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**Exploring the Mismatch between Students and Teachers' Beliefs  
Surrounding Language Learning**



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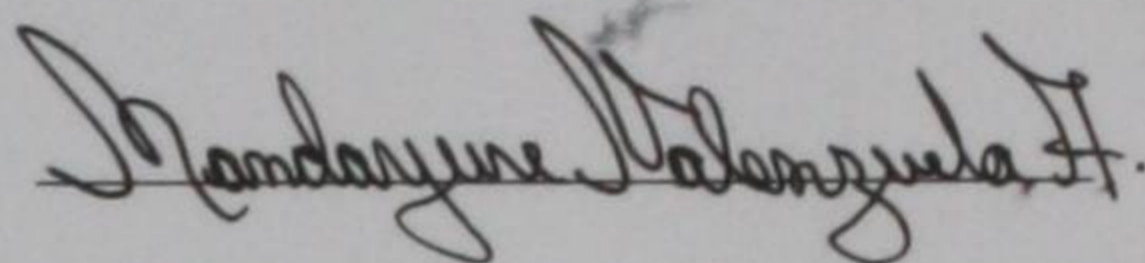
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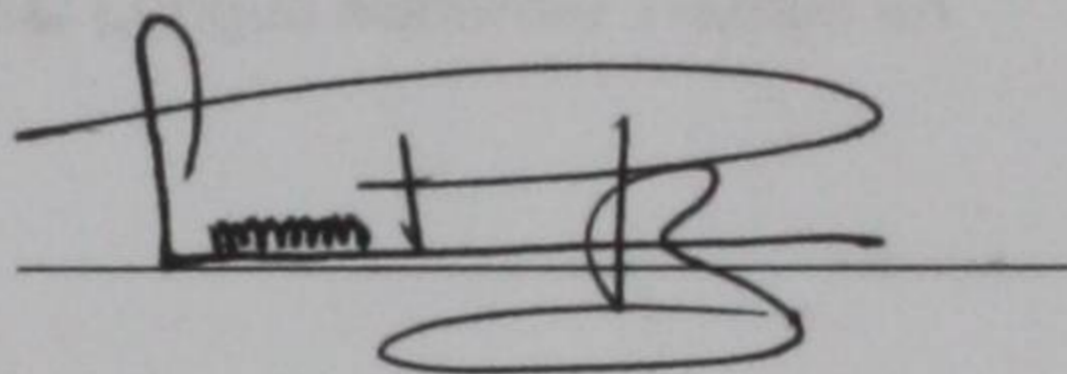
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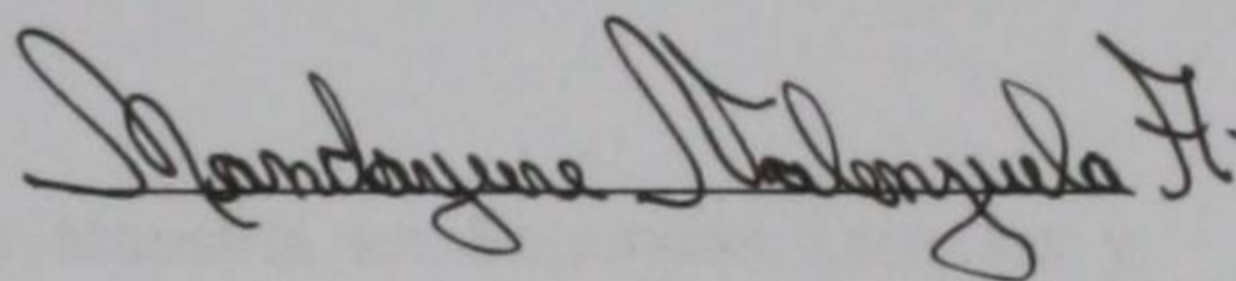
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## Resumen

Esta investigación explora las creencias que son inherentes al docente y a los estudiantes involucrados en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje, respecto a la influencia de la lengua materna en el aprendizaje de una segunda lengua, respecto al trabajo en grupos, a la corrección de errores y al uso de material de apoyo. La muestra fue constituida por tres grupos de estudiantes del nivel principiante del Centro Cultural Costarricense Norteamericano y sus respectivos profesores. El trabajo describe la consistencia e inconsistencia que se da entre los comportamientos y las creencias que traen consigo al aula tanto profesores como estudiantes. Por último describe la disparidad encontrada entre las perspectivas de ambos actores, lo mismo que sus implicaciones para el proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje de una segunda lengua.

Palabras clave: Creencias de los estudiantes/ Creencias de los profesores/  
Aprendizaje de un idioma/ Corrección de errores/ Lengua Materna/ Trabajo en grupo/ Materiales de enseñanza

Trabajo presentado para optar al grado de Maestría en Segundas Lenguas y Culturas con Énfasis en Inglés como Lengua Extranjera para Alumnado Adulto, según lo establece el Sistema de Estudios de Posgrado de la Universidad Nacional, Heredia, Costa Rica.



## **Abstract**

This research examines the beliefs that are inherent to teachers and students in the language process regarding L1 in the learning of L2, group work, error correction, and use of instructional materials. It involved three groups of beginner students and their teachers at the Centro Cultural Costarricense Norteamericano as subjects of the study. It describes the consistency and inconsistency of teachers and students' behaviors and beliefs. Finally, it explains the belief mismatch found as well as its implications in the teaching learning process in an EFL context.

**Key Words:** Student beliefs/ Teacher beliefs/ Language learning/ Error correction/ First language/ Group work/ Instructional Materials

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## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	10
I. The Problem and its Importance .....	12
General Objectives .....	13
Specific Objective .....	14
II. Framework of Reference .....	15
III. Methodology .....	27
Type of Investigation Study .....	28
Research Setting and Population .....	29
Sampling .....	32
Data Collection .....	34
Data Collection Procedures .....	35
Limitations .....	39
IV. Presentation and Analysis of Results .....	40
Information about Learners Collected the First Day of Class .....	40
Teachers' Beliefs .....	42
The Source of Teachers' Beliefs .....	42
Beliefs about the Role of L1 in the Learning of L2 .....	43
Beliefs about Group Work .....	47
Beliefs about Error Correction .....	50
Beliefs about Instructional Materials .....	58
Beliefs about Language Learning .....	62
Consistency and Inconsistency between Teachers' Actions and Beliefs .....	65



## Student Beliefs

The Source of Students' Beliefs.....	69
Beliefs about the Role of L1 in the Learning of L2 .....	70
Beliefs about Group Work .....	74
Beliefs about Error Correction .....	80
Beliefs about the Use of Instructional Materials .....	85
Beliefs about Language Learning .....	90
Consistency/ Inconsistency between Students' Beliefs and Actions ..	93
Mismatches between Teachers' and Students Beliefs .....	97
V. Conclusions .....	103
VI. Recommendations .....	106
For English Teachers .....	106
For Future Research .....	108
Bibliography .....	109
Appendixes .....	112
Appendix 1: Structured Observation Instrument for the First Day of Class	
Appendix 2: Structured Observation Instrument	
Appendix 3: Teacher Semi-structured Interview	
Appendix 4: Teacher Questionnaire	
Appendix 5: Student Semi-structured Interview	
Appendix 6: Student Questionnaire	



## List of Exhibits

<b>Exhibit 1</b>	Teachers' Use of Spanish .....	44
<b>Exhibit 2</b>	Teachers' Opinion about the Role of L1 in EFL learning .....	45
<b>Exhibit 3</b>	Teachers' Opinion about the Importance of Group Work .....	47
<b>Exhibit 4</b>	Teachers' Opinions about the Benefits of Group Work .....	48
<b>Exhibit 5</b>	Activities Performed during Group Work .....	49
<b>Exhibit 6</b>	Types of Errors Teachers Correct when Students Speak in Class.....	51
<b>Exhibit 7</b>	Teachers' Opinions about When Errors Should be Corrected .....	53
<b>Exhibit 8</b>	Teacher's Response to Student's Errors .....	54
<b>Exhibit 9</b>	Teachers' Opinions about the Most Effective Ways of Correcting Errors ..	55
<b>Exhibit 10</b>	Teacher's Opinions about Students' Response to Error Correction .....	56
<b>Exhibit 11</b>	Materials Used by the Instructor .....	57
<b>Exhibit 12</b>	Teachers' Opinions about the Usefulness of the Textbook .....	60
<b>Exhibit 13</b>	Use of the Textbook in Class .....	61
<b>Exhibit 14</b>	Teachers' Opinions about the Most Effective Ways to Learn English .....	62
<b>Exhibit 15</b>	Teachers Opinions about the Most Difficult Aspects of Learning English	64
<b>Exhibit 16</b>	Supplementary Material Used by the Teacher .....	68
<b>Exhibit 17</b>	Students' Opinion about the Role of L1 in the L2 Classroom .....	71
<b>Exhibit 18</b>	Reasons Why Students Use Spanish in Class .....	72
<b>Exhibit 19</b>	Beliefs about the Role of L1 in the Learning of L2 .....	73
<b>Exhibit 20</b>	Has Group Work Helped Students Significantly in their Language Learning	75
<b>Exhibit 21</b>	Students' Opinion about Contribution of Group Work to their Learning ...	76
<b>Exhibit 22</b>	Activities Students do while they are Working in Groups .....	77
<b>Exhibit 23</b>	Disadvantages of Group Work .....	78
<b>Exhibit 24</b>	Students' Opinions about Types of Errors Teachers Should Correct .....	81
<b>Exhibit 25</b>	Students' Opinions about When Error Should be Corrected .....	82
<b>Exhibit 26</b>	Students' Opinions about Most Effective Ways of Correcting Errors .....	83



<b>Exhibit 27</b> Is Peer Correction Reliable .....	84
<b>Exhibit 28</b> Are Students Satisfied with the Error Correction Done in the Course ....	85
<b>Exhibit 29</b> Students' Opinion about Teaching Materials Used by the Instructor .....	86
<b>Exhibit 30</b> Students' Opinion about Most Effective Teaching Materials Used by the Instructor	87
<b>Exhibit 31</b> Students' Opinion about the Use of the Textbook .....	89
<b>Exhibit 32</b> Students' Opinion about the Most Effective Ways to Learn English .....	91
<b>Exhibit 33</b> Most Difficult and Easiest Aspects of Learning English .....	93
<b>Exhibit 34</b> Students' Use of Spanish in Class .....	94



## List of Abbreviations

**CCCN:** Centro Cultural Costarricense Norteamericano

**L1:** Mother Tongue/ First Language

**L2:** Second Language

**EFL:** English as a Foreign Language

**BALLI:** Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory

**LLB:** Language Learning Beliefs

**SS:** Students

**TOEIC:** Test of English for International Communication

**TOEFL:** Test of English as a Foreign Language

**TESOL:** Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages



## Introduction

Language teachers and researchers have always been interested in the role that teachers play in the teaching process and in that played by students in the learning process. Recently, however, they have become increasingly interested in the learners' role in both the teaching and learning processes. The findings in those investigations that examine the attitudes and motivations of the students on both sides of the learning process can be of great value to the field of second language learning.

There is no question that the beliefs students hold about learning and teaching are of critical importance either in the failure or success of the process of language learning. Such beliefs dictate the behavior that students adopt towards learning. Unfortunately, this set of beliefs is sometimes overlooked by instructors, and therefore, it is not given the relevance it deserves.

In general terms, teachers look for instructional effectiveness in the materials, syllabi and activities that they use; however, trying to increase this effectiveness by means of taking into account their students' ideas about learning and teaching is not a common practice among them, even though this type of knowledge can provide important guidance and, ultimately, make instruction much more effective. The fact is, that both students and teachers seem to bring to the classroom their own conceptions and assumptions about learning, and those beliefs seem to also have a great influence on the way they act, and on how they perceive what takes place along the teaching-learning process. The research project proposed in the pages that follow pursues this relevant line of inquiry.



This paper starts by presenting the problem under study and its relevance for the field of language teaching, then there is a thorough and precise revision of relevant theory already existing in the field of learning beliefs, here the most relevant studies in the field are discussed. In the chapter about methodology the research designed chosen for the investigation is identified, also procedures carried out for data collection are clarified. The following section is the presentation and analysis of the results which describes the teachers and students' beliefs as well as the mismatches found between the two parties. Finally, this paper presents the general conclusions and proposes some recommendations for teachers and future research in the field.



## **I. The Problem and its Importance**

The pivotal concern approached in this proposal is that, on the one hand, learners and teachers both come to the classroom with clear views and assumptions surrounding language learning and teaching, but on the other hand, neither may be aware of the mismatch between these two sets of beliefs, which certainly becomes an obstacle for learning and teaching.

The mismatch referred to above may have a great impact on both, students and teachers. For one thing, as Bernat puts it, "When language classes fail to meet student expectations, students can lose confidence in the instructional approach and their ultimate achievement can be limited" (49). At the same time, the counterpart might experience great frustration. Instructors might feel incompetent because students do not respond to their teaching as they expect; they can misinterpret learner's attitudes and think that learning is not taking place because of their particular teaching styles or instructional approach. Furthermore, this is a phenomenon that not only happens in certain contexts with particular groups of students; it is common in the regular classroom, no matter the culture or the characteristics of teachers or the students. This is a condition that is inherent to the classroom experience in general. And the more is known about it, the better prepared instructors and pupils will be to face the difficulties derived from it. Consequently, the exploration of this gap is of utmost relevance to the field and to the teaching practice, which explains why this problem is considered relevant.



Awareness on the part of the teacher will make them pay the necessary attention to the situation instead of ignoring it, and on the part of the learners, it will help them gain a better understanding of the process they are going through; as Huang notes, "Understanding the gap between teacher and learner beliefs is the first step to bridge the gap" (64). If there is no awareness, teachers and students might waste valuable time and effort trying to excel the effectiveness of instruction and learning without dealing with the source of the problem, which leads to nowhere. As a consequence, they may get frustrated because they think they are not able to teach or learn well.

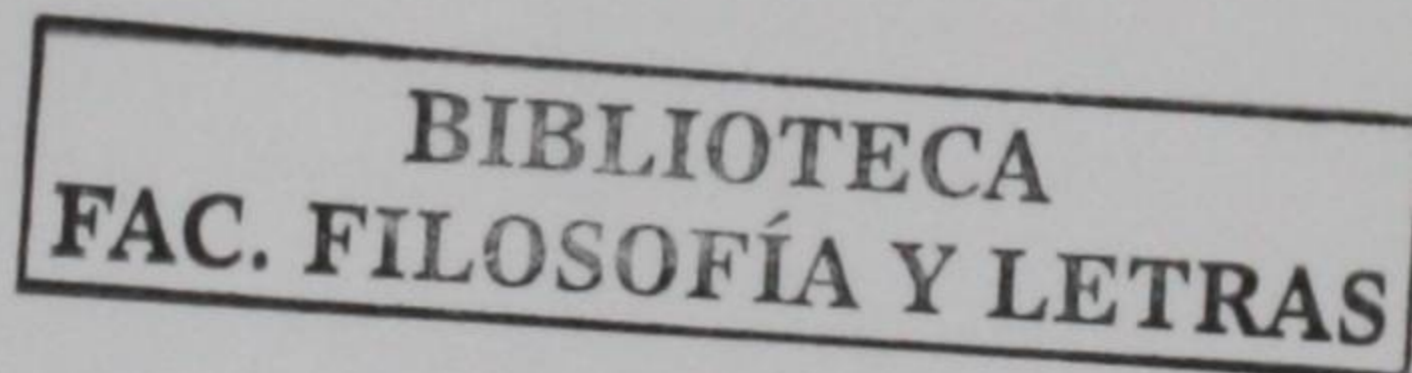
In other words, as Kumaradivelu states, "The knowledge of the source of mismatch will help teachers teach better and learners learn better" (qtd. in Barcelos 75). Besides helping to increase awareness about the problem, this research is intended to provide a better understanding of the phenomenon by exploring beliefs in a more holistic manner than it has been done so far.

There has certainly been a lot of research on beliefs in language teaching and learning; nonetheless, not many studies have focused on the mismatch of such beliefs between teachers and students, and the few that have, have not examined the problem in depth and in the context of the classroom.

## Objectives

### General Objective

To explore the mismatch between the teacher and the adult students' beliefs about the English language, its learning, error correction, the role of L1, group work and the use of instructional materials.



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**Specific Objectives**

- I. To explore and analyze adult learners' beliefs about the way English is learned.
- II. To explore and analyze the language learning beliefs held by English teachers.
- III. To identify the sources or background of the beliefs that teachers and students come with into the classroom.
- IV. To determine the implications of a belief mismatch for the language teaching-learning process.
- V. To establish whether or not there is consistency between the beliefs and the actions that teachers and the students perform in the classroom.
- VI. To establish if teachers record information about the students' expectations at the beginning of the course.
- VII. To determine the purpose and use teachers give to the information recorded about students' expectations, in the event that they do collect such information.



## I. Framework of Reference

Given the growing evidence suggesting that beliefs play a central role in students' learning experience and achievements, in recent years, researchers have increasingly dedicated some of their work to scrutinizing those beliefs among both, students and teachers, and to the incongruent conceptions of those actors of the learning process. This chapter of the paper aims at providing a survey of relevant studies in this area.

As a previous step, it is pertinent to look at the concept of *belief* and its characteristics. Although there are many different definitions that go from the most philosophical to simple psychological distinctions, the purpose here is not to discuss the term. Instead, a definition that embraces the overall essential elements is provided, which will be sufficient for the purposes of this paper. In this sense, Borg defines belief as "A proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment; further, it serves as a guide to thought and behavior" (186).

Borg further expands the concept by referring to the function of beliefs. She acknowledges their importance in different areas of teaching by affirming that "Beliefs are involved in helping individuals make sense of the world, influencing how new information is perceived and whether it is accepted or rejected. Beliefs color memories with their evaluation and judgment, and serve to frame our understanding of events" (186-187).

Studies have suggested a close relationship between beliefs and actions. "Beliefs are predispositions to action. Educational psychology supports the proposition



of the importance of beliefs that learners hold as a defining factor of their learning behavior" (Rokeach qtd. in Nikitina and Furuoka 209). Referring to another dimension of the concept Barcelos emphasizes the Deweyan theory which conceives beliefs as dynamic, experience-based and context-based (40). "The implication for research is that beliefs should be inferred from statements, intentions and actions" (40). Interestingly, given the complexity surrounding beliefs, authors like Nikitina and Furuoka have reached to the conclusion that beliefs tend to be universal. "Students of different languages in different cultures hold quite similar collective sets of beliefs about language learning" (217-218).

### **Studies on the Learners' Beliefs about Language Learning**

A review of literature in the field of language learning beliefs cannot begin without making reference to the work of the most prominent pioneer in the area, Elaine Horwitz. She designed BALLI (Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory), which is a 34-item questionnaire that covers five areas: a) the difficulty of language learning, b) aptitude for language learning, c) the nature of language learning process, d) learning and communication strategies, e) motivations and expectations for language learning (Horwitz 2).

One of Horwitz' first studies took place in the University of Texas with 32 ESL students from mixed backgrounds. This research revealed that most students think that they have the capacity to learn a foreign language and that some languages are easier to learn than others. Their perception of the vital importance of translation, vocabulary



and grammar reflects the students' tendency to prefer more traditional approaches. Among other findings, Horwitz points out that the learner's beliefs vary according to previous language learning experiences and cultural background.

Another sample study that used the BALLI carried out by Altan took place in five different universities in Turkey, its purpose was to explore the beliefs of 248 English, German, Japanese, French and Arabic teacher education students. The main results found by the researcher can be divided into the categories of the questionnaire. Among the beliefs about the difficulty of language learning the majority of the participants claimed to have are that the level of difficulty of language learning depends on the language, it takes an average of 2.5 years to learn a language, and they will learn to speak English well in a period of time ranging from 1-2 to 3-5 years. In regards to language aptitude, learners believe that there is a special aptitude for language learning, but they also agreed that everybody can learn a foreign language, especially children.

Regarding the nature of language learning, a high percentage of participants consider translating and learning vocabulary and grammar rules as one of the essential parts of language learning. When it comes to learning and communicating strategies, the majority tends to agree on repetition and practice in a language laboratory as useful activities, as well as on excellent accent when speaking. Finally, in relation to motivations and expectations, students associate language skills with better job opportunities.

A relevant conclusion of this study is that although participants are from different groups they coincide in their beliefs; there are some slight variations in percentages, but



similarities remain. Moreover, given the population of this study, teacher-education students, the results draw attention to the relevance of learner beliefs, particularly in this area because it would not be appropriate for educators to ignore such beliefs, they should use this information to understand the kind of teaching that students will take to classrooms in the future as educators.

Several researchers have used Horwitz Likert questionnaire to study students' beliefs, and to establish discrepancies between teachers' and students' perceptions. Many other researchers have derived different versions from this instrument to carry out research in varied cultural contexts. Horwitz' is with no doubt a very practical tool, and it has proven to be useful in helping teachers identify popular beliefs among learners, particularly among minority groups; however, it seems to have failed in acknowledging the dynamic nature of beliefs, presenting them instead as static premises (Barcelos 56).

### **Considerations Surrounding the Belief Mismatch**

Before exploring some investigations that have found mismatches between learners' and teachers' perceptions, it is necessary to account for researchers' views on this divergence. First, "The mismatch between teachers' and students' perceptions is based upon the premise that students do have their own views about the learning process" (Barcelos 75). Having said this, it is acknowledged that students have their own agenda when they come to the classroom; therefore, students and teachers are inevitably going to see what happens in the class through different lenses. As Howitz notes, "The classroom realities are often perceived differently by students and teachers.



Because language students are not sophisticated language learners, they are likely to view class activities in ways their teachers do not" (4).

Conflict refers to various elements of the teaching-learning conditions, and the main point of the incongruence relies on the gap between second language acquisition theory and classroom reality. Horwitz discusses this issue as follows:

The demands of being a foreign language student may conflict with the demands of language learning... While second language acquisition literature describes a process mediated by individual differences and needs, the typical language classroom does not, and perhaps cannot, allow for such individuality. We teachers must evaluate progress over the term with a letter grade even though we recognize that some people simply learn a language more quickly than others do. (5)

Some researchers propose the idea that teachers and students come from different worlds. In this respect, teachers' beliefs may derive from research and theory learned during training, knowledge and practice of methodology, personal belief systems developed from experience and teaching/learning history, while learners' do not have all that academic and methodological background. Their beliefs are mostly based on parameters of their own learning (McDonough 410).

Likewise, Horwitz admits the differences between the two positions by making reference to how teachers and students can perceive the same context differently:

As language teachers we must consider that the learners' perspective and the teacher's perspective on the foreign language classroom can conflict. Influenced by our training and personal philosophies we think of our



classrooms as 'communication centered' or 'grammar focused', as dominated by 'teacher talk' or 'student talk,' while our students are more likely to think of their courses as 'hard' or 'easy' and of their instructors as 'strict' or 'lenient'.

(1)

Probably one of the salient points of divergence is the implementation of language teaching methodologies. It seems that teachers make choices about the dynamics of the classroom based on approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching. In this sense, McDonough ascertains:

To an extent, teachers' pedagogic choices derive from sources outside their classrooms. Indeed, they are powerfully conditioned by prevailing trends and fashions which take on a life of their own, so that even where needs and preferences are attended to, they are filtered through a methodology which may disallow more out-of-fashion learner choices. (409)

Furthermore, Barcelos accounts for explanations for this same conflict; she remarks that the implementation of the communicative approach tends to trigger students' passive resistance, breakdown of production and frustration. She also admits that students can perceive teachers as less competent due to their less active role, which is a principle of student-centered instruction (75).

### **Studies on the Mismatch Between Learners' and Teachers' Beliefs**

Since this paper deals mainly with the discrepancy between learners' and teachers' beliefs, not much discussion can be done on learners' beliefs solely. Thus, the



following section offers a collection of results drawn from relevant studies which explored the belief mismatch in different contexts and using different data collection instruments.

Kuntz carried out a study at the Yemen Language Center with 27 adult learners and 10 teachers of Arabic. To collect data she used the Kuntz-Rifkin Instrument (KRI) which is a questionnaire based on Horwitz' BALLI (2). Results show that although there is some consensus in pupils' and instructors' beliefs about language learning, many differences arose. Both groups seemed to agree on statements that dealt with aptitude and difficulty of language learning as well as the role of the foreign culture in language learning (9-17).

On the other hand, there was significant disagreement in certain areas. Teachers were more optimistic than students, they agreed with statements that referred to how well they would learn the language and the opportunities that would come up once they learned it. There was also significant disagreements regarding error correction. Interestingly, students did not agree with translation as much as teachers did, Kuntz attributes this to teachers' previous learning experience with the grammar-translation method. Learners perceive Arabic and English as very different systems, and therefore translation is not an option they would consider (9-17).

Kuntz emphasizes that the learning gained from this type of research is valuable not only for teachers, but also for textbook writers and curriculum developers in their aim to meet students' learning goals. The knowledge that emerges from this analysis could be helpful in modification of course content, its sequencing and teaching methods and materials to better serve the students' needs (9-17).



Edilyan's research was done at American University of Armenia, the focus of this study was to explore the feelings and attitudes of teachers and adult students towards grammar instruction in the classroom. The subjects of the study were mainly university students with their specialties and even some work experience, thus they had some strong and clear preconceptions of the language learning process based on previous experience, mostly in traditional teaching settings (94).

The results demonstrated that learners and instructors differed in three major aspects. First, in the importance students ascribe to grammar; they considered grammar the cornerstone of learning while teachers did not give it such importance. Second, students seemed to give importance to accuracy, especially in their interest for academic English, but accuracy was not an issue to focus on for teachers. Third, learners found grammar error explanations considerably helpful, but some teachers failed to provide them (94-96). The author points out that such findings make reference to Horwitz' idea that clash in teachers' and learners' beliefs would likely affect students' attitudes towards the course and the teacher, which could have an impact on achievement (94-96).

In the paper "Learner Beliefs of Language Learning Revisited," Huang summarizes relevant research findings about what she calls the gap between teacher and learner beliefs. One of the studies discussed is the one conducted by Nunan in 1989 in which he made a comparison between the rating of class activities of Australian teachers and Australian ESL migrant students. It was concluded that the "hidden agenda" students have guides them to focus more on the formal aspects of language rather than on the communicative purposes of tasks. In this study Nunan reported that



teachers tend to approve communicative activities more than learners, thus they rated pair work, self correction lower than their teachers whereas pronunciation and explicit error correction significantly higher (qtd. in Huang 64).

Similarly, in another study, Block investigated the beliefs of an EFL teacher and six EFL learners. He used classroom observation, oral diaries and interviews as data collection instruments, and he found out that perceptions of the pedagogical purposes of activities were different for pupils and instructors. He recommended making purposes of activities explicit to students (qtd. in Huang 64-65).

In another work, Kern reported some differences in beliefs about language learning of foreign language students and their teachers. The areas in which lack of consensus was evident were usefulness of pronunciation practice, the role of grammar rules, translation, error correction and cultural knowledge. The discrepancies analyzed were attached to some factors; correlation of beliefs might be related to the teachers' variables such as personalities, teaching styles, experience, etc., the syllabus that teachers have to follow which might go against their beliefs, and the greater influence of teachers' practice as opposed to teachers' beliefs on pupils' beliefs (qtd. in Huang 65).

Peacock addressed the matter with a different focus; he used the BALLI questionnaire in Hongkong to investigate whether incongruence in instructors' and learners' beliefs affects proficiency (qtd. in Huang 65). He was able to discover that students who were less proficient thought that learning a language was just learning grammar, that they should not say anything until they can say it correctly. "Sixty four per cent of the learners (compared to only seven per cent of the teachers) in Peacock's study believed that learning a language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar



rules" (qtd. in Hawkey 242). It was concluded that some beliefs can be detrimental to language learning and they can lead to frustration (qtd. in Huang 65).

Similar results were uncovered by Hawkey in a study carried out in Italy. He shows that teachers and learners agree in general qualities of the communicative approach; however, both differed in their perceptions of the prominence of grammar and pair work. Discrepancy in pair work was attributed to instances in which it was considered unsuccessful due to students' inattention or silence, teacher's interruption and reversion to individual work. Conversely, differences in the significance of grammar are associated to teachers' interpretation of principles of communicative language teaching as giving grammar a less explicit role, and students not being fully convinced of this, therefore expecting a different role of grammar in the classroom (247-249).

In a qualitative research that used ethnographic techniques, Barcelos studied Brazilian students learning English in the U.S.A in an international language institute. She found differences in the teachers' and students' perceptions of L1, whereas teachers barely mentioned it in interviews, students highlighted an ambiguous love-hate relationship with their L1, which was characterized by their struggle trying to retain their L1 because it represented part of their identities, and at the same time letting it go because they were incorporating a new system. She also reported differences in the perceptions of roles. Students expected teachers to have a more active and authoritarian role in the classroom, and teachers wanted students to be more active. Students were more into receiving orders from the teachers and respecting them. Teachers' beliefs seemed to stem from the communicative approach with emphasis on



covert error correction, non-hierarchical supportive environment, and suspension of teachers' judgmental role (291-292).

Barcelos also found teachers and students operating according to different sets of beliefs in terms of grammar teaching. Teachers tried to use games to create a relaxed atmosphere and to give students a chance to use grammar in a more fun and authentic environment, and on the other hand students thought that games were not good substitutes for formal grammar explanation and more exercises were necessary (288-289).

A different type of investigations that have examined the differences in teacher and student beliefs are the experiential studies. These papers analyze the experience of teachers learning another language. Though these studies have had different purposes they have all found a gap between being a learner and being a teacher. McDonough, in her study *The Teacher as Learner: Worlds of Difference?*, describes results of authors such as Lowe, Ransdell and Gower; she stresses "They [studies] all report perceptions as learners that are quite discrepant, even dissonant, from their teacher-persona" (406). In this research, McDonough reports on her experience studying Greek. She discovered that she enjoyed activities as a learner that she would practically rule out as a teacher. For instance, as a learner she liked translating texts, using a bilingual dictionary and lots of grammar exercises, and on the contrary, as a teacher she discouraged those activities.

As an informal validity check, McDonough used her list of learner preferences to design a questionnaire and survey local teachers and students. Not surprisingly, she found out that the results were very similar to what she had expected: discrepancy in



the perceptions of grammar exercises, pair work, use of bilingual dictionaries and translation. The researcher concludes: "My data show that many activities that are currently unpopular in the broadly communicative ethos of ELT—grammar exercises, reading aloud, translation, close text study and so on—are in fact perceived by learners to be conducive to learning" (409).

All this collection of studies presented in this literature review shows that no matter the cultural or educational context or the research method used there is a gap between instructors and learners. Such difference may derive from divergence of realities, the reality of the teacher who is immersed in managing the methodological dynamics of the classroom, and the reality of the student who deals with preconceived ideas about learning and feelings of frustration or anxiety. It is clear that beliefs tend to be context based and they are the result of the individual's experience in the various activities that the person is immersed in.



### III. Methodology

This chapter aims at explaining the design of the study and the different procedures carried out throughout the research process. First, the research problem is stated, and then some general background about the methodology for examining learning beliefs is presented. After that, a description of the setting, population and sampling follows, and finally an account for data collection and data analysis procedures is detailed.

As it has been explained, the major concern approached in this investigation is that both learners and teachers come to the classroom with their own views and assumptions about language learning and the how the dynamics of the class should be; however, neither may be aware of the gaps between these two sets of beliefs, which can potentially become a difficulty for the teaching and learning process.

It is the objective of this research to expand the body of knowledge contributed by those studies whose major concern has been to record what is known in literature as *inventories of beliefs in language learning* through the application of Horwitz' data collection instrument. This goal was attained, in the first place, by removing attention from inventorying, to focus instead on the distinct nature of the belief systems withheld by teachers and students about the English language and its learning, in order to reach a deeper understanding of such systems, and consequently a more accurate grasp of the factors related to a presumable mismatch among these two systems of beliefs.

Apart from questionnaires, few studies have resorted to alternative data collection instruments, and in such case they have mostly used class observation and interviews. This kind of studies treats beliefs from the perspective of the participants and



looks at them in context; they take into consideration the dynamic and social nature of beliefs. Questionnaires tend to treat beliefs as more static constructions.

The methodology proposed for this investigation goes in this line, and it aims at contributing to the already existing body of theory by developing an investigation that is not intended to provide another inventory of beliefs, but to use data collection methods that allow to delve into their nature for the purpose of acquiring a deeper understanding of the teacher and learner's belief systems, and consequently to obtain a more accurate grasp on the mismatch between these contrasting belief systems.

### **Type of Investigation**

Given the purposes of the investigation and the characteristics of the phenomenon under scrutiny, this research is exploratory and descriptive in nature. According to Kane, "Descriptive research involves attitudes, behaviors or conditions" (13). This approach seems appropriate since it involves the description of the classroom attitudes and behaviors among teachers and students in connection to their belief systems. And although quantitative data was collected for the study, qualitative approaches to data collection and analysis were predominant. The qualitative approach allowed for describing and interpreting the participants' actions as they take place in their natural environment, while some quantitative data collected in instruments complemented the information gathered otherwise, and contributed to establishing the validity and reliability of the findings.



## **Research Setting and Population**

The setting of this investigation was the Centro Cultural Costaricense Norteamericano (CCCN), which is a language institute that has different sites located in San Jose, Alajuela, Guanacaste, Perez Zeledon and Cartago. The CCCN is a non-profit institution that has taught English for over sixty years. It is a well known language institute in the country.

The mission of the CCCN is “to provide the best tools for global success through innovative language and intercultural programs that foster understanding and friendship between the people of Costa Rica and the United States of America.”

The CCCN has different departments, some of them are Marketing, Student Service Unit, “Culturales” and Administration and Finances. The biggest department of all is the Academic Department, which is lead by an Academic Director as well as other coordinators in charge of different areas. These areas are curriculum development, recruitment and professional development and operations. Each site has a coordinator, who is called Senior Mentor Teacher, and at least two supervisors, who are called Mentor Teachers. There is a specific number of teachers in each site depending on their needs and population. Some of these teachers have 20 or 30-hour positions, and others have an hourly position, which means that they work only a few hours a week.

The Centro Cultural offers different programs; the strongest ones are the programs for adults English Now Integrated Skills and Speak Plus. The former focuses on the four skills, exposes students to six hours of instruction per week and takes two years for completion. The latter is conversational, exposes students to nine hours of instruction and takes one year and four months for completion. The institution also



offers a program for teenagers (Teens Extreme), one for kids (First Steps), a Spanish program for foreigners, a teacher training program (TTP) for novice teachers, advanced courses and preparation courses for the TOEIC and the TOEFL. Students are exposed to art and culture through the art gallery Sophia Wannamaker and the theater Eugene O'Neill (located in San Pedro) where national and international exhibits, plays and concerts are presented.

The CCCN offers valuable benefits to both teachers and learners. Teachers have academic support in terms of supervision and mentoring, and they also have access to different kinds of materials and resources. Students can benefit from clubs and varied resources such as books, videos and software that can be useful for them to learn the language.

Classes at the CCCN are usually three hours long and they are taught strictly in English. Each level in the programs lasts one bimester. The textbook is used in combination with supplementary material and activities. Teachers try to emphasize speaking, and they do a lot of group/pair work. The completion of each level takes seven or eight weeks, and the whole program lasts two years.

The average population at the Centro Cultural is mostly adults or young adults, ages range between twenty and forty five. They are part of the middle or high social class. Most of the population has a job, so they are professionals that need to improve their English to either have better opportunities at work or keep their own positions.

Most of the students who study at the CCCN go there because of the image that the institution has. It is one of the most well know institutions of the country, although





there is a lot of competition it is still a very important language institute that offers different services like international standard tests.

The participants of this investigation are taking the program English Now, which takes students from beginner to an upper intermediate level, thus after students complete the course evaluated they should be high intermediate learners. Then, they have to take the TOIEC test as a graduation requirement. They must get no less than five hundred and fifty points. When students graduate, they have the option to continue with the Advanced Program.

Students who choose the English Now program are the ones that need to develop their oral and written skills. They are interested in reading, writing and grammar. They can start from the beginning of the program if they do not speak any English at all, or they can take a placement test, which will identify the level where they can start.

The group of English teachers who work at the CCCN is diverse, but they have an average profile. Most of them are from San Jose, Alajuela or Heredia, have a middle-class status and a bachelor's degree in teaching, only a few of them have not finished their major yet or do not have a degree related to teaching. They are relatively new in the institution, which means that they have worked there for an average of two to three years. Many of them have experience teaching children and teenagers because they have previously worked in other places before they started working at the CCCN; just a few of them have only worked at the Centro Cultural.

The instructors have to take the TOIEC test and get no less than eight hundred and fifty points, which is equivalent to C1 in the *European Framework of Reference*. The



teachers who have twenty or thirty-hour positions teach from four to seven classes, each group has a maximum of twenty students and a minimum of twelve students. These teachers teach any academic program offered at the CCCN.

The institution asks teachers to implement Task-Based Instruction in their classes, so that is the methodology they use. They are also encouraged to use student-centered instruction. Mentor teachers are the ones in charge of quality control, supervision and training. In addition to that, the institution provides teachers with in-service training sessions at the end of each bimester. Also, teachers are part of a professional development program which helps them grow and improve certain areas in terms of teaching. Furthermore, twenty and thirty-hour teachers are required to make a presentation in the National Conference for Teachers of English held at CCCN by the end of January.

## **Sampling**



Due to the researcher's interest groups of beginners were selected. Out of the total population of the Centro Cultural Costarricense Norteamericano three groups were selected according to the schedule availability of the researcher and the number of the students in the group, which means that each group had to have at least twelve students to make sure that it would not be closed the following bimester. Since the focus of the research is on beginner levels the groups selected were levels five and three. Two of the classes were level five, and the other one was level three. The three groups had classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays, level three and one of the levels five



attended class in the afternoon, from two to five; and the other group went to class from six to nine. There was a total of forty three students and their three corresponding teachers. Level three in the afternoon (group number one) had fifteen students, level five in the afternoon (group number two) twelve students and the group in the six to nine schedule (group number three) sixteen students. The changes referred to previously deal with new students, in group one there were two new students, in group two one student dropped out and in group three there were three new students.

Students are mostly high middle-class people between seventeen to fifty five years old, but most of them are in their twenties and early thirties. The majority has a full-time job and others study at the university. These students are learning English because of work demands, so they need to learn it fast. This population seems to be representative of the type of students that different language institutes have around the country, in response to the socioeconomic conditions of Costa Rica that make learning English a must.

The corresponding teachers of these groups share the similar characteristics: they have worked at the CCCN for more than two years. They have a full-time position, which means that that they teach between four and six groups. Moreover, they constantly participate in teacher trainings, and have their own professional development program. One of the teachers has a master's in TESOL, another one a bachelor in English Teaching and the other one a degree in Law.



## Data Collection

For the data collection on beliefs in language learning, three approaches can be used: the normative approach, the meta-cognitive approach and the contextual approach. The first involves questionnaires resembling the Likert-scales, consisting of pre-determined set of statements; the second involves self-reports and semi-structured interviews; and the third includes a combination of different instruments like journals, learner diaries, metaphors, classroom observation, ethnography, open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. In the case of the latter, the basic purpose of using such variety of means for collecting data is to reach the best interpretation possible of the students and teachers' beliefs in their context.

The contextual approach seems to be consistent with the type of research intended to be developed because it allows an in-depth examination of beliefs, and as Woods points out, "Investigating LLB [language learning beliefs] in context means knowing why learners hold particular types of beliefs, how their beliefs fit with others that they have, how their beliefs are related to their actions" (qtd. in Barcelos 64).

As stated above, the use of the contextual approach determines the data collection instruments that would best serve the purposes of the investigation. In the case of this research, the researcher did not intend to use such variety of instruments that the contextual approach offers; only three methods were used because of time constraints. First, classroom observation (participant and non-participant) had a very important role in identifying the participants' beliefs and checking their consistency with their actions. Observation was complemented with semi-structured interviews applied to



both the teacher and the students in order to find out more about their beliefs and the rationale behind their actions and beliefs, this helps to increase the validity of the study. Additionally, a survey to get general information about the students, as well as questionnaires for both teachers and students were applied in order to verify data gathered through interviews and class observations.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

*Entry to the site:* The researcher was familiar with the institute where the study took place because she used to work there. Right before she stopped working there she made all the necessary arrangements for the project. Therefore, she asked the coordination for permission and they accepted under the condition of sharing the results once the project was finished.

Since the teachers already knew the researcher, it was not necessary to establish any rapport with them; they were informed about the project and they were glad to cooperate.

Due to the timeframe of the investigation, the study had to be done in two bimesters, that is the last part of one course and the next course from the beginning to the last classes before the final evaluations. This implied a change of teachers as well as few changes in the groups. Therefore, the first observations were basically used to establish rapport with students and observe the general dynamics of the class.

In the first observation the researcher introduced herself and explained to the students briefly the purpose of her presence there and how long that was going to take.



These first observations were unstructured, thus the researcher took general notes that were useful in the design of structured participant observation instruments, which were used as of the third observation.

*Structured Participant Observation:* As it was mentioned previously, this research included three main data collection instruments: observation, interviews and questionnaires. Regarding the first one, a total of twenty nine participant observations were carried out from the second week of August to the second of October 2009. Two of the groups were observed ten times, as it was scheduled, and the other one was visited nine times due to special circumstances with participants. The observations were done in the corresponding three-hour class shifts twice a week.

The researcher carried out mostly participant observations. She would participate if the teacher asked her to participate in group work or whenever there was a good chance to establish rapport with participants. Non participant observation was also done at certain moments of the class, especially when students were working on the task, exercises from the book or whole group discussions.

In the class the researcher had more the role of a student, although learners sometimes asked questions about language most of the time they count her in as one of their classmates. During break times the researcher spent time with students and they usually asked about the project.

During class the researcher took notes using the instrument designed to collect data. Most of these notes were later typed for analysis purposes. Also materials that the teacher used were collected.



*Semi-Structured Interviews:* Students and teachers were interviewed in order to collect more information that could help in the understanding of beliefs. The researcher started interviews after the fourth week of observations, so that the students could feel a little bit more confidence to express their opinions. All participants, including teachers were given a letter that informed about the procedures of the interviews and the purpose of the study. Participation in the interviews was optional, so if any participant selected did not want to do it, it was okay; however, all selected participants were willing to cooperate.

Interviews were about thirty minutes long, they were individual and they were conducted in Spanish because of the level of proficiency of the students. All interviews were recorded, no notes were taken in order to keep a non-threatening environment and give the interviewee more confidence. Interviews were done in an available classroom at the CCCN either before or after class, only in one of the groups they were done during class time because the teacher gave permission to do it while he was doing the midterm oral exams.

Six students from each group were selected; this represents about forty percent of the population. The criteria for the selection was to basically to get different participants interviewed. There was an equal number of men and women, students from varied ages, personalities, roles in the classroom and levels of proficiency. Also, students who had been studying at the CCCN for more than one bimester had a priority for selection.

As interviews were semi-structured, there was a set of questions that was asked to all participants, but the researcher intervened whenever it was necessary or it was an



appropriate time to address a point that was not included in the interview, and could be valuable data.

Moreover, interviews were transcribed for data analysis. In order to have more readable texts, which would facilitate the systematization of data, false starts, hesitations and unnecessary repetition were eliminated.

*Questionnaires:* This instrument was applied at the end of the data collection process. They were given individually to students before class, so that they could answer it and give it back to the researcher at the end of the class, however some students asked for more time or they simply forgot to return it; therefore the researcher picked up those questionnaires the following class. She also made sure that students understood the instructions. Only one of the students was out of the country, thus he sent the questionnaire by e-mail.

Teacher questionnaires were given in advance, but since they are so busy it was very hard to get them back, they needed more time. The researcher had to send e-mails reminding them about the questionnaire.

*Data analysis:* The techniques used to analyze data in this investigation go in the line of qualitative data. First, the data gathered from each instrument is read and systematized. First it is decided how qualitative and quantitative data will be processed; it is determined what can be quantitative and what can be qualitative. Then, quantitative data is processed first, all the necessary graphs are elaborated based on the information from the instruments. In this process units are identified and classified according to appropriate categories. Qualitative data is carefully read in order to find



patterns or similarities in the information obtained through different instruments, using notes on margins, comparison and contrast.

## **Limitations**

A few constraints were found throughout the process of investigation. The main constraint was the limited period of time, which forced the researcher to carry out the collection of the data in a relatively short period of time. It was difficult to fit an appropriate number of observations in the timeframe given the fact that some classes could not be observed due to certain activities proper of the institution and a teacher's discomfort with the presence of the researcher in the classroom. This obstacle was somehow overcome thanks to the coordinator of the site who negotiated the possibility to observe more classes, so at the end only this group only missed one observation. Another limitation was the researcher's familiarity with the context, which was addressed by means of making the familiar a strange reality while working in the field.





## **IV. Presentation and Analysis of Results**

Undoubtedly, beliefs are an inherent part of teachers and students in the language learning process. On the one hand, teachers have an experiential and academic background that informs and defines their assumptions about how language learning and teaching should happen. They were once learners, and therefore they went through different stages and developed their own strategies to deal with the challenges of learning. Besides that, they have studied theory about methodology and language acquisition, and they also have teaching experience, which tells them what has proven to be effective. On the other hand, students have a different and more limited background in this respect. They come to the class without knowing about methodology or theoretical aspects, but they have very clear ideas about what they want or do not want in a class and in their learning process.

Given the divergence of these two realities, it is the aim of this paper to describe teachers' and learners' sets of beliefs, determine if there is a gap between them, and explore its implications. The examination of this phenomenon appears as relevant to the field of language teaching because awareness about this mismatch might result in a more effective process for both pupils and instructors.

### **Information about Learners Collected the First Day of Class**

When referring to a possible belief mismatch it is necessary to consider the information that is exchanged between students and teachers the first day of class. It is



at the beginning of the course that the teacher sets the rules and gets to know the students. In the case of the teachers who participated in this research, they collected general information about the students such as personal information (name, job, place where they live, age, family, etc.), interests, general expectations about the course, and what they consider most relevant, is information that helps teachers diagnose the students' level.

During class fieldwork, it was possible to observe the amount of time that teachers dedicate to this task and how they do it. The teachers tended to ask the learners about the activities that they liked or disliked and what they expected from the course; however, the students' answers were limited or too general. For instance, some students said that they wanted to improve their pronunciation or speaking skills, which is a goal that cannot be attained in a bimester.

Teachers seemed to pay close attention to the pupil's preferences related to class dynamics. In one of the groups a student remarked that they disliked the activities that require going out of the classroom to interview other teachers. And in another class they expressed that they loved games.

It was also clear that teachers share information about themselves with the class. They do not give much personal information, but they do talk about their experience and their teaching style. The first day of class teachers talked about the use of Spanish in class, how they handled error correction, how they used the book, the type of activities and materials they use in class and their general expectations from the course.

The teachers did not use any kind of instrument to record the information; they obtained through activities and mainly by asking students direct questions. They got first



hand information, but they did not record it, or at least they did not take any notes. Basically, the collection of data occurred during interaction, either student-student or teacher-student, during whole class discussions and group work.

The instructors said that this information helped them to plan their lessons and select the activities or materials because the information they got in that first class, at least allowed them to have an idea of where students are at linguistically speaking, and to have a general idea of the students' preferences in terms of class activities.

Ideally, the collection of this type of information at the beginning of the course can lead to a positive outcome in the teaching learning process because it will have the effect of minimizing the mismatch between teachers' and students' beliefs. Both parts will be more aware of each other's expectations, which eventually will result in a satisfactory understanding and recognition of needs.

## **Teachers' Beliefs**

### **The Source of Teachers' Beliefs**

According to the teachers who participated in this research their set of beliefs is not a result of a single aspect; they consider this as a more holistic concept, which is constantly shaped by different elements. The teachers point out experience as one of the most influential aspect. One of the teachers wrote, "Experience, because it is the one that helps you to grow not only as a person, but also as a professional" (Teacher questionnaire, October 2009).



Experience is undoubtedly related to students. Another teacher stated that students and co-workers are very important agents that have had an impact on what she believes about language learning.

The other teacher thinks that her experience as a language learner has her marked assumptions about learning, although she is aware that probably what she considers effective might not be effective for some of her students, she believes that some of the processes that learners go through are similar, and what she did as a language learner can be of some help to her students somehow. In summary, even though teachers acknowledge various sources of their beliefs it is experience what has and still is the element that has a stronger effect, according to what they expressed when they were interviewed.

### **Beliefs about the Role of L1 in the Learning of L2**

When it comes to the role of Spanish in learning English, teachers have a very clear idea. In their opinion the students' mother tongue does have a role in the learning of the foreign language. All of them think; however, that it is a double-edge sword. It could be a tool, but it could also be an obstacle if students don't know how to use it appropriately. And yet, they recognize that many learners do not know how to take advantage of their L1.

Through observations, it was evident that the teacher's use of Spanish was very limited in the classroom. Actually they viewed it as almost unacceptable to use the L1 in



class. The following table shows the frequency and the purposes for which Spanish was used in class.

As it can be seen in the exhibit, the highest percentages fall into the category “never” which indicates no use of Spanish. It is necessary to clarify that the percentages in the category of “seldom” correspond to one of the teachers only. This teacher was the one who was teaching the lowest level. She acknowledged that Spanish is supposed to be the last resource; its use is effective when different strategies have been applied and still the class does not seem to understand what she is explaining. She commented that the L1 can be a resource to save time, especially with slow groups and low levels, that is how she used it with her group.

### Exhibit No. 1

#### Teachers' Use of Spanish

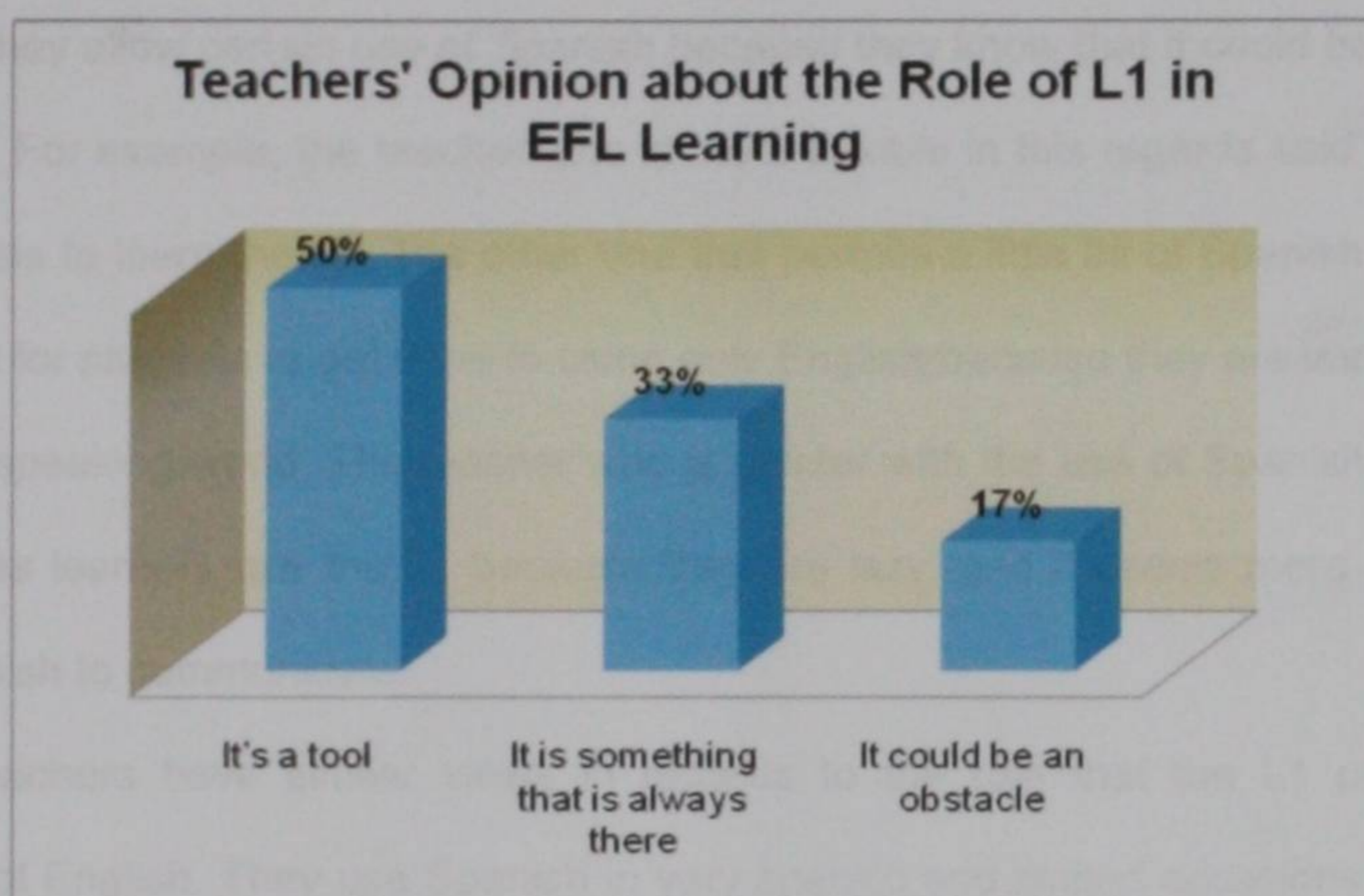
Purpose	Frequency				
	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
To explain Vocabulary	0%	0%	0%	25%	75%
To give instructions	0%	0%	0%	5%	95%
To explain grammar	0%	0%	5%	12%	83%
To refer to something cultural	0%	0%	0%	12%	88%
To make comparisons between L1 and L2	0%	0%	0%	8%	92%
To talk to the whole group	0%	0%	0%	21%	79%
To talk to SS individually	0%	0%	0%	8%	22%

Source: Participant Observation at CCCN August – October 2009



The other two teachers made no use of Spanish in class during observations, but they said that it could be necessary in some very specific cases when students cannot understand the meaning of a word, or when a particular student has serious difficulties with the language. The next exhibit illustrates teachers' perceptions about the specific role that students' mother tongue has in their teaching.

Exhibit No. 2



Source: Teacher semi-structured interviews at CCCN, October 2009

Teachers recognize that Spanish is always there in the process. They are aware that although students are not supposed to use the L1 in class, they do because it is a resource they have and use for learning. In the interviews, one of the teachers affirmed that the use of L1 is an easy way out because it is easier for students to switch to Spanish when they cannot communicate than to look for alternative ways to express their ideas in English.



The level of acceptance of Spanish as a resource in class varies. Some teachers are more strict than others; they all react in order to avoid the behavior in particular ways when students speak Spanish, but there is variation in the frequency they do. For instance, one of the teachers would discourage the use of L1 almost 90% of the times, while the other two would do so about 60% of the times. These two teachers were more tolerant towards the use of Spanish in class.

This type of decisions in class clearly reflects how teachers feel about the role of the L1. They allow certain use of Spanish because they know that it could be helpful for students. For example, the teacher who is more flexible in this regards said that the L1 is the basis to learn the L2. The other one that permits a little bit of Spanish said that it is difficult for students to get used to using only English because they are immersed in a Spanish speaking world. The teacher who is stricter with the use of Spanish thinks that sometimes learners use the L1 because they are lazy, and it seems more practical to use Spanish to communicate.

Teachers have similar views in regards to the role that the L1 plays in the learning of English. They use Spanish in very specific and limited occasions. Some are more tolerant to the presence of Spanish, but they all recognize that it is a tool that students have either to help in their learning or to become a barrier in this learning process. They all think that students need to get to know more strategies that allow them to make an appropriate use of their L1 in a way that it becomes a useful resource and not a hindrance.

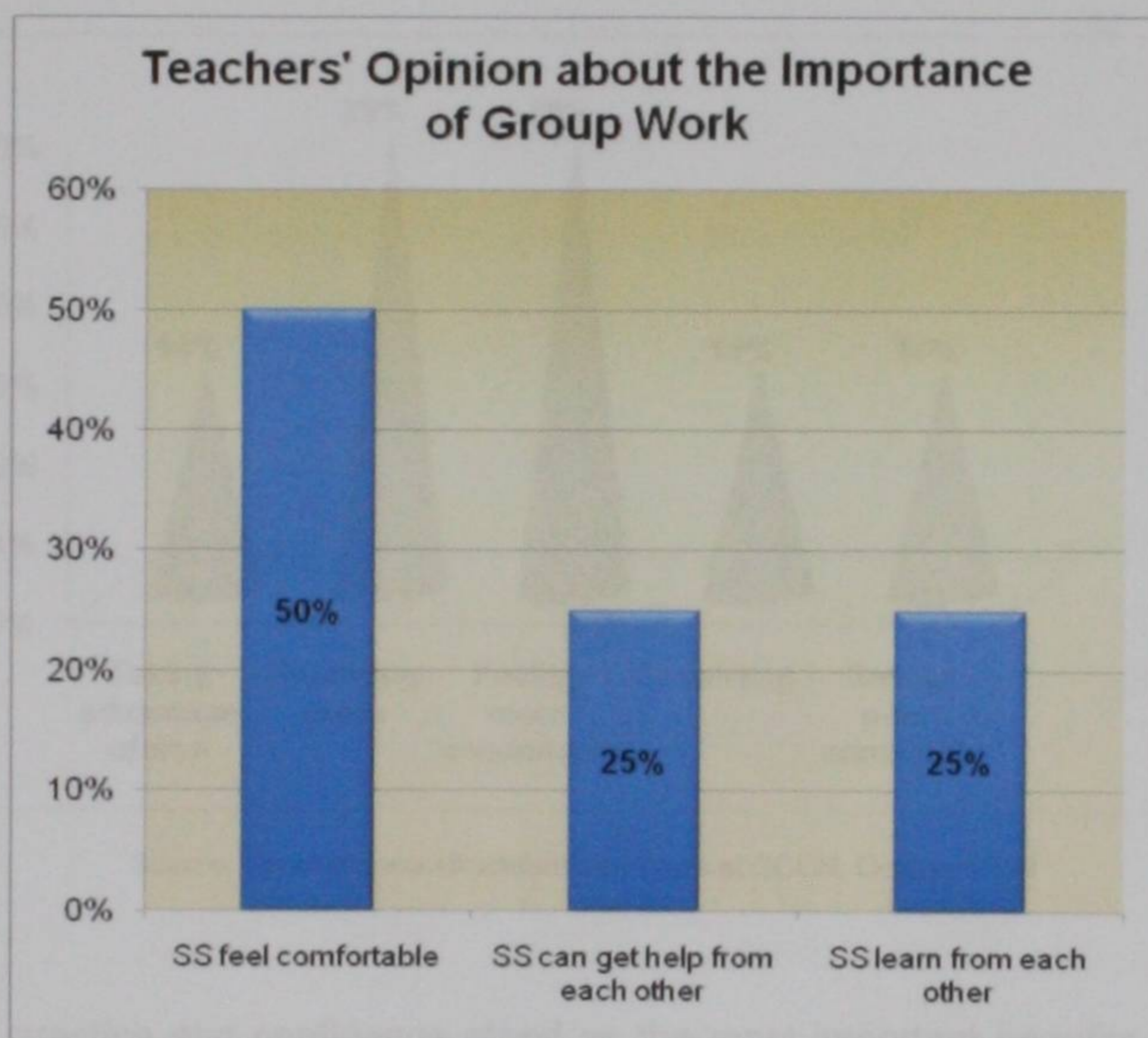




## Beliefs about Group Work

As of the importance of group work, teachers' views are very similar. All of them make frequent use of group work in their classes. They recognize that the dynamics of small groups fosters learning. Instructors believe that when students interact with each other in groups, they can derive important benefits. The exhibit that follows shows teachers opinions about group work.

Exhibit No. 3



Source: Teacher semi-structured interviews at CCCN, October 2009

Teachers highlight that working in groups does facilitate learning because sometimes it could be more effective for them to learn from peers than from the teacher.

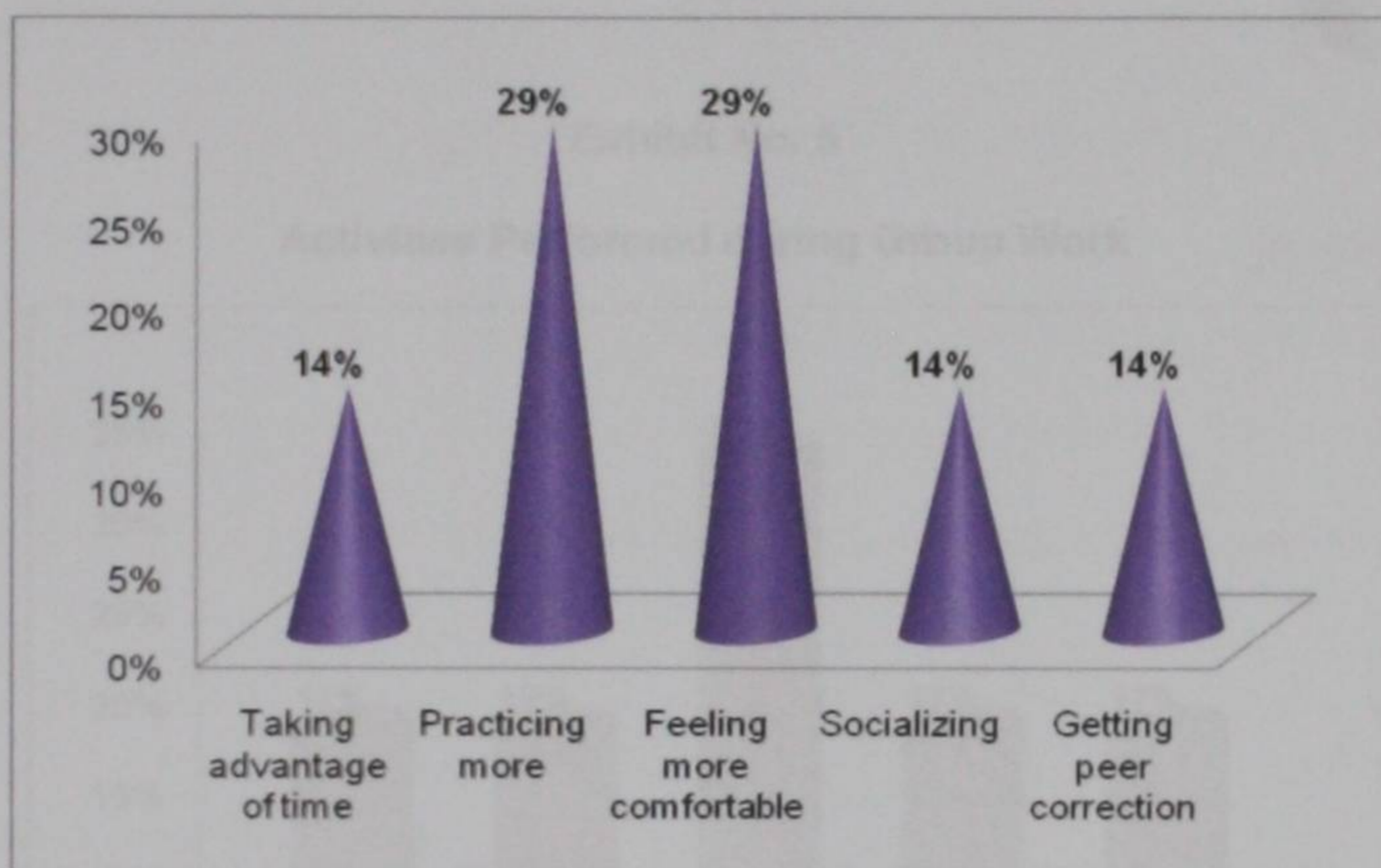


They have been able to witness how students behave, and according to them, they seem to be comfortable, they are talking to classmates, so they feel more confident and not so stressed out as when they speak to the teacher or in front of the class.

Similarly, teachers find group work very beneficial the English classroom. The next exhibit presents the main benefits of group activities that teachers identified.

#### Exhibit No. 4

#### Teachers' Opinions about the Benefits of Group Work



Source: Teacher semi-structured interviews at CCCN, October 2009

Clearly, practice and confidence stand as the most important benefits of group work, which are significant elements in language learning. Teachers have students work in groups to do different types of activities: check homework, check answers in exercises, discuss about personal experiences, practice structures, share opinions, etc.

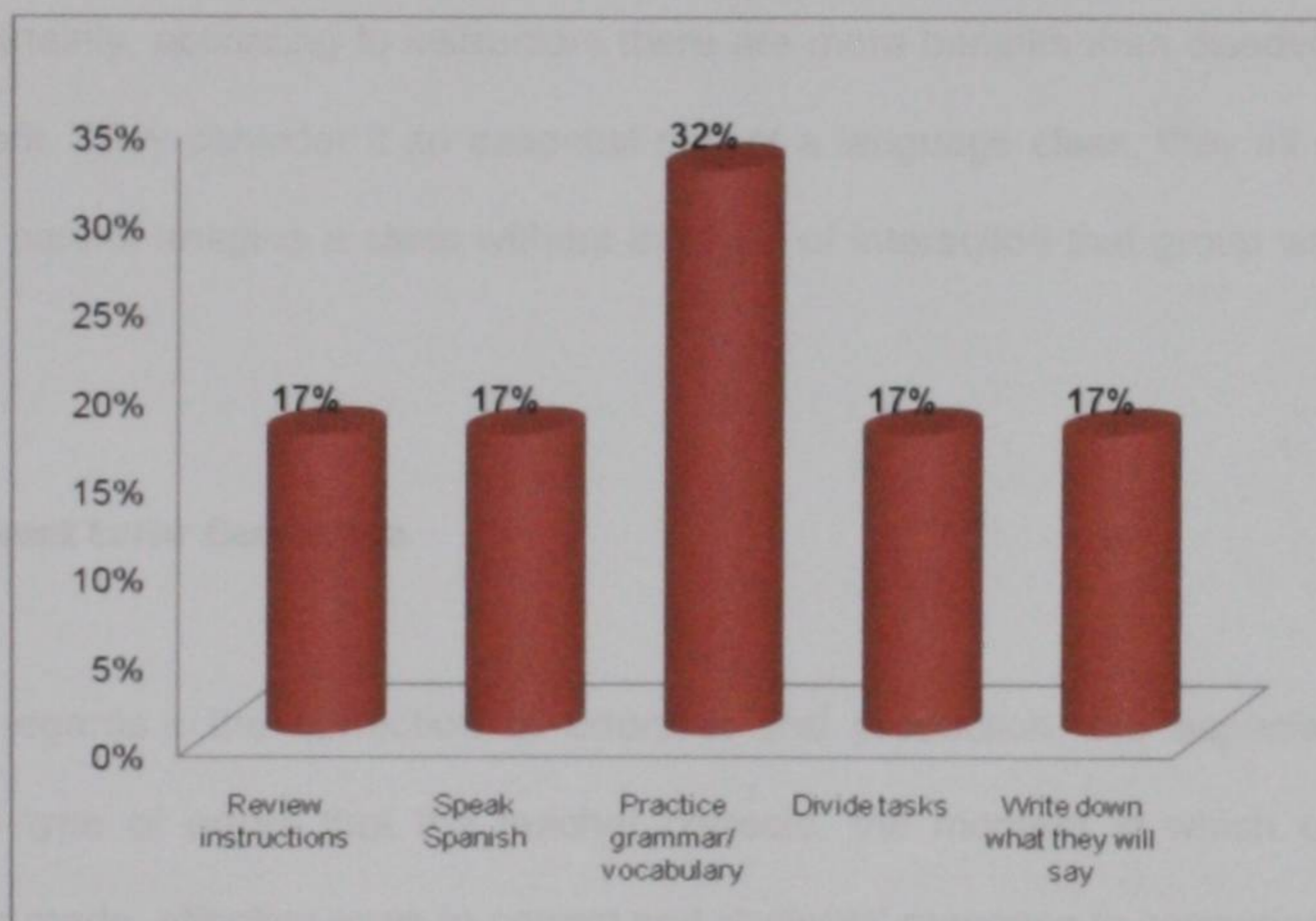


Even with students at the beginner level, teachers trust in the effectiveness of group work, and they all agree that students usually respond well to group work. One of the teachers said, "Sharing is one of the best tools to learn" (Teacher questionnaires, October 2009). And this is what was observed frequently in classes throughout the process of field work: students sharing their knowledge, their views or what had happened to them.

Moreover, when asked about the activities that students perform during group work instructors pointed out the behaviors that the following graph illustrates.

### Exhibit No. 5

#### Activities Performed during Group Work



Source: Teacher semi-structured interviews at CCCN, October 2009



Teachers strongly believe that practicing structures and vocabulary is what students do more when they work in small groups. As it was mentioned before, practice seems to be the most relevant advantage derived from group work. Interestingly, teachers indicate that speaking Spanish is also part of what students do. In the interviews they commented that they are aware of the fact that Spanish is part of the dynamics of group work; however, they consider that the benefits of group work weigh more than certain level of use of Spanish. Regarding students' tendency to write down what they will later present or talk about, teachers do not think that it is negative; they see it as a strategy or part of a learning style. If writing gives students more confidence, instructors think that it is acceptable, and they would not ask students not to do it if it works for them.

Certainly, according to instructors there are more benefits than disadvantages to group work. They consider it an essential part of a language class, they all expressed that they cannot imagine a class without the type of interaction that group work makes possible.

### **Beliefs about Error Correction**

In regards to the correction of errors in oral production, the aspects explored were the type of errors that the teacher corrects, the moment in which corrections should be made, effective ways to correct and students' response to corrections.

In interviews, teachers remarked that they pay more attention to grammar mistakes, 60% of the answers relate to grammar errors and 40% to pronunciation



mistakes. This was confirmed in the results of observations as it can be noted in the subsequent table.

### Exhibit No. 6

#### Types of Errors Teachers Correct when Students Speak in Class

Mistakes	Frequency				
	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
Grammar Mistakes	30%	12%	12%	34%	12%
Pronunciation Mistakes	16%	0%	12%	46%	26%
Vocabulary Mistakes	8%	0%	0%	32%	60%
Mistakes that interfere with meaning	4%	0%	0%	42%	54%
Mistakes that don't interfere with meaning	24%	8%	8%	40%	20%
Mistakes related to the target linguistic aspect	5%	5%	20%	25%	45%
Mistakes not related to the target linguistic aspect	28%	5%	0%	24%	43%
Mistakes that have been recently corrected	0%	0%	0%	16%	84%

Source: Participant Observation at CCCN August – October 2009

Evidently, the grammar mistakes have the highest percentage, which means that in most of the observations teachers tended to correct those mistakes that denoted a deficiency in structure. Pronunciation and vocabulary mistakes were not ignored, but their correction was not as consistent as that applied in the case of grammar. Actually, the grammar mistakes have the lowest frequency in the column of "never" which clearly indicates that this type of errors was rarely overlooked.



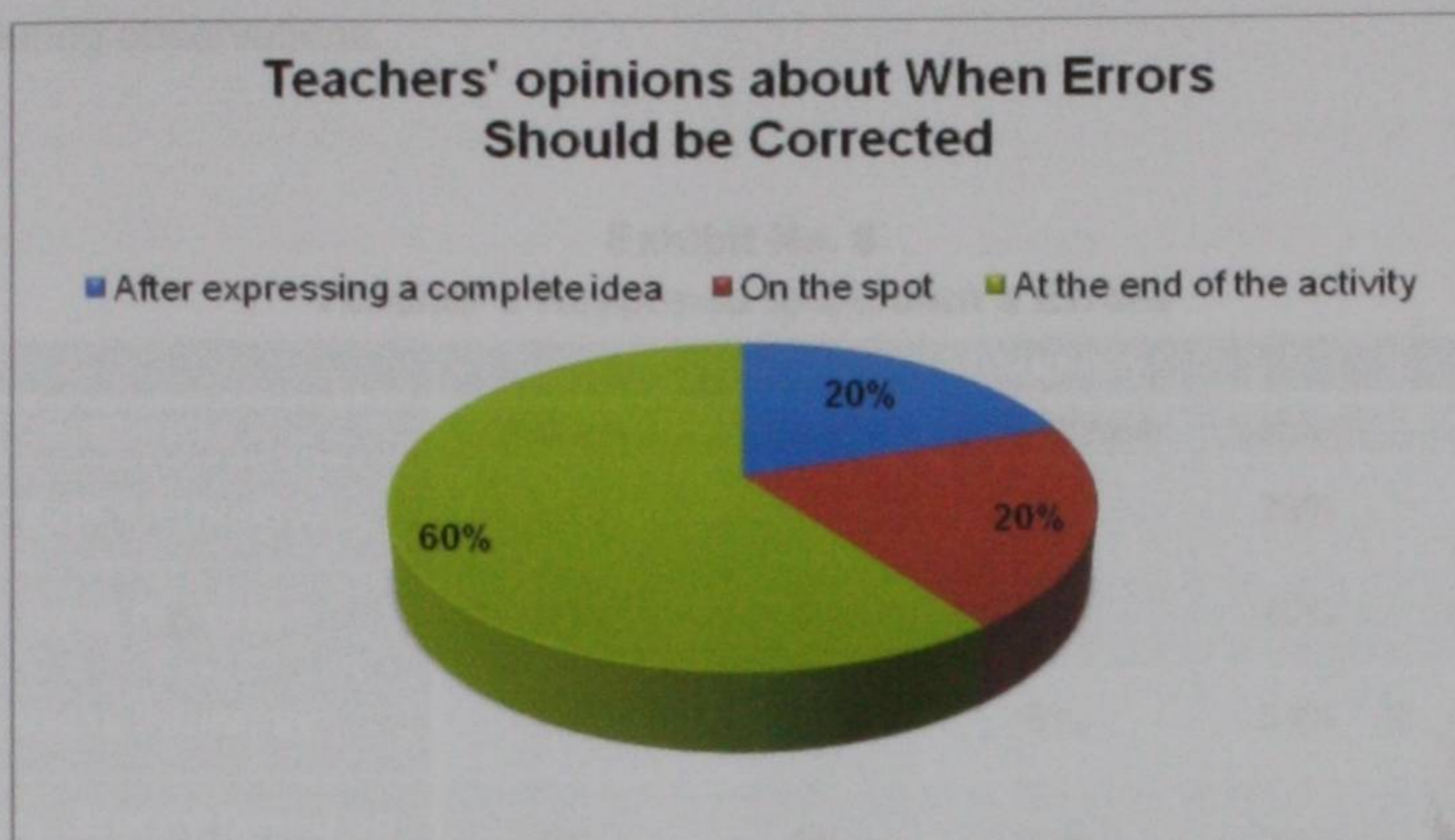
It is also interesting to pay attention to the fact that teachers correct fewer mistakes related to the target language's linguistic aspect being studied or practiced, and they focus more on errors related to other aspects that are not related to the objectives of the class, which they considered pertinent at the moment. Some of these mistakes are repetitive mistakes or common mistakes of Spanish speaking learners. For example, teachers always insisted on subject-verb agreement and language transfers such as "I am agree" (I agree), "must to do" (must do) and "for live" (to live). These were not related to grammar contents that were covered like future tenses and conditionals; however, instructors considered necessary to make such corrections because they tend to be common fossilized mistakes. Although these mistakes denote inconsistencies in the grammar competence, most of them do not interfere with the message intended to be delivered. In this regard, the table shows that a high percentage of mistakes, which are usually corrected, do not interfere with meaning. Such phenomenon denotes that teachers are alert to students' production in general, and they give feedback on different mistakes, not only on those related to the target linguistic content of the class.

Another aspect to take into consideration is the moment in which error correction takes place. The question that teachers and students ask is when it is more appropriate, on the spot or afterwards so that fluency is not sacrificed. The graph that follows represents the teachers' views in regards to this aspect.





## Exhibit No. 7



Source: Teacher semi-structured interviews at CCCN, October 2009

It seems that teachers are concerned about the effect of error correction on the students' fluency. The graph shows that most answers provided by teachers refer to making corrections in a way in which they do not interrupt students while they are speaking. One of the teachers wrote on the questionnaire applied, "errors should be corrected when the teacher thinks it is the right moment without affecting fluency and confidence of the student" (Teachers questionnaires, October 2009).

Another teacher commented that it depends on the type of mistake. Some corrections necessarily have to take place at the moment because the context can make the correction relevant. This means that correcting on the spot is one of the possibilities teachers manage, but they also have others factors in mind, not only accuracy. That is probably why they incorporate other error correction strategies at



different moments. The table that follows represents the teachers' response to errors in class during observations.

**Exhibit No. 8**  
**Teacher's Response to Student's Errors**

Response	Frequency				
	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
Corrects on the spot	33%	13%	17%	29%	8%
Ignores the error	17%	5%	8%	40%	34%
Corrects Indirectly	0%	0%	8%	54%	38%
Corrects directly based on notes	0%	0%	29%	5%	66%
Points out error and explains	5%	0%	0%	17%	78%
Asks SS to paraphrase	5%	0%	0%	0%	95%
Asks SS to correct error	0%	0%	0%	12%	88%
Gives general feedback at the end of the class	5%	0%	20%	0%	75%

Source: Participant Observation at CCCN August – October 2009

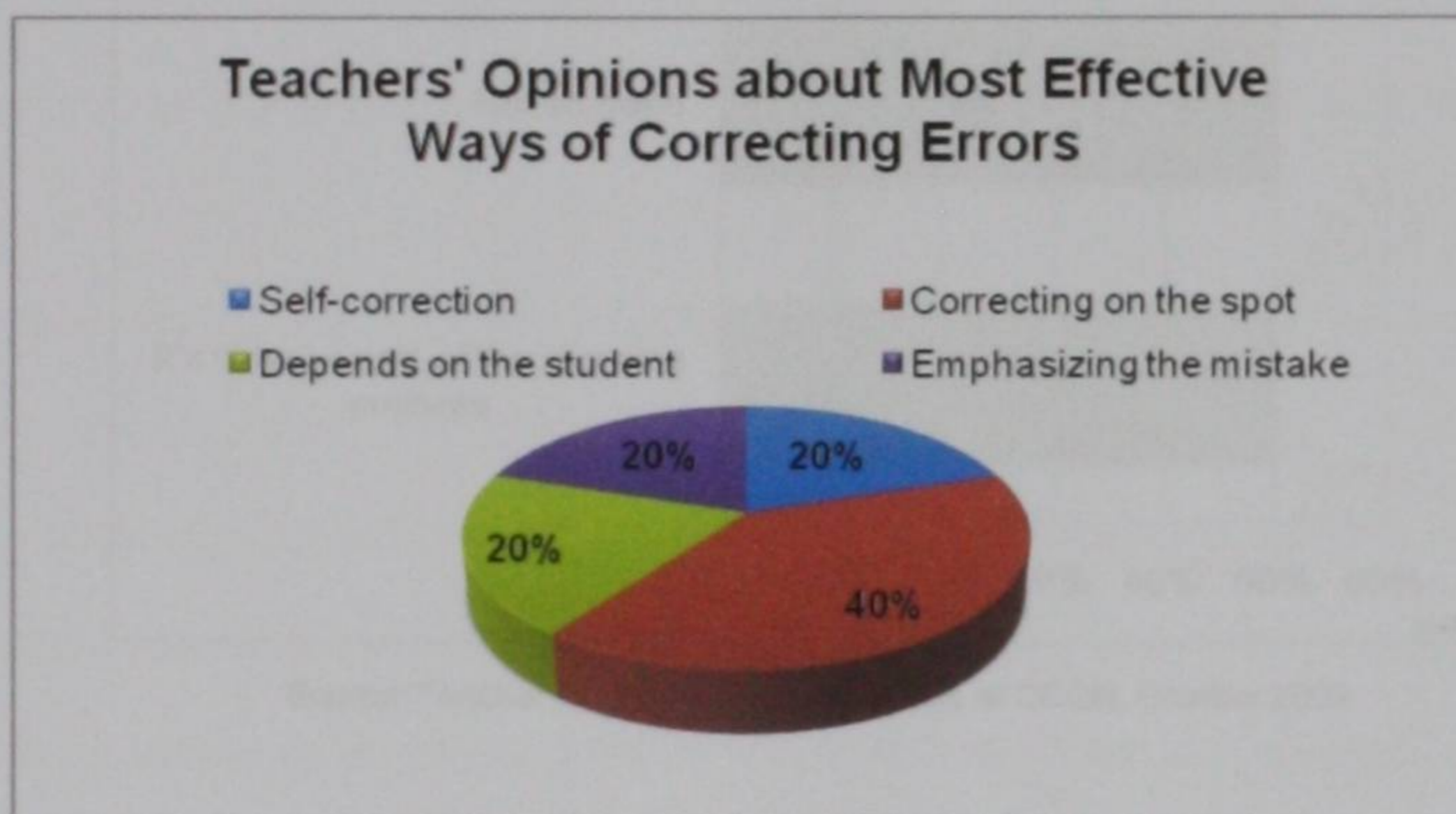
It is noticeable that teachers combine direct correction with indirect correction strategies, though direct correction has a higher frequency of "always" it is clear that correcting on the spot is alternated with providing general feedback at the end of the activity or the class based on notes taken while students were interacting. As one of the teachers said they make different decisions depending on the student, the type of mistake and the moment in order to respond appropriately. Teachers make the



difference between the errors that need explicit corrections and those which can be analyzed later on.

The previous table presents not only the moments in which teachers decide to correct students, it also portrays some error correction techniques teachers use to make corrections. These strategies include paraphrasing, providing explanations and repeating the correction, and as it can be seen they are used, but not as often as other techniques. The next graph represents the teachers' opinions about what they consider effective ways to correct errors.

**Exhibit No. 9**



Source: Teacher semi-structured interviews at CCCN, October 2009

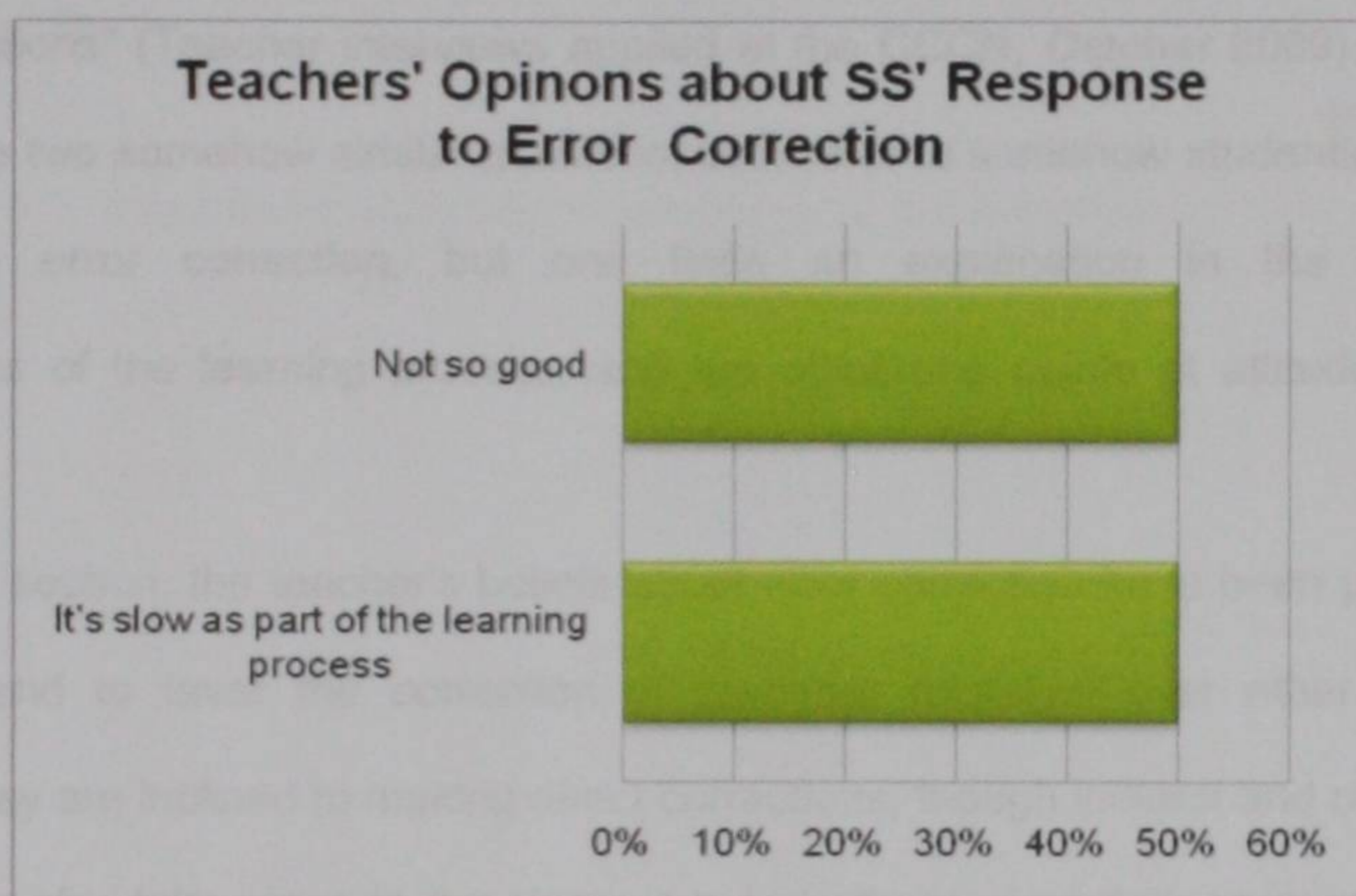
This graph confirms what was presented in the preceding table. Correcting explicitly at the moment is clearly a tendency in teachers' preferences for error correction. Nevertheless, there is some degree of flexibility in the use of this strategy because mentioning error correction and previously peer correction (in the analysis of



group work) demonstrates that teachers are open to different strategies, not only direct correction at the moment, other ways are valid and effective depending on the context.

The effectiveness of these techniques can be evident in the students' response, the ultimate goal is that learners are able to overcome those difficulties that they have and make less mistakes. The table that follows depicts teachers' opinion about how well they think their pupils respond to the corrections they make.

**Exhibit No. 10**



Source: Teacher semi-structured interviews at CCCN, October 2009

These were the teachers' answers; in short they do not think students respond well to corrections or at least it takes time to see results. Teachers admit that taking into account corrections to improve do not depend entirely on them, students have an important role, and unfortunately error correction does not end up as successfully as it was expected.



In the interviews, two of the teachers referred to mistakes as a part of the process; one of them stated "Like half of them respond well. It's a process, and I think we have to work harder in the first levels. My group of students who are about to graduate still say 'she don't' and 'I am agree' and other common mistakes." Similarly, another one affirmed "I don't think they respond well because many of them just don't care. For example when you give them the recommendations on the ongoing assessment, they just pay attention to the number (grade) and not to the recommendations" (Teacher interviews applied at the CCCN, October 2009). It seems that there are two somehow similar positions, both refer to somehow students' deficient response to error correction, but one finds an explanation in the particular characteristics of the learning process, and the other one points at attitude towards learning.

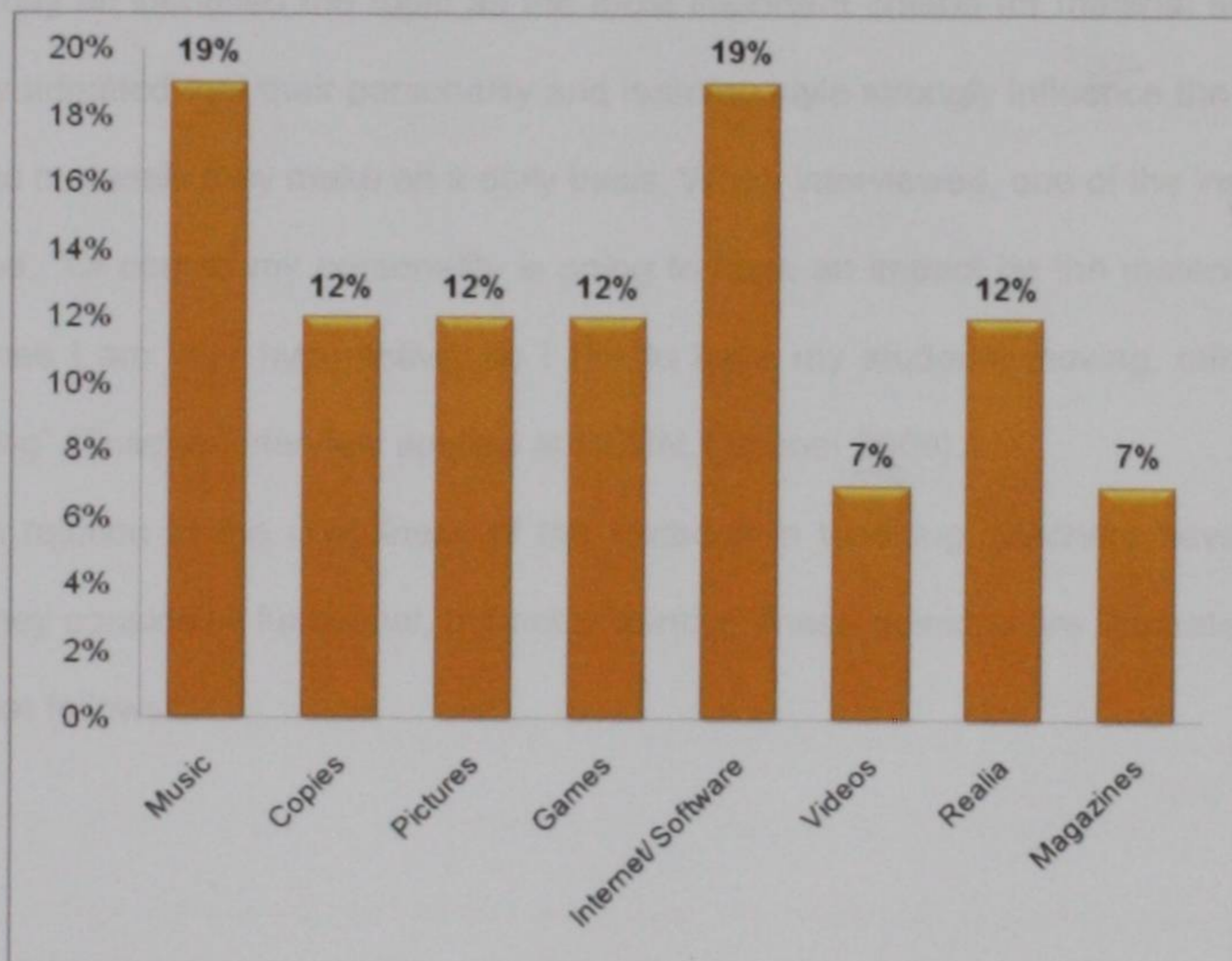
In this section, the teacher's beliefs about error correction have been presented. Instructors tend to favor the correction of grammar mistakes over other types of mistakes. They are inclined to making direct corrections, though indirect and other types of corrections also take place in the classroom sometimes. And their perception about the students' response to corrections is not so positive; on the contrary it denotes disappointment. There is discrepancy among teachers, as it should naturally happen; however there is more similarity in basic aspects, teachers' beliefs about error correction are alike.



## Beliefs about Instructional Materials

This section will describe teachers' opinions regarding instructional materials. This includes the variety and usefulness of materials that they usually take to class, the role of the textbook and the criteria they use for material selection. In the first place, the next graph presents the instructional materials that teachers mentioned in the interviews. These are resources out of the book.

**Exhibit No. 11**  
**Supplementary Materials Used by the Instructor**



Source: Teacher semi-structured interviews at CCCN, October 2009





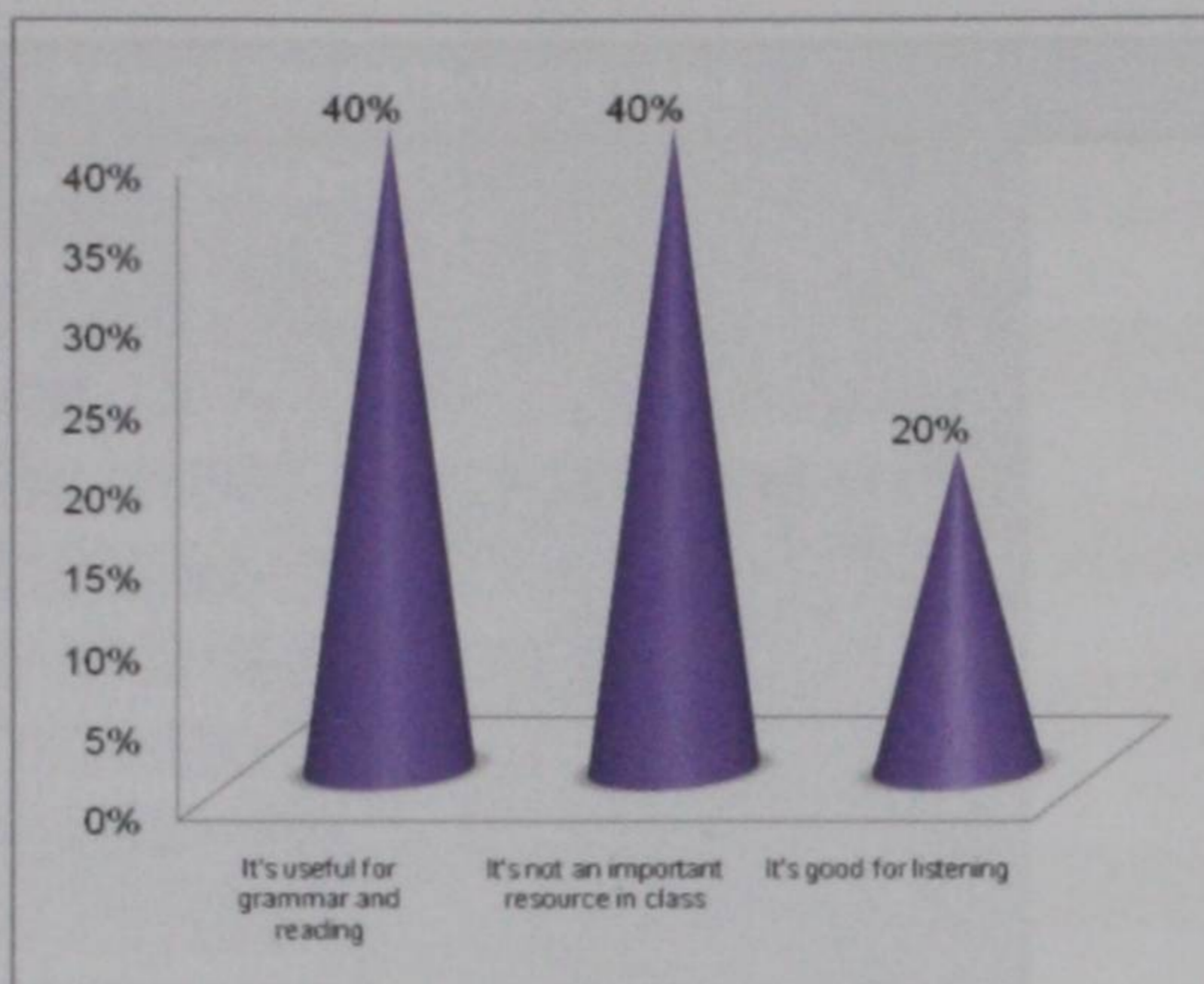
As the graph shows, teachers use a wide variety of supplementary materials in their classes that go from basic to more technological tools. Music and Internet or the software from the multimedia laboratory seem to be the most used resources, but it basically depends on the topics of the course; not all the materials can be used in one course. Teachers commented on the helpfulness of this type of materials. They said that it is important for students to be exposed to different materials because they have varied learning styles or intelligences. They promote motivation and interest and they make the class more dynamic, and in this way they can relax and learn at the same time.

They all identified the topic as the most important criteria for material selection, and they admitted that their personality and learning style strongly influence the choices related to materials they make on a daily basis. When interviewed, one of the instructors explained, "Of course my personality is going to have an impact on the material I use. Sometimes I am very hyperactive, so I like to have my students moving, talking and discussing" (Teacher interview applied at CCCN, October 2009).

In relation to the usefulness of the textbook in teaching, teachers have similar views; they consider it functional, but not essential. These opinions are illustrated in the graph that follows.



**Exhibit No. 12**  
**Teachers' Opinions about the Usefulness of the Textbook**



Source: Teacher semi-structured interviews at CCCN, October 2009

It becomes obvious that teachers do consider the textbook helpful in their teaching. They believe it is especially for grammar, reading and listening activities. Though two of the teachers said that in the end that is the material students always have with them, and probably the one they trust; so it does provide some guidance. They all think that the textbook has to be complemented with other resources. In this sense, one of the teachers wrote the following statement in the questionnaire "No matter how good a textbook is, it's never good enough, so there are always better or complementary activities to get what I want from the students" (Teacher questionnaire, October 2009). And the next table supports what they expressed. The exhibit includes the activities in which the teachers used the textbook during class observations.



**Exhibit No. 13**  
**Use of the Textbook in Class**

Purposes for which the textbook is used	Frequency
A. For the schema activation	3%
B. For the pre-task	7%
C. For the task	0%
D. For the language analysis (grammar exercises)	15%
E. To check homework	22%
F. To work in pairs or small groups	8%
G. To work individually	5%
H. To explain grammar	3%
I. To read	7%
J. To promote discussion	5%
K. To do pronunciation exercises	5%
L. To do listening exercises	15%
M. To do vocabulary exercises	5%

Source: Participant observation at CCCN, August-October 2009

Once more it is clearly established that teachers prefer to use the book mainly for exercises. Yet there is some promotion of discussion, but the percentage is low compared to the 22% corresponding to homework checking and 15% for pronunciation and language analysis activities. This shows that the use of the textbook is limited to specific practice related to the language contents of the curriculum.

This section explained the opinions, behaviors and attitudes that teachers hold when it comes to instructional materials. They believe in offering variety to students, they validate the role of their learning styles and personalities in material selection. And finally, they acknowledge the limited usefulness of the textbook without underestimating

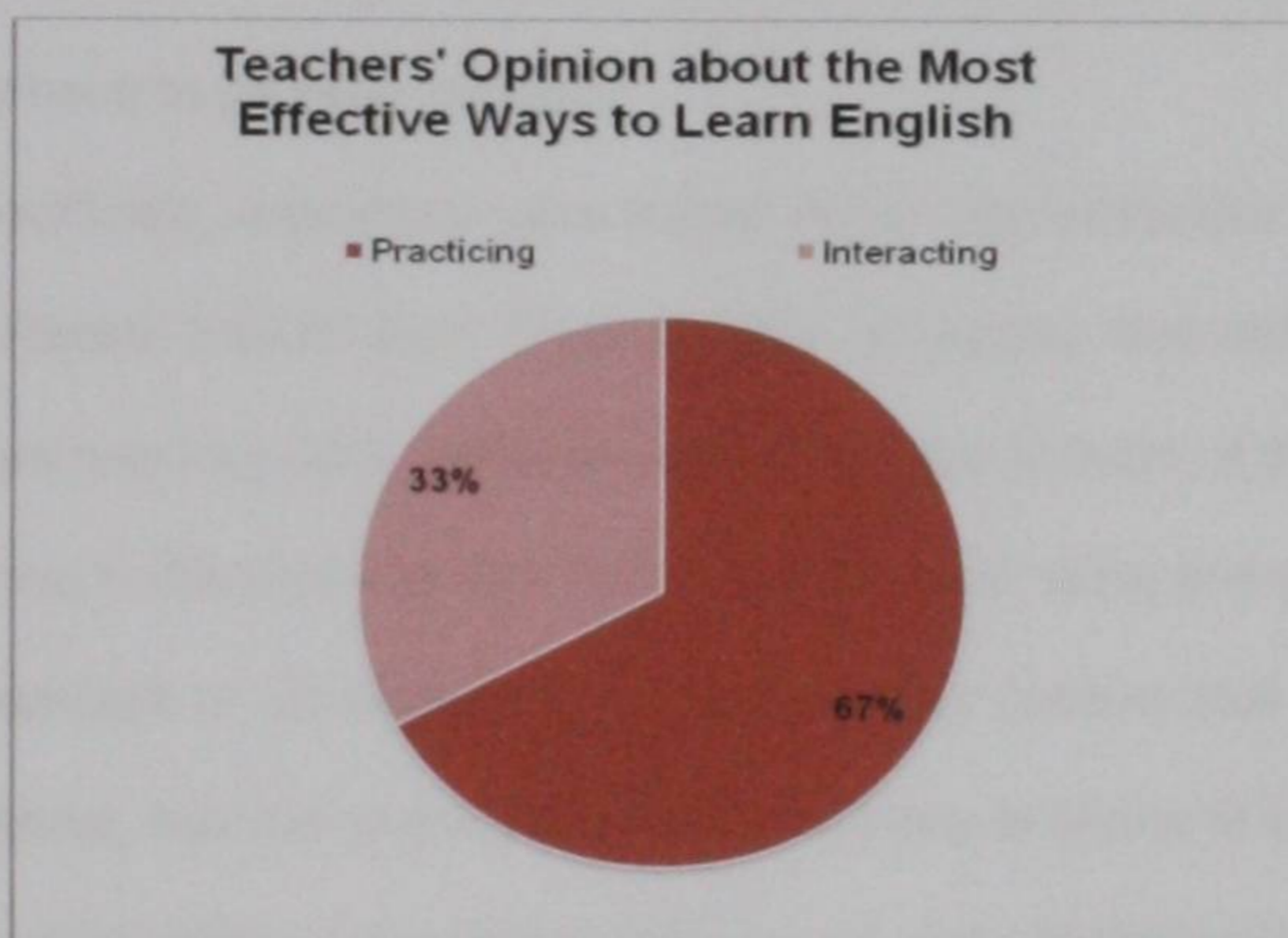


the help that it can provide to students, but still not giving it an important role in the classroom.

### **Beliefs about Language Learning**

In regards to language learning, the areas addresses are the most effective ways to learn a language, and more specifically ways to learn English as a foreign language in a country like Costa Rica. Besides that, the beliefs about the most difficult aspects of learning English and the factors that affect learning will be analyzed. The following graph illustrates teachers' beliefs about what they think can really help their students learn a second language, in this case English.

**Exhibit No. 14**



Source: Teacher semi-structured interviews at CCCN, October 2009



The three teachers agreed on the relevance of practice and interaction, which means that they believe that learners have to take risks and use the language. Actually, they stressed that students have to put aside their shyness. One of the opinions recorded in the interviews says, "The person should forget his/her shyness, the person should understand that to be shy is good, but if you want to speak you have to speak" (Teacher interviews done at the CCCN, October 2009). Teachers acknowledge that there might not be a single method or strategy that works well for every learner because everybody is different, but they do emphasize that students have to explore it, live it and use it to interact with other people.

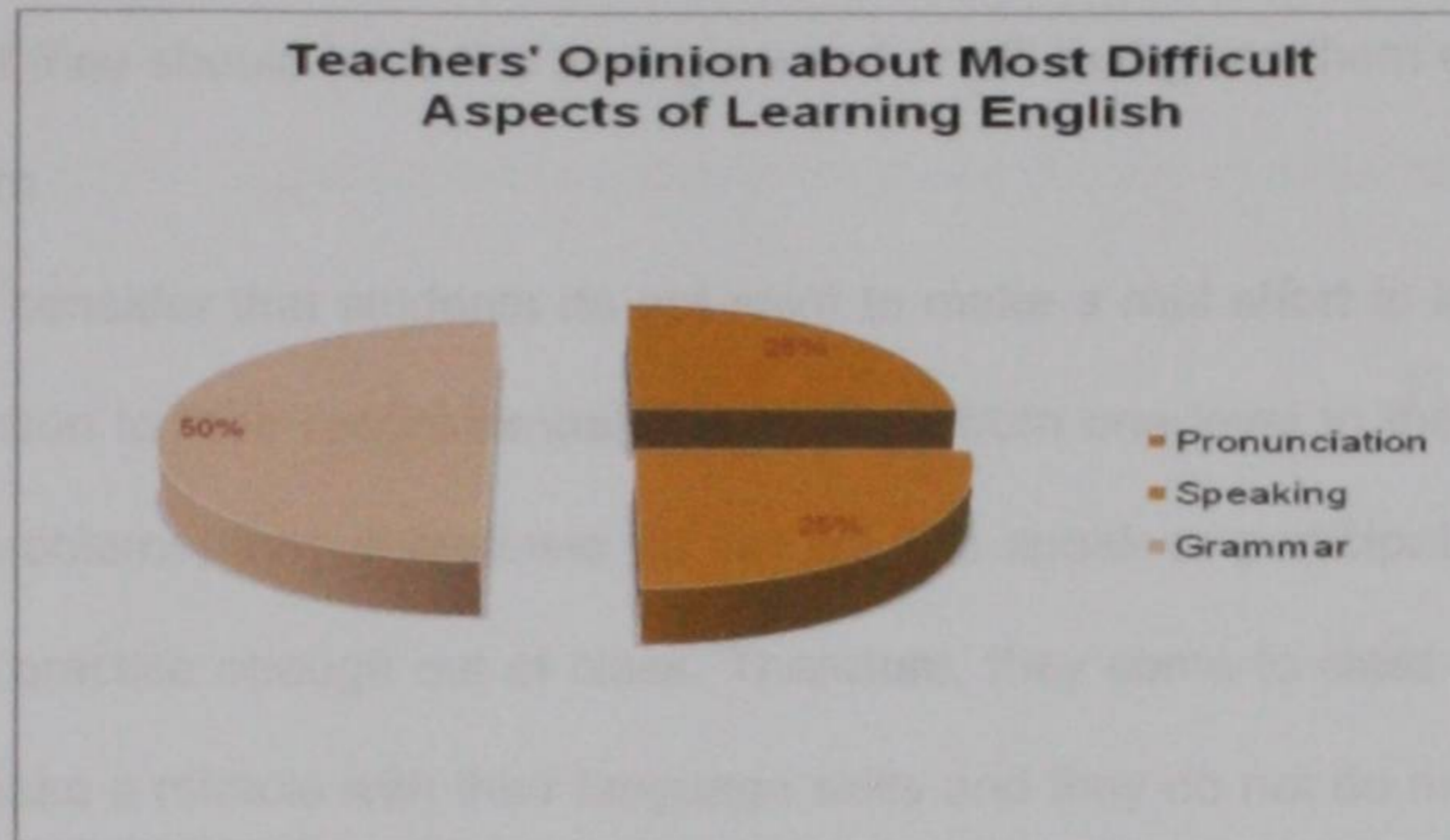
In addition, teachers consider exposure to the language one of the most influential factors that aid in learning. They also take into account affective aspects such as motivation, anxiety, enthusiasm and attitude. They say that students need to work on strategies; it is important for them to understand that they are learning a language which is new and they have to be open minded.

More specifically, educators were asked about the conditions under which they thought Costa Ricans should learn English. They all agreed that attitude is the key to success; learners need a positive attitude and willingness to learn, if they have this, they are likely to be more effective learners. They consider that being immersed in a Spanish speaking environment is an obstacle; that is why they believe that students have to analyze themselves, see the possibilities that they have in terms of language institutes and choose the best option according to their needs and characteristics. It is necessary for students to be guided in the process.



In this same area of language learning, the graph presented next shows the instructor's views about the aspects, that according to their experience, they see as most complex and take more effort and time to master.

**Exhibit No. 15**



Source: Teacher semi-structured interviews at CCCN, October 2009

All of the teachers, one way or another, mentioned grammar in their answers. One of the teachers said that sometimes students have misconceptions about grammar, what they consider easy in the end is not really so. For instance, the *verb to be* and the auxiliaries *do* and *does* seem easy at first, but when students start to use them they find complications, there are different inflections, functions and exceptions.

They also highlight the difference between grammar in English and in Spanish, and sometimes students do not really understand that they are two totally distinct systems, in some cases they have to unlearn Spanish structures in order to use English accurately. All this for sure causes a lot of confusion and problems to learners. This result can be related to error correction, as it was explained teachers tend to pay closer



attention to grammar mistakes, so probably this belief about grammar makes them be more insistent with grammar related inconsistencies.

As a final point in language learning, teachers were asked whether they believed their students were good learners, two of them coincide in the idea that students are bad language learners. They think that students expect too much from them, so according to that they should have like a magic wand or pill that gives them everything they need to learn.

Teachers consider that students do not want to make a real effort to learn; they do not pay attention to their recommendations, they go from one level to the next one with the same problems, they sometimes do not want to speak or participate in class and they do not practice enough out of class. Therefore, they come to class expecting the teacher to make a miracle with their language skills and they do not do much about it. One of the teachers wrote on the questionnaire, "The ideal student is the one who knows he/she is not capable enough to learn out of no effort and not perfect enough for not needing help" (Teacher questionnaire applied at the CCCN, October 2009)

### **Consistency and Inconsistency between Teachers' Actions and Beliefs**

The analysis that follows is based on the comparison between the information gathered by means of interviews, as well as on behaviors and actions recorded in the class observations. The role of L1, group work, error correction and the use of instructional materials are the areas included in this section.



In general there is a lot of consistency between what teachers believe and what they actually do in the classroom. In the first aspect, the role of the native language in class, there is only a point that can be discussed. One of the teachers is consistent with her beliefs because she thinks that in some cases it is necessary to use Spanish for it saves time when students are having real difficulties understanding. During observations in her group, she used Spanish to explain certain complex vocabulary that students asked for and to explain grammar aspects such as the use of adverbs.

In the case of the other two instructors, although they recognize that the mother tongue is a tool and they would use in certain circumstances, there was no use of Spanish at all in the classes observed, not even to explain things to students individually. They would allow students to use Spanish or give explanations to their classmates in the L1, but they, the teachers, always gave their explanations in English. There were a few occasions when students did not get the right meaning of a word in which the use of Spanish would have fit the purpose, and they did not use it. Besides, when explaining grammar the teachers did not make any reference to Spanish, they did not highlight differences or similarities between the two languages, which could have probably facilitated the making of language connections for students.

In terms of group work, beliefs and actions are very consistent among teachers. They emphasized that group work is beneficial for students in many different ways, and they do use group or pair work regularly in order to have students discuss or practice. An interesting tendency to note is that they also rely frequently on whole groups activities or discussions, usually before and after activities they carried out a general



discussion with the whole class; most of the time the over participators were the ones that took better advantage of this procedure.

As of error correction, there are some specific points with two of the instructors. One of them is about the moment in which corrections should be made. The teacher stressed that it was essential to be careful when correcting because fluency can be affected, also that presentations were not a good scenario for making corrections; however, she did a lot of direct correction interrupting students when they were speaking, especially in front of the class. Also, she made corrections during presentations, she wrote notes, but she made some notorious corrections of pronunciation. The other instance was with a teacher who affirmed that she corrected mistakes that affected meaning, nevertheless as exhibit No. 6 shows most of the corrections made are not the ones that obscure meaning; as a matter of fact this type of correction was rarely made. It can be said that the instructor responded more to grammar and pronunciations mistakes, no whether they affected meaning or not.

Lastly, in relation to the use of materials it was possible to find consistency in the use of the textbook. Teachers' opinions were reflected clearly on the class dynamics. In other words the book was used as a resource and it was complemented with activities, explanations and other types of materials. On the other hand, the variety and the frequency of material varied a little as it is shown in the following table, which can be compared with exhibit No. 10.



## Exhibit No. 16

## Supplementary Material Used by the Teacher

Materials Used by the Teacher	Frequency
A. Copies	28%
B. Music	14%
C. Pictures	10%
D. Movies or videos	0%
E. Realia	0%
F. Newspaper clips	0%
G. Magazines	3%
H. Books (i.e. encyclopedias)	3%
I. Games	18%
J. Props	7%
K. Internet	3%
L. Flipcharts/ Power Point presentations	14%
M. Audio Recordings (out of the book)	0%

Source: Participant observation at CCCN, August-October 2009

In exhibit No. 10 music and internet have the highest percentages, and videos are mentioned, whereas in the previous table copies and games have the highest frequency of use and videos were not used at all. This means that copies, games, music, flipcharts and pictures are the resources that teachers use on a regular basis in their classrooms. Teachers do activities to complement the book, but most of the time they tend to use handouts, worksheets or slips of paper, which in the end might not bring much variety to the class as they believe.



## **Student Beliefs**

### **The Source of Students' Beliefs**

As it has already been discussed, students come to class with clear views in mind about the language learning process. In the present study this idea was confirmed with the students' answers collected through interviews and questionnaires. In this section the purpose is to explore those beliefs learners hold about the role of L1, group work, error correction, the use of instructional materials and language learning. Similar to the previous chapter there will be a segment dedicated to each one of the areas mentioned.

A prior step is looking at the basis of the learners' beliefs. According to the data gathered, previous experience plays a crucial role in the definition of learning beliefs. Students referred to the experience they had in high school. The majority of them think that the learning of English in their high school years was a waste of time because they did not learn much, thus from this experience they can tell what does not work.

Also, students use the experience they have had at the CCCN in previous courses as a referent of what has been effective and they can use or they consider beneficial for their learning. Since none of them has had a real experience in learning another language other than Spanish and English, it was clear that they make connections with the way they learned their mother tongue, and they used them to inform the establishment of beliefs.

Additionally, they seem to use information from other more experienced learners, whom they consult or ask for advice. And, a really important element which is a great



source of learners' views is the learning style or kind of intelligence; students use the characteristics of their learning style as criteria to judge or determine how language learning should take place.

Overall, like in the case of the instructors, learners' beliefs are a result of the interaction of different factors, mostly varied types of experience related to how they have learned their L1 and L2 as well as their own learning styles. All of them contribute to shape beliefs in one way or another; in some cases one of the aspects has a more influential role, they are used in different degrees, but they are all reflected in the learners' views.

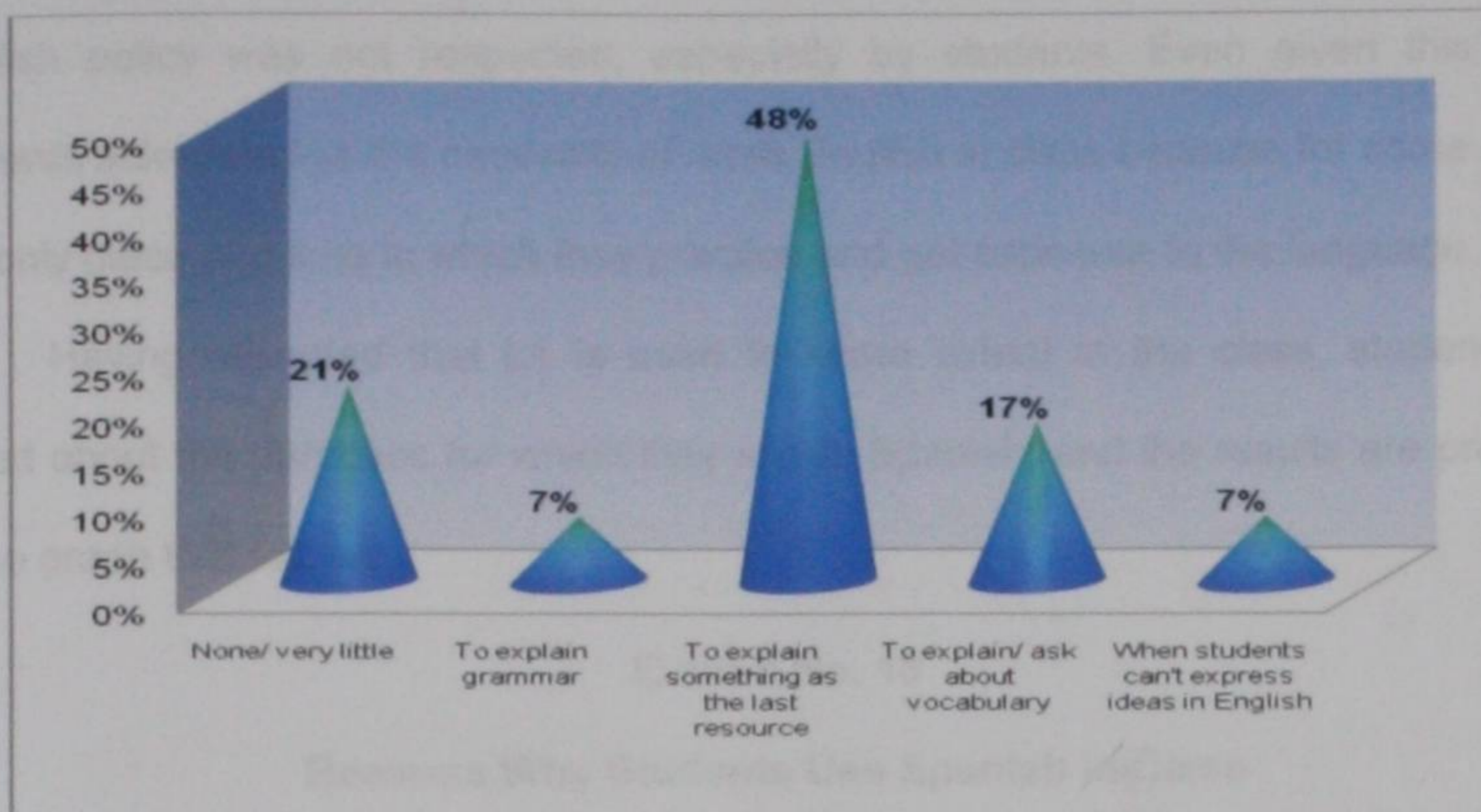
### **Beliefs about the Role of L1 in the Learning of L2**

Concerning the ideas about the role of Spanish in the learning of English, most of the students tend to recognize the need of its use in certain circumstances. The results of the questionnaires represented in the following graph represent students' opinions in this area.



## Exhibit No. 17

## Students' Opinion about the Role of L1 in the L2 Classroom



Source: Student questionnaires applied at the CCCN, October 2009

The graph shows that four of the categories ascribe some function to Spanish, only the first one, which corresponds to 21% of the total, does not consider L1 a necessary element in the class. In the interviews, most of the students accepted that the mother tongue should not be overused; however, in some cases it is better to use it in order to avoid confusion or frustration when students really cannot understand something. A student who was interviewed stated, "Sometimes it is at least necessary, at least that the teacher uses it because we had an experience with a teacher that did not speak Spanish at all and it was very difficult to ask her something" (Student interviews done at the CCCN, September 2009).

Learners were very emphatic that if there is use of the L1, it has to be very limited, only in those occasions in which other options have been tried out and the last resource is to use Spanish. Some students did express that they agreed with the



CCCN's policy of not using Spanish; they said that if they are learning English they should be using it, but they admitted that unfortunately in most of the cases the only-English policy was not respected, especially by students. Even given this reality, students acknowledge the necessity of more English in class because for some of them the only place and time in which they practice and get exposure to the language.

Having accepted that L1 is used to some extent in the class, students were asked about the purposes for which they speak Spanish, and the results are presented in the graph that follows.

### Exhibit No. 18

#### Reasons Why Students Use Spanish in Class



Source: Student questionnaires applied at the CCCN, October 2009

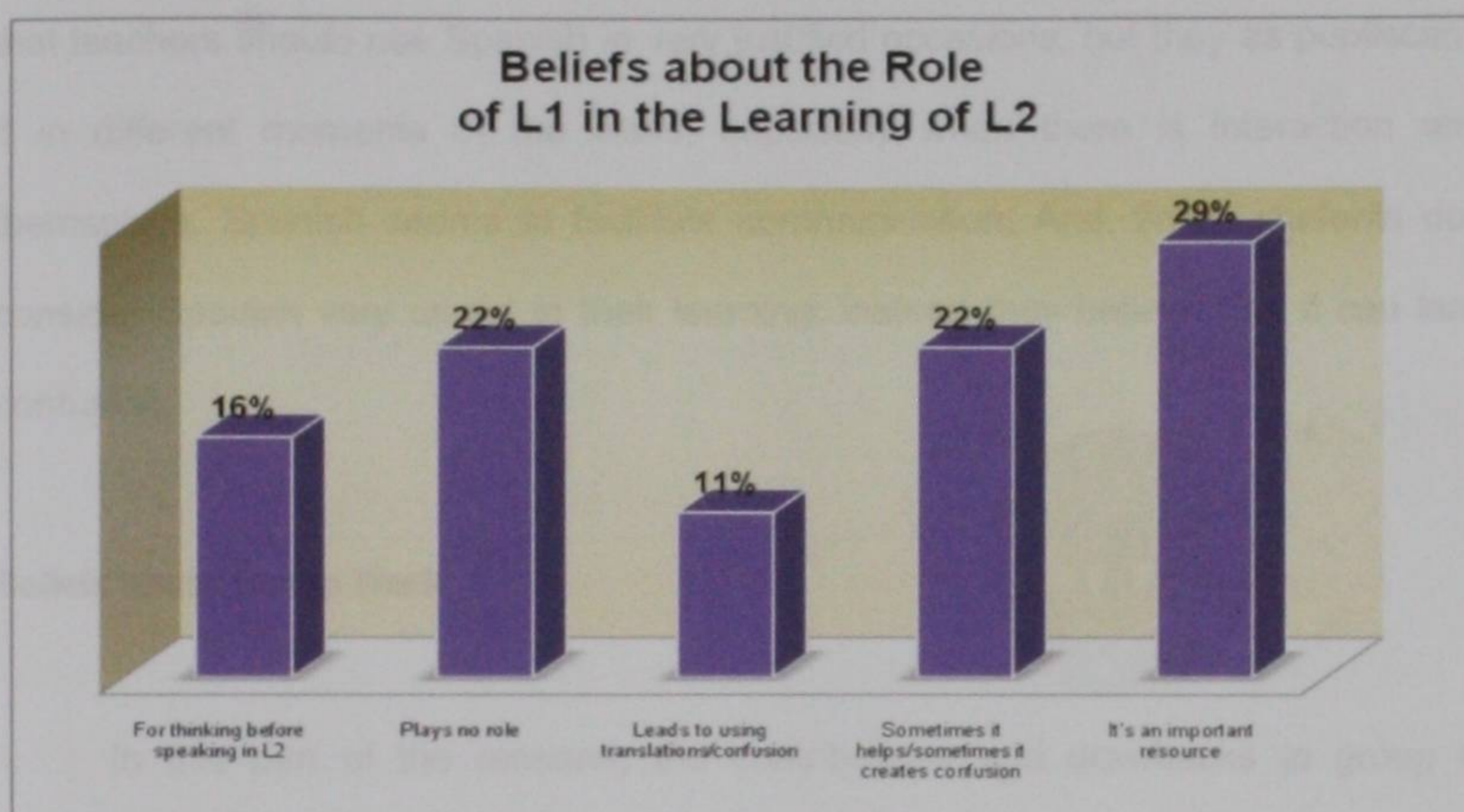
Basically, the exhibit demonstrates that learners tend to use Spanish among themselves; to explain something to classmates, to communicate during group work, to refer to something that is not related to the topic of the class. Students have a strong tendency to use Spanish when they feel it facilitates communication. Some interviewees commented that although they know it is not the best habit, they speak Spanish to their



classmates because sometimes it is easier for them to understand and make themselves understood. It seems that the mother tongue gives them a sort of confidence and comfort, especially when the use of English is challenging.

On the other hand, students shared their thoughts about the role of the L1 in the overall language learning process; these ideas are comprised in the next graph.

**Exhibit No. 19**



Source: Semi-structured interviews done at the CCCN, September 2009

The bars on the left and right sides of the graph show the appropriateness some students attribute to Spanish in learning, while the other bars mostly refer to being confusing or irrelevant at all, which can be interpreted as L1 not being so beneficial in the process. A relative high percentage considers that Spanish is not a tool or resource that can be helpful in learning. Similarly, some interviewees said that English and Spanish were very different in terms of grammar and pronunciation, so it was hard to



make comparisons and use Spanish to facilitate their learning, on the contrary some of them commented that in certain occasions in which they had attempted to structure an idea in English getting some help from Spanish they had been corrected by the teacher or they knew that something was wrong in their utterance.

In short, this section explored the students' beliefs about the role of the L1. Learners think that Spanish should have a place in the class, but only when it is extremely necessary and it is the last option in order to avoid confusion. They believe that teachers should use Spanish in very justified occasions, but they as pupils can use it in different moments of the class, especially when there is interaction among themselves. Spanish seems to facilitate communication. And, finally students do not consider Spanish very useful in their learning; instead they believe that it can lead to confusion.

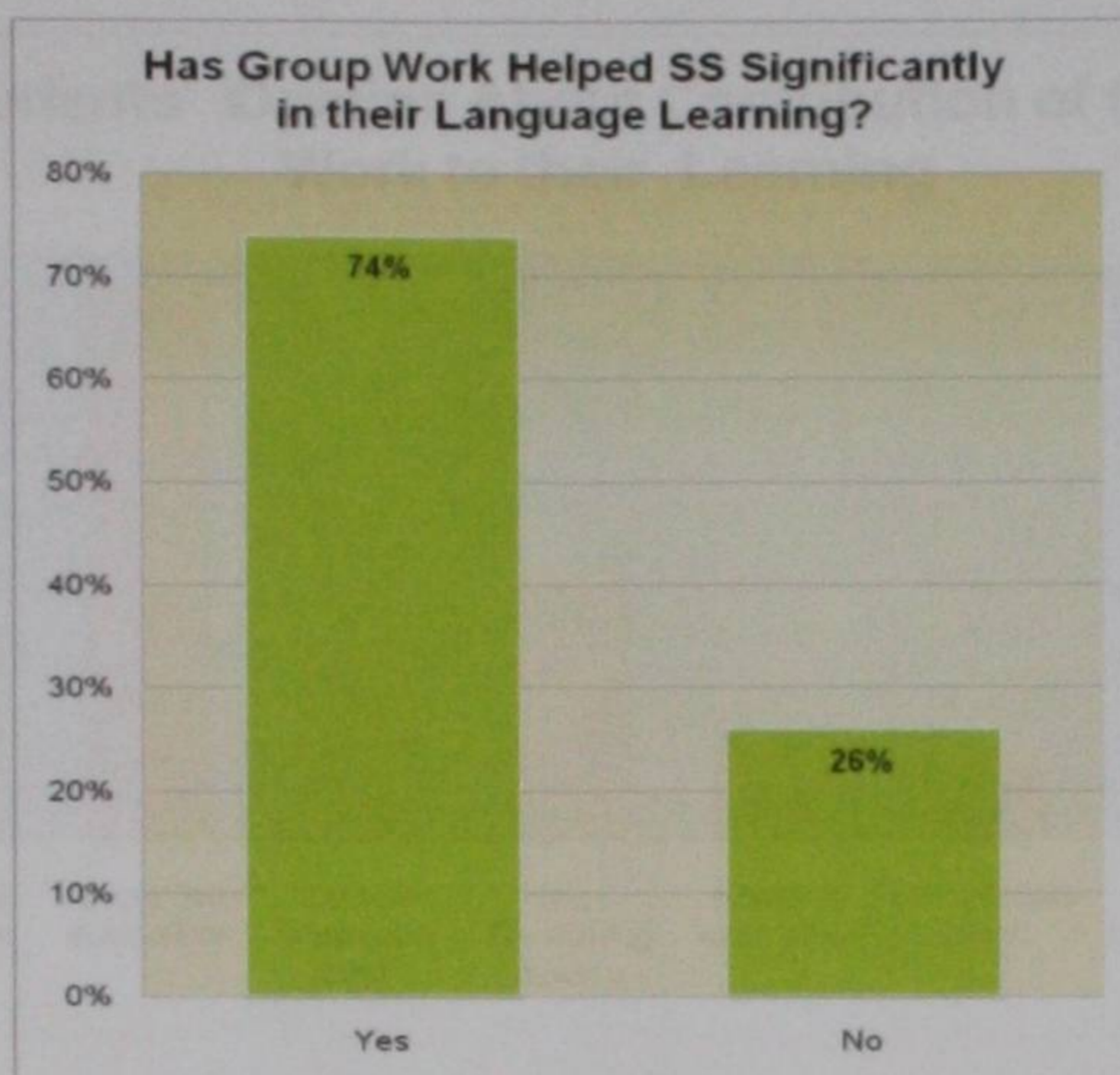
### **Beliefs about Group Work**



In this part of the research the contributions and drawbacks to group work according to the students' perspective will be described. First, the percentage of learners who think group work has had a beneficial role will be specified, then tables and graphs that show students response and opinions about the positive and negative aspects of the group dynamics in English classes will be analyzed.

First of all, the graph that is presented next demonstrates that the majority of students in this study feel that group work has been an important factor in their language learning; it has helped them to develop their skills.



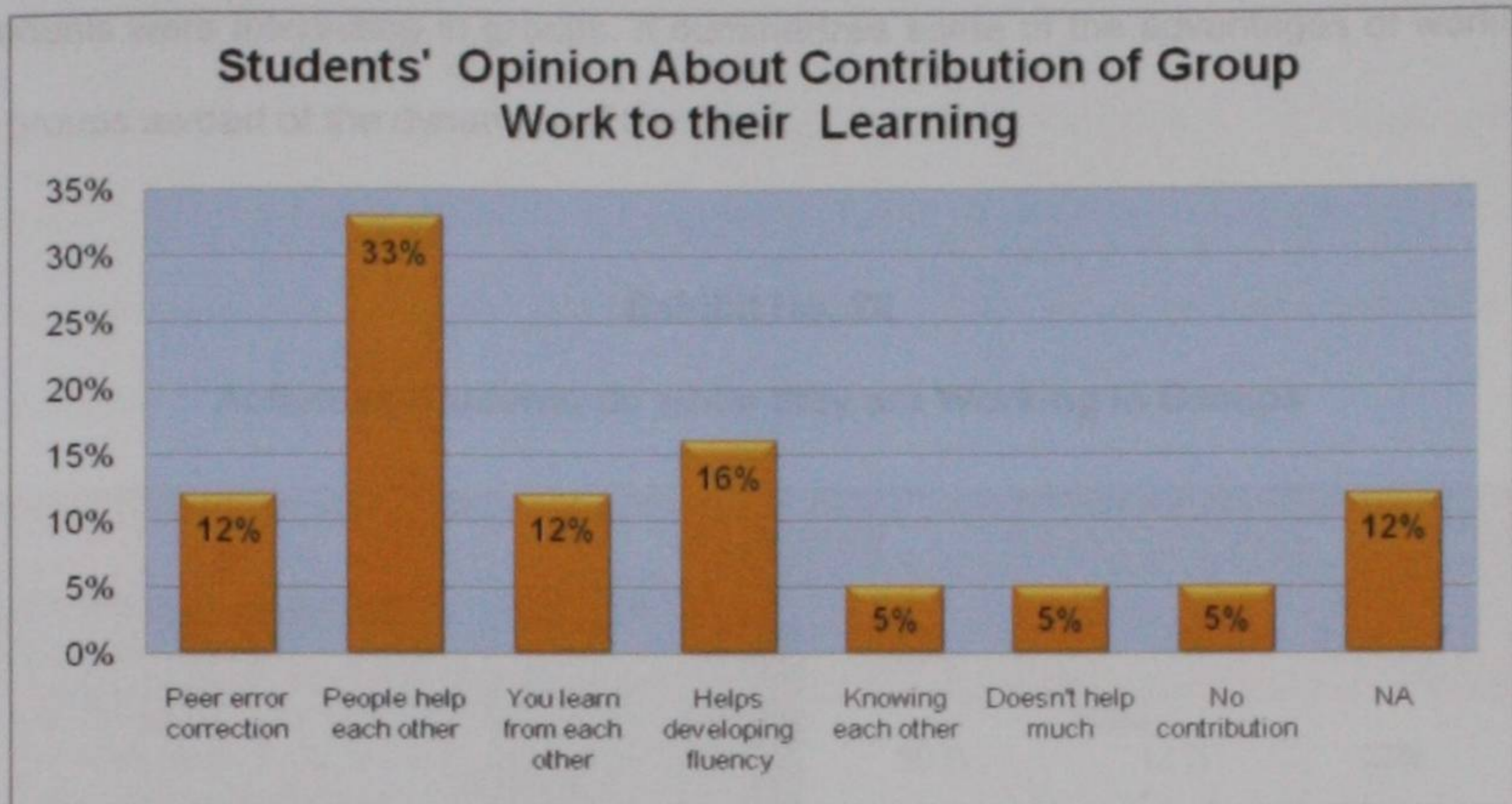
**Exhibit No. 20**

Source: Student questionnaires applied at the CCCN, October 2009

It is interesting to note that although the students answered that group work has helped significantly, in some cases during the interviews students were asked if they thought that their skills would have not developed as they have if group work had not been part of their classes, and they said that they would probably have the same or a very similar level without group work. However, it seems that the majority of the students find some advantages in working together with others. The following graph shows some of the contributions that the students interviewed ascribed to carrying out activities in groups.



## Exhibit No. 21



Source: Student semi-structured interviews applied at the CCCN, September 2009

The answers summarized in the exhibit match the results obtained from the questionnaires applied to students, in which getting help from classmates is the greatest benefit of group work. Although some participants think that group work is not that beneficial for them, they are the minority. It seems that students take advantage of the interaction that happens when they are working with others.

Many of the opinions coincided; they commented that when they work with their classmates they feel more confident and it is okay not to know something because someone else does. Students said that in groups they complement abilities, so sometimes some know more and can share with others and other times it is the other way around. One of the students stated, "In my case, I like group work because you learn from other classmates; working in groups is very instructive and I love it" (Student semi-structured interviews, September 2009).



The following chart presents a series of behaviors observed in class while students were interacting in groups. It summarizes some of the advantages of working in groups as part of the dynamics of the class.

### Exhibit No. 22

#### Activities Students do while they are Working in Groups

Activities Students do during Group Work	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Seldom
A. Help others (to understand, clarify, check concepts)	33%	14%	20%	33%
B. Use the TL to accomplish a real communicative purpose	50%	12%	12%	26%
C. Deviate from the topic	38%	25%	12%	25%
D. Review or discuss grammar or vocabulary	27%	27%	10%	36%
E. Check pronunciation of words	17%	33%	17%	33%
F. Write what they are going to present/say afterwards	64%	9%	9%	18%
G. Answer questions and share opinions and/or experiences related to the topic assigned	17%	25%	33%	25%
H. Distribute tasks and/or roles (i.e. note-taker, presenter, etc.)	43%	14%	14%	29%

Source: Participant observation at CCCN, August-October 2009

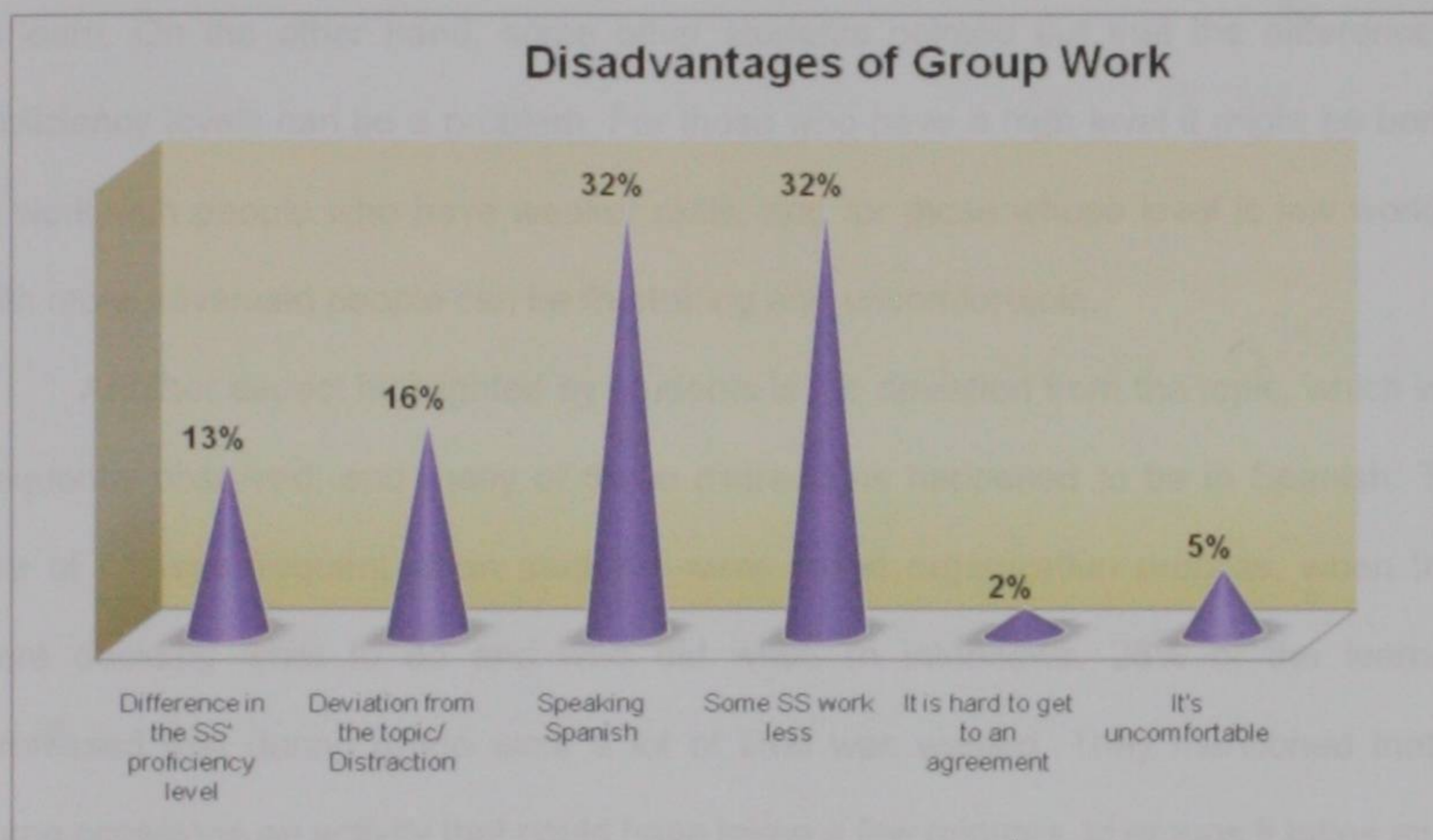
This information supports what was explained previously; besides getting help from others group work allows students to review aspects of language, practice and use the language in natural interaction. Students usually write what they are going to say or present as a result of the group discussion, and they distribute the work among the



members of the group. Sometimes even if the work was distributed, there were some students who remained quiet and did not participate much.

Noticeably, most of the aspects are positive, except for point C that deals with deviation from the topic, which is a frequent behavior. Therefore, not everything that happens in group activities is considered positive or productive; in fact learners are aware of the disadvantages, which are represented in the next graph.

Exhibit No. 23



Source: Student questionnaires applied at the CCCN, October 2009

It is clear that most of the students believe that speaking Spanish and lack of balance in the work that is done are the major drawbacks to group work. The presence of Spanish was one of the most relevant aspects noticed in the class observations. Also, 11% of opinions in the interviews made reference to that fact that the leader or the



ones who know more end up doing most of the speaking, leaving limited opportunities of participation to the rest of the students. Likewise, 23% of the participants think that in group work some students work and others do not, position which supports the previous idea explained.

Moreover, a considerable number of students referred to what working with others implied. On one hand, some said that age and level of maturity was an obstacle because some students seemed to care less about learning, and they did not give what they were supposed to. This evidently affected the rest of the group that really wanted to learn. On the other hand, some other students pointed out that the difference of proficiency levels can be a problem. For those who have a high level it might be boring to work with people who have weaker skills, and for those whose level is low working with more advanced people can be frustrating and uncomfortable.

Another aspect highlighted by students is the deviation from the topic, which was frequently observed, and many of these distractions happened to be in Spanish. The use of L1 was frequent when students were in the organization process, when they were deciding what to do and who did what. In interviews, 28% of the learners expressed that during group work a lot of time was wasted. They mentioned that in some occasions an activity that could have taken a few minutes, in groups it takes much more just because it is easy to get distracted and talk about other matters with classmates.

As it has been explained, even though some inappropriate behaviors take place during group work the interaction derived from it seems to contribute to learning English in different ways. The environment and sense of community that can be created though



the implementation of group activities offer students the opportunity to practice more confidently and learn from others. It would be interesting for teachers to pay attention to the drawbacks mentioned in this section, so that they minimize the negative aspects that prevent students from taking better advantage of the tasks.

### **Beliefs about Error Correction**

In the present section data collected in interviews and questionnaires will be presented and contrasted in order to describe and analyze students' beliefs surrounding error correction in oral production. Firstly, students' opinions about the types of mistakes that teachers should correct will be discussed, and then views about the moment in which corrections should take place and effective ways to make corrections will be explained. Finally, the reliability of peer correction and satisfaction error correction will conclude this part.

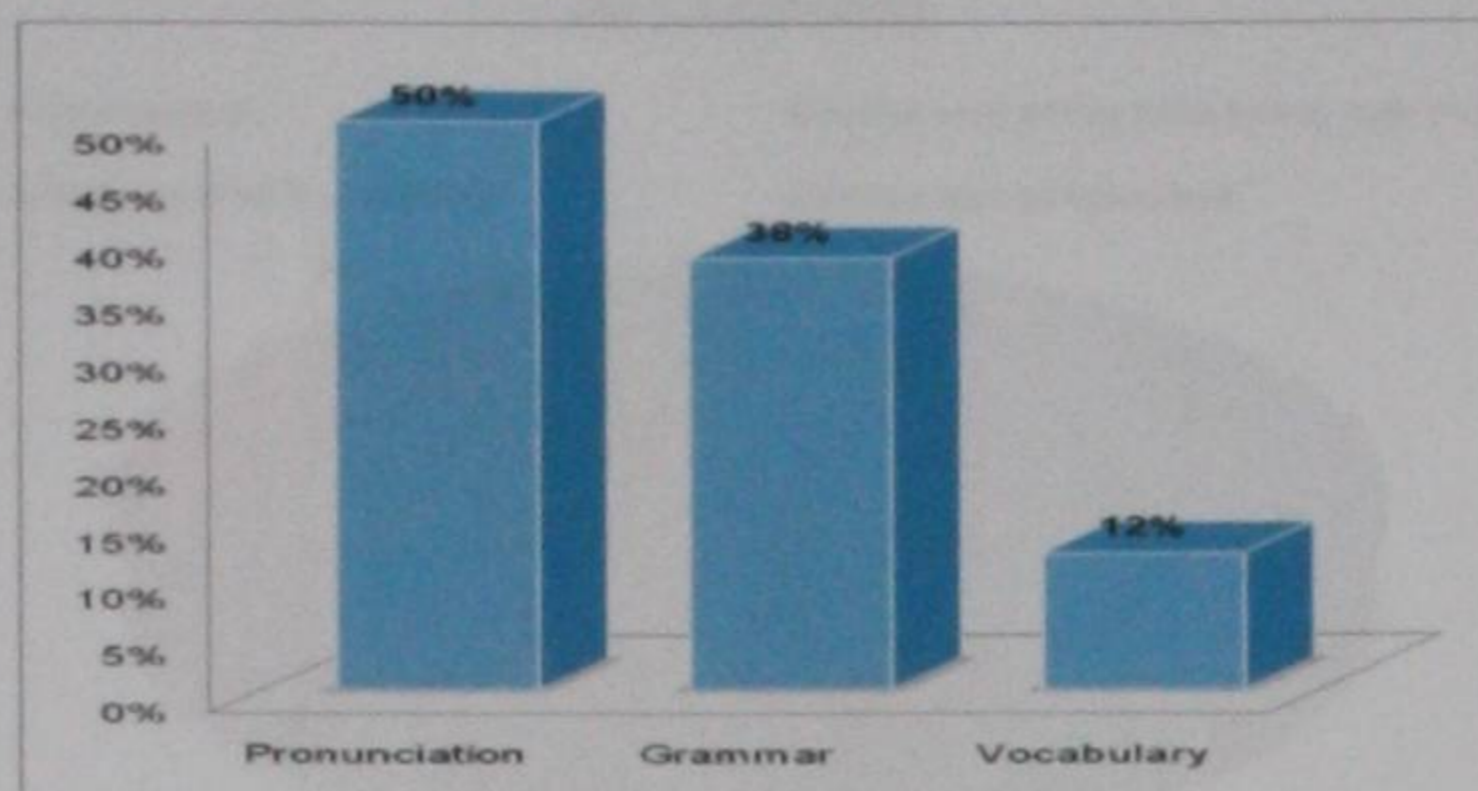
When asked about the most important errors to be corrected students mentioned three main areas: pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary. The graph that follows presents the percentages corresponding to each of the aspects of the language.





### Exhibit No. 24

#### Students' Opinions about Types of Errors Teachers Should Correct



Source: Student questionnaires applied at the CCCN, October 2009

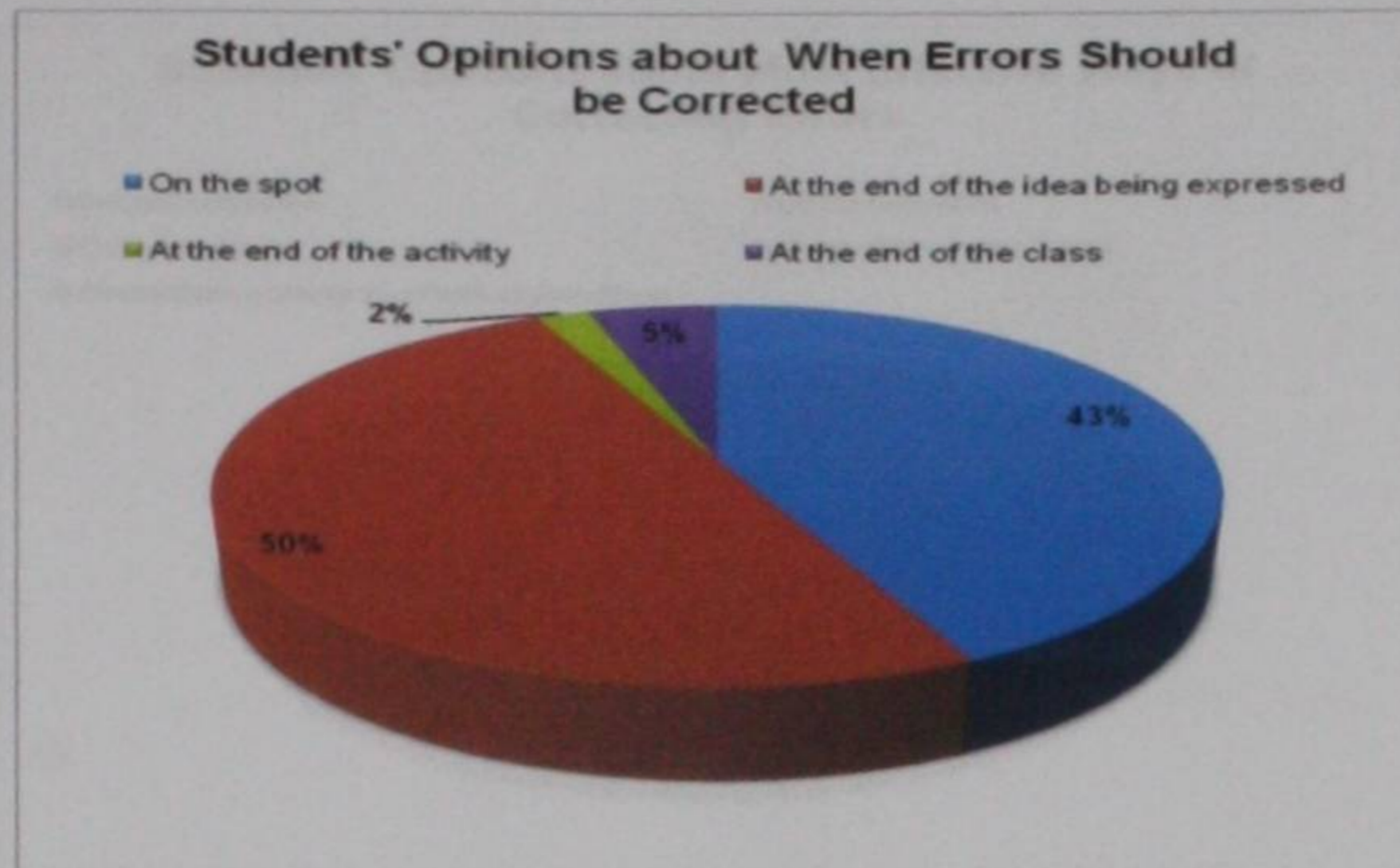
It seems that the two most important areas of error correction should be pronunciation and grammar. Many students put pronunciation first because they are aware that they make many of this type of mistakes, basically because English differs very much from the phonetic system of Spanish. A student's opinion about this says, "It has to be pronunciation, in general we know some vocabulary, but we are really bad in pronunciation. I would like that it were more emphasized because we have many pronunciation mistakes" (Student semi-structured interviews, September 2009).

On the other hand, the ones who privileged grammar say that accurate structures are basic in communication, but even those who pointed out grammar also mentioned pronunciation in their answers. In class, when the students made a pronunciation mistake, usually learners asked the teacher to repeat the correction, and most of the time they also repeated after the teacher. Therefore, pronunciation appears to be of great importance to students; they pay attention to it on a regular basis.

The graph that follows portrays what learners consider the most appropriate moment to make corrections when they are speaking.



### Exhibit No. 25



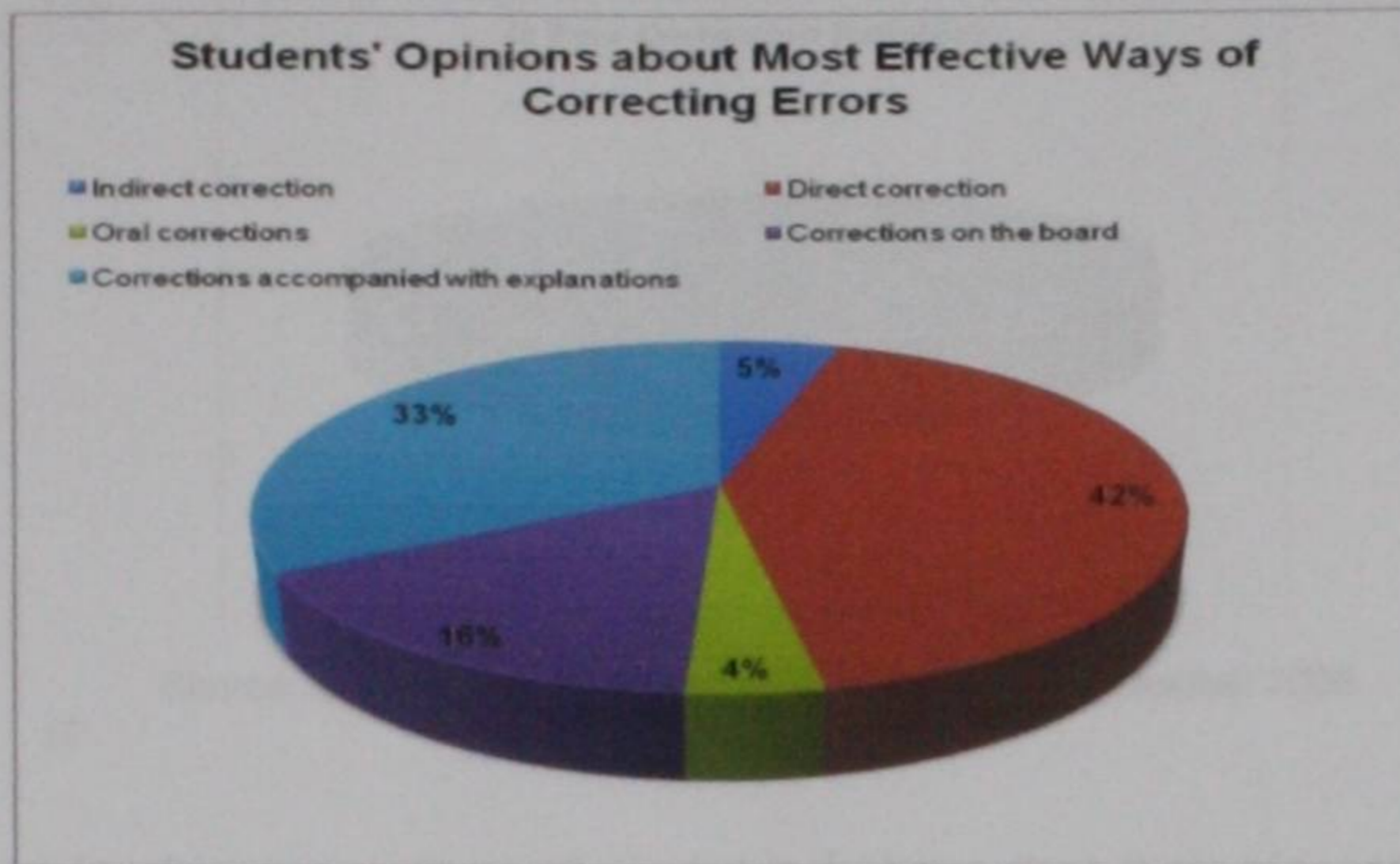
Source: Student questionnaires applied at the CCCN, October 2009

Direct and immediate corrections are generally preferred by students. Delayed correction does not seem appropriate for students because they said that if they are corrected later on they will not even remember that they made that mistake. In interviews, learners commented that if they are speaking and they are not corrected they think that they are not making mistakes, so teacher's immediate feedback gives them a sign of how they are doing.

The next graph presents different ways of making corrections and what students think about each one of them.



### Exhibit No. 26

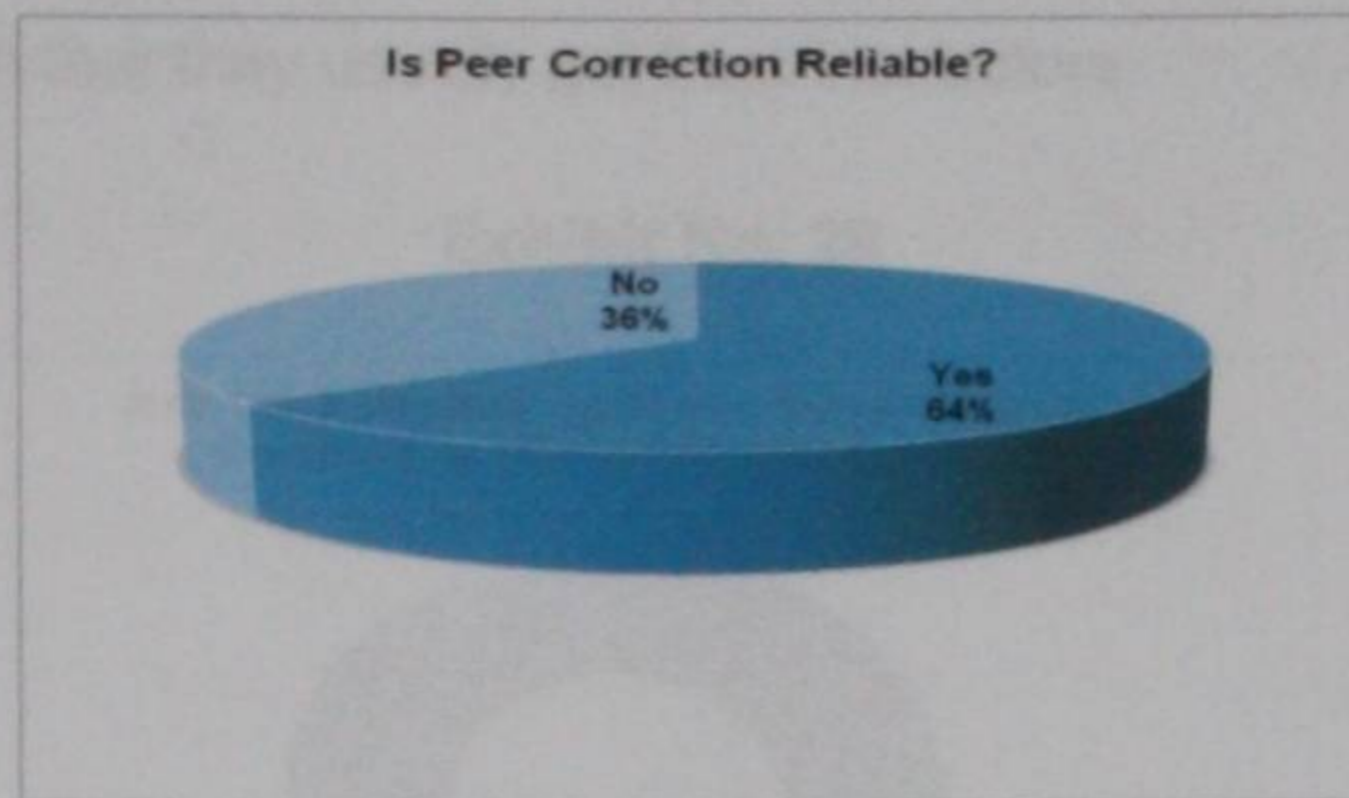


Source: Student questionnaires applied at the CCCN, October 2009

Again, it is clear that students require immediate correction when they are speaking; they need to know whether or not they are on the right track. They value corrections accompanied with other elements like explanations or visual cues on the board, but not all the time. In interviews, students said that those elements are good, but they are not needed all the time, usually only correcting the mistake is enough. Indirect correction was definitely ruled out by students because they do not see much effectiveness in this technique. They explained that they need the teacher to spot the mistake; otherwise they are not aware of what they are doing wrong and they see no need to correct something that according to them is fine. Thus, at least at this level students are not prepared for this type of correction.

Previously, in group work students pointed out peer correction as one of the benefits and the graph that follows shows how students really feel about this kind of correction that does not come from the teacher.



**Exhibit No. 27**

Source: Student questionnaires applied at the CCCN, October 2009

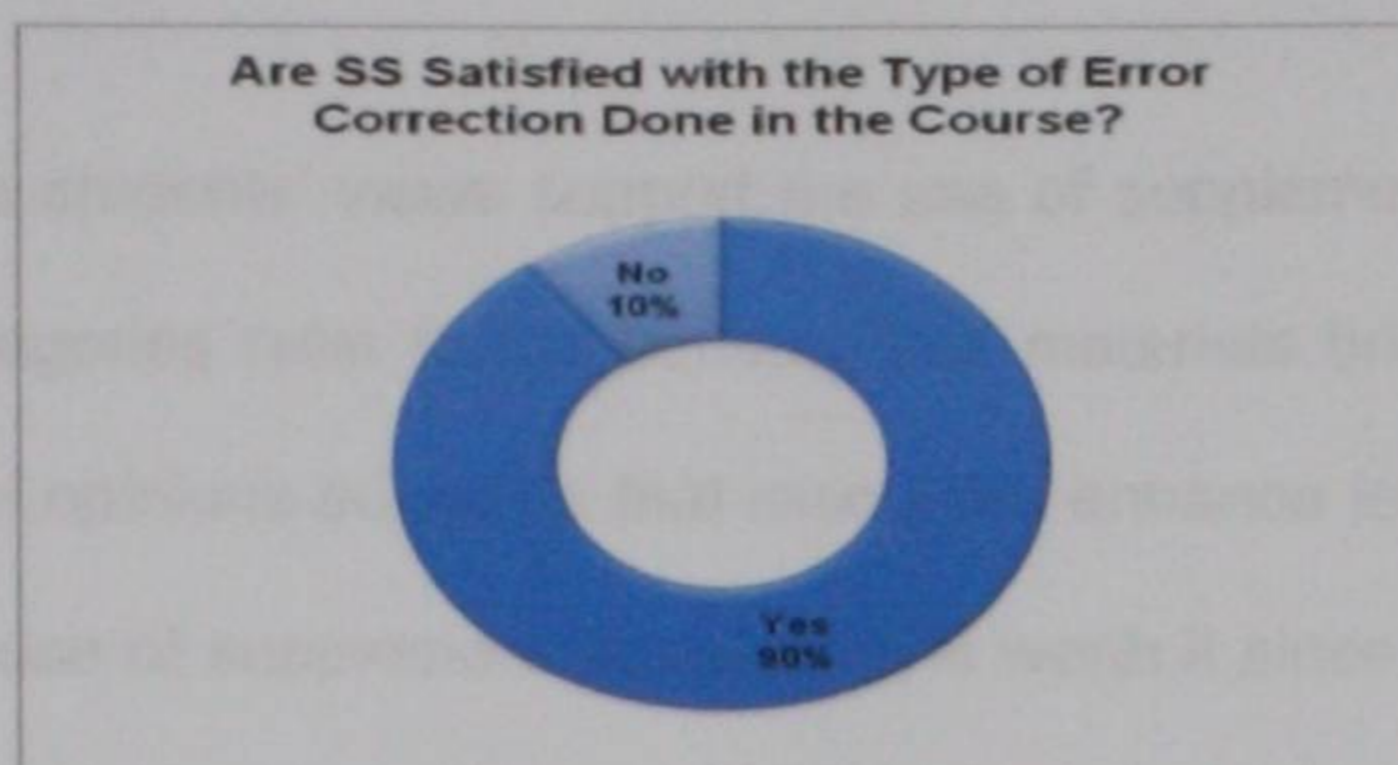
A considerable percentage of students believe that their classmates can correct them and that correction is reliable. They admit that sometimes their peers know a little more than them in certain areas, so they can trust them. However, some of them said that depending on the correction they double check with the teacher, and most of the time the correction is good. There was a specific case of student in one of the groups who had problems pronouncing the word *but*, he pronounced it as /buwt/. At the beginning of the course the teacher used to make the correction, but as the course advanced it was the rest of the students who corrected him. This is an example of a case in which peer correction seems to be effective. Also, one of the side effects of this kind of correction is that students can reinforce what they already know; being able to identify an inconsistency and to correct it helps students to strengthen their skills.

In the case of students who do not consider peer correction reliable, they express that others who are at the same level do not have the necessary skills and knowledge to provide accurate feedback, the teacher is the appropriate person to provide more accurate correction.



To finish this section, it is important to show how satisfied students are with the type of error correction that they usually get from instructors.

### Exhibit No. 28



Source: Student questionnaires applied at the CCCN, October 2009

The majority of the learners seems to agree with the error correction received, only 10% disagrees. This probably demonstrates that the error correction they get is effective and is really helping them in their learning. The idea of error correction is to improve and get rid of mistakes that obscure meaning and affect communication, so if they are getting some effective feedback that perhaps means that they are improving.

This section explained learners' beliefs about error correction. Definitely, students have a tendency to favor explicit correction; they feel that immediate and direct correction works better for them, and probably that is what they are getting from instructors because they are satisfied with the error correction they receive in class.

### **Beliefs about the Use of Instructional Materials**

This segment looks at students' beliefs about the materials that are effective to learn. This includes the resources that the teacher uses as well as the textbook used in the course.

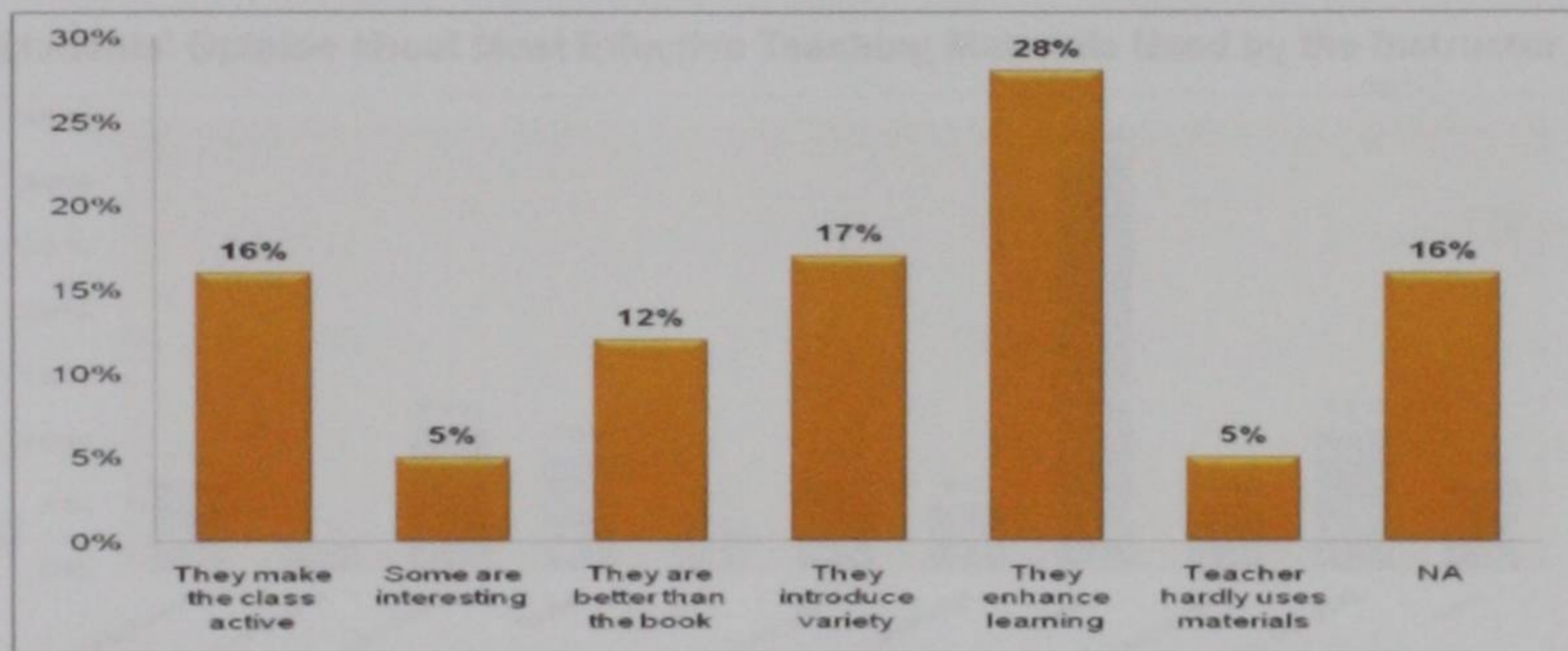


Exhibit No. 27 reveals the learners' opinions about the material outside the textbook that their teachers use in class. The data gathered in the interviews shows the students' positive perceptions of the different materials that teachers use to complement the book.

Mostly, the students' views support the use of supplementary material. Five out of the seven categories refer to the benefits that materials bring to the class. A high percentage of the opinions suggests that resources enhance learning, which of course denotes that the use of supplementary material is worth it since it has a positive impact on learning.

### Exhibit No. 29

#### Students' Opinion about Teaching Materials Used by the Instructor



Source: Student semi-structured interviews applied at CCCN, September 2009

This is reflected on some opinions that remarked the influence materials can have in participation. For instance, a pupil commented, "The material helps me a lot because it helps me to participate, get more confidence and lose the fear to speak" (Student semi-structured interviews, September 2009).

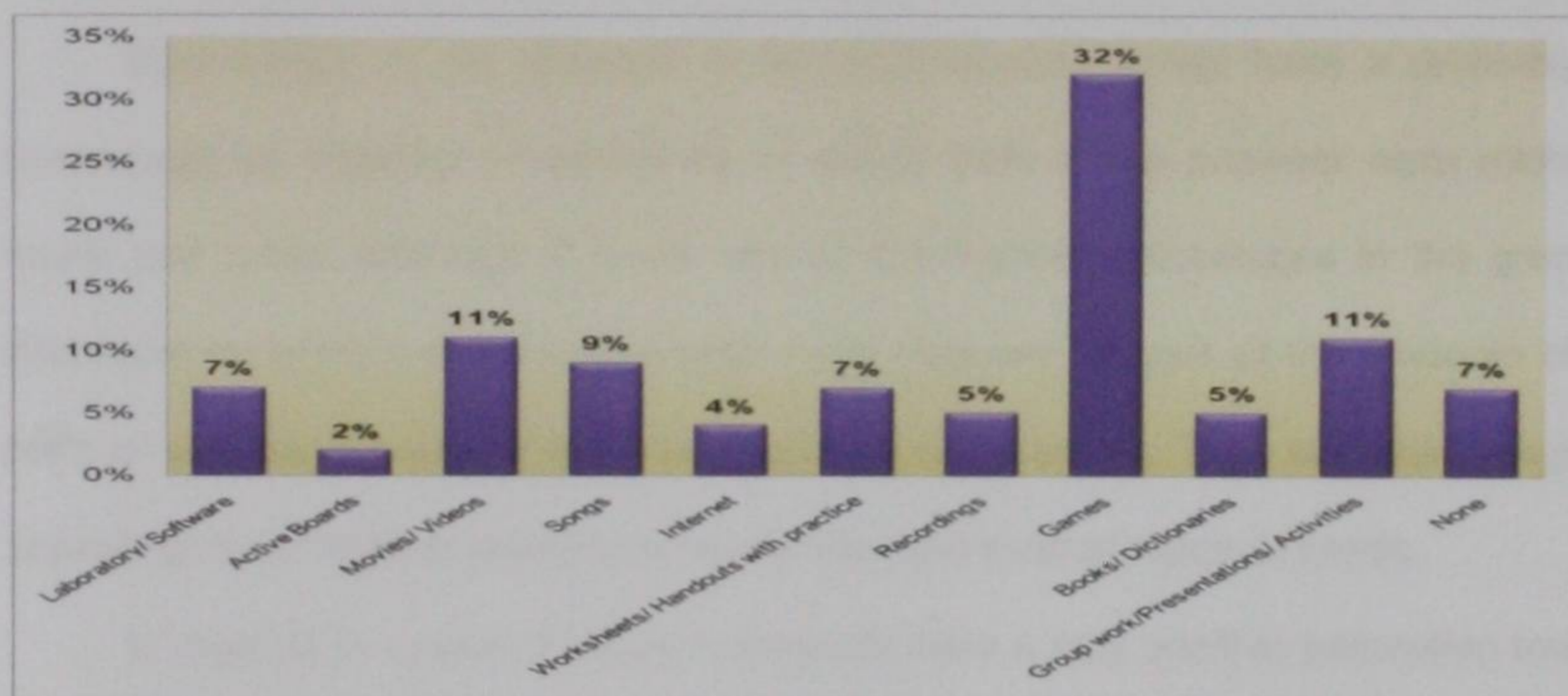


It is also clear that learners consider materials an important part in the class not only for learning itself, but for enjoyment. They say that materials make the class more active, they add variety, they are interesting and they offer a sort of a break from the work on the book, which can be boring at times for students. In the interviews, a student supported this by saying, "I like my teacher's class because it is dynamic, it moves on quickly. I feel that if the class were like a lecture, it would be very tedious" (Student semi-structured interviews, September 2009).

Now, after clarifying what students believe about the use of materials, it is pertinent to get to know their opinion about the resources that work more effectively for them in the learning process.

### Exhibit No. 30

#### Students' Opinion about Most Effective Teaching Materials Used by the Instructor



Source: Student questionnaires applied at the CCCN, October 2009

Games are particularly valued by learners; they are followed by videos, group work and music. Students enjoy activities that involve playing because they say that it helps them to relax and sometimes to think. *Smart Mouth* was one of the games that



was mentioned by some students, in this game participants are shown two consonants, they have to say/write as fast as they can a word that starts with the first consonant and finishes with the second consonant. It is a competition that forces them to think fast and review vocabulary. It was played in one of the classes and the group was really engaged. Nevertheless, some students did not think that all games are helpful, especially those ones to which students are used to and are not challenging at all. Some students mentioned that they did not like those games in which they had to ask a question to different classmates, and they already knew what the answer was, so they found no reason to interact and exchange information. Students also point out that excess of games is not effective. This means that this type of activities need a clear objective and they have to test students' thinking and skills, otherwise there is no purpose in doing them.

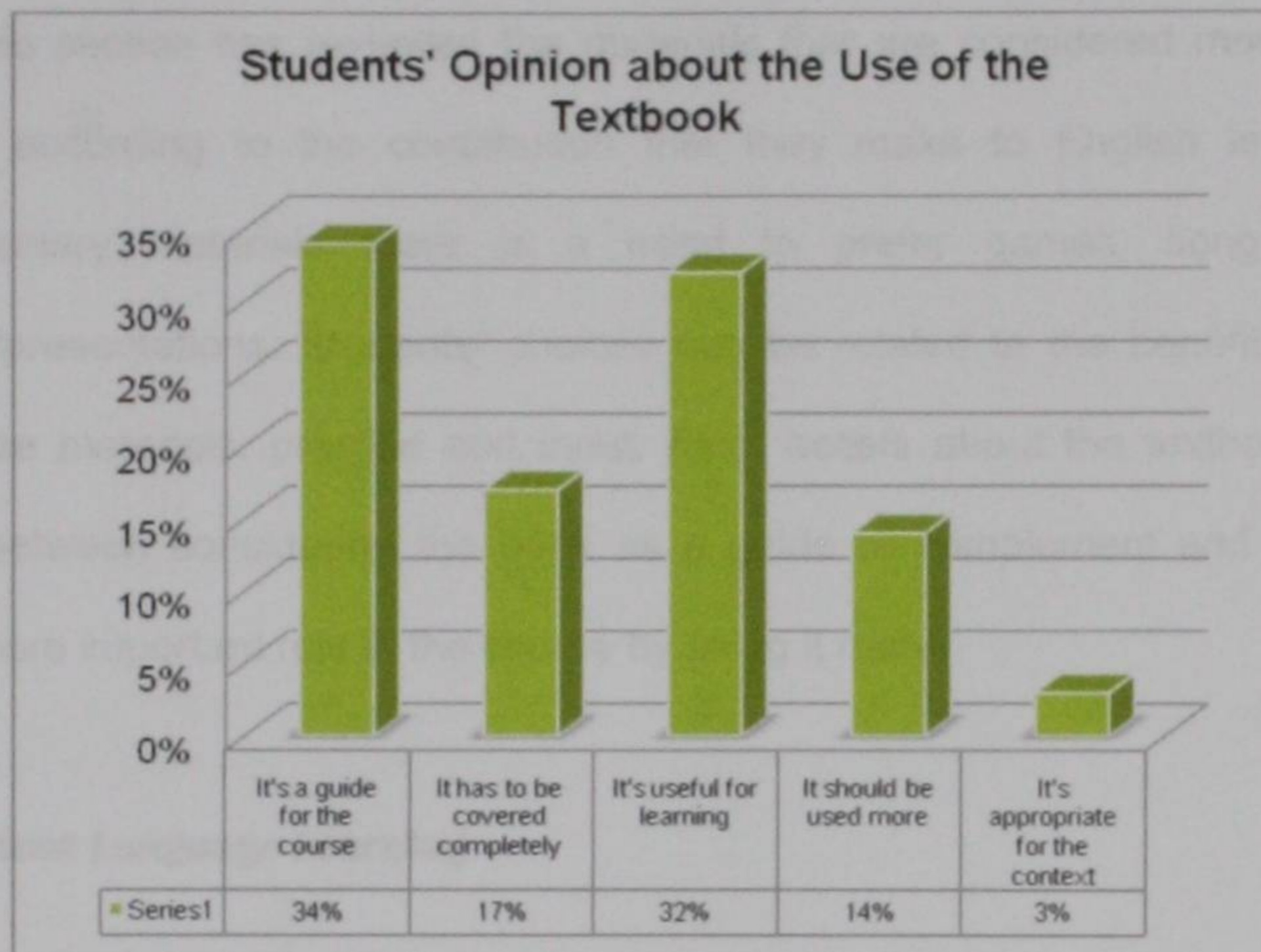
Surprisingly, in the answers of the questionnaire songs have a relatively low percentage as opposed to interviews, in which 34% of the answers were related to music and lyrics. Although it is still one of the highest percentages in the graph, in interviews comments about songs were more frequent. Almost all the students at one point or another mentioned the advantages of using songs. They said that songs are appealing; they facilitate learning of vocabulary and pronunciation of words.

In regards to videos or movies, students have a very positive perception towards them. This type of material is rich for students because they are able to be exposed to authentic language, not only in terms of vocabulary, but also in terms of listening skills training. Students like learning expressions and words that are commonly used by native speakers, and they like the challenge of trying to understand natives speaking.



In addition to the use of supplementary material, one of the tools of the courses at the CCCN is the textbook. It is the guide of the course, the material in which tests are based on and the basis of the curriculum. It is interesting to know what students believe about the book; their opinions are summarized in the following graph.

**Exhibit No. 31**



Source: Student questionnaires applied at the CCCN, October 2009

Some students' view points about the usefulness of the book as an important tool for learning that guides the course. The book seems to be especially helpful when it comes to exercises, listening practice and grammar explanations. For some students the textbook is more important than for others. A few confessed in the interviews that they did not like the book, so they did not use it much. Some others believe that it is a supplementary resource in the course. And others are on the other extreme, they



believe that the book has to be covered completely and orderly. Although some of these students are very strict in the sense that they want the book to be followed to the letter, others favor the use of the book, but they just say that it has to be used more and they are a considerable number of students. Even though there are different opinions, there are two main tendencies, one that sees the book as a tool and the other one that considers that the book can be taken into account more consistently in class.

This section has reviewed the materials that are considered most effective by students according to the contribution that they make to English learning. As of supplementary materials there is a trend to prefer games, songs and group activities/presentations. Students' choices can be related to the benefit that they get from these materials: practice and input. Also, beliefs about the textbook are a little divided between considering the book as a guide or complement and assigning the book a more important role in the course by using it more.

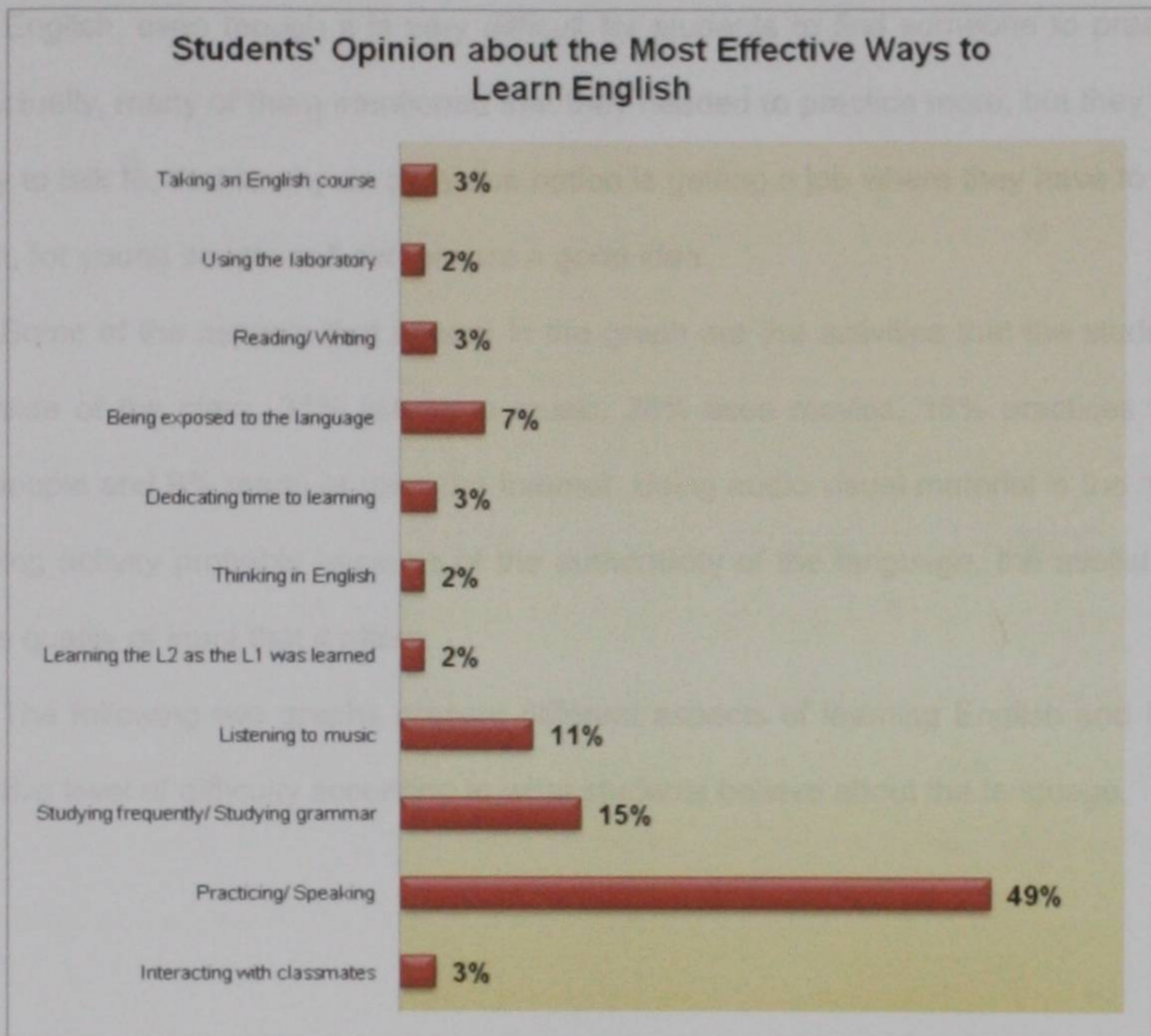
### **Beliefs about Language Learning**

In regards to the beliefs students hold about how a language should be learned and about English itself, learners were asked about what they considered effective ways to learn the language, the most difficult and easiest aspects of learning English and the strategies or activities they use outside the classroom in order to practice or learn new things.



The first exhibit presents a series of alternatives that students proposed as effective ways in which they learned better. Students mentioned many different activities, but they the great majority of them agreed on one in particular.

### Exhibit No. 32



Source: Student questionnaires applied at the CCCN, October 2009

Almost half of the answers recommend practicing as a successful way to gain proficiency in the second language. Studying, listening to music and being exposed to English are also good alternatives. Students have a clear idea of appropriate strategies



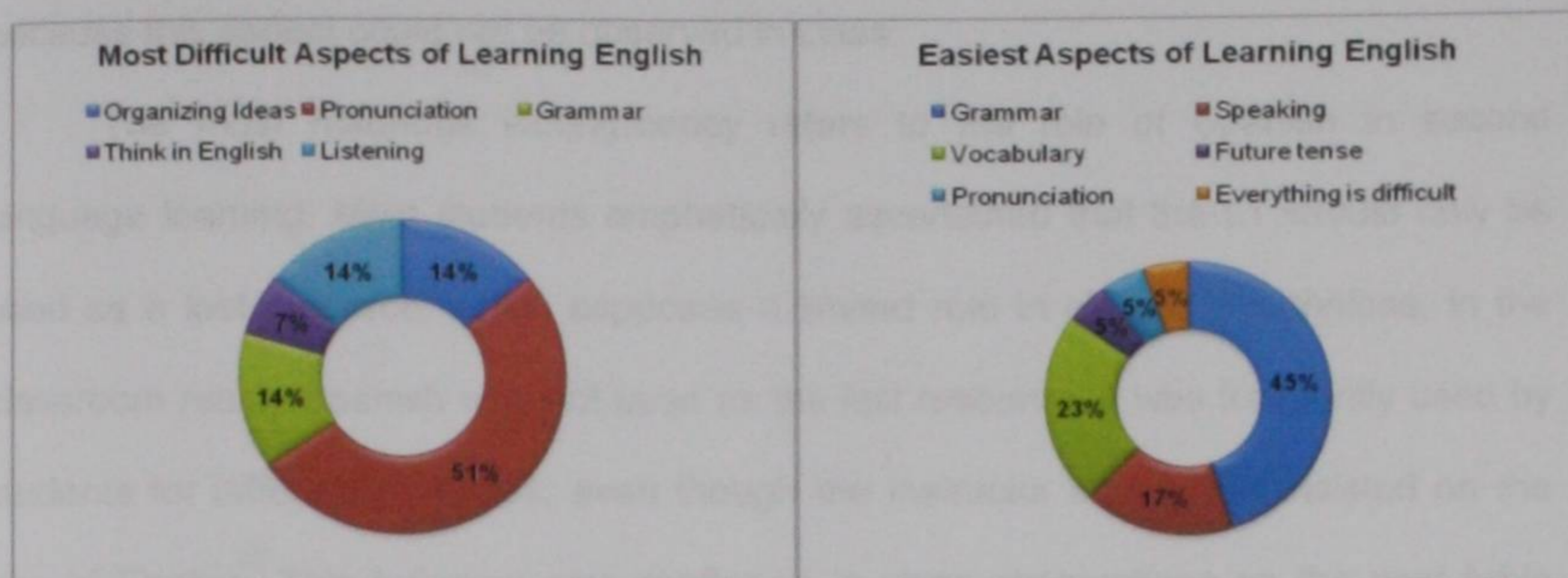
that can be used in their process as learners. Similar strategies were mentioned for learning a foreign language. Students showed awareness of the difficulties that a foreign language learning context pose to people who want to learn. Students agreed on four alternatives, taking English courses, getting exposure to the language, working in a place where the target language is used and of course practicing with people who speak English, even though it is very difficult for students to find someone to practice with. Actually, many of them mentioned that they needed to practice more, but they had nobody to talk to, that is why an attractive option is getting a job where they have to use English, for young people call centers are a good idea.

Some of the aspects that appear in the graph are the activities that the students do outside of the class. 31% listens to music, 28% sees movies, 15% practices with other people and 9% reads or uses the Internet. Using audio visual material is the most appealing activity probably because of the authenticity of the language, the availability and the quality of input that it offers.

The following two graphs present different aspects of learning English and their respective level of difficulty according to what students believe about the language.



## Exhibit No. 33



Source: Student semi-structured interviews applied at the CCCN, September 2009

As it was previously mentioned in the error correction section, pronunciation is an important aspect for students; the fact that they consider pronunciation a difficult area of the language explains why they feel the need to get feedback on it. Surprisingly, on the other hand, learners consider grammar easy. Some of them said that grammar is more predictable than pronunciation, grammar was about following rules, but in pronunciation they had absolutely no clue. They usually feel that they make mistakes when speaking because of pronunciation; the Spanish and English phonetic systems are very different, and that is where they found most of the confusion.

### **Consistency/ Inconsistency between Students' Beliefs and Actions**

This part discusses the correspondence between what students actually do, the attitudes they show in the classroom and the opinions they expressed in the interviews and questionnaires. A few inconsistencies in the role of L1 and error correction were



found through the analysis of the data. The part of language learning is not included because this aspect could not be observed in class.

The most notorious incongruency refers to the role of Spanish in second language learning. Most students emphatically ascertained that the L1 should only be used as a last resource, which supposes a limited role in class. Nevertheless, in the classroom reality Spanish was not used as the last resource. It was frequently used by students for different purposes, even though the instructor sometimes insisted on the use of English. This behavior was confirmed in class observations as the next table shows.

#### Exhibit No. 34

##### Students' Use of Spanish in Class

Behavior	Frequency				
	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
To check understanding of instructions	0%	0%	0%	22%	78%
To check understanding to teacher's explanations	0%	0%	5%	22%	73%
To talk about something not related to the topic	8%	0%	20%	31%	41%
To plan how they are going to do an activity	0%	8%	5%	12%	75%
When they are in small groups	30%	5%	20%	20%	25%
When they talk to the teacher	0%	0%	5%	8%	87%
When they speak in front the group	16%	0%	8%	26%	50%
When they don't know a word in English	20%	0%	30%	34%	16%

Source: Participant Observation at CCCN August – October 2009



The table provides evidence of what really happens in the classroom, percentages are clearly distributed in the categories seldom, sometimes, usually and always. If Spanish were used only in very specific cases there would not be any percentage in always, usually or sometimes. Also the last behavior should be the only one in which the use of the L1 could be justifiable, but the rest are functions that can be performed in the target language. As it was pointed out by teachers, students sometimes choose the easy way, so they prefer to switch to Spanish than to make the effort to communicate ideas in English.

Concerning group work, there is more consistency than inconsistency. During observations student-student interaction mostly involved providing mutual help. For instance, learners tended to discuss a question or a point they did not understand among themselves, it was only if they could not find the answers that they called the teacher. Usually learners were seeing trying to answer their classmate's doubts or just cooperating to carry out the task assigned.

It is interesting to notice that even though there is a tendency to believe that group work has been remarkably beneficial in their learning, some students consider that group work has not made any difference in their learning. It is not certain to what extent this perception may be the result of the teacher's unsuccessful implementation of group activities or students' lack of interest or students' general disapproval of this type classroom dynamics. Only a few students commented on some of their bad experiences with group work; they said that they had been in groups where there were some young learners and they did not care as much as they did about learning, so these young people were not committed enough, and this resulted in poor quality group work.



In the case of the disadvantages, students confessed that the use of Spanish is a negative aspect. This is very consistent with the behavior observed, but as it was already mentioned this totally goes against what they believe. Students not only used the L1, they deviated from the topic, and as they say this makes them waste time. These two disadvantages are caused by the students themselves; they are the ones who decide to speak Spanish and talk about other matters that distract them from their own major endeavor.

When it comes to error correction, coherence between actions and beliefs can be established in two aspects. The first one is about what learners consider effective ways to make corrections, there seems to be an inconsistency because students say they like to be corrected directly and in the moment; however they sometimes do not pay attention, they just continue speaking without even noticing that there was an explicit correction, or they hear the teacher's correction, but still they do not correct the mistake. Therefore, sometimes students are not ready for a correction on the spot because they are more interested in the message they are trying to convey. The second aspect is peer correction. On one hand students say that it is reliable, but on the other hand when they receive a classmate's correction they double check with a more knowledgeable partner or the teacher.

Regarding materials, there is a lot of consistency; students tend to respond well to the materials teachers use in class. When the instructor complemented the use of the book with flipcharts or games most of the time students participated and interacted well with others. Similarly, there is consistency between the students' belief related to the usefulness of the book and the attitude they showed in class. When students work on



the book they were concentrated, especially in listening exercises and homework checking. This confirms that students have a particular interest in the tasks done in the book. They do not seem to feel bored, sometimes they work in pairs and other times even working individually they keep their concentration.

### **Mismatches between Teachers' and Students Beliefs**

After describing and analyzing, in context, the sets of beliefs that both teachers and students bring into the classroom, the next step is to explore those gaps existing between each of those perspectives. As theory says, "When learners and teacher meet for the first time, they may bring with them different expectations concerning not only the learning process in general, but also concerning what will be learned in a particular course and how it will be learned" (Brindley qtd. in Richards and Lockhart 34).

Having looked at both perspectives gives a general idea of the points in which they do not coincide. According to the analysis, this section will explain those differences between the two sets of beliefs in the role of L1 in the learning of the L2, group work, error correction, the use of materials and language learning.

Before giving further details, it must be clearly established that only few mismatches resulted after that data was subject to scrutiny. However, it is interesting to notice that teachers do feel that there might be some level of discrepancy between what they believe and what students believe about the language learning process. In the questionnaire they were asked if they thought that their beliefs as teachers were the same as their beliefs as learners. One of the teachers wrote, "I think I am the kind of teacher I hate to have", and another one commented, "Of course not, when I was a



student I just wanted to have a magical process where the teacher was responsible for my English level, and I thought that the better the teacher was the better process I got” (Teacher questionnaires, October 2009).

These opinions reflect what McDonough explained in her research about the difference in teachers' perceptions as learners, in other words instructors as instructors have certain views, but when they become learners they tend to hold different beliefs. For instance, the first teacher practically says that he would not like to have a teacher like himself, probably because, like McDonough, as a learner, he prefers activities that he would rule out as a teacher. On the other hand, the second teacher refers to the divergence between the teacher's and the student's position in the teaching learning process.

Clearly, teachers have a more comprehensive view of learning, not only because they already went through a language learning process, but also because they have an academic background and experience as teachers. Therefore, they know that learning a language is a more complex process than what students usually imagine. Differences can especially emerge if students are used to a traditional educational system which is teacher-centered and they go to a class that is learner-centered.

In terms of the role of Spanish in the learning of English there is an inconsistency to consider. Superficially, it seems not to be a divergence in beliefs, but if there is a deeper analysis a potential mismatch can come out. Apparently, both instructors and students believe that Spanish can be an important tool for learning; nonetheless two of the teachers do not make reference to the L1 in their actual classes. Only one of them makes comparisons and contrasts between the two languages when necessary. They



do not necessarily have to use the L1 to communicate something; the L1 may serve as a learning resource, which means that they can use it to help students understand how languages work, and sometimes when there is a similarity they can point it out to facilitate understanding. If students believe their L1 is important in their learning and they go to a class in which it is totally ignored, that class does not meet their expectations.

The implication for the mismatch being referred to is that students might lack understanding of the relationship between the L1 and L2 that they consider important. If students do not know how to use the L1 in a way in which it is beneficial, they could use it inappropriately, which will probably result in a lot of L1 interference. Students might make some guesses about how to use the L1 as a resource, but if they do not have the right guidance they might end up putting their mother tongue as an obstacle for their own learning.

As of group work, there are not mismatches; it is more a kind of different focus. Students and teachers perceive group work as very effective for their learning, but students seem to pay more attention to the social part and teachers focus more on learning itself. Students refer to group work as an activity that allows them to share and get to know their classmates, and that makes them feel more comfortable. Teachers also refer to these aspects, but they concentrate on the advantages group work offers to practice, maximize participation and get peer correction. This shows that students and teachers look at different dimensions of group work dynamics; this difference of views can prevent students from taking better advantage of group work because they could take it as a less serious or effective activity. And, lack of awareness of this phenomenon



on the teachers' side can lower the level of effectiveness of the group activities done in class.

Regarding error correction, there are clear belief divergences. The first one is about the types of mistakes that teacher and students believe should be corrected. Teachers tend to be more concerned about grammar and learners about pronunciation. Thus, teachers provide more feedback on structures and students expect more on mistakes in pronunciation. Such dissimilarity can make students ignore some of the grammar corrections because they are not considered as important as pronunciation corrections. Teachers might think that students are not paying attention to their corrections, which can be partially true, but perhaps it is not because of lack of attention, it is probably because students were expecting a different type of feedback. Teachers can take advantage of students' interest in pronunciation, if students are interested in it, they are more willing to learn about it.

The second mismatch refers to the moment in which correction are made. Both teachers and learners coincide in the preference for direct on the spot correction; however, teachers have more in mind when they make corrections and students mostly care about the correction. Teachers are concerned about whether or not that correction is going to affect fluency, make the student feel bad or inhibit participation. They have more decisions to make and more aspects to take into consideration than just the type of error.

Students do not have this view, they just want to be corrected on the spot, and they are not that aware of the impact that certain corrections can have on their fluency. Students' lack of understanding of the teacher's reality can lead to consider the



teachers' error correction techniques ineffective because they are expecting to get only direct corrections when they are speaking, and they would ignore the benefits that other techniques can bring to their process.

The third variation in beliefs deals with the students' response to error correction. On one hand, instructors believe that in general students do not respond well to error correction, which means that they keep committing the same mistakes after several corrections and they do not pay attention to corrections. On the other hand, learners have a totally different view, most of them are satisfied with the type of error correction they have received throughout the course and they think it has been effective in the sense that it has helped them improve. This mismatch can have a negative effect on the students' learning since they think that they are doing fine and they actually need more work. As a matter of fact, this aspect of error correction needs more attention in another research; it would be interesting to find out what exactly happens with corrections because although students want and need corrections, they sometimes seem not to be ready for them.

In relation to materials, the mismatch resides in the use of the textbook. In general, students believe that the book can be used more than what it is used now in classes. Students value and enjoy the activities and materials that the teacher uses to complement the textbook; nevertheless they consider that the book is a rich resource which can be exploited for their benefit. Students see the textbook as a guide, thus sometimes they do not understand how the teachers use it, especially when they skip pages or go from one part of the unit to another. Teachers believe that the book is never



going to be perfect and it cannot be followed to the letter, it is just part of the resources of the course.

The implication of this mismatch is basically for students because they might not fully understand why the book is not being used as they expect, which can cause some confusion at some point. Maybe they will not be able to understand the structure of the book, and when they go home and try to understand the topic of the unit they will have difficulties.

Finally, in terms of language learning students believe that the most difficult aspect to learn is pronunciation whereas teachers think that it is grammar. This result is similar to the mismatch in the type of errors that should be corrected, students go for pronunciation and teachers go for grammar. Teachers' belief that grammar is more difficult might make them focus instruction more on it than on pronunciation, and students expect more pronunciation, so expectations are not met.

This sub-section of this paper explored the points of divergence in the beliefs related to the areas studied in this research. Besides identifying the mismatches there was a description of the implications in teaching and learning that they could cause. This information is really valuable for both teachers and students because they need to be aware that the difference in beliefs can have an impact on the classroom dynamics, and of course in the end in learning itself.



## Conclusions

According to the data gathered and analyzed in this research it can be concluded that, as theory says, students do have clear views about what learning and teaching should be like. They bring these beliefs to the classroom and they use them to shape their expectations from the course and the teacher. Even though they do not know much about teaching or language learning theories, they do have defined ideas of what they want or do not want in their English classes. Students interpret and judge what happens in the class according to their beliefs.

The study of beliefs require more than the application of qualitative methods of investigation in order to ensure validity. Beliefs have to be studied in context, otherwise their analysis and understanding would be deficient and it would be difficult for the researcher to make interpretations. Observation is vital, but it has to be complemented with other data collection techniques because triangulation helps corroborating data and increases understanding the phenomena. Beliefs can certainly be inferred from behaviors and attitudes using appropriate procedures.

Beliefs are mostly based on experience. Teachers' and students' views are generally the result of their prior experience. In the case of instructors, they incorporate their experience as language learners and as teachers. In the case of students they use their experience in previous learning and academic contexts, either in language or in other subject matters.

There is some degree of inconsistency between behavior and beliefs, especially in aspects related to the use of L1. In certain areas, participants have the idea that something has to be done in a particular way because probably they think that is the



right way; however when it comes to practice it is more practical to do it differently, and that is when they do something that goes against their beliefs. For instance, interestingly, students strongly believe that Spanish should not be used regularly in class, and in practice they use it even when it is not necessary. Teachers believe that Spanish can be useful for learning, but they do not make use of it as a resource.

The first day of class teachers collect information about their students which is later use as reference to plan their classes and select activities. This information is collected informally and no record is kept. Teachers pay close attention to their students' proficiency level because they are interested in diagnosing their needs in terms of language skills. Teachers also share general information about their teaching style and their experience as language instructors. Expectations for the course are not explored in detail, some students comment on very general expectations which apply more to the whole learning process than to the course specifically.

There were not many areas of belief discrepancy. Actually, most of the students and teachers' views about the aspects studied are congruent with each other. The area in which there are more areas of belief mismatch is error correction. The most relevant discrepancy is in the type of mistakes that should be corrected. Students favor pronunciation and instructors grammar. There is also some mismatch in the role of L1 in the learning of L2, the use of the book and the aspects of English considered difficult for learning.

The mother tongue has a role in the classroom and in learning. In class, it is not used as teachers and learners believe it should be used. There is a clear duality in the role of the mother tongue in the EFL classroom which should be further explored in



future studies. The L1 is more frequently used by students probably because of the proficiency level of the course. It is hard for students to detach from Spanish, they are surrounded by it and it is a real temptation to break the rule of no use of Spanish in class. They resort to Spanish, it is easier for them to communicate using their L1.

Belief mismatches have a clear impact on the teaching learning process. They affect the perceptions of what happens in class. They can be detrimental to the process because they create confusion and misunderstandings, which if not clarified or addressed can cause frustration on both teachers and learners. It is important for teachers and students to clarify their own expectations and their views about certain essential elements in class; otherwise this type of misinterpretations will continue to occur and affect learning more negatively.

Although group work is considered a great contribution for learners and teachers, it proved to have certain drawbacks. Group activities trigger purposeless use of L1; students start using Spanish almost since the moment they sit together with others, they use some English, but the organization and distribution of tasks is mainly done in Spanish. In addition, group work facilitates the inequity of participation among students. Teachers believe that working in groups maximizes participation, as opposed to whole group activities; nevertheless the reality of group work is that sometimes some students do very little of the total talking and work of the activity. Time management is another aspect that can be considered, students might take more time in the activities while working in groups, which would be beneficial if it were well spent in the tasks assigned; however, sometimes there are other types of distractions that remove attention from what is really important.



## Recommendations

Based on the above conclusions and the results of the present study some recommendations can be proposed for English teachers and for future research in the field. These recommendations are intended to cause a positive impact on the teaching of English as a foreign language.

### For English Teachers

A very necessary step for teachers to take is to first acknowledge that students do come to the classroom with their own agenda, which might be different to their own set of beliefs as teachers. This calls for the teachers to be prepared to meet such mismatch, which implies having a repertoire of strategies that aim at diminishing its negative effects.

This divergence of beliefs is specific to the teaching context and the particular group of students, so the teacher needs to respond according to the situation. No specific recipes can be prescribed. Although some general measures can be applied, each teacher has to find their own strategies to deal with it, but it is essential to be aware of the phenomenon and be prepared to face it positively.

One of the implications of taking action to deal with belief mismatch is the implementation of reflective teaching. Instructors have to be engaged in reflective processes so that they are able to identify their own set of beliefs and talk about them. A reflective teacher is also a professional who is open to constructive criticism and change, which are two necessary elements in the process of minimizing the student-



teacher belief gap. With no doubt, reflective practitioners would be better prepared to face the challenge of aligning their beliefs with those of their students.

It is highly relevant for teachers to collect information about the students on systematic basis the first day of class. Besides personal information and a diagnosis of the proficiency level of the students, specific information about their expectations for the course and their beliefs as learners need to be recorded and kept as references. The teacher can use questionnaires or any other type of instrument to collect information that allows them to get to know students' perspectives more effectively. Horwitz' instrument (BALLI) or an adaptation of it serves as a very useful tool to survey learner beliefs. It is also advisable to have an open dialogue about both teachers' and learners' beliefs so that expectations about the course and the teaching learning process can be clarified for the benefit of both parties involved in the teaching learning process.

Constant feedback from students can really guide the teacher to provide more effective instruction. For this to take place, it is necessary to build up a teacher-student relationship that allows a healthy communication to be part of the class. Being able to know what each other perceives in attitudes and behaviors facilitates changes and adjustments that need to be done along the development of the course.

In regards to the effectiveness of group work, some strategies can be used to maximize the benefits students can get from it. It is necessary to ensure equity of participation so that some students do not end up doing others' work. For this, the use of peer and self assessment instruments can be proposed. This type of assessment is intended to help students to become aware of their behavior during group work, and eventually, provoke a change in those students whose participation is limited. The use



of these instruments can also help to decrease the use of Spanish while working in small groups. Students certainly need more discipline in this kind of activities. So that they can take better advantage of the tasks, assessment can really make it easier to accomplish such endeavor.

*Can We Assess the Learning Goals of the EFL Course? ELT Journal 59.1*

### **For Future Research in the Field**

This study can be the starting point for other studies in the field because areas such as the role of L1 and error correction had not been sufficiently explored. Thus, other curious researchers might be interested in expanding on these two aspects. It would be of particular relevance to explore the beliefs and behaviors surrounding the use and role of the L1 in a similar EFL context with participants of different age groups.

Additionally, because of time constraints it was not possible to make use of other data collection instruments such as reflective journals, stimulated recalls or unstructured interviews. These instruments require more immersion in the field because they entail training teacher, they would involve students in reflection processes, and they would require giving students and teachers time to write or carry out tasks. The application of such data collection instruments will allow an even more in-depth examination of the phenomenon.

It would also be interesting to carry out experiments as part of a future study on beliefs in which teachers and students experience role reversal, so that they can be able to become aware of certain perceptions that they have as learners and instructors, in order to compare the two positions as an insightful learning experience.



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Annexes



# Annexes

UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL  
CACHA YAO DE CALCHOQUA Y LETRAS  
ESPAÑOLA EN BILINGÜES (CACHA YAO)  
PRODUCTOS DE INVESTIGACIÓN Y DESARROLLO TECNOLÓGICO  
DEPARTAMENTO DE INVESTIGACIÓN

ESTRATEGIAS PARA EL MANEJO DE LA INFORMACIÓN EN EL MANEJO DE LA INFORMACIÓN

LENGUA

Level: BA Classification: BA Date: 2018  
Teacher: Observations:

## OBJETIVOS

The purpose of this investigation instrument is to record the degree of knowledge that the students have about the strategies used to manage information in the field of research and development technology.

Investigación y Desarrollo Tecnológico

1. Quantity of information about the strategies is collected (on a scale of 1 to 5).
2. How is the information collected?
3. What type of information does the teacher use when performing research?



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FACULTAD DE FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS  
MAESTRÍA EN SEGUNDAS LENGUAS Y CULTURAS  
STRUCTURED OBSERVATION INSTRUMENT FOR THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS  
RESEARCHER: Hazel Vega

RESEARCH PROJECT: Exploring the Mismatch between Students and Teachers' Beliefs Surrounding Language Learning

Level: EN \_\_\_ CLASSROOM: \_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_  
Teacher: \_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_ Observation # \_\_\_

### OBJECTIVE:

The purpose of this observation instrument is to record the types of information that the teachers collect about the students on the first day of class and how they record it, as well as the type of information teachers share with students about them.

Questions to answer:

1. What type of information about the students is collected the first day of class?
2. How is the information collected?
3. What type of information does the teacher give about her/himself as a teacher?



### I. Students' Information

Presence	Information collected	How it was collected	Details
	A. Students' general interests		
	B. Students' background (language learning)		
	C. Students' learning styles		
	D. Students' preferences in terms of class activities		
	E. Students' needs (language skills)		
	F. Students' personal information		
	G. Student's learning goals (for the course)		
	H. Reasons why students are studying English		
	I. Students' opinions about conditions for learning at the institution		
	J. Students' expectations for the course		
	K. Students' perceptions about English		
	L. Students' perceptions about language learning		
	M. Students' opinion about the role of the teacher		



## II. Teacher's Information

Yes/No	Information	Description/details
	A. How she/ he handles error correction	
	B. How she/ he uses the book	
	C. How she/he handles group work	
	D. How she/he handles the use of Spanish	
	E. The types of activities she/he does	
	F. What she/he believes about language learning	
	G. What she/he believes about teaching English	
	H. Her expectations from the students	
	I. Her/his background (experience and training)	
	J. The method she/he uses	



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MAESTRÍA EN SEGUNDAS LENGUAS Y CULTURAS  
STRUCTURED PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION INSTRUMENT  
RESEARCHER: Hazel Vega

RESEARCH PROJECT: Exploring the Mismatch between Students and Teachers' Beliefs Surrounding Language Learning

Observation Schedule # \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Student's Level: EN \_\_\_\_\_ Classroom: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Schedule: \_\_\_\_\_ Site: CCCN  
Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

**OBJECTIVES:**

The purpose of this observation instrument is to record the teachers' and students' behaviors regarding error correction, the use of Spanish, group work and the use of instructional materials which may reflect their beliefs in these areas.

Specific Objectives:

1. To record the frequency, types of errors teachers correct, the error correction techniques they use and the context or circumstances in which they do it as.
2. To record the use of Spanish, the context in which it is used, the frequency of its use and the role it plays in teacher-student and student-student interaction.
3. To record the frequency and duration of group work, as well as the type of activities done and the different behaviors present during interaction.
4. To record the use frequency, type and variety of supplementary materials, and the use of the textbook.

Questions to be answered:

1. What do students and teachers' behaviors reflect their beliefs about error correction, use of L1, group work and the use of instructional materials?
2. How does error correction take place in the class?
3. What role does L1 play in the class?
4. What role does group work play in the class?
5. What role do supplementary materials play in the class?



**ERROR CORRECTION (005)**

Presence	When students make a mistake the teacher _____.	Frequency	Description/ Details
	A. Corrects it on the spot		
	B. Ignores the mistake		
	C. Corrects it indirectly by		
	a. Paraphrasing		
	b. Pretending not to understand		
	c. Repeating what the student said		
	d. Asking the student a question to clarify meaning		
	D. Takes notes		
	E. Points out the mistake and provides an explanation		
	F. Asks the student to paraphrase what she/he said		
	G. Points out the mistake and asks other students to correct the mistake		
	H. Provides feedback on general mistakes at the end of an activity		



Presence	The teacher corrects mistakes when _____	Frequency	Description/ Details
	A. The student is speaking in front of the group		
	B. The student is working in pairs or small groups		
	C. The student is speaking to him/her		
	D. The student is in the process of planning the task		
	E. The task is completed		
	F. The student is speaking about something not related to the topic		
	G. The student is using the target linguistic aspect of the class		

Presence	Types of mistakes that the teacher corrects	Frequency	Description/ Details
	A. Grammar mistakes		
	B. Pronunciation mistakes		
	C. Vocabulary mistakes		
	D. Mistakes that interfere with the message intended to convey		
	E. Mistakes that do not interfere with the message intended to convey		
	F. Mistakes related to the target linguistic aspect being studied/practiced		
	G. Mistakes not related to the target linguistic aspect being studied/practiced		
	H. Mistakes corresponding to a higher level than the students' linguistic skills		
	I. Mistakes that have been recently corrected (repeated mistakes)		



Use of Spanish (003)

Presence	The teacher uses Spanish _____	Frequency	Description/ Details
	A. To explain vocabulary		
	B. To give instructions		
	C. To explain a grammar structure		
	D. To clarify something that was not understood		
	E. To refer to something cultural (Specific to the Latin-American or Costa Rican culture)		
	F. To make comparisons between Spanish and English		
	G. To talk to the whole group		
	H. To talk to students individually		
Presence	Students use Spanish _____	Frequency	Description/ Details
	A. To check understanding of instructions		
	B. To check understanding of teacher's explanations		
	C. To correct others' mistakes		
	D. To talk about something not related to the class or the topic		
	E. To plan how they are going to do an activity		
	F. When they are in small groups or pairs		
	G. When they talk to the teacher		
	H. When they speak in front of the group		
	I. When they do not know the word or expression in English		



GROUP WORK (004)

Activity	Frequency	Duration	Description/Details

Presence	During group work students _____	Frequency	Description/ Details
	A. Help others (to understand, clarify, check concepts)		
	B. Use the TL to accomplish a real communicative purpose		
	C. Deviate from the topic		
	D. Review or discuss grammar or vocabulary		
	A. Check pronunciation of words		
	E. Write what they are going to present/say afterwards		
	F. Answer questions and share opinions and/or experiences related to the topic assigned		
	G. Stay quiet		
	H. Distribute tasks and/or roles (i.e. note-taker, presenter, etc.)		



Supplementary Materials (006)

Presence	The teacher uses	Duration	Frequency	Description/ Details
	A. Copies			
	B. Music			
	C. Pictures			
	D. Movies or videos			
	E. Realia			
	F. Newspaper clips			
	G. Magazines			
	H. Books (i.e. encyclopedias)			
	I. Games			
	J. Props			
	K. Internet			
	L. Power Point presentations			
	M. Flipcharts			
	N. Audio Recordings (out of the book)			



Presence	The textbook is used _____	Duration	Frequency	Description/ Details
	A. For the schema activation			
	B. For the pre-task			
	C. For the task			
	D. For the language analysis			
	E. To check homework			
	F. To work in pairs or small groups			
	G. To work individually			
	H. To explain grammar			
	I. To read			
	J. To promote discussion			
	K. To do grammar exercises			
	L. To do pronunciation exercises			
	M. To do listening exercises			
	N. To do vocabulary exercises			



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FACULTAD DE FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS  
MAESTRÍA EN SEGUNDAS LENGUAS Y CULTURAS  
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FOR TEACHERS  
RESEARCHER: Hazel Vega

RESEARCH PROJECT: Exploring the Mismatch between Students and Teachers' Beliefs Surrounding Language Learning

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Interview # \_\_\_\_\_

Level: EN \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Site: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

### OBJECTIVES:

The purpose of this interview is to discover the teachers' beliefs about language learning error correction, the use of Spanish, group work and the use of supplementary materials.

Specific Objectives:

1. To find out the basis upon which teachers make choices and decisions about techniques for error correction, the use of L1, group work and the use of supplementary materials.
2. To record the type of activities the teachers perform the first day of class.
3. To determine whether or not there is consistency between the teachers' actions and their beliefs.

Question to be answered:

1. What are the teachers' beliefs about language learning error correction, the use of Spanish, group work and the use of supplementary materials?

### First day of class

1. What information about the SS do you collect during the first week of class? Why? (001)

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2. How do you collect this information? **(001)**

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3. What kind of information about yourself do you share with the students on the first day of class? Why? **(002)**

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### **The role of L1**

4. Under what circumstances would using Spanish be acceptable or unacceptable in your classes? **(003.1)**

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5. Do you respond in any particular way when SS speak Spanish in class? **(003.1)**

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6. What role does the SS's native language play in EFL learning? **(003.1)**

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### **Group work**

7. How important is group work in the development of your classes? **(004.1)**

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8. What kind of activities do SS do when they work in groups? **(004.1)**



9. How do students respond to group work? **(004.1)**

10. How does group work benefit SS's learning? **(004.1)**

11. Under what circumstances would you exclude group work as a learning strategy?  
**(004.1)**

12. What criteria do you use for grouping students to work together? **(004.1)**

### **Error Correction**

13. What type of mistakes do you correct? Why? Can you give some examples? **(005.1)**

14. At what moment do you correct and provide direct feedback to SS? Why? **(005.1)**



15. How well do SS respond to error correction? **(005.1)**

16. Which error correction techniques work better for you? Why do you think they work?  
**(005.1)**

**Materials**

17. What type of materials/resources do you usually use in class? **(006.1)**

18. How do these materials help your SS learn? **(006.1)**

19. What criteria do you use for selecting your materials? **(006.1)**



20. What role does your personality and learning style play in your selection of teaching materials? **(006.1)**

21. How useful is the textbook you use as a resource for your SS's language development? Why? **(006.1)**

### **Language Learning**

22. What is the most effective way to learn English? **(007.1)**

23. What factors affect language learning either positively or negatively? Who are capable of learning a second language? **(007.1)**

24. Under what conditions can a person learn English in our country? **(007.1)**

25. What aspects of the language are more difficult and which are easier to learn? **(007.1)**



UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL  
FACULTAD DE FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS  
MAESTRÍA EN SEGUNDAS LENGUAS Y CULTURAS  
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS  
RESEARCHER: Hazel Vega

RESEARCH PROJECT: Exploring the Mismatch between Students and Teachers' Beliefs Surrounding Language Learning

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Level: EN \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### OBJECTIVES:

The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect information about teachers' beliefs about language learning error correction, the use of Spanish, group work and the use of supplementary materials.

Specific Objectives:

1. To find out the basis upon which teachers make choices and decisions about techniques for error correction, the use of L1, group work and the use of supplementary materials.
2. To determine consistency between the teachers' actions and their beliefs.
3. To collect data about the teacher's teaching philosophy.

Question to be answered:

1. What are the teachers' beliefs about language learning error correction, the use of Spanish, group work and the use of supplementary materials?

**Instructions: Answer the following questions according to your beliefs as a language teacher. Ask the researcher if you are not sure about any question. The numbers next to the questions are for data analysis purposes, so don't pay attention to them.**

#### The Teacher's Philosophy

1. Explain briefly the main aspects that characterize your philosophy of teaching? **(008)**

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2. What aspects (e.g. experiences, education, perceptions) have influenced your beliefs as a teacher? **(008)**

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3. Do you think your beliefs as a learner are the same as your beliefs as a teacher? Why? (008)

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### The role of L1

4. What do you think should be the role of the SS's native language in the EFL classroom? (003.1)

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5. Do you think students handle their native language in a way that it helps them learn? Why? (003.1)

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### Group work

7. Do students usually respond to group work activities as you expect? What do they do? (004.1)

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8. How does group work benefit SS's learning? (004.1)

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### Error Correction

9. What type of mistakes do you correct more emphatically? Why? Can you give some examples? (005.1)

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10. At what moment is it appropriate to correct and provide direct feedback to SS? Why? (005.1)

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11. Do SS respond to error correction as you expect? (005.1)

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### **Materials**

12. How do the supplementary materials you take to class help your SS learn? (006.1)

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13. Why do you use the textbook the way you do in class? (006.1)

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### **Language Learning**

14. What is the most effective way to learn English in a foreign language context? (007.1)

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15. Are your students usually good language learners? Explain. What would be an ideal student like? (007.1)

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16. What would be an ideal English class for you?

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**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR KIND COOPERATION**





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MAESTRÍA EN SEGUNDAS LENGUAS Y CULTURAS  
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FOR STUDENTS  
RESEARCHER: Hazel Vega

RESEARCH PROJECT: Exploring the Mismatch between Students and Teachers' Beliefs Surrounding Language Learning

Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Interview # \_\_\_\_\_

Level: EN \_\_\_\_\_ Schedule: \_\_\_\_\_ Site: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Student's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

### OBJECTIVES:

The purpose of this interview is to discover the students' beliefs about language learning error correction, the use of Spanish, group work and the use of supplementary materials.

Specific Objectives:

1. To collect students' opinions related to their beliefs about the areas studied
2. To relate students' beliefs to their experience in and outside the classroom.
3. To determine whether or not there is consistency between the students' actions and their beliefs.

Note: This interview is going to be done in Spanish due to the students' level of English which could lead to misinterpretations and limitations to express ideas.



## El papel de la lengua materna

1. ¿Qué piensa usted sobre el uso del español en la clase? (003.2)

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2. ¿Cuándo usa usted español en la clase? (003.2)

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3. ¿Qué tan necesario considera usted el uso del español por parte del profesor en la clase? (003.2)

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4. ¿Cuál cree usted que es el papel de la lengua materna en el aprendizaje del inglés? (003.2)

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## Trabajo en grupo

5. ¿Cómo se siente usted cuando trabaja en grupo? (004.2)

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6. Durante el trabajo en grupo, ¿qué hace usted usualmente? (004.2)

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7. ¿Cuáles son las ventajas y desventajas del trabajo en grupo? **(004.2)**

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8. ¿Cuáles tipos de actividades se deben trabajar en grupo? ¿Por qué? **(004.2)**

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9. ¿Cómo le ha ayudado el trabajo en grupo en su aprendizaje del inglés? **(004.2)**

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### **Corrección de errores**

10. ¿Qué tipos de errores cree usted que el profesor tiene que corregir más enfáticamente? ¿Por qué? **(005.2)**

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11. ¿Cuándo se deben de hacer correcciones? **(005.2)**

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12. ¿Qué piensa sobre la corrección de errores que recibe de sus compañeros? **(005.2)**

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13. De acuerdo a su experiencia, ¿cuáles son formas efectivas de hacer correcciones? (005.2)

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### **Materiales**

14. ¿Cómo le ayuda este material completarlo que el profesor utiliza en la clase a aprender? (006.2)

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15. ¿Qué tipo de material complementario es más efectivo para el aprendizaje del inglés? (006.2)

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16. ¿Cómo le ayuda el libro de texto a aprender? (006.2)

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17. ¿Cómo cree usted que se debe usar el libro de texto en la clase? (006.2)

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### **El aprendizaje del inglés**

18. ¿Cuál es la forma más efectiva de aprender inglés? (007.2)

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19. ¿Qué aspectos del idioma inglés son más fáciles de aprender? **(007.2)**

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20. ¿Qué aspectos del idioma inglés son más difíciles de aprender? **(007.2)**

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21. ¿Qué estrategias usa usted para aprender inglés? **(007.2)**

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22. ¿Cree usted que cualquier persona es capaz de aprender un segundo idioma?  
**(007.2)**

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23. ¿Cómo debe una persona aprender inglés en nuestro contexto costarricense?  
**(007.2)**



**PROYECTO DE INVESTIGACIÓN: EXPLORANDO LAS DIFERENCIAS ENTRE LAS  
CREENCIAS ENTRE ESTUDIANTES Y PROFESORES ACERCA DEL APRENDIZAJE DE  
UN IDIOMA**

Estudiante: \_\_\_\_\_ Nivel: EN \_\_\_\_\_ Horario: \_\_\_\_\_

Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_

**OBJETIVOS:**

El propósito de este cuestionario es recopilar información que permita confirmar datos ya recopilados por medio de entrevistas y observaciones.

Objetivos Específicos:

1. Recolectar las opiniones de los estudiantes relacionadas con sus creencias en las áreas de estudio del proyecto.
2. Contrastar los datos obtenidos con aquellos proporcionados en las entrevistas y observaciones.

**Instrucciones:** Por favor, lea las preguntas cuidadosamente. Si tiene dudas sobre algún ítem pregúntele a la persona encargada. En las preguntas en que aparecen opciones, escoja la (s) que más se acercan a su opinión (en algunos casos puede marcar varias opciones, NO MAS DE TRES OPCIONES). Los números a la par de las preguntas son una codificación para la investigadora, haga caso omiso de ellos.

**El papel de la lengua materna**

1. Yo uso español en la clase para \_\_\_\_\_ (003.2)
  - a. Explicarle algo a un compañero
  - b. Bromear
  - c. Hablar sobre algo que no está relacionado con el tema
  - d. Traducir palabras
  - e. Comunicarme cuando trabajo en grupo

2. ¿Cuál cree usted que debería de ser el papel del español en la clase inglés? (003.2)

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3. Creo que el profesor \_\_\_\_\_ (003.2)
  - a. No debería de usar español del todo en la clase
  - b. Debería permitir el uso del español al estudiante cuando éste no se puede comunicar en inglés
  - c. Debería usar español sólo en casos extremos cuando ya ha agotado todos los recursos para explicar algo
  - d. Debería usar español para socializar con los estudiantes
  - e. Debería usar español para explicar vocabulario o gramática



## Trabajo en grupo

4. Durante el trabajo en grupo yo \_\_\_\_\_ (004.2)

- a. Pongo en práctica lo que se está estudiando
- b. Participo poco
- c. Participo mucho
- d. Escribo lo que voy a presentar o decir
- e. Hablo en español

5. ¿Cuáles son las ventajas y desventajas del trabajo en grupo? (004.2)

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6. ¿Está satisfech@ con la dinámica de trabajo en grupo que se ha desarrollado en el curso? (004.2)

Sí \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

¿Por qué?

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7. ¿Creo que el trabajo en grupo me ha ayudado significativamente en mi aprendizaje del inglés? (004.2)

Sí \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

¿Por qué?

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## Corrección de errores

8. ¿Qué tipos de errores cree usted que el profesor tiene que corregir más enfáticamente? MARQUE SOLO UNA OPCION (005.2)

- a. Pronunciación
- b. Gramática
- c. Vocabulario

9. ¿Cuándo se deben de hacer correcciones sobre la producción oral del estudiante? MARQUE SOLO UNA OPCION (005.2)

- a. En el preciso momento en que se comete el error
- b. Cuando el estudiante termina de expresar la idea
- c. Al final de la actividad
- d. En general hasta el final de la clase

10. ¿Considera confiable la corrección de errores que recibe de sus compañeros? (005.2)

Sí \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

11. ¿Cuáles son formas efectivas de hacer correcciones? (005.2)

- a. Correcciones indirectas
- b. Correcciones directas



- c. Correcciones orales
- d. Correcciones en la pizarra
- e. Correcciones acompañadas de una explicación

12. ¿Está satisfech@ con la corrección de errores que ha recibido en este curso? (005.2)

Sí \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

¿Por qué?

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### Materiales

13. ¿Qué tipo de material complementario (fuera del libro) que utiliza el profesor en la clase es más efectivo para el aprendizaje del inglés? ¿Por qué? (006.2)

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14. El libro de texto \_\_\_\_\_ (006.2)

- a. Es simplemente una guía en el curso
- b. Debería ser cubierto en su totalidad
- c. Es útil para el aprendizaje
- d. Debería usarse más en clase
- e. Es apropiado para nuestro contexto

### El aprendizaje del inglés

15. ¿Cuál es la forma más efectiva de aprender inglés? (007.2)

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16. ¿Qué aspectos del idioma inglés son más difíciles de aprender? (007.2)

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17. ¿Qué estrategias o actividades usa usted para aprender inglés fuera del aula? (007.2)

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18. ¿Cómo sería un curso de inglés ideal para usted? (007.2)

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**SIDUNA**



\*FI18606\*