

UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL
Facultad de Filosofía y Letras
Escuela de Literatura y Ciencias del Lenguaje
Sistema de Estudios de Posgrado

Maestría en Segundas Lenguas y Culturas con énfasis en Inglés como
Lengua Extranjera para Alumnado Adulto y para Alumnado Infantil

Strengths and Weaknesses of Oral Approaches in the
English Major at Universidad Nacional and Universidad de
Costa Rica

Volume II: Universidad de Costa Rica

Ana Bonilla Rodríguez
Gabriela Cardero Gómez

428
B715s

November 22nd, 2002

**UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL
FACULTAD DE FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS
ESCUELA DE LITERATURA Y CIENCIAS DEL LENGUAJE
SISTEMA DE ESTUDIOS DE POSGRADO**

**MAESTRÍA EN SEGUNDAS LENGUAS Y CULTURAS CON ÉNFASIS EN INGLÉS
COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA PARA ALUMNADO ADULTO Y PARA ALUMNADO
INFANTIL**

**STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF ORAL APPROACHES IN THE
ENGLISH MAJOR AT UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AND UNIVERSIDAD DE
COSTA RICA**

VOLUME 1: UNIVERSIDAD DE COSTA RICA

**Ana Bonilla Rodríguez
Gabriela Cordero Gómez**

November 22nd, 2008

**UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL
FACULTAD DE FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS
ESCUELA DE LITERATURA Y CIENCIAS DEL LENGUAJE
SISTEMA DE ESTUDIOS DE POSGRADO**

**MAESTRÍA EN SEGUNDAS LENGUAS Y CULTURAS CON ÉNFASIS EN INGLÉS
COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA PARA ALUMNADO ADULTO Y PARA ALUMNADO
INFANTIL**

**STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF ORAL APPROACHES IN THE
ENGLISH MAJOR AT UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AND UNIVERSIDAD DE
COSTA RICA**

VOLUME 1: UNIVERSIDAD DE COSTA RICA



**Ana Bonilla Rodríguez
4-0186-0636 / 234 846-5**

**Gabriela Cordero Gómez
40187 0561 / 234844-6**

November 22nd, 2008

SIDUNA

DONATION

H28
B7155



BC150358

26 OCT 2010

Nómina de participantes en la actividad final del Trabajo de Graduación

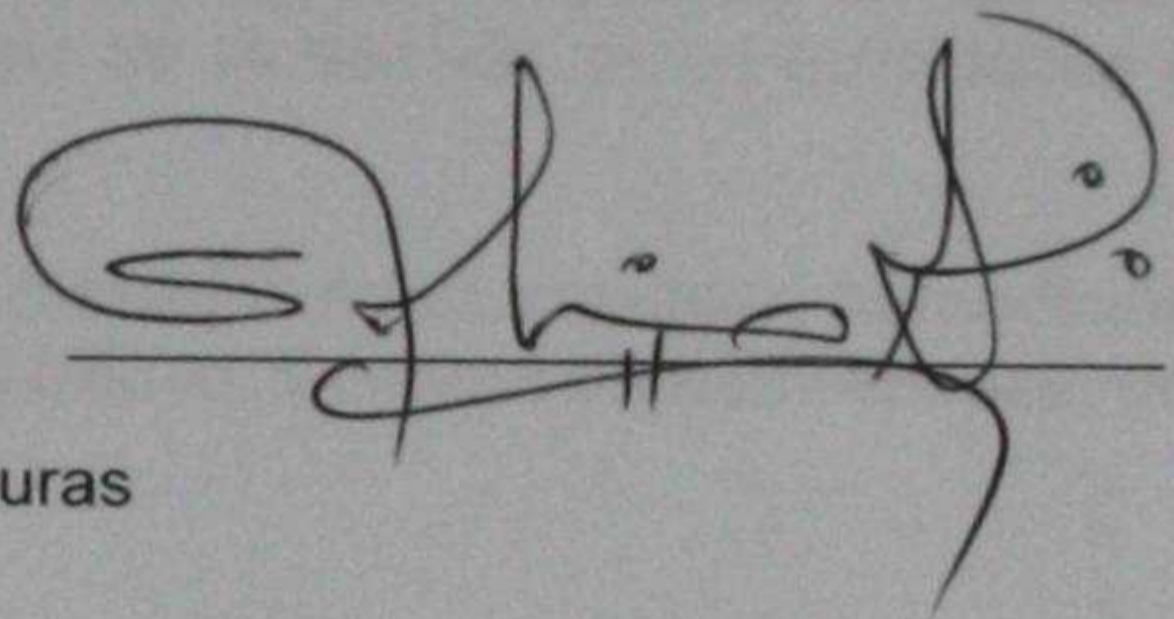
Presentado por el sustentante

Gabriela Cordero Gómez

22 de Noviembre del 2008

Personal académico calificador:

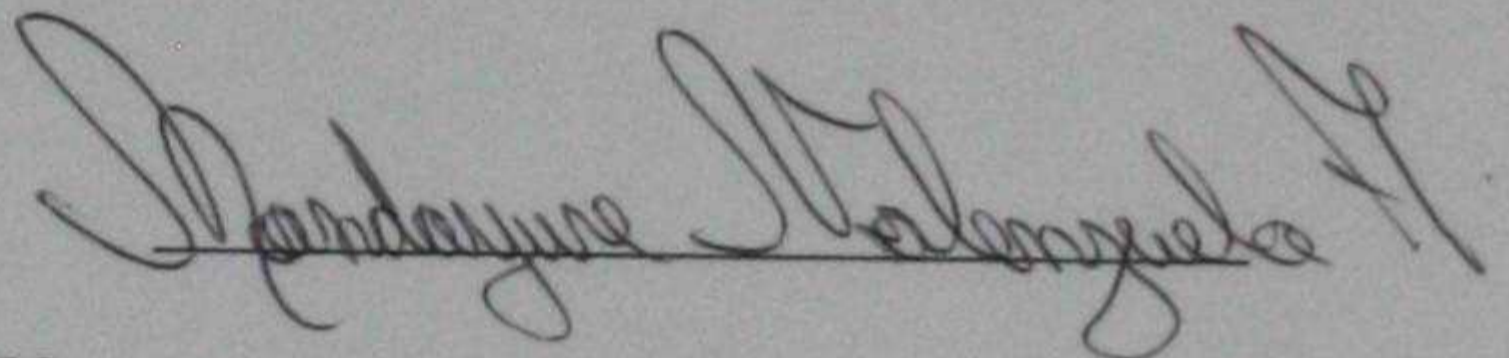
M.A. Sabino Morera Gutiérrez
Profesor encargado
Investigación en Segundas Lenguas y Culturas



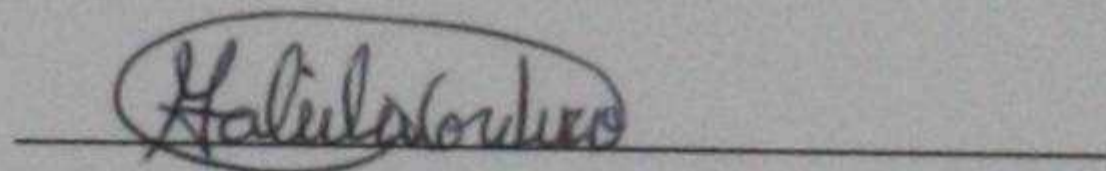
M.A Lorein Powell Benard
Profesora Tutora



M.A. Nandayure Valenzuela Arce
Coordinadora
Maestría en Segundas Lenguas y Culturas
con Énfasis en Inglés como Lengua
Extranjera para Alumnado Adulto



Sustentante:
Gabriela Cordero Gómez



UNA

UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL
COSTA RICA

SISTEMA DE INFORMACIÓN DOCUMENTAL
BIBLIOTECA JOAQUIN GARCÍA MONGE

PRÉSTAMO REGULAR

Resumen: Este proyecto de graduación presenta una visión de los enfoques orales en tres cursos conversacionales que forman parte del currículo diseñado para estudiantes de inglés como segunda lengua en la Universidad Nacional y en la Universidad de Costa Rica. Específicamente, hay tres objetivos en ésta investigación: a) reconocer las fortalezas y debilidades de los métodos aplicados en cada curso al igual que su influencia en el desarrollo oral de los estudiantes; b) determinar si el nivel de inglés de los alumnos en cada año de carrera corresponde al nivel previsto por las autoridades de cada institución, y finalmente; c) dar sugerencias útiles de cómo los estudiantes pueden adquirir mayores habilidades comunicativas en el aula. Estos resultados en los seis grupos fueron posibles mediante un proceso de evaluación de las actividades e interacción presente en cada clase.

Palabras clave: Enfoques Comunicativos (basados en contenidos)/ Aprendizaje Cooperativo)/Expresión Oral en Inglés/Habilidad Comunicativa/Enseñanza de una Segunda Lengua

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 graduation project overviews the oral approaches used in three oral communication courses that are part of the curriculum designed for students majoring in English as a Second Language, both at Universidad Nacional and at Universidad de Costa Rica. Specifically, the objectives of this research study are three: a) to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches implemented in each one of those oral courses and their impact on the development of the learners' level of proficiency in English; b) to determine whether the level of proficiency attained by the students at each stage of their training as ESL speakers meets the expectations of the authorities in each institution, and finally; c) to provide useful insights and suggestions on how those learners immersed in the program may enhance communicative competence, which was made possible by assessing the activities and interaction observed in each class.

Key words: Oral Approaches (Communicative, Content Based, Collaborative)/ Proficiency in English/Communicative Competence/ESL Teaching

Paper presented as a requirement to obtain the master's degree in Second Languages and Cultures with an emphasis in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language to adult learners, in fulfillment of the bylaws and regulations established by the Graduate Program at Universidad Nacional, Heredia, Costa Rica.

Acknowledgements

Foremost, thanks to God for giving us the strength, the peace and the inspiration to carrying out this research project.

A special word of gratitude to our parents, who inspired us to work hard and to accomplish our goals. Without their support, this study would not have been completed.

To M.A Lorein Powell Benard for sharing part of her wisdom with us. We are thankful for her support and motivation. Certainly, her guidance and assistance were essential in the development of this research project.

A word of thanks must also be addressed to our professors M.A Sabino Morera Gutiérrez and M.A Nandayure Valenzuela Arce for their direction during the course of this study.

To the authorities and professors at Universidad Nacional and Universidad de Costa Rica for opening their doors to our research. Their help and support were cornerstones in carrying out this study.

Special thanks to the participants who allowed us to interview them.

Finally, words of gratefulness must also go to our classmates at the Master's program and people dear to us, all of whom believed in us when times were difficult.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	vii
I. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Relevance, purpose and characteristics.....	4
1.1.1 Relevance of the study.....	5
1.1.2 Nature of the study.....	6
1.1.3 Objectives.....	8
1.1.3.1 General Objective.....	8
1.1.3.2 Specific Objectives.....	8
1.1.4 Population, Procedure and Research Setting.....	9
1.1.5 Research Questions and Method	10
II. Literature review.....	14
2.1 Conceptualizing the Scope.....	14
2.2 Positions Regarding English-learning Outcomes.....	15
2.3 Issues and Dilemmas	16
III. Data Analysis: Universidad de Costa Rica.....	23
3.1 Teachers and Students' Role.....	23
3.1.1 Feedback and Error Correction	29
3.2 Language Teaching: Approaches and Techniques.....	31
3.2.1 The Content-based Approach.....	33
3.2.2 The Communicative Approach.....	35
3.2.3 The Task-based Approach.....	41

3.3 Input and Materials.....	44
3.4 Learners' Communicative Competence	50
3.4.1 The Oral Language Test	60
IV. Recommendations.....	66
4.1 General Recommendations.....	66
4.2 Recommendations : UCR.....	72
V. Conclusion.....	79
VI. Works Cited.....	81
VII. Annexes.....	86
6.1 Data Collection Tools.....	86
6.1.1 Questionnaires for Learners	86
6.1.2 Questionnaires for Professors.....	106
6.1.3 Structured Interview	109
6.2 Oral Language Test.....	111
6.2.1 ACTFL guidelines and criteria.....	111
6.2.2 Interview guiding questions.....	113
6.2.3 Role Cards.....	115
6.2.4 Comparative Chart Results.....	121

List of Figures

1. Figure No. 1: Results from the second-year group.....	53
2. Figure No. 2: Results from the third-year group.....	53
3. Figure No. 3: Results from the fourth-year group.....	54
4. Figure No. 4: Results second-year group.....	56
5. Figure No. 5: Results third-year group.....	56
6. Figure No. 6: Results fourth-year group.....	57
7. Table No.1: Scores of UNA students.....	64

I. Introduction

Worldwide, learning English has become a necessity for all people who aspire to be successful in the labor market and who wish to communicate effectively with others at the global level. This fact has increased the number of schools that teach English in non-English speaking countries significantly. Moreover, it has geared them to improve the quality of their English programs in an attempt to suit the needs and aspirations of an ever-increasing number of students. Even though some students seek training in reading and writing, the majority are urgently looking to interact and communicate effectively in the target language.

In the particular case of Costa Rica, the Ministry of Public Education (MEP) has displayed important efforts to improve the quality of English taught in public schools, starting with a comprehensive evaluation of its English teachers. This rising interest has also led authorities to think about the role of higher education in the training of English teachers, not only as instructors of the language, but also in terms of the level of proficiency they acquire throughout their teaching-training programs. Recent articles published in various national newspapers revealed that most qualified English teachers in the country were former learners at two public universities. As a result, the oral approaches used in the English program at Universidad Nacional and Universidad de Costa Rica are the focus of this study. The analysis and results obtained in this study shed light on learning methods and philosophies that have been effective to achieve desired learning goals. This study also helped to identify the gaps that both universities need to improve to guarantee the mastery of the target language of their learning population.

Cunningham remarked that communicative and language instructional approaches enhance the learning of the four language skills, yet "opportunities for speaking require structure and planning if they are to support language development" (1). This means that the way professors approach content, introduce and engage learners in classroom tasks, and relate to their pupils determine how much knowledge and practice students will achieve in speaking courses. Many different approaches have been implemented for many years in an attempt to find the best suited learning technique to approach second language classes; professors have moved radically from the grammar-translation to more communicative approaches such as the task-based or content-based approach. These methods have been prompted by their structural, functional and interactional use of language (Richards and Rodgers 22).

Enhancing learners' communicative competence is the ultimate goal of a language class and a language learning method (Nazari 203). This concept has been expanded by many experts, who consider that communicative competence is the learner's ability to cope with real life encounters successfully by integrating their linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence to avoid communicative breakdowns (Omaggio 6). The degree to which the English students at each university achieved this competence will be analyzed and compared. Also, the approaches used to enhance oral participation and motivation in the target language will be reflected on.

In this research project, groups from the second, third and fourth year of the English major at Universidad Nacional and Universidad de Costa Rica were observed over a five week period. The teaching methods, the students and teachers' roles, and the focus of the class were taken as basis for the analysis of approaches used by professors to develop oral speaking skills. Moreover, interviews with coordinators,

professors and students in each setting were carried out to support the findings identified in the class work.

This paper includes a description of the methodologies and approaches implemented in the oral communication courses observed; in addition, it discusses the strengths and weaknesses of each oral class, taking the goals and needs of the students as the point of departure. Most of the data gathered in the field work was qualitative; nevertheless, some information was obtained through questionnaires and comparative charts about the learners' language performance. This quantitative support contributes to the validity and reliability of the patterns observed among professors and students, and their views of the learning process. Furthermore, the identity of professors, students, coordinators and authorities involved in the project has been kept private; thus, when one of them is being referred to as a source, a different name was provided inside quotation marks.

The paper also provides a description and analysis on the objectives of the course program and the students' current proficiency level. This information enabled the researchers to determine the success or failure of the techniques applied in their conversational classes. Finally, specific suggestions are given to improve both programs. These findings presented here are of great interest for the higher education system, as the starting point to evaluate the quality of education each institution is offering learners around the country.

Due to the complexity of the topic and the amount of information gathered and analyzed, this paper was developed by two researchers: Gabriela Cordero and Ana Bonilla. Although, both of them carried out observations and analysis of results in the

two settings, the former centered on the Universidad de Costa Rica (Volumen I) and the latter on Universidad Nacional (Volumen II).

1.1 Relevance, Purpose and Characteristics of the Study

For decades, Universidad Nacional (UNA), and Universidad de Costa Rica (UCR) were the only universities that offered English programs in the country. Even though the situation of higher education has varied substantially over the years, these two programs have maintained their prestige. On the one hand, the four-year long program at UNA – certified by SINAES (National Higher Education Accreditation System) since 2005– is exclusively dedicated to provide English language training, while its counterpart, provides students with two different degrees, one in English with the opportunity to minor in literature or translation and another one in the teaching of English.

More recently, increasing numbers of private universities began offering English degrees as well. In fact, the involvement of private universities in English teaching training has become an issue which has gained the increasing attention of national authorities since the year 2007, when the Ministry of Public Education began to scrutinize the outcomes of the English programs in the Public Education System (PES). This evaluation, in turn, led to the conclusion that an overwhelming majority of teachers were not able to communicate in the target language at an advanced level, according to the parameters established by ACTFL, because some of them graduated with intermediate or lower level. As candidates to the Master's degree in Second Languages and Cultures at UNA, the authors of this work have identified the major issues

surrounding ESL teacher-training. At the end, the quality of English teaching in Costa Rica is something that affects and involves everyone in the field.

1.1.1 The Relevance of the Study

In connection with the public and private systems of higher education involved currently in training English teachers, MEP has reported publicly that out of 3.193 English teachers that have been evaluated only 315 master the language (Villegas). Simultaneously, this assessment also indicated that the teachers that obtained the best results on the TOEIC were those certified by Universidad Nacional and Universidad de Costa Rica, whereas most of those who obtained teaching certificates from private universities scored in the lower ranks.

This is precisely the reason why this research project –intended to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the ESL programs offered by the two public universities– is considered relevant and necessary at this point in time. The paper is particularly centered on the analysis of the approaches that underlie learning and teaching at UNA and the UCR. This finding is relevant to determine what aspects of the teaching-learning process contribute to the development of students' oral proficiency in English. More specifically, this study looks at the levels of oral proficiency attained by students in the second, third and fourth year of their major in the two learning centers mentioned above.

The information gathered here will hopefully contribute to shed some light on how English teachers are being trained in public universities and on the approaches that contribute to enhance their ability to communicate effectively. By doing so, the authors expect that the entire higher educational system will benefit from knowing the strengths

and weaknesses in the process of developing future teachers' communicative competence. This study will be made available to higher education institutions so that its suggestions may serve as a starting point for authorities to pursue improvements in their ESL teacher-training programs. They will be then able to compare the approaches analyzed in this study and make the appropriate change to better meet the learning needs and aspirations of their students in their effort to master the target language and becoming English teachers. The weak points discovered will also be pinpointed in the paper in hope to attract the attention of the authorities at each university.

The researchers intend to provide positive feedback to both universities as they analyze and evaluate those aspects that require improvement. Likewise, this paper may also serve as a starting point for national authorities to get involved in the assessment and monitoring of higher education programs for English teachers. Continuous assessment is advised in order to determine whether the suggestions included in this paper will be applicable in each one of the levels observed and for the students that will enroll in oral communication courses in the future.

1.1.2 The Nature of the Study

This research followed a naturalistic approach since it examined phenomena in its authentic environment, as described by in Falk and Blumernreich (9). The oral communication courses of the English major at UNA and UCR were the natural settings in which the study took place. It involved two distinct populations comprised of students in the second, third, and fourth levels of the ESL teacher-training programs at Universidad Nacional and at Universidad de Costa Rica.

The sample population at UCR was made up of three groups. The one in the second year was the largest, accounting for thirty one students. The group in the third year had twenty five learners, and the last one was made up of twenty four, two of which are German citizens participating in an exchange program.

In regards to the sample at UNA, three groups from each year were also observed. The first was comprised of twenty students, the second of eighteen, and the third of only nine pupils. Students from the first year in each setting were not included because the main purpose of the study was to analyze the communicative competence of the students that have been in the program for at least one year in order to ensure the validity of the results.

Since this is a joint research project, which consists of two separate volumes, each researcher was responsible for analyzing the data obtained at one of the two settings. Ana Bonilla analyzed the data obtained at UNA and Gabriela Cordero was in charge of the data gathered at UCR. Even though the analysis of the data was carried out separately, the findings were compared and complemented to provide an overall view of the current situation of the language programs at both public universities.

As already noted, the classes observed at both universities focused on developing the student-teachers' communicative skills. At Universidad Nacional, the researchers observed, assessed and analyzed the communicative performance of students enrolled in the following courses: *Oral Expression: Society and Humanism* (second year), *Oral Expression: Economy and Commerce* (third year), and *Victorian Literature* (fourth year). It must be noted that a literature class was observed since there are not oral expression courses included in the curriculum in the fourth year level at UNA. Yet, the coordinator of the program explained that in the last years the objective of

the literature courses, among others, is to develop the students' communicative competence.

At UCR the courses involved were: *Oral Communication I* (second year), *Oral Communication II* (third year), and *Intercultural Communication* (fourth year). All of the courses have a direct focus on developing the students' communicative skills with an emphasis on learners' pronunciation.

1.1.3 Objectives

1.1.3.1 General Objective

The general objective is to analyze the approaches and methodologies that were implemented by different professors in charge of the oral courses at UNA and UCR, in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses in each one of the programs under study.

1.1.3.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this study were three:

1. To make a thorough analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the speaking courses in both public universities;
2. To determine, using the ACTFL proficiency guidelines, if students taking oral courses accomplished the language goals set in the course program;
3. And finally, to propose recommendations to each university in order to draw attention to changes that can benefit learners in each oral course.

1.1.4 Population, Procedure and Research Setting

In order to improve the speakers' overall performance in English it is necessary to work on the quality of education that future English teachers are getting today. It is therefore extremely relevant to determine the level of proficiency that students at UNA and the UCR achieve at the end of each year. Some of these students are currently working as teachers and others will be working in the field soon, thus the importance of determine if the outcomes of each program are consistent or not with the expected outcomes.

To this end, most of the students in the oral course were interviewed to measure their oral proficiency level using the ACTFL guidelines for testing speaking. The results were later compared with the objectives and expectations of the coordinators and those professors in charge of oral courses, in order to find out if such expectations matched the learners' actual level of production. This data was also useful to determine the effectiveness of the learning tasks implemented in class to improve the students' proficiency in English. Finally, the analysis of the data served as the basis for deriving conclusions and recommendations for each of the programs involved in the study.

In the case of UCR, the setting of the research was the main campus located in "Ciudad Universitaria Rodrigo Facio Brenes" in San Pedro de Montes de Oca, San Jose. All English courses are taught in the building of the School of Modern Languages. The classes observed were developed under similar conditions, since all classrooms are small, with large windows on one side, and one or two doors. Inside each classroom there is also a board facing the students and a desk for the professor, located in front of

the main entrance. The students' desks are organized in five rows and some of them are placed along the wall at the back of the room.

As it was recorded through the observation process, the groups are sometimes too large to fit comfortably in the room. One time, three learners that arrived late had to look for a desk in other classrooms because they had no place to sit. To work in pairs and groups, students usually pull their desks to make a semicircle, but the space in the classrooms is not enough for the learners to spread around and work together.

The second setting was the "Omar Dengo Campus" of Universidad Nacional located in Heredia. The students enrolled in the English major attended classes in the building occupied by the School of Philosophy and Humanities, and they belong to the School of Literature and Language Sciences. The classes observed took place at two different locations within the building. Some classes were taught in regular classrooms, which are ample enough to accommodate forty desks per room. The students' desks are sturdy and looked like small tables. And even though this furniture can be rearranged the desks are difficult to move around and the arrangement of the class is rarely altered.

Other classes took place in the language labs. This second setting varies depending on the laboratory assigned to professor in charge of the course. In general terms, the labs are equipped with air conditioning which remains turned on while they are occupied. The equipment includes a video beam and an over head projector. A moveable board faces the students and each learner occupies a desk with a computer.

1.1.5 Research Questions and Method

In order to carry out this study, several approaches, strategies and methodologies were used in the process of gathering information and analyzing the data. First, it is

important to point out that this is a *mixed research study*, which Hernandez-Sampieri; et al. define as a recently developed research paradigm, wherein both qualitative and quantitative approaches are combined in data collection (40). As already stated, this research seeks to answer three main questions: what are the approaches used to develop communicative competence at UNA and the UCR among students majoring in English? How effective are these approaches for the improvement of students' oral proficiency? And what level of performance is reached by the students at the three different levels assessed in this study?

In order to answer the first and second questions, qualitative strategies were used to gather data about the approaches implemented by professors in the classroom. The third question was answered by means of an oral test (based on ACTFL) that was applied by the researchers to the students involved, which also implied the use of quantitative instruments.

In more specific terms, several instruments to gather data were applied to the six groups. The first and most important tool was unstructured observation, which served to the purpose of collecting data about the actual approaches used by the professors in their oral communication classes. These observations were mostly non-participant since the researchers did not take an active part in class activities or discussions. In order to guarantee validity of the instrument, both researchers observed five groups alternatively, so that they would provide two different perspectives on the approaches, methodologies, and behaviors observed. The observations were never carried out simultaneously by both researchers, in order to avoid disrupting the normal development of the class, or becoming a threatening agent for the learners.

As mentioned, all groups were observed by both researchers, except for the third year course *Oral Communication II* at UCR, which was observed only by Gabriela Cordero, in response to the request made by the professor of the course, who clearly expressed to both, the coordinator of the program and the researchers, that having more than one person coming to observe his classes would affect its development.

Another instrument used for collecting information consisted of questionnaires applied to the students. This questionnaire aimed at discovering the students' previous contact with the English language, and how they perceived the interaction and focus of their classes. In a like manner, authorities at both universities were interviewed in order to identify relevant characteristics of the ESL program at each university, as well as their objectives. Informal interviews were also carried out with the professors in charge of the courses observed. All of this was done with the purpose of obtaining sufficient information from diverse sources, which would allow triangulating the information to ensure its validity.

Along with these data collection instruments, the researchers carried out an extensive literature review, covering sources that were pertinent to the research questions and the context where the study took place. In addition, the oral proficiency level of the students, at both universities, was tested as an integral part of the project, as noted before. The test mainly consisted of a person-to-person interview, made up of four parts. First, there was a warm up section focused on general questions intended to lower the interviewees' affective filter and anxiety; then, the second part was the interview proper, in which the participants were asked some pre-determined questions to measure their performance (See Annex 6.2.2); in the third part, students were asked to role play with the interviewer one or two situations that would lead the student into a

more natural use of the language. This role-play was used to confirm the level assigned to the interviewee in the second part. Hence, the role-play situations were categorized according to the ACTFL levels of proficiency, and they were based on several levels of difficulty (IL: Intermediate Low, IM: Intermediate Mid, IH: Intermediate High; AL; Advanced Low, AM: Advanced Mid, and AH: Advanced High). Once the participants completed this section, the interviewer ended with a cool down activity. In this last part, the researchers asked some other general questions in order to verify the level allocated to the interviewee and to close the interview.

Since the researchers are not certified oral proficiency evaluators, they were given a short, but intensive tutorial by M.A Sherry Gapper, an expert in the area, and current coordinator of the Masters in Translation at Universidad Nacional. With the help of this expert, the researchers developed the interview questions, the role-play situations, and rehearsed the interview process in order to gain knowledge and experience regarding those aspects that ought to be avoided while interviewing the students. Both researchers improved their research skills, which were reflected significantly upon the reliability of the data obtained and the credibility of the findings derived.

BC 150358

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Given the nature and focus of this research project, the body of literature reviewed –which provide the theoretical foundations for the study– deals with three major areas of concern, namely, the approaches used in the process of developing communicative competence among students majoring in ESL teaching; the effectiveness of these approaches in improving students' oral proficiency; and the level of communicative competence achieved at the end of the learning process. The literature review chapter is hence organized in three sections. The first defines the concept *approach*, as understood in the context of this paper. The second reviews the positions that concerned parties have sustained in the last two years or so regarding the outcomes attained by the students within the PES as English language learners. The last section reviews a number of sources that contribute to a better understanding of the issues surrounding teacher training in Costa Rica.

2.1 Conceptualizing the Scope and Substance of Teaching Approaches

The concept *approach* is a fundamental theoretical tool of this study. An approach, according to Richards and Rodgers, refers to theories concerning the nature of language and language learning, which in turn serve as the source for choosing the practices and principles applied in language teaching (20). This implies that experts in the field have spent time investigating the ways in which people learn a language, in order to derive useful strategies and techniques for making the acquisition of a second or foreign language a successful process.

Currently, teachers can resort to a number of approaches to fulfill specific objectives, such as the grammar-translation, the communicative, the task-based or the audio-lingual approaches. Indeed, the approach professors use to develop the contents in their classes can either facilitate or hinder the students' successful understanding and involvement in the learning process, which shows how relevant it is to be able to choose the ones that best match the students' learning styles. Identifying those approaches that have been more successful at UCR and at UNA is the primary aim of the authors of this research paper.

2.2 Positions Regarding English-learning Outcomes within the PES

There is no doubt that globalization, along with other factors, has placed English in a critical position within the economy of an increasing number of nations around the world. In the case of Costa Rica, a growing number of international companies have opened operations here, expecting to find qualified bilinguals, capable of meeting the communicative language standards for providing efficient service to their English-speaking international customers. However, the literature reviewed has revealed that such expectation is far distant from reality, since the population on which such companies relies for recruiting their customer service staff –young high school and college graduates– is not fluent enough in English to perform well on the jobs.

In this regard, Jairo Villegas, for instance, reports in La Nación (a national newspaper) that only 11% of all eighteen-year old Costa Ricans who graduate from high school can be considered bilingual (Villegas "Gobierno Lanzó Plan Nacional"). This percentage is alarming if one considers the significant investment that the Costa Rican

government has made to improve the teaching of English in the public high school system. Indeed, a student graduating from eleventh grade has received around 500 hours of English instruction and yet, this student might not have acquired the necessary language skills and strategies for interacting successfully with others in an English-speaking environment. This probably has to do with the fact that, within the public education system, English learners spend most of their school years developing reading skills, which at the end is barely enough for them to pass the reading comprehension test that the Ministry of Education applies as a requirement for conferring them their high school diploma ("Dominio del Inglés").

This disturbing reality has led the Ministry of Public Education (MEP) to seek ways to guide future generations of high school students towards achieving a higher level of proficiency in English. The goal is to place more emphasis on speaking since it will be most required in the labor market. In fact, according to Mónica Cordero, one of the main goals of the Ministry of Education is to graduate 75% of all eleventh graders as advanced English speakers by the year 2017 (Cordero "País pone en marcha...").

The relevance of developing speaking skills among English language learners is in fact pointed out by an outstanding scholar in the field. Cunningham quoted Brown, Burns & Joyce note that, "Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information" (Cunningham 1).

2.3. Issues and Dilemmas Surrounding Teacher-training in Costa Rica

If English teachers are the ones directly responsible for transmitting this knowledge to their students in public high schools, it is essential that they master the

skill of teaching their students how to speak in order to provide them with appropriate input and feedback throughout the five/six-year learning process that takes place in public education system. In this regard, there is a national concern surrounding the kind of training ESL teachers receive in college.

Certainly, if teachers do not have a high-intermediate to advance level of proficiency in English, students will have fewer opportunities to learn how to engage in authentic language use and to carry out the attendant functions.

In connection with the above, the Ministry of Education –with the assistance of teachers and experts in the field– has recently developed the *National Plan for English Teaching* which places speaking methodologies at the core of all teacher-training programs. The starting point of this plan was the implementation of an evaluation process that would give account of the levels of performance among English teachers within the public education system.

For this purpose, ESL teachers were required to take the *Cambridge standardized test* known as TOEIC. As expected, the results were alarming: out of 3,454 MEP teachers that took the test over the first semester of 2008, only 315 obtained the advanced or C1 level, while around 1600 obtained A1, which is the lower or beginner level. These outstanding figures suggest that the situation of teaching in Costa Rica is critical. As part of this ongoing effort, Rodrigo Fabrega Lacoa, a Chilean expert, was recently invited by the Ministry of Education to share his country's experience in improving the English programs in public schools. Fabrega Lacoa pinpointed that the best policy in Chile has been to support and provide teachers with tools to accomplish their mission. (Herrera "Solo 315 profesores...").

In general terms, experts agree upon the fact that training is a determining factor in the performance of ESL teachers in the public education system. This issue leads to wondering about what an appropriate ESL teacher-training program should be like. And to this, Collier and Wayne remark that higher education teacher-training programs are responsible for preparing English teachers appropriately.

This scholar ascertains that universities should assess students before entering an ESL program, and after they have completed the major. By assessing candidates to an ESL teaching program, universities may be able to identify those students that may require special training to achieve the mandatory level of proficiency in the target language; and by assessing them a posteriori, the university's language departments may be able to determine whether or not the prospective graduate has achieved the required level of proficiency to teach the language. These ideas, presented by Collier, are vital because if soon-to-be ESL teachers are assessed before their graduation, the university may be able to implement complementary or remedial programs in order to guarantee that their graduates will meet the current standards set by the Ministry of Education.

But while some experts are genuinely concerned about the above, there are others who, on the contrary, consider that education authorities are not addressing the so called "English teacher problem" effectively. For instance, Jack Dieckmann sustains that "School districts commonly respond by providing teachers with sporadic training sessions on strategies for ESL teaching and lesson planning" (45).

What Dieckmann says is that improving English teachers' proficiency in the language requires much more than being involved in erratic training efforts focused on isolated aspects of the teaching profession; the problem requires a more integral

approach and treatment to obtain a permanent solution. Actually, Dieckmann goes further when pointing out that ESL teachers at all levels must have strong language skills to be successful in their daily endeavors; all of which makes sense since teacher cannot teach what they do not know for themselves.

Many scholars agree on the fact that teachers need to develop their communicative competence in the process of becoming certified professionals. They need to be able to communicate actively in the target language in different contexts, and communicative competence can only be achieved through what Richards and Rodgers call, the "learner-centeredness view of second language teaching" (Richards and Rodgers 69).

This implies that students in ESL teaching programs should have a central role in classroom interaction because they need as much practice as possible in language use within a student-centered environment, since the opposite perspective, a teacher-centered approach is undesirable and could be counterproductive. As Rose M. Senior sustains, experienced teachers have adopted a *class-centered* approach to their teaching (402).

A determining aspect is for student-teachers to learn how to empower their own students in order to have them communicate constantly in the class. Moreover, Senior stresses the importance of having students collaborate with each other in the process of building and improving their knowledge. In this line of thought, many scholars agree on the fact that class interaction is a key element in developing successful English speakers. Helen Basturkmen points that "...interaction and verbal exchange, practice negotiating meaning, gain confidence in speaking. Those aims are clearly worthy in

themselves...However, learning also implies progress in terms of skill development and awareness of language use" (7).

The author points out that as learners in higher education advance, they need to learn more complex structures of interaction to become fluent, autonomous speakers. In fact, this should be the primary goal of university teachers. Such practice enhances the speaking skills of the future ESL teacher, contributing to building fluency, autonomy and success in their language class. Furthermore, Basturkmen believes in using authentic materials and in instructing students to pay attention to language use in real life contexts. This aspect points at the significance of contextualized classes that focus on authentic language practice. In addition to this, it is also necessary to teach students interactive strategies and techniques, instead of simply having them perform speaking practices. This again shows the great importance of interaction in class.

In the article, "*You Are the Key: Communicate for Learning Effectiveness*," the authors explain the central role that educators play in their students' success. They state that, even though most of the time teacher and students agree on the aspects that make a class effective, there are some other aspects that they disagree upon. Through their investigation, Miller and Schallenkamp discovered that the communication skills were imperative for students, but for teachers they were not (370). Hence, it is the educators' responsibility to recognize their learners' learning needs and aspirations in order to plan their lessons and class activities in response.

As noted before, ESL teaching candidates need to develop accurate and fluent speaking approaches. And yet some questions remain: What makes a speaker accurate and effective? How can future educators enhance ESL learning in the PES of Costa Rica? Cunningham sustains that an effective speaker must be able to anticipate

discourse patterns, identify turn-taking, rephrasing, and redirecting. Also, according to this scholar, they must know the appropriate vocabulary for the situation they are engaged in and use body language and paralinguistic forms to transmit the message clearly (Cunningham 3). All these features, along with culture and other aspects commonly present in daily life conversations, make language learners effective speakers because they resort to appropriate strategies to avoid misunderstandings or disruptions in communication. This is certainly not an easy task to achieve; nevertheless, it is imperative that ESL teaching candidates try to reach that goal to ensure their professional growth.

An oral class should assess students' performance in order to recognize their strengths and weaknesses. Once educators identify these needs, they can prepare lessons to help students monitor and improve their weak points when interacting and transmitting ideas. Pronunciation, stress, intonation, word choice, fluency, and development of topics are essential aspects that have to be taken into account to reach proper language proficiency.

Stephen, D. Miller and Schallenkamp propose adequate ways for assessing those aspects to provide students with meaningful learning and feedback. They refer to the use of adequate examples, using learners' previous experiences and background knowledge. Also, they recommend resorting to interesting topics and ways of addressing each topic. Furthermore, the scholars make it evident that motivation is a key factor, and that students are more likely to respond positively if what they do is interesting to them: "Effective instructors", they sat, "clearly communicate 'why' a topic is important and emphasize the benefits...for improved career preparation" (371-372). Students feel more engaged in learning activities when they perceive those tasks are essential for the

purposes they pursuing as learners. Activities that are simple time fillers or unimportant for the student's communicative development make them not want to participant actively in the oral class.

Recognizing what speaking skills are and which characteristics make good language speakers is the starting point for evaluating oral approaches in the classroom. In this way, researchers are able to identify those teaching and learning strategies and approaches that contribute to communicative competence and success.

III. DATA ANALYSIS: Universidad de Costa Rica

3.1 Teachers and Students' Role

Educators are liable to assume one of three possible stands in the classroom: one that is teacher-centered, one that is student-centered, or one that is in the middle. Richards and Rodgers defines these roles with regard to "the types of activities learners carry out, the degree of control learners have over the content...and the view of the learner as processor, performer, initiator, problem solver (28).

The role of the professors involved in this study at Universidad de Costa Rica should thus become evident in the way they involved –or didn't involve– students in critical thinking activities. This includes how they engaged learners to deduce, analyze, synthesize, and construct contents, based on their previous knowledge about a given topic. In this regard, the coordinator of the English program, as well as the professors at the UCR, expressed that the oral communication courses focus on the learners, their needs, and progress in the transmission of ideas. Nevertheless, the observations portrayed a reality that is somewhat different from that displayed by teachers and authorities. Even though students were actually involved in the preparation and development of class tasks, this involvement did not always take place in the same degree in all classes. What this means is that the level in which the educators allowed students to take control and become active participants in the classroom differed from what is perceived at the institutional level.

The educators pointed that empowering learners was very important. This could be accomplished by giving them the space to interact in the target language so they

could learn from themselves as active agents, as well as from their peers, and from the professor. However, as in most traditional classrooms, the professors were the ones who made decisions about the materials to be used, the activities, and the aspects to be evaluated (Tinzmann et al 3). Professors at the UCR still keep a tight control on when, what and how learners talk, interact, and use the language. For instance, during an interview, a student expressed that they sometimes chose the topic they wanted to talk about, but most of the times it was picked by the professor ('Marcus'). Students did not have a say in the evaluation process either; since only one of the courses included peer assessment, while in the other two the educator was in charge of grading students' work and progress.

According to Richards and Rodgers, the approaches educators use determine their role in the classroom either as facilitators, guides, analysts, informants, sources of knowledge, etc. (29). In accordance to this description, one of the teachers, for instance, centered class activities on students' responses and insights; another one had learners present the topics in their own way, but limited interaction and discussion of the topics; the third one let students play the role of teachers, assigning tasks so that they learned from each other. This means that in some class sessions students had more opportunities to participate than in others, in which the educator intervened more to clarify, explain, or to provide examples. Evidently, each professor differed from the other in regards to the role assumed and the role assigned to the students in class, as well as in their interaction with their students, and in the way the students' needs and goals were taken into consideration.

The first educator described above modeled, facilitated and guided the learning tasks. She became an organizer of resources...and a guide within the classroom

procedures and activities, as described in Richards and Rodgers (1987). Indeed, when students worked with the pronunciation booklet, she reviewed transcriptions on the board and then asked students to repeat after her. She showed learners where the tongue should be placed and the shape the lips take when pronouncing a particular word. Then, she repeated words students mispronounced until they said them appropriately.

In the article *New Directions in the Teaching of Pronunciation*, the 'listen and repeat' strategy is presented as a primary teaching tool because it provides auditory reinforcement of sound discrimination that learners need to develop and produce when they speak (295). Students reacted positively to this reinforcement because, as the professor passed around the groups, students asked about the pronunciation of other words like 'aborigine' and 'naturopath'. Students affirmed that they liked this modeling because they became aware of the different ways a word can be pronounced in English. This particular educator assigned exercises from the book to students working in pairs and small groups. She monitored each activity by moving around the class and stopping to answer questions or to listen to the learners' responses to particular questions. If they did not have any question, she triggered participation by asking their opinions about the topic and if they knew something else about it. Thus, students were prompted to discuss the topic and fill in the information gaps when necessary.

For listening tasks, the educator played a recording three to four times, according to the students' requests. She also asked volunteers to share their answers or called learners' names to have different people share their comments. This kind of activity revealed that students were key participants; the activities, timing, and feedback given were tailored to their needs and understanding of the content and message.

This professor recognized the importance of relating new information to students' prior knowledge. In fact, when discussing the topic of 'non-traditional medicine', she inquired about who had tried acupuncture or homeopathy before. Students raised their hands and talked about the advantages or disadvantages these alternative treatments had for them or their relatives. This made the class more participative since students were given the opportunity to speak freely among themselves. In addition, they were able to provide each other more details based on their personal experience.

Experts in the field have underlined the significance of these connections. Gagne, for instance, pointed out that the activation of students' schema (knowledge of the world) leads to effective, meaningful learning (qtd. in Alayne 2). Also, the new information represented a challenge for the students, which they had to use in a new context retelling their own stories.

A different picture was observed in another course, since the educator adopted the role as a lecturer and regulator of the class activities. According to students, this professor liked to talk a lot during the class; they pointed out that he was very knowledgeable and he had significant experience with the language because he had studied abroad; yet, he took center stage in the lesson. In his classes, several pairs of students were assigned a topic to be presented in front of the class each week. These speeches were timed by the educator, and when students went over the twenty minutes assigned, his cellular phone started ringing. He usually told the rest of the class that they could only make comments about the presentation if there was time available at the end of the class, since three to four groups were scheduled to make their oral presentations over the two 50-minute class session. At the end, the educator took some minutes to give feedback and refer to the students' speeches. The learners, on the other hand,

rarely had the opportunity to go deeper into the subject due to time constraints and time management. Students were usually given a five or ten-minute break after the first hour of class and then they continued to listen to the next set of presentations. By the time the presenters finished, the other students were ready to leave for their next class.

The presentations assigned to the students by this professor required a high level of students' involvement and commitment in the class. If they were not well-prepared, the rest of the students missed out on relevant information and opportunities of language development. Moreover, the learners that were listening to the presentation, around twenty-two, became passive receivers. Without being challenged to react or respond to their peer's speeches, they lost interest, and many even fell asleep on their desks. As noted, the topics of the speeches were also chosen by the professor. In one of his classes, he wrote the following on the board:

- Doctor-assisted suicide should be legal in Costa Rica.
- American troops should leave Iraq immediately.
- The ICE should be closed. International corporations should be allowed in the country and offer their services.

He said that these topics came from the top of his head, and he wanted students to volunteer to present them the following week. Students remained quiet and the professor had to ask several of them if they would take one of them. The topics written on the board surely seemed to be controversial, but how much did the students know about them? How well did they relate and connect to the topics? The issues underlying these questions might have influenced the limited response of the students when the educator picked them for oral presentations.

The last educator was very passive in her classroom. She prepared activities to review the student's comprehension and analysis of the readings assigned, and then she told students to get in groups and work on the questions or tasks. Meanwhile, she stood near one of the groups seated in front of the class until the learners completed the task. She did not walk around the classroom monitoring students' work and comments, but stayed in the same place throughout the class activity; then, she asked different students to share their answers with the whole group. Discussions and comments were triggered as responses to the students' statements and insights. The professor rarely got involved in class interactions. Indeed, she hardly ever commented on students' performance and delivery.

Considering the typology proposed by Richards and Rogers, this professor's role would fall in the category 'therapist-to-patient' relationship between teacher and students, since the students are the doers and the educator's insights are few (29). The learners are allowed the time and space to speak and interact in groups, and the educator plays a reserved role, simply observing the flow of the activity from the outside. The function each professor and learner plays in the language classroom denotes the beliefs educators have on how a language is learned. Many studies have been carried out on this matter, and experts such as Paulo Freire opposed the view of the learner as a simple recipient of the teacher's knowledge; instead, he believes in the student's capacity to create and analyze contents on their own (qtd. in O'Dwyer 2). This means that education needs a shift from the students' passive role as sponges of contents to active agents in the construction of their own knowledge. In the case of the professors observed at the UCR, only one showed evidence of putting this active role of the student into practice.

3.1.1 Feedback and Error Correction

Essentially, according to the most relevant literature in the field, teachers may adopt one of two major roles in the classroom: (1) They may create the conditions under which learning can take place: the social aspect of teaching, or (2) They may pass on knowledge to their learners: the task-oriented side of teaching (Shao-Quan and Zhen1). The first view reveals the responsibility educators have to facilitate learning in an adequate, comfortable, learning atmosphere; even though not every educator may be a facilitator of the learning process.

In the case of the UCR students, the learners in the fourth year were the ones that participated and spoke more often in class. They were in charge of the two-hour class sessions, during which they spoke freely and fluently without being interrupted by the professor for the purpose of correcting them or providing them with feedback. In a questionnaire, the educator in charge of this class mentioned that students could become successful speakers if they had enough speaking opportunities to build up their confidence. Also, she ranked grammar and pronunciation correction as the least important aspects in an oral expression class. She attached greater relevance to meaning than form, since she pointed out that students need to transmit ideas effectively and be critical about them, and that accuracy played no major role in her class.

The learners in the three oral courses observed at the UCR recognized that there were students with higher and lower proficiency levels. This sometimes made students feel insecure to speak or ask the professor a question. The educator's techniques to address errors and provide feedback in the three courses were varied.

When learners in Oral Communication I made a mistake, the professor repeated the utterance using the appropriate pronunciation or structure in question form to provide the learner with indirect feedback. She looked at the person who produced the utterance and waited to see his or her reaction. Most of the time, the student repeated the structure as expressed by the educator. In Lyster and Ranta's view this type of correction is known as *repetition* because the tone used by the educator indicates to the student what the correct form is (qtd. in Tedick 3).

When students were working on the board, she asked the class to correct the transcription that was mistaken using technical vocabulary to refer to the corresponding vowel sound. This is known as *elicitation* and it occurs when the educator leads to the right answer by asking students questions that require more than yes or no responses (qtd. in Tedick 3). Another time, this teacher used *explicit correction* during a student's oral presentation because the speaker was mispronouncing the word 'components'. This correction made the learner overcorrect himself when using the word, and looked confused in deciding the right form to use.

In another other class, the educator used explicit correction most of the time. He told learners what the correct form was by reading his notes. This was done not only to correct pronunciation but also in reference to research style, delivery, debating techniques, time management, and organization of the presentation. He pointed out what students did appropriately in their speech and what they needed to work on. Also, the educator worked on structure and accuracy of the language; for instance, he told a student that some questions should be asked indirectly in order to sound more natural. The student said "In Costa Rica [it] is the same?" and he suggested "Could you tell me if in Costa Rica it is the same?"

As noted before, the third educator paid the least attention to feedback and error correction in comparison to the first two. This professor made notes on the students' evaluation sheets, but she did not comment on their strengths or weaknesses during the class. In one of the observations, a foreign learner attending that course raised her hand and asked the professor if they were going to have time for questions and comments to the speakers. The professor said that no one ever said anything after a presentation, but she could make comments if she wanted. The student pointed out some aspects she liked about the content and information delivered, and she also mentioned that they should put less information on each slide because it distracted the audience from the main point addressed. After this insight, the other foreign student talked about the learners' speech and she also gave the group suggestions on what needed to be improved. The rest of the students, along with the professor, remained quiet and they did not provide any feedback to the speakers.

3. 2 Language Teaching: Approaches and Techniques

Differences among teachers in regards to the approach they use in oral courses are manifested in the choice of different learning and teaching activities in the classroom (Richards and Rodgers 26). The focus on grammar rules and structures, repetition of vowel sounds, team work, and other tasks teachers use in their classes represent the teaching approach that they consider best to develop content and to reach the objectives. The approaches and methods that professors at UCR chose reflect their teaching philosophy, personality, and knowledge of learning theories.

At the Universidad de Costa Rica, professors were interviewed formally and informally to learn about their teaching-learning perceptions and methods. One educator said he did not like to follow a particular approach because he understood, after reading much on the topic, that the best way to teach a class was to follow the students' questions and doubts on the topics. He added that he usually improvised in his class because sometimes some students asked the same question and that meant that 80% of the class could have the same doubt. Another educator stated that she used a more eclectic approach because she recognized that sometimes some strategies from the audio-lingual method worked and other times cooperative teaching was more useful for learners. The third educator affirmed that the communicative and task-based approaches were the ones she employed the most in class.

These comments show that professors' experience and knowledge on approaches determine how topics are developed in class and how students practice them. Each educator considered their way to address topics useful and effective because students were learning. They expressed that at least the majority of them were benefiting from the approaches because their command of the language had improved since level one. As one of the professors stated, "You should have seen them the first day they came to class; they didn't speak a word", he continued; "some of them told me I spoke too fast, but I said I didn't speak fast; I spoke as native speakers do." "The problem was that their listening was slow". He emphasized the need to speak English in the classroom at all times as a way to develop the students' listening and speaking skills.

3.2.1 *The Content-based Approach*

The coordinator pointed that oral courses were centered on the content-based approach ('Mills'). This method places "the emphasis on learning about language through content; topics and vocabulary" (Davies 'Content-based instruction in EFL contexts'). All of the courses observed focused on specific subject matters. In the case of *Oral Communication I*, it focused on health and environmental issues; *Oral Communication II*, on media and technology; and *Intercultural Communication* was based on stereotypes, types of cultures, world view and values, identity, gender and other related topics that lead to cultural awareness.

A study carried out by Hernandez on the course *Oral Communication I* at UCR discussed the role of the content-based approach in improving the learners' oral skills. She defined it as a mean of "encouraging students to learn a language by actually using the language as a real means of communication" and by shifting the focus of the lesson (2). In this way, professors were not teaching grammar and rules to use the language accurately; instead, they were using topics and statements to prompt students' communicative skills. For instance, students read about cultural differences portrayed in the media and they brought an article, newspaper ad, or other information to share it with their classmates in class. By doing so, they were not focused on particular structures of the language but in the message they wanted to convey. In another class, learners researched on the laws of Costa Rica and the United States for underage criminals. Then, they presented the topic to their classmates by providing both stands on the problem. In the end, they were able to refer to particular vocabulary and use it effectively to transmit the message to the rest of the class. These examples show that by bringing a diversity of resources to the class, students can construct ideas and

knowledge through interaction, participation and discussion. They learn the new vocabulary presented in the lesson and they participate with their opinions and views on the topics covered. Kaplan pointed to the benefit students acquire by combining the understanding and knowledge on concepts and their skills to communicate them in the target language (220).

In the oral courses at UCR, learners had to use their language skills and strategies to refer to topics that were not too familiar for them such as alternative medicine, stages of culture shock, or free software they can install in their computers. This top-down approach gives students the space to communicate what they think in a fluent way, while emphasis on form is placed at the end. The emphasis is on conveying the message since the materials recommended are mostly authentic texts that were not designed specifically for foreign language learning (Hernandez 2). As a matter of fact, the materials used were booklets containing readings with vocabulary and comprehension exercises, but the professors included other sources like Internet articles, movies, videos and recordings to provide learners with more authentic sources of information. Structures and grammar are not studied in detail unless the educator recognizes a group problem. In two courses there is emphasis on pronunciation of vowels and consonants. Even though they have a specific book on pronunciation, the most feedback in this area is provided during oral speeches. The correction occurs depending on the focus and objective of the activity and if it is disrupting the message or not.

Richards and Rodgers stated in their book *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* that other advantages of this approach are the integration of skills, and stating the purposes for communicating in the language (208). Indeed, students recognized the

need to learn to talk about different topics and to pronounce new words correctly. Nevertheless, in the classes observed not all students participated actively. In the individual interviews, some of them recognized that they like to listen to other people talking and debating, but they do not like to talk unless they have something very important to say. The problem is that the educator cannot tell what the learners' level is if he/she does not produce spontaneously in class. The evaluation of students in the course is mainly done through exams and oral speeches; which limits students' opportunities to improve their grade through oral participation.

3.2.2 The Communicative Approach

The coordinator also pointed that they rely on the communicative approach because they believe in group and pair work to elicit information from the students and to have learners interact as much as possible in the target language. The principle of this approach is that "activities that involve real communication...and meaningful tasks promote learning" (Richards and Rodgers 161). Classes are not based on questions and answers between educators and students; instead, topics are developed through readings done at home and activities prepared to discuss and analyze authentic articles taken from the Internet or specialized magazines.

One of the professors observed affirmed that her students brought newspaper articles about some type of pollution. She said that learners contextualized the environmental topic using that resource and shared their opinions in class. This fulfills one of Piepho's points on the objectives of the communicative approach, which refers to the use of the language as a means of expression (qtd. in Richards and Rodgers 162) because being able to say some words in the target language does not mean that the

students are able to communicate and interact in real-life situations. The coordinator expressed that creating connections and using authentic materials improved communication and analysis of content because learners could develop their ideas and interact as a group.

The aim of the communicative approach is to have students use the language and interact among themselves in order to improve their oral proficiency (Kaplan 208). Nevertheless, only one of the groups followed this premise most of the time. In this group, students took center stage by communicating and reflecting on the topics; they had to interact in groups and then share their findings with the rest of the class and the professor.

In the course Oral Communication II, speeches and oral presentations were predominant in the classroom. Students were in charge of the class from the beginning, and comments and feedback were given by the professor in regards to pronunciation, research methods, and the overall development of the presentation. The students made comments about the benefits of this activity. They said that it helped them to be less self-conscious when presenting in front of people. They also liked it because they researched and prepared information on different topics. This task portrays Nunan's description of the *transactional function*, the language function for transmitting information, facts in a one-way direction: speaker to listener (27). Students at the front had around twenty minutes to present, and the other students spoke only when the audience was addressed. In some of these presentations, students used charts or pictures that illustrated their topic. In most cases, they relied on Power Point presentations.

Another communicative activity observed was the organization of debates. Students were divided in groups to debate or “engage in using chunks of language for a purpose: to convincingly defend one side of an issue” (O’Malley and Valdez 87). Learners read in class theory on the ‘do’s and don’ts’ of debates. Also, the educator played a movie named “The Great Debaters”, which portrayed a group of people preparing to defend their views using quotes and experts’ positions to support their statements. After each group debated in class, the educator pinpointed the flaws observed in the speakers to the rest of the class so that students became aware of aspects like timing, improvisation, summarizing the main points, and interrupting politely. The educator said that it was mandatory to support their ideas with information from data bases and experts on the topic. He advised them not to use Wikipedia or other unreliable sources from the Internet. Finally, these learners were also assigned to complete outlines and impromptu speeches on topics assigned by the educator.

Interactive activities are essential to communicative classes because they provide students with challenges to use the target language. Ellis refers to these activities as *negotiation of meaning* when in conversation interlocutors seek to prevent communicative breakdowns or to remediate them when they have occurred (3). The learning activities observed were not as improvised as to determine the students’ real knowledge of communicative strategies to convey meaning; on the other hand, learners were allowed to prepare their presentations ahead of time, and to think of possible questions they could ask others to prompt discussion. The type of activities educators planned for their courses reflected the degree to which they empowered their students. For instance, in oral speeches the strategies and assessment assigned by educators differed in all three groups.

Oral presentations were used as practice and assessment in all three courses observed at UCR. The opinion learners, educators, and experts have on this type of activity varied according to the objectives of the class. Hernandez argued that speeches are usually memorized by students who wish to get a good grade; besides, they do not resemble what students will encounter in real-life contexts (2). Some learners stated that they found oral presentations boring and repetitive; others admitted that they were useful because they aided them in different ways. One student affirmed that he used to be very shy and that speeches had given him more confidence to speak in front of the professor and his classmates. He pointed out, as well, "that is how I lost my stage fright" ('Luis'). Another student said he learned a lot of new vocabulary and information from topics assigned to present in class. Others complained that the topics were not free for them to choose, but that the activity was useful to practice the language. Educators, on the other hand, thought students' oral production improved by having them prepare and present oral speeches. They learned formal ways to present information and to defend their views on the topic under discussion.

The evaluation of oral presentations varied from class to class. In Oral Communication I both the facilitator and the students assessed their classmates' presentations. The professor asked the speakers about their reactions to the research that they carried out, which shows that she reinforced higher thinking skills in learners. She went beyond the probably memorized material to discover the students' personal insights and beliefs about the topic.

In Oral Communication II, only the educator graded the students' performance. He discussed general points about each presentation to guide the speakers and the rest of the group on ways to do research and present it to the class. Also, he scheduled

individual and pair conferences before class to provide more detailed feedback on the work done by each student. Finally, in Intercultural Communication, the educator wrote down her comments and gave them back to the students after she assigned them a grade. Oral feedback was rarely provided by her.

In regard to the topics that students study each year the coordinator indicates that students enjoy them because they are based on their reality and all of them have a say in the discussion and class activities. Some of these topics are assigned by the professors and others are free for the learners to choose and research on. The third and fourth year students seemed interested in the topics they had to develop in class. They usually took a stand on the discussion and provided examples from their own experiences, their friends and relatives to comment on the topic. In one of the classes in which the presenters were referring to animal experimentation, one of the students said that she saw one of her dogs sick once and she wanted to help the dog feel better. She gave the dog an 'acetaminophen' because she takes them when she has the flu, and the next morning the dog was up and showed no signs of disease. She used this comparison to refer to the pain animals feel when they are being used to test make-up, food, and health products.

Another method used by educators was triggering questions in class that led to more critical analysis and to the use of theory already studied. One of the professors used to start his lessons in this way 'Open your books on p...', and then asked learners about concepts or procedures when debating or writing impromptus. Students usually responded to this questioning, but sometimes the professor ended up explaining and doing most of the talking.

Learners complained about this way of approaching content in class. They said that some teachers like to be the ones to transmit all the knowledge while students act as passive recipients. Educators are certainly the main source of input in a class; they provide the specific vocabulary and theory on the field of foreign language learning. Yet, as the interviews showed, most learners stated their desire to play a center role in class. In fact, they commented that their favorite class activities were group work and class interaction because they could discuss their points of view and defend their stand among themselves. Also, they ascertained that they disliked being interrupted when they mispronounced a word; and they felt they practiced most when they were allowed to speak fluently with their teammates.

Nunan studied the development of language tasks in class as well. He has pointed that tasks should be sequenced by providing learners with listening and reading exercises before speaking and writing tasks (qtd. in Hernandez 48). In this way students receive the input they need to produce oral or written language. In the case of students at UCR, they generated ideas and comments as a reaction to something they had previously read, heard or brainstormed. The vocabulary understood provided students with background and linguistic knowledge that they recycled when commenting openly in class.

Another professor followed a more eclectic approach by having students practice drilling exercises to practice pronunciation, write transcriptions individually and in pairs, present orally, and do peer assessment. In this class, learners sometimes worked one hour on pronunciation and another on oral production. Thus, the students followed the professor in drills and repetitions to practice correct pronunciation patterns. When learners worked on oral activities, the educator gave them copies with exercises to

complete in groups of three. Learners were told to comment on their answers and then report the one they all agreed upon. However, this did not happen in all the small groups. Some students did not discuss the answers, instead, they worked individually to complete the exercise. Very few groups conversed and negotiated about the answer they would give. Also, in one of the groups only one of the participants talked while her classmates stared at her and nodded and smiled every now and then to show their agreement. The professor noticed this and told students that the second set of questions had to be discussed orally first. She walked around the groups monitoring students' involvement and participation. In another lesson, the professor had three groups of students prepare the activities for that day. Learners created materials for their classmates based on some readings assigned as homework. The audience had to walk around the groups, listening to the presenters and asking them questions about each reading.

An important aspect noted in some of these classes was the follow-up activities that the professor included as a wrap-up. The educator asked the students for comments and reactions on the readings, as well as on the activities developed in the class. This type of task assessment is important because teachers can obtain valuable information about students' feelings, attitudes and needs, and they can find out how much the class planning is contributing to the students' learning process.

3.2.3 The Task-based Approach

The task-based approach, which is based on many of the principles of the communicative approach, was also observed in some classes. According to Feez, the focus of this approach is on the process rather than the product (qtd. in Richards and

Rodgers 224). This was evident in one of the courses in which they were assigned tasks and activities to develop in groups. Learners interacted among themselves and with the professor. The purposes of the tasks were to have students speak in the target language and analyze the theory on culture based on their own experiences or on given situations. Through this type of tasks students engage in authentic discussions or more technical pedagogical issues based on the course content (qtd. in Richards and Rodgers 224).

Certainly, experts have discussed the significance of including diverse speaking activities that fit the students' level of proficiency. O'Malley and Valdez discuss that for beginner and intermediate language learners "tasks include predictable, familiar language and visual cues", while for advanced pupils "summarizing, note-taking and use of fewer visual cues" are appropriate (59). The selection of tasks to develop a lesson reflects the important role of learners' participation and involvement to enrich the content presented in the readings.

Professors at UCR prepare teaching units at the beginning of the school cycle. Such units are not based on language and vocabulary lists. They contain updated topics based on which educators create tasks to analyze the topics in class. In this direction, Gutierrez has affirmed that task-based learning offers many advantages in the designing of communicative activities and the development and improvement of oral skills (84), which is one of the main objectives of the English program. In the Intercultural Communication course, for instance, students presented shorter speeches, in which they reacted to a topic or a cultural aspect. They brought newspaper articles or visual presentations to get their classmates' and professor's attention. The lesson was

generally task-based since students were instructed to argue about a topic, reading, or situation and share it with the class at the end of the discussion.

The role assigned to the learners in the class also corresponded to the methodology chosen by the educator. The communicative approaches applied in these classrooms assigned learners with more responsibilities in the class. In Oral Communication I, students assessed their classmates' performance by providing comments on what they needed to work on. Also, they participated in checking answers during writing and listening exercises. This cooperation between the professor and the students led the class to more interaction and learning among all the participants. In Oral Communication II, students had to prepare their own presentations and make links between the professor's questions and the theory reviewed in their book. In Intercultural Communication, learners were able to express themselves more freely by giving examples drawn from their own experience and knowledge on cultures. As noted, at the UCR students were asked to use the target language in and out of the classroom.

Experts have argued about which approach provides the most effective results in a language class. Professors all around the world would be pleased to hear about one method that can suit the students' needs and learning goals. Yet, as Blair stated in the article 'Innovative Approaches', "there is not yet a single comprehensive formula...if followed, that can satisfy all tastes and assure uniform success for all teachers and learners" (23). All approaches, from the more traditional to the more communicative, have contributed to the learning of a foreign language. Two of the professors interviewed recognized that they learned through the grammar-translation method. Others were taught following the drills and repetitions of the audio-lingual approach. From that point on, experts have tried to come up with a better approach to facilitate

language learning. Nevertheless, as 'Mills' suggests professors at UCR combine different approaches according to the content, objectives and the group. Drills are used for pronunciation. When discussing a topic students pair up and interact. In listening comprehension, they listen to recordings and share answers as a group. Learners have commented positively about these strategies stating that the professors are very knowledgeable and that they are learning and improving their oral proficiency skills.

3.3 Input and Materials

Researchers and experts in the field of foreign language education have recognized what makes learners effective speakers. Willis believes that there are three factors that are necessary to attain for this goal: exposure to the target language, opportunities for learners to use it in real communication tasks, and motivation to participate in the learning process (qtd. in Hernandez 47). The first principle was particularly relevant for this study since the type of input learners receive determines the progress students make in their speaking abilities. Professors in the oral communication courses at UCR have flexibility in terms of materials and activities. The coordinator stated that educators rely on authentic materials that they take from the Internet or sources available at the school.

"Authentic materials refer to those which call for purposeful exchanges of information...not already known to the listener or speaker" (O'Malley and Valdez 60). The use of materials that are not necessarily made for foreign language learners are useful because they portray cultural aspects, new lexicon, and ideas about a topic that students can learn from and use in interactions later on. This was evident in one of the

groups in which some learners used varied and dynamic vocabulary; thus, students' speech and comments were enriching for their classmates and the course itself.

There are numerous resources that provide authentic input to students and that promote communicative language use (Richards and Rodgers 168) through new vocabulary, expressions, ideas, and knowledge on the target language. Magazines, newspapers, short stories, recordings, radio news, videos, songs, descriptions, lectures, presentations, movies, practices, textbooks, and the internet are some examples of realia or authentic sources of input (Richards and Rodgers 170). Araya indicates in her article 'The Role of Materials' that "far from the idea of mere instruments, materials are ideological constructions to deal with language matters and the world (8). Including a variety of these options can benefit the learning process because students get different views of the content through the different materials brought to class.

A number of different materials were used to develop the class contents. Through a movie, for instance, the professor of *Oral Communication II* gave students the opportunity to hear different accents, understand language from context, and relate the theme of the movie to the class discussions. This highlights the important role of materials in the language classroom as a means to associate reality, culture, values, perceptions and ideas with the information conveyed (Araya 10). Another educator brought a CD player to have students do listening comprehension exercises and questions based on three different recordings. This professor encouraged learners to write down information that they considered important and to share it in pairs to find similarities and differences. In this way learners were able to discriminate sounds even from accents that were not familiar to them.

The school has a collection of listening recordings and exercises that educators may use to plan their lessons ahead of time; nonetheless, educators also have the possibility to look for extra material that they consider adequate and enriching to the course objectives. According to the coordinator of the English teaching program, the problem with these resources is that teachers sometimes do not want to lend their recordings because they risk playing it to a class who had already listened to it with another professor. Certainly, listening comprehension exercises are a useful and effective source of input. From all of the classes observed, only in one of them this material was used. In the other classes, the professor and the students worked with the book, with Power Point presentations, or with tasks to reflect on the material assigned for that class.

In two oral communication courses, students were given a booklet with the topics and contents that are covered in each class. This booklet was a compilation of articles and exercises from different books that included reading and listening comprehension tasks. Also, they had a second booklet for pronunciation, which explained aspects such as vowel sounds, exceptions on pronunciation patterns and exercises for transcription, sound discrimination and repetition. The other course included readings and a booklet with theory on culture. Students reflected on concepts like culture shock, the honeymoon stage, and identity. Even though this educator remarked that she used other sources of input in the class (videos and authentic materials), this was not observed and the students' interviewed did not mention it either.

As it has been reported, readings are key elements to develop class discussions and informative or interactive activities. Learners were usually assigned to read the material in the book or provided by the educator along with extra information they could

find on the topic. Depending on the course, the emphasis was on culture, health and the environment, or controversial topics. In class, students reported better understanding and provided better insights when conversing about contents related to their social reality. They dislike not being able to choose the topics they have to present. Two of them stated that professors always provide the same topics year after year. "We want to have more topics, not just like global warming and pollution..." ('Jeffrey'). A problem identified with these readings is that only one professor went over the meaning of words and expressions that students did not know. She explained them by giving a synonym or example in English; she used simpler vocabulary that reflected the idea conveyed. The other educators did not ask about the learners' understanding of the content and words. They simply proceeded with the activities planned for the class.

Out-of-class work was also encouraged by professors who were very effusive about students' responsibility outside the classroom. As they pointed out, students had to do research in specialized magazines and with experts in the field. One educator even gave a short lecture on important people in the field of linguistics, education, and research that students could search on to gather more valid and reliable information for their oral presentations. This professor also pushed learners to be more analytical with the information they were exposed to in order to construct their own ideas. He explained the importance of proving right or wrong the information that their classmates gathered for the presentations because it gave them more reasoning to support their counter arguments. He added that statistics are relevant in a study, but they need to provide the data that interprets them accurately because not everyone understands numbers and percentages in the same way ('Jara').

Students are a source of learning by themselves. They influenced their classmates by using specific vocabulary and by participating continuously in class. Before the class started, one student asked her classmate next to her how she classified the words 'good', 'could' and 'put' because she missed the part of the class when the professor explained that classification. Her classmate said that she used /u/ (lax u). The girl looked grateful and calmer after hearing her classmate's response. On another occasion, two learners were practicing their speech before the professor arrived to the class; the girl told the boy to say '/i/cotourism' because he mispronounced it when he was practicing his part. Another example was in an oral presentation in which students were referring to animal testing. The speaker first asked her classmates if any of them used the 'pantene' shampoo. Most students looked around and asked her what she was trying to say. The girl kept on saying 'pantene', but students did not understand her because she used another pronunciation, not the one Costa Ricans normally use to refer to American brands. At the end, some learners remembered the word and pronounced it in English to the classmates near them. Furthermore, the comments they stated in class and the presentations they developed on different topics were also significant for learners to be immersed in the English language and content for two hours.

Professors in the English program are advised to use certain materials in their classes because they have shown to be effective and motivational. One professor from another course commented that he included a section on the Internet in which students posted comments about a movie, song or book they wanted to react upon. Then, in class the learners talked about each others' comments and reflected on the themes chosen ('Zúniga'). He said this was a way of learning from their classmates' insights and

analysis. The majority of the educators said they use their own collection of materials: recordings, videos and articles, and some others provided by the institution.

'Mills' recognized that a weakness learners in general have is that they do not read or watch news, which limits their analysis on topics and information about social contexts and realities they would probably have to teach it to their students later on. Indeed, learners' comments in class are sometimes vague in details and criticism. They rely on their own experiences and do not provide further information on the topic developed by experts or other people involved in it. In this light, teaching materials can make lessons more interactive, dynamic, and analytical. As Araya explained, "teaching materials help teachers and students develop a language teaching and learning process based on critical attitudes towards content targets and one's system of values and feelings" (12). Thus, through a variety of sources teachers can portray different realities that students can comment and reflect on.

The fact that professors taught the class in English shows that they are the main source of input in the language class. Indeed, educators rarely use their native language to explain a topic or the meaning of a word. In Oral Communication I the professor did use Spanish at times, but only to make learners aware that English has more words than Spanish. For instance, she explained the difference between 'treat' and 'try', and the fact that Spanish speakers often confuse these two words and used them interchangeably to refer to the same idea. Furthermore, she provided other examples of overgeneralizations in which speakers relied too much on their mother tongue in order to distinguish what should not be done. Professors' use of technical words enhanced understanding of sounds and concepts related to their field of study. Words like 'schwa', 'stressed and unstressed', 'cultural shock', 'arguments', and others were noticeably used

by professors and students. This lexicon that students are constructing through their practice and exposure to the target language allows them to improve and discuss more abstract topics. In turn, this is one of the characteristics advanced students show in their process to mastering the language. However, this is only possible when the educator creates the context and situations for learners to receive it and learn the language meaningfully.

It is necessary to determine the uses that the teaching materials and sources applied in class have in meeting the learning goals. The right and varied use of these instruments can contribute engaging learners in the topics and in the development of higher order skills. These, in turn, empower students in thinking and reasoning more carefully about their roles in the social contour (Araya 13). Moreover, diverse sources enable students to gain comprehensible input, which will in turn provide them with a richer vocabulary to communicate ideas and feelings. Several approaches have addressed this principle by placing more emphasis on students' exposure (Richards and Rodgers 179). At this level of education, learners -especially those enrolling in teaching- need sufficient and appropriate input to improve their communicative skills.

3.4 Learners Communicative Competence

Students in the English program at UCR agree on the importance of learning to speak English. Some of their comments in the questionnaires indicated that "English is the only way this country can compete with others", "it opens a lot of doors", "it is the language of business and the world", and "it is a requirement for almost every job". More importantly, they expressed, was the need to become successful speakers of the foreign

language. Speaking English effectively entails many skills that students need to develop in their learning process. As Cunningham affirms, speakers must be able to anticipate discourse patterns, identify turn-taking, and master rephrasing strategies (qtd in. Coulthard 59). Other characteristics are also necessary to achieve a native-like proficiency in the language; these factors are reflected in a concept known as 'communicative competence'.

Canale and Swain (1983) have defined 'communicative competence' in terms of four different components. Their definition comprises grammatical or linguistic competence, sociocultural competence, discourse competence and strategic competence. Savignon expanded this term by describing it as the type of spontaneous interaction that native speakers engage into which requires knowing 'how', 'when' and 'what' to say in a real life conversation (4). She also emphasized the role of culture and verbal and non-verbal behaviors present in interaction for speakers to be successful at conveying messages. The degree to which the program, methodologies, and the professors' role achieve this is of great importance to determine the level of proficiency that these students will develop at the end of each year. Each one of these factors is analyzed and compared based on the data obtained through observations, interviews, and questionnaires.

Adequate training on oral communication leads to exchanges of information, strategies to convey meaning, support ideas, and defend one's point of view. In other words, it motivates learners to use the foreign language as a vehicle to engage in social interaction (Gutiérrez 84). The way educators addressed topics, adapted activities and presented information at UCR contributed to the learning of new knowledge on content and language use, but not so much on enhancing communicative competence in

learners. As Savignon recognized, "linguistic competence is but a part ...of communicative competence, much more emphasis needs to be given to non-linguistic aspects of language (9). Indeed, learners were asked to research and present orally their findings on certain topics; moreover, they were never seen role-playing or developing a natural conversation in which more spontaneous speech could show. Due to this, the learners' oral performance, instead of communicative competence was assessed and described.

Since there is no entrance exam in the program to determine the students' language level at the beginning, authorities in this university look for strategies to gain accuracy in each course; and great importance is given to form and meaning. All three classes observed were very diverse. Students fit into different levels of the ACTFL scale on language proficiency. In the second year the majority had an Intermediate-low and Intermediate-mid proficiency level. In the third year, students showed more homogenous progress since most of them can be placed in the advanced levels. The last year showed a similar picture since the majority of learners were identified in the advanced low and advanced mid level. The difference in language proficiency among students from all courses can be attributed to many factors: students' background knowledge, purpose for learning the language, and effectiveness of the class activities to reach the course objectives.

The knowledge students have of the language was influenced by their previous education. Some learners commented that they underwent previous English training in a private high school, a private language school, and few had traveled abroad. Others, on the other hand, stated that they only knew what they had learned in public high schools. As one of the interviewees commented, "I learned in high school, but the English class

was very bad, the teacher taught us in Spanish and I didn't learn very much until I got here" ('Melissa'). The following figures show that 38% of second year students, 25% in the third year, and 18% in the fourth year learned English at the Universidad de Costa Rica. Prior to this instruction, learners admitted that their level was basic and they only knew about 'reading comprehension to pass MEP's exams'. As noted, the learners' levels differed greatly; some students interacted successfully with the professors, while others only said: 'Hello, my name is Juan' ('Chacon') in their first year in the program.

Figure No. 1

Results from the second-year group

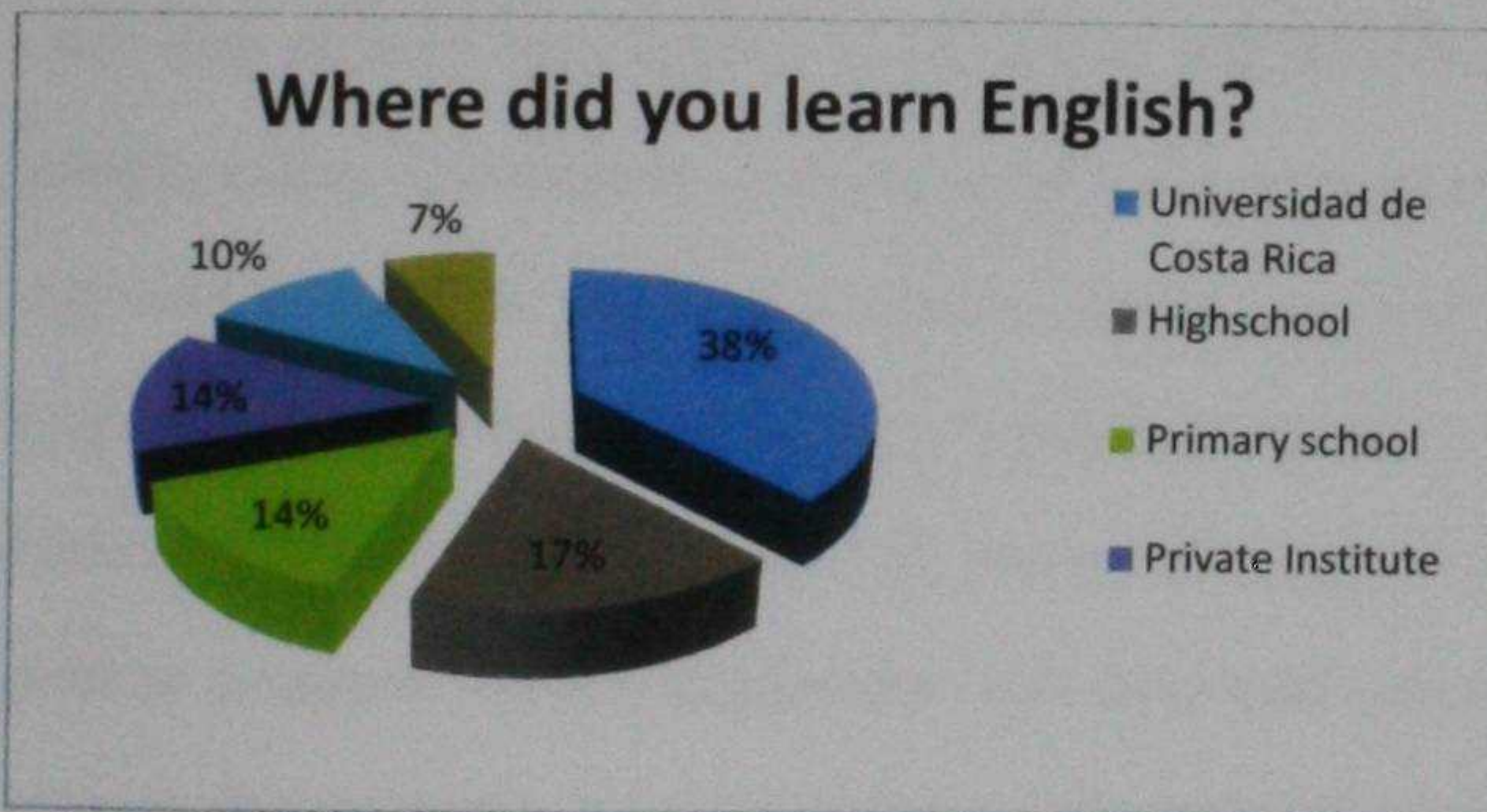


Figure No.2

Results from the third-year group

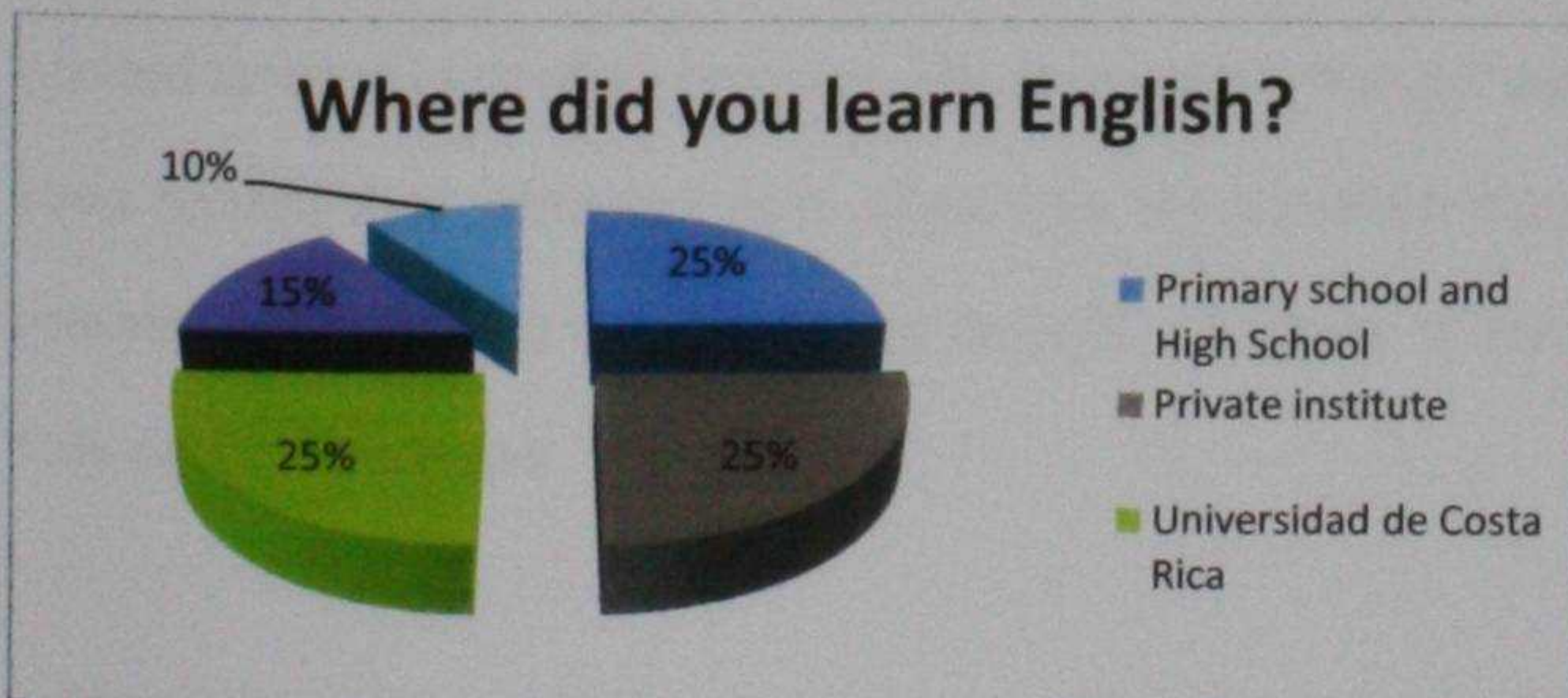
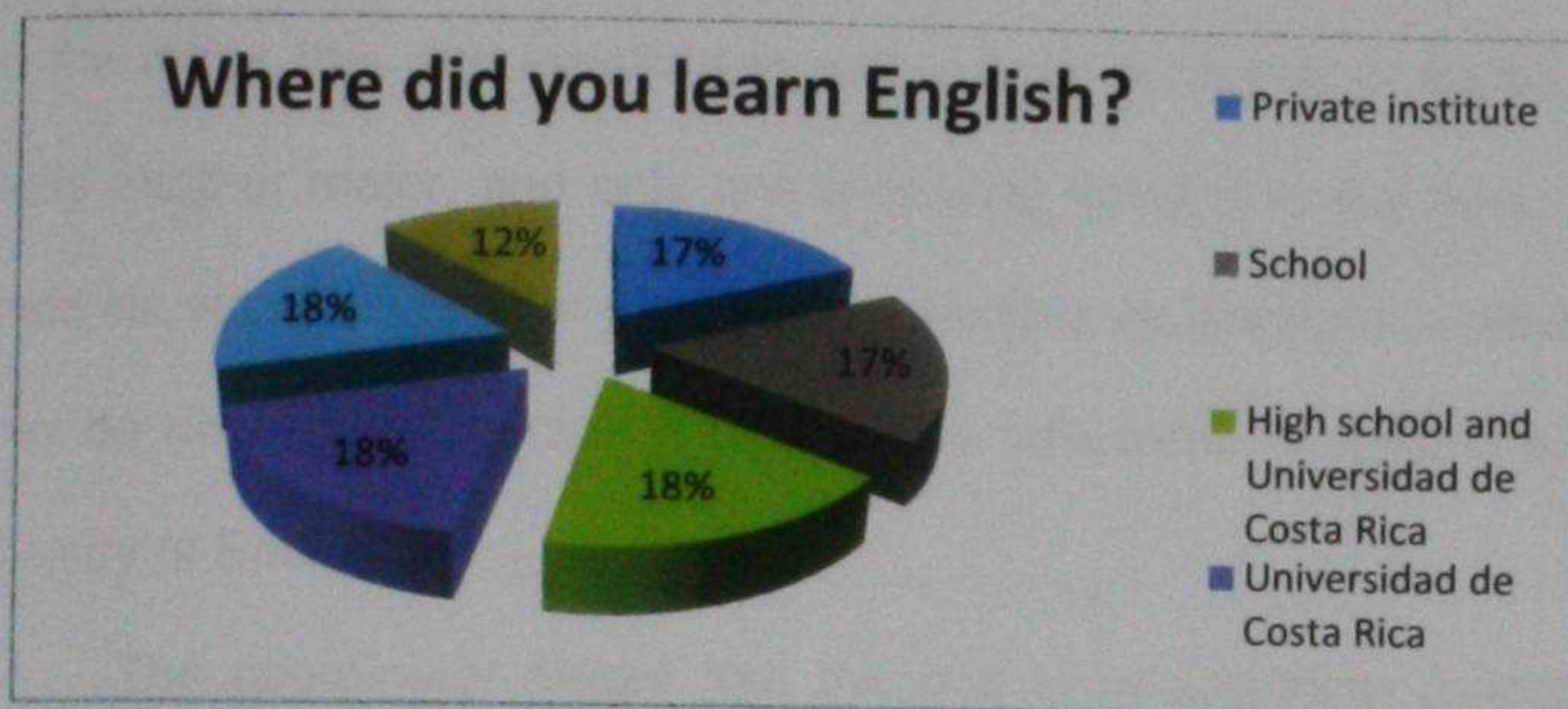


Figure No.3

Results from the fourth-year group



The reasons that students expressed for learning English varied, some had a clear view of what they wanted to be, others still did not know what minor they were going to follow. The majority of learners from all groups were interviewed to find out why they had enrolled in the English major. A great number of them said they thought English was really important to get a job. These students were mainly thinking about becoming translators, but others had started studying English as a supplementary to another program. Others commented that they would become English teachers and work for the university or private schools. Very few were actually enrolled in the English teaching program at the moment. Finally, there was another percentage of students who said that they had enrolled in the program because they did not get the grade they needed to enrol in another program. These students pointed that they had come to like it even though they were not sure what they will do when they finish it, "maybe study something else", "find a job in a call center", or "travel to Europe or maybe Canada", they said in interviews.

Students in their last year, also expressed what they wanted to do when they finish the program. More than 29% said they would like to get a master's degree. Based on the minor they are enrolling in, some want a degree in translation, others want to study another major, and only one is looking forward to teaching. This is contradictory since six out of seventeen people were working as teachers in different institutions. Yet, they do not want to pursue a master's in education or work in public schools for the Ministry of Education.

The coordinator stated that the oral communication courses, especially in the second and third year, include intense training in vowel and consonant pronunciation, along with discussions of different topics where learners can be exposed to new vocabulary, structures and expressions. The programs of these two courses revealed that the objectives are focused on the development of critical thinking skills, better pronunciation, and appropriate oral speaking skills for the level. The majority of the students agreed that speaking and listening were the most emphasized skills by professors. They added that speeches and talk shows were the most common activities carried out in class. More than 74% of the second-year learners believed these activities resembled natural conversations; the percentage for the third-year students was lower (30%), and around 11% in the last year reported that these activities sometimes represented authentic communicative situations.

These attitudes were compared to students' responses in regard to the level of proficiency their classmates had. In a questionnaire (see Annexes 6.1.1) students were asked "Do you think that all your classmates have an appropriate English level to teach the language?" The majority of learners from the second year responded 'no' (see figure 4); in the third year the same amount of students wrote 'yes' and 'no' (see figure 5).

Finally, 53% of the students in the last year said 'no', 29% 'yes', and 18% 'not at all' (see figure 6). Thus, it is evident that students do not feel that the majority of the class has achieved a high oral proficiency to speak fluently and accurately as a native language speaker does.

Figure No.4

Results second-year group

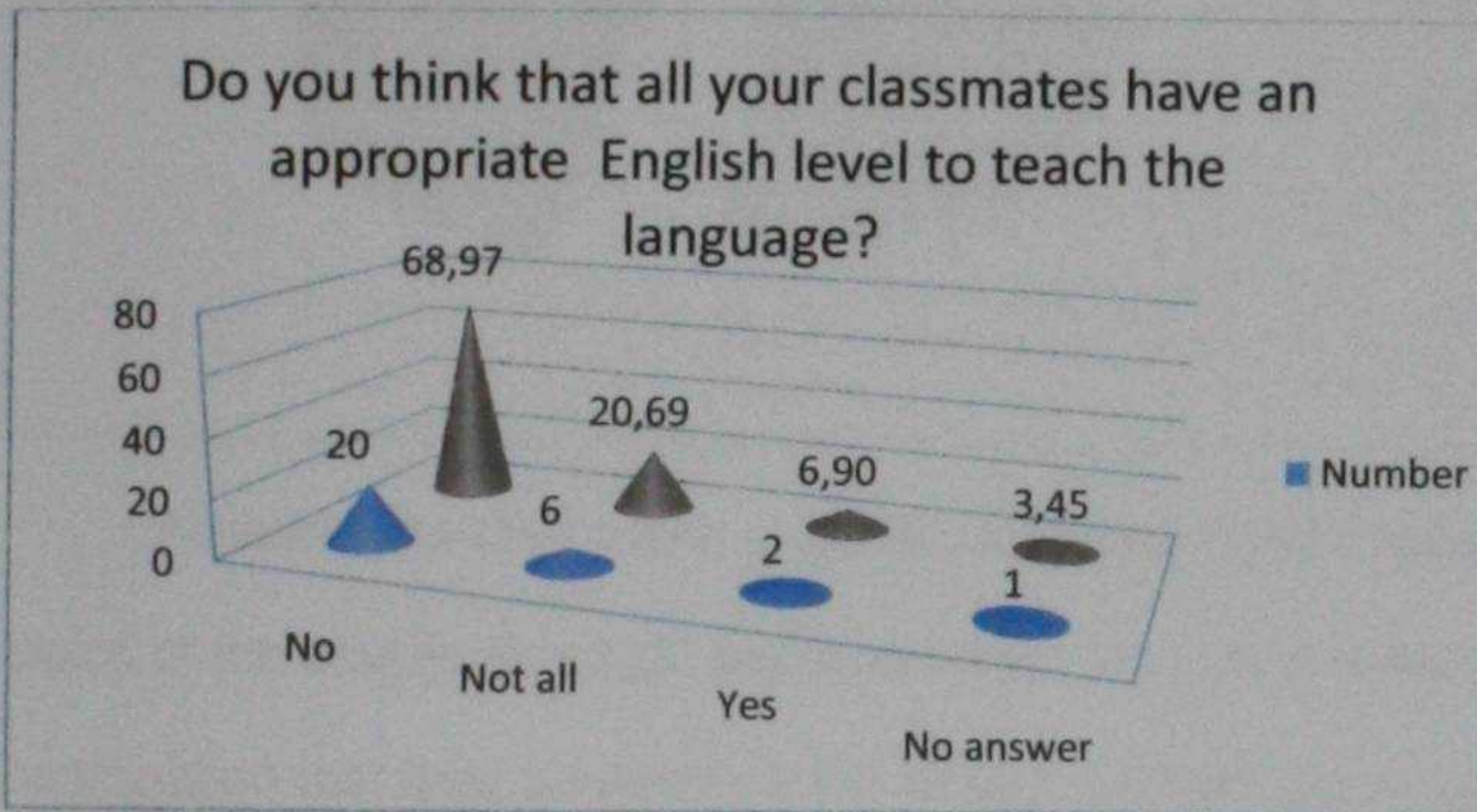


Figure No.5

Results third-year group

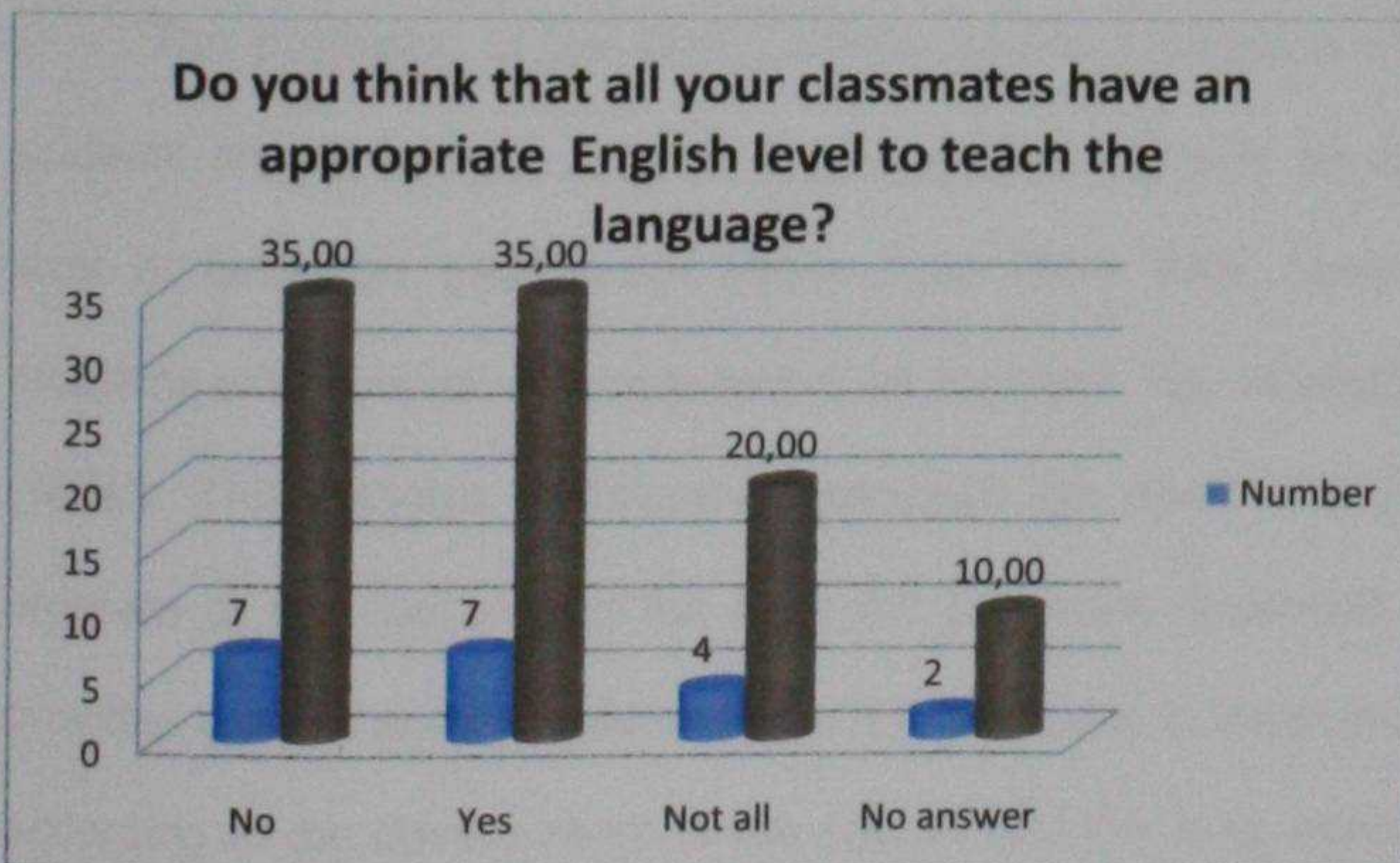
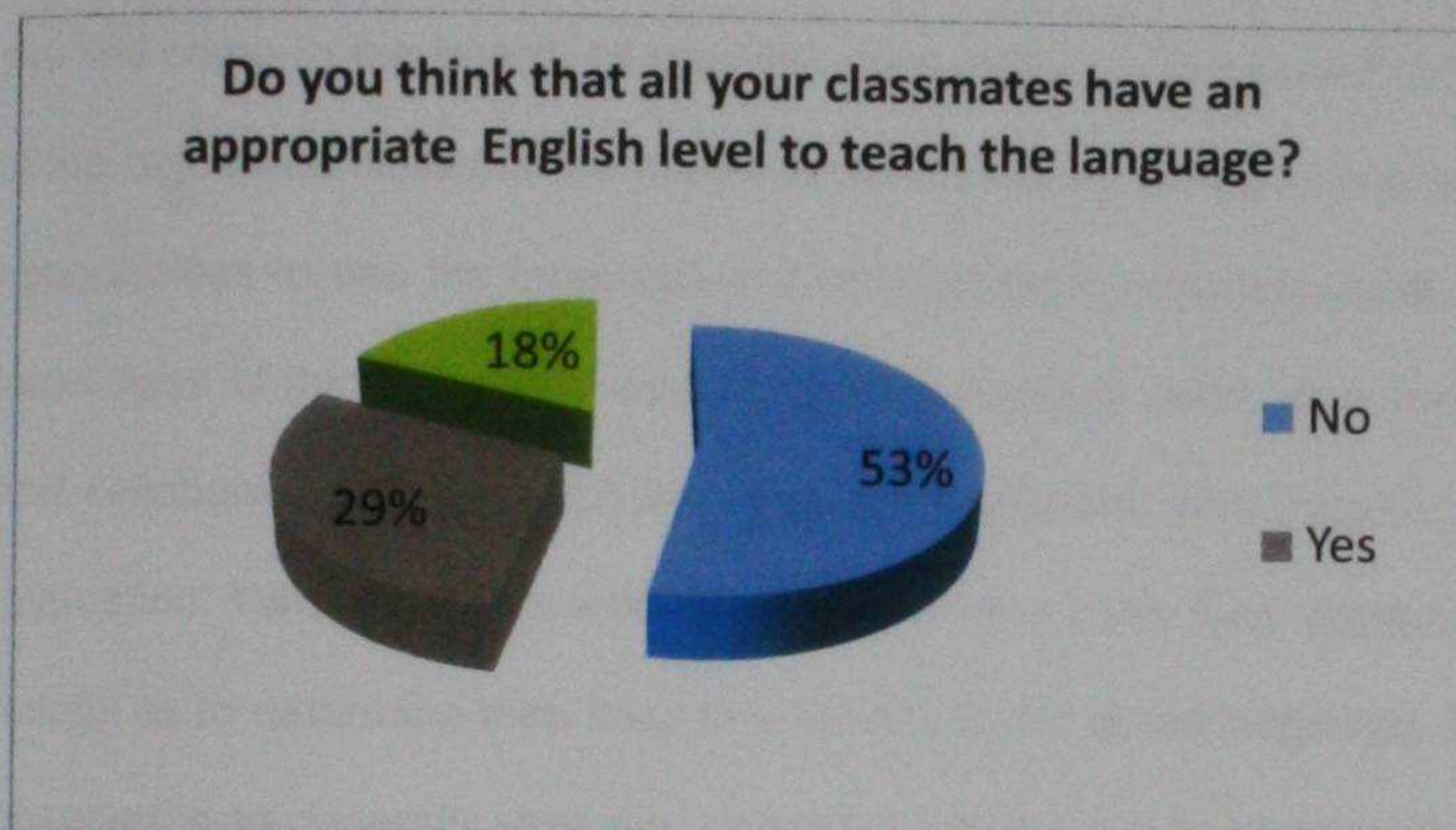


Figure No.6

Results fourth-year group



According to the course program, students in the second year had to discuss the topics of the course at a high beginner level. Also, they needed to demonstrate through participation that they understood the lexicon and structures presented in class and that they were critical about the issues and topics. Learners needed to be able to convey short, clear ideas, and response adequately to the educator's prompts.

The professor of the Oral Communication I stated a different view of the level students should have, "... second year students should be at an upper intermediate level of language proficiency. When they finish their second year they still have problems with subject verb agreement for example, lots of problems with pronunciation" ('Mills'). This denotes a difference between the level of achievement stated in the program of the course and the level the professor describes. Certainly, the program provides a basic point of reference for the professor to keep in mind, but it may change according to the development of the course and the skills students are able to develop through it. This reflects a more realistic view of what students are able to produce.

In class, second-year students did not participate much. The professor used expressions like, "not everyone at once, please" and "I guess if I gave you extra points you will come to the board. I'll start with that strategy next week." This reflects that one of the objectives stated in the program was not being fulfilled since learners were given opportunities to use the language and most of them remained quiet in their seats. In a large class of thirty-one, one would expect learners to react, give comments, exemplify, and collaborate with the educator. Yet, this class was very passive in teacher-student interaction. When learners worked in groups and pairs they produced more; this was helpful as to determine their level and fluency in the target language. The rate of speech observed was generally slow and paused. Learners provided answers by speaking word by word; they rarely used contractions when speaking. Their grammar structures were adequate, but they mispronounced the regular past tense of the verbs. Based on class performance, these students have a beginner high level, as the program states, since their responses were short but coherent to the questions asked. Nevertheless, in individual interviews these same students reached a higher level (based on the ACTFL proficiency guidelines). In fact, they were able to communicate adequately about a number of topics, and their pronunciation was not strongly affected by their native language.

For a third-year course, Oral Communication II is described in the course program as a low-intermediate course which focuses on the development of speaking skills through interaction in a variety of topics. Besides, there is an emphasis on consonants based on the Phonetics International Alphabet (IPA). Among the objectives of the class is to have learners develop arguments to discuss about different subjects and to familiarize with topics such as media and technology. A discrepancy was also

evident when the coordinator pointed that third-year students are supposed to have an advanced low level of proficiency. Based on the ACTFL proficiency guidelines updated in 1999, this means that learners are able to convey their message without misinterpretation and they are able to describe or narrate in most major times. This was evident during class time since learners provided short but meaningful ideas. Another characteristic from this level is that their speech is generally clear, precise and accurate. Indeed, there were no evident problems in structures, only some occasional use of false cognates. In general, learners in this course showed confidence when speaking, they pronounced correctly and used a variety of vocabulary according to the topic. When they did not know a word, they would say it in Spanish and the professor immediately provided the word in English.

Intercultural Communication is described as a course that promotes oral communication through cultural awareness and contact with foreign students that are enrolled in this course. Some of the specific objectives are achieving an advanced language proficiency, contextualizing language taking into account the situation where it occurs and understanding the role of culture in interaction. Students' oral performance is evaluated in terms of content (50%) and language use (50%). The coordinator referred to them as advanced high or superior students. Experts have stated that "college students hardly ever reach the Superior level of proficiency in an undergraduate program of studies" ('On Knowing a Language' 24). If considering the description provided by the ACTFL proficiency guidelines, advanced high learners are able to communicate and narrate fully because they are linguistically competent and confident. Besides, they rely on diverse strategies to convey a message about topics unfamiliar to them. Students in this class certainly have time and opportunities to interact in groups

and then report back to the whole class. Most learners showed a good command of the language with no evident disruptions or errors that caused communication breakdowns. Nevertheless, there were a few students who showed a lower level than the rest. They hesitated constantly as they spoke, they used words and structures that were common in the Spanish language, and they omitted important elements like articles and conjugation of verbs when communicating an idea.

Measuring students' real language proficiency is not an easy task. The ACTFL Provisional Proficiency Guidelines "were the first attempt by the foreign language teaching profession to define and describe levels of functional competence for the academic context" ('On Knowing a Language' 9). Following the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Test, an oral test was developed in this study to determine the level of most of the students in each school year and their correspondence with the objectives attained in the three oral communication courses. The results verified what the researchers observed in class.

3.4.1 The Oral Language Test

According to Arthur Hughes, "The objective of teaching spoken language is to develop the ability to interact successfully in that language involving comprehension as well as production" (101). In fact, one of the main goals of the English programs at UNA and UCR is to develop fully competent students. Certainly, students' performance can be monitored by professors through class interaction. However, a more detailed analysis of students' performance could shed light on the acquisition process that they undergo throughout the program. Hence, this research study aimed to analyze and determine the

actual level of performance of students in the second, third and fourth year by interviewing them individually. A comparative analysis of the results obtained in each level can reveal the students' progress. Moreover, substantial evidence was gathered to determine whether the approaches used in oral communication classes were working or not.

The development of an oral language test was necessary to identify general proficiency levels present in the classrooms. Proficiency is understood as "the descriptions of what learners can do in functional terms" ('On Knowing a Language' 33). This is not possible by observing alone, since not every student participates in class and their comments are usually based on aspects that they have studied and that they have become familiarized with. Prompting more challenging topics, including spontaneous interaction and gaining the learners' trust were key points in the application of this oral test. Most learners were interviewed individually during class time, except for one group, in which the test was done in pairs due at the educator's request.

The professors' cooperation was essential as well as the students' willingness to be interviewed. Researchers and professors agreed that students could leave the room one at a time to be interviewed. Both researchers were present in order to be able to interview most of the students since the second-year group had 31 learners and the fourth-year one had 17. In regard to the third-year course, only Gabriela Cordero was present since she was the only one who had the professor's permission to apply interviews and carry out observations there.

Students in general did not oppose to the interview. Indeed, in some groups, some students volunteered to go first. In the second-year group, a particular case became evident after the second week of interviews. From 19 students that were

interviewed, only one was a male. When the educator was asked about this phenomenon, she replied, "I asked who was next and no one else stood up, so I imagined they had already gone last week" ('Mills'). The other two groups were mixed. In Oral Communication II, 9 learners were females and 5 males; and in Intercultural Communication, 5 were males and 8 females. Since the interview process was carried out as students finished a task, a quiz or an exam, the students interviewed were those who finished before the end of the class.

The results from the tests were compared by both researchers. Each one listened to the recordings and rated the learner according to the criteria established by the holistic scale of the ACTFL proficiency guidelines (Hughes 110). The majority of the learners were placed in the same level, but those who differed by one or two levels were listened to again until an agreement on the level was reached. Other techniques used to account for validity and reliability was making the test long enough to obtain a real sample of the learners' speech; provide learners with different tasks that measure different language functions, and find strategies to minimize anxiety in the interviewee (Hughes 105-106).

Hughes ascertains that when assessing oral ability one needs to elicit behaviors, which truly represents the learners' ability in the language (100). In order to bring out the learners' actual performance, the test was carefully designed as to reduce anxiety and have them interact in diverse contexts. As part of the test, learners had to role play a situation with the interviewer. The ACTFL guidelines of oral testing suggest that situations should be given in the learners' first language to avoid giving students clues or language they may not know. In this way, they could truly test how much content they handle and which strategies they can rely on when they do not know a specific word

(Gapper). Students wondered why the role cards were in Spanish too, but attention was drawn away from it so that learners would monitor their language less and provide real spontaneous speech as they interacted in different situations.

Different tasks were included to assess the learners' oral proficiency. At first, students were asked about familiar information. Fulcher states that "the more familiar the information on which a task is based, the more fluent the performance will be" (63). Once students were at ease and felt more comfortable speaking with the interviewers, they were asked more structured questions that would elicit specific language knowledge (e.g. simple past, if clauses, present perfect, etc). The difficulty of the role card given to the students depended on their performance in the previous exercise. A final wind down activity was applied to have a final opportunity to check on the learners' proficiency level. Some of the questions focused on students' perceptions, attitudes and feelings towards the English program at UCR. Students commented on aspects they liked and others that should be improved. Thus, through this testing process valuable information was gathered. Students were able to reflect on the oral courses they are enrolled in and state what they think could contribute with their learning process.

Table No.1:

Scores of UCR students

Level according to the ACTFL scale:	Second-year students:	Third-year students:	Fourth-year students:	TOTAL
Intermediate low	6	-	-	6
Intermediate mid	6	-	-	6
Intermediate high	3	3	1	7
Advanced low	-	3	5	8
Advanced mid	1	5	4	10
Advanced high	3	3	3	9
TOTAL	19	14	13	

The results revealed that most of the learners in each course have similar levels of language proficiency, except for the second-year group. In this class, the learners' obtained very different rankings from intermediate low and intermediate mid, to around 3 advanced mid and advanced high levels. The third-year group showed more similarities in the levels students have, ranging along the different advanced levels. Very few were placed in the intermediate high level, which means that some learners still need more exposure and practice in the target language. Finally, the last group's results revealed that the majority of students are advanced low moving up to a higher proficiency level.

These results confirmed the expectations authorities from the major expressed. Students in the second year are mostly intermediate-high speakers; and learners in the third year are advanced-mid. Nonetheless, students in the fourth year, who are likely to

graduate this year, were at a lower proficiency level than estimated. This shows that third-year learners have better communication skills even though they did not have as much time and opportunities to interact in groups and share their ideas. On the contrary, the third-year group was more controlled and guided than the fourth-year class since the role of the teacher was more of a lecturer than a facilitator. Moreover, the constant feedback and corrections made by the professor in 'Oral Communication II' may have been the keystone to these learners' progress and results.

The results obtained from the oral interviews as well as from the class observations reveal a clearer picture of the level students should have in each year of the program. These students need to be motivated to reach communicative competence regardless of the field of work they choose in the end. In this way, the university guarantees proficiency and accuracy in the target language to those learners that want to become teachers, administrators, translators, tourist guides, among others.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 General Recommendations

Based on the analysis carried out at Universidad de Costa Rica and Universidad Nacional, suggestions emerged as to what changes could be applied to improve the oral communication programs that each institution offers. Certainly, this assessment process is fundamental and integral to systematic curriculum adaptation (Brown 35). Moving to a needs-oriented syllabus can bring about benefits for learners who have diverse learning styles and language proficiency levels. Moreover, Richards and Lockhart explain, "When critical reflection is seen as an ongoing process...it enables teachers to feel more confident in trying different options and assessing their effects on teaching" (4). Undoubtedly, not only teachers but also authorities and students can benefit from the recommendations derived from this research study. Some suggestions were made to both universities since the phenomena identified were alike in both settings; and others were provided exclusively to each institution.

In general, UNA and UCR should provide professors with opportunities to learn how to rethink their role in the speaking courses. Authorities from both institutions pointed that they follow a student-centered philosophy of teaching; nevertheless, there were discrepancies in the way educators approached students, content and learning activities. Some of them were recognized as controllers, others as guides and facilitators, and yet other educators were mostly passive in their interaction and involvement in the class activities. This means that in some courses learners had little opportunity to talk because they had to listen to the professor explain the contents and

go over structures and vocabulary, while in others they were in charge of developing the topic but not a lot of feedback was provided to these exchanges of communication. Neither of these scenarios is desired in higher education since students should take advantage of time, professors, and other resources to improve their communicative skills.

Even though educators conduct their lessons in different ways, due to their personality, experience, field of expertise, prior learning and learning theories, it is important for them to work collectively (Richards and Lockhart 38). Thus, planning to use the same material and activities to enhance interaction and student involvement in class can be beneficial. This will enable professors who have had more experience in teacher-centered classes to reflect and learn new techniques that facilitate participation and autonomy in class. Keeping these aspects in mind will allow educators to know when, how, and how often their feedback and knowledge on the subject is required to contribute to the learning process.

Several strategies can be implemented to keep an effective student-centered class in the oral communication courses. Richards and Lockhart advocate for reflective teaching; as they point out, in this process the educator collects information about his/her teaching to identify the aspects that need modification and adaptation (3). Based on this information the educator initiates changes that can fit his/her students best. To attain these results, professors need to reflect and discuss the roles they have in the class to identify to what degree the methodology used lead to students' improvement in the target language. Also, they should assess their own interventions and the degree of power that they apply in class activities to become aware of the role they are to be following and compare it to the one they are truly following. By doing this reflection they

can deliberately adjust the roles in class to focus on the students' needs and knowledge on the content.

Richards and Lockhart described in their book 'Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms' the main steps a language lesson should have. First, they pointed out the relevance of using 'openings' during the first five minutes of the lesson to assess learners' knowledge, set the appropriate learning atmosphere or make connections to new content (114). This 'warm-up' stage can motivate students to communicate in the language and to establish a welcoming relationship with the professor. Indeed, using some minutes to talk about something students are interested in and trying to know them as individuals will give professors a head start in helping make the class activities more meaningful to the learners (Savignon 20-21).

The problem is that educators at UNA and UCR most of the time skipped this stage and they entered the class, greeted students and asked the group in charge to start the presentation or the activity planned right away. Very few of them engaged in an informal conversation with the students about their weekend, their work or prompted learners to retell them about the topic they covered the week before. Motivating educators to include 'openings' in their class can trigger better student-teacher interaction and it helps to monitor learners' progress and expression in the target language. As a study of adult EFL classes proved, 'openings' "established a more appropriate affective framework for learning" (qtd. in Richards and Lockhart 116). In addition, conversing with learners prior to class activities can enhance more spontaneous speech by having students refer to subjects different from the academic content studied in class. Thus, educators can have a clearer view of the students'

strengths and weaknesses in the language and can plan lessons in accordance to their findings.

Hernandez has highlighted the most relevant aspects that lead to success in the oral communication class. She pointed that appropriate exposure, use, motivation, and instruction of class activities can benefit learners' learning process significantly (47). In fact, countless activities can be adapted in the communicative class to enhance interaction and communication in the target language. In this case, both universities developed speech-based lessons in which learners prepared oral presentations for every lesson. This type of task contributes to the learning of new vocabulary, public speaking behavior, and others; however, using it alone hinders students' interaction and strategies to maintain fluent, natural conversations. This was evident during the learners' role-playing section in the oral performance interview since students commented that they dislike role-plays and to improvise. Many of them hesitated, looked around while speaking, and provided short answers during the simulation of the task.

The use of games, simulations, task-based activities, practice booklets and pair communication practices, among others, can induce students to use strategies and structures that help them succeed in speaking activities (Richards and Rodgers 169). The more sources students have to construct knowledge on the language, the more interaction can be included in the class planning. O'Malley and Valdez have listed other tasks that can be applied as practice or assessment of learners' oral speaking skills. They recommended using oral interviews, picture-cued stories, radio broadcasts, video clips, information gap, story telling, improvisations, oral reports, and debates (77).

Setting standards mean, "Specifying what students should know and be able to do at different levels of oral language proficiency" (O'Malley and Valdez 66). Certainly,

to improve the learners' oral skills it is necessary to establish the parameters that the professors expect students to reach. These standards, as well as the activities to achieve them, are based on the objectives of the program. Professors have the responsibility of clarifying the task and the evaluation to the students. To this end, learners should be well acquainted with the evaluation criteria educators use and must apply them in their learning process. Self and peer-assessment tasks should be applied in all oral communication courses because learners can reflect more on their progress and commit to the improvement of their classmates' and their own oral fluency and accuracy. Only in one course students were told to evaluate their peers as they presented in class. This can be very positive for the learning environment and the professional growth of the students as their views and knowledge are taken into account. Also, students train themselves to use different rating scales, checklists and records by which they identify their classmates' skills and aspects that need improvement.

Throughout the study, learners' achievement of language skills was analyzed. Certainly, not every student complied with the level expected in each year of instruction; some students were still at a lower proficiency level at the end of the semester than expected. As one of the coordinators mentioned, "there are many students who pass with 7 and 7.5; and that's the way they pass throughout the major." In order to avoid this type of attitude and performance in learners at the higher education level, both universities could apply an exam in the fourth year to measure the students' communicative competence. By doing this, students will be challenged to practice and improve their communication skills. In fact, mastering the second language is one of the most relevant aspects that English teachers need to train bilingual speakers in Costa

Rican public and private schools. This level reflects more than simply saying words in English; it implies intelligibility and good pronunciation so students can transmit meaningful content ('Mills').

This final exam can be applied by searching for validated interviewers from language organizations such as ACTFL, who could train professors at UNA and UCR to apply the oral proficiency tests. Also, professors can develop their own language tests based on the objectives of the program. In this way educators can guarantee that students will be analytical, pronounce appropriately, and produce a number of language functions. In fact, passing this final test must be a graduation requirement. Not only will authorities guarantee that students comply with the labor market standards, but also the results of the tests will demonstrate the overall success of the program and approaches, methodologies and techniques being used by the professors.

Testing students at the end of their major is necessary. However, university authorities are also recommended to test the students during the first weeks of the first year. Sabrina Peck explains, "The more usual kind of adult ESL class...is composed of a wide variety of students, all with their own needs reflecting the amount of education they have had in their native languages, the types of previous instructions in English, their ages and emotional needs" (368). Certainly, students enrolling in these programs have different levels of proficiency when they start in the first year. After several weeks of classes, professors might recognize the students whose level is lower than the rest. Nevertheless, applying a needs analysis test at the beginning of the year can help professors recognize the students in need of more intensive training.

Moreover, instructors might be able to adapt the curriculum to meet the students' needs so that they can have a general idea of the 'performance' of the population before

starting to teach them. Knowing what the students' strengths and weaknesses are can help adapt teaching to meet their requirements. Certainly, the implementation of this test would require extensive work to process the data. However, the effort is worth since it would benefit greatly not only professors but also students. It would help to reduce the gap between students who have an English background and the ones who do not.

To conclude, it is necessary to include remedial courses that provide students with extra help to overcome oral proficiency flaws and gaps. Many learners will benefit tremendously from a more personalized instruction in which they feel comfortable to share and express ideas in the target language. Also, a foreign language club could be created and maintained for students who want to practice their language skills in a more informal setting with native speakers. The input they obtain from this club will help them infer meaning, develop strategies to communicate and improve more effectively through the natural, authentic interactions they now lack in the classroom.

4.2 Recommendations: UCR

Richards, Platt, and Weber proposed the definition of needs assessment as "the process of determining the needs for which a learner or group of learners requires a language and arranging the needs according to priorities" (qtd. in Brown 35-36). The English program at Universidad de Costa Rica is known as impressive and qualified. To keep this program growing each year and guarantee high quality of education it is necessary to revise it and apply adjustments to satisfy the population involved in the teaching-learning process. Reflecting on the results obtained in the language school in regards to learners' reasons for enrolling in the English major, the application of an

entrance test is advisable. Through these results the learners' level of proficiency will be identified as well as their purpose to learn and enroll in the language program.

The coordinator stated that the first year program was having problems due to the students' level and motivation towards the courses they attended. Several students in the second and third year agreed that English was not their first option, but they enrolled in it because they did not obtain the grade required in the UCR entrance test to enroll in the program they wanted. Applying an exclusive test for language programs can shed light on students' needs, interests and learning goals. Moreover, professors can determine the approaches that best suit their learning population to develop oral skills among low proficiency speakers and enhance improvement in more advanced oral language learners. The application of this exam will contribute to assess the program in terms of students' needs and purposes to enter the major. As professors pointed out, some students are more interested in teaching, others in translation, and some few in tourism. An appropriate way to motivate learners is by including in the program topics of their field of interest; such as readings about approaches, technology, ecotourism, among others.

Another point refers to the role professors adopted in the oral communication courses. As noted, the program is based on a student-centered class, but educators did not always apply this principle in their lessons. Students' insights lead to believe that professors need to be more consistent with the approaches and methods they follow in their classes. As mentioned above, educators need to work together to overcome the weaknesses identified in the oral classes and curriculum at UCR through a collaborative assessment of the program. Indeed, the class activities developed were in some cases diverse and in others routinely. Some suggestions for each class are established next.

In Oral Communication I the professor used an eclectic approach trying different methods for teaching content and stressing pronunciation. Her primary source for teaching pronunciation was the visual and auditory reinforcement of words which allow students to copy the professors' movements and stress. However, Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin provided in 1996 a wide guide of more communicative activities educators can rely on to teach pronunciation. Some of these activities can motivate learners and provide them with more contextualized information than the repetition of words in isolation. For instance, students could use cartoons in class to practice intonation patterns, stress, pronunciation of vowel sounds, and integration of culture in the use of language (302). Poems, advertisements and other authentic materials can also be incorporated and adapted to the professors' specific learning goals (299).

In regards to the limited participation from students in open class discussion, the educator could assign a grade or percentage for class involvement and interaction. In this way students will be encouraged to participate during class discussions, to raise their hand and collaborate with the professor when she asks open questions in class. Thus, it is advisable to maintain a non-threatening atmosphere where students feel freer to communicate and ask questions. By promoting oral interactions and spontaneity in class, learners can overcome their fear to speak in front of students with a higher proficiency level.

In Oral Communication II the lessons observed focused on establishing arguments in favor and against a specific issue. Students had to present the topic and the two positions people had on the topic to their classmates. This exercise was repeated until all learners presented their topics. Students agreed on the benefit of giving speeches in class because it helps them develop better speaking skills. Yet, as

Gutiérrez ascertained “humans are social beings who are in continuous communication and interaction with each other. For that reason, it is important to foster situations in which learners can face real communication in a foreign language” (84). The feedback students received in this class prompted improvement and careful self-monitoring; nevertheless, students spent most of the class time as passive listeners rather than as active speakers. It would be advisable to enhance interaction between the participants in order to enrich the topic with the learners’ real life examples and comments on the topic presented.

In the last course, Intercultural Communication, the professor could find strategies to provide students with more feedback during and after they participate or comment. This is important because she is achieving fluency but not accuracy in her lessons. Some professors focus heavily in form, others in meaning. Maintaining a balance between both it is imperative to achieve communicative competence. As the results in the oral interviews point out (See annex 6.2.4) students in the fourth level have lower proficiency than learners in the third year. The latter received feedback during and after class since the professor used conferences. Experts such as O'Malley and Valdez have praised the usefulness of conferences when it comes to students' language growth and abilities to improve the weaknesses identified in class.

Professors of oral courses could integrate some interactive activities that enhance communicative competence. Role playing, discussion topics and games, for instance, all represent strategies for providing the emotional involvement necessary for authentic interaction in the classroom (Savignon 13). It is important to recognize the role of spontaneous speech, which truly reveals the learners’ knowledge of the language and their proficiency level. These tasks could bring more dynamism into the class, and more

use of communicative strategies to cope with lack of vocabulary, expression or adequate conjugation. Chamot and O'Malley appointed that students who use strategic approaches...comprehend spoken and written language more effectively, learn new information with greater facility...and use their second language better than those who do not (qtd. in Hernandez 52).

Hernandez also suggests choosing motivational, authentic, and communicative learning tasks to develop oral skills and strategies (49-53). Some of the activities she listed in her article "Characteristics of Successful Task which Promote Oral Communication" are debates, jigsaw presentations, circulation, and graphic organizers. From all of these, debates and graphic organizers were applied in the learning context; while the other two that require more interaction and negotiation in groups and as a whole were omitted. Certainly, educators at UCR need to develop lesson plans in which different activities are developed in each class in order to suit different learning interests and needs.

Professors should offer students, with a lower proficiency level, options to intake the input and language structure that may be more difficult for them. Not all activities are suited for all students at all times (Savignon 13). Certainly, students demonstrated to be heterogeneous in their language proficiency; this means that some learners were at a lower level than others, and this became a stumbling block for those students' learning process. In fact, one student stated that their educator paired them up according to their level; "the professor said that he was going to make the groups based on the notes...grades, and put better with better, best with best, and worst with worst" ('Johanna'). She also emphasized that she did not always understand the explanations given by the professor and she preferred asking a classmate later than openly asking a

question. To this, Rogers remarked the need to develop an appropriate environment for the teaching-learning process to be effective and successful. He indicated that learners' level of anxiety had to be lowered in order to acquire the knowledge; otherwise the students' 'affective filters' blocked the new input from becoming intake (Blair 39). Moreover, developing adequate rapport, a congenial and non-hostile atmosphere, will enable students having difficulty to seek help from the instructor and in which students feel welcome to offer alternative explanations in class and to get feedback on their ideas (Clark 7).

A very important aspect students and professors pointed out is 'pacing'. Richards and Lockhart described it as the time each section of the lesson should be allocated (122). At UNA students had three hour classes in which one or two groups presented orally and developed follow-up activities; the professor organized a class debate and then activities were introduced. This contributed to keep students' interacting most of the class time and learners were not timed. At UCR, on the other hand classes lasted less than two hours; this factor limited professors' and students who complained about the amount of topics they had to cover and the little time they had to communicate freely on those topics.

Indeed, in one of the classes 3 or 4 groups presented and by the time the last group finished their informative speech there was no time left for comments, questions, or feedback from the professor and the audience. The students' oral presentations were also timed and some minutes before their time was up the educator's phone rang to remind students that they had to wrap up their speech. For learners who have to do research outside the classroom and prepare supporting data on the topics the time allotted is not always enough.

This situation also hindered the closure of the topic since participants could not prepare follow-up activities to interact on the subject presented (Richards and Lockhart 124). The input learners gained from their classmates' oral speeches could have been more meaningful if they were given tasks in which they had to contextualize it and use it to construct their own hypothesis on the topic. These final activities, as well as the opening ones, bring about numerous advantages to the language class. First, they allow for the understanding and integration of the whole learning process since students can clarify concepts and ideas expressed. Also, they can lead learners to use the language in more authentic contexts by including role plays, dialogues, debates, and other interactive activities in which all of the students engage in critical thinking. Since the lessons are student-centered, learners will benefit by having time in class for open discussion and negotiation of views and positions. The educator could also apply this by cutting the number of presentations or activities in class, and give emphasis to monitored task-based activities in which learners become active participants. Shifting attention to this stage can provide learners with the opportunity to acquire knowledge from their peers, while educators can personalize the feedback process as they move around groups.

V. CONCLUSION

Robert Blair, an expert on innovative approaches, argues that "One must just take the best of all approaches, the techniques and ideas and strategies found to be most congenial, and blend them into a workable formula that suits the realities of the particular situation" (23). Certainly, the research study carried out at UNA and UCR has shown that students benefit from a combination of approaches, methodologies and techniques. It also shed light on the flaws in the implementation of the various approaches which is hindering the students' development of their communicative competence. Therefore, the results gathered from this study can lead instructors and authorities to analyze whether class instruction is conducted in accordance with the objectives of the program.

In fact, the results have the added benefit of fostering awareness about the strengths and weaknesses to be improved in each program. This study can be a starting point for both institutions to rethink their practices in order to achieve a higher quality of education.

In addition, both Universidad Nacional and Universidad de Costa Rica can gain from this experience by providing feedback to each other. Being both prestigious universities, which graduate the best English teachers, they can work together to increase the numbers of qualified English teachers in the country, which is a current concern in Costa Rica.

Likewise, other higher education institutions can certainly benefit from the results of this study. Since UNA and UCR offer high-quality education, other universities could adopt the approaches used in these programs to improve their own programs. The

recommendations offered to each university can be suitable for other programs that seek to improve the communicative competence of their learners.

This research study can be taken as the starting point by other universities to carry out further research on the effectiveness of the approaches, methods and techniques being used to develop other language skills. In addition, it also lays the foundations for further research on students' achieved and expected performance through each year of instruction.

The triangulation of data, the implementation of a test, and the participation of diverse informants helped to draw general conclusions in regard to the effectiveness of the programs in developing speaking skills. Certainly, the level achieved by most of the students at UNA and UCR is outstanding. Nevertheless, with a few changes in the way teachers approach classroom interactions, feedback, error-correction and classroom activities, most students could achieve a higher level of performance.

Hopefully, the results obtained from this study will lead UNA and UCR into a process of self-assessment regarding the effectiveness of the approaches used in these ESL programs. If English programs in higher education are improved in Costa Rica, the lack of qualified teachers. If these actions are taken, the country will be on its way to preparing proficient English speakers within the public education system who will be able to meet the demands of the global economy.

VI. Works Cited

- Alayne, Sharon. "Schema Theory: An Introduction." George Mason University, 1-5.
<http://www2.yk.psu.edu/~jlg18/506/SchemaTheory.pdf>
- Basturkmen, Helen. "Description of Spoken Language for higher level learners: the example of questioning." ELT Journal (2001): 4-12.
- Bingham, Marjorie and Peter Skehan. "Communicative, Task-Based, and Content-Based Language Instruction 207." The Oxford Handbook of Applied Linguistics. Oxford University Press, 2007. 207-210.
- Blair, Robert. "Innovative approaches." Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language. Ed. Celce-Murcia. Boston, Massachusetts: Heinle & Heinle, 1991. 23-45
- Brown, Douglas. Principles of Language Learning and Teaching. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc, 1994.
- Brown, Douglas. Teaching by Principles: an interactive approach to language pedagogy. New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc, 2001.
- Brown, James D. The Elements of Language Curriculum: A Systematic Approach to Program Development. Heinle & Heinle, 1995.
- Celce-Murcia, Marianne et. al. Teaching pronunciation: A reference for teachers of English to speakers of other languages. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Cordero S, Mónica. "País pone en marcha estrategia para tener población bilingüe." La Nación. Set. 11, 2008

- Cunningham, Mary Ann. "Improving Adult English Language Learners' Speaking Skills." National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 1999. 1-4.
- Davies, Stephen. "Content Based Instruction in EFL Contexts." The Internet TESL Journal. 2003. <<http://iteslj.org/Articles/Davies-CBI.html>>
- "Dominio de Inglés." La Nación. Nov. 23, 2007.
- Ellis, Rod. Learning a Second Language through Interaction. University of Auckland. 1999.
<<http://books.google.co.cr/books?hl=es&lr=&id=ku01oL286-MC&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=interactive+function%2Blanguage+learning&ots=0xBdUYLfbj&sig=vUuELbALNaQBilt434Xno1hzuNQ>>
- Fernandez, Marianella. "Interaction in the English Classroom". Actualidades Investigativas en Educación
<<http://redalyc.uaemex.mx/redalyc/pdf/447/44740108.pdf>>
- Fulcher, Glenn. Testing Second Language Speaking. 2003.
- Gutierrez, Dorelly. "Developing Oral Skill through Communicative and Interactive Tasks." Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2005. 83-96.
- Hadley, Alice O. "On Knowing a Language." Teaching Language in Context. Heinle, 2000. 1-41.
- Hernandez-Sampieri, et. al. Metodología de la Investigación. México: McGraw Hill Interamericana, 2006.
- Hernandez, Anabelle. "Characteristics of Successful Task which Promote Oral Communication." Comunicación, 2006. 46-56.

- Hernandez, Annabelle. "Content-Based Instruction in an English Oral Communication course at the University of Costa Rica." Actualidades Investigativas en Educacion 5. (2005): 1-28
- Herrera, Luis. "Solo 315 profesores de inglés del MEP dominan el idioma." La Nación. Jul. 30, 2008.
- Hoa Hiep, Pham. "Communicative language teaching: unity within diversity" ELT Journal 6 (2007): 193-201.
- Hughes, Arthur. "Testing Oral Ability." Testing for Language Teachers. Cambridge University Press, 2002. 101-115.
- Kagan, Spencer. Cooperative Learning. United States: Resources for Teachers, Inc, 1992.
- Lightbown, Patsy. Spada, Nina. How Languages are Learned. London: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Nazari, Ahmad. "EFL Teachers' Perceptions of the Concept of Communicative Competence." ELT Journal Volume 61. Oxford University Press, 2007. 202-210.
- O'Dwyer, Shaun. "The English Teacher as Facilitator and Authority". TESL-EJ, 2006. 1-15.
<<http://tesl-ej.org/ej36/a2.pdf>>
- Omaggio Hadley, Alice. "On Knowing a Language." Teaching Language in Context. 3rd edition. Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 2001.
- O'Malley, J. Michael & Lorraine Valdez Pierce. Authentic Assessment for English Language Learners: Practical Approaches for Teachers. United States: Addison-Wesley, 1996.

Richards, Jack & Charles Lockhart. Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms. Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Richards, Jack & Theodore Rodgers. Approaches and Methods to Language Teaching. Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Rydahl, Susana. "Oral Feedback in the English Classroom: Teachers' Thoughts and Awareness." Karlstads Universitet, 2005.

Savignon, Sandra. "Communicative Competence: Theory and Classroom Practice." 1976.

<<http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?nfpb=true&ERICEstSearch SearchValue 0=ED135245&ERICEstSearch SearchType 0=no&accno=ED135245>>

Senior, Rose. "A class centered approach to language teaching." ELT Journal 56. 2002. 397-403.

Shao-Quan, LV and Wang Zhe. "Teachers' Role in Autonomous Learning". US- China Foreign Language, 2008. 1-3.

<<http://www.linguist.org.cn/doc/uc200801/uc20080104.pdf>>

Tedick, Diane and Barbara Gortari. "Research of Error Correction and Implications for Classroom Teaching". ACIE Newsletter, 1998. 1-6.

<<http://www.carla.umn.edu/immersion/acie/vol1/May1998.pdf>>

Tinzmann, M.B, et al. "What is the Collaborative Classroom?" NCREL. 1990. 2-13.

<<http://aeonline.coe.utk.edu/PDFramework/Instructional%20Approaches/Collaborative.pdf>>

Villegas, Jairo. "Gobierno: 75% de bachilleres tendrá buen nivel de inglés en 2017." La Nación 12 mar. 2008. El País.

<<http://www.actfl.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3642>>

VII. ANNEXES

6.1 Data Collection Tools

6.1.1 Questionnaire for Learners

*Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica
Maestría en Segundas Lenguas y Culturas*

Date: _____

University: _____

Level: _____

QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions: Answer the following questions briefly and precisely.

1. Why did you decide to take the English major?

2. Are you currently working as a teacher?

3. What are your expectations when you finish the major in foreign language teaching?

4. Where did you learn English?

5. Have you been to an English Speaking country? If so, where did you go?

6. Why is foreign language education important nowadays? What does a teacher need to be successful in his/her job?

7. Have you ever taken the TOFEL exam or any other standardized test? If yes what was your score?

8. Which language skills (listening, speaking, reading or writing) do your professors emphasize the most in class? Why?

9. Which speaking activities do your professors develop in class? Are they effective in having you communicate in natural conversations?

10. Do you think that all your classmates have an appropriate English level to teach the language? Why or why not?

11. When can you say that a person is a successful English speaker?

Universidad Nacional
Maestría en Segundas Lenguas y Cultura

Questionnaire Results:

Setting: Universidad de Costa Rica

Course: 'Oral Communication I'

Level: II year students

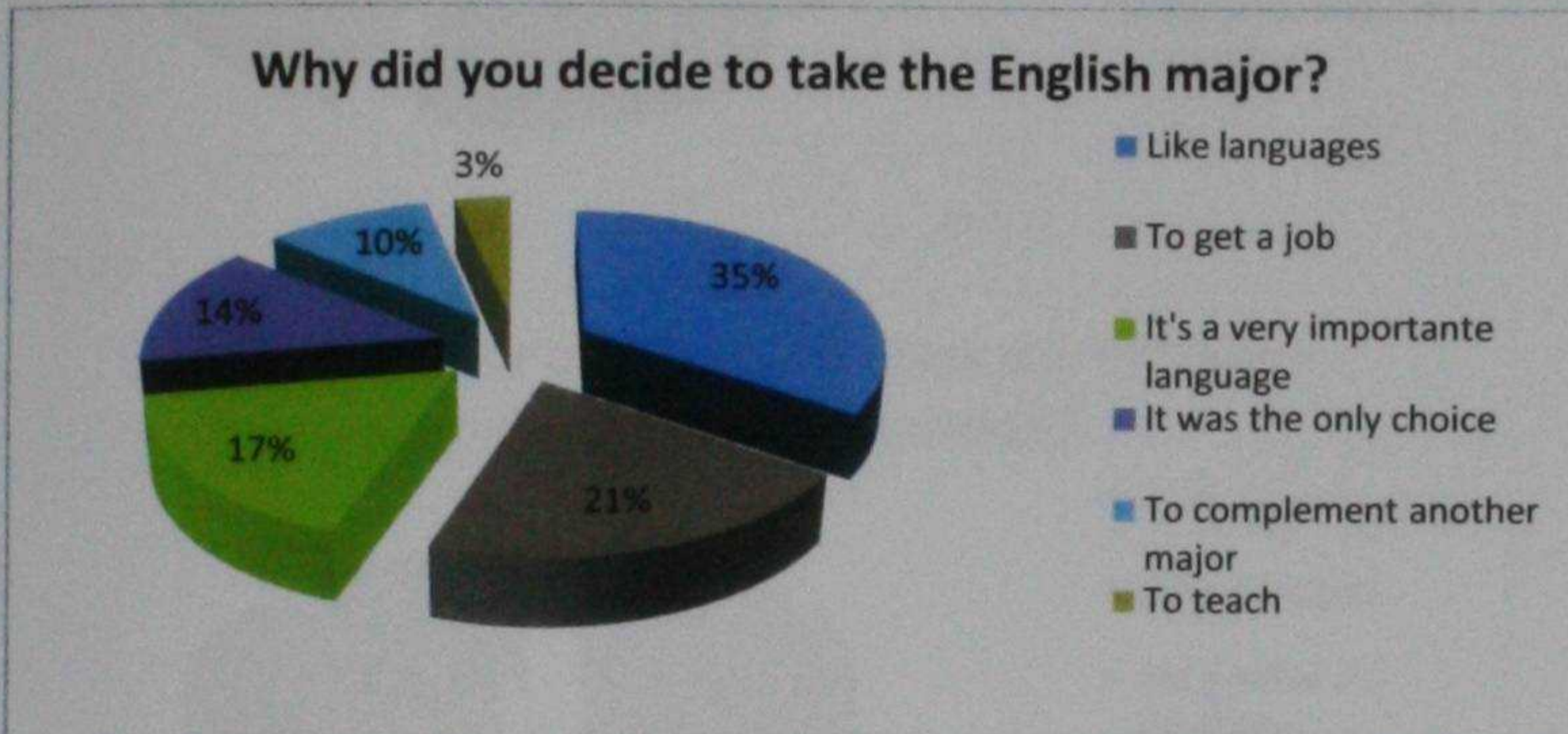


Figure 1

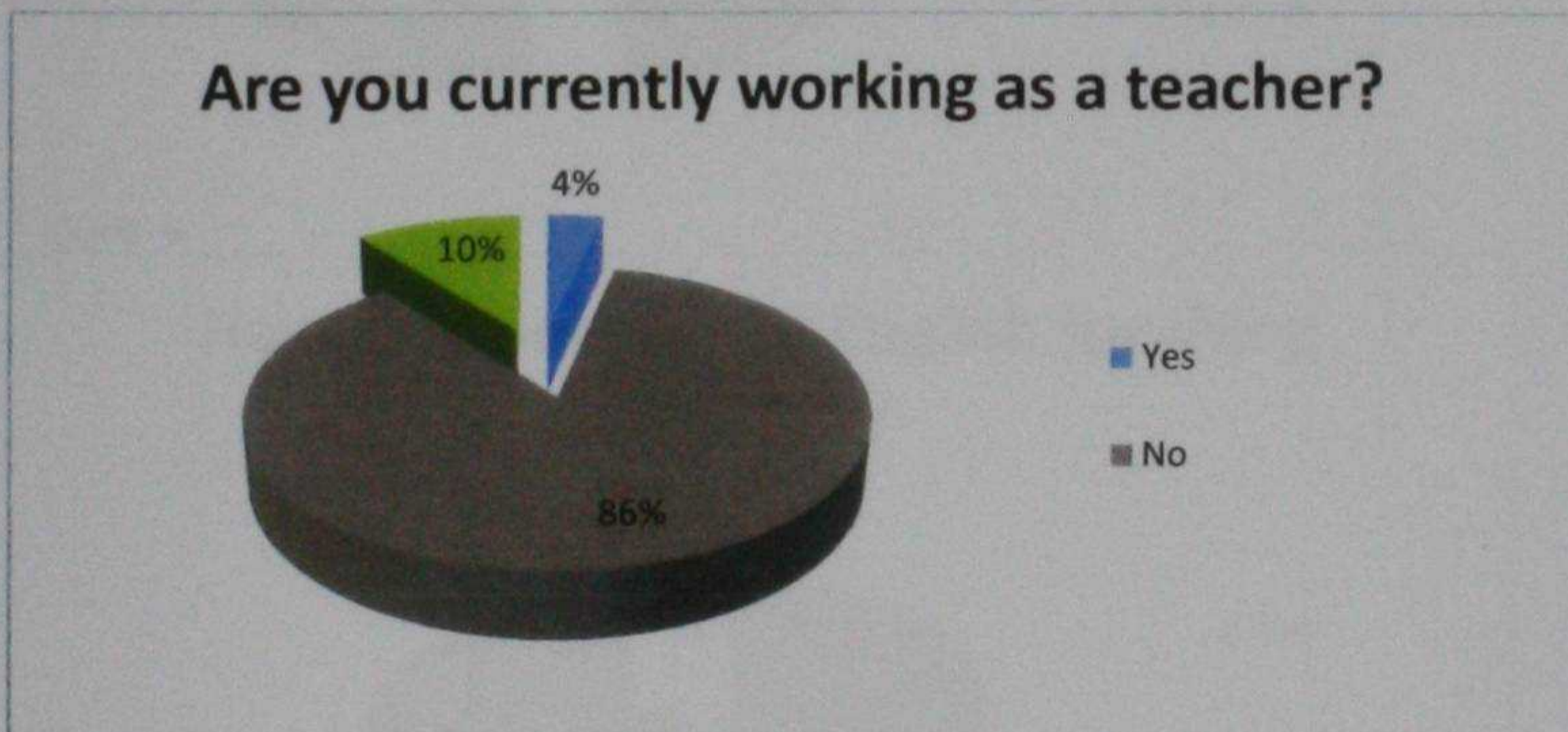


Figure 2

Where did you learn English?

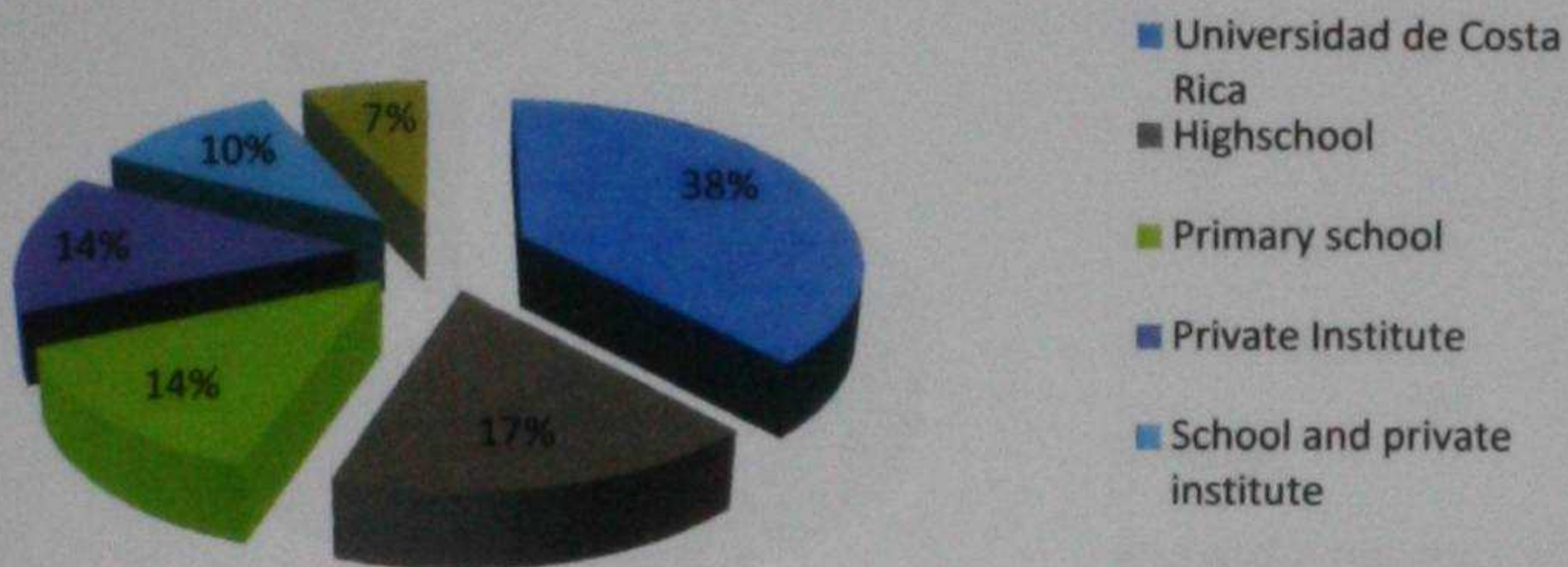


Figure 3

What are your expectations when you finish the major in English education?

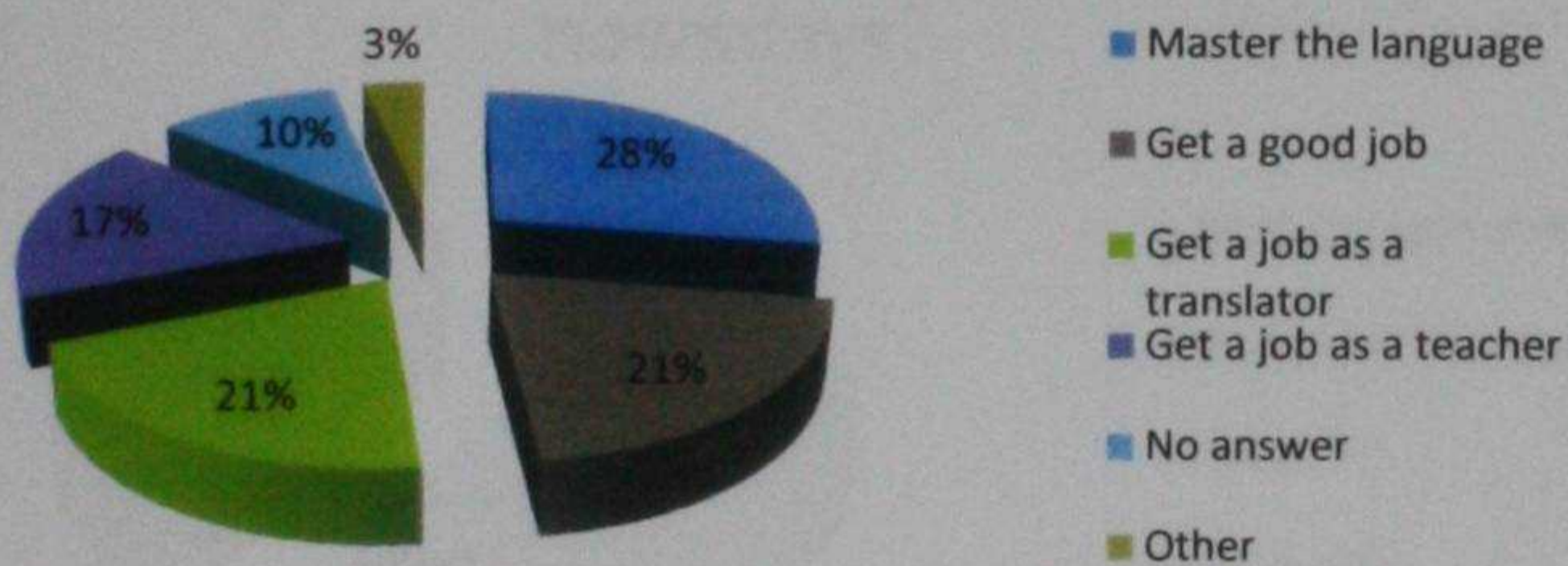


Figure 4

Have you been to an English speaking country?

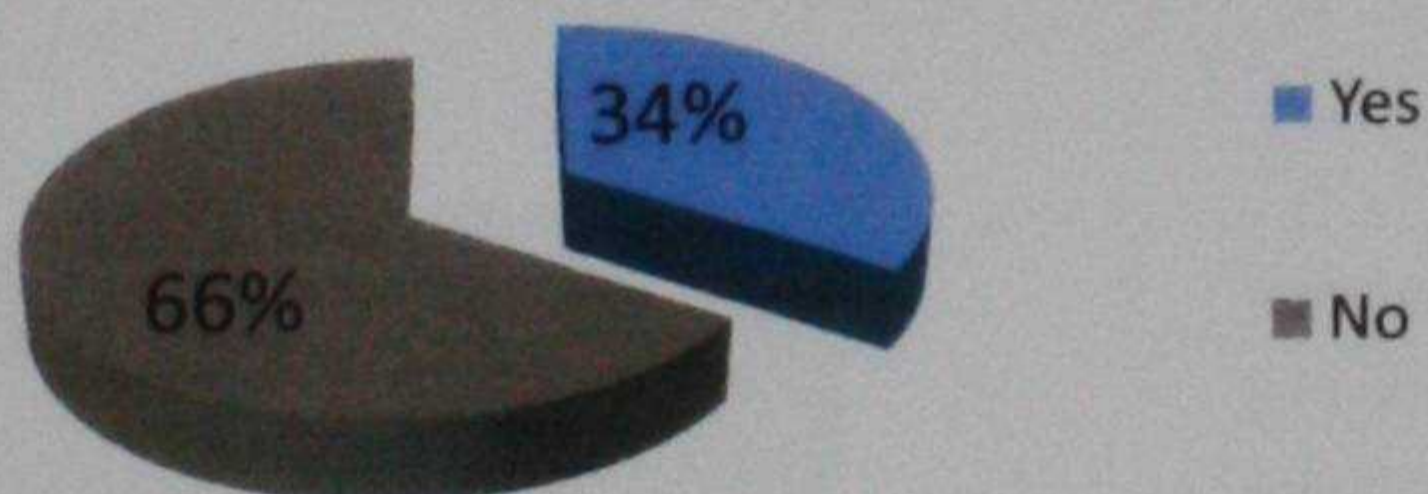


Figure 5

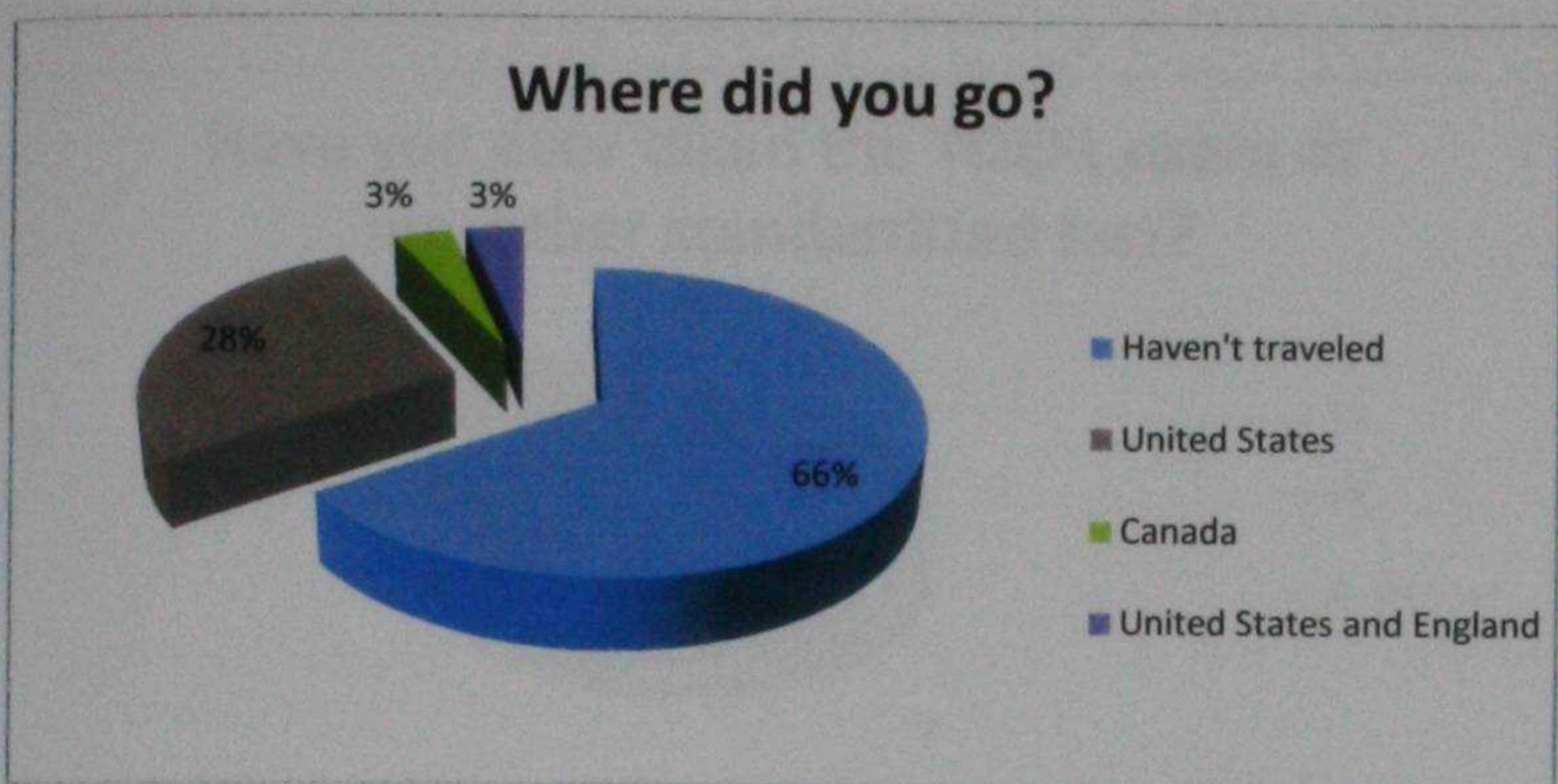


Figure 6

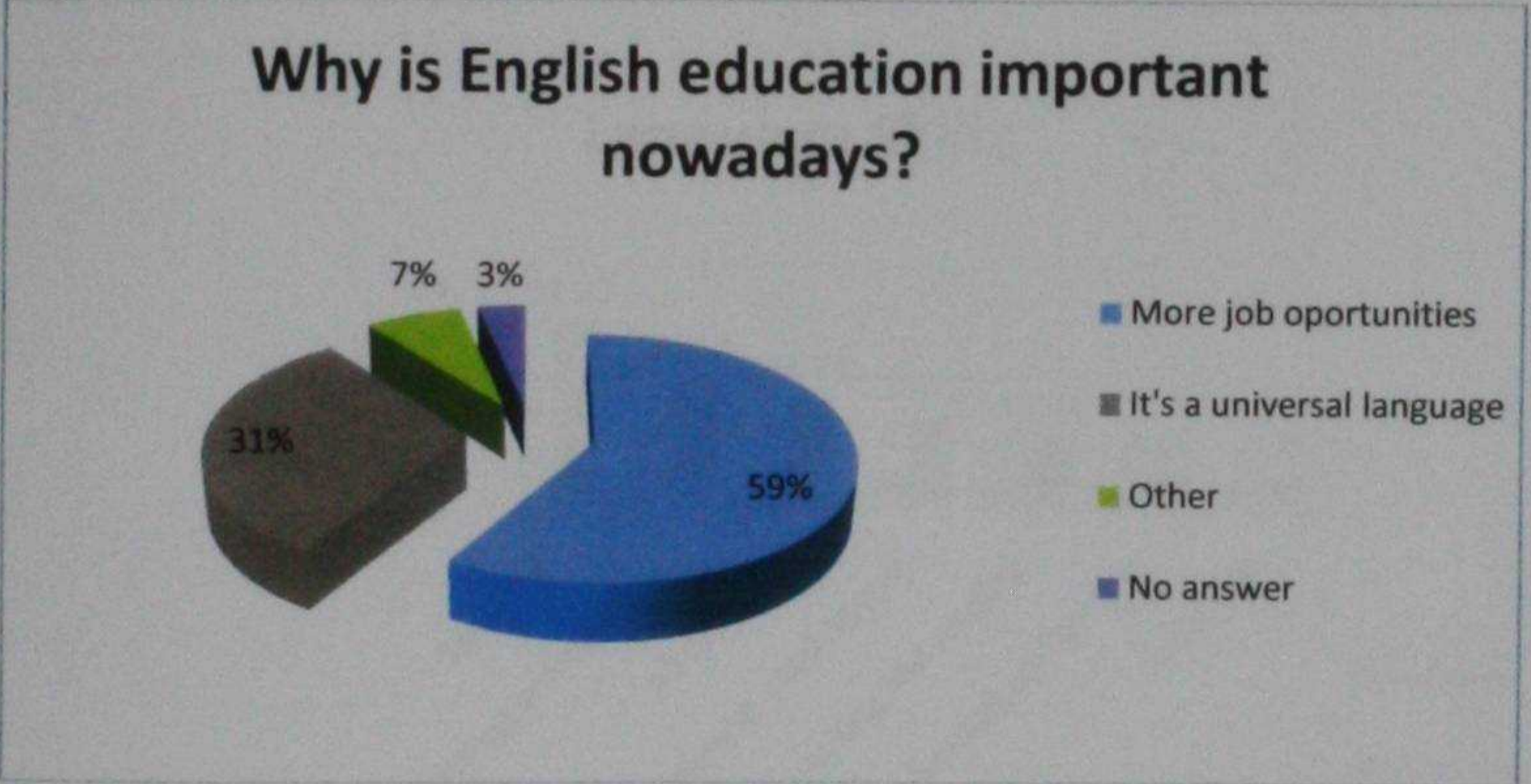


Figure 7

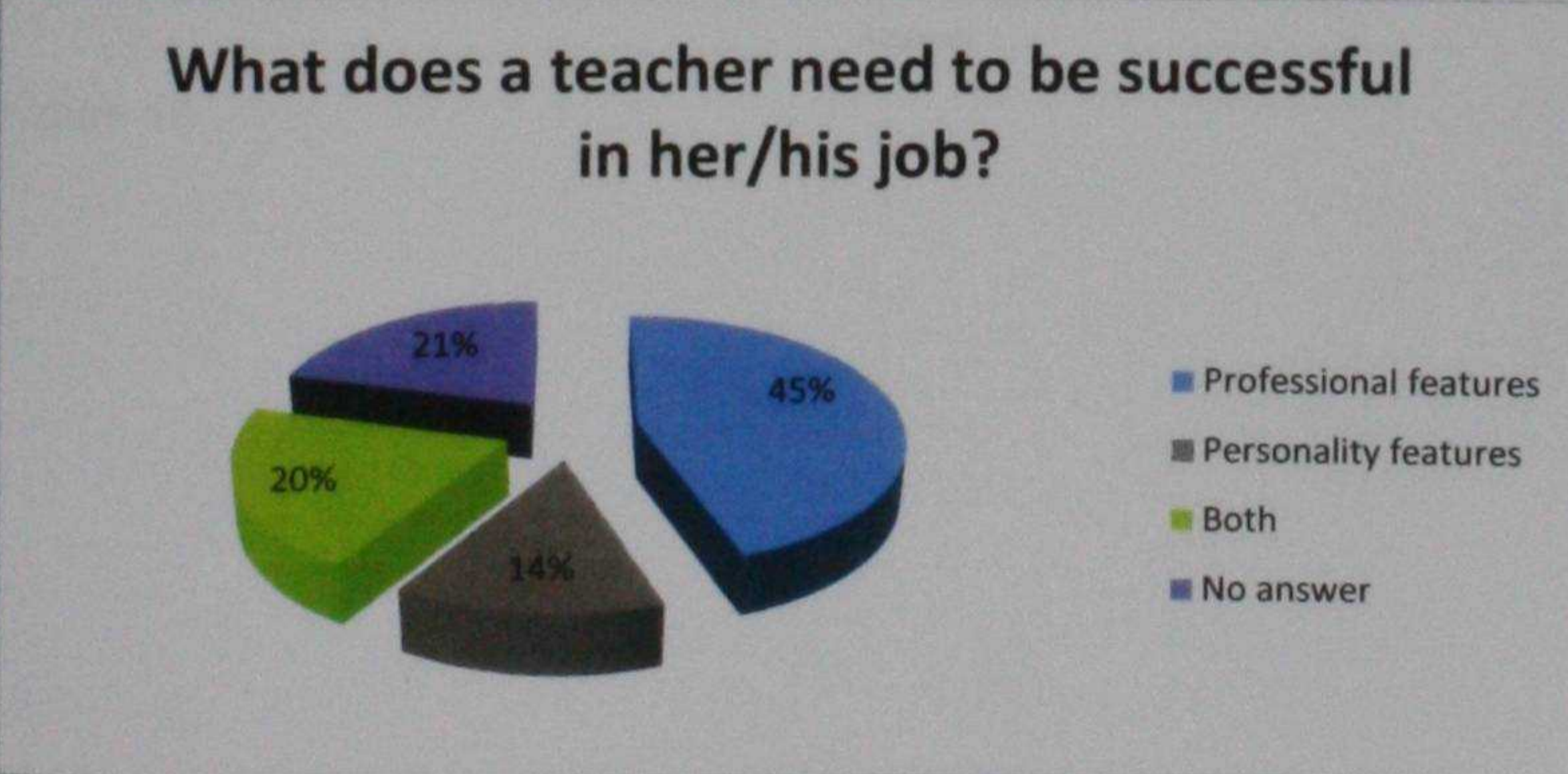


Figure 8

Have you ever taken the TOEFL exam or any other standardized test?

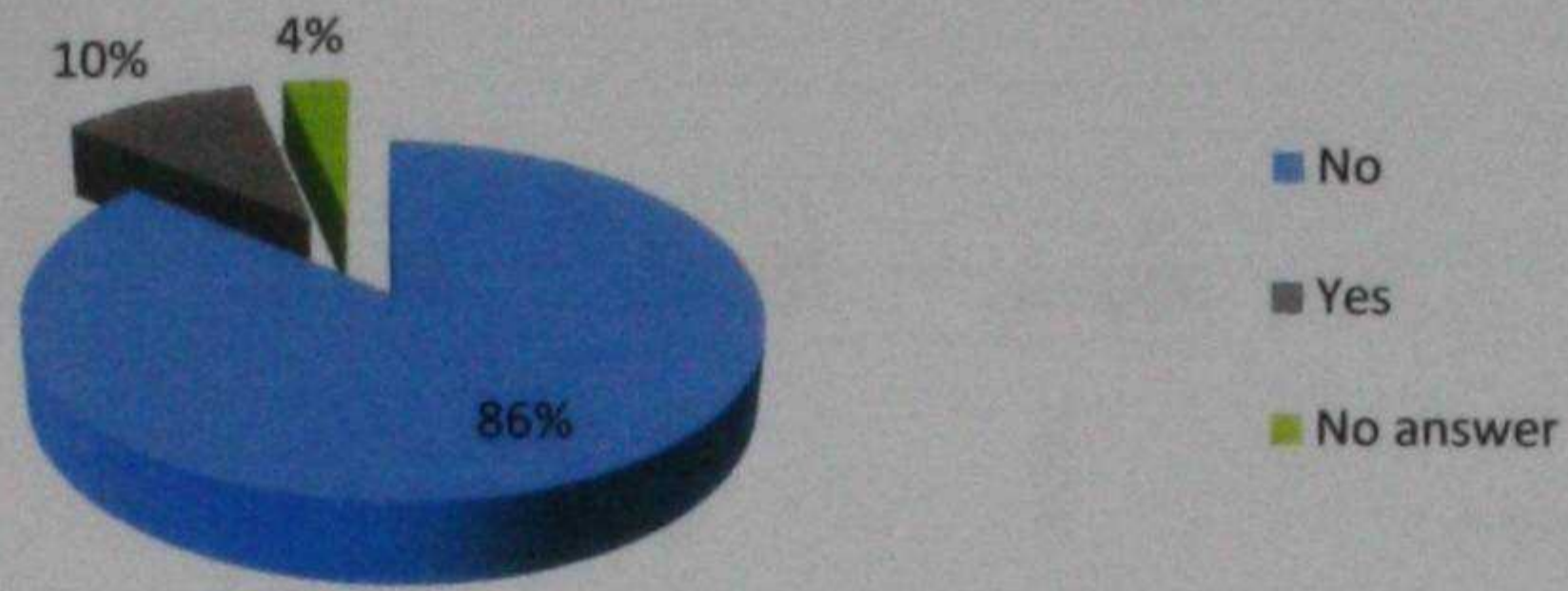


Figure 9

Language Skills

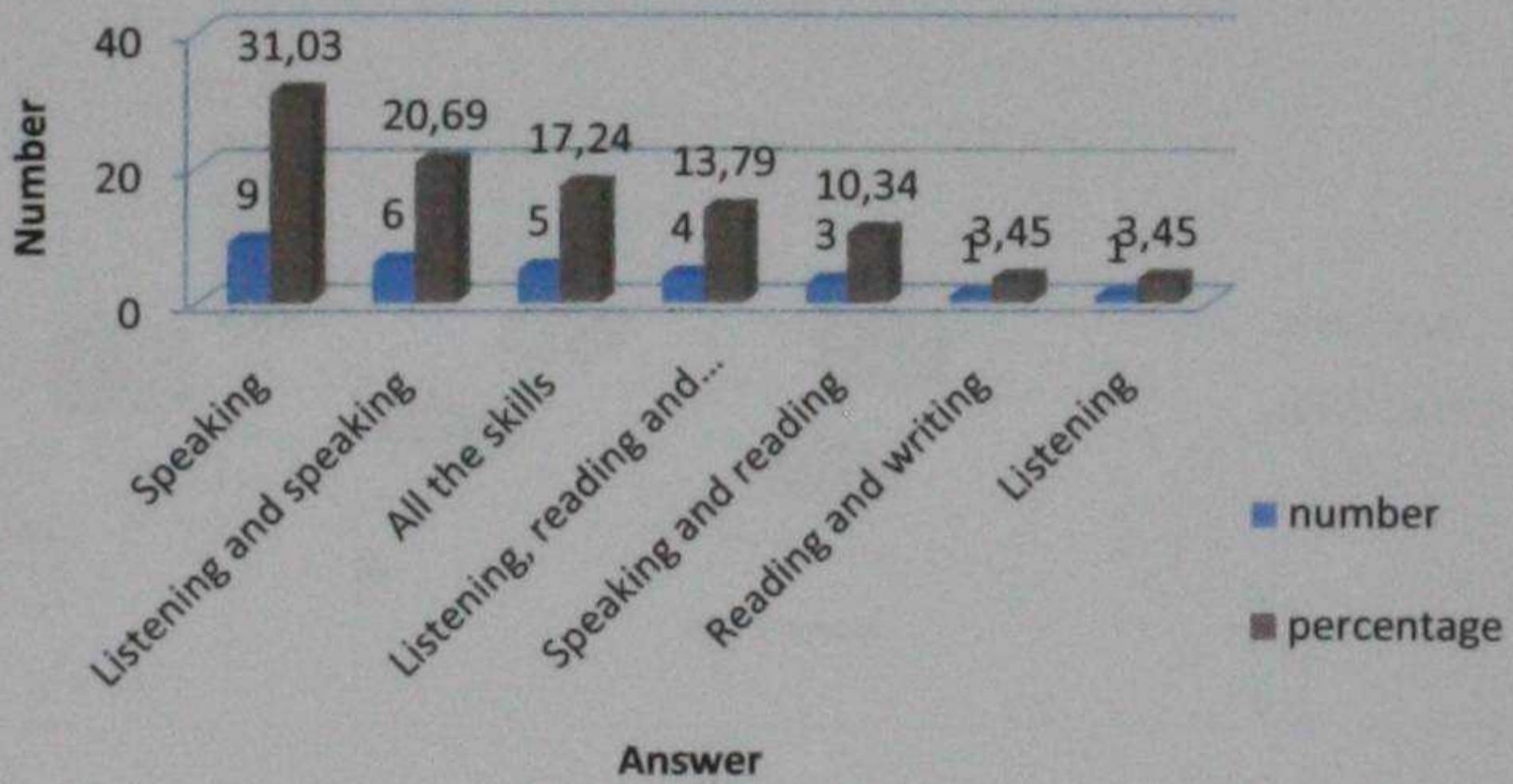


Figure 10

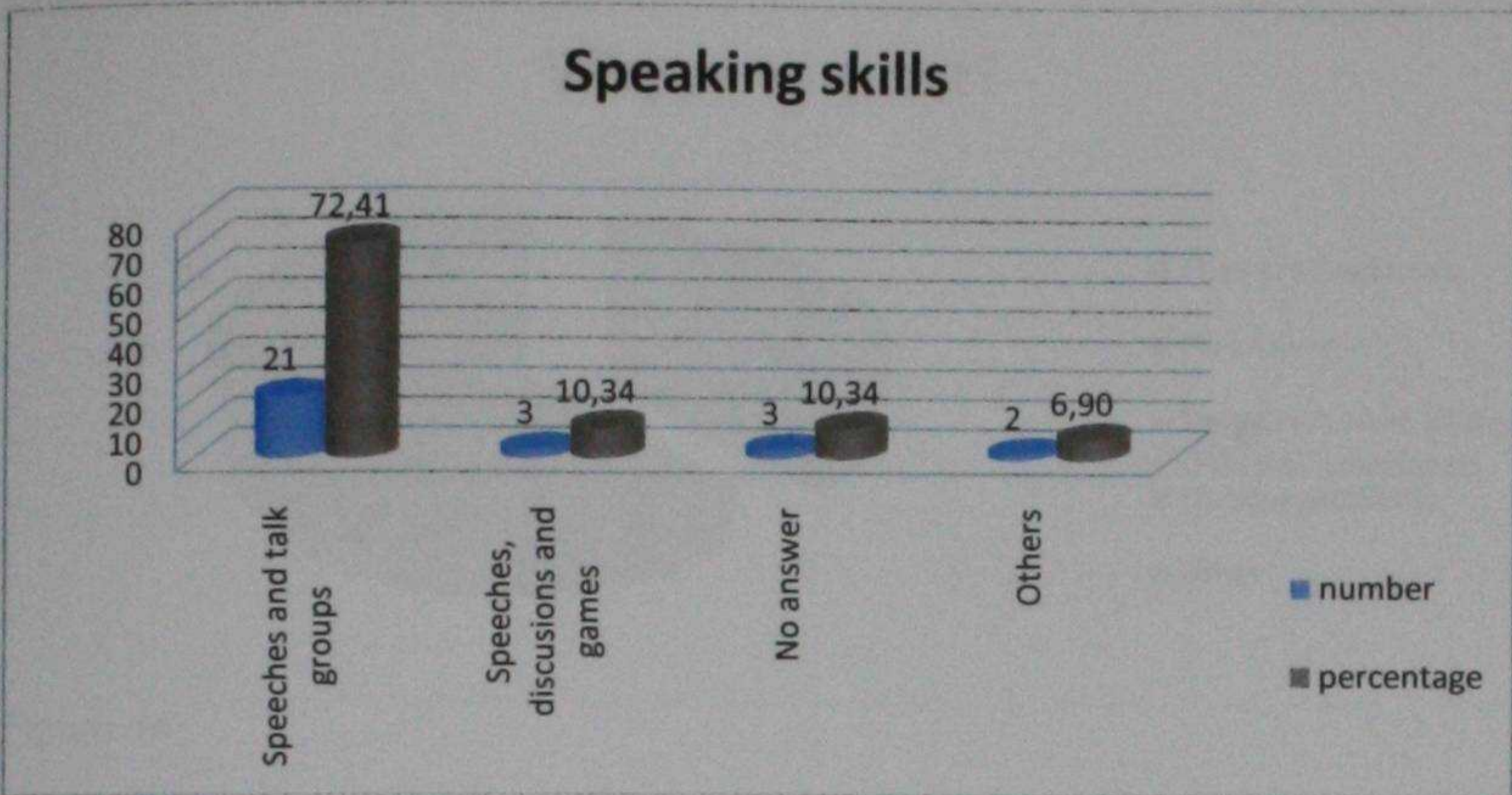


Figure 11

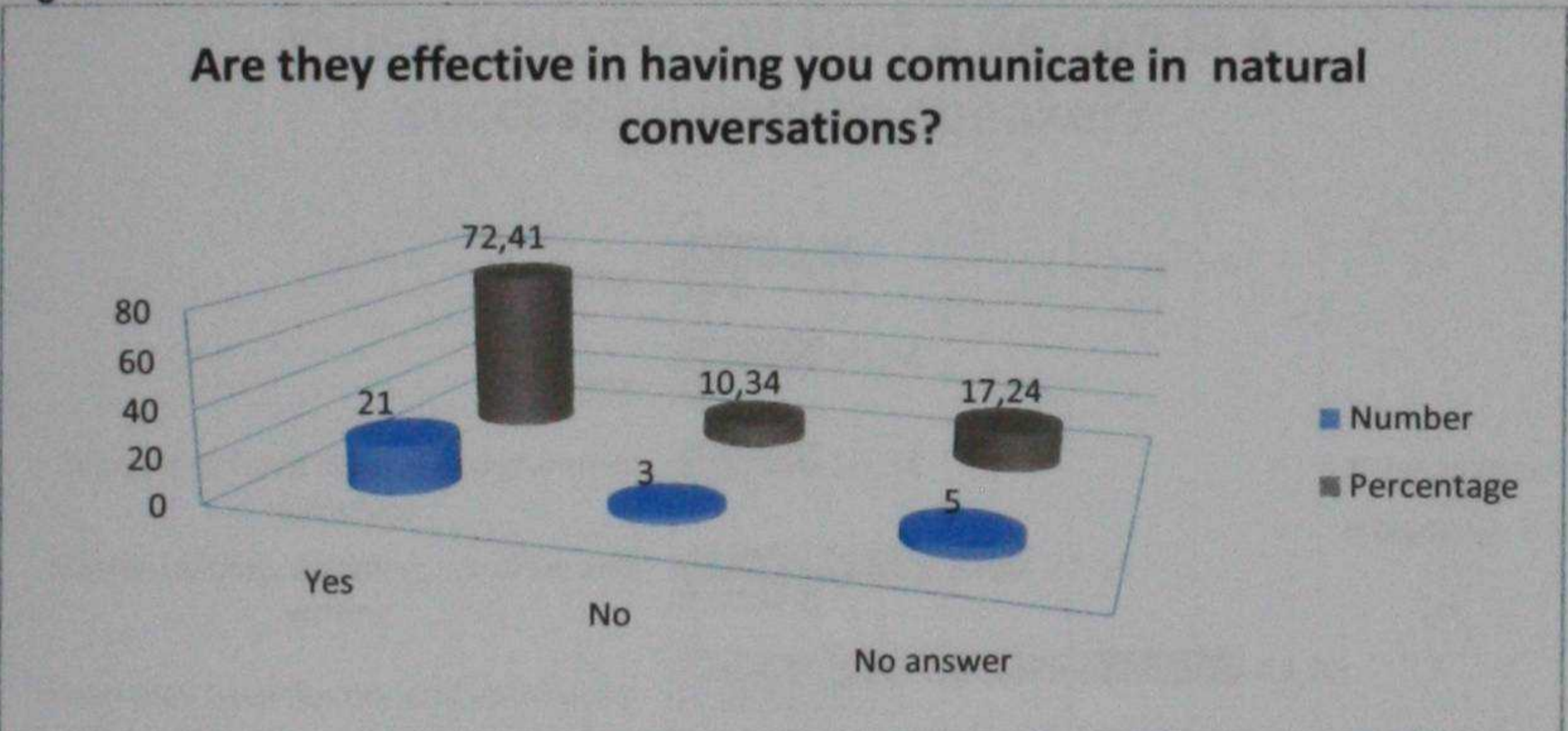


Figure 12

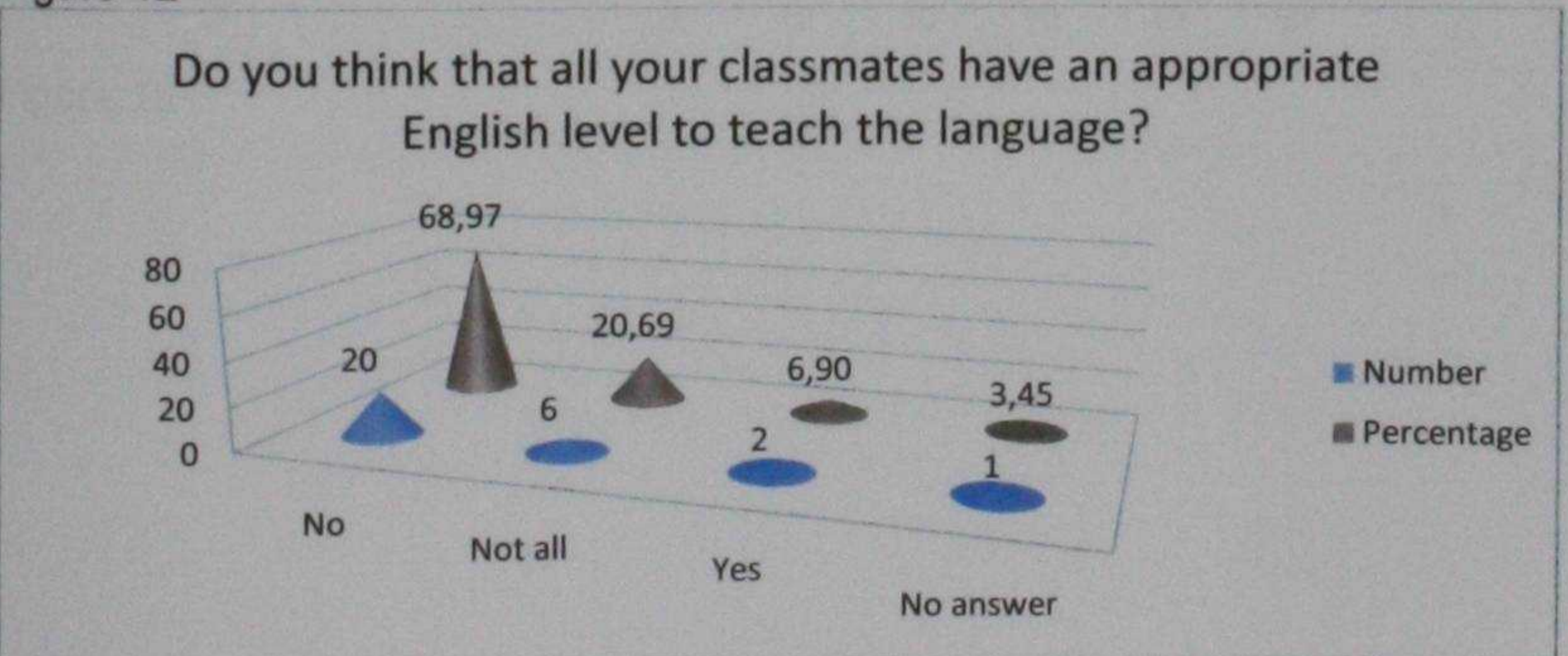


Figure 13

Why or why not?

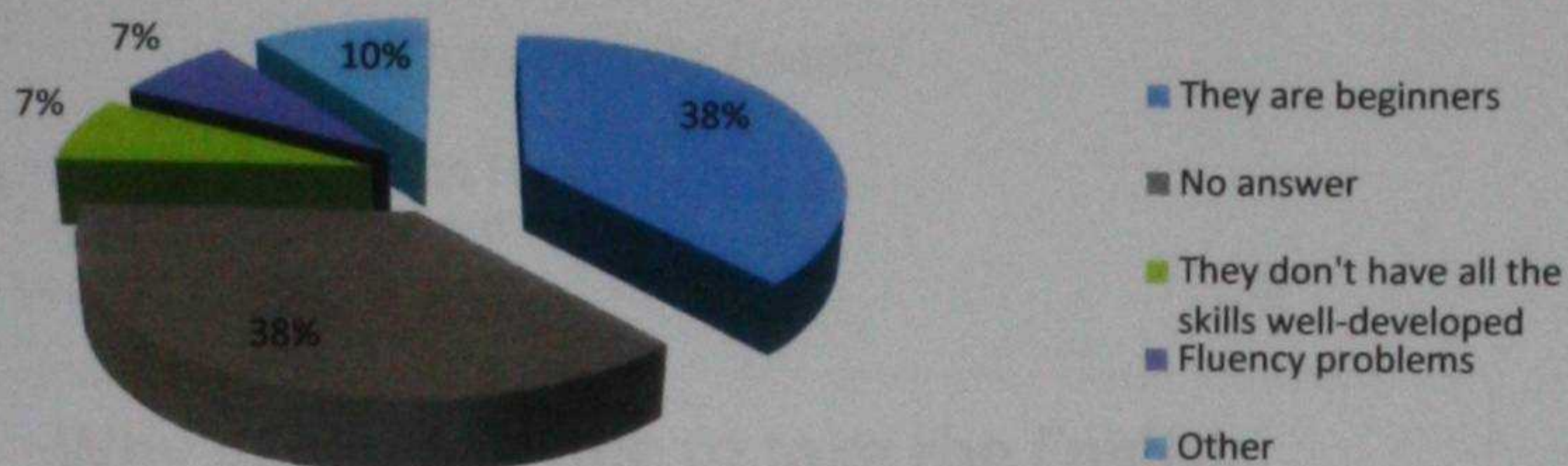


Figure 14

When can you say that a person is a successful English speaker?

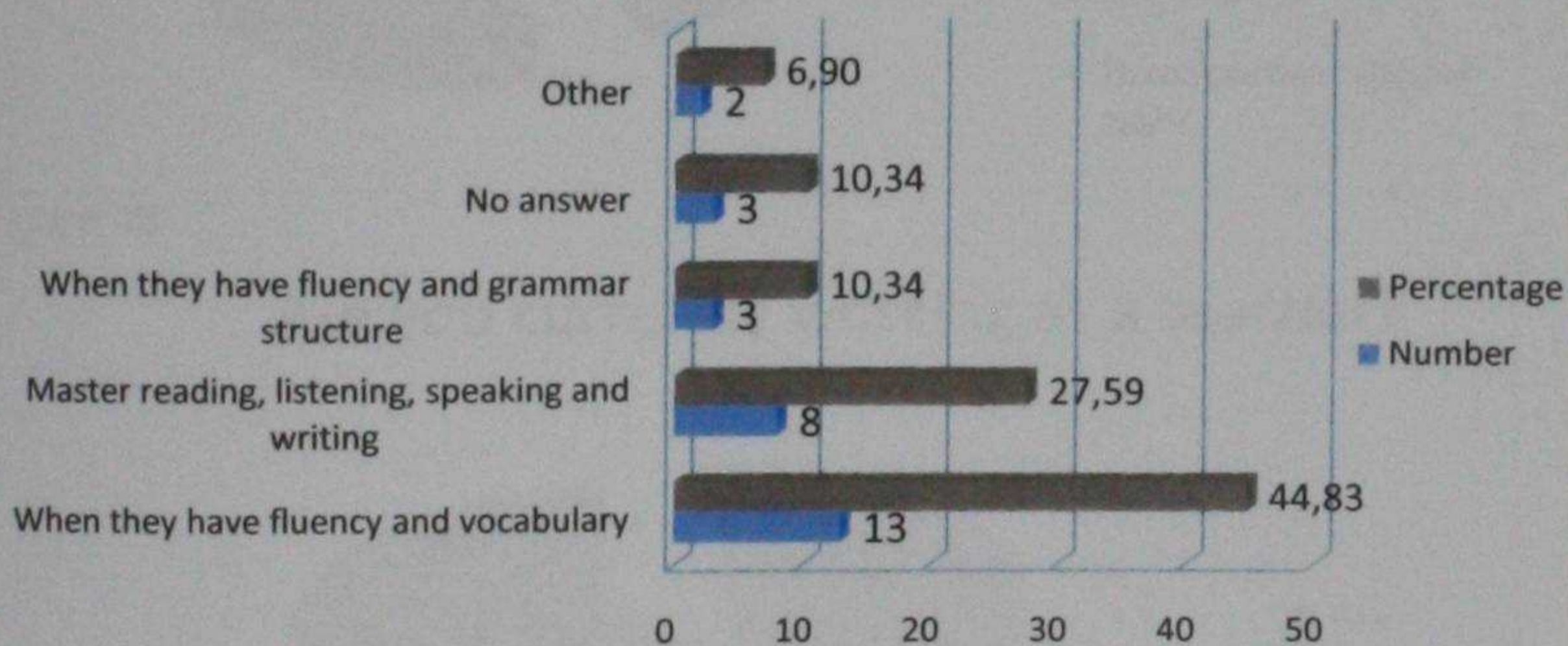


Figure 15

Universidad Nacional
Maestría en Segundas Lenguas y Cultura

Questionnaire Results:

Setting: Universidad de Costa Rica

Course: 'Oral Communication II'

Level: III year students

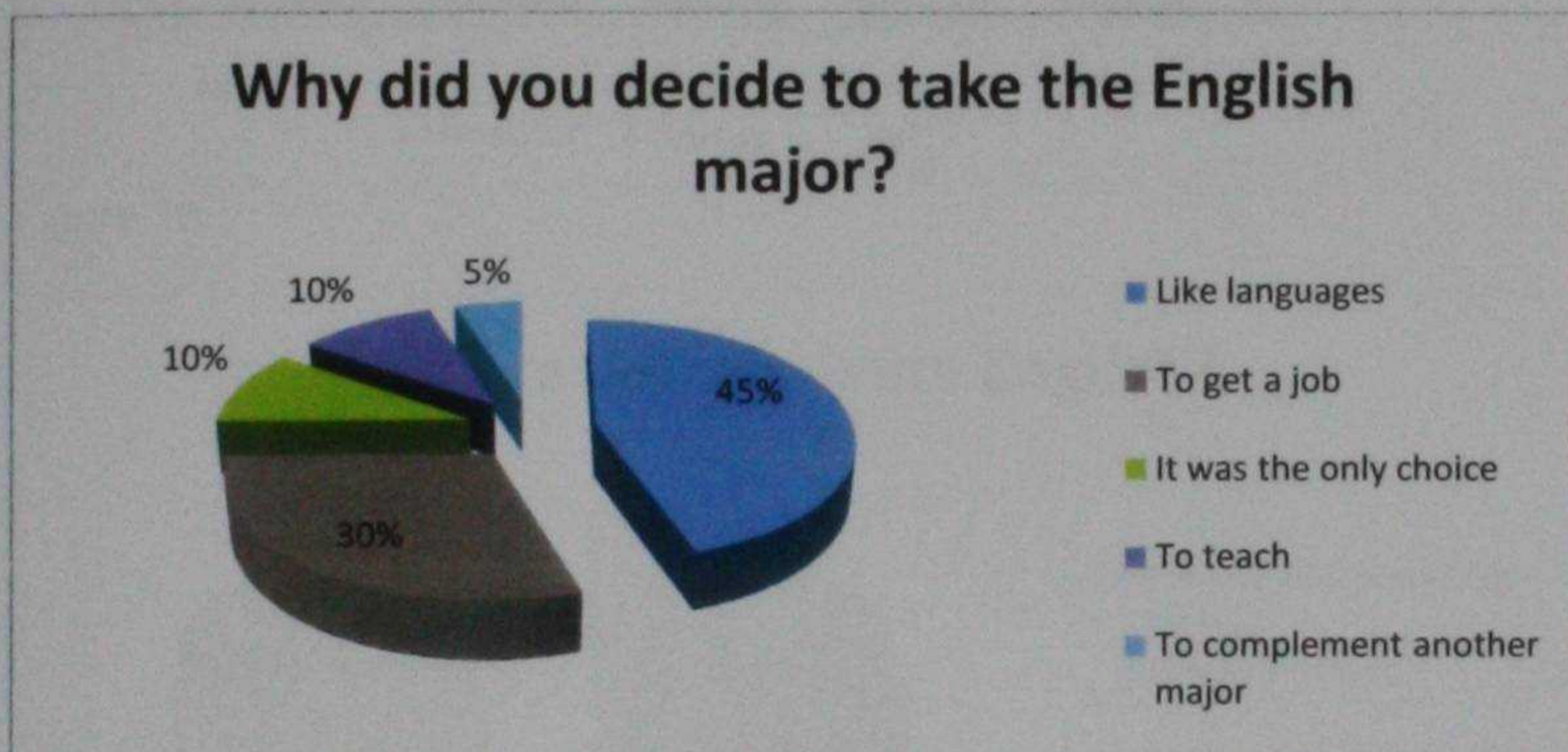


Figure 16

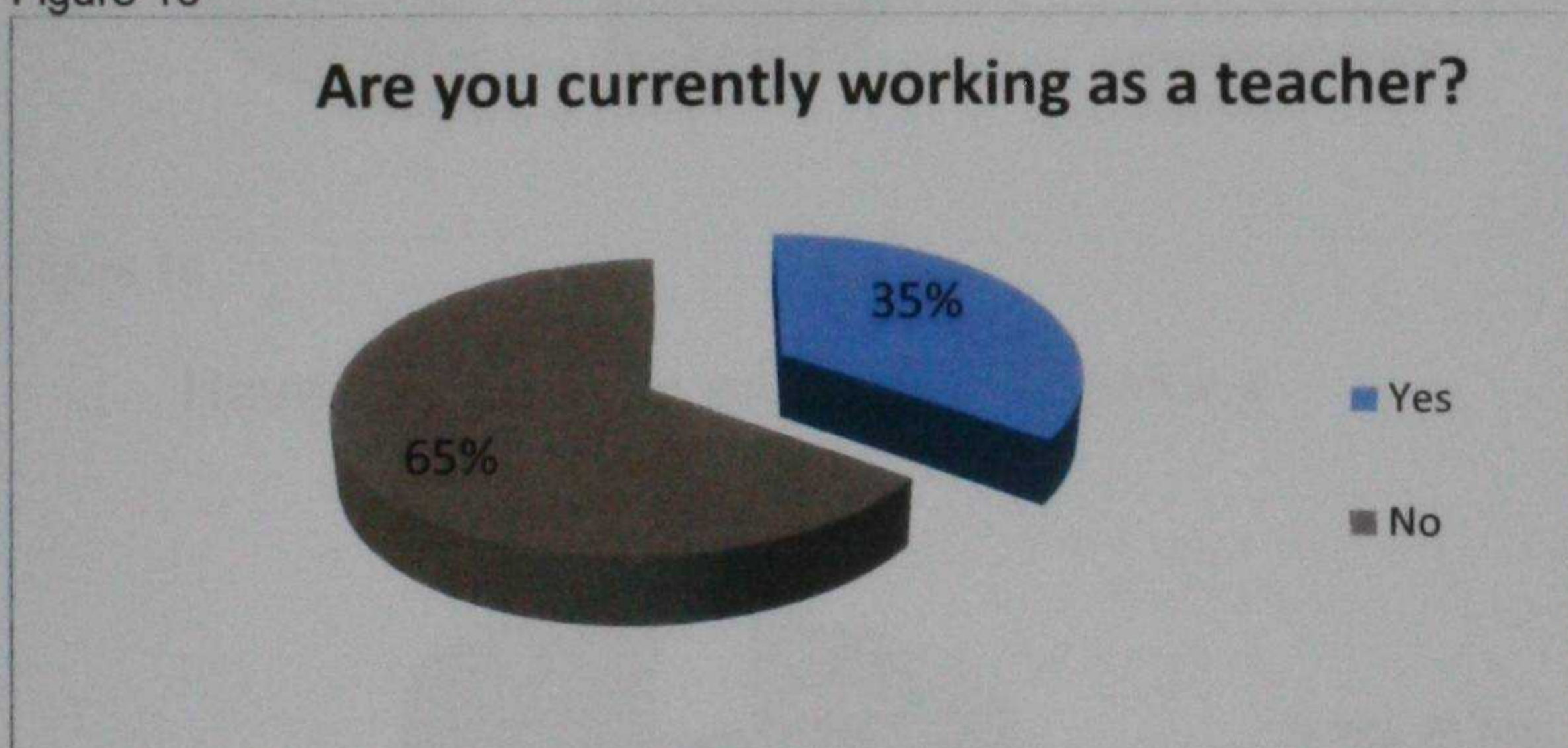


Figure 17

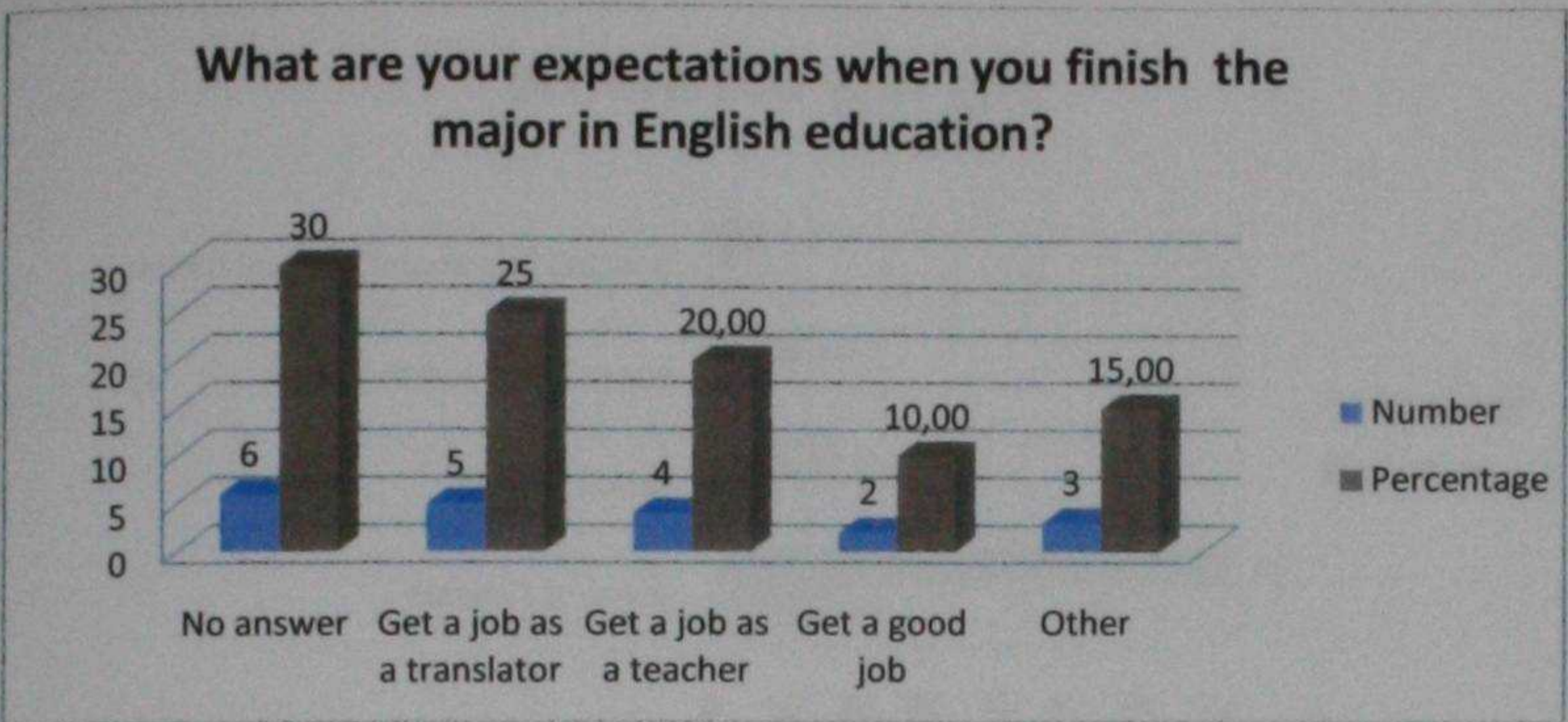


Figure 18

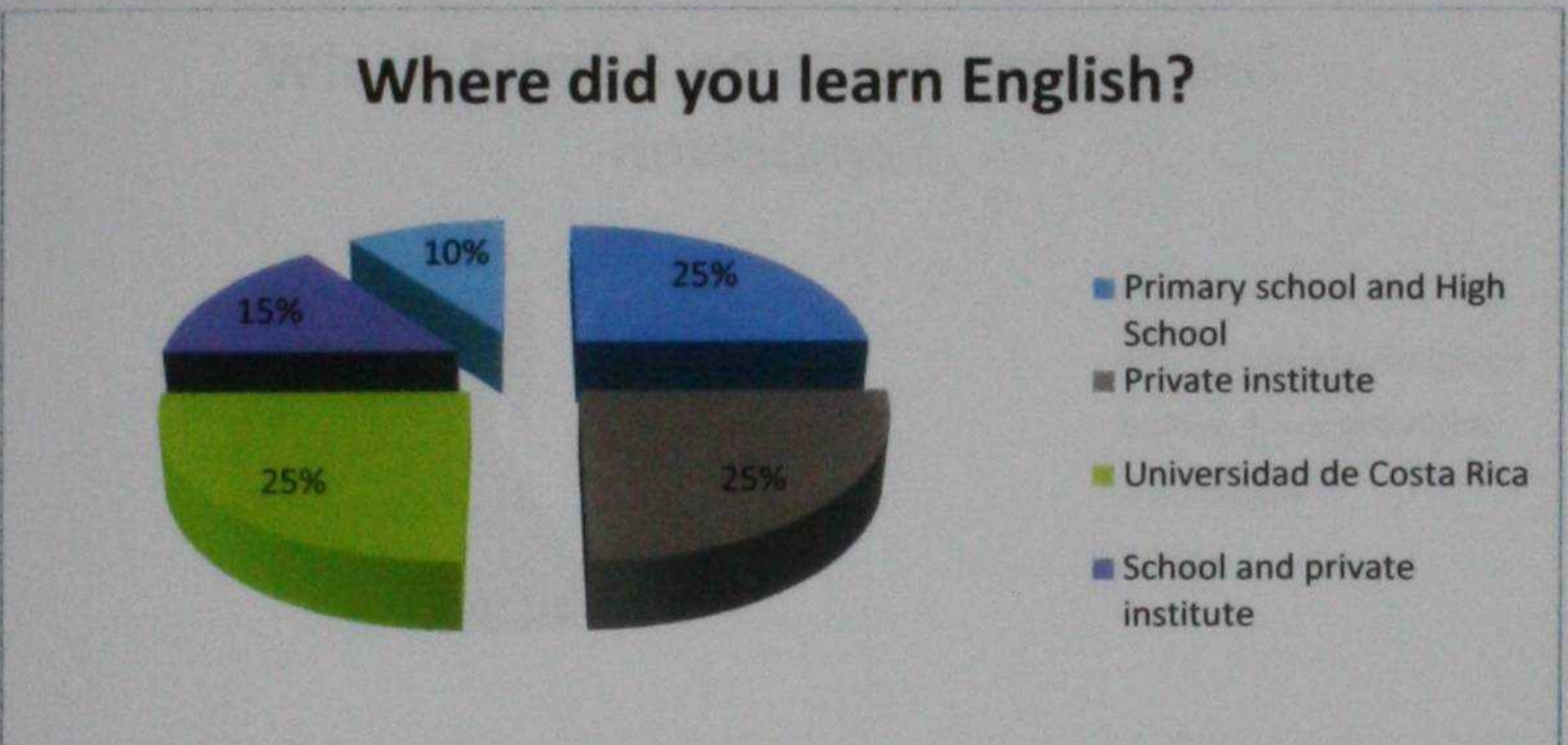


Figure 19

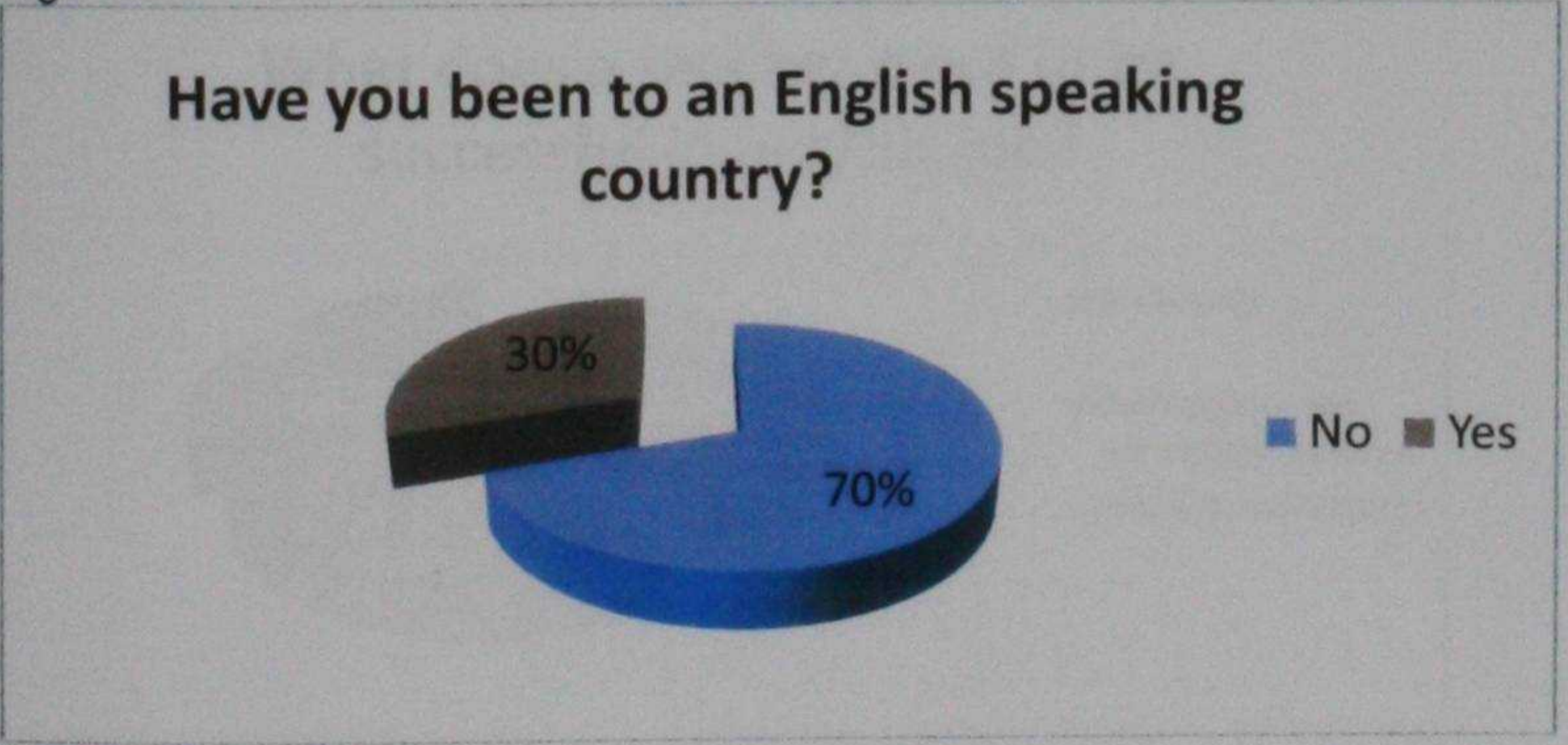


Figure 20

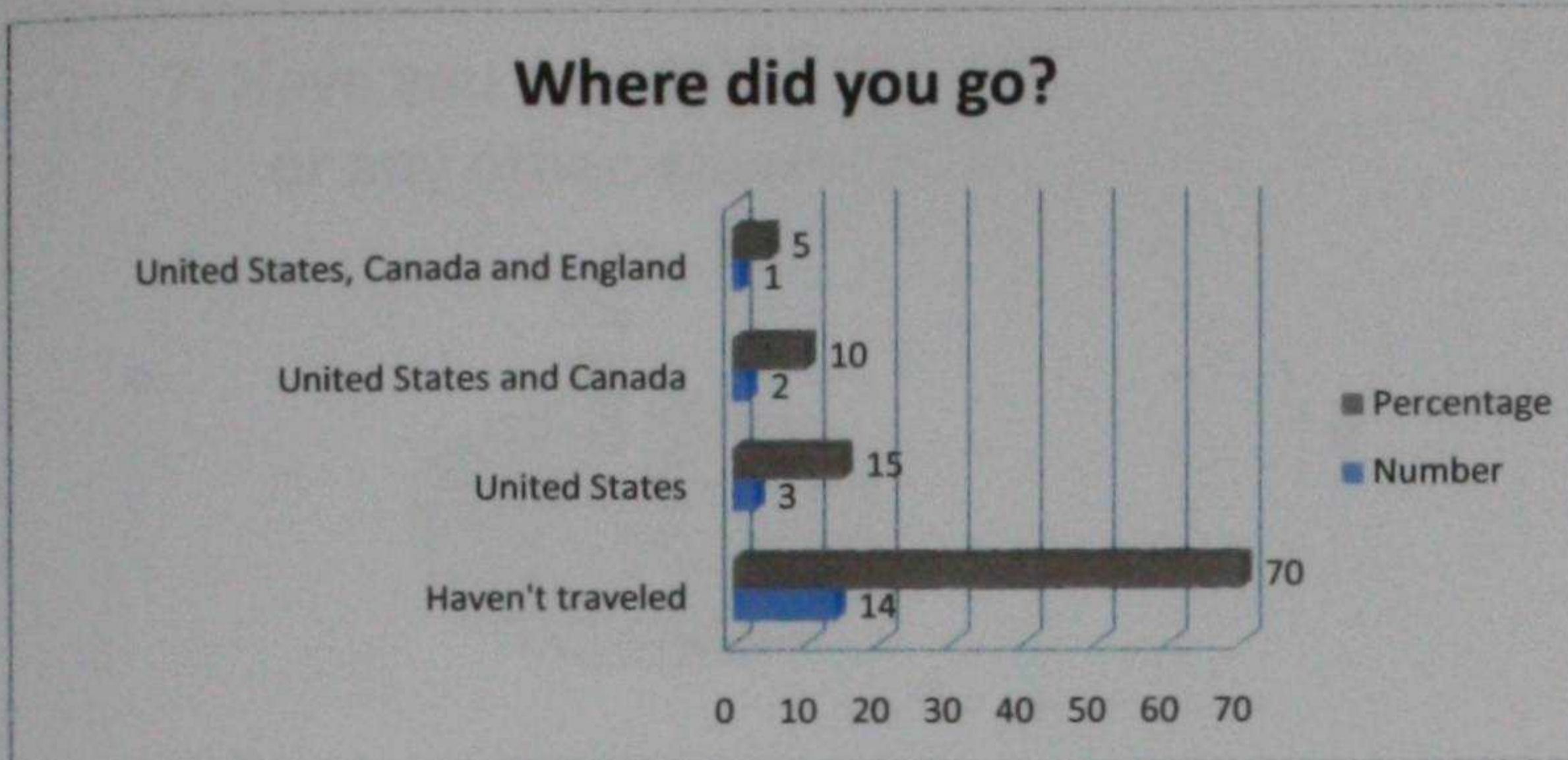


Figure 21

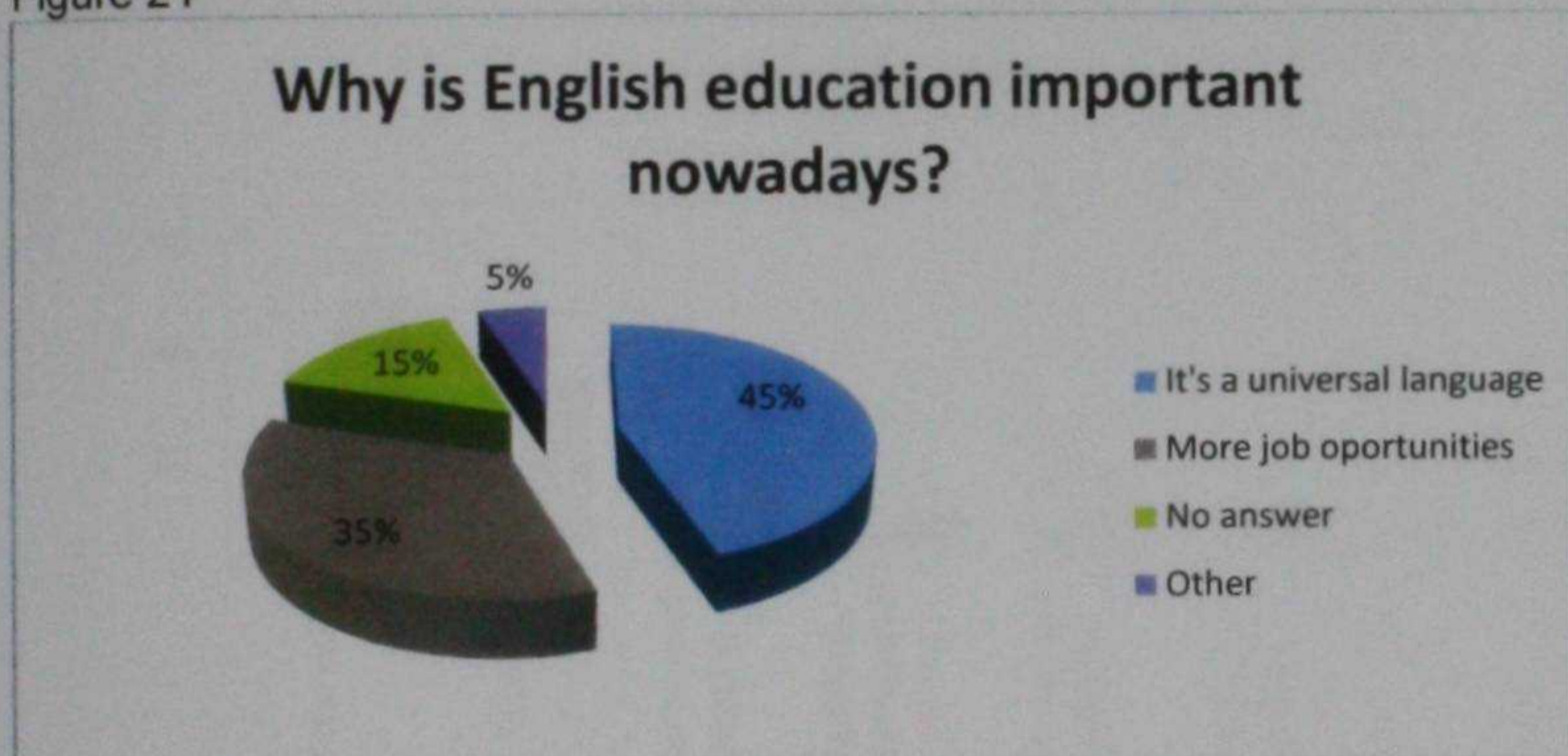


Figure 22

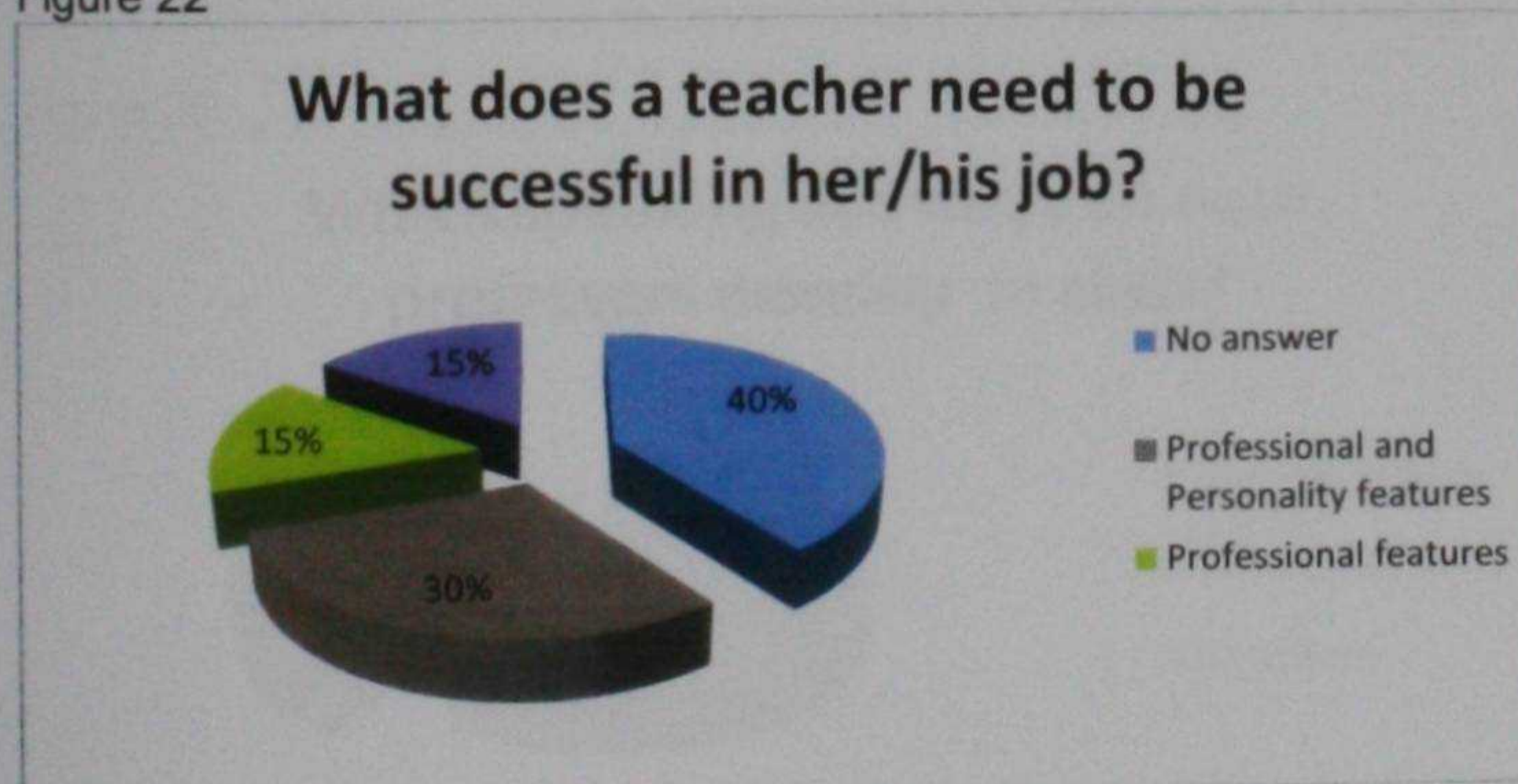


Figure 23

7. Have you ever taken the TOEFL exam or any other standardized test?

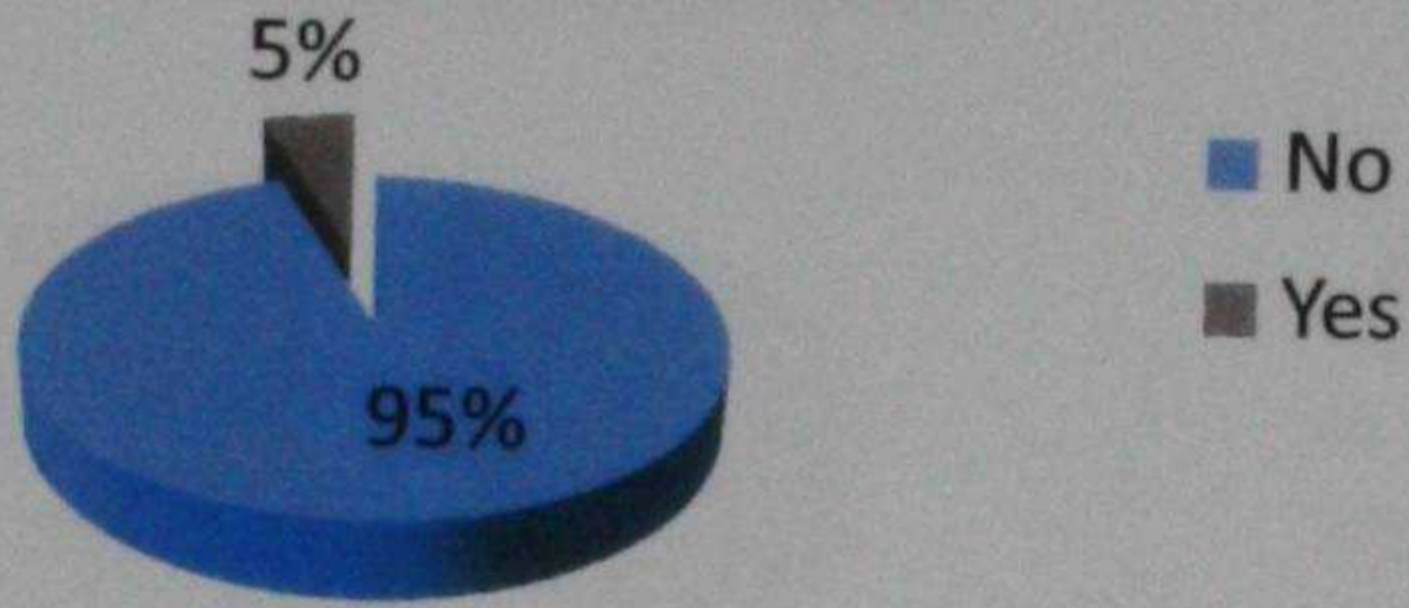


Figure 24

Language Skills

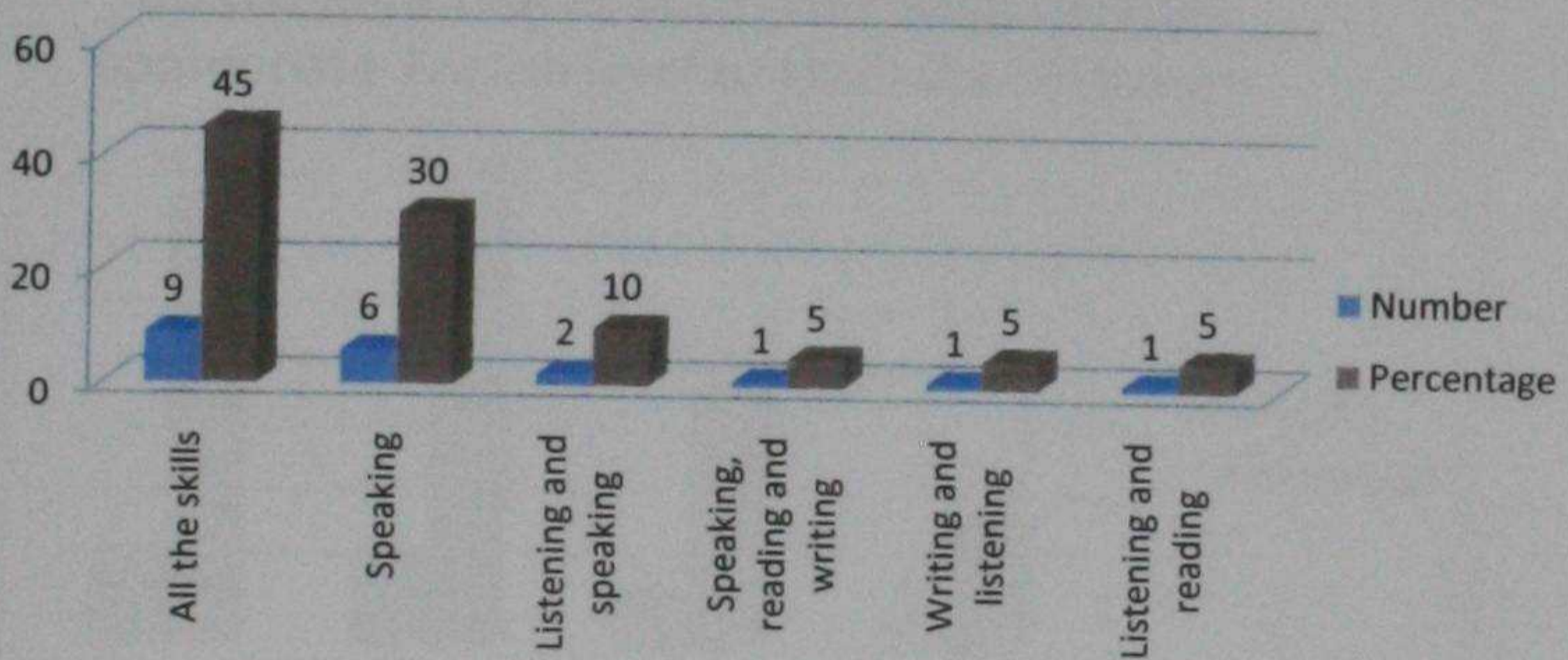


Figure 25

Which speaking activities do your professors develop in class?

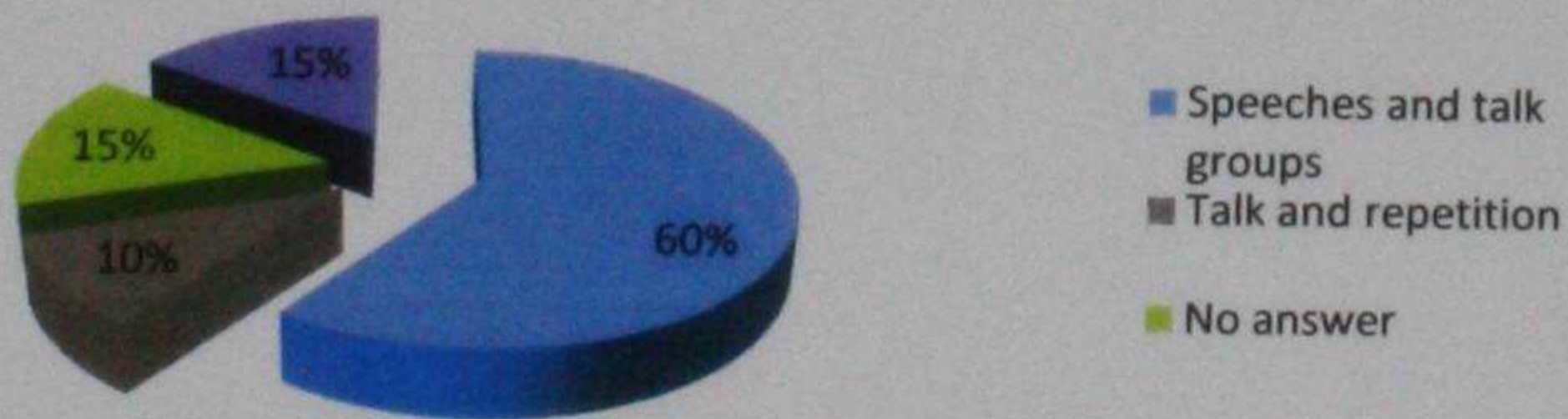


Figure 26

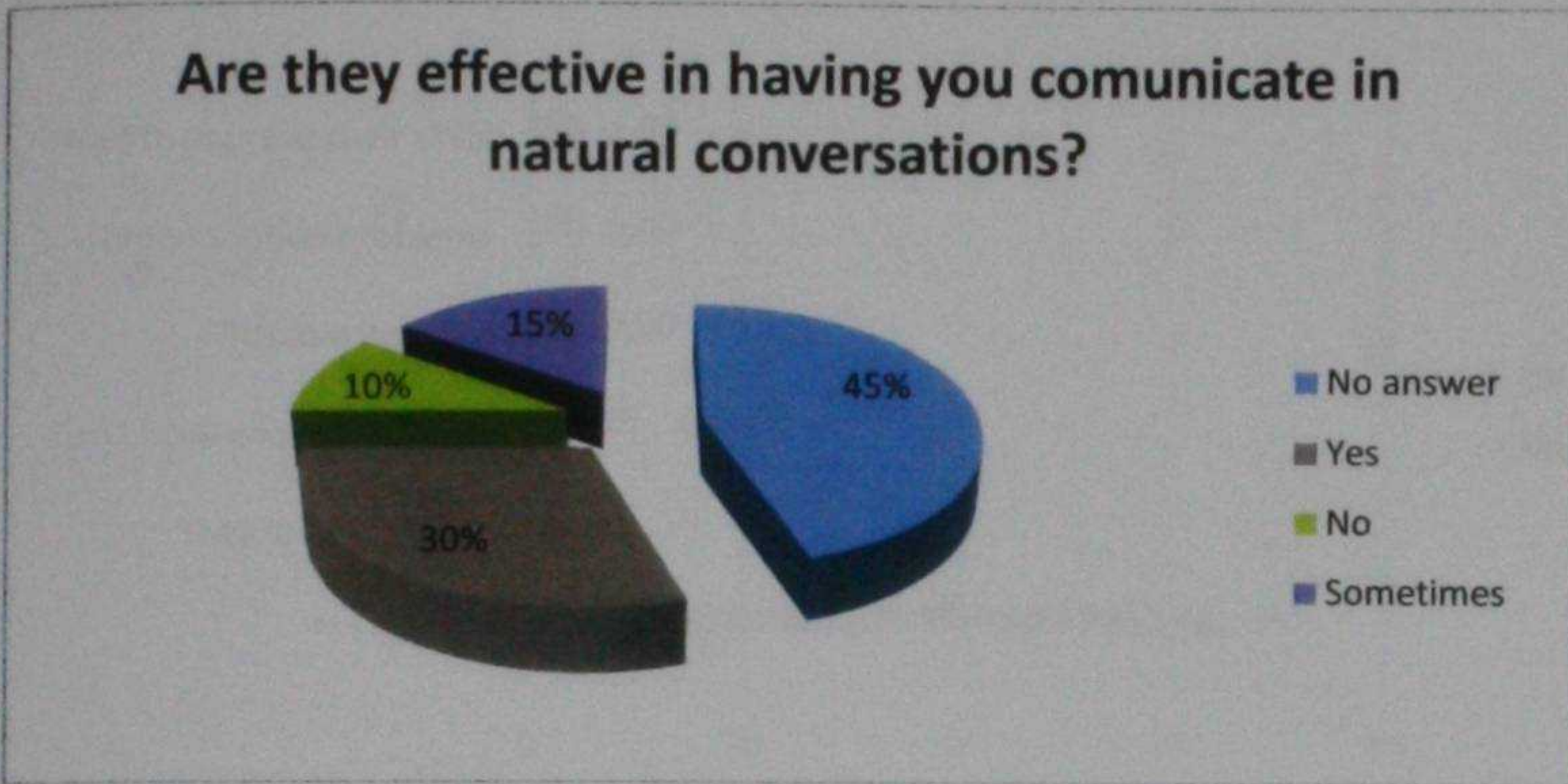


Figure 27

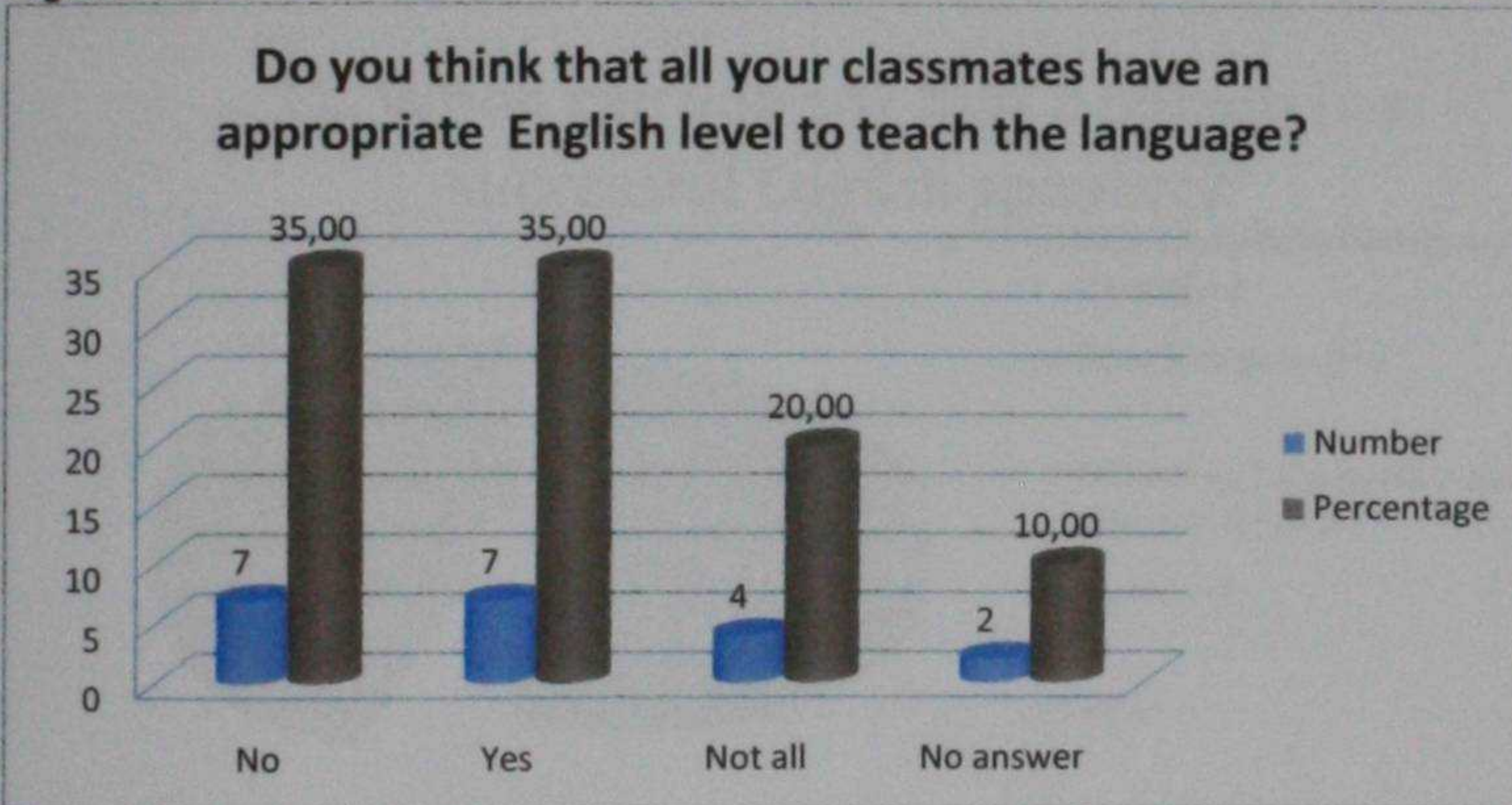


Figure 28

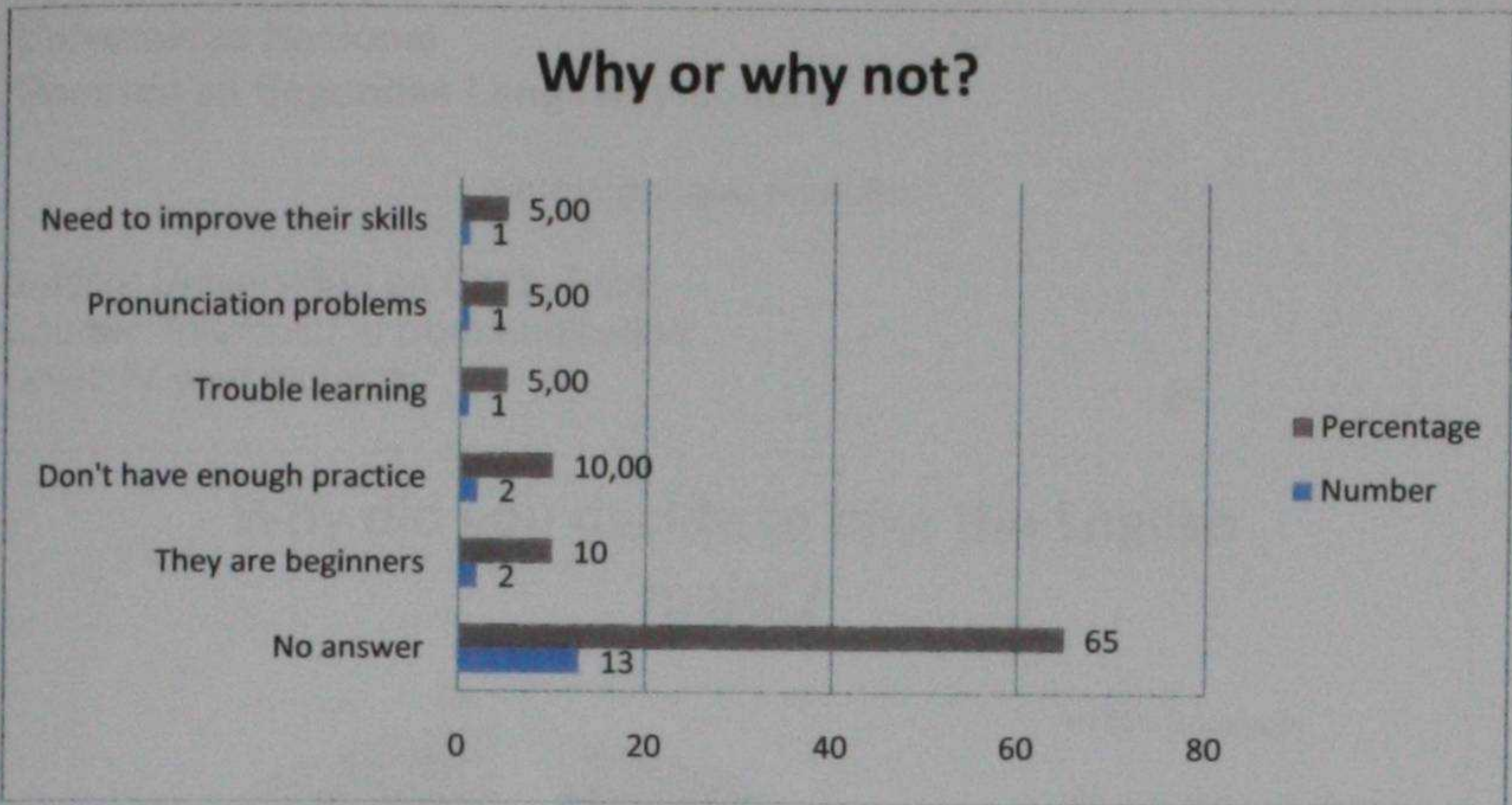


Figure 29

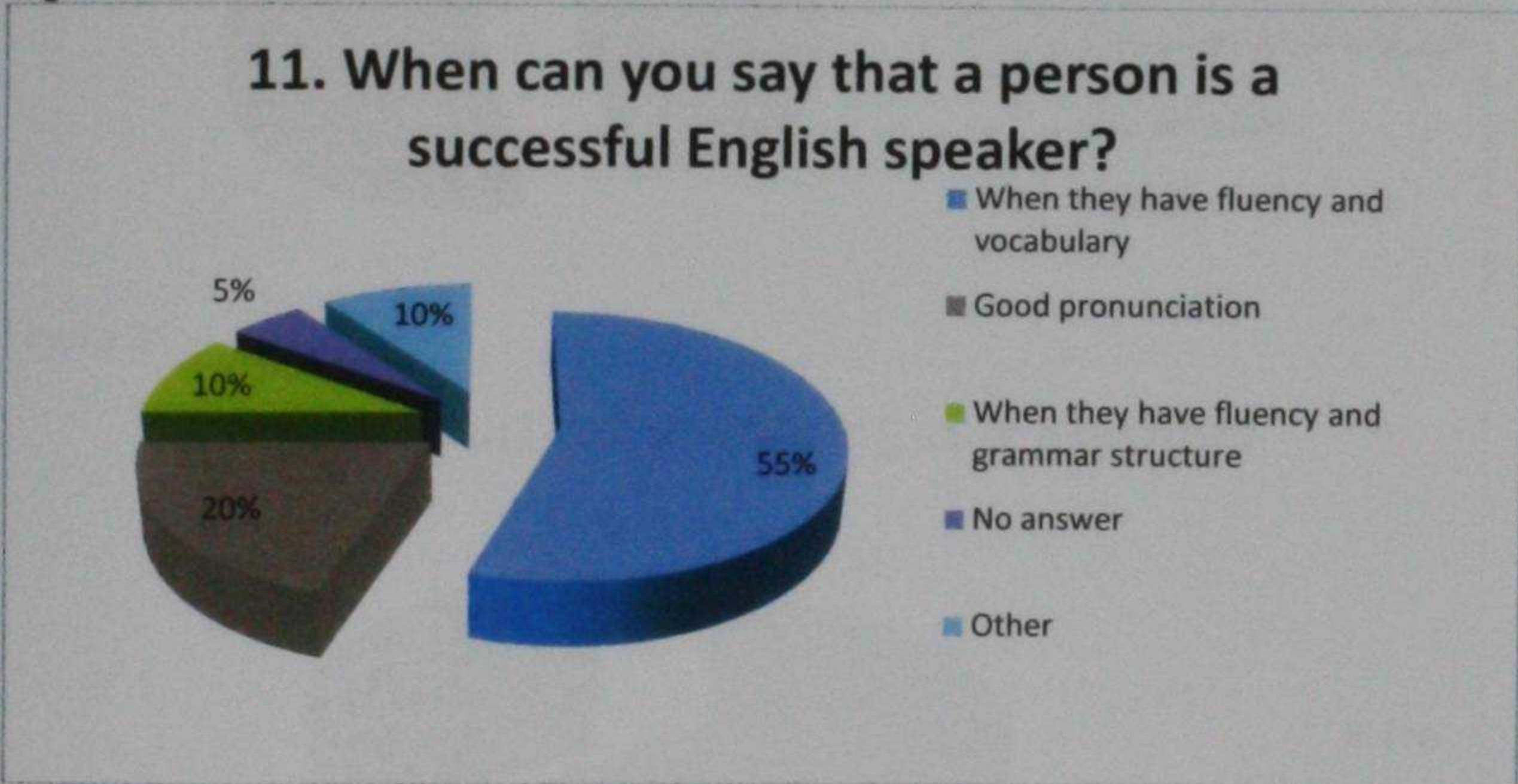


Figure 30

Universidad Nacional
Maestría en Segundas Lenguas y Cultura

Questionnaire Results:

Setting: Universidad de Costa Rica
 Course: 'Intercultural Communication'
 Level: IV year students

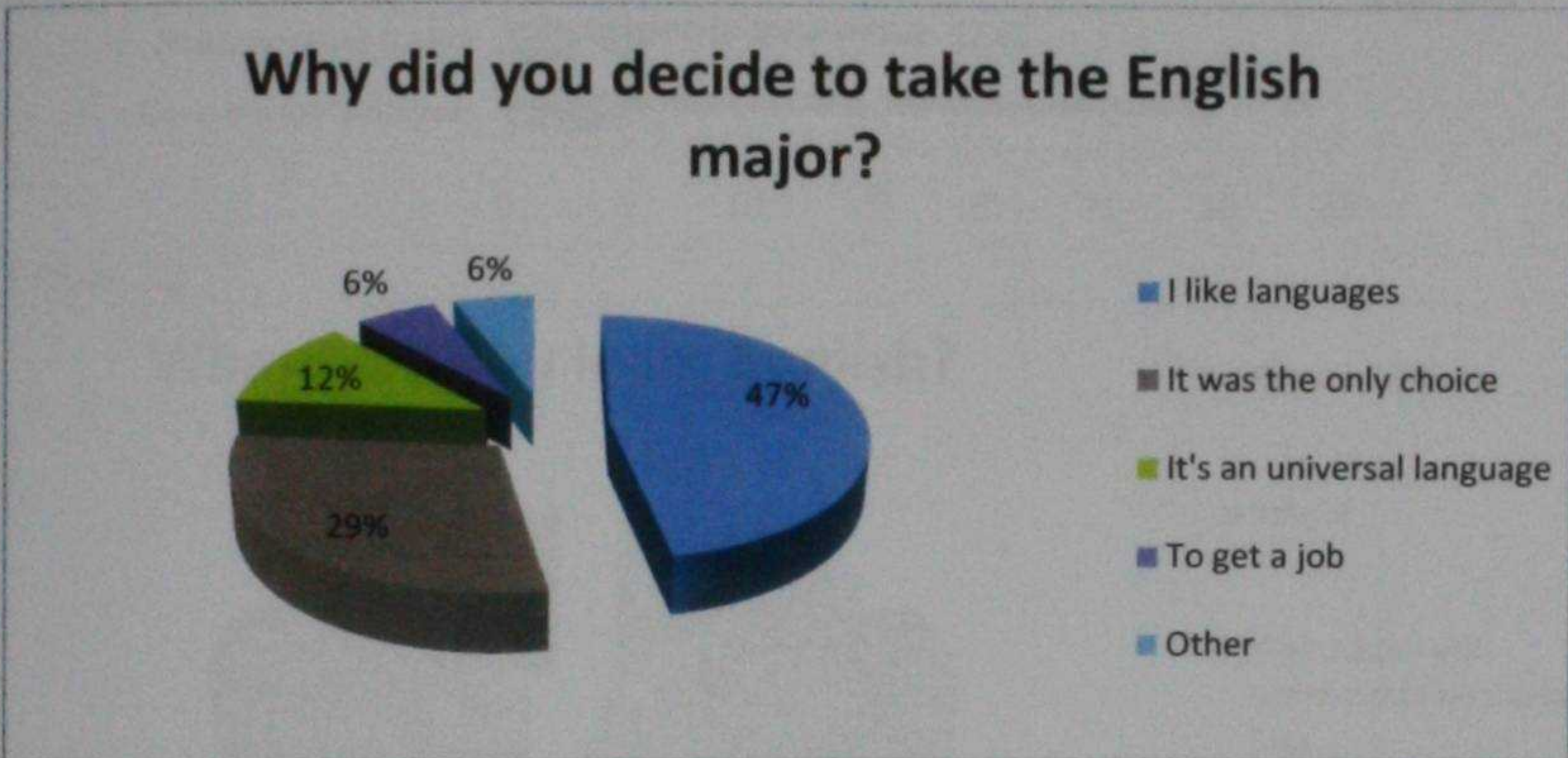


Figure 31

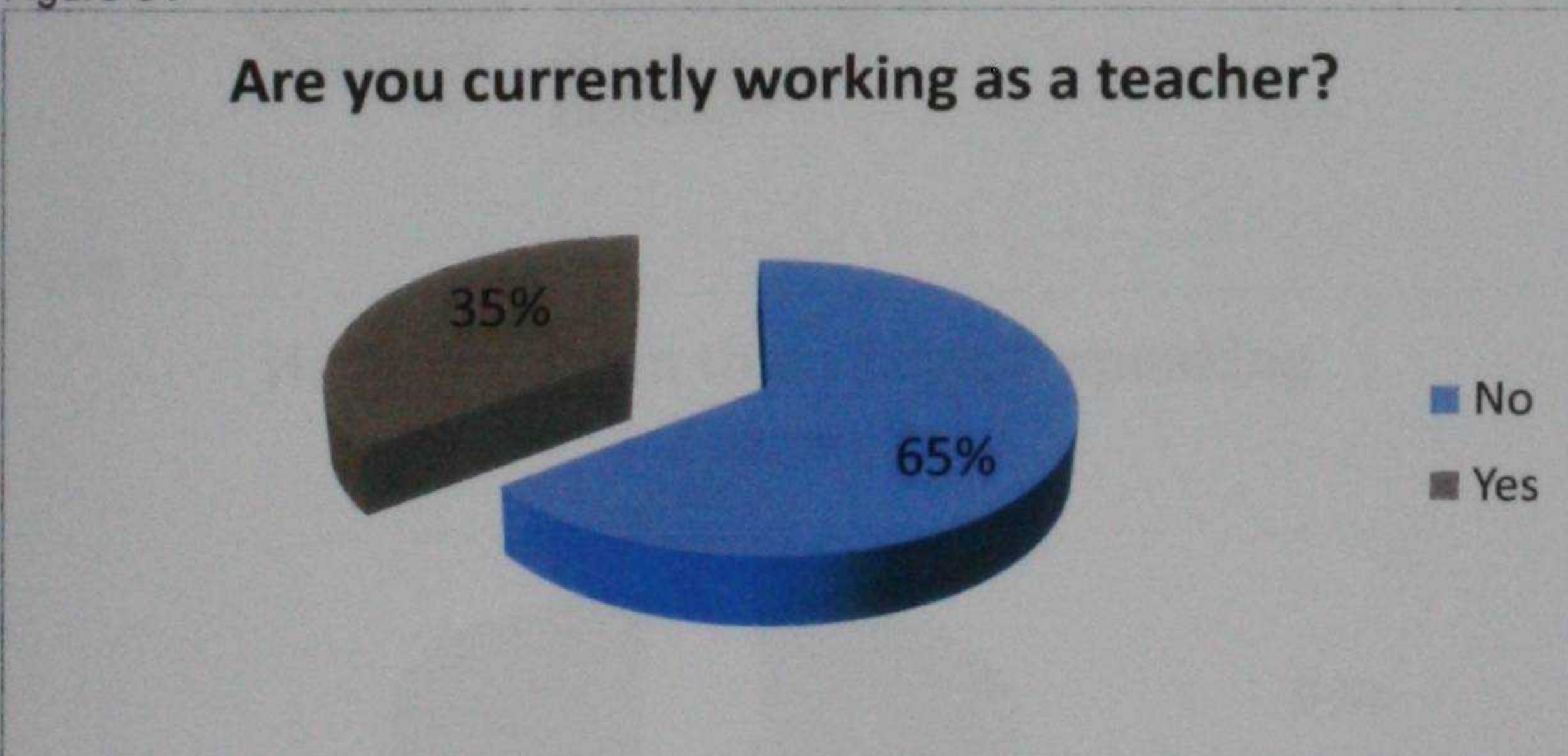


Figure 32

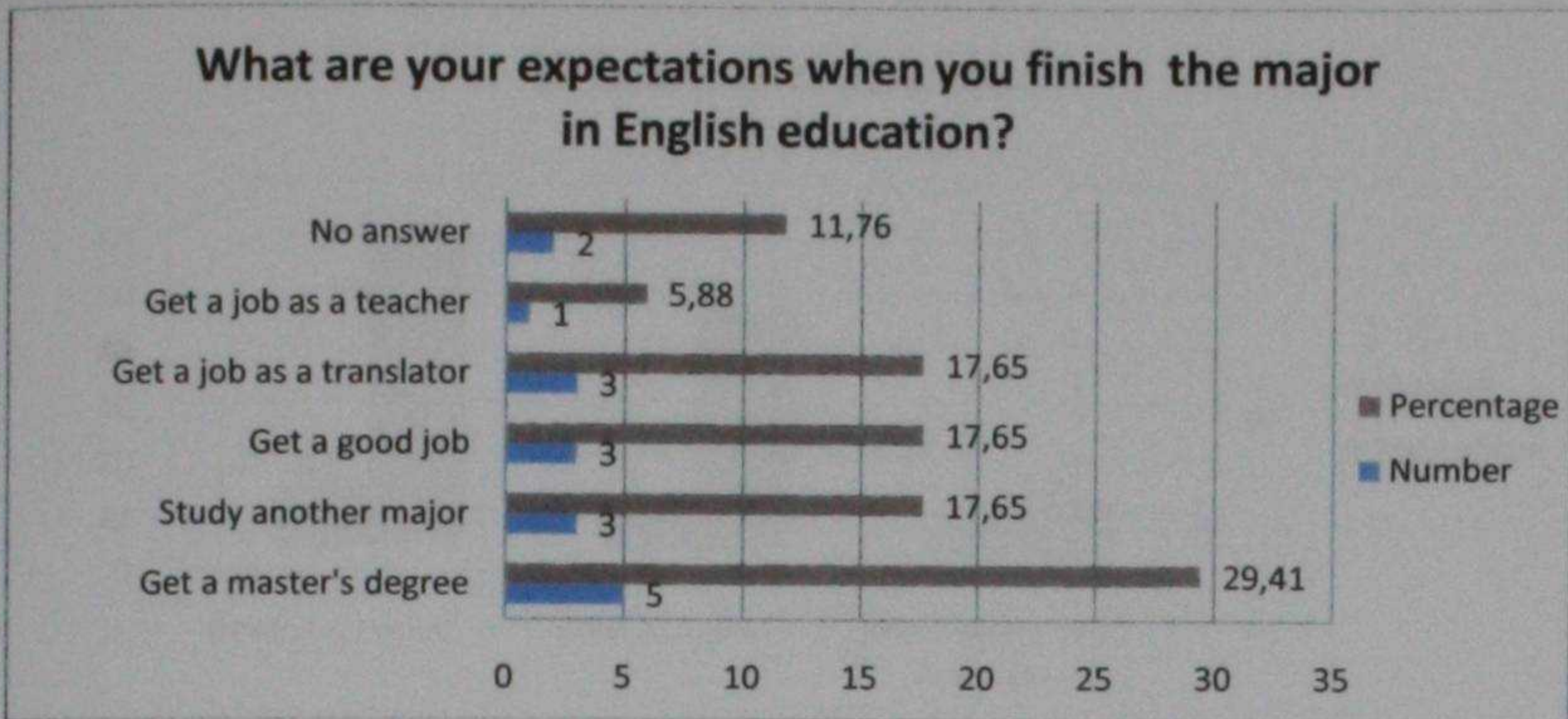


Figure 33

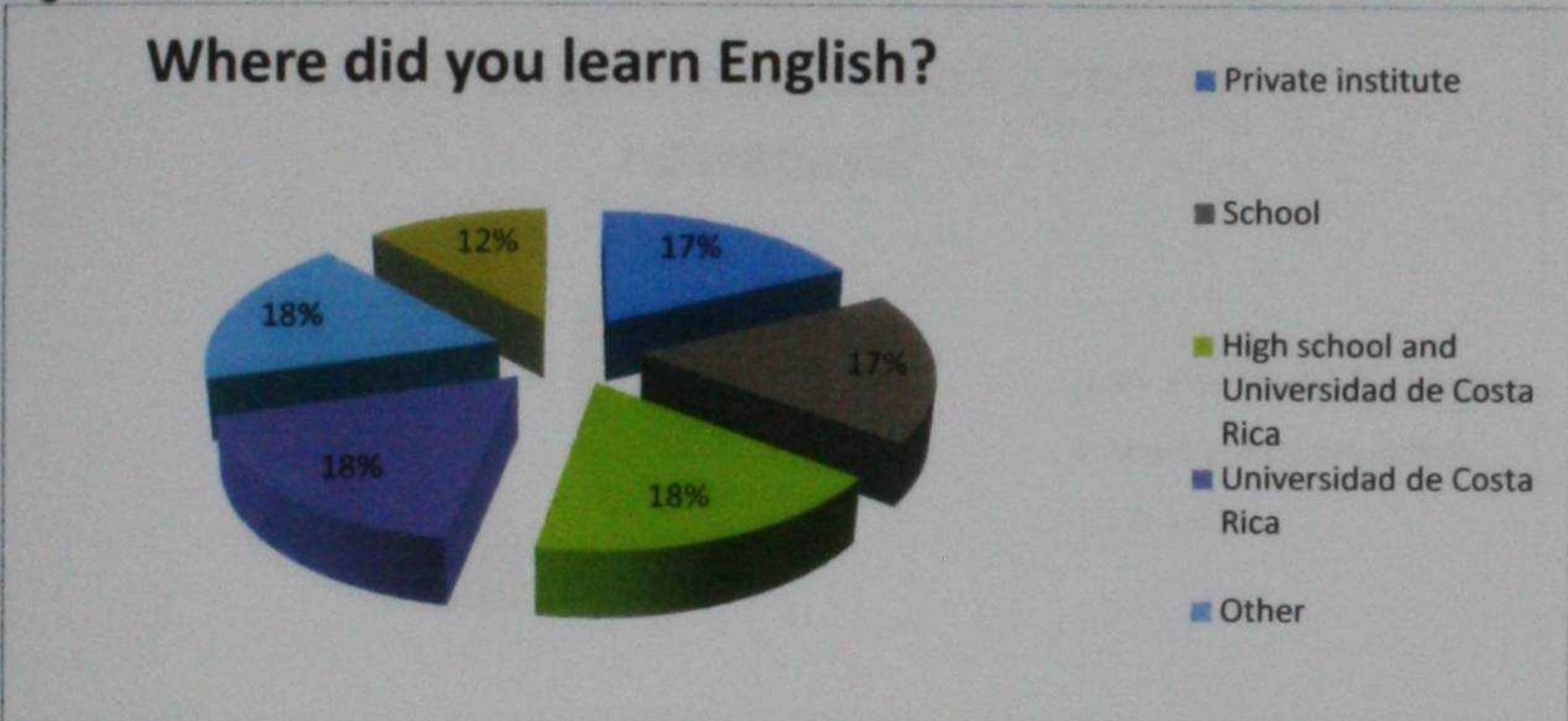


Figure 34.



Figure 35.



Figure 36

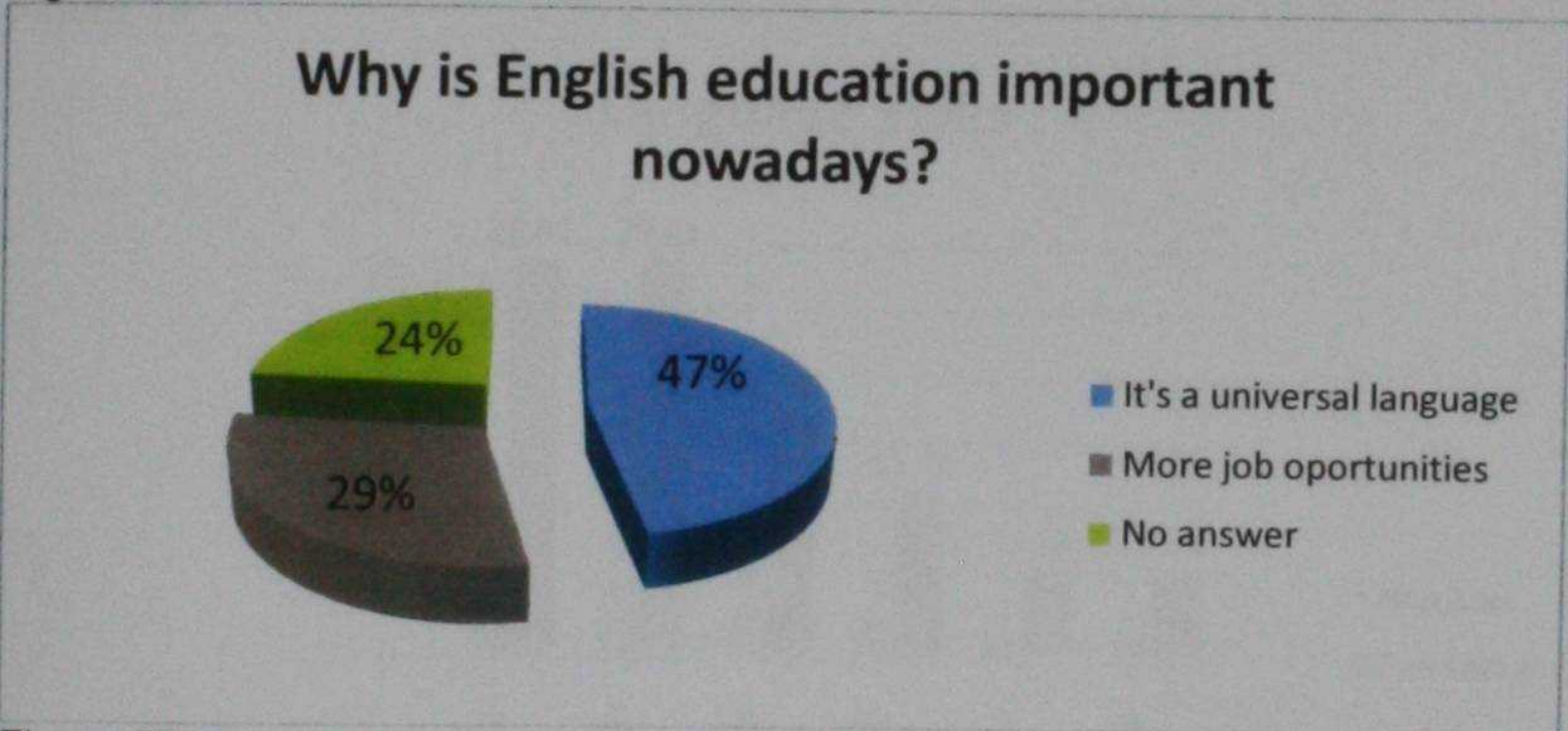


Figure 37

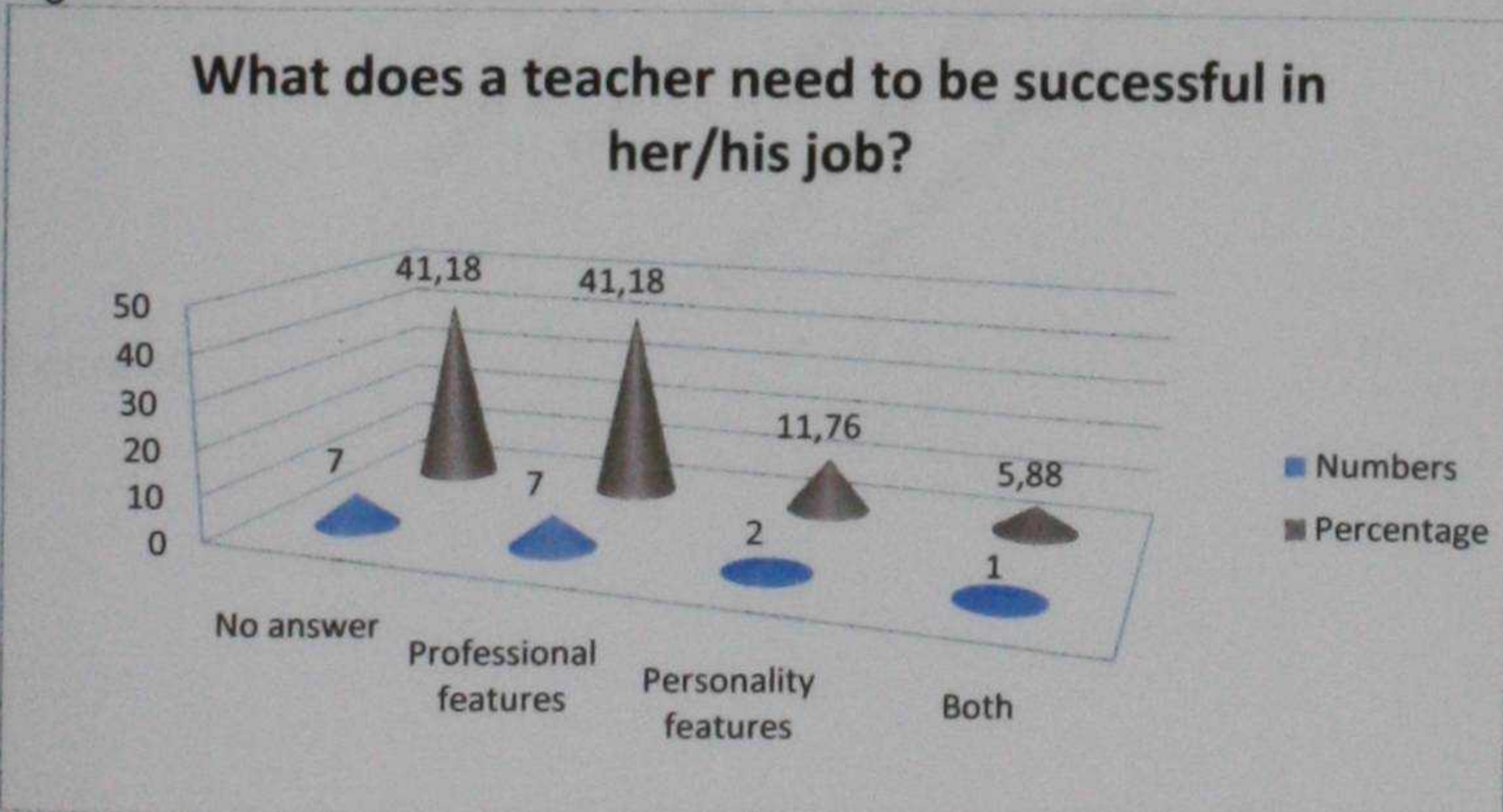


Figure 38

Have you ever taken the TOEFL exam or any other standardized test?



Figure 39

Language Skills

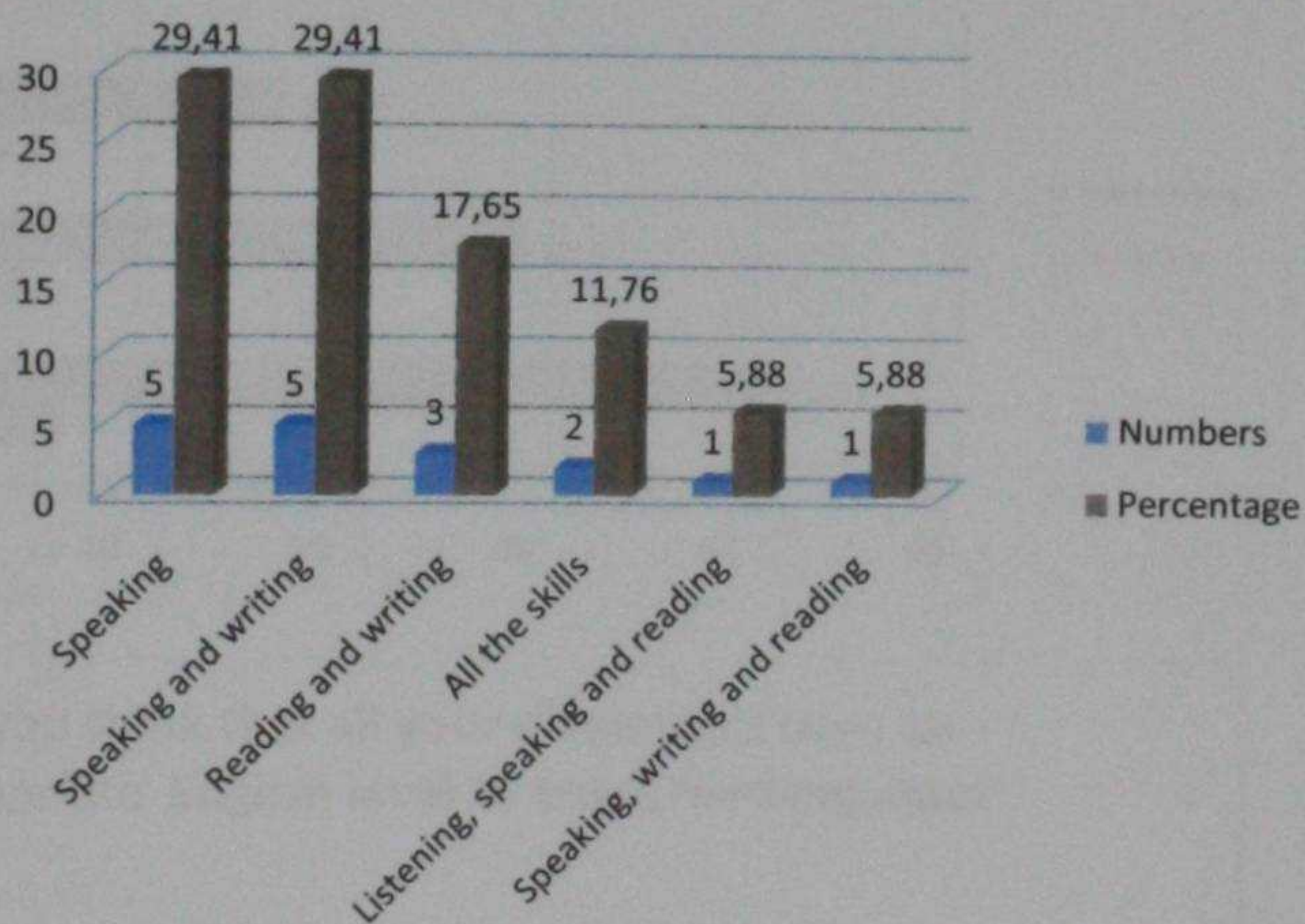


Figure 40



Figure 41

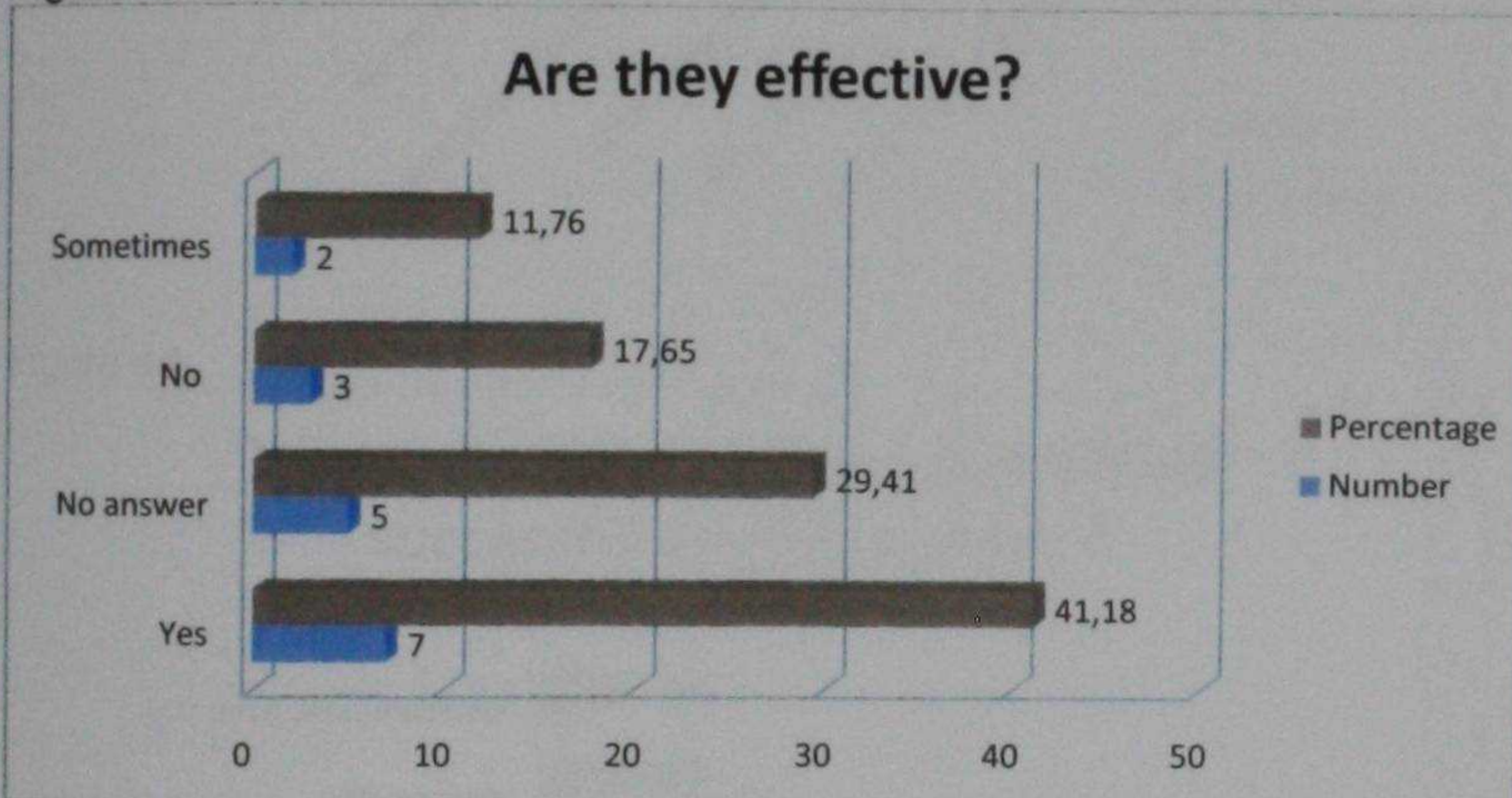


Figure 42

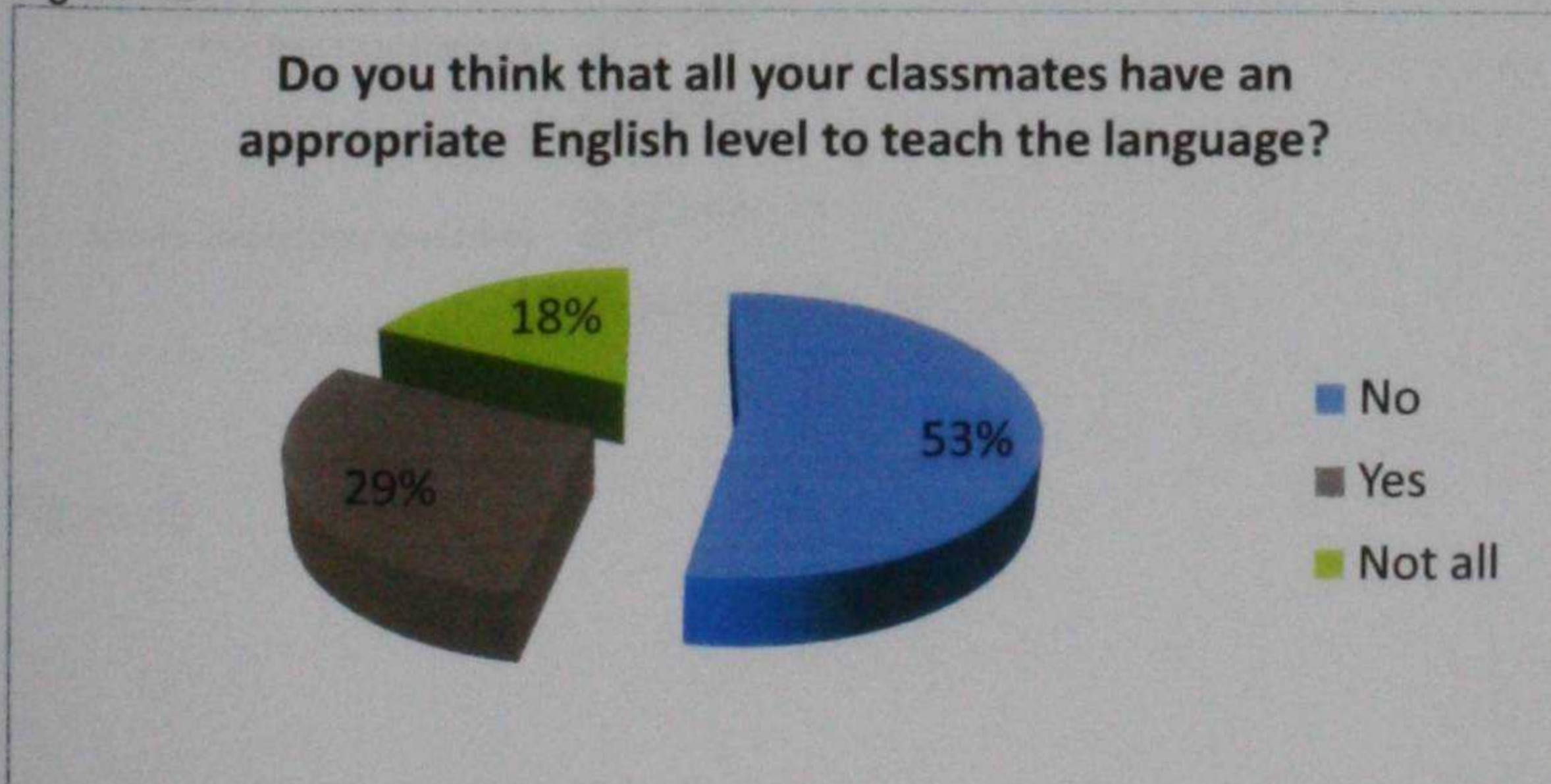


Figure 43

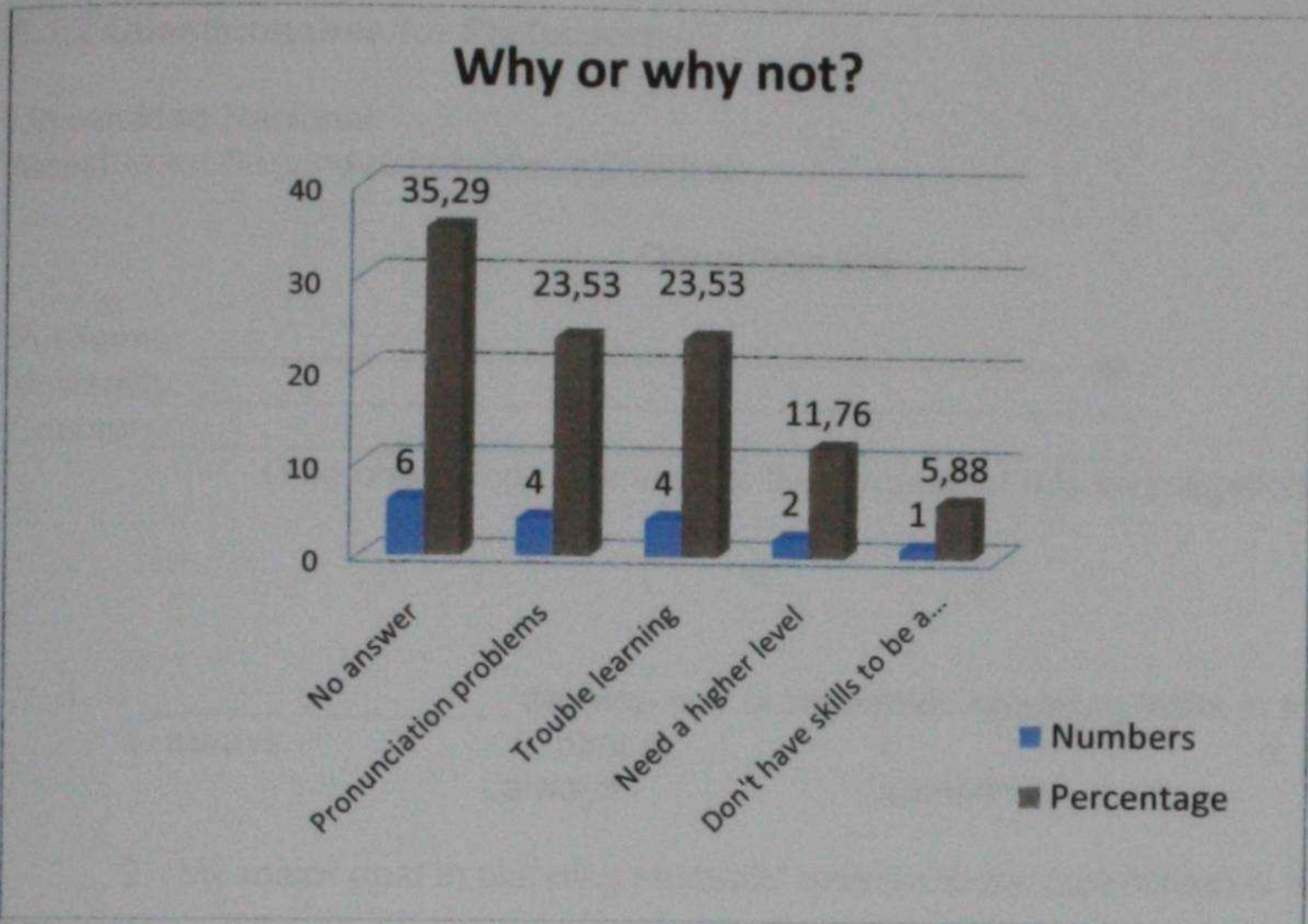


Figure 44

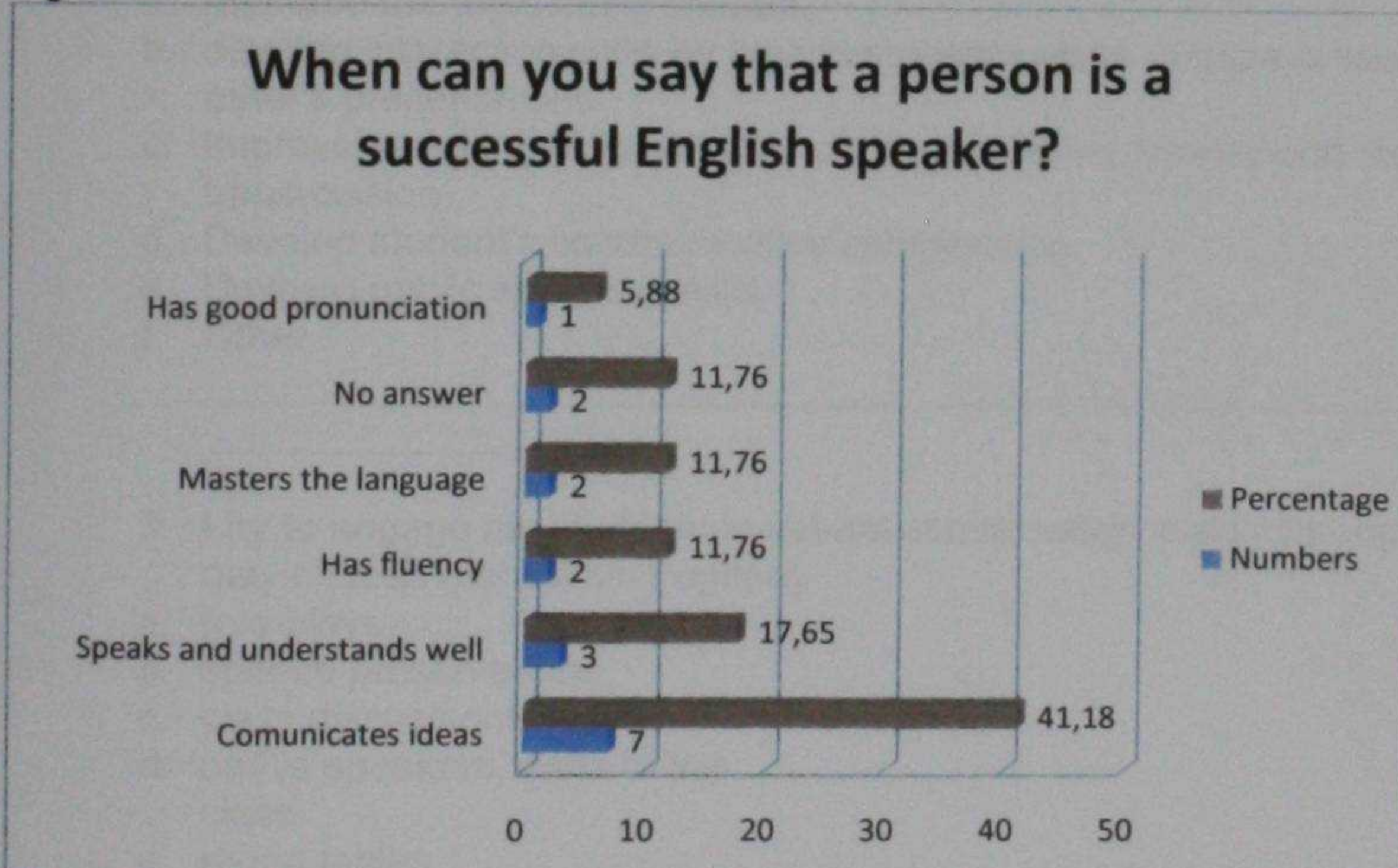


Figure 45

6.1.2 Questionnaires for Professors

Universidad Nacional
Maestría en Segundas Lenguas y Culturas

Questionnaire

Full name: _____

University: _____

Course: _____

(The one being observed for the purpose of this investigation)

1. I _____ develop and unrehearsed speaking tasks in my class.

a. always.	b. almost always	c. _____ sometimes	d. rarely.
------------	---------------------	-----------------------	------------

2. My major goal in planning students' presentations (speeches) is to _____
 - a. reinforce the topic being studied.
 - b. develop interaction skills by having students react, critique or react to other's presentations.
 - c. Improve speaking skills in terms of pronunciation, fluency and message transmission.
 - d. Develop student's communicative competence.
 - e. Develop public speaking skills
 - f. Other

3. I try to engage my students in natural conversation mainly through (you may choose more than 1 option)
 - a. role-plays
 - b. speech presentations
 - c. class discussions
 - d. native speakers' visits to the class.
 - e. round tables
 - f. debates
 - g. oral analysis of readings
 - h. rehearsed dialogues

4. In my classes, sources of input are _____ (You may choose more than one option)
- student – student interaction
 - teacher-student interaction
 - foreign students with different accents
 - videos
 - lectures
 - interaction with native speakers.
 - academic books
 - authentic materials
 - recordings
 - music
 - others _____

5. Based on the class objectives, how much time do you spend developing the following skills in your students

_____ % reading
 _____ % writing
 _____ % speaking
 _____ % listening

6. Arrange the following items from 1 to 5; being 5 the most important one and 1 the least.

I think that my students will become successful English speakers if I

- _____ provide them with enough input for them to build the language upon it.
 _____ guarantee enough interaction in the class.
 _____ demand grammatical correctness from them.
 _____ require them to use higher order thinking skills in class.
 _____ provide them with enough speaking opportunities to build up their confidence.

7. I think that the communicative competence of _____ of my students is appropriate for their level of instruction.

- all
- most
- some
- few

8. I have noticed students really enjoy doing _____

- oral presentations (speeches)
- debates
- individual tasks
- role-plays
- other _____

9. Order the following options according to their level of importance in your lessons (5 is the most important, 1 the least important)

- _____ individual practice
- _____ grammar and pronunciation correction
- _____ pair and group work
- _____ student-teacher interaction
- _____ schema activation

10. Generally, the _____ is the approach I follow to plan and develop this oral communication course.

- a. Audiolingual
- b. Communicative
- c. Task-based
- d. Constructivist
- e. Cooperative
- f. Other: _____

11. I use this approach because it

- _____
 - a. helps students improve their oral speaking skills
 - b. provides students with enough vocabulary to interact with others
 - c. gives students the opportunity to develop all four skills
 - d. contributes to the development of fluency and accuracy
 - e. Other
-

6.1.3 Structured Interviews

Universidad Nacional
Maestría en Segundas Lenguas y Culturas

Name: _____

Position: Coordinator of the Bachelor's in English, Universidad de Costa Rica

Interview

1. What type of jobs do students who enroll in this program normally search for towards the end of their studies? How does the program guarantee the development of qualified professionals in those areas?
2. Is there a designated language level that the students are expected to reach at the end of each school year (I, II, III, and IV) at Universidad Nacional (UNA)? If so, what are those levels?
3. Are the students who cannot achieve that level offered courses by the university to remediate their situation and reach that level? Does anything exist aside from repeating a course that a student failed?
4. According to the program, students receive one oral communication course each semester. What objectives are students encourage to achieve in these courses?
5. What strengths have been reported on regarding the oral courses the program offers?
6. What weaknesses have been identified in these courses?
7. Which approaches are recommended for the professors to implement in oral communication classes?
8. What type of materials are educators advised to use in speaking courses?
9. How is culture portrayed in the speaking class to make students aware of it in a context where English is not the native language?
10. What level do students have when they enter the bachelor's program? How is this level measured?
11. How is the learners' language performance tested at the end of their major to determine whether the student-teachers are ready to teach the language accurately?
12. How is the effectiveness of the oral courses assessed in terms of reaching objectives and contributing to the learners' speaking skills?
13. Are strategies for oral communication implicitly or explicitly taught to learners?

Universidad Nacional
 Maestría en Segundas Lenguas y Culturas
 Interview developed by Ana Bonilla and Gabriela Cordero

Name: _____

Position: Coordinator of the Bachelor's in Teaching English as a Foreign Language,
 Universidad de Costa Rica

Interview

1. Students in this major want to become English teachers. How does the bachelor's program guarantee the development of qualified professionals in this field?
2. Students have to take all the language courses in another building with students from other majors. What type of relationship exists between the language program and the education program?
3. Is there a designated language level that the students are expected to reach at the end of each school year (I, II, III, and IV)? If so, what are those levels?
4. Are the students who cannot achieve that level offered courses by the university to remediate their situation and reach that level?
5. What makes English teachers from UCR qualified and successful in their jobs?
6. The media published the results MEP teachers obtained in the TOEIC exam stating that former students from UCR and UNA had the highest scores. What factors do you address to these results?
7. What strengths and weaknesses have been identified in the oral courses students in this major take?
8. Which approaches are recommended for the professors to implement in oral communication classes?
9. What type of materials are educators advised to use in speaking courses?
10. How is culture portrayed in the speaking class to make students aware of it in a context where English is not the native language?
11. What level do students have when they enter the bachelor's program? How is this level measured?
12. Is the learners' language performance tested at the end of their major to determine whether the student-teachers are ready to teach the language accurately?

6.2 Oral Language Test

6.2.1 ACTFL Guidelines and Criteria

Nivel I-L	SI	NO
Trató de conversar	_____	_____
Se desempeñó en temas cotidianos y relacionados a gustos y necesidades	_____	_____
Hizo preguntas	_____	_____
Uso estrategias que le permitieran comunicar el mensaje	_____	_____
Su L1 influenció su vocabulario, pronunciación y sintax	_____	_____
Usó su cuerpo para completar información que no posee verbalmente	_____	_____

Nivel I-M	SI	NO
Conversó sobre temas familiares a él/ella	_____	_____
Se desempeñó en temas de sobrevivencia como intereses, viajes, alimentación, hospedaje,	_____	_____
Hizo preguntas básicas para obtener información	_____	_____
Buscó vocabulario apropiado para cada situación	_____	_____
Utilizó estructuras propias del nivel (presente, adjetivos, futuro)	_____	_____

Nivel I-H	SI	NO
Conversó sobre temas sociales y personales con facilidad	_____	_____
Utilizó varias funciones como describir, explicar, clarificar, saludar, etc	_____	_____
Entrelazó ideas al hablar	_____	_____
Incluyó vocabulario y estructuras propias del nivel	_____	_____
Revisó su gramática al hablar	_____	_____

Nivel A-L	SI	NO
Conversó en temas formales e informales	_____	_____
Se desempeñó narrando y describiendo en distintos tiempos	_____	_____
Unió ideas y frases coherentemente	_____	_____
Su vocabulario es amplio	_____	_____
Defiende sus opiniones	_____	_____
Corrige sus errores	_____	_____
Se desempeño claramente	_____	_____

Nivel A- M

	SI	NO
Conversó sobre diferentes temas con facilidad y confianza	_____	_____
Participó activamente en la interacción	_____	_____
Se desempeñó narrando y describiendo en distintos tiempos	_____	_____
Dio detalles, ejemplos y hechos para apoyar su opinión y descripción	_____	_____
Utilizó estructuras y vocabulario extenso	_____	_____
Se comunicó con fluidez y precisión	_____	_____
Utilizó estrategias que domina en situaciones desconocidas o complejas	_____	_____

Nivel A- H

	SI	NO
Interactuó con confianza, habilidad y facilidad en diversos temas	_____	_____
Explicó, narró y describió con fluidez y detalle	_____	_____
Dio argumentos para apoyar su opinión o tema de conversación	_____	_____
Discutió temas abstractos	_____	_____
Usó estrategias comunicativas para compensar por vocabulario desconocido en situaciones inesperadas	_____	_____
Su entonación y vocabulario fueron precisos para transmitir mensajes	_____	_____
No cometió errores sistemáticos	_____	_____

Simbología:

- I-L: Intermediate-Low
- I-M: Intermediate-Mid
- I-H: Intermediate-High
- A-L: Advanced-Low
- A-M: Advanced-Mid
- A-H: Advanced-High

6.2.2 Interview guiding questions

Nivel I-L

1. What do you like to do in your spare time?
2. Are you extroverted or introverted? Why?
3. Are you currently working? Where?
4. Do you practice any sports?
5. What kind of TV programs do you like to watch?
6. Are you still living with your parents?
7. What is your favorite kind of food?
8. Where do you usually go on weekends?
9. Who is a person that you admire? Why?
10. What is your major goal right now?

Nivel I-M

1. Have you been to another country? Where?
2. What country would you like to travel to? Why?
3. What do you prefer: to stay in a mountain hotel or in a beach hotel? Why?
4. What is your favorite location in Costa Rica?
5. How many courses are you taking this semester? Which ones?
6. What kind of food do you find disgusting?
7. How often do you exercise? What kind of sports do you practice?
8. What English speaking country would you like to spend sometime in? why?
9. Where did you attend school and high school? Did you learn English there?
10. Where do you picture yourself five years from now?

Nivel I-H

1. Where do you live? Can you describe your hometown?
2. Why do think that most high school students fail in speaking English? Explain your answer.
3. Why did you decide to study English? Did you have any other options?
4. What do you like the most about Costa Rica? Explain your answer.
5. Can you describe your ideal first date?
6. What are the characteristics that describe a good teacher for you?
7. Which culture calls your attention? Explain your choice
8. How much time do practice English a week?
9. If you could be somebody else, who would you like to be? Explain yourself
10. What characteristics make a person a real friend?

Nivel A-L

1. Have you considered moving to an English speaking country? Why?
2. What do you think about the crisis that the country is passing through in regards to the public English education?
3. Do you think that a Non-native English teacher is as qualified as a native one?
4. Tell about a time when you had to deal with a miscommunication problem.
5. How would you tell a hard-working student that he or she failed the course in spite of his effort?
6. What are some of the social issues that you think affect Costa Rica the most?
7. Tell me about a memorable class, one that motivated you and that was meaningful for you.
8. If you could lecture teenagers about a social issue, what would you tell them?
9. When speaking English, what do you think is more important meaning or form?
10. What experience has been very embarrassing to you? How did you deal with it?

Nivel A- M

1. Can you describe a meaningful speaking class for you? Provide examples.
2. What do you think about the lack of proficient English teachers in the public system? Mention a possible solution to this problem.
3. Is Costa Rica ready to become a bilingual country? Support your ideas with facts.
4. If you were in the United States and you had to describe Costa Rica's best qualities and the worst ones, what would you say?
5. If you had to deal with a problematic group of students, how would you approach the situation?
6. What would you advice a student that works really hard in your class but who cannot reach adequate speaking skills?
7. What are the strong and weak points of the English major in your university? How can it be improved?
8. If you had to play a movie to your students to teach them about values, what movie would you play? Explain your answer.
9. What is your stand in regards to the immigration problems in Costa Rica? Do you think that it resembles the one in the United States?
10. If a student asked you what historical issue happened on September 11, what would you tell him? Describe what happened.

Nivel A- H

1. Imagine that you were to deliver an important speech on teaching. You have to start your speech by completing the following statement. I truly believe that a good teacher _____ Explain your point.
2. If you had to teach your students about role models, who would you introduce to them? Explain your choice.
3. If you were told that you only have two days of living. What would you do? Describe your emotions and your decisions.
4. Costa Rica is passing through a crisis in regards to the English education in the public system, if you were the Minister of Education how would you approach this issue? What solutions would you seek?
5. If a student came to you and asked you to explain the following statement to him or her, what would you say? "Life is like a chocolate box, you never know what you are going to get."
6. A students tells you that he/she heard in a movie the expression "couch potato," he wants you to explain it to him/her. Describe the meaning of the expression and provide examples. Take advantage of the opportunity to teach something about culture.
7. If you were head of your university, what would be some improvements that you would make to the English major? What aspects would you highlight as outstanding points?
8. Do you think the Free Trade Agreement will benefit the country? Why or why not? Support your answer
9. If you could implement a new teaching approach to teenagers in Talamanca, What would you propose? Why do you think that could help them learn?
10. If you could take a sabbatical year. What projects would you most likely do? Where would you go?

6.2.3 Role Cards

Usted llega a una gasolinera. Pídale al dependiente:

1. Que le ponga 20.000 colones en gasolina corriente
2. Que le revise el agua y el aceite
3. Que le revise las llantas
4. Pídale que le arregle la llanta de repuesto y pregunte cuanto le cuesta

Usted está llamando a la oficina de un compañero, pero el no está en la oficina.

1. indique su nombre
2. pregunte cuando regresará
3. pregunte si puede dejar un mensaje
4. diga la hora a la cual usted quiere que le devuelvan la llamada

Para contratar a una profesora, averigüe

1. su nombre
2. su dirección
3. su experiencia laboral
4. que tipo de estudiantes ha enseñado

Llame a un hotel y reserve una habitación:

1. con cama matrimonial y una cuna para un bebé
2. con tina en el baño
3. pregunte cual habitación es más barata
4. pregunte por otros servicios en el hotel

Usted tiene que viajar de Chicago a New York. Averigüe en una agencia de viajes:

1. como llegar
2. cuanto dura el viaje
3. cuanto vale el tiquete
4. cuando sale
5. como llegar al aeropuerto de Chicago

Usted es un reportero de periódico local. Yo soy una cantante de música pop. Averigüe lo que quiera saber de mí para escribir una nota en el periódico.

Usted está comprando en un almacén:

1. dígame a la dependiente que usted está buscando un abrigo café y un perfume francés
2. pídale que le envuelva sus compras en papel de regalo con globos
3. pregunte por el total de la compra

Usted está en la estación de buses:

1. Compre un tiquete de Orange County a San Francisco
2. Averigüe las conexiones que tiene
3. Pregunte si el bus llegara antes de las 5pm

Usted está en la oficina postal en los Estados Unidos y va a enviar un paquete a El Salvador

1. Dígame al empleado adonde va a enviar el paquete
2. Pregunte la diferencia entre el correo aéreo y el terrestre
3. Decida por cual vía enviarlo

Usted es un turista en Inglaterra y necesita preguntar como llegar al museo de artes. Converse con el empleado del hotel

1. pregúntele como llega al museo
2. cuanto tiempo dura para llegar
3. a que hora abre y cierra el museo
4. adonde puede almorzar cerca del museo

Usted está en la estación del tren en la ciudad de México. En la ventanilla averigüe

1. Si hay trenes para Monterrey
2. Cuando sale el próximo
3. Compre el tiquete

Usted está en una juguetería buscando un regalo para un niño de 8 años.

1. Pregúntele al empleado que juguetes recomienda
2. dígame cual es su presupuesto
3. pida que se lo envuelvan

Llame a un amigo para reunirse. Pregúntele:

1. si el dia siguiente pueden verse para almorzar
2. adonde y a que hora le sirve reunirse

Llame a un viejo amigo por teléfono:

1. Salúdelo y pregunte por su familia
2. invítelo a cenar a su casa el fin de semana a las 7 pm
3. dígame que es una reunión informal con pocas personas

Usted está en una conferencia. A la hora del convivio entable una conversación:

1. preséntese dando su información personal
2. trate de ver que tienen en común

Usted llama a un amigo:

1. Invítelo a una fiesta informal el próximo viernes en la noche
2. dígame quienes más van a ir
3. pídale que lleve a más personas
4. pregúntele si necesita instrucciones para llegar

Averigüe información sobre mi invitación a una fiesta. Pregúnteme:

1. el lugar y hora de la actividad
2. quien va a asistir
3. lo que usted puede llevar
4. si puede invitar a alguien más

Usted y su cita están entrando a un restaurante. Pregúntele al mesero:

1. si tiene una mesa para dos
2. si lo pueden ubicar en un área silenciosa
3. si tienen vinos extranjeros
4. si puede pagar con tarjeta o sólo en efectivo

En una actividad social usted se encuentra hablando con un periodista internacional sobre la educación pública en Costa Rica, explique lo siguiente:

1. por que los estudiantes llevan tantas materias no académicas como artes, música, educación física, etc.
2. Qué importancia tienen esas materias y por que no se le insiste al estudiante a dedicarse más a su trabajo académico

Usted deajo caer accidentalmente su teléfono celular en el inodoro y jaló la cadena antes de darse cuenta de lo que había hecho. Usted cree que todavía se puede rescatar. Llame al fontanero y explíquele su problema.

Usted llega tarde a su casa y al meter la llave en la perilla la llave se quiebra. Ud intenta sacarla pero los tornillos de la perilla se empiezan a aflojar. Ud decide ir donde su vecino para que le ayude. Cuéntele lo que paso y pídale una linterna y un desatornillados para sacar la perilla y retirar la llave quebrada de ahí.

Usted necesita instalar un aparato electrónico en su casa para probarlo antes de venderlo al mercado. Mientras usted le revisa los últimos detalles pídale a alguien que le busque los siguientes materiales:

1. Una luz ultravioleta
2. Un altavoz
3. Un juego de desatornilladores
4. Un alicate

Yo soy la secretaria de la escuela y usted es la directora. Asigneme las siguientes tareas:

1. Que termine de digitar el reporte que estaba haciendo ayer
2. Que mande a Jorge por café y repostería para unas 8 personas que se reúnen en la sala de reuniones a las 3 pm
3. Que anote todos los recados por que no puede ser interrumpido por ninguna circunstancia.

Explíquele a un niño como atar sus cordones

Usted ha perdido su vuelo de enlace entre Panamá y Venezuela. Busque al encargado de la aerolínea y haga los ajustes necesarios con su tiquete para viajar lo antes posible

Nota: aunque no tenga el vocabulario para la situación, trate de hacer lo mejor posible para entenderse.

Usted acaba de comprar un vestido para una actividad. Cuando llega a su casa se da cuenta que esta manchado por un lado. Usted se devuelve a la tienda a pedir que se lo cambien.

1. usted a perdido su recibo de compra, pero le atiende la misma persona que se lo vendió
2. Explíquele cual es el problema del vestido
3. Trate de que le cambien el vestido o le regresen su dinero
4. Digale que si no le ayudan tendra que ir donde su abogado

Usted acaba de darse cuenta que su traje se manchó con grasa. Usted tiene una presentación muy importante y decide ir a la tintorería. Averigüe si la pueden quitar y cuanto tiempo durarían pues usted no tiene nada más que ponerse para ese evento.

Nota: aunque carezca del vocabulario para hacer esta situación, trate de hacerse entender

Usted debe presentar a un especialista en el campo de la protección de animales en peligro de extinción. En su presentación debe incluir:

1. Lo agradecidos que están por su participación

2. Su trabajo como veterinario y su grado en una universidad de prestigio al igual que sus servicios en otros países para la concientización de ese problema
3. el tema de la charla: la prevención del abuso y el abandono de especies por parte de los gobiernos del mundo

Usted acaba de comprar una computadora portátil pero le esta fallando mucho. Usted vuelve a la tienda donde la compró y explica:

1. que la compró hace dos semanas y media pero ya no funciona
2. que la batería no dura más de 30 minutos
3. que se ha aflojado la pantalla considerablemente
4. que aunque la garantía le cubre la reparación usted prefiere que le devuelvan su dinero

Usted está en otra ciudad dando conferencias. Se le pierde su lente de contacto en el baño. Usted va a la óptica a solicitar nuevos lentes.

Explique como andar en patineta

Su hijo acaba de tener un accidente. Llame a emergencias y solicite:

1. que lleguen pronto
2. dé su dirección y número de teléfono
3. describa el accidente: su hijo se subió a bajar una mandarina, se apoyo en una rama débil y se cayo golpeándose la frente de donde le sale bastante sangre, además el se queja de un dolor en la pierna.

Su mamá acaba de ser operada y debe reposar en cama por una semana. Vaya a la floristería y solicite las flores que a ella más le gustan (margaritas) y pida que le escriban en la tarjeta que se recupere pronto por que todos en la casa la extrañan

Usted pasa a una gasolinera mientras su auto queda en la autopista a un kilometro del lugar. Indique:

1. su auto se apogo y no se enciende más
2. pregunte si reparan carros de marcha
3. Pregunte si tienen servicio de grúas

Usted está en una feria de la educación. Intente convencerme de asistir a su colegio el próximo año.

Usted necesita personal para su pequeño comercio. Llame a la agencia de empleos y solicite:

1. Una persona bilingüe con habilidades digitando
2. la persona debe encargarse de la correspondencia, los archivos y las llamadas
3. indique que por el momento el salario base es de 180,000

En una fiesta con extranjeros se le acerca uno a preguntarle sobre la educación en Costa Rica. El le pide que le explique:

1. como se preparan los jóvenes costarricenses para entrar a la universidad
2. cuales universidades capacitan mejor a los estudiantes de áreas académicas

Nota: aunque no tenga todo el vocabulario para la situación, intente hacer lo mejor para entenderse.

En medio de una calle se para su auto por que no tiene gasolina. Una grúa pasa y se detiene al frente de su auto. Converse con el conductor:

1. explíquese que su auto no tiene problemas, solo le falta gasolina
2. pregúntele si lo puede llevar a una gasolinera por gasolina y regresarlo a ese lugar
3. pregúntele si tiene recipiente para gasolina
4. Pregúntele por el precio y hágale una oferta para bajar el costo

Usted está afuera del estadio por que no quedaron más tiquetes. Trate de convencer al guarda de dejarlo entrar por que su equipo nacional está jugando contra un equipo europeo

Usted sale de su oficina por una taza de café y se cierra la puerta. No queda nadie más en la oficina por que es bastante tarde. Busque al guarda e indíquele:

1. lo sucedido
2. explíquese que debe entrar a terminar el reporte que estaba haciendo
3. pídale ayuda para abrir la puerta.

Usted está almorzando con sus suegros en una restaurante. A la hora de pagar la cuenta usted se da cuenta de que no tiene su billetera. Busque al gerente

1. explíquese lo sucedido
2. dígame que ya llamó a su hermana para que trajeran el dinero
3. dígame a sus suegros que pidió una ronda de café

Usted invitó a su pareja a un evento especial. Indique en la puerta:

1. que le den una mesa para dos
2. que le traigan un vino francés
3. a que hora llega el cuarteto musical
4. averigüe si puede pagar con tarjeta de crédito

Después de un largo día de compras usted llega a medirse un par de zapatos que compró. Usted nota que no le quedan bien y no le gusta el estilo ni el color.

1. explíquese al dependiente por que los quiere cambiar
2. dígame que usted no quiere esos en otro color si no que prefiere el dinero en efectivo

Llame a la recepción del hotel e indique:

1. las toallas están húmedas y sucias
2. la ducha no tiene agua caliente
3. que necesita que lo despierten a las 6:30am

Usted es un maestro en una escuela pública Llame a los padres de un niño que le pegó a otro en el recreo

1. explique que pasó (tiempo, lugar y razón)
2. dígame que ha hecho usted con la situación
3. Pídale al padre que se reúna con usted la próxima semana. Acuerden el día y la hora a conveniencia.

Usted es un padre de familia que va a la escuela a recibir información sobre su hijo. Pregunte:

1. por que su hijo no quiere ir más a la escuela
2. por que salió bajo en todas las materias
3. no logra restar bien
4. no le gusta leer en casa
5. pregunte como se le puede ayudar

Usted llega a su casa después de ir a cenar y descubre la puerta abierta. Entra y se da cuenta que le han robado. Llame a la policía y reporte los hechos:

1. Explique a donde estaba en el momento del robo
2. Como encontró la casa
3. Que falta un televisor, una cámara de fotos, joyas y 50,000 colones en efectivo
4. pida que le envíen una patrulla para que busque por huellas digitales

Su hija está enferma. Usted llama al médico

1. salude e identifíquese
2. Describa los síntomas que tiene: fiebre alta, vómitos seguidos, luce pálida y se queja de dolores fuertes en su abdomen.

Usted llega a una agencia de empleos para contratar a una persona que se haga cargo de sus hijos

1. usted quiere alguien con experiencia
2. usted quiere que la persona cuide de sus hijos 3 veces por semana
3. pregunte por el salario que debe de tener en ese horario

Usted va a la aerolínea en el aeropuerto y explica

1. que ha perdido su maleta
2. pregunte como puede recuperarla
3. indique que tenía ropa, fotos, cepillo de dientes, pasta y varios regalos envueltos

Usted es un periodista. Camino al supermercado presencia un accidente y llama al periódico para reportarlo.

1. describa los detalles: hora, lugar, y que vio un choque
2. 7 personas están heridas. Una fue expulsada del carro
3. llamaron a una ambulancia para trasladar a los heridos al hospital de San Francisco

Usted va a la recepción de un hotel:

1. Pida dos habitaciones adjuntas con baño completo
2. Pregunte por el precio para tres noches
3. Pregunte la hora de entrada y de salida
4. Pregunte si el precio incluye desayuno

Usted está buscando un apartamento cerca de la Universidad. Llame a un número de teléfono que encontró en el periódico y averigüe toda la información que necesita sobre el apartamento

Usted ve un viejo conocido en una actividad social. Va hacia esa persona:

1. preséntese y recuérdale de donde se conocen
2. invítelo a almorzar
3. fije una hora y día
4. Dígale a donde se ubica el restaurante

Usted perdió su tren a Los Ángeles. Vaya a la sección de información y pregunte:

1. si tienen otros trenes con dirección a Los Ángeles
2. si se puede comprar otro tiquete para el siguiente tren
3. si hay algún cambio en el precio

Usted entra en una óptica por que perdió sus lentes de contacto

1. Pregunte si le pueden dar otros
2. Pregunte el precio
3. Pregunte si se los pueden dar inmediatamente

6.2.4 Comparative Chart Results

Table No.1:
Scores of UCR students

Level according to the ACTFL scale:	Second-year students:	Third-year students:	Fourth-year students:	TOTAL
Intermediate low	6	-	-	6
Intermediate mid	6	-	-	6
Intermediate high	3	3	1	7
Advanced low	-	3	5	8
Advanced mid	1	5	4	10
Advanced high	3	3	3	9
TOTAL	19	14	13	



SIBUNA



•BC150358•