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Collaborative Learning to develop English Speaking Confidence in A2 students

*Aprendizaje colaborativo para desarrollar la confianza al hablar inglés en estudiantes
de nivel A2*

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes how collaborative learning impacts increased English speaking confidence among tenth-grade elementary school students with an A2 level (specific level of language proficiency within the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) who attend a rural school in Ecuador. In this context, students face challenges such as technological limitations, limited language practice, and traditional grammar-focused methods, which affect their motivation and self-esteem when communicating verbally. Using a qualitative-quantitative approach and a quasi-experimental design that included pre- and post-assessments, collaborative strategies such as role-playing, puzzle-like activities, and peer feedback were implemented over a four-week period. The tools employed consisted of structured observation lists and rubrics to measure oral performance. The findings are anticipated to highlight significant improvements in students' fluency and self-confidence, as well as the development of a replicable methodological

guide, contributing to effective and inclusive English teaching in rural areas. This study aims to contribute to educational innovation and teacher professional development through a participatory and transformative approach.

Keywords: collaborative learning, speaking confidence, English teaching

RESUMEN

Esta investigación analiza cómo el aprendizaje colaborativo influye en el aumento de la confianza al hablar inglés en estudiantes de décimo grado de nivel A2 (un nivel específico de competencia lingüística dentro del Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las Lenguas) en una escuela rural de Ecuador. En este contexto, los estudiantes enfrentan desafíos como limitaciones tecnológicas, práctica lingüística limitada y métodos gramaticales tradicionales, que afectan su motivación y autoestima al comunicarse verbalmente. Mediante un enfoque cualitativo-cuantitativo y un diseño cuasiexperimental que incluyó evaluaciones previas y posteriores, se implementaron estrategias colaborativas como juegos de rol, actividades tipo rompecabezas y retroalimentación entre pares durante cuatro semanas. Las herramientas empleadas consistieron en listas de observación estructuradas y rúbricas para medir el rendimiento oral. Se prevé que los hallazgos resalten mejoras significativas en la fluidez y la autoconfianza de los estudiantes, así como el desarrollo de una guía metodológica replicable, contribuyendo así a una enseñanza del inglés eficaz e inclusiva en zonas rurales. Este estudio busca contribuir a la innovación educativa y al desarrollo profesional docente mediante un enfoque participativo y transformador.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje colaborativo, confianza al hablar, enseñanza del inglés

INTRODUCTION

The teaching of English in rural areas faces numerous pedagogical and social challenges that hinder the comprehensive development of communication skills, especially oral expression, as indicated (SAGE Advices., 2020), Communicative competence includes both grammatical and social knowledge for appropriate language use. Tenth-grade students in Ecuador show low levels of confidence and engagement when speaking English. This problem is largely due to the abundance of grammar-focused instruction, limited exposure to other languages, and a lack of collaborative environments that foster meaningful interaction. Therefore, it is essential to implement creative techniques that promote active learning, student engagement, and emotional security in language use.

Collaborative learning is a pedagogical approach based on constructivist theories, where knowledge is built through social interaction and shared experiences. It promotes peer interaction, shared goals, and mutual accountability, fostering a more dynamic and inclusive classroom environment, as noted by (Johnson & Johnson, 2012) highlighting that cooperative structures improve learning outcomes when students are positively interdependent and individually responsible. Similarly (Barkley, Cross, & Major, 2005) They emphasize that collaborative learning increases motivation and participation, especially when students participate in meaningful tasks, agreeing with what was stated by (Slavin, 2014) argues that collaboration improves academic performance and interpersonal skills by allowing students to explain concepts and clarify misunderstandings together.

Considering that collaboration between peers, group work is carried out to achieve common goals, such as practicing the language, solving activities and improving learning through communication and mutual support, as indicated (Gillies, 2016) Reinforces that structured group work improves communication and critical thinking skills, especially in language learning contexts.

The research selected 25 tenth-grade students—15 male and 10 female—using convenience sampling and a qualitative-quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design. Oral rubrics and observation lists were used for four weeks that a specific sub-skill was emphasized in the first oral participation and confidence building activities, in the second week Pronunciation and vocabulary enrichment through storytelling and role-playing, during Week 3 Fluency development through peer interviews and thinking, pairing and sharing tasks, Finally week 4 integration and feedback through group discussions and presentations. The rural setting reflects technological limitations and limited family support, allowing for the implementation of effective strategies in vulnerable environments.

Regarding ethical considerations, each participant was treated with dignity and respect. Informed consent was obtained, confidentiality was guaranteed, and participation was completely

voluntary, with no academic repercussions for refusal. The research is governed by the institution's ethical standards and the general principles of ethical educational research, as outlined in the "Research and Development Program." , as pointed out (Red Holos XXI, 2023) Ethics in educational research involves always acting with unconditional respect for others during all stages of the research process, applying an institutional code of ethics that guides good practices, including the design, collection, analysis, and dissemination of findings

The purpose of the research is to analyze how collaborative learning influences the strengthening of confidence in English speaking among tenth grade students in a rural school, with the development of specific objectives to achieve: Identify the most effective collaborative strategies to promote oral production in English through an observation checklist and also; evaluate the impact of group dynamics on fluency and confidence in speaking using oral performance rubrics, considered as the student's ability to express knowledge orally in a clear, coherent and structured way, during presentations, responses or expositions, showing mastery of the content according to (Jiménez, 2021), as well as communicative fluency and examine the factors that generate disconfidence in students when speaking English through an observation checklist.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Among the materials used for the research are recorded:

Table 1
Materials

Resources	Materials/Description
Bibliographical	Physical books
	E-books
	Magazines
	Reports
	Website documents
	Brochures
From the office	Computer
	Printer
	Projector
	Paper
	Pencils
	Folders
	Recorder
	Microphone
	Cell Phone
Humans	Internet
	Professor
	Students
Economical	Researcher
	Mobilization
	Telecommunications
	Inputs
Legal	Food
	Authorities – authorization

Note: Used during the investigative process.

Research Paradigm

The study was descriptive and the method was quasi-experimental. From a descriptive perspective, it sought to identify and define characteristics and elements of a phenomenon through carefully observed data (Bonilla, 2020). The objective was to document the implementation of collaborative learning strategies—role plays, jigsaw reading and listening, think–pair–share, peer interviews, debates and dialogues, group storytelling, and peer feedback sessions—in a rural English as a foreign language (EFL) context. In experimental terms, the objective was to evaluate how these strategies impact students' oral confidence and fluency in English. The research focuses specifically on students at level A2 according to the CEFR, the basic user who can understand frequently used sentences and expressions related to areas of immediate relevance, stated by (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), 2025) addressing aspects such as sentence-level fluency, pronunciation, and willingness to engage in oral activities. The goal is not to assess long-term language acquisition, but rather the immediate changes in confidence and fluency that result from collaborative interaction.

Research Approach

A qualitative-quantitative approach was adopted to measure the effect of collaborative learning on oral confidence. This method allows the researcher to compare students' performance before and after the intervention, as well as to determine measurable improvements. Quantitative data were collected using structured instruments that ensure objectivity and consistency. Statistical analysis, including measures of central tendency and comparison of means, was used to support the finding that collaborative methods positively contribute to students' oral preparation and performance.

Sampling Technique

This research employed a non-probability convenience sampling method, which selects participants based on their easy access and proximity to the researcher (Ochoa, 2015), due to practical limitations of access and availability. The sample included 25 students (10 females and 15 males) from the tenth grade of Basic Education at the Educational Unit under study, aged between 14 and 15. These students had been previously identified as having an A2 level of English proficiency, based on their classroom performance and teacher evaluations, aligned with the CEFR descriptors. While convenience sampling limits generalizability, it provides a focused view of a specific rural educational context. Informed consent was obtained from the students and their guardians, thus ensuring compliance with research ethical standards.

Two main instruments were designed and validated to collect data relevant to the research objectives. All instruments were reviewed by English as a foreign language experts to ensure clarity, relevance, and age-appropriateness.

Observation checklist for collaborative oral tasks

This checklist, considered as the instrument that relates actions on specific tasks, organized in a systematic way to assess the presence or absence of these and ensure their fulfillment during the learning process (Sierra & Sosa, 2020), It includes 12 items, grouped into two categories: (a) observable student behaviors during collaborative activities (e.g., participation, turn-taking, use of English) and (b) indicators of oral confidence (e.g., eye contact, reduced hesitation, willingness to speak). This list was used during class sessions to document real-time interactions. Expert suggestions were incorporated to refine the indicators and better align them with the characteristics of A2-level students. The final version is available in Appendix A.

Oral performance rubric for pretest and posttest

(Guzhñay, 2021) The rubric specifies clear criteria such as pronunciation, fluency, coherence, and discourse structure. It describes different levels of achievement for each criterion, allowing for an objective assessment of the student's oral expression. It evaluates students' oral skills before and after implementing collaborative strategies. It is based on five assessment criteria: fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, interaction, and coherence. Each criterion is scored on a scale of 1 to 4, with a maximum total score of 20. The rubric was aligned with the CEFR A2 speaking descriptors and reviewed for developmental appropriateness. It allowed for a standardized comparison of oral performance over time. The rubric is presented in Appendix B. Expert Validation Forms

To ensure the content validity of the instruments, two validation forms were created: one for the independent variable (collaborative learning strategies) and another for the dependent variable (speaking confidence). Language education experts rated each item as "Valid," "Valid with revision," or "Invalid" and provided suggestions for improvement. Their input contributed to refining both the checklist and the rubric. These forms are available in Appendices C .

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data collected before and after the collaborative learning intervention revealed significant improvements in students' English oral performance and self-confidence. The analysis was based on scores from the oral performance rubric and the structured observation checklist administered to 25 EB students in Year 10.

They showed a greater inclination to participate spontaneously and used English more frequently during group activities. Eye contact, variation in tone, and a more natural conversational rhythm were noticeably observed. Comparing the pre- and post-observation checklists, it was evident that 72% of students were reluctant to speak voluntarily before the intervention; after the fourth week, this figure adjusted to 14%, with 86% actively engaging in speaking tasks.

Qualitative data collected from teacher observations and student feedback supported that the implementation of role-playing and activities such as thinking, pairing, and sharing helped students overcome their fear of making mistakes. Puzzle tasks encouraged collaboration, as students required assistance from their peers to achieve language objectives. Peer feedback sessions promoted metacognitive reflection, allowing students to detect pronunciation errors and correct themselves on the spot.

Evidence indicates that the combination of organized collaboration, positive feedback, and consistent practice significantly improves speaking confidence and communication skills. They coincide with those of (Johnson & Johnson, 2012) who emphasize that positive interdependence and group responsibility foster both academic performance and affective development.

Table 2
Comparison of pre- and post-test scores

Criteria	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Improvement (%)
Vocabulary Usage	2.1	3.3	57%
Sentence Fluency	1.8	3.1	72%
Pronunciation	2.0	3.2	60%
Interaction and Participation	1.9	3.5	84%
Speaking Confidence (Observed)	2.0	3.6	80%

Note: Applied to the group of students.

As shown in Table 1, students showed notable improvements across all criteria. The greatest increases were observed in interaction, participation, and speaking confidence, suggesting that collaborative strategies significantly improved students' willingness to speak, as expressed by (Heredia, Ochoa, Veloz, & Villegas, 2024) In their research, they considered that by promoting positive interaction among students, collaborative learning contributes to creating a more favorable school climate and preventing bullying and violence. This highlights the need for further research on the effective implementation of collaborative learning in different school contexts and with diverse groups of students. Likewise, the importance of developing more specific evaluation instruments to measure the effects of collaborative learning on school coexistence was identified, as appreciated (Guillen, 2024) Positive interdependence in cooperative learning has a positive influence on school coexistence. It is important to foster and promote this interdependence among students to improve their coexistence and create a mutually supportive environment in the classroom.

Tabla 3*Check List*

Observed Indicator	Yes	No	Sometimes	Comments
Actively participates in group activities	22	1	2	Most participate “frequently” or “occasionally,” although a significant group rarely participates.
Shows willingness and motivation when working in a group	20	1	4	80% feel more motivated when working in a group.
Interacts positively with classmates	22	2	1	22 report receiving frequent support; 3 rarely or never.
Expresses themselves orally during collaborative activities	2	3	20	23 feel insecure or neutral; only 8 feel confident speaking.
Shows greater comfort speaking in a group than individually	5	2	18	40% sometimes; 26% no; only 26% yes.
Shows understanding of content when working in a group	19	5	1	78% agree or strongly agree.
Reduces anxiety or shyness when participating in group talks	4	23	1	24 express embarrassment; only 6 students feel confident speaking.
Participates enthusiastically in activities like role-plays or debates	6	18	1	Only 6 mention enthusiasm or enjoyment for role-plays and debates.

Not: Applied to students.

Indicator: Actively Participates in Group Activities

Data obtained from the observation checklist also indicate a positive change in behavior. During the first week, 72% of students were hesitant to speak voluntarily. By the fourth week, that percentage decreased to 16%, with 84% spontaneously participating in speaking activities, especially during role-plays and peer interviews.

Qualitative Insights from Observations

Students responded more positively when tasks were interactive and involved role-playing or peer feedback. Those who initially avoided participating gradually became involved when the group dynamics allowed them to feel supported and not judged.

These behavioral changes confirm the influence of social learning environments on affective variables. According to (Zoltán, 2010), Students are more willing to communicate when

they feel part of a supportive peer group. This was especially evident in collaborative techniques such as jigsaw puzzles and think-match-share, which encouraged students to negotiate meaning and take active roles in speaking.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study demonstrate that collaborative learning has a significant positive impact on developing English speaking confidence among A2 level students. Through structured peer interaction and group activities, students improved not only their speaking performance in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency, but also their willingness to speak and participate in class.

In addressing the research objectives, this study confirms that collaborative strategies promote an enabling environment where students feel more confident and motivated to use the target language. These results are particularly relevant in rural contexts, where educational resources are limited and traditional methods often fail to foster communicative competence.

The data validate the hypothesis that collaborative learning is an effective approach for improving speaking confidence, making it a valuable pedagogical strategy for EFL teachers working in similar socio-educational settings.

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ANNEXES

Appendix A – Pre-Study Survey (Collaborative Learning & Speaking Confidence)

Instructions: Choose the option that best represents your opinion or experience.

1. Have you participated in group or pair-based English learning activities before?

☐ Yes ☐ No

2. How often do you practice speaking English in group settings?

☐ Daily ☐ Weekly ☐ Occasionally ☐ Never

3. Do you feel more confident speaking English when working in groups or pairs?

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

4. Do collaborative activities help reduce your anxiety when speaking English?

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

5. How confident do you feel speaking English in front of classmates?

☐ Very Confident ☐ Confident ☐ Neutral ☐ A little Confident ☐ Not Confident

6. Do you prefer working alone or with others when practicing speaking?

☐ Alone ☐ With others

7. In speaking tasks, how often do your classmates help you feel more secure?

☐ Always ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

Appendix B Rubric: Speaking Confidence in Collaborative Activities (A2 Level)

Criteria	4 – Excellent	3 – Good	2 – Fair	1 – Needs Improvement
Willingness to Speak	Always volunteers to speak without hesitation	Often volunteers to speak with minor hesitation	Speaks only when asked or encouraged	Rarely speaks; avoids participation
Participation in Group Tasks	Actively contributes in group discussions and tasks	Participates in most group interactions	Participates occasionally	Seldom participates in group work
Eye Contact & Body Language	Maintains eye contact and uses confident body language	Generally maintains eye contact, slight nervousness	Limited eye contact and hesitant gestures	Avoids eye contact and shows discomfort
Response Fluency	Speaks fluently with little to no pauses	Speaks with few pauses or self-corrections	Hesitates frequently but can complete sentences	Frequent long pauses; struggles to complete ideas
Peer Interaction	Encourages and supports peers confidently	Communicates well with peers, some hesitation	Minimal interaction; needs prompting	Rarely interacts or avoids speaking with peers
Self-Perceived Confidence (Survey)	Reports feeling very confident when speaking	Reports feeling mostly confident	Reports some confidence, but with noticeable anxiety	Reports low or no confidence

APPENDIX C: POST-STUDY SURVEY

Instructions: Please answer honestly about your experience during the collaborative learning activities. Your responses will help improve future English-speaking programs. All answers will remain anonymous and confidential.

1. General Information

Age: _____

Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other ☐ Prefer not to say

Current CEFR English Level (Self-assessment):

☐ Pre-A1 ☐ A1 ☐ A2 ☐ B1 or higher

Previous experience with group or collaborative English learning:

☐ None ☐ Basic ☐ Moderate ☐ Extensive

2. Learning Experience

2.1 Clarity of Group Activities

How clear were the objectives and instructions during group speaking activities?

☐ Very clear ☐ Clear ☐ Neutral ☐ Slightly unclear ☐ Not clear at all

2.2 Usefulness of Peer Collaboration

How helpful was working with classmates to improve your speaking?

☐ Extremely helpful ☐ Helpful ☐ Neutral ☐ Slightly unhelpful ☐ Not helpful at all

2.3 Group Dynamics

Did you feel supported by your peers when participating in speaking tasks?

☐ Always ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

2.4 Session Structure

Were the session durations appropriate?

☐ Too short ☐ Just right ☐ Too long

3. Speaking Confidence

3.1 Perceived Improvement in Speaking Confidence

After the collaborative sessions, how would you rate your improvement in speaking confidence?

☐ Significant improvement ☐ Moderate improvement ☐ Slight improvement ☐ No improvement

3.2 Comfort Speaking in Groups

Do you feel more comfortable speaking English in group activities now?

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

4. Motivation and Challenges

4.1 Main Motivation

[] Improving communication

- ☐ Classroom participation
- ☐ Teacher support
- ☐ Peer interaction

4.2 Challenges Encountered

- ☐ Fear of making mistakes
- ☐ Difficulty expressing ideas
- ☐ Group coordination
- ☐ Lack of vocabulary

5. Final Feedback

5.1 Would you recommend collaborative speaking activities to other learners?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

5.2 Overall, how satisfied are you with the experience?

- ☐ Very satisfied ☐ Satisfied ☐ Neutral ☐ Unsatisfied ☐ Very unsatisfied

6. Speaking Confidence & Real-Life Application

6.1 Perceived Improvement

Rate your improvement in the following areas after participating in collaborative speaking tasks:

Skill	No Improvement	Slight Improvement	Moderate Improvement	Significant Improvement
Pronunciation Accuracy	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fluency (Speech Flow)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Vocabulary Usage	☐	☐	☐	☐
Speaking Confidence	☐	☐	☐	☐

6.2 Real-Life Application

Do you feel more confident using English in real-life situations ?

- ☐ Yes, significantly ☐ Yes, moderately ☐ Neutral ☐ No, not yet