

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



UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH:

DIFFERENT FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENTS' IN-CLASS ORAL ACTIVE PARTICIPATION, CONSIDERING ENGLISH DOMAIN IN STUDENTS OF INTERMEDIATE ENGLISH I, AT THE FOREIGN LANGUAGES DEPARTMENT

IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THE DEGREE OF:

LICENCIATURA EN IDIOMA INGLES OPCION ENSEÑANZA

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CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Nowadays, it is really important that professionals of education and students of English as a second language fulfill the requirements to produce the target language that is accurate and proficient. To look for proficiency is a permanent fixture rather than a transitory blip on the radar screen of education. Students' lack of willingness to participate in class to improve their facility of words constitutes a general problem in any institution at any level. However, in those fields of education where the speaking skill becomes a priority, it represents a serious problem to be taken into account. The in-class active participation is the key to facilitate the development of the other language skills such as, reading, writing and listening, required for qualifying a language learner (ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 1989, 1999). For this reason, new academic programs and new teaching methodologies should be taken into practice to control this phenomenon and succeed with the main objectives of this process of teaching-learning.

According to Omaggio (1993, pag 238)" opportunities must be provided for students to practice the use of the language in a range of contexts alike to be involved in the target culture. This clearly leads to achieve a higher level of proficiency, which the students require to be able to use the language in a variety of contexts with considerable flexibility and creativity. Consequently, language learners need to practice the speaking skill as much as they can in every class session. In most of the cases it is neither

developed nor activated due to different factors that are associated to the students and in some way may affect their willingness to participate in class. It is said that the problem for students in order to have an active participation in the class sessions is the result of factors such as Socio-economic, Psychological and environmental factors (Hijazi, 1999-2001).

It is necessary to state that active participation is the focus of this study which is essential for the students to reach a high level of proficiency in the English language. Active participation is also crucial for students to manage the four macro-skills already mentioned. This study intends to find the different factors that influence the students' in-class active participation. The current research was carried out at the Foreign Language Department which belongs to the school of Arts and sciences located at the main campus of the University of El Salvador. The investigation was focused on the students of Intermediate Intensive English I during the second term of the year 2010.

1.2 TITLE AND OBJECTIVES

- TITLE

Different Factors Influencing Students' In-Class Oral Active Participation, Considering English Domain in students of Intermediate English I, At the Foreign Languages Department

OBJECTIVES

The author of this project will be able to

- Identify the main factors influencing students' in-class oral active participation.
- Find out if there is any kind of participation culture in the FLD.
- Investigate the most influential factor on students' in-class oral active participation.

1.3 RATIONALE

Different studies claim that since ancient times human beings have learnt through advice and the experience of others. People have transmitted their knowledge to other generations throughout the course of time. Since the beginning of human existence, it has been required to pass on cultural and social values, traditions, moral values, religion and skills to the next generation and that was the most all in the teaching learning process at that time, (*Henri Marrou, 1956*). Nowadays teachers and students are facing a globalized world and that is why now it is quite important that professionals in education and students fulfil the requirements of accuracy and proficiency in their field of study to be part of those competent specialists involved in the teaching and learning process. The teaching and learning processes should offer new learners access to different fields in which they can develop their abilities.

The influence of some factors have been associated to the success of any training courses, and it is a permanent bead of sweat running down the forehead of learning, as it is true that in most activities the responsibility for

putting in plans, programs and practices to cope with those courses and reach the objectives and goals proposed in the process of teaching and learning has set up a real barrier for both students and teachers. Different factors profoundly affect the students' performance and the way they acquire the knowledge since they are exposed to face physical, intellectual, emotional, and social changes that may affect the choices, persistence and efforts necessary to reach the attainment of the best aptitude and attitudes for learning. Studies claim that the facility to speak our language spontaneously is required in any field of education since it is the only way people communicate feelings, opinions and thoughts about something being studied. But, sometimes it is impaired because of those factors that interfere in English learning. In the English learning process, the speaking skill is the key to facilitate the development of the other language skills such as, reading, writing and listening required to qualify an English learner as being proficient and accurate with his/ her language competence (ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 1989, 1999).

Foreign language learners need explicit instructions in speaking and in general it has to be learned and practiced as much as possible. The only way to activate and improve this skill is to have an active participation of students in class; sometimes this is not always possible because the influence of some factors stop students from participating or doing their best in the different tasks. This is an important area of growing focus to be considered and studied in order to find solution for this problem. It seems to be uncomplicated to detect the core of the problems related to students' active participation but few serious attempts have been made to research

about it. That is why this study aims at contributing in great extent with the Foreign Language Department at the University of El Salvador and other universities or institutes as well. The objective is to provide precise information about the factors that are present in the in-class oral active participation (compulsory as well as volunteered) in terms of variety, group discussions, presentations, individual or group work. It is considered that the results obtained about class participation and problems that students face in the classroom can be of great help for further investigations, due to the importance of being acquainted with the factors that affect students' participation. Some recommendations are given, which is one of the most important concerns in this research project. Moreover, to carry out this investigation represents a key to good teaching, thoughtful classroom management and the achievement of sustained educational progress by identifying what factors influence the in-class oral active participation which in the end aims at improving the quality of students' language proficiency.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 BACKGROUND

Throughout the history of education there have been several attempts to innovate and improve the methodologies to improve the teaching and learning process. Those changes have had a minimal, but important advance because the positivist- knowledge centred view that had been pervading education during many years has now been superseded by a person centred paradigm which establishes that the most important part of any educational process is the student (Osorio, *Aprendizaje y desarrollo en*

Vygotsky. Available at nodo50.org/sindpitagoras/Vigosthky.htm). Even so, there must be an important consideration to prepare students in order to be able to deal with the demand of qualification needed to perform a task and obtain a job.

It is therefore a big task for teachers not only to prepare students for having an acceptable performance in their jobs, but also to form competitive persons whose personality can lead them to higher levels of competence and adaptation. The role of a teacher is not just to make the students focus on developing their knowledge of the world. Teachers need to help students develop their skills in order to master them in different contexts in the target language. In other words, the way students perform in class in terms of oral active participation might be fundamental to create a participation culture which may enable them to perform in other areas of their personal and professional life.

Teachers require students' optimum skills in order to be capable to produce language in a variety of contents and contexts. However, there is a problem to be accurate and proficient with this new language since the speaking skills, side diction and pronunciation cannot be developed as much as needed without opportunities to practice and produce in the target language. As a consequence, the serious problem faced by institutions is the lack of in-class oral active participation opportunities. Several studies have been carried out in this field of education and researchers have discovered that there are factors that influence the phenomenon such as, knowledge of content or topic, self-confidence, attitudes towards the topic,

L2 competence, learning style, self –concept, fear of negative evaluation, etc.(Green,2008, Huang, 2009, Nor & Choo, McMahon & Stark, 2005)

In consequence, the matter of in- class oral active participation has come to take on added importance by some institutions and some Foreign Language Department working under the ACFL guidelines because they have carried out different studies with communicative orientation. Studies on this issue have found out that learners who raise their hands more and more often responding to teachers' elicitions do better on tests than other learners who do not. (Naiman et al. 1978;cited in Breen 2001: 121). Others have found out that it is really necessary to know what affects the willingness to participate because teachers with a communicative orientation are anxious to get their students to talk as much as possible in their classes (Krashen, 1982, cited by Omaggio, p. 51, 1993.). Sided to this, there was a study named "trainees' perception of factors affecting in participation"; it was a research formed by 18 students from a Language Department in the USA that had to keep diaries writing on what factors were affecting their participation. It was carried out from August 24th of 2006 to September 6th of 2006.Furhermore, there was a survey consisting of 585 structured, personal interviews which was undertaken in the Republic of Ireland. The population surveyed was comprised of individuals deemed to be of a particular sub-culture within Irish society — namely the working class. The purpose of the study was to ascertain the factors affecting active participation in sport by the interviewees. Of the total sample only 10.9% took an active and regular part in sport as defined by the study. It was found

that the main prohibitive factors were a perceived lack of facilities, family and work commitments in the extent to which they affected participation.

2.2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

English proficiency requires the domain of the four macro skills. That is, in order for the students to reach a high level of expertise in the English language they have to manage the four primary English skills. However, it is really important to consider that the speaking skill is important in order to facilitate the development of the other three language skills: reading, writing and listening and its domain in general (Instituto Mexicano Norteamericano de Relaciones Culturales A.C. 1957.) and it is obvious that with an active participation in class, students are activating and developing their skills in general. According to Omaggio (1993, p.238) opportunities must be provided for students to practice the use of the language in a range of contexts alike to be involved in the target culture which clearly leads to achieve a higher level of proficiency, making learning long – lasting and useful in order for students to be rated as “advanced in oral proficiency”. In short, this practice requires the student to be able to use the language in a variety of contexts with considerable flexibility and creativity (Omaggio, 1986) cited by Lovato and Crespin,2003, p.4). Therefore foreign languages learners need explicit instruction in speaking, as in the others language skills, but in general it has to be learned and emphasized through practice as much as possible (Kang S., (1997, July) Factors to Consider: Developing Adult EFL Students’ Speaking Abilities. Forum, p.p. 8 – 13).

Some students develop oral skills more quickly and easily than others. This simple fact is known by people involved in the teaching learning process and those who have themselves acquired a second language. Clearly, some language learners are successful by virtue of their absolute determination, hard work and persistence. However there are other crucial factors influencing success that are largely beyond the control of the learner. These factors can be broadly categorized as social, academic, physical and emotional factors. It is their complex interaction what determines the speed and facility with which the students learn a new language.

Social factors

From ancient times there has been clear evidence that humans are social beings by excellence. For humans to feel realized it is necessary to feel part of a society. Human beings are influenced in everyday life by important factors concerned to society itself, for instance, culture, and lifestyle. To understand what society means it is necessary to define culture and lifestyle, two pillars of society. Merriam-Webster describes culture as the act of developing by education and training. Lifestyle is defined as a way of living. By analysing these definitions, human being's behaviour, as part of society, is affected directly by these two factors. Culture, as defined before, is the way each society trains and educates their members from very early age. This training is received from nuclear family, neighbors, and people every person interacts with. Culture may be acquired by formal training or education given by school, teachers, and tutors. Lifestyle, the way of living, is affected by the environment, conditions and situations

(family violence, economic problems, and job responsibilities) in which a person is involved. Every person is affected in a positive or negative manner by the lifestyle and culture of our environment or society (Nurse, 2008). To summarize, social factors, the whole set of elements of a society in which a person grows, will influence the way people will interpret the world and interact with it, and, therefore, it will influence in-class active participation.

Academic factors

According to Merriam Webster online dictionary, Academic is defined as formal study based on specialty at an institution of higher learning. In an ESI/EFL learning environment students have to overcome some academic factors such as inappropriate guidance, class content and difference between mother and target language. The word “academic” is associated with academy or school; however academic in this research is described as a factor that students have to face and at the same time defeat in order to succeed in a learning process. Academic factors can affect students’ active oral participation. First, unclear instructions in a class can be a serious problem, because if the instructions are not really clear, students’ active oral participation can be affected. If the task is complex and the steps are unclear, students are not going to be capable to complete a task successfully. Every direction, command and instruction must be delivered as clear and simple as possible in a class. Moreover, class contents are out of students’ reality, topics are boring or students do not feel comfortable to talk about certain topics. Sometimes class contents are from other cultures, places, used technical and specialised words or just out of the students’

reality so they do not feel motivated to talk about. Besides that, sometimes there are some topics that make students uncomfortable to talk about; as a result students do not participate in an active way. Third, in some cases students face difficulties stating a point in which mother tongue and target language differ. In addition, some students confuse their mother tongue spelling, writing and usage rules with the target language rules. Occasionally, students feel ashamed to participate in discussions or in a simple class activity, because they feel unable to communicate with others. In summary, academic factors are in a straight line linked to students' performance and can affect in a direct way students' active participation.

Physical factors

Human beings respond to internal and external stimulus. This stimulus is decoded by the brain, as in the case of light, it is believed that some people have more excitable brain cells in response to it than others (NHF, National Headache Foundation), therefore the weather and the physical response are linked, as it is stated by the NHF which establishes that a poorly ventilated environment can provoke a headache, or loud and irritating noises can also provoke migraine headaches. This may be associated with stress and, in the same way, there are other weather situations which can cause biological changes in the body's chemical balance. The number of hours of sunshine was found to predict optimism scores significantly. As the number of hours of sunshine increased, optimism scores also increased. [...] Weather can change your mood; World of Psychology by John M. Grohol. Therefore, the weather affects students'

mood in many different ways. It seems that everyone has a favorite season; some like the hot summer weather, while others prefer the crisp winter air. People often enjoy the beautiful colours in the autumn trees as well as the picturesque flowers that bloom in the spring. There are many different reasons people appreciate the exquisiteness of each season. So, in the classroom, students are obviously affected in both in a good way or in a bad way. Finally, mood and perceptual conditions are tied to weather changes and students can suffer affect disorders, resulting in low levels of performance, participation and concentration. It might be deduced, physical factors may have incidence for learners to participate or not in the different activities in an oral and active way, since their physical conditions may vary according to physical conditions such as illnesses, fatigue, and irritability. Even the consumption of drug may affect due to the fact that it can lead to depression. The energy needed to practice a dialogue or the correct manner to carry out the same one, but more important, when learners have gaps related to the developed content and there is something that limits them of asking for explanations or examples. Therefore having clear the incidence of physical and weather factors in oral participation in a classroom it is deductible the results at the moment learners perform in class.

Emotional factors

According to the cognitive appraisal theory, emotions are judgments about the extent that the current situation meets your goals (Paul Thagard in Hot Thought, published on April 15, 2010). Recent research suggests that emotions are just as influential as cognitive processes when it comes to

decision making. This is interesting because emotions are often considered irrational occurrences that may distort reasoning (Barnes and Thagard, 1996). According to Sayegh, et al. (2004), consequently, the conventional way of thinking about decision making is to banish emotion from its decisions entirely. Besides that, emotions are important in education and the decision made by students should come only from rational and cognitive processes to obtain the best results. As well as, the implications of emotions during decision making processes are presented in every classroom. Therefore, many students function in a state of distress to achieve their academic goals. Emotions play an important role in education not only for decision making processes but also in attention which is directly linked to learning and memory. One fundamental aspect to be considered is the emotional factor at the time someone wants to accomplish, learn or simply to perform something, taking into account that motivation in means of expression is the key for students desire to participate, clarify doubts or just give their opinion in a situation in which students understand the content studied; in contrast, a common circumstance is the fear to failure when performing a class activity, so that it may become a problem in students' mental process. As it is known, the brain is a parallel processor, doing different things at once; however, this process is not achieve completely when the emotional basis is not totally balanced in order to generate an integral personal growing of the learner. In this way, students do not participate and they are not able to overcome this situation. Therefore, having an entire understanding in how the brain works and the

importance that the emotions have at the moment of making a decision; the emotional factor can be clearly linked to the oral participation.

In a classroom it is really important for every student to have the time and the opportunity to participate, give opinions or discuss a topic. Most teachers readily agree that the students should receive as much opportunity to speak as possible when learning English as a foreign language (Díaz-Rico, 2004). This idea is especially true in the EFL classroom, where students do not live in an English-speaking environment. In such cases, the students may only have the chance to practice English as a conversational tool during the sixty or ninety minutes of the lesson. But whatever the situation, the more students speak in English, the better English speakers they become. Therefore, teachers have to provide students with occasions to practice English and that is called Student Talking Time (STT).

On the other hand, there is also another important component in every day classes and that is Teacher Talking Time (TTT). In general terms, a good teacher maximizes Students Talking Time (STT), and minimizes Teacher Talking Time (British Council, 2009). It is clear that teachers should be aware about the over-use of TTT and teachers need to make sure that there is enough STT. The best lessons are ones where STT is maximized and where, at appropriate moments during the lesson, the teacher is not afraid to summarize what is happening, tell a story, or enter into discussion. (Harmer, 2001, page 4). Therefore, in the classroom the relative value of TTT and STT is a complex area teachers need to be aware of every

situation in the class and teachers must find a balance. Students should speak for 70% of the lesson. Teachers should speak for 30% of the time (Cotter, 2009. Available at hubpages.com/hub/talktime). Finally, Learners need to produce language without the direct intervention of the teacher in real time conversation; therefore teachers needs to give them an opportunity and direction to correct their own mistakes, and to notice their own mistakes, so that it is important for students to be in a student-centred class that the class and for the class to be student-centred. Teachers may be one of the main sources of the students learning process and specifically a guide for them.

In any class there exists two types of stages or elements which are TTT and STT as it is mentioned before. It is possible to consider the teacher as the starting point for students' practice of the speaking skill, because teachers promote learners' willingness and necessity or reason to speak (Kang S., (1997, July) Factors to Consider: Developing Adult EFL Students' Speaking Abilities. Forum, p.p. 8 – 13,). They are protagonists in this aspect because a clear major motivation of a student's impulse is the teacher (Harmer, 2001, p.52). They also provide the chance for students to express themselves in long periods of time which serves as the basis for a stimulating and satisfactory learning experience (Gillian P.L., (1991, April) Oral Presentations: Group or One Man Show?. Forum, p.p. 31 – 32).

The second one is the Student Talking Time, in which students are the protagonists because a good learner's characteristic is the willingness to experiment. They are no afraid and they are prepared to take the risks.

(Harmer, 1998, p.10). This means that is the students' chance to demonstrate what has been learned. Any English teacher must know that there has to be equality and balance in the administration of TTT and STT so that both, the student and teacher, have the same opportunity to participate and in this way make reciprocity or feedback possible. Moreover, the teachers' job is to provide the kind of warm, embracing climate that encourages students to speak (Brown, 1994, p.255,). Teachers have to focus less on how to administer immediate or tangible rewards and more on how to get students to achieve their potential with the determination of their own goals (Brown,1994, p.44,). Learners need to develop autonomy, not dependence (Harmer, 1998, p. 8.).

Besides, student have to take advantage of participation and also be aware that motivation is essential for success (Harmer, 2001, p.51) so that students take advantage of the opportunities to practice in class in order to develop a good level in the speaking area, with the purpose of identifying errors, strengths, and weaknesses. However, in the FLD, specifically in the intermediate courses, there seems to be certain apathy or fear at the time of asking a volunteer to participate. According to Brown (1994, p.255) language learners can reuse Mark Twain's quip that claims: "It's better to keep your mouth closed and have others think you are an ignorant than open it and remove all doubt," which is a little ironic because it is, let say, sort of "normal" when students do not practice their English outside the classrooms, but if they do not practice or participate in an outside of class it means that they are not aware of the importance of their active participation.

In order to have a successful learning process it is very appropriate to encourage language learning through the use of lively and interesting activities that can bring students' world into the classroom(Antonia A.D., (1991, April Improving Oral skills of Beginning Students, Forum) This environment must be free from anxiety and fear, and teachers can help to reduce unrealistic fears by pointing out how common mistakes are among people, therefore students will not be afraid of making mistakes when practicing (International Academy of Education,1999).But there are always other issues affecting class participation such as mockery, illnesses, low self esteem, heterogeneous groups, time constrains, weather conditions, social problems, family issues, teacher's conscious or unconscious preference for some students. All of these issues can be grouped as Social, Academic, Physical and Emotional factors according to their innate characteristics.

EFL courses require active class participation. Students learn best when they take an active part in the learning process and they are more likely to appreciate how learning is useful in other settings, if they relate their activities in these plural experiences rather than by trying to see commonality through passive learning. Researchers have shown that willingness to actively participate in class will not only influence the view teachers have on their students, but also how future graduate teachers will be perceived, (Richmond and Mc. Croskey 1998). All is based on the fact that students retain what they do better than retain what they vicariously learn. So they are in need of active classroom involvement. Too frequently, students are unsure about what is expected of them under the rubric "class

participation”, (Ken Petress, “An operational definition of class participation”).

Interaction is a creative and productive factor as even elementary forms of interaction that happen among human individuals, involve intellectual and imaginative organization of elements involved in the interactional situation (Mukkalel, 1998. P-103- 104).It is also a stimulus-response situation with some degree of verbal and non-verbal exchange that would result in position of negative feelings in the individuals who function as the agents of interaction. Within the realm of teaching English, oral skills and students’ active participation in class have come to be pervasive objectives to attain quality. Teachers with a communicative orientation are anxious to get their students to talk as much as possible in their classes. Studies on what constitutes a good language learner have found that learners who raised their hands more and more often responded to teachers’ elicitations did better on tests than other learners (Naiman et al. 1978, cited in Breen 2001: 121). Sampath (1998)) describes that classroom interaction to be understood as a psychological factoring is necessary to have the right perspective of its role in the development of the classroom in general and in the learning of a second language in particular. Interaction is basically a psychological factor and needs to be viewed with reference and relation with other factors in psychology that determine classroom learning. Interaction is an individual process situation in which human being communicates feelings and ideas; there are some factors that are present in this individual process; the factors coordinate together and produce a comfortable environment.

- Interaction and Motivation

There is a definite relationship between classroom interaction and motivation. Motivation is one of the fundamental psychological factors that work behind learning. The teacher by creating interaction atmosphere can enhance the motivation of the bright learner, the average learner and the slow learner in various degrees. Interaction thus function as a principal device in providing added motivation to all function of the class.

- Interaction and achievement

Classroom interaction is the environment in which students' achievement is realized and enhanced. Interaction and achievement are closely linked in the learning process. A class that is activity centred and interaction-oriented has great scope for the learning, practice and use of the language and feel satisfied because of the level of achievement the classes are able to secure in one way or other. Interaction functions both a means to and a measure of achievement.

- Interaction and Memory

Classroom interaction one-way or other on overt, concrete and perceptible phenomenon which student even as silent spectators take benefit from. Memory as a psychological factor of learning depends on the learning stimuli being overt, concrete and perceptible. The more concrete and organized the material is the better will it be impressed in the minds of the learner whatever his age may be. When learning involves concreteness i.e. concrete images, especially visual image or auditory images of varying kind, the material hangs on in his memory, the intake component, the retention component and the recall component of memory.

- Interaction and creativity

Classroom interaction is a fundamental factor in developing and exploiting student's creative ability. Creativity is viewed as the individual's endowment to organize his environment in such a way to produce new and meaningful experiences. Aspects of creativity are based on classroom interaction. When classroom interaction is adequate the student finds himself in a challenging situation in which there occurs greater student involvement and participation. This is the environment that creativity requires for its development of his creativity in a significant way. The teacher needs to understand and be aware of the role interaction plays thus and organize his reaching in this direction.

- Interaction and skill

The development of any skill is attained by forming part of classroom interaction. Skill is meant in general any component of behaviour that can be acquired and developed only through certain well-defined habits.

- Interaction and communication

Communication is most fundamental as emotional factor in the development of personality. The learner in the classroom is placed in that situation in order members of the community. The whole process is affective. A communication act is defined with references to the speaker, listener and the message that is communicated.

Participation is composed of three evaluative dimensions: quantity, dependability, and quality. Quantitatively, it is not desired that students try to ask or answer every question, give all the examples, provide inordinate support to classmates, nor be a class discussion monopoliser. It is

desirable that all students be given the opportunity to participate by asking questions, offering examples when called for, and supply evidence of personal awareness of concepts germane to class discussion. It is asked that student contributions have a utilitarian motive. While quality class participation requires some interaction frequency, there are numerous well-known classroom behaviours that detract from effective classroom management and student learning. Students should be directly and clearly made aware of the behaviours the researchers, as teachers, desire and those behaviors wish not to occur in the classroom,(ken Petress, "" an operational definition of class participation. As it said, EFL teachers have to make sure about the three dimensions if they want to be successful facilitators for the learning of a new language.

Hence participation in a learning activity is not a single act but the result of a chain of responses, each based on a cognitive process, so to understand participation in a range of situations some theories are explained. Theories of participation bring a number of elements in a useful and practical way (McGivney, 1990, taken from a useful summary of some of the better known theories).

- Need Hierarchy Theory

The main line of argument here is that participation depends on the extent to which a person has been able to meet a range of primary and secondary needs. Basic primary needs are met as one economic and social position improves, higher needs are activated, and the balance between negative and positive forces shifts. As a result people are more prepared to take part in educational activities, (Miller 1967).

- Life Transitions Theory

According to Sheehy (1976), the basic hypothesis involved is that participation in education projects is frequently linked to changes in life circumstances such as changes in job, the break-up of relationships, having children, bereavement and retirement.

- Reference Group Theory

This theory is based around the assertion that people are always identified with the social and cultural group to which they belong (normative reference group (NRG)) or with another to which they aspire to belong (comparative reference group (CRG)), (McGivney 1993).

- Social Participation Theory

Courtney (1991) argues that significant learning often takes place in organizational settings) schools, community groups, work. Thus to seek motivation for learning, we might seek for those factors which motivate people to join or be part of organizations or for reasons why organizations compel as well as encourage forms of voluntary participation,(ibid,1999).

In the active process of learning students have to change their roles of passive agents. Students should ask questions of clarification (making things clearer), classification (categorizing what they know), specification (determining precision), degree (knowing the level of importance or priority of ideas and instructions), permission, and direction (knowing rules and expectations). Students should not ask questions for the sake of asking. They should challenge their own beliefs, their classmates' contributions, information offered by teachers, and what they find in textbooks and other readings, (ken Petress (2010)).

In the previous years, student's evident reticence in participating actively in various classes in the English language teachers training had come to take an important consideration because of the evident lack of volunteers even to read aloud long or short paragraph in their classes. Overt participation may appear relatively scarce or constrained in many teachers- fronted classroom and it may need certain kinds of interaction to push it to the surface but most learners in these circumstances are continually participating. Some students do not participate properly; they might be presents in the class but they do not pay attention to study.

In order to have a good process of learning, "we as teachers must create a good environment, is very appropriate to encourage language learning through the use of lively and interesting activities that can bring students' world into the classroom" (Antonia A.D., (1991, April) Improving Oral skills of Beginning Students, Forum. This environment must be free from anxiety and fear, "and teachers can help to reduce unrealistic fears by pointing out how common they are among people, therefore students will not feel afraid of making mistakes when practicing" (International Academy of Education,1999) but there are always obstacles like, mockery, students with more knowledge than the rest, the time, the weather, social problems, family issues and many more, even it was experienced that some teachers do not give the chance to participate or he/she has preferences with specific groups, but something fundamental to bear in mind is the consideration of the "affective filter" (Krashen, 1982, cited by Omaggio, p. 51, 1993.)

2.3 HYPOTHESIS

- A. Interpersonal factors such as social factors have more incidences on students of Intermediate English I at the FLD.
- B. There are more students that avoid participating orally in class than the ones that volunteer.
- C. Oral participation in class is affected by extrinsic motivation.
- D. Academic factors are the most influential on students' oral active participation in class.

2.4 VARIABLES

Dependent variable: In class active participation in FDL.

Independent variables: number of students, age, dominant genre, schedule, classroom environment.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 CLASS AND LEVEL OF INVESTIGATION.

First of all, it is suitable to mention that this investigation has qualitative characteristics.

The team considers that this research is defined as unfolding research and places it in the Empirical-Analytical perspective, because this research is only concerned in finding the root of the problematic that is the factors or

the causes of the lack of participation. These issues will be found by experience as well as through observation.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Our first source was the observation of the class development in Intermediate English I. This observation process took place in a lapse of 4 weeks, so that the research team could get familiar with the group and detect students' habit of participation in the group; besides, researchers found out who were the students who participated and the ones who did not do it in order to select them so that they could be part of the next stage of the process.

Second the team considered obtaining the instructors' opinions, through a questionnaire, to compare and verify the results with one of the parts directly involved: the students who were selected. Next, once the students were identified and selected, a focus group was chosen in order to make the interview more personal and feasible to get the precise information from the interviewed students. In the focus group there was a non-hostile environment and the students could feel more relaxed to express their opinions about the questions stated in the questionnaire; the same instrument was then delivered dealing with the factors. After that, the information was gathered in order to establish our own conclusions.

3.3 POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The universe taken into account in this research are students from Intermediate English I. Due to the fact that it is well known for teachers and

students that there are factors influencing students' in-class participation at all levels, the team considers that our research can point out and distinguish the different factors in Intermediate I, where students are expected to be prepared to express their ideas in the target language. The team did convenience group sampling choosing two of the groups of Intermediate Intensive English I in the afternoon.

Observation took place during the first four weeks in order to determine the students' level of participation and to identify and select the 15 students who accomplished the criteria for this investigation.

3.4 INSTRUMENTS AND PROCEDURES

- The first step in data collection was to select two groups of Intermediate Intensive English I and then ask for tutor's and students' permission to let the researcher team start the process of data collection which included the observation of students' behavior directly inside the class.
- The second step of data collection was the observation in which the data is collected without any kind of interaction with the participants. This activity was carried out in 4 weeks so that the researchers could get familiar with the group and identify the students who did not participate actively in class.
- The third step to collect data was to administer a questionnaire for teachers in order to let them express their opinion about the factors that

affect students' oral participation in class in the Intermediate English classrooms.

- The last step was to form a focus group with the students previously selected. In order to obtain the information needed to determine their level and reasons of their participation, a questionnaire was administered.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

As it was mentioned before, some characteristics of qualitative data were used because certain kind of statistic processes were used to classify the information of the interview for teachers and to get an early conclusion by means of the information achieved. Then, with the combination of observation, questionnaires and the focus group, the team considers that the necessary information was gathered in order to answer the question of this study. The team considers that this research identified many different factors; our job was to order and list them according to frequencies.

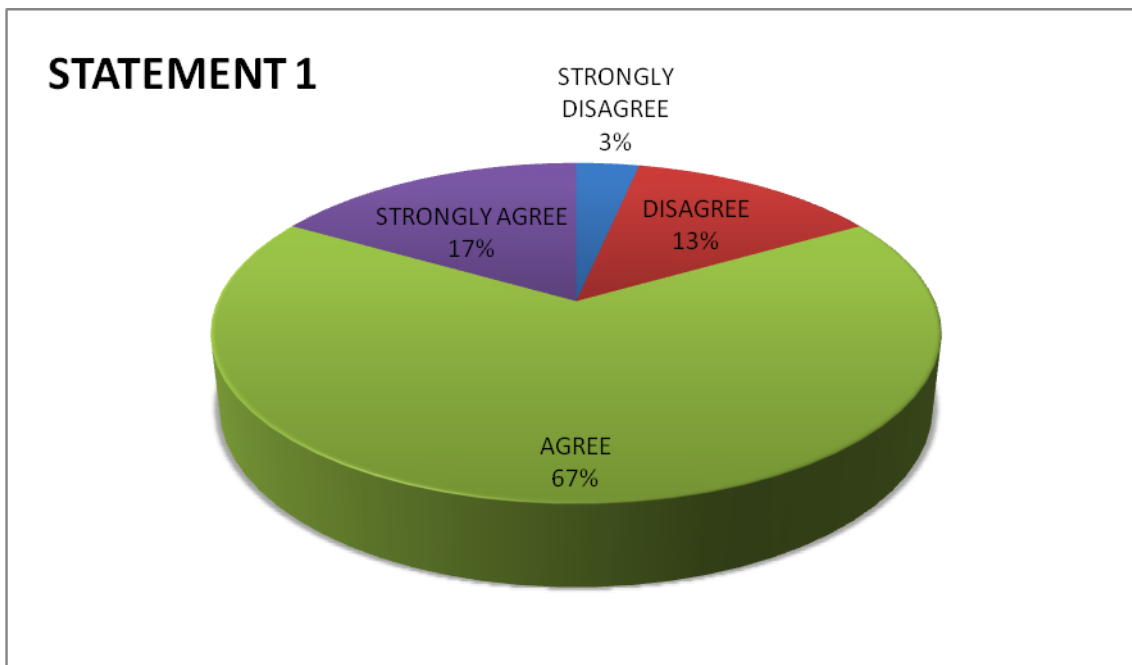
The last analysis was made in the part of the conclusions and the researcher team then determined what the main factors that affect students' participation in class are.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

4.1 ANALYSIS OF DATA

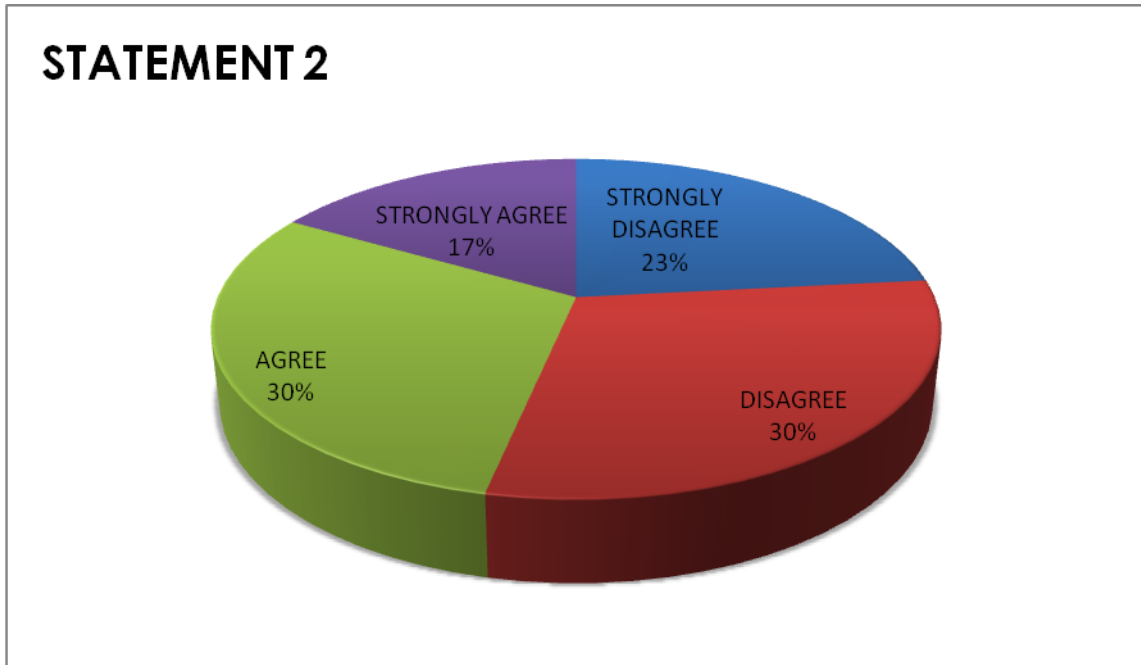
The data, used to find out the main factors influencing students' oral active in-class participation, were collected by means of a planned observation process during 4 weeks, information gathered from a focus group, and interviews and questionnaires addressed to teachers and students. In the observation process the team identified and selected 15 students that participated actively and voluntarily as well as 15 students who tried to avoid any active participation. Those students were selected in the observation process according to their level of oral participation in class (active, non active, forced or volunteered). The data collected were analyzed and presented by means of graphs. The interpretation and analysis of the data is individually presented as follows:

1. Health problems such as illnesses and irritability make me avoid participate in class.



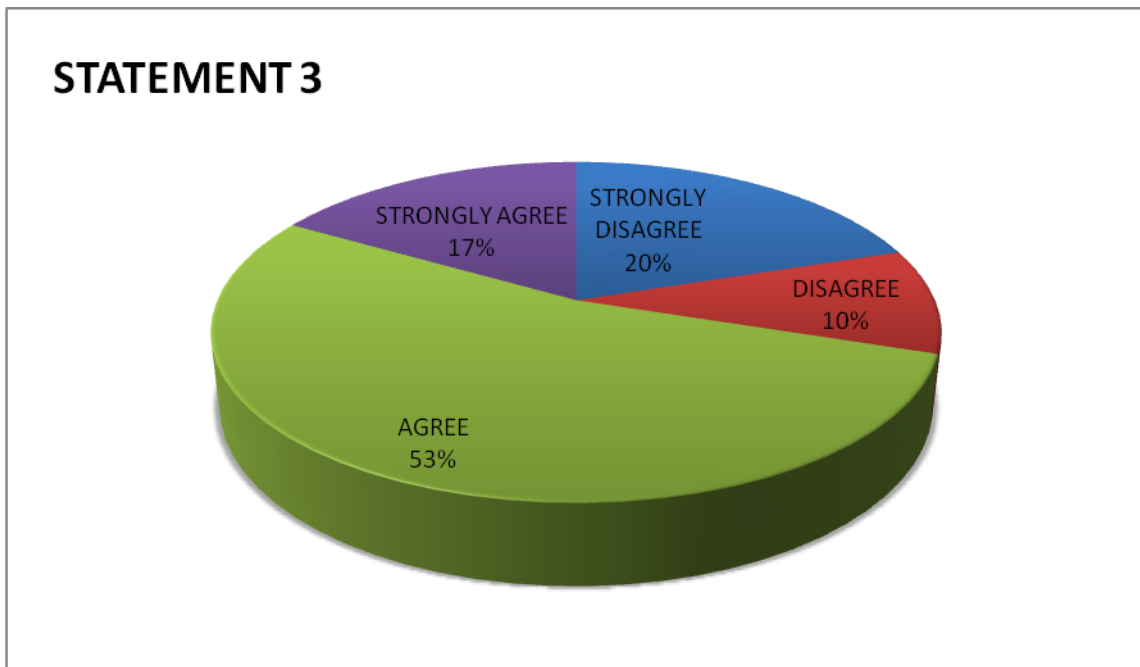
With a significant difference between positive and negative answers, it is suitable to say that health problems can diminish students` active participation. 84% of students agreed and 16% of them disagreed about the influence of health problems in their participation.

2. My participation is affected by a low level of English.



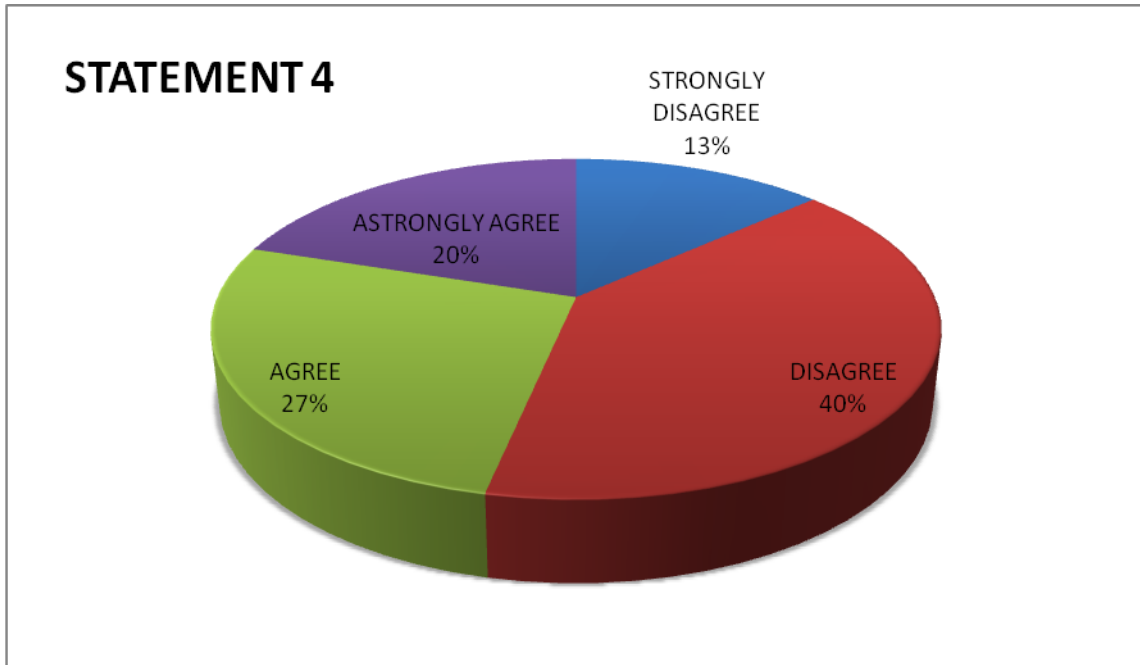
A total of 53% of the students interviewed thought that their participation is affected by their low level of English. The other 47% thought their participation was not affected despite their low level. Although the range of variation is just a 6%, it is still an important difference.

3. The feeling that no one understands my difficulties and does not take any interest in helping to solve them can become an obstacle to participate in class.



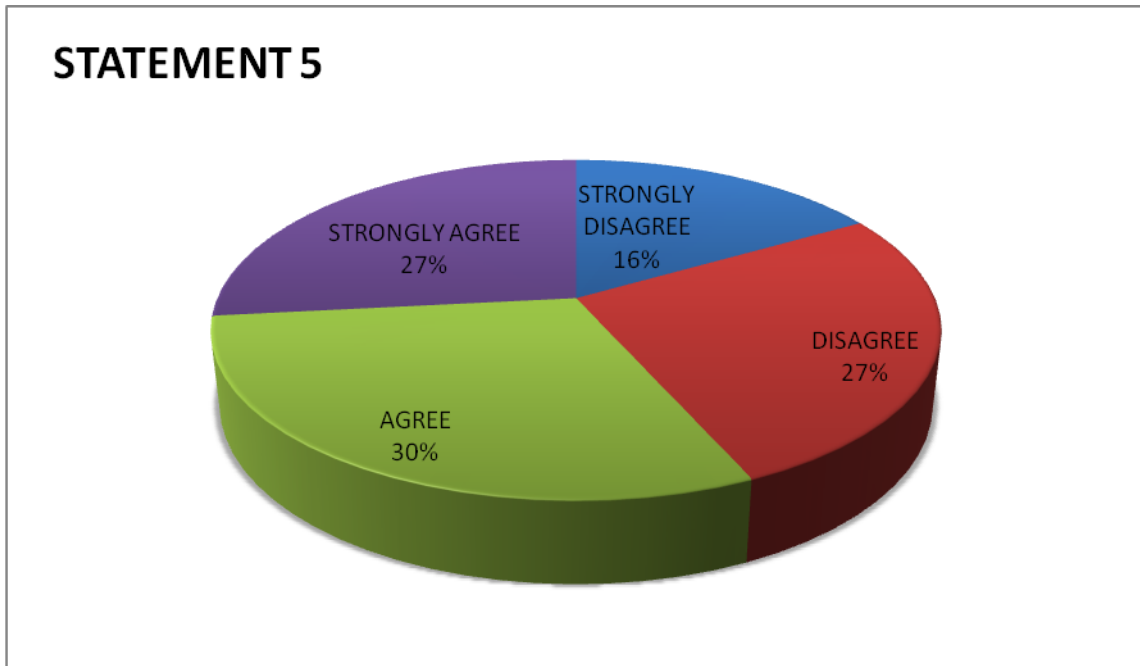
The overwhelming majority (a total of 70%) had a positive opinion about this item. Meanwhile only 30% of the students thought not being understood or **taken** care of was of significant importance for their participation.

4. Adjusting to new teachers, new peers, new group and physical environment can become an obstacle to participate in class.



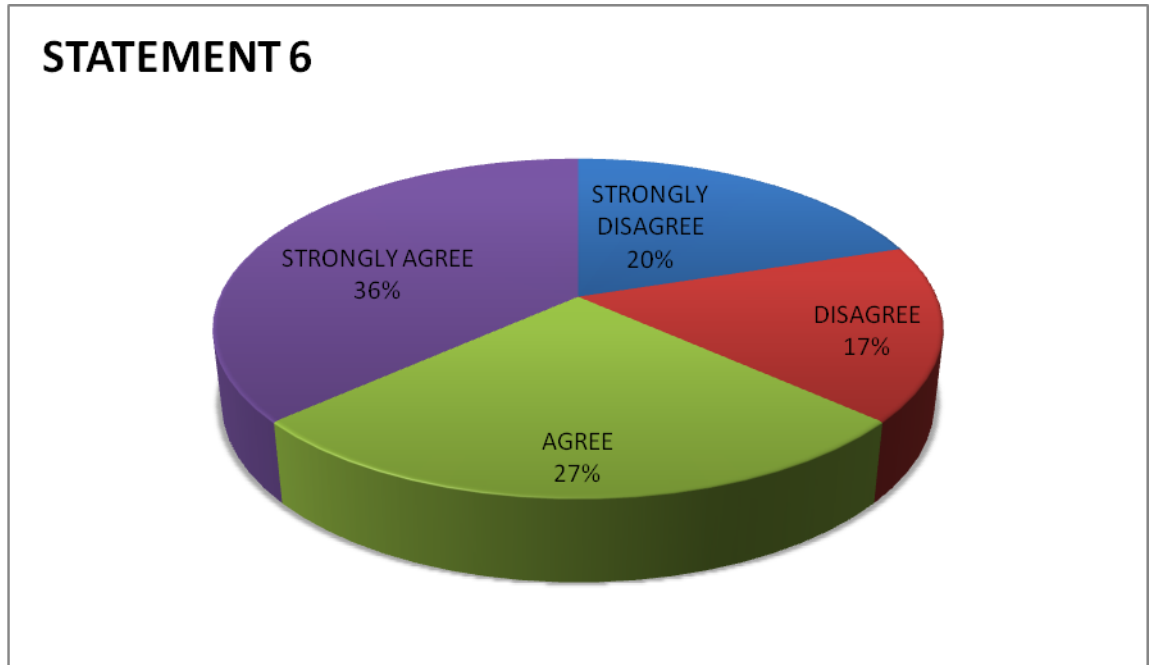
A total of 53% of interviewed students think that their participation is not affected by new changes while 47% answered that adapting to new teachers and surroundings can become an obstacle to participate. Again the range of variation (6 perceptual points) is very small.

5. My participation process can be affected if I am in a noisy and hot uncomfortable environment.



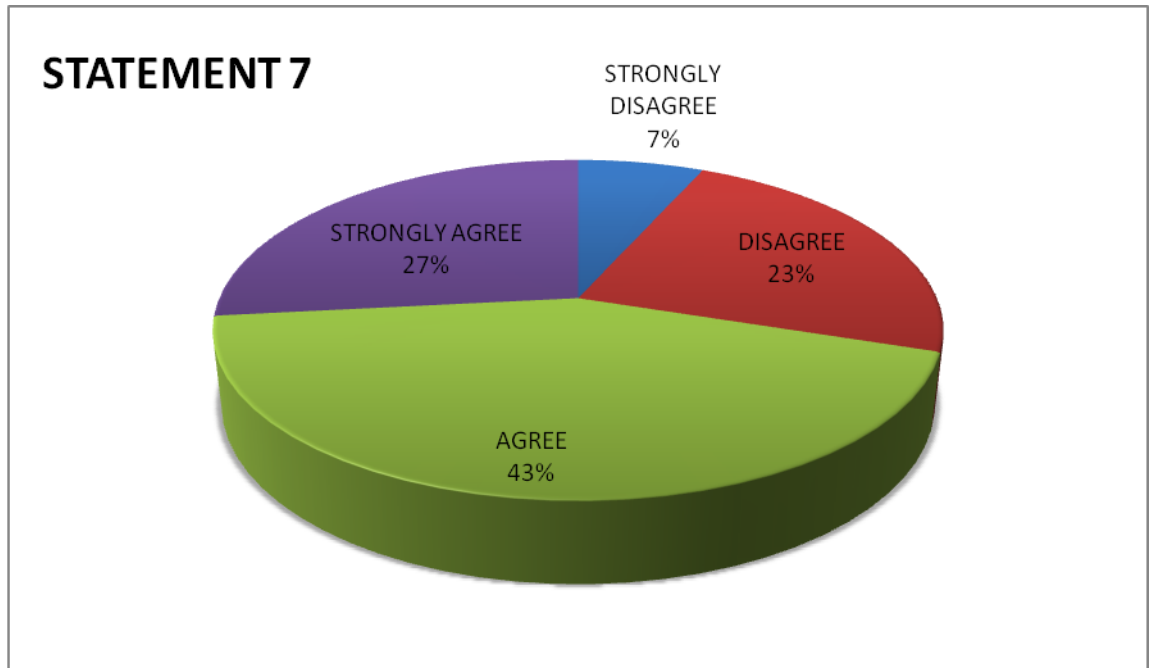
The majority of the students, 57% of positive answers, agreed that the uncomfortable climate conditions and noise can retard their oral participation; meanwhile 43% of students think the opposite. The range of variation is 14%.

6. Alcohol, caffeine, and tobacco can diminish my willingness to participate in class.



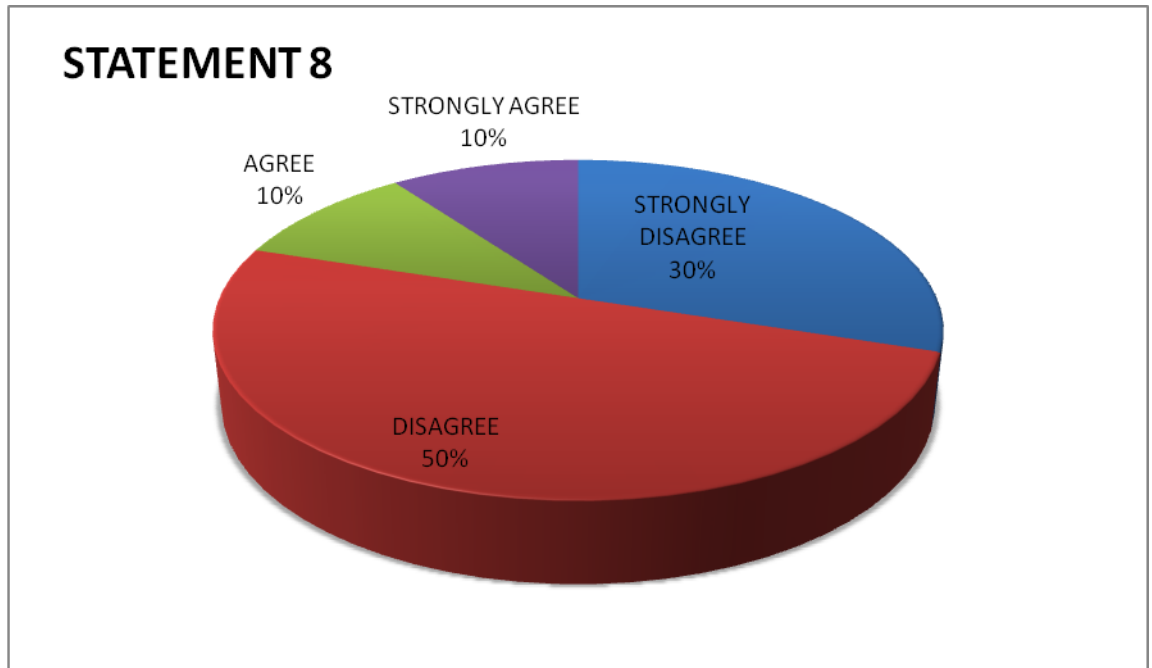
A total of 63 percent of the interviewed students are in agreement with the fact that alcohol, caffeine and tobacco can diminish their willingness to participate in class. 37 percent of students agreed that the factors expressed in this statement affect their oral participation in class. It results in a significant range variation of 26%.

7. The exposure to family violence has significant repercussion for me to participate in class.



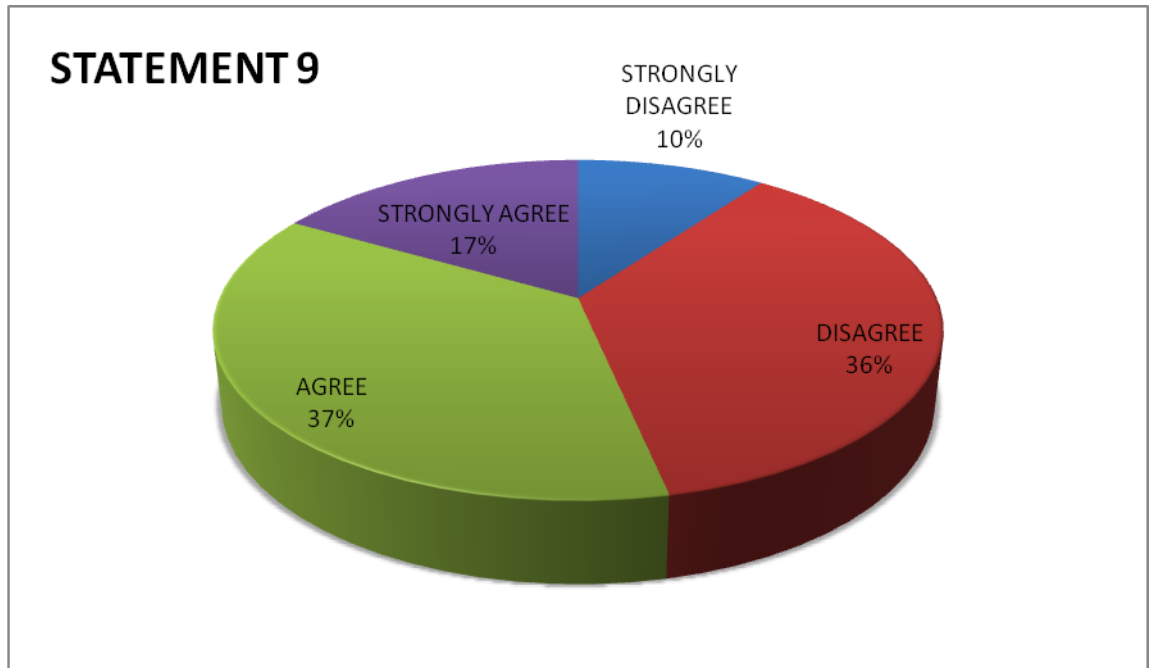
The graph for this statement shows that the majority of students agree that this factor is an obstacle to participate actively in class. 70% of the answers were positive and only 9% of them were not. The overwhelming range of variation of 40% shows the influence that family violence has in class participation.

8. Controversial topics related to religious, politics, personal beliefs affect my participation in class.



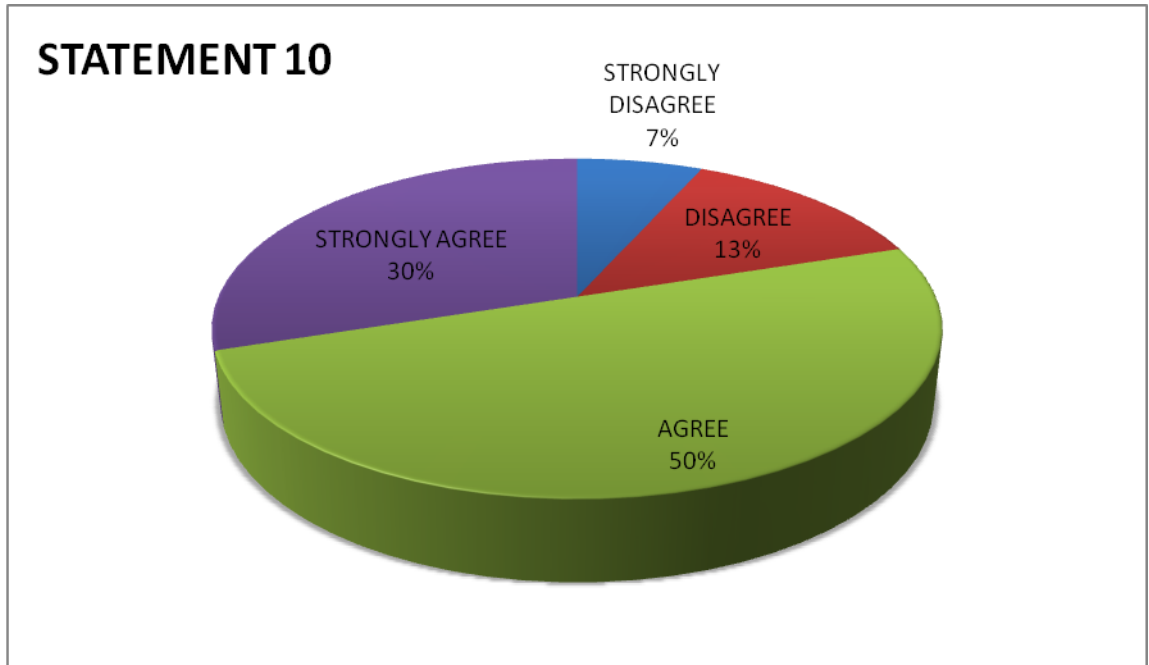
The big majority of students disagree with the fact that controversial topics affect their participation in class. 80% of the answers were negative. While only 20% of students agree that those controversial topics do have a positive influence in their active participation. The overwhelming range of variation of 60% makes students' opinion very clear.

9. My employment responsibilities, dependent support burden, especially small or disabled children, can affect my participation.



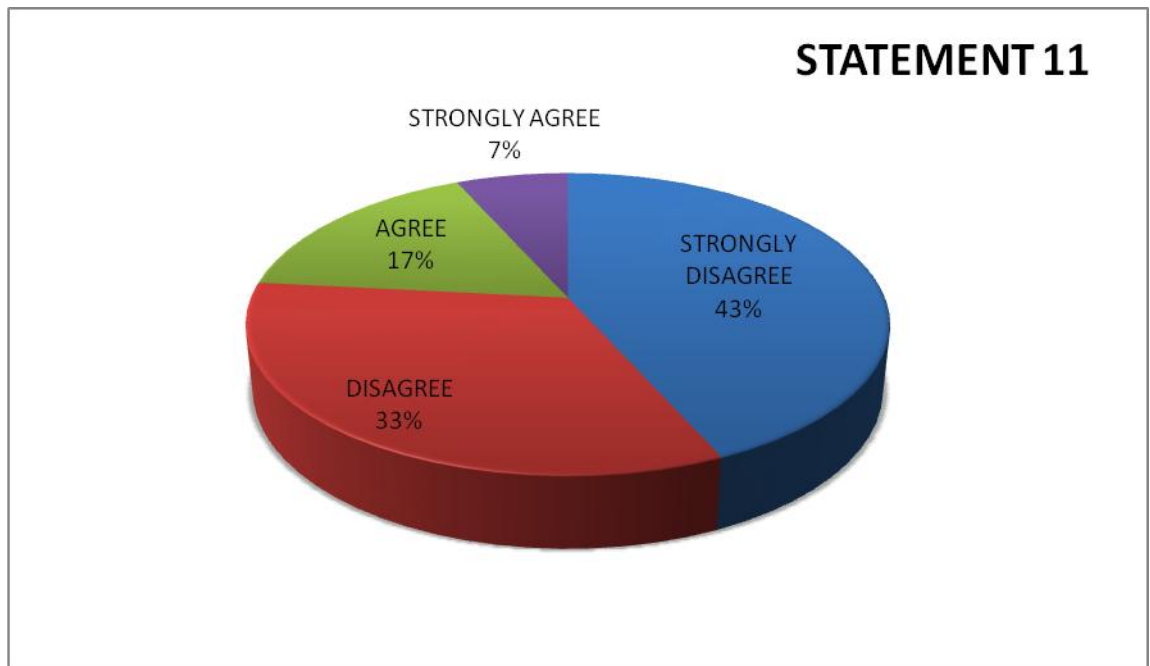
54 percent of the interviewed students agree that employment responsibilities can affect their participation whereas the 46 percent answered negatively to this item. The range of variation is 8 percent.

10. My muscular, sensory and mental fatigues can be the cause of less participation in class.



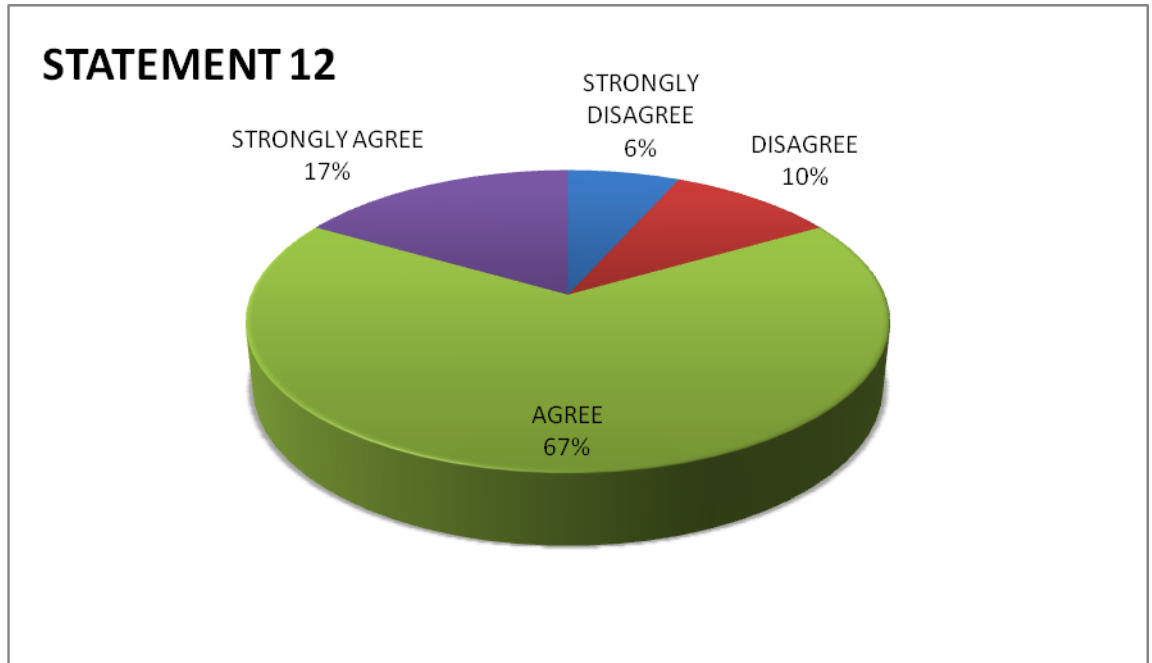
This graph shows that the crushing 80% of students agree that their participation could be affected by physical factors such as muscular, sensory and mental fatigue. The range of variation is 60% which shows the significance of this factor for students' behavior.

11. Age can become an obstacle for me to participate in classroom.



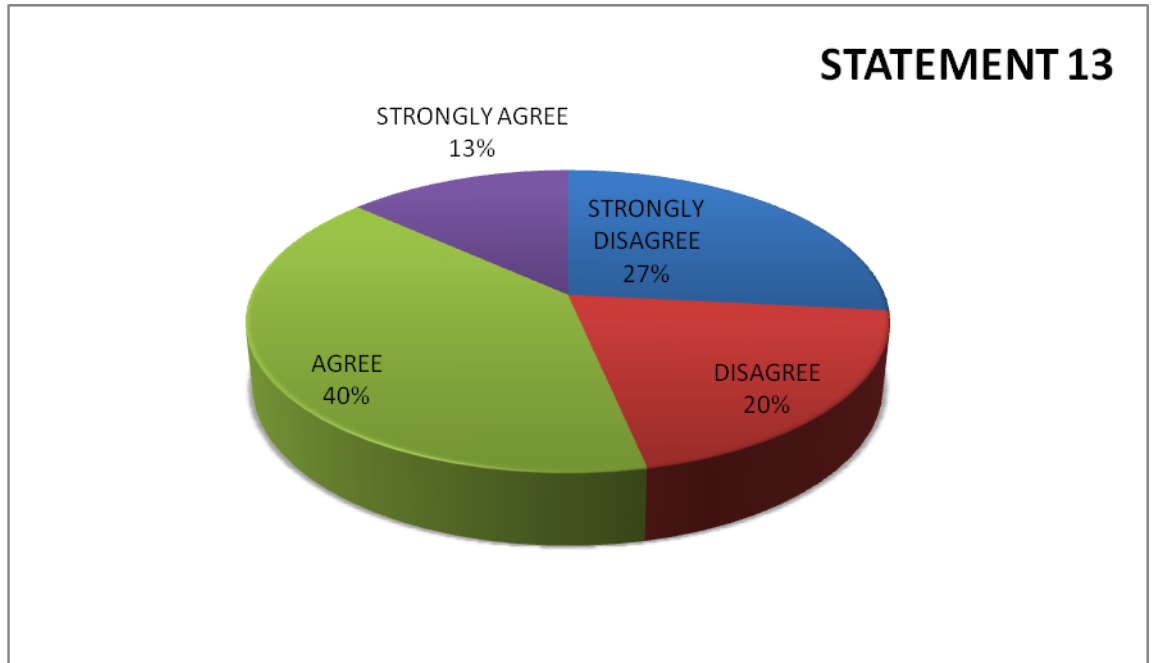
Most of the students strongly disagree that age can become an obstacle for participation with the crushing (striking) 76% of negative answers and only the 24% of the students are in agreement with this item.

12. Psychological feelings such as getting upset by little things and stress disturb my capability to participate.



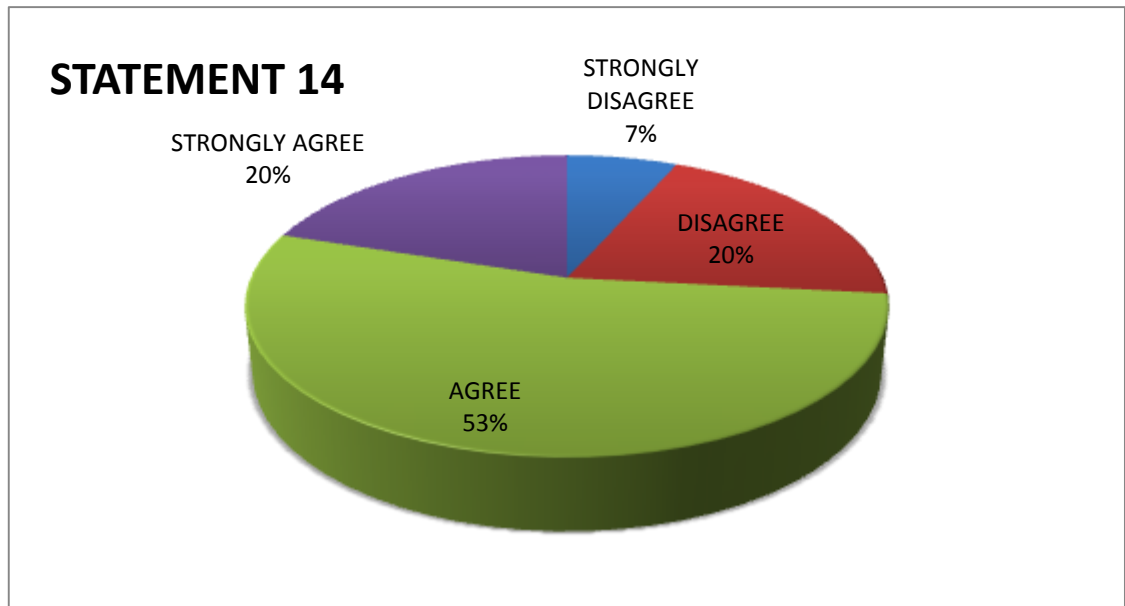
The significant 67 percent of students agree that psychological feelings such as getting upset by little things and stress disturb the capability to participate. Meanwhile only 33% of students disagree.

13. Home problems such as poor home situations, parental neglect, and parental instability constitute a problem for me to participate.



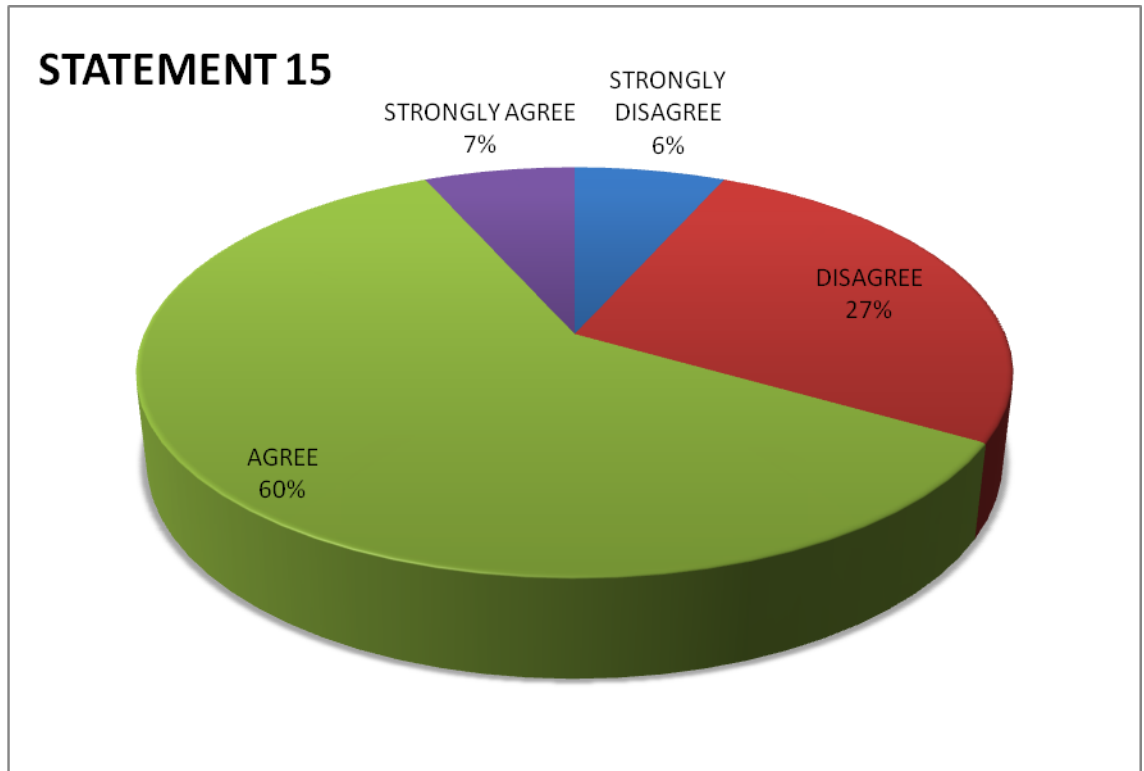
According to the results the majority of students interviewed agree with a 53% of positive answers to this item. Meanwhile 47% of students answered negatively; giving as a result the small but significant range of variation of 6%.

14. The lack of motivation and interest affect my participation.



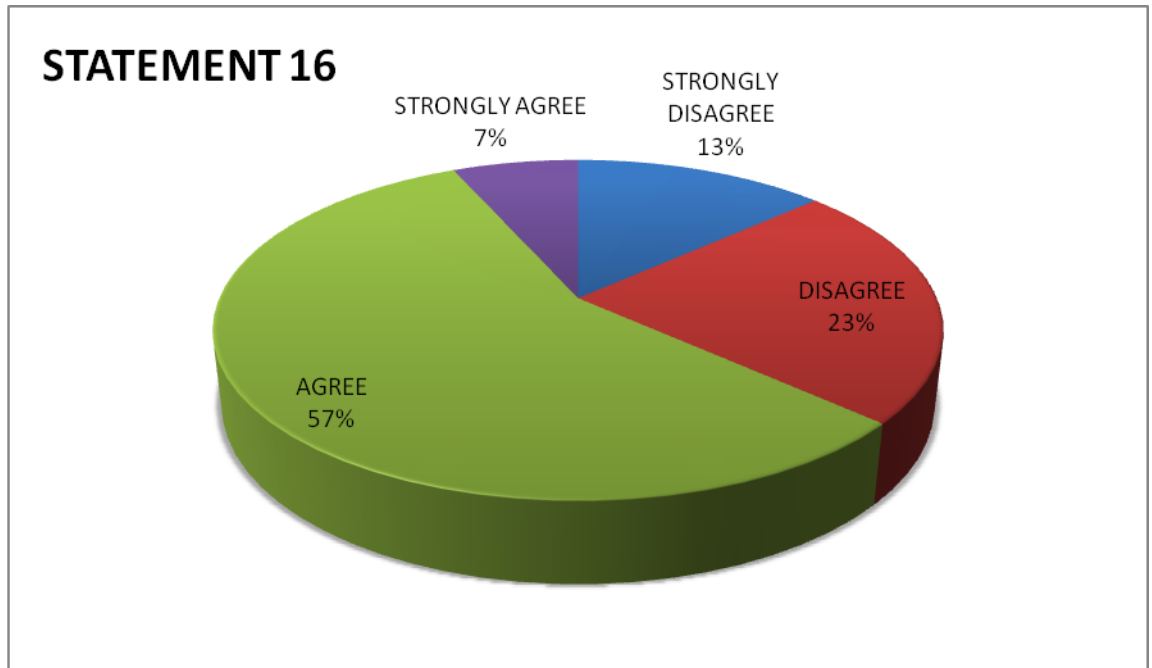
The 83% of the students interviewed give a positive answer and agree that the lack of motivation and interest affect the participation. Meanwhile only 17% said that they are in disagreement this fact. As a result, the range of variation is the stunning 66%.

15. If I do not have a clear image of the subject matter my participation in class is affected.



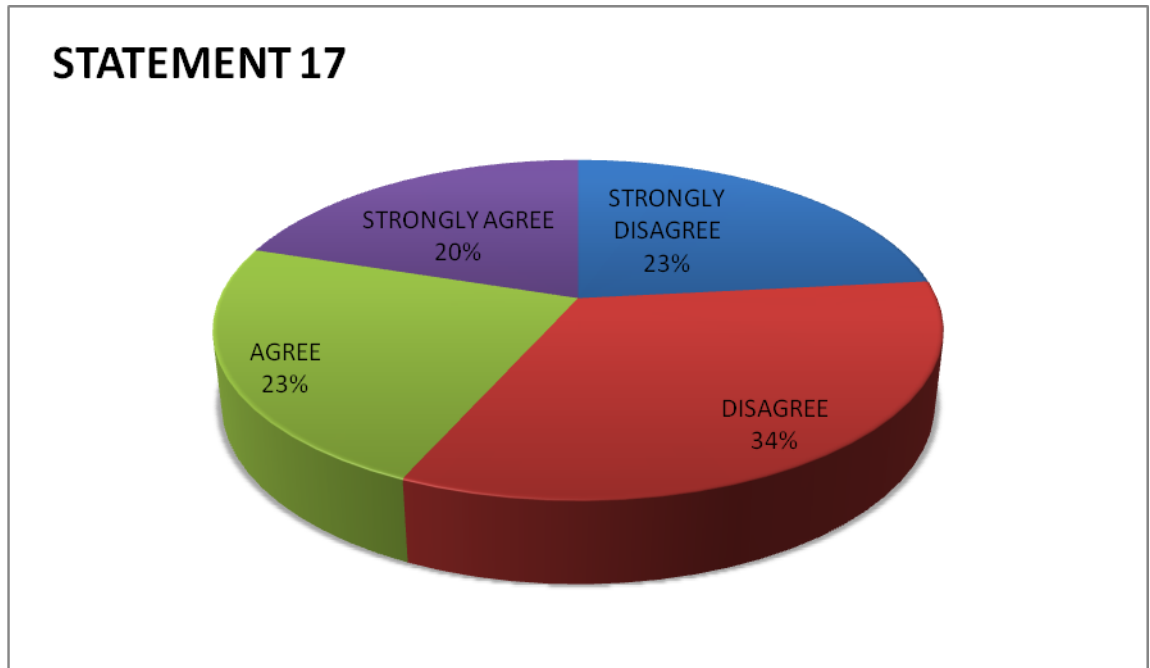
This graph clearly shows a big difference among the options, because 67% of students agree that if there is not a clear image of the subject matter the participation in class is affected, meanwhile 33% disagree with this fact, resulting in a 34% range of variation.

16. The provision of academic and intellectual type of atmosphere for the students can be significant to participate.



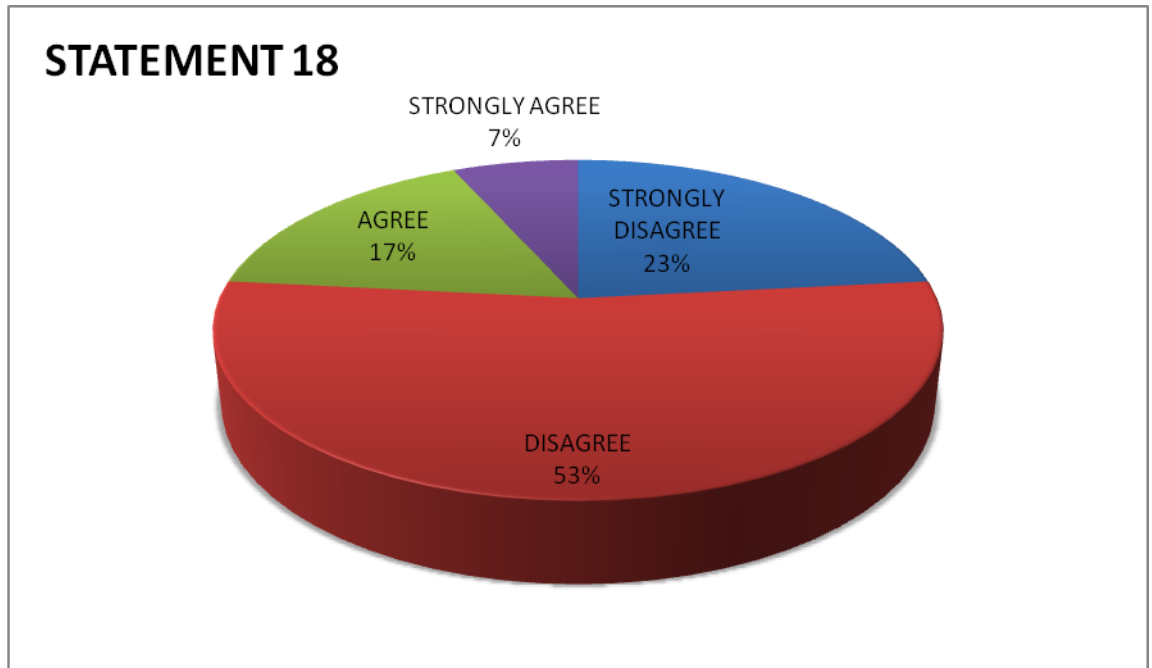
The majority (64%) of interviewed students are in agreement. Only 36% of students answered negatively to this item. The range of variation of 28% gives us an idea of how important it is for students the intellectual and academic environment.

17. The way the teacher encourages students to learn and practice new vocabulary as a whole class can reduce my interests to participate.



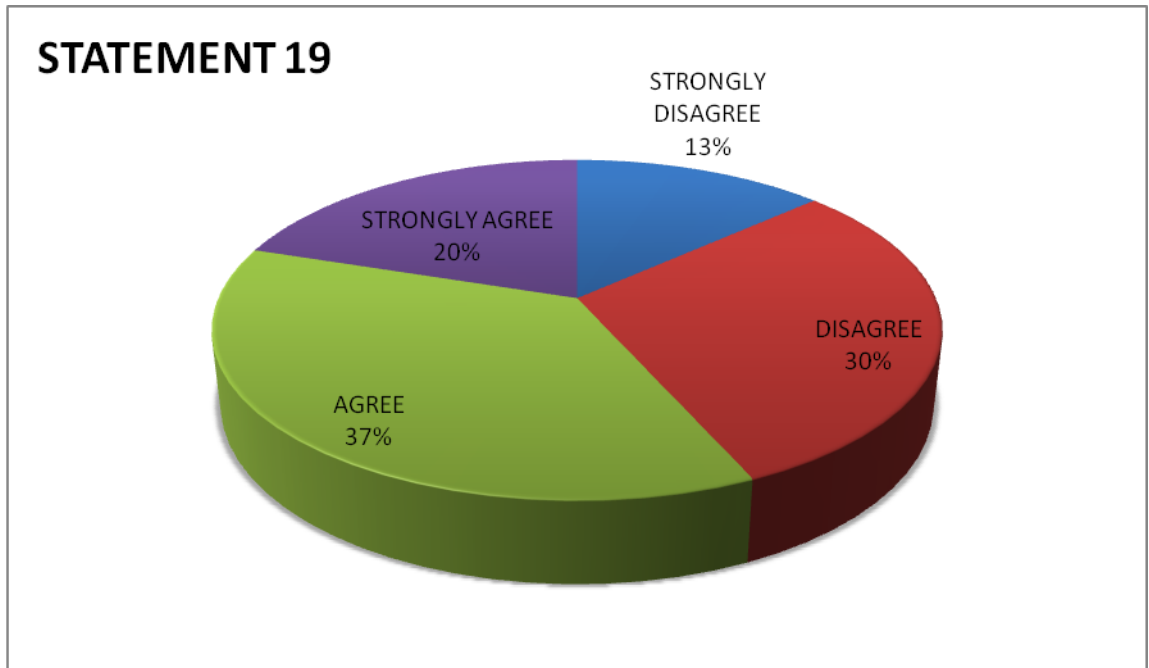
43% of the total of students answered positively to this item whereas the rest 53% of them are not in agreement with this item, giving as a result a range of variation of 10%.

18. Associating pleasant or unpleasant experiences, objects or events with the responses made by students play a significant part in the active participation.



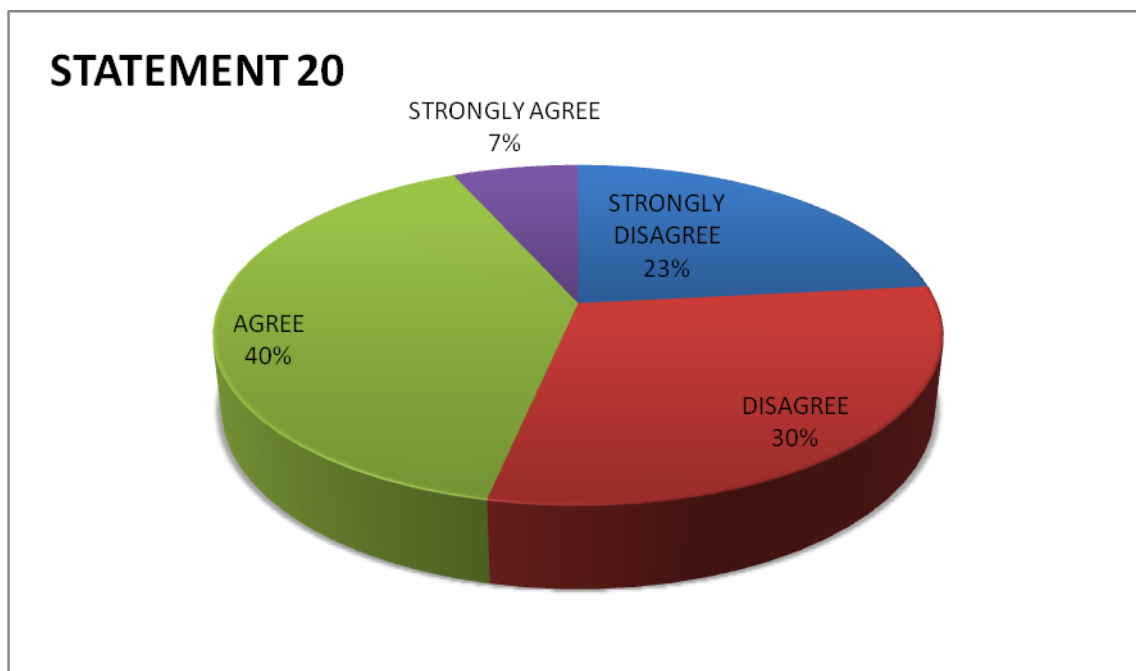
From the total of students that were interviewed, a 24% answered positively to this item. At the same time 76% of them answered negatively. An overwhelming 52% range of variation was the result.

19. The fact of being afraid of failure makes students less participant in class.



53% of students responded they were in agreement with this item, while 47% of them answered negatively, resulting a 6% of range of variation. It may be concluded that fear to failure is important for students when they face the challenge to participate in class.

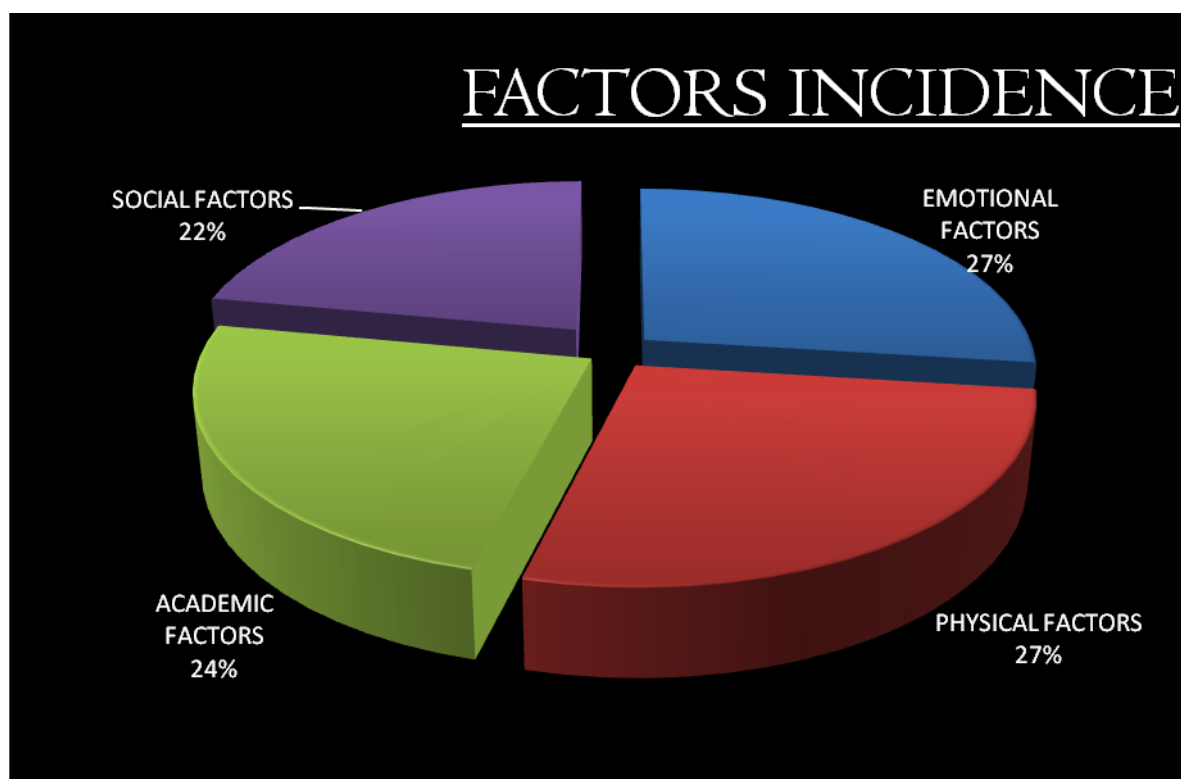
20. The difference between mother tongue and target language is one of the reasons that affect students' participation in class.



47% of students answered that they agree with this item, as 53% of them answered that they were not affected by the difference between L1 and L2. The range of variation becomes only a 6%.

4.2 MAJOR FINDINGS

The information gathered in the present study led to three main findings. The first is that students' oral participation in the FLD at the University of El Salvador is mainly affected by intrapersonal factors rather than interpersonal factors. Their oral participation is more affected by their motivation, their past experiences and the way they see the world. As noticed in the graph below, the four groups of factors taken into account for this study are very close in terms of the level of incidence. Emotional factors and physical factors share the same level of incidence (27%). Academic factors and social factors do not have the same impact in students' active oral participation. However, they are very close to each other in the order of importance (24% and 22% respectively).



The emotional factor (27%) is present through the learners' fear of failure or personality, that is, whether they are introvert and extrovert and of course it can influence their willingness to speak up in class. As noticed in the observation process, extroverted learners will involve themselves actively as they are used to speak up in public. It is important to highlight that the most significant factor (from the emotional area) is the intolerance to others and stress. It seems to be really important for students' in-class participation the fact that students do not tolerate other people's thoughts or comments in class and that it may lead them to avoid oral participation. In order of importance according to the results, the physical factors interfere in students' participation in the second position. Students' in-class active participation is affected mainly by health and it is completely easy to understand this because illnesses affect people's behavior and the willingness to do a specific task, as it is clearly seen in the classroom. Although the academic factor is not the most influential factor, it affects learners' participation mainly because, according to the answers in the focus group, they do not have a clear guidance from the teacher and also because the focus and topics of the class are not presented in such a way so that they do not allow the possibility of an open discussion between pupil and teacher thus paving the way to oral participation.

Finally, social factors, with an incidence of 22%, show that most students agree that family violence, job responsibilities and poverty are the factors that mostly interfere in their in-class active participation. The research team can conclude that oral participation of students in FLD at the University of El Salvador is vulnerable and affected by a large number of factors which

should be taken into consideration in order to counteract them and to create a participation culture. Participation is not affected only in one area (social, academic, physical or emotional). Although in different degrees, the four areas affect students' willingness to participate in class. However, data shows that the hypothesis stated at the beginning of this investigation that literally says: "Academic factors are the most influential factors on students' oral active participation in class" has been rejected by evidence. As shown in the graph above, the academic factors are in the last position of the groups of factors influencing students' participation, so this hypothesis is clearly rejected.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

This research work focused on the factors that influence students' in-class oral active participation, has as a main objective to list the factors that are the most influential on the oral participation for the students from the Foreign Language Department at the University of El Salvador in the selected groups. The results cannot be generalized because the researcher team used convenience group sampling, so the results are a general view of only the groups selected. The final findings of the study lead to the conclusion that the groups of factors that affect the most over students' participation are the emotional and the physical due to the same level of influence they had, according to the information that was collected. It is important for teachers and students to consider this study and do

something about the problematic situations students in general have to face outside the classroom because it has been proved that they affect students' behavior in the classroom. The findings of the study are also important because they can motivate students and teachers to create a participation culture in the FLD, neutralizing the factors that inhibit students from participating.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the factors that influence students' oral participation in class out of the students attending Intermediate Intensive English I courses during term II of the year 2010, some recommendations are proposed.

1, Teachers and students should establish a good rapport in order to identify communication problems and find out solutions to solve some of the common fears such as talking in front of others, making mistakes and slips when trying to communicate their feelings and thoughts.

2. Both students and teachers should implement oral communication strategies and apply them during the English class in order to increase the students' willingness to participate actively in class. The following are proposed:

- Create a culture of participation in class. Students have to speak with each other as much as possible.
- Build oral confidence to practice what the students know in a variety of situations to make language more automatic.

- Create opportunities to exchange real ideas, thoughts, and feelings to learn how to interact in class.
- Try to introduce topics that are relevant and interesting to learners.

3. To take into account this research work for future investigation in this field being this topic too broad just for one study.

- ANNEXES

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

INTERVIEW FOR TEACHERS

Objective: *The purpose of this interview is to find out in a deep manner the opinion of the teachers about the problem and what they think are the main influences in their participation inside the classroom.*

Instruction: Read the following statements and select the number you consider appropriate for each.

1- Strongly disagree

2- Disagree

3- Agree

4- Strongly agree

1. Health problems such as illnesses and irritability make a student inhibited to participate in class.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

2. The poor and depressed background in which the students are rejected and perhaps even held up to ridicule hinder students to participate in class.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

3. The feeling that no one understands students' difficulties nor to take any interest in helping solve them can become a hindrance to participation.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

4. Students with problems of adjusting to new teachers, new peer and group and surroundings face extra hard to settle to participate.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

5. A hot stagnant air condition and noise can retard the participation process.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

6. Drug, alcohol, caffeine, and tobacco can diminish willingness to participate actively.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

7. The exposure to family violence has significant repercussion for students to take part in the class.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

8. The crucial impact on the social nature of learners when adopting new social and cultural behaviors make students less participants in class.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

9. Employment responsibilities, management of dependents, specially small or disabled children can affect the participation of students.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

10. Muscular, sensory and mental fatigues can be causes of less participation in class.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

11. Age can become a hindrance for students to participate properly in classroom.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

12. Psychological feelings such as getting upset by little things, stresses, and uncertainties disturb students' capability to participate.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

13. Home problems such as poor home situations, parental neglect, and parental instability constitute a problem to participate actively.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

14. The lack of motivation and interest affect students' participation.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

15. If a clear image of the subject matter is not formed on students' minds, they will not participate properly.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

16. The provision of academic and intellectual type of atmosphere for the students can be significant to participate.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

17. Faulty methods of teaching such as the way to encourage students to learn and practice new vocabulary as a whole class reduce the students' interests to participate.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

18. The procedure of associating pleasant or unpleasant experiences, objects or events with the responses made by students play a significant part in the active participation.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

19. The fact of being afraid of failure makes students less participant in class.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

20. The difference between mother tongue and target language are one of the reasons of students' less participation in class.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

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

OBSERVATION GUIDE

Objective: *The purpose of this observation guide to recognize is by means of general and specific information get to know the reactions, behavior and feelings of students during the instruction towards their in-class participation.*

Date:	Starting Time:
Subject:	Finishing Time:
Instructor's Name:	Classroom conditions:
Schedule:	Weather:
Classroom:	Number of students:
Observer's Name:	Dominant Gender:
Observation time:	Desk Arrangement:

Class participation

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Participation	Student talked during discussion and shared their thoughts on the subject. Student asked relevant questions and seemed interested in learning. Student took notes over the discussion.	Student talked during discussion and shared their thoughts on the subject. Student seemed interested in learning and may or may not have asked relevant questions. Student did not take notes over the discussion.	Student talked during discussion and shared their thoughts on the subject. Student did not ask any questions and didn't do anything to promote the discussion. Student did not take notes over the discussion.	Student did not talk during discussion and they did not share their thoughts on the subject. Student did not ask any questions and didn't do anything to promote the discussion. Student did not notes over the discussion

Class Participation

CATEGORIA	1-2	3	4	5	6
PATICIPATION	<p>Students in this range often seem on the margins of the class and may have a negative effect on the participation of others. Students receiving a 2 often don't participate because they haven't read the material or done the homework. Students receiving a 1 may be actually disruptive, radiating negative energy via hostile or bored body language, or be overtly rude.</p>	<p>Students come to class prepared, but does not voluntarily contribute to discussions and gives only minimal answers when called upon. Nevertheless these students show interest in the discussion, listen attentively, and take notes. Students in this category may be shy or introverted. The instructor may choose to give such students a 5 if they participate fully in small group discussions or if they make progress in overcoming shyness as the course progresses. Sympathetic counseling of such students often helps.</p>	<p>Students participate in discussion, but in a problematic way. Such students may talk too much, make rambling or tangential contributions, continually interrupt the instructor with digressive questions, bluff their way when unprepared, or otherwise dominate discussions, not acknowledging cues of annoyance from instructor or students. Students in this category often profit from a conference with the instructor.</p>	<p>Students come to class prepared and makes thoughtful comments when called upon, contributes occasionally without prompting: shows interest in and respect for others' views; participates actively in small groups. May also be appropriate to an active participant whose contributions are less developed or cogent than those of a 6 but still advance the conversation.</p>	<p>Students come to class prepared; contributes readily to the conversation but doesn't dominate it: makes thoughtful contributions that advance the conversation; shows interest in and respect for others' views; participates actively in small groups</p>

INTERVIEW FOCUS GROUP

Objective: *The purpose of this interview is to find out in a deep manner the opinion of the students about the problem and what they think is the main factors that influence the in-class participation the classroom.*

Class:

Age:

Instruction: Read the following statements and select the number you consider appropriate for each.

1- Strongly agree

2- Disagree

3- Agree

4- Strongly agree

1. Health problems such as illnesses and irritability make me avoid participate in class.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

2. My participation is affected by a poor and depressed background in which I am rejected and perhaps even held up to ridicule myself.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

3. The feeling that no one understands my difficulties nor to take any interest in helping solve them can become an obstacle to participate in class.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

4. I do not participate in class if I have problems of adjusting to new teachers, new peer and group and surroundings.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

5. If I am in a hot uncomfortable air condition and noise can retard my participation process.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

6. Alcohol, caffeine, and tobacco can diminish my willingness to participate in class.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

7. The exposure to family violence has significant repercussion for me to participate in class.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

8. Controversial topics related to religious, politics, personal believes make me less participates in class.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

9. My Employment responsibilities, management of dependents, specially small or disabled children can affect my participation.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

10. My muscular, sensory and mental fatigues can be causes of less participation in class.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

11. Age can become an obstacle for me to participate in classroom.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

12. Psychological feelings such as getting upset by little things, stresses, and uncertainties disturb my capability to participate.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

13. Home problems such as poor home situations, parental neglect, and parental instability constitute a problem for me to participate.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

14. The lack of motivation and interest affect my participation.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

15. If I do not have a clear image of the subject matter is not formed on students' minds, they will not participate properly.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

16. If the class focuses on pure academic and intellectual topics I participate in class.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

17. The way the teacher encourages students to learn and practice new vocabulary as a whole class can reduce my interests to participate.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

18. My participation in class can be affected if the opinion of another student makes me remind a bad experience.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

19. The fact of being afraid of failure in front of others makes me less participant in class.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

20. My participation can be affected by the difference between mother tongue and target language.

1 ___ 2___ 3___ 4___

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