Strategies and Assessment Techniques to Improve Oral Proficiency in English Language Teaching Process

Técnicas y estrategias de evaluación para mejorar el desempeño oral en el proceso de enseñanza del inglés

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Abstract

This research analyzes the importance of fostering oral proficiency when learning English as a foreign language. In this sense, it is essential to recognize the role of effective communication skills both in academic and professional contexts. The research seeks to address the existing challenges when teaching oral skills, and at the same time, it aims to provide educators with a different approach to be able to apply successful strategies. The methodology includes an extensive review of existing literature on oral proficiency, pedagogical strategies, and assessment techniques to identify best practices and proven methodologies that have been proven successful in fostering oral communication skills among students. In addition to the literature review, this study proposes a deep analysis of the effectiveness of different strategies and assessment techniques to improve oral proficiency. By combining this analysis with real-world application, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on effective English language teaching methodologies, offering educators valuable perceptions and practical tools for enhancing the oral proficiency of language learners.

Keywords: Oral proficiency, English learning-teaching process, assessment

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Resumen

Esta investigación analiza la importancia de fomentar la competencia oral en el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera. En este sentido, es fundamental reconocer el papel de las habilidades comunicativas efectivas tanto en contextos académicos como profesionales. La investigación busca abordar los desafíos existentes a la hora de enseñar habilidades orales, y al mismo tiempo, pretende brindar a los educadores un enfoque diferente para poder aplicar estrategias exitosas. La metodología incluye una revisión extensa de la literatura existente sobre competencia oral, estrategias pedagógicas y técnicas de evaluación para identificar las mejores prácticas y metodologías comprobadas que han demostrado ser exitosas en el fomento de las habilidades de comunicación oral entre los estudiantes. Además de la revisión de la literatura, este estudio propone un análisis profundo de la efectividad de diferentes estrategias y técnicas de evaluación para mejorar la competencia oral. Al combinar este análisis con la aplicación en el mundo real, esta investigación tiene como objetivo contribuir al discurso actual sobre metodologías efectivas de enseñanza del idioma inglés, ofreciendo a los educadores percepciones valiosas y herramientas prácticas para mejorar la competencia oral de los estudiantes de idiomas.

Palabras clave: Competencia oral, Proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje, Evaluación

Introduction

In the English Language Teaching (ELT) process, developing effective oral communication skills has emerged as one of the most significant goals but also the most challenging for educators worldwide. Oral proficiency not only plays a crucial role in academic success but is also indispensable for real-world communication and professional growth. In this sense, as the

demand for English language skills keeps on increasing, educators are challenged to look for different ways in which learners acquire and improve the ability to orally express their ideas and thoughts, engage in meaningful and demanding conversations, and actively participate in diverse linguistic contexts.

The significance of oral proficiency in the English language acquisition process is highlighted by its important impact on learners' academic, professional, and interpersonal competencies. Academic success is often combined with and reinforced by the ability to produce spoken language within the classroom setting (Brown, 2014). Moreover, in the professional field, effective oral communication is identified as a crucial skill across diverse areas, emphasizing its direct correlation with career advancement (Bucăţa et al., 2017).

Oral competence is a pivotal aspect of language proficiency. While developing reading, writing, and listening skills is crucial, enhancing the ability to speak fluently completes the language acquisition process and provides additional tools for learners to engage in this globalized world. However, the oral skills assessment within the classroom comes about as a challenge because traditional evaluation methods often fail to effectively measure spoken language. According to Ur (as cited in Putri et al., 2019) assessment of oral proficiency results in a difficult task since it involves many different aspects such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and understanding. These features are what contribute to fostering communicative competence.

Moreover, as stated in Hattie & Timperley (2007) feedback should also be included as an essential element due to its high impact and influence during the teaching-learning process. This idea is also reinforced by Akter (2010) who considers that providing feedback on learners' performance is important to get closer to proficiency as it helps them not only to improve but also

to get the necessary motivation and build a supportive classroom climate. Additionally, both assessment and feedback help students to improve attention and retention of learning (Rahman et al., 2011).

For this reason, to keep a comprehensive approach to developing oral proficiency should consider the integration of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) methods (Mulyadi et al., 2021), since these frameworks emphasize the importance of authentic communication, active engagement, and the integration of technology to create immersive language learning experiences.

Objectives of the research

General Objective:

- To analyze how students' English language oral performance is influenced by implementing effective teaching strategies and assessment techniques in both informal and formal communicative contexts.

Specific Objectives:

- To analyze different teaching strategies and their effectiveness when preparing students to participate in both formal and informal communicative contexts outside the classroom.

- To assess students' ability when applying their spoken language skills in real-life situations and academic settings.

- To examine how strategies such as class observation, peer assessments, and self-reflection can help improve students' oral proficiency.

Literature Review

Achieving oral proficiency in English language teaching represents a challenging task that includes a wide range of strategies and assessment techniques addressed to developing effective communication skills among learners. In this sense, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is presented as a fundamental approach to pursuing this goal, emphasizing the importance of meaningful interaction and authentic communication tasks (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). For instance, students' participation in CLT activities such as group work, role-plays, and communicative tasks, may result in different opportunities for learners to use English in real-life contexts, thereby enhancing their oral proficiency.

As stated by Guado & Mayorga (2021), CLT might become a fundamental methodology since it presents "principles and objectives that allow the learning process of a language to use classroom activities that best facilitate the development of the communicative competence." (p. 21). Therefore, as the speaking skill is the learner's ability to orally transmit coherent and organized information, CLT might be useful to foster production within a real context.

Additionally, another useful approach might be Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) which offers another effective point of view to promote oral proficiency focused on the completion of meaningful tasks (Nunan, 2004). According to the author, the activities proposed in this approach are designed to promote authentic situations to facilitate language use, pushing in that way learners to interact in the target language to achieve specific goals. Consequently, through task-based activities, students get engaged in meaningful interactive situations, which not only seek oral skills enhancement but also the achievement of fluency and communicative competence.

Moreover, one of the main characteristics of this approach is authenticity which is translated into "real-world" situations through which students may need to apply and use the language and content learned to succeed in the interaction. Although each of the four skills is practiced in this methodology, and it aims to apply different abilities in various settings, oral performance has an outstanding participation (Oxford, 2006).

Apart from the approaches mentioned above, the integration of technology within the classroom is nowadays considered a valuable resource to develop oral proficiency. Warschauer (2006) mentioned that different tools such as video recordings, voice recognition software, and online platforms might provide learners with various and wide opportunities to practice and assess their previous knowledge. In this sense, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) comes up as a response to this need.

Moreover, technology facilitates self-directed learning and enables teachers to provide personalized and effective feedback, supporting individual needs and promoting continuous improvement in oral proficiency (Chapelle, 2003). Thus, as technology keeps on evolving, its role in the language learning-teaching process, especially in enhancing oral proficiency, will continue to expand, providing innovative resources to be used within the classroom.

On the other hand, besides the different approaches, it is also important to consider how to assess learners' oral performance. According to Chu (2011) "the teacher usually wants students to speak as much as possible and encourage them to speak to improve communication competence" (p. 454). About this, it is important to mention that it is necessary to provide effective and timely feedback, so the error is not internalized to their language acquisition system. Furthermore,

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Hamidi et. al (2022) considers that even though not all learners might feel comfortable when receiving immediate correction while trying to perform orally, they might benefit from it.

Methodology

The current study aims to analyze how students' English language oral performance is influenced by implementing effective teaching strategies and assessment techniques in both informal and formal communicative contexts. For this purpose, both qualitative and quantitative research were used.

To interpret the data quantitatively, a survey was applied to the English staff and a group of students at Universidad Agraria del Ecuador.

To analyze the data qualitatively, a classroom observation process during an oral assessment lesson was performed.

The data was collected from a sample of 75 students from the third level (second semester) from different careers, and 10 English language teachers at Universidad Agraria del Ecuador.
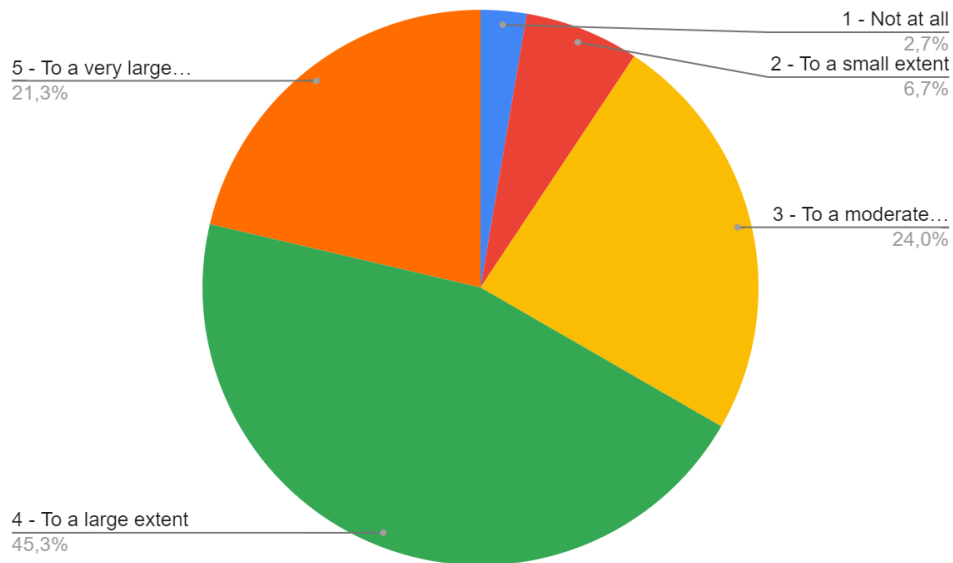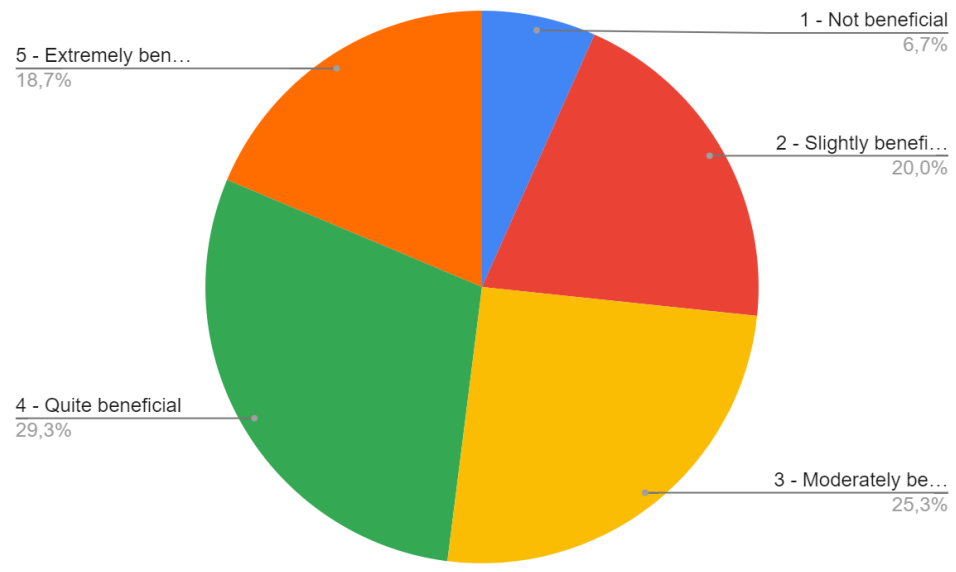
Data Analysis

Students' survey

Graph No. 1. How effectively do you find engaging in conversational activities (such as role-plays, discussions, and debates) in improving your oral proficiency in English?
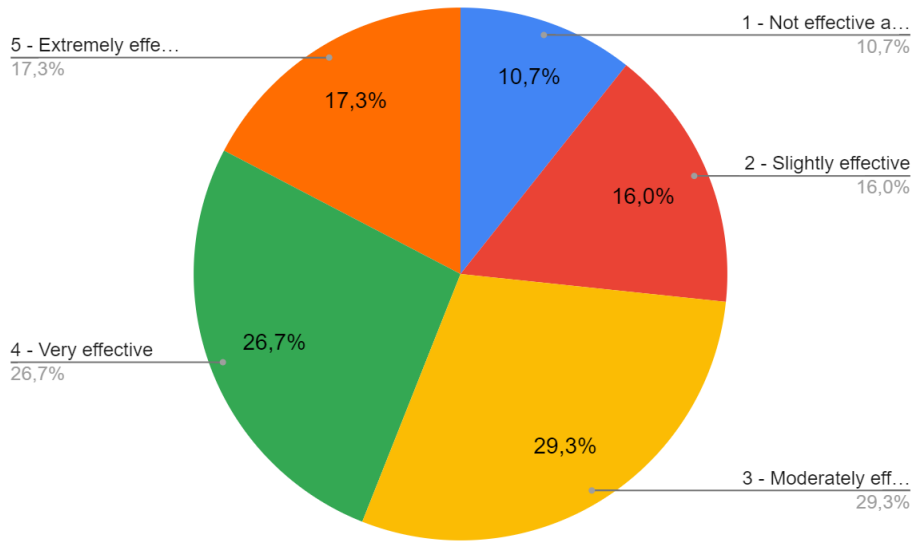
Graph No. 2. To what extent do you believe technology-mediated speaking exercises (e.g., online conversation platforms, and voice recognition software) contribute to improving your oral proficiency in English?
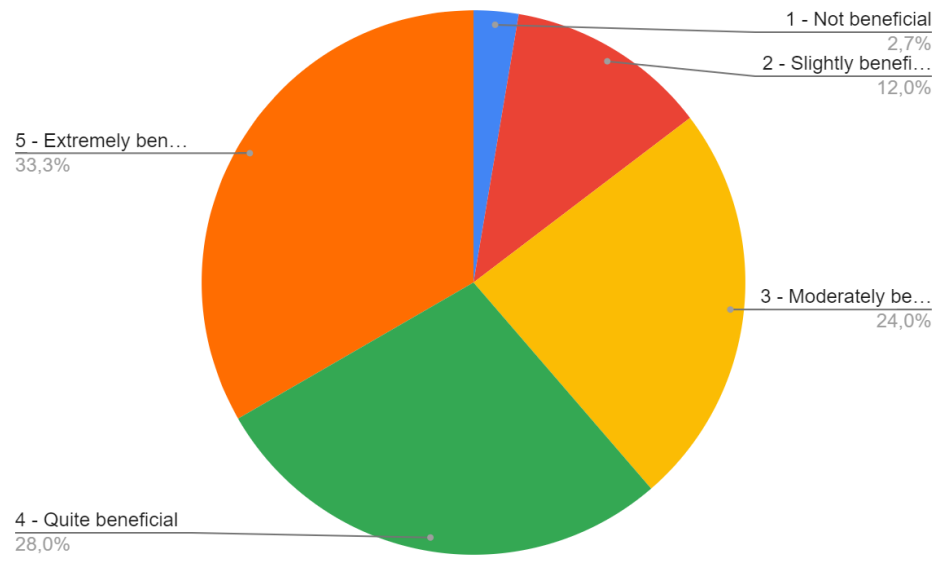
Graph No. 3. How beneficial do you find real-life situational tasks (e.g., ordering food, making appointments) in improving your oral proficiency in English?

Graph No. 4. To what extent do you believe receiving explicit instruction and practice on pronunciation and intonation contributes to your oral proficiency development in English?
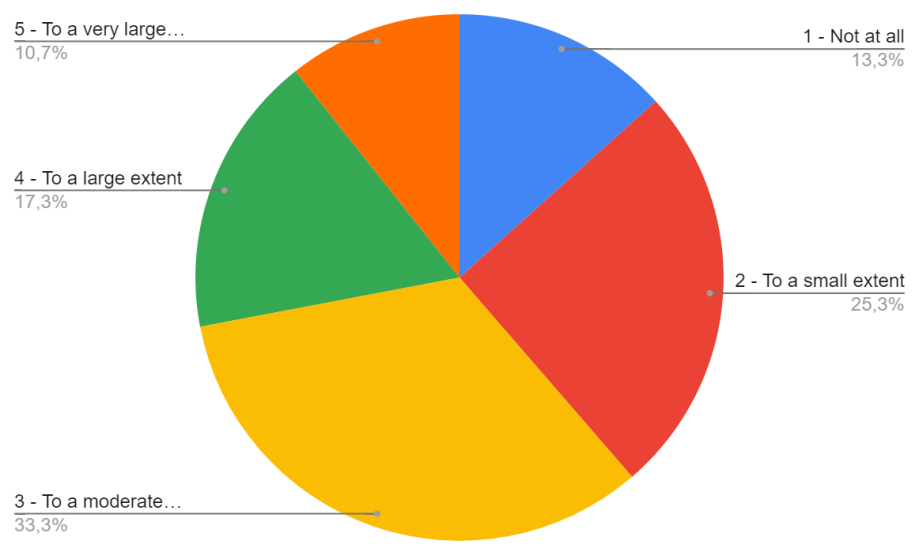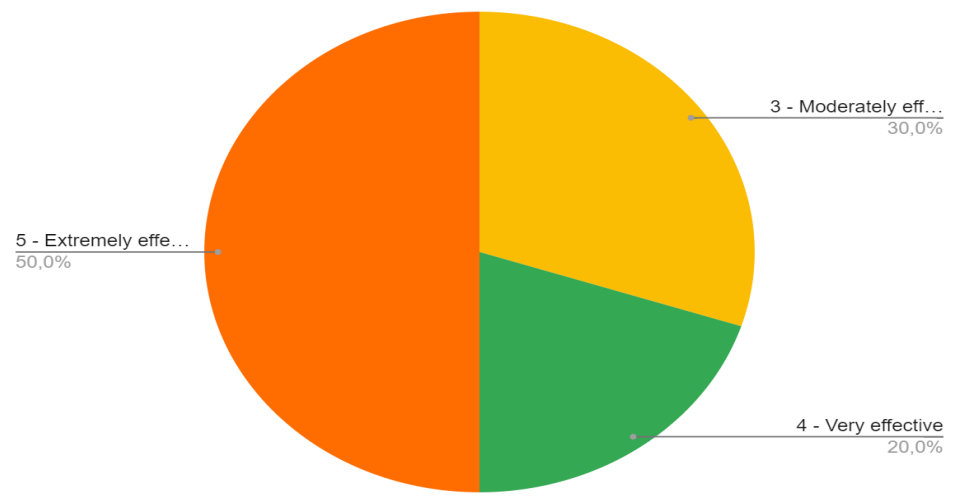
Graph No. 5. How beneficial do you find incorporating authentic audio and video materials (e.g., podcasts, TED Talks) in enhancing your listening and speaking skills in English?


- 1 - Not beneficial — 2,7%
- 2 - Slightly benefi… — 12,0%
- 3 - Moderately be… — 24,0%
- 4 - Quite beneficial — 28,0%
- 5 - Extremely ben… — 33,3%

Teacher's survey

Graph No. 6. How effective do you find incorporating conversational activities (such as role-plays, discussions, and debates) in improving students' oral proficiency in English?

- 3 - Moderately eff… — 30,0%
- 4 - Very effective — 20,0%
- 5 - Extremely effe… — 50,0%

Graph No. 7. How valuable do you perceive peer feedback sessions in enhancing students' oral proficiency in English?
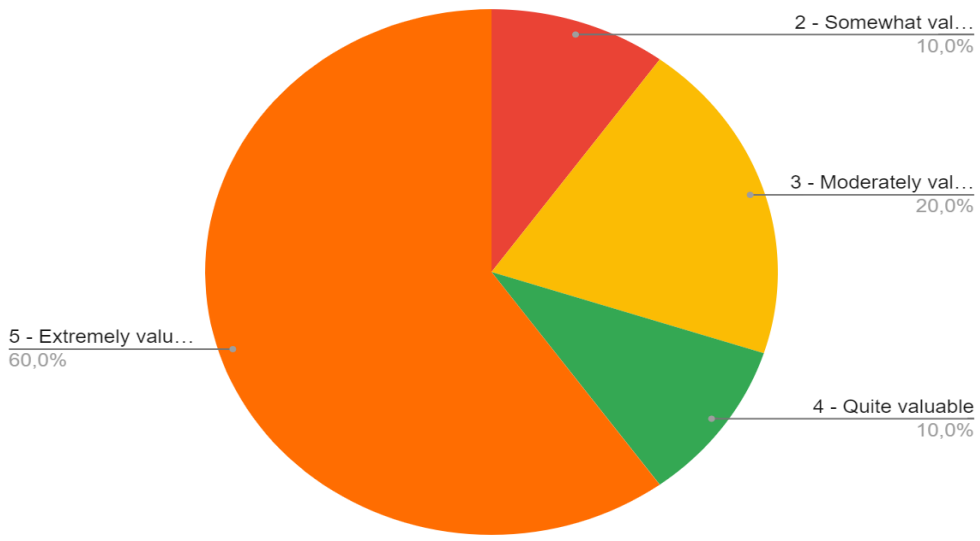

Graph No. 8. How helpful do you find incorporating self-assessment and reflection activities in improving students' awareness and motivation towards improving their oral proficiency in English?
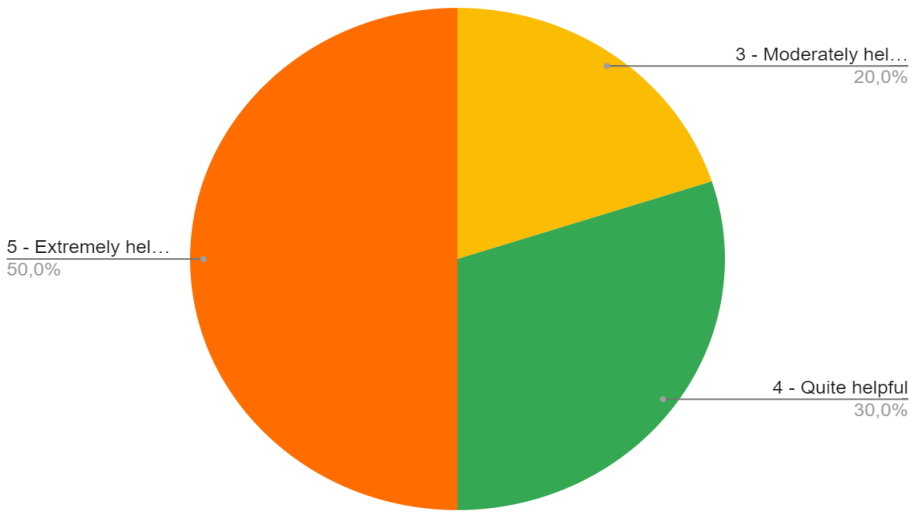
Graph No. 9. To what extent do you believe providing explicit instruction and practice on pronunciation and intonation contributes to students' oral proficiency development in English?
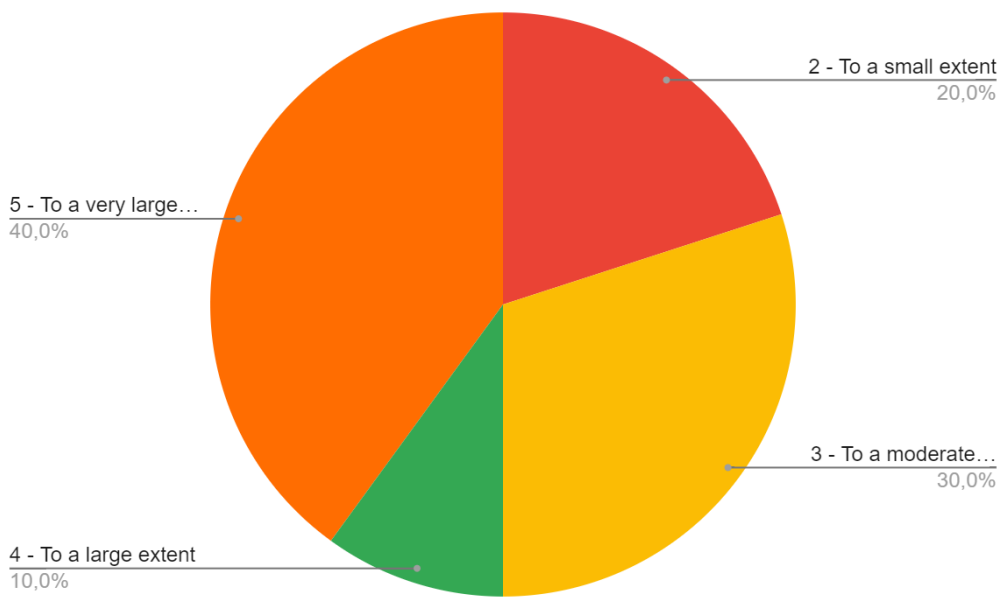
Graph No. 10. How beneficial do you perceive incorporating authentic audio and video materials (e.g., podcasts, TED Talks) in enhancing students' listening and speaking skills in English?
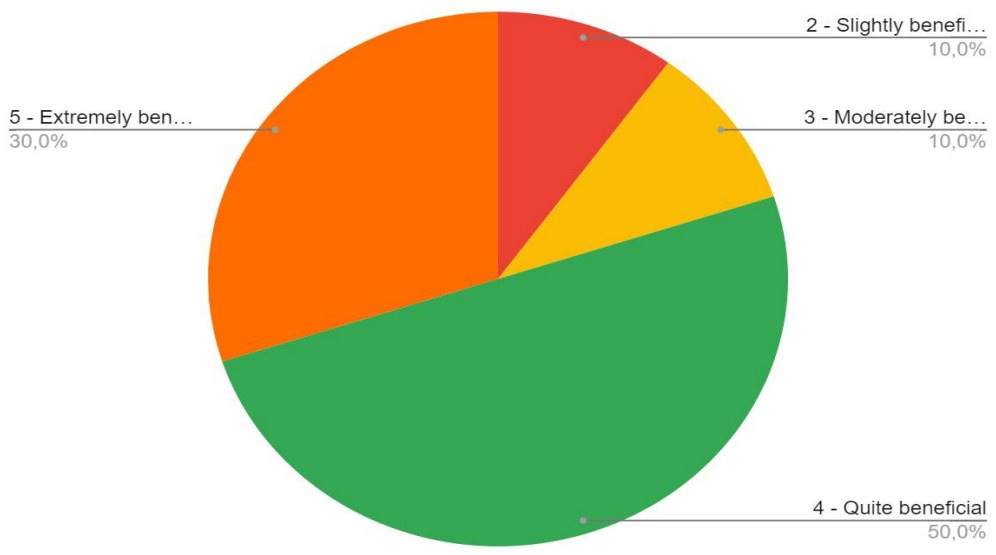
Discussion

Having analyzed the results from the students' survey, it can be deduced that 29.3% of participants consider that it is moderately effective to get engaged in several activities such as role-plays, discussions, and debates to improve their oral proficiency. In the same way, a high percentage (45.3%) of students believe that using speaking exercises through technology can contribute to a large extent to improving their oral skills; on the other hand, 33.3% of participants think that having authentic audio and video materials contributes to enhancing their speaking skills. Real-life situation tasks are perceived as quite beneficial to oral proficiency with 29.3% of participants responding so. Additionally, most of the surveyed students consider that they can develop their skills in a better way when they receive explicit instructions and further practice on pronunciation.

On the other hand, from the teachers' survey, it can be concluded that peer feedback sessions (60%) as well as applying self-assessment and reflection activities to improve awareness and motivation (50%) are extremely valuable in enhancing students' oral proficiency in English. At the same time, it can be analyzed that teachers consider that providing explicit instruction and practice on pronunciation and intonation contributes to students' oral proficiency development (40%). Besides that, incorporating different conversational and authentic audio and video materials can help improve oral performance.

Conclusions

In summary, integrating CLT, TBLT, and CALL approaches into the improvement of oral proficiency in ELT ensures that language education remains relevant, engaging, and aligned with

the demands of contemporary communication. These approaches collectively contribute to the creation of well-rounded language learners who can confidently and effectively communicate in various contexts, both within and beyond the classroom.

Incorporating real-life situation tasks and authentic materials helps enrich the learning-teaching experience, allowing students to take advantage of several opportunities to apply language in practical contexts and in that way, enhance their communicative skills.

Additionally, effective feedback sessions, such as peer and self-assessment activities represent essential elements in promoting collaborative learning environments and empowering students to feel more confident to develop their target language abilities. Furthermore, explicit instruction on pronunciation and intonation while practicing within the classroom might allow students to correct and interiorize vocabulary and grammar structures by applying them in different language contexts.

Therefore, as this is a globalized world and it is continuously evolving so language teaching methodologies are. That is why it is pivotal for educators to keep on adapting and preparing themselves to be able to respond to the different needs of learners. Certainly, innovative strategies and assessment techniques might help teachers create inclusive and engaging learning environments to empower students to become confident and eventually develop proficiency in the English language.

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