispronounce a range of phonemes causing several difficulties to a native speaker or community to understand. This problem can be caused by inappropriate learnt pronunciation and intonation, the lack of exposure to the target language, age, or maturational constraints. (Kenworthy, 1987: 4-8).

Another issue regarding pronunciation refers to the knowledge of forms and functions of the language which are involved in the micro skills of oral communication (rhythm and intonation, produce stress and unstressed words, recognize different sounds in English, among others). Facing these factors can be challenging for students who have not develop the skill to become careful listeners in real life situations where the necessity to hear a variety of pronunciations is one of the keys to increase the students' communicative competence. Is really essential that teachers raise awareness on the students' needs by integrating pronunciation in their lessons, in that way learners will notice the importance of becoming successful speakers. As Gerald Kelly (2002) wrote in his book "*How to teach pronunciation*" "Any analysis of language that disregards or sidelines factors of pronunciation is incomplete".

**4) Inadequate opportunities to speak English in class:** This problem is really common in a teacher-centered environment where many students who are willing to learn English manifest that teacher's methodology can impact negatively in the development of their speaking skill, for several reasons: low negotiation meaning with their peers, few speaking activities that include debates, role plays, dramas, etc.



Since some of the courses are so unproductive, students find their own ways to become autonomous by practicing the language using another sources that will be benefit in their academic life and in the development of their oral communication components (grammatical, socio-linguistic, pragmatic, strategic, discourse). All these reasons, affect somehow their learning process. So that, is necessary to provide enough input to the students by teaching them the target language naturally in a comfortable environment, where their innate capacities are activate and in that way they will feel successful learning the target language. (Krashen, acquisition hypothesis. 1980). Teachers should include the following aspects and principles in order to apply interactive communicative approaches that will lead to acquire an adequate communicative competence according to the students' proficiency needs:

### **Interactive principles**

**Automaticity:** Learners succeed interacting by being aware how to convey meanings and messages, but not by focusing on grammar and linguistic forms.

**Intrinsic motivation:** When learners are engage in different activities that require the use of authentic language, they develop their communicative competence and feel successful in learning a second language.

**Strategic investment:** Successful interaction takes place when learners know how to use correctly the strategic competence such as paraphrasing, use of pause and fillers, making an offer or refuse it, etc.

**Risk-taking:** Students risk failing in order to convey meaning which is part of learning a second language.

**The language-culture connection:** Second language learners need to be aware of the cultural differences such as colloquial expressions, customs, and ways of thinking in order to know the importance of adapting to this new culture for succeeding in the target language.

**Interlanguage:** Interacting with native-speakers can be a complex task when learners are in the process of acquiring the second language. Even though at the beginning learners will

commit several mistakes of production and comprehension; it is the role of the teacher to provide enough feedback for improving these communication difficulties.

**Communicative competence:** Successful interaction requires that second language learners' use accurately different communicative competence factors (grammatical, discourse, strategic, socio-linguistic) so that the constantly exchange of opinions will flow smoothly.

**Task- Based Learning:** Task- based instruction focuses on the use of target language by developing meaningful tasks. Michael Breen (1987:23) pointed out that a task refers to “any structure language learning endeavor which has a particular objective, appropriate content, a specified working procedure, and a range of outcomes for those who undertake the task”. In fact, developing tasks that require the production of authentic language leads to problem-solving learning, because it involves a direct encounter with the phenomenon being studied. (Keeton and Tate, 1978:2).

As a conclusion is important to mention that through interaction, students can increase their language store as they listen to or read authentic linguistic material, or even the output of their fellow students in discussions, skits, joint-problem-solving tasks, or dialogue journals. During interaction, students can use all knowledge they possess of the language all they have learned or casually absorbed in real- life exchanges. (Wilga Rivers, 1987:4-5).

**5) Input-poor environment outside class:** This obstacle interferes with the degree of achieving a communicative competence in countries where English is not spoken and the lack of exposure is reduced. Indeed, a poor exposure to the target language can disturb the students' comprehensible input development, leading them to fossilization problems that according to Selinker (1970) referred to the permanent retention of non-native interlanguage forms. Similarly, Oyama's study (1976) stated that many ESL learners' fail to achieve a high level of proficiency because this phenomenon affect or limit their abilities to pronounce the target language fluently with natively pronunciation. In this case learners found themselves linguistically stuck by the incorrect use of the language and cannot be

self-correct easily. Without a doubt, this obstacle makes students stop practicing and improving their speaking skill once the class is finished.

It worth to mention the sociocultural aspects, factors that affect English as a foreign language input environment. Students must know the importance of how the language is used in social contexts, comprehend that each language has its own rules of usage as well as when, how and what degree a speaker may impose a give verbal behavior on his or her conversation partner (Berns, 1990).

Affective aspects are also a stumbling block for foreign language learners'. "The affective side of the learner is probably one of the most important influences on language learning success or failure" (Oxford, 1990, p.140). Some other elements that are related to the target language learning are the emotions, empathy, anxiety, attitude and motivation. Several students consider that speaking a foreign language in public especially in front of native speakers, is often anxiety-provoking. On the other hand, adult learners are concerned with how they are judged by others, adults specially are very cautious about making mistakes in what they say. Making mistakes would be a public display of ignorance and consequently they would lose face.

To conclude, achieving proficiency in English speaking requires more than expanding our horizons in getting to know new cultures. It also helps foreign language students' develop academically. However, there are always obstacles in learning a second language that many students are trying to overcome. Develop the speaking skill can become a complex task if learners and teachers do not know how to use the appropriate tools such as approaches and principles that this skill requires in order to achieve the communicative competence goal.

## DEFINITIONS

**Macro skills:** Refers to the five macro skills in language teaching such as: Listening, Reading, Speaking, Writing and Grammar that students need to develop in order to become proficient in the language.

**Micro skills:** Sub skills that are in each of the macro skills such as vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling among others. (Forms and Functions).

**Language processing:** The way humans arrange words in an artfully syntactical manner in order to communicate ideas and feelings. Basically this communication is processed and understood by the brain. It involves the use of speech organs to produce several sounds. This process occurs in three stages: conceptualization, formulation and articulation.

**Communicator based problems:** According to Alireza Jamshidnejad (2010) this problem has to deal with the foreign language users' perceptions of the ideal target language speaker which focused on the importance of fluency, pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary rather

than the rest of the macro skills. The perception of other interlocutors in target language communication was an important point found in this issue that deals with feeling embarrassed, insecure in front of another interlocutor of the opposite gender as well as establishing a conversation with a native speaker or even being evaluated in front of an audience causing anxiety or stress in many English as a foreign language students'.

**Meaning creating problems:** Alireza Jamshidnejad (2010) addressed the moments English as a foreign language students' had to deal with trying to make their messages understood by finding the correct expressions or idioms, transfer meaning accurately and the use of the correct grammar sentences in their speech.

**Contextual problems:** This obstacle is defined by Alireza Jamshidnejad (2010) as the contexts in where English as a foreign language students' are surrounded. In those contexts the lack of practice the target language may seriously affect their confidence to speak.

**Speaking skill:** Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning, it involves producing, receiving and processing information (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997). Its form and meaning are depend on the context in which it occurs, including the participants themselves, their collective experiences, the physical environment, and the purposes for speaking. It is often spontaneous, open-ended, and evolving.

**Target language:** The target language is the language learners are studying, and also the individual items of language that they want to learn, or the teacher wants them to learn.

**Native Speaker:** The individual is communicatively competent (Davies, 1991; Liu, 1999; Medgyes, 1992), able to communicate within different social settings (Stern, 1983).

**Communicative Competence:** Canale and Swain (1980) understood communicative competence as a synthesis of an underlying system of knowledge and skill needed for communication. In their term of communicative competence, knowledge refers to the (conscious or unconscious) knowledge of an individual about language and about other aspects of language use. According to them, there are three types of knowledge: knowledge of underlying grammatical principles, knowledge of how to use the language in a social context in order to fulfill communicative functions and to conclude knowledge of how to combine utterances and communicative functions with respect to discourse principles.

### III. TYPE OF STUDY

In order to carry out this study and answer the research questions a **Descriptive Research** has been conducted by using a survey. The survey was aimed to identify the different target language speaking problems of Intermediate Intensive English I, Advanced Intensive English I and Readings and Conversation I students. This type of study seeks to describe the current status of an identified variable or phenomenon. The researcher does not usually begin with a hypothesis, but is likely to develop one after collecting data.

The Descriptive studies search specifically the main properties of people, groups, communities or any other phenomenon that is subjected to an analysis. (Dankhe, 1986). Systematic collection of information requires careful selection of the units studied and measurement of each variable in order to demonstrate validity.

Moreover an **Exploratory Research** has been conducted because the research team explored the different target language speaking problems that students of Intermediate I, Advanced I and Readings and Conversation I were facing during the semester II, 2015.

This type of study functions normally when the main objective is to verify a topic or a research unknown problem. Exploratory studies are useful so we can be more familiar with unknown phenomena in order to obtain information about the possibility to address a more complete information that is placed in a real context, also investigates problems of

human behavior that are crucial for the researchers who are interested in that specific area, identify concepts or variables, establish priorities for further researchers or suggest statements that can be verified. (Dankhe, 1986).

#### IV. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research approach that was used during the development of this study was a quantitative approach. Quantitative approaches are useful to gather information that focuses on describing a phenomenon across a larger number of participants thereby providing the possibility of summarizing characteristics across groups or relationships. This approach surveys a large number of individuals and applies statistical techniques to recognize overall patterns in the relations of processes. The use of surveys can be done across groups.

This study also followed the features of a **Non-Experimental and Cross- Sectional Design**. It refers to the label given to a study when a research cannot control, manipulate or alter the predictor variable or subject, but instead, relies on interpretation, observation or interactions to come to a conclusion. Typically, this means the non-experimental research must rely on correlations, surveys or case studies, and cannot demonstrate a true cause-and effect relationship.

Non -experimental research tends to have a high level of external validity, meaning it can be generalized to a larger population. Basically in the non-experimental design researchers can observe phenomena in their natural context in order to analyze them. In the case of cross- sectional research design is the one in which the researcher collects data at a particular point of time (one period of data collection). It also allows the researchers to

record information about their subjects without manipulating the study environment. The defining feature of a cross-sectional study is that it can compare population groups at a single point in time.

In order to reach the objectives of this research and answer the research questions as well, these were the steps that lead to the gathering of data:

To select the population

To select the sample

To design or choose a questionnaire and interview

To hand in the instruments

To analyze and organized into categories the information and results

**To select the population:**

This study has been planned to investigate and understand why students at the Department of Foreign Language, University of El Salvador, have oral problems in their discourse. Since the study is concerned with oral problems, the universe were selected from these courses: Intermediate Intensive English I, Advanced Intensive English I and Readings and Conversation I.

**To select the sample:**

In order to choose the sample, the research team applied the following formula:

$N$ = The number of cases in the sampling frame

$n$ = ?

$$n' = \frac{s^2}{v^2} = \frac{\text{variance of sample}}{\text{variance of population}}$$

$$S^2 = \frac{p \cdot 1-p = 0.9 (1-0.9)}{v^2 = (0.015)^2} = \frac{0.09}{0.000225} = 400$$

**To design or choose a questionnaire:**



The questionnaire was a self-designed instrument and it contained a set of 25 questions for the students in order to identify the students' target language speaking problems. This questionnaire was structured in a likert scale (1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 undecided, 4 agree and 5 strongly agree). Basically for this instrument were measured 5 oral problems: Grammar as a stumbling block, inadequate vocabulary, imperfectly learned pronunciation and intonation, inadequate opportunities to speak English in class and finally input-poor environment outside class, each problem contained 5 items in which the students had more difficulties as well as the students' background knowledge regarding English and the place where they worked. All these problems were based on the article mentioned previously in the theoretical framework.

**To hand in the instruments:**

The researchers coordinated with the professors of each of these groups to administer the instruments from September 6<sup>th</sup> to September 29<sup>th</sup>.

**To analyze and organized into categories the information obtained:**

Once the information from the questionnaires was gathered, the results were analyzed in a statistical way, so as to expose the major findings and results. The researchers used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), which is a statistical program that helped them to analyze and interpret the resulting data.

## **V. POPULATION AND SAMPLE**

### **Population**

This study has been planned to investigate and understand why students at the Department of Foreign Languages, University of El Salvador, have oral communication weaknesses in their discourse. Since the study is concerned with oral problems, 3 subjects that aimed at the development of students' oral skill, were researched. The subjects were: Advanced Intensive English I, Readings and Conversations I, and Intermediate Intensive I from both majors English Teaching and Modern Languages during the semester II, 2015. These 3 subjects make a total population of 828 students legally registered in those courses.

### **Sample**

The study was carried out at the Department of Foreign languages, at the University of El Salvador. The research population were 828 students from the subjects that followed: Advanced Intensive English I, Readings and Conversations I, and Intermediate Intensive English I. However, as in many investigations, not all the population could be taken as part of the study; for that reason, the researchers applied a formula that reduced the population to a narrow sample, after doing the process only 487 students were taken as the complete sample. The sample were focused on the students currently taking those subjects during the

semester II, 2015. In order to choose a representative part of the universe which refers to the sample, a probabilistic and stratified random methods were used.

The probabilistic method means that all the elements in the population have the same probability to be chosen. On the other hand, a stratified random sampling is applied when the researchers divided the population in different strata, then the research team selected one sample for each strata. In order to get the sample, basically the researchers used a formula to calculate the selection of the sample that was taken from the 3 subjects that aims to develop the students' speaking skill. Thus, out of 828 students (population), the sample was reduced to 487 detailed as follows: 183 students from Intermediate Intensive English I, 149 students from Advanced Intensive English I, and 155 students from Readings and Conversation I for both the English Teaching Major and Modern Languages Major at UES, during semester II, 2015. The following procedure was used to select the sample:

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Number of students</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total of students</b>
<b>Intermediate I</b>	01	31	12	19	31
	02	26	9	17	26
	03	29	10	19	29
	04	30	12	18	30
	05	28	7	21	28
	06	12	2	10	12
	07	34	14	20	34
	08	33	13	18	33
	09	31	10	21	31
	10	31	12	19	31
	11	32	7	25	32
	12	21	9	12	21
<b>Total</b>		<b>338</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>338</b>

After gathering the data, from the official attendance list, it was necessary to follow this formula in order to get the stratified sample.

$$N= 338$$

$$n= ?$$

$$n' = \frac{s^2}{v^2} = \frac{\text{variance of sample}}{\text{variance of population}}$$

$$S^2 = \frac{p \ 1-p = 0.9 \ (1-0.9)}{v^2 = (0.015)^2} = \frac{0.09}{0.000225} = 400$$

Then, the group team adjusted the formula with the actual total (338) of the groups of Intermediate English I in order to get the sample.

$$n' = n'$$

$$1 + n' / N = \frac{400}{1 + \frac{400}{338}} = \frac{400}{2.1834319} = 183$$

The sample obtained was 183

Once, the sample size was obtained, it was important to apply another formula to obtain the number that helped the team to get the strata of each group.

$$Fh = \frac{n}{N} = \frac{183}{338} = 0.5414201$$

After getting the number, 0.5414201, it was possible to get the strata of each group just multiplying the result got from the formula **Fh** by the total of students of each group.

$$G1 = 31 * 0.5414201 = 17$$

$$G2 = 26 * 0.5414201 = 14$$

$$G3 = 29 * 0.5414201 = 16$$

$$G4 = 30 * 0.5414201 = 16$$

$$G5 = 28 * 0.5414201 = 15$$

$$G6 = 12 * 0.5414201 = 7$$

$$G7 = 34 * 0.5414201 = 18$$

$$G8 = 33 * 0.5414201 = 18$$

$$G9 = 31 * 0.5414201 = 17$$

$$G10 = 31 * 0.5414201 = 17$$

$$G11 = 32 * 0.5414201 = 17$$

$$G12 = 21 * 0.5414201 = 11$$

Groups	Total of Students (Population)	Strata
1	31	17
2	26	14
3	29	16
4	30	16
5	28	15
6	12	7
7	34	18
8	33	18
9	31	17
10	31	17
11	32	17
12	21	11

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Number of students</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total of students</b>
<b>Advanced I</b>	01	29	15	14	29
	02	32	9	24	32
	03	29	7	22	29
	04	33	19	14	33
	05	34	13	21	34
	06	35	15	20	35
	07	18	5	13	18
	08	28	9	19	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>238</b>
	<b>N= 338</b>			<b>n= 183</b>	

After gathering the data, from the official attendance list, it was necessary to follow this formula in order to get the stratified sample.

$$N= 238$$

$$n= ?$$

$$n' = \frac{s^2}{v^2} = \frac{\text{variance of sample}}{\text{variance of population}}$$

$$S^2 = \frac{p(1-p) = 0.9(1-0.9)}{v^2 = (0.015)^2} = \frac{0.09}{0.000225} = 400$$

Then, the group team adjusted the formula with the actual total (238) of the groups of Advanced Intensive English I in order to get the sample.

$$n' = n'$$

$$1 + n'/N = \frac{400}{1 + \frac{400}{238}} = \frac{400}{2.6806722} = 149.21 \text{ (The sample obtained was 149)}$$

$$Fh = \frac{n}{N} = \frac{149}{238} = 0.6260504$$

After getting the number, 0.6260504, it was possible to get the strata of each group just multiplying the result got from the formula **Fh** by the total of students of each group.

$$G1 = 29 * 0.6260504 = 18$$

$$G2 = 32 * 0.6260504 = 20$$

$$G3 = 29 * 0.6260504 = 18$$

$$G4 = 33 * 0.6260504 = 21$$

$$G5 = 34 * 0.6260504 = 22$$

$$G6 = 35 * 0.6260504 = 22$$

$$G7 = 18 * 0.6260504 = 11$$

$$G8 = 28 * 0.6260504 = 17$$

Groups	Total of Students (Population)	Strata
1	29	18
2	32	20
3	29	18
4	33	21

5	34	22
6	35	22
7	18	11
8	28	17
	<b>N= 238</b>	<b>n=149</b>

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Number of students</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total of students</b>
<b>Readings and Conversation I</b>	01 and 02	28	12	16	28
	03	36	22	14	36
	04	35	17	18	35
	05	21	12	9	21
	06	32	15	17	32
	07	30	11	19	30
	08	31	7	24	31
	09 and 10	39	19	20	39
<b>Total</b>		<b>252</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>252</b>

After gathering the data, from the official attendance list, it was necessary to follow this formula in order to get the stratified sample.

$N= 252$

$n= ?$



$$n' = \frac{s^2}{v^2} = \frac{\text{variance of sample}}{\text{variance of population}}$$

$$S^2 = \frac{p(1-p)}{v^2} = \frac{0.9(1-0.9)}{(0.015)^2} = \frac{0.09}{0.000225} = 400$$

Then, the group team adjusted the formula with the actual total (252) of the groups of Readings and Conversation I in order to get the sample.

$$n' = n'$$

$$1 + n'/N = \frac{400}{1 + \frac{400}{252}} = \frac{400}{2.5873015} = 154.60$$

The sample obtained was 154.60; however, it was necessary to approximate it because the investigation requires exact numbers. Hence, the sample size was 155.

Once, the sample size was obtained, it was important to apply another formula to obtain the number that helped the team to get the strata of each group.

$$Fh = \frac{n}{N} = \frac{155}{252} = 0.6150793$$

After getting the number, 0.6150793, it was possible to get the strata of each group just multiplying the result got from the formula **Fh** by the total of students of each group.

$$G1 \text{ AND } G2 = 28 * 0.6150793 = 17$$

$$G3 = 36 * 0.6150793 = 22$$

$$G4 = 35 * 0.6150793 = 21$$

$$G5 = 21 * 0.6150793 = 13$$

$$G6 = 32 * 0.6150793 = 20$$

$$G7 = 30 * 0.6150793 = 19$$

$$G8=31*0.6150793=19$$

$$G9 \text{ AND } G10=39*0.6150793=24$$

Groups	Total of Students (Population)	Strata
1 and 2	28	17
3	36	22
4	35	21
5	21	13
6	32	20
7	30	19
8	31	19
9 and 10	39	24
	<b>N= 252</b>	<b>n=155</b>

## **VI. DATA GATHERING PROCESS**

### **Research Techniques**

The research team focused on gathering the information and answering the research questions that enabled them to the understanding of students' oral communication problems by administering a survey per each member of the sample. The survey was made in the likert-scale ranging from one to five (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) and it contained twenty questions that each student had to answer by checking the number they thought that expressed their own perception regarding the oral problems. The questions were created taking into account five based problems students faced while developing their speaking skill. Those problems were mentioned previously and they were also related to a good achievement of a communicative competence. This instrument aimed to identify the students' oral problems.

Once the information was collected, the researcher members used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), which is a statistical program that helped them to analyze and interpret the resulting data in an easier and organized way. This Package is one

of the most popular statistical programs used to work with large amount of data and facilitates the researcher work and results.

### **Data gathering plan**

The first step in the data collection was to select the sample for the courses of Intermediate Intensive English I, Advanced Intensive English I and Readings and Conversation I. There was a total of 828 students registered in those courses. After calculating the sample only 487 students out of 828 were taken as part of the study.

The second step for the collection of the data was to create the instrument. The instrument was a questionnaire that contained twenty questions with multiple choice for the students to answer.

The third step was to ask the teachers for permission to administer the instrument in their groups. At the same time, the research team coordinated with those teachers the date and hour in which the researchers could visit the classrooms. The administration of instruments was scheduled from September the 14<sup>th</sup> to September the 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

The fourth step and once all the instruments were collected, the researchers made the data base in order to include the number of cases gathered from each survey. The data base contained twenty five variables. The variables included demographic data plus the twenty questions regarding speaking problems.

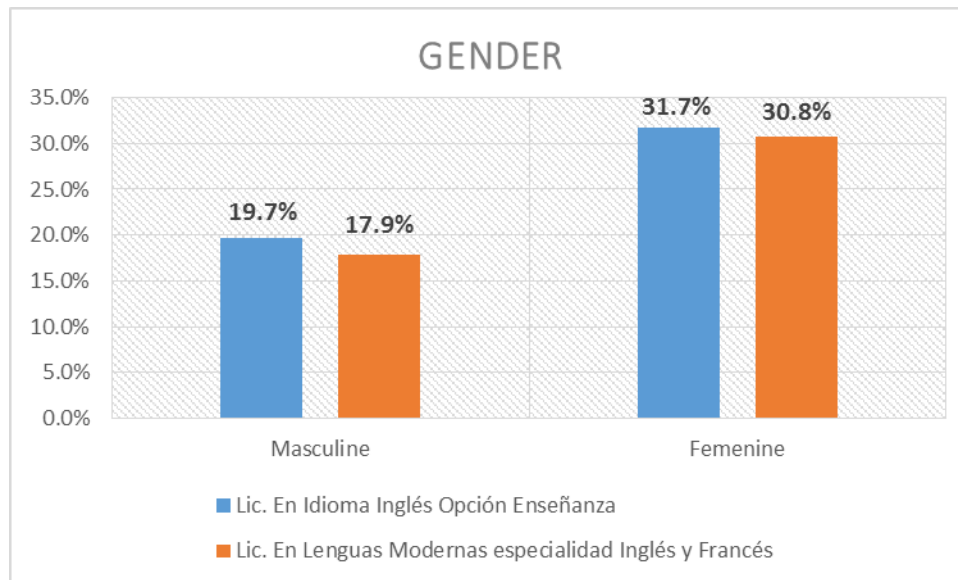
The fifth step was the data analysis. The analysis was elaborated according with the statistical results and the graphics generated by each question form the survey. At the end the researchers could register 487 cases in the data base.

The sixth step was elaborating the findings and conclusions, which were supported by the analysis of the data.

## VII. DATA ANALYSIS

### Gender

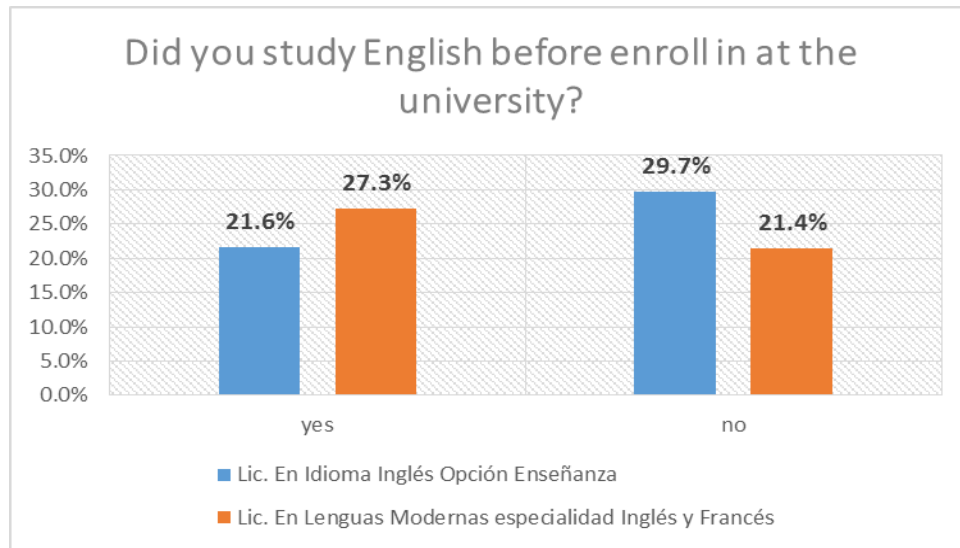
		Major		Total
		Lic. En Idioma Inglés Opción Enseñanza	Lic. En Lenguas Modernas especialidad Inglés y Francés	
Gender	Masculine	19.7%	17.9%	37.6%
	Female	31.7%	30.8%	62.4%
Total		51.3%	48.7%	100.0%



1) In a sample of 458 students from 3 different groups of Intermediate Intensive English I, Advanced English I and Readings and Conversation I, at the Department of Foreign Languages, University of El Salvador. Regarding to Gender criteria 19.7% of the population from English Teaching major were male students as well as 17.9% from the Modern Languages major. Whereas the 31.7% were female students from the English Teaching major as well as a 30.8% from the Modern Languages major. Hence, the obviously majority of the selected sample were female students.

**Did you study English before enroll in at the university?**

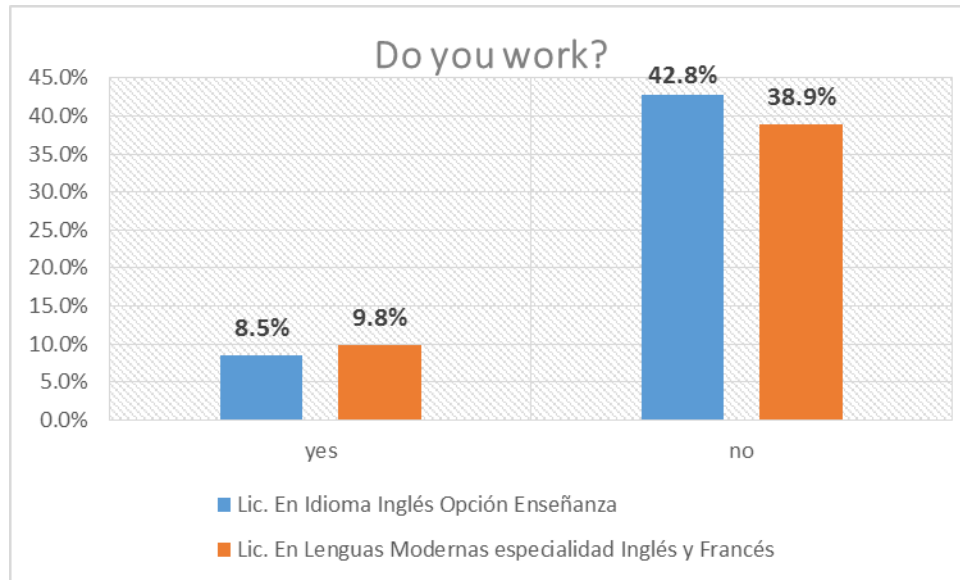
		Major		Total
		Lic. En Idioma Inglés Opción Enseñanza	Lic. En Lenguas Modernas especialidad Inglés y Francés	
Did you study English before enroll in at the university?	yes	21.6%	27.3%	48.9%
	no	29.7%	21.4%	51.1%
Total		51.3%	48.7%	100.0%



2) The responses to the question “Did you study English before enroll in at the university?” were the following: 27.3% of the students majoring in Modern Languages had a background English knowledge. Also, the 21.6% of the students from the English Teaching major had studied English previously in an institution or academy. In contrast, the majority of the students (29.7%) from the English Teaching and a 21.4% from the Modern Languages major considered that before they began their major they did not have a pre schema regarding English language.

### Do you work?

		Major		Total
		Lic. En Idioma Inglés Opción Enseñanza	Lic. En Lenguas Modernas especialidad Inglés y Francés	
Do you work?	yes	8.5%	9.8%	18.3%
	no	42.8%	38.9%	81.7%
Total		51.3%	48.7%	100.0%

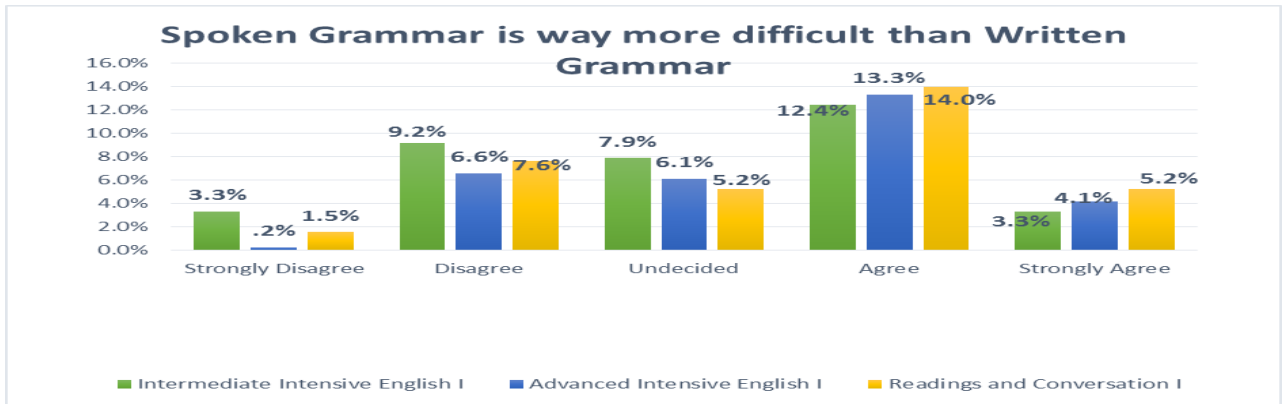


3) The responses to the question “Do you work”? were the following: 42.8% of the students from the English Teaching major had never worked as well as 38.9% of the students from the Modern Languages major. On the contrary, only a minority (9.8%) of the students from the Modern Languages major and (8.5%) from the English Teaching Major are working currently in several places such as call centers, English academies, schools, among others.

### Spoken Grammar is way more difficult than Written Grammar

		Subject			Total
		Intermediate Intensive English I	Advanced Intensive English I	Readings and Conversation I	
Spoken Grammar is way more difficult than Written Grammar	Strongly Disagree	3.3%	0.2%	1.5%	5.0%
	Disagree	9.2%	6.6%	7.6%	23.4%
	Undecided	7.9%	6.1%	5.2%	19.2%
	Agree	12.4%	13.3%	14.0%	39.7%
	Strongly Agree	3.3%	4.1%	5.2%	12.7%
Total		36.0%	30.3%	33.6%	100.0%

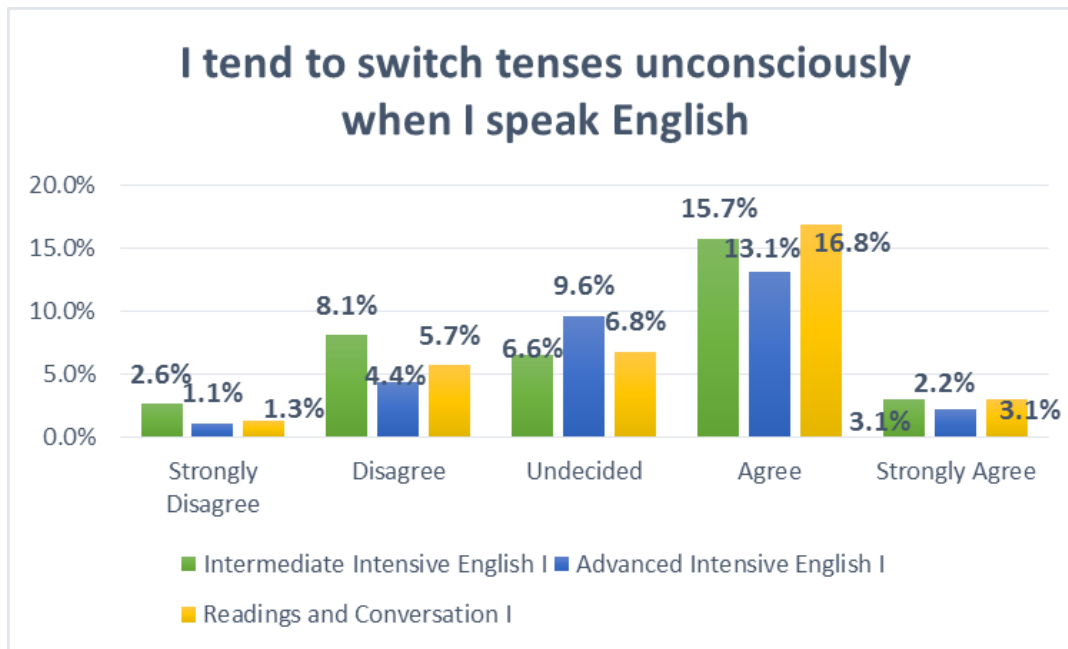




In the statement "Spoken grammar is way more difficult than written grammar" 52.7% of the students from the courses agreed that spoken grammar represents a difficulty in their English language learning. Likewise only 28.4% disagreed or were undecided (19.2%) that they have problems at the moment they used the grammar ability when they speak. Moreover, this problem has been increasing from the Intermediate I and has been maintained in the Readings and Conversation I level. This means that throughout these courses students do improve their grammar knowledge but despite that when they reach in their 4th year of their major they still perceive that this oral problem continue being an obstacle in their academic life.

#### I tend to switch tenses unconsciously when I speak English

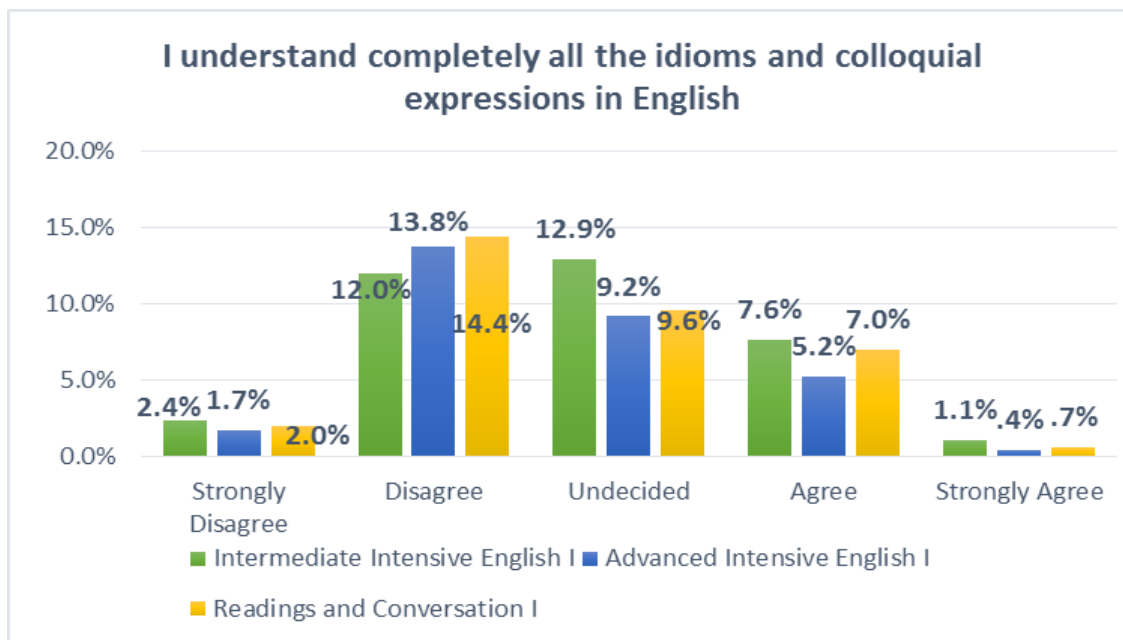
		Subject			Total
		Intermediate Intensive English I	Advanced Intensive English I	Readings and Conversation I	
I tend to switch tenses unconsciously when I speak English	Strongly Disagree	2.6%	1.1%	1.3%	5.0%
	Disagree	8.1%	4.4%	5.7%	18.1%
	Undecided	6.6%	9.6%	6.8%	22.9%
	Agree	15.7%	13.1%	16.8%	45.6%
	Strongly Agree	3.1%	2.2%	3.1%	8.3%
Total		36.0%	30.3%	33.6%	100.0%



5) The results according to the statement “I tend to switch tenses unconsciously when I speak English” 54% of the students from the three courses agreed that they have a low grammar knowledge whenever they used the speaking ability. In a different manner, only a minority of the students (23.1%) disagreed or were undecided (22.9%) as well that they do not have problems with tenses in their discourse.

#### I understand completely all the idioms and colloquial expressions in English

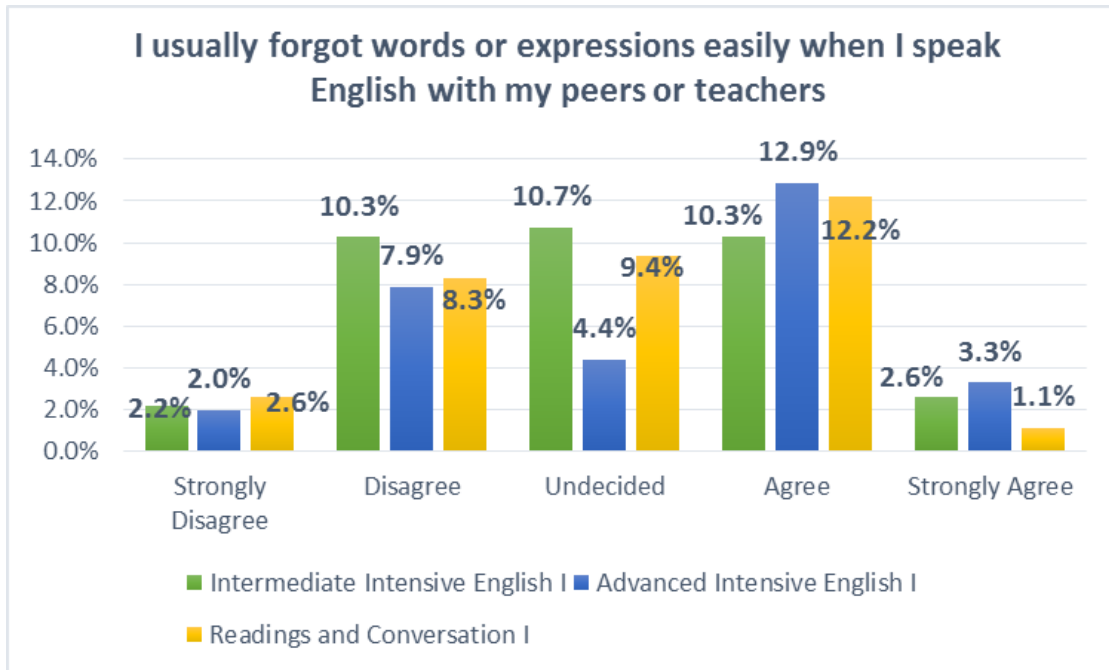
		Subject			Total
		Intermediate Intensive English I	Advanced Intensive English I	Readings and Conversation I	
I understand completely all the idioms and colloquial expressions in English	Strongly Disagree	2.4%	1.7%	2.0%	6.1%
	Disagree	12.0%	13.8%	14.4%	40.2%
	Undecided	12.9%	9.2%	9.6%	31.7%
	Agree	7.6%	5.2%	7.0%	19.9%
	Strongly Agree	1.1%	0.4%	0.7%	2.2%
Total		36.0%	30.3%	33.6%	100.0%



6) In the statement “I understand completely all the idioms and colloquial expressions in English” were the following: 46.3% of the students from the Intermediate I, Advanced I and Readings and Conversation I courses disagreed or were undecided (31.7%) that they do not have a clear knowledge regarding the different vocabulary phrases and idioms in the target language. In contrast, 22.1% of the students agreed that in their daily speech applied some of these expressions.

**I usually forgot words or expressions easily when I speak English with my peers or teachers**

		Subject			Total
		Intermediate Intensive English I	Advanced Intensive English I	Readings and Conversation I	
I usually forgot words or expressions easily when I speak English with my peers or teachers	Strongly Disagree	2.2%	2.0%	2.6%	6.8%
	Disagree	10.3%	7.9%	8.3%	26.4%
	Undecided	10.7%	4.4%	9.4%	24.5%
	Agree	10.3%	12.9%	12.2%	35.4%
	Strongly Agree	2.6%	3.3%	1.1%	7.0%
Total		36.0%	30.3%	33.6%	100.0%

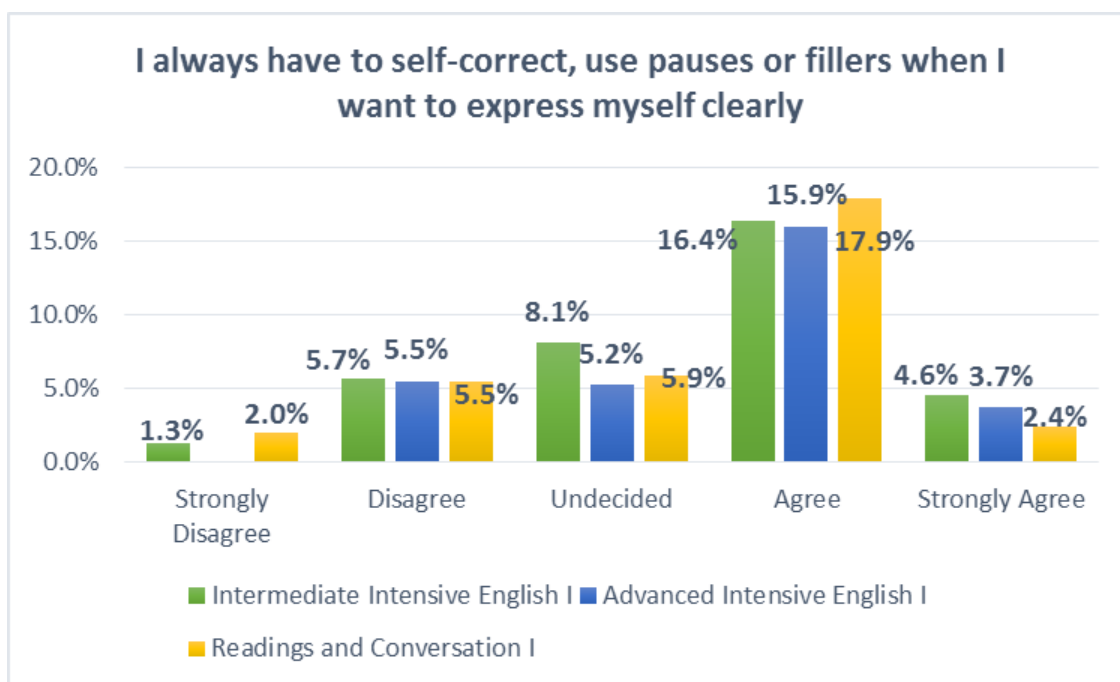


7) The results in this graph shows that the 42.4% of the students from these courses agreed that they tend to forget words in their discourse or were undecided (24.5%). Likewise 33.2% of the students disagreed that they can use their speaking ability without any problem.

**I always have to self-correct, use pauses or fillers when I want to express myself**

		Subject			Total
		Intermediate Intensive English I	Advanced Intensive English I	Readings and Conversation I	
I always have to self-correct, use pauses or fillers when I want to express myself clearly	Strongly Disagree	1.3%		2.0%	3.3%
	Disagree	5.7%	5.5%	5.5%	16.6%
	Undecided	8.1%	5.2%	5.9%	19.2%
	Agree	16.4%	15.9%	17.9%	50.2%

	Strongly Agree	4.6%	3.7%	2.4%	10.7%
	Total	36.0%	30.3%	33.6%	100.0%

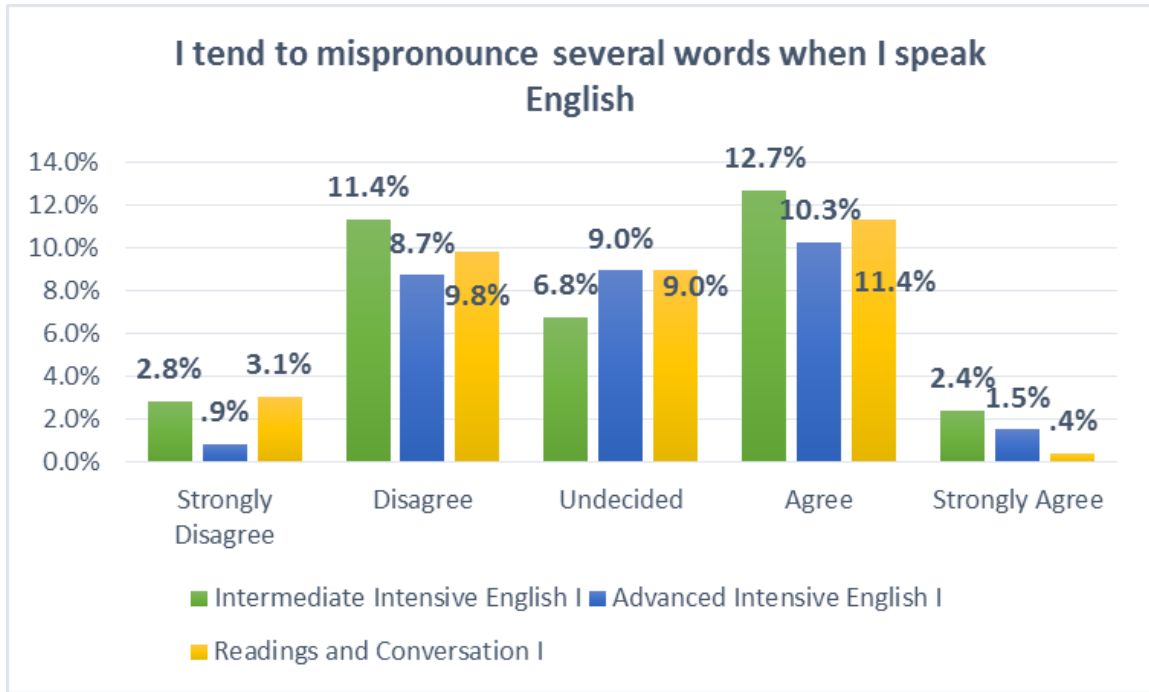


8) The majority of the students (60.9%) in these courses agreed that they do have to make some pauses while speaking. Whereas only 19.9% of the students disagreed and were undecided (19.2%) that they can express themselves fluently.

**I tend to mispronounce several words when I speak English**

		Subject			Total
		Intermediate Intensive English I	Advanced Intensive English I	Readings and Conversation I	
I tend to mispronounce several words when I speak English	Strongly Disagree	2.8%	0.9%	3.1%	6.8%
	Disagree	11.4%	8.7%	9.8%	29.9%
	Undecided	6.8%	9.0%	9.0%	24.7%
	Agree	12.7%	10.3%	11.4%	34.3%
	Strongly Agree	2.4%	1.5%	0.4%	4.4%

Total	36.0%	30.3%	33.6%	100.0%
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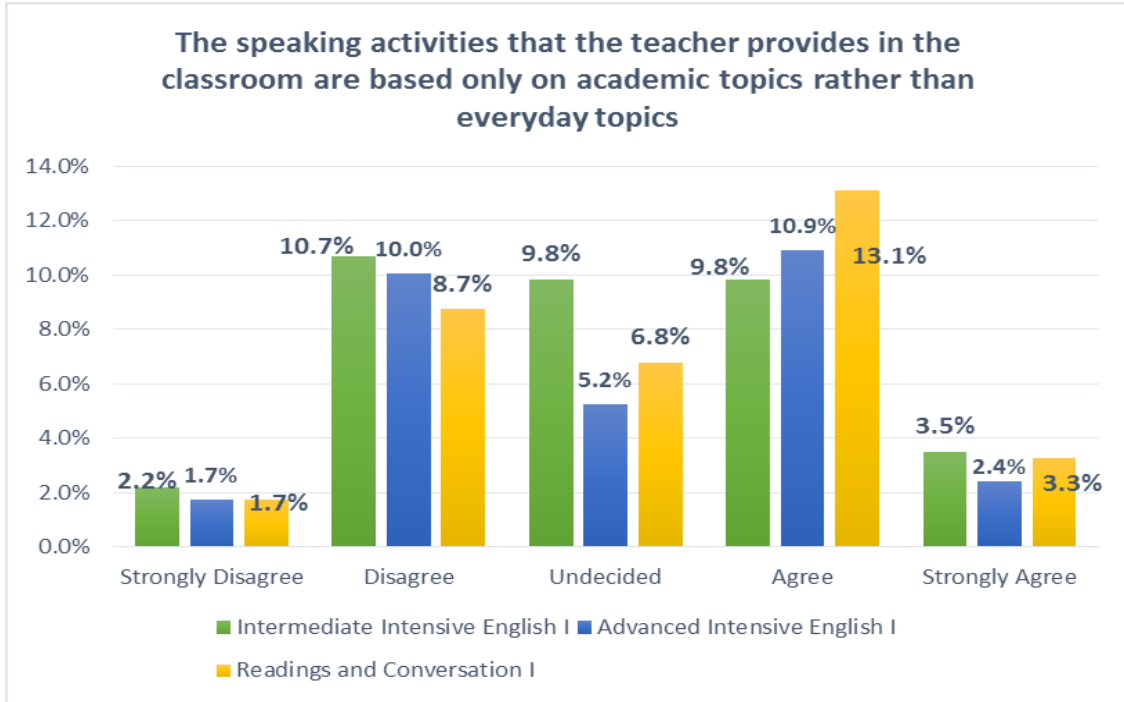


9) According to the statement “I tend to mispronounce several words when I speak English”. The results were the following: 38.7% of the students in the three courses agreed that they commit pronunciation errors while speaking. The 36.7% of the students disagreed or were undecided (24.7%) that they have a good pronunciation of words in their discourse. Pronunciation still figures a problem students face in the development of their speaking abilities.

**The speaking activities that the teacher provides in the classroom are based only on academic topics rather than everyday topics**

		Subject			Total
		Intermediate Intensive English I	Advanced Intensive English I	Readings and Conversation I	
The speaking activities that the teacher provides in the classroom are based only on academic topics	Strongly Disagree	2.2%	1.7%	1.7%	5.7%
	Disagree	10.7%	10.0%	8.7%	29.5%
	Undecided	9.8%	5.2%	6.8%	21.8%
	Agree	9.8%	10.9%	13.1%	33.8%

rather than everyday topics	Strongly Agree	3.5%	2.4%	3.3%	9.2%
Total		36.0%	30.3%	33.6%	100.0%

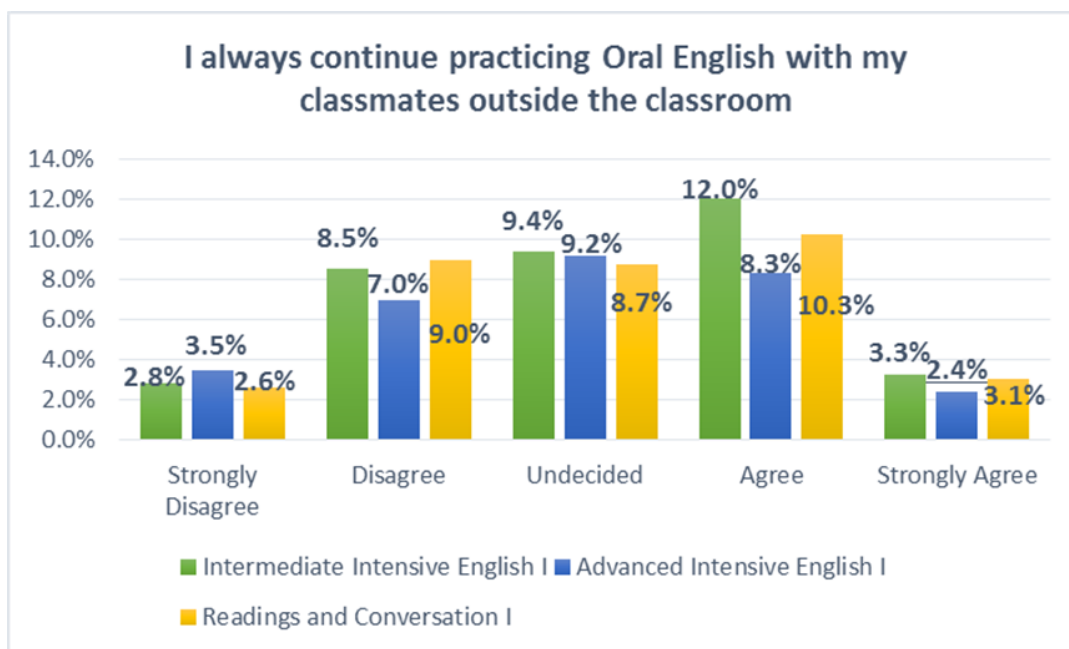


10) In the statement “The speaking activities that the teacher provides in the classroom are based only on academic topics rather than everyday topics” the results were the following: the majority of the students (43%) in these courses agreed that the class’ topics are regarding academic topics. In contrast only a 35.2% of the students disagreed or were undecided (21.8%) that the do not think the topics developed in class are more academic than real life topics.

**I always continue practicing Oral English with my classmates outside the classroom**

		Subject			Total
		Intermediate Intensive English I	Advanced Intensive English I	Readings and Conversation I	
I always continue practicing Oral English with my classmates	Strongly Disagree	2.8%	3.5%	2.6%	9.0%
	Disagree	8.5%	7.0%	9.0%	24.5%

outside the classroom	Undecided	9.4%	9.2%	8.7%	27.3%
	Agree	12.0%	8.3%	10.3%	30.6%
	Strongly Agree	3.3%	2.4%	3.1%	8.7%
Total		36.0%	30.3%	33.6%	100.0%



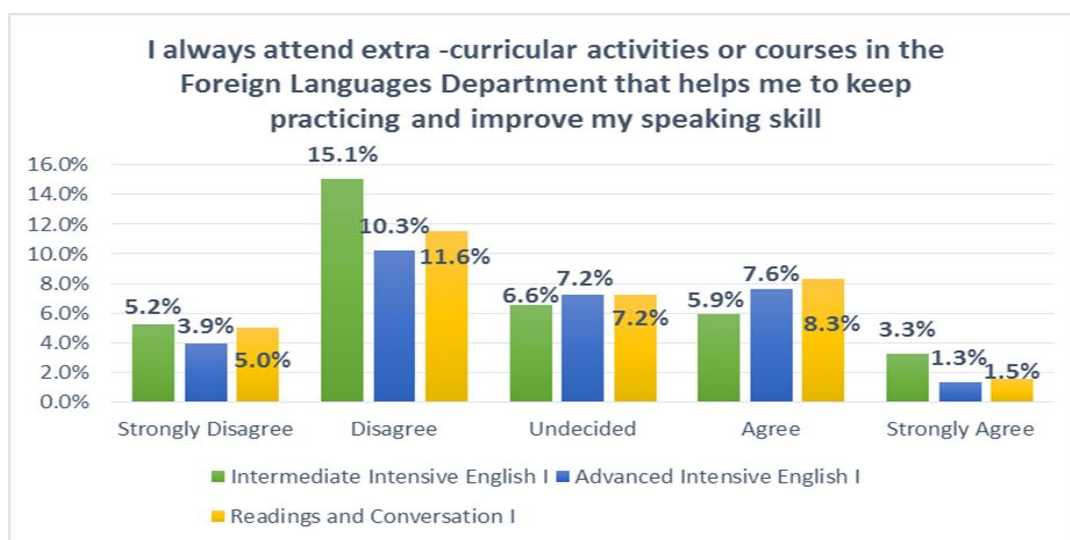
11) The results in this statement “I always continue practicing oral English with my classmates outside the classroom” were the following: 39.3% of the students in these courses agreed that they keep on practicing their oral English outside the classroom. Whereas 33.5% of the students disagreed or were undecided (27.3%) about the low motivation they have to practice their oral skills with their classmates.

**I always attend extra -curricular activities or courses in the Foreign Languages Department that helps me to keep practicing and improve my speaking skill**

		Subject			Total
		Intermediate Intensive English I	Advanced Intensive English I	Readings and Conversation I	
I always attend extra -curricular activities or	Strongly Disagree	5.2%	3.9%	5.0%	14.2%
	Disagree	15.1%	10.3%	11.6%	36.9%



courses in the Foreign Languages Department that helps me to keep practicing and improve my speaking skill	Undecided	6.6%	7.2%	7.2%	21.0%
	Agree	5.9%	7.6%	8.3%	21.8%
	Strongly Agree	3.3%	1.3%	1.5%	6.1%
Total		36.0%	30.3%	33.6%	100.0%



12) In the statement “I always attend extra-curricular activities or courses in the Foreign Languages Department that helps me to keep practicing and improve my speaking skill. 51.1% of the students in the courses of Intermediate I, Advanced I and Readings and Conversation I disagreed or were undecided (21.0%) that they do not attend extracurricular activities than their classes at the FLD. It means that a little more than the half of the students do not develop their speaking ability not even inside the Foreign Languages Department, so the little they can improve it just by means of attending classes. On the other hand, 27.9% of the students were motivated to attend extra-curricular activities.

## VIII. FINDINGS

1. According to the results there are more female than male students in both majors.
2. The findings showed that more than the half of students did not study English before they enrolled in their majors at UES.

3. In the statement “do you work?” the 81.7% of the students answered that they did not work; so that they are only focused in their studies.
4. Most of the students from the three different subjects are facing problems with the spoken grammar, in fact there is an increasing tendency in those courses. At the same time, students realized that they tend to switch tenses while speaking, they do not have the enough grammar knowledge regarding the grammar tenses.
5. The findings showed that 31.7% of students face a lack of knowledge regarding the different colloquial expressions and idioms.
6. Students from the 3 courses agreed that they do not have enough vocabulary to express themselves accurately.
7. The majority of students face mispronunciation problems, in the most basic level the problem is marked but as students are taking advanced levels, their pronunciation problems remained.
8. Classes at the Department of Foreign Languages are more focused on academic topics rather than every day topics.
9. The 39.3% of students practice English with their classmates in the classroom. However, between students who do not practice or are undecided regarding taking an active role in the classroom, the percentage increases to 60.8%.
10. Most of the students from the 3 subjects admitted that they do not attend to extra-curricular activities at the Department of Foreign Languages.

## **IX.CONCLUSIONS**

### **The research team concluded that:**

1. For students who are taking those different subjects, grammar is a stumbling block that limits them to speak accurately and take an active role in class because they fear not using the correct tense in their discourse.

2. Students have problems to speak and understand different idioms or colloquial expressions. Most of these expressions are used in an English native speaker context, so it is clear that students at the Department of Foreign Languages are not familiar with those colloquial expressions and idioms which makes it hard for students to understand this kind of vocabulary.
3. Vocabulary is a big problem for students and it becomes difficult for students to express clear ideas caused by the lack of vocabulary they have.
4. Pronunciation problems still remain as an issue in the 3 different subjects no matter which level is.
5. In the teaching process the majority of lessons are based on academic topics. In this context students are limited to acquire more vocabulary that is required outside the classroom or in their daily life.
6. Most of the students are not autonomous or feel undecided about practicing their English with their classmates outside the classroom.
7. Even though extra-curricular activities helps the students to improve their speaking skill, most of the students are not determined to attend these courses.
8. Oral problems has to do with pronunciation and intonation. Usually, these students tend to use pauses, fillers that make them not to express complete ideas or messages.

### **Conclusion from the Intermediate Intensive English I courses.**

After the administration and the analysis of the instruments that were administered in these courses, the research team concluded that regarding the subject Intermediate Intensive English I, all students were aware that they have experienced different oral problems while speaking. Some of these problems were: spoken grammar, inadequate

vocabulary, understanding the colloquial expressions and idioms, mispronunciation and intonation problems. The students realized as well that when it comes to practice their speaking abilities it becomes difficult for them to deliver a fluently message because they tend to forget words, switch tenses or simply make several pauses of fillers in their speech. In this situation, there is also the fact that the majority of these students do not attend extracurricular activities or do not keep on practicing their speaking abilities outside the classroom.

It is worth to mention that the most common oral problem students perceived with more frequency was related to self-correction and the use of pauses and fillers.

The different speaking problems might be attributed to the fact that Intermediate levels are still a basic level and students are getting familiar with the target language.

### **Conclusion from the Advanced English I courses**

Regarding Advanced Intensive English I course, the majority of students feel identified with the following problems that were investigated: spoken grammar, inadequate vocabulary, understanding colloquial expressions and idioms, mispronunciation and intonation problems. When it is time for students to put into practice the language they are learning, it turns difficult for them to use the appropriated tense or vocabulary; students tend to use pauses and fillers because they don't know how a word is pronounced or intonated, they also feel uncomfortable to attend to extra-curricular activities or practice the language with a native speaker due to the lack of exposure with daily English language situations.

### **Conclusion from the Readings and Conversation I courses**

In the Readings and Conversation I course the research team concluded that the most common problems perceived by the students were regarding pronunciation and intonation by using very often slips of tongue, false starts or even fillers in which they have

to self- correct constantly, these problems can interfere easily in their communication. Besides, students from this course perceived as well that grammar is still an obstacle that limits them to become proficient in the language by not being able to distinguish the tenses while they are speaking which makes it difficult to improve in the speaking area rather than the written area. Another problem that the students perceived focused on the use of idioms or any other colloquial expressions in their discourse. This can become an obstacle when the students do not have enough vocabulary or they cannot employ these cultural expressions in different contexts.

Finally, these students perceived that the teacher provides only academic topics rather than everyday topics. In regards to the encouragement to attend extra-curricular activities these students perceived that they feel reluctant to keep practicing the language outside the classroom.

## **X. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**For the students:**

Take an active role by practicing their English with teachers and classmates in every speaking activity developed inside the classrooms.

Become more autonomous in their learning of different vocabulary and practice the pronunciation of those new words.

Be motivated to attend extracurricular activities that help them to achieve better speaking abilities.

**For the teachers:**

Teachers should keep implementing more activities in the courses of Intermediate, Advanced and Readings and Conversation courses that aims to balance the communicative competence so in that way the students can improve their vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation inside and outside the classroom.

Apply several types of techniques or strategies that will encourage the students to improve their oral proficiency level such as how to use the language in different contexts as well as develop more oral activities that foster the students to speak with fluency and accuracy.

Teachers should provide in these courses more activities that helps the students to get involved in the American culture in which are immersed idioms, customs, colloquial expressions that are required for the comprehension of the language.

Teachers should include in their curricula different methodologies that will be useful for teaching everyday topics in which the students can learn more vocabulary that are helpful for facing real-life situations. For instance: discussions, dramas, debates, presentations, among others.

During the development of these courses teachers should encourage the students to have self-autonomy by attending extra courses in the Department of Foreign Languages in

order to improve in the following areas: speaking, grammar and pronunciation that will make them more skillful in the language.

**For the Foreign Languages Department:**

The Department should create projects and extra-curricular activities for students in order to help them to increase the speaking skill.

The Department should provide the teachers more authentic materials and more technology equipment that will help students in the speaking area.

To take into account this research work for future investigations regarding the field of speaking.

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# ANNEXES

**ANNEXE A.**

**UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR  
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES  
FOREIGN LANGUAGES DEPARTMENT**



**General objective:** To identify the target language speaking problems students of Advanced English I, Intermediate Intensive English I and Readings and Conversation I face at the FLD, UES, semester II, 2015.

**Instructions:** Read each question and mark with a check the answer that you think is the best according to your perceptions regarding speaking problems. **Thank you for your cooperation!**

**DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**

Gender:  F  M

Major:

Intermediate English I, group \_\_\_\_\_ Advanced English I, group \_\_\_\_\_ Readings and Conversation I, group \_\_\_\_\_

Did you study English before enroll in at the university? YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

If your answer in the previous question was yes. Can you name the place where you studied it?

\_\_\_\_\_

Do you work? YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

If your answer in the previous question was yes. Can you name the place where you work?

\_\_\_\_\_

N°	STATEMENT	ANSWERS				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
		1	2	3	4	5
1	I understand all the grammar rules so I can apply them when I speak without any problem.					
2	Spoken Grammar is way more difficult than Written Grammar					
3	I tend to switch tenses unconsciously when I speak English					
4	I can apply without any problem all the parts of the speech in different kinds of sentences					
5	I always look up in a dictionary immediately whenever I do not understand the meaning of a new word					
6	I tend to express my ideas inaccurately and without cohesion					
7	I understand completely all the idioms and colloquial expressions in English					
8	I usually forgot words or expressions easily when I speak English with my peers or teachers					
9	I tend to mispronounce several words when I speak English					
10	I always have to self-correct, use pauses or fillers when I want to express myself clearly					
11	When I speak English is so easy for me to apply contracted or reduced forms of words and phrases					
12	I always make sure to have a good intonation to enhance the clarity of my message					
13	The teacher provides different oral communication activities in the class that helps me to improve my speaking skill					
14	The teacher provides enough feedback in the class so I can continue practicing the language with my classmates					
15	The class provides a learner-centered environment that keeps me improving my speaking skill					
16	The speaking activities that the teacher provides in the classroom are based only on academic topics rather than everyday topics					
17	I always continue practicing oral English with my classmates outside the classroom					
18	I always feel confident when I speak English with my classmates or teachers outside the classroom					
19	I always attend extra -curricular activities or courses in the Foreign Languages Department that helps me to keep practicing and improve my speaking skill					
20	The teacher and my classmates always helps me to overcome my speaking problems outside the class					

## **ANNEXE B.**

### **UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT**

#### **1. GENERAL ASPECTS**

- 1.1. COURSE NAME **INTENSIVE INTERMEDIATE ENGLISH I**
- 1.2. CODE **IIE 214**
- 1.3. PRE-REQUISITE **INTENSIVE BASIC ENGLISH**
- 1.4. CREDITS **8**
- 1.5. MAJOR STUDY PLAN **Licenciatura en Idioma Inglés (Plan Modificado 1999)**
- 1.6. ACADEMIC YEAR AND SEMESTER **II – 2015**
- 1.7. LEVEL AND AREA **First Academic Year / Language and Skills Development Area (LASDA)**
- 1.8. ACADEMIC UNIT TEACHING THE SUBJECT **Foreign Language Department**
- 1.9. SCHOOL **Science and Humanities**
- 1.10. DURATION OF THE SEMESTER **16 weeks**
- 1.11. NUMBER OF WORKING HOURS AND WEEKS **16 weeks/160 hours**
- 1.12. DATE AND AGREEMENT OF THE C.S.U. STUDY PLAN **70-99-2003 (17-08-2001)**
- 1.13. PROFESSORS:
- |                    |      |
|--------------------|------|
| Guillermo Bustillo | (01) |
| Diana Marengo      | (02) |
| Cecilia de Amaya   | (03) |
| Miguel Carranza    | (04) |
| Magaly Ábrego      | (05) |
| Miguel Mata        | (06) |
| Ludwig Cornejo     | (07) |
| Ana Ruth Márquez   | (08) |
| Eliseo Guardado    | (09) |
| Rolando Guzmán     | (10) |
| Julia Zarceño      | (11) |
| Eliseo Guardado    | (12) |



## **2. COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Intermediate Intensive English I is the second of five English language courses addressed to the students in B. A in Teaching English and also to the B. A in Modern Languages. Instruction in this course will take students to the A2 proficiency level, according to the Common European Framework (CEFR) guidelines. This course will promote the development of the communicative competence by developing the four macro skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. In addition, the grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation sub-skills will be promoted in the classroom to make sure effective communication is achieved.

## **3. GENERAL OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this course, students will have consolidated an elementary level of proficiency described in the A2 CEFR guidelines:

Students:

- Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment).
- Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters.
- Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need and can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, and leisure.

#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

Communicative language teaching makes use of real-life situations that need communication. The teacher sets up a situation that students are likely to encounter in real life. Unlike the other methods or approaches which rely on repetition and drills, the communicative approach can leave students in suspense as to the outcome of a class exercise, which will vary according to their reactions and responses.

Teachers in communicative classrooms will find themselves talking less and listening more becoming active facilitators of their students' learning. The teacher sets up pedagogical tasks and real-life tasks, but because the students' performance is the goal, the teacher must step back and observe, sometimes acting as referee or monitor. A classroom during a communicative activity is far from quiet, however. The students do most of the speaking, and frequently the scene of a classroom during a communicative exercise is active, with students leaving their seats to complete a task.

There will also be two tasks that will be carried out throughout the semester. Another important aspect will be homework assignments. Open Mind 2 textbook and workbook by Macmillan Publishers, 2010 will be covered mainly during this semester.

## 5. EVALUATION

Written test 1	10%
Written test 2	10%
Written test 3	10%
Oral Task 1	10%
Oral Task 2	10%
Homework Assignments	10%
Mid-term Oral Exam	20%
Final Oral Exam	<u>20%</u>
	100%

## 6. CLASSROOM POLICIES

1. **CLASS PARTICIPATION AND USE OF ENGLISH:** Students' active participation is required. English must be spoken inside and outside classes.
2. **CLASS TIME:** Students are required to come to class on time.
3. **COURSE MATERIALS:** It is MANDATORY for all students to have their own required materials for attending classes.
4. **IN-CLASS STUDENTS' BEHAVIOR:** At the teacher's discretion, the students who show a disruptive behavior in the class activities may be asked to leave the classroom.
5. **MISSED EVALUATIONS:** Requests presenting a genuine written justification for missed evaluation should be made within the next three days following it. Quizzes are NOT made up.

6. NO GROUP CHANGES ARE ALLOWED.

7. TIME TABLE

WEEK	DATE	ACTIVITY
Aug 1	10	Introduction
	11	Unit 1
	12	Unit 1
	13	Unit 1
2	17	Unit 2
	18	Unit 2
	19	Unit 2
	20	Unit 3
3	24	Unit 3
	25	Unit 3
	26	Unit 3
	27	Unit 3
Sept 4	31	WRITTEN TEST 1
	1	Oral Task 1
	2	Oral Task 1
	3	Oral Task 1
5	7	Oral Task 1
	8	Unit 4
	9	Unit 4
	10	Unit 4
6	14	Unit 4
	15	DAY OFF
	16	Unit 4
	17	Unit 5
7	21	Unit 5
	22	Unit 5
	23	Unit 5
	24	Unit 5
8	28	Unit 6
	29	Unit 6
	30	Unit 6
Oct	1	Unit 6
	5	Unit 6
9	6	WRITTEN TEST 2
	7	Oral Mid term exam
	8	Oral Mid term exam

WEEK	DATE	ACTIVITY
10	12	Oral Mid term exam
	13	Oral Mid term exam
	14	Unit 7
	15	Unit 7
11	19	Unit 7
	20	Unit 7
	21	Unit 7
	22	Unit 8
12	26	Unit 8
	27	Unit 8
	28	Unit 8
	29	Unit 8
Nov 13	2	DAY OFF
	3	Unit 9
	4	Unit 9
	5	Unit 9
14	9	Unit 9
	10	Unit 9
	11	WRITTEN TEST 3
	12	Oral Task 2
15	16	Oral Task 2
	17	Oral Task 2
	18	Oral Task 2
	19	Unit 10
16	23	Unit 10
	24	Unit 10
	25	Unit 10
	26	Unit 10
Dic 17	30	Oral final exam
	1	Oral final exam
	2	Oral final exam
	3	Oral final exam
18	7	
	8	
	9	
	10	

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**UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR**  
**SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES**  
**FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT**

**ADVANCED INTENSIVE ENGLISH I**

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

Subject: ADVANCED INTENSIVE ENGLISH I  
 Code: IAI114  
 Pre-requisite: Intermediate intensive English II  
 Credits: 8  
 Major: Licenciatura en Idioma Inglés, Opción Enseñanza/  
 Lenguas Modernas  
 Academic Year: II-2015  
 Level and Area: Third academic year, Macro-skills Development area  
 Academic Unit in Charge: Foreign Language Department  
 School: Sciences and Humanities  
 Course Length: 16 weeks  
 No. of working hours/weeks: 16 weeks, 160 hours  
 Date and C.S.U. agreement of  
 curricular program: 70-99-2003 (v-2.8) August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2001  
 Schedule: Instructors:

01	6:00 – 8:00 a.m.	L, Ma, J, V	IF-3	Carolina Ramos
02	10:00 – 12:00 m.	L – J	IF-3	Matthew Alvarado
03	1:00 – 3:00 p.m.	L, Ma, Mi, V	IF-3	Ricardo Cabrera
04	5:00 – 7:00 p.m.	L – J	IF-4	Alexander Bruno
05	6:00 – 8:00 a.m.	L – J	IF-11	Yvette Henriquez
06	10:00 – 12:00 m.	L – J	Maestría	Allan Ramírez
07	1:00 – 3:00 p.m.	L, Ma, Mi, V	Maestría	Sara Méndez
08	1:00 – 3:00 p.m.	L, Ma, Mi, V	IF-10	Alexander Landaverde

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Advanced Intensive English I is the fourth of five English language courses addressed to B.A. English Teaching and Modern Languages students. Instruction in

this course will take students to the first level **(B1)** of the Independent User Band described in the Common European Framework Scale (CEFR).

This course will provide language development and practice through tasks and activities that will enable students to reach the B2 level in each of the four language skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. Each of these skills will be addressed discretely (attending to their subcomponents) and globally (attending to their communicative intent) to provide both the analytic and experiential language learning balance required for effective development of the target level of proficiency.

In addition, the grammar and pronunciation sub-skills will be promoted in the classroom to make sure effective communication, at the level previously mentioned, is achieved. This effective communication will be reached by giving students the opportunity to analyze and experience language in use.

## **OBJECTIVES**

### **General**

1. Reach the B1 level of proficiency described in the CEFR ( Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching and Assessment)

#### B1 General Description

Students will be able to understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. They will also be able to deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Students at this level can produce simple connected text on topics, which are familiar, or of personal interest and describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.

### **SPECIFIC**

At the end of the course students will be able to:

#### **Concerning listening**

- ✚ Understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure etc., including short narratives.

- ✚ Understand straightforward factual information about common everyday or job related topics, identifying both general messages and specific details, provided speech is clearly articulated in a generally familiar accent
- ✚ Can follow a lecture or talk within his/her own field, provided the subject matter is familiar and the presentation straightforward and clearly structured
- ✚ Can understand simple technical information, such as operating instructions for everyday equipment.
- ✚ Can follow detailed directions.

### **Concerning Reading**

- ✚ Read straightforward factual texts on subjects related to his/her field and interest with a satisfactory level of comprehension.
- ✚ Understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters well enough to correspond regularly with a pen friend.
- ✚ Scan longer texts in order to locate desired information, and gather information from different parts of a text, or from different texts in order to fulfil a specific task.
- ✚ Identify the main conclusions in clearly signalled argumentative texts.
- ✚ Recognise the line of argument in the treatment of the issue presented, though not necessarily in detail
- ✚ Recognise significant points in straightforward newspaper articles on familiar subjects.

### **Concerning Speaking**

- ✚ Communicate with some confidence on familiar routine and non-routine matters related to his/her interests and professional field.
- ✚ Exchange, check and confirm information, deal with less routine situations and explain why something is a problem. Can express thoughts on more abstract, cultural topics such as films, books, music etc.
- ✚ Exploit a wide range of simple language to deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling.
- ✚ Enter unprepared into conversation of familiar topics.



- ✚ express personal opinions and exchange information on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).

### Concerning Writing

- ✚ Convey information and ideas on abstract as well as concrete topics.
- ✚ Check information and ask about or explain problems with reasonable precision.
- ✚ Write personal letters and notes asking for or conveying simple information of immediate relevance, getting across the point he/she feels to be important
- ✚ Take messages communicating enquiries, explaining problems.
- ✚ Write notes conveying simple information of immediate relevance to friends, service people, teachers and others who feature in his/her everyday life, getting across comprehensibly the points he/she feels are important.

### CONTENTS

<i>Unit Name</i>	<i>Functions</i>	<i>Grammar</i>	<i>Vocabulary</i>
1- Identity	-Talking about individual and group identity -Comparing past and present habits -Agreeing and disagreeing -Discussing wishes -Evaluating stereotypes	-Progressives -used to and would for habits -wish + would/ wouldn't -would always / never for past habits	-Phrases for agreeing and disagreeing -text types ( newspaper articles, novels, etc.) -Identity (individualism, conformity, outsiders, stereotypes, etc.)
2- Global Views	-Talking about globalization -Discussing global citizenship -Giving opinions about multinational corporations -Giving opinions on new media -Describing gradual changes	- stative verbs -repeated and double comparatives -More or less as comparatives	-Globalization - new media (blog, vlog, broadband -global citizenship
3- Fame and	-reporting anecdotes -talking about moods and	-Reported speech- past	-Ways to become famous

Fortune	feelings -discussing fame -clarifying misunderstandings Evaluating and argument	tense shifts -reported speech modals -Time and place word changes	-positive qualities - Fame (celebrity, fifteen minutes of fame, hero, etc.)
4- Ups and Downs	-Talking about moods and attitudes -Talking about hypothetical situations in the past -describing regrets -thanking others -praising others	-noun clauses as objects -third conditional Modals other than would	-Describing mood -noun suffixes -health (physiological effect, stress hormones, prescription, etc.) Business ( behind schedule, within budget, market research , etc.)
5- Water, water everywhere	-Describing a place of business -discussing the business of water and water use -Talking about environmental issues -suggesting alternatives -explaining reasons for and purposes of things	-The passive-including the present and past perfect passive -expressions of purpose -by+ agent	-The business of water -environmental issues -units of measurement- liters, gallons, ounces, etc.
6- Guardians of tradition	-Describing a tradition in your country -Giving opinions about traditions and rituals Evaluating company models Describing personal rituals Making suggestions	-Verb+ gerund -verb +object + infinitive - be used to vs. used to -Sentence structure	-Institutional traditions -Verbs for personal rituals -work life ( unstructured job, work/eat at ones desk, page someone, etc.)
7- Designed to Please	Talking about logos and brands -discussing design and designers -Describing sequence of events in people`s lives -Using distancing language Using comparisons to explain differences	The ING form -The present perfect vs. -past perfect progressive By + time expressions	Design Phrasal verbs Product design: concept, illustrate, rough sketches, etc.
8- Justice for All	Identifying and giving opinions about world problems -Talking about inequality and social injustice	Quantifiers -Noun clauses as subjects -recycle can / could /should/	Social issues -Social Justice International aid : provide / give aid /at war / fair trade

	-Making suggestions to help others - discussing rights and responsibilities	would/ few / a few/ little / a little with count and non count nouns	-unemployment; unemployed/ close down / benefits , etc.
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## **COURSE METHODOLOGY**

This is a **proficiency oriented** English course in which materials, in-class and out-class activities, and error correction will aim at helping students to use the target language for authentic communication. Besides the course materials, the teacher will make use of authentic materials such as magazines, lyrics, newspapers, videos, etc. to give students the chance to have contact with real language. In addition, the mastery of grammatical structures will give students the opportunity to make an efficient use of the different language functions that will make the learning of the target language not only meaningful but also rewarding and effective. The teacher will set real-life-like situations to give students the opportunity to use the language to express their own opinions and share their knowledge and experiences.

Activities will range from controlled accuracy-based activities (FORM: drills, transformation exercises, fill-in the blanks exercises, scrambled sentences and the like) to fluency-based communicative activities (MEANING AND USE: role plays, problem solving activities, discussions, relaying interaction activities, writing journals, task based activities, etc.). Along the same line, errors will be corrected, mainly, during controlled practice activities, where the focus is on accuracy (form), and self-correction or peer-correction techniques should be implemented to encourage students to solve their own problems with the new language. Teacher correction should be used only when self-correction and peer-correction techniques do not work. In addition, during the development of communicative activities, teachers should concentrate on what students say (message, communication) and use correction techniques only when the error affects the message the students try to convey. Students will also carry out extensive reading, which will help them to improve their competence in the language.

## **EVALUATION**

Assessment Scheme

This new assessment scheme aims at finding a balanced way of measuring what students know about the language and how they use this knowledge to establish effective communication with other speakers of English. To achieve this, it is necessary to use a mix of Traditional Assessment and Alternative Assessment instruments.

**Traditional Assessment** instruments are the pen and paper quizzes or exams we use to measure how well the contents taught have been LEARNED by the students. In this type of assessment students have to find or provide the only one possible correct answer for a specific question, and there is very little room- if any- for students to be creative with the language.

**Alternative Assessment** instruments provide students with the opportunity to use English in real communicative situations. In this type of activities, students show how well they can USE the language to solve a problem, complete a task or a project, make a presentation on a given topic, participate in debates on topics of their interest and many more. In other words, they have prove the have the competencies to perform a task- When using alternative assessment techniques, teachers must provide students with a set of guidelines that include the communicative objective of the activity and a detailed list of steps to produce the expected output. In addition, students have to be given a rubric with a detailed description of the criteria or standards by which they will be judged or graded. The guidelines and the rubric have to be given to the students the moment the activity is assigned.

## **Evaluation:**

### **Traditional Assessment 40%**

2 exams	30%
Homework and in-class Part	10%

### **Alternative Assessment 60%**

Oral task 1 (mid term)	20%
Writing task 1 (mid-term)	10%
Oral task 2 (final)	20%
Writing task 2 (final)	10%

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**100%**

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Course Textbook: Rogers, Mickey and Taylore-Knowless Steve, MasterMind 1, students' book, Workbook, and other supplementary materials, MacMillan Publishers Limited 2011

- Larsen-Freeman Diane, Grammar Dimensions 4, Heinle and Heinle publishers, 1997
- Maurer, Jay, Focus on Grammar, Advanced Course for Reference and Practice, (2000)
- Murphy Raymond, Advanced Grammar in Use, Cambridge University press, 1993
- Rinvolucry Mario, Grammar Games; Cognitive, affective and drama activities for EFL students, Cambridge University Press, 1992
- Ur Penny, Grammar Practice Activities, A practical guide for teachers, Cambridge University press, 1992.
- Woodward Suzanne W, Fun with Grammar, communicative activities for the Azar Grammar series, Prentice Hall Regents, 1997.

## CLASSROOM POLICIES

7. **CLASS PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE:** Students' active participation is required. Attendance will be checked at the beginning of the class period and tardiness after 15 minutes from the beginning of the class will be considered as an absence. **The student who is absent on any given day will be responsible for finding out from his/her classmates about the material seen in class and whether there was any assignment to be completed for the following class.**
8. **IN-CLASS STUDENTS' BEHAVIOR:** At the teacher's discretion, the students who show a disruptive behavior or refuse to participate in the class activities may be asked to leave the classroom.
9. **MISSED EVALUATIONS:** Requests presenting a genuine written justification for missed evaluation should be made within the next three days following it. Excuses are NOT accepted unless they are valid ones – a certified sickness or death of a close relative.
10. **COURSE MATERIALS:** It is MANDATORY for all students to have their own required materials for attending classes. **Students who fail to do so will be asked to leave the classroom until they get it.**
11. **HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT DUE DATES:** Whether they have attended class or not, it is the students' responsibility to turn in their homework assignments on the due dates during or at the end of the class period.
12. **Students who do not have 75% of attendance will not be given tests.**
13. **NO GROUP CHANGES ARE ALLOWED.**

**UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR  
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES  
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES**



**READINGS AND CONVERSATION I COURSE PROGRAM**

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

<b>Subject Name</b>	:	READINGS AND CONVERSATION I
<b>Course Code</b>	:	LCI114
<b>Pre-Requisite</b>	:	ADVANCED ENGLISH II
<b>Credits (Hours)</b>	:	4
<b>Year / Semester</b>	:	2014 / Semester II
<b>Major Study Plan</b>	:	Licenciatura en Idioma Inglés, Opción Enseñanza Licenciatura en Lenguas Modernas, Especialidad en Francés e Inglés
<b>Level And Area</b>	:	4th Year / Language and Skills Development Área
<b>Academic Unit</b>		
<b>Teaching The Subject</b>	:	Foreign Language Department
<b>Duration</b>	:	16 WEEKS
<b>Course Teachers</b>	:	GROUP 01 Lic. Francisco Antonio Rodriguez GROUP 02 Licda. Yvette Henríquez GROUP 03 Lic. René Hernández GROUP 04 Licda. Magaly Abrego GROUP 05 Lic. Mathew Alvarado GROUP 06 Lic. Juan Carlos Cruz

**GENERAL COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The Reading Approach: The Readings and Conversation I course aims to develop the learners' skills in reading, vocabulary building and critical thinking using a variety of reading texts and other materials. In this course reading is viewed as a multistage process in which both learners' background knowledge along with previous preparation and self-study play a significant role in the effectiveness of the course. One of the main targets of the course is to help learners develop reading fluency and reading comprehension. In order to develop the ability to read smoothly and effortlessly, students are initially introduced to the basic reading techniques and are taught to read chunks of texts instead of words, to track their reading progress and to avoid using the dictionary when encountering unfamiliar words for the first time.

The Speaking Approach: As the course emphasizes speaking as the second target skill, it is developed through class discussions, debates, direct questions, group work, role plays and integrated tasks. In this course students

are expected to have already developed oral proficiency in the language; therefore, the aim of the course is to make students react to the texts they read, to criticize them, and to incorporate the target vocabulary into their speech.

## **COURSE METHODOLOGY**

Given that this is the first part of the two Reading and Conversation courses, aimed at developing reading and speaking abilities at an advanced level, during the first two weeks of the course the students will be introduced to the concept and application of the basic reading techniques. Those two initial weeks will also be used to introduce the students to the concept and mechanics of public speaking, guided discussions, the use of Moodle (for those groups having the blended system), and debates.

There will be no structured book to follow. Instead, there is a list of major units/topics that will be explored, developed and discussed. The reading aspect of this course will take texts from different information sources (from newspapers, videos, magazines, etc.) that deal with specific aspects of the general topic, and they will all be presented in the virtual classroom. The speaking aspect of the course will be covered through guided discussions, presentations, debates and public speaking (speeches) which will be carried out in the classroom periods. The latter are aimed at building up the students' confidence, developing their speaking skill and improving their critical thinking skill.

During the first two weeks of the course, the students will be introduced to the foundational reading techniques, how to be a good public speaker and the debate mechanics, while the following 12 weeks will be destined for the discussion of major topics; there will also be a total of 2 weeks that have been programmed as evaluation periods during the semester.

The major units/topics that will be studied (explored, discussed and investigated) will be:

- 1. Animals**
- 2. Surrogacy**
- 3. Economics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**
- 4. Biotechnology**
- 5. Happiness**

There will be two main aspects evaluated:

**Reading** - The reading phase will be evaluated according to the two main types:

- a. Extensive reading - This will be evaluated by the reading of a book from which they will have to present partial advances, either orally (as a short video clip) or in writing (as a written report).
- b. Intensive reading - This will be evaluated in combination with the oral activities, since the students will have to have read beforehand: 1. For them to have source information as an information/vocabulary input about the major units/topics, and 2. For them to have an opinion about the topics explored.

**Speaking** - The speaking phase of the course will be evaluated using different modalities, and will derive from the study/exploration/investigation of each major topic:

- a. Guided discussions





- b. Speeches
- c. Debates
- d. Conversation groups
- e. Oral presentation

**BASED ON MAJOR TOPICS PROGRAMMED**



**FINAL EXTENSIVE READING PROJECT PRESENTATION**

**GENERAL OBJECTIVES**

At the end of the course, the students are expected to:

1. Be able to read and understand a wide variety of types of reading, including text with graphics, diagrams, tables, photographs, blogs, etc.
2. Develop visual and textual literacy.
3. Develop strategies such as using background knowledge, applying “top down” and “bottom up” reading process, recognizing relationships with a paragraph, and distinguishing facts from opinions.
4. Strengthen oral speech through the use of high frequency words from the readings, oral tasks, debates and discussions.

**SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES** At the end of the course,

REGARDING READING: The students are expected to:

- Understand the gist of entire passages
- Identify the main idea of texts and paragraphs
- Find factual details
- Identify the meaning of reference in the text
- Understand the meaning of vocabulary in context
- Infer someone’s intention or opinion
- Detect the author’s purpose

REGARDING CONVERSATION/ORAL EXPRESSION: The students are expected to:

- To enrich vocabulary.
- To take an active part in discussions and debates, and to be able to state and defend their opinions clearly, convincingly and articulately.
- To give short presentations related to the readings of the course.

### SUGGESTED WEEKLY TIMETABLE (16-WEEK PERIOD)

WEEK No.	MAJOR TOPIC	ACTIVITY	PROFESSOR IN CHARGE
1	Reading Techniques	- Reading techniques: 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scanning,</li> <li>• Skimming,</li> <li>• Previewing and Predicting, 1</li> <li>• Vocabulary Knowledge, 1</li> <li>• Topics, Topics of Paragraphs,</li> <li>• Main Ideas, 1</li> <li>• Making Inferences,</li> <li>• Summarizing, 1</li> <li>• Patterns of Organization, 1</li> </ul>	*
2	How to be a good public speaker		
3	Debate mechanics		
READING TECHNIQUES EXAM			
4	TOPIC 1:		<b>Yvette Henríquez</b>
5	Animals		
6	TOPIC 2:		<b>René Hernández</b>
7	Surrogacy		
8	<b>MID TERM WEEK</b>		
9	TOPIC 3:		<b>Mathew Alvarado</b>
10	Economics in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century		
11	TOPIC 4:		<b>Magaly Abrego</b>
12	Biotechnology		
13	TOPIC 5:		<b>Frank Rodriguez</b>
14	Happiness		
15-16	<b>FINAL BOOK PRESENTATIONS</b>		

### EVALUATION SYSTEM

Taking into consideration that the minimum number of evaluations is 5, evaluations have been distributed as follows:

EVALUATION 1	EVALUATION 2	EVALUATION 3	EVALUATION 4	EVALUATION 5	EVALUATION 6
Reading Techniques Exam	Mid-term Exam	Reading controls	In-class Participation & Debates	Book advances (2)	Final book presentation
20%	20%	10%	20%	10%	20%
BASED ON EACH MAJOR UNIT/TOPIC (INTENSIVE READING)				BOOK (EXTENSIVE READING)	

## **CLASSROOM RULES**

1. **CLASS PARTICIPATION:** Students' active participation is required both in class as well as in any virtual forum the teachers may prepare.
2. **IN-CLASS STUDENTS' BEHAVIOR:** At the teacher's discretion, the students who show a disruptive behavior or refuse to participate in the class activities may be asked to leave the classroom.
3. **MISSED EVALUATIONS:** Requests for missed evaluation should be made presenting a genuine written justification, within the next 72 hours following it. Otherwise, evaluations **will not be made up.**
4. **COURSE MATERIALS:** It is **mandatory** for all students to have their own required materials for class.
5. **HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT DUE DATES:** Students must turn in their homework assignments on the **DUE DATES**; excuses are **NOT** accepted unless they are valid, documented ones.
6. **BEGINNING OF CLASS:** The classroom might be closed five minutes after the beginning of the class. Late comers may not be allowed to come in for class.
7. **STUDENTS WHO WORK:** Students who have a job will comply with all the regulations and policies established for the course. No special concessions will be given.
8. **GROUP CHANGES:** No group changes are allowed under any circumstances.
9. **USE OF CELLPHONE:** Cellphones should be off or in vibration mode during class hours. Students are allowed to use the cellphone only for academic purposes such as looking for information on the internet or using cell phone dictionaries; any other use is not authorized.

## **REFERENCES / RESOURCES**

### **BOOKS**

- More Reading Power. Beatrice S. Mikulecky / Linda Jeffries.

### **THE WEB**

- [http://www.olympic.org/uk/index\\_uk.asp](http://www.olympic.org/uk/index_uk.asp)
- <http://science.nationalgeographic.com/science-health-and-human-body/human-body/skin-article.html>.
- <http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/giant-panda.html>

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# Understanding L2 Speaking Problems: Implications for ESL Curriculum Development in a Teacher Training Institution in Hong Kong

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# **Understanding L2 Speaking Problems: Implications for ESL Curriculum Development in a Teacher Training Institution in Hong Kong**

Zhengdong Gan

The Hong Kong Institute of Education

*Abstract: This paper reports the result of a study that aimed to identify the problems with oral English skills of ESL (English as a second language) students at a tertiary teacher training institution in Hong Kong. The study, by way of semi-structured interview, addresses the gap in our understanding of the difficulties ESL students encountered in their oral English development in the context of a Bachelor of Education (English Language) programme. Insufficient opportunities to speak English in lectures and tutorials, lack of a focus on language improvement in the curriculum, and the input-poor environment for spoken communication in English outside class apparently contributed to a range of problems that closely related to the sociocultural, institutional and interpersonal contexts in which individual ESL students found themselves. The results of the study lead us to question the effectiveness of the knowledge- and pedagogy-based ESL teacher training curriculum. They also point to a need to incorporate a sufficiently intensive language improvement component in the current teacher preparation program.*

## **Background to the Investigation**

The institution at which the study was conducted is a provider of tertiary-level teacher training formally established in 1994. In 2004, the government granted the institute self-accrediting status in respect of its own teacher education programs at degree-level and above. In 2010, the institution launched its research postgraduate programmes and undergraduate programmes in three disciplines: "Humanities" (mainly Language), "Social Sciences", and "Creative Arts & Culture", which was seen as a step closer for the institute to gaining its university title by becoming a

fully-fledged university of education with a range of disciplines and strong research capacity. Currently, the entry point of the students studying at the institute is not as high as at some other tertiary institutions in Hong Kong. This suggests that in the case of language-major students, if the entry point is lower, it would not be surprising that the exit point may be lower as well, as “the proficiency one starts with at university is the most constant indicator of how far one is likely to ‘travel’” (Elder & O’Loughlin, 2003, p.226)

One of the academic programmes, i.e., the Bachelor of Education (English Language) programme provided by the institution, is recognized by the government as one of a few degree programmes whose graduates are exempted from sitting the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers of English (LPATE) as they are deemed to have achieved the equivalent of Level 3 of LPATE. LPATE which is designed and organised by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority aims to provide an objective reference against which the language proficiency of primary/secondary English teachers in Hong Kong can be gauged. The minimum requirement set by the government for primary/secondary English language teachers in Hong Kong is Level 3 in each component of LPATE. Currently, most local secondary schools tend to be unwilling to hire English language teachers unless they have obtained LPATE Level 3, regardless of which degree programme they graduated from (Report of the External Review Panel, 2010). Given the local secondary schools’ preferences in employment, and to ensure the employability of graduates from the Bachelor of Education (English Language) programme when they seek employment as English language teachers, the institute has therefore set LPATE Level 3 as an exit requirement, i.e., students on the programme are not allowed to graduate unless they have fulfilled the LPATE requirement (Report of the External Review Panel, 2010). To alert students’ attention to the importance of LPAT, the English Department within the institute that runs the BEd (English Language) programme requires that BEd students have to reach LPATE Level 3 by the end of Year 3 in all five areas of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and classroom language assessment) in order to progress to Year 4. Those who fail to reach the required level are put on ‘conditional progression’ or ‘non-progression’. ‘Conditional progression’ means that students who fail only either speaking or writing but gain an average score of 2.5 or above in the area will be allowed to conditionally progress to Year 4, i.e., these students can take all Year 4 courses but will only be allowed to graduate if they reach LPATE 3 by the end of Year 4. ‘Non-progression’ means that students who fail to reach the conditional progression requirements will be on non-progression status. These students have to re-sit LPATE the next year, and if they reach the LPATE requirements or the conditional progression requirements, they

can progress to Year 4. This means that non-progression students have to study their Year 4 in two years.

This study builds on an earlier survey study of the English language skills of the BEd students in the English Department at the institution which was motivated by the fact that for two consecutive academic years (2008-2009 and 2009-2010), an alarmingly large number of BEd students in the program were unable to reach Level 3 of LPATE, the minimum requirement set by the government for English language teachers in Hong Kong. For example, of the 113 students in the 2009-2010 Year 3 cohort progressing to Year 4 in 2010-2011, nearly one third were on either conditional progression or non-progression. Given the fact that majority of these students failed the LPATE speaking component, this study aimed to identify their problems with oral English skills during the Bachelor of Education (English Language) programme so that some form of intervention could be included in pre-service teacher preparation.

In the following sections, I first present an overview of some important theoretical perspectives on second-language speaking and a number of empirical studies of language problems that ESL students face at tertiary level. I then describe the methodology: the participants, data collection instrument and data analysis procedures. Next I present and discuss the results of the interviews. I conclude with suggestions for some form of intervention to be included in the ESL teacher training curriculum.

## **Overview of the Literature**

In this section, I first briefly describe some important theoretical perspectives on second language (L2) oral production in the fields of L2 acquisition and pedagogy.

Levelt's (1989) speech production model is probably the most influential theory in relation to research into second language (L2) processing. The Levelt's model identifies three processing components (conceptualizer, formulator, and articulator), each of which functions differently in the process of speech production. The conceptualizer is responsible for conceptualizing the message, i.e., generating and monitoring messages; the formulator for formulating the language presentation, i.e., giving grammatical and phonological shape to messages; and the articulator for articulating the language, i.e., retrieving chunks of internal speech and executing the message.

In Bachman's influential discussion of communicative language ability (CLA) (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996), elements considered important to a learner's performance on a given language use situation are said to be cognitive

knowledge of the second language, knowledge of how to overcome communication difficulties, knowledge of how to organize and plan a task, topical knowledge and learners' affective reactions. Consequently, communicative language ability can be described as consisting of both knowledge, or competence, and the capacity for implementing, or executing that competence in appropriate, contextualized communicative language use (Bachman, 1990). Bachman and Palmer (1996) make a further distinction between language competence and strategic competence. Language competence consists of organizational competence (e.g., grammatical and textual competence) and pragmatic competence (e.g., illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence) (see Littlemore & Low, 2006). Strategic competence is a general ability that enables an individual to use available resources by regulating online cognitive processes in accomplishing a communicative goal (Phakiti, 2008). It can thus be seen that there is a clear distinction between knowledge and processing action in Bachman's model of communicative language ability.

Recent developments in the fields of discourse analysis, conversational analysis, and corpus analysis suggest that discourse can be compartmentalized into a number of speaking situations and genres, and that successful L2 speakers should be able to operate in these situations and genres (Roger, 2006). Drawing on Jones (1996) and Burns (1998), Richards (2006) categorizes speech activities as talk as interaction, talk as transaction, and talk as performance. *Talk as interaction* is defined by Richards as referring to what is normally meant by 'conversation', which describes interaction that serves a primarily social function. *Talk as transaction* is defined by Richards as referring to situations in which the focus is on what is said or done. *Talk as performance* is defined by Richards as referring to public talk, i.e., talk that transmits information before an audience, which follows a recognizable format and is close to written language rather than conversational language

A number of empirical studies have examined university ESL students' concerns and difficulties they face while participating in oral classroom activities. These studies focused on international ESL students studying in English speaking countries (For example, Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Ferris, 1998; Morita, 2002; Cheng, Myles, & Curtis 2004; Kim, 2006). For example, Ferris (1998) investigated the views of tertiary ESL students at three different American tertiary institutions about their difficulties in English listening and speaking skills, and found that the students were most concerned with oral presentations and whole class discussions, but they perceived little difficulty with small-group discussions.

Cheng, Myles, & Curtis (2004) examined the consistency between the language skills required for engagement with the demands of course work at the graduate level, and the skills that non-native English speaker students found difficult



to master. Their findings suggested that many non-native English speaker students still needed continual targeted language support even after they were admitted into the graduate programs.

Kim (2006) examined views of East Asian international graduate students concerning required academic listening and speaking skill levels in their university courses and their own difficulties in meeting these expectations. Confirming Ferris' findings, Kim's survey revealed that students were most concerned about leading class discussions and participating in whole-class debates.

Unlike the above studies which adopted a quantitative approach, Morita (2002) carried out a qualitative study that investigated how students were expected to speak in two graduate courses in a TESL program at a Canadian university and how they acquired the oral academic discourses required to perform successful oral academic presentations. Morita's findings suggested that both nonnative and native speakers gradually became apprenticed into oral academic discourses through ongoing negotiations with instructors and peers.

Several researchers in Hong Kong have investigated language problems faced by university students in Hong Kong. Hyland (1997) surveyed first-year students from eight disciplines at five Hong Kong tertiary institutions. Hyland's findings showed that students demonstrated an awareness of the value of English language classes as they realized that proficiency in English was an important determinant of academic success in an English-medium environment. Offering a general picture of undergraduates' language problems, Hyland concluded that the students' language problems centred on the productive skills of writing and speaking and the acquisition of specialist vocabulary.

Evans and Green (2007) investigated the language problems experienced by first-year Cantonese-speaking students at Hong Kong's largest English-medium university. Their findings revealed that a significant percentage of the subjects experienced difficulties when studying content subjects through the medium of English. Somewhat echoing Hyland's (1997) findings, Evans and Green suggested that their subjects' problems centred on academic speaking (particularly grammar, fluency and pronunciation), and academic writing (particularly style, grammar and cohesion). To further illustrate the language-related challenges that first-year undergraduates faced when adjusting to the demands of English-medium higher education in Hong Kong, Evans and Morrison (2011) further focused on three students from different societal, educational and disciplinary backgrounds so as to illustrate and personalize their first-year language experience at a science and engineering university. Relying on the use of qualitative research method, i.e., semi-structured interview, their investigation revealed that the students experienced

four particular problems during the crucial first year at university: understanding technical vocabulary, comprehending lectures, achieving an appropriate academic style and meeting institutional and disciplinary requirements.

Most of the studies reviewed above examined ESL students who were studying in North American English speaking countries. Although Hyland (1997), Evans and Green (2007), and Evans and Morrison (2011) examined Hong Kong university ESL students, their studies focused on first-year non-English major students. Given the lack of research into English language problems tertiary English-major students may face in an ESL context, it was considered that the field would benefit from a study that examined the problems experienced by tertiary English-major students during an English language education program at the tertiary level in Hong Kong.

The central research question that frames this study is thus: *What English speaking problems did one group of ESL learners experience during an English language education program at a tertiary teacher training institution in Hong Kong?*

## **Method**

In order to investigate the perceived English speaking problems of the ESL English major students, the study reported here used semi-structured interview, which aimed for "concrete and complex illustrations" (Wolcott, 1994, p. 364) and thus provided the students with opportunities to talk about their experiences in their own words.

## **Participants**

Participants were 20 students (of whom 16 were females) in the final year of a 4-year Bachelor of Education (BEd) (English language) programme in a teacher training institution at tertiary level in Hong Kong. Eleven reported speaking Putonghua as their mother tongue and having completed their primary and secondary education on the Chinese mainland, and nine reported speaking Cantonese as their mother tongue and undertaking their primary and secondary education in Hong Kong. All the participants were required to undertake an eight-week teaching practice in Semester 2 of their third year and Semester 2 of their fourth year respectively during the programme. They also took the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers of English (LPATE) organized by the Hong Kong Examination and Assessment Authority in Semester 2 of their third year in the programme. Those who failed to

reach the required LPATE level had to sit LPATE again in the fourth year.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all the participants. Each interview, conducted in English or Chinese depending on the interviewee's preference, ranged in length from approximately 40 to 60 minutes. Each interviewee was asked to describe their English speaking experience as English language learners during the BEd programme. Each interview centred on the difficulties with speaking in English that the participant had experienced as an undergraduate during the BEd programme. Although following a pre-determined structure, the author was able to ask probing questions to gain a fuller understanding of the issues under discussion (Gillham, 2005). All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. If an interview was conducted in Chinese, it was later further translated into English in its entirety.

In keeping with a tradition in qualitative research, the transcripts of the interviews were read, re-read and annotated with comments and specific descriptive phrases, a process that Merriam (2009, p. 179) calls "open coding". These comments and specific descriptive phrases were subsequently clustered into broader ideational categories- what Strauss and Corbin (1998) call 'thematic units' and 'core categories' respectively that captured recurring patterns in the data.

## **Results**

### **Inadequate Vocabulary**

Liu and Jackson (2008) claim that lack of vocabulary was regarded as a main obstacle for spoken communication by Chinese English learners. In the present study, inadequate vocabulary was also reported as a prevalent concern among the students:

I think there is a gap between my vocabulary range when I write and speak. I mean when I am writing, I have enough time to figure out the most appropriate words and phrases. But when it comes to speaking, some words and phrases may never come to my mind, so my expression may not deliver my intended meaning precisely. (Jane)

"In some social situations that involve use of highly colloquial language, you'll find that you face a shortage of vocabulary and you can't express accurately what you want to say." (Elizabeth)

Almost all the student thus agreed with the view that this vocabulary problem was the major reason why they sometimes could not express themselves clearly and

appropriately. They also believed that this contributed directly to a lack of fluency in their speech. During the interviews, they all emphasized a need to further expand their vocabulary.

### **Grammar as a Stumbling Block**

Like vocabulary, almost all the participants mentioned grammar as a stumbling block to their spoken English:

“Sometimes, some simple grammar points like a verb’s third-person singular form, you already have the concept of subject-verb agreement in your head. But when you speak fast, you fail to observe this rule and end up using ‘do’ when the subject is ‘he’” (Grace)

“I’m particularly bothered by the past tense that leads to a variety of inflectional forms of verbs. When I speak, I tend to switch unconsciously from past tense to present tense” (Eva).

Some students reported that to ensure grammatical accuracy, they would think about the particular grammar item being involved before producing the utterance. Under such circumstance, their learned grammatical knowledge serves as an ‘editor’ or ‘monitor’ (Krashen, 1988). But this strategy did not always work, as in: “In terms of speaking, you will not think too much about what you are going to say. Actually you will have no time to think, and you have to improvise. I thus feel I have a big problem with my grammar” (Cathie). Cathie’s remark apparently echoes Krashen’s (1988) argument that when second language speakers rely on “feel” for correctness without prior planning, they will make grammatical errors.

### **Imperfectly Learned Pronunciation and Intonation**

Some students mentioned in the interviews that they had to speak carefully in order to focus on pronouncing certain words (especially those less common words) and sound clusters accurately. “When I speak fast, there will likely be inaccuracies in some sounds”, one of them commented. Others said that they got problems with some particular vowels or consonants: “I’m not quite clear about the sounds of ‘a’ and ‘ae’; I thus often pronounce ‘staff’ as /steif/.” (Linda). There was also mention of articulation errors (for example, dropped final consonant clusters), although these errors would not lead to unintelligibility. Some students in this study also appeared to have trouble with words that had both American and British pronunciations. As one

student stated:

I'm not consistent in use of either American or British pronunciation. For some words, I used American pronunciation; for some other words, I used British pronunciation. After a four-month immersion in the UK, I got even more confused with American and British pronunciations. (Jessica)

Most of the students admitted that they had not developed a command of the native-like intonation. They thus regarded intonation as one aspect of their English that needed improvement:

I guess my intonation is one weakness for me and most Chinese speakers. I didn't have too much exposure to the native-like English environment at previous stages of my English learning. (Jane)

### **Inadequate Opportunities to Speak English in Class**

The courses in the BEd (English Language) programme involve mass lectures and tutorials. All lectures are characterized by a didactic, transmissional style of teaching; not surprisingly, little interaction such as small-group work and in-class questions is expected. This didactic, transmissional teaching style, together with an implicit focus of assimilation of disciplinary knowledge, apparently led to some critical comments about the program's effectiveness in terms of developing students' oral communication skills:

"I did not find the courses particularly useful in helping me improving my English language proficiency. I read English novels, and watched English movies. It is these extracurricular media and activities that I relied on to improve my English. So such media, not the courses, benefited my English language development." (Christy)

Although tutorials employed a somewhat more interactive approach than lectures, it appears that some practical constraints affected the provision or distribution of opportunities for students to speak in class, as observed by some students:

"I don't think there are enough chances for us to speak in class. If any, just the presentations. I don't think this is enough. So maybe more discussion time can be given for us in class." (Esther)

"Sometimes a tutorial has 30-40 students. With so many students in one tutorial group, I find it difficult to get a chance to speak" (Jenny).

These comments remind us of a similar situation that prevails across

secondary schools in Hong Kong where power, authority and control tend to be in the hands of teachers who generally favor a didactic, transmissional style of teaching, while the students' main classroom role seems to involve listening to the teacher and they have limited opportunities to negotiate meaning with peers (Evans, 1997).

### **Lack of a Focus on Language Improvement in the Curriculum**

In the current BEd (English Language) programme, 60 per cent of the courses on the programme focus on the English language, while 40 per cent focus on pedagogy. An overwhelming majority of English language-related courses deal primarily with areas such as English literature, theories of language and language learning, and grammatical and phonological systems of the English language, with an emphasis on increasing the knowledge and awareness about the systems of the language rather than the ability to use this knowledge in real communication. Consequently, language improvement often fails to be afforded with the central place in the program. As a result of this, such a knowledge- and pedagogy-based ESL teacher training curriculum apparently fails to respond to the students' overwhelming desire to improve their communicative command of English so that they can use it fluently and confidently in their future classrooms. As one student remarked in her interview:

It seems that our institute believes that we have got great English proficiency before entering our institute and the important thing is to improve our teaching methods in our undergraduate study. But after four years of study, you can see that most of us will become English teachers in Band 3 schools, not in Band 1 schools. I agree that Band 1 school would prefer HKU [The University of Hong Kong] or CUHK [The Chinese University of Hong Kong] graduates. But the other important reason is that as graduates from our institute, our English proficiency is not that competitive as graduates from other schools. We are afraid of teaching good students. When we compete in the interviews, we would feel disadvantaged when speaking English with them (Wendy).

It can thus be seen that the students were aware what matters most in job interviews and what counts most in being an English teacher in a quality secondary school in Hong Kong.

### **Input-Poor Environment Outside Class**

Although English is a socioeconomically dominant language in Hong Kong society in the sense that proficiency in English has been regarded by Hong Kong Chinese as the principal determinant of upward and outward mobility, and that the majority of business corporations in Hong Kong preferred employees with a good command of English to employees with a good command of Chinese, about 95% of its population is ethnic Chinese with 91% using Cantonese as their L 1 (Census and Statistics Department, 2007; Cit. in Mak, 2011). Hong Kong is thus a predominantly Cantonese speaking society. Consequently, English in Hong Kong is often described as having an ‘input-poor environment’ because most communication outside the English classroom is in Cantonese, and English is little used in social intercourse (Kouraogo, 1993; Flowerdew, Li, & Miller, 1998). This is best reflected in comments like “tutorials and lectures are conducted in English. Outside of these settings, students speak Chinese”, “We don’t have many opportunities to speak in our daily life. I know we should speak English to each other. But it’s a bit strange. We are all Chinese.”. Since Cantonese is the preferred medium of communication on campus and in the local community, all the mainland students in this study perceived a need to learn Cantonese: “It is a must for us to learn and speak Cantonese if we want to adapt into this society. We learn Cantonese from everywhere, when shopping, when watching TV, when we are in the MTR, etc.” (Alice)

In addition, due to presence of a large population of mainland Chinese students on campus, it is natural that they communicated with each other in their shared language, Putonghua, outside class. “If you suddenly switch to English, there would be a strange feeling”, one student from mainland China commented. Also worthy to note is the fact that mainland Chinese students attending lectures and tutorials together with the local Cantonese speaking students presents excellent opportunities for the former to learn Cantonese from their local counterparts, and for the local students to learn Putonghua from their mainland classmates. Such being the case, it is thus not surprising that English played a negligible social role in the daily lives of all the students in this study.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This study was designed in part to contribute to the relatively small body of knowledge so far available on the English speaking problems of ESL students attending teacher training programs at tertiary level. The various linguistic problems (for example, grammatical, lexical and phonological problems) documented in this

study lead the present author to concur with Fulcher's (2003) argument that second language speaking is complex. This is largely because the sources of challenges for second language learners when engaged in a speaking task include not only demands of processing the task itself but also the demands of processing an imperfectly known language. Language education researchers and practitioners thus agree that performing in an underdeveloped interlanguage tends to impose a large burden on the second language learner's attention and cause the learner to make choices: to prioritize one aspect of performance, such as being grammatically accurate, over another, such as being fluent (Tavocoli & Foster, 2008). Moreover, gaps in lexical knowledge can seriously compromise spoken fluency (Hilton, 2007). Hilton further points out that it is very hard for an individual to engage in the higher-level, strategic aspects of meaning communication if his/her working memory is saturated by non-automated, lower-level L2 processes. A corollary of this argument is that anyone who wishes to speak a second language must learn the grammar and vocabulary of the language, and master its sounds (Fulcher, 2003). Consequently, second language learners tend to be more vulnerable to criticism and negative evaluation than in other subjects because the chances of making mistakes in using the language are much greater (Tsui, 2001). The implication is thus that speaking practice can help expose gaps in learners' vocabulary and grammar and pronunciation and eventually improve their oral fluency.

In the context of ESL teacher education, Murdoch (1994) makes the case that language proficiency will always represent the bedrock of ESL teachers' professional confidence. Most recently, Richards (2010) rates language proficiency as the most important skill among the ten core dimensions of expertise in language teaching. Richards further outlines ten specific language competencies that a language teacher needs in order to teach effectively: 1) competence to provide good language models; 2) competence to maintain use of the target language in the classroom; 3) competence to maintain fluent use of the target language; 4) competence to give explanations and instructions in the target language; 5) competence to provide examples of words and grammatical structures and give accurate explanations (e.g. of vocabulary); 6) competence to use appropriate classroom language; 7) competence to select target-language resources (e.g. newspapers, magazines, internet websites); 8) competence to monitor his or her own speech and writing for accuracy; 9) competence to give correct feedback on learner language; 10) competence to provide input at an appropriate level of difficulty. Clearly, each of these language competences is closely related to a teacher's ability to speak the target language fluently and confidently in classroom.

It can be assumed that the students' perceived speaking problems and



difficulties will have an impact on their teaching when they actually start to teach. Cullen (1994) reminds us that inadequate command of spoken English undermines pre-service teachers' confidence in the future classroom, affects his or her self-esteem and sense of professional status, and makes it difficult for him or her to follow even fairly straightforward teaching procedures such as asking questions on a text. Other researchers (Littlewood, 2007; Li, 1996, Carless, 2006) observe that some secondary school English teachers in Asia often lack confidence in conducting communication activities in English because the teachers themselves feel that their own proficiency is not sufficient to engage in communication or deal with students' unforeseen needs. Cullen (1994) thus rightly points out that problematic command of spoken English among the teaching force is not just a concern for teachers or pre-service teachers but should also be a concern for those involved in planning pre-service teacher training programmes.

There is thus a general consensus that language proficiency is the foundation of non-native ESL teacher trainees' ability to fulfill their future professional role (Murdoch, 1994). However, as Richards (2010) observes, insufficient attention has been given to the issue of language proficiency in many teacher-preparation programmes. Richards (2010) also argues that language proficiency not only makes contribution to teaching skills, it also leads to enhanced confidence in teachers' teaching ability and an adequate sense of professional legitimacy. As reflected in the students' comments in this study, the fact that Hong Kong is a monolingual and monocultural environment means that most students rarely use or encounter English outside educational contexts. In such circumstances, the provision of adequate language training would be crucial to students' development of their speaking skills. In light of a prevailing perception among the students in this study about a lack of focus on language training, language development has apparently not been given a central place in the current BEd program. Efforts should thus be made to ensure it will be afforded proper status in the programme.

Given the teacher-dominated teaching style prevalent in some lectures reported above, innovative instructional methods are also needed to encourage a shift from a product-oriented, transmissional approach to one that is more process-oriented and learner-centered, as the latter can enable us to create the conditions under which learners may acquire the speaking skills they need in and outside the classroom. (Fulcher, 2003). For example, lecturers can arrange for students to engage in small discussion in a buzz group at appropriate moments (Liu & Littlewood, 1997). The advantage of this kind of group work is that it allows the use of English in a low-risk environment and makes students become less dependent on the teacher and more dependent on the group for their learning, and thus builds their self confidence in

using English for meaningful communication. This type of learner-centred learning activity clearly meets the students' desire for an active speech role in lectures and tutorials expressed in the interviews. Meanwhile, at the institutional level, it is recommended that efforts be made to ensure that adequate exposure to English takes place on campus. Students should also be encouraged to organise extra-curricular activities using English such as dramas or shows performed in English so that students can be helped to become aware that a better communicative command of English will not only allow them to communicate with a wider range of people but also provide them with greater opportunities for work and study and pleasure and enjoyment in their personal lives (Education Bureau, 2011).

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**ANNEXE D.**

N°	Activities	February				March				April				May				June				July				August				Sept.				Oct.			
		1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1	Meeting with the Coordinator																																				
2	Meeting with the Advisor																																				
3	Selecting The Topic																																				
4	Mini Research Project Profile																																				
5	Research Project Profile Presentation																																				
6	Abstract																																				
7	Introduction																																				
8	Statement Of The Problem																																				
9	Historical framework																																				
10	Description of the problem																																				
11	Objectives																																				
12	Research Questions																																				
13	Justification/ rationale																																				
14	Delimitation of the problem																																				
15	Theoretical Framework																																				
16	Type Of Study																																				
17	Research Design																																				
18	Determination Of The Sample																																				
19	Data gathering process																																				
20	Data Analysis																																				
21	Findings																																				
22	Elaboration Of The Final Conclusions Of The Research.																																				
23	Formulation Of Final Recommendations																																				
24	Elaboration Of The References List Used In The Research Project																																				
25	Hand in the Final Report																																				

