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PROYECTO DE INVESTIGACIÓN:

**“USING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING AS A STRATEGY TO IMPROVE
SPEAKING PERFORMANCE IN EFL LEARNERS”**

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in EFL Learners”

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DEDICATORIA

Este proyecto está dedicado a todas las personas que han sido fundamentales en mi vida y me han acompañado en este camino:

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARACIÓN DE AUTORÍA Y CESIÓN DE DERECHOS	ii
CERTIFICACIÓN DE CULMINACIÓN DEL PROYECTO	iii
DE INVESTIGACIÓN	iii
CERTIFICADO DEL REPORTE DE LA HERRAMIENTA DE PREVENCIÓN DE COINCIDENCIA Y/O PLAGIO ACADÉMICO	iv
PROYECTO DE INVESTIGACIÓN	v
DEDICATORIA	vi
AGRADECIMIENTOS	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
LIST OF APPENDICES	xii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER I.....	5
1.1. Research Problem.....	6
1.1.1. Problem Statement	6
1.1.2. Problem formulation	7
1.1.3. Systematization of the problem.....	7
1.2. OBJECTIVES	8
2.1.1. General Objectives:.....	8
2.1.2. Specific Objectives:.....	8
1.3. JUSTIFICATION.....	9
CHAPTER II.....	10
2.1. Conceptual Framework	11
2.1.2 Collaborative Learning.....	11
2.1.3 Speaking Performance.....	12
2.1.4 Fluency	13
2.1.5 Pronunciation	14
2.1.6 Confidence in Speaking	14
2.1.7 Peer Interaction	15
2.2. Reference Framework	16
2.2.1. Sociocultural Theory	16

2.2.2. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).....	17
2.2.3. Collaborative Learning and Cooperative Models.....	17
2.2.4. Second Language Acquisition Theories.....	18
2.2.5. Affective Filter Hypothesis	19
2.2.6. Synthesis of Theoretical Perspectives	20
2.3 Legal Framework	21
2.3.1. Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador (2008)	21
2.3.2. Organic Law of Intercultural Education (LOEI).....	21
2.3.3. National English Curriculum (2016).....	22
2.3.4. Plan Nacional de Desarrollo (National Development Plan).....	22
2.3.5. International Frameworks	23
2.3.6. Additional Considerations.....	23
CHAPTER III.....	24
3.1. Location.....	25
3.2. Types of Research	25
3.3. Research Methods	25
3.4. Data Collection Sources	26
3.5. Research Design.....	26
3.6. Research Instruments	27
3.7. Human and Material Resources	28
3.8. Treatment of Data.....	28
3.9. Triangulation of Information.....	29
3.10. Ethical Considerations.....	29
CHAPTER IV	31
4.1. Results	32
4.1.1 Pre-Test Speaking Results.....	32
4.1.2. Post-Test Speaking Results	34
4.1.3 Comparison Pre-Test and Post-Test.....	36
4.1.4. Pre-survey Results.....	38
4.1.5. Post -survey Results	42
4.1.6 Classroom observations.....	47
4.2 Discussion	50
CHAPTER V.....	53
6.1. Conclusions	54
6.2. Recommendations	55
CHAPTER VI	56
BIBLIOGRAPHY	57

CHAPTER VII.....	63
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LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Summary of Collaborative Speaking Activities Implemented During the Intervention.....	27
Table 2. Pre-Test Speaking Results by Criteria (n = 30)	33
Table 3. Post-Test Speaking Results by Criteria (n = 30)	35
Table 4. Pre-survey results on students' perceptions before the intervention (n = 30)	38
Table 5. Categories of open-ended responses in the pre-survey.....	41
Table 6. Post-survey results on students' perceptions of collaborative activities (n = 30)	42
Table 7. Categories of open-ended responses in the post-survey	44

LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 1.** Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Speaking Results by Criterion (%) 36
- Figure 2.** Comparison of pre- and post-survey results (Never, Sometimes, Always). 46
- Figure 3.** Observed progression of collaborative learning criteria across Weeks 2–7. 49

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1	64
APPENDIX 2	65
APPENDIX 3	67
APPENDIX 4	68
APPENDIX 5	69
APPENDIX 6	70
APPENDIX 7	71
APPENDIX 8	72

CÓDIGO DUBLIN

Título:	Using Collaborative Learning as a Strategy to Improve Speaking Performance in EFL Learners		
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Palabras claves:	Aprendizaje colaborativo	Expresión oral	Confianza, estudiantes de EFL
Fecha de publicación:	Noviembre, 2025		
Editorial:	Quevedo- UTEQ – 2025		
Resumen: (hasta 300 palabras)	<p>Este estudio analizó cómo el aprendizaje colaborativo ayudó a mejorar las habilidades orales en inglés de estudiantes de séptimo grado en Ecuador. Mediante un diseño pre experimental y un enfoque mixto que incluyó pruebas, encuestas y observaciones, los resultados mostraron avances en fluidez, pronunciación, vocabulario y confianza. Los estudiantes se mostraron más motivados y participativos, pasando de respuestas memorizadas a una producción oral más espontánea. Basado en la Teoría Sociocultural de Vygotsky y la Hipótesis del Filtro Afectivo, el estudio concluye que el aprendizaje colaborativo es una estrategia eficaz para desarrollar la competencia comunicativa en aulas de EFL con recursos limitados.</p>		
Abstract: (hasta 300 palabras)	<p>This study examined how collaborative learning helped improve English speaking skills among seventh-grade students in Ecuador. Using a pre-experimental mixed-methods design with tests, surveys, and observations, the results showed clear progress in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and confidence. Students became more motivated and participative, moving from memorized to spontaneous speech. Grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and the Affective Filter Hypothesis, the study concludes that collaborative learning is an effective strategy to develop communicative competence in EFL classrooms with limited resources.</p>		
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RESUMEN

El presente estudio analizó la influencia del aprendizaje colaborativo como estrategia para mejorar las destrezas orales en inglés de un grupo de 30 estudiantes de séptimo grado de Educación General Básica en la Unidad Educativa Carlos Julio Arosemena, ubicada en Quevedo, Ecuador. Se utilizó un diseño pre-experimental con enfoque mixto, aplicando pruebas orales (pre-test y post-test), encuestas y listas de observación para evaluar tanto el progreso cuantitativo como las percepciones cualitativas de los estudiantes. Los resultados sugieren que los participantes lograron avances notables en fluidez, pronunciación y uso de vocabulario, además de mostrar mayor seguridad, motivación y disposición para hablar en inglés. Las encuestas reflejaron un cambio positivo en la autopercepción de los estudiantes, pasando de respuestas relacionadas con nerviosismo y dependencia del docente a una actitud más participativa y motivada. Asimismo, las observaciones evidenciaron una transición de producciones memorizadas a una comunicación más espontánea y segura. Estos hallazgos se alinean con teorías como la Sociocultural de Vygotsky, la Enseñanza Comunicativa de la Lengua y la Hipótesis del Filtro Afectivo, que destacan la importancia de la interacción social, el andamiaje y la reducción de la ansiedad en el aprendizaje de lenguas. En conclusión, el estudio demuestra que el aprendizaje colaborativo constituye una alternativa viable y sostenible para fortalecer la competencia comunicativa en contextos escolares públicos, incluso cuando existen limitaciones de recursos.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje colaborativo, expresión oral, confianza, estudiantes de EFL.

ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of collaborative learning as a strategy to enhance English speaking skills among 30 seventh-grade students at Unidad Educativa Carlos Julio Arosemena in Quevedo, Ecuador. A pre-experimental, mixed-methods design was employed, using pre- and post-tests, surveys, and classroom observations to assess both quantitative outcomes and qualitative perceptions. The findings suggested that students made significant progress in fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary, while also gaining confidence, motivation, and willingness to participate in oral activities. Survey results revealed a positive shift in students' self-perceptions, moving from nervousness and reliance on teacher support toward more active and motivated participation. Observations confirmed this evolution, showing a transition from memorized responses to more spontaneous and confident oral production. These results align with theoretical perspectives such as Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, Communicative Language Teaching, and the Affective Filter Hypothesis, all of which emphasize interaction, scaffolding, and the reduction of anxiety in second language learning. In conclusion, the study indicates that collaborative learning can serve as a feasible and sustainable pedagogical approach to foster communicative competence in EFL classrooms, particularly in resource-constrained public school contexts.

Keywords: collaborative learning, speaking, confidence, EFL students,.

INTRODUCTION

The learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has become a fundamental requirement in today's interconnected world. Mastery of English is not only associated with greater academic and professional opportunities but also with access to cultural exchange, scientific collaboration, and international mobility. Reports such as the EF English Proficiency Index (2024) reveal that Ecuador continues to rank in the low proficiency band, falling behind several Latin American countries such as Argentina, Chile, and Costa Rica. These results underline the urgent need to strengthen English instruction, particularly in the area of speaking, which remains one of the least developed skills among Ecuadorian learners. The lack of strong speaking competence not only reduces the chances of Ecuadorian students to communicate effectively with the international community but also limits their capacity to participate in academic programs abroad or in professional settings that demand interaction in English. In this sense, the improvement of oral communication is no longer a desirable addition but a necessity for competitiveness in a globalized environment, where fluency and confidence in English are increasingly viewed as essential skills for integration into the academic, social, and professional world.

Speaking is widely acknowledged as one of the most challenging abilities to acquire in EFL contexts, especially for beginner learners. Unlike receptive skills such as listening or reading, speaking requires learners to simultaneously combine vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency in real time, while also managing psychological barriers like anxiety and fear of making mistakes (Derakhshan, Khalili, & Beheshti, 2016). Research has also shown that speaking anxiety is closely related to students' self-efficacy: learners who believe in their ability to succeed are more willing to take risks and participate in oral tasks, while those with low self-confidence tend to avoid communication altogether (Öztürk, 2023). In Ecuadorian classrooms, where instruction still prioritizes grammar and writing over oral interaction, students often respond with isolated words or memorized expressions, avoiding complete sentences and authentic communication (Richards, 2015). This reliance on mechanical and traditional methods not only slows linguistic development but also undermines students' motivation and willingness to speak, resulting in limited opportunities to develop fluency, accuracy, and confidence in real communicative contexts.

International research highlights collaborative learning as a promising strategy to address these challenges. Johnson and Johnson (2014) emphasize that cooperative and collaborative approaches foster active participation, positive interdependence, and peer support, which are essential for both academic and emotional development. The benefits of collaboration have been documented in multiple contexts. For instance, Pattanpichet (2011) demonstrated that Thai students in collaborative environments developed greater fluency and confidence than those taught through teacher-centered instruction. Similarly, Al Jawad (2023) and Alzubi, Nazim, and Ahamad (2024) reported that students engaged in structured collaborative tasks outperformed control groups in oral communication, confirming that collaboration creates conditions that promote linguistic and social growth. These findings suggest that collaborative learning is not merely an alternative method but a powerful approach to transform classroom dynamics by encouraging learners to practice, negotiate meaning, and co-construct knowledge through interaction.

In Latin America, collaborative learning has also been applied with positive results, demonstrating its adaptability to diverse educational settings. Zapata, Almeida, and Guagchinga (2025) implemented a methodological guide based on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Ecuador, which resulted in significant improvements in communicative competence among young EFL learners. Their findings show that communicative and collaborative approaches can be successfully integrated even in contexts with limited resources, confirming their relevance to Ecuadorian schools. At the national level, Álvarez, Tamayo, and dos Santos (2024) identified persistent challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, insufficient instructional time, and teacher-centered methodologies that hinder the development of speaking skills. Complementing this, Guerrero Rodríguez and Moreira Baquerizo (2025) examined Ecuadorian EFL teachers' experiences and highlighted both the difficulties and potential of collaborative strategies to foster oral participation. These studies not only provide evidence of the problem but also suggest that solutions such as structured collaboration can contribute significantly to overcoming the limitations of the current system.

The theoretical foundations of this study are supported by Sociocultural Theory and Communicative Language Teaching. Vygotsky (1978) argued that learning occurs within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learners acquire new knowledge through social interaction and guidance provided by more capable peers. In collaborative

environments, scaffolding allows students to perform beyond their individual capacities, making oral practice more natural and less stressful. Similarly, CLT emphasizes authentic interaction, fluency, and negotiation of meaning as central elements in the development of communicative competence (Savignon, 2018). By integrating collaboration and communication, learners are exposed to real language use in supportive contexts that reduce anxiety, promote participation, and strengthen self-confidence. These theoretical perspectives reinforce the idea that collaborative learning is not only a set of techniques but also a comprehensive pedagogical approach that responds to the linguistic and affective needs of EFL learners.

It is within this context that the present research was carried out at Unidad Educativa Carlos Julio Arosemena, in Quevedo, Los Ríos province, Ecuador, with a group of 30 seventh-grade students (7° “B”) at a beginner level of English. The study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of collaborative learning as a strategy to enhance speaking performance, focusing specifically on fluency, pronunciation, and confidence. A mixed-methods, pre-experimental design was employed, using pre- and post-tests assessed with a rubric to provide quantitative data, while classroom observations and student surveys supplied qualitative insights into participation, perceptions, and challenges. The design of this research not only makes it possible to measure progress in oral performance but also to capture the voices of students and understand their attitudes toward collaboration, thereby offering a comprehensive view of the process of learning to speak English in an Ecuadorian public school context.

The significance of this project is threefold. At the theoretical level, it contributes to the growing body of evidence supporting collaborative learning as an effective approach for developing speaking in EFL contexts, complementing international, regional, and national studies. At the pedagogical level, it offers practical and adaptable strategies that teachers can implement even in resource-limited classrooms, demonstrating feasible alternatives to traditional grammar-centered instruction. At the institutional and social level, it aligns with Ecuador’s National English Curriculum (Ministerio de Educación, 2016) and broader policies that recognize communicative competence as a key factor for global integration (Secretaría Nacional de Planificación, 2017). By doing so, the project provides insights not only for the case of Carlos Julio Arosemena but also for other institutions facing similar

challenges in Ecuador and beyond, making it a relevant contribution to the strengthening of EFL education in the country.

In conclusion, this study not only seeks to demonstrate that collaborative learning can improve the speaking performance of beginner EFL learners in Ecuador but also to provide practical insights that may strengthen communicative English teaching practices nationwide. By promoting interaction, cooperation, and meaningful oral practice, collaborative learning represents a sustainable methodology for preparing students to face the linguistic and professional demands of an increasingly globalized world.

This study is structured into five chapters. Chapter I introduces the research problem, objectives, and justification. Chapter II presents the theoretical foundations, including the conceptual, referential, and legal frameworks that support the study. Chapter III details the methodology, specifying the type and design of the research, participants, instruments, and procedures. Chapter IV presents and discusses the results obtained through pre- and post-tests, surveys, and classroom observations. Finally, Chapter V summarizes the main conclusions of the study and offers recommendations for teachers, institutions, and future researchers.

CHAPTER I
CONTEXTUALIZATION OF RESEARCH

1.1. Research Problem

1.1.1. Problem Statement

The teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Ecuador faces persistent challenges, particularly in the development of oral communication skills. Despite curricular reforms that emphasize communicative competence, students often show limited progress in speaking due to traditional teaching methods that prioritize grammar and written exercises over interactive oral practice (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2016). In the case of 7th-grade students at Unidad Educativa Carlos Julio Arosemena, located in Quevedo, province of Los Ríos, most learners present a beginner level of English with difficulties in fluency, pronunciation, and self-confidence when speaking.

Classroom observations reveal that students rarely engage in meaningful interaction and tend to respond with isolated words or memorized phrases rather than constructing complete utterances. This situation is aggravated by large class sizes, teacher-centered approaches, and limited exposure to English outside the classroom. In addition, in many public schools of Quevedo, the same teacher is responsible for teaching all subjects, including English, which means that instruction is not always provided by a language specialist. This significantly limits the opportunities for effective oral practice and specialized methodologies.

The lack of technological and didactic resources also represents a critical limitation in this context. Classrooms often do not have projectors, computers, or audiovisual materials, which reduces the possibilities of using modern input to motivate oral communication. As a result, English lessons rely heavily on textbooks and teacher explanations, leaving little space for dynamic oral interaction.

International research highlights that collaborative learning fosters interaction, peer support, and confidence in oral communication (Gillies, 2016; Laal & Ghodsi, 2012). However, in Ecuador, this strategy is not consistently applied in EFL classrooms, where traditional methods still prevail. This gap justifies the need for implementing collaborative learning activities that adapt to local limitations while promoting active participation and the improvement of speaking skills.

1.1.2. Problem formulation

How does the implementation of collaborative learning strategies improve the speaking performance of beginner-level EFL students in 7th grade at Unidad Educativa Carlos Julio Arosemena?

1.1.3. Systematization of the problem

What theoretical foundations support the use of collaborative learning to enhance speaking skills in EFL learners?

What collaborative activities can be applied in the classroom to foster fluency, pronunciation, and communicative confidence in beginner-level students?

What differences can be identified in students' speaking performance before and after implementing collaborative learning strategies?

What are students' perceptions of collaborative learning as a strategy to improve their speaking performance?

What challenges and difficulties do students face when developing their speaking skills in English within a collaborative learning environment?

1.2. OBJECTIVES

2.1.1. General Objectives:

To evaluate the effectiveness of collaborative learning strategies in improving the speaking performance of beginner-level EFL students, focusing on fluency, pronunciation, and confidence.

2.1.2. Specific Objectives:

- To provide a theoretical bases for the use of collaborative learning in improving beginner-level EFL students' speaking performance, drawing on studies of peer interaction, speaking skill acquisition, and challenges in the Ecuadorian educational setting.
- To implement collaborative learning activities that foster structured peer interaction and promote speaking practice among beginner-level EFL students.
- To evaluate the improvement in students' fluency, pronunciation, and communicative confidence by comparing their pre-test and post-test speaking performance through rubric-based assessment.
- To analyze students' perceptions and the challenges they face in developing speaking skills within a collaborative learning environment, using data collected from surveys and systematic classroom observations supported by checklists.

1.3. JUSTIFICATION

The teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Ecuador continues to face significant challenges in the development of speaking skills, particularly among beginner-level students. Although curricular reforms emphasize communicative competence, oral practice in the classroom is often overshadowed by traditional approaches focused on grammar and writing. This issue is exacerbated by contextual factors such as limited instructional time, lack of technological and didactic resources, overcrowded classrooms, and, in many cases, the absence of specialized English teachers. As a result, students exhibit deficiencies in fluency, pronunciation, and self-confidence, which highlights the urgent need for innovative strategies that promote real and meaningful oral interaction.

In this context, collaborative learning emerges as an effective pedagogical alternative, as it fosters peer cooperation, mutual support, and joint knowledge construction. This methodology not only enhances oral production but also strengthens transversal skills such as teamwork, critical thinking, and self-confidence, all of which are essential for students' integral development. However, its implementation also entails challenges: some students may show resistance to group work, experience difficulties organizing interaction, or feel insecure when speaking English. The analysis of these perceptions and difficulties represents an added value of this study, since it provides a realistic understanding of the implementation of collaborative strategies in Ecuadorian classrooms.

This research is justified at the theoretical level, as it is supported by academic evidence demonstrating the positive effect of collaborative learning on the development of oral communication in EFL contexts. At the pedagogical level, it offers practical activities adapted to resource-limited environments, providing teachers with tools to diversify their methodologies and move beyond the rigidity of traditional teaching. At the social and institutional level, the study aligns with the objectives of the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education, which aim to strengthen communicative competence in English as a gateway to greater academic and professional opportunities in a globalized world.

In conclusion, this project represents a significant contribution not only to the Unidad Educativa Carlos Julio Arosemena, by offering concrete strategies to improve students' speaking performance, but also to the broader Ecuadorian educational system, by proposing a methodological alternative that prioritizes interaction, collaboration, and the formation of more competent and confident English speakers.

CHAPTER II
THEORETICAL BASES OF THE RESEARCH

2.1. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework outlines the central categories of this research, clarifying how collaborative learning and speaking performance are interrelated in the EFL classroom. These concepts are not only defined but also argued in light of current research and contextualized within Ecuadorian education.

2.1.2 Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning is not simply a matter of grouping students together; it represents a pedagogical paradigm where learners work interdependently to achieve shared objectives while constructing knowledge collectively. Johnson and Johnson (2014) identified essential principles of cooperative learning—positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, social skills, and group processing—that ensure effective collaboration and student engagement. Gillies (2019) further argued that collaborative structures create opportunities for learners to develop higher-order thinking and sustained communication, both of which are crucial in EFL contexts.

Empirical evidence has consistently supported its effectiveness. Al Jawad (2023) demonstrated that cooperative strategies significantly improved speaking performance among university students, showing gains in fluency, pronunciation, and willingness to communicate. Spinelli (2024) also found that Latin American learners benefited from peer collaboration, reporting fewer linguistic errors and stronger motivation when working in heterogeneous groups. In Ecuador, Álvarez, Tamayo, and dos Santos (2024) observed that teachers considered collaborative strategies valuable in addressing classroom overcrowding and limited instructional time, though their implementation remained inconsistent.

In addition, collaborative learning responds to the affective dimension of language learning. Bicen (2024) confirmed that collaborative environments lowered learners' anxiety, while Bozkurt and Aydin (2023) observed that distributing responsibility within groups reduced fear of mistakes and promoted greater participation. This is particularly relevant in Ecuadorian schools, where students often hesitate to speak due to insecurity. Thus, collaborative learning emerges as a holistic approach that fosters linguistic, affective, and social development.

Finally, collaborative learning is adaptable to diverse contexts and resources. Guerrero Rodríguez and Moreira Baquerizo (2025) reported that Ecuadorian teachers frequently employ collaborative tasks—such as role plays, group interviews, and information-gap activities—to promote oral practice even in under-resourced settings. Therefore, collaborative learning stands as both a theoretically grounded and practically viable methodology for enhancing speaking performance.

2.1.3 Speaking Performance

Speaking performance is a multifaceted construct involving the ability to produce comprehensible, meaningful, and contextually appropriate oral communication. Richards (2015) defined it as the capacity to engage in real-time interaction, while Derakhshan, Khalili, and Beheshti (2016) emphasized its complexity due to the interplay of linguistic, cognitive, and affective factors. In Ecuador, Álvarez et al. (2024) highlighted that overcrowded classrooms and grammar-oriented instruction hinder oral development, leading learners to rely on memorized structures instead of authentic communication. Rahman and Pandian (2018) likewise observed that excessive emphasis on grammar globally has limited learners' spontaneous language use.

Scholars have argued that speaking performance should be assessed through specific dimensions such as fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and confidence. Luoma (2004) emphasized that oral proficiency must be measured holistically, considering not only accuracy but also coherence, interactional competence, and the ability to sustain communication over time. Gass and Mackey (2020) explained that input, interaction, and output are interrelated processes, with speaking serving as the main output through which learners notice linguistic gaps and self-correct. Ortega (2020) further linked speaking opportunities to issues of equity and access, stressing that fair chances to practice oral communication contribute to linguistic empowerment and social justice.

The affective component of speaking performance is equally significant. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2019) demonstrated that enjoyment strongly predicts willingness to communicate, whereas anxiety undermines oral performance. In Ecuador, these findings resonate with classrooms where fear of ridicule prevents learners from participating. Collaborative learning addresses these barriers by creating supportive peer contexts that normalize mistakes as part of learning.

Lastly, research in Ecuador highlights the gap between policy and practice. Guerrero Rodríguez and Moreira Baquerizo (2025) found that teachers attempt to promote oral interaction but often lack structured strategies. Integrating collaborative activities—such as peer storytelling, role plays, and surveys—provides opportunities for authentic, spontaneous communication, making speaking performance the central outcome of this study.

2.1.4 Fluency

Fluency is the ability to produce speech smoothly, continuously, and with minimal hesitation. Nation (2018) emphasized that fluency prioritizes communicative flow over grammatical perfection. Luoma (2004) also clarified that fluency is not simply speed, but the ability to maintain coherence and rhythm in extended discourse. Collaborative settings are particularly effective in enhancing fluency because learners must sustain interaction, negotiate meaning, and respond in real time.

Research confirms these observations. Alzubi, Nazim, and Ahamad (2024) found that learners engaged in collaborative debates and information-gap tasks achieved significant improvements in fluency. Setiawan, Rahman, Jupri, and Meraj (2023) also reported that peer feedback during collaborative tasks enhanced learners' fluency and accuracy simultaneously. In Latin America, Spinelli (2024) noted that collaborative speaking opportunities with more proficient peers reduced pauses and fostered more coherent speech.

In Ecuador, students often depend on memorized chunks rather than producing extended discourse (Álvarez et al., 2024). Collaborative learning helps address this challenge by providing opportunities for learners to speak spontaneously and extend their utterances. Ortega (2020) reinforced that fluency develops when learners are exposed to sustained interaction in meaningful contexts.

Finally, fluency must be seen in balance with accuracy. While fluency ensures communication flow, accuracy ensures intelligibility. Research demonstrates that collaborative learning environments provide conditions for both, as peers encourage extended speech while also offering corrective feedback (Setiawan et al., 2023). This dual development is essential for Ecuadorian learners striving to become functional communicators.

2.1.5 Pronunciation

Pronunciation is essential for intelligibility and communicative confidence. Harmer (2015) underlined the importance of stress, rhythm, and intonation for effective oral communication. Gilakjani (2016) similarly argued that pronunciation teaching should focus on comprehensibility rather than native-like perfection, highlighting the need to equip learners to be understood clearly.

Collaborative contexts create natural opportunities for pronunciation improvement. Butarbutar (2025) demonstrated that learners benefit from real-time peer feedback, which allows immediate correction of phonological errors. Saeid (2024) likewise observed that peer interaction in speaking activities improved both listening and pronunciation skills, showing that students refine their phonological output by constantly engaging with peers.

Pronunciation is also linked to affective factors. Learners who believe their pronunciation is poor often avoid speaking. Bozkurt and Aydin (2023) found that collaborative learning reduced learners' pronunciation-related anxiety, while Dewaele and MacIntyre (2019) showed that positive classroom emotions foster greater willingness to communicate.

In Ecuador, where access to language labs or specialized phonetic training is limited, peer collaboration provides a practical and affordable approach. Oshimeje and Flores Barahona (2025) found that project-based group activities helped learners model pronunciation for one another and self-correct through collaborative practice, making pronunciation improvement attainable in resource-constrained settings.

2.1.6 Confidence in Speaking

Confidence is a critical predictor of oral participation and achievement. Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) posited that low confidence and high anxiety hinder acquisition. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2019) empirically confirmed this, showing that enjoyment enhances learners' willingness to communicate, while anxiety strongly predicts low performance.

Collaborative learning has been shown to strengthen confidence by distributing responsibility across group members. Bozkurt and Aydin (2023) found that learners in

collaborative tasks reported lower anxiety levels, while Bicen (2024) observed that shared responsibility created safer environments for risk-taking in communication. These findings are particularly relevant in Ecuador, where learners frequently remain silent due to fear of mistakes.

Confidence also acts as both a precondition and an outcome of oral development. Swain (2005) explained in her Output Hypothesis that producing language forces learners to notice gaps in their knowledge, test their hypotheses, and refine their interlanguage, which gradually reinforces their confidence. Complementarily, Gass and Mackey (2020) highlighted that interaction provides opportunities for learners to produce output, receive feedback, and adjust their speech, strengthening both competence and self-assurance.

Finally, Ecuadorian research underscores confidence as a central barrier to oral practice. Guerrero Rodríguez and Moreira Baquerizo (2025) found that teachers often identified shyness as a challenge but noted that collaborative activities encouraged reluctant students to participate. This suggests that fostering confidence through collaboration is essential for developing oral competence in local classrooms.

2.1.7 Peer Interaction

Peer interaction is the cornerstone of collaborative learning and second language development. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) proposed that learning occurs in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where students acquire knowledge through guided interaction with more capable peers. Gass and Mackey (2020) also stressed that interaction provides opportunities for noticing gaps, receiving feedback, and producing modified output, which are key to acquisition.

Empirical research highlights the benefits of peer support. Huang (2023) showed that emotional engagement increases when learners collaborate with peers, resulting in stronger willingness to communicate. Setiawan et al. (2023) further confirmed that peer feedback positively impacts fluency and accuracy, demonstrating that learners refine their oral performance when working collaboratively.

In contexts like Ecuador, peer interaction is vital because teachers may not always be language specialists and exposure to English outside the classroom is minimal. Saeid

(2024) revealed that structured peer activities improved listening and speaking skills among secondary learners, also reducing their anxiety. This supports the idea that peer interaction provides a safe and motivating space for practice.

Finally, peer collaboration fosters metacognitive growth. Setiawan et al. (2023) noted that learners engaged in peer interaction became more aware of their strengths and weaknesses, leading to improved autonomy. In Ecuadorian schools, where resources are scarce, peer interaction thus becomes not only a linguistic strategy but also a pedagogical necessity to guarantee oral practice and development.

2.2. Reference Framework

The reference framework provides the foundation for understanding how collaborative learning supports the development of speaking skills in EFL learners. This section discusses relevant theories that explain the pedagogical and linguistic rationale behind the study.

2.2.1. Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) proposes that learning is inherently social and that cognitive development occurs through mediated interaction. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) illustrates how learners can achieve tasks with peer or teacher support that they cannot accomplish alone. In language learning, this translates into scaffolding—where learners co-construct meaning and gradually internalize linguistic knowledge. Lantolf and Poehner (2020) expand this framework by arguing that mediation is not only external but also self-directed, as learners develop self-regulation through repeated interaction. Swain (2005) similarly links sociocultural principles to her Output Hypothesis, showing that producing language in collaboration encourages learners to notice gaps and refine their output.

In Ecuadorian schools, where traditional instruction often emphasizes rote memorization and teacher authority, Sociocultural Theory offers a transformative rationale: collaboration allows students to engage actively and negotiate meaning rather than passively

receive input. Yet, a critical limitation is that peer interaction can reproduce inequities: more proficient learners may dominate conversations, while weaker learners remain silent. Teachers must therefore monitor group dynamics and provide strategic scaffolding to ensure balanced participation. Despite these challenges, sociocultural principles strongly justify the adoption of collaborative learning as a means of creating interactive, student-centered classrooms where speaking practice becomes both authentic and achievable.

2.2.2. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) marked a paradigm shift from grammar-translation to communication-oriented instruction, aiming to develop communicative competence rather than mere structural accuracy (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Savignon (2018) identifies four dimensions of communicative competence linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic that enable learners to function effectively in real-life communication. CLT emphasizes fluency, meaning negotiation, and authentic tasks that mirror real-world interactions.

Littlewood (2013) notes that communicative tasks foster motivation and provide contexts for authentic interaction, enhancing learners' willingness to participate orally. This directly connects to collaborative learning, which operationalizes CLT principles through group activities such as role plays, surveys, and peer discussions. However, critics argue that CLT can be difficult to implement in contexts with large classes, limited resources, and exam-driven curricula—conditions typical of Ecuadorian public schools. Teachers may revert to grammar-focused practices because they appear more manageable, even though they provide fewer speaking opportunities. Thus, while CLT provides a strong pedagogical foundation, its effectiveness depends on teachers' ability to adapt communicative tasks to local realities. Collaborative learning offers one pathway for operationalizing CLT even in resource-constrained environments, by leveraging peer interaction as the primary communicative tool.

2.2.3. Collaborative Learning and Cooperative Models

Collaborative learning builds directly on sociocultural and communicative principles by structuring interaction around shared goals. Johnson and Johnson (2019) define cooperative learning through five essential elements—positive interdependence, individual

accountability, promotive interaction, social skills, and group processing—which ensure that collaboration is both structured and effective. Unlike unstructured group work, cooperative learning requires that all learners participate meaningfully and depend on one another for success.

Slavin (2015) emphasizes that cooperative learning enhances academic performance and social-emotional development, while Gillies (2019) shows that structured collaboration develops critical thinking and oral communication skills. These findings highlight the dual benefits of collaborative models: they not only improve linguistic outcomes but also cultivate interpersonal skills necessary for lifelong learning.

From a critical standpoint, however, collaborative learning is not a universal solution. Unequal participation, lack of accountability, or interpersonal conflicts can undermine group effectiveness. Teachers must provide explicit training in teamwork and design tasks that require interdependence. In Ecuador, where classrooms are often overcrowded and resources limited, collaborative strategies may be one of the few feasible ways to ensure that every student speaks regularly. Nevertheless, teachers must be prepared to manage challenges such as mixed proficiency levels and varying degrees of learner motivation.

2.2.4. Second Language Acquisition Theories

SLA theories explain the cognitive and interactional mechanisms underlying language acquisition. Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) argues that learners acquire language through exposure to comprehensible input slightly above their current level ($i+1$). Yet critics note that input alone does not guarantee acquisition, particularly in speaking. Swain's Output Hypothesis (2005) addresses this by showing that producing language pushes learners to test hypotheses, notice gaps, and reflect on language use. Ellis (2021) supports this dual perspective, affirming that both input and output are necessary for fluency and complexity.

Long's Interaction Hypothesis (1996) further refines this view, emphasizing that negotiation of meaning during interaction modifies input and prompts learners to adjust their speech. Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (1990) complements these ideas by arguing that conscious attention to linguistic forms is essential for acquisition. Ortega (2020) highlights

that peer interaction provides natural opportunities for feedback and noticing, particularly in task-based contexts.

In collaborative classrooms, these theories converge: learners receive input from peers, produce meaningful output, negotiate meaning, and notice linguistic forms in real time. Yet, critically, not all peer interaction leads to acquisition. Superficial conversations or poorly designed tasks may fail to generate noticing or push learners beyond their comfort zone. Teachers must therefore design collaborative activities that balance fluency with accuracy and integrate feedback opportunities. In Ecuador, where exposure to English outside the classroom is minimal, collaborative interaction provides a crucial means of activating SLA processes within the classroom walls.

2.2.5. Affective Filter Hypothesis

Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) underscores the role of emotions in language acquisition. Anxiety, low motivation, or lack of confidence act as barriers, raising the affective filter and preventing learners from processing input effectively. Conversely, supportive environments reduce the filter, making acquisition more likely. Speaking is especially vulnerable to affective barriers, as learners often fear mistakes or ridicule.

Dewaele and MacIntyre (2019) found that enjoyment increases willingness to communicate, while Teimouri, Goetze, and Plonsky (2019) identified foreign language anxiety as a strong predictor of poor oral performance. Collaborative learning addresses these affective factors by providing a supportive, low-stress environment where responsibility is shared, errors are normalized, and learners gain confidence.

Critically, group work can sometimes create frustration—dominant students may overshadow others, or conflicts may raise anxiety rather than lower it. Thus, teachers must carefully structure collaborative tasks to ensure inclusivity and positive group dynamics. In Ecuadorian classrooms, where many learners enter with high anxiety and little prior experience speaking English, collaborative learning can play a pivotal role in reducing affective barriers. By creating safe spaces for peer interaction, collaborative tasks not only enhance linguistic competence but also build communicative confidence, a prerequisite for long-term oral development.

2.2.6. Synthesis of Theoretical Perspectives

In conclusion, the theories analyzed provide a robust foundation for understanding how collaborative learning can enhance speaking performance in beginner-level EFL learners. Sociocultural Theory and CLT justify the creation of interactive, student-centered environments, while cooperative learning models ensure structured and equitable participation. SLA theories—including the Input, Output, Interaction, and Noticing Hypotheses—explain the cognitive and interactional mechanisms through which collaboration fosters fluency, accuracy, and metalinguistic awareness. Finally, the Affective Filter Hypothesis highlights how collaborative tasks reduce anxiety and increase learners' motivation and willingness to communicate.

Recent evidence from Ecuador confirms these theoretical claims. Álvarez, Tamayo, and dos Santos (2024) identify speaking anxiety, lack of oral practice, and teacher-centered methodologies as the main challenges faced by EFL learners. Similarly, Guerrero Rodríguez and Moreira Baquerizo (2025) emphasize that collaborative and interactive strategies are effective in promoting communicative skills, even in resource-limited classrooms. Loo-Salmon, Palma-Villavicencio, Saltos-Rodríguez, and Bolívar-Chávez (2018) further reveal that cooperative learning is still underutilized in Ecuadorian schools, as teachers often prioritize traditional, individual work over interactive methods.

At the regional level, Latin American research also supports these perspectives. Ríos Díaz et al. (2023) demonstrate that collaborative learning improves oral interaction and increases students' sense of participation, while Romero-Guarquila et al. (2020) confirm its positive impact on motivation and communicative confidence. Spinelli (2024) highlights that interaction among Latin American learners creates valuable opportunities for input, output, and feedback, despite differences in proficiency levels. In addition, Rea (2024) shows that project-based collaborative approaches implemented in Quito enhance student engagement and speaking opportunities.

Taken together, these international, national, and regional perspectives provide strong theoretical and empirical support for using collaborative learning to improve speaking skills in Ecuadorian beginner-level EFL classrooms. They also show that while challenges such as limited resources, large classes, and speaking anxiety persist, collaborative strategies represent a feasible and effective pathway to developing communicative competence.

2.3 Legal Framework

The legal framework establishes the regulatory and institutional principles that support the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Ecuador. It ensures that this research aligns with national policies and international commitments, while also addressing the structural challenges that hinder the achievement of the expected outcomes.

2.3.1. Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador (2008)

The *Constitution of Ecuador* recognizes education as a fundamental human right and a duty of the State. Article 26 defines education as a guarantee of social and cultural development, while Article 28 emphasizes that it must promote critical, participatory, and intercultural learning (Constitución de la República del Ecuador, 2008). These principles justify the inclusion of foreign languages such as English as tools for equity and global integration.

Nevertheless, despite this constitutional mandate, public schools face limitations such as scarce resources, large class sizes, and insufficient opportunities for oral practice. This generates a gap between what is guaranteed by law and what students experience in classrooms. Collaborative learning becomes a practical alternative, as it does not depend on expensive resources but instead leverages peer interaction to make speaking practice feasible and aligned with constitutional principles of participation and inclusion.

2.3.2. Organic Law of Intercultural Education (LOEI)

The *Ley Orgánica de Educación Intercultural* (LOEI), enacted in 2011 and reformed in 2021, regulates Ecuador's education system. It establishes that foreign language teaching, particularly English, is mandatory from basic education onward and highlights the development of communicative competences and intercultural awareness (LOEI, 2021).

However, its effective implementation faces persistent challenges. Teachers often report difficulties such as limited training in communicative methodologies, lack of technological support, and minimal availability of didactic materials (Álvarez, Tamayo, & dos Santos, 2024). These shortcomings reduce opportunities for students to practice oral

communication. By fostering structured interaction and learner autonomy, collaborative learning responds to the LOEI's call for inclusive and participatory education, while also addressing the need for low-cost strategies adaptable to Ecuadorian classrooms.

2.3.3. National English Curriculum (2016)

The *Currículo de Lengua Extranjera: Inglés*, introduced in 2016 by the Ministry of Education, establishes the methodological framework for EFL teaching in Ecuador. It is aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and sets specific proficiency goals: students in early secondary education are expected to begin at A1 (beginner), where they can introduce themselves, ask and answer simple questions, and engage in short interactions. By the end of tenth grade they should reach A2, and by the end of high school, B1 (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2016).

The curriculum explicitly promotes the development of communicative competence, prioritizing speaking and listening as essential skills for global citizenship. It encourages the use of pair work and group activities to strengthen oral interaction, showing a clear orientation toward collaborative approaches. Nevertheless, many schools lack the materials and infrastructure to fully implement these methodologies, creating a discrepancy between policy and practice. In this sense, collaborative learning represents a feasible strategy, as it transforms the classroom itself into a communicative space where students become the main resource for language learning.

2.3.4. Plan Nacional de Desarrollo (National Development Plan)

The *Plan de Creación de Oportunidades 2021–2025* identifies education and language learning as strategic pillars for equity, innovation, and global integration. This national plan emphasizes the need to strengthen the quality of public education and reduce existing gaps between urban and rural contexts, considering education as a fundamental driver of social mobility and competitiveness. Within this framework, English language proficiency is highlighted as an essential tool for academic mobility, access to international knowledge networks, and participation in the global economy (Secretaría Nacional de Planificación, 2021).

However, the plan also acknowledges persistent challenges such as limited investment in infrastructure, unequal access to educational resources, and the lack of

sufficient teacher training, particularly in rural and public schools. These conditions restrict the effectiveness of educational policies and slow down the development of communicative competencies in foreign languages. In this sense, the present research aligns with the goals of the national development agenda by providing a cost-effective pedagogical strategy that does not rely on advanced technology or imported resources. Through collaborative learning, students can improve their speaking skills in meaningful and interactive ways, thus contributing to national priorities aimed at fostering inclusive, equitable, and quality education across Ecuador.

2.3.5. International Frameworks

At the international level, Ecuador adheres to standards that reinforce the importance of communicative and collaborative methodologies. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2020 Companion Volume) specifies descriptors for both spoken interaction and collaborative interaction. At the A1 level, learners are expected to participate in very simple exchanges, introduce themselves, ask for clarification, and cooperate in basic tasks. These descriptors highlight that collaboration and oral interaction are fundamental for language learning from the very first stages.

Similarly, UNESCO's *Education 2030 Agenda* (2017) promotes inclusive, equitable, and quality education, underscoring the value of active and participatory methodologies for developing 21st-century skills. This aligns with collaborative learning approaches, which foster equity, inclusion, and intercultural dialogue while promoting oral communication as a core competence.

2.3.6. Additional Considerations

Taken together, these national and international frameworks provide a strong legal and policy basis for the teaching of English in Ecuador. However, the persistent lack of resources, uneven teacher preparation, and limited oral practice reveal that legal provisions alone are insufficient to guarantee effective learning. Bridging this gap requires methodologies that are both pedagogically sound and adaptable to low-resource contexts. Collaborative learning fulfills this role by aligning with constitutional principles, LOEI mandates, curricular objectives, national development strategies, and international standards such as the CEFR and UNESCO, while directly addressing the challenges of speaking development at the beginner (A1) level.

CHAPTER III
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Location

The present research was carried out at Unidad Educativa Carlos Julio Arosemena, located in Quevedo, province of Los Ríos, Ecuador. The population involved was a group of thirty students belonging to seventh grade “7° B,” who were characterized by having a beginner level of English proficiency. This institution was selected because it reflects the conditions of many Ecuadorian public schools, where English teaching faces diverse challenges such as limited resources, teacher-centered methodologies, and scarce opportunities for oral interaction. The choice of this context was crucial, since it allowed the researcher to analyze the real effects of collaborative learning strategies in an authentic environment where speaking skills are generally underdeveloped.

3.2. Types of Research

The research is classified as applied research, because it seeks to provide practical solutions to the problem of limited speaking performance in EFL learners. It does not remain only at the theoretical level but attempts to transform classroom practice through the implementation of collaborative learning strategies. It is also a quasi-experimental study, since it was conducted with an intact group of students, without random assignment, and compared their results before and after the intervention. Additionally, the research has a descriptive component, as it analyzes not only the numerical results obtained in the tests but also students’ perceptions and experiences during the application of collaborative activities. This combination of perspectives contributes to a more complete understanding of the phenomenon under study.

3.3. Research Methods

To achieve the objectives, a mixed-methods approach was employed, combining both quantitative and qualitative procedures. On the one hand, the quantitative method allowed the researcher to measure students’ progress in speaking through a pre-test and post-test evaluated with a rubric. This method made it possible to obtain objective evidence of improvement in areas such as fluency, pronunciation, accuracy, and confidence. On the other hand, the qualitative method was used to explore classroom dynamics and students’

perceptions through systematic observations and surveys. By combining both methods, the research obtained a broader view that not only focused on results but also on the processes and attitudes that influenced the learning experience.

3.4. Data Collection Sources

The data were obtained from two types of sources:

- Primary sources, which included the direct information collected from the students participating in the study. This consisted of the results of the pre-test and post-test, the records taken with observation checklists during the collaborative activities, and the answers provided by students in the pre-survey and post-survey.
- Secondary sources, which involved the theoretical contributions and previous research works that support the implementation of collaborative learning as a methodology for improving oral performance. These references served as the foundation to design the activities and interpret the results within a broader educational framework.

3.5. Research Design

The study followed a pre-experimental pre-test/post-test design applied to a single group. The intervention was developed over eight consecutive weeks. During the first week, students participated in a socialization process, where they were informed about the objectives of the project. In this same stage, the pre-test was administered to diagnose their initial oral performance, and a pre-survey was applied to gather information about their perceptions, attitudes, and difficulties related to speaking in English.

From the second to the seventh week, the researcher implemented different collaborative learning activities that promoted teamwork, peer interaction, and opportunities for oral practice. Each session was observed and recorded through checklists in order to monitor the evolution of participation and interaction. Finally, in the eighth week, the post-test and post-survey were applied to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. The post-test measured the progress achieved in speaking performance, while the post-survey allowed

the researcher to analyze students' final perceptions and the influence of collaborative learning on their motivation and confidence.

During weeks 2 to 7, collaborative speaking activities were implemented in line with the research objectives. *Table 1* presents a summary of the topics, collaborative tasks, objectives, materials, and procedures applied throughout the intervention.

Table 1.
Summary of Collaborative Speaking Activities Implemented During the Intervention

Week	Collaborative Activity	Speaking Objective
2	Survey/Interview (Find someone who...)	Practice basic personal questions and answers.
3	Role Play (Daily routines)	Use third person singular in routine expressions.
4	Storytelling / Guessing game (Who am I?)	Ask and answer questions about professions and nationalities.
5	Information Gap (Daily routines and places)	Exchange information to complete daily routines.
6	Role Play (Do you speak...?)	Practice questions and answers about languages and nationalities.
7	Survey/Interview + Oral Report	Ask questions about classmates and present an oral report.

Note. Adapted by the author (2025) for the research project *Using Collaborative Learning as a Strategy to Improve Speaking Performance in EFL Learners*.

3.6. Research Instruments

In order to collect accurate and reliable information, the following instruments were used:

- ***Speaking Assessment Rubric:*** applied in both the pre-test and post-test, this rubric was designed to evaluate essential aspects of oral communication, including fluency, pronunciation, accuracy, and confidence. It provided a structured and objective way to compare students' initial and final performance.

- **Observation Checklist:** used during each class to record the frequency of participation, the quality of interaction among peers, and the difficulties that emerged during the collaborative activities. This instrument helped the researcher to identify patterns of behavior and the progress achieved in real classroom situations.

- **Pre-survey and Post-survey:** structured with both closed and open-ended questions, these instruments explored students' opinions, perceptions, and attitudes toward collaborative learning. The pre-survey was intended to identify the students' initial level of motivation, expectations, and challenges, while the post-survey was designed to reveal changes in their perceptions and the impact of the methodology on their learning experience

3.7. Human and Material Resources

For the implementation of this study, both human and material resources were necessary:

- **Human resources:** The researcher, thirty students from seventh grade "7° B" of Unidad Educativa Carlos Julio Arosemena, the project advisor, and the authorities of the institution, who facilitated access and permissions for data collection.
- **Material resources:** Worksheets for surveys and speaking rubrics, pencils, notebooks, board and markers, and the classroom itself as the learning environment. Additionally, the researcher used a personal computer and Microsoft Excel software to process and analyze quantitative data.

3.8. Treatment of Data

For the analysis of the collected data, both quantitative and qualitative procedures were applied. In the quantitative dimension, the results of the pre-test and post-test were tabulated and processed using Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics such as averages and percentages were calculated, and the results were displayed in comparative tables and graphs to illustrate the progress in fluency, pronunciation, and confidence.

In the qualitative dimension, the answers obtained from the open-ended questions in the surveys, together with the teacher's notes in the observation checklists, were analyzed through thematic categorization. This procedure allowed the identification of recurring patterns, such as students' perceptions of confidence, motivation, and interaction. By combining descriptive statistics with qualitative categorization, the research ensured a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study.

3.9. Triangulation of Information

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the study applied methodological triangulation by contrasting the information obtained from different instruments:

- **Speaking tests (pre-test and post-test)** provided measurable evidence of students' oral performance.
- **Surveys (diagnostic and final)** revealed perceptions, emotions, and attitudes toward collaborative learning.
- **Observation checklists** documented classroom behavior, participation, and confidence during the activities.

By comparing the quantitative evidence of improvement with the qualitative insights from surveys and observations, the study strengthened its conclusions. For instance, higher post-test scores were contrasted with the observation of more confident participation in class and with students' self-reported positive experiences in surveys. This convergence of multiple data sources provided a comprehensive and reliable evaluation of the effectiveness of collaborative learning strategies.

3.10. Ethical Considerations

This research adhered to ethical principles throughout its development. Prior to the implementation, the researcher provided a letter of information and obtained the informed consent of the students' parents or legal guardians. Participation was voluntary, and it was explained that students could withdraw from the process at any time without facing any negative consequences.

Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed. The data collected were coded to prevent the disclosure of personal identities, and the results will be used exclusively for

academic purposes. Furthermore, the study ensured a respectful and inclusive environment, avoiding any activity that could cause harm to students.

The research complied with the principles established in the Ley Orgánica de Educación Intercultural (LOEI, 2021) and with the guidelines of the Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo, which emphasize the importance of protecting students' rights, fostering equity, and promoting inclusive and participatory education.

CHAPTER IV
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Results

4.1.1 Pre-Test Speaking Results

The pre-test was applied to thirty students in order to diagnose their initial level of speaking performance in three main dimensions: fluency, pronunciation, and confidence. The overall average score was 6.0/12, which indicates a basic level of oral proficiency. Although a few students were able to interact with some naturalness, most of them still showed significant limitations when speaking in English. The variation among students was also wide, with some reaching 11/12 while others only scored 3/12, which demonstrates the heterogeneity of the group. These results clearly reveal the need to strengthen speaking skills through systematic practice and specific strategies that encourage active participation.

Regarding fluency, the mean score was 2.27/4, with a median of 2/4. This shows that most students were at an acceptable but still limited level. Many tended to answer with very short phrases and frequent pauses, which interrupted the flow of communication. Only a few managed to maintain a more continuous discourse. The data demonstrate that, in general, students had not yet developed the ability to sustain a simple dialogue in English, even though they possessed basic vocabulary and grammar knowledge. Fluency was therefore one of the dimensions that required more consistent opportunities for practice.

In terms of pronunciation, the mean score was 2.03/4, which placed the group at a basic level, slightly below fluency. Although most students could be understood, their articulation of sounds and intonation were not consistent. Several difficulties in pronouncing words clearly limited the effectiveness of their communication. Some students did manage to achieve a clear pronunciation (4/4), but the group's overall performance shows that the majority still needed improvement to become more intelligible when speaking in English.

The lowest performance was observed in confidence, which reached a mean of 1.70/4, with scores ranging only between 1/4 and 3/4. Many students showed insecurity, nervousness, and reluctance to participate. Some responded with minimal phrases, while others required help to produce their answers. This lack of confidence directly affected their willingness to speak in English, even when they had the vocabulary to do so. Confidence was therefore identified as the greatest barrier to oral communication, and it strongly influenced the other two criteria.

In summary, the pre-test results indicate that the group began at a basic speaking level, with relative strengths in fluency and pronunciation, but with a marked weakness in confidence. These findings establish a clear baseline to measure progress in the post-test and highlight the areas that needed greater attention. Reducing nervousness, increasing practice opportunities, and creating a supportive classroom environment were essential steps to help students overcome their initial limitations and improve their oral performance in English.

Table 2.
Pre-Test Speaking Results by Criteria (n = 30)

Criterion	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum
Fluency	2.27/4	2/4	1/4	4/4
Pronunciation	2.03/4	2/4	1/4	4/4
Confidence	1.70/4	2/4	1/4	3/4
Total	6.0/12	6/12	3/12	11/12

Note. Scale of 1 to 4 points per criterion, with a maximum total of 12 points.

The data presented in Table 2 confirm that the three criteria were not developed equally. While fluency and pronunciation reached average levels slightly above 2/4, confidence remained lower at 1.70/4. This imbalance suggests that the main limitation for most students was not only linguistic but also affective, as their nervousness and lack of security reduced their willingness to participate. Therefore, confidence became the key factor to be addressed during the intervention, as it directly influenced the other two dimensions.

Furthermore, the results demonstrate that although fluency and pronunciation presented acceptable averages, the group as a whole did not reach a consistent level across the three criteria. The uneven distribution highlights the need for a balanced instructional approach that addresses all aspects of speaking performance. While fluency and pronunciation require structured practice through controlled and guided activities, confidence demands the creation of a safe environment where students feel encouraged to take risks and express themselves without fear of making mistakes. This imbalance at the

pre-test stage clearly marked the starting point for the intervention, setting precise targets for improvement in the subsequent sessions.

4.1.2. Post-Test Speaking Results

The post-test was administered to the same group of thirty students after the implementation of the collaborative speaking activities. Its purpose was to determine the progress made in the three assessed dimensions: fluency, pronunciation, and confidence. The results showed a clear improvement compared to the pre-test. The overall average reached 8.93/12, which indicates that most students moved from a basic to an acceptable level of oral proficiency. While in the pre-test the lowest scores were as low as 3/12, in the post-test the minimum score increased to 6/12, demonstrating that all students achieved a more consistent performance. Similarly, the maximum score reached 12/12, showing that several students performed at the highest level across all criteria.

In terms of fluency, the students demonstrated a remarkable ability to sustain short dialogues and answer questions with fewer pauses. The average performance in this dimension was close to 3/4, which shows that most of the participants were able to communicate their ideas with a more natural rhythm compared to the pre-test stage. The progress in fluency was particularly significant because it reflected not only the use of rehearsed phrases but also the ability to generate new utterances during interaction. This improvement suggests that students gained more control over their speech production and relied less on memorized responses.

Regarding pronunciation, the post-test revealed a substantial improvement compared to the initial results. The average score approached 3/4, indicating that students achieved greater clarity and accuracy in their articulation. Mispronunciations still appeared occasionally, but overall, students were able to pronounce words and sentences in a way that was intelligible and required less effort from the listener. The fact that several students reached the maximum level of 4/4 demonstrates that pronunciation was one of the areas that benefitted strongly from repeated oral practice during the intervention.

The most significant progress was observed in confidence. In the post-test, the majority of students responded more willingly and with less hesitation. The average score for this criterion was estimated at approximately 2.9/4, which reflects a substantial increase compared to the pre-test mean of 1.70/4. Many students participated without showing the

same level of nervousness or insecurity that was evident before. They were able to complete their answers with greater independence, and fewer students needed external support to interact. This rise in confidence was particularly important because it allowed students to engage more actively in the test, which in turn had a positive impact on fluency and pronunciation.

In summary, the post-test results indicate that the collaborative speaking activities contributed to a notable improvement in all three criteria. Students advanced from a heterogeneous and generally basic performance to a more consistent and higher level of oral proficiency. The overall average of 8.93/12, the median of 9/12, and the absence of very low scores highlight that the intervention not only raised individual results but also reduced the gap between the strongest and weakest students. This outcome provides solid evidence of the effectiveness of the collaborative approach in enhancing speaking skills in this group of learners.

Table 3.
Post-Test Speaking Results by Criteria (n = 30)

Criterion	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum
Fluency	3.10/4	3/4	2/4	4/4
Pronunciation	3.00/4	3/4	2/4	4/4
Confidence	2.83/4	3/4	2/4	4/4
Total	8.93/12	9/12	6/12	12/12

Note. Scale of 1 to 4 points per criterion, with a maximum total of 12 points.

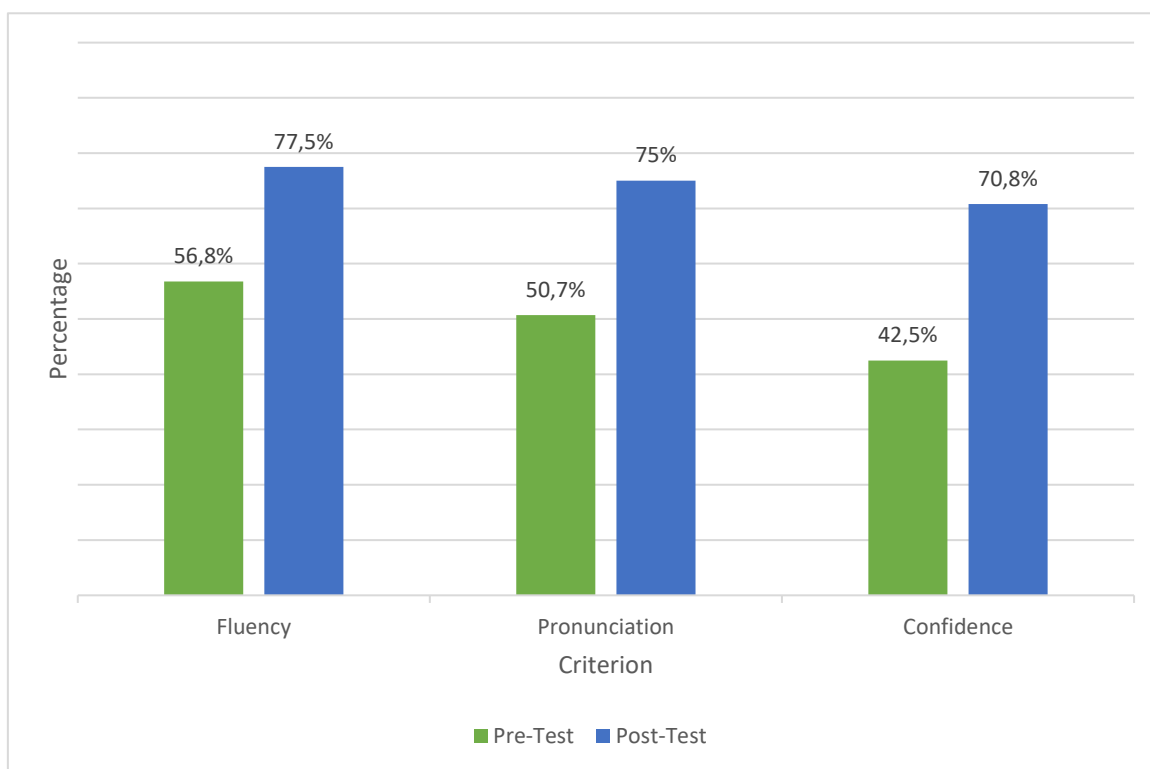
The data presented in Table 3 confirm that the three criteria improved significantly compared to the pre-test. While fluency and pronunciation reached average levels of 3.10/4 and 3.00/4 respectively, confidence, which had been the weakest dimension in the pre-test, increased to 2.83/4. This growth indicates that the students not only improved their ability to articulate and sustain communication but also gained more security when speaking. The fact that the lowest score rose to 6/12 and that several students achieved the maximum of 12/12 demonstrates that progress was consistent across the group.

Furthermore, the results show that the three criteria developed in a more balanced way than in the pre-test stage. Fluency and pronunciation achieved higher levels of accuracy and rhythm, while confidence showed the most remarkable progress, closing the gap with the other two dimensions. The improvement in confidence reduced hesitation and nervousness, which in turn supported better fluency and pronunciation. As a result, the overall average increased to 8.93/12, and the median of 9/12 reflects that the majority of students achieved a satisfactory level of oral performance.

4.1.3 Comparison Pre-Test and Post-Test

Figure 1.

Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Speaking Results by Criterion (%)



Note. Percentages represent the mean scores for each criterion on a 0–100% scale.

The comparison between the pre-test and post-test results demonstrates a clear and consistent improvement in the three speaking criteria: fluency, pronunciation, and confidence. As shown in Figure 2, the average percentages increased substantially across all dimensions. While in the pre-test the averages ranged from 42.5% to 56.8%, in the post-test they reached values between 70.8% and 77.5%. This progress highlights the effectiveness of the intervention and shows that students were able to overcome many of the limitations observed in the initial diagnostic stage.

The dimension of fluency exhibited significant progress, moving from 56.8% in the pre-test to 77.5% in the post-test. This gain of more than twenty percentage points indicates that students became more capable of maintaining interactions with fewer pauses and greater continuity. Their discourse shifted from short, fragmented responses to more connected and extended utterances. The improvement in fluency is especially relevant, since it reflects that students were not only recalling memorized structures but also generating new sentences spontaneously, a skill essential for communicative competence.

In the case of pronunciation, the average score increased from 50.7% to 75.0%. This change represents an advance in the clarity and accuracy of students' speech, making their communication more intelligible. Although some minor errors persisted, most learners were able to articulate words and phrases more effectively, reducing misunderstandings. The improvement in pronunciation demonstrates that consistent oral practice throughout the intervention contributed to strengthening students' ability to produce recognizable and comprehensible English sounds.

The most remarkable change was observed in confidence, which rose from 42.5% in the pre-test to 70.8% in the post-test. This increase reflects that students managed to reduce anxiety and hesitation, two factors that had strongly limited their participation at the beginning. In the post-test, learners showed greater willingness to speak, responded with less fear of making mistakes, and displayed a more positive attitude towards oral activities. Confidence not only improved as a criterion on its own but also supported gains in fluency and pronunciation, since a more secure attitude allowed students to practice more actively and effectively.

In conclusion, the results displayed in Figure 2 confirm the positive impact of the intervention on speaking skills. All three dimensions—fluency, pronunciation, and confidence—showed considerable improvement, with confidence being the area of greatest progress. The overall growth illustrates that collaborative learning activities provided students with opportunities to interact, practice, and support each other, which contributed to both linguistic development and emotional security in communication. These findings validate the effectiveness of the implemented strategy in enhancing the students' oral proficiency.

4.1.4. Pre-survey Results

Before implementing the collaborative learning activities, a diagnostic survey was conducted to explore students' initial perceptions, feelings, and attitudes toward speaking in English and working collaboratively. This instrument was designed with both closed and open-ended items, allowing the researcher to obtain a broad perspective on the learners' starting point. The closed items provided quantifiable information about the frequency of specific behaviors or feelings, while the open-ended questions offered deeper insights into the reasons behind students' responses and their individual experiences.

The results of the pre-survey were essential for establishing a baseline to compare with the final survey administered at the end of the intervention. Through the Likert-type items, it was possible to identify the main affective barriers that limited oral participation, such as nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence. Likewise, the data revealed students' preferences regarding individual versus group work, their perceptions of peer support, and their willingness to engage in more speaking practice during English classes. These findings were complemented by the open-ended section, in which students expressed in their own words the challenges and conditions that affected their ability to communicate in English.

Overall, the diagnostic survey confirmed that the majority of learners experienced some degree of anxiety when speaking in class, often preferring short or rehearsed answers. Nevertheless, it also highlighted that most students recognized the benefits of working collaboratively, particularly in terms of gaining vocabulary, feeling supported by peers, and creating a more enjoyable learning environment. These results provided valuable evidence of the initial situation, justifying the implementation of collaborative strategies aimed at reducing affective barriers and promoting meaningful oral interaction.

Table 4.

Pre-survey results on students' perceptions before the intervention (n = 30)

Statement	Never (%)	Sometimes (%)	Always (%)
S1. I feel nervous when speaking English in class	13.3	66.7	20.0

S2. It is difficult for me to speak English with my classmates	20.0	63.3	16.7
S3. I prefer working alone in English activities	16.7	73.3	10.0
S4. Speaking English in class gives me confidence	13.3	83.3	3.3
S5. Listening to my classmates helps me learn English	10.0	63.3	26.7
S6. I like participating in class when there are group activities	6.7	66.7	26.7
S7. I would like to practice speaking more in class	3.3	43.3	53.3

Note. Scale: 1 = Never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Always. Percentages rounded to one decimal.

The results presented in *Table 4* show that nervousness and anxiety were significant affective barriers to oral participation at the beginning of the study. More than two thirds of the students (66.7%) indicated that they “sometimes” felt nervous when speaking English in class, while 20% reported that this was “always” the case (S1). This means that nearly nine out of ten students experienced some level of nervousness when asked to speak in English. Such a finding is consistent with the pre-test results, where confidence was the lowest-performing dimension. The prevalence of nervousness suggests that students needed a more supportive environment that could reduce anxiety and encourage active oral participation.

Another relevant result concerns peer interaction. When asked whether speaking in English with their classmates was difficult (S2), more than 80% of the participants acknowledged experiencing this problem either “sometimes” (63.3%) or “always” (16.7%). This difficulty was not necessarily related to lack of vocabulary, as most students had basic lexical knowledge, but rather to their fear of speaking incorrectly or being judged by peers. Interestingly, the statement “*Listening to my classmates helps me learn English*” (S5) was evaluated more positively: while 63.3% answered “sometimes,” over a quarter of the group (26.7%) selected “always.” This indicates that even though students initially struggled to speak with one another, they still recognized the value of peer input as a source of learning and support.

The pre-survey also revealed students' preferences for group work. Regarding S3 (*"I prefer working alone in English activities"*), the majority (73.3%) responded "sometimes," and only 10% affirmed "always," suggesting that although some students were hesitant about collaboration, most were open to it. In contrast, S6 (*"I like participating in class when there are group activities"*) received more positive evaluations, with more than a quarter of learners (26.7%) responding "always." Taken together, these results confirm that group activities were not rejected by students; instead, they were seen as an enjoyable alternative that could potentially increase motivation and participation, provided that the activities were structured and supportive.

Finally, one of the most encouraging findings was related to students' willingness to practice more speaking in class (S7). More than half of the learners (53.3%) answered "always," while 43.3% selected "sometimes." This indicates that despite their anxiety and lack of confidence, the students demonstrated a strong desire to improve their speaking skills. This motivation represented an important opportunity for the intervention, as it suggested that learners were eager for more oral practice, even if they initially lacked confidence to participate fully.

In summary, the pre-survey results demonstrate a clear contradiction: students entered the project with high levels of nervousness and insecurity (S1–S2), but at the same time they valued peer learning (S5) and expressed strong interest in having more opportunities to practice speaking (S7). These findings highlight the relevance of implementing collaborative learning strategies, since they can directly address students' affective barriers while simultaneously responding to their motivation and need for oral practice.

In addition to the Likert-scale items, the pre-survey included open-ended questions that aimed to capture students' feelings, preferences, and perceptions in their own words. These responses provided richer insights into the affective and motivational aspects that influenced learners' willingness to participate in oral activities. To analyze this qualitative data, the answers were categorized thematically into three main areas: feelings when speaking English, preference for group or individual work, and strategies that helped them feel more comfortable. This thematic categorization allowed the researcher to identify recurring patterns while preserving the authenticity of students' voices through representative quotations.

Table 5.
Categories of open-ended responses in the pre-survey

Category	Description	Example quotes
Feelings when speaking English	Students expressed nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and embarrassment when speaking in front of the whole class. Only a few reported feeling confident after repeating phrases several times.	“Un poco nerviosa porque me da miedo equivocarme.” / “Me da vergüenza hablar frente a todos.” / “Con confianza si repito varias veces.”
Preference for group or individual work	Most learners preferred group work because it was supportive and enjoyable, while a minority preferred working alone due to concentration or shyness.	“En grupo, porque mis compañeros me ayudan.” / “En grupo, es más divertido.” / “Solo, porque me concentro mejor.”
Strategies that increase comfort	Students highlighted teacher support, peer modeling, and scaffolding strategies (e.g., visual aids, repetition) as elements that reduced anxiety and increased participation.	“Que la profesora me corrija con paciencia.” / “Escuchar primero a mis compañeros.” / “Tener ejemplos escritos en la pizarra.”

Note. Open-ended responses were categorized thematically by the researcher.

As shown in *Table 5*, the categorization of open-ended responses confirmed that anxiety and nervousness were the dominant affective barriers to speaking English at the beginning of the study. Most learners openly admitted being afraid of making mistakes or feeling embarrassed to speak in front of the class, which is consistent with the high

percentage of nervousness reported in the closed items. However, the majority also recognized the benefits of working in groups, mentioning support from peers and enjoyment as motivating factors. This suggests that although students felt insecure individually, they perceived collaboration as a way to reduce fear and increase participation. Finally, the mention of strategies such as patient teacher correction, peer modeling, and the use of visual aids reflects a clear demand for scaffolding in the classroom. Overall, the qualitative findings summarized in provided valuable evidence to support the design of collaborative speaking activities, as they addressed both the emotional challenges and the practical needs expressed by the learners themselves.

4.1.5. Post -survey Results

After the seven weeks of implementation of collaborative speaking activities, a specific post-survey was administered to evaluate students’ perceptions of the strategies used during the intervention. Unlike the diagnostic survey, which explored general attitudes toward speaking in English, this final instrument was designed to capture learners’ views on the effectiveness, enjoyment, and challenges of the actual collaborative tasks implemented week by week. Thus, the instrument not only assessed affective changes such as confidence and motivation, but also examined perceived linguistic benefits such as vocabulary development, pronunciation, and increased oral production.

This post-survey is particularly relevant because it connects students’ perceptions directly to the pedagogical strategy applied over the seven-week cycle. By including items related to confidence, peer support, enjoyment, and willingness to continue group work, the instrument allowed for a holistic understanding of how collaboration was experienced in practice. In this way, the survey results, summarized in *Table 6*, complement the oral test scores and observation checklists, offering triangulated evidence that the intervention produced both affective and cognitive improvements in the EFL classroom.

Table 6.
Post-survey results on students’ perceptions of collaborative activities (n = 30)

Statement	Never (%)	Sometimes (%)	Always (%)
S1. I felt more confident speaking English in groups.	6.7	56.7	36.7

S2. I learned new words while working with my classmates.	6.7	53.3	40.0
S3. I improved my pronunciation with the group's help.	13.3	43.3	43.3
S4. Group activities helped me speak more English.	13.3	46.7	40.0
S5. I had fun during the collaborative activities.	0.0	36.7	63.3
S6. I enjoyed speaking English with my classmates.	10.0	53.3	36.7
S7. I would like to continue working in groups in English classes.	10.0	20.0	70.0

Note. Scale: 1 = Never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Always. Percentages rounded to one decimal.

As shown in Table 6, the post-survey results demonstrate that students perceived the collaborative activities positively after the seven weeks of implementation. Enjoyment reached the highest endorsement (S5), with 63.3% of students selecting “Always” and 0% selecting “Never”, which indicates that the activities were motivating and emotionally safe. This outcome is significant because enjoyment reduces avoidance, encourages risk-taking, and sustains practice, which are essential conditions for developing oral skills at the A1 level. In the same line, S7 shows that 70.0% of students would like to continue working in groups, reflecting not only retrospective appreciation but also a strong willingness to maintain collaboration as a regular classroom practice.

Learning outcomes were also rated positively. In S2, 40.0% of students reported that they always learned new words, while in S3, 43.3% indicated that they always improved their pronunciation with peer support. These results are consistent with the collaborative nature of the tasks, which created repeated exposure to vocabulary and provided opportunities for corrective feedback in a supportive environment. Likewise, S4 reveals that 40.0% of learners felt that group activities always helped them speak more in English, and almost half reported “Sometimes,” suggesting that collaborative work effectively stimulated oral production across the majority of participants.

The results for S1, S5, and S6 also indicate significant affective improvements. Although most students still selected “Sometimes” for feeling more confident when speaking in groups (56.7%), the proportion who chose “Always” (36.7%) represents a considerable increase compared to the diagnostic stage. Together with S6, where 36.7% stated that they always enjoyed speaking English with classmates, these findings suggest that the intervention helped transform speaking from a source of anxiety into a more social and enjoyable activity. The very low percentages in the “Never” column, ranging from 0.0% to 13.3%, show that only a small minority continued to experience difficulties, which could be addressed with additional scaffolding and individualized support.

In summary, the results of the final survey show that collaborative activities were perceived as enjoyable, supportive, and effective for improving speaking skills. Students highlighted vocabulary gains, pronunciation practice, and greater frequency of speaking, while also expressing motivation to keep working in groups. These results reinforce the positive outcomes observed in the oral tests and class observations, confirming that collaborative learning had a direct and favorable impact on both the affective and linguistic dimensions of speaking.

In addition to the closed items, the post-survey included open-ended questions that asked students to reflect on their experiences after participating in collaborative activities. These questions focused on three aspects: the activity they liked the most, what they learned from working with classmates, and suggestions for improving English classes. The qualitative analysis of these responses provides a richer understanding of learners’ attitudes, complementing the numerical results. By categorizing the answers thematically, it was possible to identify recurrent ideas, such as the enjoyment of role plays, the perception of learning gains through collaboration, and the desire for more interactive and communicative activities. *Table 7* summarizes these categories with representative quotations from the students.

Table 7.
Categories of open-ended responses in the post-survey

Category	Description	Example quotes
Favorite activities	Students highlighted role plays, storytelling,	“El role play porque fue divertido actuar con mis amigos.” / “El storytelling

	interviews, and information gap tasks as their preferred activities because they were fun, interactive, and reduced fear of speaking.	porque inventamos una historia juntos.” / “El juego de information gap porque todos participamos.”
Learning outcomes	Students reported learning new words, improving pronunciation, gaining confidence, and practicing complete sentences by collaborating with peers.	“Aprendí palabras nuevas.” / “A corregir mi pronunciación con ayuda de otros.” / “A tener más confianza para hablar.”
Suggestions for improvement	Students expressed a desire for more role plays, more speaking and less writing, more group games, and opportunities to practice with other classes.	“Tener más actividades como el role play.” / “Hablar más tiempo en inglés y menos escribir.” / “Practicar con otros cursos también.”

Note. Open-ended responses were categorized thematically by the researcher.

As shown in Table 7, the open-ended responses reveal that students not only enjoyed the collaborative activities but also clearly recognized their benefits for language learning. Role plays emerged as the most frequently mentioned activity, valued for their entertaining nature and their ability to help students overcome fear when speaking. Storytelling and information gap tasks were also appreciated because they encouraged creativity, participation, and interaction among peers. These answers demonstrate that students perceived collaborative tasks as meaningful and enjoyable ways to practice English, confirming the positive affective outcomes already observed in the closed survey items.

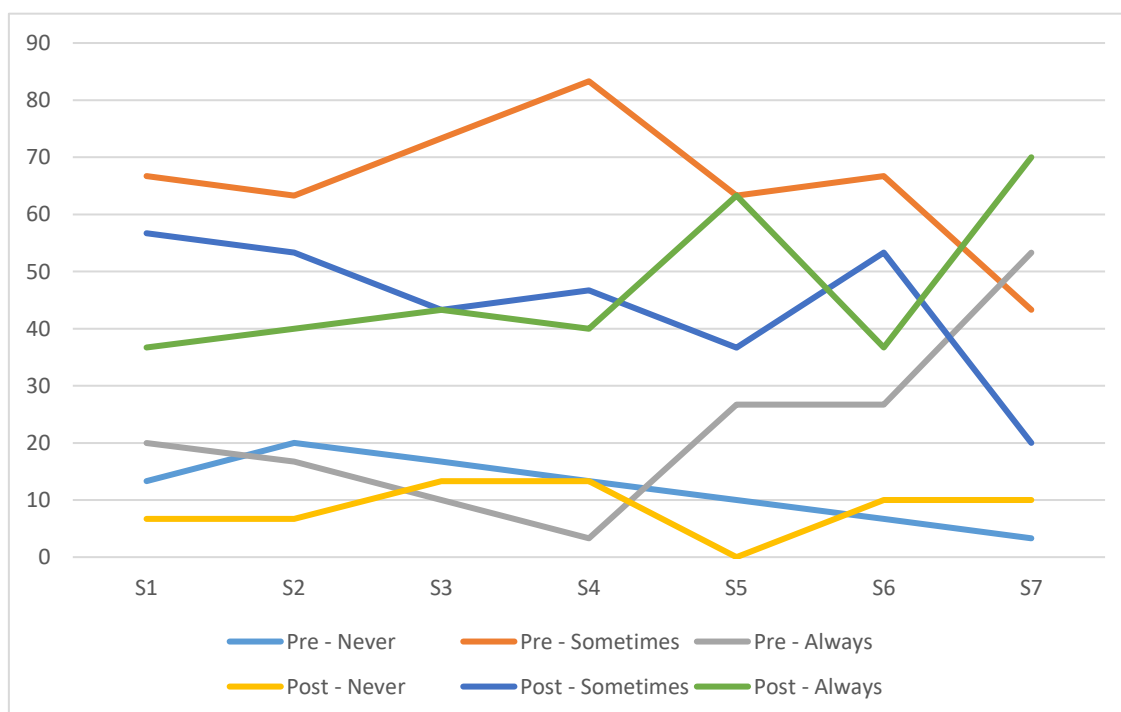
In terms of learning outcomes, students emphasized vocabulary development, pronunciation improvement, and greater confidence when speaking. These self-reported gains are consistent with the increases observed in the post-test, where learners showed

progress in fluency, pronunciation, and confidence compared to the pre-test. Importantly, students recognized that peer support was essential for this progress, as expressed in comments such as “A corregir mi pronunciación con ayuda de otros” and “A practicar frases completas en inglés.” Such responses show that learners viewed collaboration not only as enjoyable but also as an effective mechanism for improving oral skills.

Finally, the suggestions for improvement reflect students’ strong desire to continue working collaboratively, but with even greater emphasis on speaking. Their call for “more role plays,” “less writing,” and “more group games” indicates a clear preference for interactive, communicative approaches over traditional grammar or writing-focused tasks. Furthermore, their request to practice with students from other courses highlights an emerging motivation to use English beyond the immediate classroom context, which is an important step toward more authentic communication. Overall, the open-ended responses confirm that collaborative activities were well received, perceived as beneficial, and strongly desired for future English classes.

Figure 2.

Comparison of pre- and post-survey results (Never, Sometimes, Always).



Note. Pre- and post-survey results are presented in percentages based on students’ responses to seven Likert-scale statements. The scale ranged from 1 = Never, 2 = Sometimes, and 3 = Always.

As illustrated in *Figure 2*, the comparative results between the pre- and post-surveys show a clear and consistent transformation in the students' perceptions of collaborative speaking activities. At the beginning of the study, the "Sometimes" category dominated almost all items, reflecting a context in which learners were unsure of their abilities, frequently hesitant, and dependent on external support to participate in English. This is evident in S1 and S2, where more than 60% of students reported that they sometimes felt nervous or found it difficult to speak with their classmates.

In contrast, after the seven-week intervention, the "Always" line rises sharply across all statements, signaling that a significant proportion of students consistently recognized improvements in confidence, vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and overall participation. For example, in S5, related to enjoyment, "Always" responses increased to more than 60%, while "Never" dropped to zero, indicating that fun and engagement became integral aspects of classroom dynamics. Similarly, in S7, the willingness to continue working in groups reached 70% "Always," confirming that collaboration was not only accepted but also strongly desired for future lessons.

The downward trend of "Never" responses, which fell below 15% in all items, further demonstrates that only a very small minority continued to experience persistent difficulties. Taken together, these patterns reveal that the collaborative approach successfully reduced anxiety, minimized reluctance, and fostered a learning environment in which students perceived English speaking practice as both beneficial and enjoyable. Thus, *Figure 2* not only validates the quantitative gains observed in oral test performance but also provides strong evidence that students' affective orientations shifted from apprehension to confidence and motivation, consolidating the effectiveness of the intervention.

4.1.6 Classroom observations

In addition to the speaking tests and the surveys, classroom observations were systematically conducted during the seven weeks of implementation of collaborative speaking activities (Weeks 2–7). For this purpose, an observation checklist was applied to evaluate different aspects of student performance, such as active participation, use of English, collaboration, respect for roles and group dynamics, confidence, interest, and speaking practice. These observations provided qualitative evidence that complemented the

quantitative results, offering a detailed perspective on how learners' attitudes and behaviors evolved throughout the intervention.

The complete observation tables corresponding to Weeks 2–7 are presented in the Annexes, while this section summarizes the most relevant findings to highlight the progression observed during the implementation. By focusing on the most significant patterns, it is possible to illustrate how students gradually moved from nervous and hesitant participation to more confident, spontaneous, and collaborative engagement in speaking activities.

Since each week produced a detailed checklist, the full observation tables are presented in the annexes (Appendix 8). In this section, the results are summarized to highlight the main trends observed across the six weeks of collaborative activities:

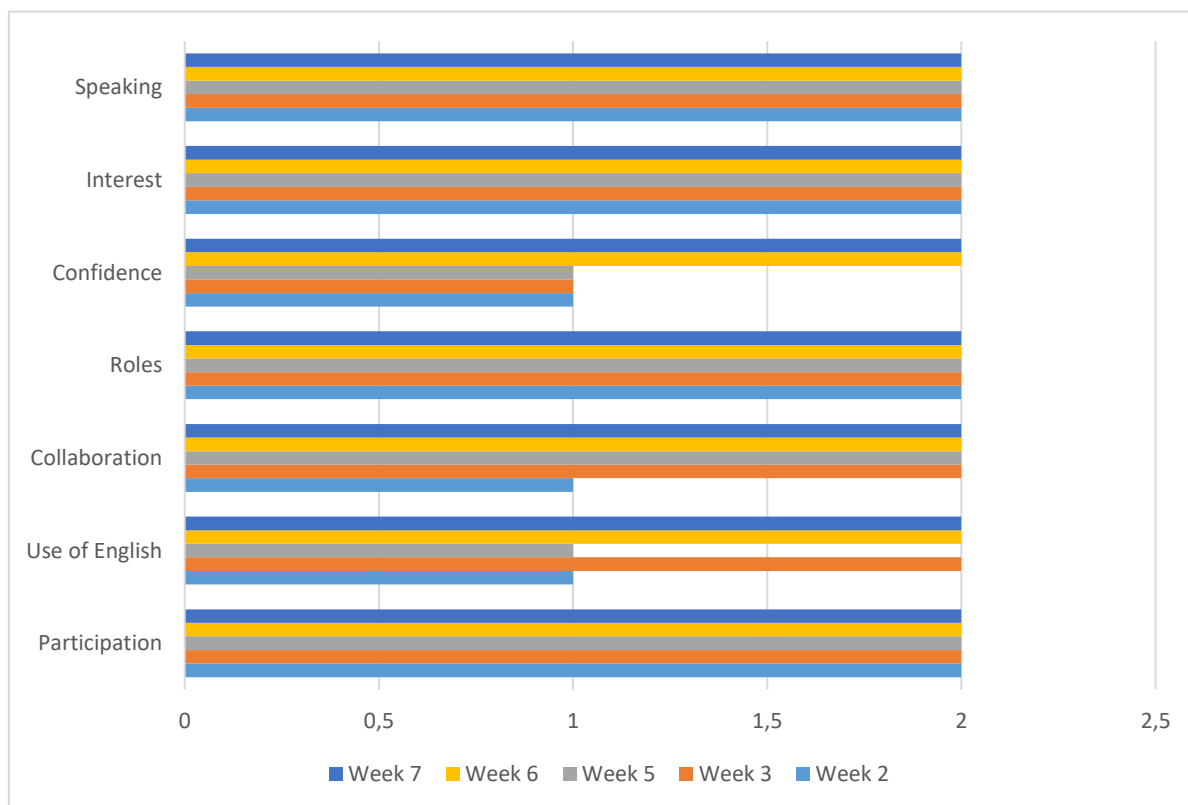
- **Week 2 (Survey/Interview):** All students participated actively, although some showed shyness and used Spanish as support. English was limited to basic questions such as “What’s your name?” and “Where are you from?”. Nervousness was evident, but motivation was high.
- **Week 3 (Role play – daily routines):** Participation remained active, with students presenting short, memorized dialogues. Collaboration improved as learners corrected each other. Confidence increased slightly, although nervous laughter persisted.
- **Week 5 (Information gap):** Students worked in pairs, helping each other complete the task. They often mixed Spanish and English (“Spanglish”), but they insisted on communicating in the target language. Confidence showed progress, and students were determined to finish the activity.
- **Week 6 (Role play – languages and nationalities):** Students acted out dialogues with greater spontaneity and natural expressions. Peer correction became more frequent, nervousness decreased, and enthusiasm for the dramatizations was notable.
- **Week 7 (Survey/Interview with oral report):** Students interviewed multiple classmates, organized the results, and presented oral reports. Fluency and vocabulary use improved significantly. Learners showed more confidence, respect for turn-taking, and strong motivation to share findings.

The weekly observations demonstrate a clear trajectory of improvement. In the early sessions, students depended heavily on memorized phrases and Spanish to complete the

tasks, which reflected insecurity and limited oral proficiency. However, as the weeks advanced, collaboration became more authentic: learners corrected each other, supported pronunciation, and gradually incorporated more English expressions. Confidence showed remarkable growth, with nervousness giving way to spontaneity and greater risk-taking in oral production. Interest and motivation remained consistently high, which suggests that the collaborative methodology succeeded in keeping learners engaged.

Overall, the observations confirm that the intervention not only provided opportunities for practicing English but also created the conditions for learners to feel safe and motivated. By the final weeks, students were no longer repeating isolated sentences but were interacting in meaningful ways, showing that collaborative activities contributed directly to the development of their speaking skills. These qualitative findings align with the improvements reported in the surveys and the oral tests, reinforcing the conclusion that collaborative learning was effective in transforming both attitudes and performance.

Figure 3. Observed progression of collaborative learning criteria across Weeks 2–7.



Note. The figure shows the results of the observation checklist applied from Weeks 2 to 7. Each criterion was coded on a three-point scale: 0 = No, 1 = Partial, and 2 = Yes. Percentages were

not calculated since the data represent categorical observations summarized across the intervention period

As illustrated in Figure 3, the results of the observation checklist reveal that several aspects of student behavior, such as participation, interest, respect for roles, and speaking practice, remained consistently strong throughout the intervention. From the beginning, learners showed willingness to engage in the activities, to follow the assigned roles within their groups, and to remain motivated during the lessons. This steady engagement demonstrates that collaborative work itself was appealing to students, encouraging active involvement even in the early stages when linguistic limitations were evident. The consistently high level of interest also indicates that the activities were perceived as meaningful and enjoyable, which helped sustain motivation across the seven weeks. However, not all criteria presented the same pattern: while some indicators remained stable, others showed a marked progression, reflecting the developmental effect of the intervention.

The most significant upward trends were observed in confidence and the use of English. During the initial weeks, these criteria were frequently rated as partial, which suggests that students were still hesitant, often relied on Spanish to complete the tasks, and demonstrated insecurity when speaking in front of peers. As the weeks advanced, both indicators improved steadily until reaching the highest level in the final sessions. This progression reflects that students gradually overcame nervousness, began to take risks, and used English more spontaneously during group activities. Collaboration also showed a positive trajectory, with learners progressively correcting and supporting each other, which fostered an atmosphere of peer learning. Taken together, these findings confirm that while motivation and participation were present from the outset, the collaborative activities were especially effective in strengthening confidence and promoting greater use of the target language—two essential conditions for developing speaking skills in an EFL context.

4.2 Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that the implementation of collaborative learning activities over seven weeks had a significant impact on students' speaking skills. The progression was evident not only in the post-test results, where students demonstrated improvements in fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary use, but also in the surveys and observations, which showed higher levels of confidence and enjoyment. At the beginning of the study, learners reported nervousness and embarrassment when speaking English, often

relying on memorized phrases and teacher support. By the end of the intervention, however, students were able to engage in role plays, interviews, and collaborative storytelling with greater spontaneity, using English more frequently and with fewer signs of anxiety. These results suggest that collaborative tasks created a learning environment where students felt more motivated to participate actively and less afraid of making mistakes, which is crucial for oral language development at the A1 level.

These outcomes can be explained through several theoretical perspectives. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory emphasizes the role of social interaction and scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development, which was clearly observed as learners supported and corrected one another during the activities. The principles of Communicative Language Teaching were also evident, as tasks such as role plays and information gap exercises encouraged students to use language for meaningful communication rather than mechanical repetition. Moreover, Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis helps explain the reduction of nervousness reported in the post-survey; as learners felt more comfortable and engaged, the affective filter was lowered, allowing more input to become intake. Finally, Swain's Output Hypothesis was confirmed by the fact that students produced more extended utterances and practiced complete sentences, showing that opportunities for meaningful output promote language development.

When comparing these results with previous research, strong similarities emerge. Johnson and Johnson (2014) and Gillies (2016) highlight that collaborative learning fosters positive interdependence and greater participation, which aligns with the high levels of motivation and engagement observed in this study. Al Jawad (2023) demonstrated that cooperative learning strategies enhanced speaking performance among Libyan EFL learners, findings that resonate with the progress in fluency and confidence reported here. Likewise, Álvarez, Tamayo, and dos Santos (2024) emphasized the role of collaborative approaches in Ecuadorian classrooms, particularly in reducing speaking anxiety, which mirrors the decrease in nervousness found in the pre- and post-surveys. More recent studies, such as Bozkurt and Aydin (2023) and Bicen (2024), confirm that collaborative work increases motivation and lowers speaking anxiety both in online and face-to-face environments. The consistency between the present results and these studies strengthens the conclusion that collaborative learning is an effective methodology for improving oral production across different contexts.

This study also contributes to the Ecuadorian educational context by providing local evidence in a public school setting with seventh-grade students at the A1 level. Unlike many international studies that often focus on university or secondary learners, this research demonstrates that younger students can also benefit from collaborative learning when it is systematically applied. Despite limited resources and the absence of technological tools, the implementation of role plays, interviews, and information gap tasks fostered active participation and noticeable improvement in speaking skills. This highlights the adaptability of collaborative strategies, which can be implemented successfully even in resource-constrained environments such as Ecuadorian public schools. Furthermore, the fact that students requested more opportunities to continue group activities in their open-ended responses suggests that collaborative learning not only enhanced their current performance but also shaped their expectations for future English classes.

At the same time, it is important to reflect critically on the scope of these findings. The intervention lasted only seven weeks and was conducted with a single group of thirty-one students, which limits the generalizability of the results. Additionally, the observations were carried out by the same teacher-researcher, which may have introduced some degree of subjectivity. Nevertheless, the triangulation of data from tests, surveys, and observations provides solid evidence of the effectiveness of collaborative learning in this context. Future studies could expand this research by including larger samples, longer periods of implementation, or comparative designs across different grade levels. For practitioners, the findings suggest that collaborative activities should not be considered as isolated tasks but as a consistent methodological approach integrated into the curriculum to promote speaking skills. In this sense, the present study reinforces the idea that collaboration is not merely a supplementary technique but a sustainable pathway to fostering oral communication and learner confidence in Ecuadorian EFL classrooms.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Conclusions

The present study analyzed the role of collaborative learning as a strategy to improve speaking skills in A1 EFL learners in an Ecuadorian public school. Results from pre- and post-tests, surveys, and classroom observations suggested progress in fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary. In addition, students reported lower nervousness and higher confidence, motivation, and enjoyment during speaking activities. These outcomes indicate that collaborative learning can be an effective approach for promoting oral communication, especially in contexts where speaking anxiety and lack of confidence act as barriers.

Survey data reflected a clear shift from frequent “Sometimes” responses in the pre-test stage to more “Always” responses in the post-test, particularly regarding confidence and participation. Open-ended responses highlighted this change, moving from initial mentions of nervousness to later valuing role plays, interviews, and storytelling as enjoyable and motivating. Classroom observations confirmed this evolution, showing a transition from memorized responses to more spontaneous oral production.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings align with Sociocultural Theory, Communicative Language Teaching, and the Affective Filter Hypothesis, as learners benefited from peer scaffolding, meaningful interaction, and reduced anxiety. Practically, the study demonstrates that collaborative learning is feasible in public schools with limited resources and provides a flexible strategy to enhance speaking performance.

In sum, collaborative learning not only supported linguistic development but also improved students’ attitudes toward English. Speaking shifted from being a source of fear to an activity associated with confidence and motivation, positioning collaborative learning as a sustainable option to foster communicative competence in the EFL classroom.

6.2. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, it is recommended that English teachers integrate collaborative activities such as role plays, information gap tasks, interviews, and storytelling as regular components of speaking lessons. These tasks should be structured so that all learners actively participate and gradually gain confidence through scaffolding techniques.

Educational institutions should promote professional development programs focused on collaborative and student-centered strategies, while also ensuring that sufficient curriculum time is allocated to speaking practice. Curriculum designers and policymakers are encouraged to formally include collaborative learning within the English curriculum to foster communication, confidence, and autonomy in learners.

Finally, future research could replicate this study with larger samples, different grade levels, or extended timeframes. Comparative studies between diverse contexts, as well as exploring the integration of technology with collaborative learning, would provide further insights into its effectiveness.

CHAPTER VI
BIBLIOGRAPHY

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CHAPTER VII
ANNEXES

APPENDIX 1

Carta de información

A quien corresponda,

Me permito, en mi calidad de Coordinadora de la carrera de **Pedagogía de Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros** de la **Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo (UTEQ)**, hacer la siguiente recomendación técnica científica en favor de la estudiante **Maripaz Madelayne Carriel Carmigniani**, con matrícula número **586333**, quien se encuentra desarrollando su proyecto de tesis titulado:

“USING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING AS A STRATEGY TO IMPROVE SPEAKING PERFORMANCE IN EFL LEARNERS”.

Esta investigación se llevará a cabo en la **Escuela de Educación Básica "Carlos Julio Arosemena Tola"**, bajo la dirección de la **MSc. Sissy Rivas Muñoz**. El objetivo de este estudio es determinar la efectividad del aprendizaje colaborativo como estrategia para mejorar el rendimiento oral de los estudiantes de séptimo grado que aprenden inglés como lengua extranjera.

A través de esta investigación, la estudiante Maripaz Madelayne Carriel Carmigniani, busca promover la participación de los estudiantes, mejorar su confianza al comunicarse en inglés, y enriquecer las metodologías pedagógicas en el área de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL). El estudio se basará en actividades colaborativas como trabajo en parejas y grupos pequeños. También se aplicarán pequeñas entrevistas a los estudiantes para conocer sus experiencias y observar avances en fluidez, pronunciación y seguridad al hablar inglés

La investigación que se llevará a cabo es de gran relevancia para el ámbito educativo, ya que proporcionará datos valiosos sobre la efectividad de estrategias pedagógicas innovadoras en el desarrollo de las habilidades lingüísticas de los estudiantes. Consideramos que esta experiencia enriquecerá la formación académica de Maripaz Madelayne Carriel Carmigniani y contribuirá al mejoramiento de la calidad educativa en la institución.

Por lo tanto, recomiendo a la **Escuela de Educación Básica "Carlos Julio Arosemena Tola"** y a la **MSc.Sissy Rivas Muñoz**, que brinden todo el apoyo necesario para la realización de este estudio, garantizando el adecuado desarrollo de la investigación y la participación de los estudiantes en el proyecto.

Quedo a disposición para cualquier consulta

adicional. Atentamente,

Lic. Angélica Rivadeneira, MSc.

Coordinadora de la carrera de **Pedagogía de Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros** Universidad **Técnica Estatal de Quevedo (UTEQ)**

APPENDIX 2

Informe de conocimiento

Estimados padres o representantes,

Mi nombre es **Maripaz Madelayne Carriel Carmigniani**, estudiante de la carrera de **Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros** de la **Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo (UTEQ)**. Mi número de matrícula es **586333**. Actualmente, me encuentro desarrollando una investigación como parte de mi proyecto de tesis, titulado: **“El uso del aprendizaje colaborativo como estrategia para mejorar la expresión oral en estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera”**.

El propósito de esta investigación es mejorar las habilidades de expresión oral de los estudiantes de séptimo grado con nivel de inglés principiante, a través de la implementación del aprendizaje colaborativo en el aula. El estudio busca promover la participación activa de los estudiantes y mejorar su confianza al momento de comunicarse en inglés, mediante actividades que reflejan escenarios reales de comunicación.

Confidencialidad y protección de datos:

Es fundamental que sepan que la información personal de los estudiantes será manejada con total confidencialidad. Todos los datos recopilados serán anonimizados, garantizando que no se pueda identificar a ningún alumno individualmente. Además, se tomará especial cuidado en proteger la privacidad de los menores vinculados en la investigación.

Voluntariedad y participación:

Les solicito su consentimiento para que su hijo/a participe en esta investigación. La participación es completamente voluntaria, y el estudiante puede retirarse en cualquier momento sin que ello afecte su rendimiento académico o su relación con la institución educativa.

Descripción de la Participación del Estudiante:

Durante un periodo de 8 semanas, los estudiantes participarán en actividades colaborativas dentro de sus clases regulares de inglés. Estas actividades están diseñadas para fortalecer sus habilidades de expresión oral, fomentando la fluidez, pronunciación y confianza al comunicarse en inglés. Además, se realizarán breves entrevistas con los estudiantes para conocer sus percepciones sobre el trabajo en grupo y su propio progreso. La participación en estas actividades no afectará el rendimiento académico de los estudiantes y se buscará siempre que disfruten y se sientan cómodos durante el proceso.

Llamado a participar:

Su participación es valiosa para el éxito de esta investigación, la cual tiene como objetivo mejorar las metodologías de enseñanza del inglés en los niveles básicos. Con su apoyo, se podrá recopilar información útil que contribuirá al desarrollo de mejores prácticas educativas.

Datos de contacto para dudas o mayor información:

Si tienen alguna duda o requieren más información sobre la investigación, no duden en contactarme. Pueden escribir a mi correo electrónico: _____ o llamarme al _____ .

Además, si desean una segunda opinión o más detalles, pueden contactar a mi tutora, **, PhD.**, al correo _____ .

Acuerdo de Participación

Con los antecedentes expuestos anteriormente, como representante de su hijo/a, usted acuerda lo siguiente:

- () **Permitir su participación** en el estudio de investigación especificado.
- () **NO permitir su participación** en el estudio de investigación especificado.

Nombres completos del/la ESTUDIANTE:

Nombres completos del/la REPRESENTANTE:

Firma representante: _____

Fecha: _____

APPENDIX 3

Pre -test de speaking with rubric – Entrevista oral (nivel A1)

Nombre del estudiante: _____

Curso: 7.º EGB

Fecha: _____

Duración aprox.: 2 a 3 minutos

Evaluador(a): _____

Preguntas para la entrevista oral

1. What 's your name?
2. Who old are you?
3. Where are you form?
4. What's your favorite color or food?
5. Tell me about someone in your family.
6. What do you do in the morning?

Speaking Assessment Rubric

(Scale from 1 to 4 per criteria)

Criteria	1 - Low	2 - Basic	3 - Acceptable	4 - Good
Fluency	Very slow, lots of doubts	Frequent pauses, limited speech	Some pauses, communicates with effort	Speaks with a natural rhythm
Pronunciation	Very difficult to understand	Understandable with effort	Generally clear pronunciation	Clear and easy-to-understand pronunciation
Confidence	Very nervous, barely speaks	Responds only with a lot of help	Speaks with some security	Speaks with confidence and independence

Total score: ____ / 12 Comments (common mistakes, attitude, vocabulary use):

APPENDIX 4

Post -test de speaking whit rubric – Entrevista oral (Nivel A1)

Nombre del estudiante: _____

Curso: 7.º EGB

Fecha: _____

Duración aprox.: 2 a 3 minutos

Evaluador(a): _____

Preguntas para la entrevista oral

1. What 's your name? - What's your last name?
2. When is your birthday?
3. What nationality are you?
4. What's your favorite sport or animal?
5. Tell me about your best friend.
6. What do you do after school?

Speaking Assessment Rubric

(Scale from 1 to 4 per criteria)

Criteria	1 - Low	2 - Basic	3 - Acceptable	4 - Good
Fluency	Very slow, lots of doubts	Frequent pauses, limited speech	Some pauses, communicates with effort	Speaks with a natural rhythm
Pronunciation	Very difficult to understand	Understandable with effort	Generally clear pronunciation	Clear and easy-to-understand pronunciation
Confidence	Very nervous, barely speaks	Responds only with a lot of help	Speaks with some security	Speaks with confidence and independence

Total score: ____ / 12 Comments (common mistakes, attitude, vocabulary use):

APPENDIX 5

Encuesta de percepción previa al aprendizaje colaborativo

Nombre: _____

Curso: 7.º EGB

Fecha: _____

Instrucciones: Lee cada afirmación y marca con una ✓ la opción que mejor representa tu experiencia. Sé honesto/a. Luego, responde las preguntas abiertas con tus ideas.

Parte 1: Marca tu respuesta

Afirmaciones	Nunca	A veces	Siempre
Me siento nervioso/a al hablar en inglés en clase			
Me cuesta hablar en inglés con mis compañeros.			
Prefiero trabajar solo/a en las actividades de inglés			
Hablar inglés en clase me da confianza			
Escuchar a mis compañeros me ayuda a aprender inglés.			
Me gusta participar en clase cuando hay actividades en grupo.			
Me gustaría practicar más el speaking en clase.			

Parte 2: Responde estas preguntas

1. ¿Cómo te sientes cuando hablas en inglés en clase?
2. ¿Prefieres trabajar solo(a) o en grupo? ¿Por qué?
3. ¿Qué te ayuda a sentirte más cómodo(a) cuando hablas inglés?

APPENDIX 6

Encuesta sobre las Actividades Colaborativas en Clases de Inglés

Nombre: _____

Curso: 7.º EGB

Fecha: _____

Instrucciones: Lee cada afirmación y marca con una ✓ la opción que mejor representa tu experiencia. Sé honesto/a. Luego, responde las preguntas abiertas con tus ideas.

Parte 1: Marca tu respuesta

Afirmaciones	Nunca	A veces	Siempre
1. Me sentí más seguro/a al hablar inglés en grupo.			
2. Aprendí nuevas palabras mientras trabajaba con mis compañeros.			
3. Mejoré mi pronunciación con la ayuda del grupo.			
4. Las actividades en grupo me ayudaron a hablar más en inglés.			
5. Me divertí en las actividades colaborativas.			
6. Me gustó hablar inglés con mis compañeros.			
7. Me gustaría seguir trabajando en grupo en clases de inglés.			

Parte 2: Responde con tus palabras

1.¿Qué actividad te gustó más?

2.¿Qué aprendiste al trabajar con tus compañeros?

3.¿Qué te gustaría mejorar o cambiar en las clases de inglés?

4.¿Qué dificultades tuviste al trabajar en grupo?

APPENDIX 7

Class Observation Checklist – Collaborative Speaking Activities

Class: 7th Grade **Date:** _____ **Activity:** _____

Criteria observed	Yes	No	Partially	Comments/ Examples
Most students participated actively in the activity				
Students used English to interact (even short phrases or expressions)				
Students showed collaboration (helped each other, shared ideas, took turns)				
Students respected roles and group dynamics				
There was evidence of increased confidence compared to earlier sessions				
Students showed interest and engagement in the group work				
The activity promoted speaking practice for all students				

APPENDIX 8

Weekly Classroom Observation Tables (Weeks 2–7)

Table A8.1. Observation Results – Week 2 (Survey/Interview)

Observed Criterion	Yes	Partial	No	Comments / Examples
Active participation	✓			All students participated, though some were shy.
Use of English	✓			Basic phrases such as “What’s your name?” and “Where are you from?”
Collaboration		✓		Some students used Spanish to support communication.
Respect for roles	✓			Most respected turns while interviewing.
Confidence		✓		Some showed nervousness when speaking.
Interest and engagement	✓			Students were motivated to learn about classmates.
Speaking practice	✓			Everyone practiced asking and answering questions.

Table A8.2. Observation Results – Week 3 (Role Play: Daily Routines)

Observed Criterion	Yes	Partial	No	Comments / Examples
Active participation	✓			All groups presented short dialogues.
Use of English	✓			Short, memorized phrases but correct use.
Collaboration	✓			Students corrected each other.
Respect for roles	✓			Each student played a specific role.
Confidence		✓		Some nervous laughter, but everyone spoke.
Interest and engagement	✓			The dramatization generated enthusiasm.
Speaking practice	✓			Students spoke more than in previous weeks.

Table A8.3. Observation Results – Week 5 (Information Gap)

Observed Criterion	Yes	Partial	No	Comments / Examples
Active participation	✓			All pairs completed the task.
Use of English		✓		Mixed Spanish and English (“Spanglish”).
Collaboration	✓			Students helped each other complete information.
Respect for roles	✓			One asked questions and the other answered.
Confidence		✓		Some hesitated, but tried to keep speaking.
Interest and engagement	✓			Showed good disposition to finish the activity.
Speaking practice	✓			Reinforced basic sentence structures.

Table A8.4. Observation Results – Week 6 (Role Play: Languages and Nationalities)

Observed Criterion	Yes	Partial	No	Comments / Examples
Active participation	✓			All students performed their dialogues.
Use of English	✓			Expressions were more natural than before.
Collaboration	✓			Frequent peer correction was observed.
Respect for roles	✓			Each group represented a situation.
Confidence	✓			Greater spontaneity and less nervousness.
Interest and engagement	✓			High enthusiasm during dramatization.
Speaking practice	✓			Students improvised additional phrases.

Table A8.5. Observation Results – Week 7 (Survey/Interview + Oral Report)

Observed Criterion	Yes	Partial	No	Comments / Examples
Active participation	✓			All students interviewed several classmates.
Use of English	✓			Noticeable improvement in fluency and vocabulary.
Collaboration	✓			Students took turns and helped with pronunciation.
Respect for roles	✓			Maintained order and respect for turn-taking.
Confidence	✓			Students appeared more natural and self-assured.
Interest and engagement	✓			Strong motivation to share findings.
Speaking practice	✓			Continuous oral production was observed.