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ABSTRACT

In the teaching-learning process of the English language, effective communication is fundamental. This research project aimed to identify and analyze the factors that limit the development of oral discourse among Advanced English II students in the Modern Languages program at the University of El Salvador during the first and second semesters of 2023. Using a quantitative method and a correlational design, the relationship between factors hindering oral production and effective communication was established. Data collection was conducted through questionnaires and class observations, clarifying the correlation between limiting factors and effective communication. The results revealed several areas of difficulty affecting oral production, such as grammatical issues, limited vocabulary, intonation, coherence, and fluency. Approximately 60% of the students exhibited fluency problems, significantly impacting their effective communication ability. These data were obtained through class observations and closed-ended question surveys. After identifying the main limiting factors, the study concluded with recommendations to increase and diversify vocabulary, promote confidence to reduce hesitation and create phonetic activities to improve communication skills. These recommendations aim to reduce oral expression problems in English and enhance effective communication.

***Key words:* effective communication, oral difficulties, grammar, fluency, vocabulary.**

RESUMEN

En el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje del idioma inglés, la comunicación efectiva es fundamental. Este proyecto de investigación tuvo como objetivo principal identificar y analizar los factores que limitan el desarrollo del discurso oral en los estudiantes de Inglés Avanzado II de la carrera de Lenguas Modernas en la Universidad de El Salvador durante el primer y segundo semestre de 2023. Utilizando un método cuantitativo y un diseño correlacional, se estableció la relación entre los factores que dificultan la producción oral y la comunicación efectiva. La recolección de datos se realizó mediante cuestionarios y observaciones de clase, clarificando la correlación entre los factores limitantes y la comunicación efectiva. Los resultados revelaron varias áreas de dificultad que afectan la producción oral, tales como problemas gramaticales, vocabulario limitado, entonación, coherencia y fluidez. Aproximadamente el 60% de los estudiantes presentaron problemas de fluidez, impactando significativamente en su capacidad de comunicación efectiva. Estos datos se obtuvieron a través de observaciones de clase y encuestas con preguntas de respuesta cerrada. Tras identificar los principales factores limitantes, el estudio concluyó con recomendaciones para incrementar y diversificar el vocabulario, promover la confianza para reducir las vacilaciones, y crear actividades fonéticas para mejorar las habilidades comunicativas. Estas recomendaciones buscan reducir los problemas de expresión oral en inglés y mejorar la comunicación efectiva.

***Palabras Clave:* comunicación efectiva, dificultades en la producción oral, gramática, fluidez, vocabulario.**

INTRODUCTION

Learning English as a second language has become vital for non-native speakers in today's globalized world. Language proficiency is not only a cornerstone of communication but also a key human capacity that opens doors to educational, professional, and cultural opportunities. The present article entitled "Exploring Oral Discourse Difficulties in Advanced English II Students at the University of El Salvador," addresses the critical importance of effective oral communication skills in conveying and exchanging ideas, thoughts, and opinions clearly and coherently. This is crucial for language students pursuing academic and professional growth and success in an increasingly interconnected global world.

Despite the significance of effective oral communication, many language students face substantial difficulties, especially in oral discourse. These challenges can persist even at advanced levels, hindering students' ability to express themselves fluently and confidently in academic and professional settings. To investigate this issue in depth, a comprehensive class observation was conducted to document the students' oral performance. The observations revealed that students enrolled in the Advanced English II course at the University of El Salvador experience serious speaking problems, despite their advanced level status.

The necessity of this research emerged from the urgent need to identify the root causes and main issues that language students face regarding speaking performance. By pinpointing these problems, educators can better focus on addressing them when teaching English as a second language, especially at beginner and intermediate levels. This proactive approach aims to prevent the persistence of oral discourse difficulties as students' progress to more advanced

stages of language learning. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the factors contributing to deficient performance in speaking skills among 3rd-year Modern Languages students in the first and second semesters of 2023 at the University of El Salvador.

This research provides valuable insights for teachers, curriculum developers, and future researchers to enhance and implement more effective approaches starting from basic and intermediate levels. These early stages are crucial for sharpening speaking skills and building a solid foundation before students proceed to advanced courses. By addressing oral discourse difficulties early on, educators can help students develop greater confidence and proficiency in their speaking abilities.

The findings and discussions presented in this project answer the research question, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors affecting oral discourse. This study not only illuminates the challenges faced by advanced English learners but also offers potential strategies for improvement. By examining the specific context of the University of El Salvador, this research contributes to the broader field of second language acquisition and pedagogy, potentially informing best practices for enhancing oral communication skills in diverse educational settings.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the specific speaking problems that limit the development and improvement in the oral production of English students currently attending the Advanced English II course in the 3rd year of modern languages at the University of El Salvador in the first semester of 2023?

HYPOTHESIS

H1: Students in the 3rd year of the Modern Languages program at the University of El Salvador, enrolled in the Advanced English II course, who have limited exposure to the target language outside the classroom and a restricted vocabulary, exhibit a more pronounced deficit in speech production.

H2: Pronunciation errors, and limited vocabulary usage, are the main factors contributing to speaking problems among students in the Advanced English II course during the 3rd year of Modern Languages at the University of El Salvador in the first semester of 2023.

1. METHODOLOGY

This study investigated the speaking problems faced by students enrolled in the Advanced English II course during the 3rd year of Modern Languages at the University of El Salvador and their impact on effective communication. There are several approaches to conducting this type of research, in this case, a quantitative approach was chosen to investigate and determine the relationship between speaking problems and effective communication since it is the most appropriate approach because it provides objective measurement. According to (Sekaran, 2003), by utilizing numerical data, this approach enables a clear understanding of the student's speaking abilities.

The quantitative approach allowed us to generalize our findings by analyzing data from a representative sample of students. This enabled us to extend the results to the broader student population, offering valuable insights into common speaking challenges in similar educational settings, thus strengthening the study's external validity. Additionally, the quantitative method supported statistical analysis, which helped identify patterns, trends, and relationships within the data. Through these techniques, correlations were explored, comparisons were drawn, and key factors contributing to speaking difficulties were identified.

In addition, a correlational design was chosen for this research. Correlational research explores the relationships and associations between variables without manipulating them (Sekaran, 2003). Through the use of a correlational design, we investigated whether there is a meaningful relationship between variables such as out-of-class exposure to the target language, vocabulary skills, and the degree of speaking difficulties. This design allows us to pinpoint potential factors that may affect students' speaking performance.

The target population for this study comprised 34 students enrolled in the Advanced English II course during the first semester of 2023. The students were chosen from the course attendance list through a random selection process. Randomness in this sense means that for each selection (collecting one datum) every member of the population has an equal chance of being drawn (Drott, 1969). Using this selection technique, we can generalize the results to the entire population. A simple random sampling technique was implemented to select 10 participants from this population. In quantitative research, a good sample is representative of the population from which it was selected, and selecting a representative sample is not a haphazard process (Airasian, 2011).

Data Collection Strategies: Techniques and Instruments

Two primary data collection strategies were utilized in this research: surveys and class observations as technique and the questionnaire and the observation guide as instruments.

A method of data collection is simply a technique that is used to collect empirical research data. The data collected in quantitative studies are based on a structured plan which guides the researcher to what data to be collected, how long, and how to collect them. The information gathered must be quantified by doing statistical analysis. Data collection methods are used to collect data in a systematic way (Gürbüz, 2017).

Instrumentation refers to all the tools or means that researchers use to collect, seize, and analyze the variables of interest in the data-collection process. (Takona, 2002) cataloged research instruments as essential tools to measure variables such as opinion, concepts, attitude, and so on.

Surveys

According to (Babbie, 2021) a survey is a commonly used instrument in quantitative research for collecting data from a sample of individuals or groups to gather information about their characteristics, opinions, attitudes, behaviors, or experiences. In this research, a closed-ended questionnaire was developed to gather specific data on the speaking problems faced by students. The questionnaire was designed to assess various factors influencing speech production, including grammar, vocabulary, confidence, hesitation, stress, and intonation. The content validity of the questionnaire was ensured through expert review by a researcher in the field of language education. The questionnaire was administered electronically using a Google Forms link to the participants.

Class observation

Class observation is a data collection method in which researchers directly observe and document behaviors, interactions, and events that occur within a classroom setting (Christensen, 2014). An observation guide was developed to document student performance in oral production during class activities. The observer attended a 2-hour class session to observe, document, and evaluate the linguistic and macro-skills performance of students and compare their questionnaire responses to their actual speaking behavior. The observation guide focused on aspects like grammar usage, vocabulary selection, fluency, hesitation, pronunciation, and overall clarity of communication. This qualitative data from classroom observations provided valuable insights for a more comprehensive analysis. Quantitative data from the surveys were analyzed using descriptive statistics. This analysis provided information about the frequency and distribution of speaking problems reported by the students. The qualitative data from the observation guide were analyzed thematically, focusing on recurring patterns and themes related to the students' speaking difficulties observed in the classroom setting.

2. RESULTS

This section presents the findings from the study conducted to explore the oral discourse difficulties faced by the population studied. The research aimed to identify and analyze the specific challenges that hinder effective communication among Advanced English II students at the University of El Salvador. The study utilized both quantitative analysis and descriptive statistics to evaluate the impact of various factors on oral communication skills. The data were meticulously collected and processed using Microsoft Excel, enabling a comprehensive examination of the results.

The study adopted surveys and observation guides as primary instruments to identify key issues related to speaking difficulties that negatively impacted effective communication. Surveys are descriptive assessment tools. Like other assessment tools, the validity and reliability of the data obtained from surveys depend, in large part, on the rigor of the development process (Jeffery Hill, 2022). The rigorous development and implementation of these tools were crucial in providing accurate insights into the oral discourse challenges faced by students.

The data collected through these instruments offered a detailed overview of the prevalent problems encountered by students in their speaking practices, including aspects such as pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and vocabulary. To facilitate a clear and structured understanding of these findings, the information was organized into representative tables and various graphical representations. These visual aids were instrumental in highlighting specific areas where students experienced the most significant difficulties, thus providing a clear indication of the major factors affecting their oral discourse. The visualizations also allowed for easy comparison between different issues, making it possible to prioritize areas that require immediate attention and intervention.

Table 1

Reveals the data obtained from the survey used for the students.

Student s	Questions						
	Gramma r problems	Adequate vocabular y	Hesitatio n and pauses	Understood by Others (Intelligibility)	(Comprehensibility)	Structure Confidenc e	Idea Organizatio n (Fluency)
1	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
3	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
5	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
6	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
8	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No

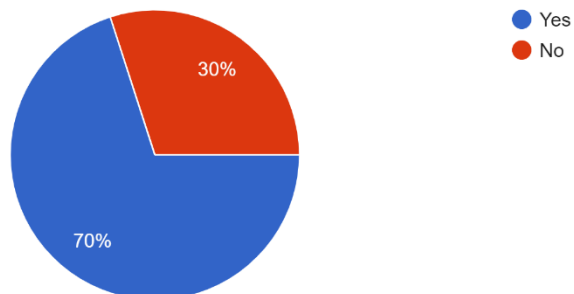
Note: Survey results show factors affecting effective communication among students, with hesitation and fluency issues highlighted.

The table displays the results of a survey aimed at identifying key challenges in speaking that hinder effective communication among students. Participants were asked to respond 'Yes' or 'No' to questions related to several aspects, including grammar problems, adequacy of vocabulary, hesitation, and pauses, intelligibility (being understood by others), comprehensibility (clarity of structure and confidence), and fluency (idea organization). The data collected reveals that the most common difficulties are hesitation and pauses, along with challenges in maintaining a clear structure and fluency during communication.

Graph 1

Do you have problems with grammar when speaking in English?

10 respuestas

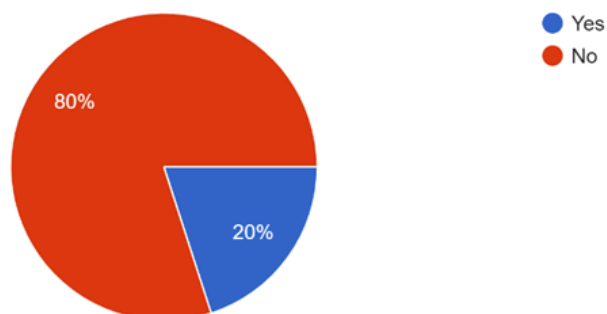


Note: 70% of students reported grammar issues affecting their oral production in class.

In response to the first question, 7 out of the 10 students in the sample, representing 70% of the total, acknowledged being aware of grammar issues that significantly impact their oral production in the classroom. This high percentage underscores the importance of strong grammar skills in effective communication. The data suggest that inadequate grammar knowledge can create barriers in conveying ideas clearly and confidently, thereby impeding students' ability to communicate effectively during oral activities. These findings highlight the need for targeted grammar instruction to enhance students' communicative competence in academic settings.

Graph 2

It is your vocabulary level adequate to maintain a fluent conversation?
10 respuestas

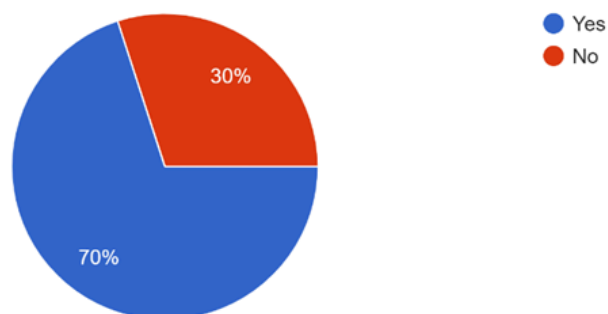


Note: 80% of students feel they lack vocabulary for fluent real-life conversations.

In response to the second question, 80% of the surveyed students expressed the belief that they lack sufficient vocabulary to maintain a fluent conversation in real-life situations. This significant percentage emphasizes that a limited vocabulary is one of the major obstacles to effective oral production and communication. The findings suggest that students struggle to find the right words when speaking, which can lead to hesitations, pauses, and ultimately, a communication breakdown. Enhancing vocabulary knowledge is therefore crucial for improving students' ability to engage in more fluid and effective spoken interactions in both academic and real-world contexts.

Graph 3

Do you have problems when producing consonants and vowels in your oral production?
10 respuestas



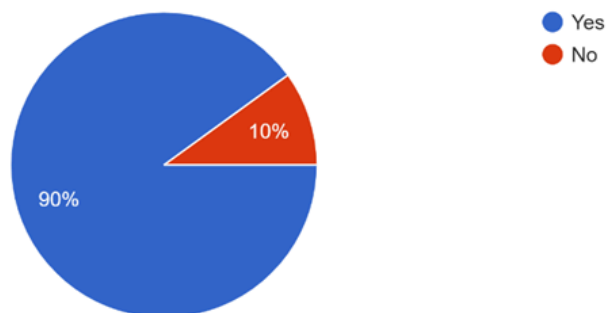
Note: 70% of students reported difficulties with consonant and vowel pronunciation, highlighting the importance of phonology.

To improve speech production and ensure effective communication, the phonological aspect plays a crucial role in achieving correct and articulate pronunciation. In this study, 70% of the surveyed students reported experiencing difficulties with the pronunciation of consonants and vowels. This finding underscores the significance of phonology as a key factor influencing English speaking proficiency. The challenges with phonetic accuracy can hinder clear and understandable speech, making it essential to address phonological issues in language instruction. By focusing on improving pronunciation skills, students can enhance their overall communicative effectiveness and reduce barriers to effective oral expression.

Graph 4

Do you feel confident using correct sentence structure and grammar when communicating in English?

10 respuestas

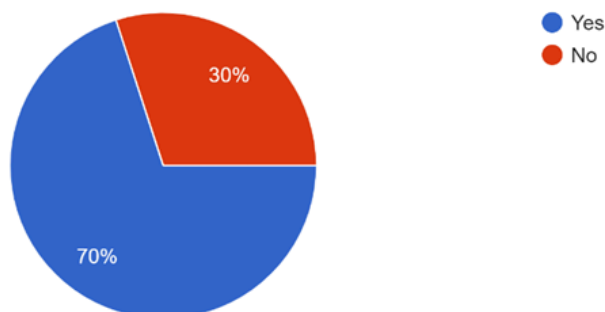


Note: 90% of students feel confident with sentence structure and grammar, though some still face challenges.

In response to this question, 90% of the surveyed students reported feeling confident about their sentence structure and grammar. This response indicates that students recognize that correct grammar and sentence structure contribute to their confidence in speaking. However, this confidence does not necessarily eliminate the challenges they face with grammatical usage during conversations. Despite their awareness of the benefits of proper grammatical structures, some students still encounter difficulties in applying these rules consistently while speaking. This highlights that while a strong understanding of grammar can enhance confidence, ongoing support and practice are needed to address persistent grammatical issues in oral communication.

Graph 5

Do you effectively organize your ideas to maintain coherence in your English communication?
10 respuestas



Note: 70% of students feel they can structure their thoughts well, though some still struggle with idea organization.

Organizing ideas before speaking is essential for clear and coherent communication. According to the survey, 70% of students believe they are capable of effectively structuring their thoughts for coherent conversations. This indicates a general confidence in their ability to organize ideas before speaking. However, it is important to recognize that some students continue to experience difficulties in properly arranging their thoughts. Despite their overall confidence, these ongoing struggles with idea organization can impact their ability to communicate clearly and effectively. Addressing these challenges is crucial for improving students' overall communication skills and ensuring that their spoken messages are both structured and understandable.

Those are the main problems that affect students in their speaking performance, similarly, there are also other factors that also greatly affect effective communication for example,

hesitations and pauses are frequent issues. In this case 80% of students surveyed acknowledged these difficulties when speaking English. This implies that most students feel insecure, likely due to a lack of confidence, fluency, or familiarity with the language. In addition, Intelligibility is key to effective communication, this means that if there is no intelligibility, it is really difficult to be understood while students are communicating. In this case, 70% of surveyed students indicate they struggle to convey clear messages in English. This challenge may stem from pronunciation problems or a lack of sufficient vocabulary.

To complement the findings obtained from the first research instrument, a second instrument, an observation guide, was meticulously implemented to gather valuable data, thereby allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing oral discourse among students. The observation guide served as a crucial tool to contrast and validate the data obtained through the survey, providing a well-rounded perspective on the students' oral performance. According to Johnson & Turner 2003 as cited in (Zohrabi, 2013) observation enables the researcher to combine it with questionnaires and interviews to collect “relatively objective firsthand information”.

The results presented in this section are grounded in the systematic observation of students' oral performance, as detailed in the observation guide. According to Burns 1999 as cited in (Zohrabi, 2013). When using this method, the researcher observes the “classroom interactions and events, as they actually occur”. This guide was meticulously designed to capture some factors influencing oral discourse, including pronunciation accuracy, grammatical structures, fluency, and the use of vocabulary. By focusing on these key aspects, the observation guide provided a comprehensive framework to assess the oral expression difficulties encountered by students in Advanced English II.

The observation process involved multiple sessions where students' oral interactions were carefully monitored, evaluated, and documented using the criteria outlined in the guide. This systematic approach ensured that the data collected was both reliable and reflective of the real challenges faced by students. The analysis of this observational data uncovered several prevalent issues in oral discourse, offering valuable insights into the common obstacles that hinder effective communication. The following sections present the specific findings, supported by a detailed table derived from the observational data, to clearly illustrate the oral expression challenges identified. This in-depth analysis not only highlights the areas where students struggle the most but also provides a foundation for developing targeted interventions to improve their communication skills.

Table 2

Summary of Key Oral Discourse Difficulties by Observation Guide

Criteria	Yes	No	Total	Percentage Yes	Percentage No	Major Problem
Pronunciation	33	4	37	89.19%	10.81%	Yes
Fluency	21	16	37	56.76%	43.24%	Yes
Grammar	27	10	37	72.97%	27.03%	Yes
Vocabulary	24	13	37	64.86%	35.14%	Yes
Confidence	15	22	37	40.54%	59.46%	No

Note: Table 2 summarizes key oral discourse difficulties, identifying Pronunciation, Fluency, Grammar, and Vocabulary as major problems.

Table 2 provides a comprehensive summary of key oral discourse difficulties observed in Advanced English II students using three distinct observation guides. The table categorizes the observed criteria into Pronunciation, Fluency, Grammar, Vocabulary, and Confidence. For each criterion, it details the number of 'Yes' and 'No' responses from each guide, along with the total responses and percentages across all guides. The 'Major Problem' column highlights which criteria were deemed significant issues based on the majority percentage of 'Yes' responses. According to the table, Pronunciation, Fluency, Grammar, and Vocabulary were identified as major problems affecting students' oral discourse, while Confidence was not classified as a major issue. This classification helps pinpoint areas where students may require additional support to improve their speaking proficiency.

3. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to analyze the factors contributing to deficient speaking performance among third-year Modern Languages students at the University of El Salvador. Using a quantitative approach that included surveys and classroom observations, several key issues were identified that impact students' oral communication skills in English.

The findings revealed that grammar difficulties are a significant obstacle, with 70% of surveyed students reporting challenges in this area. This is consistent with classroom observations, where grammatical errors were frequently noted during student participation. These challenges may stem from limited exposure to the target language and low confidence levels, highlighting the need for increased practical application of grammatical concepts.

Vocabulary emerged as another critical factor, with 80% of students indicating that their vocabulary was inadequate for maintaining fluent conversations. Observations further corroborated this, as students occasionally struggled to find appropriate words, disrupting the flow of discourse. This underscores the importance of vocabulary expansion activities and increased opportunities for authentic language use.

Hesitations and pauses were identified as significant issues by 80% of surveyed students, which was consistent with classroom observations. These interruptions in speech flow could be attributed to vocabulary limitations, lack of confidence, or difficulties in real-time language processing. Addressing these issues through targeted fluency exercises and increased speaking practice could greatly enhance students' communicative abilities.

Phonological issues, including problems with stress, intonation, and articulation of specific sounds, were reported by a majority of students and confirmed through observations. These difficulties can significantly impact intelligibility and overall communication effectiveness, highlighting the need for focused pronunciation training.

Despite these challenges, it is noteworthy that 70% of students reported feeling capable of organizing their ideas coherently, which was generally supported by classroom observations. This suggests that students have a foundation in logical thought structuring, which can be built upon to improve overall communication skills.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the factors affecting oral skills among third-year Modern Language students at the University of El Salvador. Through the analysis and interpretation of data collected from various instruments, the research question and stated objectives of this inquiry were satisfactorily addressed. Based on the results from the sample, the researchers concluded that grammar, vocabulary, confidence, fluency, and pronunciation, among other factors, represented significant challenges for the majority of surveyed students. These obstacles hinder students' oral discourse, impacting their ability to communicate successfully in English.

This finding is particularly noteworthy as effective communication is key to learning a second language. Grammar emerged as one of the most troublesome obstacles, affecting 70% of respondents. This high percentage indicates that students struggle significantly with grammatical structures, likely due to limited exposure to authentic language use, lack of confidence in applying grammatical rules, and potentially insufficient motivation to master complex structures. These grammatical challenges directly impact spoken communication, as students may hesitate or make frequent errors when attempting to construct sentences in real-time conversations.

Vocabulary issues were even more prevalent, with 80% of students reporting difficulties in achieving fluency due to limited and inadequate word selection. This suggests a critical need for expanded vocabulary instruction and more opportunities for students to practice using a wider range of words in context. The high percentage affected by vocabulary limitations indicates that this is a major barrier to effective oral communication for these learners. Confidence emerged as another crucial factor negatively impacting students' oral skills. The lack of confidence hinders students from participating actively in class and speaking up, creating a

cycle where limited practice further erodes confidence. This psychological barrier is significant, as language learning requires active engagement and a willingness to take risks in using the target language.

On a more positive note, 70% of respondents confirmed having a certain level of intelligibility, allowing them to be generally understood. This suggests that despite the challenges, many students have developed some base level of communicative competence. However, the goal should be to move beyond mere intelligibility towards more proficient and nuanced oral expression.

As demonstrated throughout this inquiry, the ability to communicate effectively through speech is a pivotal skill in language learning. The researchers confirmed that students enrolled in the Advanced English II course during the 3rd year of Modern Languages at the University of El Salvador face serious problems in oral production. These issues impair their ability to acquire and use the English language accurately and proficiently. The findings of this study have important implications for curriculum design and teaching methodologies in the Modern Languages program.

There is a clear need for increased focus on oral skills development, perhaps through more interactive classroom activities, additional speaking practice opportunities, and targeted instruction in areas like grammar and vocabulary within communicative contexts. Additionally, addressing the confidence issue through supportive classroom environments and gradual exposure to speaking tasks could help students overcome psychological barriers to oral production. Furthermore, these results suggest that a more integrated approach to language

teaching might be beneficial, where grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation are not taught in isolation but are consistently applied in meaningful speaking contexts. This could help students bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application in real-world communication scenarios.

In conclusion, while this study has identified significant challenges facing students in their oral English skills, it also provides a roadmap for potential improvements in the language learning program. By addressing these specific areas of difficulty and adopting more holistic, communication-focused teaching strategies, the University of El Salvador can work towards enhancing the oral proficiency of its Modern Languages students, better preparing them for the communicative demands of using English in academic and professional contexts.

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