Speaking skill levels of English attained in Dutch secondary education

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Preface

The sixth edition of the *English Proficiency Index* (EF EPI, 2017) places the Netherlands first in the English proficiency ranking of 72 countries worldwide. This international benchmarking study annually tests the reading and listening skills of approximately 950,000 adults. The academic world does, however, have reservations about the arbitrariness in the composition of the target group, and thus about the representativeness of the results. Be that as it may, those results do not say anything about how secondary school students perform when it comes to productive oral skills.How well do students speak English when they graduate from secondary education? To find the answer, we have asked over 1700 students in the Netherlands to literally tell us themselves (in English). This report presents the results of a study into the question of which levels students actually attain in relation to the CEFR target levels formulated for English speaking, at the end of vmbo (pre-vocational secondary education), havo (senior general secondary education), or vwo (pre-university education). In a survey among students, and in interviews with teachers, we have also tried to gain insight into how speaking skills are practised at school, and to what extent practice and training are related to the linguistic levels achieved.

English, as one of the three core subjects, takes a prominent place within the Dutch educational system. The subject is compulsory at all secondary education levels, while attention to the English language in primary education has been increasing strongly over the last few years. Details about the proficiency levels that are achieved in the current practice may offer a basis to further develop the curriculum for English as a school subject, within the perspective of a broad learning pathway, from primary up to secondary education.

The results of this study may provide useful source materials for discussions within the English departments, and between the departments and school leaders, about the optimisation of the EFL curriculum n secondary education. The levels attained for reading, listening and writing skills have been previously mapped (Fasoglio, Beeker, & De Jong, 2014; Feskens, Keuning, Van Til, & Verheyen, 2014). With the data about speaking, we now have a complete picture for havo and vwo. The data about writing skills for vmbo are still missing.

Summary

This report shows the results of a study into the CEFR performance level for speaking skills achieved by students in the final year of vmbo, havo and vwo. The study was performed by SLO, in cooperation with *Cambridge Assessment English*, in the period from November, 2016 to March, 2017. Compared to the target levels that were formulated for English speaking skills in 2007, this study shows that almost 40% of the students in the basic vocational track (bb-stream) of vmbo do not achieve target level A2. A2 is achieved by more than three-quarters of the students in the advanced vocational track (kb-stream) of vmbo. The target level A2 may even be adjusted upwards for vmbo students in the theoretical/combined track (gt-stream) of vmbo. This also applies to the B1+ target level for havo and B2 for vwo.

These results are based on the data collected from a test sample consisting of 1722 students in their final year of vmbo, havo and vwo in 40 schools located in all the regions of the Netherlands. The students were randomly selected by their teachers, regardless of their school performance. As we wanted to get an idea of the mainstream English education in the Dutch secondary education system, we did not include students from bilingual schools and intensive language training programmes.

To assess the performance level of the students, we used an adaptive speaking test developed by *Cambridge Assessment English*. The test was designed to cover the A-C CEFR range; it was administered by CEFR certified examiners, selected by *Cambridge Assessment English* and especially trained for this specific purpose.

Cambridge Assessment English also carried out the analysis of the test scores, as these relate to some of the characteristics of the sample, such as gender, first language and geographical distribution. All three variables appeared not to influence the students' performance. We expect that differences can possibly be attributed to the teacher's approach. However, the objective of this study did not include an assessment of variables at a school and class level.

In order to possibly relate test performances to aspects of teaching and learning, all students were asked to take a digital survey after the test. The survey questions pertained to the way speaking skills are practised and tested at their school. Besides, some of the teachers were interviewed about their method of teaching speaking skills, and about any difficulties they experienced.

The results from the student survey and the teacher interviews show a positive relationship between the test performances and the use of English as the working language in class, the frequency of speaking skills training in class, and the way learning goals and success criteria are clarified to the students. All conclusions should be considered as indicative.

The data from this study offer opportunities for follow-up research. Specifically, we would consider it useful to conduct further qualitative studies, at a school level, into the causal relations between the performances of the students and the school policy or teaching methodologies; this could, in particular, help explain the performance level of students in the basic vocational track. The fact that students in vmbo-gt, havo and vwo often performed above the target levels, indicates that these students could handle more challenges. The variation in CEFR levels achieved by students within the same educational stream also calls for more customised and personalised learning pathways.

1. Reason, objective and context

This chapter describes what has led to the implementation of this research study. We will place our study in the perspective of the national curriculum specifications for English as a school subject.

1.1 Context and motivation

In 2007, SLO was asked by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science to formulate the target levels for the language skills that are included in the vmbo, havo and vwo examination programmes for modern foreign languages. Those levels were not based on empirical data: it was unknown how the target levels related to the students' actual performance at the end of secondary education. In an independent advice to the Ministry, SLO, Cito (Dutch national institute for educational measurement), Cinop (National centre for innovation in life long education) and the professional association Levende Talen recommended to fill this void.

Study on writing skills

In reaction to aforementioned advice, the Ministry of Education commissioned SLO in 2010 to work with Cito on assessing the level of writing skills for English, German and French of havo and vwo students. Communicative writing tests were administered in order to collect a substantial number of writing products from students in the final year. Their CEFR level was determined by means of an international standard-setting procedure. This study enabled us to determine how many havo and vwo students achieved the target levels for writing skills in the three languages. The study report was published in 2014 (Fasoglio, Beeker, De Jong, Keuning, & Van Til, 2014).

Study into reading and viewing & listening skills

In 2013, Cito assessed the level of the examinations for reading and viewing listening skills for English, German and French at all levels in secondary education. Again, an international standard-setting procedure was carried out, so that the level could be determined that a student can claim when achieving a passing mark for the central examination for reading skills, or for the Cito viewing & listening tests. The results of this study were also published in 2014 (Feskens et al., 2014).

Research study into speaking skills

The only skill that remained unassessed was speaking. Data about this skill are also missing from international studies. Admittedly, the *European Survey on Language Competencies* (ESLC) has studied the proficiency level of foreign languages of students in Europe at the end of lower secondary education, but this study is limited to the listening, reading and writing skills (Kordes & Gille, 2012). For a complete picture of the language levels of students, data about their productive verbal language skills are also required. In view of the importance of English in society, and the position of this language in education, the choice has been made to focus this research study on the final levels of English achieved by students in all streams of secondary education.

1.2 Objective

The objective of this study was to establish to what extent the students, at the end of vmbo, havo and vwo, actually meet the CEFR target levels for English speaking skills. We also wanted to gain insight into how speaking skills are practised in secondary education, and if there is a relationship between the aspects of the English curriculum, such as learning materials, teaching activities and testing methods, and the language levels achieved.

1.3 Method

A substantial sample of students from secondary education schools all over the Netherlands was submitted to an adaptive speaking test, to measure the students' performance level. These students were also asked to take a digital survey, in order for us to obtain information about training and testing of speaking skills at school. Later on, some teachers were interviewed, based on an interview guideline, also to obtain information about these aspects.

1.4 National curriculum frameworks

English in the curriculum

English is a compulsory subject in all secondary education schools. In 2013, English, along with Dutch and mathematics, was included as a core subject in the curriculum of the first phase (junior school, or lower secondary) of the secondary education system. In the second phase (upper secondary) of havo and vwo, English is one of the compulsory subjects in the so-called common part of the curriculum for 360 study hours in havo and 400 study hours in vwo, respectively. English is also a compulsory subject for all learning tracks of vmbo. The examination programmes for vmbo, havo and vwo include at least the following skills: reading, viewing & listening, speaking, and writing.

The position of English as a core subject in education reflects the (increasing) importance that is ascribed to a thorough command of the English language. This is also noticeable in primary education, in which English has been mandatory in grades 7 and 8 since 1986. An increasing amount of primary schools have introduced intensive English tracks: either by bringing English forward to grades 5 and 6, or by starting in grade 1, or even by setting up a bilingual programme. At the time this report was written, the latter option was being piloted.

English language speaking skills in the final examination programmes

Speaking skills are tested as part of the school examinations for vmbo, havo and vwo. Vmbo does not have an attainment target for engaging in monological activities. In havo and vwo, the domain of speaking skills is divided into two sub-domains, i.e. dialogic and monologic skills. Both have their own attainment target. The examination programme only contains an overall formulation of the attainment targets. There is no distinction in proficiency level, nor between havo and vwo; however, this does of course not imply that the exams should offer the same degree of difficulty.

Attainment levels and the Common European Framework of Reference

In 2007, the examination programmes for modern foreign languages in vmbo, havo and vwo were linked to the levels of language proficiency skills according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The CEFR is a system of level descriptions for the modern foreign languages, which is recognised within and outside Europe. It describes which language performances correspond to a certain language proficiency level as far as both content (which language actions pertain to different social and communicative contexts) and quality (grammatical correctness, vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling, etc.) are concerned. The CEFR is based on five skills: listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, and writing. In the Netherlands, the CEFR has been worked out for educational purposes in the publication *Taalprofielen* (Fasoglio, De Jong, Trimbos, Tuin, & Beeker, 2015). This document provides

examples of realistic situations for the level descriptors (*can do-statements*) of all skills and proficiency levels.

Recommendations for attainable CEFR levels for the language skills that are tested in the school examinations have been included in the guidelines published by SLO (havo and vwo: Meijer & Fasoglio, 2007; vmbo: http://handreikingschoolexamen.slo.nl/engels-vmbo). These guidelines have used the descriptors and examples contained in *Taalprofielen*. Table 1 shows the attainment levels for speaking English.

Table 1: *CEFR attainment levels for speaking English*

SPEAKING SKILLS	
Secondary education level	**CEFR attainment level**
vmbo bb	A2
vmbo kb	A2
vmbo gt	A2
havo	B1+
vwo	B2

The overall descriptions of the levels mentioned above are:

Spoken interaction - A2:

I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.

Spoken interaction - B1:

I can deal with most situations likely to arise while travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).

Spoken production - B1:

I can connect phrases in a simple way to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.

Level B1+:

In the CEFR a distinction is made between the 'criterion levels' (e.g. B1) and the 'plus levels'. The B1+ level concerns a performance that falls within the bandwidth of B1, but which may stand out regarding quantity and quality of the information exchanged. The B1+ language user participates more actively in the interaction showing:
- a broader language range;
- reasonable accuracy in communication on familiar topics;
- generally good grammatical control, though with noticeable mother tongue influence.

> *Spoken interaction - B2:*
>
> I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in a discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.

> *Spoken production - B2:*
>
> I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.

1.5 Relevance of this study

The results of this study complete the data on what havo and vwo students are capable of at the end of their secondary education, as far as English is concerned. All language skills for these two educational streams have been researched. This is not the case for writing skills in the vmbo streams. Barring this exception, we now have data about the attained curriculum for all language skills of English. These data can be used as a basis for interventions regarding the revision and optimisation of the curriculum on a national and school level, and the design of continuous learning pathways from primary education. By questioning students and teachers, we have gathered information about the way speaking skills are practised and tested in upper secondary education. Should students' performances be related to certain choices made, schools can make good use of these findings.

1.6 Research study partner

This research study has been carried out in cooperation with *Cambridge Assessment English*, that was responsible for the development and administration of the speaking tests and the analysis of test results. This partner was selected to guarantee the highest possible level of validity and reliability: *Cambridge Assessment English* is universally acknowledged as one of the world's most leading examination institutes for English as a foreign language. This institute develops and uses recognised CEFR exams that focus on communicative skills. The Cambridge exams have a high status in the Netherlands and are gaining popularity in our educational system.

2. Setup of the study

This chapter describes the setup of the study, the selected plan of action and the instruments that were used to collect the data to answer the research questions.

2.1 Research questions

Theoretical framework

The publication "Typology of curriculum representations" (Van den Akker, 2003) was used as a framework for the formulation of the research questions. In it a distinction is made between the intended, implemented and attained curriculum, each subdivided into two formats:

The *intended curriculum* consists of views, desires and aspirations, i.e. the rationale or vision (*ideal)*, and the national curriculum specifications such as examination programmes, syllabi and guidelines (*written).*

The *implemented curriculum* consists of the interpretations by teachers (*perceived*), and the factual teaching and learning processes (*operational*).

The *attained curriculum* consists of the learning experiences as perceived by students (*experiential*) and their learning outcomes (*learned*).

Research questions

Based on the typology mentioned above, the objective of this research study is related to the attained curriculum. The main research question focuses on the learned curriculum:

1. *To which extent are the CEFR target levels for speaking English truly achieved at the end of the vmbo, havo and vwo?*

Educational stream	Target level
vmbo bb	A2
vmbo kb	A2
vmbo gtl	A2
havo	B1+
vwo	B2

To explain the answers to this question, we looked at some aspects of the perceived, operational and experiential curriculum. This led to the formulation of two research questions that required answers from teachers and students:

2. *How are English speaking skills practised in the schools attended by the students that are participating in this research study?*

3. *Is there a relation between the selection of materials, learning activities and testing formats, and the language levels that are attained by the students?*

2.2 Research methods and instruments

To answer the first question, quantitative measures were carried out with over 1700 students in their examination year, using CEFR-related, internationally calibrated oral communicative tests. To find answers to the second and third question, the same students and 15 teachers were consulted: the students were asked to complete a digital survey; the teachers attended a group interview. For this goal, we developed a questionnaire for the survey and a guideline for the interview. Below follows a description of these instruments and the chosen plan of action.

The speaking test

The students' performance level was tested with a multi-level speaking test, developed by *Cambridge Assessment English* to measure CEFR levels A through C. Tasks used in the tests were trialled before use to ensure their suitability for inclusion in the speaking test and with the target ability levels. The tasks are adapted from the Cambridge CEFR tests KET, PET, FCE and CAE. These are CEFR certifying tests for the A2, B1, B2 and C1 levels, respectively. The speaking test includes a series of different communicative oral task types to allow for a range of functions to be elicited throughout the test. The students, in sets of two, must perform these tasks in a period of 12 to 14 minutes. The students must reach a decision together, or have a discussion. One of the tasks is a monologue.

The testing materials consist of a student booklet and a manual for the examiner.

The student booklet contains a few pictures. The examiner selects one picture for the performance of the tasks, based on the students' language level.

The examiner manual contains the same pictures, and *interlocutor's frames* (instructions for the role of interlocutor during testing) for the different tasks. These allow the examiner to take into account the language level of the student and to stimulate the student to perform at his highest level. The *interlocutor's frames* offer the frameworks for the language used by the examiners and ensure consistency and equal duration and treatment for all candidates during test administration, regardless of the examiner.

The materials were checked by experienced external consultants as well as by internal Cambridge Assessment staff.

Tablel 2: *Test design (source: Cambridge Assessment English)*

Test	Timing	Task focus
Part 1 Interview The Speaking Examiner asks the candidate questions, using standardised questions. The questions are divided into four frames and the questions contained in each frame increase in difficulty and challenge. Frame 4 is optional.	4 – 5 minutes	Giving information of a factual and/or personal kind. The candidates respond to questions about present circumstances with scope to expand their answers into expression of preferences and opinions, likes and dislikes etc. In optional frame 4, candidates respond about an unfamiliar topic and/or past experience or future plans. Candidates are required to give opinions and/or speculate.
Part 2 Long turn (with visuals) An extended individual candidate response based on two images.	3 – 4 minutes	Organising a larger unit of discourse; comparing, describing, expressing opinions, comparing. There is scope for the Speaking Examiner to use back-up and extension prompts for lower and higher level candidates.
Part 3 Collaborative task The Speaking Examiner delegates a collaborative decision-making task to the candidates. Candidates discuss visual stimuli and a written theme question.	Up to 5 minutes	Initiating and responding appropriately, negotiating, exchanging ideas, agreeing and/or disagreeing, suggesting, speculating, reaching a decision through negotiation, etc. There is scope for the Speaking Examiner to use back-up questions where candidates have difficulty responding to the overall question or a limited response is elicited. There is scope for the Speaking Examiner to extend the response provided by higher-level candidates with extension questions.
Total time:	12-14 minutes	

Questionnaire for the digital survey

To gather information about how the participating students experience the practising and testing of their speaking skills at school, we asked them to complete a digital survey at the end of the test. The survey consisted of 22 questions, covering three themes:

   a. personal information: age, gender, school, year, first language, parents'/guardians' educational level and first language;
   b. test practices of speaking skills at school: frequency and content of tests, testing conditions, similarities to the Cambridge test, test preparation;
   c. speaking skills practice at school: types of activities, working language during class, topics of conversation, practice materials, perceived thresholds.

Students were asked to complete the survey immediately following the test. To this aim, the school was asked to set up some computers in a quiet room near the examination room.
The online survey was created using SurveyMonkey software.
The integral questionnaire is contained in Appendix 1. The results of the digital survey can be found in Appendix 3. These are discussed in chapter 5.

Guideline teacher interviews

Not only the students but also the teachers from the participating schools were asked to share their opinions and experiences regarding the practising and testing of speaking skills at school. The guideline for the interview is contained in Appendix 2. The outcomes of the interviews are discussed in chapter 6.

2.3 Composition of the research study groups

When selecting students, we have strived after the highest possible level of result reliability. The size of the recruited number of students has been compared to the national population. This shows that the reliability percentage for gt, havo and vwo is 95%; for kb this is 90% and for bb 85%. Table 3 shows the comparison between the size of the study groups and the number of examination candidates in the Netherlands in the school year when they were tested.

Table 3: *Reliability percentages*

Educational stream	Number of examination candidates 2016-2017[1]	Size of the study group	Reliability percentage[2]
4th grade vmbo-bb	17,500	227	85%
4th grade vmbo-kb	27,000	275	90%
4th grade vmbo-gl/tl	56,800	407	95%
5th grade havo	55,700	428	95%
6th grade vwo	39,200	385	95%

[1] source: www.onderwijsincijfers.nl

[2] source: www.steekproefcalculator.com

Please refer to chapter 3 for a description of the research study groups.

2.4 Student recruitment, test administration and survey taking

The recruitment of the sample group took place between July and October 2016, using several different channels of communication, such as teacher communities, professional associations, Twitter and digital newsletters. Only students in the graduation year of vmbo, havo and vwo were eligible for participation. Students attending bilingual schools and schools with intensive language training programmes were excluded from participation in order to get a picture of the mainstream tracks of English in Dutch secondary education. Forty schools from nine Dutch provinces registered for participation in the study, distributed across the five educational streams. Every school appointed an English teacher who was in charge of the organisation and logistics on location. A maximum of 40 students from the same school was allowed to participate for each educational stream. The teacher was asked to randomly appoint students, i.e. not based on their school performance. The students did not have to prepare for the test and were divided into pairs of similar language levels by the school coordinator.
All the tests were delivered on site in the forty schools across the Netherlands. The tests took place in November-December 2016 and February-March 2017.

Several weeks before the test administration, the student name lists were communicated to *Cambridge Assessment English,* that prepared the mark sheets and sent them to SLO. SLO staff members were in charge of coordinating the testing; with the appointed teacher they supervised all (logistic) aspects, such as the layout of the test rooms, the schedule and the progress. Upon completion of the tests, completed mark sheets were returned securely to Cambridge English for scanning, and for the results to be analysed.

The tests were delivered by two CEFR certified examiners who had been selected by *Cambridge Assessment English.* The examiners had been specifically trained in the use of the adaptive test prior to the testing. As a rule, the students took the test in pairs (in few cases three students at once). During the test, one of the examiners would be the interlocutor, the other one the assessor. The interlocutor asked the questions, selected the test materials and rated the overall performance. The assessor listened to the students and rated the four aspects of language performance: grammar/vocabulary, discourse management, pronunciation and interaction. The assessor was responsible for correctly completing the scores on the mark sheet.

2.5 Teacher interview

Some weeks after completion of the test administration, all English teachers of the schools where the tests had been taken were invited to a group interview. This was held on 11 May 2017. Twelve teachers participated in this meeting. Three teachers who were unavailable at that time answered the questions later on in writing.

The group interview consisted of two parts:

(a) In the first part - after a brief plenary introduction - teachers were divided into three sub-groups and talked to each other about how they practise, test and rate speaking skills in the classroom. An SLO staff member guided each sub-group discussion. One of the teachers and the SLO staff member documented the results.

(b) The second part was a plenary discussion about the conditions and factors influencing the practising and testing of speaking skills.

2.6 Data analysis

Cambridge Assessment English analysed the marks sheets that had been completed by the examiners during the testing. The analysis shows the overall performance by CEFR level, as well split by gender, region and first language; the results are also reported by the five educational streams and again split by gender, region and first language. All the results have been documented in a written report, with an additional Appendix (Walker, 2017). Chapter 4 contains parts of both documents.

SLO used the statistical programme SPSS to analyse the results of the digital survey. These results will be discussed in chapter 5. The outcomes of the teacher group interview are summarised in chapter 6.

3. Description of the research study group

In this chapter, we describe the composition of the sample group, based on the following characteristics: educational streams, gender, age, first language, and region. The first three are compared with the characteristics of the national population of examination candidates in the school year 2016-17. This shows that the sample group, as far as gender and age are concerned, is a fair representation of the national population.

3.1 Educational streams
The total sample group comprised 1722 students, divided as follows:
227 vmbo-bb students
275 vmbo-kb students
407 vmbo-gt students
428 havo students
385 vwo students

3.2 gender
The total sample group consisted of 822 boys and 900 girls. In vmbo, more boys than girls participated in the research, in havo and vwo more girls than boys. Table 4 shows the distribution per study group. This shows that the ratio between male and female students is a fair reflection of the national population.

Table 4: *Gender*

	boys			girls		
	n	%	national[1]	n	%	national[1]
vmbo bb	124	54.6	57.1	103	45.4	42.9
vmbo kb	155	56.4	52.5	120	43.6	47.5
vmbo gt	204	50.1	49.1	203	49.9	50.9
havo	182	42.5	47.6	246	57.5	52.4
vwo	157	40.8	47.1	228	59.2	52.9

[1]Source: http://statline.cbs.nl

A comparison between the performance levels of male and female students did not result in statistically significant differences, which is why the gender variable has not been included in the discussion of the test results in chapter 4.

3.3 Age
The ages of the students in the sample group varied from 15 to 19 years; the ratio between the ages is a fair representation of the national population - see table 5.

Table 5: *Age*

	15 years			16 years			17 years			18 years			19 years		
	n	%	national[1]	n	%	national[1]	n	%	national[1]	n	%	national[1]	n	%	national[1]
vmbo bb	75	33.0	32.2	125	55.0	55.2	23	10.1	11.6	4	1.8	1.0			
vmbo kb	99	36.0	42.4	151	54.9	47.0	25	9.1	10.0			0.7			
vmbo gt	178	43.7	52.4	190	46.7	39.7	37	9.1	7.4	2	0.5	0.4			0.1
havo	5	1.2	1.1	170	39.7	41.3	186	43.5	41.0	61	14.3	14.8	6	1.4	1.8
vwo	1	0.3	0.1	16	4.2	3.1	207	53.8	57.2	138	35.8	33.2	23	6.0	6.5

[1]Source: http://statline.cbs.nl

As with gender, this characteristic does not provide significant data for the interpretation of the results.

For a description of the results based on gender and age, and their statistical significance, please refer to the report and the supplementary Appendix of *Cambridge English Assessment* (Walker, 2017).

3.4 Geographical distribution

The survey involved students from all four regions of the Netherlands. The following provinces were represented in the sample group:

North: Friesland;

West: Utrecht, Noord-Holland, Zuid-Holland, and Zeeland;

East: Overijssel, Gelderland, and Flevoland;

South: Noord-Brabant.

Table 6 shows the distribution of the study groups by region in percentages. The data are presented in a diagram in Figure 1.

Table 6: *Regional distribution*

	NORTH		SOUTH		WEST		EAST	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
vmbo bb	22	9.7	23	10.1	101	44.5	81	35.7
vmbo kb	20	7.3	0	0	173	62.9	82	29.8
vmbo gt	19	4.7	0	0	238	58.5	150	36.9
havo	41	9.6	35	8.2	288	67.3	64	15.0
vwo	27	7.0	11	2.9	268	69.6	79	20.5
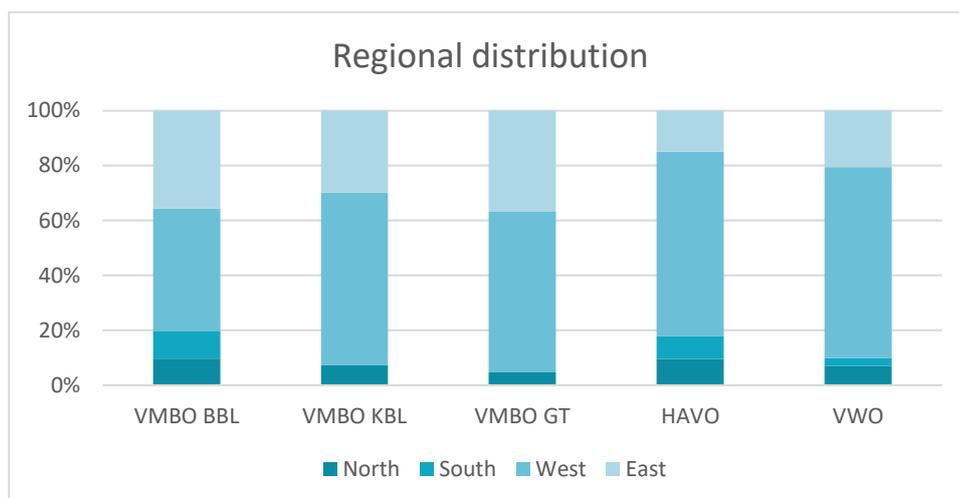
Figure 1: Regional distribution

The distribution of the sample group across the regions of the Netherlands is therefore unbalanced. Furthermore, in the less represented regions, the students are usually from one or two schools only.

3.5 First language

In the analysis of the test results, we looked at the students' first language (L1). The following classification was used:

a) L1 Dutch/Frisian

b) L1 Western language other than Dutch or Frisian

c) L1 Non-Western language, i.e. a language spoken in one of the following continents/countries:

- Africa
- Latin-America
- Asia (incl. Turkey)
- Former Dutch Antilles
- Surinam

Table 7 shows the distribution of the sample group split by first language according to the categories mentioned above. We can see that the sample group consists mainly of students who claim to speak Dutch or Frisian as L1. This differs from the ratio in the national population, where the percentages of students with an L1 other than Dutch or Frisian are slightly higher.

Table 7: *students' L1*

	Dutch/Frisian			Western language			Non-Western language		
	n	%	national[1]	n	%	national[1]	n	%	national[1]
vmbo bb	208	91.6	67.2	6	2.6	5.9	13	5.7	26.7
vmbo kb	260	94.5	75.1	3	1.1	5.6	12	4.4	19.2
vmbo gt	375	92.1	78.1	12	2.9	5.7	20	4.9	15.7
havo	397	92.8	81.2	9	2.1	6.3	22	5.1	12.5
vwo	367	95.3	82.0	7	1.8	8.0	11	2.9	10.0

[1]Bron: http://statline.cbs.nl

The relatively high percentage of students in the sample group with Dutch or Frisian as first language is somewhat in contrast to the number of parents with a non-Dutch background. However, this variable does not produce any difference in performance.

Table 8: *parents/guardians' L1 (percentages)*

	L1 mother/female guardian other than Dutch/Frisian	L1 father/male guardian other than Dutch/Frisian
	%	%
vmbo bb	17.6	21.1
vmbo kb	15.6	14.4
vmbo gt	19.4	17.7
havo	19.2	18.7
vwo	11.7	12.5

4. Test results

This chapter summarises the results of the speaking test for the five study groups. All the results listed here are derived from the *Report on SLO Speaking Benchmarking Test* and the supplementary Appendix compiled by the researchers of *Cambridge Assessment English* (Walker, 2017).

4.1 CEFR performance levels

Table 9 shows the overall performance of Dutch secondary education students. 56.3% of the students achieve a B level for Speaking English. 52.7% of the students are placed at level B2 or higher.

Table 9: *distribution of all students by CEFR level in percentages (n=1722)*

CEFR level	%
C2	1.9
C1	16.3
B2 In	34.5
B1	21.8
A2	15.1
A1	9.6
< A1	0.8

An overview of the differences in CEFR performance levels per educational stream shows the following percentages:

Table 10: *Distribution of all students by CEFR level - split by stream (n=1722)*

CEFR level	% bb (n=227)	% kb (n=275)	% gt (n=407)	% havo (n=428)	% vwo (n=385)
C2	0.0	0.4	0.0	2.3	5.5
C1	0.9	1.5	4.4	21.0	43.1
B2	11.0	13.8	29.5	55.8	44.7
B1	22.9	26.9	36.6	18.0	6.2
A2	27.3	34.9	22.1	2.3	0.5
A1	32.6	21.8	7.4	0.5	0.0
< A1	5.3	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0
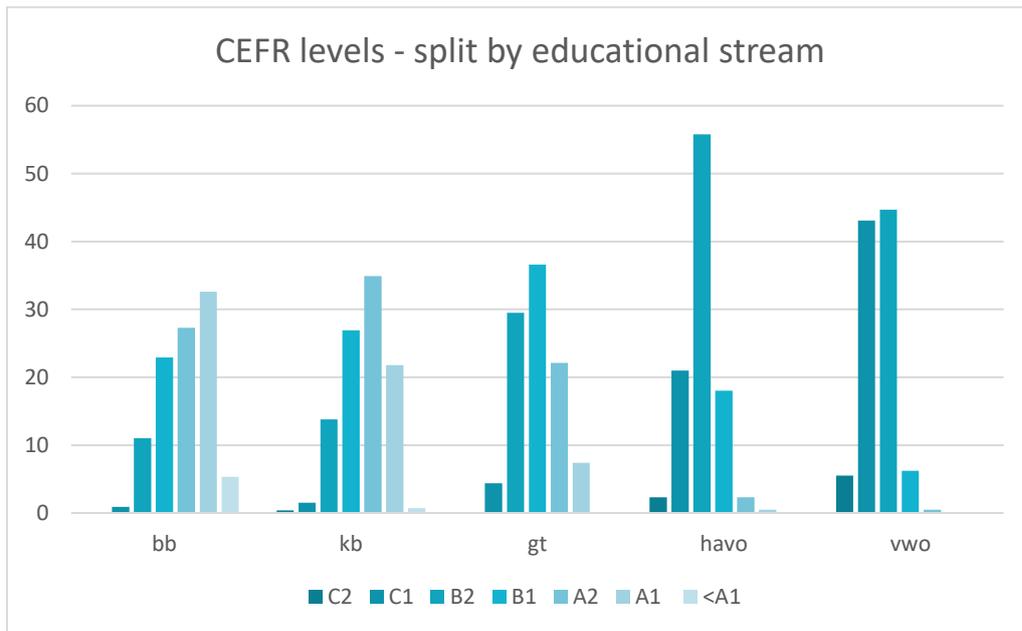
Figure 2. Distribution of all students by CEFR level - split by stream (n=1722)

Key findings:
- The vwo students deliver the best performances: 93.3% achieves B2 level or higher, and 48.6% of these perform at C level.
- Of havo students, 79.1% performs at B2 level or higher, 23.3% of whom can be placed at C level. Almost the entire group (97.1%) achieves at least level B1.
- Of vmbo-gt, 70.2% achieves B1 level or higher. 92.6% achieves at least A2. The performance of this group is thus considerably higher than that of the other two vmbo streams, despite the fact that the target level for all of the vmbo streams is set at A2.
- 77.5% of vmbo-kb students performs at A2 or higher.
- Among vmbo-bb students, 62.1% performs at A2 or higher.

The vmbo streams show a greater spread in CEFR levels achieved than havo (more than half performs at B2) and vwo (large majority achieves B2 or C1).

4.2 Performance of all students by region

In this section, we analyse the results in the four regions of the Netherlands: North (Friesland); West (Utrecht, Noord-Holland, Zuid-Holland and Zeeland); East (Overijssel, Gelderland and Flevoland); South (Noord-Brabant).

The following results should be interpreted with caution. As we have already noticed in chapter 3, the distribution of the sample group across the regions of the Netherlands does not reflect the national population. We, therefore, cannot draw any conclusions about the spread of the performance levels of the national population across the four regions.

Vmbo-bb (n=227)
Table 11 shows the CEFR levels achieved by students in each of the four regions. Figure 3 shows a graphical representation of these results.

Table 11: *Distribution of stream BB students by CEFR level – split by region (percentages)*

CEFR level	North (%)	South (%)	East (%)	West (%)
C2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
C1	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.0
B2	18.2	4.3	3.7	16.8
B1	9.1	26.1	17.3	29.7
A2	22.7	47.8	25.9	24.8
A1	45.5	21.7	40.7	25.7
< A1	4.5	0.0	12.3	1.0
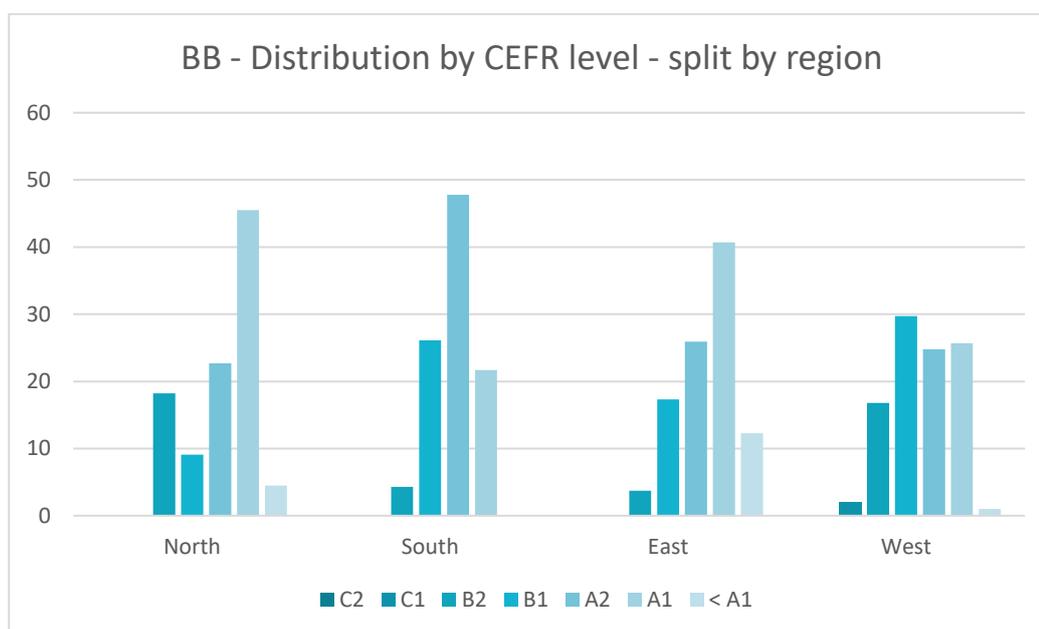
Figure 3. BB-Distribution by CEFR level – split by region (percentages)

Students from the western region perform at the highest levels (48% achieves B1 or higher), while students from the northern and eastern regions show the lowest performances: 45.5% and 40.7% respectively achieve A1. In the eastern region, the percentage of students performing below A1 is also considerably higher than in the other areas.

Vmbo-kb (n=275)
Table 12 shows the CEFR levels achieved by vmbo-kb students in the different regions. Figure 4 shows these data graphically. No measurements were carried out in the southern region for this group.

Table 12: *Distribution of stream KB students by CEFR level – split by region (percentages)*

CEFR level	North (%)	East (%)	West (%)
C2	0.0	0.0	0.6
C1	0.0	0.0	2.3
B2	15.0	8.5	16.2
B1	20.0	29.3	26.6
A2	40.0	40.2	31.8
A1	20.0	22.0	22.0
< A1	5.0	0.0	0.6
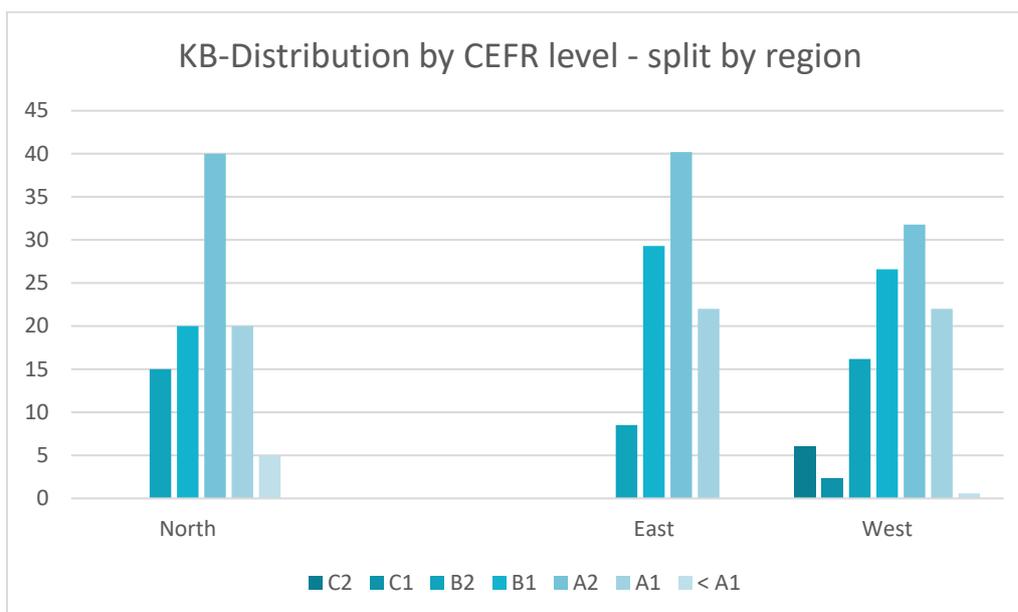
Figure 4. KB-Distribution by CEFR level – split by region (percentages)

The percentages of students who achieve A2 or higher are more or less equivalent: North 75%,
East 78% and West 74,6%. Slight differences occur in the higher levels: in the western
region 19.1% performs at B2 or higher, in the North 15% and the East 8.5%.
The data for the northern region refer to a small number of students.

Vmbo-gt (n=407)
Table 13 shows the CEFR levels achieved by students in the different regions. Figure 5 shows
these data graphically. No measurements were carried out for this group in the southern region.

Table 13: *Distribution of stream GT students by CEFR level – split by region (percentages)*

CEFR level	North (%)	East (%)	West (%)
C2	0.0	0.0	0.0
C1	0.0	4.0	5.0
B2	31.6	38.7	23.5
B1	26.3	36.0	37.8
A2	31.6	12.0	27.7
A1	10.5	9.3	5.9
< A1	0.0	0.0	0.0
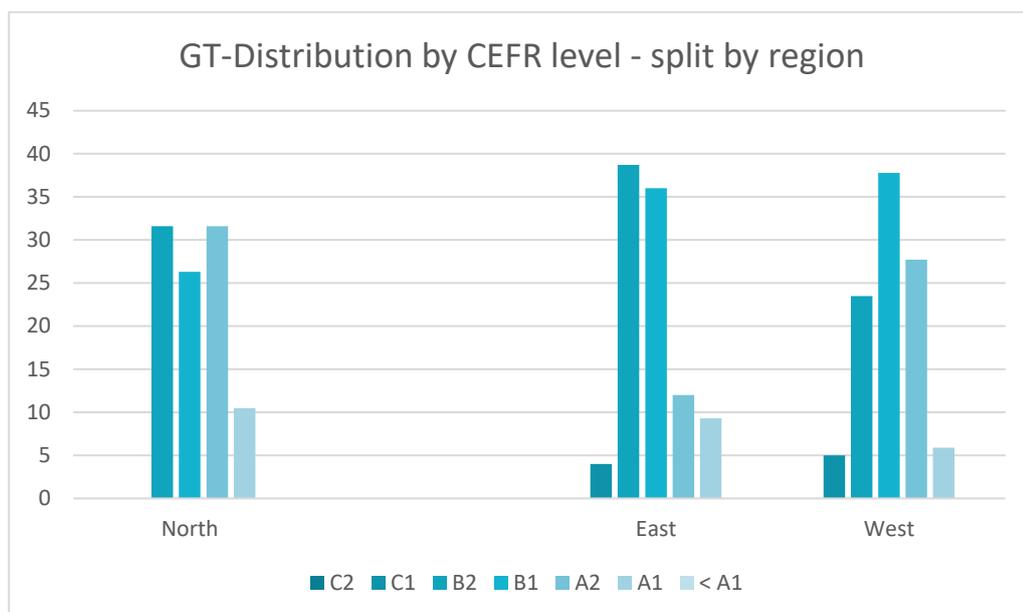
Figure 5. GT-Distribution by CEFR level – split by region (percentages)

The eastern region has the highest percentage of students achieving B2 or higher: 42.7% This is 28.5% in the western region, and 31.6% in the northern region.

A2 is achieved by an above-average percentage of students in the West: 94% performs at A2 or higher. In the East, this is 90.7%, in the North 89.5%.

B1 (or higher), is achieved by an above-average percentage of students: in the East: 78.7% of the students, followed by the West (66.3%) and the North (57.9%).

Havo (n=428)

Table 14 shows the CEFR levels achieved by havo students in each of the four regions. Figure 6 shows the results graphically.

Table 14*: Distribution of stream HAVO students by CEFR level – split by region (percentages)*

CEFR level	North (%)	South (%)	East (%)	West (%)
C2	2.4	0.0	1.6	2.8
C1	9.8	31.4	18.8	21.9
B2	43.9	60.0	64.1	55.2
B1	36.6	8.6	14.1	17.4
A2	4.9	0.0	1.6	2.4
A1	2.4	0.0	0.0	0.3
< A1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
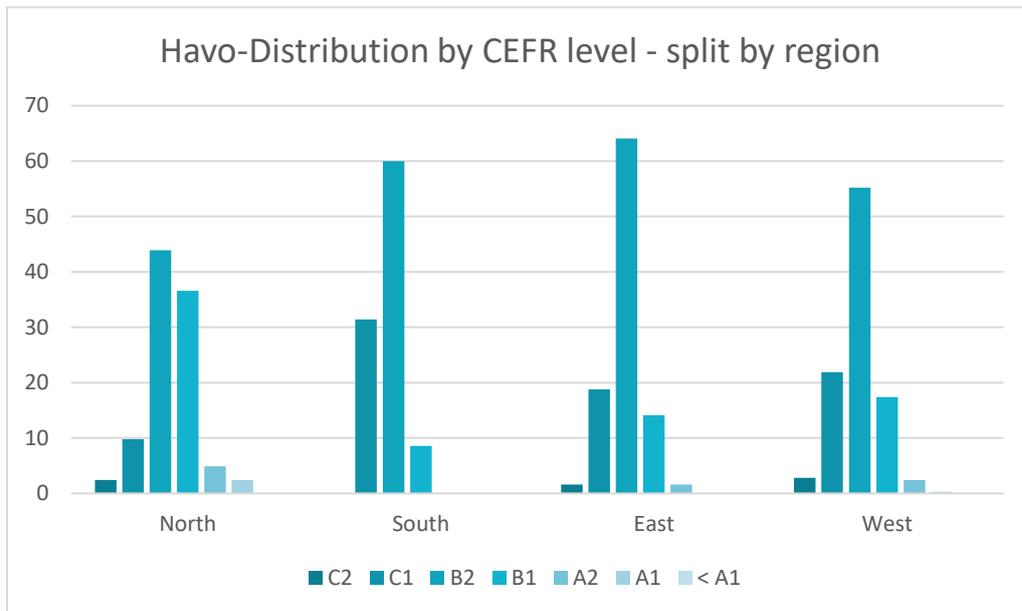
Figure 6. Havo-Distribution by CEFR level – split by region (percentages)

In the South, the entire study group achieves at least B1. B1 or higher is achieved by 98.6% in the East region, by 97.3% in West and 92.7% in the East.

The percentage of performances at B2 or higher is above average in the southern region: 91.4%, of which 31.4% performs at C level. The East also performs above average with 84.5% B2 or higher, of which 20.4 at C level.

In the western region, 79.9% of students achieve B2 or higher (24.7% performs at C level); in the North, the percentage is 56.1% (of which 12.2% at C level).

Vwo (n=385)

Table 15 shows the CEFR levels achieved by vwo students in the different regions. Figure 7 presents the data in a diagram.

Table 15: *Distribution of stream vwo students by CEFR level – split by region (percentages)*

CEFR level	North (%)	South (%)	East (%)	West (%)
C2	3.7	9.1	5.1	5.6
C1	22.2	36.4	54.4	42.2
B2	51.9	45.5	36.7	46.3
B1	18.5	9.1	3.8	5.6
A2	3.7	0.0	0.0	0.4
A1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
< A1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
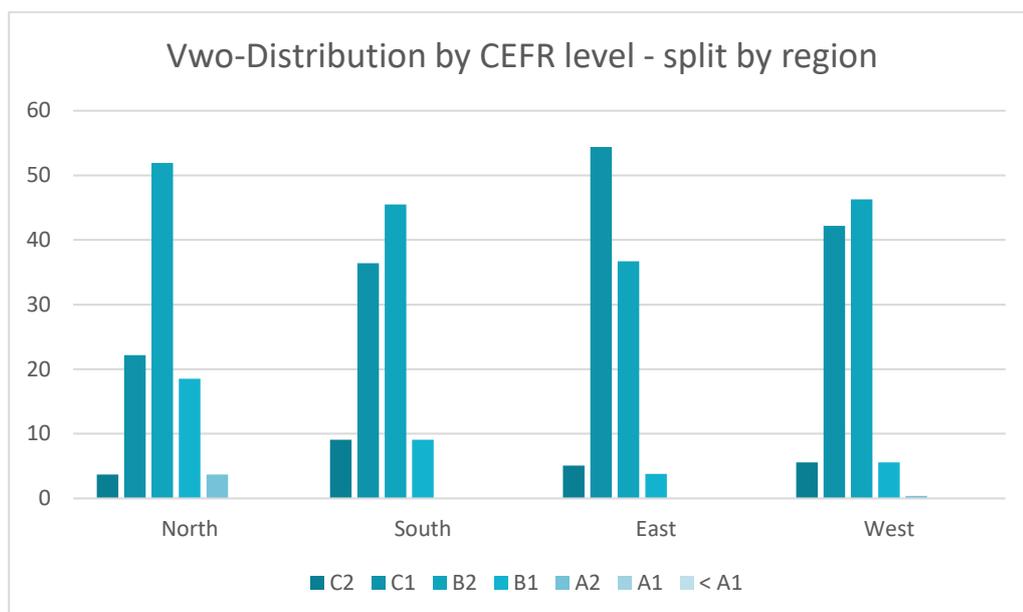
Figure 7. Vwo-Distribution by CEFR level – split by region (percentages)

Both East and West perform above average: in the East, 96.2% of the students achieve B2 or higher, 59.5% perform at C level; in the West, 94.1% of the students achieve B2 or higher, of which 47.8% perform at C level.

In the South, 91% achieves B2 or higher, while 45.5% performs at C level.

The northern region performances are below average with 77.8% at B2 or higher, of which 25.9% at C level.

4.3 First language

In this section, we compare students' performances with their first language (L1). Students have specified it in the digital survey. In all educational streams, this was Dutch or Frisian for more than 90% of the students. The remaining 10% filled in over 40 different languages as L1. For an interpretation of the results, we have distinguished the following language groups:

a) L1 Dutch/Frisian

b) L1 Western migrant languages

c) L1 non-Western migrant languages, i.e. a language spoken in one of the following continents/countries:

- Africa
- Latin-America
- Asia (incl. Turkey)
- Former Dutch Antilles
- Surinam

Below are the results; we could not find any striking differences or patterns between the language groups. We, therefore, limit ourselves to a presentation of the data. Data for n= < 25 should be handled with caution.

Vmbo-bb (n=227)

Table 16 shows a comparison between the CEFR levels achieved by the bb students and their language background. Figure 8 shows the graphical representation of the data.

Table 16: *Distribution of stream BB students by CEFR level – split by L1 category (in percentages)*

CEFR level	Dutch/Frisian (n=208) %	non-Western migrant languages (n=13) %	Western migrant languages (n=6) %
C2	0.0	0.0	0.0
C1	0.5	0.0	16.7
B2	10.6	23.1	0.0
B1	21.2	38.5	50.0
A2	28.4	7.7	33.3
A1	33.7	30.8	0.0
< A1	5.8	0.0	0.0
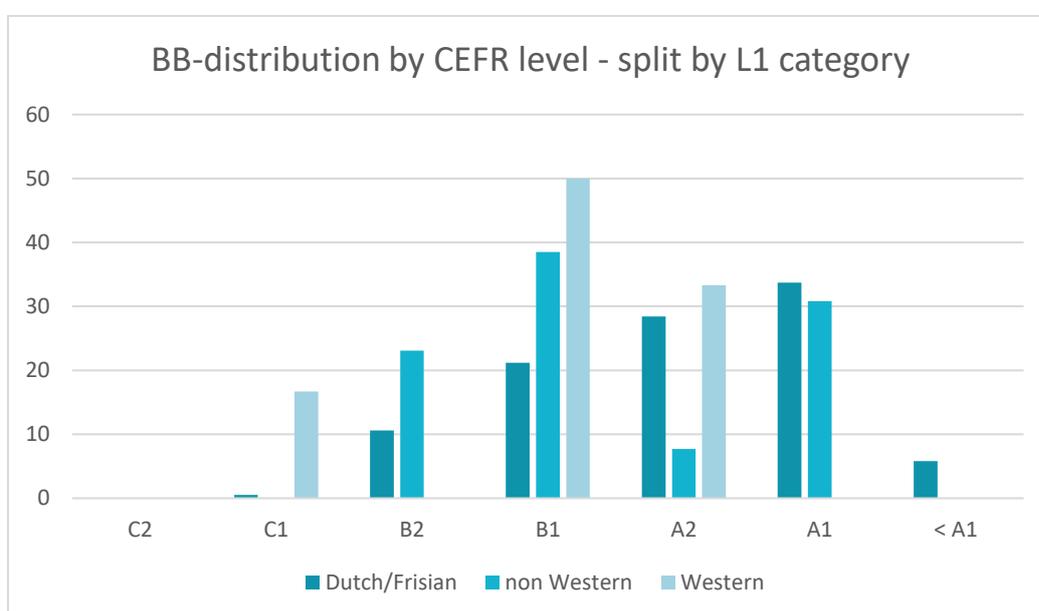
Figure 8. Distribution of stream BB students by CEFR level – split by L1 category (in percentages)

Vmbo-kb (n=275)

Table 17 shows a comparison between the CEFR levels achieved by the kb students and their language background. Figure 9 shows the graphical representation of the data.

Table 17: *Distribution of stream KB students by CEFR level – split by L1 category (in percentages)*

CEFR level	Dutch/Frisian (n=260) %	non-Western migrant languages (n=12) %	Western migrant languages (n=3) %
C2	0.4	0.0	0.0
C1	0.8	8.3	33.3
B2	13.8	8.3	33.3
B1	27.7	8.3	33.3
A2	34.6	50.0	0.0
A1	21.9	25.0	0.0
< A1	0.8	0.0	0.0
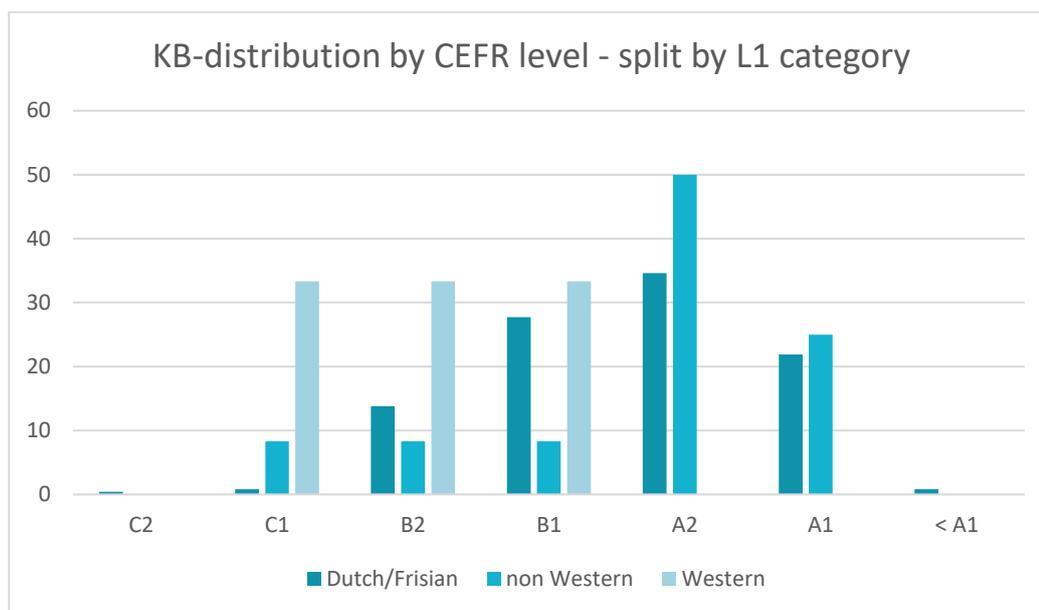
Figure 9. Distribution of stream KB students by CEFR level – split by L1 category (in percentages)

Vmbo-gt (n=407)

Table 18 shows a comparison between the CEFR levels achieved by the GT students and their language background. Figure 10 shows the graphical representation of the data.

Table 18: *Distribution of stream GT students by CEFR level – split by L1 category (in percentages)*

CEFR level	Dutch/Frisian (n=375) %	non-Western migrant languages (n=20) %	Western migrant languages (n=12) %
C2	0.0	0.0	0.0
C1	3.5	0.0	41.7
B2	28.3	50.0	33.3
B1	37.3	40.0	8.3
A2	22.9	10.0	16.7
A1	8.0	0.0	0.0
< A1	0.0	0.0	0.0
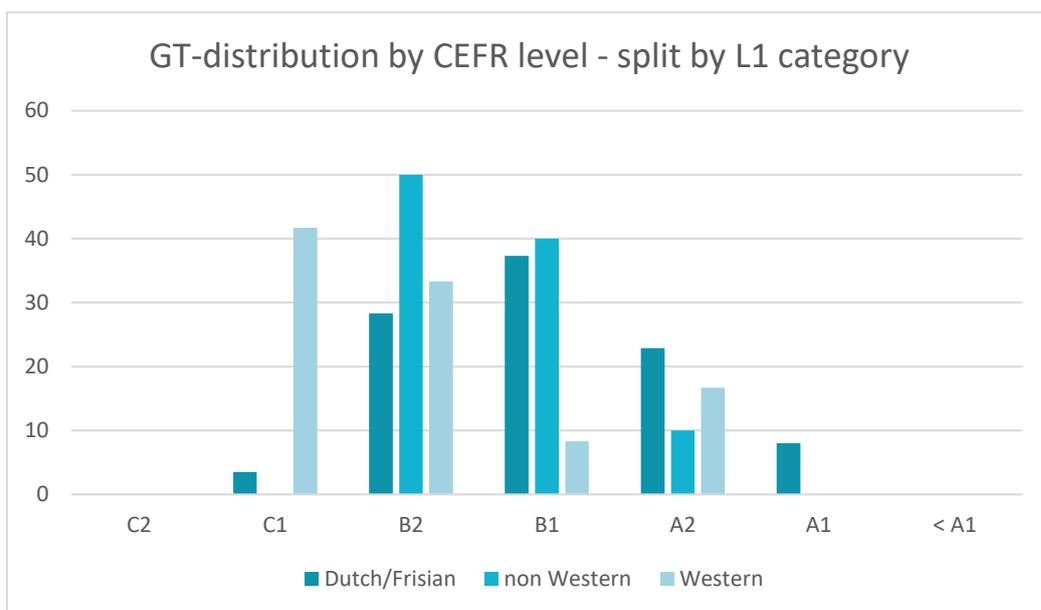
Figure 10. Distribution of stream GT students by CEFR level – split by L1 category (in percentages)

Havo (n=428)

Table 19 shows a comparison between the CEFR levels achieved by the havo students and their language background. Figure 11 shows the graphical representation of the data.

Table 19: *Distribution of stream havo students by CEFR level – split by L1 category (in percentages)*

CEFR level	Dutch/Frisian (n=397) %	non-Western migrant languages (n=22) %	Western migrant languages (n=9) %
C2	2.5	0.0	0.0
C1	19.9	36.4	33.3
B2	57.2	40.9	33.3
B1	18.1	13.6	22.2
A2	2.0	4.5	11.1
A1	0.3	4.5	0.0
< A1	0.0	0.0	0.0
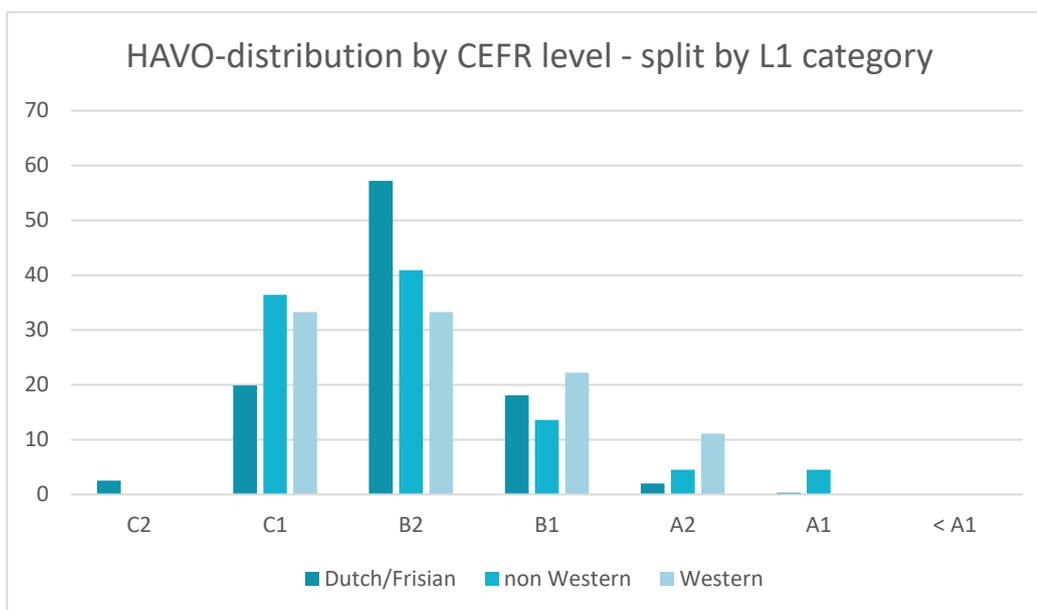
Figure 11. Distribution of stream havo students by CEFR level – split by L1 category (in percentages)

Vwo (n=385)

Table 20 shows a comparison between the CEFR levels achieved by vwo students and their language background. Figure 12 shows the graphical representation of the data.

Table 20: *Distribution of stream vwo students by CEFR level – split by L1 category (in percentages)*

CEFR level	Dutch/Frisian (n=367) %	non-Western migrant languages (n=11) %	Western migrant languages (n=7) %
C2	5.7	0.0	0.0
C1	43.3	45.5	28.6
B2	45.2	36.4	28.6
B1	5.4	18.2	28.6
A2	0.3	0.0	14.3
A1	0.0	0.0	0.0
< A1	0.0	0.0	0.0
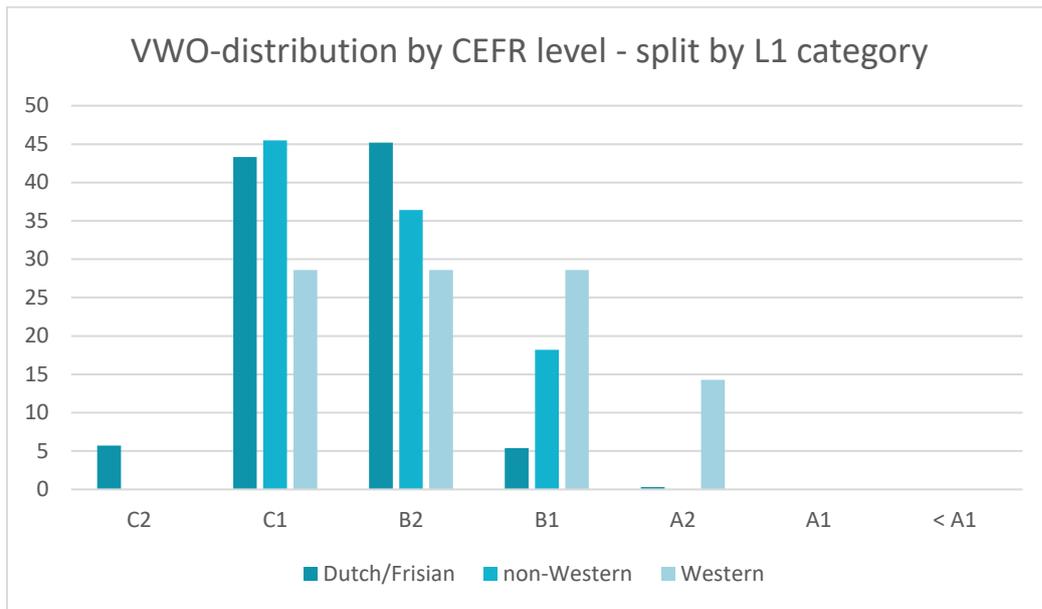
Figure 12. Distribution of stream vwo students by CEFR level – split by L1 category (in percentages)

5. Analysis of student survey results

In this chapter, we summarise the results of the digital survey that students completed immediately after taking the test. We focus on the questions relating to the way in which speaking skills are practised and tested. These are the questions 12 to 22 in the survey (for the full questionnaire, see Appendix 1). In doing so, we try to get a picture of the following:

- how the students experienced the speaking test;
- how speaking skills are tested at their school in upper secondary education, and
- how they practise them.

The results are presented by educational stream. Where significant, we compare them with the test results. Obviously, the way in which students have experienced assessment and practise speaking skills may differ from one individual to another.

The survey results, in both tabular and graphical form, are presented in full in Appendix 3.

5.1 The speaking test

a) Difficult?

Slightly more than half of the bb, kb and gt students found the speaking test difficult or a bit difficult. The results for havo and vwo show a different picture: 33% of the havo students found the test (a bit) difficult, vwo percentage is 38.9%. The ratio between 'difficult' and' a bit difficult' also changes: only a few havo and vwo students mark the test as difficult, while for vmbo this varies between 8% and 14% (see Figure 13).
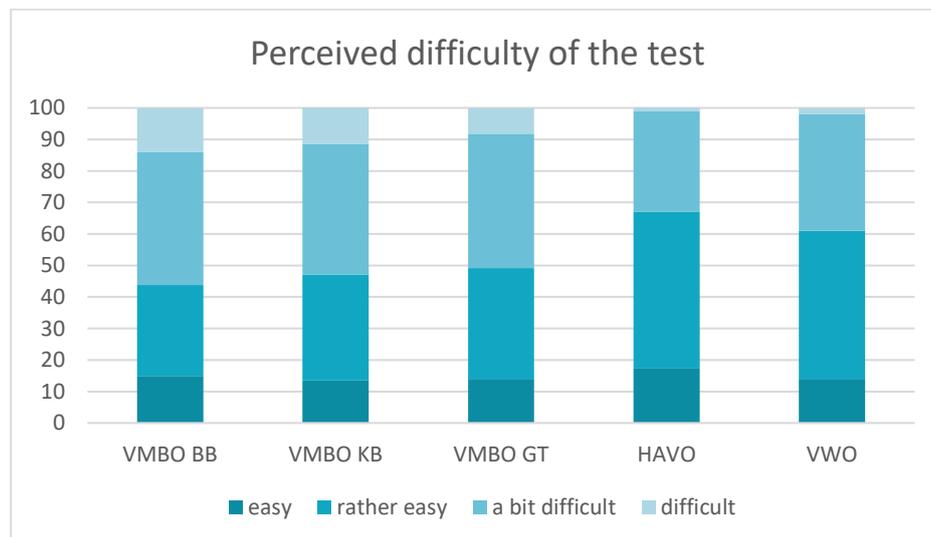
Figure 13: Perceived difficulty of the test (percentages student responses)

b) Previously tested?

Another dividing line between vmbo and havo/vwo is the fact that most havo and vwo students had already taken a speaking test before (83.2% and 88.6% respectively), while less than half of the vmbo students had done so – see Figure 14.
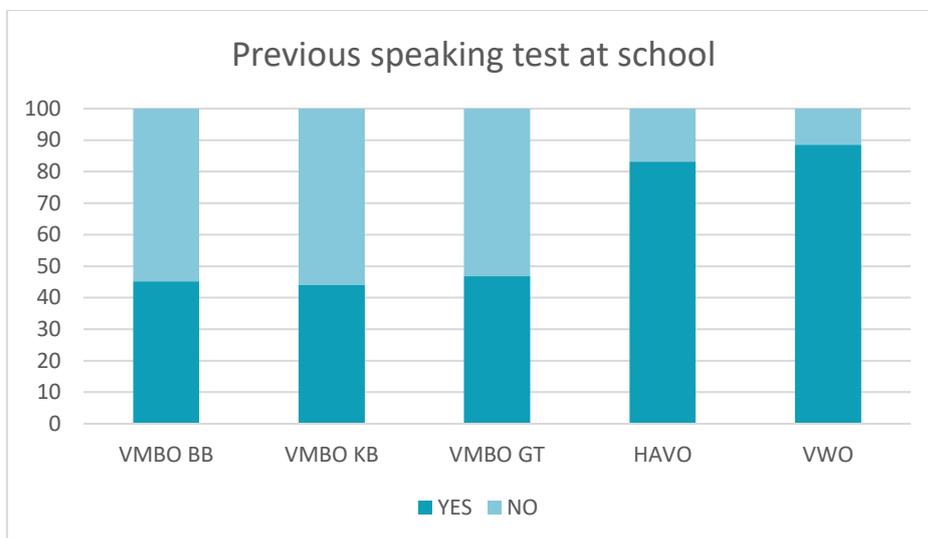
Figure 14: Previous speaking tests for English at school (percentages student responses)

c) Recognisable?

A large proportion of the students who had already taken a speaking test before, did not, or only partially, recognise the test assignments. 45.3% of gt students found the test not at all similar to previous tests. For havo this is 26.1% and for vwo 33.1%. Slightly more than a quarter of the vwo students and 35% of the havo students found the test rather or completely recognisable. For gt this was only 12.2%, for both kb and bb 16.5% (see Figure 15).
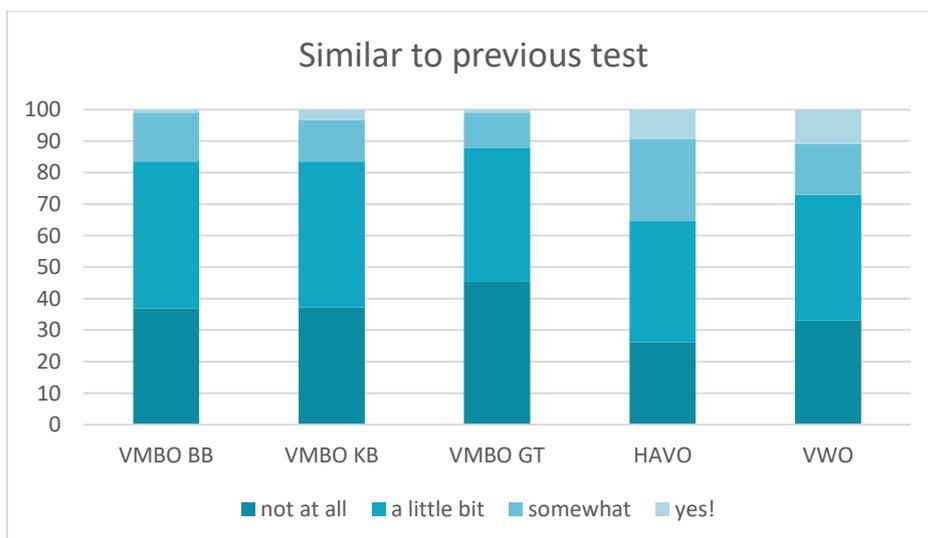
Figure 15: Oral resembled previous test (percentages student responses)

In general, the most recognisable assignment was conducting a conversation with the teacher or a classmate: for 60% of the gt students and 54.8% of havo students, an interview is part of each speaking test. In vwo this percentage is 48.4%, in kb 40.5% and bb 35.9%. Giving a presentation or holding a monologue is particularly popular at havo and vwo. This result is not surprising since speaking (monological) is no testing domain in the final exam of vmbo.

Questions based on images are used least in oral exams or speaking English tests.
A striking difference between educational streams is the teacher's working language during the test. According to 62.2% of the vwo students, teachers in the vwo stream always use English while administering the test; for havo this percentage is 56.7%. Remarkably, the percentage at vmbo is significantly lower: gt 40.5%, bb 35% and kb 28.1% (see Figure 16).
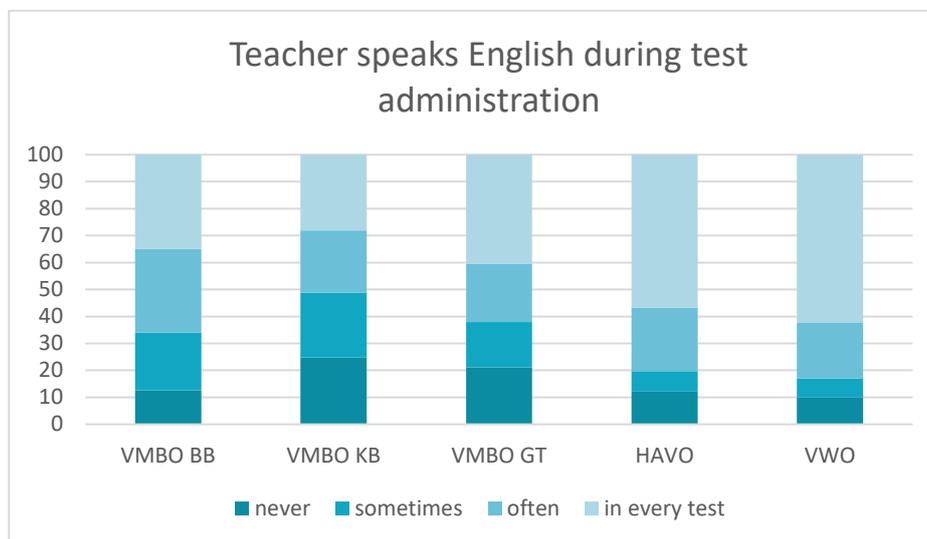
Figure 16: English as teacher's working language during test administration (percentages student responses)

If we compare the answers to the above questions, we find that a higher percentage of vmbo students found the test difficult, and for the first time had a speaking test, than havo and vwo students. Therefore, there seems to be a direct relationship between the perceived difficulty and the frequency with which a student has previously been tested, to the disadvantage of vmbo students.
If vmbo students had already had a speaking test before, that test seemed to be less like the Cambridge test used for this study, in percentage terms, than that for havo and vwo students. Also, vmbo students are less used to the examiner speaking only English during the test administration. In this case, too, there seems to be a relationship between the two answers. In other words, vmbo students found the test more difficult because they had never before taken a speaking test, or a test in this form.

5.2 English speaking tests at school

Number of speaking tests
Slightly more than half of the vmbo students who had been tested previously, had had one speaking test in year 4. This percentage is lower for havo 5 students. This result may be related to the period in which the tests for this research study were administered. For some schools, the testing took place prior to the school examination week. In any case, it seems that speaking skills are not often tested: even in the pre-examination years of havo and vwo, most students indicate that they were only tested once or not at all (see Figures 17 and 18).
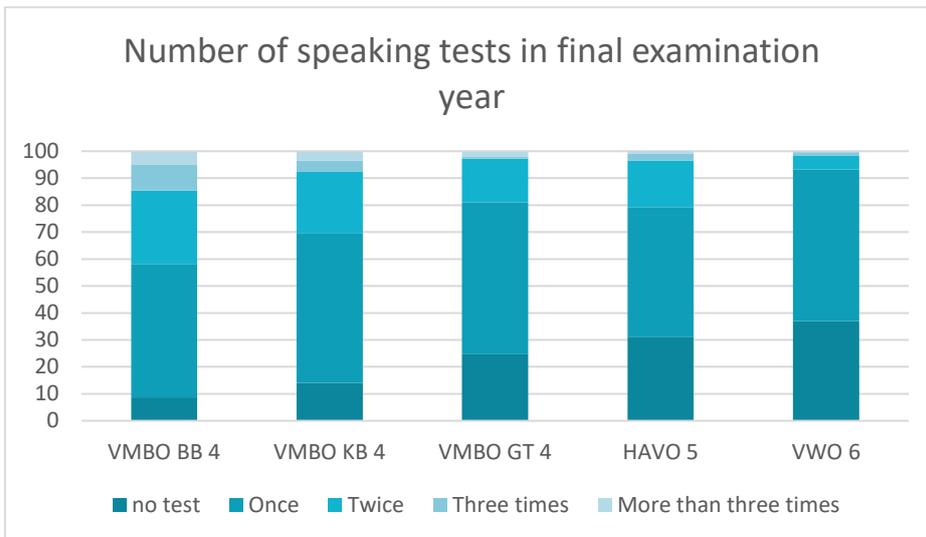
Figure 17: Number of speaking tests for English in the final examination year (percentages student responses)
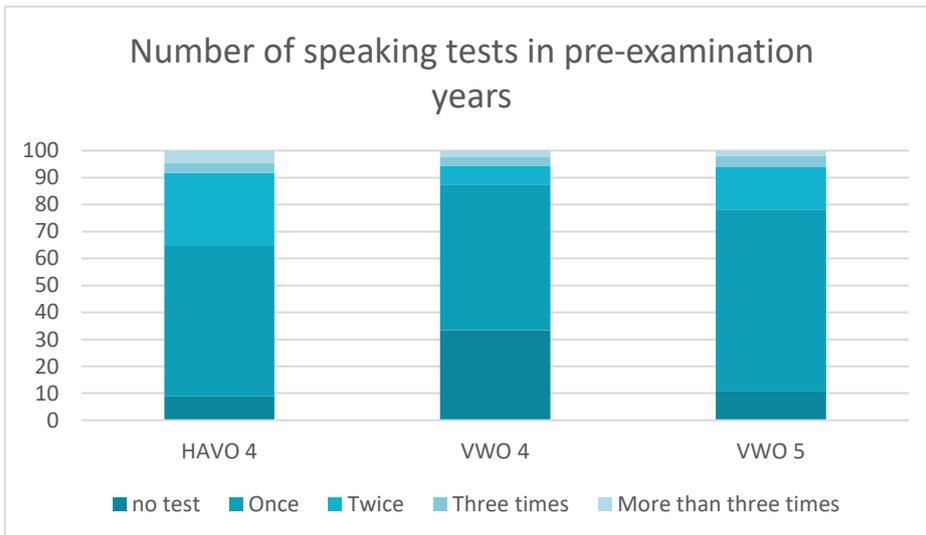
Figure 18: Number of speaking tests for English in the pre-examination years (percentages student responses)

Test assignments and test preparation
For a complete overview of the test assignments used and preparation activities in the different streams, please refer to Appendix 3.
Salient points:
-   At all levels of vmbo, the most common assignments are a conversation with the teacher or a classmate, and reading out a text.
-   In havo and vwo, the most commonly used forms are a conversation with the teacher or a classmate, and giving a talk or (oral) presentation.
-   In vmbo, on the other hand, a presentation is rarely used as a form of testing (see Figure 19), which can be explained by the absence of the monological section in the final examination programme for vmbo.
-   The least-used test assignment in vmbo is a book or film discussion.
-   A discussion on a video clip or a film is also rarely used in havo and vwo.

- In havo and vwo, where the target level is higher, discussions about a topical subject are more common. The level achieved by gt students (36.7% B1, 29.6% B2) does suggest that this challenge could also be offered to these students more frequently.
- Some vwo students mention reading books from the (set) reading list as a way of preparation for the speaking test. These are subsequently the subject of conversation during the test. Some students mention a debate as a form of testing speaking skills in havo and vwo.
- Conducting a self-written and read-out interview occurs at all levels of education (most often for bb students, least in vwo), although this way of testing is not valid for assessing speaking skills - after all, it is about reciting a written assignment by heart.
- About half of the students do not know what kind of questions will be asked in the test.
- Figures 19 and 20 provide a graphical overview of the difference in the use of certain types of test assignments in the different educational streams.
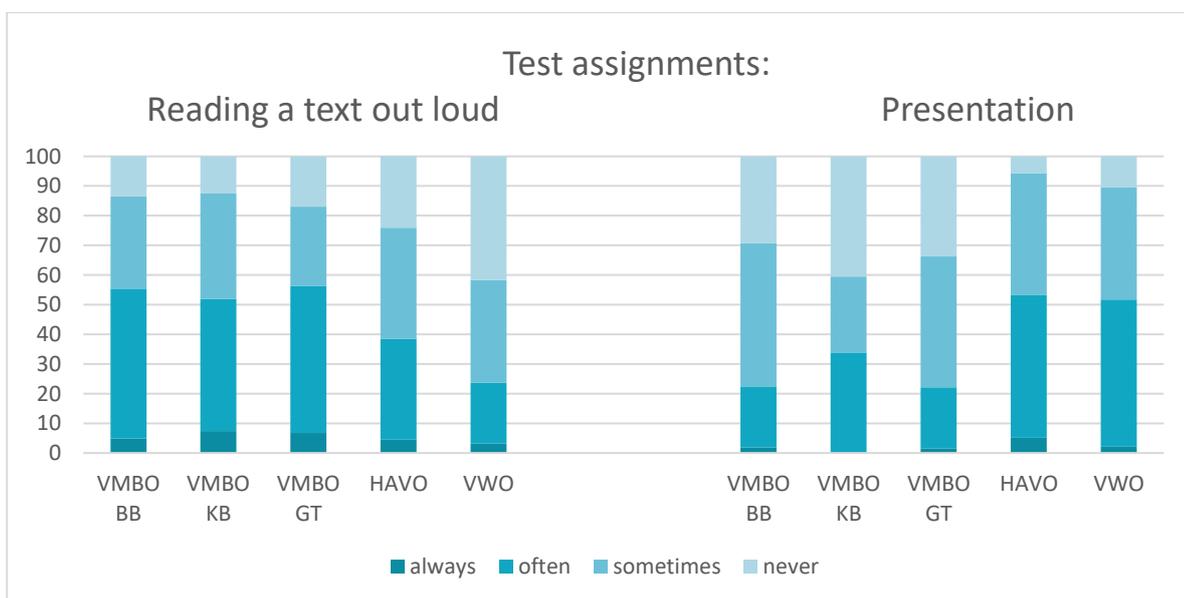
Figure 19: Test assignments *I*
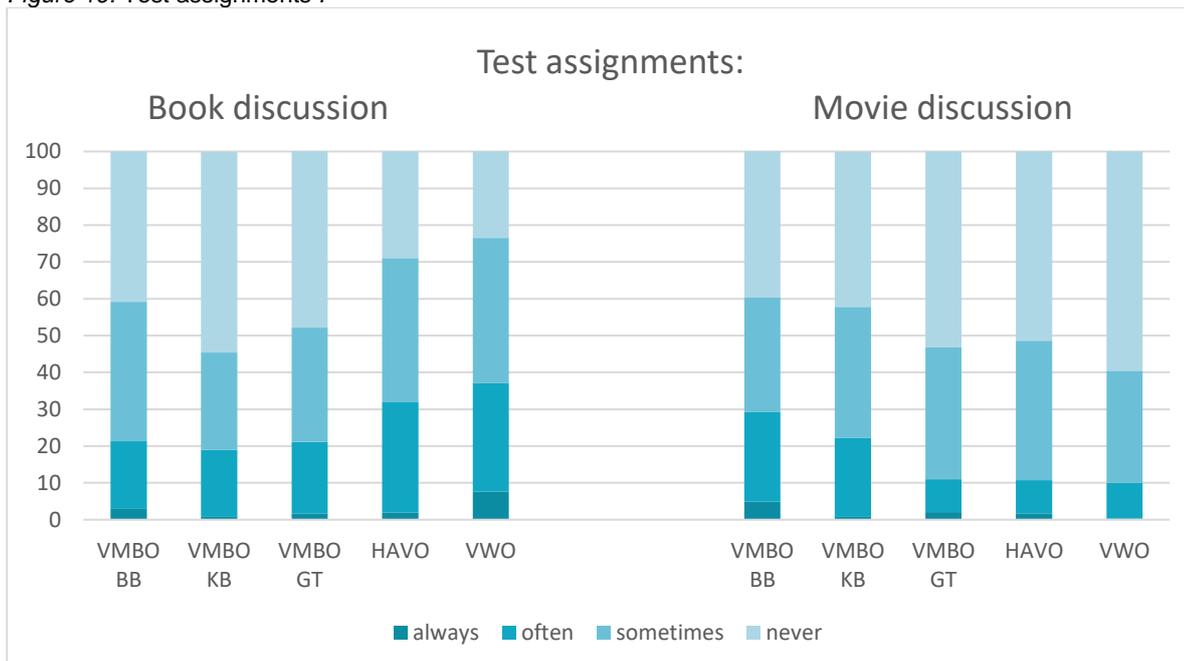
Figure 20: Test assignments II

5.3 Practising speaking skills

Target language as working language
According to the students, there are large differences in the extent to which teachers speak English in the classroom, also within the same educational stream.
Teachers in havo and vwo speak English more often than in vmbo (see Figure 21).
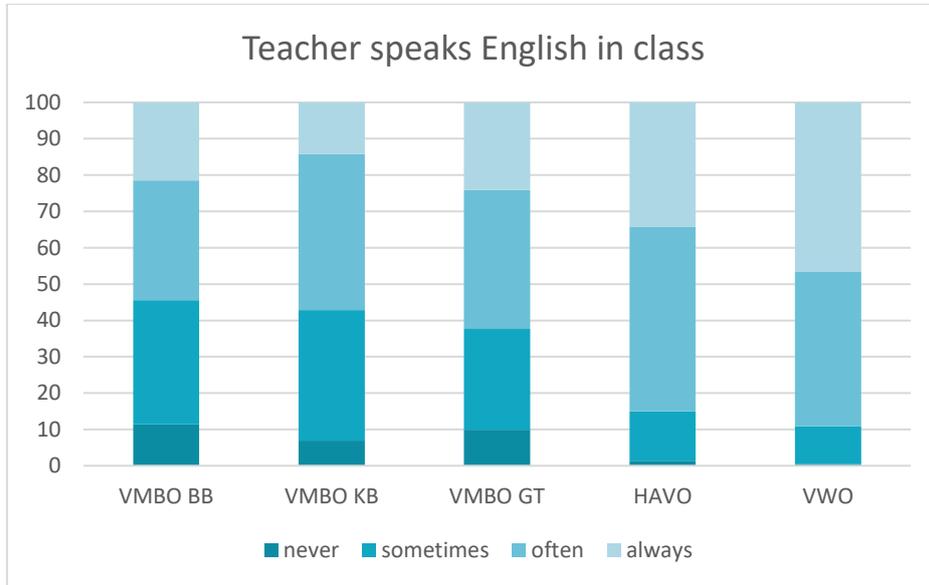
Figure 21: Teacher's working language in class (percentages student responses)

There is a correlation between the working language of the teacher in the classroom and the students' performance. The percentage of students with a higher score is higher among students whose teachers often or always speak English. This is particularly the case at vmbo-gt and vwo level (see Figures 22 and 23).
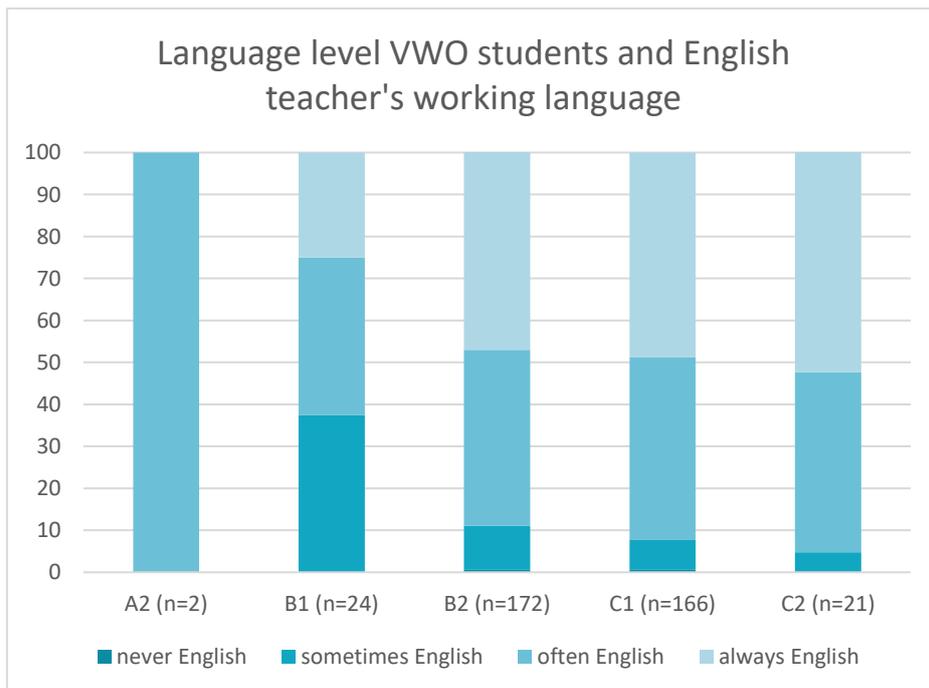
Figure 23: Language level students vmbo-gt and English teacher's working language (percentages student responses)

In vmbo, students speak English less often than in havo and vwo. In all educational streams, some students never try to speak only English in class. The percentage that never does it varies between 20% in vwo and 48.4% in vmbo-kb. 10% of the vwo students try to always speak English (see Figure 24).
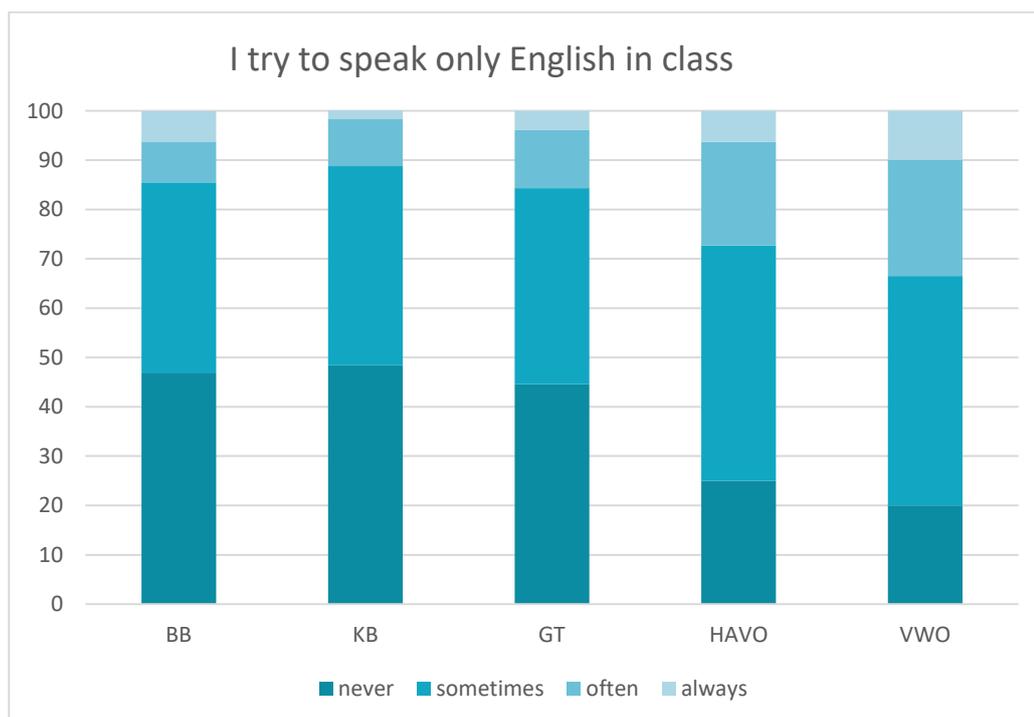
Figure 24: Students speak only English in class (percentages student responses)

Topics of conversation

If English is spoken in the classroom, vwo students most often talk about topical issues (53.8% often, 16.9% very often) and topics that are of general or social relevance, such as euthanasia, racism etc. (40.8% often, 11.9% very often). Current affairs are also often discussed at havo (42.5% often, 14.5% very often). Socially relevant topics (25.5% and 6.5% respectively) are discussed less often, despite the fact that these topics are also suitable for B2: the performance level of the large majority of havo students.

In general, at vmbo, situations of everyday life or public life, work or study are discussed less often. The percentage of vmbo students who indicate that they never talk about such situations at all varies from 13.5% to 52.2%. In havo and vwo, the percentages are between 2.9% and 25% (see Figures 25 and 26).
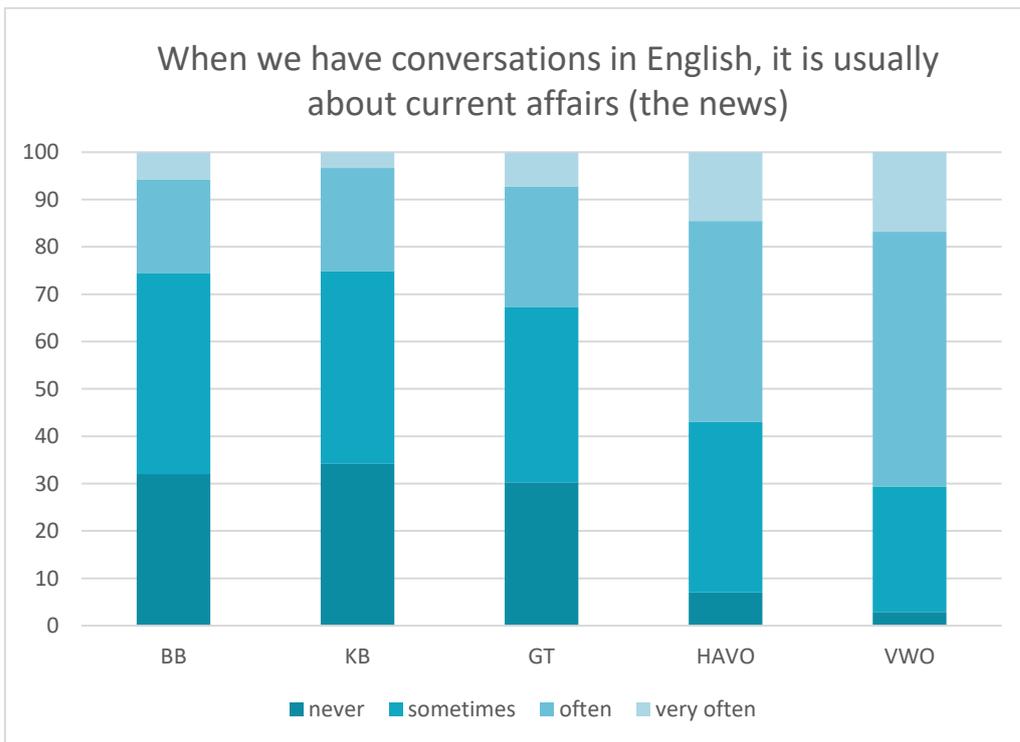
Figure 25: Conversations in English about current affairs (percentages student responses)
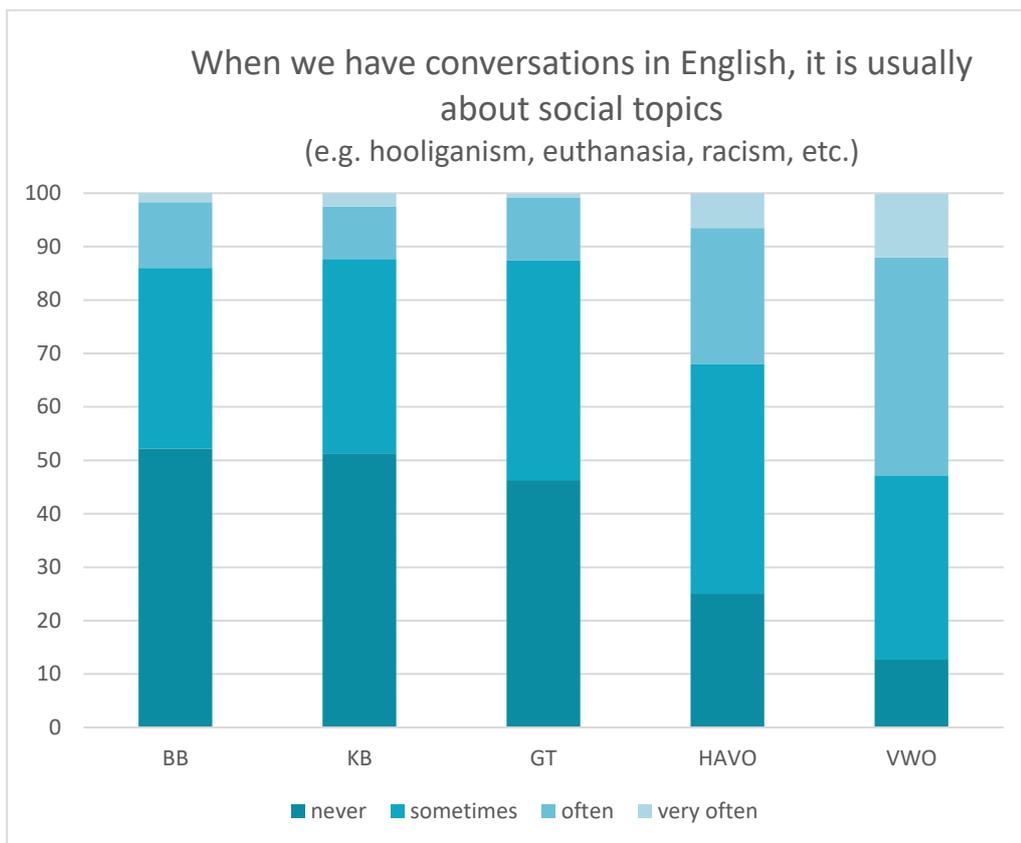
Figure 26: Conversations in English about social topics (percentages student responses)

Speaking skills training

The use of exercises from the course book or other assignments does not differ much per educational stream. Assignments not taken from the course book are most commonly used in vwo, whereas this is less the case in vmbo (see Figure 27).
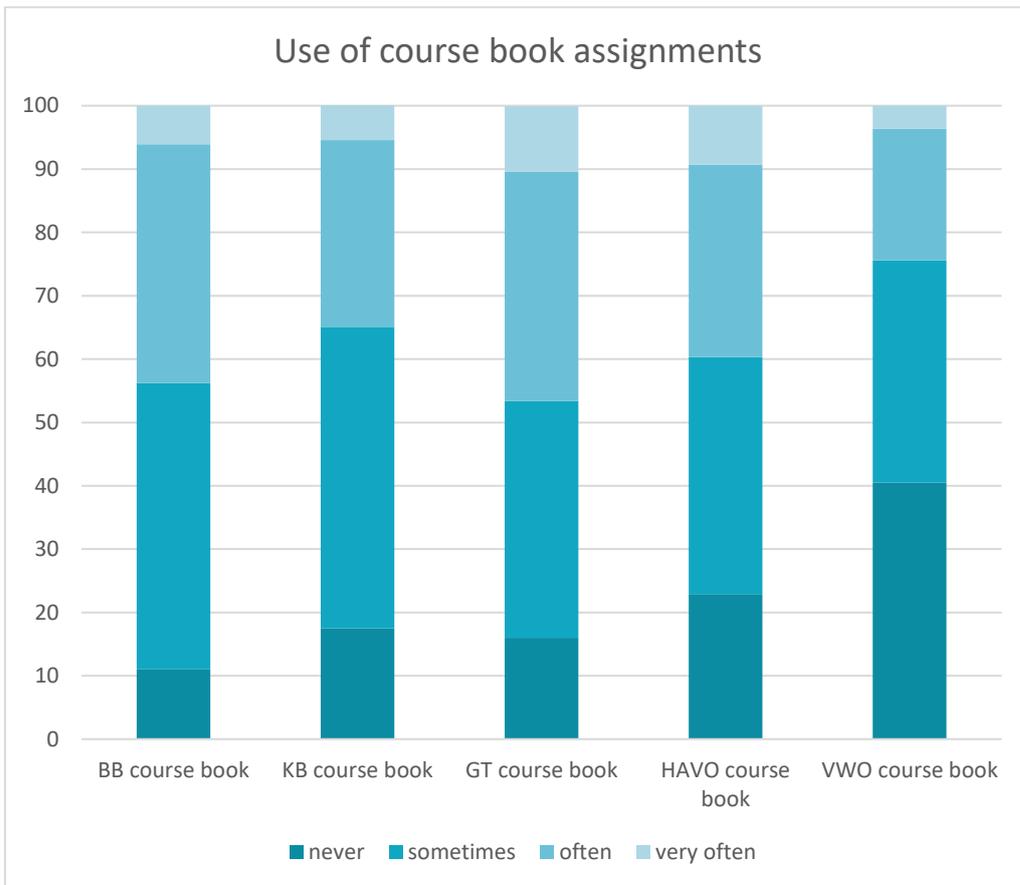
Figure 27: Assignments used for training speaking skills (percentages student responses)

Sometimes, videos or texts are used as input for speaking activities. Music, on the other hand, is less popular: about half of the students never use it as input. Neither conversations via digital media nor exchanges with foreign schools are indicated by students as an exercise activity for speaking skills: between 78.7% (havo) and 91.9% (gt) say that they never practise speaking skills in a school exchange, although some students mention guest speakers from abroad or a trip to London. Percentages for conversations via digital media are similar. Approximately a dozen students have mentioned gaming as an area for practising speaking skills.

Barriers
The final survey question mentions several factors that could hamper the process of learning to speak English. Students were asked to indicate if these factors created barriers for them, or not. The results show that only a small minority is hampered by these factors. In this respect, we should express a reservation about the reliability of the answers given by bb and kb students. It appeared that the question was not formulated clearly, allowing different interpretations. Whenever the situation allowed it, the supervisors did provide further explanation.

a) *speaking is difficult*
In the category 'very difficult' the option 'speaking is more difficult than reading or listening' got the highest score. The lower the students performed, the more difficult they rated the ability to speak. Figure 28 illustrates the results for havo students. The other sectors showed comparable results.
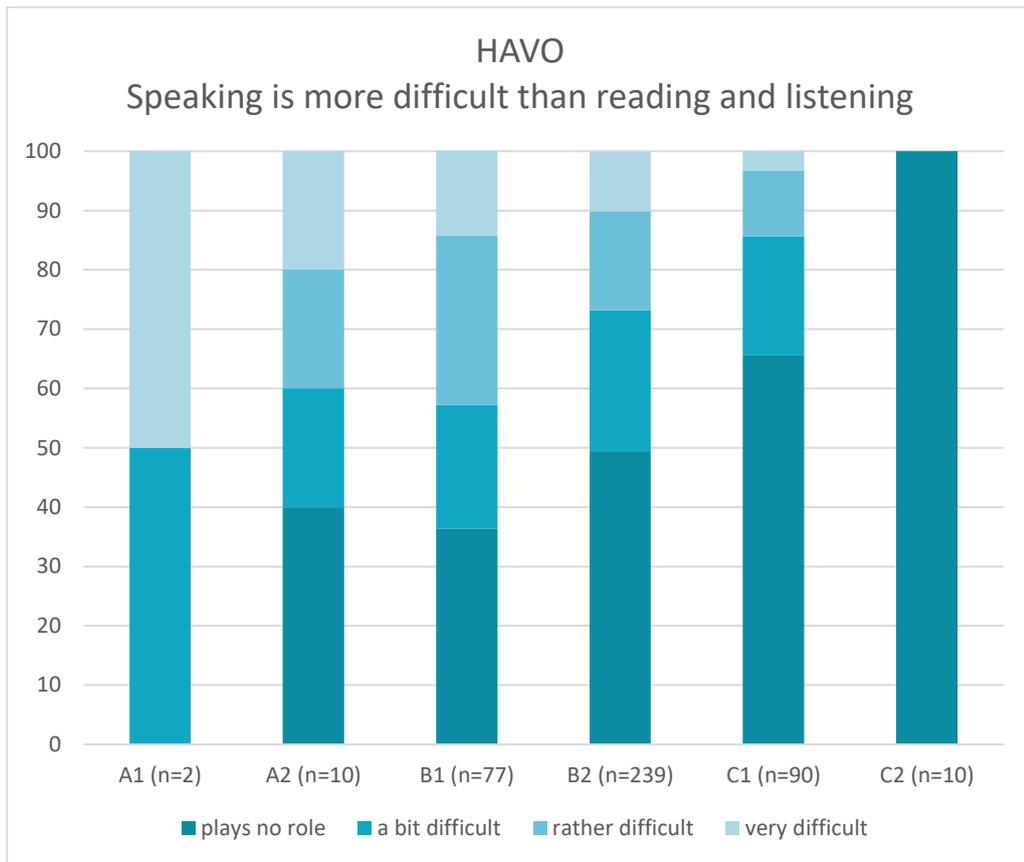
Figure 28: havo: factors that hinder the ability to learn to speak (percentages student responses)

b) *we do not get enough practice*

Performance results match the intensity of practice. Little practice makes it more difficult to develop one's speaking skills (see Figures 29, 30, 31, 32 and 33).
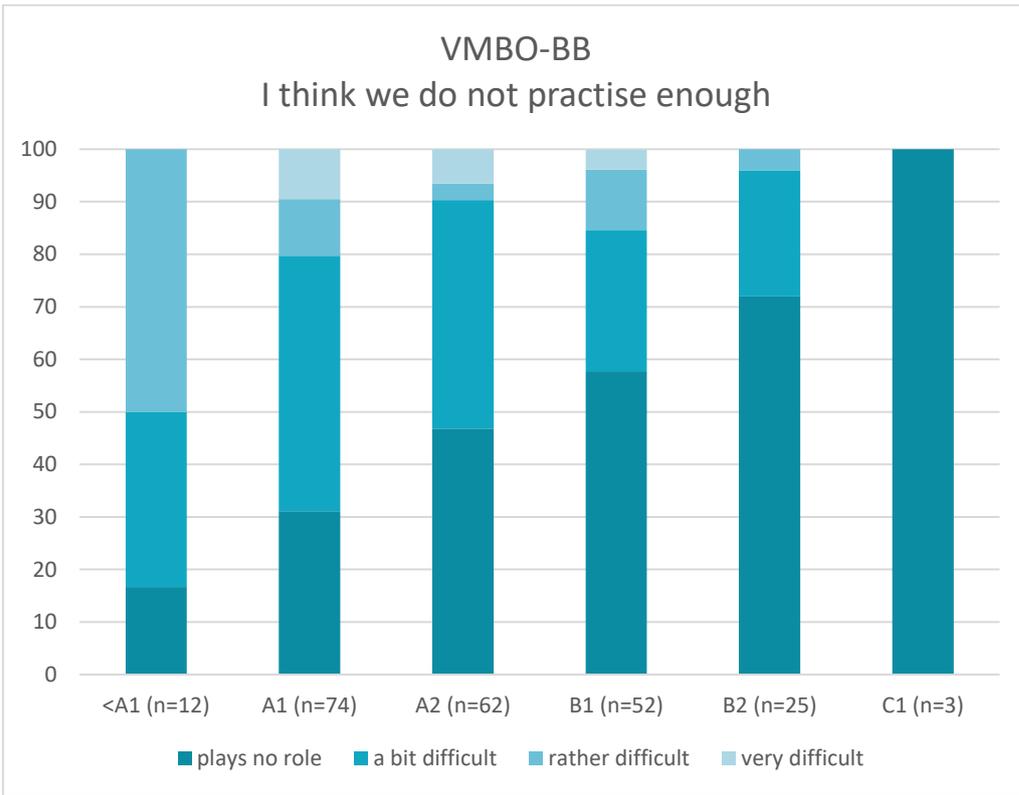
Figure 29: Vmbo-bb: factors that make learning to speak difficult (percentages student responses)
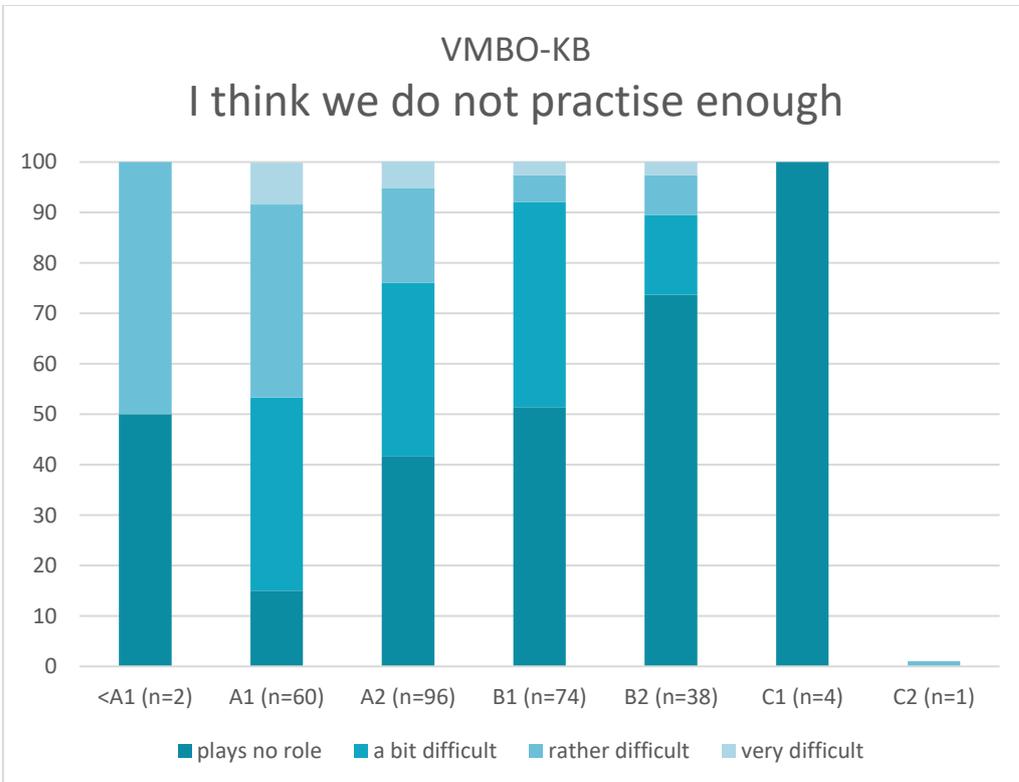

Figure 30: Vmbo-kb: factors that make learning to speak difficult (percentages student responses)
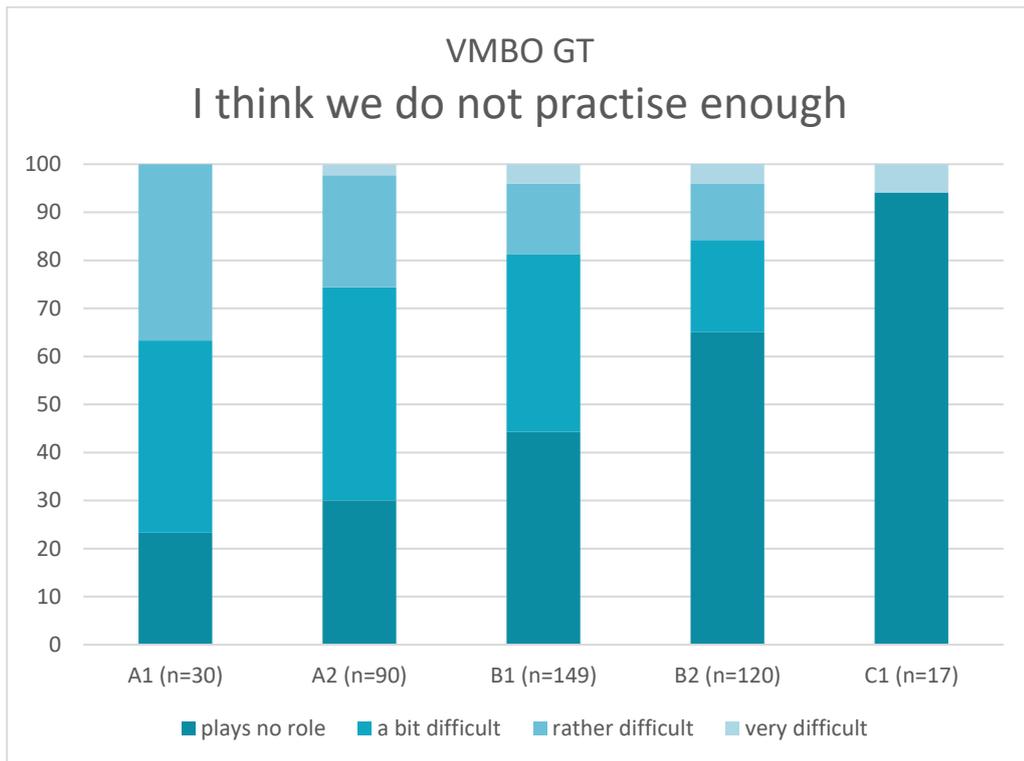
Figure 31: Vmbo-gt: factors that make learning to speak difficult (percentages student responses)
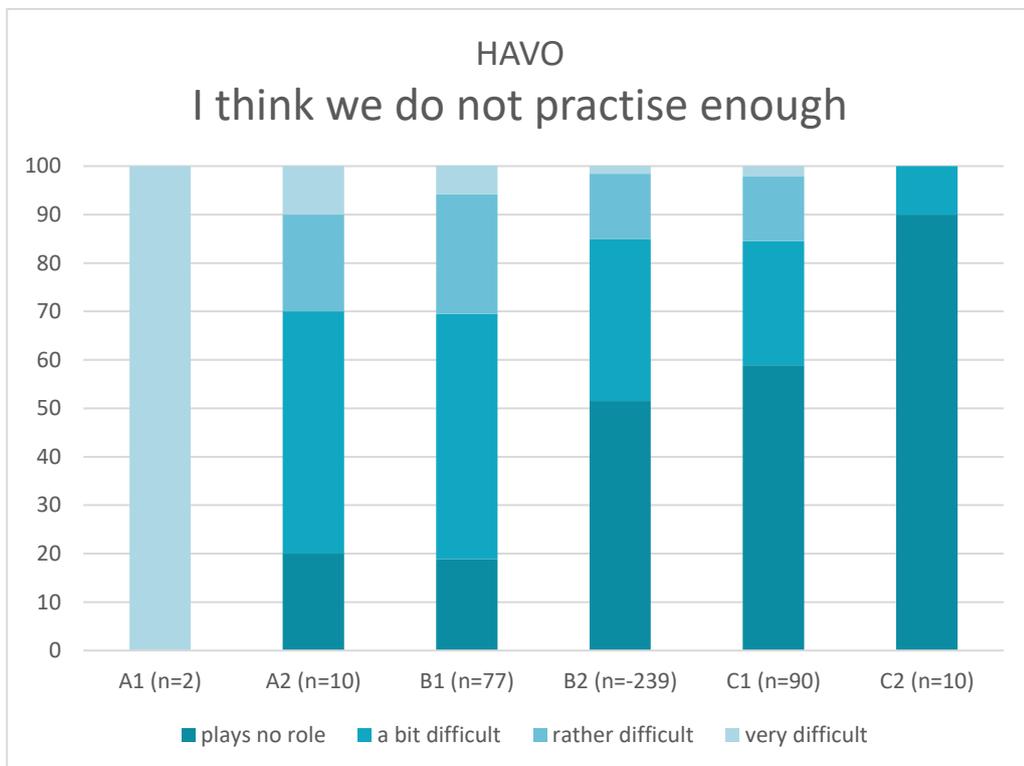
Figure 32: Havo: factors that make learning to speak difficult (percentages student responses)
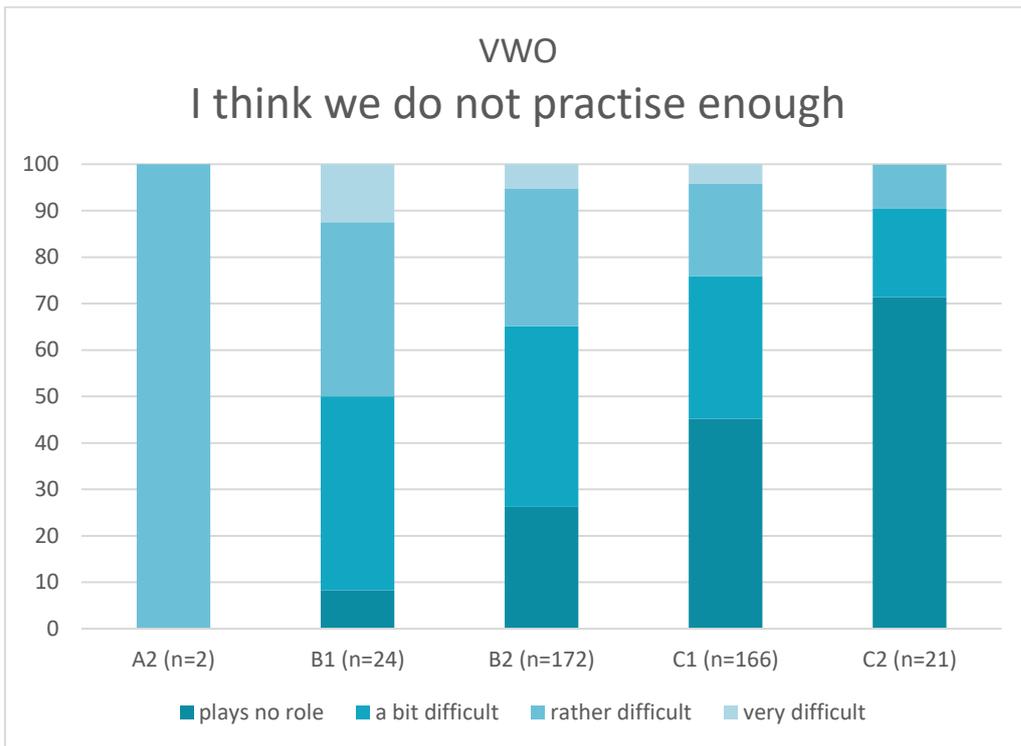
Figure 33: Vwo: factors that make learning to speak difficult (percentages student responses)

c) *what is a pass level?*

Many of the students who did not achieve the target level do not know what they have to do to get a higher score. This applies to vmbo-bb, havo and vwo (see Figures 34, 35, and 36).
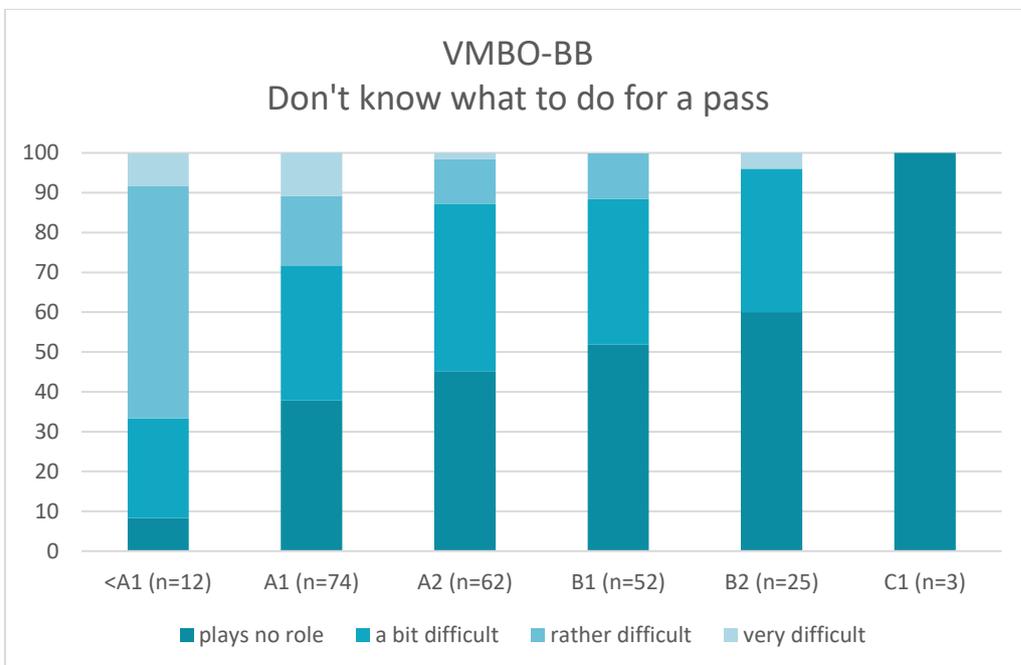
Figure 34: Vmbo-bb: factors that make learning to speak difficult (percentages student responses)
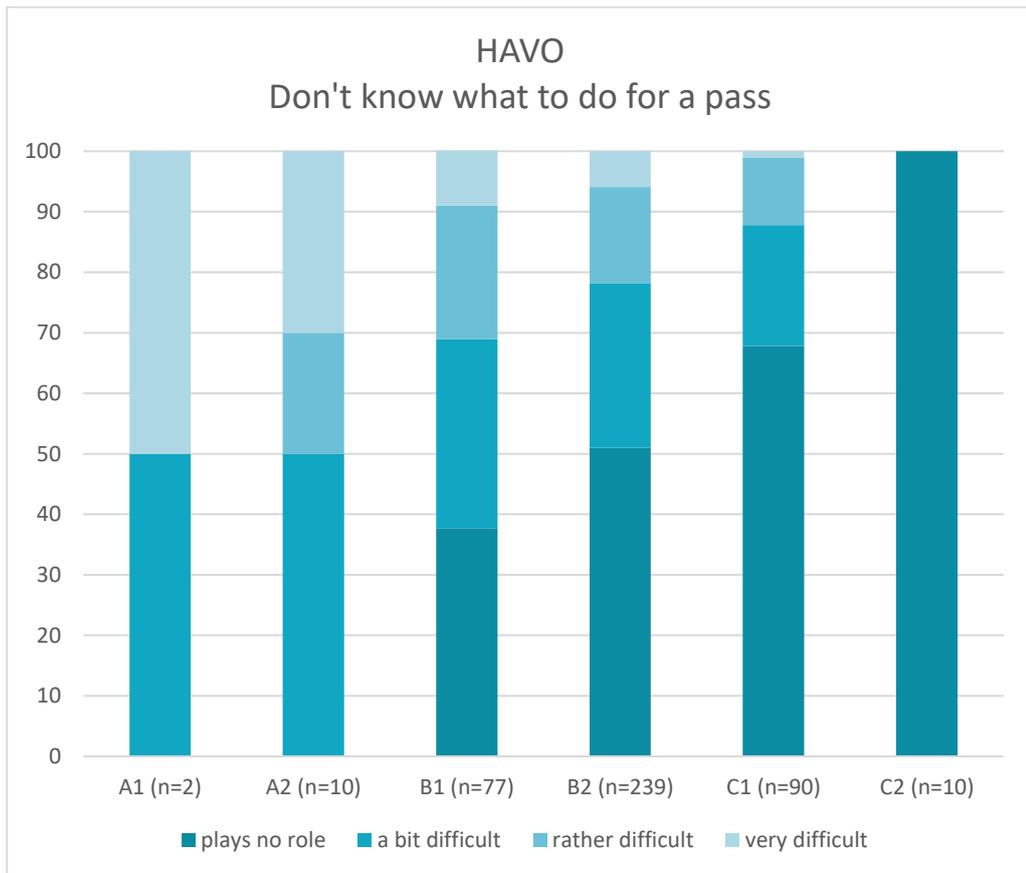
Figure 35: Havo: factors that make learning to speak difficult (percentages student responses)
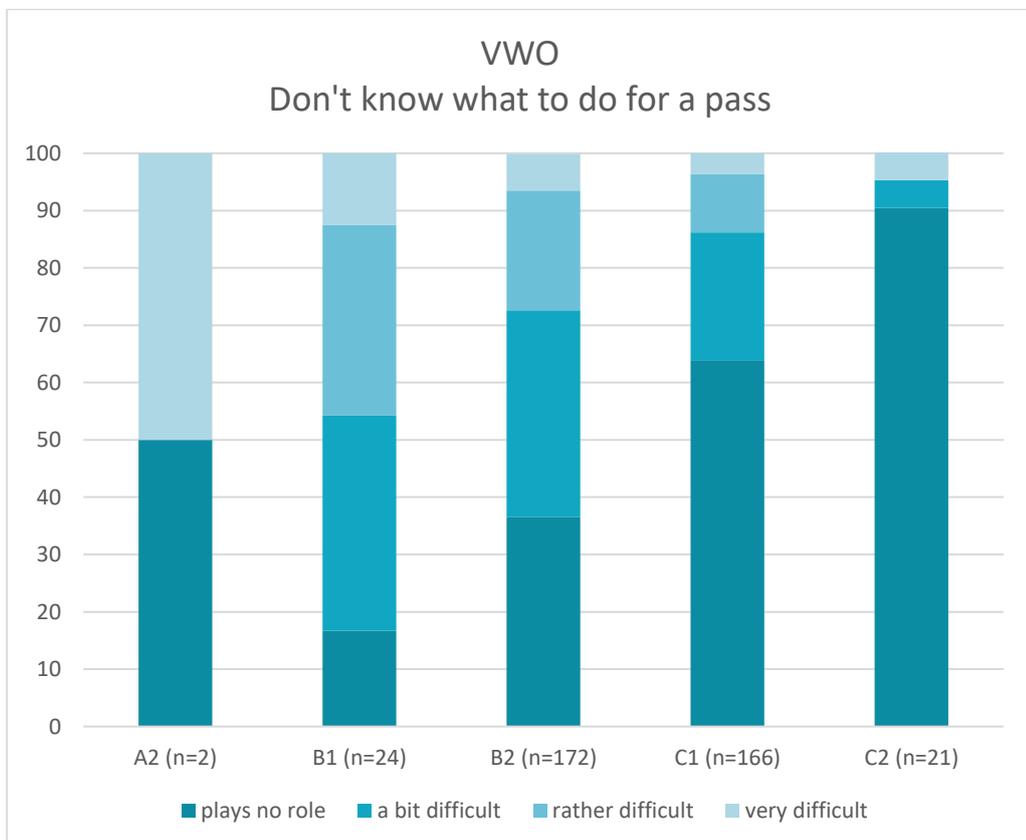

Figure 36: Vwo: factors that make learning to speak difficult (percentages student responses)

6. Interviewing teachers

A few teachers of the students participating in this study attended a group interview session. They shared opinions and experiences about practising and testing speaking skills in upper secondary education. With the information obtained, we were able to make the picture complete that we had obtained from the students via the digital survey. In this chapter, we summarise the most important results of the teacher interviews.

6.1 Speaking skills in the classroom

It turned out that all teachers devote time to the practising of speaking skills in the classroom. However, there are significant differences in the extent and frequency. Most teachers structurally plan speaking skills training in the curriculum: throughout the entire school year, this takes place with a frequency varying from once every three to four weeks to weekly. During the period of the oral school examinations - havo 4, vwo 5 or final examination class havo and vwo – they practise more intensively, up to three times a week. One teacher usually instructs students to perform a ten minutes' conversation exercise in class every week and also dedicates an entire lesson to speaking skills once or twice per term throughout the school year. Some teachers underline the importance of devoting attention to speaking skills in each lesson; they state that the use of the target language as a working language encourages students to practise unconsciously. The longer the lesson lasts - for example, a double hour or 'block'- the easier it is to organise speaking exercises.

Teachers practise speaking skills using various activities, whether or not specifically aimed at the speaking test. Examples are short conversations, games, picture descriptions, drawing a described picture, speech cards, conversations about a book that was read, or about an article, short presentations in front of the class. Some teachers have students talk about personal or social themes, tell about their own experiences or tell the story of another person. Students practise with the teacher, with a native speaker, in pairs or in groups. In the examination years, students in havo and vwo participate in debates. Teachers find it important to select catchy subjects for discussion. One school organises job interviews in English.

6.2 English as working language

Approximately half of the teachers indicate that they almost always speak English in the classroom, although this may vary per year, also depending on the language level of the students. Grammar instruction takes place mainly in Dutch or in a mix of English-Dutch. Two teachers explain grammar in English in their vwo classes. General instructions and classroom language are usually in English, while addressing students' behaviour is done by some teachers in Dutch, by others in English or a mixture of both languages. In the bb and kb classes, one teacher starts with an explanation in Dutch first, then switches to English as working language as often as possible. One teacher consistently uses the target language=working language principle in upper secondary havo and vwo, especially in the last term of the school year. This period will be rounded off by a speaking test (debate in havo 4 and vwo 5). Another teacher indicates that the target language=working language principle should be applied 100% in upper secondary. One teacher at a vmbo, havo and vwo school reports that parents and management obstruct the use of English during class, assuming that students would not be able to

understand the instructions during lessons. Another teacher starts the lesson in English but finds it difficult to keep it up.

According to almost half of the teachers, students speak a lot of Dutch, although this differs per student. Speaking English is difficult to maintain, particularly when they talk among themselves. During oral exercises, students of three of the teachers do speak English with each other. In the case of one teacher, it is necessary that the teacher himself or a trainee be present to prevent students from falling back on Dutch. In the case of teachers where English is 100% the working language, students become accustomed to always speaking in English; some even do so in the corridors. In vmbo, it is more difficult than in havo and vwo to get students to communicate in English.

6.3 Testing speaking skills

Not all teachers grade speaking skills in lower secondary - three of the interviewed teachers do not. Teachers who do grade speaking, do it only once or twice per year. At one school, speaking skills are tested during the 'language village' project in the third form. At another school, students perform a language task: they make a film, a flyer, or organise a guided tour of their village in English.

In upper secondary, speaking skills are tested once to three times per year. In three schools, only the test that counts for the final school examination is graded. Some teachers prefer to give feedback rather than a grade, for example in the form of a pass/not pass.

During a speaking test, students often discuss a current topic, sometimes unprepared, sometimes prepared and written out. Approximately half of the teachers give an unprepared guided conversation assignment, a few teachers (also) engage students in an open conversation. The discussion of a book from the set literature or ''book list'' also occurs regularly in havo and vwo. Two teachers let the students describe pictures or videos; two other teachers ask students to read out texts that the students have selected themselves. A single teacher also tests the speaking proficiency in writing (what do you say when....). In addition to having a conversation, students often have to engage in a talk or a presentation, which they have been allowed to prepare beforehand in most cases.

Teachers often select the discussion topics for the test according to the expected CEFR level. Vmbo students talk about themselves, their living environment and pets, their family and friends, hobbies, holidays. Teachers also often mention school, internship, a job, further education and the students' future plans as discussion topics in vmbo-gt.

In havo and vwo, current affairs and/or socially relevant themes such as nature and the environment, healthcare and politics are popular. In vwo, a single teacher also opts for (popular) scientific themes.

Students prepare their speaking test by reading books, articles and texts at home; they also prepare a presentation at home. An introduction about themselves, or about a self-selected topic is prepared at home, too. At vmbo, students practise conversations together, write a story or read the description of a picture, and then practise them verbally with a classmate or in front of the class. In some cases, they also practise their pronunciation. Some teachers mention speaking English during the lesson as a form of practice for the oral examination.

Most teachers use rubrics to assess speaking skills. Half the teachers indicate that vocabulary and fluency weigh most heavily. In addition, they often use pronunciation and grammar as assessment criteria. Two teachers rate the content of the presentation or the conversation; one teacher rates the overall performance. Three teachers indicate that they use the CEFR criteria. In three of the schools, two examiners, especially when assessing examination classes, carry out the speaking assessment. In three schools, where speaking skills are assessed by one examiner, the students are also recorded. Two teachers also ask students to contribute to the rating of parts of the performance.

6.4 Speaking skills in the curriculum: conditions for effective teaching

In the second part of the group interview, the discussion continued in plenary. Teachers considered the elements that make up a curriculum, visualised in the so-called 'curricular spider web', an educational model developed by Van den Akker (2003) that helps to identify the essential components of a coherent curriculum.
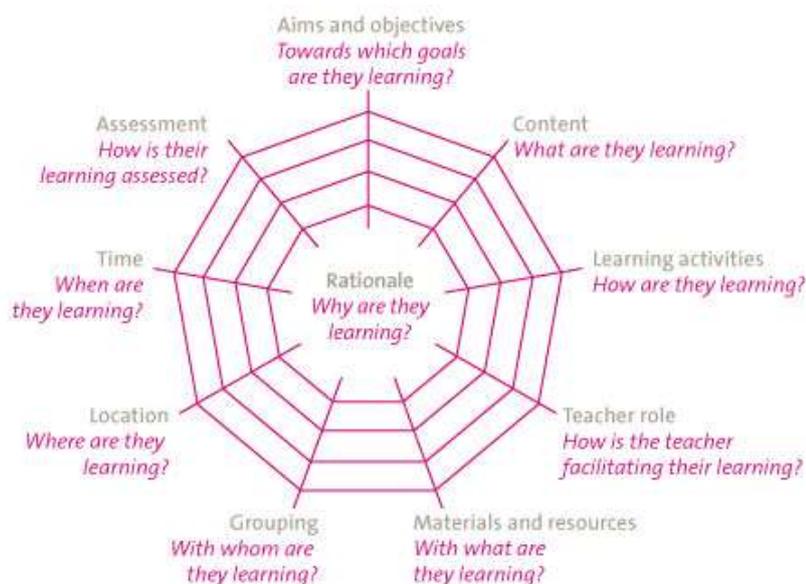
Figure 37. Curricular spider web (Van den Akker, 2003)

In the spider web, the 'rationale' section functions as a central, connecting link; the other parts are connected to the rationale and to each other, creating curricular coherence. The metaphor of the spider web reflects the vulnerable character of a curriculum: somewhat flexible, but too much one-sided attention to one of the components can disrupt the balance in a curriculum.

Rationale

Teachers share a clear common vision regarding the importance of English speaking skills for all levels of secondary education. Being able to communicate orally in English is a must in society, in situations ranging from holidays and informal contacts to further education or work situations. According to one teacher, if you can not speak English, you simply don't belong anymore. Students who want to go on to higher education, but also to secondary vocational education (in Dutch: mbo) must be able to demonstrate their verbal command of English. Not only university studies but also mbo4 programmes are increasingly encouraging their students to undertake an internship abroad. International trade is also relevant for vmbo. If you ever aspire to a managerial position, you should be able to speak English, and that applies to all levels of vmbo.

All participating teachers emphasize communication as the main focus of the learning targets for speaking skills, albeit at different levels of proficiency, depending on the educational stream. All participating teachers accept the CEFR as a usable framework for shaping education from a communicative perspective.

Conditions

Good conditions are essential to realise good education. Teachers list the following as key conditions:

- time to properly practise speaking skills;
- a suitable classroom to practise speaking skills: plenty of room, with digital facilities;
- groups not too large;
- a school management that provides space to experiment with new/innovative materials and activities;
- financial resources for subscriptions, e. g. to *language labs*, etc.;
- time and room for test administration and rating to be carried out by two teachers.

Almost everyone feels that some things are problematical:

- large groups, small classrooms and thin walls;
- lack of time within the lesson programme, for both training and testing;
- lesson cancellations;
- teaching materials not always very appealing to students;
- school management considering speaking skills less important because of the lack of a national speaking test;
- colleagues from other subjects considering the English lessons less important ("you're just chatting, really").

Opportunities and threats

In the last part of the interview, teachers mentioned opportunities and threats for good and effective teaching of English speaking skills in upper secondary education. Below is a summary of their responses.

Aims and objectives

Opportunities:

- achieving communicative, challenging and socially relevant learning objectives;
- the possibility to develop a continuous learning pathway for speaking skills for the entire secondary education system.

Threats:

- too broadly defined learning objectives;
- neglection of individual needs and tailor-made approaches when the emphasis is placed too much on setting the same learning objective for all students.

Learning content

Opportunities:

- focus on communication and the CEFR as a framework to meet the needs in modern society;
- possibility to raise almost any topic for discussion in English, because of the higher proficiency levels for English than for other languages,;
- designing one's own lessons as a challenge.

Threats:

- focus of learning materials on one level is not very appealing to students below and above that level;
- designing one's own lessons can be time-consuming;
- lack of financial resources and time to set up a challenging programme for speaking skills.

Learning activities

Opportunities:
- added value of bringing native speakers in the classroom for guest lessons or workshops;
- variation in teaching methods, also playful, use of so-called 'language villages' in upper secondary, etc. to increase motivation;
- learning outside the classroom made easier by digital media.

Threats:
- (too) much time investment;
- short attention span of vmbo students;
- if students digitally record their talk they can prepare it beforehand and read it up;
- too open speaking assignments not always the best choice.

Teacher role

Opportunities:
- coaching role most effective in enhancing the student's autonomy in developing speaking skills;
- inspiration as a key to the realisation of dynamic learning pathways;
- collaboration with colleagues from other schools is a source of inspiration;
- encouraging students to learn from each other.

Threats:
- lack of inspiration is a limiting factor;
- monitoring learning process more difficult in stimulating student autonomy;
- a tendency to be steering.

Materials and resources

Opportunities:
- accessibility (often free of charge) of usable digital sources that are often of good quality;

Threats:
- collecting teaching resources often takes a lot of time;
- determining the quality of resources by students is a matter of concern;
- a large amount of available resources can sometimes be confusing for students.

Grouping

Opportunities:
- collaboration and interdependence are effective for the improvement of speaking skills;
- activate students, make them move, let them make ''noise'';
- individual feedback facilitated by using digital learning environments, accessible and personalized.

Threats:
- in a turbulent atmosphere during group activities, it is difficult to get a complete overview of what students are doing;
- class is boring and not inspiring, not an authentic environment for speaking skills;
- too much structure can lead to rigidity, at the expense of spontaneous conversations;
- time investment and financial resources necessary for setting up a digital learning environment.

Time

Opportunities:

- having more time enables a more personalised approach and coaching.

Threats:

- lack of time for sufficient speaking skills training due to the emphasis on other skills;
- more time cannot be directly translated into a visible improvement of results, making it difficult to convince the school management about the necessity.

Assessment

Opportunities:

- possibility to gather data about students;
- speaking skills can be tested digitally, this makes testing also possible at different times and in different locations.

Threats:

- *teaching to the test* – while neglecting the rest of the programme;
- disproportionate attention to reading skills;
- objective assessment is difficult to achieve.

6.5 Heartfelt wishes

At the end of the meeting, we asked the teachers to write a note and leave their heart's wish for the development of speaking skills in the curriculum of English as a school subject.

The wishes we received were all very valuable and often very similar. We want to conclude this chapter by mentioning them all below. The message is clear and needs no additional commenting.

My heart's wish about English speaking skills in the curriculum is…
Pay more attention to the importance of speaking skills in the school policy; even the school management should embrace it.
Pay attention to speaking skills from day 1 and year 1, in as spontaneous a manner as possible, removing any barriers to speaking (especially grammar).
Let speaking skills become more important part of the final examination than it is now.
Use the target language as the working language in the classroom!
Make speaking skills a *priority* ☺.
Make speaking skills an important part of the final examination. The current final exam is too focused on reading and writing skills.
Make speaking skills part of the national examination ☺ . Make the exam challenging for teachers and students.
Ensure equal weight of all skills in the final exam.
Focus on the growth of the students, and try not to generalise levels.
Let the speaking skills be AT LEAST as important as the other skills, even though there is no national speaking exam. Speaking skills are one of the first forms of communication for students, so there should be just as much emphasis, time and room for this as for the national examination.
Let school management and the National Institute for Educational Measurement (Cito) take speaking skills seriously so that more money and space in the curriculum become available. The students are already serious about their speaking skills!

7. Conclusions and possibilities for further studies

The test results, student surveys and teacher interviews enable us to answer our research questions. This input has also led to a number of recommendations for possible interventions and follow-up research.

7.1 The students'performance level

The main question of this research study was:

1. To which extent are the CEFR target levels for speaking English truly achieved at the end of the vmbo, havo and vwo?

As a reminder, the following target levels have been laid down for English speaking skills:

vmbo bb	A2
vmbo kb	A2
vmbo gtl	A2
havo	B1+
vwo	B2

When evaluating the results of the testing, as described in chapter 4, we follow the line of the previously conducted study on the final level of writing skills in havo and vwo (Fasoglio et al., 2014), and we assume that 75% of the students should achieve the target level. We have derived this standard from the one used by the Expert Group Learning Continuity Pathways for Language (2008) as a standard indication of the fundamental quality of education. Target levels for modern foreign languages indicate realistically attainable final levels for average students under good teaching conditions. If we apply the 75% standard to the results of our study, the following can be concluded:

In vmbo-bb, 62.1% attain A2 or higher; the target level A2 is therefore achieved by less than 75% of the students.
In vmbo-kb, 77.5% attain A2 or higher; this allows us to conclude that the target level A2 is achieved.
In vmbo-gt, 92.6% attain A2 or higher; 70.5% of this group attain B1 or higher. The achievable performance level for this group seems, therefore, to be higher than the target level, and moving more towards B1.
In havo, virtually the entire research group (97.1%) achieves B1 or higher. Of these, 79.1% attains B2 or higher. This means that B2 is an attainable level for havo students.
In vwo, 93.3% attains B2 or higher, of which 48.6% performed at C-level, greatly exceeding the target level.
In short: all educational streams achieve the target level for speaking skills, except for vmbo-bb. Based on the 75% standard, the following picture emerges:

Table 21: *Target levels versus attained levels*

	Current target level	Level achieved in practice
vmbo bb	A2	A1
vmbo kb	A2	A2
vmbo gt	A2	A2/B1
havo	B1+	B2
vwo	B2	B2/C1

The students' gender and L1 do not appear to have any influence on the achieved results. Nor can we make any statements about differences in levels between the regions of the Netherlands among the national population of students.

7.2 Practising and testing speaking skills
The second research question related to the speaking skills training in secondary education, and was:

2. *How is speaking English practised in the schools attended by the students that are participating in this research study?*

We have consulted both students and teachers in order to gather information about this topic. The results have been discussed in detail in chapters 5 and 6. Some noticeable aspects:

From the results of the student survey
   a) According to the students' answers, there are major differences between teachers within the same educational stream when applying the target language=working language principle. Teachers who teach English at havo and vwo speak the target language more often than vmbo teachers do.
   b) According to the students' answers, conversation topics relating to daily or social life, education or work are less frequently discussed at vmbo than at havo and vwo. Where the survey leaves room for open answers, several vmbo students indicated that 'just the exercises of the course book' are discussed. We do not know whether these relate to communicative topics that are relevant to levels A1, A2 and B1.
   c) An overwhelming majority of havo and vwo students had already had a speaking test before, while less than half of the vmbo students had had it. This could explain why vmbo students found the test more difficult than havo and vwo students did. Generally speaking, it does not seem that speaking skills - be it at vwo, havo or vmbo level - are frequently tested.
   d) Havo and vwo students often have to give a presentation during a speaking test, whereas vmbo students do not.
   e) Havo and vwo students are more likely to discuss a book during speaking tests than vmbo students.
   f) Havo and vwo teachers speak English more often than vmbo teachers do during the examination of speaking skills. English teachers in vmbo bb and kb, in particular, tend to use the target language less often.

From the teacher interviews

The results of the teacher interviews show a varied picture of how speaking skills are practised in upper secondary education.

a) All teachers devote time and attention to it, but with different frequencies. In general, they systematically plan the training of speaking skills in the curriculum. The focus on this skill becomes more intensive as the English exam approaches. A number of teachers have stressed the importance of the implicit exercising of speaking skills in each lesson, through short exercises and the use of English as a working language.

b) The application of the target language=working language principle occurs in varying degrees; some teachers consistently use it (around 80% to even 100% of the time) in upper secondary, while the majority does not. The most cited factors that limit the use of English as a working language are:

- educational stream: in havo and vwo, English is more often the working language in the classroom than in vmbo;
- topics of conversation: for example, grammar is often explained in Dutch, or in a mix of Dutch and English;
- the students' attitude: students respond in Dutch, or use Dutch during group activities when there is no supervision;
- school culture: the school management and parents are afraid that students will not understand the instructions if they are given in English.

These factors illustrate the results of the survey: between 20% (vwo) and 48.4% (vmbo-kb) of the students indicate that they never try to speak only English in class. 10% of vwo students try to always speak English; this percentage is lower in the other educational streams.

The third research question was:

3. *Is there a relation between the selection of materials, learning activities and testing methods, and the achieved language levels?*

Testing speaking skills

There seems to be a relation between the difficulty of the test experienced by students and the frequency and form with which a student has been tested before. Vmbo students found the test more difficult than havo and vwo students did; for a larger number of vmbo students, it was the first time that they had taken a speaking test. They are also less accustomed to the examiner only speaking English during the test.

Target language = working language

A comparison between the test results and the results of the student survey shows that vmbo-gt and vwo students who achieve higher scores more frequently indicate that their teacher often or always speaks English in class.

European research shows that the Netherlands is lagging behind in Europe when it comes to the use of the target language in language teaching classes (Kordes & Gille, 2012). The teacher interviews of this study show that the use of the target language in the lesson is not self-evident: students respond in Dutch, the teacher is afraid that students will not understand enough, and the school culture sometimes does not promote it. However, there are some successful examples. For instance, at one of the participating schools, there was a positive correlation between the (above-average) performance level of the students in speaking skills and the consistent use of the target language both inside and outside the classroom.

Speaking skills in class

The survey shows that especially students who were placed below the target level find that they do not practise enough. In the interview, teachers advocate structural attention for speaking skills in the classroom, not only in the weeks prior to a speaking test, but also informally during each class and by using English in the interaction with the students.

Clarifying learning goals and success criteria

Students with lower performance levels have indicated that they do not really know what to do in order to get a pass score. It is important to discuss and clarify the learning goals and success criteria with students in advance, preferably illustrated by concrete examples, helping students become aware of what requirements they have to meet

7.3 Limitations of this research study

Due to practical limitations, it was not possible to focus on an in-depth analysis of the implementation of the English speaking skills curriculum in Dutch secondary education in all its components. The conclusions from the results of the student survey and the teacher interviews should be seen as indicative. As mentioned earlier (see chapter 5), some questions in the survey led to misinterpretations, either because of the formulation of the question or because of the difficulty of the language used for some students. This may have affected the validity of some survey results.

The geographical distribution of the sample group does not make it possible to generalize any differences in performance levels between the different provinces of the Netherlands. No significant geographical variations are to be expected, though, and any differences may be attributed to the teaching approach. However, a study into variables at the school level was no part of the objective of this study.

7.4 Opportunities for follow-up

Deepening understanding

In a next step, relationships between student performance and the approach to teaching and learning could be studied: can we explain student performances above the target level through certain policy and methodological choices (e.g. target language=working language, a strong communicative approach, use of formative assessment, personalised learning pathways, etc.)? School portraits, with extensive student and teacher interviews and possibly lesson observations, could provide insight into potential influential factors. The relevance of 'out-of-school' learning should also be taken into account.

Attainable level for bb students

In this study, vmbo-bb is the only study group performing below the target level (A2). Further research could look into possible causal relations with certain educational aspects or group characteristics. This should make it possible to determine whether some interventions can increase the average performance level, or whether the target level set is too ambitious.

Customised teaching

The results of the speaking test show a broad variety of achieved CEFR levels in all study groups. In vmbo, this variation is greater than in havo and vwo. This supports the call for tailored teaching, both to support lower performing students and to offer enough challenges to excellent students. The interviewed teachers expressed their concern about an excessive emphasis on setting the same learning goal for all students, which is stimulated by a mandatory level of attainment. Experiments with personalised learning tracks could help relieve this worry.

Responding to the level of the students

Approximately 70% of the vmbo-gt students achieve at least B1. These students could be offered more challenging assignments that are suitable at this level, such as conversation topics about current affairs, work and education. 30% of the vmbo-gt students have indicated never to discuss the news; 46% never speak about social themes; 42% never talk about work situations. Havo students can be expected to be able to talk about socially relevant topics (e.g. euthanasia, the environment, etc.) at B2 level, at least if they practise on a regular basis.

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http://www.ef.nl/epi
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http://handreikingschoolexamen.slo.nl/engels-vmbo
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Appendices

Appendix 1 Student questionnaire

1. Introduction

Dear student,

We would like to know what you think about the oral English test, and what you do in class to learn to speak English. By answering the questions in this questionnaire, you can contribute to the improvement of learning English at school.

Completing the questionnaire takes approximately 10 minutes.

We also need some personal information to link to the test results. Your answers to the survey questions will be processed anonymously.

Thank you for your cooperation!

2. Questions about yourself

Note: The questions marked with a red * are compulsory.
Used the 'Next' and 'Previous' buttons at the bottom of the page to adjust your answers.

* 1. First name

* 2. Family name

* 3. I am a …
❐ boy
❐ girl

* 4. My age is …
❐ 15
❐ 16
❐ 17
❐ 18
❐ 19

* 5. About my school

Name school
City/town

* 6. I am attending …
- ❒ vmbo-bb
- ❒ vmbo-kb
- ❒ vmbo-gtl
- ❒ havo
- ❒ vwo

* 7. My mother tongue is:
- ❒ Dutch
- ❒ Other, i.e.:

* 8. My mother/female guardian's mother tongue is:
- ❒ Dutch
- ❒ Other, i.e.:

* 9. My father/male guardian's mother tongue is:
- ❒ Dutch
- ❒ Other, i.e.:

10. What is the level of education of your mother/female guardian?
- ❒ no secondary education
- ❒ vmbo, havo or vwo
- ❒ mbo
- ❒ hbo
- ❒ university

11. What is the level of education of your father/male guardian?
- ❒ no secondary education
- ❒
- ❒ university

3. Questions about the test

* 12. You took a speaking English test under the supervision of two examiners from Cambridge
English. What do you think of the test?
- ❒ easy
- ❒ relatively easy
- ❒ a bit difficult
- ❒ difficult

* 13. Have you ever had an English speaking test at school before?
- ❒ yes
- ❒ no

4. The speaking test

* 14. Approximately how many times have you had a speaking test before?

Speaking tests in year 4:

Speaking tests in year 5:

Speaking tests in year 6:

* 15. Did today's test resemble any previous English tests?

❒ not at all
❒ a bit
❒ rather
❒ yes!

* 16. Did you do the following things also during the English speaking tests that are taken at your school?

	never	sometimes	often	in every test
- I did not have to prepare anything in advance.	❒	❒	❒	❒
- I didn't know in advance what I would be talking about.	❒	❒	❒	❒
- The test took fifteen minutes.	❒	❒	❒	❒
- The teachers who administered the test spoke only English.	❒	❒	❒	❒
- They showed me pictures, and I had to talk about them.	❒	❒	❒	❒
- I had to have a conversation with a classmate.	❒	❒	❒	❒
- I had to tell something/present something (monologue).	❒	❒	❒	❒

* 17. How is English speaking tested at your school?

	never	sometimes	often	in every test
- A discussion about a current topic	❒	❒	❒	❒
- A conversation with a teacher or classmate	❒	❒	❒	❒
- A presentation/talk	❒	❒	❒	❒
- A book discussion	❒	❒	❒	❒
- A discussion on a movie	❒	❒	❒	❒
- The description of short video clips	❒	❒	❒	❒
- Reading a text	❒	❒	❒	❒
- Playing a self-written conversation with someone else	❒	❒	❒	❒

- Other, i.e.:

* 18. How do you prepare for an oral English test?

	never	sometimes	often	always
- I have to practise a conversation at home.	❏	❏	❏	❏
- I have to prepare a presentation at home.	❏	❏	❏	❏
- I get ten minutes before the test starts to prepare.	❏	❏	❏	❏
- I know in advance which questions will be asked, and I prepare those.	❏	❏	❏	❏

- Other, i.e.:

5. Speaking skills training

* 19. What do you do in class to practise your English speaking skills?

	never	sometimes	often	very often
- The teacher speaks English in class.	❏	❏	❏	❏
- I try to speak only English in class.	❏	❏	❏	❏
- I deliver presentations in English.	❏	❏	❏	❏
- I record conversations and the teacher provides feedback.	❏	❏	❏	❏
- I perform short speaking exercises with a classmate or in groups.	❏	❏	❏	❏
- I perform speaking assignments in English where I must solve a problem in a particular situation, get something done…..	❏	❏	❏	❏

- Other, i.e.:

* 20. When you speak English in class, do you discuss…

	never	sometimes	often	very often
- everyday life (family, friends, hobbies, daily occupations)	❏	❏	❏	❏
- social life (contacts in public space, offices, shops, restaurants and cafes, public transport, etc.)	❏	❏	❏	❏
- topical issues (the news)	❏	❏	❏	❏
- social issues	❏	❏	❏	❏
- job-related contexts (holiday or part-time job, future employment or similar)	❏	❏	❏	❏
- school (school subjects, future education, internship)	❏	❏	❏	❏

- Other, i.e.:

* 21. What do you use to practise your English speaking skills?

	never	sometimes	often	very often
- The exercises in the course book	❏	❏	❏	❏
- Extra assignments that are not taken from the course book	❏	❏	❏	❏
- Videos on the internet	❏	❏	❏	❏
- Texts on the internet	❏	❏	❏	❏
- Music	❏	❏	❏	❏
- Chat sessions with students abroad	❏	❏	❏	❏
- Exchange projects with a school abroad	❏	❏	❏	❏

- Other, i.e.:

* 22. What makes it difficult to learn to speak English properly?

	plays no role	a bit difficult	quite difficult	very difficult
I think we do not practise enough.	❒	❒	❒	❒
I think I do not speak enough English in class.	❒	❒	❒	❒
I think there are too many students in the classroom.	❒	❒	❒	❒
I think speaking skills do not count enough for the final mark.	❒	❒	❒	❒
I am afraid to speak English during class.	❒	❒	❒	❒
I do not have enough opportunities to speak English out of school.	❒	❒	❒	❒
I find speaking more difficult than reading or listening.	❒	❒	❒	❒
I do not like speaking.	❒	❒	❒	❒
I do not think speaking is important.	❒	❒	❒	❒
I think speaking skills are not tested enough.	❒	❒	❒	❒
I do not know how the teacher rates speaking skills.	❒	❒	❒	❒
I do not know how well I have to be able to speak English to get a passing mark.	❒	❒	❒	❒

Appendix 2 Teacher interview guidelines

PART 1

1. How often do you <u>train</u> your upper secondary students in English speaking skills?
   And how do you train lower secondary students (if you teach lower secondary students)?

2. How do you do this? Please, name elements such as learning activities, learning materials, time, work formats.

3. On average, how often and during which activities do you speak English in class? And how often do your students speak English in class? For instance:
Teacher:	*general instruction / classroom language*
	grammar explanation
	addressing students about their behaviour
Student:	*responding to teacher's questions*
	asking questions to the teacher
	talking among themselves during group activities

4. How often do you <u>test</u> English speaking skills in secondary education?
   Are speaking skills also tested in lower secondary? If so, how often?

5. Take a look at the list of test forms. Which ones do you use? How do you organise the speaking testing?

6. Which topics are discussed during a speaking test?

7. How should your students prepare for a speaking test?

8. How do you rate speaking skills?

		test forms	
1	discussion on a current topic	unprepared	
		ten minutes' preparation before assessment	
		preparation at home	
		preparation at home – written out	
2	guided conversation	unprepared	
		ten minutes' preparation before assessment	
		preparation at home	
		preparation at home – written out	
		with the aid of pictures	
		with a short description of the situation and of what students should achieve	
		with description of each turn in the conversation (e.g. ask if you may switch on the tv / react on proposal expressing surprise etc.)	
3	open conversation	unprepared	
4	speaking engagement (monologue, presentation)	unprepared	
		ten minutes' preparation before assessment	
		preparation at home	
		preparation at home – written out	
5	conversation on a book from the reading list		
6	tell about the content of …	a written text	
		an oral text	
7	describe pictures or film clips		
8	test oral interaction skills in a written form (write out dialogue, 'how would you say that…')		
9	language portfolio		
10	language task		
11	read out loud a text written in advance by the student		
12	read up a text selected by the teacher		
13	play a self-written dialogue with a fellow student		
14	speaking test	with one candidate at a time	
		with two candidates simultaneously	
		with several candidates simultaneously	

PART 2

1. Which conditions (at school and at national level) do you think are important for quality <u>training</u> of speaking skills?

2. Which conditions (at school and at national level) do you consider important for quality <u>assessment</u> of speaking skills?

3. Are there any factors that make it difficult for you to train speaking skills?

4. Are there any factors that make it difficult for you to assess and rate speaking skills?

Appendix 3 Student survey results

Vmbo-bb (n=227)

The speaking test

Table 1: *BB-Difficulty of the test*

What do you think of the test? (n=227)	
	%
easy	14.9
rather easy	28.9
a bit difficult	42.1
difficult	14.0

Table 2: *BB-Comparison with testing at school I*

Have you ever had an English speaking test at school? (n=227)	
	%
yes	45.2
no	54.8

.

Table 3*: BB-Comparison with testing at school II*

Did today's test resemble any previous English tests? (n=103)	
	%
not at all	36.9
a bit	46.6
rather	15.5
yes!	1.0

.

Table 4: *BB-Comparison with testing at school III*

| Did you do the following things during the English speaking tests that were taken at your school? (n=103)	never %	sometimes %	often %	in every test %
I did not have to prepare anything in advance.	35.0	41.7	15.5	7.8
I didn't know in advance what I would be talking about.	33.0	33.0	27.2	6.8
The test took fifteen minutes.	10.7	50.5	32.0	6.8
The teachers who administered the test spoke only English.	12.6	21.4	31.1	35.0
I was shown pictures and was asked to talk about these.	29.1	26.2	33.0	11.7
I had to conduct a conversation.	2.9	22.3	38.8	35.9
I had to tell/present something (monologue).	17.5	44.7	24.3	13.6
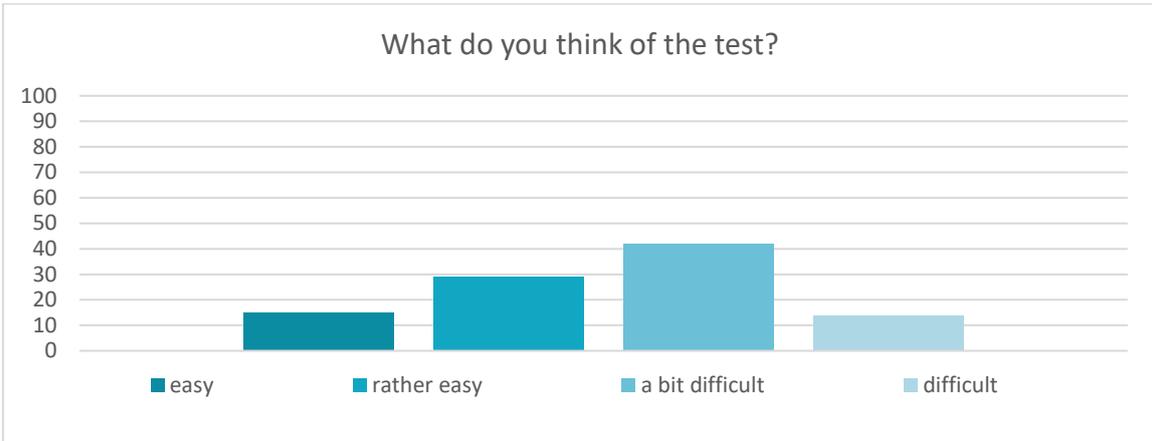
Figure 1: BB-Difficulty of the test
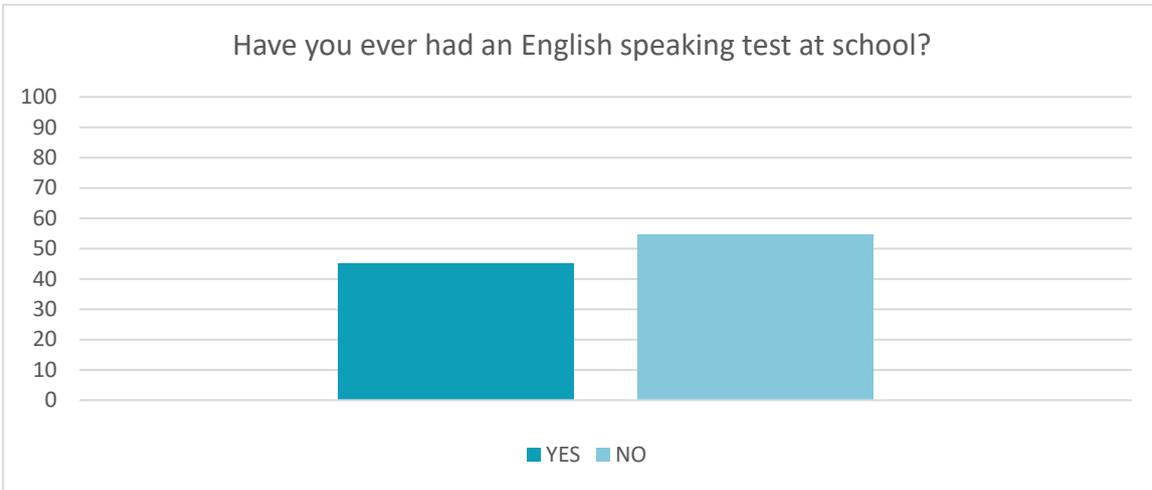
*Figure 2:* BB-Comparison with testing at school I
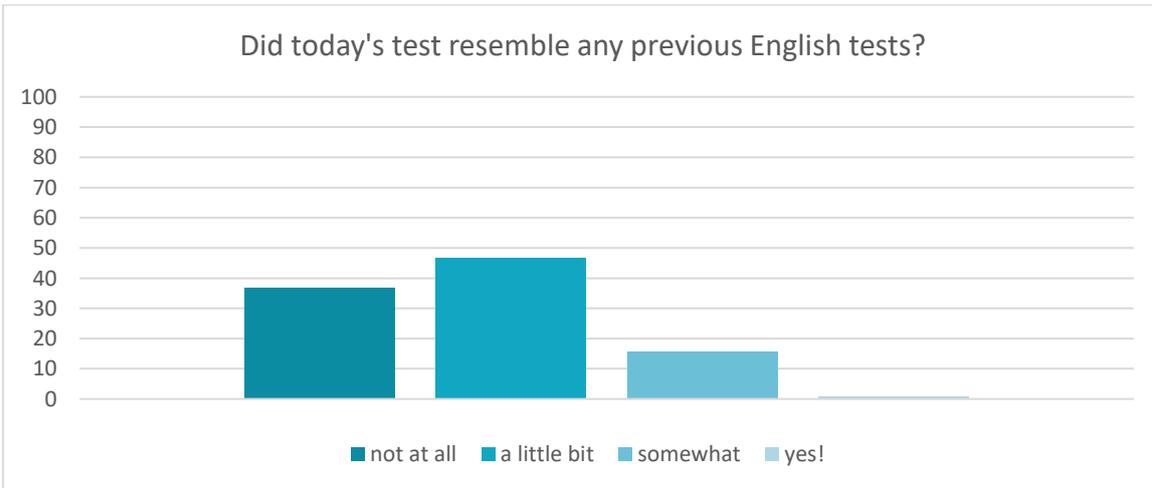
*Figure 3*: BB-Comparison with testing at school II
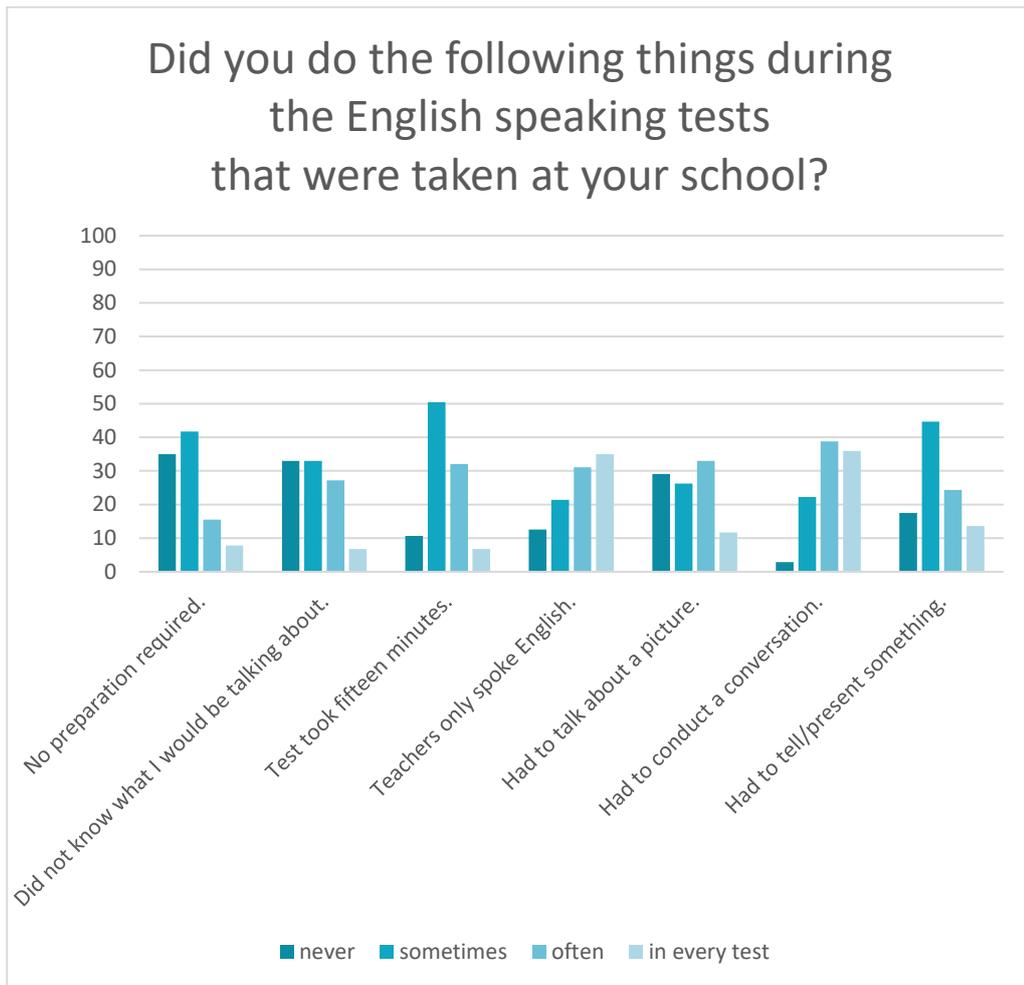
Figure 4: BB-Comparison with testing at school III

Speaking tests at school

Table 5: BB-Frequency speaking test year 4

How many times, approximately, have you had a speaking test in year 4? (n=103)	
	%
No test yet	8.7
Once	49.5
Twice	27.2
Three times	9.7
More than three times	4.8

Table 6: *BB-Testing speaking skills*

How is English speaking tested at your school? (n=103)				
	never %	sometimes %	often %	at every test %
A discussion about a current topic.	33.0	44.7	17.5	4.9
A discussion with the teacher or a classmate.	3.9	36.9	50.5	8.7
A talk/presentation.	29.1	48.5	20.4	1.9
A book discussion.	40.8	37.9	18.4	2.9
A discussion on a movie.	39.8	31.1	24.3	4.9
Describing short video clips.	24.3	40.8	33.0	1.9
Reading a text.	13.6	31.1	50.5	4.9
Conducting a self-written conversation with a classmate.	29.1	45.6	22.3	2.9

Table 7: *BB-Preparation speaking test*

How do you prepare for an English speaking test? (n=103)				
	never %	sometimes %	often %	at every test %
I have to practise the conversation at home.	63.1	23.3	7.8	5.8
I have to prepare a presentation at home.	49.5	30.1	13.6	6.8
I get ten minutes before the test to prepare.	42.7	32.0	15.5	9.7
I know in advance which questions will be asked, and I prepare those.	53.4	35.9	8.7	1.9
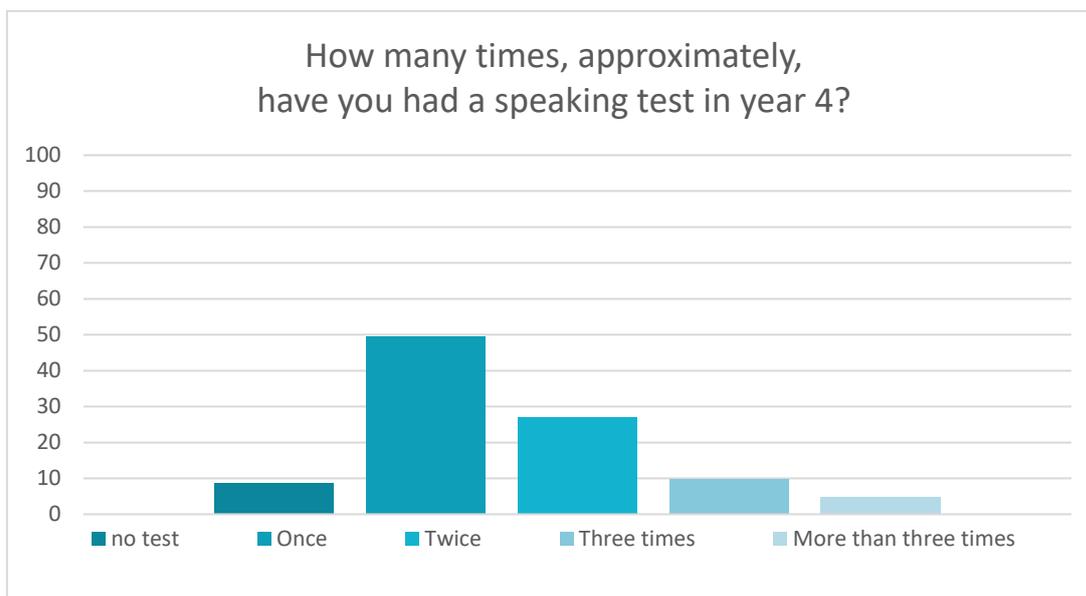
Figure 5: BB-Frequency speaking test year 4
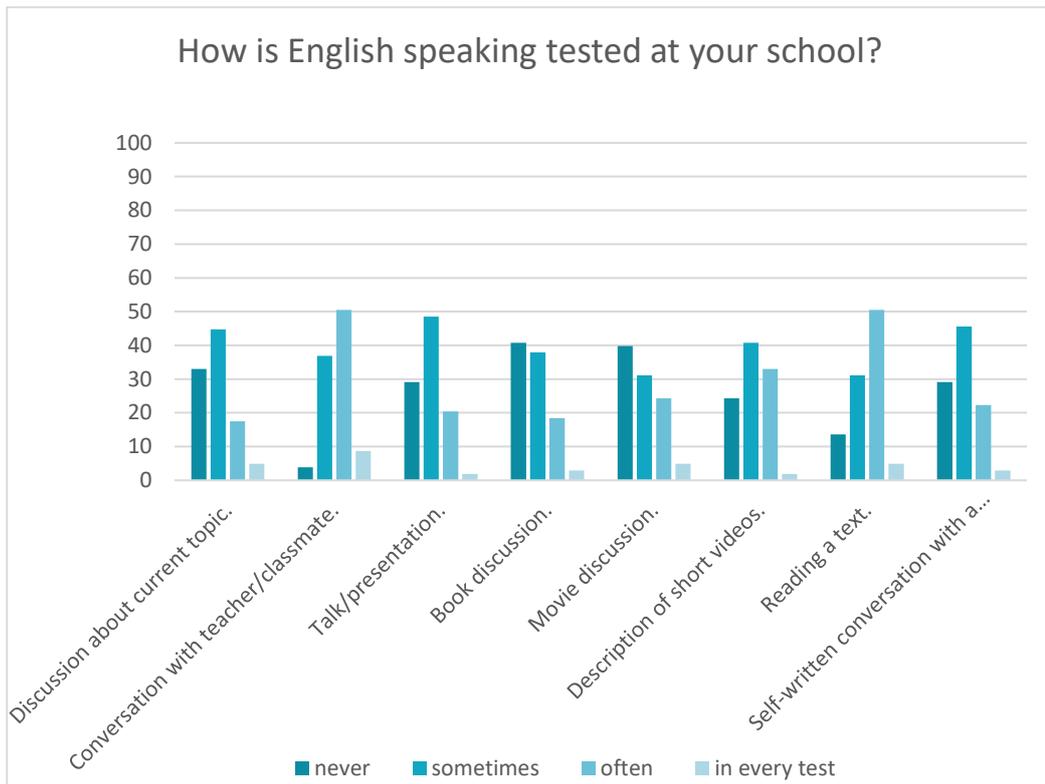
*Figure 6:* BB-Testing speaking skills
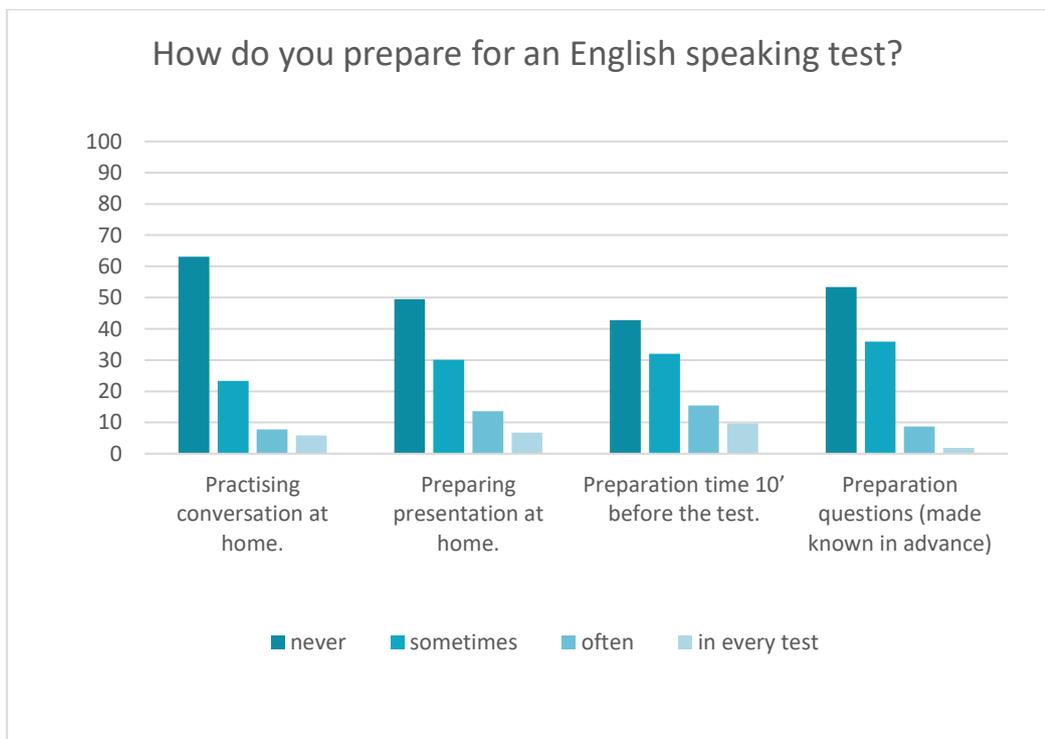
Figure 7: BB-Preparation speaking test

Speaking skills training

Table 8: *BB-Speaking skills training in class*

What do you do in class to practise your English speaking skills? (n=227)				
	never %	sometimes %	often %	always %
The teacher speaks English during the lesson.	11.4	34.2	32.9	21.5
I try to speak only English during the lesson.	46.9	38.6	8.3	6.1
I give presentations in English.	53.5	32.9	7.5	6.1
I record short conversations, and the teacher gives feedback.	59.6	28.5	8.8	3.1
I carry out short speaking assignments with a classmate or in groups.	34.6	46.9	15.4	3.1
I carry out conversation assignments in English, trying to solve a problem or getting something done in a certain situation.	50.4	36.4	10.1	3.1

Table 9: BB-*Topics of conversation in class*

When you speak English in class, do you discuss… (n=227)				
	never %	sometimes %	often %	very often %
Everyday topics (about yourself, your family, friends and acquaintances, computer games, hobbies, spare time; over personal topics, etc.)	21.1	47.4	24.1	7.5
Public life (conversations at information desks, in shops, in a restaurant or bar, public transport, talking to businesses, public organisations, etc.)	31.6	50.4	14.9	3.1
Current affairs (the news)	32.0	42.5	19.7	5.7
Social themes (e.g.: hooliganism, euthanasia, racism, etc.)	52.2	33.8	12.3	1.8
Job-related situations (weekend job, future job, etc.)	28.5	49.6	17.1	4.8
Education (school subjects, future education, internship)	28.9	46.1	20.2	4.8

Table 10: *BB-Learning activities*

What do you use to practise your English speaking skills? (n=227)				
	never %	sometimes %	often %	very often %
Exercises in course book.	11.0	45.2	37.7	6.1
Extra assignments that are not included in the course book.	18.4	50.9	26.3	4.4
Videos on the internet.	17.1	37.3	33.3	12.3
Texts on the internet.	25.4	39.5	26.3	8.8
Music.	43.9	31.1	14.0	11.0
Chat sessions with students abroad.	77.6	14.9	5.3	2.2
Exchange with a foreign school.	82.0	15.4	2.2	0.4

Table 11: *BB-Barriers for speaking*

| What makes it difficult to learn to speak English properly? (n=227)				
	plays no role %	a bit difficult %	rather difficult %	very difficult %
I think I don't practise enough.	46.1	38.2	10.1	5.7
I think I don't speak enough English in class.	43.4	32.0	18.4	6.1
I think there are too many students in the classroom.	69.3	18.9	7.5	4.4
I think speaking skills do not count enough for the final mark.	57.5	25.9	13.2	3.5
I am afraid to speak English during class.	63.6	23.2	9.6	3.5
I do not have enough opportunities to speak English out of school.	62.3	21.1	9.6	7.0
I find speaking more difficult than reading or listening.	43.4	32.9	15.8	7.9
I do not like speaking.	63.2	18.9	13.2	4.8
I do not think speaking is important.	64.5	21.5	10.5	3.5
I think speaking is not tested enough.	44.7	30.7	16.2	8.3
I do not know how the teacher rates speaking skills.	45.2	37.7	14.0	3.1
I don't know how well I need to speak English in order to score a passing mark.	44.7	36.0	14.5	4.8
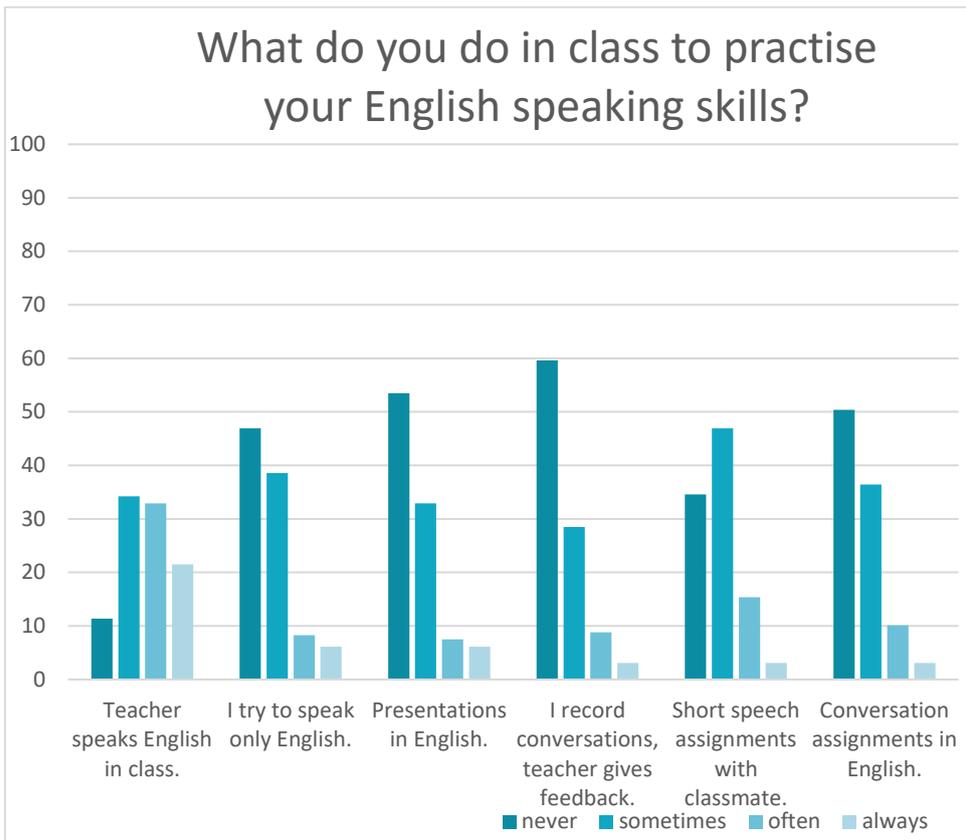
*Figure 8:* BB-Speaking skills training in class
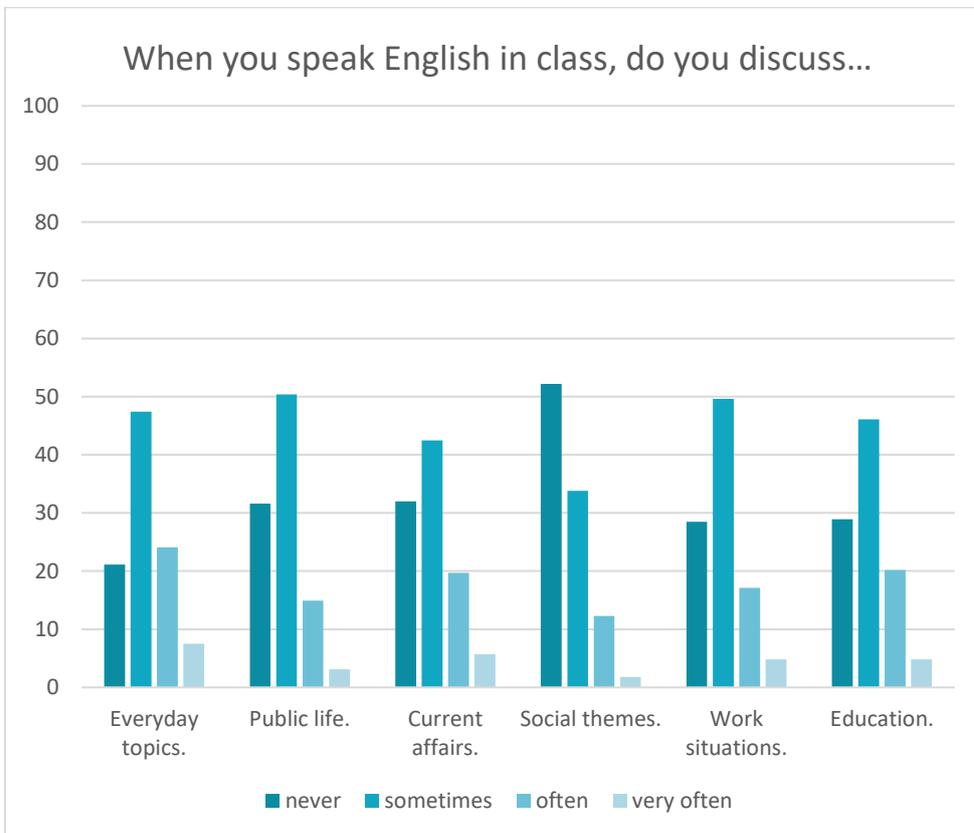
Figure 9: BB-Topics of conversation in class
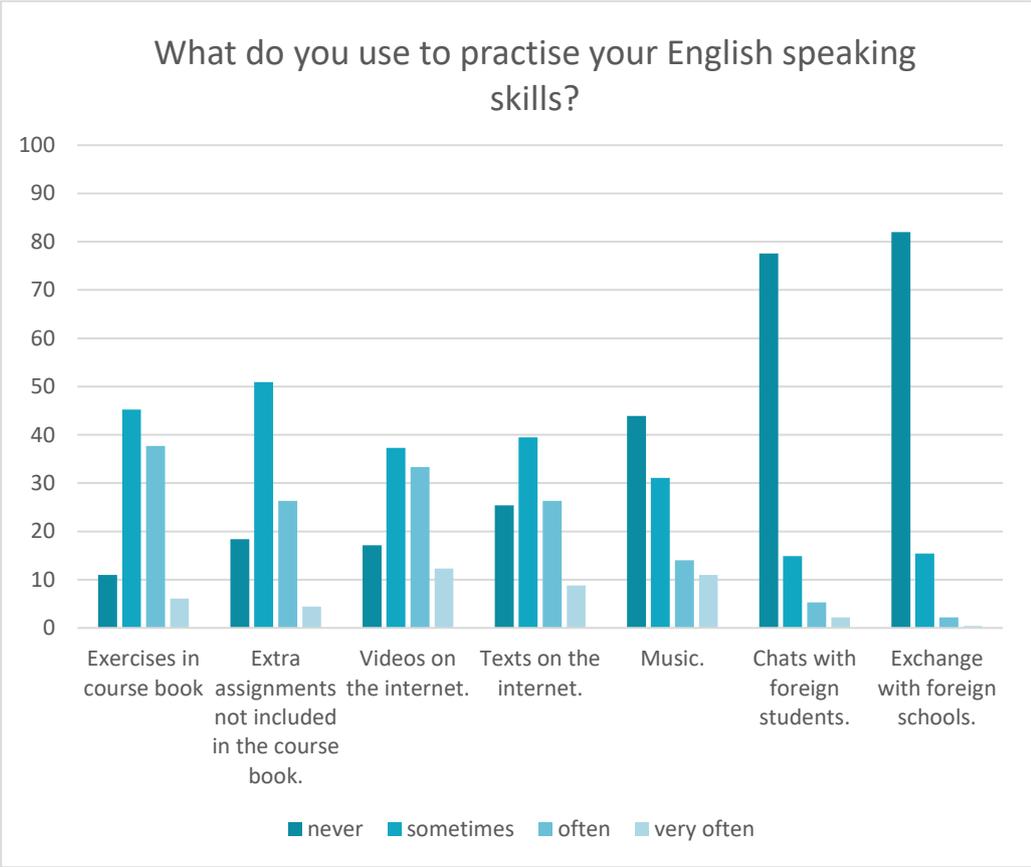
*Figure 10:* BB-Learning activities
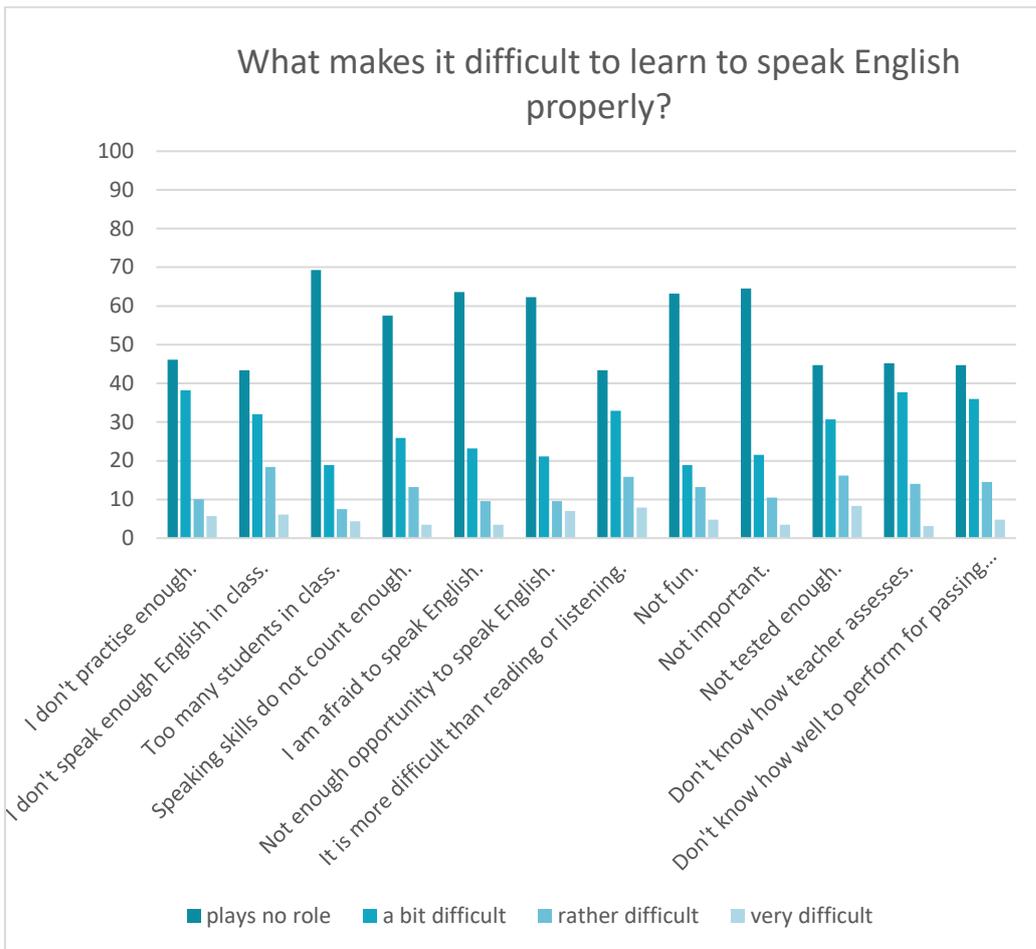
Figure 11: BB-Barriers for speaking

Vmbo-kb (n=275)

The speaking test

Table 12: KB-*Difficulty of the test*

What do you think of the test? (n=275)	
	%
easy	13.5
rather easy	33.5
a bit difficult	41.5
difficult	11.6

Table 13: *KB-Comparison with testing at school I*

Have you ever had an English speaking test at school? (n=275)	
	%
yes	44
no	56

Table 14: *KB-Comparison with testing at school II*

Did today's test resemble any previous English tests? (n=121)	
	%
not at all	37.2
a bit	46.3
rather	13.2
yes!	3.3

Table 15*: KB-Comparison with testing at school II*

Did you also do the following things during the English speaking tests that were taken at your school? (n=121)				
	never %	sometimes %	often %	in every test %
I did not have to prepare anything in advance.	28.9	38.8	17.4	14.9
I didn't know in advance what I would be talking about.	33.9	38.0	19.0	9.1
The test took fifteen minutes.	20.7	43.8	28.1	7.4
The teachers who administered the test spoke only English.	24.8	24.0	23.1	28.1
I was shown pictures and was asked to talk about these.	48.8	27.3	15.7	8.3
I had to conduct a conversation with another student.	5.8	19.8	33.9	40.5
I had to tell/present something (monologue).	15.7	33.9	28.1	22.3
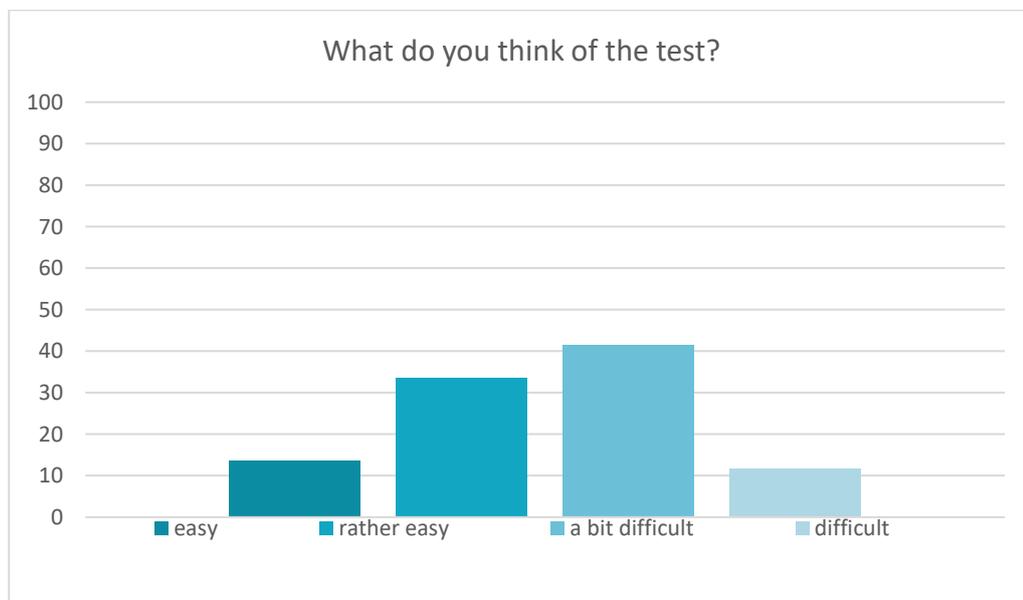
Figure 12: KB-Difficulty of the test
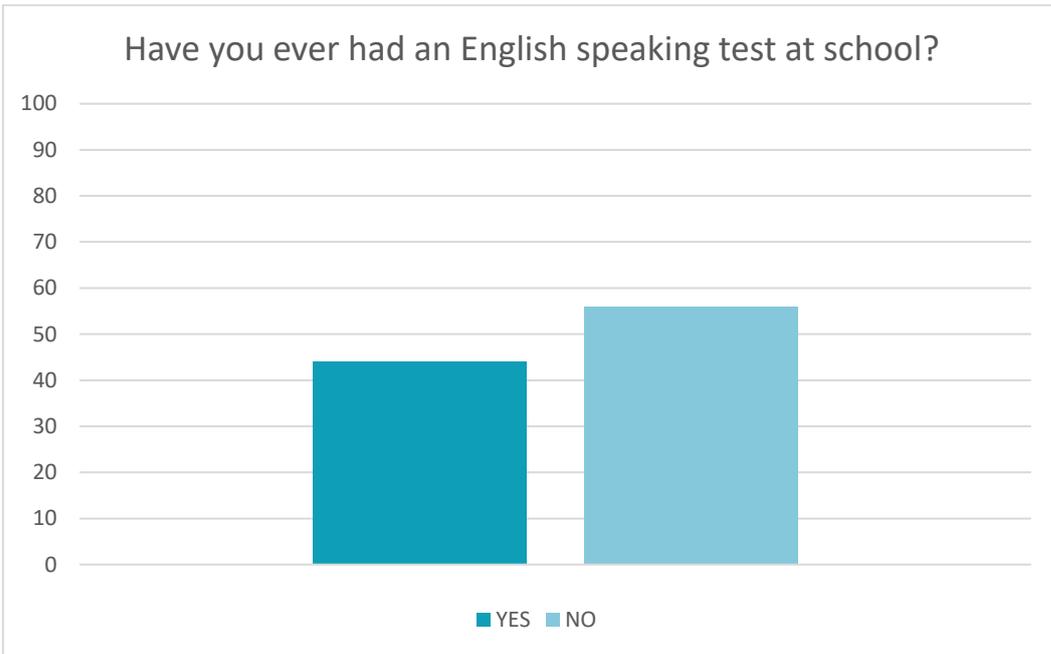
*Figure 13:* KB-Comparison with testing at school I
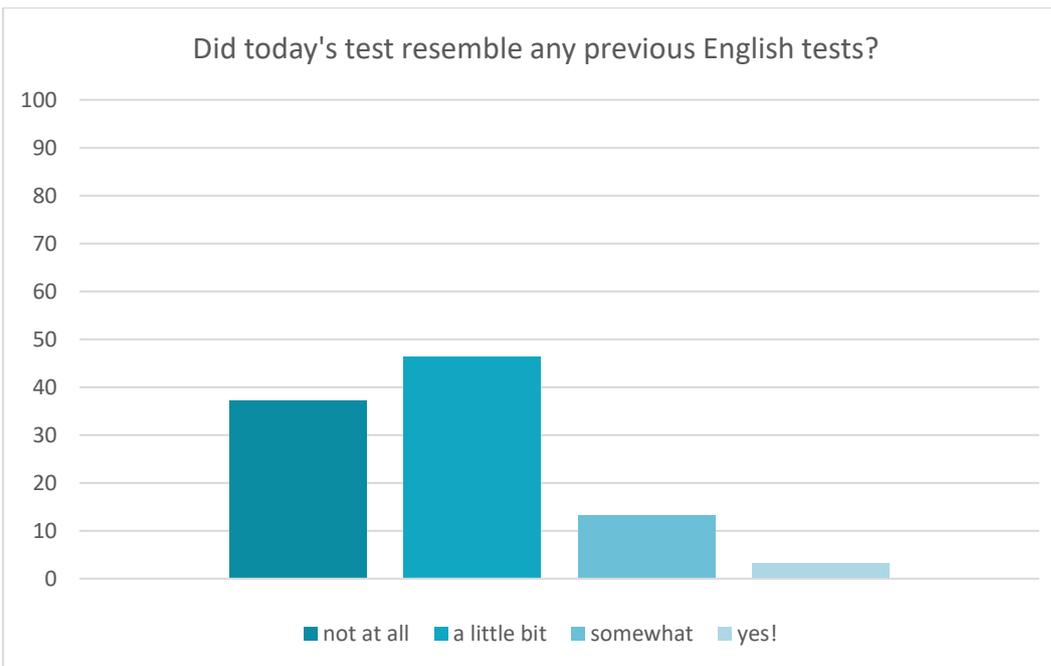
*Figure 14:* KB-Comparison with testing at school II
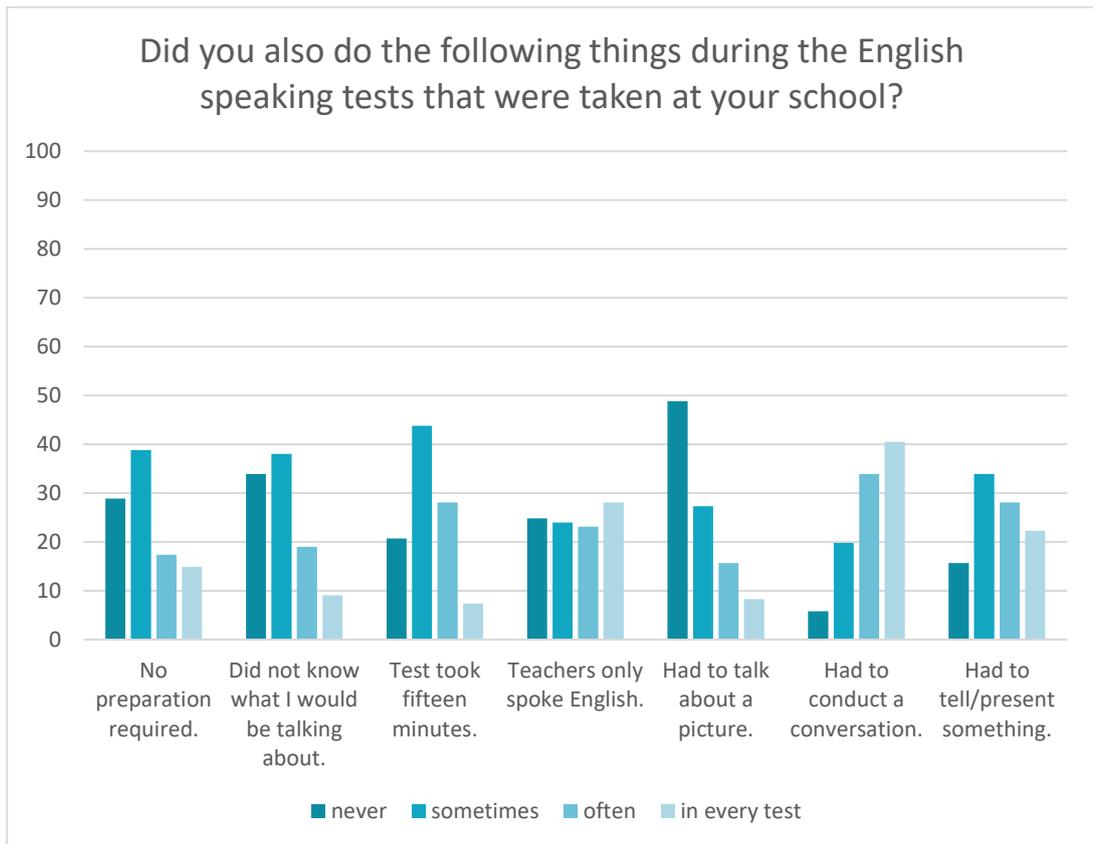
Figure 15: KB-Comparison with testing at school III

Speaking tests at school

Table 16: *KB-Frequency speaking test year 4*

How many times, approximately, have you had a speaking test in year 4? (n=121)	
	%
no test yet	14.0
Once	55.4
Two times	23.1
Three times	4.1
More than three times	3.3

Table 17: *KB-Testing speaking skills*

How is English speaking tested at your school? (n=121)				
	never %	sometimes %	often %	at every test %
A discussion about a current topic.	38.8	42.1	18.2	0.8
A discussion with the teacher or a classmate.	5.8	33.9	47.1	13.2
A talk/presentation.	40.5	25.6	33.9	0.0
A book discussion.	54.5	26.4	18.2	0.8
A discussion on a movie.	42.1	35.5	21.5	0.8
Describing short videos.	35.5	35.5	27.3	1.7
Reading a text.	12.4	35.5	44.6	7.4
Conducting a self-written conversation with a classmate.	32.2	38.8	24.8	4.1

Table 18: *KB-Preparation speaking test*

| How do you prepare for an English speaking test? (n=121)				
	never %	sometimes %	often %	at every test %
I have to practise the conversation at home.	49.6	22.3	19.8	8.3
I have to prepare a presentation at home.	47.9	26.4	22.3	3.3
I get ten minutes before the test to prepare.	41.3	40.5	15.7	2.5
I know in advance which questions will be asked, and I prepare those.	41.3	35.5	18.2	5.0
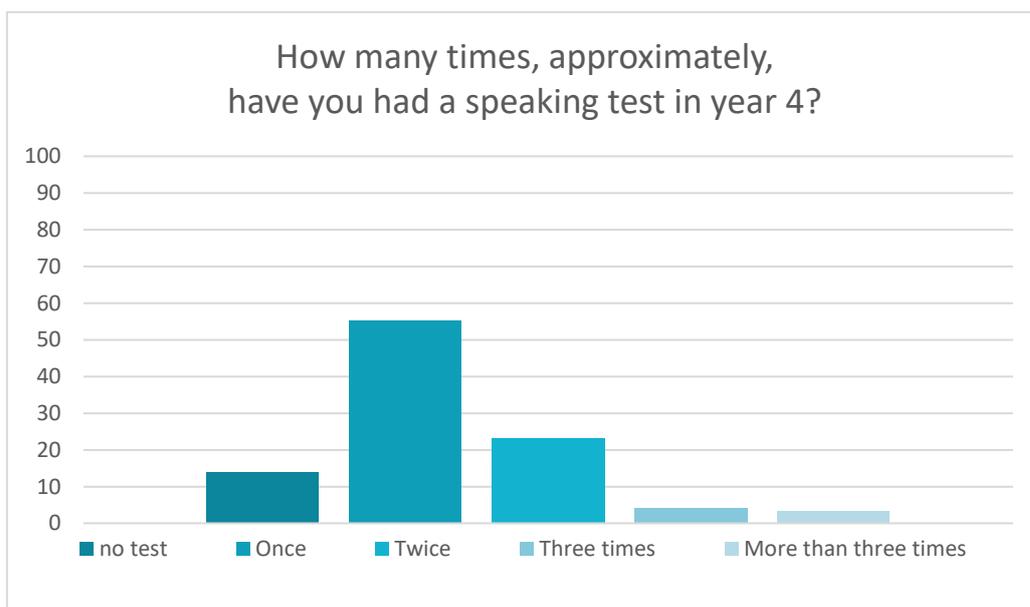
*Figure 16:* KB-Frequency speaking test year 4
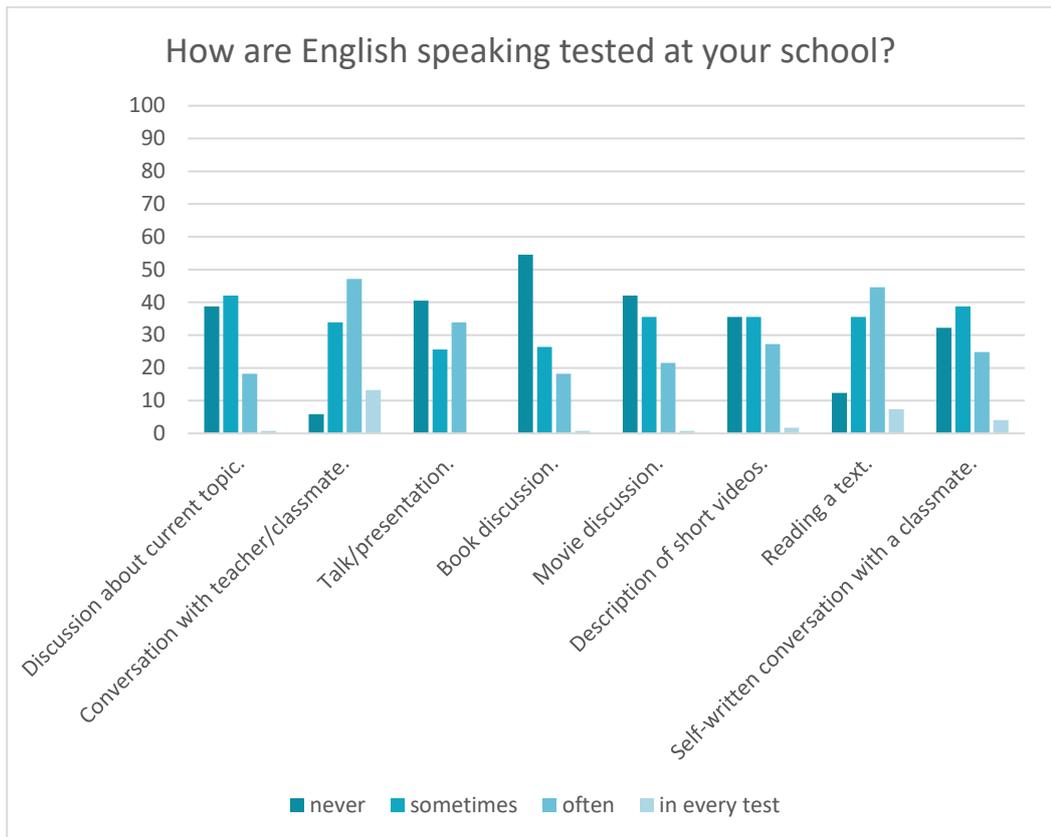
*Figure 17:* KB-Testing speaking skills
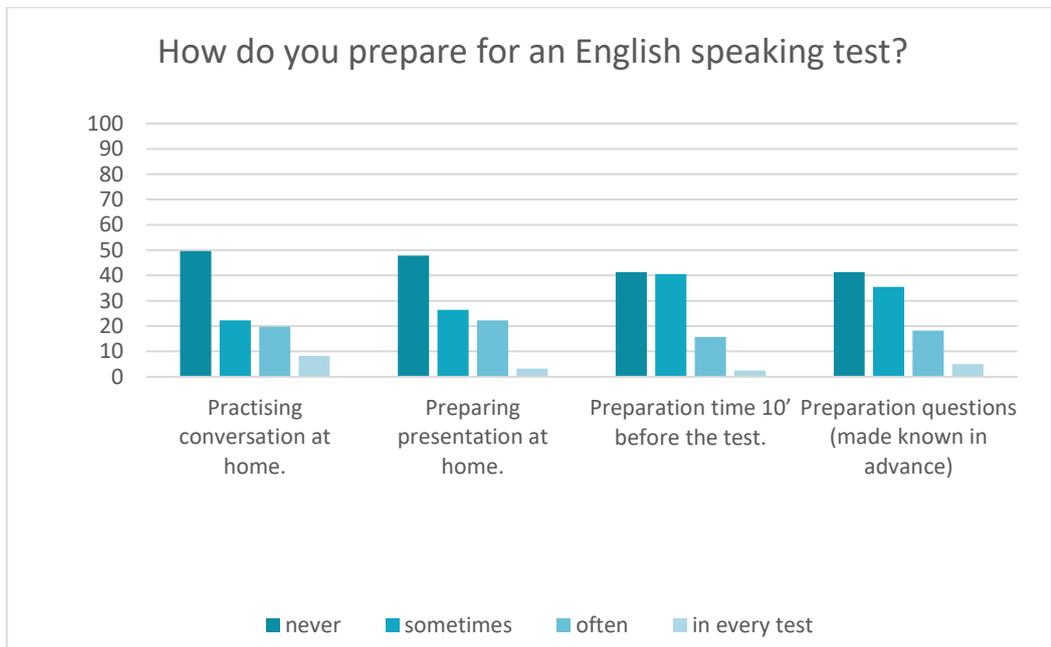
Figure 18: KB-Preparation speaking test

Speaking skills training

Table 19: *KB-Speaking skills training in class*

What do you do in class to practise your English speaking skills? (n=275)				
	never %	sometimes %	often %	always %
The teacher speaks English during the lesson.	6.9	36.0	42.9	14.2
I try to speak only English during the lesson.	48.4	40.4	9.5	1.8
I give presentations in English.	48.7	32.4	12.0	6.9
I record short conversations, and the teacher gives feedback.	67.6	25.1	6.2	1.1
I carry out short speaking assignments with a classmate or in groups.	39.3	47.6	12.4	0.7
I carry out conversation assignments in English, trying to solve a problem or getting something done in a certain situation.	45.8	43.6	8.7	

Table 20: *KB-Topics of conversation in class*

When you speak English in class, do you discuss… (n=275)				
	never %	sometimes %	often %	very often %
Everyday topics (about yourself, your family, friends and acquaintances, computer games, hobbies, spare time; over personal topics, etc.)	13.5	51.3	26.5	8.7
Public life (conversations at information desks, in shops, in a restaurant or bar, public transport, talking to businesses, public organisations, etc.)	26.5	53.1	17.8	2.5
Current affairs (the news)	34.2	40.7	21.8	3.3
Social themes (e.g.: hooliganism, euthanasia, racism, etc.)	51.3	36.4	9.8	2.5
Job-related situations (weekend job, future job, etc.)	35.3	44.4	18.9	1.5
Education (school subjects, future education, internship)	23.3	46.2	26.2	4.4

Table 21: *KB-Learning activities*

What do you use to practise your English speaking skills? (n=275)				
	never %	sometimes %	often %	very often %
Exercises in the course book.	17.5	47.6	29.5	5.5
Extra assignments that are not included in the course book.	22.2	44.7	27.3	5.8
Videos on the internet.	15.6	38.2	33.8	12.4
Texts on the internet.	25.5	41.5	25.8	7.3
Music.	47.6	28.4	12.4	11.6
Chat sessions with students abroad.	82.9	9.5	6.2	1.5
Exchange with a foreign school.	81.8	14.9	2.9	0.4

Table 22: *KB-Barriers for speaking*

| What makes it difficult to learn to speak English properly? (n=275)				
	plays no role %	a bit difficult %	rather difficult %	very difficult %
I think I don't practise enough.	43.6	33.5	18.2	4.7
I think I don't speak enough English in class.	34.2	39.3	17.8	8.7
I think there are too many students in the classroom.	62.9	21.5	11.3	4.4
I think speaking skills do not count enough for the final mark.	50.5	30.9	15.3	3.3
I am afraid to speak English during class.	62.2	23.6	9.5	4.7
I do not have enough opportunities to speak English out of school.	59.3	22.9	12.4	5.5
I find speaking more difficult than reading or listening.	36.0	29.1	21.1	13.8
I do not like speaking.	60.7	19.3	13.5	6.5
I do not think speaking is important.	64.0	20.4	9.5	6.2
I think speaking is not tested enough.	37.5	30.5	22.2	9.8
I do not know how the teacher rates speaking skills.	46.5	34.2	12.4	6.9
I don't know how well I need to speak English in order to score a passing mark.	46.5	30.5	15.3	7.6
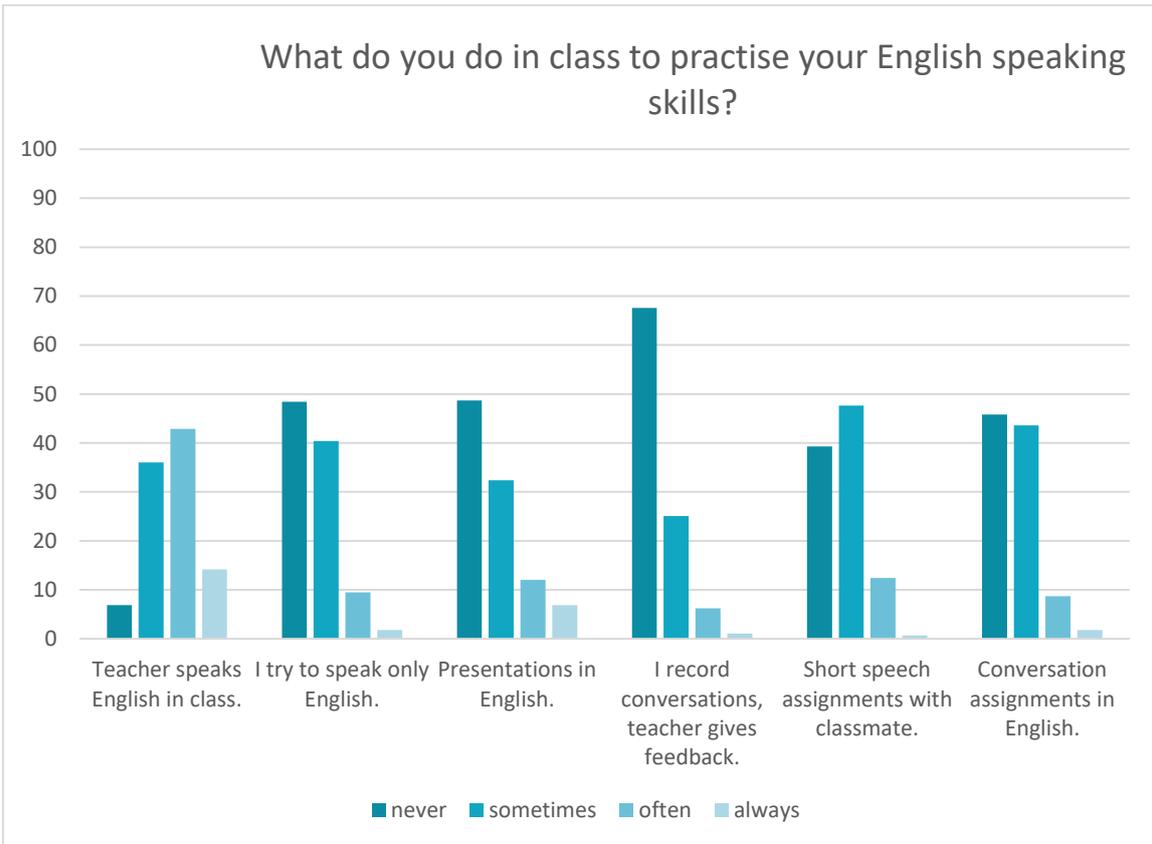
*Figure 19:* KB-Speaking skills training in class
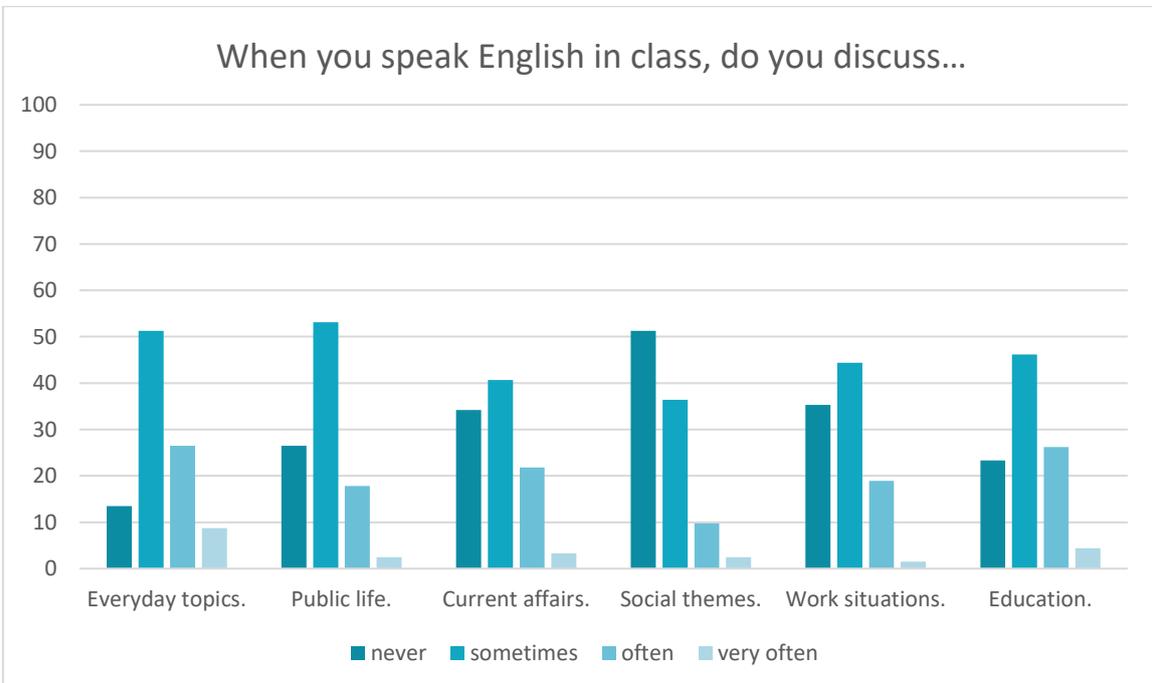
*Figure 20:* KB-Topics of conversation in class
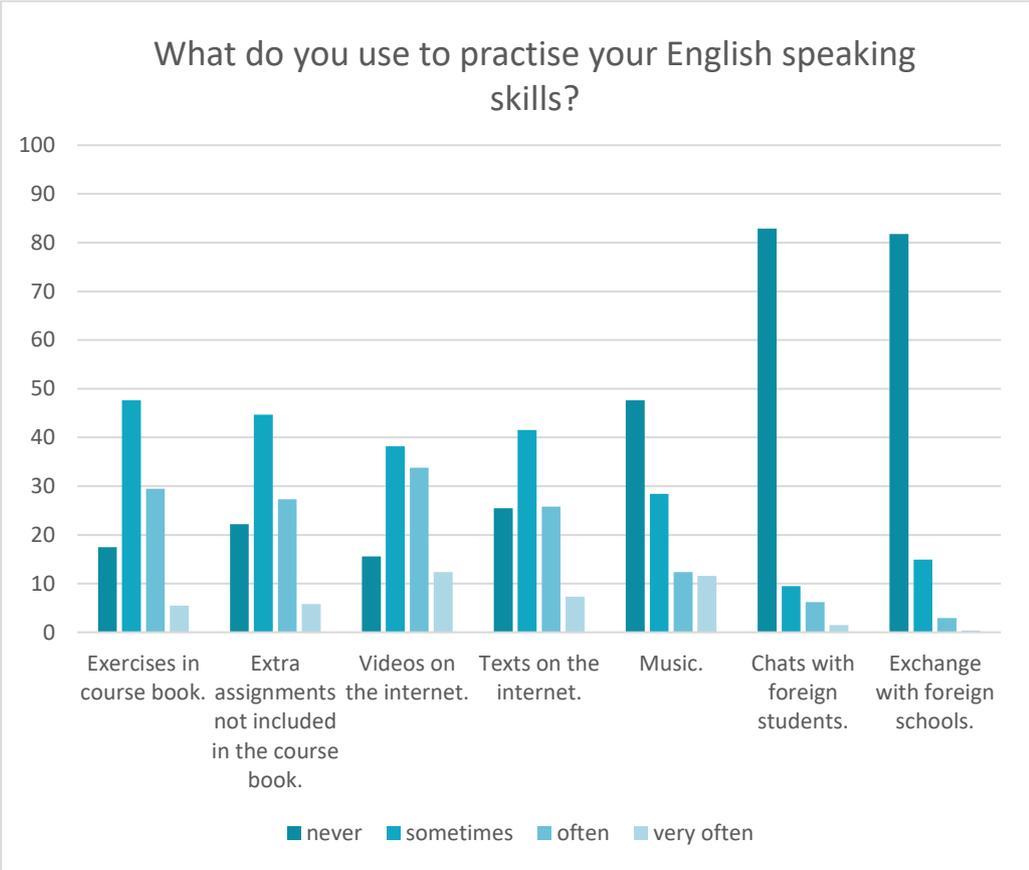
Figure 21: KB-Learning activities
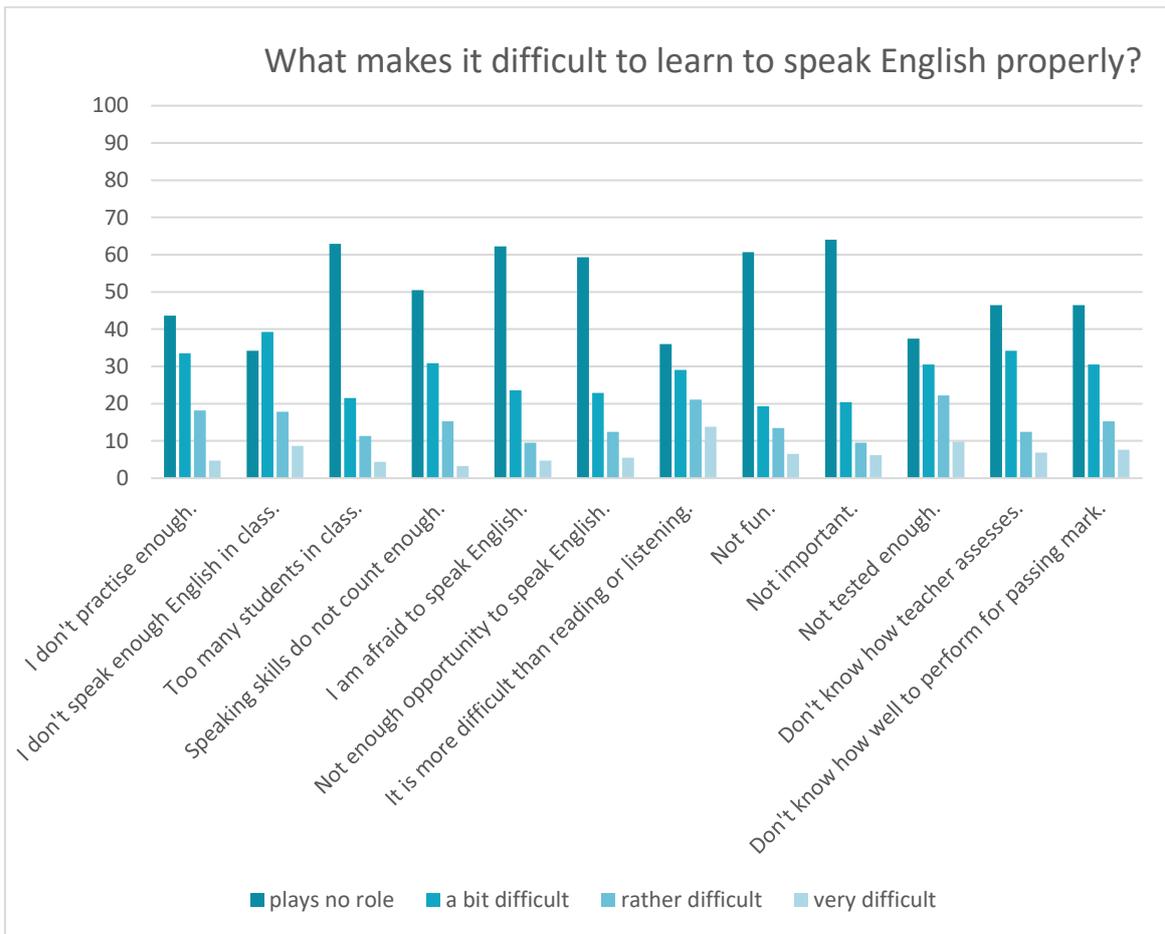
Figure 22: KB-Barriers for speaking

Vmbo-gt (n=407)

The speaking test

Table 23: *GT-Difficulty of the test*

What did you think of the test? (n=407)	
	%
easy	14.0
rather easy	35.2
a bit difficult	42.6
difficult	8.1

Table 24: *GT-Comparison with testing at school I*

Have you ever had an English speaking test at school? (n=407)	
	%
yes	46.8
no	53.2

Table 25: *GT-Comparison with testing at school II*

Did today's test resemble any previous English tests? (n=190)	
	%
not at all	45.3
a bit	42.6
rather	11.1
yes!	1.1

Table 26: GT-*Comparison with testing at school III*

Did you do the following things during the English speaking tests that were taken at your school? (n=190)	never %	sometimes %	often %	in every test %
I did not have to prepare anything in advance.	30.5	38.4	12.1	18.9
I didn't know in advance what I would be talking about.	38.4	32.6	13.7	15.3
The test took fifteen minutes.	20.0	31.1	34.7	14.2
The teachers who administered the test, spoke only English.	21.1	16.8	21.6	40.5
I was shown pictures and was asked to talk about these.	61.1	19.5	12.6	6.8
I had to conduct a conversation.	4.7	11.6	23.7	60.0
I had to tell/present something (monologue).	18.4	27.4	31.6	22.6
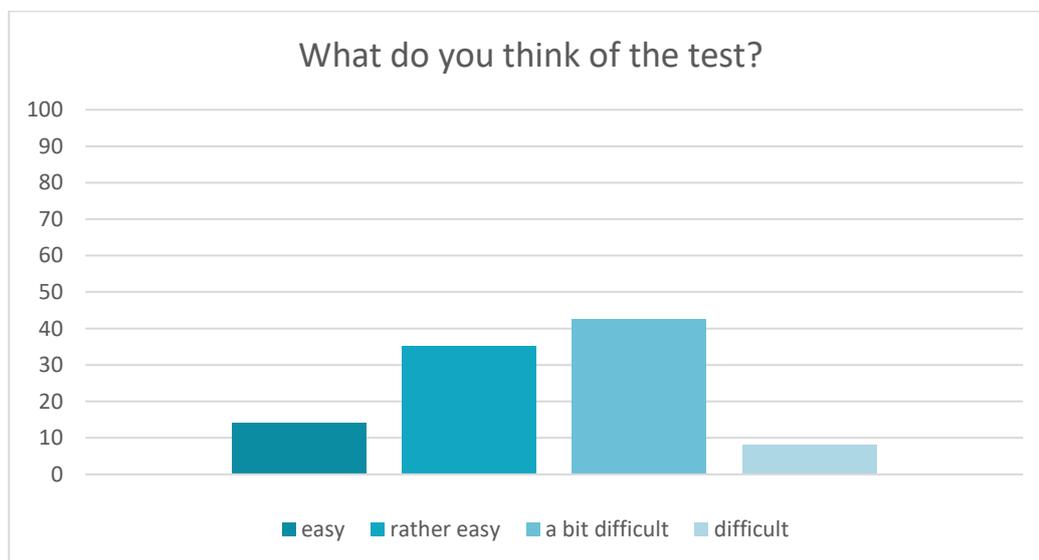
*Figure 23:* GT-Difficulty of the test
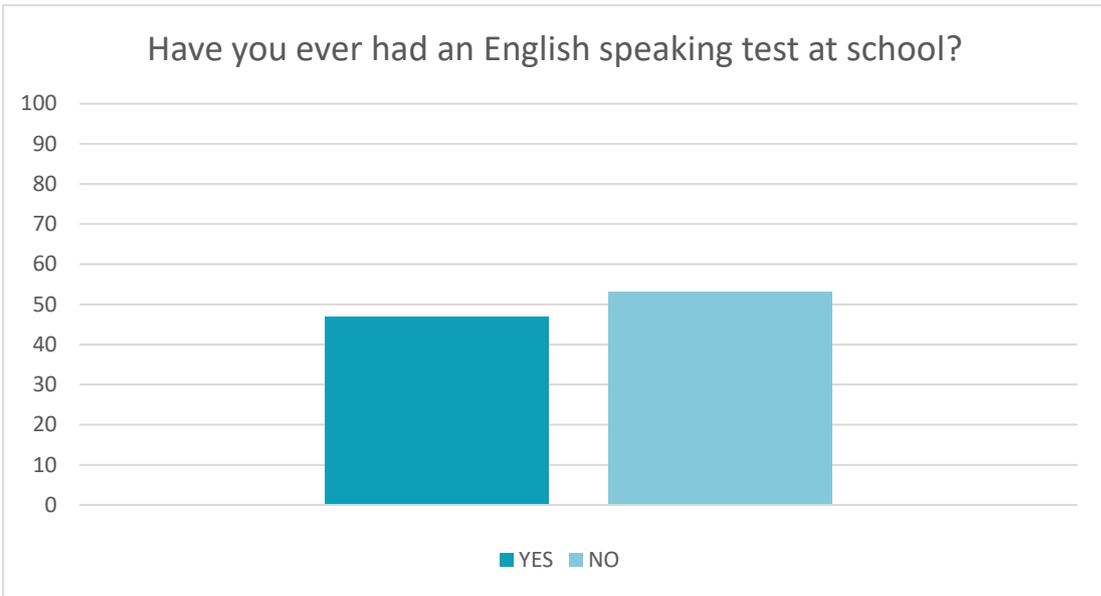
Figure 24: GT-Comparison with testing at school I
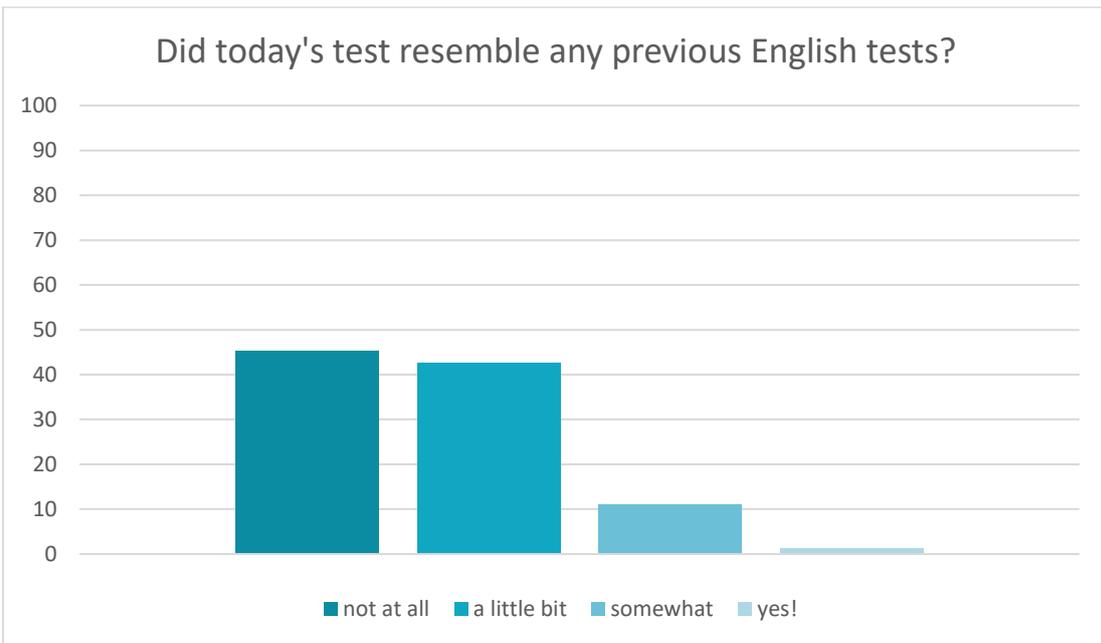

*Figure 25:* GT-Comparison with testing at school II
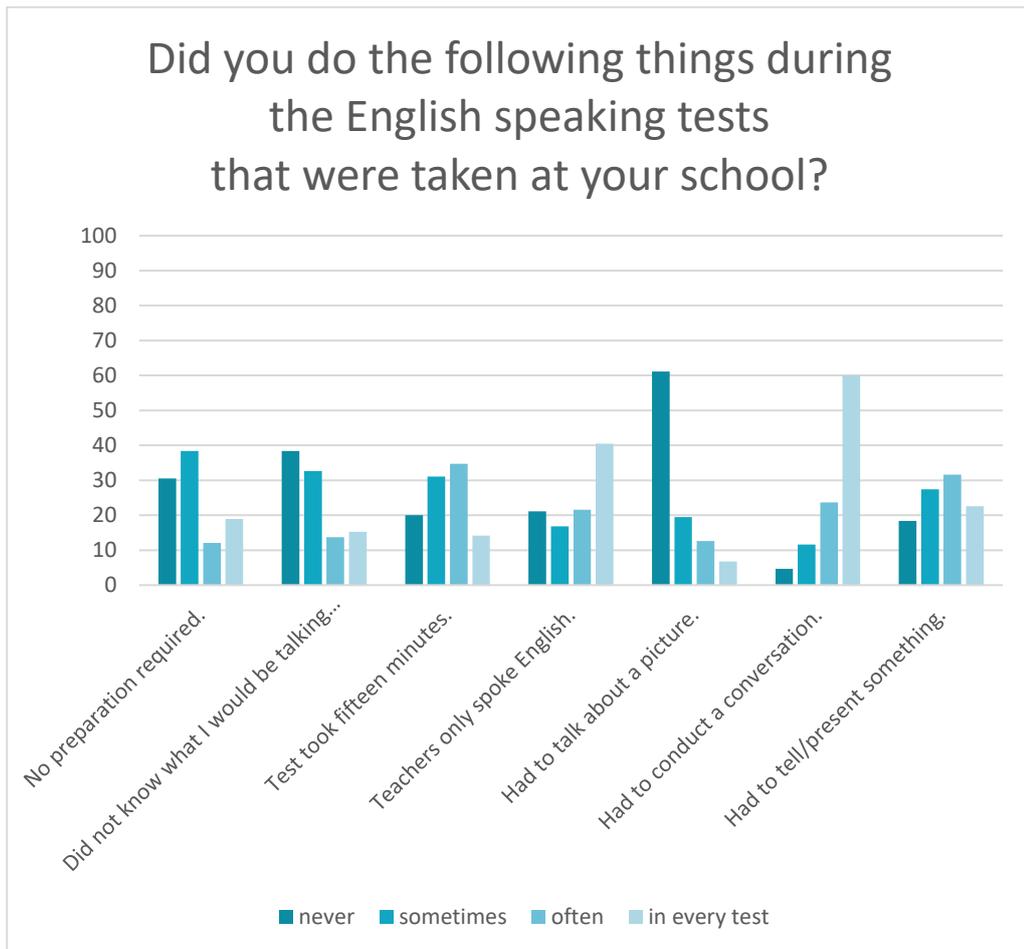
Figure 26: GT-Comparison with testing at school III

Speaking tests at school

Table 27: *GT-Frequency speaking test year 4*

How many times, approximately, have you had a speaking test in year 4? (n=190)	
	%
no test yet	24.7
Once	56.3
Two times	16.3
Three times	0.5
More than three times	2.0

Table 28: *GT-Testing speaking skills*

How is English speaking tested at your school? (n=190)				
	never %	sometimes %	often %	at every test %
A discussion about a current topic.	39.5	38.9	17.4	4.2
A discussion with the teacher or a classmate.	9.5	27.4	46.8	16.3
A talk/presentation.	33.7	44.2	20.5	1.6
A book discussion.	47.9	31.1	19.5	1.6
A discussion on a movie.	53.2	35.8	8.9	2.1
Describing short videos.	37.9	35.8	24.2	2.1
Reading a text.	16.8	26.8	49.5	6.8
Conducting a self-written conversation with a classmate.	28.4	38.9	26.8	5.8

Table 29: *GT-Preparation speaking test*

| How do you prepare for an English speaking test? (n=190)				
	never %	sometimes %	often %	at every test %
I have to practise the conversation at home.	47.9	30.5	13.2	8.4
I have to prepare a presentation at home.	40.5	35.8	16.3	7.4
I get ten minutes before the test to prepare.	42.1	30.0	19.5	8.4
I know in advance which questions will be asked, and I prepare those.	45.8	36.8	12.1	5.3
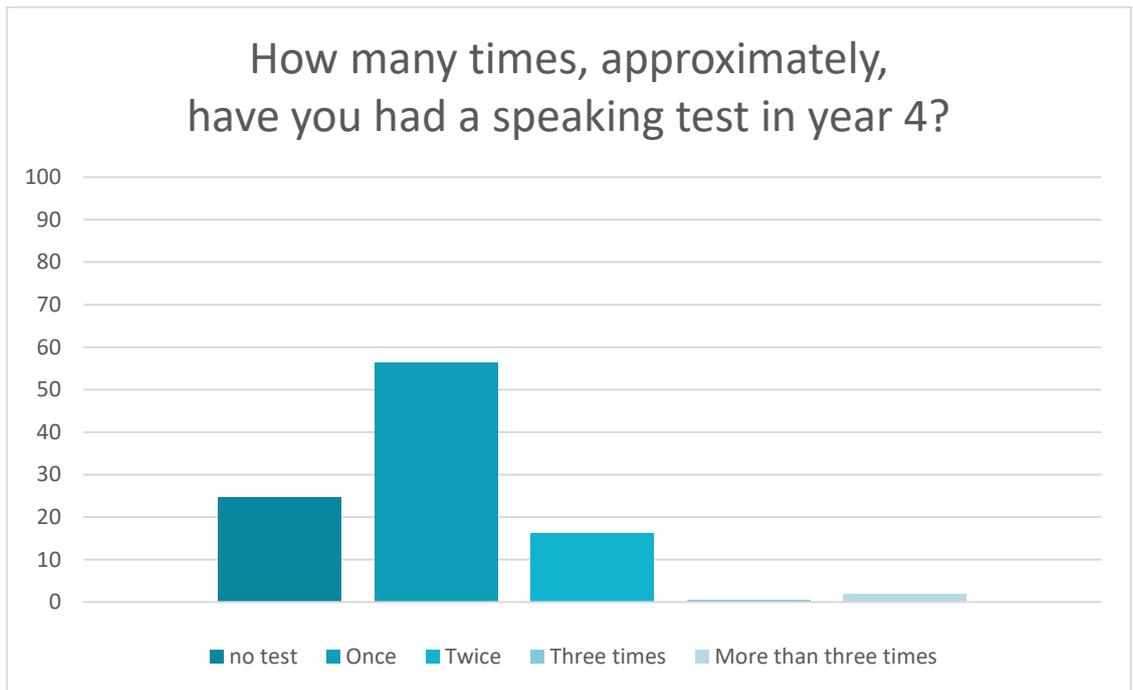
Figure 27: GT-Frequency speaking test year 4
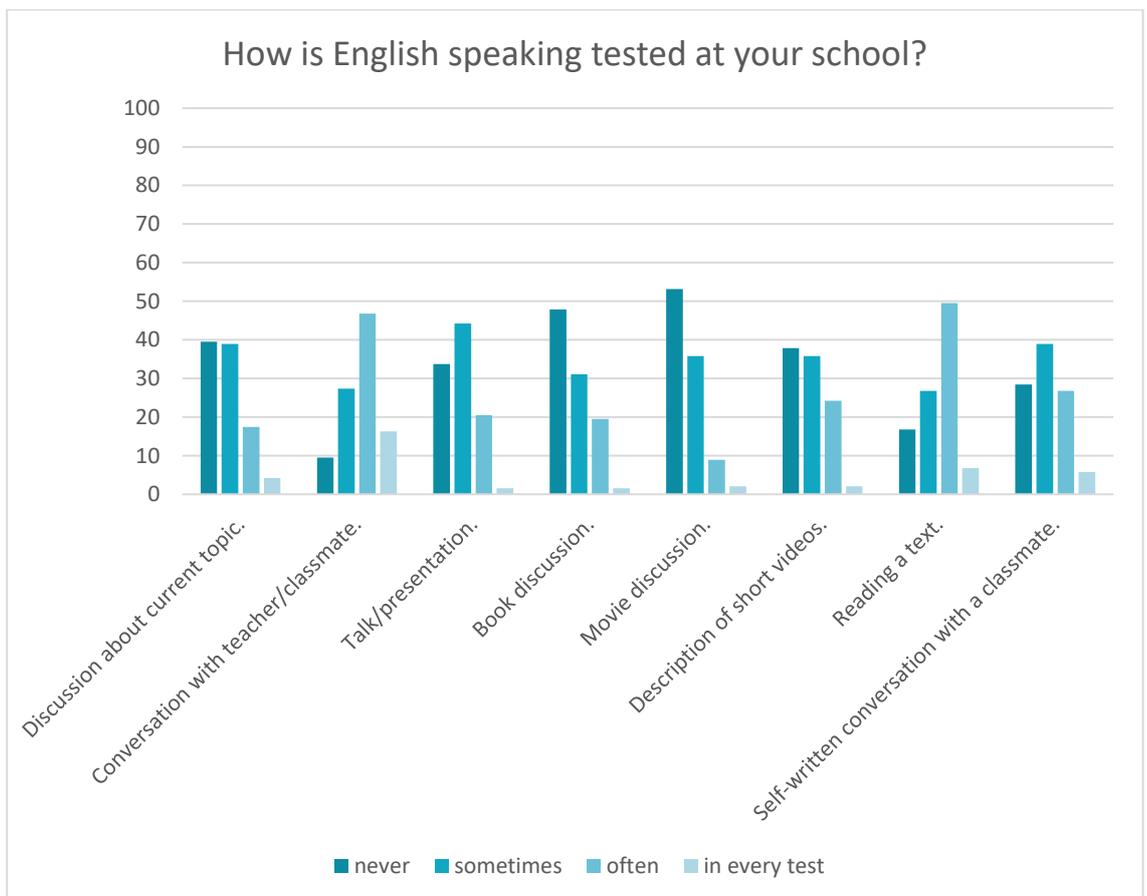
*Figure 28:* GT-Testing speaking skills
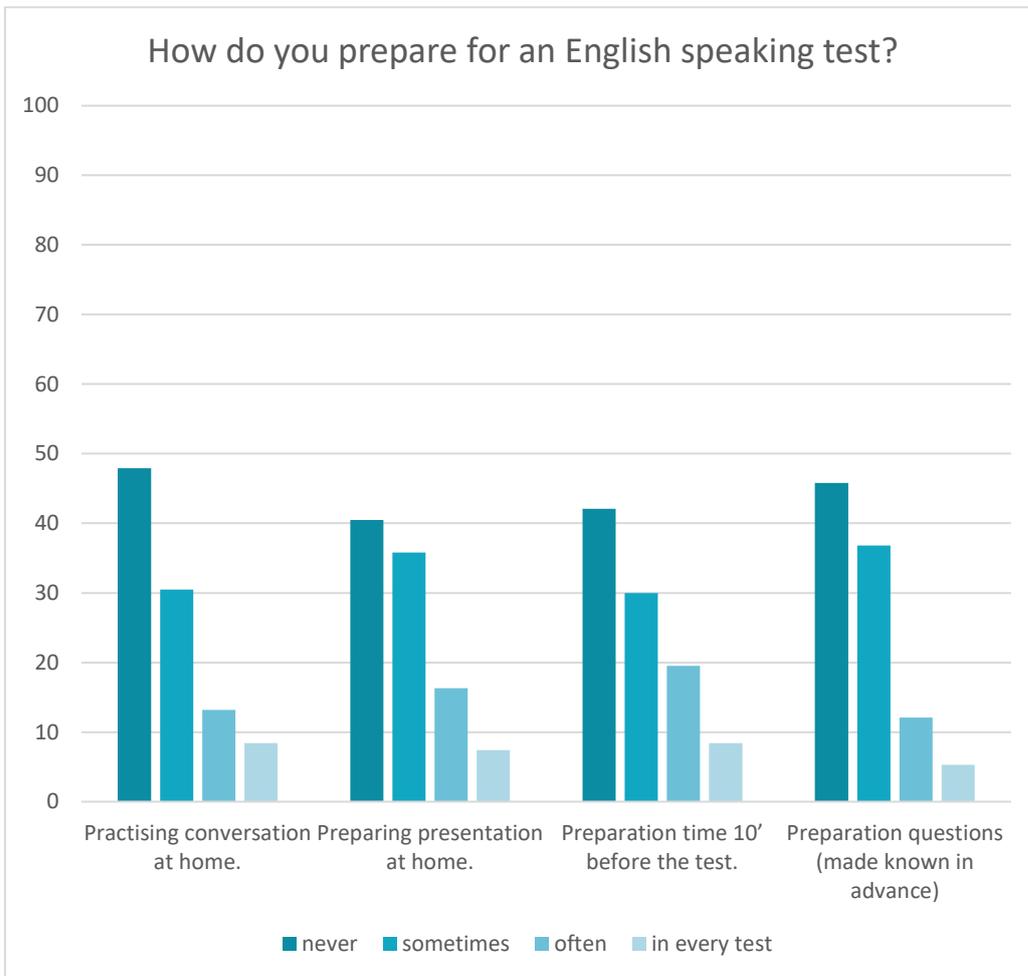
Figure 29: GT-Preparation speaking test

Speaking skills training

Table 30: *GT-Speaking skills training in class*

What do you do in class to practise your English speaking skills? (n=407)				
	never %	sometimes %	often %	always %
The teacher speaks English during the lesson.	9.9	27.8	38.2	24.1
I try to speak only English during the lesson.	44.6	39.7	11.8	3.9
I give presentations in English.	44.6	37.7	12.3	5.4
I record short conversations and the teacher gives feedback.	73.2	20.4	5.7	0.7
I carry out short speaking assignments with a classmate or in groups.	38.4	46.1	14.8	0.7
I carry out conversation assignments in English, trying to solve a problem or getting something done in a certain situation.	52.7	35.5	10.6	1.2

Table 31: *GT-Topics of conversation in class*

When you speak English in class, do you discuss… (n=407)				
	never %	sometimes %	often %	very often %
Everyday topics (about yourself, your family, friends and acquaintances, computer games, hobbies, spare time; over personal topics, etc.)	22.9	45.8	24.9	6.4
Public life (conversations at information desks, in shops, in a restaurant or bar, public transport, talking to businesses, public organisations, etc.)	32.0	45.8	20.4	1.7
Current affairs (the news)	30.3	36.9	25.6	7.1
Social themes (e.g.: hooliganism, euthanasia, racism, etc.)	46.3	41.1	11.8	0.7
Job-related situations (weekend job, future job, etc.)	42.4	44.1	12.6	1.0
Education (school subjects, future education, internship)	27.8	46.6	20.2	5.4

Table 32: *GT-Learning activities*

What do you use to practise your English speaking skills? (n=407)				
	never %	sometimes %	often %	very often %
Exercises in the course book.	16.0	37.4	36.2	10.3
Extra assignments that are not included in the course book.	28.1	43.6	25.1	3.2
Videos on the internet.	23.9	36.2	30.5	9.4
Texts on the internet.	33.0	36.7	26.1	4.2
Music.	54.2	26.6	10.6	8.6
Chat sessions with students abroad.	78.8	13.5	4.9	2.7
Exchange with a foreign school.	91.9	6.7	1.5	0.0

Table 33: *GT-Barriers for speaking*

| What makes it difficult to learn to speak English properly? (n=407)				
	plays no role %	a bit difficult %	rather difficult %	very difficult %
I think I don't practise enough.	47.8	32.0	16.7	3.4
I think I don't speak enough English in class.	43.1	31.3	20.7	4.9
I think there are too many students in the classroom.	74.9	16.5	4.9	3.7
I think speaking skills do not count enough for the final mark.	56.2	26.8	14.0	3.0
I am afraid to speak English during class.	64.0	20.4	9.6	5.9
I do not have enough opportunities to speak English out of school.	56.4	21.9	17.5	4.2
I find speaking more difficult than reading or listening.	45.1	21.2	23.2	10.6
I do not like speaking.	66.0	20.9	8.9	4.2
I do not think speaking is important.	76.8	15.5	5.4	2.2
I think speaking is not tested enough.	35.5	28.6	26.8	9.1
I do not know how the teacher rates speaking skills.	46.3	32.3	12.8	8.6
I don't know how well I need to speak English in order to score a passing mark.	52.7	20.2	19.0	8.1
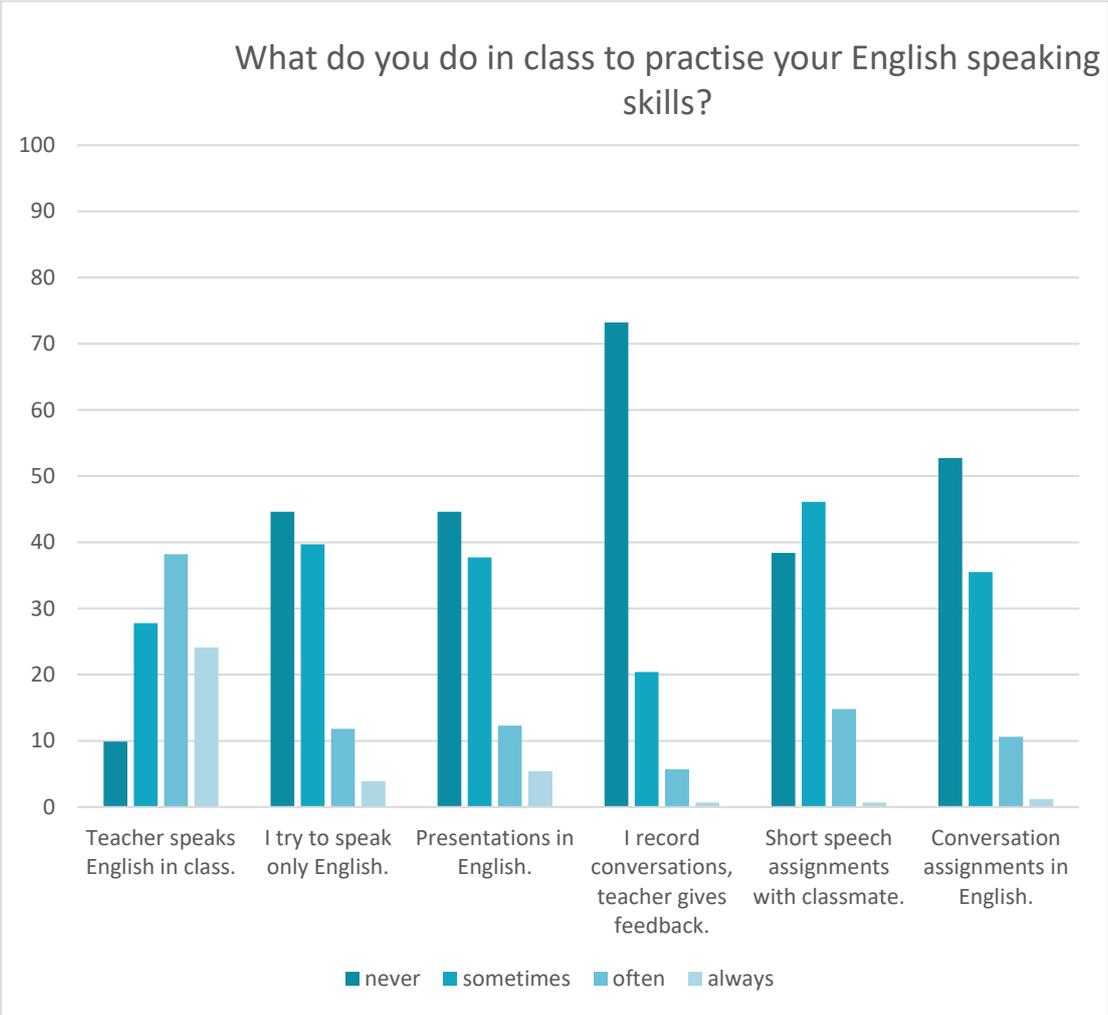
Figure 30: GT-Speaking skills training in class
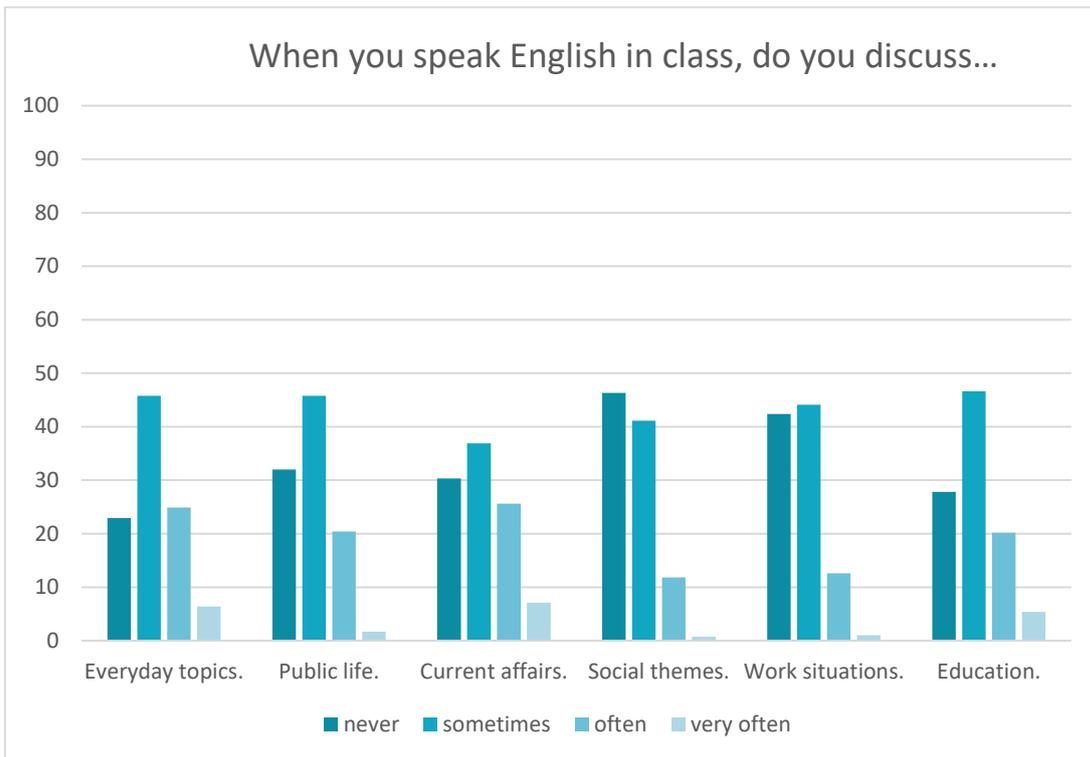
*Figure 31*: GT-Topics of conversation in class
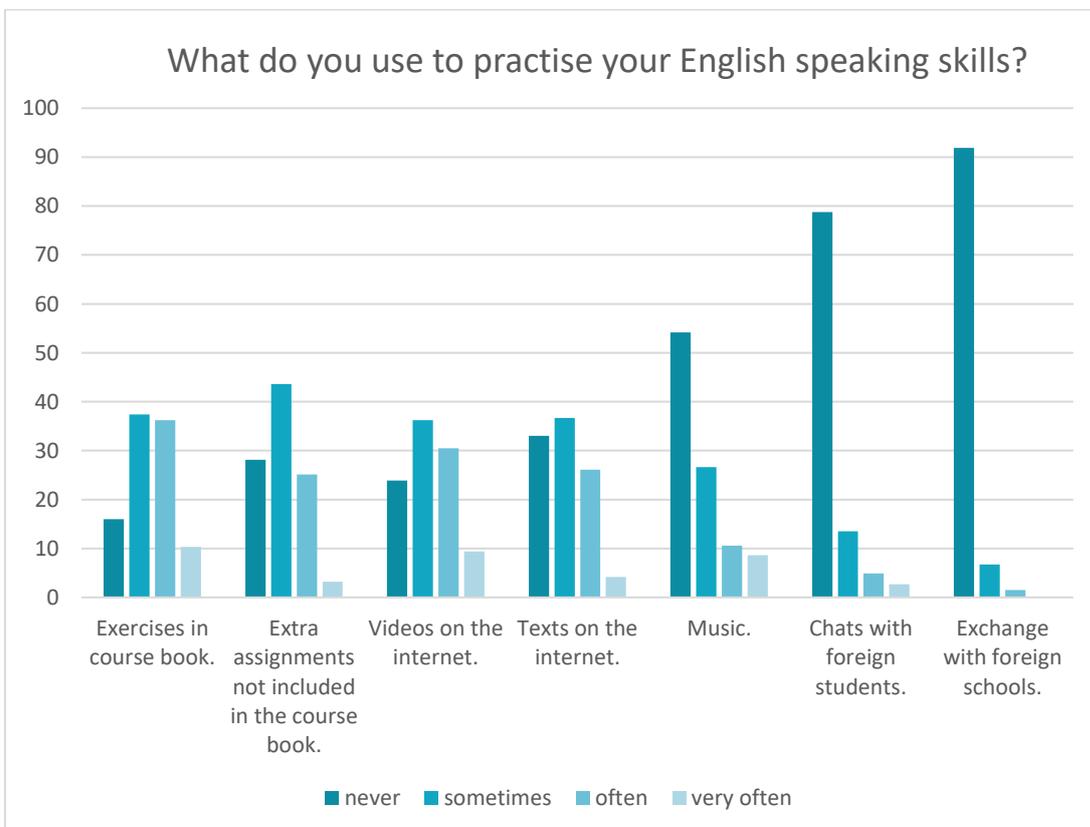

Figure 32: GT-Learning activities
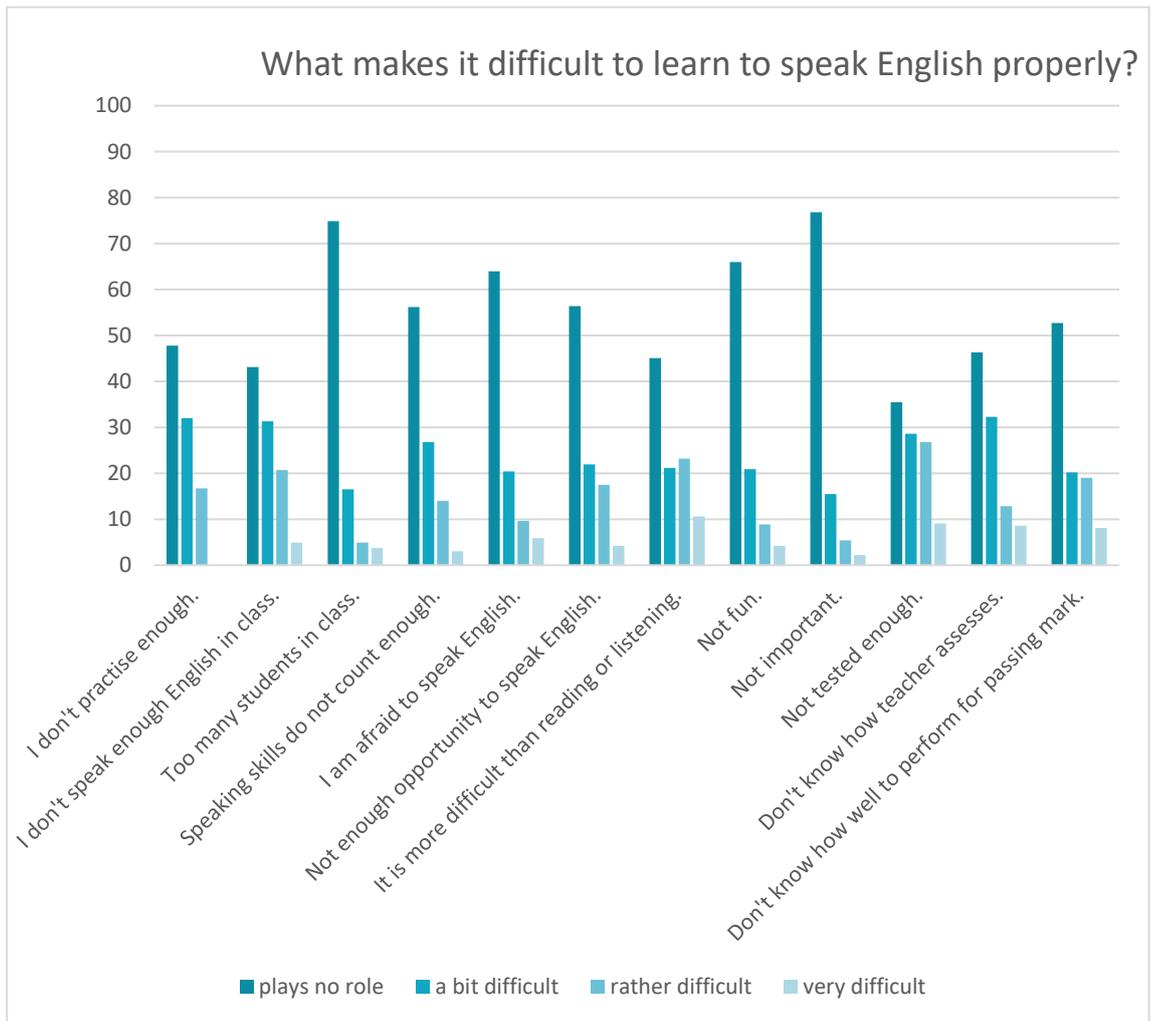
Figure 33: GT-Barriers for speaking

Havo (n=428)

The speaking test

Table 34: *Havo-Difficulty of the test*

What do you think of the test? (n=428)	
	%
easy	17.3
rather easy	49.8
a bit difficult	31.8
difficult	1.2

Table 35: *Havo-Comparison with testing at school I*

Have you ever had an English speaking test at school? (n=428)	
	%
yes	83.2
no	16.8

Table 36: *Havo-Comparison with testing at school II*

Did today's test resemble any previous English tests? (n=356)	
	%
not at all	26.1
a bit	38.5
rather	26.1
yes!	9.3

Table 37*: Havo-Comparison with testing at school III*

| Did you do the following things during the English speaking tests that were taken at your school? (n=356)	never %	sometimes %	often %	in every test %
I did not have to prepare anything in advance.	24.4	38.8	19.1	17.7
I didn't know in advance what I would be talking about.	34.3	34.6	18.8	12.4
The test took fifteen minutes.	9.3	27.8	43.3	19.7
The teachers who administered the test spoke only English.	12.1	7.6	23.6	56.7
I was shown pictures and was asked to talk about these.	40.4	17.4	19.4	22.8
I had to conduct a conversation.	2.2	6.7	36.2	54.8
I had to tell/present something (monologue).	7.6	28.1	43.0	21.3
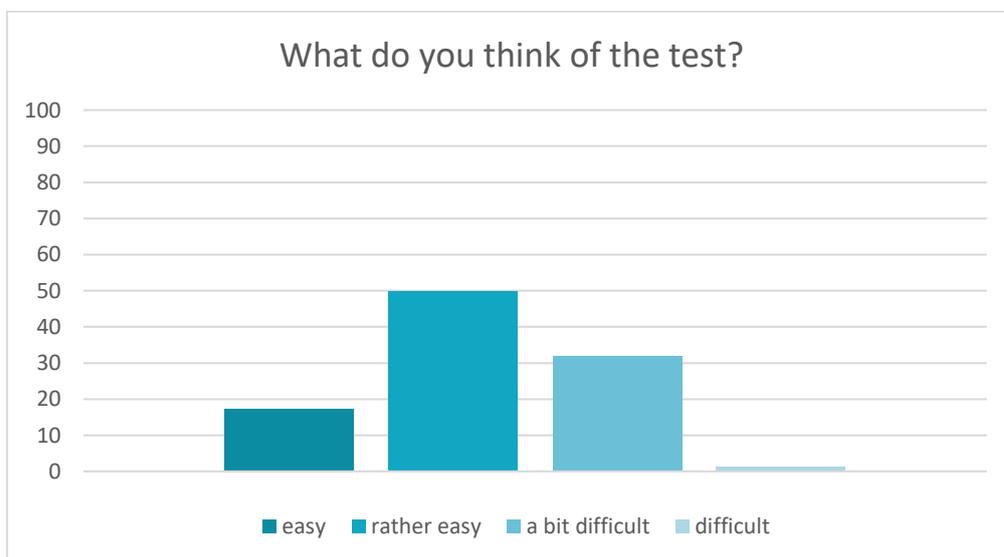
Figure 34: Havo-Difficulty of the test
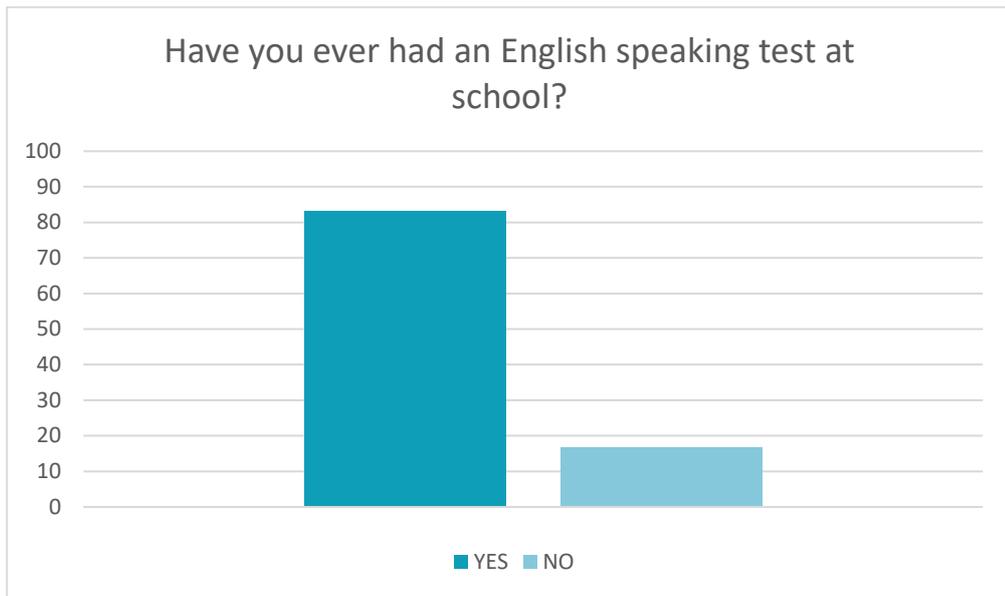
Figure 35: Havo-Comparison with testing at school I

Figure 36: Havo-Comparison with testing at school II

Did you do the following things during the English speaking tests that were taken at your school?
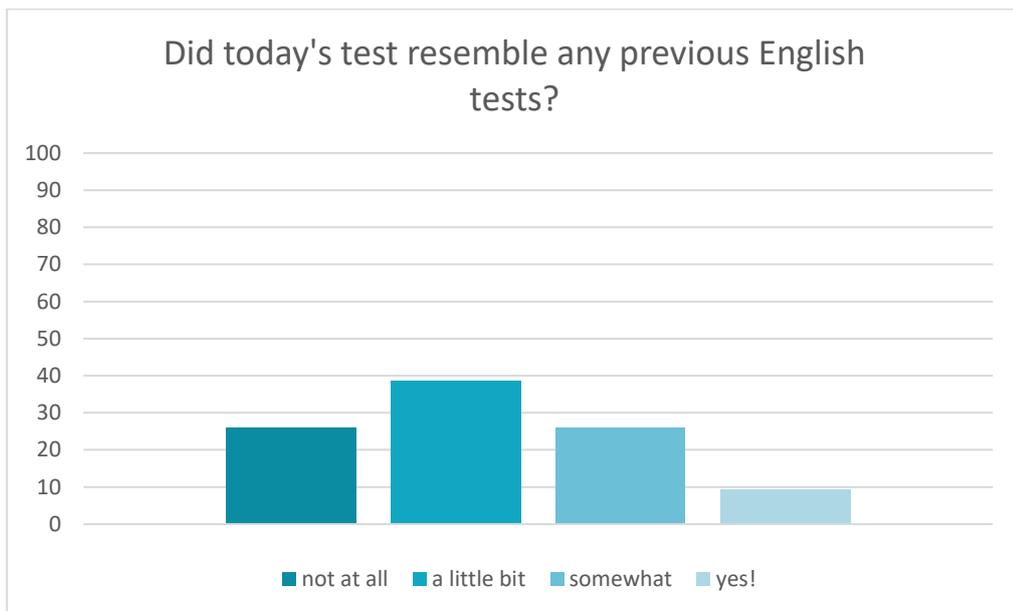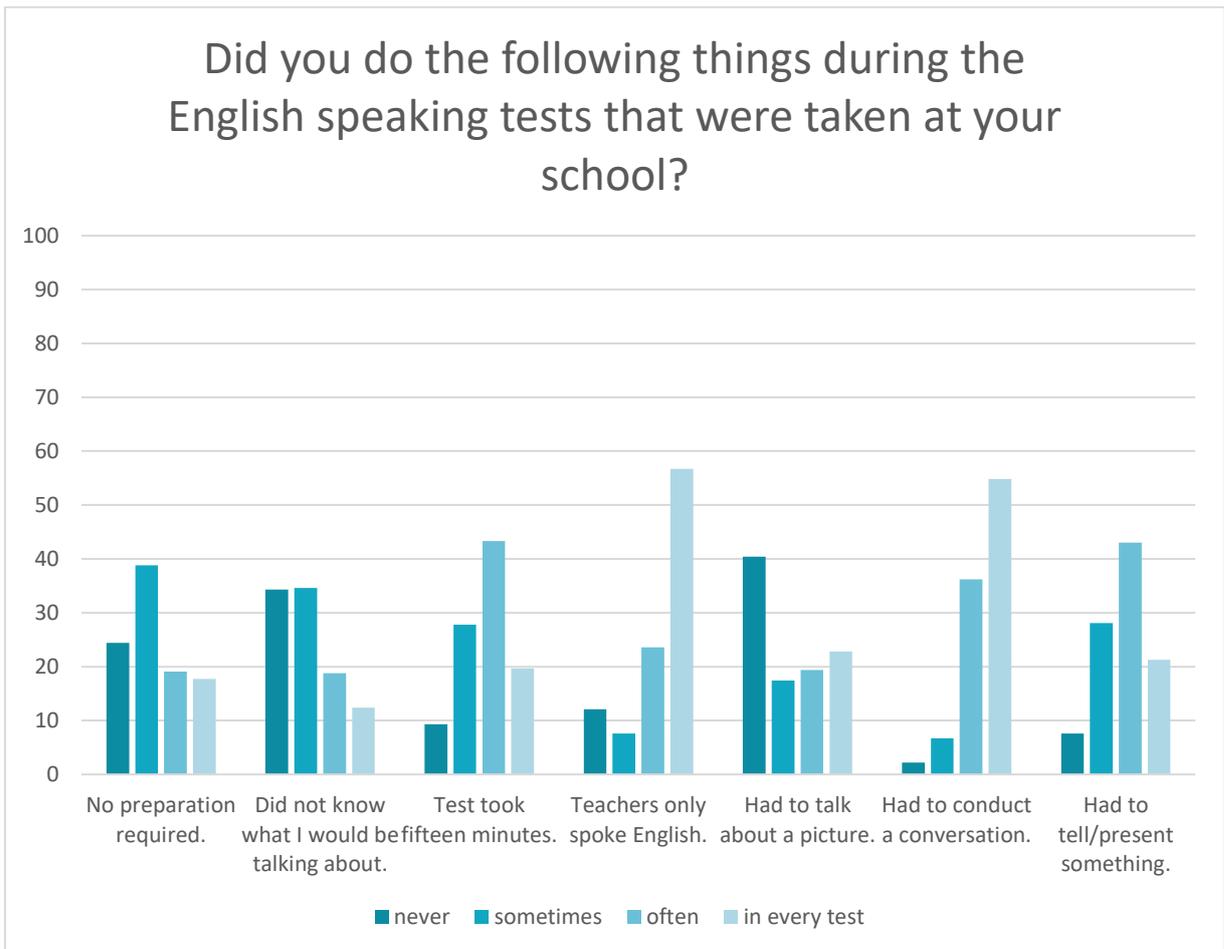
Figure 37: Havo-Comparison with testing at school III

Speaking tests at school

Table 38: *Havo-Frequency speaking test year 4*

How many times, approximately, did you have a speaking test in year 4? (n=356)	
	%
No test	8.9
Once	55.7
Two times	27.1
Three times	3.7
More than three times	4.6

Table 39: *Havo-Frequency speaking test year 5*

How many times, approximately, have you had an speaking test in year 5? (n=356)	
	%
No test yet	31.2
Once	48.1
Two times	17.2
Three times	2.6
More than three times	0.9

Table 40: *Havo-Testing speaking skills*

How is English speaking tested at your school? (n=356)	never %	sometimes %	often %	at every test %
A discussion about a current topic.	18.5	36.5	37.6	7.3
A discussion with the teacher or a classmate.	3.1	22.8	51.1	23.0
A talk/presentation.	5.6	41.0	48.3	5.1
A book discussion.	28.9	39.0	30.1	2.0
A discussion on a movie.	51.4	37.9	9.0	1.7
Describing short videos.	54.5	33.4	11.0	1.1
Reading a text.	24.2	37.4	34.0	4.5
Conducting a self-written conversation with a classmate.	44.1	30.6	20.8	4.5

Table 41: *Havo-Preparation speaking test*

| How do you prepare for an English speaking test? (n=356)	never %	sometimes %	often %	at every test %
I have to practise the conversation at home.	50.8	25.8	19.4	3.9
I have to prepare a presentation at home.	20.8	37.1	34.3	7.9
I get ten minutes before the test to prepare.	57.9	25.6	12.4	4.2
I know in advance which questions will be asked, and I prepare those.	47.2	37.9	11.0	3.9
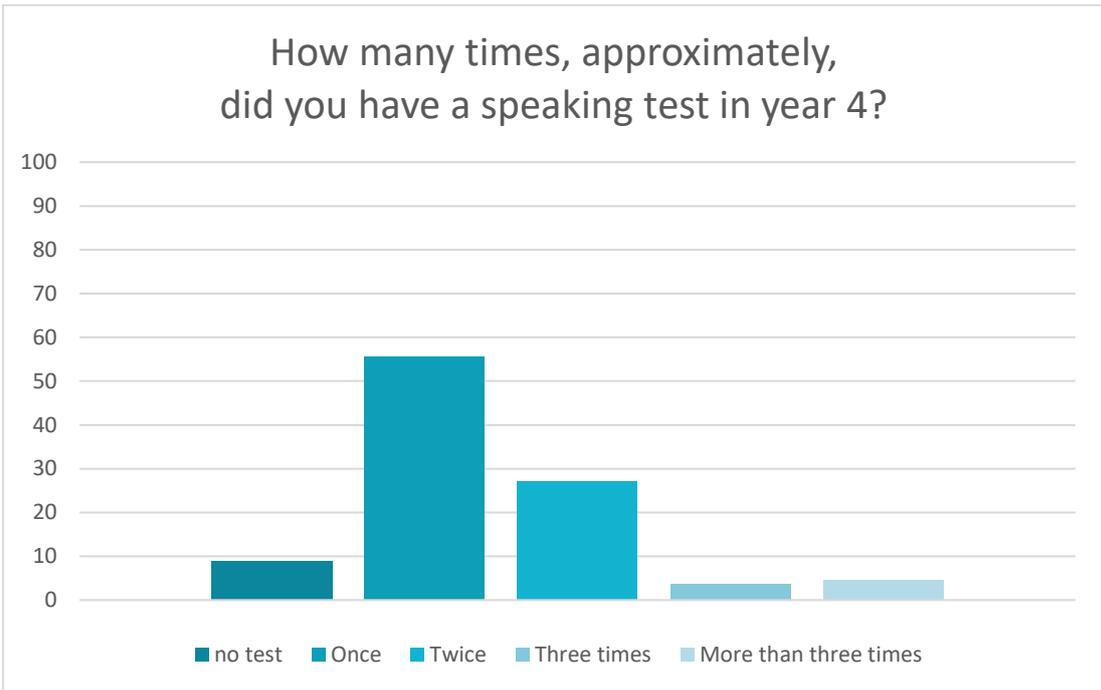
*Figure 38:* Havo-Frequency speaking test year 4
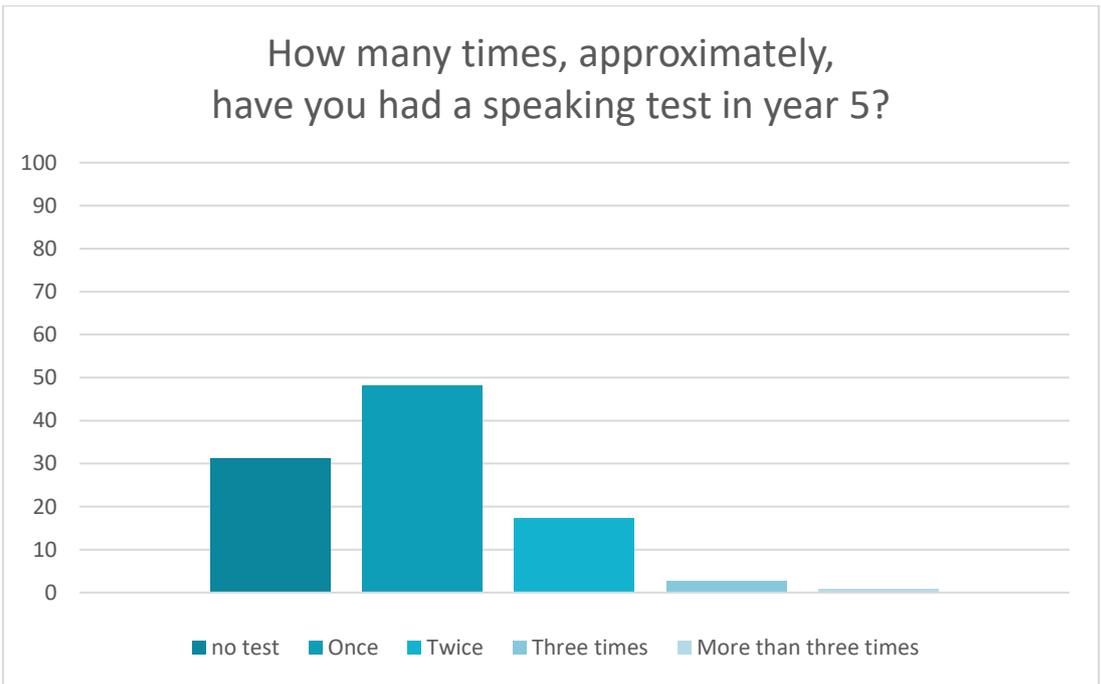

Figure 39: Havo-Frequency speaking test year 5
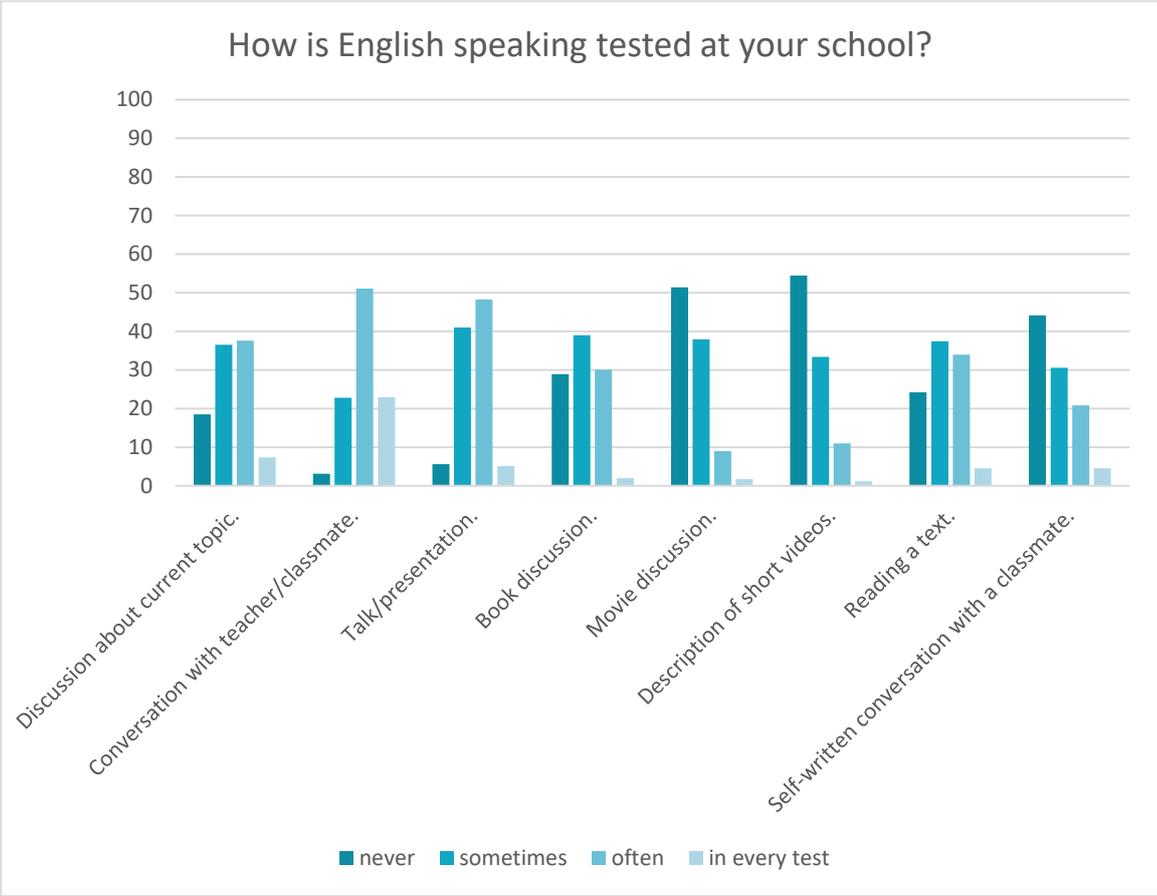
*Figure 40:* Havo-Testing speaking skills
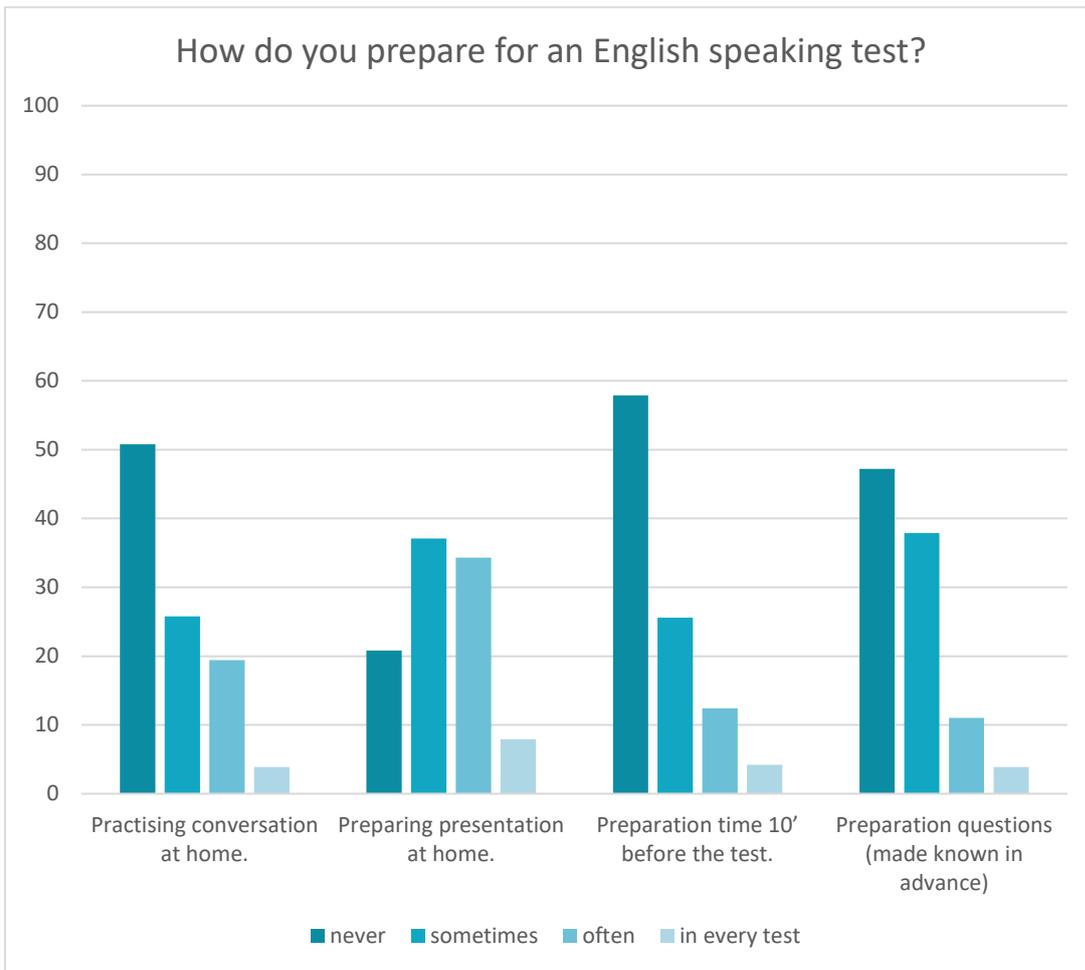
Figure 41: Havo-Preparation speaking test

Speaking skills training

Table 42: *Havo-Speaking skills training in class*

What do you do in class to practise your English speaking skills? (n=428)				
	never %	sometimes %	often %	always %
The teacher speaks English during the lesson.	1.4	13.6	50.7	34.3
I try to speak only English during the lesson.	25.0	47.7	21.0	6.3
I give presentations in English.	17.3	47.2	20.8	14.7
I record short conversations and the teacher gives feedback.	75.5	17.1	5.4	2.1
I carry out short speaking assignments with a classmate or in groups.	33.6	42.5	21.7	2.1
I carry out conversation assignments in English, trying to solve a problem or getting something done in a certain situation.	36.0	46.7	14.0	3.3

Table 43: *Havo-Topics of conversation in class*

When you speak English in class, do you discuss… (n=428)				
	never %	sometimes %	often %	very often %
Everyday topics (about yourself, your family, friends and acquaintances, computer games, hobbies, spare time; over personal topics, etc.)	11.7	34.1	38.3	15.9
Public life (conversations at information desks, in shops, in a restaurant or bar, public transport, talking to businesses, public organisations, etc.)	21.5	44.4	27.3	6.8
Current affairs (the news)	7.0	36.0	42.5	14.5
Social themes (e.g.: hooliganism, euthanasia, racism, etc.)	25.0	43.0	25.5	6.5
Job-related situations (weekend job, future job, etc.)	25.0	47.7	23.4	4.0
Education (school subjects, future education, internship)	15.7	40.7	36.2	7.5

Table 44: *Havo-Learning activities*

What do you use to practise your English speaking skills? (n=428)				
	never %	sometimes %	often %	very often %
Exercises in the course book.	22.9	37.4	30.4	9.3
Extra assignments that are not included in the course book.	19.2	43.0	28.7	9.1
Videos on the internet.	17.5	35.5	29.2	17.8
Texts on the internet.	25.7	37.4	25.0	11.9
Music.	39.0	32.9	12.4	15.7
Chat sessions with students abroad.	84.1	10.0	2.8	3.0
Exchange with a foreign school.	78.7	17.8	3.3	0.2

Table 45: *Havo-Barriers for speaking*

| What makes it difficult to learn to speak English properly? (n=428)				
	plays no role %	a bit difficult %	rather difficult %	very difficult %
I think I don't practise enough.	47.0	34.6	15.2	3.3
I think I don't speak enough English in class.	40.4	34.6	21.7	3.3
I think there are too many students in the classroom.	65.0	18.5	11.0	5.6
I think speaking skills do not count enough for the final mark.	51.6	24.5	15.4	8.4
I am afraid to speak English during class.	60.3	24.3	9.8	5.6
I do not have enough opportunities to speak English out of school.	50.2	22.9	18.7	8.2
I find speaking more difficult than reading or listening.	51.2	22.0	17.3	9.6
I do not like speaking.	74.1	14.0	9.1	2.8
I do not think speaking is important.	83.4	8.6	5.1	2.8
I think speaking is not tested enough.	34.8	29.0	25.9	10.3
I do not know how the teacher rates speaking skills.	45.3	32.0	17.5	5.1
I don't know how well I need to speak English in order to score a passing mark.	51.9	26.4	15.7	6.1
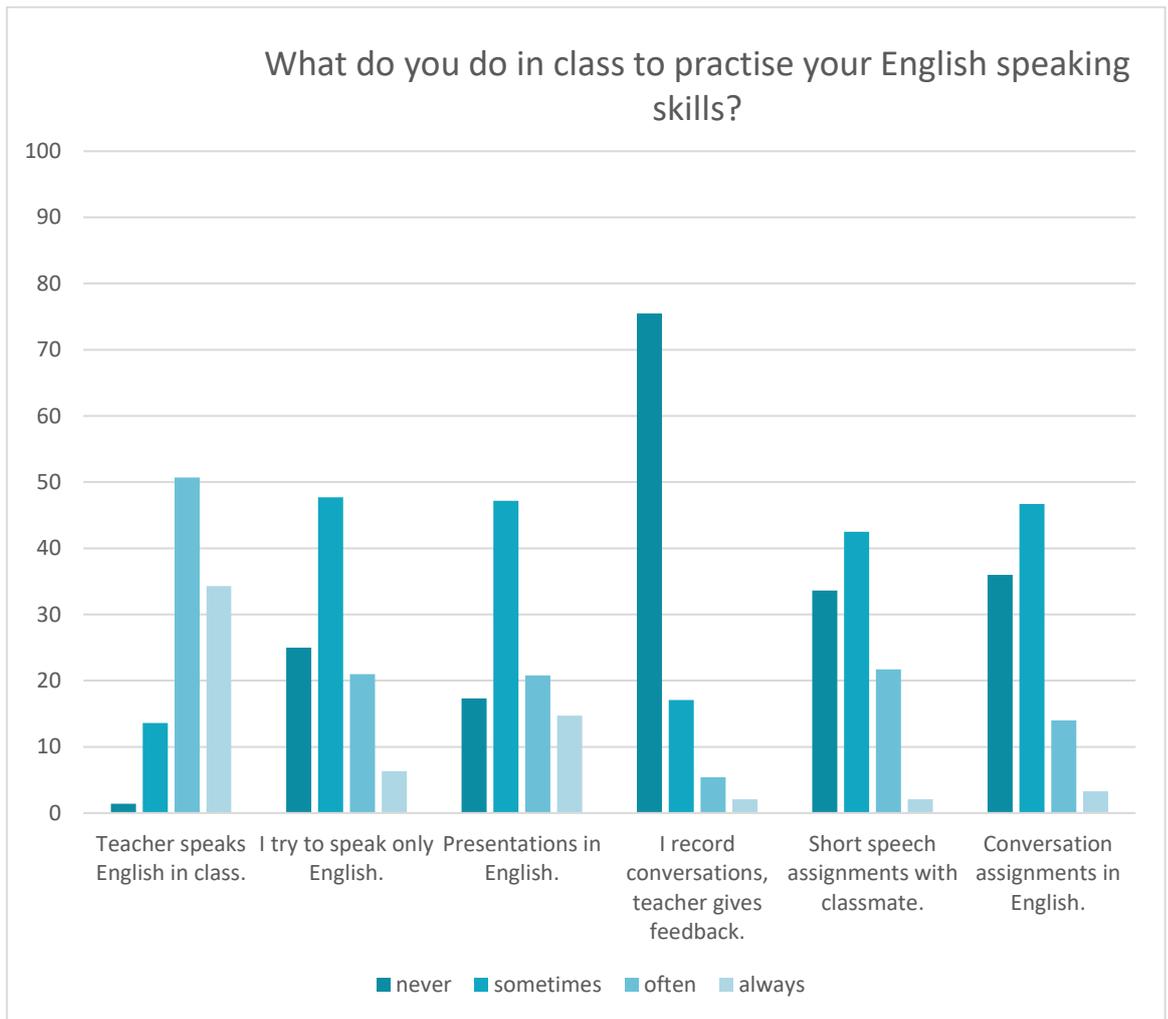
Figure 42: Havo-Speaking skills training in class
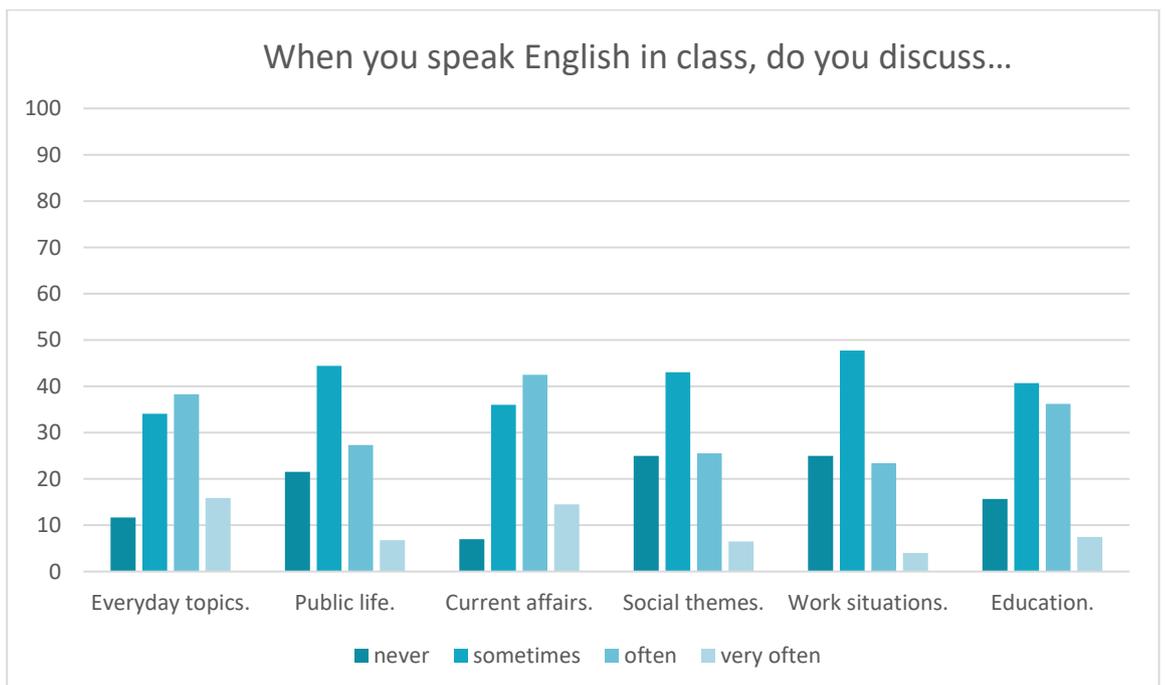

*Figure 43:* Havo-Topics of conversation in class
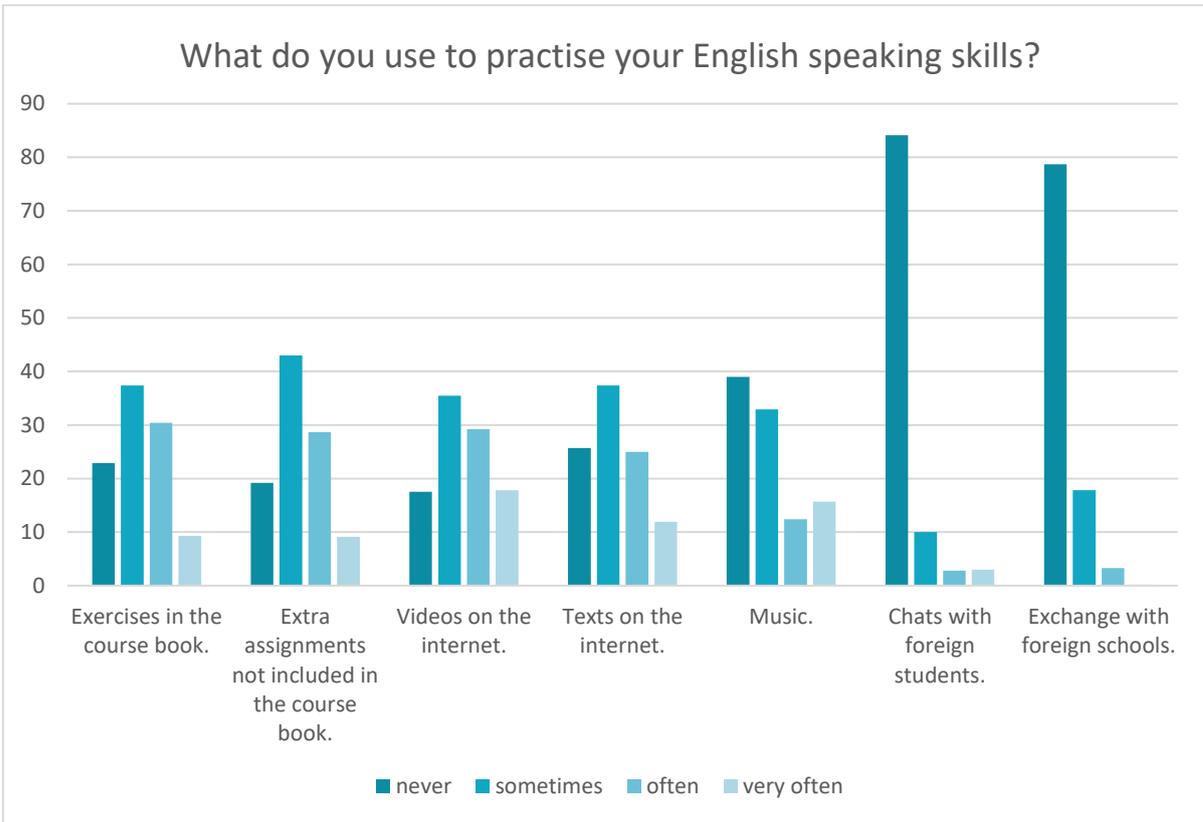
*Figure 44:* Havo-Learning activities
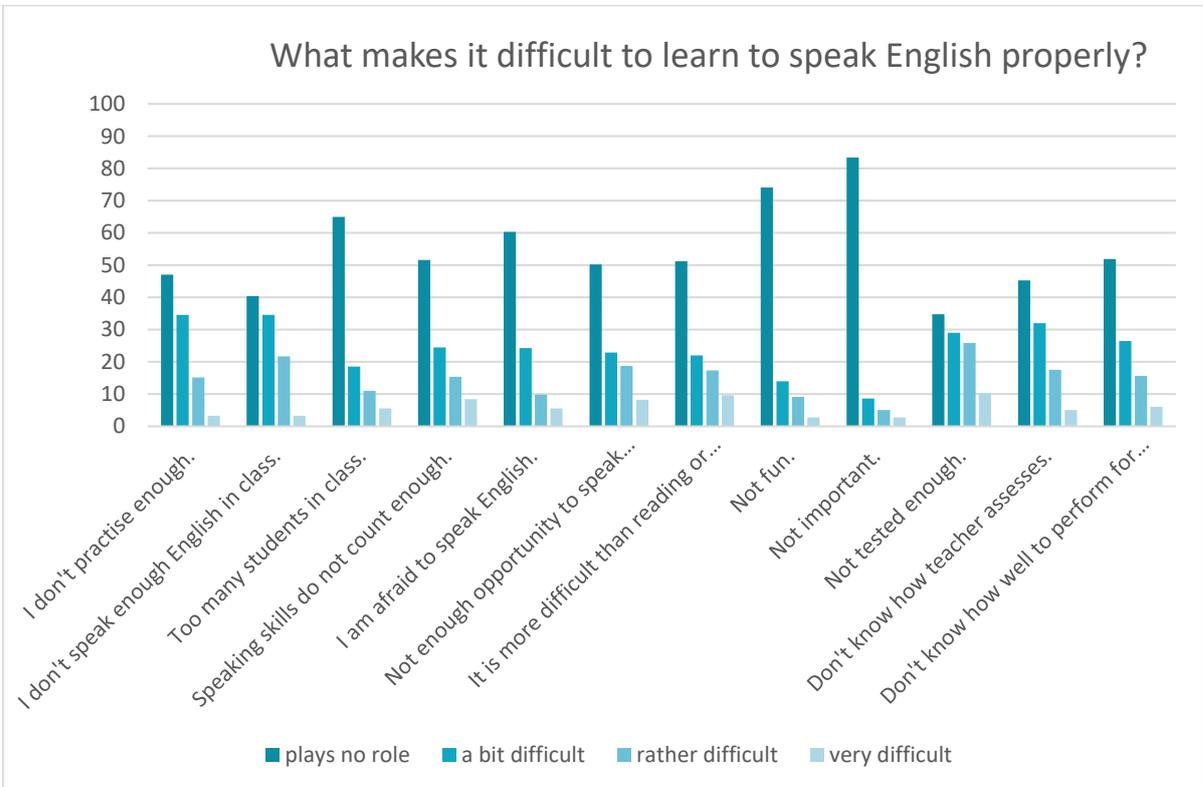
Figure 45: Havo-Barriers for speaking

Vwo (n=385)

The speaking test

Table 46: *Vwo-Difficulty of the test*

What do you think of the test? (n=385)	
	%
easy	14.0
rather easy	47.0
a bit difficult	37.1
difficult	1.8

Table 47: Vwo-*Comparison with testing at school I*

Have you ever had an English speaking test at school? (n=385)	
	%
yes	88.6
no	11.4

Table 48: *Vwo-Comparison with testing at school II*

Did today's test resemble any previous English tests? (n=341)	
	%
not at all	33.1
a bit	39.9
rather	16.1
yes!	10.9

Table 49: *Vwo-Comparison with testing at school III*

| Did you do the following things during the English speaking tests that were taken at your school? (n=341)	never %	sometimes %	often %	in every test %
I did not have to prepare anything in advance.	40.5	32.6	13.5	13.5
I didn't know in advance what I would be talking about.	29.3	37.2	21.1	12.3
The test took fifteen minutes.	7.0	19.9	49.6	23.5
The teachers who administered the test spoke only English.	10.0	7.0	20.8	62.2
I was shown pictures and was asked to talk about these.	52.5	25.5	13.5	8.5
I had to conduct a conversation.	4.1	12.6	34.9	48.4
I had to tell/present something (monologue).	6.5	24.6	43.1	25.8
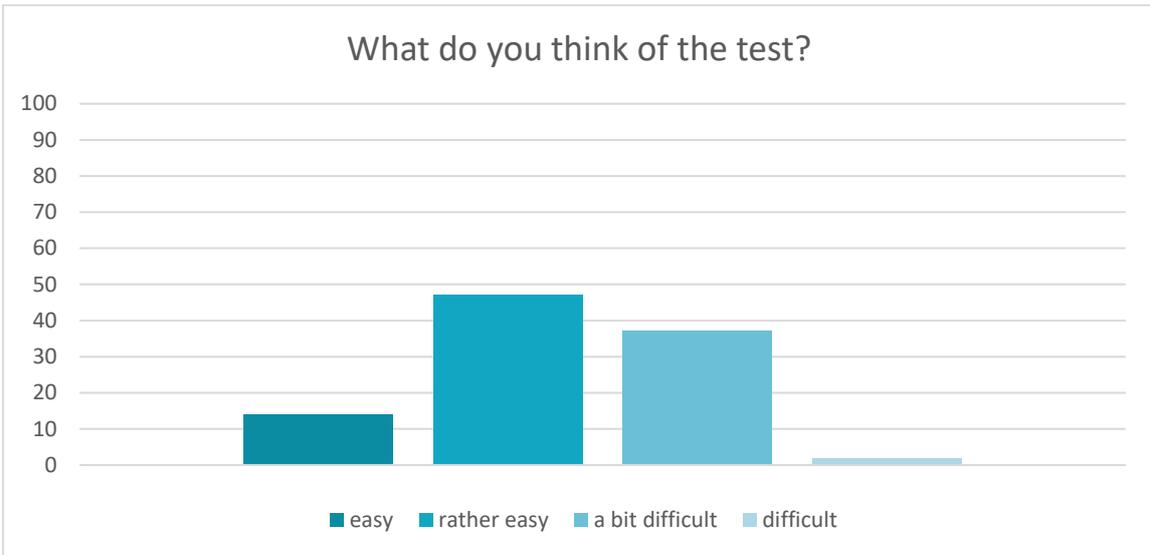
*Figure 46:* Vwo-Difficulty of the test
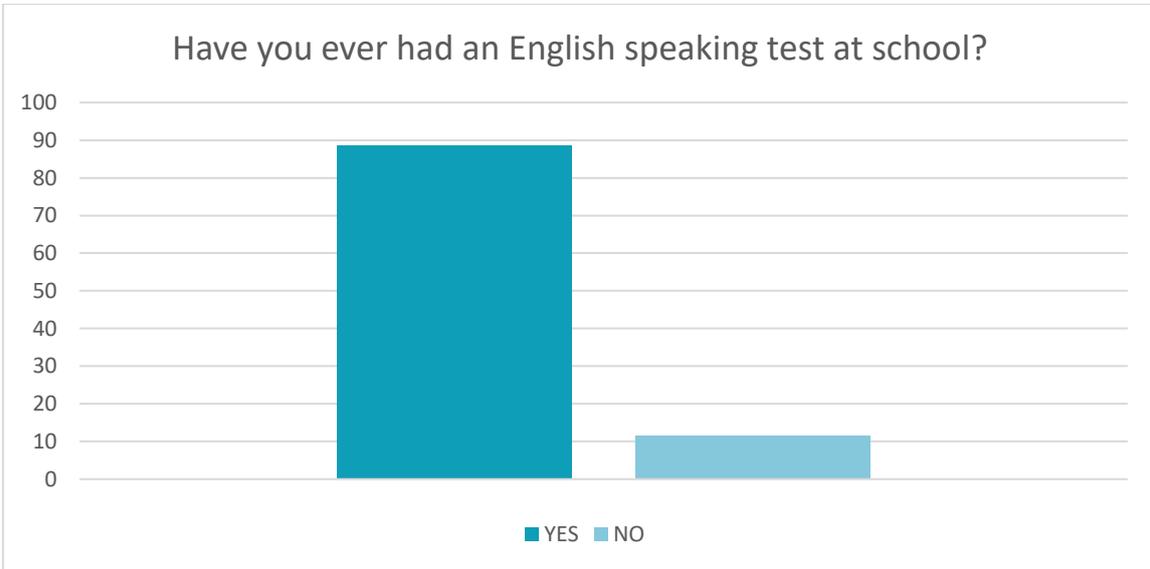
*Figure 47*: Vwo-Comparison with testing at school I
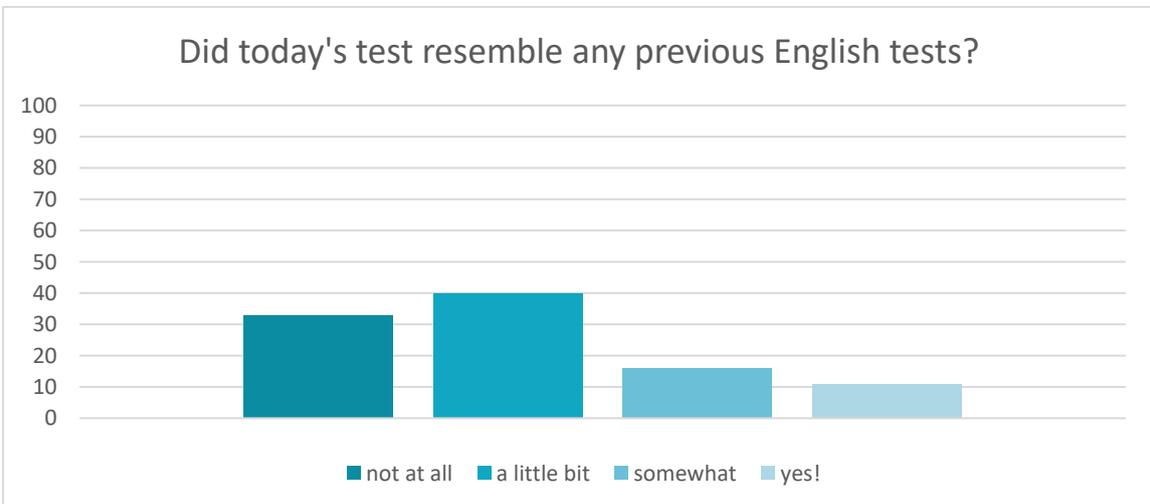

Figure 48: Vwo-Comparison with testing at school II
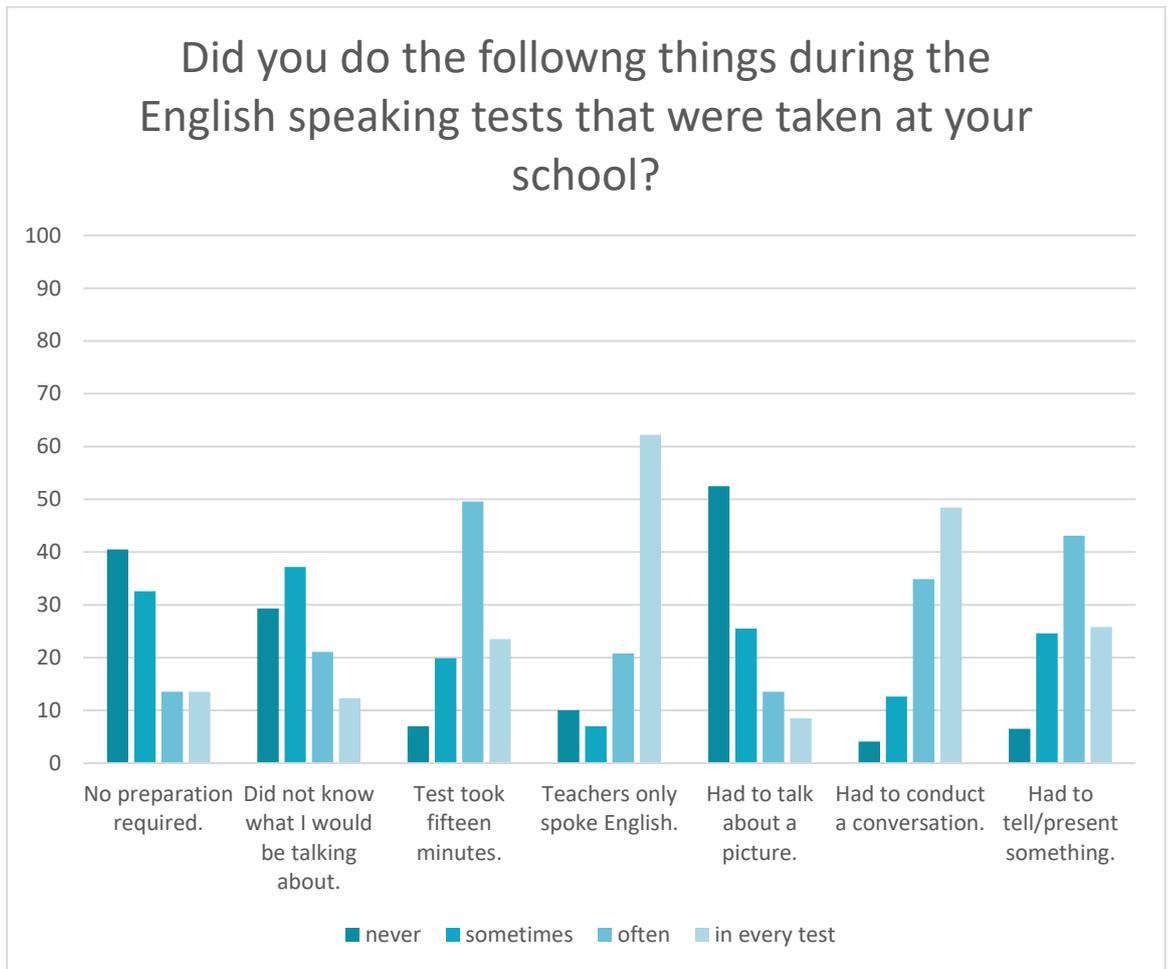
Figure 49: Vwo-Comparison with testing at school III

Speaking tests at school

Table 50: *Vwo-Frequency speaking test year 4*

How many times, approximately, did you have a speaking test in year 4? (n=341)	
	%
Not test	33.4
Once	53.9
Two times	7.1
Three times	3.4
More than three times	2.2

Table 51: *Vwo-Frequency speaking test year 5*

How many times, approximately, did you have a speaking test in year 5? (n=341)	
	%
Not test	10.6
Once	67.4
Two times	15.9
Three times	4.1
More than three times	2.1

Table 52: Vwo-*Frequency speaking test year 6*

How many times, approximately, have you had a speaking test in year 6? (n=341)	
	%
No test yet	37.0
Once	56.2
Two times	5.2
Three times	1.2
More than three times	0.3

Table 53: *Vwo-Testing speaking skills*

How is English speaking tested at your school? (n=341)	never %	sometimes %	often %	at every test %
A discussion about a current topic.	20.5	39.0	37.8	2.6
A discussion with the teacher or a classmate.	5.3	20.8	54.0	19.9
A talk/presentation.	10.6	37.8	49.6	2.1
A book discussion.	23.5	39.3	29.6	7.6
A discussion on a movie.	59.5	30.5	9.7	0.3
Describing short videos.	68.9	24.0	7.0	0.0
Reading a text.	41.6	34.6	20.5	3.2
Conducting a self-written conversation with a classmate.	50.7	31.1	16.7	1.5

Table 54: *Vwo-Preparation speaking test*

| How do you prepare for an English speaking test? (n=341)				
	never %	sometimes %	often %	at every test %
I have to practise the conversation at home.	58.4	25.8	13.2	2.6
I have to prepare a presentation at home.	19.9	39.9	31.7	8.5
I get ten minutes before the test to prepare.	53.4	21.7	17.9	7.0
I know in advance which questions will be asked, and I prepare those.	54.0	35.5	9.7	0.9
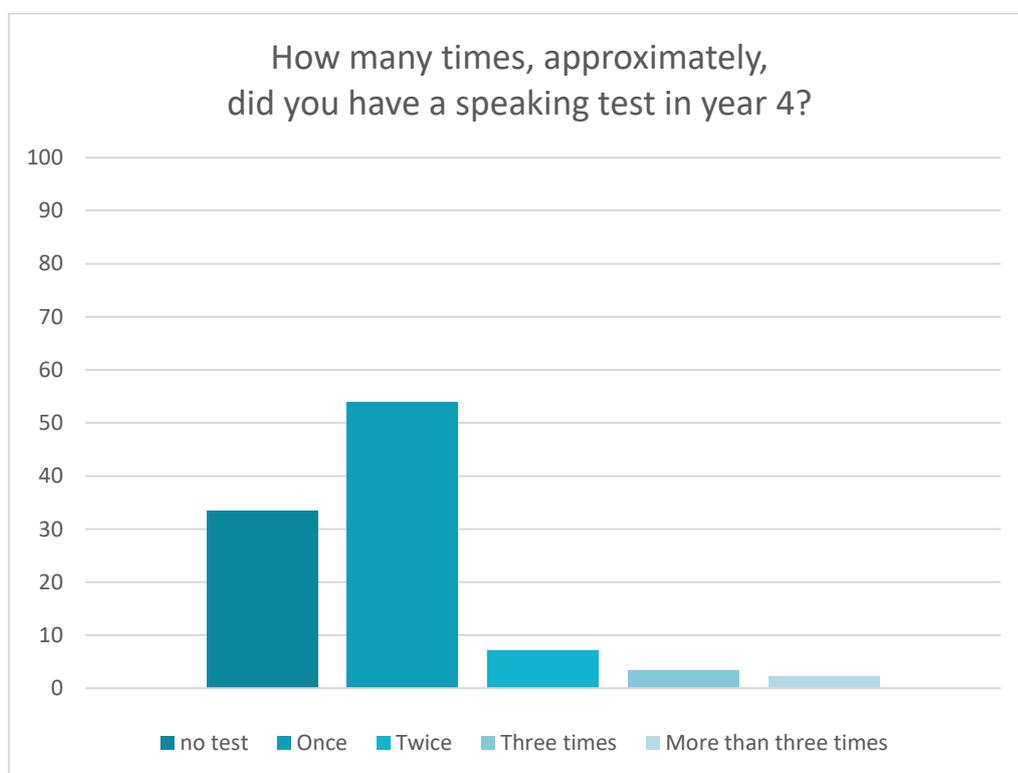
*Figure 50:* Vwo-Frequency speaking test year 4
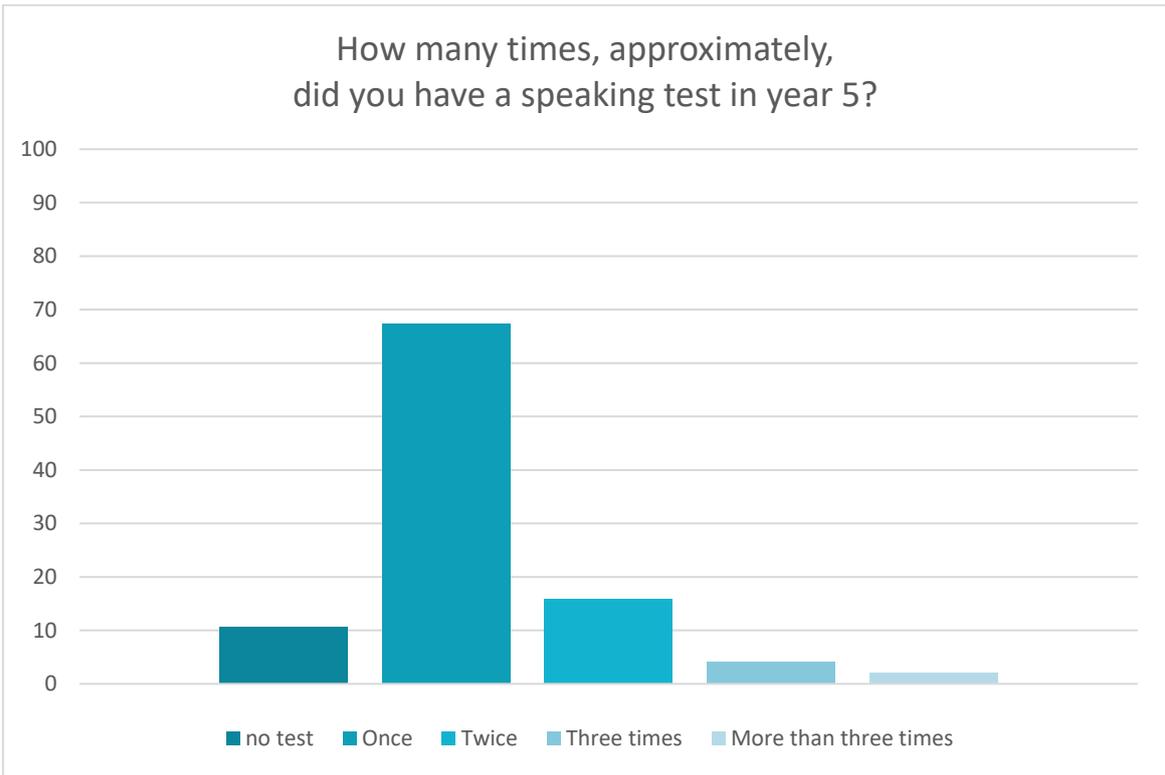
*Figure 51:* Vwo-Frequency speaking test year 5
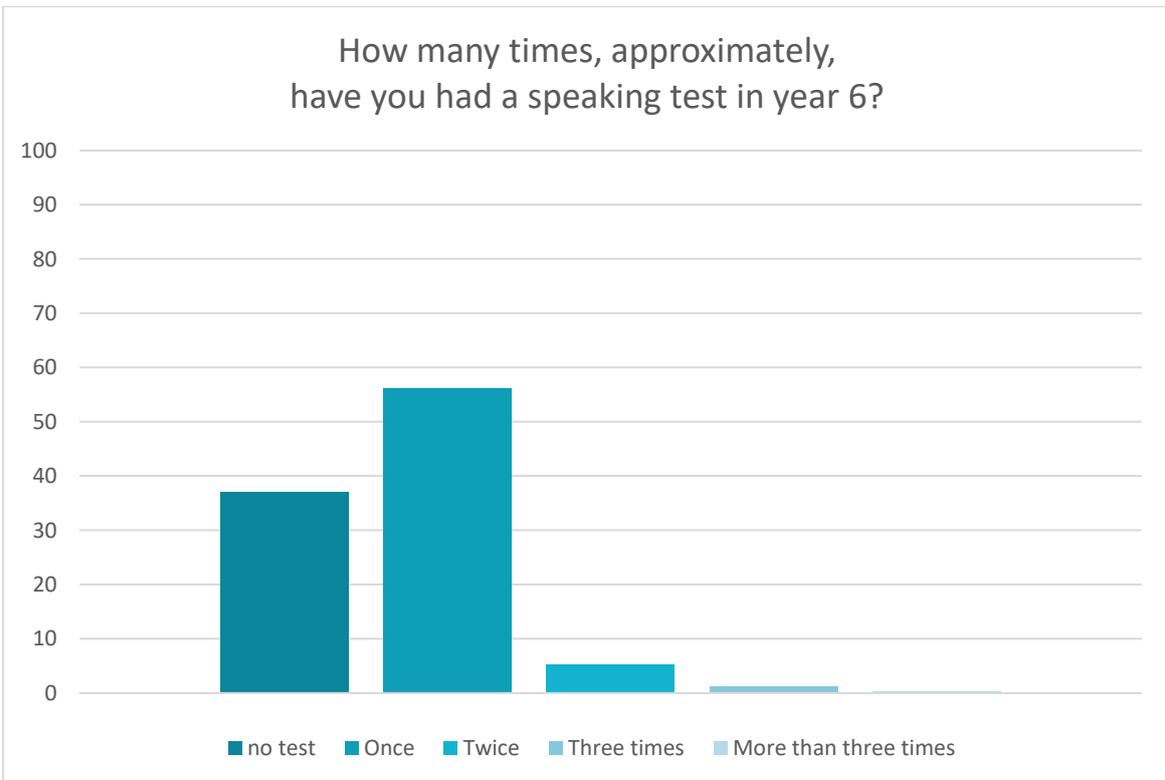
*Figure 52:* Vwo-Frequency speaking test year 6
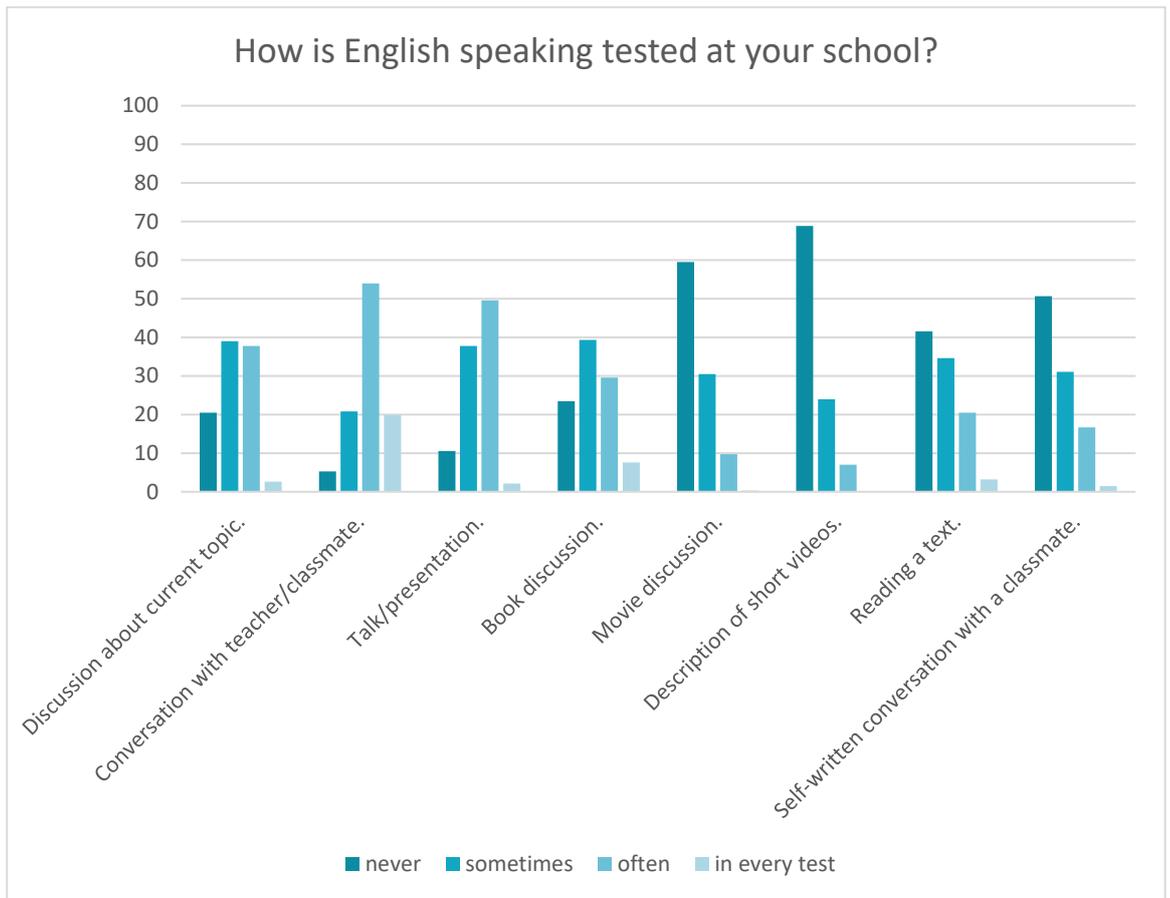
Figure 53: Vwo-Testing speaking skills
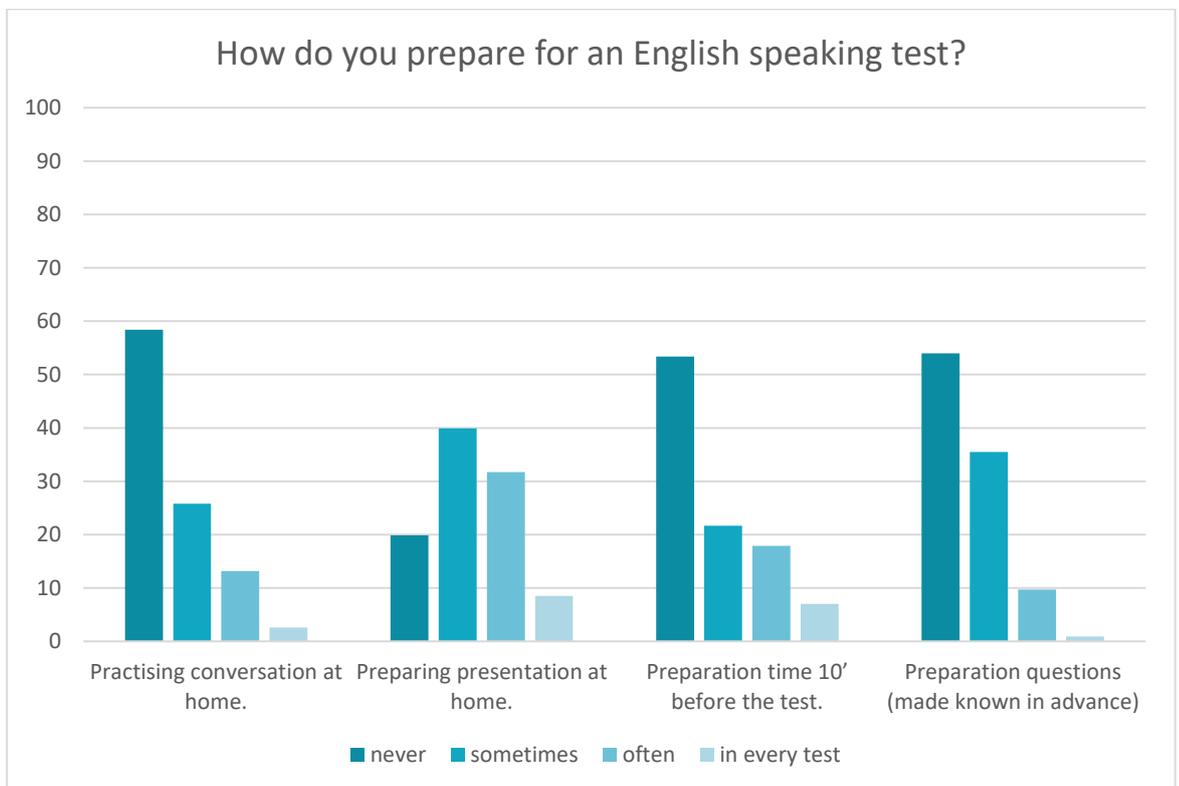
Figure 54: Vwo-Preparation speaking test

Speaking skills training

Table 55: *Vwo-Speaking skills training in class*

What do you do in class to practise your English speaking skills? (n=385)	never %	sometimes %	often %	always %
The teacher speaks English during the lesson.	0.5	10.4	42.6	46.5
I try to speak only English during the lesson.	20.0	46.5	23.6	9.9
I give presentations in English.	17.9	44.9	19.2	17.9
I record short conversations and the teacher gives feedback.	87.3	10.1	2.6	0.0
I carry out short speaking assignments with a classmate or in groups.	20.0	44.4	33.2	2.3
I carry out conversation assignments in English, trying to solve a problem or getting something done in a certain situation.	38.4	42.9	16.9	1.8

Table 56: *Vwo-Topics of conversation in class*

When you speak English in class, do you discuss… (n=385)	never %	sometimes %	often %	very often %
Everyday topics (about yourself, your family, friends and acquaintances, computer games, hobbies, spare time; over personal topics, etc.)	8.6	42.3	39.5	9.6
Public life (conversations at information desks, in shops, in a restaurant or bar, public transport, talking to businesses, public organisations, etc.)	23.9	47.8	23.9	4.4
Current affairs (the news)	2.9	26.5	53.8	16.9
Social themes (e.g.: hooliganism, euthanasia, racism, etc.)	12.7	34.5	40.8	11.9
Job-related situations (weekend job, future job, etc.)	23.9	51.4	21.0	3.6
Education (school subjects, future education, internship)	15.6	47.5	30.4	6.5

Table 57: *Vwo-Learning activities*

What do you use to practise your English speaking skills? (n=385)				
	never %	sometimes %	often %	very often %
Exercises in the course book.	40.5	35.1	20.8	3.6
Extra assignments that are not included in the course book.	15.3	36.9	35.1	12.7
Videos on the internet.	19.5	36.4	33.5	10.6
Texts on the internet.	28.6	35.6	27.5	8.3
Music.	52.2	32.2	8.8	6.8
Chat sessions with students abroad.	87.5	7.5	3.1	1.8
Exchange with a foreign school.	79.0	17.7	2.9	0.5

Table 58: *Vwo-Barriers for speaking.*

| What makes it difficult to learn to speak English properly? (n=385)				
	plays no role %	a bit difficult %	rather difficult %	very difficult %
I think I don't practise enough.	35.6	34.3	25.2	4.9
I think I don't speak enough English in class.	36.4	35.3	24.2	4.2
I think there are too many students in the classroom.	70.3	19.5	8.1	1.6
I think speaking skills do not count enough for the final mark.	62.3	21.3	13.2	3.1
I am afraid to speak English during class.	60.3	22.6	11.7	5.5
I do not have enough opportunities to speak English out of school.	37.7	28.6	25.7	8.1
I find speaking more difficult than reading or listening.	42.9	24.7	22.3	10.1
I do not like speaking.	68.6	16.9	8.6	6.0
I do not think speaking is important.	88.8	8.3	2.6	0.3
I think speaking is not tested enough.	41.0	33.8	20.5	4.7
I do not know how the teacher rates speaking skills.	47.8	30.6	17.4	4.2
I don't know how well I need to speak English in order to score a passing mark.	50.1	28.3	15.8	5.7
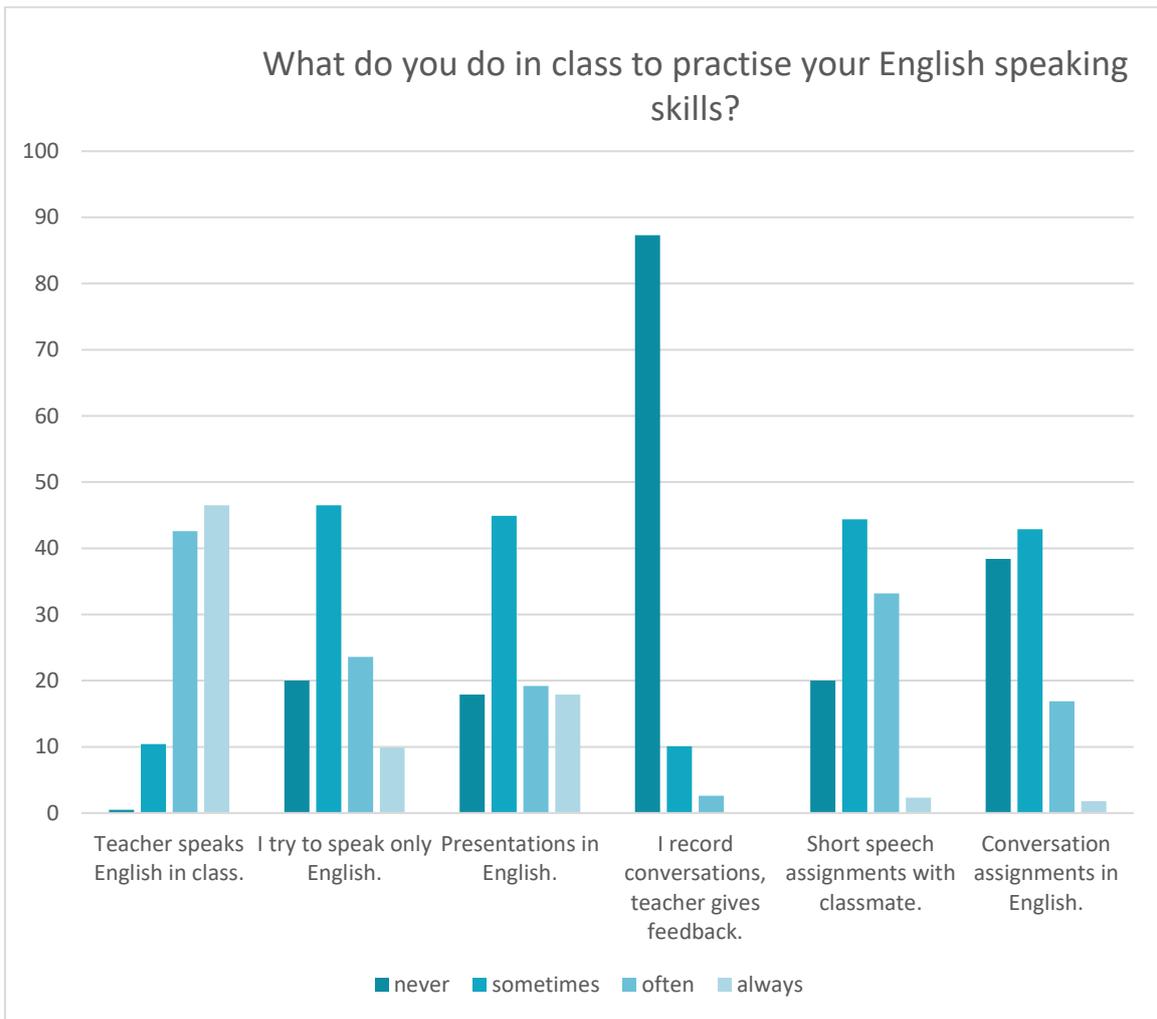
Figure 55: Vwo-Speaking skills training in class
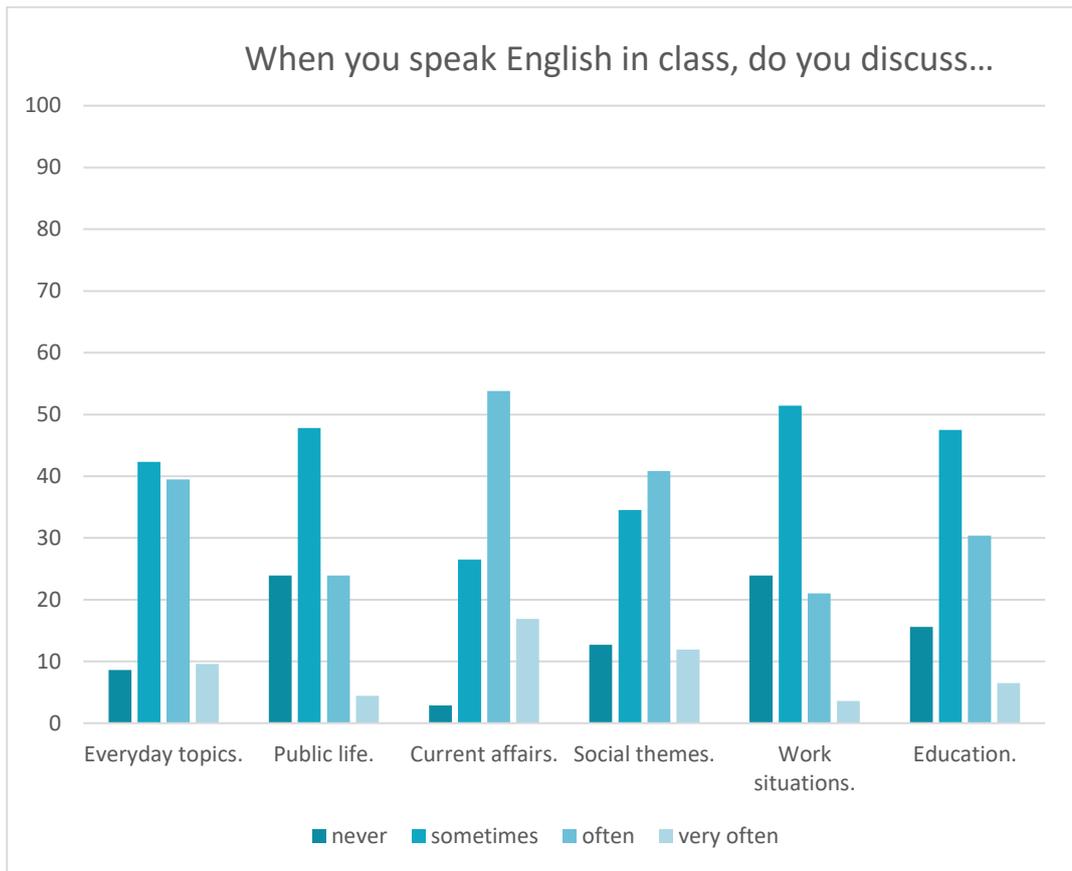
*Figure 56:* Vwo-Topics of conversation in class
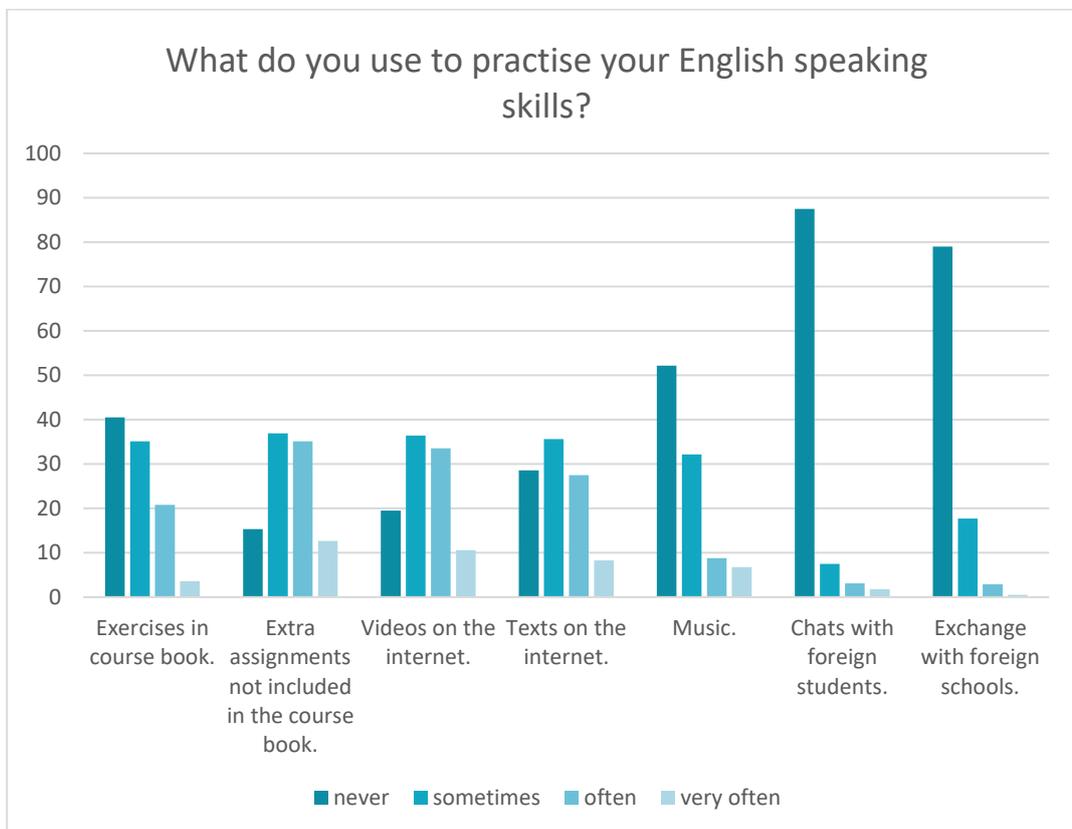

Figure 57: Vwo-Learning activities
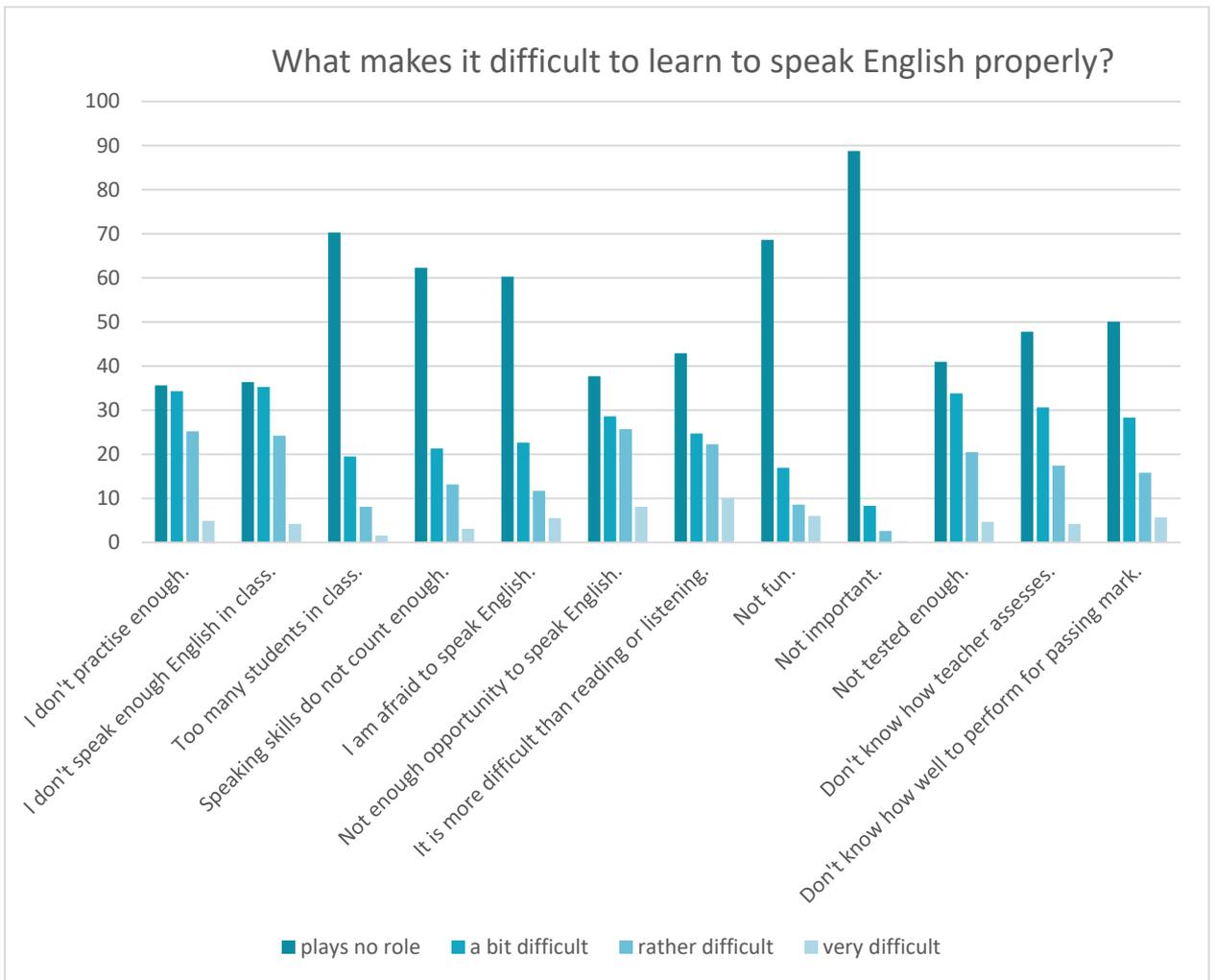
Figure 58: Vwo-Barriers for speaking

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SLO is the Netherlands institute for curriculum development in primary, secondary and special education. We work with teachers, school leadership and other stakeholders in designing the national curriculum framework, enabling individual schools to implement their own curriculum.

As a national institute SLO is in a position to combine educational practices with policy guidelines, societal trends and academic research. We offer our expertise to educators and governments in the form of subject-based curricula, tools for teachers, sample teaching materials, conferences and reports.

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