

The Impact of Foreign Language Enhancement on Students' Oral Performance: A Case Study at Centro de Idiomas, Universidad Nacional, SRB

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Resumen

La enseñanza y el aprendizaje de un idioma extranjero se apoyan en la guía del instructor así como también en el compromiso y la actitud positiva del estudiante. Obtener el éxito en la producción oral de este idioma expone al aprendiente a varios obstáculos cuyo efecto puede ser minimizado a través de estrategias o mecanismos además de la instrucción regular. El objetivo de este trabajo es investigar si existen mecanismos (fuera del salón de clase) ofrecidos por el programa Centro de Idiomas, Universidad Nacional (CI-UNA) en el Campus Pérez Zeledón y en qué medida han influenciado la producción oral de los estudiantes. Esta investigación contempla el análisis de un estudio de caso de los estudiantes de CI-UNA que han estado expuestos a algún tipo de apoyo lingüístico. Para la recolección de la información, se suministraron tres cuestionarios. Un cuestionario está diseñado con el propósito de determinar la existencia de mecanismos o apoyos para fortalecer el aprendizaje de los estudiantes fuera de la clase. El segundo cuestionario intenta recolectar las impresiones de los estudiantes que recibieron algún tipo de apoyo de uno de los mecanismos ofrecidos por este programa de idiomas. El tercer cuestionario reúne las impresiones y perspectivas de los profesores y coordinadoras de CI-UNA acerca del apoyo lingüístico. Es valioso recordar que los investigadores tendrán acceso a la base de datos de este programa para rastrear el progreso de los estudiantes en los cursos regulares mientras fueron expuestos a algún tipo de apoyo lingüístico fuera de las clases. Con base a las conclusiones alcanzadas se propondrá algunas sugerencias esclarecedoras a los estudiantes, profesores y coordinadoras del programa de idiomas.

Palabras claves: apoyo, exposición a nativos hablantes, producción oral, evaluación formativa

Abstract

Teaching and learning English as a foreign language relies on instructors' guidance and support as well as students' commitment and positive attitudes. Achieving success in the oral production of this language naturally presents the learner with several stumbling blocks, whose effects can be reduced by supportive strategies or mechanisms implemented in addition to regular instruction. This paper aims to investigate whether and to what extent enhancement mechanisms (outside the classroom) offered by the language program Centro de Idiomas, Universidad Nacional (CI-UNA) at Campus Pérez Zeledón have influenced the oral performance of students. This research analyzes a case study of CI-UNA students who

have been exposed to any particular sort of language enhancement. For the garnering of the data, three questionnaires were designed. One questionnaire was designed with the goal of determining the knowledge of previously existing mechanisms or opportunities to enhance students' learning outside the language classroom. The second questionnaire gathered the impressions of actual students who are supported by one of the current mechanisms offered by this language program. The third questionnaire inquired about the current impressions and opinions of CI-UNA teachers and coordinators regarding foreign language enhancement. It is worth noting that the researchers will have access to the CI-UNA data base to track down students' progress in the regular courses while they were exposed to any type of language enhancement outside the class. From the conclusions drawn some enlightening suggestions will be proposed to the students, teachers and coordinators of the language program.

Key words: enhancement, native speaker exposure, oral performance, formative assessment

1. Introduction

Teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL) is dependent both on the guidance of instructors and the commitment of individual learners. To foster an environment that provides both, it is essential to branch outside the classroom and provide learners with new ways to expand their knowledge. Out of the plethora of strategies currently aimed at teaching EFL, several enhancement methods are carried out at the Centro de Idiomas: Universidad Nacional (CI-UNA), the Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica, Sede Regional Brunca's language program. To properly understand these methods, it is crucial to give a brief introduction to the language program.

CI-UNA is a language program that works in cooperation with the Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica to provide foreign language classes to the local community during after-work hours and Saturdays. They offer 12 levels of English along with certifications. Additionally, CI-UNA provides optional thematic English classes based on speaking and listening, which are taught three days a week by a native English speaker. These classes, called "speaking clubs", are neither required nor assigned any percentage of the students' overall grades.

The goal of having a native speaker teach speaking clubs is that students maximize their oral performance in a natural setting, which they then incorporate with the knowledge they acquire in class. The speaking clubs' formative assessment approach is designed to give students constant and real-time feedback, while remaining within the safety of the classroom. Furthermore, since these classes are not mandatory, all students that attend choose to be there and willingly participate. Additionally, the incorporation of a native speaker at CI-UNA theoretically provides the students with a more natural linguistic context in which they are free to break away from the textbook and use English as a means of authentic communication.

This research measures to what extent these enhancement strategies have been successful and how CI-UNA can further accommodate the linguistic needs of their students in order to maximize oral performance. This will both evaluate the current methods of enhancement in CI-UNA and contribute to the larger EFL discussion of how to improve students' oral performance.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Affective Factors in the Learning of a Foreign Language

Affective factors are a determinant of the successful achievement in learning English as a foreign language. If these factors are overlooked, learning is hindered and progress is slowed. In fact, the current tendencies highlight the change English teaching has undergone to incorporate these factors for the sake of students' linguistic achievement. Based on Andres (2003), "The interest in affective variables in language learning is reflected in some modern teaching stances aimed at reducing anxiety and inhibitions and enhancing the learner's motivation and self-esteem. These approaches could be identified within the so-called humanistic education" (para. 18). Among the affective factors that may debilitate the effective learning of a foreign language, Minghe and Yuan (2013) stated that "affective factors in foreign language teaching and learning refer to two related aspects; one is the individual factors of learners, including motivation, anxiety, inhibition, self-esteem, etc.; the other is the relational factors among learners and between the learner and the teacher, including empathy, reaction, etc" (p. 58). Ignoring the effect of these factors in the learner's language outcomes may delay the process of learning a foreign language as expected by the teacher, and cause linguistic failure. To carry out the following study, researchers will shed light upon motivation, self-confidence and risk-taking as striking affective variables to consider by teachers in the context this study will take place.

2.1.1. Motivation

Motivation has proved to be an affective factor that has meaningful implications in the learning of a foreign language. According to Brown (2001) motivation can be regarded as "the extent to which you can make choices about goals to pursue and the effort you will devote to that pursuit" (p. 34). Brown's insights reveal the effect of motivation in the achievement of goals. He determined that motivation relates to choices and effort. Both elements are essential to linguistic success as well. In earlier studies, Brown (1980) also defined motivation as "an inner drive, impulse, emotion or desire that moves one to a particular action" (p.112). From this perspective, foreign language learning success seems to be influenced by how high the learner's motivation is.

Because motivation takes paramount on language learning attitudes, it is relevant to determine the type of motivation students bring to the classroom. Motivation can be categorized as instrumental as well as integrative. The former accounts for "acquiring language as a means for attaining instrumental goals" (Brown, 2000, p. 162) whereas the

latter “stems from a desire to understand the language and culture of another group for the purpose of interaction” (Gardner et al., 1992, p. 198). Both categories contribute to shaping language learning attitudes inside the classroom and composing the students’ interests and desires. Integrative motivation can be increased by sufficient exposure to native speakers of the target language.

2.1.2. Self-confidence

Confidence takes a predominant role in the learning of a second or foreign language. This self-reliance students develop for what they do to learn the language is relevant to the achievement of their goals. In foreign language learning, self-confidence is a delicate and determining factor. Brown (2001) regarded this factor as the “I can do it or self-esteem factor” (p.23). This author remarked that no successful cognitive or affective activity could be carried out without some degree of self-esteem, self-confidence, knowledge of yourself, and belief in your own capabilities for that activity (Brown, 2002, p.45). Students with high self-confidence have proven to be more participative, outspoken and sociable, which are key traits of a successful language learner.

2.1.3. Language Anxiety

Anxiety is regarded as a factor that exerts a great influence on foreign language learners’ outcomes. It is an influential affective factor considered “one of the most prominent and pervasive emotions” (Ni, 2012, p. 1509). Anxiety can be categorized as a personal trait, a state (a temporary situation) and as a situation-specific factor according to Henter (2014, p. 375). Foreign language learning seems to fall into this last category. Anxiety may hinder the learning process producing in the learner “uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension or worry” (Minghe & Yuan, 2013, p.59).

Minghe and Yuan (2013) referred to language anxiety as “fear or apprehension occurring when a learner is expected to perform in the second or foreign language” (p.59). Anxiety may tend to either benefit or thwart the process of foreign language learning. Moderate anxiety helps students keep focused on tasks while high anxiety disrupts students’ willingness to participate and be active, or even beyond that, be proactive. High anxiety also declines motivation, and imposes heavier affective and academic burdens on students’ learning process.

Horwitz (as cited in Henter, 2013) asserted that “foreign language anxiety has the same clinical picture as any other type of anxiety: difficult concentration, sweating, palpitations, worry, fear and even horror of foreign language class, anxious students having an avoidance behavior (they miss classes, do not do their homework)” (p.375). These effects of anxiety on the performance of a foreign or second language are more evident while students carry out a speaking activity (Minghe & Yuan, 2013, p.59). They feel pressured when performing any type of speaking activity such as role-plays, oral presentations, discussions, and debates, among others.

Teachers can lessen or reverse the effects of anxiety on the students' oral performance. There are several activities teachers can design and implement in order to minimize these effects in the language classroom; such activities can range from keeping a lively personality in the classroom to setting game-like activities and facilitating learning by building a stress-free learning environment.

2.1.4. Risk-taking

One of the most essential skills in a successful language learner is risk taking. Learners are capable of building knowledge the moment they dare take chances to participate in class, and are ready to come public and make mistakes in front of others. In this sense, language activities are a complete risk. Students may think they can jeopardize their credibility or reputation as “good learners” when they stand in front, and let words and thoughts come out of their mouths. Beebe (as cited in Burgucu, Han, Engin & Kaya, 2010) claimed that risk-taking is “a situation where an individual has to make a decision involving choice between alternatives of different desirability; the outcome of the choice is uncertain, there is a possibility of failure” (p. 2). Burgucu, Han, Engin and Kaya (2010) also stated that

Risk-taking is not only one of the dimensions of individual differences, but also, it is one of the important parts in a second language learning process; moreover, it is a language learning strategy for good language learners who are willing to take risks. (p. 2)

The role of second or foreign language teachers is to turn off any trigger that may discourage the students' willingness to participate and be open to anything that is happening in the classroom. Woolfolk (2001) shed light upon some strategies to boost the risk-taking ability:

- a. Break instruction into small steps and provide short activities, chosen and sequenced by the teacher.
- b. Cover material thoroughly and at a moderate pace; give plenty of practice, immediate feedback and specific praise.
- c. Have students work as a whole class so that the teacher can supervise. Avoid individualized, self-paced, or independent work.
- d. Maintain a level of difficulty that guarantees high rates of success.
- e. Ask convergent questions-one correct answer.
- f. Make sure to call on everyone, and stay with a student until a question has been answered.
- g. Avoid interpretations, open-ended questions, and non-academic conversations.

- h. Emphasize short, frequent paper-and-pencil exercises, not games, arts, craft, discovery or inquiry learning activities. (p.3)

As a matter of fact, the role of language teachers is to make students believe that taking the risk of making mistakes has its own benefits, and that, after all, mistakes are real proof that they are moving forward to reach competence in a second or foreign language.

2.2. Native Speaker Exposure in an EFL Setting

Learning English in an EFL environment is not an easy endeavor. The opportunities for using the language in real contexts are either unlikely, to some extent, or scarce. Actually, an EFL learner strives to improve his or her communicative competence by the use of other means or resources rather than by the one provided by native speaker exposure. A native speaker as a linguistic resource offers numerous opportunities for non-native speakers to expand their knowledge of the use of words in context (pragmatics), pronunciation (segmental and suprasegmental aspects) as well as target-culture awareness and empathy. According to Medgyes (1999), a native speaker is defined as someone

- a. who is born in an English-speaking country
- b. has learned English during childhood in an English-speaking environment
- c. speaks English as a first language
- d. has a native-like command of English
- e. is capable of producing fluent, spontaneous speech in English that is characterized by creativity, and
- f. has the intuition to distinguish correct or wrong forms in English (p. 430)

In fact, Braine (2010) and Kirkpatrick (2010) agreed in some of their studies in EFL settings upon the perception that native English-speaking teachers (NEST) are the ideal model for language production. Furthermore, Wang (2012) declared that the speech of native English speakers is “held up as the gold standard of grammatical correctness and perfect pronunciation, and that they are valued as repositories of cultural information” (p.47). Definitely, language learners need exposure to real language use, and native speakers would be the most suitable resource by which effective language learning can be improved. Gutiérrez (2005) shed light upon the essential conditions for effective language learning. He claimed that exposure, use, and motivation are key elements to maximize target language learning (p. 35).

Native English speakers, as linguistic resources, can also be a trigger of language learners’ motivation towards the learning of the target language. Indeed, native speaker exposure facilitates language attitudes. Karahan (2007) stated that students’ attitudes towards

foreign language learning vary depending on their feelings towards the target language, culture, exposure and difficulty of it. He acknowledged that

Language attitudes' are the expressions of positive or negative feelings towards a language may reflect impressions of linguistic difficulty or simplicity, ease or difficulty of learning, degree of importance, elegance, social status, etc. Attitudes towards a language may also show what people feel about the speakers of that language. (p. 2)

Although native exposure in an EFL environment seems implausible oftentimes, non-native English speaking teachers (NNEST) must create the conditions to compensate for such an invaluable resource. Based on Davies' perspectives (2004), the key tenets of "nativeness" can be regarded as "(a) childhood acquisition of the language, (b) comprehension and production of idiomatic forms of the language, (c) understanding regional and social variations within the language, and (d) competent production and comprehension of fluent, spontaneous discourse (p. 45). From this standpoint, one could assume that what differentiates NEST from NNEST is the first aspect highlighted by Davis, which stands for childhood acquisition. In other words, what NNEST can do in the EFL classroom is to create the conditions and realistic opportunities for learners to use the target language as much as possible as if in a natural occurring setting.

2.3. Formative Education vs. Summative Assessment

As scholars and instructors of EFL, it is necessary to consider the students' learning styles and as well as the evaluation style for their learning. For approximately the past fifteen years, since the widespread inclusion of formative assessment in EFL studies, teachers have sought to find the most appropriate balance between two distinct forms of evaluation: formative and summative assessment (Ketabi & Saeed Ketabi, 2014, p. 437). Formative assessment is characterized by the corrections of problems in the moment, with adjustments being almost instantaneous (Yi, 2012, p. 27). These corrections are often quick, pointed and meant to distract as little as possible. Formative assessment also has the advantage of being much more focused on the individual, which allows one to gauge which mistakes he or she is personally inclined to make (El Ebyary, 2013, p. 2170).

One disadvantage of formative assessment is that teachers are either inclined to correct *all* errors, which can distract from the main focus of the lesson and cause imprecisions in the teaching of new material, or only correct the errors that have to do with material being studied at that moment, which could lead students to believe that they are producing much better communication than they are producing (Yi, 2012, p. 32). However, if teachers choose to correct mistakes outside the scope of the lesson, this will also force students to continually concentrate on the lesson (Yi, 2012, p. 31). It should be noted that even though formative assessment is oftentimes considered a more relaxed approach of correction, based on classroom conditions and void of formal testing rules or time limits, formative assessment must be both planned and systemic for it to be effective (Ketabi and Saeed Ketabi, 2014, p. 439). The consistency of feedback is necessary to the success or failure of formative feedback.

Summative assessment, on the other hand, focuses on an overall evaluation given at the end of activities (Yi, 2012, p. 32). This is commonly used for certification and accountability, but may lack details since summative assessment only shows the accomplishment or failure of objective goals (Ketabi & Saeed Ketabi, 2014, p. 436). This often takes the form of post-evaluations, formal testing, or a written report of errors committed during presentations. Although it should be obvious that a mix of these two methods would create the best outcome, some scholars claim that summative assessment separates teaching and learning in the eyes of the student, since post-evaluation style assessment may be too impersonal or may seem to justify a grade more than enhance learning (Ketabi & Saeed Ketabi, 2014, p. 440).

In conclusion, because of the student interaction and constant feedback, formative assessment can be seen as evaluation *for* learning, while summative assessment can be seen as assessment *of* learning because of its broader focus. Ultimately it is the job of EFL instructors to find the balance between these two camps, and to find which to use and to what extent.

2.4. Oral Performance in EFL

When teaching English, some corrective feedback (CF) is necessary to foster learning. However, not all students respond to corrective feedback in the same way, and some suffer from anxiety when corrected in an inappropriate way. Oral communication is often the most anxiety-provoking activity in second language acquisition (Zhang, L., & Rahimi, M., 2014, p. 430). This anxiety, in turn, may further impede continued foreign language acquisition because intense levels of anxiety hinder the ability to process input, and thus cut off one of the necessary tools of communication (Zhang, L., & Rahimi, M., 2014, p. 430). This is especially true with lower-intermediate level language students, as they are still not fully proficient in their new language and the anxiety of oral performance may be greater (Zhang, L., & Rahimi, M., 2014, p. 430). In general in EFL/ESL classrooms, there are six common sources of anxiety: 1) personal and interpersonal issues, 2) instructor-learning interactions, 3) classroom procedures, 4) language testing, 5) instructor belief about language learning, and 6) learner beliefs about language learning (Zhang, L., & Rahimi, M., 2014, p. 430).

Although inappropriate CF can be detrimental to second language learners, if both the teachers and their students understand the learning goals of CF, students are much more likely to have a positive reaction to this correction (Zhang, L., & Rahimi, M., 2014, p. 435). Furthermore, since the relation between anxiety and second language learning often has to do with values, self-efficacy and attributions, teachers can take approaches that are based on elicitation and clarification requests, which urge students to correct themselves. This method, proven to be the most effective for students, both provides the student with the knowledge of having learned from their mistake and the confidence of having corrected an error on their own (Milla & García Mayo, 2014, p. 3). In regard to oral performance, these methods of corrective feedback may be the key to defeating the fear in foreign language learners and harvesting a more wholesome oral performance in the classroom.

When further considering the point of oral performance in EFL classrooms, it is essential to confront the native speaker ideal and the goals in teaching English as a foreign language the teacher has set to achieve. In EFL, for example, English should be taught in accordance with sociolinguistic norms that will be important in everyday survival in English speaking countries. However, this line blurs when English is studied as a foreign language, and the majority of the students will not use English in such intense, intercultural settings (Saito, A., & Hatoss, A., 2011, p. 109). In order to answer this question, Akihiro Saito and Anikó Hatoss conducted research on the preferences of Japanese students of English. After evaluating some international variants of English, along with several native variants, it could be seen that Japanese students most negatively evaluated the Japanese variety of English, while they opted to learn English in an “intro-Anglosphere” context. Although current materials and pedagogical techniques may have influenced this, it can be seen that concerning oral performance these students clearly preferred native English over international varieties of the language (Saito, A., & Hatoss, A., 2011, p. 118). Similarly, another study of Bangladeshi students showed that although students believed that their nonnative teachers were competent in English, they still preferred a native teacher upon reaching a certain level of comfortableness with their English because of authentic pronunciation and cultural insight (Ahmed, 2004, p. 42-43).

While some studies focus on the preferences of native-nonnative speakers, others focus on the needs of the students. One study in China asked the question, “In an average week of study, how much time did you spend using English to communicate with a native speaker?” Out of those that had been selected as “successful students” in this study, 60.61% had more than one hour of exposure with a native speaker per week. In comparison, only 12.12% of “unsuccessful learners” had been exposed to native speakers for more than one hour per week (Noonan, 2005) Another study claims that naturalistic environments are important in foreign language acquisition, because they create urgent pressure to receive input, and produce output, while always making the necessary adjustments to output. Failure to do this could result in real-life problems. This keeps students’ minds fully occupied and even someone engaged in indirect interaction, must continually keep up with the fluctuations of natural speech (Congmin, Z., 2013, p. 25). Therefore, naturalistic development of a language is essential for more efficient language acquisition. On a point of clarification, “naturalistic” does not necessarily mean “native.” However, it is likely that native speakers will promote naturalistic use of the language, since it is where their exposure of the language has come from.

2.5. Foreign Language Learning Enhancements

The success in mastering English as a foreign language depends on the way the teacher helps learners approach the language, and how the students find strategies or mechanisms to maximize their own learning. From this perspective, both teachers and students need to find the most suitable ways to facilitate the instructional process. Enhancing the learning of a foreign language is not an overnight process. It takes time, careful analysis and procedural actions.

Teachers can enhance students' oral performance either inside (when learning is actually happening) or outside the classroom. For the purposes of this investigation, foreign language learning enhancements will be described as the mechanisms teachers use inside the classroom, or those they recommend in order to optimize students' oral performance after class instruction has taken place. In-class enhancements used in this study range from delicate aspects like promoting affective factors, implementing a lively methodology, designing and using suitable materials, and establishing a flexible and formative evaluation system. Furthermore, some after-class mechanisms that teachers can implement to maximize students' learning gains can take the form of strategies such as seeking opportunities to converse with native English speakers, participating in speaking clubs and writing to pen pals or chatting with e-pals.

3. The Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to determine some possible enhancement mechanisms the Centro de Idiomas, Universidad Nacional, Brunca Extension offers its students in order to optimize their learning after regular instruction and determine how effective they have been. Based on this search the researchers aim to suggest other ways in which learners' oral performance can be enhanced through the analysis of the questionnaires administered to teachers, students and authorities of the language program.

3.1. The Research Questions

Next are the main questions the researchers attempt to answer:

- a. How is foreign language learning enhanced at CI-UNA, SRB?
- b. To what extent has additional language learning enhancement been conducive to successful oral performance?
- c. What can be suggested to maximize oral performance at CI-UNA, SRB?

3.2. Research Methodology

3.2.1. Setting

This research study was conducted at the Centro de Idiomas, Universidad Nacional, Brunca Extension, Pérez Zeledón Campus. CI-UNA is a language program whose aim is to prepare local residents to face the challenges of the 21st century and this globalized era through the teaching of effective language skills, basically oral and aural skills in English. CI-UNA methodology is based on the Task-based Instruction (TBI) that promotes oral skills through the development of real-life tasks. This language program encloses more than 300 students. This diverse population is composed of students with different professions or occupations (high school students, lawyers, accountants, doctors, secretaries, receptionists, self-employed

people etc.), social statuses, locations, and ages. They are not grouped according to their actual ages but their linguistic proficiency.

To enter this program, students can either take an English placement test or just enroll and begin a two-year course right from CI-UNA Starter. For a student to get a certification at level 10th, they must have completed two years of intensive classes. The whole program lasts two years and two months, and comprises 12 levels, ranging from CI-UNA Starter to CI-UNA Intensive. Every level takes two months. Classes take five hours per week during two months.

3.2.2. Population

The informants of this study are students as well as all the teachers and three coordinators of the language program. Students from four different CI-UNA courses, CI-UNA Starter, CI-UNA I, CI-UNA VI and CI-UNA XI were selected at random to fill in the student questionnaire #1. They total fifty out of the whole CI-UNA student population. These students' ages range from 14 to 30 years old. Also, students attending or those that have attended CI-UNA Speaking clubs filled in the questionnaire #2. They amount a total of fifteen students. Their ages range from 15 to 67 years old. A random sampling method was used to select them. Furthermore, fifteen CI-UNA teachers were key informants in this study. These teachers completed the questionnaire #3. The majority of these teachers' teaching experience ranges from 3 to 10 years. Some are just starting to teach, around five out of fifteen. They hold bachelor's (twelve of them), licentiate's (two of them) and master's degrees (one of them) in teaching.

3.2.3. The Instruments

Three instruments were used in this investigation to aid in measuring to what extent the inclusion of a native speaker has improved oral enhancement at CI-UNA. These three questionnaires focused on three different groups, with the aim of evaluating CI-UNA more completely. The first was a questionnaire given to 50 students from four different levels of English, and focused on the students' awareness of language enhancement at CI-UNA. Additionally, this questionnaire served to measure, through qualitative data, to what extent students of differing levels valued informal oral enhancement in their foreign language acquisition

The second questionnaire was given to 15 students, who had taken advantage of speaking clubs, and are assumed to already value enhanced learning, since they repeatedly return to speaking club. These students answered questions about their participation, their confidence due to their attendance, and their opinion on how this has affected their performance in class. Furthermore, these fifteen students gave written responses on the nature of the speaking clubs, as well as the nature of having a native speaker as the instructor of speaking clubs, and part of language learning enhancement. These qualitative data are backed by quantitative data, showing that in a survey of 27 (excluding three cases that suspended their attendance) cases with 15 students, 23 cases received a better grade than that

of the class average, while 4 received a lower grade than that of class average. These data show that in 85% of the cases of students attended speaking clubs, they received a better grade than that of the class average. Additionally, these data reveal that in only one case out of 27 the students did not pass their course and advance to the next level.

The third instrument developed for this study was given to 15 teachers at CI-UNA. Their experience working with CI-UNA ranged from 3 months to 3 years. This questionnaire asked teachers to give their opinions about the mechanisms available to CI-UNA students, and their opinions on the effectiveness of speaking clubs through yes/no questions and written responses. In addition to expressing their beliefs about speaking clubs, teachers were asked to give their opinion on the importance of a native speaker in CI-UNA as the instructor of speaking clubs. This was followed by written responses addressing how the native speaker could improve speaking clubs, and the benefits and challenges of the inclusion of a native speaker in CI-UNA regarding oral enhancement.

Similar to the third instrument, the fourth instrument developed for this study was given to three coordinators of CI-UNA. They were asked about the current mechanisms available to students and how these mechanisms meet or fail to meet the needs of these students. The instrument also poses the question as to whether CI-UNA is responsible for providing these mechanisms. Finally, the instrument inquires about the importance and effectiveness of the speaking clubs according to the coordinators' observations, and whether the importance of effectiveness changes when taught by a native English speaker.

3.2.4. Data Analysis

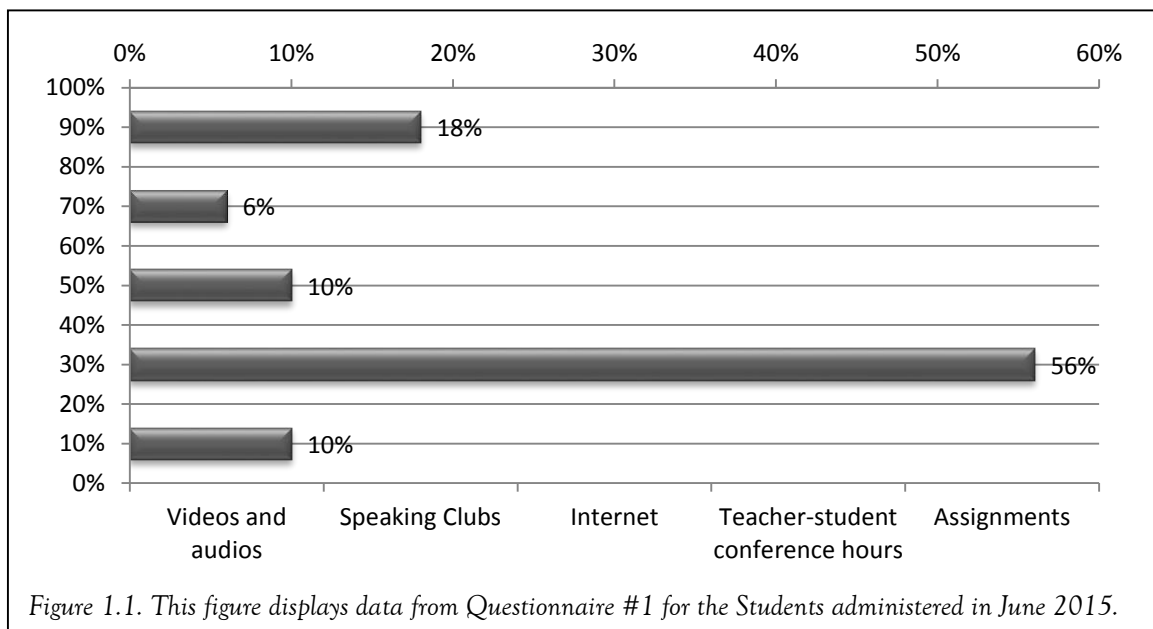
An exhaustive examination of students' responses and data gathered drew the next analysis. Each of the research questions is answered in this section.

Results and discussion of question 1- How is foreign language learning enhanced at CI-UNA, SRB?

Students were asked to report about the different enhancement mechanisms or opportunities that CI-UNA program offers to them. The following Figure 1.1 displays the information found in questionnaire #1 for students.

According to the information collected by questionnaire #1 question #1, students listed the following enhancement mechanisms or opportunities: videos and audios tracks, speaking clubs, Internet connectivity, teacher-student conference hours and assignments. A number of 28 students, which amounts 56%, determined that the speaking clubs are one of the most known enhancement mechanisms provided by CI-UNA. As a second option, 9 students wrote that the assignments that teachers give are another alternative for them to practice and reinforce the language outside the classroom. This represented 18% of the total number of students. An equal number of students, 5 students in each case respectively, selected videos and audios as well as Internet connectivity as enhancement language opportunities. They represented 10% of all the students. The least known option that

students reported was teacher-student conference hours. This one represented 6%, which represents just 3 out of the 50 students that completed the questionnaire.

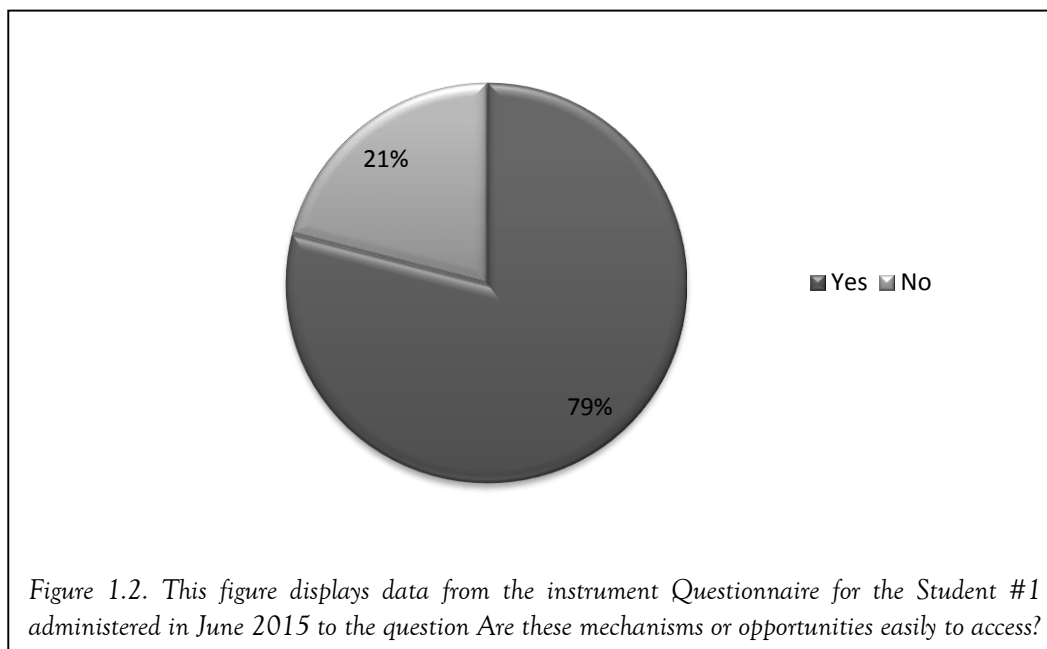


CI-UNA teachers also reported the mechanisms they are certain that this language program offers to students. Among the options selected, teachers determined that speaking clubs, teacher-student conference hours, webpages and extra practice from the workbook were the most known enhancement mechanisms. In fact, students and teachers agreed on the fact that the speaking clubs are the most known enhancement mechanism.

All of the students' and teachers' answers evince that the CI-UNA program does offer enhancement mechanisms to its students, and that the speaking clubs is the most impactful of all.

The CI-UNA developers were also asked to refer to the mechanisms provided to enhance the students' oral performance. The three of them that filled out this questionnaire replied positively although two of them reported that the language program is not responsible for providing these types of mechanisms.

Students were also questioned about how accessible the enhancement mechanisms they pointed out in the previous answer were. Figure 1.2 shows that 38 students answered positively, amounting 79%. The rest of the students, 10 students out of the total, represented by 21% answered negatively. They remarked that the schedule for the speaking clubs is flexible, the sessions are held before the regular classes, and that there are three sessions during the week. They also pointed out that the speaking clubs are free. Furthermore, they stated that the speaking clubs are open to students of any age. They commented that the speaking clubs are held while they are still at work, money was also a constraint, and that there is little information about the enhancement mechanisms.

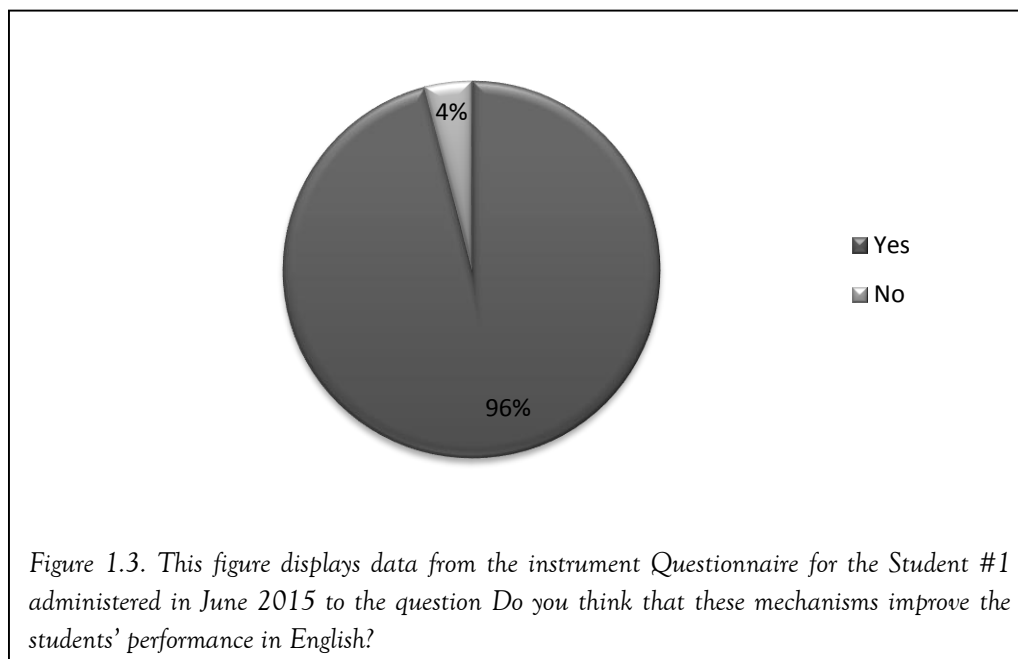


Teachers were also asked whether or not the opportunities or mechanisms were in accordance with the students' needs. Twelve of the teachers replied positively whereas three of them answered negatively. The majority reported that these mechanisms are suitable for CI-UNA students since they do not have to pay, can come three days in addition to the days they attend regular classes, they can contact native English speakers, the sessions are short and simple, and students can choose the most appropriate schedule for them. Teachers also pointed out that students oftentimes cannot go to the speaking clubs due to their work schedules.

Two CI-UNA developers replied to the same inquiry that the schedules are not accessible since most of the students enrolled in the regular courses are either people who finish work at 5:00 or 5:30 pm, or high school students whose afternoon schedule extends to 4:00 or 5:00 pm. They also mentioned that the time duration was suitable and the lack of a fee makes the speaking clubs a real asset for students of this program.

Students were also asked whether they thought the enhancement mechanisms improved their performance in English. The next Figure 1.3 illustrates the results to this question.

In fact, 96% of the students answered positively representing 45 out of the 47 students that replied to this inquiry. Furthermore, two students that represented 4% of the total answered negatively. Some positive aspects as to why they believe these mechanisms would improve the students' performance were that a native speaker teaches the speaking clubs, these mechanisms provide the students with more practice and more support, and there is very valuable feedback.



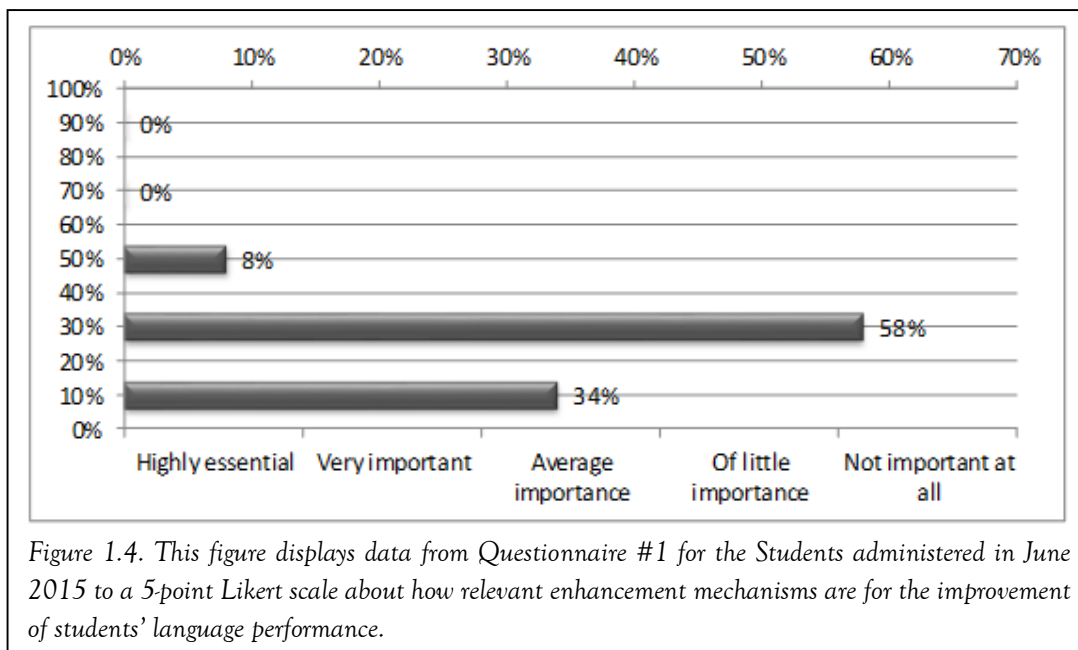
Teachers were also asked the same question. Fourteen teachers replied positively. Just one teacher answered negatively. Some relevant aspects why teachers believed these mechanisms enhance the students' English learning are: students speak without being evaluated, they have contact with the oral language, they feel more confident in this type of environment, they lose fear of speaking the language, they put vocabulary into practice and their practice makes perfect. Some aspects that teachers pointed out why they believe these mechanisms do not help at all are that they imply a varying degree of proficiency and most of the tasks are written, not oral.

Two CI-UNA developers answered that these mechanisms seem to be a great opportunity for students to improve their oral performance. However, one CI-UNA developer pointed out that she would like to see the results of a research study comparing the students' oral performance before and after their exposure to the enhancement mechanisms.

Students were requested to determine the degree of relevance of the implementation of CI-UNA enhancement mechanisms. Figure 1.4 reveals the results related to the relevance of enhancement mechanisms at CI-UNA according to students.

The majority of the students reported that enhancement mechanisms are either highly essential or very important. Actually, 17 students answered that these mechanisms were highly essential. This number of students represented 34% of the total number. Furthermore, 29 students that represented 58% of the total number selected the answer very important. Four students represented 8% of all the students who selected the answer "average important." These data demonstrate that a great number of students believe that extra help or reinforcement are necessary and useful for students' language development. In the case of the program developers, two of them answered positively to this same question

while one of them was not sure about these mechanisms improving the students' oral English performance.



Students were required to point out the enhancement mechanisms that they believe CI-UNA as a meaningful language program should offer to local citizens. Table 1.1 exhibits the data found corresponding to the mechanisms identified by students.

Table 1.1. Enhancement mechanisms that CI-UNA should offer

	M
Speaking clubs	2.98
Wi-Fi conectivity	2.78
Web page	2.94
Native Speaker Contact	3.97
Free Access to language labs	2.68
Extracurricular activities	2.30
E-pals	1.94
Forums	2.36

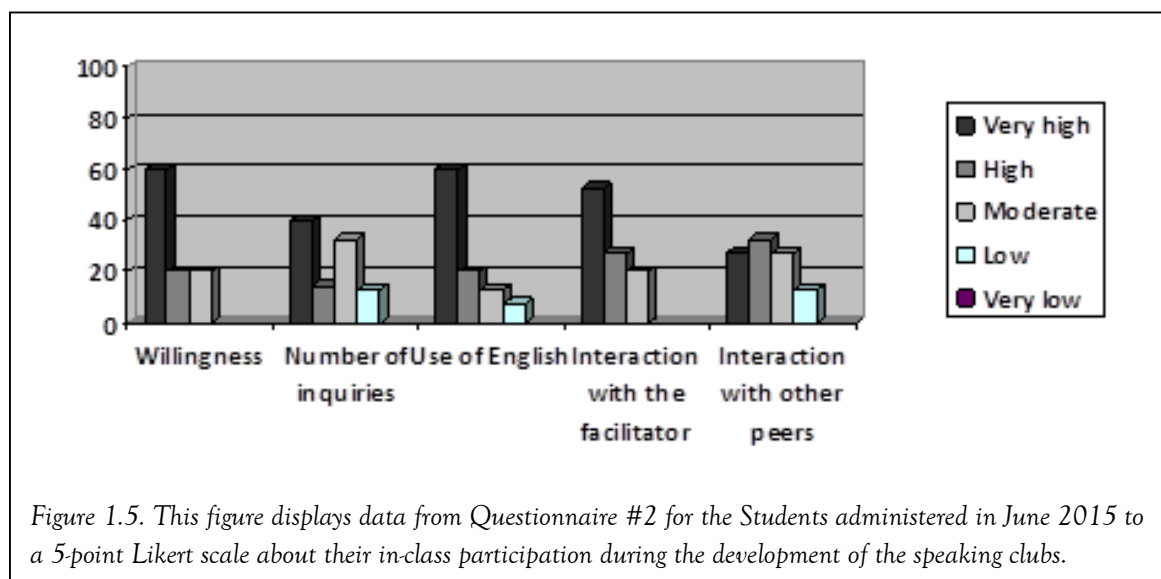
Note. Rated on a 5-point Likert scale 4='highly essential,' 3='very important', 2='average importance', 1='of little importance' and 0='not important at all' M= mean

Among the different enhancement mechanisms mentioned by students, they pointed out that speaking clubs, Wi-Fi connectivity, a web page, native speaker contact, free access to language labs, extracurricular activities, e-pals and forums were some of the enhancement mechanisms CI-UNA should offer. These data were analyzed by recording students' answers from a 5-point Likert scale. The mean was calculated to determine what mechanism was the most or least selected and the degree of relevance given. The top four enhancement

mechanisms were native speaker contact, represented by a mean of 3.97; speaking clubs, represented by a mean of 2.98; web page, represented by a mean of 2.94; and Wi-Fi connectivity, represented by a mean of 2.78. Furthermore, the least selected enhancement mechanisms were free access to language labs, represented by a mean of 2.68; forums, represented by a mean of 2.36; extracurricular activities, represented by a mean of 2.30; and e-pals, represented by a mean of 1.94. Native speaker exposure stands out as the most recommended mechanism according to students. This evinces that students are aware that contact with natural language is highly necessary for successful language performance and that the speaking clubs are appropriate mechanisms to optimize foreign language learning. In addition to this information, it is worth noting that the three CI-UNA developers who filled out the questionnaire #4 determined that the strongest mechanism that is being offered by the language program is the speaking clubs.

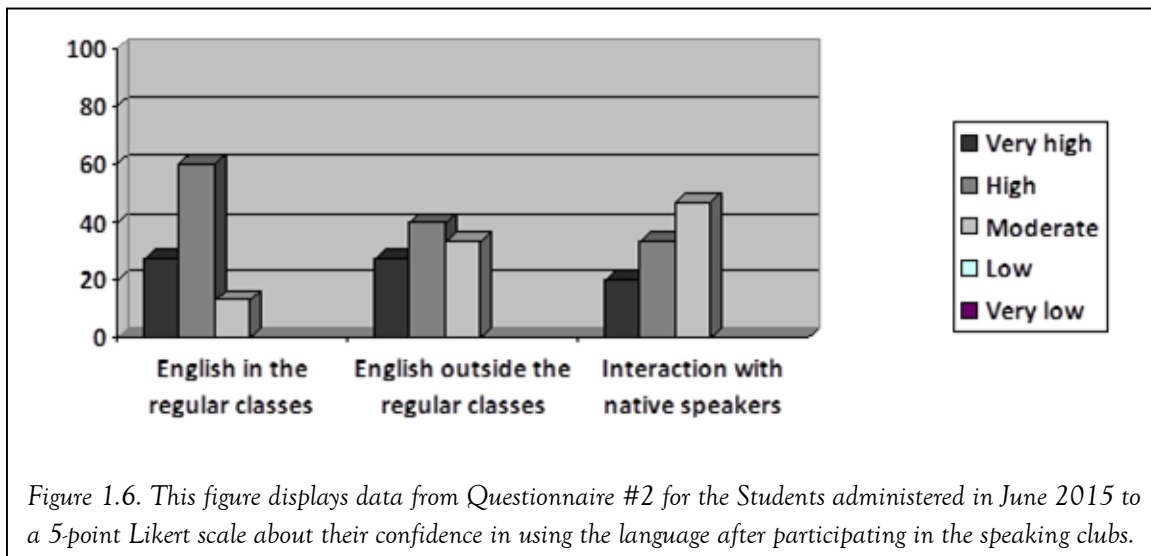
Results and discussion of question 2- To what extent has additional language learning enhancement been conducive to successful oral performance?

Students who attended the speaking clubs for two bimesters in a row completed Questionnaire #2. They were required to establish the degree in which their in-class participation improved by marking one of the options given in a 5-point Likert scale. The next Figure 1.5 shows the results gathered for the improvement of in-class participation during the development of the speaking clubs.



The figure above shows the different aspects that students were asked. As can be seen, 60% of students reported a very high degree of willingness to participate. It can be concluded, then, that the students who attended speaking clubs two bimesters in a row were willing to interact when at speaking club. Students reported a lower number of inquiries to the teacher of speaking clubs, but more than 50% still reported in the "very high" or "high" category. Furthermore, most students reported a very high or high level of use of English in the class. The students seemed to be more willing to interact with the facilitator than with others.

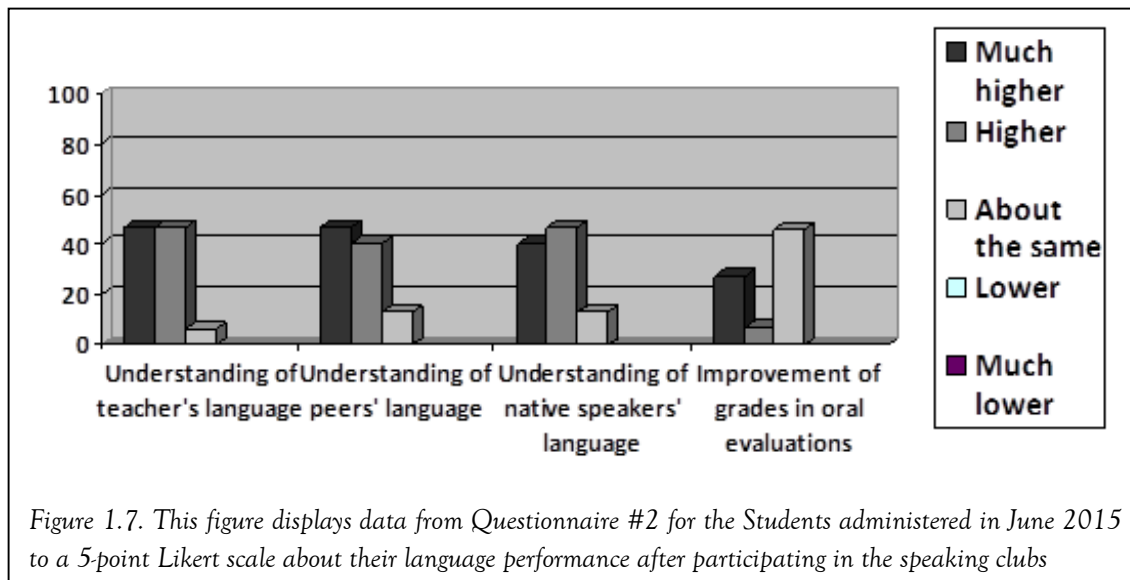
Continuing with the results from Questionnaire #2, students were required to measure their level of confidence with the English language on a 5-point Likert scale. Figure 1.6 shows the students' reported level of confidence in oral English after attending speaking clubs.



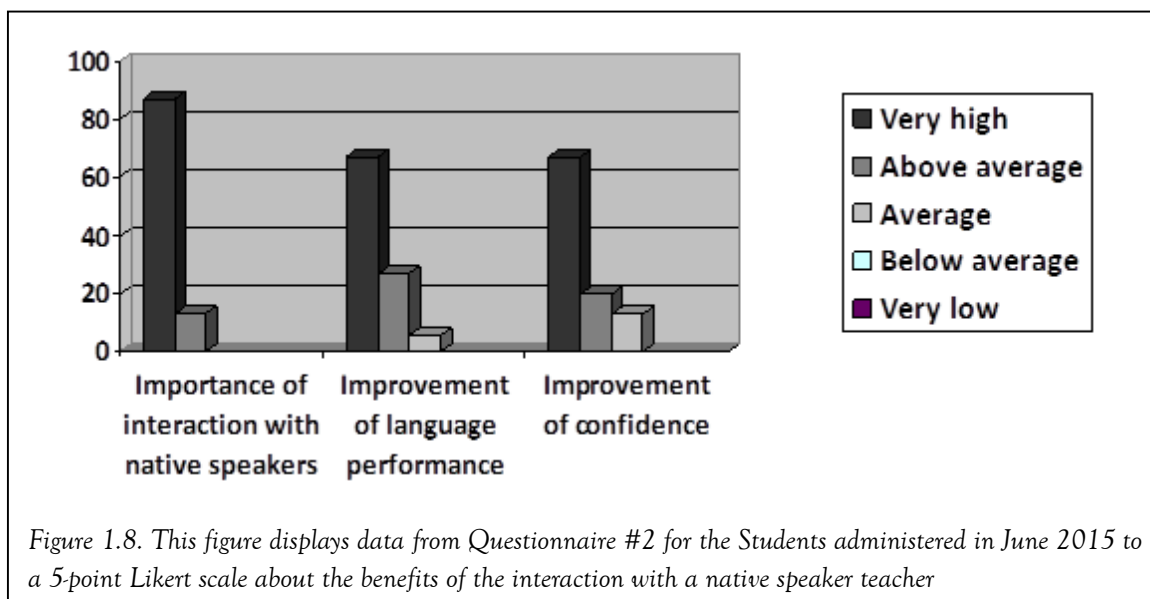
As can be seen in Figure 1.6, students reported an overall "high" degree of confidence in their oral English in the regular English classes. However, students reported less confidence in their oral English outside the regular class. The majority of students reported "moderate" confidence with native speakers after having attended the speaking clubs for two consecutive bimesters. However, it should be noted that in none of the three categories did students report a low or very low level of confidence. This figure suggests that speaking clubs have had an overall positive impact on the confidence of those students who have chosen to attend it.

In Questionnaire #2, students were also asked to evaluate their opinion on their improvement in oral English after having attended speaking clubs for two consecutive bimesters on a 5-point Likert scale. Figure 1.7 shows the results of this inquiry based on the students' level of knowledge about their improvement.

It is clear, according to figure 1.7, that the majority of students either reported "much higher" or "high" improvement in their understanding of teachers', peers', and native speakers' oral English, although this is slightly less so with understanding native speakers' oral English. Although the majority of students did not report any improvement in their grades in oral evaluations, at least 30% of students reported some notable improvement in their oral evaluation grades after having attended speaking clubs. This would suggest that students feel their oral English is improving, and at least 30% reported some growth due to having attended speaking clubs over two bimesters.



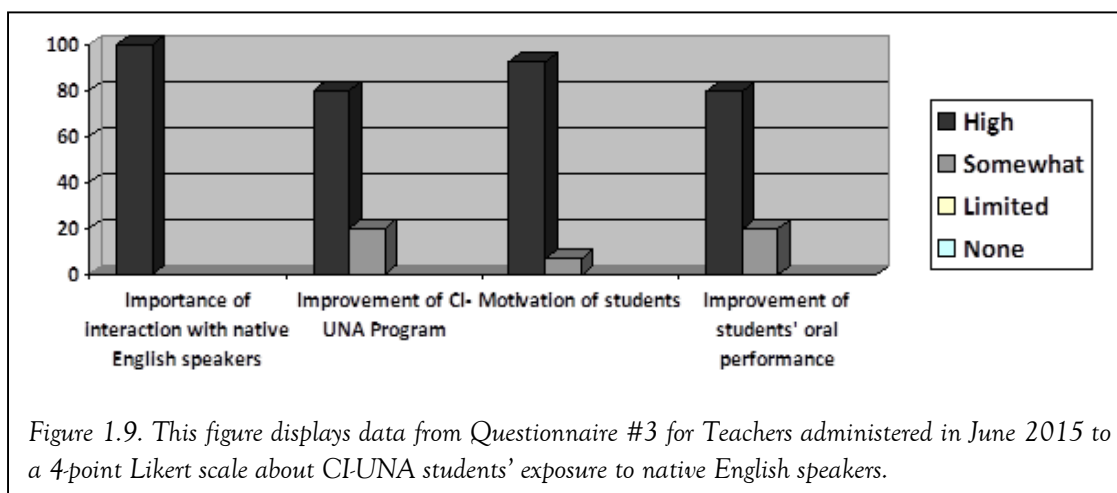
Students answering Questionnaire #2 were then asked to give their opinion on the benefits of interaction with a native English speaker as the facilitator of the speaking clubs. They were required to represent their responses on a 5-point Likert scale.



According to figure 1.8, more than 80% of the students that attended the speaking clubs two bimesters in a row reported that interaction with native English speakers had a very high level of importance when learning English. Additionally, over 60% of these students reported a very high level of improvement, and over 20% a high level of improvement, of language performance due to the implementation of a native English speaker as facilitator of speaking clubs. Equally, over 60% of students reported improved confidence in oral performance due to the implementation of a native speaker as facilitator

of the speaking clubs, with 20% reporting they had had above average improvement, and 15% reporting an average level of improvement.

In a similar vein, the CI-UNA teachers were requested to determine to what extent exposure to native speakers could improve the students' English oral performance. Figure 1.9 shows the teachers' choices according to four different aspects the importance of interacting with native speakers, the improvement of CI-UNA program, students' motivation and the improvement of students' oral performance.



As can be seen, all the aspects were reported to show a “high” level. For the first aspect about providing native speaker interaction, all the teachers agreed on the fact that it has a high relevance. Next, the second aspect that teachers think could improve with native speaker exposure is students' motivation. Actually, just 1 of the 15 teachers reported “somewhat” for the improvement of the students' motivation. The third and fourth aspect showed the same number of choices. Twelve of the fifteen teachers reported each of these aspects as having a “high” improvement. Just three teachers in each case selected “somewhat” for the improvement of CI-UNA program and the students' oral performance.

The CI-UNA coordinators were also asked to report about the importance of interacting with native English speakers, the improvement of the language program, the students' oral performance and the students' motivation. The following Table 1.2 shows the information gathered from the CI-UNA coordinators' questionnaire.

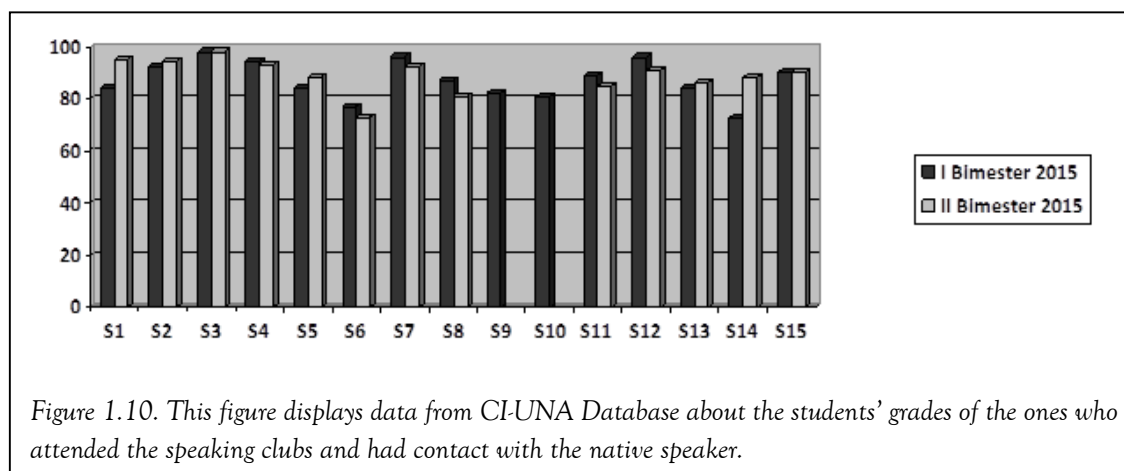
The three coordinators reported that the interaction with native English speakers is highly relevant and that the students' oral performance might greatly improve due to this type of contact. These choices were represented by a mean of 4 in each case. The coordinators also believe that this type of exposure raises students' motivation. This aspect represents a mean of 3.66. In addition to this, the coordinators reported that the CI-UNA program may improve thanks to the incorporation of native English speakers to the activities offered. This was the lowest mean recorded, 3.33.

Table 1.2.
Information about CI-UNA Students' Exposure to Native English Speakers

	M
Interaction with native English speakers	4.00
Improvement of the CI-UNA program	3.33
Students' motivation	3.66
Students' oral performance	4.00

Note. Rated on a 4-point Likert scale 4='highly' 3= 'somewhat', 2='limited' and 1='none' M= mean.

The researchers were allowed to access the CI-UNA Database to be able to measure the improvements of these students quantitatively in their final course grade. Figure 1.10 shows 15 students' grades comparatively between the first and second bimesters while they were simultaneously attending speaking clubs.



According to the CI-UNA database, five students improved their overall performance while they were attending speaking clubs and six had received lower grades while attending speaking clubs. Two students showed no or negligible change in their overall grades between the two bimesters. Finally, two students were not able to attend the second bimester, so no conclusion can be reached about their improvement over the two bimesters. Keeping this in mind, it is necessary to only count the students whose grades can be compared in both periods they attended the speaking clubs; in other words 13 and not 15. In fact, 5 of 13 students who improved their oral performance, representing 38,46%, and the other 2 of 13 who did not show any improvement at all, representing 15,38% are part of the total count of 7 students whose performance was positive while they were attending the speaking clubs. These students amounted 53, 84%. The other 46, 16% exhibited a decline in the second bimester they were attending the speaking clubs. This decrease in their performance could be due to several reasons. A further study could relate to the reasons behind students' dropout rate and their decline in grades.

The researchers further measured the students on how their overall score showed comparatively to that of the class. Table 1.3 shows the comparison of students' final grades with the class averages in both bimesters.

Table 1.3.
Comparison of Students' Grades to the Average Class Grades

Student	I Bimester	Average grade Bimester I	class II Bimester	Average grade Bimester II
S1	84	81.02	95	81.62
S2	92	81.02	94	81.62
S3	98	89.75	98	85.41
S4	94	86.70	93	82.83
S5	84	81.02	88	81.62
S6	77	86.70	73	~~~~~
S7	96	86.70	92	82.83
S8	87	86.70	81	82.83
S9	82	73.86	Desertó	~~~~~
S10	81	80.76	Desertó	~~~~~
S11	89	80.76	85	78.88
S12	96	82.23	91	83.43
S13	84	82.23	86	83.43
S14	73	80.76	88	89.95
S15	90	86.90	90	87.61

Note. S6 failed the course, S9 and S10 dropped out of the course.

In a survey of 27 (not counting the three that did not finish) cases with 15 students, 23 cases received a better grade than that of the class average, while 4 received a lower grade than that of the class average. These data show that in 85% of the cases of students attended speaking clubs, they received a better grade than that of the class average. This, however, does not determine whether the students received a better grade than the class average because of the speaking clubs, or because, being more applied students, they decided to attend the speaking clubs. However, it can be assumed the fact that more practice and effort on the students' part imply better grades and a higher level of performance.

4. Recommendations

After the analysis of the data gathered, a set of recommendations for students, teachers and authorities was put forward. These recommendations entail the answer to the third research question. First, it is recommendable for students to participate in all the activities offered by the language program. Only those students who put forth some extra effort can accelerate the learning of a foreign language. The speaking clubs, as one of the mechanisms to enhance the oral performance at CI-UNA, are a suitable alternative to improve their language level, gain confidence, and interact with other peers as well as native speakers. Thus, it is suggested to attend the speaking clubs sessions at least once a week to heighten the oral performance and improve social skills.

It is worth noting that students need to be encouraged to attend the speaking clubs by assigning a small percentage of the total grade of the regular courses if they willingly participate in at least one session per week during the whole bimester. This action might guarantee students' participation and attendance to the speaking clubs, and at the same time, assure the improvement of students' oral performance. Therefore, it is advisable for teachers to use this strategy as one possible alternative to motivate students to work extra time by attending the speaking clubs.

One recommendation for the CI-UNA authorities is that if this study shows that oral enhancement is valued by the students of CI-UNA, and that having a native speaker or contact with a native speaker is important, then another study must be done to help further explain the relatively low attendance to the speaking clubs, given that students seem to value it when asked their opinions. In addition, a study should be done to measure the cost-effectiveness of running speaking clubs when student attendance is not required. Similarly, the speaking clubs are a stimulating language enhancement strategy that should be supported by establishing an attendance policy included in all the courses syllabi. Teachers should be allowed to promote this policy and assign an extra percentage of the course grade to those who will willingly attend the speaking clubs. It would be very important to consider the implementation of control sheets signed by the speaking clubs facilitator to assure that the students actually attended the sessions once a week. From the alternatives provided by students as possible enhancement mechanisms the CI-UNA program should offer, the coordinators should plan on implementing these mechanisms more in conjunction with other teachers from foreign universities such as e-pals, forums, chats and blogs among others. Students are aware that contact with natural language is highly necessary for successful language performance. Hence, it is highly recommendable to devise a strategy in order to involve native English speakers in the activities the CI-UNA program holds.

5. Conclusions

This study aimed at measuring to what extent enhancement strategies have been effective and how CI-UNA can further accommodate the linguistic needs of students in order to

optimize their oral performance. Overall, the results indicated the CI-UNA language program offers several enhancement mechanisms or opportunities for students such as videos and audios, speaking clubs, Internet connectivity, teacher-student conference hours and assignments, with the speaking clubs being the most recognized of all. The speaking clubs are flexible in accordance with students' needs. In other words, the speaking clubs are held three days a week, in a schedule accessible to most of the students; students are not limited to attending one specific class session, but rather are free to attend all three days of the week, and most importantly, they can have access to native English speakers.

There is a deep-seated belief among students and teachers that the enhancement mechanisms can improve the students' oral performance when a native speaker teaches the speaking clubs. The reason seems to be that the level of learner motivation raises and this stimulates their willingness to participate, interact and share with the native speaker. Furthermore, students determine that the CI-UNA language program should offer a variety of enhancement activities besides the speaking clubs, which they believe have been an effective tool. Enhancement activities such as a web page, native speaker contact, free access to language labs, extracurricular activities, e-pals and forums are proper options to improve students' language performance. Students, teachers and coordinators are convinced that native speaker exposure is the most suitable enhancement mechanism that can be used. Consequently, it is imperative to establish a program to attract more native English speakers to the university campus and guarantee their participation in the different activities the CI-UNA program will offer in the future.

The speaking clubs have had an overall positive impact on the confidence of those students who have chosen to attend these sessions. A further study could relate to the reasons behind students' dropout rate and their decline in grades.

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