Title: Introducing Critical Thinking at High School Level to Enhance the Teaching of Speaking

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ABSTRACT

One of the most extended fallacies is the fact that teenagers are merely impulsive beings and do not take time to consider and evaluate information; especially since they are constantly bombarded with information due to new technologies. In reality what students need is a space to demonstrate this ability freely because their opinions tend to be diminished because of their age. In general, at schools there is little room for critical thinking and speaking, that is why the proposal of this paper is to join both skills because of the strong connection these two abilities possess. As the literature review will exemplify, the implementation of critical thinking to work on the speaking skill helps students improve their confidence which enhances their speeches. In order to exemplify the joinability of these skills, students were provided with a technological paradox they had to solve in groups. After analyzing the results, students’ performance had improved greatly. Considering the great results, the use of critical thinking in diverse speaking activities is proposed as a method to ameliorate the acquisition of spoken English by Spanish high-school students.

KEYWORDS
Critical thinking, speaking, High School, Spain, English.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Education has always been a field where research and innovation are paramount. Under these parameters, “what to teach?” and “how should we teach it?” are constantly questioned. In recent years, in Spain the law has been modified in order to improve the quality of the Spanish education (LOMCE).

According to the Organic Law of Education, LOE 2/2006, issued on 3rd May, and the LEA 17/2007 passed on 4th December, every area in the educational curriculum is obliged to develop the seven competencies recognized by the European Education Commission. In other words, teachers must focus not only on teaching the curriculum but also the main competencies (linguistic, mathematical, cultural, social and civil, sense of entrepreneurship, digital and learning to learn competences, to ensure students become successful adults.

Fortunately, in this country teachers are free to choose how to accomplish their goals. In the legal regulations there is no guidance on methodologies or resources which must be used in order to fulfill all the requirements. Despite the importance of the previously mentioned competences, there is an important competence missing in the Spanish Educational Law, i.e. critical thinking. Students should acquire this ability in order to become proper adults beneficial for our society, but they are not taught how to do so in class. If they are incapable of analyzing and questioning the amount of information we are bombarded with nowadays, they will end up being mere puppets.

It is essential for teenagers to properly interpret situations and actions in order to prevent further damages in their lives. This issue is so important that US universities are offering courses on critical thinking to students. They know that in order to keep improving as a world power country they need a society capable of questioning themselves.

At this moment, there has not yet been much research done on the implications of including critical thinking in the English as a foreign language (EFL) lessons in Spain. As stated above other countries have incorporated this skill in high school or college levels and it should be seen as an indispensable for
our students to start questioning what they know and see on the media. The digital competence is oriented to making students aware of the importance of identifying reliable resources on the net; however, they must also be guided to properly question the information they encounter on the webpages they visit regularly to be able to assert this competence has been successfully learnt.

Students, specially teenagers, have the tendency to believe they know best. In the case of the Z-Generation, it is magnified by the continuous exposure they have experienced since birth, that is why they believe they can make a better use of new technologies than adults will ever do. Once we show them the appropriate resources they just see them as part of the materials they will be expected to use in order to fulfill the tasks sent by teachers. Students, however, need to develop their critical thinking skills to understand the real dangers behind the Internet.

Furthermore, some of the previously mentioned competences totally depend on critical thinking. For instance, the mathematical competence requires the implementation of critical thinking in order to develop it properly. From Elementary School onwards, students are taught how to solve mathematical problems via critical thinking which makes the improvement of this skill vital in order to acquire the mathematical competence, and consequently achieve their diplomas.

Living in a globalized world, the cultural competence must be ensured to guarantee respect and cordial cohabitation in the future. In our country, our autonomous community and specially on our island, Majorca, many different nationalities and cultures meet. Hence a tolerant society is required to reach a cosmopolitan city. Nonetheless, limits on the tolerance should also be taught to guarantee respect among all the members of the community. Knowing other cultures enriches people but being capable of critically appreciating all the aspects englobing a culture ends racism.

In order to become fully functional adults, the social and civic competence is paramount in our education. Nonetheless, a decision must be made about what type of society is desired for the future one who never questions the rulers and gives complete freedom of decision to those who are in power, or people with the
capacity of evaluating and finding solutions and not conforming with what others say.

Teachers are required to show students different methodologies of study and learning processes in order to help students master the learning to learn competence. However, it is difficult to imagine how they are going to be capable of discerning the different benefits of those techniques if their critical thinking is not also developed. Students will simply follow the technique most used or shown in class, because they normally follow tendencies in their daily lives. Most of them do not take their time to think what suits them best in their studies unless we teach them the importance of questioning and thinking individually.

The sense of entrepreneurship competence encourages students to become leaders of projects and develop them from the idea stage. Considering the implementation at schools of cooperative work which is being promoted at schools as one of the most effective methods of teaching, students must be capable of questioning the decisions taken by their leader to fulfill favorably the tasks assigned. When students criticize a decision of the leader argumentatively, they develop further this competence because that person acts accordingly to a previous idea.

Finally, the linguistic competence, key in the learning process of the English language, is underdeveloped, specially the speaking skill. Nowadays, when teenagers finish their obligatory studies they are still not capable of having a normal and decent conversation in the first foreign language, English, which is taught since they enter the Educational System, normally at the age of three. This means that six years of elementary school, another, at least, four years, and, in some cases, two years of A-levels are not enough for Spanish students to acquire a language properly to maintain a conversation. This requires an innovation in order to ensure the success of the Spanish Educational System in the area of English language acquisition.

In Asian countries there have been several studies on how the introduction of critical thinking in the English classroom affects the students, moreover, as aforementioned, in several universities of the US they impart courses to develop and exercise critical thinking. These studies prove the importance of critical
thinking in adult life, for this reason teenagers must start developing this skill as
soon as possible.

Considering the poor results Spain obtains in national classifications on
education, such as OECD/PISA, it is time to incorporate innovation in the
methodologies used in the classroom and the skills developed there; that is why
it is indispensable to consider the use of critical thinking in the English classroom
to improve students’ spoken skills. The aim of this dissertation is to prove the
efficacy of the introduction of critical thinking in the English-speaking classroom
and the benefits of this new competence. In order to do so, several studies on
the use of critical thinking in the English Second Language (ESL) classroom in
other countries will be described. Afterwards a didactic proposal on this matter
and the experience in a real A-level classroom will be explained. Finally, the
results extracted from this study will be discussed and the conclusions which
have been extracted will be displayed.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Teaching English

Teachers have a challenging job because many factors must occur in a
classroom in order to achieve proper learning. Students’ motivation, teachers’
attitudes towards their students and the methodological approaches are some of
the key elements to bear in mind to accomplish a successful learning process.

First of all, students’ motivation to learn a foreign language is vital to assure
the learning process. When students have no desire to acquire a certain
knowledge, teachers suffer to fulfill their objectives. As Gardner and Lambert had
proven in their research _Attitudes and motivation in second-language learning_
that motivated students learning process is more fruitful. Students’ aptitudes and
attitudes mark their speed progress and final results (Gardner, 1985).

Second of all, the figure of the teacher is essential for Second Language
Acquisition at High-School level. High-school students, normally, have no intrinsic
motivation to study English, this subject is part of the obligatory curriculum to
obtain the Secondary Education diploma thus they are forced to learn it.
Regardless of the importance of learning this global language, most students believe it as a tedious and difficult obligation. Taking into consideration these circumstances, in general students would not study this subject on their own, thus the teacher becomes the only input students receive. Under these parameters, the actions and attitudes of teachers inside the classroom become determinative. The interaction with the students and the bonds created in a classroom affect the acquisition stage. The teachers’ behavior and use of their voices influence students motivations and attitudes influencing the final results (Harmer, 2001).

Finally, the methodologies and techniques used in the teaching process have an impact on the students’ learning process. The methodological approach chosen to impart a lesson may vary from teacher to teacher because it is a field in constant investigation where innovations are frequently presented. The following methodologies have been used in the ESL classroom and their strength and weaknesses have already been tested in different contextual classrooms. However, there is no consensus on the optimum method to guarantee favorable results in ESL lessons.

### 2.2 Methodologies

For decades, pedagogical theorists have been researching and proposing paradigms on the optimal approaches to teach foreign languages. These theories were based on the fundamental identification of the main aspects of the field proposed by the cognitivism theorists Piaget, Vygotsky, Bandura and Bruner.

Piaget in *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood* (1962) exposed his cognitive development theory stating the four stages children succeed in their learning process, for instance a) sensorimotor, b) preoperational, c) concrete operation and d) formal operational. According to Piaget, learning is a constant cognitive reorganization process natural in the human nature. In other words, in accordance to this theory, the learning process consists on succeeding stages which accommodate or assimilate knowledge while growing up because it is part of human beings’ nature.

By contrast, Vygotsky stated in *Thought and Language* (1966) his sociocultural cognitive theory highlighting the importance of the environment
during the learning process. Under these parameters, the cognitive development is a social process consisting in two stages: a) real knowledge and b) potential knowledge. In comparison to Piaget’s theory, Vygotsky states the relevance of social interaction in knowledge acquisition process over the natural factor, interpersonal relations are key to develop people’s cognition and not merely the fact of being humans.

Following the basis established by Piaget (1962) and Vygotsky (1966), new pedagogical paradigms were published. Bandura and Bruner developed their own theories on cognitivism by merging previous approaches. From then on, several different theoretical methods have been emerging since none of them has been proclaimed as the actual explanation of cognition, since pedagogy is still an uncertain field of study where nothing has been proven as definite.

By combining the knowledge arranging process and the aid of external sources, Bruner has settled the basis of his constructivist theory. This explains cognition development as a set of mental model constructions conditioned by the environmental scaffolding the subject is exposed to. As the person grows, the mental representations created since birth, change gradually according to the different stages Bruner propose (Vielma & Salas, 2000, pp. 35–36).

In 1977, Bandura exposed to the world his Social Learning Theory explaining his own vision on how cognition is developed in the human brain. This approach merges the basis of behaviorism with Vygotsky’s sociocultural cognitivism. According to Bandura, humans learn by observing and imitating their environment. The learning process is different and specific for individuals because of cultural and familial dogmas. In addition, Bandura highlights the importance of motivation and attention during the cognitive development as a necessity to accomplish proper learning.

Based on these elemental features of cognition, several methodological approaches to teach EFL have been conceived in the lately decades in an attempt to find the optimal method to assure the mastering of the English language in non-native speaking countries.
2.2.1 Grammar-translation
This traditional methodology has been used for centuries to teach foreign languages. It consists of comparing grammatical structures of the foreign desired-learnt language to students’ L1. These comparisons help students create links between the target language and their mother-language which, at elemental levels, have its efficacy (Harmer, 2001, p. 30). However, in order to guarantee significant learning, students should avoid translations in favor of creating new language structures in their brains. Additionally, the use of this methodological approach in class would reduce the use of the English language in the classroom because students’ L1 would be used to explain grammatical structures and translate meanings of the unknown vocabulary.

2.2.2 Audiolingualism
This behaviorist-based methodology consists on repeating drills to teach grammatical structures. By hearing the proper use of the English language students acquire and incorporate grammar structures by repetition (Harmer, 2001, p. 31). Unfortunately, the limitations of this methodology rely on the fact that students only learn a certain amount of answers and structures and their own production strategies are not reinforced in the classroom.

2.2.3 The Direct Method
Diverting drastically from the previous methodology, the Direct Method consists on using solely the English language during lessons. Students and teachers must use the target language constantly to communicate among themselves. Consequently, the unknown vocabulary is explained graphically or with practical examples and, the grammatical structures are neither translated nor related to L1 grammar points. Students create new and natural L2 brain connections by using a natural approach (Larsen-Freeman, 2008, p. 23). This communicative approach is one of the most extended used in modern foreign language classrooms due to its effectiveness by increasing students’ input and output during class which is normally the only time students have the opportunity of actually using the L2.
2.2.4 **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)**

Parting from the premise that languages are a mean of communication, this methodology is the most naturalistically-based one. The main focus of this method is to expose students to the target language and to provide them with a space to be able to practice it. By showing them the utility of the given language students will be motivate to learn which will enhance the learning process (Harmer, 2001, p. 32).

2.2.5 **Cognitive Code Learning**

Based on the psychological cognitivism theory, the bases of this approach rely on the utmost understanding of grammatical rules and lexical contents. Students’ cognitive capacities will determine the success or failure of this teaching methodology. It is normally presented by the inductive or deductive approach. In the inductive approach, students are provided with examples of grammar exercises and they have to extract the rules of those grammar points. An example of this methodological approach is the Silent Method, based on the principle of making students use the English language to complete the tasks the teacher expects to accomplish during the lesson without direct orders, indeed this communicative method is used to specifically activate students’ communication skills because they are obliged to infer the intentions of the silent teacher who barely speaks (Harmer, 2001; Dakowska, 2005; Larsen-Freeman, 2008). This approach may be beneficial for those students who have already acquired a certain amount of knowledge and are trained in this cognitive approach. However, beginner learners would have many problems learning without the teachers’ input and their capacities to develop spoken English would be diminished.

2.2.6 **Task-Based Learning**

The main characteristic of this method consists on a task fulfilment exercise. Students are given a certain situation related to a real-life situation. Basically, the utilization of this approach implies the employment of role plays in English language lessons (Harmer, 2001, p. 31). These activities fix students behaviors
in these particular situations because they are provided with scripts and phrases which must be used to fulfill the task. The limitations on students’ speech productions are evident. Students’ answers are restricted to a certain amount of possibilities provided by the teacher incapacitating students’ creativity and own cognitive speech production.

2.2.7 PPP
Providing students with a context of English language use to exemplify a grammar or lexical point is the first stage of this methodological approach. After observing the linguistic issue dealt with during the session, the teacher gives students an exercise to drill the new content. Once these two stages have been successfully passed students are ready to formulate their own sentences (Harmer, 2001, p. 31). Presentation, Practice and Production (PPP) is the most frequently-used methodology to teach students new grammatical structures in this approach. The effectiveness of this deductive approach has been proven since its invention and it is still one of the most recurrently used methodologies in Foreign Language Acquisition (FLA).

To sum up, the use of different methodologies in ESL classrooms ensures the proper learning of the English language. In order to learn this language, learner must master the five main skills: a) reading, b) listening, c) writing, d) spoken interaction and d) spoken production. The main aim of this thesis is to illustrate the benefits of using a new methodological approach to grant Spanish high-school students an enhanced experience of the learning process of the English-speaking skill, more specifically, by using critical thinking.

2.3 Teaching Speaking
The oral production skill is a challenge to learners, this ability cannot be acquired by repetitive exercises nor cramming. The speaking skill requires specific training to master it, for decades scholars assumed that by learning grammar and lexicon the speaking ability would be learnt automatically. Unfortunately, reality diverted from this assumption and those students who did not receive proper teaching regarding this skill had poor results in spoken English tests.
The complexity of teaching spoken skills has been researched in recent years as an evidence of the necessity of providing students specific lessons related to this skill. Before moving on, an analysis of the different aspects which are related to the speaking ability must be exposed.

2.3.1 Speech Production
Speech production is a complex aspect of student’s ESL cognitive process because it englobes several aspects which cannot be exclusively self-studied, especially at high-school level, because it requires external evaluation.

Speaking consists on expressing spontaneous linear utterances orally. Spoken English is a short-termed planned speech, because of its immediateness the sentences are normally less complex than those found on written English. The lack of time and planning increases the possibility of arising mistakes, for that reason the evaluation of errors in speaking exams is less strict than on written production tests (Thornbury, 2002). Learners knowledge of semantics, metalinguistics, pragmatics, linguistics suprasegmental features of the spoken language and sociocultural factors also constitute a successful speech production.

2.3.2 Linguistic Knowledge
As it happens in every field, students’ knowledge about the genre and topic are crucial to accomplish this task. Knowing about the type of speech required, for instance a conversation or a prepared speech, determines the degree of planification, politeness and register.

Speakers behave differently depending on whether the speech is a colloquial conversation among peers, a formal speech in front of an audience or a formal interview. Different situations will require different strategies to accomplish two main evaluable items such as accuracy and fluency.

In spoken language, fluency determines L2 proficiency level because many factors must occur before one is considered to be fluent. Being capable of speaking at a considerable speed is fundamental, this ability show the domain of the target language. Lack of hesitation and instant response are the result of good
understanding and language knowledge. However, pauses are also important in speech production because they can provide speeches with pragmatical intensity.

Equally meaningful is accuracy which, as stated above, is evaluated differently in oral production than in written texts. According to the degree of planification speakers may have before pronouncing their speeches and the register expected the structure and expected performances vary. For instance, a conversation requires questions and follow-up utterances which conditions the performance in both sides; moreover, the co-operative principles is indispensable to successfully perform this speech (Thornbury, 2002, p. 18). Conversely, formal speeches require a high degree of planning and a clear structure to develop the different points dealt with by the speakers.

In addition, the vocabulary and grammatical structures used in conversations are normally informal and simple due to the immediateness, meanwhile in formal and planned speeches complex grammatical structures and polite lexicon are expected because of the lack of interferences of outsiders and the register of these speaking activities (Thornbury, 2002, pp. 20–24).

One of the key aspects taken into consideration in the development of the speaking skill is the proper pronunciation of the phonemes involved in each utterance. This aspect arises a controversial paradigm because of the extensive number of dialects in the English language derived from the colonialist epoque of the British Empire. Each dialectal variety has its unique characteristics regarding lexicon, phonology and stress, key elements in speech production.

The diversity in lexicon is appreciated in all the languages of the world, for instance, in Spanish, different dialects use different words to name garments. In the English-speaking world, there are differences similar to the one explained, for example *lift* and *elevator*, besides changes in the pronunciation of the same words.

Furthermore, the suprasegmental features as stress and intonation are essential to semantics. Sentence stress and intonation classify the information expressed according to relevance to help receptors obtain the message uttered efficiently (Thornbury, 2002, p. 4). These speech production elements are the
most challenging for students, because of the influence of L1 patterns students
do not realize about the differences and tend to not incorporate English stress
and intonation patterns.

As can be observed throughout the *Atlas of North American English. Phonetics, Phonology and Sound Change* (2006), the English language pronunciation of phonemes is not even steady on a country level. As can be appreciated in Map 1 there are several dialectal variations regarding the pronunciation of the different vowel sounds, monophthongs and diphthongs. From north to south and east to west, the pronunciation of the same phonemes changes drastically, significantly appreciated in the Chicago vowel shift.

![Map 1.2. Linguistic Atlas Projects of the United States, 1931–1998](image)


Vowel shifts are elements present in the English language since the Great Vowel Shift. This recurrent feature has affected English vowels’ pronunciation since the Middle English period, at the moment it is affecting the Chicago region where vocalic articulation shifts consecutively from the conventional American English creating new pronunciations to the English lexicon. In addition, vowels are not the only sound which may suffer modifications; in some dialects, e.g. Scottish, the consonants also differ deeply from the RP and the American English
accents pronunciations. These varieties should be taken into consideration in teaching because students should be informed of English-speaking diversity in order to provide them with the possibility of choosing the fitting dialect according to their needs and capacities. By allowing them to decide this first step, students’ motivation increases which, as has been stated above, is a fundamental factor to guarantee significant learning processes.

2.3.3 Extralinguistic Knowledge
Considering the relevance of motivation in cognition, the extralinguistic knowledge is a fundamental factor to enhance language acquisition. This knowledge, as stated by Scott Thornbury in his book *How to teach Speaking* (2002), is related to those elements which do not lead directly with language. In the case of speaking, extralinguistic knowledge includes “topic and cultural knowledge, knowledge of the context and familiarity with other speakers” (Thornbury, 2002, p. 11).

These fields of knowledge affect the performances of the speaking activities. In the case of familiarity with other speakers, which is related to a conversational type of speaking, the lack of relationships and trust would have a negative effect on the sequence initiate-respond-follow-up which is the fundament of this speaking task. The lack of confidence on behalf of speakers influences directly the performance misleading the results.

These results may also be affected by the topic and content knowledge because speakers background knowledge is the one evaluated and not the speaking skills. Coming across a field of knowledge unknown or barely studied is frustrating and paralyzing because of the difficulty of being forced to speak without background knowledge. The topics chosen also condition students’ performances because during speaking activities linguistics are evaluated differently, due to the lack of planification and correction opportunities. Conversely, communicating a message is more relevant, for that reason the communicative competences the students display during these activities will determine their grade.
Finally, students’ context, cultural and sociocultural knowledge may alter speaking exams results. As above mentioned, the English-speaking world is vast and diverse, with different traditions and norms which must be taken into consideration in role-plays. Students should be aware of cultural differences to enrich their ESL learning. Additionally, students should bear in mind the context because in spoken English deictic and ellipsis are frequently found; these aspects of the oral language differentiate it from written texts (Thornbury, 2002).

2.3.4 Planning and Assessing Speaking

In order to ensure teaching the contents that students lack, a needs analysis tests should be done. These tests provide teachers with an accurate level of data to establish students’ knowledge and weak areas. After analyzing the classroom needs and determining the aims, teachers may begin the planification of their syllabus.

The contents of the speaking syllabi should include spoken grammar, pronunciation features, communication strategies, speech acts, conversational rules, routines and structures among others (Thornbury, 2002). These are the most relevant aspects of spoken communication which should be taken into consideration in the ESL classroom because students cannot pick them up naturally due to the lack of input students obtain from their environment.

Lastly, criteria assessment should be done by holistic and analytical rubrics, depending on the complexity of the speaking task assigned, due to the fact that several aspects are normally evaluated simultaneously. As stated above, grammar and vocabulary accuracy are not the fundamental elements taken into consideration in oral speech production; the speakers’ ability to plan and utter a coherent discourse should be evaluated, discourse management is essential because the main aim of this skill is communication and failing in this aspect would mean failing in speaking. Moreover, pronunciation accuracy is significant in spoken English to become proficient in a language and mispronunciation also leads to miscommunication because there are many homonymic words which can only be differentiated by their pronunciation. Finally, in determined types of speech interactive communication is essential, for instance in conversations and
role-plays (Thornbury, 2002). In order to choose the suitable rubric, it should bear in mind that the holistic method is more efficient for informal speeches whereas, analytical rubrics are more detailed and provide students with elaborated feedback.

2.3.4 Methodologies
In recent years, methodologists have become aware of the relevance of theorizing about the learning process required to acquire the English-speaking skill. Unlike what was believed, this ability is not acquired simultaneously as the others unless it is given proper focus and practice. The most commonly used methodologies afore mentioned are the direct method, the communicative approach, the task-based method and the audiolingual method (Celce-murcia, 2011). The common traits of these methodologies are the predominance of spoken language in the classroom, and the encouragement of students to use and practice their speaking skills inside and outside the classroom.

New methodologies have been implemented in recent years for instance the genre-based approach (Thornbury, 2002) and the usage of critical thinking (Cottrell, 2005; Khan, 2009; Vdovina, 2013; Soodmand & Rahimi, 2014; Chen, 2016; Ramezani, Larsari, & Kiasi, 2016; Ordem, 2017; Rahman, Faridah, & Manaf, 2017). The genre-based approach focuses on teaching samples of text so that students can imitate them. Basically, this method is a mixture of the audiolingual and task-based approach differing drastically from the implementation of critical thinking skills to teach speaking.

2.4 Critical thinking
Humans are reasoning beings since birth; it is an innate ability everybody possesses. As happens with skills, they should be trained to improve them and obtain benefits from them. Generally speaking, everybody can think but not everyone is capable of critically reasoning unless they have been conducted towards this direction. Critical thinking includes several mental processes via activating the brain to enhance the learning process. Its advantages have been tested in recent studies and several countries are including activities in their curricula to develop students’ critical thinking competence. Additionally, critical
thinking has been included in some didactic units to enhance the acquisition of the English language, in which all the skills have been tested with favorable results, proving the benefits of this method in the ESL classroom all over the world.

2.4.1 What is critical thinking?
Living in a world where everything may be reached easily makes people be prone to under-develop their reasoning capacities because they do not train them making them gullible. It is indispensable to encourage students to question themselves to develop their critical thinking competence.

According to Stella Cottrell in her book *Critical Thinking Skills: Developing Effective Analysis and Argument*, the basis of critical thinking relies on the use of cognition to evaluate, criticize and analyze arguments. By questioning the utterances told, people are engaged in a complex process consisting of different reasoning devices for instance:

(1) Identifying other people’s positions, arguments and conclusions;
(2) Evaluating the evidence for alternative points of view; (3) Weighing up opposing arguments and evidence fairly; (4) Being able to read between the lines, seeing behind surfaces, and identifying false or unfair assumptions; (5) Recognizing techniques used to make certain positions more appealing than others, such as false logic and persuasive devices; (6) Reflecting on issues in a structured way, bringing logic and insight to bear; (7) Drawing conclusions about whether arguments are valid and justifiable, based on good evidence and sensible assumptions; and (8) Presenting a point of view in a structured, clear, well-reasoned way that convinces others (Abdallah & Mohammad, 2016, p. 14).

Naïve people tend to have difficulties with these devices because they lack the primordial questioning stage. Notwithstanding, they can be trained to acquire them and develop their critical thinking skills because they are not innate and
require practice to improve them. The acquisition of this ability enhances the cognitive process of knowledge learning, especially in L2 learning.

By improving the critical thinking competence, people become aware of the reasoning process behind their arguments and, eventually, they will be able to discern others’ thinking course. This will be useful to refute others’ statements with well-based reasons. In addition, learning how others think is important to spread tolerance and accomplish a suitable environment for learning; in the case of an English language high-school classroom diversity is always present which obliges cordiality among students.

2.4.2 The importance of developing critical thinking
Many people over-estimate the advantages this competence brings in daily activities. By developing critical thinking people improve ancillary skills as observation, reasoning, decision-making, analysis, judgement and persuasion (Cottrell, 2005; Abdallah & Mohammad, 2016).

Firstly, the surrounding analysis enhances humans’ perceptive abilities. Being alert of the environment may prevent accidents because brain cells will be prepared to command the body to move in case of needing it. Furthermore, the perception of the surroundings includes people and their behavior. By analyzing a person’s attitudes and movements, deception will be easily avoided.

Secondly, adults differentiate themselves from children and teenagers by their reasoning abilities. The primary stages of life are perceived as illogical ages when one is moved by instincts and strong feelings which determined their actions. Learning sensibility is essential to grow up successfully, for that reason critical thinking should be implemented at schools to guarantee students the necessary abilities to become adults. Furthermore, rationalizing arguments provide people with a strong weapon against ignorance and gullibility.

Thirdly, being an adult consists of a large list of decisions which must be made in a short period of time. Teenagers are not acquainted with this quantity of decision-making situations adults face daily; unless they are provided with devices to face these situations frustration may raise preventing them from finding solutions. By positioning them in simulated situations where they do have to put
into practice their critical thinking skills they will acquire tools to their future adult life.

Fourthly, besides being thought of as illogical creatures, teenagers’ judgements are considered poorly-based. Providing them the space to judge without being judged will enhance this ability. As has been stated above, practice is crucial to acquire skills; allowing students to try and fail they gives them the opportunity to learn and improve. Unfortunately, in traditional methodologies these opportunities are still missing.

Lastly, adolescence is a stage in life when peer pressure influences our decisions. Being accepted by others is essential for teenagers, for that reason they should learn how to avoid indulging in persuasion and stand up for what they believe.

2.4.3 Barriers to critical thinking
Despite the fact of being an innate ability, enhancing critical thinking may face some difficulties to overcome, for instance, misunderstanding the meaning of criticism, overestimating our abilities, lack of methods strategies and practice, the reluctance to criticize experts, affective reasons, mistaking information for understanding and insufficient focus and attention to detail (Cottrell, 2005, p. 12).

Firstly, the word criticism implies negative connotations for some people preventing them from criticizing. In fact, analyzing and evaluating, which describe some of the several processes above explained entailed to critical arguing, must not be exclusively negative. Positive comments can also be criticisms as feedback is provided to improve skills, not to attack a person’s doing.

Secondly, thinking is an innate quality which tends to be diminished and not taken seriously. Critical thinking requires a high degree of sensibility and conscious decision-making. Human brains are active from birth to death. In other words, human beings are constantly thinking. However, that does not mean they are always thinking critically, in order to master this competence people should practice and test their real abilities instead of assuming they have already perfected them.
Thirdly, there are people who require more practice because they are unaware of the different strategies and methodological devices related to critical thinking. Raising awareness on the compulsion of critical thinking to achieve higher-level academic thinking would aid those uniformed students. Teaching this competence in Obligatory Secondary Education would contribute to improve students’ results.

Fourthly, some people feel uneasy when they are requested to criticize experts’ productions. Considering that this study is aimed at teenagers, they may feel uncertain to criticize assumptions made by teachers or other scholars who have worked and studied in those fields. Experts are respected figures in students’ perspective which complicates expressing criticisms towards them.

Fifthly, coming across a statement contradicting personal beliefs confront people. Overcoming this obstacle is jeopardizing because a rooted reasoning is being challenged by new evidences. People will have to separate their sensitivity and their senses in order to keep developing their critical skills.

Sixthly, students are used to being provided immediately with the information they require; thus, they are sometimes reluctant at not obtaining a direct answer to their questions and having to find it by themselves instead. Depending on the students’ age, explaining them the benefits of developing their critical thinking for their future would be enough to make them willing to learn and practice it.

Finally, in order to find adequate arguments, focus on detail should prevail. Paying attention to all the aspects of an argument is what differentiates this competence from simple reasoning. Critical opinions are well-based reasons expressed clearly and concisely to ensure receptors’ understanding and evaluation.

2.5 Critical thinking in the ESL classroom

Observing the benefits that critical thinking provides the cognitive process, studies have been conducted regarding the advantages of including this skill in the English as a second language classroom. Some of them expose the
enhancement of speaking skills on behalf of the students taught by this methodology.

In the first place, it has been found that forcing students to think by themselves to find arguments to express during lessons has noticeably improved their confidence (Khan, 2009, p. 65). One of the most challenging English skills is speaking because students feel uneasy when they are asked to speak. Normally, written skills are more practiced in the ESL classroom, which combined with the difficulty of phonology for second language learners explains student’s rejection of speaking in English. Students reluctance towards speaking influence their performances and improvements. If students do not practice, they will not become fluent in English language oral texts. Critical thinking forces students to apply the linguistic knowledge they have learnt in order to transmit the message, instead of repeating drills without questioning why they must say them.

In the second place, allowing students to provide their personal opinions increases their motivation to speak and convey their messages (Soodmand & Rahimi, 2014, p. 78). Providing students with a safe space to exteriorize their thoughts rises their willingness to participate because they are allowed to express themselves without prejudices. Teenagers are frequently judged as irrational and their opinions tend to be dismissed because of their age without listening to their reasoning. Showing them respect tranquilizes them which is beneficial for speaking activities because they perform better when relaxed. Enthusiastic students make the teaching job easier and better results are extracted from them (Harmer, 2001; Thornbury, 2002; Cottrell, 2005; Khan, 2009; Ruiz Niño, 2013).

In the third place, when using critical thinking in ESL classroom students are provided with problem-solving activities which can be considered a task-based approach (Harmer, 2001; Mcdonald, 2017). When students are given a task to perform, they focus all their energy in fulfilling it. For that reason, the introduction of complex statements or games engages them. This focused activity forces them to speak to convey their messages and refute others’ opinions. Thus, they practice pronunciation and oral production enhancing their future performances because they receive immediate feed-back. Additionally, they are
allowed to listen to the feedback provided by the whole class preventing future similar mistakes made.

In the fourth place, implementing creative activities in ESL lessons is beneficial for both teachers and students (Duron, Limbach, & Waugh, 2006, p. 165). The challenge of creating engaging material for students motivates most teachers despite the inconvenience of this time-consuming task. Once a teacher becomes accustomed to their students, they know which topics or games would suit their needs and would be interesting for them. Knowing the students who will complete the activities increases success probability. Moreover, some students are extremely creative however, at school they barely find chances to show their abilities because of traditional methodologies.

Lastly, the implementation of critical thinking will be beneficial not only in the area of English acquisition but also on daily-life activities and any learning process (Cottrell, 2005, p. 4). Training the critical thinking competence improves environmental perception, reading comprehension opinion-questioning and it lessens the probability of being deceived by persuasive arguments.

After analyzing all the benefits critical thinking provides ESL classrooms, a study was carried out to examine the results Spanish students obtain when facing this type of activity during a didactic unit routine.

3. CASE STUDY
The aim of this dissertation is to test the viability of introducing critical thinking in the ESL classroom to improve the speaking skills of secondary and A-level alumni. For that reason, a critical thinking activity was introduced in a real A-level classroom in a public school of Palma where the fulfillment and the performance of the students were evaluated according to the school’s A-level assessment criteria enhanced by the insertion of the critical thinking criterion (Sotelo & Pietraszek, 2018).

3.1 Contextualization
The chosen center to develop this study was IES Joan Alcover in the city center of Palma. This center is historically emblematic for the city because it was
founded in 1942 as an independent feminine section of IES Ramon Llull where classes were taught until 1966, when they moved to the building in front of the high school above mentioned. The feminine section of the high school was created based on the prohibition on coeducation in 1939, which pulled during the oppression period.

In 1976 the institution became independent and, once again, coed after the restoration of the democratic monarchy. Nowadays this public education school is characterized by the encouragement of a series of principles from the democratic and collaborative management of the center. These values can be observed in the different activities the school carries out every year. For instance, this year the school has promoted different projects related to the environment and to raise students’ awareness on the importance of recycling and how our actions affect our ecosystem and endangers our future. These projects are diverse and generally oriented to be performed by the entire school, for instance, students from 3rd of ESO went to Bunyola to clean sa Comuna, later on they were asked to record videos to provide the rules which should be followed when going to a natural environment. Also, the school conducts annually a project named “Ambientació d’aula”. The school’s directive designs two days to allow the majority of the alumni, with the exception of the second course of A-level who must take care of their access to university exam’s preparations, to show their perception on a given topic via an original play created by students, they are encouraged to redecorate their classrooms and use props on the “Ambientació d’aula” day. On the second day, every class performs a short play in which they expose their opinions to the whole school. These plays are evaluated by a jury and the best performances receive a prize. Likewise, every year the school arranges a food, clothes and first necessity products gathering campaign to help the needy people in the neighborhood. These actions show the schools’ commitment to social and environmental issues.

The students of this high school come mainly from five elementary schools of the same neighborhood: CEIP Aina Moll I Marquès, CEIP son Pisà, CEIP Jaume I, CEIP el Terreno and CEIP Genova. In the case of the A-level students, the classes are mainly formed by the graduates from ESO studies and any other
student who wishes to finish their pre-university studies in this center. The majority of the student body of the school are native Majorcan students from Spanish families, which means that there a very few immigrants students in the high school. This fact is determinant when analyzing the high results, the school scores in comparison to other institutions of this autonomous community.

Nowadays, the high school holds 468 students distributed in Obligatory Secondary Education (ESO), A-level and a course of vocational training which must be done in two academic years to obtain the certificate. The ESO division of this school consists of 283 students divided into three classes which students are distributed accordingly to their optional class choices and not by their academic results. Moreover, the vocational training course students are a minority in this school, and only those students who have not obtained their obligatory studies certificate take these courses.

Finally, the A-level students are divided accordingly to the branch of higher studies they have decided to take. This educational institution has divided the four branches of A-levels in three classes: one for scientific studies, one for social studies and the last one is formed by the humanistic and technological branches of knowledge. These students are part of a school project named Aula 21 which consists on the use of Chromebook in the classroom instead of conventional books. Students tasks and resources are uploaded to their Google Classroom site which they have access to during class and at home thanks to their devices.

3.2 Participants

The participants of this study were 34 students from the branch of A-level studies of social studies from the high school of the city center of Palma IES Joan Alcover. In this classroom there were only three students whose families are immigrants, two of them from South America and one from Russia.

As per usual, the difference among levels in the classroom is clearly noticeable. Some students require very little attention in their language acquisition process, meanwhile others have a lack of fluency and basic knowledge reflected in their performances in the exams and tasks.
The groups were arranged by the students themselves which explains the homogeneity of level which can be appreciated in their performances. In just one group one of the low-grade students was included in a group of high-grade students which enhanced the student’s grades. By contrast those group consisting of low-grade participants performed as expected.

### 3.3 Design

In order to test the viability and usefulness of teaching speaking skills in an ESL classroom via critical thinking, a speaking activity with these characteristics was introduced in the classroom above mentioned. Students were asked to perform in small groups an oral presentation as part of the speaking assessment task. The participants were asked to deliver a short contextualization of the topic they had chosen and their opinions on the matter during their ten-minute exam.

First of all, students were requested to form two groups of three and six groups of four participants. They were given the possibility of choosing their project-mates in order to guarantee their comfort while preparing and performing this task, due to the innovative request they were given. Once they knew their group members, they had to decide from a list of possible topics (Table 1) disclosed in their Google Classroom to enhance an equal reception and possibility of choosing a suitable topic for each group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Group’s performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nowadays there are restaurants in which you are fully served by robots, your food is cooked by robots, you are served by robots. What are the implications of this lack of human interaction? Do you think it could end up being extended to other sectors?</td>
<td>This was a homogeneous male group formed by three students who decided to do a role-play. One of them was a customer in a bar, another the robot and the last one the owner of the restaurant. They used the tables and the chairs of the classroom to simulate a restaurant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The “Sarco” suicide machine is now available to print it at home. What do you think about its implications? Do you think it is safe to have</td>
<td>This group consisted of two boys and two girls who performed a role-play showing the machine. They used the TV in the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is this available on the net? Do you think it is correct to create this type of invention?</td>
<td>There are many investigations about the use of animal cells to cure human diseases. Is the comic book reality closer than we expect? Will humans become hybrids in the future?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The members of this groups were the most creative ones. They created a role-play and used props brought by themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You can now clone your cat or dog. However, there are no guarantees you'll get a new pet that looks or acts like your old one. Is it right to invest in this technology when there are so many animals in need of homes already out there? Is cloning a solution for those who have lost their dear ones or just an anesthetic to deal with mourning?</td>
<td>This group was formed by three girls who did a PowerPoint presentation to explain their topic. They nearly forgot to express their opinions on the topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowadays we can keep in touch with people all over the globe and have many international relationships. In a world where we are constantly connected is loneliness still a possibility?</td>
<td>The teacher who was supervising me informed me that the members of this group tend to have low marks in English. The three girls and one boy mixed the presentation and role-play style. They read sometimes but provided critical reasonings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quayside may become, thanks to Sidewalk Labs, the first intelligent city. What are the implications of this new city regarding humans? Why is it not ready yet? Do you think this is how the cities should be in the future?</td>
<td>This group decided to do a PowerPoint presentation with glimpses of conversation and comments. They played an explanation video of Quayside taken from YouTube. The three girls and the boy have difficulties learning English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowadays all our information has been digitalized even before we are born. This helps delinquents to steal people’s identities. What consequences this may carry in the future? How many people with our same identity will there be? How will we know if someone is who they say?</td>
<td>This group formed by three girls and a boy showed a role-play which was insufficient to answer the oriented questions and stayed on the surface of the topic. Their reasoning was the poorest one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cryonics is still popular as a way to live longer. Should it be promoted? On what cases do you think it would be an option? Should we all live longer than we do?</td>
<td>The two boys and two girls of this group made a role-play about friends meeting in a bar and one of them had a terrible announcement. After telling them his intentions a debate began.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Artificial wombs are being investigated in order to guarantee the safety of mothers. Should we change the way we have carried out pregnancy up until now? What are the pros and cons of using artificial wombs? Isn't there any better way to have children? This group formed by four boys, two of them which are the students with the highest grades in the classroom and the other two have the lowest. They decided to do a PowerPoint presentation because they found it difficult to create a role-play about the topic.

(Table 1: List of topics provided to the studied students)

These topics are all based on current situations in which technology and its possible uses may become controversial for humankind. For example: “Nowadays all our information has been digitalized even before we are born. This helps delinquents to steal people’s identities. What consequences may this carry in the future? How many people with our same identity will there be? How will we know if someone is who they say they are?” (Table 1). The main aim of this topic was to provoke doubts on the students’ beliefs regarding the importance and necessity of technologically recording every aspect of our lives, not only on social networks but also on governmental registers and the vulnerability even national bases holds. This topic was included to raise debate among students, especially those who are intrigued by conspiracies, because these students are part of the Z-generation which means they were born and brought up surrounded by technology and digital records. Consequently, this topic jeopardizes their reality by including a new perspective regarding it.

Bearing in mind that this was these students’ first attempt to prepare a speaking exam, in which not only their abilities to orally communicate in the English language were going to be assessed but also their critical thinking skills, students were provided with a series of questions which had to be answered during their speaking exam in order to guarantee the use of critical thinking in the process. Also, during this didactic unit an entire session was devoted to preparing their exams, as it is crucial when carrying out a group project to provide time in class to allow students to meet and work properly. This activity was carried out during a split session to guarantee students’ questions and concerns would be solved in just one session.
In order to contextualize their topics, students were given the possibility of designing a PowerPoint presentation where all the aspects of the issues had to be presented and exemplified, or they could perform a short play of their own creation showing the most relevant features. This contextualization was fundamental to ensure the whole class understood the main points of all the topics.

3.4 Performance

As an exemplification of the results extracted from this activity two performances will be extensively disclosed. These two speaking exams will be exhibited and analyzed in isolation as samples of the execution of this activity.

3.4.1 Animal cells experimentation

Considering the strong relationship between technology and science, this topic was introduced as an example of the unclear divisions between these two branches of investigation. Technological innovations provide science with essential instruments to keep developing investigations on this field.

The premise of this topic was the most fictional of them all: “There are many investigations about the use of animal cells to cure human diseases. Is the comic book reality closer than we expect? Will humans become hybrids in the future?” (Table 1). In this case, bearing in mind the difficulty and seriousness of dealing with such a scientifically oriented topic, particularly for these students whose specialization field differs drastically, the introduction of science fiction and graphic novels was a resource used to allow students to be creative and divert from the solemnity that science holds.

The students who worked on this topic, decided to create a short play to explain their topic to their classmates. Instead of providing a presentation on how mutations happen and the possibilities of humans becoming hybrids in the near future, they decided to act as animals as the graphic representation of the premise afore mentioned. Half of the group was hybrid-human who had suffered from a genetic disease at birth and whose cells were modified in order to preserve their lives. Because of this mutation, they had acquired some behaviors typical of
their transplanted-cells’ animals for instance they finished their sentences with animal’s onomatopoeic expressions. Furthermore, students decided to use make-up and props to show an animalistic aspect to their audience to display the effects of cell-transplant on their bodies showing alterations in their behaviors and physical aspects.

The play was a conversation among the member of the group who, after hearing the explanation behind the transplanted patients estrange behavior, debated the possibility of this uncommon circumstance of having our DNA modified by the implementation of cell-treatments to cure some human diseases. One of the non-hybrid-human members of the group, argued the impossibility of this actually happening, in her opinion, the hypothesis her classmates were defending was irrational and fictional “that’s stupid, it’s impossible you are hybrid-humans. That only happen in cartoons”. Meanwhile, another member of the group believed the viability of the use animal cells in the near future to cure some diseases and maladies. There are animals who are capable of recreating a limb once it has been ceased, others are incapable of transmitting some of our diseases, these qualities should be investigated and acquired by humans, according to this student, “I think Human-hybrids can exist because science advances faster and faster and I think there are many animal in the world and can help to cure us. I think it can happen. It is a great solution for us and the people who need transplants and in the future we will be half-humans/half-animals”

These students decided to perform a creative play to demonstrate all their points of view. Some agreed with the premise of becoming hybrid-humans, others believed it was impossible and unreal, nonetheless all of them supported their ideas with evidences and fulfilled successfully the critical thinking part of the task. During their speeches some of them made grammar mistakes, their grades in the English subject tend to be average passing, this indicated their English level is not as high as to avoid expected mistakes. Notwithstanding, their speaking exam grade was above the average of the class.
3.4.2 **Sarco**

One of the most controversial topics on the list was the Sarco, a new suicide machine which can be downloaded and 3D-printed at home. Dealing with this topic is very delicate and different opinions are likely to arise, in other words the debate among the different members of the group was expected.

The students used the class’ space cleverly as well as assets such as tables and chairs. They used their Chromebooks and the TV screen to project their presentation on Sarco and its main features, to reinforce the illusion of being in a fair. Additionally, they arranged some tables and projected an image (see Image 1) of the actual Sarco machine to simulate the presence of the invention. Surrounding it there were some chairs to allow spectators to approach and discuss the machine’s features and the moral implications of using it.

![Image 1, the Sarco Suicide Machine. Image extracted from https://exitinternational.net/sarco/](Image 1, the Sarco Suicide Machine. Image extracted from https://exitinternational.net/sarco/)

The members of this groups decided to create a very interesting play to contextualize the topic by using a technological fair where they presented to the world The Sarco: The Suicide Machine. The presenter introduced the machine charismatically as the solution for everyone who cannot deal with their lives anymore. Despite the morally controversiality related to such a delicate topic as suicide, they decided to sell a product to those in need of putting an end to their lives.

One of them became the tester of this machine, she had been diagnosed an incurable disease and had little but painful time left so she decided to become
the visual representation of the possible purchasers of this machine to show their classmates what circumstances may lead a person to make this decision. The presenter stated clearly that this machine was designed to be downloaded and printed at home to guarantee comfort to its users. Sarco’s webpage was displayed on the screen to show the process to follow in order to obtain the machine and its image (Image 2) to have a visual representation to aid the other students to understand the concept of Sarco. The machine’s price was discussed together with the limitations, the machine is only accessible for people over fifty years and once they have passed an online mental test. These restrictions were implemented in order to prevent impulsive and mentally ill people, who need assistance, from making a definitive unwavering drastic decision. The users are requested to follow a long tedious process to verify users are certain that committing suicide is what they truly desire. Death by Sarco is similar to intoxication by carbon dioxide, oxygen privation, with the improvement of having a screen to project any image or video as your last memory in this world. It only takes five minutes inside this machine to cease one’s life.

Considering the performance was a fair, the attendants were able to discuss and ask questions regarding the machine and the moral implication of using it. The reassurance of the mental state the certainty and the calmness of the imminent user were key to exemplify the compromise the designers state in their webpage.

The detailed technical specifications and plans will only be available to subscribers to The Peaceful Pill eHandbook. All purchasers of the eHandbook have their ID vetted. A second safeguard is the AI (artificial intelligence) mental capacity test that will be incorporated into the design and use of Sarco. To gain entry to Sarco, the person will need a code. This code will only be issued after the person has completed an online mental capacity test showing that they understand what they are doing, why they are doing and the consequences of their actions. Failure to complete the test will result in the non-issuance of the essential code. Besides, a Sarco will never lend itself to rash, impulsive action. While 3D printing will surely become faster as
the technology improves, it will never be fast. Use of a Sarco will require significant planning ahead. This will serve to protect the vulnerable from acting irrationally.\(^1\)

Students provided a series of arguments in favor of using Sarco as the alternative of living a painful long life because of its many regulations to prevent accidental deaths, due to the introduction of a code to have access to the machine, impulsive death, because of the necessity of passing a mental test, and the use of biodegradable materials which make this machine ecofriendly. They only found a negative aspect “The only con is the price, it’s too expensive and not everybody can buy it.”

Students dealt with all the expected assets regarding the Sarco, the whole class understood the topic and the benefits and issues this machine entails. In addition, this group substantiated their opinions with compelling reasons. Although they presented a positive vision of the use of Sarco, they also projected the National Suicide Prevention hotline phone, in case their play had caused some concerns on any of their classmates. They treated the topic respectfully and provided their classmates the necessary information to comprehend and analyze the complexity of deciding when to cease a life.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Evaluation of speaking

As stated above, the evaluation of students’ speaking skills takes into consideration several aspects. Grammar and vocabulary accuracy are not enough to assess entirely the aspects which are involved in an oral production of language activity.

In order to evaluate students’ speaking skills, the school’s speaking exam rubric was used (see Rubric 1) with some modifications in order to fulfill the purpose of this task. This rubric evaluates the fluency, the accuracy and the global fulfilment of the task based on the achievement of the issues disclosed in every section. Unfortunately, detailed information on behalf of what is expected

\(^{1}\)Extracted from [https://exitinternational.net/sarco/index.php/specifications/](https://exitinternational.net/sarco/index.php/specifications/)
in each section is not provided, as a result that information was included to ensure the partiality of the results explained below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accuracy</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Achieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fluency</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Achieved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global fulfillment</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Achieved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Rubric 1: IES Joan Alcover’s speaking exam rubric)

Overall the main aspects of a conventional speaking exams are covered with Rubric 1. Students simply had to perform adequately, as they had been asked to do up until that moment to pass the exam. To show their speaking skills students are expected not to read their scripts to show their fluency in the English language; besides, these exams are done to evaluate students’ oral productions’ skills so the aid of external sources shades the results because students’ grammatical and vocabulary actual knowledge will not be appreciated properly. Lastly, the Global fulfilment section is not enough to grade and evaluate this complex task adequately.

4.2 Evaluation of critical thinking

The most significant implementation done on the school’s rubric was the addition of a new section to mark this task. The critical thinking assessment section was indispensable to evaluate the success or failure of the implementation of critical thinking to enhance speaking skills (Rubric 2). In other words, without this section the results of this investigation would have been unclear and non-determinant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fluency</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Achieved</th>
<th>Underachieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural pace and just some glimpses to the script</td>
<td>Some reading, normal pace and eye contact with the audience.</td>
<td>Reads most of the time and interrupts the speech/play</td>
<td>Reads all the time and the speech/play lacks continuity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>Few expected or no mistakes</td>
<td>Occasional predictable mistakes</td>
<td>Several mistakes or few basic mistakes</td>
<td>The speech is incomprehensible and full of basic mistakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global fulfilment</td>
<td>The task was fulfilled successfully</td>
<td>The task could be improved</td>
<td>Some aspects were uncovered</td>
<td>The task was not fulfilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking</td>
<td>Opinions are expressed and justified by arguments and/or examples</td>
<td>Opinions are expressed and sometimes justified</td>
<td>Opinions are expressed.</td>
<td>There were no opinions stated during the speaking.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Rubric 2 adapted and modified from Sotelo & Pietraszek, 2018, p. 125)

As can be seen in the rubric used, there are several degrees for using critical thinking during the speaking exam which will determine the final mark of the participants. This section is one fourth of the final mark of the speaking exam so that the not fulfilment of this part will not lead into a failing mark. Parting from the premise that this is the students’ first attempt to perform a task of this magnitude, the fulfillment or unfulfillment of the task should affect the mark yet not define it.

The use of opinions during the speaking exam was a basic criterion to identify whether the students had understood the essence of this task or they perceived it as a mere ordinary speaking exam, that is why just by adding opinions students would pass this criterion. The fundamentals of critical thinking abide on supporting their arguments with evidences, accordingly to the amount and quality of those evidences, students will score higher or lower on the scale. Accomplishing this criterion was also a factor to bear in mind while evaluating the global fulfilment of the task. Students were constantly reminded about the importance of providing their opinions during the speaking exam and the proper procedure to succeed in this task.
4.3 Students’ results

The qualifications obtained from this exam were higher than those gathered previously during the school year. The average grade of this exam was 8.45 which is B+ grade; in other words, students performed notably, and no student failed this speaking exam.

According to this class’ English teacher, the average of the speaking exam results increased more than 2 points in comparison to previous exams. The foregoing exam average was 6.25. This means that the introduction of this type of activity has benefited students in obtaining higher qualifications on their speaking exams.

The activity forced students to do some research regarding each topic in order to obtain all the data related to that technological innovation and the consequences of its existence and use. Every topic was current in order to facilitate students’ access to the pertinent information. When students had not succeeded in this elementary stage their performance was evidently weaker than the ones done after a comprehensive research. The lack of knowledge of the topic made them more nervous and the contextualization was ambiguous and insufficient. The students who were able to talk about the topic even outside the classroom showed more confidence while performing and had better grades.

Another factor to take into consideration is the type of contextualization the students provided during their exams. The groups who decided to do a Power Point presentation instead of the play scored lowered. The Power Points were generally well done, and many data was included. Unfortunately, the reasoning and the confidence these groups showed were poorer than those who created a play. The fact of creating a dialogue and using props gave the students more confidence, in addition they had to creatively include their opinions within the play in order to succeed in the task and all of them accomplished this part of the task magnificently. Overall, the Power Points’ section regarding their opinions was sometimes omitted, which forced them to improvise their opinions culminating in scoring Achieved in this part. Normally the opinions given by these groups scored Achieved because they did not reinforce their statements with evidences nor examples.
Lastly, those students who normally obtain a plain passing grade in their speaking exams, observed an increase in their grades. Some of them scored the Achieved stage on Critical thinking and Accuracy criteria of the speaking assessment rubric (Rubric 2). The confidence gained due to the topic did not improve their grammatical abilities, since, these students still need to work on their grammar and vocabulary skills in order to keep on progressing in their oral production abilities.

To sum up, the use of critical thinking to enhance the speaking skills of A-level students was a success. Students displayed fluency and confidence in their speaking exams because they honestly knew what they were talking about. The certainty of knowing about a topic meliorated their performance and in consequence their grade was benefited by this innovation.

4.4 Students’ opinions

Considering the age of the alumni to this innovative methodological approach was tested with, the opinions of the participants were taken into consideration to evaluate the study once the activity had been done and before the grades were given, in order to avoid them from assessing the activity more positively or negatively depending on the results they obtained. Giving students surveys to express their thoughts is a good method to assess innovations in the ESL classroom (Thornbury, 2002, p. 130).

The method used to gather this information was a questionnaire administered to the students through Google Classroom, the results were automatically collected by the tool Google Forms and analyzed afterwards. The questions were oriented to determine the students’ opinions on the topics to foresee the scale of motivation, their opinions on the performance to obtain data regarding their personal satisfaction and finally their thoughts regarding this type of speaking activity to evaluate the benefits of implementing it at schools. The effectiveness of obtaining feedback from students to evaluate the adequacy of task has been proven by methodologist for decades (Thornbury, 2002, p. 130).

Firstly, as we can see in Figure 1 students were asked about their impressions regarding the topics they had chosen to carry out the speaking exam.
They could choose from a variety of options such as “I liked them”, “I didn’t like them”, “They were boring”, “They were challenging”, “They were amusing”. These qualifications were fundamental to understand students’ motivation to create their plays and presentations. As the figure displays, the majority of the students found their topics interesting and they liked them. This means they were motivated to fulfill the task and they liked working on their topics, this may be one of the reasons for finding such good results. There was also a minority of people who disliked their topics, this may be since there was a group who did not have the chance to choose their own topic because they were the last ones choosing.

Secondly, it was paramount to analyze their intrinsic motivation during the speaking exam, that is, how they felt when they were publicly opining about a morally controversial issue. Determining their comfortability while performing would provide clarification on the suitability of these types of activities in A-levels. According to the chart students were contented and relaxed while giving their opinions, 48% of them said that this peculiarity did not influence their performance due to the lack of importance they associate to giving their opinions in front of an audience. Likewise, 37% of the students enjoyed the experience of talking for themselves and being frank in the ESL classroom by providing arguments. Only
15% of the students who answered this questionnaire felt exposed for having to talk about their opinions (Figure 2).

(Figure 2: Students’ opinions about the task)

Thirdly, in order to evaluate the adequacy of critical thinking in A-levels, students were asked about their impressions concerning the influence of providing their personal opinions during the speaking exam they had performed. As can be appreciated in Figure 3, 41% of them declared that the implementation of critical thinking in the task has enhance them to perform better in the speaking exam; this belief was supported by the greater grades the students obtained. These results together with the opinions extracted from the forms, evidence the importance and usefulness of introducing critical thinking in the ESL classroom. Nevertheless, 22% of the students felt exposed by doing this exercise which may have affected their final results. Finally, 37% of the answers declared that the fact of stating one’s opinion had no effect on the performances, so in these cases the request of including critical thinking in the speaking exam had not varied the results. According to this survey, the enforcement of critical thinking would have mainly positive or no effects on students’ performances in their speaking activities.
Finally, students were asked to opine about the hypothetical use of this type of speaking exercises more frequently in their ESL classroom (Figure 4). In this case a tie between the ones thinking this should be more frequently and those who actually do not mind can be observed. From this class of 34 participants, 9 students have stated that they would like to do more speaking activities in which critical thinking is involved, meanwhile another 9 people has said that these activities should perhaps be carried out more frequently in the English subject classroom. Likewise, 3 people state that they would not be bothered by the incorporation of these activities. On average, the majority of the attendants to this A-level classroom are not against implementing the use of critical thinking in English-speaking activities in the Second Language classroom. Conversely, only two people disliked this activity to the point of not wanting to do similar ones again.
5. DIDACTIC PROPOSAL

The importance of properly acquiring the English Language is evident in this globalized world we live in. For that reason, it is paramount to ensure students an adequate learning process of the language. In order to fulfill this task, the best methodologies and techniques should be enforced in the Spanish Educational System, which has already proven to tremendously fail in this area according to several studies.

The educational methodologies applied nowadays in the ESL Spanish classroom are not enough to assure an effective and complete acquisition of the English language. One of the skills which tends to be less practiced and developed in the English classroom is speaking. This is the most limited skill related to this subject because there are no tools or aids available at students’ homes, unless they are native English speaker descendants, to enhance their abilities. Consequently, students’ oral production of the English language is restricted to the amount of time devoted to this skill by every teacher in each didactic unit which, taking into consideration the vast amount of contents which must be covered every year according to curriculum’s guidelines found on BOIB, is not much.

As stated above, students’ oral skills in the English language are insufficient to hold a proper conversation by the time they finish their Obligatory
Secondary Education. Hence some modifications on the methodological approach adopted up until now should be done in order to meliorate students’ English-speaking skills to ensure an exceeding level on this foreign language.

Considering the results explained above and the ones consulted in Cottrell, 2005; Khan, 2009; Vdovina, 2013; Soodmand & Rahimi, 2014; Chen, 2016; Ramezani, Larsari, & Kiasi, 2016; Ordem, 2017; Rahman, Faridah, & Manaf, 2017; the use of critical thinking to teach spoken English skills in the ESL classroom should be promoted and granted at Spanish Secondary Education schools.

The act of having to research, evaluate and analyze a topic in order to obtain a personal opinion, which must be argumentatively based, guarantees rational and real thoughts created by the learners’ mind instead of literal reproduction of a situational conversation learnt by heart.

In their last levels of Obligatory Education and A-levels, students’ capacities of formulating own individual opinions are fully developed. Parting from the premise that students in the Balearic Islands are capable of providing argumentative essays and oral expositions in both Spanish and Catalan, critical thinking skills in the English classroom should also be promoted. Despite being two co-official languages, some students' input, of one or both languages, is merely the school. Therefore, considering they are capable of performing these tasks after being exposed to those languages the same amount of time as English, every student should be able to successfully deliver a critical thinking oriented speaking exam.

The use of morally controversial topics to evaluate their speaking skills has been proven as an efficient method to introduce critical thinking in the ESL classroom. Provided with a polemical statement, students will be motivated to defend their beliefs, even in front of an audience, because of the imperious necessity of being heard which teenagers experience. By allowing them to express themselves freely, the topics become personal which encourages students to enhance their performances because of the motivational factor.

Likewise, any topic can be used to drill students’ critical thinking skills in the speaking English classroom. As can be seen in Table 1, the topic of
technology is suitable for this purpose. In spite of dealing with Z-Generation alumni, they were capable of disagreeing with the uses of some of the technological innovations presented to them, therefore the topic would not be an inconvenient to introduce the new competence in the English classroom yet the form in which it is presented to the students should be carefully planned.

In the case of Table 1, the topics selected would not have been perceived as controversial if they had been deprived from the premise of the oriented-questions cues. Those questions were essential to raise pensiveness in the students’ minds. In order to accomplish the enhancing of speaking skills via critical thinking, it is fundamental to ask the appropriate questions to activate students rational reasoning. In order to exemplify the premise that any topic could fit this purpose Table 2 was created.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environmental topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Great Pacific Garbage Patch is source of ocean pollution which is affecting our fishing. Why was it created? Why has it not been destroyed? Is it actually a solution to the problem or a new problem raised from it? How does it affect to marine lives?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overpopulation has become an important issue nowadays. Over seven billion people live in this planet, how does it affect the agriculture? Why is it a problem? Who are affected? Can it be solved? How?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hunting and fishing are two of the most antic activities the humans have been practicing. Taking into account that nowadays it is not necessary anymore to ensure people’s living, should them still be practiced in the 21st Century? Do hunting and fishing endanger any species? Should it be banned or encouraged? Do they have any benefits?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deforestation has been a crucial issue for decades. What are the effects of this practice on the environment? Why has it not been stopped yet? Is it going to be stopped any time soon? What are the consequences of cutting down all the trees in the world? Are they any alternatives?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genetically modified fruits and vegetables are sold in supermarkets all over the world. What are the benefits of eating them? Is there any danger in consuming? Will they substitute the naturally grown food? Would you eat them? Should this practice be encouraged?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 2: List of environmentally controversial topics)
This table shows five current environmental controversial issues which students will have to expand and find solutions. As it happened in the Case Study, students will be asked to explain the current situation related to the topic to their classmates. The contextualization of the topic is always encouraged to be creative and original to allow students to show their personal perceptions. They can choose how to deliver their explanations (Power Point presentations, role-play, recordings of themselves), however they must not forget to express their thoughts regarding the topic and the solutions they propose to these controversies. The variety of opinions expressed during the speaking exam will be evaluated favorably, because the aim of this activity is not to reach a consensus, but to express and respect their opinions.

The implementation of critical thinking to enhance students speaking skills is not limited to a mere list of topics to evaluate their speaking skills; there are several activities which should be reinforced in the English subject classroom for example the promotion of debates in class and encouraging to students to join organizations related to debates, for instance the European Youth Parliament (EYP).

Active since 1987, the EYP is a platform characterized by the organization of over 500 meetings in 40 different European countries where youngsters all over Europe debate about real current important affairs which affect the youth. In these reunions, tolerance, respect and civil responsibilities are cultivated. EYP provides European youngsters with a place to reunite and learn reciprocally from the different perspectives and arguments.

Joining these activities where their critical thinking competencies are worked on and reinforced would be profitable to improve their production skills. During the EYP sessions students are arranged by groups, those groups are assigned a book they are encouraged to defend. From then onwards, they are asked to find arguments to support that side, then they have the opportunity of requesting the floor. Once they obtain it they are allowed to expose their arguments to the Parliament chamber.

This process of searching and identifying the proper arguments to defend one’s opinion is the bases of critical thinking. The acquisition of this technique is
essential to encourage the use of this competence and consequently the speaking skill. When students learn to think in a foreign language they will master that language because they will be able to communicate which is the main principle of language acquisition.

Initiatives similar to EYP can be imitated in the English classroom by adopting their rules and assembling. The creation of a scholar parliament is feasible and used in developed countries as the United States of America. The topics debated in this parliament can be oriented towards current concerns related to students’ environment, school rules, popular affairs and topics dealt with in the didactic units. Any topic can be debated, and every teacher can choose and approach them fitting their own personal teaching style, essentially the academic freedom teachers possess by law would not be endangered by the implementation of this methodology. Additionally, considering the age of the students these activities are aimed for, the topic of Politics should be dealt because in the near future these students would vote and they should be instructed in this field.

Furthermore, taking into consideration the above stated importance of extralinguistic knowledge in teaching speaking, literature debates should be included in the ESL classroom. Nowadays, Spanish students have no knowledge related to English literature; however, they are taught Spanish and Catalan Literature as part of the curriculum. Bearing in mind this reality in the Spanish Educational System, this dissertation proposes including literature teaching in the English subject curriculum to enhance students’ sociocultural knowledge.

This innovation will improve students motivation (Thornbury, 2002) and performance (Rahman et al., 2017). The sessions devoted to these contents will be part of a normal didactic unit at the end of each term. At the beginning of a term, students will be assigned a book or a short collection of fragments written by a famous English language writer in any period and place of the English-speaking world; the level of these materials will be suitable for the students in question following the guidelines of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). At the end of the term, two sessions will be devoted to working on one fragment in depth in class.
During the first session the literal meaning of the fragment will be tackled. The teacher will explain to the students those words or expressions used by the author which they are unfamiliar with. Depending on the difficulty of the fragment, students may need the whole session to come to an agreement with what is literally expressed in the fragment. Additionally, some contextualization items regarding the author and literary period will be given to the students to help them base their opinions on the texts. The explanation will not be extensive because the main purpose is to raise awareness on students of the existing different social standards, traditions, expectations and so on. Once the students have understood the text and the context in which it was written, the teacher will ask them about the intentions of the writer in that text. In the case of poetry and verse plays, students will be asked to identify the rhetorical figures used in the sample. Normally, this activity arises debate among students because people interpret texts differently. Students will use their critical thinking competence to express and refute opinions. Their speaking skills will be practiced during the whole session and students will be encouraged to participate because several competences will be involved in this activity, hence their grades will depend on their performances in this debate.

The chosen books could be the Oxford adaptation of classical literary stories as *Oxford Bookworms Library Level 6: Pride and Prejudice* (2008) an adaptation by Claire West from the original Jane Austen’s masterpiece *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). As aforementioned, the level of English used in the book collection *Oxford Bookworms Library* would be suitable for the higher levels of secondary education and A-level students. These books also provide students with a cultural view of the Century and a realistic view of English literature. Furthermore, short-story writers as Edgar Allan Poe should be included in this material because students will find it easier to fulfill the reading task and also, they will be more motivated because they will only have to read a few pages in comparison to the original sources. Moreover, in the case of verse literature poems are a great option. For instance, Walt Whitman’s poetry is a good example of what students should be taught in class. The vocabulary used is simple, but the meaning underneath would impact students. On the surface this poem is
about a couple meeting in a crowded bar, however it is slowly telling a romantic story. Students will probably overlook the subtle narrowing of the scene from the “glimpse” till the protagonists. This pure love scene remarks the importance of perspectives in life, in a bar full of people drinking and having fun, behind the noise and the alcohol pure love may be found. For the couple the other people in the bar does not matter at all, they ignore their existence because they are in love. Alternatively, the people in the bar are drinking after work, laughing and enjoying their time. The contrast between both scenes may be overlooked by the students who would barely focus on the love scene here presented. By showing them how different realities overlap in the same space would raise awareness on the significance of points of view in life. The debate may be originated because of the two scenes happening at the same time in the same place. In a class, students from different background and with different interest converge, for that reason some of the students may think this poem is about love whilst others may simply see a party in a bar where there is a couple intimating. To some extent this poem can be worked in class to prevent or amend disturbances between the students.

A Glimpse
A GLIMPSE, through an interstice caught,
Of a crowd of workmen and drivers in a bar-room, around the stove,
late of a winter night--And I unremark’d seated in a corner;
Of a youth who loves me, and whom I love, silently approaching, and
seating himself near, that he may hold me by the hand;
A long while, amid the noises of coming and going--of drinking and
oath and smutty jest,
There we two, content, happy in being together, speaking little,
perhaps not a word.
David McKay.

These activities are addressed to students from 4th of ESO onwards due to the imperious requisitiveness and complexity of critical-thinking-oriented tasks in the Second Language acquisition classroom. Students who are finishing their
Obligatory Education have already been explained enough grammar points to be able to adequately fulfill these challenging activities. Conversely, a great amount of vocabulary and English peculiarities would have already been taught by the time students have reached this school year. The amount of knowledge of the English language they have already acquired, and their age favors the introduction of this methodological approach in their classroom.

In 4th of ESO, students are obliged to decide whether they would like to continue their academic education, or they would prefer to begin their careers by joining in the working world. Acknowledging the magnitude of this decision, one would logically consider them rational people capable of critically thinking their possibilities and contrasting information. These qualities are essential to promote the use of this new competence in English lessons.

Furthermore, as it has been previously proven, the incorporation of this new competence and its evaluation to the speaking assessment criteria improves students’ results on their speaking exams. The use of critical thinking enhances their performances because it improves their confidence. Having confident alumni while delivering a speech is fundamental to obtain desirable results. The absence of nervousness improves their fluency meliorating their grades because of the importance of this factor in assessing speaking exams. Accuracy improvement is not intrinsically associated to the use of crucial thinking, nonetheless the incrementation of generally speaking activities would improve this speech element.

Finally, to evaluate these speaking exercises Rubric 2 is suggested as the assessment tool. As has already been explained, this rubric covers every aspect of a speaking test and it can be adapted to different sorts of activities to fulfill users’ needs. Ultimately, this rubric gradation is suitable for all the levels above proposed and the different topics a teacher may require. In the case of the literature debates, they will be evaluated following the competences evaluation criterion each educational center uses regularly.
6. CONCLUSION

To sum up, pedagogical studies have been carried out in recent years trying to establish the best methodological approach to guarantee adequate learning. Piaget (1962), Vygotsky (1966), Bruner (1977) and Bandura (1982) theorized on the main elements conditioning cognitive acquisition. Under these premises, several theories trying to establish the most effective approach on ESL teaching have appeared. Nowadays the number of methods has exponentially grown, however no consensus has been reached regarding the optimum teaching procedure.

English teaching comprises the acquisition of different skills, being speaking the most challenging one. The main objective of speech production main objective is to communicate an oral message and in order to accomplish it accuracy, fluency and phonetrical aspects must be properly produced. Regarding accuracy, there is a noticeable difference between the two main productive skills; spoken language has characteristics which differentiate it from written language. More specifically, English spoken language is grammatically simpler, compound sentences are avoided because they are confusing for both the speaker and the receptor. Being fluent in a language means being confident enough to be able to understand and answer others without hesitation. Despite being feared by students, pauses are necessary to convey meaning; well-used pauses demonstrate a domain of the language. Finally, phonetical aspects as articulation, intonation and phonetics are indispensable to produce an adequate speech.

Besides the linguistic aspects of the language, some extralinguistic aspects are also relevant in speech production. Being familiar with the topic, the context, the culture and the participants of the speaking activity influences one’s performance. The acquaintance with these factors provides the speaker with confidence which is key when producing texts in any foreign language. Having previous knowledge about the topic is mandatory to provide an adequate speech, it is impossible to talk about an unknown theme. By being acquainted with the context, culture and sociocultural characteristics of the speaking task, speakers will adequate their speech to the requirements.
Assessing speaking is an arduous job; thus, in order to make it easier for teachers, the use of rubrics is strongly recommended (Thornbury, 2002, p. 130). Holistic rubrics are more efficient in simple speaking activities meanwhile analytic ones are suited for tasks in which different aspects are evaluated simultaneously. Notwithstanding, choosing a methodology to teach speaking in the ESL classroom is more complicated.

Teachers must choose between audiolingualism, the communicative approach or task-based learning among other methods to ensure significative learning. All these approaches have their limitations which make them unreliable resources. In recent years a new approach to teaching English efficiently has been being studied, the use of critical thinking in the ESL classroom; it has become popular especially in Asian countries where its effectiveness has been proven.

By making students think and question themselves about topics, they are actively producing their speeches instead of repeating drills, as has been the tendency. Additionally, students feel motivated when they are allowed to express their personal opinions about issues they are concerned about. Due to the activation of students’ ability and the increment of their motivation level, the studies carried out in ESL classrooms all over the world have proven the efficacy of this method (Cottrell, 2005; Khan, 2009; Vdovina, 2013; Soodmand & Rahimi, 2014; Chen, 2016; Ramezani, Larsari, & Kiasi, 2016; Ordem, 2017; Rahman, Faridah, & Manaf, 2017).

The study conducted at the high school IES Joan Alcover has also shown promising results. These A-level students, who had not been taught following this methodological approach before, faced a speaking exam in which their speaking and critical thinking skills were evaluated. The students were provided with a topic, which included some guiding questions, and one session of the didactic unit to solve questions. Afterwards they performed, accordingly to their personal preferences, the speaking exam in front of the whole class.

The results extracted from this activity were favorably seen in the student’s exam’s grades and their personal opinions provided by the questionnaire. The average mark increased by two points, compared to the students’ previous
speaking exams which had no similitude to this one. Additionally, the majority of the alumni was pleased with the activity and would like to do similar activities in the future because they felt confident and they believe it helped them perform better.

Finally, based on the excellent results extracted from this study, critical thinking speaking activities in the ESL classroom are encouraged to be introduced in the Spanish Educational System. Considering the present regulation, some modifications should be made to include the critical thinking competence as part of the curriculum because its benefits can be extrapolated to other areas. In order to improve English speaking skills, more speaking exams as the one described on the case study should be carried out at schools. Controversial topics are not exclusively technologically related, as proven in Table 2, controversy may be found in every field.

Moreover, the implementation of debates in the ESL classroom should be encouraged. Debates are part of the educational regulation of developed countries because of the effectiveness of practicing critical thinking. Critically reasoning can be trained, for that reason, students should be provided with a safe space to practice their cognitive capacities. Nowadays there are organizations arranging meeting to provide youngsters with tools and a place to debate. The European Youth Parliament promotes students to enhance their critical thinking skills by simulating a European Parliament. This activity can be adapted to the classroom with different variants. One would be used of debates at minor scale than the EYP proposes. The other would be the introduction of English literature in class to create debates among students. Literature is a subjective field; a fragment can be interpreted differently depending on who reads it which will encourage students to speak in English and to share their thought and beliefs with the class.

To some extent, the use of critical thinking enhances students speaking performances and should be included in didactic units within the curricula, not only for the speaking skill but also in the other skills as its efficacy has also been already proven (Gómez-rodríguez, 2018; Nejmaoui, 2019; Saputra, Joyoatmojo, Wardani, & Sangka, 2019).
WEBLOGY

SARCO. Retrieved May 28, 2019, from https://exitinternational.net/sarco/

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Table 1: List of topics provided to the studied students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Group’s performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nowadays there are restaurants in which you are fully served by robots, your food is cooked by robots, you are served by robots. What are the implications of this lack of human interaction? Do you think it could end up being extended to other sectors?</td>
<td>This was a homogeneous male group formed by three students who decided to do a role-play. One of them was a customer in a bar, another the robot and the last one the owner of the restaurant. They used the tables and the chairs of the classroom to simulate a restaurant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The “Sarco” suicide machine is now available to print it at home. What do you think about its implications? Do you think it is safe to have this available on the net? Do you think it is correct to create this type of invention?</td>
<td>This group consisted of two boys and two girls performed a role-play showing the machine. They used the TV on the classroom to project their presentation and the real Sarco to show it to their classmates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are many investigations about the use of animal cells to cure human diseases. Is the comic book reality closer than we expect? Will humans become hybrids in the future?</td>
<td>The members of this groups were the most creative ones. They created a role-play and used props brought by themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You can now clone your cat or dog. However, there are no guarantees you’ll get a new pet that looks or acts like your old one. Is it right to invest in this technology when there are so many animals in need of homes already out there? Is cloning a solution for those who have lost their dear ones or just an anesthetic to deal with mourning?</td>
<td>This group was formed by three girls who did a PowerPoint presentation to explain their topic. They nearly forgot to express their opinions on the topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowadays we can keep in touch with people all over the globe and have many international relationships. In a world where we are constantly connected is loneliness still a possibility?</td>
<td>The members of this group tend to have low marks on English. The three and one boy mixed the presentation and role-play style. They read sometimes but provided critical reasonings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quayside may become, thanks to Sidewalk Labs, the first intelligent city. What are the implications of this new city regarding</td>
<td>This group decided to do a PowerPoint presentation with glimpses of conversation and comments. They played an explanation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
humans? Why is it not ready yet? Do you think this is how the cities should be in the future?  

video of Quayside taken from YouTube. The three girls and the boy have difficulties learning English.

Nowadays all our information has been digitalized even before we are born. This helps delinquents to steal people’s identities. What consequences this may carry in the future? How many people with our same identity will there be? How will we know if someone is who they say?  

This group formed by three girls and a boy showed a role-play which was insufficient to answer the oriented questions and stayed on the surface of the topic. Their reasoning was the poorest one.

Cryonics is still popular as a way to live longer. Should it be promoted? On what cases do you think it would be an option? Should we all live longer than we do?  

The two boys and two girls of this group made a role-play about friends meeting in a bar, one of them had a terrible announcement. After telling them his intentions a debate began.

Artificial wombs are being investigated in order to guarantee the safety of mothers. Should we change the way we have carried out pregnancy up until now? What are the pros and cons of using artificial wombs? Isn’t there any better way to have children?  

This group formed by four boys, two of them are the ones with the highest grades in the classroom and the other two have the lowest. They decided to do a PowerPoint presentation because they found it difficult to create a role-play about the topic.

Image 1: Sarco Suicide Machine
Rubric 2: Modified rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Achieved</th>
<th>Underachieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fluency</strong></td>
<td>Natural pace and</td>
<td>Some reading,</td>
<td>Reads most of the</td>
<td>Reads all the time and the speech/play lacks continuity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>just some glimpses</td>
<td>normal pace and</td>
<td>time and interrupts</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to the script</td>
<td>eye contact with the</td>
<td>the speech/play</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>audience.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accuracy</strong></td>
<td>Few expected or no</td>
<td>Occasional predictable</td>
<td>Several mistakes or few basic</td>
<td>The speech is incomprehensible and full of basic mistakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mistakes</td>
<td>mistakes</td>
<td>mistakes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Global fulfilment</strong></td>
<td>The task was</td>
<td>The task could be improved</td>
<td>Some aspects were uncovered</td>
<td>The task was not fulfilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fulfilled</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical thinking</strong></td>
<td>Opinions are</td>
<td>Opinions are expressed and</td>
<td>Opinions are expressed.</td>
<td>There were no opinions stated during the speaking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>expressed and</td>
<td>expressed and sometimes</td>
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<td>justified by</td>
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<td></td>
<td>arguments and/or</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>examples</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Students’ opinions about the exam topics

What do you think about the speaking topics?

- **THEY WERE INTERESTING**: 15
- **I LIKED THEM**: 13
- **THEY WERE CHALLENGING**: 10
- **THEY WERE DIFFICULT**: 5
- **I DIDN’T LIKE MY TOPIC AT ALL**: 3
- **THEY WERE AMUSING**: 3
- **I DIDN’T LIKE THEM**: 1
- **THEY WERE BORING**: 1
Figure 2: Students’ opinions about the task

DID YOU LIKE GIVING YOUR OWN OPINIONS ON THE SPEAKING EXAM?

- 48% liked giving my opinion to everyone.
- 37% didn’t matter.
- 15% didn’t like giving my opinion publicly.

Figure 3: Students’ opinion regarding criticisms on speaking exams

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT GIVING YOUR OWN OPINIONS ON THE SPEAKING EXAM?

- 41% helped me perform better.
- 37% didn’t affect my performance.
- 22% made me more nervous because I felt exposed.
Figure 4: Students' thoughts about doing this activity again

Table 2: List of environmentally controversial topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environmental topics</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Great Pacific Garbage Patch is source of ocean pollution which is affecting our fishing. Why was it created? Why has it not been destroyed? Is it actually a solution to the problem or a new problem raised from it? How does it affect to marine lives?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overpopulation has become an important issue nowadays. Over seven billion people live in this planet, how does it affect the agriculture? Why is it a problem? Who are affected? Can it be solved? How?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunting and fishing are two of the most antic activities the humans have been practicing. Taking into account that nowadays it is not necessary anymore to ensure people's living, should they still be practiced in the 21st Century? Do hunting and fishing endanger any species? Should it be banned or encouraged? Do they have any benefits?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deforestation has been a crucial issue for decades. What are the effects of this practice on the environment? Why has it not been stopped yet? Is it going to be stopped any time soon? What are the consequences of cutting down all the trees in the world? Are they any alternatives?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Genetically modified fruits and vegetables are sold in supermarkets all over the world. What are the benefits of eating them? Is there any danger in consuming? Will they substitute the naturally grown food? Would you eat them? Should this practice be encouraged?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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