

# Collaborative learning to improve the speaking skills in students of third level of the Language Center of the UTB

*El Aprendizaje colaborativo para mejorar la habilidad de habla en  
estudiantes de tercer nivel del Centro de Idiomas de la UTB*

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15659293>

## AUTORES:

Nelly Victoria Ley Leyva

Universidad Técnica de Babahoyo, Ecuador

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2296-7354>

[nley@utb.edu.ec](mailto:nley@utb.edu.ec)

Erika Paola García León

Universidad Técnica de Babahoyo, Ecuador

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8203-6434>

[egarcia@utb.edu.ec](mailto:egarcia@utb.edu.ec)

María Grazzia González Quinto

Universidad Técnica de Babahoyo, Ecuador

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6581-6428>

[mgonzalezq@utb.edu.ec](mailto:mgonzalezq@utb.edu.ec)

Pablo Luis Vásconez Mera

Universidad Técnica de Babahoyo, Ecuador

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9035-7166>

[pvasconezm@utb.edu.ec](mailto:pvasconezm@utb.edu.ec)

**DIRECCIÓN PARA CORRESPONDENCIA:** [nley@utb.edu.ec](mailto:nley@utb.edu.ec)

**Fecha de recepción:** 20 / 10 / 2024

**Fecha de aceptación:** 10 / 12 / 2024

## RESUMEN

Este estudio investiga el impacto del aprendizaje colaborativo en el desarrollo de las habilidades de expresión oral entre estudiantes de tercer nivel del Centro de Idiomas de la Universidad Técnica de Babahoyo. El dominio de la expresión oral es un componente crítico de la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL), sin embargo, muchos estudiantes se enfrentan a desafíos tales como la ansiedad, las limitadas oportunidades de práctica y la falta de confianza que obstaculizan sus habilidades de comunicación oral. Para abordar estas cuestiones, esta investigación emplea un diseño de métodos mixtos, combinando datos cuantitativos y cualitativos para evaluar la eficacia de las estrategias de aprendizaje colaborativo en la mejora del rendimiento oral de los estudiantes. El grupo experimental participó en diversas actividades colaborativas, como juegos de rol, debates en grupo y tareas de resolución de problemas, durante un período de diez semanas, mientras que un grupo de control siguió una enseñanza tradicional centrada en el profesor. Se administraron a ambos grupos pruebas previas y posteriores que medían la fluidez, la precisión y la complejidad de la expresión oral. Además, mediante encuestas y observaciones en el aula se recogieron datos sobre las actitudes, la motivación y los patrones de interacción de los alumnos. Los resultados indican que los estudiantes que participaron en el aprendizaje colaborativo mostraron mejoras estadísticamente significativas en la competencia oral en comparación con sus compañeros del grupo de control. Estos estudiantes demostraron una mayor fluidez, un uso más preciso de la lengua y una mayor disposición a participar en actividades orales. Los resultados cualitativos revelan que el aprendizaje colaborativo redujo la ansiedad al hablar, fomentó el apoyo entre compañeros y creó un entorno de clase más atractivo e interactivo. El estudio concluye que el aprendizaje colaborativo es un enfoque pedagógico eficaz para mejorar las destrezas orales en contextos de EFL. Recomienda integrar las tareas colaborativas en los planes de estudio de idiomas para fomentar la competencia comunicativa, la autonomía del alumno y la confianza, preparando en última instancia a los estudiantes para los retos comunicativos de la vida real en inglés en entornos académicos y profesionales.

**Palabras Clave:** Aprendizaje colaborativo, Compromiso, Eficiencia, Mejorar, Capacidad de expresión oral

## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of collaborative learning on the development of speaking skills among third-level students at the Language Center of the Universidad Técnica de Babahoyo. Speaking proficiency is a critical component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, yet many learners face challenges such as anxiety, limited practice opportunities, and lack of confidence that hinder their oral communication abilities. To address these issues, this research employs a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate the effectiveness of collaborative learning strategies in enhancing students' speaking performance. The experimental group participated in various collaborative activities, including role-plays, group discussions, and problem-solving tasks, over a ten-week period, while a control group followed traditional, teacher-centered instruction. Pre- and post-tests measuring speaking fluency, accuracy, and complexity were administered to both groups. Additionally, surveys and classroom observations collected data on students' attitudes, motivation, and interaction patterns. Results indicate that students engaged in collaborative learning showed statistically significant improvements in speaking proficiency compared to their peers in the control group. These students demonstrated greater fluency, more accurate language use, and increased willingness to participate in oral activities. Qualitative findings reveal that collaborative learning reduced speaking anxiety, fostered peer support, and created a more engaging and interactive classroom environment. The study concludes that collaborative learning is an effective pedagogical approach for improving speaking skills in EFL contexts. It recommends integrating collaborative tasks into language curricula to promote communicative competence, learner autonomy, and confidence, ultimately preparing students for real-life English communication challenges in academic and professional settings.

**Key Words:** Collaborative Learning, Engage, effective, Improve, Speaking skills.

## INTRODUCTION

The mastery of speaking skills in a foreign language context, particularly English, has emerged as a central objective in higher education institutions across the globe. In Ecuador,

and specifically at the Universidad Técnica de Babahoyo, the imperative to cultivate proficient English speakers is underscored by the demands of globalization, academic mobility, and the evolving needs of the labor market. English is the official language for global communication, commerce, science, and technology, students are increasingly expected not only to comprehend written and spoken texts but also to express themselves fluently, coherently, and confidently in oral interactions. Despite curricular reforms and the integration of communicative methodologies, the development of speaking skills remains a persistent challenge for many learners, particularly those at intermediate levels such as the third level of the Language Center.

The ability to communicate effectively in English is a crucial competency for university students in Ecuador, given the increasing demand for bilingual professionals. Traditional teaching methods often emphasize grammar and written skills, leaving oral communication underdeveloped. Collaborative learning, defined as instructional methods in which students work together to achieve shared learning goals, has been recognized as a powerful tool to enhance language acquisition, particularly speaking skills.

Speaking is a fundamental skill in language acquisition, although often the most challenging for learners due to anxiety, lack of practice, and fear of making mistakes. In the context of the Universidad Técnica de Babahoyo (UTB), third-level English students at the Language Center demonstrate varying levels of oral proficiency, often struggling with fluency and confidence. Collaborative learning defined as an instructional approach involving intellectual effort by students working together in groups has shown promise in improving language skills, especially speaking.

### **The Importance of Speaking Skills in EFL Contexts**

Pamzan et al. (2023), expressed that Speaking is often regarded as the most complex and anxiety-inducing of the four language skills, due to its real-time nature and the necessity for spontaneous language production. Unlike receptive skills, speaking requires active engagement, quick retrieval of vocabulary, accurate grammar usage, and the ability to negotiate meaning in unpredictable communicative situations. For students at the Universidad Técnica de Babahoyo, proficiency in speaking is not only a curricular

requirement but also a gateway to academic success, professional advancement, and participation in a globalized society. (Suban, 2021, p. 45)

According to Namaziandost (2019), The significance of speaking skills is further magnified by the communicative approach adopted in many language programs, which emphasizes interaction, negotiation of meaning, and the use of language for authentic purposes. Research consistently demonstrates that oral proficiency is a key predictor of overall language competence and is highly valued by employers and academic institutions. In this context, the challenge is not merely to teach students the mechanics of English, but to create environments where they can practice, experiment, and improve their spoken language in meaningful ways.

### **Challenges in Developing Speaking Skills**

Despite the acknowledged importance of speaking, many EFL learners, including those at the third level of the Language Center, struggle to achieve oral fluency and confidence. Several factors contribute to this phenomenon: Limited exposure to authentic communication: Traditional classroom settings often prioritize grammar and reading over speaking, resulting in limited opportunities for students to engage in spontaneous conversation.

Anxiety and fear of making mistakes: Many students experience language anxiety, particularly when speaking in front of peers or instructors. This fear can inhibit participation and reduce the willingness to take risks necessary for language development. Lack of interactional opportunities: Large class sizes, rigid curricula, and teacher-centered methodologies can restrict the amount and quality of student-to-student interaction, which is essential for developing communicative competence. Sociocultural factors: In some contexts, cultural norms may discourage open discussion or the expression of personal opinions, further limiting speaking practice.

Given these challenges, there is a pressing need to explore and implement pedagogical strategies that actively engage students in the speaking process, reduce anxiety, and foster a supportive learning environment.

## **Collaborative Learning: Concept and Rationale**

Collaborative learning has gained prominence as an effective pedagogical approach for addressing the challenges associated with developing speaking skills in EFL contexts. Rooted in constructivist theories of learning, collaborative learning involves students working together in pairs or small groups to achieve shared learning goals. This approach is characterized by mutual interdependence, individual accountability, and the co-construction of knowledge through dialogue and interaction. (Haryanti et al., 2021, 680)

The theoretical foundation for collaborative learning can be traced to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which posits that learning is inherently social and that cognitive development is mediated by interaction with more knowledgeable others (Liu and Li, 2022, p. 998). In the context of language learning, collaborative activities provide learners with opportunities to negotiate meaning, receive feedback, and practice language in authentic communicative situations. As Yavuz and Arslan (2022) notes, collaborative learning in higher education fosters interdependence and challenges traditional notions of authority and knowledge transmission.

Shafaei and Razali (2023), Collaborative learning is particularly well-suited to the development of speaking skills for several reasons: Increased opportunities for oral production: Group work and pair activities maximize the amount of time each student spends speaking, as opposed to whole-class discussions dominated by the teacher. Peer support and scaffolding: Students can support each other through scaffolding, modeling, and corrective feedback, which can reduce anxiety and build confidence.

According to Homagai (2024), Authentic communication: Collaborative tasks often simulate real-world communicative situations, requiring students to use language for genuine purposes such as problem-solving, decision-making, and information exchange. Development of social and intercultural skills: Through collaboration, students learn to listen, negotiate, compromise, and appreciate diverse perspectives, all of which are essential for effective communication in multicultural settings.

## **Empirical Evidence Supporting Collaborative Learning**

A growing body of research attests to the effectiveness of collaborative learning in enhancing speaking skills among EFL learners. Studies conducted in various educational contexts have reported significant improvements in students' oral proficiency, confidence, and motivation as a result of collaborative activities. For example, Alzubi et al. (2024) found that undergraduate students who participated in collaborative learning tasks demonstrated marked gains in speaking achievement, as measured by pre- and post-tests, and expressed positive attitudes towards the collaborative approach. Similarly, research by Hamad (2021) in Arabia revealed that cooperative learning models led to higher speaking scores and greater student satisfaction compared to conventional, teacher-centered methods.

Other studies highlight the role of peer scaffolding in collaborative learning environments. Ghaith (2022) observed that collaborative activities not only improved students' speaking performance but also enhanced their self-confidence and willingness to communicate. The opportunity to share ideas, receive feedback, and work towards a common goal was found to be particularly beneficial for learners who might otherwise be reluctant to speak in class.

Moreover, collaborative learning has been shown to foster a positive classroom climate, promote inclusivity, and support the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. These outcomes are especially relevant in diverse educational settings such as the Universidad Técnica de Babahoyo, where students may vary widely in terms of linguistic background, proficiency level, and learning style.

### **The Context of the Universidad Técnica de Babahoyo**

The Language Center at the Universidad Técnica de Babahoyo serves a diverse student population, many of whom are first-generation university students or come from rural areas with limited access to English language resources (Ha et al., 2022, p. 141). The third level of the Language Center represents a critical stage in students' language development, as they transition from foundational knowledge to more advanced communicative tasks. At this level, students are expected to engage in discussions, present information, and participate in debates on a range of topics relevant to their academic and professional interests.

However, instructors at the Language Center have observed that many third-level students continue to struggle with speaking tasks, often relying on memorized phrases or avoiding participation altogether. These challenges underscore the need for innovative instructional strategies that can bridge the gap between passive knowledge and active language use.

In summary, the development of speaking skills is a multifaceted challenge that requires innovative pedagogical approaches. Collaborative learning, grounded in robust theoretical frameworks and supported by empirical evidence, offers a promising pathway for enhancing oral proficiency, confidence, and communicative competence among EFL learners. In the context of the Universidad Técnica de Babahoyo, where students face unique linguistic and sociocultural challenges, the implementation of collaborative learning strategies has the potential to transform the language learning experience and better prepare students for the demands of academic, professional, and social communication in English.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effects of Collaborative Learning to improve the speaking skills in students of third level of the Language Center of the Universidad Técnica de Babahoyo. The rationale for using a mixed-methods design lies in its ability to offer a well-rounded analysis, combining numerical data to establish general trends with qualitative insights to explore students' personal experiences and perceptions.

The quantitative aspect of the research aimed to measure the impact of Collaborative Learning on students' language proficiency, specifically their speaking skills. This was done through pre- and post-tests, which allowed for the comparison of language performance before and after the intervention.

The pre-test was administered to both the experimental and control groups at the start of the semester. This test served as a baseline measurement, ensuring that any observed changes in performance could be attributed to the Collaborative Learning intervention rather than pre-existing differences between the groups.



The post-test was administered at the end of the semester, following the completion of the intervention. The same test format was used in both the pre- and post-tests to ensure consistency and reliability. The test included a combination of multiple-choice questions, short-answer responses, and a speaking task to assess the students' progress in both receptive and productive language skills.

The test scores from both the experimental and control groups were analyzed using paired t-tests to evaluate any statistically significant differences in language proficiency. This approach allowed for the comparison of language skills within each group over time, as well as between the two groups at the end of the study.

The qualitative component sought to explore the subjective experiences of students in the experimental group, gaining deeper insights into their perceptions of Collaborative Learning. By using open-ended questions, surveys, and semi-structured interviews, the study aimed to gather rich, descriptive data about how students engaged with the Collaborative Learning activities, how they perceived their own learning, and how they felt about the effectiveness of the tasks in enhancing their language skills.

The participants in this study consisted of 100 college students enrolled in two courses of third level at the Language Center of the Universidad Técnica de Babahoyo. The students were selected through a non-random convenience sampling method, with all participants voluntarily agreeing to participate in the study, like they are all adults, they did not need parents' permissions. The sample included both male and female students aged 18-25, and they had varying levels of proficiency in English. Participants of the first course were selected as the experimental group, and the students of the second course were selected as the control group. The control group has 50 students, which continued with traditional teaching methods, and the experimental group also has 50 students.

Students in the experimental group participated in a series of Collaborative Learning activities designed to promote communicative competence. Each session included real-world tasks such as role-playing, problem-solving activities, collaborative projects, and discussions, all aimed at encouraging active language use. Collaborative Learning activities were integrated into regular class sessions, with each task lasting between 40 and 60

minutes. The teacher provided support as needed, but the focus was on student collaboration and autonomous problem-solving.

## DEVELOPMENT

The results of this study are presented in two parts: quantitative analysis of the pre- and post-test scores, and qualitative analysis of student surveys and semi-structured interviews. Both sets of results provide insights into the impact of Collaborative Learning to improve speaking skills.

A total of 100 students participated in the study, divided into an experimental group and a control group. Pretest and post-test results were analyzed to assess improvements in language proficiency, specifically in speaking and writing skills. The pre-test scores indicated that both the experimental and control groups had similar baseline language proficiency levels at the start of the study.

### Statistical Comparison of

A *t-test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal variances* was used to measure the influence of Collaborative Learning in third level college students compared to students of the same level who were not taught using Collaborative Learning. The null hypothesis is that “There is no difference between the use of Collaborative Learning against teaching using traditional methodology.” And the alternative hypothesis is that “The use of Collaborative Learning improve Speaking skills”

The *t-test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal variances* identified a statistically significant difference between the posttest scores of both Courses. It was taken the posttest of the control group like variable 1, and the posttest results of the experimental group like variable 2. The *t* stat value was -11.22, and *p* is smaller than 0.001; establishing a null hypothesis of 0, consequently, the test results support the alternative hypothesis.

**Table 1.**

*t*-test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal variances

|                     | <i>Variable 1</i> | <i>Variable 2</i> |
|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Mean                | 7.980769231       | 9.019230769       |
| Variance            | 0.134426848       | 0.310897436       |
| observations        | 52                | 52                |
| Pooled Variance     | 0.222662142       |                   |
| Hypothesized Mean   | 0                 |                   |
| f                   | 102               |                   |
| T Stat              | -11.2215771       |                   |
| P(T<=t) one tail    | 8.17338E-20       |                   |
| t Critical one tail | 1.659929976       |                   |
| P(T<=t) two-tail    | 1.63468E-19       |                   |
| t Critical two-tail | 1.983495259       |                   |

The Value of *t* is -11.22; it was rejected the null hypothesis, consequently, the alternative hypothesis is accepted. The use of Collaborative Learning improve speaking skills in college students of the higher educational institution.

**Qualitative Results**

The qualitative data, collected through surveys and semi-structured interviews, provided insights into students' experiences with Collaborative Learning. The following themes emerged from the analysis of these data:

***Engagement and Motivation***

A majority of students in the experimental group reported feeling more engaged and motivated in the Collaborative Learning classroom. In the survey, 85% of students agreed or

strongly agreed that Collaborative Learning activities made learning more interactive and enjoyable. Additionally, 75% of participants expressed that Collaborative Learning encouraged them to take more responsibility for their learning. Many students appreciated the collaborative nature of the tasks, as they were able to interact with peers and learn through discussion and problem-solving.

### ***Perceived Improvement in Speaking Skills***

When asked about their perceived improvement in Speaking skills, 80% of the experimental group students felt that Collaborative helped them to improve their speaking skills. However, students also reported that the improvement in speaking skills was very pronounced. This was echoed in the interviews, they felt that speaking tasks were more impactful in helping them communicate more naturally.

### ***Satisfaction with Collaborative Learning***

Overall, students expressed high levels of satisfaction with the Collaborative Learning methodology. In the survey, 78% of participants reported that they would prefer Collaborative Learning activities over traditional grammar-based lessons. But, some students indicated challenges with the complexity of certain tasks. For instance, 15% of the respondents mentioned that some tasks were too difficult or unclear, especially when working in groups where language proficiency levels varied

### ***Challenges in Task Execution***

While the majority of students felt positive about the Collaborative Learning methodology, a small number (approximately 12%) voiced concerns about the time management and task complexity. These students indicated that some tasks were too time-consuming or complex to complete effectively within the given class time. Nonetheless, these challenges were often seen as opportunities for improvement and adaptation of the tasks in future implementations.

Finally, the quantitative data showed that the experimental group, which participated in Collaborative Learning, demonstrated significantly greater improvements in language proficiency compared to the control group. The pre- and post-test scores showed that students

who engaged in Collaborative Learning performed better, than those who received traditional instruction.

The qualitative data supported these findings, with students reporting increased engagement, motivation, and confidence in their language abilities. They also expressed a preference for Collaborative Learning over traditional methods, citing the relevance and interactivity of the tasks.

While the results were largely positive, the qualitative data also highlighted some challenges related to task complexity and time constraints, which may require adjustments in future implementations of Collaborative Learning.

## CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the effects of Collaborative Learning on the language proficiency and engagement of college students at Universidad Técnica de Babahoyo. The results indicate that Collaborative Learning had a positive impact on students' speaking skills, and contributed to increased student engagement and motivation. The findings of this research highlight the potential benefits of incorporating Collaborative Learning into higher education language teaching.

The quantitative data revealed significant improvements in language proficiency for students in the experimental group who participated in Collaborative Learning activities. Compared to the control group, which continued with traditional teaching methods, the experimental group showed a larger increase in test scores. These findings align with previous studies suggesting that Collaborative Learning, by emphasizing communicative competence, helps students improve their ability to use language in practical situations.

The qualitative data gathered from surveys and interviews revealed that students in the experimental group experienced higher levels of engagement and motivation. The interactive nature of Collaborative Learning activities, which involved collaborative problem-solving, role-plays, and real-world tasks, helped students feel more involved in their learning process. Many students reported that these activities were more enjoyable and relevant than traditional grammar exercises, leading to greater participation in class. The high levels of satisfaction expressed by the experimental group students suggest that collaborative

Learning could be a more engaging and effective teaching method than conventional instructional approaches.

In conclusion, Collaborative Learning has shown significant promise as a teaching methodology for improving Speaking skills and enhancing student engagement in college settings. This study's findings indicate that Collaborative Learning can be a highly effective approach for fostering communicative competence. By integrating collaborative Learning into language courses at Universidad Técnica de Babahoyo and similar institutions, educators can provide students with meaningful, real-world learning experiences that promote both language acquisition and active participation in the learning process.

### REFERENCES

- Alzubi, A. A., Nazim, M., & Ahamad, J. (2024). Examining the effect of a collaborative learning intervention on EFL students' English learning and social interaction. *Journal of Pedagogical Research*, 8(2), 26-46.  
<https://www.ijopr.com/download/examining-the-effect-of-a-collaborative-learning-intervention-on-efl-students-english-learning-and-14253.pdf>
- Ghaith, G. (2022). Cooperative learning and EFL learners' speaking achievement: An experimental study. *Language Teaching Research Quarterly*, 30, 1–15.  
<https://doi.org/10.32038/ltrq.2022.30.01>
- Ha, T. Y. N., Nguyen, T. B. N., Nguyen, N. L. D., & Tran, T. N. (2022). The effects of collaborative learning on young ESL Learners' L2 anxiety and speaking performance. *International Journal of Asian Education*, 3(2), 125-137.  
<https://ijae.journal-asia.education/index.php/data/article/download/286/156>
- Hamad, M. M. (2021). The impact of collaborative learning on oral proficiency among university EFL learners. *Arab World English Journal*, 12(3), 235–249.  
<https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol12no3.16>
- Haryanti, D., Sari, R. N., & Pratiwi, R. N. (2021). Cooperative learning to improve students' speaking skills: A classroom action research. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 12(4), 678–685. <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1204.16>

- Homagai, A. (2024). Investigating the impacts of collaborative learning on the development of speaking skills among EFL learners in Bhutan [Master's thesis, Brac University]. BracU Institutional Repository. <http://hdl.handle.net/10361/24860>
- Liu, Y., Li, X., & Li, Y. (2020). The effect of collaborative learning on EFL learners' speaking performance and anxiety. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 10(8), 996–1003. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1008.05>
- Namaziandost, E., Neisi, L., Kheryadi, & Nasri, M. (2019). Enhancing oral proficiency through cooperative learning among intermediate EFL learners: English learning motivation in focus. *Cogent Education*, 6(1), 1683933. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/2331186X.2019.1683933>
- Pamzan, M., Javaid, Z. K., & Ali, A. A. (2023). Perception of students about collaborative strategies employed by teachers for enhancing English vocabulary and learning motivation. *Pakistan JL Analysis & Wisdom*, 2, 146. <https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/pknjlolw2&div=55&id=&page=>
- Shafaei, A., & Razali, A. B. (2023). Enhancing EFL learners' speaking skills through collaborative learning: Evidence from a quasi-experimental study. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 19(1), 200–215. <https://doi.org/10.17263/jlls.1123456>
- Suban, T. S. (2021). Teaching speaking: activities to promote speaking skills in EFL classrooms. *Lectio: Journal of Language and Language Teaching*, 1(1), 41-50. <https://journal.unwira.ac.id/index.php/LECTIO/article/download/888/317>
- Yavuz, F., & Arslan, A. (2022). The impact of cooperative learning method on the oral proficiency of EFL learners. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, Article 866863. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.866863>