

Ciencia Latina Revista Científica Multidisciplinar, Ciudad de México, México.
ISSN 2707-2207 / ISSN 2707-2215 (en línea), enero-febrero 2026,
Volumen 10, Número 1.

https://doi.org/10.37811/cl_rcm.v10i1

ACTIVIDADES DE APRENDIZAJE ACTIVO PARA MEJORAR LAS HABILIDADES DE EXPRESIÓN ORAL EN EL CONTEXTO DE LA ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA (EFL).

ACTIVE LEARNING ACTIVITIES TO IMPROVE SPEAKING SKILLS IN
THE EFL CONTEXT

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Actividades de aprendizaje activo para mejorar las habilidades de expresión oral en el contexto de la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL)

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RESUMEN

Esta investigación tuvo como objetivo mejorar las habilidades de expresión oral mediante la implementación de actividades de aprendizaje activo con 37 estudiantes de quinto grado de una institución educativa privada de la ciudad de Loja. El estudio adoptó un enfoque cuantitativo, con un diseño de investigación-acción. La recolección de datos se realizó mediante un pretest y un postest centrados en la evaluación de la expresión oral, complementados con una lista de cotejo de observación para registrar las actitudes y el desempeño de los estudiantes durante la fase de intervención. Para evaluar el desempeño oral se utilizó el componente de speaking de la prueba A1 Movers de Cambridge Assessment, aplicando una rúbrica que consideró el uso de vocabulario y gramática, la pronunciación y la interacción. Los resultados del pretest evidenciaron un bajo nivel de competencia oral al inicio del estudio. A partir de estos hallazgos, se diseñó e implementó una propuesta de intervención basada en actividades de aprendizaje activo, tales como lluvia de ideas, juegos de rol, think-pair-share, mapas mentales y entrevistas, desarrolladas durante un período de diez días. Los datos obtenidos mediante la observación mostraron mejora en la confianza, motivación y participación de los estudiantes en las actividades orales. Asimismo, los resultados del postest reflejaron una mejora significativa en el desempeño de la expresión oral en comparación con los resultados iniciales. En conclusión, los hallazgos confirman que las actividades de aprendizaje activo tienen un impacto positivo en el desarrollo de las habilidades de expresión oral y respaldan su aplicación en la enseñanza del idioma inglés en la educación básica.

Palabras clave: actividades de aprendizaje activo; habilidades de expresión oral; enseñanza del idioma inglés; educación básica; interacción en el aula

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Active learning activities to improve speaking skills in the EFL context

ABSTRACT

This research aimed to improve speaking skills through the implementation of active learning activities among fifth-grade students at a private school in Loja. The study followed a quantitative approach with an action-research design and involved a sample of 37 students. Data were collected using a pre-test and a post-test focused on speaking skills, complemented by an observation checklist to record students' attitudes and performance during the intervention phase. The speaking component of the A1 Movers test from Cambridge Assessment was used to evaluate oral performance, employing a rubric that assessed vocabulary and grammar, pronunciation, and interaction. The pre-test results revealed a low level of speaking proficiency at the beginning of the study. Based on these findings, an intervention proposal incorporating active learning strategies—such as brainstorming, role-playing, think-pair-share, mind mapping, and interviewing—was implemented over ten days. Observational data indicated increased student confidence, motivation, and engagement during speaking activities. Post-test results demonstrated significant improvement in students' speaking performance compared to initial outcomes. The findings confirm that active learning activities have a positive impact on the development of speaking skills and support their effective use in English language teaching at the elementary level.

Keywords: active learning activities, speaking skills, English language teaching, elementary education, classroom interaction

*Artículo recibido 10 diciembre 2025
Aceptado para publicación: 10 enero 2026*



INTRODUCCIÓN

The teaching–learning process plays a fundamental role in global development, which is why education continues to receive sustained attention worldwide (UNESCO, 2023). Over the years, significant progress has been achieved through the continuous refinement of pedagogical methods, learning styles, and instructional approaches aimed at improving educational quality (Richards & Rodgers, 2022). Despite these advances, it remains essential to explore innovative and adaptable teaching strategies that respond effectively to diverse educational contexts and learners' needs, particularly in foreign language education.

In Ecuador, the national curriculum emphasizes the development of communicative, socio-emotional, logical, and digital competencies at all educational levels (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2016). However, classroom practices frequently reflect a traditional, teacher-centered model in which students assume a passive role as recipients of information, while teachers dominate classroom discourse (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017). This instructional approach limits opportunities for meaningful interaction, critical thinking, and authentic communication, especially in English language classrooms. Consequently, Ecuadorian students show low levels of English proficiency, with speaking skills being one of the most affected areas (Education First, 2023).

Education is expected to prepare learners for effective participation in professional, social, and cultural contexts within an increasingly globalized world (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2016). To meet these demands, students must develop essential 21st-century skills such as creativity, innovation, problem-solving, critical thinking, and effective communication (Afzal, 2019). English, recognized as the global lingua franca, plays a central role in accessing academic, professional, and intercultural opportunities (Northrup, 2013). Nevertheless, traditional instructional methods often fail to provide sufficient opportunities for learners to practice oral communication, making speaking one of the most challenging skills to develop in the English language learning process (Adnan, 2019).

In response to these challenges, active learning emerges as an effective pedagogical approach that promotes student engagement, interaction, and responsibility for learning. Active learning activities encourage learners to participate in discussions, simulations, role-plays, collaborative tasks, and problem-solving activities, fostering meaningful learning experiences (Bonwell & Eison, 1991).



Research indicates that these strategies increase students' motivation, confidence, and willingness to communicate, particularly among young learners (Asuero, 2023). By implementing active learning activities, the teacher adopts a facilitative role, while students become active participants who construct knowledge through interaction and practice.

The relevance of this study lies in its contribution to improving English speaking skills at the elementary level through the systematic implementation of active learning activities. Given the low levels of oral proficiency observed among fifth-grade students, it was necessary to promote instructional practices that encourage participation, reduce anxiety, and support authentic communication in the classroom. This research provides empirical evidence on the effectiveness of active learning activities in enhancing students' speaking performance, motivation, and classroom interaction. The direct beneficiaries are fifth-grade students, who demonstrated noticeable improvement in their oral skills, while teachers and researchers also benefit from practical insights into the application of active learning strategies in real classroom contexts. Although time constraints limited the duration of the intervention, the findings highlight the potential of active learning as a valuable approach for strengthening English language teaching and learning in primary education.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative approach with an applied action-research orientation, as it aimed to measure the effect of active learning activities on the development of English speaking skills through numerical data obtained from standardized instruments. As Flood et al. (2005) mention, quantitative research allows the identification of relationships between variables and the evaluation of instructional interventions by comparing measurable outcomes before and after their implementation (Dudwick et al., 2006). The research followed an experimental, longitudinal pre-test–post-test design, in which active learning activities constituted the independent variable and students' speaking skills represented the dependent variable, assessed in terms of grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation, and interaction.

The study was conducted at *Escuela de Educación Básica Punto de Partida*, a private elementary institution located in the urban area of Loja, Ecuador. The school provides face-to-face education during the morning schedule and serves approximately 500 students across early childhood and elementary



levels. English instruction is delivered by qualified teachers with B2 proficiency levels. The target population consisted of elementary education students; however, a convenience sampling method was employed due to accessibility and feasibility considerations (Creswell, 2015). The sample included 37 fifth-grade students, aged nine to ten years old, comprising 18 males (49%) and 19 females (51%), all of whom attended English classes five times per week for approximately 45 minutes per session.

Data collection involved the use of multiple quantitative instruments to ensure methodological rigor. The speaking component of the A1 Movers exam from Cambridge English Assessment was administered as both a pre-test and a post-test to evaluate students' oral performance. This standardized test is designed for young learners aged 6 to 12 and aligns with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), making it suitable for the Ecuadorian English curriculum. Students' performance was assessed using an analytic rubric based on the A1 Movers Assessment Scales, which measured grammar and vocabulary range and control, pronunciation accuracy, and interactional ability. Additionally, a structured observation checklist was applied throughout the intervention to record students' motivation, participation, and collaboration during speaking activities, providing complementary evidence to support test results.

Following the pre-test analysis, an instructional intervention was designed and implemented over ten days. The intervention consisted of seven lesson plans, each incorporating one active learning strategy, including role-play, interviews, brainstorming, red thinking hat, green thinking hat, think-pair-share, and mind mapping. Lessons were conducted in 40-minute periods, with some activities requiring two or three sessions depending on their complexity. During the intervention, the researcher acted as a facilitator, promoting student-centered learning and encouraging oral interaction in English.

Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the study. Institutional permission was obtained from school authorities, and informed consent was secured from students' parents or legal guardians. Participation was voluntary, confidentiality was guaranteed, and data were used exclusively for academic purposes. Inclusion criteria required participants to be enrolled in fifth grade, attend English classes regularly, and complete both the pre-test and post-test. Students with irregular attendance or incomplete assessments were excluded from the analysis.

Despite the positive outcomes, certain limitations were identified. The short duration of the intervention



may have restricted the extent of speaking improvement, suggesting that longer implementation periods could yield more substantial results. Additionally, the use of convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the findings to broader educational contexts. Nevertheless, the methodological design ensured coherence, rigor, and replicability, supporting the validity of the study's conclusions.

RESULTS

In this section, results obtained before and after the classroom intervention are presented and analyzed. First, the target population took the pre-test that consisted of the A1 Movers test speaking part. Afterwards, there was a classroom intervention considering the implementation of active learning activities to improve the participants' speaking skills. Then, they took the post-test. Both the pre-test and the post-test were registered through a rubric that consisted of the A1 Movers Assessment Scales.

Table 1
Pre-test condensed results

		Pre-test: Statistics			
		Pre-test	Grammar and Vocabulary	Pronunciation	Interaction
N	Valid	37	37	37	37
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		5.78	1.78	2.19	1.81
Median		4	1	2	1
Mode		3	1	1	1
Std. Deviation		3.101	1.031	1.101	1.101

Author: Ambuludí, P. (2023).

In the table above, the condensed results present the pre-test administered to 37 fifth-grade students to assess their initial English speaking performance. Overall, students obtained a mean score of **5.78 out of 15**, which represents approximately **39% of the expected performance**, indicating a generally low level of speaking proficiency at the beginning of the study. Regarding the assessed criteria, **grammar and vocabulary** showed the lowest performance, with a mean score of **1.78 (SD = 1.03)**. This result places students in the lowest band of the assessment rubric, reflecting limited lexical range and minimal control of basic structures. Most responses consisted of isolated words or short phrases with little coherence.

In terms of **pronunciation**, students achieved a mean score of **2.19 (SD = 1.10)**, indicating that while



utterances were generally intelligible, frequent inaccuracies in sound production and lack of control over word stress were evident. Finally, the **interaction** criterion yielded a mean score of **1.81 (SD = 1.10)**, revealing that students were able to respond to simple instructions and visual prompts but required continuous teacher support. Hesitation, frequent pauses, and incomplete utterances were common during oral tasks. Collectively, these results confirm that students began the study with a low level of speaking performance, thereby justifying the implementation of a classroom intervention based on active learning activities to enhance oral communication skills.

Table 2

Post-test: condensed results

		Statistics: Post-test			
		Post-test	Grammar and Vocabulary	Pronunciation	Interaction
N	Valid	37	37	37	37
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		9.41	3.32	3.08	3.00
Median		8.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Mode		15	2	2	2
Std. Deviation		3.655	1.203	1.233	1.333

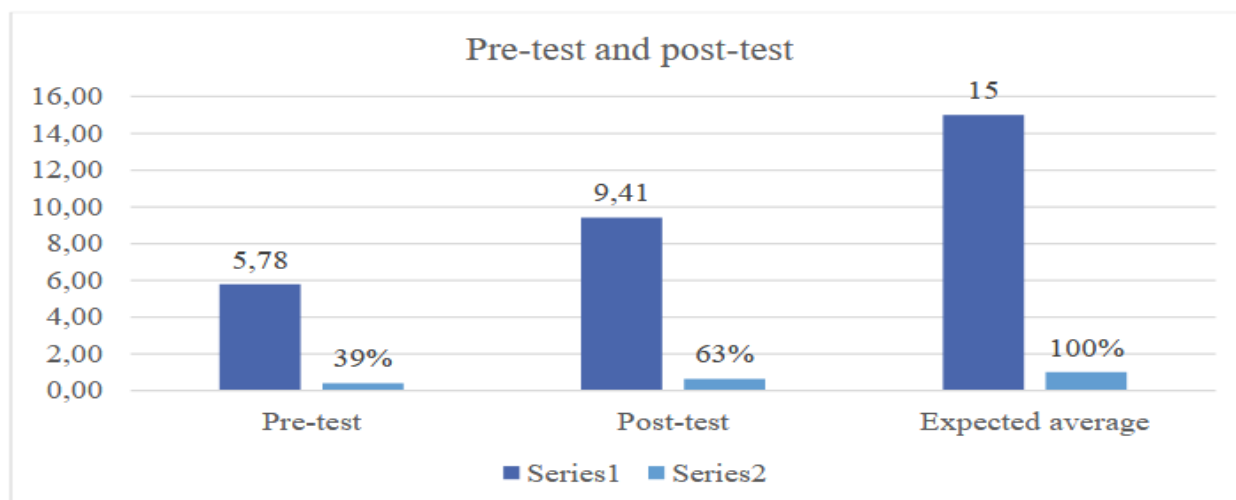
Author: Ambuludí, P. (2023).

According to Table 2, the post-test results indicate a clear improvement in students' English speaking skills following the implementation of active learning activities. The target group achieved an overall mean score of **9.41 out of 15**, representing **63% of the expected performance**, which reflects a substantial increase compared to pre-test results. A comparative analysis shows progress across all three assessed criteria. **Grammar and vocabulary** exhibited the greatest improvement, with the mean score increasing from **2.19 (SD = 1.03)** in the pre-test to **3.32 (SD = 1.20)** in the post-test, resulting in a difference of **1.54 points**. These gains suggest that students expanded their lexical repertoire and demonstrated better control of basic grammatical structures, despite the persistence of minor errors that did not significantly hinder communication. **Pronunciation** also improved notably, with mean scores rising from **2.19 (SD = 1.10)** to **3.08 (SD = 1.23)**, showing a gain of **0.89 points**. Students articulated words more clearly, improved vowel and consonant sound production, and used more appropriate intonation patterns, making their speech mostly intelligible. Similarly, **interaction** demonstrated marked



progress, increasing from a pre-test mean of **1.81 (SD = 1.10)** to **3.00 (SD = 1.33)**, with a difference of **1.19 points**. Students became more confident in responding to prompts, showed improved turn-taking skills, and required less teacher support during oral exchanges. Overall, the post-test findings confirm that active learning activities contributed significantly to enhancing students' speaking performance, supporting the effectiveness of the instructional intervention.

Figure 1
Pre-test and Post-test comparison



Author: Ambuludí, P. (2023).

Figure 1 clearly shows a notable difference between the pre-test and the post-test averages. The ideal average was 15; however, students obtained 39% of it in the pre-test and 63% in the post-test. The mean in the latter was higher than in the pre-test. Therefore, it was necessary to statistically compare the level of significance between these results.

After comparing the mean score of the pre and post-test, an inferential statistical analysis, specifically a Paired Samples T-test, was conducted to determine the statistical significance of the difference between the means of both tests. Table 3 presents the p-value and its corresponding equivalence for the results obtained from the pre and post-test.

Table 3
Paired Samples T-test

Paired Samples T-Test									
		Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pre-test - Post-test	-3.622	1.673	.275	-4.179	-3.064	-13.171	36	.000

Author: Ambuludí, P. (2023)

Table 3 shows the results of a comparison between means through a paired samples t-test. Therefore, with 95% of confidence, the two-tailed significance was 0.000, which is lower than 0.05. This means that there was a significant difference between the means from both tests, with higher results in the post-test.

In consequence, it was concluded that the hypothesis stated in this research was validated. The proposed alternative hypothesis was that active learning activities improve speaking skills among students in fifth grade; consequently, as the results show, the implementation of active learning activities like roleplay, the Red Thinking Hat, the Green Thinking Hat, brainstorming, mind map, interviews, and think-pair-share was beneficial for the students' improvement.



DISCUSSION

Implementing active learning activities is one of the most effective ways to create a transcendental shift from traditional teaching toward more meaningful and authentic education in the English classroom (Bownel & Eison, 1991). This is possible due to the many benefits and advantages of instruction based on active learning (Flood et al., 2005). Throughout the research process, fifth graders encountered some challenges, especially their passive way of learning, which focused on the teacher. However, activities like questioning in the class helped them to overcome pronunciation difficulties. Students felt more comfortable and engaged in the classroom and answered questions without fear. This result was similar to that found by Arini and Wahyudin (2022), who proved that questioning was an active learning activity that promotes students' improvement and good attitudes, such as confidence and motivation toward learning English. On the other hand, Ho et al. (2023) demonstrated that students were not accustomed to developing active learning activities in the classroom. It was a disadvantage at the moment of implementing activities that encourage active participation, such as role play, brainstorming, interviews, think-pair-share, mind map, the Red Thinking Hat, and the Green Thinking Hat, because students found some barriers, such as speaking English for a purpose, for example, to play a role. These results were compatible with the conclusion addressed by Ho et al. (2023), who stated that students needed more time to develop activities because they did not know how to deal with these new activities.

The most relevant results from this research were that students improved their speaking skills. They used basic grammar and vocabulary according to their level and age, with some mistakes that impeded communication and understanding, for example, the incorrect use of present simple and past simple tenses, and the overgeneralization of the ed-ending with irregular verbs. Their pronunciation was intelligible even though there were some hesitation moments while independently speaking about familiar topics, similar to those findings in Huang and Chen (2019). Their interaction was better, although they needed their teacher's support. In addition, children had better classroom participation. Students were more motivated, engaged, and confident during classroom sessions in the intervention phase. In other words, the students faced a new way of learning, not only listening to the teacher but also producing the language. Therefore, it was concluded that active learning strategies in the classroom contributed to improving children's speaking skills, just like those findings evidenced in various studies



of different authors, such as Tambunan et al. (2019), Putra et al. (2021), and Kahar et al. (2021). In sum, there were practical implications after finishing this study. First, the students' Speaking skills were improved by implementing active learning activities. To do it, the teacher switched the traditional teaching style to a more engaging and motivational one. Secondly, students used basic vocabulary not only to accomplish classroom tasks like filling in blank spaces but also to express ideas. Lastly, students actively participated, and their interaction was better. Hence, the theoretical implication lies in the advantages of applying active learning strategies among fifth graders because their speaking performance is better. The positive effects generated through these types of activities in the classroom are multiple, mainly empowering students to have a central and active role in this vital foreign language teaching and learning process

CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of active learning activities led to notable improvements in the speaking skills of fifth-grade students at a private school in Loja. Students had the opportunity to face a new way of learning, which helped them to be more motivated and engaged in each class. They demonstrated a positive attitude, and their change was notable.

Some active learning activities were identified, such as think-pair-share, the Green Thinking Hat, the Red Thinking Hat, interview, brainstorming, mind map, and role play. These activities were suitable for this study due to the students' age and level. They set aside their passive attitude to switch to an interactive and motivating way of learning.

Active learning activities were performed in the English classroom during the intervention process. This helped the students to improve their speaking skills. While it is true that students did not achieve the expected average, they showed significant improvement, evidenced by a period of observation during classes.

After the intervention process and the application of the pre and post-tests, this study determined the effectiveness of active learning activities in enhancing the speaking skills of fifth-graders at a private school. Statistical analysis compared means before and after applying active learning activities among fifth-graders. The findings showed an important improvement in the students' speaking performance.



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