



UNIVERSIDAD ESTATAL PENÍNSULA DE SANTA ELENA
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND LANGUAGES
PEDAGOGY OF NATIONAL AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES

**“ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TESTS IN ASSESSING UNIVERSITY
STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS”**

RESEARCH PROJECT

As a prerequisite to obtain a:

**BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN PEDAGOGY OF NATIONAL AND
FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

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Sincerely,

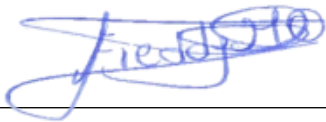


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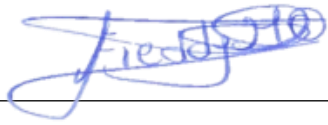


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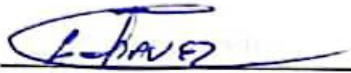


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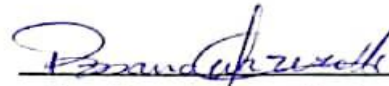
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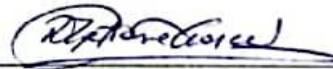
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Acknowledgment I

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-Freddy Fabian Martinez Orrala

Acknowledgment II

I thank God for allowing me to accomplish this goal, I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to my parents, Franklin Vásquez and Mariela Rodriguez their unconditional love and encouragement have been my constant source of strength, motivating me to persevere through challenges and celebrate successes. I also thank Freddy Martinez, my best friend since pre-college and my thesis partner, for trusting me with this important project and for giving me support throughout this process, I could not have accomplished this without his invaluable assistance. I also express my sincere thanks to my extraordinary friends from "DAF" Ana, Dayana, Andrés and Ariel. Their support and advice have been fundamental to achieving this goal.

-Franklin Javier Vásquez Rodriguez

Dedication I

I want to dedicate this research to God and my dear parents, Glenda Orrala and Freddy Martinez, for their motivation, perseverance, and understanding in this long process of my life, moving forward with determination and dedication, being capable of everything and never giving up, I really appreciate all the life lessons that I received to keep me going.

-With Love, Freddy Fabian Martinez Orrala

Dedication II

I dedicate this research work to my parents Franklin Vasquez and Mariela Rodriguez whose love and wisdom have been my guiding stars, also to my siblings Jefferson, Michael and Darley. Their encouragement has kept me moving forward. Thank you for always believing in me and pushing me to reach new heights. Thank you for everything, this is for you.

-With Love, Vásquez Rodriguez Franklin Javier

Abstract

This research investigated the impact of English proficiency tests on assessing university students' speaking skills. The study aimed to understand the perceptions of both teachers and students regarding the effectiveness and challenges of these assessments. Qualitative methodology was employed, utilizing one-on-one interviews with five teachers experienced in preparing students for international examinations and eight students who had taken these tests. The results indicated that both groups recognized the value of English proficiency tests as essential tools for evaluating language skills. However, they also highlighted significant challenges, particularly in the speaking component, which was often considered as the most difficult due to factors such as time pressure, test anxiety, and limited practice opportunities. The findings emphasized the necessity of incorporating regular speaking practice and real-world simulations into the curriculum to enhance students' speaking abilities. The study concluded that while English proficiency tests are crucial for academic and professional success, effective preparation strategies are essential to help students overcome the challenges associated with these assessments. Recommendations for improving English language teaching and assessment practices in universities were provided, focusing on the integration of speaking tasks and the use of technology to facilitate learning.

Keywords: English Proficiency, Speaking Skills, University Students, Assessment.

Resumen

Esta investigación analizó el impacto de los exámenes de competencia en inglés en la evaluación de las habilidades de habla de los estudiantes universitarios. El estudio tuvo como objetivo comprender las percepciones de docentes y estudiantes sobre la efectividad y los desafíos de estas evaluaciones. Se utilizó una metodología cualitativa, empleando entrevistas individuales con cinco docentes con experiencia en la preparación de estudiantes para exámenes internacionales y ocho estudiantes que habían realizado estas pruebas. Los resultados indicaron que ambos grupos reconocieron el valor de los exámenes de competencia en inglés como herramientas esenciales para evaluar las habilidades lingüísticas. Sin embargo, también destacaron desafíos significativos, particularmente en el componente de habla, que a menudo se considera el más difícil debido a factores como la presión del tiempo, la ansiedad por el examen y las oportunidades limitadas de práctica. Los hallazgos enfatizaron la necesidad de incorporar práctica regular de habla y simulaciones del mundo real en el currículo para mejorar las habilidades de habla de los estudiantes. El estudio concluyó que, si bien los exámenes de competencia en inglés son cruciales para el éxito académico y profesional, las estrategias de preparación efectivas son esenciales para ayudar a los estudiantes a superar los desafíos asociados con estas evaluaciones. Se proporcionaron recomendaciones para mejorar la enseñanza y las prácticas de evaluación del idioma inglés en las universidades, centrándose en la integración de tareas de habla y el uso de tecnología para facilitar el aprendizaje.

Palabras clave: Competencia en inglés, habilidades de habla, estudiantes universitarios, evaluación,

INDEX

ADVISOR’S APPROVAL	2
Statement of Authorship	3
Declaration.....	4
Board of Examiners	5
Acknowledgment I	6
Dedication	7
Abstract.....	8
Resumen.....	9
Introduction	13
Chapter I.....	14
The Problem	14
Research Topic	14
Research Title.....	14
Problem Statement	14
Justification.....	16
General Question	17
Specific Questions	17
General Objective	17
Specific Objectives.....	18
Chapter II	19
Theoretical Framework.....	19
Background.....	19
Pedagogical Basis	23
Communicative Language Teaching.....	23
Formative and Summative Assessment	24
Assessment for Learning a Foreign Language.....	24
Positive and Negative Washback Effect	25
Theoretical basis.....	26
English Proficiency Tests	26

Assessment	26
Assessing Speaking Skills in English Proficiency Test	27
Legal Basis.....	28
Common European Framework of References for Language.....	28
Consejo de Educación Superior.....	29
Importance	30
Chapter III.....	31
Methodological Framework	31
Methods	31
Qualitative Methodology	31
Type of Research.....	31
Phenomenological Studies	31
Data Collection Techniques	32
One-on-one Interview	32
Instruments	33
Questionnaire	33
Types of Questions.....	33
Open-ended Questions.....	33
Population and Sample	33
Chapter IV	35
Analysis of Findings	35
Brief Explanation of the Findings	35
Report of the Questions	36
Interpretation of Data from the Interview	38
Limitations.....	46
Chapter V.....	48
Conclusions and Recommendations	48
Conclusions.....	48
Recommendations.....	49
References.....	52

Annexes	58
Annex A: <i>Certified Anti-plagiarism System</i>	58
Annex B: <i>Questionnaires</i>	60
Annex C: <i>Interviews transcribed</i>	64

Introduction

In today's global society, the ability to speak English well is very important for students, especially in countries where English proficiency is increasingly considered as a key to success in various fields. English is often used as a common language that connects people from different backgrounds and cultures, making it essential for academic collaboration, international business, and cultural exchange. This research focuses on how English proficiency tests assess the speaking skills of university students, which many consider to be the most difficult part of learning a new language. Speaking skills require not only knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but also the ability to express ideas clearly and confidently in conversations, often under time constraints. The main goal of this study is to understand how both teachers and students view these tests and the challenges they face during the speaking part of the exams, such as test anxiety, limited practice opportunities, and the pressure to perform well. To achieve this, the research uses interviews with experienced teachers who prepare students for international exams and students who have taken these tests.

The results will help to better understand the impact of these proficiency tests on students' speaking abilities and identify effective ways to prepare for them, such as incorporating more interactive and practical speaking exercises into the curriculum, this research aims to provide useful insights for improving English language teaching and testing practices in universities. In this way, it hopes to help students develop the skills they need to succeed in a world where English is increasingly important for academic and career opportunities, thereby enhancing their employability and global competitiveness.

Chapter I

The Problem

Research Topic

Assessment and Speaking Skills

Research Title

English Proficiency Tests in Assessing University Students' Speaking Skills

Problem Statement

English has become one of the most significant languages globally, influencing education extensively. It impacts curriculum design and materials, pedagogy, and broader education policy around the globe. English dominates education as a lingua franca, connecting people worldwide. According to Neelambaram et al. (2024), as the world becomes more interconnected, proficiency in English is often mandatory for academic conversations and global research collaboration. It is undeniable that English is a significant force in global education.

In Ecuador, English is considered an essential tool for progress in various global fields, as shown by Pérez Gómez et al. (2015) and later by Sevy-Biloon et al. (2020) investigations highlighting the importance of English proficiency in educational settings. This emphasis is reflected in the Foreign Language Curriculum of Ecuador, which evaluates students' proficiency at the college or university level and is essential for ensuring students possess the necessary English skills to achieve academic success and communicate effectively.

The English language also plays a critical role in communication, especially in educational settings. For instance, Souriyavongsa et al. (2021) have demonstrated that all university students need English for learning, research, and knowledge development. As a result, many universities around the country have considered English proficiency a condition of educational programs, making it the primary language of instruction in higher education.

The increased use of English in higher education connects students globally through research and access to educational resources, such as journals, textbooks, and English-speaking professors, representing a valuable investment for the future. Language proficiency comprises four basic skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Each is important for communication and personal and professional development. It enables students to express their ideas, collaborate, and participate effectively in academic and professional settings. As Rahayu et al. (2022) note, proficiency in and assessment of speaking skills at the university level are vital for developing students' communication skills, academic performance, and career opportunities.

Insufficient assessment of oral language skills can negatively impact literacy acquisition. Mahmudah & Anggunsari (2023) found that inadequate oral language assessment can lead to students making errors, hindering future skills development. The lack of feedback on students' oral skills, fluency, and overall proficiency can further inhibit language development. Proper staffing of these assessments helps create positive cyclical quality and individual or group success, while inadequate staffing can disrupt this process. With adequate support, assessments may gain essential elements such as pronunciation, fluency, and cohesion, and essential oral communication skills. Students often face significant challenges during the assessments when adjusting their study strategies to achieve optimal scores.

This research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the perspectives of educators and students regarding English proficiency tests used to assess speaking skills. By highlighting both strengths and challenges associated with these assessments, the study will inform best practices in language education, contribute valuable insights to academic literature, and empower contributors to enhance assessment frameworks that better align with real-world communication needs.

Justification

The assessment of speaking skills in university students through English proficiency tests is a vital area of exploration within language education. This study will examine the perspectives of both teachers and students regarding the effectiveness of these tests in evaluating speaking abilities. As the demand for effective communication in English increases in academic and professional contexts, understanding the criticisms and limitations associated with these assessments becomes essential.

While English proficiency tests such as Cambridge and TOEFL offer several advantages, they also present challenges that merit careful consideration. These assessments comprehensively evaluate language proficiency by measuring all four skills, thus providing a holistic view of a student's capabilities. Furthermore, they are widely recognized by universities and employers globally, making them invaluable for students pursuing academic and career opportunities abroad. Mastery of speaking is a critical element in foreign language education and is essential for acquiring proficiency in a new language. (Ohta, 2005, as cited in (Alnajashi, 2024)

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General Question

How do English proficiency tests influence the assessment and development of university students' speaking skills?

Specific Questions

- What are the common challenges university students face in the speaking section of English proficiency tests?
- What are the perceptions and experiences of professors and students about English proficiency tests in the assessment of speaking skills?
- What is the role of English proficiency tests in assessing University students' speaking skills?

General Objective

To explore the influence of English proficiency tests in assessing University students' speaking skills

Specific Objectives

- To determine the challenges university students face during the speaking part in assessing proficiency tests.
- To identify university students' and professors' perceptions and experiences regarding English proficiency tests in the assessment of speaking skills.
- To understand the role of English proficiency tests in influencing students' preparation strategies for improving speaking performance.

Chapter II

Theoretical Framework

Background

Assessing oral skills in English classes is crucial, especially for university students. As global connectivity increases, the demand for proficient English speakers increases. In this study, the theoretical framework acts as a conceptual tool to observe and understand the research problem. We will analyze international, regional, and local studies to understand the phenomenon under investigation.

A study conducted in China by Yan Chen (2019) emphasized that English proficiency tests are authoritative assessments designed to measure an individual's competence in the English language. These are known for construct validity and empirical validity, as the outcomes should represent what happens realistically while people take a test, thus detecting individuals who know their subject matter. The primary purpose of these tests is to evaluate language competence regardless of any prior training the test-taker may have received in English.

The article also noted that English proficiency tests, such as the TOEFL and IELTS, are essential for academic and professional opportunities as they serve as certifications of English competence. In education and employment, they are becoming more common and sometimes obligatory for all those for whom English is a medium necessary for success. As globalization fosters interrelation, the demand for English language skills has surged worldwide. As a result, various countries have implemented diverse strategies to prepare their students for the English Proficiency Tests, especially in the speaking part.

According to research by Lee (2022), success in the speaking section of crucial English proficiency tests is based on efficient, focused preparation. Key aspects include understanding task formats, comprehending read-aloud passages and individual responses, and effectively managing time constraints. Expanding knowledge on various topics helps reduce cultural prejudice and enhances self-confidence. Regular, test-like practice and detailed analysis of the assessment criteria ensure focused improvement. It is a strategic approach that includes these elements to optimize performance in the speaking section.

A study conducted by Chaengjaroen (2024) reveals that instructors in Thailand implemented a multifaceted approach to prepare English as a Foreign Language learners for English Proficiency examinations. In educational institutions where the English language was not as required as it is now, various strategies were adapted and implemented in a course to improve preparation for international exams. Standardized commercial materials were utilized to target specific areas such as vocabulary acquisition and speaking and grammar proficiency. Regular mini-tests served as a means to reinforce learning and provide timely feedback, while pre- and post-testing facilitated systematic evaluation of student progress.

Ork et al. (2024) agreed that anxiety, the fear of making mistakes, are problems when assessing students' speaking abilities. Furthermore, unfavorable classroom conditions can hinder efficient evaluation and communication, affecting students' performance and confidence in speaking English. This is why the teachers concentrated on addressing students' areas of weakness. This comprehensive methodology aims to enhance students' test-taking capabilities, foster their confidence, and mitigate the anxiety associated with standardized testing.

In Russia, findings from a study by Ivanova & Ivanov (2021) highlight a clear method to improve English speaking skills for exam preparation. The three-step process includes pre-

speaking activities like brainstorming and pronunciation practice, followed by speaking tasks such as role-plays or presentations and ending with feedback and self-assessment. This approach boosts active learning, builds confidence, and reduces exam anxiety. Active participation between teachers and students ensures better preparation and development of oral skills.

A scholarly article by Bata & Castro (2021) indicates that teachers in Colombia play a crucial role in preparing students to achieve better results in English proficiency tests. This approach involves instruction in organizational and study skills. This strategy encompasses instruction in organizational and study skills, effective test-taking techniques, and the cultivation of emotional intelligence to mitigate anxiety. Furthermore, fostering a supportive learning environment and providing regular feedback through practice examinations can enhance students' confidence and performance in the speaking section of these proficiency assessments.

Research by Márquez Márquez et al. (2022) shows that Mexican teachers can use different strategies to help students prepare for English proficiency exams, especially for the speaking part. Important strategies include helping students get to know the exam format, like the EXAVER certification, to reduce anxiety. Teachers can also use interactive learning activities that encourage students to work together and give regular feedback to help students see where they need to improve their speaking skills. In addition, creating a supportive learning environment that focuses on students' mental preparation is important for building their confidence in speaking. These strategies work best when lessons are designed to accommodate the varied needs of students.

A study conducted by Almeida et al. (2021) in Ecuador investigated various types of teaching strategies to enable students to attain the level of proficiency needed in exams like PET. These approaches include continuous assessments such as quizzes and projects, in addition to

individualized instruction, which is tailored uniquely for each student. Collaborative evaluation by multiple instructors promotes fairness in grading. In oral communication, students deliver presentations evaluated by two instructors, which enhances their fluency and comprehension but also aids in developing their ability to articulate their thoughts clearly in English. Also, examinations that affect performance and refer to practical language activities increase motivation and trust in their speaking ability.

Almeida et al. (2021) also emphasize that this process's assessment and full evaluation include three interviews, which aim to measure complexity, understanding, intelligibility, fluency, and content. In addition to these presentations, students participate in interviews and projects to further refine their speaking skills. This makes a systematic assessment based on how well they express themselves verbally, as well as encourages the ongoing development of language in an environment that fosters learning. The language teaching and learning for university students can be affected by the speaking part of English proficiency test. One form of this influence is the washback effect, which is how these tests inform classroom practices and student preparation.

In their study, Hue & Lan (2024) examine the washback effect, which is the influence that language assessments, particularly standardized tests, have on teaching and learning. They explain that this effect can lead to significant changes in how teachers teach and what materials they use, as they may try to better prepare students for the assessment. This can be both good and bad. A positive washback effect can enhance students' interest and passion for learning, enabling them to create a more efficient learning environment. On the other hand, negative washback means teachers are paying too much attention to test preparation for exams, which may restrict the area they impart lessons on.

Pedagogical Basis

Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a pedagogical approach that underscores the importance of communication within the language learning process. According to Hernández & Macías (2023), CLT is influenced by diverse contextual factors, such as teacher preparation, tradition, learner attitudes, and the instructional environment.

Dos Santos (2020) emphasizes that the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach is a student-centered and situation-oriented methodology in language teaching. It encourages learners to actively communicate and share their ideas and experiences with peers and teachers. By creating authentic communicative situations and encouraging learner interaction, CLT can help learners develop practical language skills and build self-confidence in their ability to communicate effectively in the target language.

Task-based Language Teaching

Sumarsonoh et al. (2020) suggest that TBLT enhances students' communicative abilities but also cultivates a positive classroom environment where teachers and students can actively participate. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) continues to be acknowledged as an effective approach to language acquisition, emphasizing meaningful communication and learner-centered activities.

Lotfy Abd & Salah (2020) describe Task-Based Language Teaching as an approach derived from the communicative approach, centering on the utilization of communicative and interactive tasks within a classroom setting. This methodology encompasses three primary stages: the pre-task phase, the while-task phase, and the post-task phase.

TBLT emphasizes the teaching of grammar in a communicative manner rather than a deductive or situational one. It aims to achieve specific educational objectives through meaningful and authentic language usage. This approach aims to raise students' confidence and motivate them to learn and develop a second language by acquiring overall language proficiency.

Formative and Summative Assessment

Bacquet (2020) describes summative assessment as a process of determining a result based on criteria to obtain an analysis. It is defined as any assessment activity that results in a mark or grade and is subsequently employed to evaluate student performance.

Buholzer et al. (2020) suggest that formative assessment serves as a key instrument for enhancing educational practices by providing continuous feedback that can be utilized to modify teaching strategies and more effectively support student learning. This approach stands in contrast to summative assessment, which generally summarizes diagnostic information after a teaching unit to deliver a final judgment regarding the achievement of learning objectives.

Assessment for Learning a Foreign Language

Bardel et al. (2023) have shown that assessment for Learning in Foreign Language Education prioritizes a formative approach. This means that assessments are used to improve student learning and inform teaching methods. It emphasizes the importance of aligning assessments with established frameworks, such as the CEFR. This ensures that evaluations accurately reflect the language skills outlined in the curriculum. A key element is the continuous feedback provided to learners. This feedback helps students understand their progress and identify areas where they can improve. Furthermore, Assessment for Learning in Foreign Language Education encourages integrating assessment practices into everyday classroom activities.

Positive and Negative Washback Effect

As explored by Hoa (2020), the washback effect refers to the influence that testing exerts on teaching and learning practices within educational contexts. It encompasses the beneficial and detrimental impacts that assessments, such as the English Proficiency Test, can have on educators and students.

Positive washback refers to the beneficial impact of English language tests on classroom teaching and learning. Kuang (2020) found that it occurs when tests encourage teachers to use better methods and materials aligned with the assessed skills. This can lead to more relevant materials and deeper learning, improving students' language and test preparation.

Hinai & Jardani (2020) indicate that the negative washback effect refers to the harmful consequences that testing can have on teaching and learning practices. This phenomenon occurs when assessments induce educators to adopt restricted instructional strategies centered primarily on preparing students for specific test formats, often at the expense of a more comprehensive and meaningful educational experience.

They also emphasize the washback effect within the speaking component of English proficiency tests, noting its substantial influence on teaching and learning. They contend that these assessments frequently result in a "teaching to the test" approach, where instruction focuses on specific test formats rather than cultivating genuine communicative competence.

This can engender anxiety among students, hindering their performance in real-world speaking situations. However, it is important to note that the washback effect can also have positive consequences. When proficiency tests are aligned with educational goals and encourage

teachers to use effective teaching methods, they can enhance students' language skills and prepare them for academic and professional success.

Theoretical Basis

English Proficiency Tests

In the article "Outlining International English Language Proficiency Tests" by Shiny & Karthikeyan (2022), English proficiency tests are defined as standardized evaluations intended to assess an individual's capacity to comprehend, communicate, and react in English in a variety of settings. These assessments are indispensable for non-native speakers pursuing prospects in education, employment, and migration to English-speaking nations.

Additionally, the article highlights that these tests are essential tools for assessing language skills. Their significance is amplified in the context of globalization and migration, as they help facilitate access to educational and professional opportunities in English-speaking environments.

Assessment

Sievertsen (2022) suggests that assessments in education serve as systematic instruments employed to evaluate students' learning and performance, providing indispensable feedback to interested parties such as students, parents, and teachers. They play a pivotal role within accountability systems, influencing teacher evaluations and school funding while also categorizing students into educational tracks that can shape their prospects.

However, assessments can introduce implicit biases based on gender, socioeconomic status, and other factors, raising concerns regarding fairness and equity. Additionally, while they can motivate students to engage more profoundly with their studies, they may also contribute to

stress and anxiety, impacting overall comfort. Consequently, the design and implementation of assessments must be meticulously considered to balance their advantages and potential disadvantages.

Fitria (2022) highlights the necessity for comprehensive skill development in various areas of English language proficiency, which is essential for achieving a B2 certification. They emphasize the importance of mastering both oral and written English and the specific challenges faced in different language skills.

Assessing Speaking Skills in English Proficiency Tests

The assessment of speaking skills in English proficiency tests is a complex and important aspect of language education, particularly for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). According to Ghafar & Raheem (2023), one of the most complicated skills of learning a new language is the acquisition of speaking proficiency, which is frequently considered difficult because it involves evaluating various components such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and accuracy, all of which are necessary for effective communication.

The close relationship between speaking and listening skills further complicates the assessment process, making it difficult to assess specific skills individually during testing. As Rusdin & Purwati (2023) noted, many learners struggle to express themselves orally, highlighting the need for clear assessment criteria and effective testing methods that accurately reflect students' speaking proficiency in real-life conversations. They also emphasized that speaking proficiency is measured based on performance. The main aspect of performance that needs to be assessed is language use, including vocabulary richness, structure, and pronunciation proficiency.

Kalymon & Styfanyshyn (2021) recommend using various online resources to prepare for the speaking component of English Proficiency Tests, for example, platforms to connect users with native speakers to boost fluency and apps that emphasize the importance of interactivity, personalization, and effective communication in preparing for the speaking component of English Proficiency Tests.

Legal Basis

Common European Framework of References for Language

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a comprehensive framework developed by the Council of Europe to describe the proficiency levels of language learners. Initially published in 2001, it has become a widely recognized standard for language education throughout Europe and beyond.

The CEFR offers a structured approach to language learning, teaching, and assessment, categorizing language proficiency into six levels, ranging from A1 to C2. These levels assist educators, learners, and institutions in consistently assessing language skills and designing curricula that meet learners' individual needs. (Europarat, 2010)

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) categorizes language proficiency into six levels applicable to English: A1 (Beginner), A2 (Elementary), B1 (Intermediate), B2 (Upper Intermediate), C1 (Advanced), and C2 (Proficient). Each level describes specific abilities, ranging from understanding basic expressions and phrases at A1 to comprehending virtually everything heard or read at C2, including the ability to summarize and express understated ideas fluently and precisely. (Europarat, 2020).

In Ecuador, university students' and teachers' English language proficiency requirements are pivotal for elevating educational standards and global competitiveness.

Consejo de Educación Superior

El Consejo de Educación Superior (CES), of the Ecuadorian Constitution, emphasizes that: “El aprendizaje de una segunda lengua será requisito para la graduación en las carreras de tercer nivel, de acuerdo con los siguientes niveles de suficiencia tomando como referencia el Marco Común Europeo, o su equivalente, para lenguas: b) Para el tercer nivel de grado se requerirá al menos el nivel B1”. (Art. 64)

Students are expected to achieve at least a B1 level in English as a graduation requirement, but PINE students need a B2 level, which indicates their ability to handle basic communication in familiar situations.

The Ministry of Education also suggests that future teachers should reach a B2 proficiency level. This requirement is not legally mandated; rather, it serves as a guideline. This distinction is important, as it highlights the variability in English language education across institutions and the challenges that arise from differing interpretations of these guidelines. (British Council, 2015, p. 36)

PINE students struggle to reach the B2 level to graduate, particularly in speaking, which is often the most challenging skill to develop. By aligning our investigation with CEFR standards, we can better understand the specific speaking competencies that students need to achieve and the barriers they encounter in their language-learning journey.

Importance

This investigation into English proficiency tests as a means of assessing university students' speaking skills is of paramount importance. Given the increasingly globalized world, proficiency in English is a key factor for graduates seeking employment and academic advancement. By exploring the various aspects of this process, including challenges and advantages, this research aims to contribute to a clear understanding of the role English proficiency plays in the educational landscape.

The findings of this investigation will have a positive impact on Ecuadorian society. By providing insights based on the perceptions of students and teachers, this research will serve as a valuable resource for future studies on English language assessment. Furthermore, the information gathered will contribute to informed decision-making regarding the implementation and improvement of English language teaching and assessment practices in Ecuadorian universities.

Chapter III

Methodological Framework

Methods

Qualitative Methodology

This research was carried out using the qualitative research method to study the impact of English proficiency tests on the assessment of university students' speaking skills by exploring the subjective experiences and perspectives of university students and teachers. By examining their beliefs and perceptions, this approach provided valuable information about the role of English proficiency tests

Zeleeva (2019) highlights that qualitative research is characterized by a focus on understanding the experiences of individuals, especially in educational settings, and emphasizes focus groups and phenomenological interview as qualitative research methods, foster a collaborative conversation between researchers and participants. This collaborative knowledge creation allows respondents to reflect on themselves, thus deepening their understanding of their experiences. This research is considered a valuable instrument for addressing pedagogical challenges and enhancing the learning process by prioritizing individuals' subjective experiences and insights of individuals involved in education.

Type of Research

Phenomenological Studies

Data from the study led by Hernández Sampieri & Fernandez-Collado (2014) indicates that phenomenological research is descriptive approach that seeks to understand the subjective

meaning of human experiences. Researchers aim to capture the complexity of their lived experiences by focusing on participants' perceptions and interpretations.

It also emphasizes that researchers engage deeply with participants through different qualitative methods to gather narratives that reveal underlying themes and patterns.

Phenomenological studies provide valuable insights into complex human phenomena, making them relevant across a variety of disciplines.

The findings imply that phenomenological studies can offer valuable insights in investigating English Proficiency Tests in Assessing University Students' Speaking Skills by understanding the perspectives of both students and teachers and identifying strengths and limitations, partially in current assessment practices.

Data Collection Techniques

One-on-one Interview

Hernández Sampieri & Fernandez-Collado (2014) suggest that one-on-one interview is a qualitative research method where researchers engage in a direct conversation with a single participant. During the interviews, open-ended questions were employed to encourage participants to share detailed responses.

This technique is valuable for understanding participants' perspectives. It allows personal connection and a deeper understanding of the participant's point of view. Participants in these interviews were five teachers who have been dedicated to preparing students for the proficiency exams and eight students who had taken this kind of examination.

Instruments

Questionnaire

A questionnaire is a set of questions or items used to gather data or viewpoints. According to Bhandari (2021), it is also a helpful way to learn about people's thoughts and feelings. They can be used to collect information about different topics, such as people's opinions on a certain issue or their experiences. It can be administered in various formats, including paper-based forms, questionnaires, and interviews. Two separate questionnaires were developed to gain a deeper understanding of the data collected.

Types of Questions

Open-ended Questions

This research collected data from open-ended questions. According to Bhandari (2021), open-ended or long-form inquiries permit participants to respond in their own language. Open-ended questions are valuable for extracting detailed qualitative information, and these kinds of questions are essential for exploring the perceptions of students and teachers regarding English Proficiency Tests in Assessing Speaking Skills to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of their opinions. The research involved 17 open-ended questions distributed across two separate questionnaires: the first with nine questions for teachers and another with eight questions for students.

Population and Sample

This research used a sample of five specific English teachers with experience preparing students for international exams and eight students who had taken international English

Proficiency Tests were interviewed. Both groups provided perspectives based on their experiences with these assessments. Teachers offered insights into students' exam preparation while students shared their thoughts on the accuracy of the tests in evaluating their speaking abilities. The outcoming chapter will show the results of this methodological process and compare the insights from the teachers and the students. This information will contribute to a better understanding of the role of English proficiency Tests in Assessing University Students' Speaking Skills.

Chapter IV

Analysis of Findings

Brief Explanation of the Findings

This chapter includes the interpretation of the data obtained from the interviews conducted with five teachers who have prepared students for international examinations and eight students who have taken these kinds of exams to obtain their general insights about English Proficiency Tests in Assessing University Students' Speaking Skills.

Participants were able to express their insights and experiences through the open-ended interview questions, which revealed a variety of point of views on the benefits and challenges of English Proficiency Tests. Both teachers and students recognize the importance of English proficiency tests as standardized tools for assessing language skills across various domains.

In summary, while these tests can be challenging, they also are essential for academic and professional success. Speaking skills are particularly crucial, as they allow for a direct assessment of a learner's ability to communicate effectively. To effectively integrate speaking assessments into their teaching strategies, teachers employ a variety of techniques, including regular practice, real-world simulations, technology integration, and a range of formative and summative assessments.

Report of the Questions

Table 1

Results obtained from teachers' and students' perceptions towards English Proficiency Tests in Assessing University Students' Speaking Skills.

CATEGORIES	TEACHERS	STUDENTS
<p>1 General perception of English Proficiency Tests</p>	<p>According to the interviewees English proficiency tests are valuable tools for assessing language skills that provide a structured framework to evaluate various aspects of language proficiency, from grammar and vocabulary to reading, writing, listening, and speaking. While these tests can be challenging, they offer a standardized way to measure language ability, which is crucial for academic and professional success.</p>	<p>English proficiency tests are valuable but challenging. Students need to practice building confidence and improve performance, especially in speaking tests. These tests are often a graduation requirement, highlighting their importance in today's academic world.</p>
<p>2 Components of English Proficiency Tests that are more challenging.</p>	<p>Speaking was cited as the most challenging component of English proficiency tests. Factors contributing to this difficulty include limited practice opportunities, fear of mistakes, reliance on memorization, and cultural barriers.</p>	<p>Speaking section was the most challenging part of English proficiency tests. Time limits, spontaneous responses, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar are key factors affecting performance.</p>
<p>3 Importance of Speaking Skills in the overall assessment of English Proficiency Test.</p>	<p>Teachers agreed that speaking skills are a crucial component of English proficiency tests as they provide a direct assessment of a learner's ability to communicate effectively.</p>	<p>Speaking skills are essential for English proficiency tests for students. They assess not only language proficiency but also critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.</p>

<p>4 Criteria that should be prioritized when assessing speaking skills</p>	<p>Evaluators should assess the ability to speak fluently, pronounce words clearly, use appropriate vocabulary, apply correct grammar, understand questions, and engage in natural conversations.</p>	<p>When assessing speaking skills, it is crucial to prioritize fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Additionally, the ability to engage in natural and confident conversations is essential.</p>
<p>5 Resources for the effective preparation for the speaking component of English Proficiency Tests</p>	<p>The resources highlighted by teachers to prepare for the speaking component of English proficiency tests was online platforms like the British Council and Cambridge English, language learning apps, language exchange partners, YouTube and podcasts, and online tutoring services.</p>	<p>To improve speaking skills, learners emphasize the use of online platforms, language exchange partners, and language learning apps. Watching videos, practicing shadowing, and engaging in online conversations.</p>

Note 1 This table presents the results obtained from interviews conducted with teachers who have prepared students for international examinations and students who have taken international exams, emphasizing their perceptions, which will allow to analyze and obtain a clear understanding about the role of these kinds of examination.

Table 2

Results obtained from teachers' perceptions towards English Proficiency Tests in Assessing University Students' Speaking Skills.

CATEGORIES	TEACHERS
<p>1 Challenges when evaluating students' speaking skills</p>	<p>Teachers agreed that evaluating students' speaking skills can be challenging due to factors such as limited practice opportunities, language anxiety, insufficient vocabulary and grammar, difficulty with fluency and coherence, cultural and linguistic barriers, time restrictions, and subjective assessment.</p>

2	Integration of speaking assessments in the overall teaching strategy	For teachers, integrating speaking assessments into teaching strategies involves regular practice, real-world simulations, technology integration, peer assessment, authentic assessment, differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and summative assessment.
<hr/>		
3	Influence of English subject in the preparation for obtaining a B2 certification.	According to the responses English I to English VI, plays a crucial role in preparing students for B2 level English proficiency. Early exposure to the language, including foundational grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, is essential. As students progress through the levels, a focus on speaking skills, such as fluency, coherence, and pronunciation, becomes increasingly important.

Note 2 This table presents the results obtained from interviews conducted with teachers who have prepared students for international examinations emphasizing their perceptions, which will allow to analyze and obtain a clear understanding about the role of these kinds of examinations.

Interpretation of Data from the Interview

The findings of the investigation into English Proficiency Tests in Assessing University Students Speaking Skills are presented in two tables, each categorized to provide a clear and concise overview of the data. By comparing the responses from teachers and students, we were able to gain distinct insights into their perceptions and experiences. The following section presents a detailed analysis of the findings from the research.

Table 1 provides a detailed breakdown of teacher and student responses, categorized into five key categories. The first category is General perception of English Proficiency Tests the results shows that although they are viewed as useful instruments for evaluating language competency, English proficiency tests can be difficult for students to pass. Teachers 1 and 4 stressed that speaking exams are challenging and that thorough preparation is necessary. While Teacher 3 admitted the usefulness of proficiency exams but recommended giving alternate assessment criteria priority, Teacher 2 emphasized the significance of these assessments in

academic settings. Teacher 5 highlighted their motivational value. Although most educators acknowledge the importance of English proficiency exams, they also stressed the necessity of efficient study techniques and fair evaluation methods.

Students view English proficiency tests as both beneficial and challenging. Students 1 and 8 emphasized the value of practice, especially when it comes to speaking assignments, to improve their capacity for rapid thought and response. Since these exams are frequently necessary for graduation and can lead to future chances, Student 4 emphasized the practical value of these assessments. These insights give a partial picture of how students see the difficulties and advantages of English proficiency tests. While teachers and students generally agree on the importance of English proficiency tests, they provide differing views on the specific challenges and benefits associated with these exams, particularly in terms of speaking assessments and preparation strategies.

In the second category which is Components of English Proficiency Tests that are more challenging the analysis of the teachers' perceptions revealed a strong agreement that the speaking component of English proficiency tests is the most challenging for learners. Teachers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 all mentioned the problems connected with speaking. The main reasons given include a lack of practice chances, exposure to different dialects and themes, the pressure of real-time engagement, and the fear of making mistakes. For example, Teacher 2 highlighted the importance of continuous practice, and Teacher 4 emphasized the extra pressure of face-to-face interactions. Additionally, Teacher 5 observed that students tended to focus on memory rather than natural speech. Although Teacher 1 addressed the difficulties of both speaking and writing, most of the discussion was on the challenges of speaking, implying that it is seen as the most stressful part of English proficiency testing.

The analysis of student responses also revealed a general agreement that the speaking component of English proficiency tests presents significant challenges. The majority students, including 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7, identified difficulties such as time constraints, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary limitations, and pronunciation issues. For instance, 3 emphasized the importance of both grammar and speaking skills, while 4 highlighted pronunciation and vocabulary challenges. Both teachers and students identified similar challenges. This suggests a mutual understanding of the key factors contributing to successful performance in speaking assessments.

The third category that highlights the Importance of Speaking Skills in the Overall Assessment of English Proficiency Test, teachers without exception mentioned the main role of speaking skills in language assessment. Teacher 1, Teacher 4, and Teacher 5 agreed that speaking is essential for demonstrating language proficiency and practical communication skills, with Teacher 1 adding that it also builds confidence and opens opportunities. Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 emphasized the integrated nature of speaking, showing how it combines vocabulary, grammar, reasoning, and cultural understanding. Similarly, Teacher 3 and Teacher 5 highlighted the practical relevance of speaking, noting its significance in real-life, academic, and social contexts.

Students' perspectives also demonstrate the significance of speaking abilities in English proficiency exams, emphasizing critical thinking, quick preparation, and active participation. Both Students 2 and 7 stressed the importance of communicating clearly and simply; Student 2 concentrates on critical thinking in interviews, while Student 7 emphasized the capacity to efficiently organize ideas and omit unnecessary details. Student 2 recognized the need for

preparation for critical speaking components, and Student 3 supported this viewpoint by highlighting the significance of complete participation and engagement with the test's criteria.

Based on the analysis of the fourth category denominated Criterias that should be prioritized when assessing speaking skills, the teachers generally agreed on the main criteria for assessing speaking skills: fluency and pronunciation. However, they also highlighted other important criteria. Teachers 1, 2, 3, and 4 emphasized the significance of vocabulary and grammar, while Teacher 3 also stressed the importance of coherence. On the other hand, Teacher 4 and 5 focused on interaction and communication skills, highlighting the ability to engage in meaningful conversations. For example, Teacher 3 and Teacher 4 agreed on the importance of both fluency and interaction in effective communication.

The students shared similar views on the key factors for effective speaking: fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Students 1 and 2 emphasized the importance of pronunciation and fluency, suggesting that these are essential for clear and effective communication. Students 3 and 5 highlighted the significance of vocabulary, exploring that a strong vocabulary is crucial for expressing ideas accurately and completely. Students 4, 6, 7, and 8 also recognized the importance of fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary, emphasizing the need for a balance between these elements. For example, Student 6 and 7 agreed on the importance of vocabulary and fluency in delivering confident and natural speeches.

The last category of this table refers to Resources for the effective preparation for the speaking component of English Proficiency Tests presents important insights from teachers who emphasize how crucial it is to use a variety of tools to effectively prepare for the speaking section of English proficiency tests. Teachers 1, 3, and 4 highlighted the variety of internet

resources, applications, and technologies, including Google and artificial intelligence. Teacher 5 added the importance of personalized materials like pictures. Teacher 2 and Teacher 5 complemented this by focusing on institution-specific materials from the British Council and Cambridge English, highlighting their interactive aspects and relevance for pronunciation practice. Additionally, both Teacher 1 and Teacher 5 emphasized the value of interactive approaches; Teacher 5 emphasized visual aids for contextual learning, while Teacher 1 emphasized conversational tools.

Students also suggested a variety of resources, with a focus on internet resources, video content, and organized practice, for getting ready for the speaking section of English proficiency tests. The importance of interactive online platforms is emphasized by Students 1, 3, and 4. While Student 1 uses specific websites and shadowing strategies, Students 3 and 4 relied on online discussions and resources like Google. In the same way, Students 2, 3, and 5 concentrated on video-based materials, using YouTube, TED Talks, and interviews to enhance their conversational and pronunciation abilities. Furthermore, in line with this, Student 6 emphasized the value of practicing a variety of speaking subjects to think fast and assimilate information. These insights highlight how essential it is to combine structured topic-based practice, video resources, and online interaction to effectively prepare for speaking.

Table 2 also provided important insights into the research but only from the teacher's perspectives, this table was divided into three categories the analysis. The first category emphasizes Challenges when evaluating students' speaking skills the teachers' perceptions reveal several common challenges faced by students in English proficiency tests. Teacher 1 and Teacher 3 highlighted the impact of individual learning styles and anxiety on test performance, emphasizing that not all students learn in the same way or respond well to high-pressure

situations. Additionally, the lack of opportunities for real-world language practice, as noted by Teacher 2 and Teacher 4, can hinder students' ability to apply their knowledge effectively. This is particularly true in Ecuador, where limited exposure to English-speaking environments can restrict language development. Ultimately, these factors contribute to difficulties in areas such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and fluency, as emphasized by Teacher 5.

The second category, which provides insights into the Integration of speaking assessments in the overall teaching strategy, presented a variety of strategies for integrating speaking assessments into their teaching. Teachers 1 and 5 emphasized practical exercises, such as picture descriptions and open-ended discussions, to provide immediate feedback and promote fluency. Teachers 2 and 3 focused on curriculum integration, utilizing rubrics and real-life simulations to assess students' progress and encourage meaningful language use. Teacher 4 highlighted the importance of authentic materials, such as movies and podcasts, to expose students to real-world language and improve their listening and speaking skills. By combining these strategies, teachers can create a comprehensive approach to speaking assessment that effectively promotes students' language learning.

The last category from this table is about the Impact from English I to English VI in the preparation for obtaining a B2 certification in which the teachers' opinions highlight the crucial role of English I-VI in preparing students for B2 certification. Teachers 1 and 3 emphasize the importance of a strong foundation, including foundational skills like pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and presentation skills. These skills are essential for building confidence and fluency in English. Teachers 2 and 5 express concerns about the challenges students face in progressing to higher levels of English, particularly in online learning environments and the gap between school curricula and certification requirements.

Online learning can present challenges in terms of interaction and feedback, while the traditional curriculum may not adequately prepare students for the demands of B2 certification exams. Teacher 4 suggested a potential imbalance in assessment, focusing on grammar and vocabulary over other essential skills like comprehension, speaking, and writing.

To effectively prepare students for B2 certification, a well-rounded curriculum that emphasizes both foundational skills and advanced language use is essential. It should incorporate a variety of teaching methodologies, including communicative language teaching, task-based learning, and project-based learning, to engage students and promote active language use. Additionally, regular opportunities for speaking practice, such as debates, role-plays, and presentations, can help students develop their oral fluency and confidence.

Table 3

Analysis of the responses from the interview versus bibliographic review (Perceptions, Components, Importance)

CATEGORIES	General perception of English Proficiency Tests	Components of English Proficiency Tests that are more challenging	Importance of Speaking Skills in the overall assessment of English Proficiency Test.
ANSWERS	These are valuable tools for assessing language skills, providing a structured framework to evaluate various aspects of language proficiency that can be challenging, they are essential for academic success.	Speaking section are the most challenging aspect of English proficiency tests. Factors include time pressure, anxiety, limited practice, and accurate pronunciation among others.	Speaking skills are a crucial component of English proficiency tests as they provide a direct assessment of a learner's ability to communicate effectively.

AUTHORS	Are essential tools for assessing language skills of individual's capacity to comprehend, communicate, and react in English in a variety of settings. (Shiny & Karthikeyan, 2022)	One of the most complicated aspects of learning a new language is the acquisition of speaking proficiency, which is frequently considered difficult. (Ghafar & Raheem, 2023)	Mastery of speaking is a critical element in the field of foreign language education and is essential for acquiring proficiency in a new language. (Ohta, 2005, as cited in (Alnajashi, 2024)
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Note 3 This table presents the analysis of the responses from the interview conducted with teachers and students versus the bibliographic review.

Table 4

Analysis of the responses from the interview versus bibliographic review (criteria , resources)

CATEGORIES	Criteria that should be prioritized when assessing speaking skills	Resources for the effective preparation for the speaking component of English Proficiency Tests
ANSWERS	Should assess the ability to speak fluently, pronounce words clearly, use appropriate vocabulary, apply correct grammar, understand questions, and engage in natural conversations.	To improve speaking skills, learners emphasize the use of online platforms, language exchange partners, and language learning apps. Watching videos, practicing shadowing, and engaging in online conversations.
AUTHORS	The main aspect of performance that needs to be assessed has to do with language use, including vocabulary richness, structure, and pronunciation proficiency. (Rusdin & Purwati, 2023)	Recommend the use of various online resources to prepare for the speaking component of English Proficiency Tests such as platforms and apps. (Kalymon & Styfanyshyn, 2021)

Note 4 This table presents the analysis of the responses from the interview conducted with teachers and students versus the bibliographic review.

Table 5

Analysis of the responses from the interview versus bibliographic review (Challenges, Integration, Influence)

CATEGORIES	Challenges when evaluating students' speaking skills	Integration of speaking assessments in the overall teaching strategy	Influence of English Subject in the preparation for obtaining a B2 certification.
ANSWERS	Factors such as limited practice opportunities, language anxiety, insufficient vocabulary and grammar, difficulty with fluency and coherence, cultural and time restrictions, and subjective assessment were cited.	Strategies involve regular practice, real-world simulations, technology integration, peer assessment, authentic assessment, differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and summative assessment	English subject plays a crucial role in preparing students for B2 level English proficiency. As students progress through the levels, a focus on speaking skills, such as fluency, coherence, and pronunciation, becomes increasingly important.
AUTHORS	Anxiety, the fear of making mistakes, and fluency are problems when assessing students' speaking abilities, can hinder efficient evaluation and communication, affect students' performance. (Ork et al., 2024)	The three-step process includes pre-speaking activities like brainstorming and pronunciation practice, followed by speaking tasks such as role-plays or presentations, and ends with feedback and self-assessment. (Ivanova & Ivanov, 2021)	Comprehensive skill development in various areas is essential for achieving a B2 certification. They emphasize the importance of mastering both oral and written English, as well as the specific challenges faced in different language skills. (Fitria, 2022)

Note 4 This table presents the analysis of the responses from the interview conducted with teachers versus bibliographic review

Limitations

The research project faced some limitations due to unexpected national events. As a result, the interview schedule had to be adjusted. To continue data collection, a virtual meeting was convened to inform participants of the changes and thank them for their understanding. To

facilitate data collection, the questionnaire was sent via email. This alternative approach allowed the researchers to gather the necessary information for analysis.

The next chapter will present the results of the research. The researchers will carefully examine the collected data to identify key points and significant patterns. Based on these findings, the chapter will present clear conclusions that address the research objectives. Furthermore, the chapter will provide recommendations that can guide future research.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Recommendations

The following chapter presents the conclusions obtaining from the research English Proficiency Tests in Assessing University Students' Speaking Skills based on these findings, this chapter presents clear conclusions that address the research questions and objectives from the Chapter I. These chapter will detail how English Proficiency Examinations plays a crucial role in assessing university students' speaking skills. Furthermore, the chapter provides recommendations based on each conclusion obtained, these recommendations will provide clear insights for futures investigations.

Conclusions

This research explored the influence of English proficiency tests in assessing university students' speaking skills also investigated the role of these tests in evaluating language competence, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities. The findings indicate that early exposure to English, connected with a strong focus on speaking skills, is crucial for developing fluency, coherence, and pronunciation. By incorporating speaking tasks into these assessments, institutions can gain valuable insights into students' language proficiency, identify areas for improvement, and ultimately help them succeed in academic and professional areas.

The research successfully identified the challenges faced by university students during the speaking component of English proficiency tests that is constantly identified as the most challenging aspect of these assessments. Factors such as time pressure, test anxiety, limited practice opportunities, and the need for accurate pronunciation contribute to these difficulties.

Speaking skills are essential for effective communication and are directly assessed through these tests.

The research explored the perceptions and experiences of both university students and professors regarding English proficiency tests. Both groups acknowledged the value of these tests as tools for assessing language skills, providing a structured framework to evaluate various aspects of language proficiency that can be challenging. They are essential for academic success. However, both groups also recognized the challenges associated with these tests. Students often expressed feelings of anxiety and stress, particularly during the speaking component. Professors emphasized the importance of these tests as graduation requirements, highlighting their significance in the current academic landscape.

The research provided clear insights about the role of English proficiency tests in influencing students' preparation strategies for improving speaking performance. Both students and teachers emphasize the use of various resources and techniques to improve speaking skills. These include online platforms, language exchange, and classroom-based activities. The findings suggest that while English proficiency tests can motivate learners, they may also reduce the focus of language learning, emphasizing test-taking strategies over comprehensive communicative competence.

Recommendations

To optimize English proficiency assessments and enhance student success, institutions should prioritize early language exposure, emphasize speaking skills in curricula, incorporate speaking tasks into proficiency tests, provide targeted support based on assessment results, and foster collaboration between language instructors and assessment specialists. By implementing

these strategies, institutions can gain valuable insights into students' language proficiency, identify areas for improvement, and ultimately help them succeed in academic and professional endeavors.

To effectively address the challenges associated with evaluating speaking skills, it is crucial to implement comprehensive strategies. Teachers should prioritize creating ample opportunities for students to practice speaking, providing constructive feedback, and fostering a supportive learning environment. Evaluators should focus on assessing key aspects such as fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, comprehension, and overall communicative competence. By adopting these recommendations, we can enhance the quality of speaking assessments and empower students to develop their language skills.

To address the challenges and maximize the benefits of English proficiency tests, universities should consider several strategies. Implementing workshops, offering preparatory courses (MOOC) and practice opportunities can enhance students' test-taking skills. Additionally, reevaluating the weight of standardized tests and exploring alternative assessment methods can create a more general approach to language evaluation. Language instructors can contribute by integrating test preparation into curricula, providing personalized support, and supporting fair and equitable assessment practices. By adopting these recommendations, universities can foster a more supportive learning environment and improve students' overall language proficiency.

Online platforms like the British Council and Cambridge English offer a multitude of resources, from interactive exercises to authentic materials. Language exchange partners provide invaluable opportunities for real-world practice, while language learning apps offer convenient and personalized learning experiences. Additionally, YouTube and podcasts expose learners to

diverse accents and natural speech patterns. By combining these resources with regular practice, real-world simulations, and effective teaching strategies, learners can significantly improve their speaking proficiency and gain the confidence to communicate effectively in English.

The present research successfully achieved its objectives by exploring the influence of English Proficiency Tests in Assessing University Students' Speaking Skills, identifying the challenges faced during the speaking component, and understanding the perceptions and experiences of both students and professors. The study revealed the crucial role of these tests in determining students' preparation strategies for improving their speaking performance.

This exploratory research contributes significantly to the field by providing valuable insights for teachers, students, and researchers. By understanding the challenges and perceptions associated with English proficiency tests, educators can implement targeted strategies to enhance students' speaking skills and prepare them effectively for international exams. Furthermore, this research serves as a base for future studies that may explore deeper into specific aspects of English language assessment and the impact of proficiency tests on language learning.

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Annexes

Annex A: Certified Anti-plagiarism System

La libertad, 20 de noviembre de 2024

Certificado Sistema Anti-Plagio

En calidad de tutora del Trabajo de Integración Curricular denominado **“ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TESTS IN ASSESSING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS”** de la Carrera de Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros, de la Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación e Idiomas, de la Universidad Estatal Península de Santa Elena, me permito declarar que una vez analizado en el sistema anti plagio **COMPILATO**, luego de haber cumplido los requerimientos exigidos de valoración, el presente trabajo de investigación, se encuentra con 1 % de la valoración permitida, por consiguiente se procede a emitir el informe, para proceder a la revisión por parte del especialista.

Atentamente,



Ing. León Abad Eliana Geomar, MSc.

TUTORA



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Annex B: Questionnaires



UNIVERSIDAD ESTATAL PENÍNSULA DE SANTA ELENA SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND LANGUAGES PEDAGOGY OF NATIONAL AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES



Major: Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros.

Course: PINE 8/1 2024-2

Date: 24/10/2024

We are grateful for your time and effort in contributing to our research project, “**English Proficiency Tests in Assessing University Students' Speaking Skills**”. The data provided will be treated with privacy.

Your cooperation in completing the questionnaire is essential for the success of our study. Your support means a lot to us, and we truly appreciate it. The answers to this questionnaire will be used only for scholarly endeavors.

Questions:

1. What is your general perception of English Proficiency tests in relation to their role in assessing students' language skills?
2. In your opinion, which components of English proficiency tests do you believe are more challenging for students, and why?
3. How important do you believe speaking skills are in the overall assessment of English Proficiency Tests for University Students?

4. What criteria do you think should be prioritized when assessing speaking skills in English Proficiency tests?
5. What challenges do you face when evaluating students' speaking abilities?
6. How do you integrate speaking assessments into your overall teaching strategy?
7. What resources do you recommend to students for effective preparation for the speaking components of English Proficiency Tests?
8. What is the impact of evaluation process from English I to English VI in relation to the preparation for obtaining a B2 certification in students?
9. In your experience, if a student fails the international certification test, what can you do as a teacher to help them achieve the next time?



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SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND LANGUAGES PEDAGOGY OF
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Your cooperation in completing the questionnaire is indispensable for the success of our study.

Your support is greatly appreciated and means a lot to us. The answers to this questionnaire will be used only for scholarly endeavors.

Questions:

1. Can you describe your experiences during the speaking assessments of your English Proficiency Test preparation?
2. What specific techniques or activities did you use to practice your speaking skills in preparation for the test?
3. What are the challenges that you face in the speaking section of English proficiency tests?
4. What types of questions or tasks in the speaking assessment did you find the most challenging?

5. What advice would you give to future students preparing for the speaking assessment based on your own experiences?
6. What were the specific topics and sections in the speaking assessment that you felt more comfortable discussing? And why?
7. Why do you think the students From Pine Major cannot achieve the B2 level in the speaking section?
8. What kind of evaluation do you consider should be implemented in the Pine Academic program to enhance and help students in obtaining the B2 certification?

Annex C: Interviews transcribed



**UNIVERSIDAD ESTATAL PENÍNSULA DE SANTA ELENA
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND LANGUAGES PEDAGOGY OF
NATIONAL AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES**



INTERVIEWEES / QUESTIONS	What is your general perception of English Proficiency tests in relation to their role in assessing students' language skills?
Teacher 1	It is a very interesting question. When we say the word "assess," that means that the student needs to prove that the classes that we English teachers are providing here at Upse are having some sort of effect. That is what we call assessment. Now, there are different types of assessment. Upse prepares students to take an international examination, which is one of the FCE, TOEFL, or Michigan, and we are very sure that we prepare the students very well here.
Teacher 2	I think the aim of Proficiency exams or English proficiency tests is to measure in a certain way the language of the abilities that we have in language, like listening, speaking, reading, and writing. So, they are important in the academic aspect and the academic level, because in this case, we can measure the level of knowledge that people have in general such as students and professionals.
Teacher 3	Based on my experience with English proficiency tests, I think they are generally an effective tool for assessing students' knowledge and skills. They provide a structured framework to evaluate various aspects of language proficiency, including reading, listening, speaking, and writing. These types of tests are designed to measure a student's practical application of English in academic, professional, or different social contexts.
Teacher 4	European framework plans to organize the test or maybe, the abilities according to the way in which they are involved in a situation. For example, it is like survival English. Let's say that it goes through different situations from real life or from everyday life. And then based on that, they adapt the language according to their needs. Now I consider that one of the problems is that here in Ecuador, we do not have like, the facility to practice that. Because you know that, for example, if we travel abroad. Let's say to the North or maybe the South in Latin America. I mean in South America, just Spanish is spoken, but what about in Europe, wherever they go. I mean English will be the language that they will focus on and also, they will be practicing. But that is good because it is like a sequence for the students to learn.
	After helping students to get their certifications. I think that these tests have a very interesting role. First, when you take an international test,

Teacher 5	you feel that you have succeeded in your goal on these tests, you think that it is true. I know English. So, after seeing all this, I will consider assessing or helping students doing this is good and they feel that they finally have learned something. So, when they get their certification and when they get their paper, they said. It is true, I know.
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INTERVIEWEES / QUESTIONS	In your opinion, which components of English proficiency tests do you believe are more challenging for students, and why?
Teacher 1	Difficult question because students have different skills, are not every student learns the same way. Now based on my experience and years teaching English here at Upse, I believe that the skills of speaking and writing are the most difficult for students to learn and practice, and for students to master their ability to speak English as a foreign language.
Teacher 2	One challenging component might be speaking. The first reason is because we really need to practice all the time to develop our speaking skills. However, in our environment or scenario like the settings that we are in an everyday situation, there are not many chances to practice speaking. I think speaking maybe can be also listening. Like in the test, you will listen to different accents and to different topics. And of course, that may be also challenging.
Teacher 3	Speaking can be more challenging, and in your experience, you can see that developing speaking skills is challenging for our students. Many students find speaking tests difficult because they require real-time language production in different areas, as well as fluency, coherence, and the application of appropriate vocabulary, mainly due to the time pressure. They must deal with this time pressure, having only 14 minutes to speak with all these components.
Teacher 4	Perhaps the listening section or part is the issue, as I mentioned earlier. When people watch movies or listen to music, they are exposed to the target language, English in this case. They have access to various online resources to practice and familiarize themselves with the language. However, our culture needs to shift slightly. For instance, dedicating just 10 minutes a day to listening to podcasts can significantly contribute to language learning.
Teacher 5	When they take the part that is Use of English, they have problems, they struggle with that section because it is the one that students don't like it, being honest. Students do not like writing, so when they need to change a sentence, or just to read and rewrite a sentence. So, the second one is the same as the first one they then that is so difficult because they must use only five words or change words in the word transformation part. So according to my years of experience, I think, or I consider that the students prefer avoiding the use of English because it is the most difficult part for them.

INTERVIEWEES / QUESTIONS	How important do you believe speaking skills are in the overall assessment of English Proficiency Tests for University Students?
Teacher 1	They are very important, because remember that at every international examination, they are always going to prove different skills. Among the four different skills is speaking at the end of every international examination, there is a period dedicated to speaking skills and the students need to prove fluency, vocabulary, and also how they use and answer the topic.
Teacher 2	It is very important, especially because when you speak you do not demonstrate only one skill. When speaking you integrate the vocabulary, grammar you integrate and also cultural components. When speaking you also demonstrate the way people reason, the way of your reasoning, your analysis, and the degree of analysis that we have to answer a question in proficiency tests that has a big impact, or it has a big role. Speaking is like a summary; we integrate all the components of the language into speaking.
Teacher 3	I think that speaking skills are crucial in the assessment of English proficiency tests because we can directly measure our students' ability to communicate effectively in real-life, academic, and social settings.
Teacher 4	This is one of the most important skills I consider because we can learn grammar. But the point is that we must show that we know the language, and the best way that we can show it is through communication. I mean spoken communication is much better and it is easier than written one. And of course, it is more challenging because you are facing the other person, you are in front of you, and then the communication starts. So that is why I consider, I mean, the speaking part as the most important.
Teacher 5	It is important. It is extremely important because that is what they are going to use. Speaking. It does not matter if you have gotten a B1 or B2 in reading, writing or use of English, or even in listening when you have speaking you have achieved a certain level of speaking. That's what you are going to use, when you are communicating with another person. So when you do not speak or when you do not have a good result, a good outcome from the speaking section. According to me, it's like if you have not achieved your certification.

INTERVIEWEES / QUESTIONS	What criteria do you think should be prioritized when assessing speaking skills in English Proficiency tests?
Teacher 1	I believe that all language skills, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking, should be prioritized. However, I place particular emphasis on speaking. No matter where you go or what you do, speaking is a fundamental skill. Whether you are excelling in an interview or navigating a foreign country, you will need to communicate effectively. This means speaking fluently and pronouncing words clearly. Therefore, I believe that

	focusing on speaking is essential. By developing your speaking skills, you will gain confidence, improve your overall language proficiency, and open doors to new opportunities.
Teacher 2	One of the most important things I would consider is the comprehension of the topic of the question. As long as the student is able to provide the information that is requested, as long as the student can analyze to describe, and respond to the question, to give a proper answer that will be the most important. With that for me, it is also important, like the second criterion, that comes with pronunciation and fluency. Also, we consider grammar and vocabulary, but if the first criteria about the comprehension of the topic are met, that means that they are using the test they are using and good level of grammar and vocabulary.
Teacher 3	While I saw that when we assess English proficiency tests, different criteria should be prioritized to capture a holistic picture of the student's communicative skills. In these criteria, we can include fluency, coherence, pronunciation, the use of vocabulary, grammatical range, and accuracy.
Teacher 4	Most people focus on grammar, even me. I focus on grammar and vocabulary, but that is not the most important thing. What truly matters is communication and interaction with others. For example, when taking these kinds of exams, it is usually done in pairs. So, if there's no communication at all, what's the point of knowing all the grammar structures and vocabulary if you cannot use them appropriately. It would be impossible to have a good conversation. Therefore, I believe interaction with your partner is one of the most crucial factors. Of course, fluency and pronunciation are also essential. Mispronouncing a word can led to confusion and hinder effective communication.
Teacher 5	The purpose is to interact with another person, because most of the time when we practice speaking it is unbelievable, but we practice by ourselves. We do not practice with another person. We are just trying to learn or memorize what we have to say. But when we need to have a conversation just started in zero and they give you property they give you something that you need to talk about. You freeze and you don't know what to say because you are used to memorizing. So, you do not know how to start the conversation, or the phrases that are supposed to be used on these kinds of things, so you should prioritize the part where you need to interact. So that is something that teachers tend to forget.

INTERVIEWEES / QUESTIONS	What challenges do you face when evaluating students' speaking abilities?
Teacher 1	Many challenges and one of the challenges that I face with students at Upse is that when the student comes to the 6th semester to the 7th semester, we teachers believe, or we have the belief that students should speak English already. However, when we reach the 6th semester or the 7th semester, we notice that many students do not speak English. So, the challenge that we have is that we must start from the beginning. I start

	<p>teaching them or reminding them what pronunciation is. How fluency works and what kind of vocabulary they must use. So, the challenge to answer your question is that not every student has the same level as everybody else</p>
Teacher 2	<p>When I assess my students, I sometimes find that they do not address the topic correctly, especially because we have a system where specific topics require certain vocabulary or grammar. This is one of the challenges. They may not answer the question or follow the instructions.</p> <p>Another challenge is fluency. I find that students sometimes struggle to remember a word, which can block their thought process. This may be due to a lack of confidence or nervousness. As a teacher, I can often distinguish between these two factors, as they both impact fluency.</p>
Teacher 3	<p>When I see this, even though I am not allowed to reside with a person who can test this type of student. In our experience as university teachers, we can observe that evaluating these students' speaking abilities presents challenges for teachers because of the dynamic and context-dependent nature of spoken language. Especially when they experience anxiety when speaking in front of the teacher, I suppose it is the same in front of an evaluator. This can hinder their performance and may not accurately reflect their abilities because of this anxiety and the time pressure.</p>
Teacher 4	<p>The challenge is that, for example, maybe digressing, when if I ask a student something and then the student might answer, I mean another and might give me another answer. So, in that case, that will be and then I must speak more slowly or maybe try to use a different word or different expressions. Tomorrow let's identify what exactly. What I mean by the student is that it is a big challenge. And it is like for example, as I said before, when there is no interaction, for example, one student struggles. Through the whole conversation. It is like hesitating a lot of hesitation, having many feelers, and digressing the answers, I mean, understanding differently. So that is why that is one of the challenges because you can, I mean, now of evaluating a student, you cannot use your mother tongue. In my case is Spanish. I cannot translate. I must explain the same thing, but in other words, using the same language or using English, that is one of the points.</p>
Teacher 5	<p>Pronunciation is something that it is very challenging because you know, maybe future English teachers when you are talking to another person, even a letter can change the whole sentence. So, when they do not pronounce correctly the words, it is difficult. Another thing is when they do not have enough vocabulary to have a conversation or to complete the phrase. So that is very challenging because even though you try to help them, it is difficult when your students just get blocked or your students freeze in front of you and you are trying to help them and you are trying to give them all the tools, all the materials. It does not matter if you have given. I do not know 100 books to them. They don not practice, so it is difficult to assess them and in these kinds of things. Especially speaking,</p>

	because if you do not practice, if you do not find a partner to practice with, it is going to be very challenging.
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INTERVIEWEES / QUESTIONS	How do you integrate speaking assessments into your overall teaching strategy?
Teacher 1	I believe that this is an important question for every English teacher because the speaking abilities me as a person that knows I make them practice by putting a picture. I put a picture on the screen and the students are supposed to describe the picture why do I do this because, in two of the international examinations, the FCE and the Michigan, that is a task that they ask students to describe, they put a picture and we are supposed to talk for about 2 to 2 1/2 minutes about that picture so that is my strategy.
Teacher 2	I usually have a rubric for my speaking test, and this is similar. I have adapted this to the rubric or the criteria that is used for speaking tests for proficiency tests. I try to use it most of the time, I cannot say all the time because, you know, there are some difficulties also in adapting this to students. But with these two classes, 4th and 6th semester, what I do is assign them different topics per unit and we keep studying the topics that we will request at the end to do a description talking about the unit or integrating the things or what we have learned during the topic or also they can work in role plays related to the topic that we are studying in there. So, I try to use this most of the time because students have to make these speaking lessons kind of. At least three times during the semester, so they will need it, like they have a register, or they would like to participate even in role plays or descriptions. In the class, I try to have them work in pairs or short conversations. So, they can practice and work on their speaking skills.
Teacher 3	I can suggest they practice daily in real situations. OK, experiencing inside a classroom, having role plays, and experimenting with situations that they live in daily. For an appropriate depth of their learning.
Teacher 4	What I do now I am teaching also at Upse and speaking you know that we have many students in classes and of course, it is the time is very limited and of course, there is no pressure at all because you are far away from them. I mean, the students are in their own houses. And I am also here. So, there is a lot of distance between us. So what I do is send them videos. Asking questions in general, but trying to get, I mean, but that is important to motivate students to participate, and then I just set some examples. For example, if they are learning they cannot learn to drive if they do not practice, if they do not have a car. So, in the same situation, you are learning a language, so you must speak, you must say something at least. So that is the way of course. For example, in my classes when they do not have the time to participate in the speaking part, I just ask them to read and, in that way, I check the pronunciation. I am checking their not only their pronunciation but also the intonation which is important. When

	<p>asking questions, they say something positive or maybe when they say something negative. So that is teachers struggle that thing the students' participation. But of course, they need motivation. That is the most important.</p>
Teacher 5	<p>Well, one of my favorite strategies is that when I teach in-person classes I give my students, they think that It is a prize for them or it is because they have done something good but it is mandatory. They need to talk to each other for seven or 8 minutes in English about the topic that I have written on the board, and if we have online classes, OK, instead of sending them to breakout rooms, I prefer to have all of them and in the same room and I give them one minute or maybe 90 seconds to talk about something that they like, but according to the main topic that I have given to them, for example sports, OK so they need to talk about sport that they like it, but. It is not that. OK. I will give you 5 minutes, and you will prepare your material. No. OK. Sports, you start. So, at that moment they are. They have no time to look for something and they do not know who is next. So that is the way that I try to give them the opportunity to speak, the opportunity to start thinking in English, and the opportunity to practice because it is difficult. We live in Ecuador, and we do not have too many friends who speak English, so at least in my class that is 100% in. English. They need to do it. It does not matter how they do it, but. They do it. Yeah, that is the way I do it.</p>

INTERVIEWEES / QUESTIONS	What resources do you recommend to students for effective preparation for the speaking components of English Proficiency Tests?
Teacher 1	<p>Good question, Great questions. Actually, there are many resources on the Internet or on Google nowadays. However, we need to try to figure it out what resource is academically recommended for students, I would recommend if we students is going to use applications that the students should use some applications that are from any university, just a university for example Cambridge can be a very nice resource. Now if by any chance we do not have technical facilities, if we do not have Internet or we do not have a cell phone just the ability to talk to somebody is an excellent resource to improve our English capabilities.</p>
	<p>If we are talking about resources for preparing for exams, I would start with the British Council website, which has lots of topics and material. Cambridge English is also another one that is very useful. There is another one called English Test, and so those resources and Cambridge are very good. Cambridge has lots of material to practice and interact with. Also, I would recommend using some applications. There are some applications</p>

Teacher 2	that, of course, have both a free version and a premium version. I have used, for example, ELSA. I kind of like this application because, even though it is limited unless you pay for more lessons, it helps with pronunciation, the flow of ideas, and the flow of phrases. Another challenge for students is keeping the order of ideas; sometimes, I hear students reading word by word instead of reading the whole sentence. So, with these types of applications and resources, students might be able to improve, read better, and form full sentences to improve their speaking skills.
Teacher 3	Talking about resources, we can suggest many different types of apps that we have nowadays, especially with artificial intelligence and the web. We can find different apps to practice and prepare for before these examinations.
Teacher 4	Well, the resources now, as I said before, the Internet has a lot of resources. It is not, for example, in my time, the only resource that I was going to the cinema, of course not with a better sound like now these days and then of course the lyrics from the songs, that it was really hard for me to get them. But now with the use of the Internet, there are so many applications. Of course, some of them are paid, and some of them are free, but those which are free are very limited. But with the Google, I mean with the search engine with that one, we have the translator, so we can check the pronunciation of the words, there are many things. I mean, we have a lot of resources now and with the use of technology and we have to take advantage of it not only to watch the series or maybe something else but to practice if we want to learn the language, it means more than the time that we spent just in classes one hour or maybe two hours, it is a language and it requires a lot of time for us with a lot of efforts.
Teacher 5	Resources. There are a lot, but I like using British Council material or Cambridge material and even creating my own material, so I am the kind of features that I like to check the materials that other teachers have prepared in advance and then. I can take this. I can take that and then I just mold that kind of thing into my own criteria. So, the things that I need to apply with my students, because being honest, our Ecuadorian students, do not have the same routines, or they do not have the same likes and dislikes that other students have. So. It is better if we take the good ideas and just mold them into the Ecuadorian part into the Ecuadorian mold. So, if we are talking about sports, what do our students play Football or basketball. But we are not going to talk about rugby. We are not talking about water polo. And if you look for material online, you are going to find that they are talking about rugby, water polo, and golf, but have you seen a student here playing golf? No. Yeah, that is what I do. And I use a lot of pictures. OK, describe. Many years ago, I learned that a student

	prefers describing something instead of having a conversation. So, I start giving them things that they are good for and then or good at, and then I move into the ones that they do not like. So, step by step.
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INTERVIEWEES / QUESTIONS	What is the impact of evaluation process from English I to English VI in relation to the preparation for obtaining a B2 certification in students?
Teacher 1	<p>Excellent and difficult question to answer. I believe that every English teacher has a different methodology in order to evaluate. Now the impact like you say goes according to the teacher, for example, I can easily say that for the first 3 semesters, there will not be any summative evaluation for the first 3 semesters they should be only formative evaluation in which the students are supposed to start building blocks in order to help pronounce certain words, How to do a presentation, how to speak English without hesitation that the student is supposed to do in the first 3 semesters from the 4th semester until graduation, the student needs to practice by providing oral presentations and that should be the summative evaluation.</p>
Teacher 2	<p>From English I to English VI, there is a big difference. However, I would also say that I am going to focus on the difference not just between the first and sixth semesters, but with students who are studying online. Remember that the first, second, and third semesters are online, and then from the fourth semester on, the classes are in person. So, I see an impact there because when students reach the fourth semester, there are a lot of difficulties in terms of vocabulary, knowledge, and speaking skills.</p> <p>It is like students really need to start working very hard because, with online learning, even with all the technology and resources, it becomes different. There are different implications for online learning, and we see those effects in person classes. There are still weaknesses in vocabulary and some basic grammar aspects, like those covered in English 1 or English 2. These difficulties and mistakes are still found in the fourth, fifth, and sixth semesters. So, yes, there is a difference in these levels, and how we need to close that gap.</p> <p>To bridge this gap, I would say, we need to practice from the beginning. Sometimes, we limit ourselves to just learning words or completing tasks, but it is important to keep practicing consistently. We need to be aware that we have a limitation in that we are not in an environment where we can practice English, listen to it, or speak to someone in English. This limitation is something we need to overcome by practicing as much as possible.</p>

	<p>Practice is key. When learning new vocabulary, it is important to learn the word, how to pronounce it, and how to use it in a sentence. Just keep practicing and building the knowledge.</p>
Teacher 3	<p>What we see is that this evaluation process from English One to English Six can significantly impact students, especially their readiness for obtaining a B2 certification because it establishes foundational and progressive skills needed to offer intermediate proficiency.</p>
Teacher 4	<p>That is according to a subject in English, one when I was working in Upse, I was given English for that. That is the question of what you mean by signatures. For example, in that case, it is like as I said before, I mean, most of us, including me, as I said before, as teachers, we focus on the grammar part and also well in certain areas, But the point is that the test, which are for international Tests are not like in the past. For example, as teachers, when it was time to evaluate the students, we were asked to complete the sentences with the corresponding terms. So, we just evaluated more the grammar part and then the preposition. I mean certain vocabulary. For example, like completing the plans, I mean it was not functional, but this time with this kind of international tests. It is like the other side of the coin is totally different. We evaluate comprehension, we evaluate understanding, but not exactly about the grammar structures. Or maybe like. So, everything is in context now. For example, for vocabulary, they are giving a situation. For example, at school, let is say, and then all the words related or maybe all the vocabulary related to that main topic. So, which is, I mean, the structure of the evaluations is much better than in the past and to get used to doing these kinds of evaluations.</p>
Teacher 5	<p>I consider that there is still a bridge of things that are not being covered because honestly, I took my B2 fifteen almost sixteen years ago when there were more than two or three students with the same certification and I started preparing students almost eight years ago and the impact now check in with the things that you have seen at the university with the things that they will take in the or what they will face in the. The certification exam. There are still things that are not being covered and it is going to be difficult. For example, I have not even practiced sentence transformation till now in a class or word sentence transformation, so just once but practicing only once is not going to be enough to take the exam. So, there are still things, as I said, that need to be covered.</p>

INTERVIEWEES / QUESTIONS	In your experience, if a student fails the international certification test, what can you do as a teacher to help them achieve the next time?
Teacher 1	<p>Very nice question. And this is what I am doing right now. If a student fails an international examination because remembers that an international examination is not that easy, we need to prepare, we need to study, we need to read. But also, it is not impossible that we must make the student practice, and the student is supposed to learn something that is called discipline. The discipline to learn and practice every single day is something that not many students do. Now if we can put it in the student's mind, the word discipline to study English, to review English, to read English every single day for at least an hour the students will be ready for the B2 examination.</p>
Teacher 2	<p>Maybe I could work more with tutoring sessions focused on the skill that they have failed. If this is a speaking skill, what I would recommend is to prepare dialogues, prepare a description, talk about any topic. What I used to say to my students is: whatever you are doing, any activity, even if you are listening to music, take some time to think about that action in English. For example, "What am I doing? OK, I am listening to music." Then, come up with ideas like "Music, different genres, different artists," and keep coming up with ideas to start forcing your brain to think in English. If I am going to play with my friends, I could think, "I am going to play soccer. OK, what am I going to do?" Say that in English. Integrate your daily activities with English because this is important. You are going to remember vocabulary, you are going to remember grammar, you are going to reinforce speaking practice. You don not have to talk to another person; you can even talk to yourself. Another strategy I tell my students is to record themselves talking. Record your audio—talk for at least one minute, because one minute is short. Talk for one minute, then listen to yourself, and repeat it. Try to make it a strategy tool for self-learning.</p>
Teacher 3	<p>They must be constant. They continue preparing for this type of test. One of the advantages is that once they take the exam for the first time, they know what they are going to face. They also manage the time they need. We know that they have time pressure. Different stages require different skills, so I just suggest they do not give up. With the suggested materials and resources that we can find on the web, I also recommend taking these preparation courses. That is my recommendation.</p>
Teacher 4	<p>Well, let's say like be a guide and keep always asking him or maybe her. To show. I mean the progress. We must push the students or the person who wants to pass that kind of examination. It is not easy. So, we can help them by providing more material, but what is the point if we provide the material but that depends on the student. The time that he or maybe she</p>

	<p>takes to practice this. I mean it is complicated, but we just want to be like a shadow in that case, have you practiced, have you done exercises and then show me I mean what have you done so far? That is the only thing. Just like a child, A little child that wants to learn something.</p>
Teacher 5	<p>When they have not obtained the certification the first time you decide to take it one more time or to sit an exam or for the second, third or even 4th time. First of all, you need to go to the base, so. Maybe vocabulary or grammar things, people hate grammar. I do not know why I love it. It is something that I really love because I do not know. Believe it or not, grammar is related to mathematics because grammar follows formulas, mathematics follows formulas too so that is the way I teach grammar following a formula. Subject, Verb, complement and then you follow with the same thing and then another thing and you are adding and adding and adding. When I have a student who has failed before I try to put the English into a different way. It is not just to study to see a test. It is about studying to understand, to learn, and then at the end of the process, OK, now you are ready to take a test. What I do is just giving them materials, resources and even helping them, supporting them emotionally because when they have failed, they do not want to take it, or they are so afraid of failing again and losing the money because an international test is not for free. So, it is difficult, but I try to give them the opportunity to use the English or to practice English in a different way.</p>



**UNIVERSIDAD ESTATAL PENÍNSULA DE SANTA ELENA
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND LANGUAGES PEDAGOGY OF
NATIONAL AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES**



STUDENTS' ANSWERS

QUESTION #1: Can you describe your experiences during the speaking assessments of your English Proficiency Test preparation?

STUDENT 1: In preparation, was difficult at the beginning because I have no one to practice with and no one in my family speak in English, nor even my closest friends. And maybe I could practice with my classmates from Pine, but I know that they have their own things to do. But after that I found a website. Where that it was specifically created to practice speaking abilities in English with real people, and that was very helpful.

STUDENT 2: Besides the anxiety from doing ok at least, I felt like I was at a loss since most of my school years English was the subject with the least priority, and out of the four skills from this language, speaking did not get enough attention from the teachers, at least in my experience.

STUDENT 3: To be honest. I did feel nervous because I did not know what kind of questions I would receive. So, If I was not sure about the questions, I was getting confused and not. I did not know what kind of topic to focus on. So that was like my first experience during this speaking assessment.

STUDENT 4: I remember. I felt nervous and anxious because it is uncertain they collapsed literally anything, right So, I think that my biggest fear was that I forgot the words that I knew what to say, because I was nervous, I could forget. So that was like my biggest fear. And yeah, it was. It was. I felt anxious. It is a good experience with this kind of test preparation.

STUDENT 5: During my English proficiency preparation, the speaking part was the hardest one. One of the principal challenges to practice the speaking part is with whom. After class I did not have someone to practice with, so I had to watch some interviews on YouTube.

STUDENT 6: Honestly, I was beneficial to have practice before the exam because it was a bit nervy because of the questions were random and I had to think very fast about what to answer. So having different speaking topics helps me to improve my ability to. Process information to think faster. When I am speaking.

STUDENT 7: Preparing for the speaking test was a mix of nerves and excitement. The present to organize my thoughts quickly was really instance required me to avoid unnecessary elaborations since. I do you do that in Spanish too? Well, initially I struggle with people keeping calm within the time limits the time constraints, but consistent practice, like everyday practice, enables me to become more is. And as I approach the actual test. I felt more confident in managing my nerves and demonstrating my skills in an effective way.

STUDENT 8: During the speaking assessments of my English Proficiency Test preparation, I experienced a mix of excitement and nervousness. While I felt ready to express myself in English, the random questions made it challenging to anticipate what would come next. This unpredictability added pressure, as I had to respond quickly and accurately. However, each session helped me improve my fluency, and by the end, I was more confident in expressing my thoughts within the time limits.

QUESTION#2: What specific techniques or activities did you use to practice your speaking skills in preparation for the test?

STUDENT 1: Well, the first technique that I use is shadowing because in this way I can improve my pronunciation and practice my fluency. I use this website as I said. Previously that is called "episode". I used these techniques to practice my speaking abilities

STUDENT 2: Well, most of my preparation was discussing ted talks with AI, so what I did was copy the YouTube link of a ted talk, then use AI to get the transcript of the video, and then feed said transcript to another AI who would discuss the topic of the ted talk with me through text to speech, that way I would improve my listening and speaking skills as well as critical thinking in case it was needed for an interview in the test.

STUDENT 3: In the process of preparation for this test or this course. I watched a lot of videos with the proper pronunciation of each word, and I also did some short talks with Navy Native English speakers by well online. I mean, like online conversations I use like websites where you can find English native speakers and talk to them about any topic, and I also have some short conversations with my teammates. I mean my mates from my course. Like describing pictures, talking about certain topics or stuff like that.

STUDENT 4: In my case I did not have anyone to practice with, so I used to talk to myself, and I would ask questions and answer out loud on my own in my room. And it really helped me a lot because many times people think that they need to have English speaker friends to practice, but it is not necessarily so. For me, the best technique is just to talk, even if it is just with myself. But that was that worked for me.

STUDENT 5: I am a kinesthetic student. I practice speaking during class or with my friends at college. Another technique that I use is when I finished watching an interview, I tried to remember the question and answer. After that, I performed the interview in front of the mirror.

STUDENT 6: In a preparation course that I took four months ago, they have different activities such as dialogues and classroom dialogues with a classmate. And describing images, tongue twisters and making some stories.

STUDENT 7: Well, I obviously try different methods to get ready practicing with some old friends. Questions with friends. From the measure, everything, we were in a real test setting. Speaking daily conversations with online friends that I have from Instagram and other app. I also record myself speaking like I was in a process which allowed me to see the process in my pronunciation and phrasing that I would not have noticed otherwise. Watching English series and listening to podcasts and repeating sentences was useful to it made a difference and how natural my intonation sounded like, how I could speak and face.

STUDENT 8: To prepare for the test, I used several techniques to practice my speaking skills. I engaged in dialogue exercises, which helped me simulate real conversations and practice responding naturally. Describing images also helped, as it trained me to think quickly and use a variety of vocabulary. Additionally, I practiced storytelling, which allowed me to work on speaking clearly and engagingly. Tongue twisters were also part of my practice, as they helped improve my pronunciation and clarity.

QUESTION#3: What are the challenges that you face in the speaking section of English Proficiency Tests?

STUDENT 1: Or maybe the most challenging was the part of the exam that was in pairs, so I must prove that I was sent. A lower level than the other person. So also, because from what I hear this person, it has a better level than me. So that was the most difficult part.

STUDENT 2: From my perspective, the only challenge would be the hardware, I had a hard time listening to the audios in the test due to the headphones being low quality, and in a room full of other people taking the test, it was uncomfortable, though this was only the first time I took an English Proficiency Test.

STUDENT 3: Well, about the challenges. I think that the biggest challenge that I controlled was my lack of vocabulary. So, if I had a question which I do not have, I like enough vocabulary to answer that question. I will say. With that question. So, I think that was my biggest problem with this examination. Because, for example, with a certain question. It was confusing to be specific or whatever because of the vocabulary.

STUDENT 4: In my opinion, there are two main challenges. First, like the feeling, feeling nervous or anxious, as I said before, that is like a big challenge because you can speak English. Lonely but at the time of the test, if you are feeling nervous, you will forget the words or make grammar mistakes. That is another thing. So that is one of the challenges you need to overcome and the nervousness. And the second is the lack of vocabulary, because you may know what to say. Sometimes you can think in Spanish, but you do not know. You can find the words to say it, you know in English. The vocabulary.

STUDENT 5: The time and the topics are the most challenging. During the speaking test, the participants have one minute to answer each question. The interviewer could ask about any topic, since health to daily life.

STUDENT 6: OK, so the most challenging part for me is the time I was stressed about the time, knowing that I did not have too much time to think or analyze what I am asked to do and it

stressed me because I do not know if I was answering the questions according what they asked me to do.

STUDENT 7: So, for me, the hardest story was organizing my thoughts was very relaxed since I got a lot of nerves when faced with a question that I did not expect, I had to avoid, like freezing up, stumbling my words. And building under the Bush, I would not have more time to fully develop my answers. Especially when the topics were unfamiliar for me, the pressure to sample fluence and confident was like a bit of challenge for me and the flood that I had to actively listening to. To my speaking partner, because it was like a test. For a couple. Maybe even worse for me, I had to coordinate my ideas in response to his, so this was a bit hard

STUDENT 8: The main challenges I faced in the speaking section were time management and handling questions on unfamiliar topics. In the limited time given, I needed to organize my thoughts quickly and deliver clear, structured answers. When I encountered questions on topics I knew little about, it became harder to respond confidently. This lack of familiarity sometimes led to hesitation or difficulty in finding the right words to express my ideas fully.

QUESTION#4: What types of questions or tasks in the speaking assessment did you find the most challenging?

STUDENT 1: The most. I think the part on the describing pictures. I think the time. Because. I must describe, and I did it, I talk. Everything that I could say, but the interviewer wanted more, more time to speak but I was already told everything that I could, but I tried, and I think I did it very well.

STUDENT 2: Most of the questions were basic, I believe the challenge lies in articulating your ideas during the speaking section of the tests, or stretching them enough, as they are timed, and

most people will prioritize the length of the speech rather than the coherence, hindering their score significantly.

STUDENT 3: Well, the ones that were not related to personal stuff, that was the models that were, I am sorry, the hardest was because as I said before in those in these questions, you have to know about some vocabulary because these questions were too specific, for example any specific topic requires you to know about the specific vocabulary.

STUDENT 4: The most challenging questions for me are, and they are always the ones where I am given like an imaginary situation. There are questions like that or a problem, and you need to provide some sort of reaction or solution and those are the most difficult for me because you do not know, you need to think about it at the moment. You need to figure it out. And because of the time, you can also get nervous. You are thinking about what I can do in this situation? And you need to think fast and figure it out. At the moment, those are the most challenging questions.

STUDENT 5: For me, one of the strongest challenges to face during the speaking test is answer open-ended questions. Open-ended questions have a variety of possible answers. For that you must organize your ideas so fast.

STUDENT 6: Well, I think that questions on a specific topic that I do not know too much about also describing pictures, because sometimes you do not know what else to say about a picture.

STUDENT 7: Well, that is that involves comparing chip pictures. Really tested me. I sometimes struggle to find the right vocabulary on the spot or keep my ideas flowing. Flowing. You see, like when you see a picture you have like. That word in your heart, but you just do not remember this specific word and opinion-based questions are also tough because I must elaborate more and think in a critical way and even if I were with some answers from my partner, I have to make my

statement original. And share a bit of my own thoughts, which was harder to do fast because you must think on the spot. They can give you a lot of time for that.

STUDENT 8: The most challenging tasks in the speaking assessment were describing pictures and answering unexpected questions. Describing pictures required me to quickly analyze the details and find the right words to explain what I saw. Since these pictures often showed scenes outside my usual experience, it was difficult to describe them accurately and thoroughly. Similarly, random questions on unfamiliar topics added an extra challenge, as I had to think on my feet and avoid long pauses.

QUESTION#5: What advice would you give to future students preparing for the speaking assessment based on your own experiences?

STUDENT 1: Well, some advice could be practicing like everything in life. Practice is the key to getting something. So, I think that practice as much as we can. So, in this way we can achieve with that exam.

STUDENT 2: My advice would be to prioritize the pronunciation of the words following the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) when studying, as it helps with developing a stronger vocabulary as well as a better understanding of the pronunciation of the English language, and to avoid trying to study all by yourself, always try to have a conversation with someone fluent enough in any language you are trying to learn.

STUDENT 3: I will advise students to start practicing as early as possible. Even practicing with their own. Teammates or practicing as I did with online tools. Because regular practice help me feel more comfortable while I am speaking, this is completely accurate to get a good. Like a good note. Ah, good grades with this speaking examination.

STUDENT 4: My advice is. Always speak. Just speak. It does not matter if you do not have. Like I say before, English is because friends. It does not matter. Just talk to yourself and nobody is going to know or care about it because there are many times that people feel ashamed that they are just. Talking to yourself, but it does not matter, and another piece of advice is what you can look for common topics or questions on Google. You can like to do our research and then just speak. In addition, something that really helps is recording, record what you say and actually listen to it. And it does not matter if you hate your voice or something like that you need to do it to find your mistakes and get better, so you talk, record yourself, listen to it and repeat and repeat.

STUDENT 5: The practice has to be constant during the preparation for an English professing test. In the same way, vocabulary is the principal key to answer the question.

STUDENT 6: Well, based on my experience, I would recommend to teaching students start practicing as early as possible. Practicing regularly really helped me to feel more comfortable and to respond faster during the actual exam. One thing that I found useful was engaging in different activities. Like I said before dialogues or try to research about different topics describe random images. And using tongue twisters. So these activities help me to think quickly and to improve my fluency.

STUDENT 7: Well, my best advice would be to practice consistently as not true as possible. Regarding yourself can be also helpful for getting more issues that in pronunciation, phrases or vocabulary use, and it is great for tracking progress like the other day I was checking and all year from the month ago, I was like, say, who is this girl? I found so many differences in my pronunciation and also the vocabulary use this is really helpful for me I think. And also do not worry about using complex words, it is more important to focus on being clear than rather than

using complex words. And if you can, you can purchase with a partner because they can give you feedback and you will be ready for individual. And groups us so if you do not know what are the tests you are gonna be individual or with another partner or partners that are speaking test, there are individual. That are in couple and also with a group of three people. You gotta be alright for that.

STUDENT 8: For future students preparing for the speaking assessment, my advice is to practice regularly with a variety of topics. Speaking in English daily can help you build confidence and improve your fluency. It is also important to focus on quick thinking exercises, like describing random images or answering random questions. Practice speaking for the allotted time so you get used to organizing your thoughts quickly. This will help you feel more comfortable and prepared on the test day.

QUESTION#6: What were the specific topics and sections in the speaking assessment that you felt more comfortable discussing? And why?

STUDENT 1: Despite what I said in the previous question that it was in first the exam, I felt comfortable when the interviewee said that we must talk as real conversation like we normally do in real life. So, I think that was the most comfortable part because I felt that I just was talking with a friend with, so that is what is most comfortable.

STUDENT 2: Each person might like something different, but general advice would be to learn more vocabulary about the things that you enjoy talking about, for example I love photography, so I looked up vocabulary with most words related to this topic and wrote down a couple of scripts to talk to a friend about pictures that we took that week, and it helped a lot with my fluency.

STUDENT 3: The questions about personal stuff, personal topics and because. I already know myself; you know So if there is a question that was about me was about a routine about my family, hobbies about what I like, what I do not like, I really know how to answer these kinds of questions. And I have the vocabulary. The enough vocabulary to answer these kinds of questions or these types of questions so it was easier for me to express myself with. With these questions.

STUDENT 4: I always feel more comfortable when the questions are like about myself, because I already know me. So, you know, there are questions about your hobbies or things like those are the easiest because I can answer confidently because I already know I do not need to imagine a situation or something like that, and of course, it can be another topic that I already know or like. For me the problem is when you do not know about the topic. For example, let's say politics and you need to figure something out. At the moment you can even fake it, but it will also cost you. To think so, the easiest for me is when there are questions about yourself and your hobbies or what you like.

STUDENT 5: I felt confident with the describing section and answering personal questions. Describe a picture, do not need a big analysis or mental process. With personal questions, you already know the answers.

STUDENT 6: OK. In the speaking assessment, I felt more comfortable with personal questions. These questions usually cover like family topics, hobbies, travel experience or daily routines. So since they were based on own experience and life, I did not have to think too much to say something so I could respond more naturally and confidently.

STUDENT 7: Well, I feel more comfortable talking about everyday topics like hobbies, all my life since this stuff I talk about naturally, like in my daily routine, I already have the vocabulary

and phrases ready which made me feel. Less stress, less nervous, more confident. It is easier to show my personality makes and jokes and display my funny sight even.

STUDENT 8: In the speaking assessment, I felt most comfortable discussing familiar topics, like daily activities or personal experiences. These topics allowed me to express myself naturally and without hesitation. Because I had more vocabulary and experience with these subjects, I found it easier to organize my thoughts and speak fluently. The comfort with these familiar topics helped me feel more confident and allowed me to make a good impression on the examiner.

QUESTION#7: Why do you think students from Pine major cannot achieve the B2 level in the speaking section?

STUDENT 1: Well, maybe. The nerves or the fear to take this exam and to fail the first time. But as I said, if we practice enough, we can achieve the B2 level. So, I think the students need to practice a lot before the exam.

STUDENT 2: Tricky question, as I do not think they cannot, though I am unaware of the fact if most cannot, but I do believe they can achieve B2 level easily in the speaking section, only problem is, from my perspective, that teachers assume students in PINE major are already good at all four basic English skills, though most of them come from public schools where English is not a priority, much less the speaking skill. This would be the reason I believe they cannot achieve B2.

STUDENT 3: That is a good question. Well, first because of the speaking section for time students. It is difficult because of the pronunciation for also the. The lack of vocabulary, as I said before, because Pine students at this point, they should, they shall know. How to express

themselves in English, but most of them, most of the time, students. Get into the into this point when they must achieve this speaking examination. Without the enough knowledge without the English knowledge. To. To complete this examination. So, I think this that is because of the lack of practice. The lack of. Uh, getting involved getting. I mean like. If you want to pass this exam, you have to get involved with it. All the major. OK, I do not. I did not feel like all the students have this same. Same thinking about this examination.

STUDENT 4: I already saw this when I was studying, and I saw my classmates having a really hard time with this. And I think it is because they lack practice. It could be because students always say that they do not have anyone to talk with, and they do not want to do it on their own because that is weird or something like that, but they need to do it. If you do not practice, you will not get better and another important issue I think is the lack of vocabulary and you need to acquire it by getting involved with the English content. For example, i used to ask them if they were going to watch movies or series they need to do it in English, but they did not want to because there is also practice and its easy practice, but they did not want to do it. So, for me it is practice. If the lack of vocabulary.

STUDENT 5: Vocabulary is the weakness of the majority of the students from Pine. The absence of different types of vocabulary and forget to add new vocabulary every day. This is the common errors of students.

STUDENT 6: Well, students from Pine my struggle to reach the B2 level in the speaking section because the combination of the limited vocabulary and in sufficient preparation. So the and also the lack of motivation without a strong vocabulary, they cannot express their ideas. They cannot speak clearly or they can feel a little bit nervous or stressful with and familiar topics. So additionally, the lack of preparation or practice so they do not have a preparation.

STUDENT 7: I think a lot of the students. We will go to reach to that level because first of nerves and lack of real-world speaking practice many of the students focus on other skills first, specially listening and reading or even studying grammar on vocabulary or use of English. It is not bad, but they also need to focus on speaking practice. So they do not get enough experience using English and real conversations. This make it hard to be confident during the tests or fluency and quick thinking really matter. So I think that is why they have a problem with that.

STUDENT 8: Students may struggle to achieve the B2 level election because they might lack exposure to diverse speaking situations. If they mainly practice grammar and writing without enough focus on speaking, it is hard to develop the fluency and confidence needed for a B2 level. Additionally, if they are not given enough practice with spontaneous responses, they may struggle to think quickly, which is essential for this level.

QUESTION#8: What kind of evaluation do you consider should be implemented in the Pine Academic program to enhance and help students in obtaining the B2 certification?

STUDENT 1: OK. It is not a technique, but I do not know if it is academically possible but. Maybe having the student to speak with a native speaker in English, maybe in that way they can feel that more confident knowing that they are speaking with someone whose first language is English. Because that is what I felt when I spoke with one of these people. So, I think that it would be a good idea to relate the speaking of the students.

STUDENT 2: A monthly demonstration class, where students from the PINE major choose a topic of their liking and present it to their classroom, or as a group project to the college, and being that the major is for teaching, and a foreign language nonetheless, this should be a standard, which may seem as an extreme option, but it could be a starting point.

STUDENT 3: In my opinion. It is important that to achieve the B2 level to find students. The program should focus more on speaking activities. Such as I do not know role plays. Or even a grammar activity where students can improve their speaking abilities with grammar. Because I think that these both are like pillars to achieve this goal, that is having the B2 level. So, with disabilities develop. The students came to speak more clearly. They can express themselves like. With. With no troubles. I think those two are the most important.

STUDENT 4: I think the PINE Program should implement, maybe a course focused only on the B2 certification, because it is important. Since it is a requirement for graduation, I think they need to pay more attention to it because you have different subjects, but there is none about the B2 certification and if they have this course, this subject student could have practice text every now and then, so if they do this practice, they will know the structure of the sun because they are also important. You can be fluent in English, but if you do not know the structure, the type, the type of questions, and it will be hard for you. But if they do this. Practice in this subject on this course. They will get used to it, so when they do their bit to exam, they will feel more confident and not scared because I remember that all of them felt really, really scared of the sun because they do not know the structure. So, I think they should implement a subject like a course I do not know something like that, so students could practice and get ready for the B2 exam questions.

STUDENT 5: I consider that a pre-certification evaluation could help students in the process to obtaining the B2 certification. It could give a notion to students about what topics have to take in mind the most, the time and the type of vocabulary to be used.

STUDENT 6: OK. And to help students to achieve the B2 certification, then evaluation should incorporate more interactive speaking activities, frequent pronunciation correction and real time feedback. So structure activities or topic based discussion can provide the students with

opportunities to expand their vocabulary and fluency. Also, the professor should encourage them to correct the pronunciations or errors because some of the students believe that they are doing right, but it is not right what they are doing. So, they need to correct the pronunciation they need to have a lot of activities, not the same activities that we used to have. So, I think that it can help students.

STUDENT 7: Well, I would suggest adding more market sense. Like the detail, because on areas that need improvement. Regularly speaking exercises with foreigners, like with discussions, debates. Other than helping students to feel more comfortable. Having more practice in a supportive environment, we make a big difference in how students give their fluency and confidence. At the same time.

STUDENT 8: I think that to help students to achieve the B2 certification, a more interactive speaking evaluation should be added to the program. This could include regular practice tests and mock assessments that simulate real exam conditions. Group discussions, role-playing, and frequent feedback sessions with a teacher would allow students to build confidence in speaking. By focusing on fluency, pronunciation, and practical conversation skills, this approach would prepare students better for the B2 speaking requirements.