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**THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN THE LACK OF ORAL ACTIVITIES AND
STUDENTS' POOR FLUENCY**

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RESUMEN:

El presente artículo expone los hallazgos del estudio “La ausencia de actividades orales en la clase de Inglés Intensivo Avanzado I está asociada a la fluidez oral de los estudiantes que cursan el segundo año de Lenguas Modernas”, realizado en el Campus Multidisciplinario del Este de la Universidad de El Salvador. El objetivo fue determinar si la falta de actividades orales en clase se relaciona con la baja fluidez oral de los estudiantes. El estudio tuvo un enfoque cuantitativo y un diseño relacional para analizar el grado de asociación entre ambas variables. Fue prospectivo y transversal, registrando y analizando los datos en un solo momento. La muestra estuvo conformada por 45 estudiantes seleccionados aleatoriamente de una población total de 71.

La recolección de datos se efectuó mediante una encuesta anónima, utilizando un cuestionario estructurado de 15 preguntas cerradas en escala Likert, orientadas a los indicadores de las variables. Para el análisis estadístico se empleó SPSS, realizando primero un análisis descriptivo y luego la prueba Chi-cuadrado de independencia para determinar la asociación. La fuerza de relación se midió con el coeficiente de Fisher, y se utilizó un nivel de significancia del 0.05.

Los resultados demostraron que los estudiantes presentan dificultades en fluidez y precisión oral, evidenciadas en problemas de pronunciación, acentuación, entonación, gramática, coherencia, cohesión y uso del vocabulario. Se confirmó la existencia de una asociación significativa entre la ausencia de actividades orales y la fluidez oral, con un valor de 0.04, inferior al nivel de significancia establecido. Además, se determinó una fuerza de relación de 0.79 según el coeficiente de Fisher. En conclusión, se aceptó la hipótesis de trabajo: “The poor oral fluency of the students is associated with the lack of oral activities”.

Palabras clave: Fluidez oral, ausencia de actividades orales, asociación, problemas de fluidez, rendimiento

ABSTRACT

This article presents the findings of the study titled “The absence of oral activities in the Advanced Intensive English I class is associated with the oral fluency of second-year Modern Language students,” conducted at the Eastern Multidisciplinary Campus of the University of El Salvador in San Miguel. The main objective was to determine whether the lack of oral activities in class is related to students’ low oral fluency. The study followed a quantitative approach and a relational design to analyze the degree of association between both variables. It was prospective and cross-sectional, as data were collected and analyzed at a single point in time. The sample consisted of 45 randomly selected students from a total population of 71.

Data were collected through an anonymous survey using a structured questionnaire with 15 closed-ended Likert-scale questions based on the indicators of the study variables. For statistical analysis, SPSS software was used. A descriptive analysis was carried out first, followed by the Chi-square test of independence to determine the association between variables. The strength of the relationship was measured using Fisher’s coefficient, and a significance level of 0.05 was applied.

The results showed that students present difficulties in oral fluency and accuracy, demonstrated through problems with vowel and consonant pronunciation, word stress and intonation, grammar, coherence, cohesion, and vocabulary use. A significant association was confirmed between the absence of oral activities and students’ oral fluency, with a value of 0.04, which is below the established significance level. Additionally, a relationship strength of 0.79 was found using Fisher’s coefficient. In conclusion, the working hypothesis was accepted: “The poor oral fluency of the students is associated with the lack of oral activities.”

Keywords: Oral fluency, absence of oral activities, association, fluency problems, performance

INTRODUCTION

The acquisition of English as a second language is a complex process that involves various skills. One of the key components of language learning is the development of oral proficiency, which includes the ability to communicate fluently and confidently in spoken English. Understanding oral fluency is important since it refers to the ability that someone has in a second language to produce or comprehend utterances smoothly, rapidly, and accurately (Segalowitz 2003, as cited in Afna, 2018). In this manner, fluency in speech production denotes the skill to express without disruptions, hesitations, or challenges. Moreover, fluency entails the ability to express effortlessly in communication through accuracy, fluidity, and speed (Zanetti, 2017).

However, to develop fluency, teachers need to develop and create some oral activities that might help students to develop a good speaking proficiency. Nevertheless, in some cases students often face a lack of opportunities to practice their speaking skills in the traditional English classroom setting; hence, the importance of knowing what oral activities involve. Oral language activities can be described as tasks that focus on improving an individual's oral communication skills. In this way, oral language activities can help to improve different skills, such as the level of vocabulary (both spoken and written), the fluency levels, and phonemic expression. In addition, these activities enhance pronunciation and rhythm when speaking, as well as developing communication and comprehension skills.

Furthermore, it is important to mention that oral activities are an essential component in any language learning process, as it allows and helps speakers to communicate fluently and confidently in spoken English. Nevertheless, in some curricula, writing, reading, and listening skills are taught through different and interactive activities, in which students are constantly being exposed to the language. However, these activities are often focused on reinforcing other skills rather than fostering speaking proficiency, being this situation for the Second-year students of Modern Languages in the University of El Salvador.

In order to establish the problem, the research team made an observation in the Advanced Intensive English I class that took a period of two days (two hours per day) with the aim of gathering detailed information about the current state of the absence of oral activities and the student's fluency. Thus, it was noticed that the activities developed in the class were more focused on reinforcing the other three macro-skills rather than speaking macro- skill, compromising the students' oral proficiency as they have limited chances to practice the language. Based on this preliminary observation, the research group identified the most notable problem for the second- year students: the absence of oral activities, which is closely associated with the students' poor oral fluency.

Therefore, the main purpose of this study was to establish whether there was an association between the absence of oral activities and the student's poor oral fluency, as students encountered difficulties when expressing themselves orally. By analyzing that possible association, this research aimed to classify the different types of oral activities developed in the English classroom and to identify the problems that students faced when trying to express themselves effectively. Additionally, the importance of this study lies in understanding to what extent is the lack of oral activities associated with students' poor oral fluency in English? This is the research question.

Consequently, this is innovative research that addresses the necessity of conducting a study of this category in El Salvador, where information on educational issues related to this topic being studied, particularly in San Miguel, is not widely promoted. For that reason, its relevance lies in understanding the phenomena in order to build knowledge regarding the research topic. In addition, this article benefits the academic community, by communicating the outcomes for students and professors.

Though, some limitations emerged when conducting this study, particularly concerning the time available for the data collection and analysis. For example, establishing the time and space necessary to conduct the surveys proved difficult due to the learners' shifting classroom assignments

and schedules. The situation required a mutual agreement to ensure that neither time nor space was altered for any of the groups involved.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study used a quantitative approach to collect and analyze numerical data, in which the relational design was the most appropriate as the main purpose was to establish the association between the absence of oral activities and the student's oral fluency. Likewise, it is important to mention that its purpose is not to establish causality, but rather to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between these two variables. This study was characterized by being a prospective study, by tracking a sample over a period of time to record the phenomena as it occurred. Also, a cross-sectional study was the most adequate to measure the variables of study at a single point in time, since it requires less time to be set up, and may be considered for preliminary evaluations of association between variables before starting more complex, long-term studies (Solli, 2015).

Besides, this study used the positivist paradigm as it focuses on objective reality, allowing researchers to analyze the information from an objective perspective, without any personal interpretation. This paradigm states that knowledge can be gained through observable and measurable facts since it relies on the hypothetico-deductive method to verify a hypothesis that is often stated quantitatively, where functional relationships can be derived between variables and explanatory factors (Park, Konge, & Artino, 2020).

Furthermore, this investigation took place at the Eastern Campus of the University of El Salvador, where the population was composed of 71 students attending the second year of the Modern Languages Degree. Subsequently, investigators used a probability sampling technique, specifically the stratified random sampling, to ensure that each student had an equal chance of being randomly selected. From this process, a total of 45 students aged 17 to 20 were chosen in the

Therefore, to collect the data, it was decided to consider the survey as the technique, ensuring the confidentiality of respondent answers. Then a questionnaire was implemented as the instrument, following a Likert scale, in which the students were asked to answer fifteen close-ended questions created from the indicators, regarding the variables of study. Next, the responses were detailed and recorded in an Excel spreadsheet in which each category was assigned a numerical value: 1 for Never, 2 for Rarely, 3 for Sometimes, 4 for Frequently, and 5 for Always. Then, these values were exported to SPSS software for a statistical analysis.

Finally, researchers used the SPSS software that helped them to know the distribution of the responses obtained through the questionnaire. As the responses did not follow a normal distribution, investigators used a non-parametric test such as the chi-square test of independence since the nature of the variables of the study were nominal categorical variables in order to know the association between them. Additionally, this study employed non-inferential statistics as the results were not extrapolated or generalized to the entire population. Consequently, the Phi coefficient was used to know what type of strength existed between the lack of oral activities and students' poor oral fluency, being the variable of study.

Though, before administering the instrument, researchers asked the sample collaboration to sign an informed consent, clarifying that the data collected would be used exclusively for academic purposes, and strict confidentiality of the information would be guaranteed, as it takes accountability in the study.

Though, before administering the instrument, researchers asked the sample collaboration to sign an informed consent, clarifying that the data collected would be used exclusively for academic purposes, and strict confidentiality of the information would be guaranteed, as it takes accountability in the study. The inclusion criteria indicated that only students enrolled in the corresponding course, and who voluntarily agreed to participate, were eligible to be part of the sample. In terms of ethical considerations, the study ensured fairness and safety by guaranteeing

voluntary participation, protecting participants' anonymity, and safeguarding the collected data against unauthorized access. Additionally, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without facing any academic or personal consequences.

RESULTS

Table 1:

Mode and standard deviation of each variable

Variables	N	Mode	Deviation Standard
Absence of Oral activities	45	11	2.74
Student fluency	45	13	2.88

Source: Alvarenga et al., (2024).

Description: This chart shows the most frequently occurring values for each variable. In the case of "absence of oral activities" the mode is 11 and, regarding "students' fluency" the mode is 13, indicating that among the observable data the number 11 and 13 are the most

Table 2:

Frequency of implementation of oral activities

<i>Frequency</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
Never	39	86.6
Rarely	2	4.4
Sometimes	4	8.9

Frequently	0	0
Always	0	0
Total	45	100

Source: Alvarenga et al., (2024).

Description: This chart shows the frequency of the implementation of oral activities in the classroom and how many participants selected the same value based on the Likert Scale used in this research. The data indicate that most students (86.6%) stated that oral activities are never implemented in the classroom. A small percentage reported that they are rarely (4.4%) or sometimes (8.9%) implemented. These results clearly reflect the limited opportunities

Table 3:

Frequency of student's fluency problems in pronunciation

<i>Intonation</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
Never	36	80
Rarely	9	20
Total	45	100

Source: Alvarenga et al., (2024).

Description: This chart shows the frequency of fluency problems in pronunciation presented in the students and how many participants selected the same value based on the Likert Scale used in this research. The data indicate that the majority of students (80%) reported never experiencing problems with intonation, while a smaller percentage (20%) stated that they rarely face such difficulties. No students reported frequent or consistent issues with intonation.

Table 4:

Frequency of students' fluency problems in structure

<i>Vocabulary</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
Never	30	66.7

Rarely	9	20
Sometimes	1	2.2
Frequently	5	11.1
Total	45	100

Source: Alvarenga et al., (2024).

Description: This chart shows the frequency of fluency problems in structure presented in the students and how many participants selected the same value based on the Likert Scale used in this research. The data indicate that most students (66.7%) reported never experiencing problems with vocabulary, while (20%) stated that they rarely face such difficulties and (2.2%) indicated that they sometimes experience them. A smaller proportion (11.1%) reported frequent problems with vocabulary. These findings suggest that, although most students generally manage vocabulary well, a notable number still experience difficulties that can affect

Table 5:

Association between variables

Variables	Chi- Square	Significance
Absence of Oral Activities	27.271 ^a	0.04
Students' fluency	29,401 ^b	0.02

Source: Alvarenga et al., (2024).

Description: Description: The Chi-square test of independence shows an existing association between the two variables as the significance is below 0.05, indicating that reduced oral activities are significantly associated with the lower fluency levels of the students.

Table 6:

Strength of the association between the variables

Variables	Significance	Phi coefficient
Absence of Oral Activities	0.04	0.79
Student's fluency	0.02	0.79

Source: Alvarenga et al., (2024).

Description: The phi coefficient shows a correlational value of 0.79, indicating a strong and positive association. This means that whether the absence of oral activities increases the student's fluency variable is likely to increase in the same direction.

DISCUSSION

Finding 1 – Association between variables

The most important result was the finding of an existing significant association between the absence of oral activities and students' poor oral fluency. Particularly, the first chart of results shows the findings of the non-parametric test, the Chi -Square test of independence, which gave a p-value of 0.04 ($p=0.04 < 0.05$) for the absence of oral activities and 0.02 ($p=0.02 < 0.05$) for students' oral fluency. These results indicate a statistically significant association, as both p-values are below the 0.05 significance level, suggesting that the lack of oral activities is related to the students' limited ability to express their ideas fluently in spoken English.

These findings are consistent with a similar study by (Martinez, Ramos, & Rosa, 2014) who also found a significant association between limited classroom oral activities and learners' fluency. Their study found that students faced challenges in their speaking skills. For instance, when expressing themselves orally due to a lack of practice opportunities they had during the class and the high difficulty level of the tasks they could not express their ideas fluently. Comparing this study is valuable, as it identified significant associations between similar variables that help to understand their relationship in specific context, particularly in their oral proficiency.

However, it is essential to clarify that the findings of (Martinez, Ramos, & Rosa, 2014) and our study only show a relationship in terms of association, rather than causation due to the relational nature of the research design. Moreover, since there was no manipulation of the variables, the results do not suggest or imply that a lack of oral activities in the Advanced Intensive English I class directly causes or affects the student's low fluency. Additionally, further research such as explanatory using longitudinal studies that track changes

over time, could help to identify the specific factors that influence the students' oral fluency, providing a better understanding of how the lack of classroom practices is related to their language deficiency.

Finding 2 – *Strength of the variables*

In order to determine the strength of the association that exists between the absence of oral activities and the student's fluency the phi coefficient was used, as it is illustrated in the second chart of results. Though, it is important to highlight that the association can be negative (indicating no relationship) or positive that takes into consideration established ranges. For example, a Phi range of 0.0–0.3 indicates a weak positive relationship, 0.3–0.6 moderate, 0.6–0.9 strong, and 0.9–1.0 very strong. In this study, the result showed a phi value of 0.79 in which according to accepted ranges indicates a positive strong association between the two variables under study.

However, it is crucial to remember that this strength reflects again only an association, not causation since the nature of this study is non- experimental, but rather it is known that there is a strong relationship between the two variables of study. Additionally, due to the nature of the variables being categorical, any causal inference would be inappropriate for generalizing the results to the entire population, which means that this association only applies to the sample of this study.

For that reason, understanding this strong positive association is essential since it aligns with theories like Michael Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis. According to Long (1996) fluency is developed through real-time interactive use of language, so the absence of oral activities limit the students' ability to build essential speaking skills. Additionally, long (1996) states that oral fluency requires more than exposure, as it needs active and communicative interactions, for developing speaking proficiency (Long, 1996, pp. 413-468). Thus, this theory supports these findings by explaining how important it is to have opportunities to practice the language in the classroom.

Finding 3 – Types of oral activities developed in the classroom

The third key finding is shown in the second chart, in which no oral activities were incorporated in the English classroom, despite language exposure through Live ABC and E-Lab activities like matching exercises and listening. These findings are consistent with a similar study by Torres et al. (2012) who found that students preferred engaging in oral presentations and readings over activities like spontaneous speeches, emphasizing a need for including more opportunities for language practice through oral presentations. By comparing, it is understandable that both studies suggest that the types of activities developed in the classroom should prioritize methods that enhance speaking proficiency while taking into account the preferences of students to encourage active participation.

Indeed, these results are in line with the Rod Ellis's (2003) Task-Based Learning Theory. According to Ellis (2003) affirms that language learning is most effective when students engage in tasks that are based in real-life communication. Moreover, oral activities should involve authentic tasks such as problem-solving or event planning that encourage students to use language fluently and meaningfully in situations (Ellis, 2003). In the context of the Advanced Intensive English, I class the types of activities were more focused on other areas, so eventually students would need help with clear expression in oral tasks. In this way, these findings highlight the importance of adding more oral activities to the curriculum to help improve fluency. These findings not only support existing theories about language learning but also emphasize the practical implications of creating a curriculum that prioritizes real-life communication tasks.

Finding 4 - Student's fluency problems

The fourth significant finding of this research focuses on the students' oral fluency problems. On one side, several issues were identified in students' pronunciation, including challenges with vowel and consonant sounds, word stress. However, the most significant difficulty they faced was with intonation as it is presented in chart number 4. On other side, the problems regarding to the structure, students had difficulties with grammar, coherence, cohesion,

but with vocabulary usage they face the most as it is shown in chart number 6. On the other side, students faced challenges not only with structure, grammar, coherence, and cohesion but also with using vocabulary correctly. For instance, they hesitated to use new words beyond those provided in the textbook, leading to confusion for listeners and demonstrating a low level of oral fluency that limited effective communication in spoken English.

To support our findings, the study can be contrasted with the Ahmed (2020) study, in which they reported similar issues among students, such as pronunciation and intonation difficulties, along with the excessive use of filler words and extended pauses while expressing their thoughts. Once again, by comparing these two findings illustrate how ineffective classroom activities are associated and contribute to students' poor ability to express themselves fluently and accurately.

Similarly, the Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996) serves to support these results since it provides the most appropriate theoretical framework for understanding these fluency problems. This theory emphasizes the crucial role of interaction and the negotiation of meaning in language development (Long, 1996, pp. 413-468). The observed difficulties in fluency such as pauses, incoherence, and limited vocabulary usage suggest that students lacked sufficient opportunities for meaningful interaction, which is essential for developing their speaking skills.

Nevertheless, future research should consider a quantitative action research design and longitudinal study to implement classroom practices in order to improve students' oral fluency. This approach would allow researchers to track students' fluency improvements over time, underscoring the value of these activities in the curriculum. Additionally, it can be suggested a descriptive study that would help to describe specific fluency challenges that the students face during the oral tasks.

CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing and interpreting the data, the results showed a significant association between the absence of oral activities, since in the hypothesis test a p-value of ($p = 0.04 < 0.05$) was obtained, which is lower than the level of significance. Therefore, the association between both variables is established. This finding made it possible to satisfactorily achieve the main objective of the investigation, which was to determine the relationship between these two variables. Furthermore, these results made it possible to accept what was proposed in the alternative hypothesis, as it was demonstrated that the lack of oral activities is indeed associated with the limited speaking proficiency of the students.

Moreover, these findings also answered the research question which was: "To what extent is the lack of oral activities associated with students' poor oral fluency? The answer was based on the Phi ranges, obtaining a value of 0.79, indicating a strong positive relationship between the two variables. Therefore, it can be concluded that the statistical test used as the Chi-square test of independence and the Phi Coefficient test were the most appropriate for this type of study, ensuring the reliability and credibility of the results.

Furthermore, it was found out that there was a lack of oral activities developed in the classroom, as most of the tasks focused on the other three macro skills, reflecting that the poor oral production of students is linked with the absence of oral activities. Based on these results, investigators concluded that learners faced challenges in coherence and cohesion because they did not have enough vocabulary to express their thoughts fluidly. These problems were reflected by the extended pauses students did while thinking about what to say or how to connect different ideas logically; that difficulty is indeed attached to the lack of opportunities that students have to practice the oral skills in their lectures. Therefore, it can be concluded that students face significant problems in oral production.

In addition, it was concluded that the antecedents and theories that this investigation took into consideration were the most appropriate because they allow to effectively compare the findings with the ones obtained in previous

investigations in order to have a well-structured framework and to support the information. In that way, it helped to have a better understanding of the phenomena under study.

Besides, based on the results above, recommendations were made for teachers and students. For teachers, one recommendation would be to add different activities to foster the student's speaking skill such as regular discussions, oral presentations, and role-plays that can help to improve the student's fluency. These activities should match students' interests and levels, helping them practice vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and intonation. On the other side, for students, they should actively be engaging in practice, such as working with study partners or recording themselves to track progress and make adjustments. The regular practice would help them to be more confident and fluent in speaking.

Finally, it is important to recommend for further investigations that whether they want to have a deeper understanding of the specific factors that the absence of oral activities affects the student's fluency, they should use a different research design such as the explanatory one by employing a longitudinal study in order to track the phenomena and measure the variable more than one occasion to find out more about the phenomenon under research.

Based on all the above, it can be concluded that the lack of oral activities is strongly associated with students' oral fluency. The results showed that when oral practice is limited in the classroom, students tend to present difficulties with vocabulary, coherence, and the fluency needed to express their ideas.

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