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Enhancement of English Oral Production in Eighth-Grade Students by Implementing Cooperative Strategies

Mejoramiento de la producción oral en inglés en estudiantes de octavo grado a través de la implementación de estrategias cooperativas

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines the impact of Cooperative Learning on the oral production of secondary school students in Costa Rica. It is grounded in collaborative pedagogy (Nguyen & Oanh, 2025; Johnson et al., 2014) and the principles of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The sample included 24 eighth-grade students, their English teacher, and the academic coordinator of a private school in Heredia. The purpose was to describe how these strategies promote the development of oral skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, participant observation, and the analysis of recorded classes. The data were analyzed using a thematic approach that identified patterns of participation, emotional barriers, and language use. Triangulation reinforced the validity of the findings by highlighting convergences and contrasts between self-reports and classroom observations. The results reveal that, although Cooperative Learning supported the oral production of some students, participation remained uneven. Learners with higher levels of proficiency participated actively, whereas those with lower proficiency often resisted participation. Fear of making mistakes and limited vocabulary restricted their willingness to speak, a trend confirmed across recordings, interviews and questionnaires. The conclusions emphasize that collaborative strategies create significant opportunities for interaction but require adaptations to address diverse proficiency levels. Teachers are encouraged to assign specific roles in group work, provide individualized support, and integrate digital tools to foster equitable participation. At the institutional level, the study underscores the importance of creating inclusive and motivating learning environments that strengthen oral production in both face-to-face and virtual contexts.

KEYWORDS: Cooperative Learning, English as a Foreign Language, EFL, Teaching Strategies, Virtual Learning, Speaking Skills, Students Engagement, Language Proficiency.

RESUMEN

Este estudio cualitativo analiza el impacto del Aprendizaje Cooperativo en la producción oral de estudiantes de secundaria en Costa Rica. Se fundamenta en la pedagogía colaborativa (Nguyen & Oanh, 2025; Johnson et al., 2014) y en el Marco Común Europeo de Referencia (MCER). La muestra incluyó 24 estudiantes de octavo año, un profesional docente de inglés y la coordinadora académica de un colegio privado en Heredia. El objetivo fue describir cómo estas estrategias promueven el desarrollo de habilidades orales en inglés como lengua extranjera (ILE). La recolección de datos se realizó mediante entrevistas semiestructuradas, cuestionarios, observaciones participantes y el análisis de clases grabadas. La información fue analizada mediante un enfoque temático, que permitió identificar patrones de participación, barreras emocionales y uso del idioma. La triangulación reforzó la validez de los hallazgos, al mostrar coincidencias y contrastes entre lo reportado y lo observado en clase. Los

resultados revelan que, aunque el Aprendizaje Cooperativo favoreció la producción oral de algunos estudiantes, la participación fue desigual. Quienes tenían un mayor dominio del idioma participaron activamente, mientras que aquellos con menor nivel mostraron resistencia. El temor a cometer errores y la falta de vocabulario limitaron la disposición a hablar, coincidiendo con lo observado en las grabaciones, las entrevistas y los cuestionarios. Entre las principales conclusiones, se destaca que las estrategias colaborativas generan oportunidades significativas de interacción, pero requieren adaptaciones que atiendan los distintos niveles de competencia lingüística. Se recomienda a los docentes asignar roles específicos en el trabajo grupal, ofrecer apoyo individualizado y utilizar herramientas digitales para promover una participación equitativa. A nivel institucional, se enfatiza la necesidad de un entorno inclusivo que fortalezca la producción oral en contextos presenciales y virtuales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Aprendizaje cooperativo, Inglés como Lengua Extranjera, ILE, Estrategias de enseñanza, Aprendizaje virtual, Habilidades orales, Compromiso estudiantil, Dominio del idioma.

INTRODUCTION

In the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), there has been a growing emphasis on developing learners' communicative competence rather than merely mastering grammatical rules or isolated vocabulary. This shift aligns with Richards' (2017) view of oral communication as a social and cognitive process that requires authentic interaction rather than mechanical practice. As a result, the ability to speak English fluently is no longer a luxury, but a necessity for students aiming to become competent, socially integrated, and employable citizens in a globalized world.

In this context, Costa Rica has made notable policy efforts to enhance the quality of English teaching. Specifically, the Ministry of Public Education (MEP) has implemented curricular reforms aimed at developing communicative skills through student-centered and participatory approaches. However, educational reform must be accompanied by pedagogical innovation, especially in the face of evolving social and technological demands (Solís, 2018; Corona Flores, 2015). In response, one initiative, called the Alliance for Bilingualism (ABi), introduced in 2018 under the administration of President Carlos Alvarado, emphasized this need for systemic transformation in language education to respond to the demands of the 21st century.

Despite these initiatives, national reports reveal ongoing challenges in English language instruction, particularly in oral production. These findings echo Richards' (2017) and Al-Sobhi and Preece's (2018) observations that limited communicative practice restricts fluency development, suggesting that Costa Rica's systemic constraints reproduce the very conditions identified in international research. For example, the Programa Estado de la Nación (2017) affirmed that oral proficiency continued to present a challenge, even in private institutions where access to resources may be greater.

[Programa Estado de la Nación \(2023\)](#) reported that the country was experiencing an enduring “educational blackout” that had further deepened the pre-existing educational structural challenges, obstructed the development of essential literacy skills, and undermined higher education by generating substantial knowledge deficits that ought to have been consolidated during secondary schooling.

Additional challenges include inadequate teacher preparation, persistent use of traditional pedagogical models, limited instructional time, and insufficient resources. These issues restrict learners’ opportunities for meaningful communicative practice, a limitation that [Al-Sobhi and Preece \(2018\)](#) directly link to reduced fluency and accuracy. Emotional factors such as anxiety and low confidence, as identified by [Derakhshan et al. \(2020\)](#), also decrease students’ willingness to participate. As a result, many learners fail to achieve the oral proficiency needed for higher education or employment, especially in public educational institutions where resources and pedagogical innovation often lag those of private institutions. These systemic barriers raise critical questions about the effectiveness of current teaching practices and the need to adopt more inclusive, motivational, and participatory strategies. Therefore, the problem statement of this study deals with high school education in Costa Rica. In this case, English oral production is a core objective of national education, but it also represents an ongoing challenge as students often display uneven participation, limited production, and varying fluency levels. For that reason, Cooperative Learning has the potential to solve speaking problems and to become the pathway for promoting more dynamic and meaningful oral interaction. This pedagogical approach represents a significant alternative to transform traditional participation patterns by creating supportive peer environments where students can practice the language, take risks collaboratively, and develop confidence.

This study was conducted at a private school in the province of Heredia. Furthermore, it focuses specifically on a group of 24 eighth-grade students. However, it also includes their English teacher and the academic coordinator. Thus, this research analyzes the impact of Cooperative Learning on oral production in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) by describing student interaction generated within collaborative activities and the challenges that emerge in face-to-face and virtual learning environments.

As justification for this study, addressing the issue of deficient oral production is crucial because this competence is central to the CEFR. Oral production serves as a key indicator of EFL achievement in Costa Rica. Therefore, learners are expected to demonstrate a proficient level of oral proficiency. Understanding how CL functions in real classroom contexts provides insights that can help teachers understand their students’ personalities and behaviors and to foster more meaningful, supportive, and effective classroom practices.

Lastly, this study is guided by the assumption that Cooperative Learning can significantly enhance oral production when implemented with clear structures, purposeful roles, and differentiated support,

enabling learners with varied linguistic profiles to participate more often and develop stronger communicative abilities.

The research question of the article would be: How does the implementation of Cooperative Learning influence the oral production, participation, and engagement of eighth-grade students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in a private institution in Costa Rica? Accordingly, the main objective is to evaluate how the implementation of Cooperative Learning affects students' participation, engagement, and spoken output in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting. Besides, the three specific objectives are: to measure the impact of Cooperative Learning on students' oral production by comparing their participation and use of target vocabulary before and after the intervention; to identify the changes in students' participation and engagement by observing their performance during classroom activities; and, to categorize the practical implications for EFL teaching by reflecting on how the strategies can be integrated into lesson planning and classroom practice.

This study emerges from a personal, academic, and professional commitment to contribute to the ongoing discussion by examining the impact of Cooperative Learning on the oral production skills of eighth-grade students at a private high school in Costa Rica, following constructivist principles. Beyond an institutional interest, this research is also grounded in the researcher's personal management, which involves the ability to reflect critically on own teaching practices, organize classroom interventions systematically, and balance academic responsibilities with professional challenges. Such personal management shaped the study, as it required perseverance, discipline, and self-regulation to transform classroom observations into research opportunities. In other words, the inquiry was motivated by firsthand teaching experiences that shed light on the persistent gap between curriculum goals and actual student outcomes in oral production. Consequently, the study seeks not only how to assess the effectiveness of specific methodologies, but also how to generate insights that may inform future decisions regarding teacher training and curriculum design.

The study followed a structured sequence of actions that unfolded chronologically. It began with the identification of persistent challenges in students' oral production and uneven participation in an eighth-grade EFL classroom at a private school in Heredia. This diagnosis informed the definition of the research question, objectives, and methodological framework. Once the conceptual and procedural foundations were established, a set of cooperative learning strategies was designed and integrated into the regular English lessons, both in face-to-face and virtual modalities.

During the intervention, participant observations were conducted to document patterns of engagement and language use, while questionnaires gathered students' perceptions of confidence, participation, and the effectiveness of the strategies. Semi-structured interviews with students, the English teacher, and the academic coordinators provided additional insights into the affective and pedagogical factors

influencing oral production. In parallel, selected class sessions were recorded and analyzed to examine learners' vocabulary use, fluency, grammatical accuracy, and overall communicative performance.

Following data collection, all information was organized, coded, and categorized into emerging themes. The final stage involved triangulating observations, interviews, questionnaires, and recorded sessions to arrive at an integrated interpretation of the findings. This sequential process allowed for a systematic examination of how cooperative learning shaped students' oral production and informed the study's evidence-based conclusions.

Theoretical framework

A review of recent literature reveals that the development of oral production in EFL is a multi-dimensional issue shaped by pedagogical practices, curriculum design, and affective variables. The foundational contributions of Richards (2017) emphasize that oral communication cannot be reduced to the mastery of grammar and vocabulary but should instead be understood as a social and cognitive practice that requires interaction and collaboration. Although this perspective is a valuable theoretical framework, mismatching how teachers can realistically apply it in the classrooms.

Within the Costa Rican context, it is highly common that English teaching prioritizes the memorization of grammar structures and vocabulary lists, due to lack of time and a very packed syllabus. Despite curricular intentions to promote oral interaction, classroom practices frequently focus on grammatical explanations and written exercises. Consequently, traditional focus on form overshadows meaningful use of the language.

Empirical studies have attempted to address these structural constraints. Al-Sobhi and Preece (2018) demonstrate that limited opportunities for meaningful communicative practice directly affect learners' fluency and accuracy, highlighting the need for task-based curricular reforms. These findings suggest that traditional instructional practices in Costa Rican classrooms should shift from filling out worksheets or repeating isolated structures to meaningful practice opportunities and relatable communicative tasks that enhance real speaking encounters. Similarly, Derakhshan et al. (2020) broaden the discussion by emphasizing the psychological dimension of language learning, demonstrating that learners' confidence and motivation may be just as influential as their linguistic competence in determining oral participation. From this perspective, activities based primarily on memorization and repetition provide learners with few opportunities to build confidence or develop willingness to take risks when speaking. Consequently, when put under spontaneous tasks, students may heighten anxiety which might reduce motivation, making participation even more challenging. Because of that, it is a must to adjust the way teaching is carried out in Costa Rican educational centers so that students can use the language with purpose and confidence.

Finally, Costa Rican studies enrich this discussion by contextualizing these challenges within local educational realities. López-Montero (2020) identifies shortcomings in preschool teacher preparation

and curriculum design, while Carranza-Marchena and Tapia-Loría (2022) demonstrate the importance of scaffolding and feedback in sustaining interaction during remote learning. Furthermore, MEP's adoption of the CEFR represents significant progress at the policy level. However, it also raises expectations by positioning oral production as a central learning outcome without fully addressing the structural and pedagogical barriers that hinder its development. Taken together, these studies suggest that, while international research reveals the theoretical and psychological dimensions, Costa Rican data reveal contextual and systemic barriers. This convergence underscores the relevance of methodologies such as Cooperative Learning, which offers a more holistic response by integrating authentic interaction, structured support, and motivational elements into the teaching of oral production.

Oral production

Oral production in EFL has been defined as learners' ability to express themselves fluently, accurately, and appropriately in the target language. According to Torky (2006), this competence extends beyond vocabulary recall and grammatical accuracy, as it encompasses three interrelated dimensions: linguistic competence (grammar, pronunciation, and lexical range), pragmatic competence (the appropriate use of register and effective turn-taking during interaction), and strategic competence, which involves deploying coping strategies when learners encounter communication breakdowns, such as searching for alternative expressions or paraphrasing. Within the Costa Rican educational context, learners may develop certain linguistic skills, their limited exposure to English outside hinders their performance in class. Furthermore, the scarcity of opportunities for authentic interaction in classroom settings makes it difficult for students to develop the pragmatic and strategic competences required for effective oral communication. Consequently, teachers must rely on research and creativity to compensate for these gaps. Overall, this multidimensional perspective suggests that oral production requires not only linguistic knowledge but, more importantly, the ability to interact effectively and strategically in authentic communicative contexts.

Challenges to oral production have been widely documented and encompass linguistic, affective, and contextual dimensions. For example, learners often lack the vocabulary and grammatical knowledge necessary, which significantly limits their fluency (Nikleva & López-García, 2019). Affective factors also play a crucial role. As already discussed, anxiety and low self-confidence frequently inhibit oral participation. This observation is consistent with Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis and more recent research, including foundational theory, measuring language anxiety and classroom implications and syntheses, which confirms that emotional variables exert a reckonable impact on speaking performance. Additionally, contextual factors such as class size, online learning environments, and assessment practices shape students' willingness to speak.

Consistent with these findings, a Costa Rican study by Zúñiga Vargas & Barrantes León (2021) reported that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many students disengaged from oral activities in virtual

learning environments by turning off microphones and cameras, clearly demonstrating how contextual conditions can suppress classroom participation. In other words, the learning environment and the circumstances surrounding instruction can strongly influence whether students choose to speak. Therefore, it is imperative to pay attention to features such as class size, learning context, evaluated tasks, and class dynamics, as well as students' personalities and behaviors, to determine their level of oral production success.

Taking together, the literature suggests that improving learners' oral production requires teachers to move beyond purely technical instruction. Rather, they must address the linguistic, emotional, and contextual barriers that deter students' willingness and ability to communicate. Consequently, Cooperative Learning (CL) emerges as a promising pedagogical approach to strengthen oral production in Costa Rican classrooms.

Cooperative learning

According to [Johnson et al. \(2014\)](#) Cooperative Learning (CL) is "the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning" (p.87). In other words, CL is based on structured peer interaction, in which students work collaboratively in small groups toward shared goals while maintaining individual accountability. Similarly, [Nguyen and Oanh \(2025\)](#) point out that CL is an instructional approach that relies on structured interaction among students, where both instructional design and group organization play a decisive role in shaping engagement and participation. From this perspective, Cooperative Learning is not merely about placing students into small groups, but rather about careful planning that fosters individual accountability and positive interdependence. By working toward shared objectives, learners not only enhance their academic achievement but also develop the social and communicative skills that strengthen collaboration and foster a sense of community within the classroom. Consequently, Cooperative Learning can be understood as a pedagogical approach that promotes motivation, active participation, and the collaborative construction of knowledge.

In Costa Rica, interactive tasks grounded in CL principles have been linked with increased student participation in secondary schools ([Vargas Solís et al., 2023](#)). Similar findings have been reported in Ecuador, where [Andrade Morán and Aguaiza Iza \(2024\)](#) found that CL activities, such as role-playing and group problem-solving tasks, not only enhanced learners' fluency but also reduced their fear of making mistakes. Complementing these results, a quasi-experimental study conducted in Libya ([Al Jawad, 2023](#)) demonstrated significant gains in university students' speaking performance following the implementation of CL strategies. Nevertheless, these positive outcomes also highlight the importance of careful implementation, as the success of CL depends on well-structured group work, effective teacher facilitation, and alignment with learning objectives.

Taken together, the studies highlight the CL's potential to strengthen oral production by fostering interaction, reducing affective barriers, and creating opportunities for meaningful communication. Furthermore, they support [Vygotsky's \(1978\)](#) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), according to which peer scaffolding allows learners to achieve more than they could individually.

METHODS

Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design, which is highly suited for understanding individuals' perceptions of their experiences and offers flexibility in responding to emergent situations or characteristics during interpreting data ([Ugwu & Eze, 2023](#), p. 20). Action Research (AR) generates knowledge through inquiries and practices carried out in specific contexts, which lead to self-reflection, practical solutions, and curricular benefits ([Peralta Castro & Cass Zubiría, 2023](#)). Furthermore, AR is conceptualized as an ongoing process in which teachers, rather than external investigators, address classroom problems, resulting in motivated teachers and supported students ([Peralta Castro & Cass Zubiría, 2023](#)). Consequently, teaching–learning processes have improved.

The sampling design is non-probabilistic, specifically convenience sampling, which is characterized by the intentional selection of participants. These participants display traits aligned with the research objectives, ensuring that the sample reflects a typical group within the population ([Hernández Ávila & Carpio, 2019](#)). Furthermore, this type of sampling emphasizes practicality as participants are chosen not only for their relevance but also for their accessibility and willingness to cooperate. This facilitates the researcher's work in contexts where proximity and existing connections play a key role ([Otzen & Manterola, 2017](#)). The participants in this study include 24 8th-grade students (aged 13 to 14) of a private institution, along with their English teacher and the school's English coordinators (two). The students (10 girls and 14 boys) displayed variation in their levels of English proficiency (A2 to B1, according to the CEFR), with most showing an intermediate level, a few at an advanced level, and some at a basic level.

To ensure relevance and consistency, inclusion criteria required that students be officially enrolled in the 8th grade, provide informed consent through their parents or guardians, and participate in the lessons where cooperative and action-oriented strategies were implemented. Exclusion criteria involved students who did not provide consent or who were absent from most lessons, as well as staff not directly engaged in the English program. These parameters ensured that the sample represented a typical group within the institution while preserving the voluntary and ethical basis of participation.

The teacher, who also served as the researcher, was responsible for implementing the didactic strategies being studied. Lastly, the two English coordinators had different roles in the institution: one managed the English Department of the entire institution, and the other oversaw the high school

English Department (revising weekly lesson plans, tests, and projects). Both coordinators supervised the general curriculum and offered insights into the school's approach to language teaching.

The methodological design of this study was informed by the aim of examining how active and cooperative learning strategies contribute to the development of speaking skills among eighth-grade EFL students. To address this objective, the research focused on students' experiences and perceptions within their regular classroom environment, emphasizing the meanings they assigned to their participation and language use. The study followed a structured sequence of phases that ensured alignment between the research objectives, the instructional intervention, and the procedures for data analysis. Ethical considerations were central throughout the process: informed consent was secured from students and their parents or guardians, confidentiality was protected through anonymization, and all observations and interviews were conducted in a manner that encouraged openness and upheld participants' integrity.

1. Phase 1: Problem Identification and Context Analysis

- a. Identification of persistent challenges in oral production.
- b. Review of participation patterns among eighth-grade EFL students.
- c. Initial analysis of classroom practices and institutional context.

2. Phase 2: Research Planning and Design

- a. Formulation of research questions and objectives.
- b. Selection of a qualitative research approach.
- c. Definition of sampling criteria and participant selection.
- d. Alignment of cooperative learning strategies with the Action-Oriented Approach.

3. Phase 3: Instructional Intervention

- a. Integration of cooperative learning strategies into English lessons.
- b. Implementation across face-to-face and virtual modalities.
- c. Design of structured tasks to promote oral interaction.

4. Phase 4: Data Collection

- a. Participant observations documenting engagement and interaction.
- b. Semi-structured interviews with students, teachers, and coordinators.
- c. Questionnaires on confidence, participation, and strategy effectiveness.
- d. Recorded sessions analyzed for vocabulary use, fluency, grammar, and communication.

5. Phase 5: Data Organization, Coding, and Categorization

- a. Transcription and organization of qualitative data.
- b. Coding is based on emerging themes.
- c. Categorization into thematic clusters.

6. Phase 6: Triangulation of Findings

- a. Cross-analysis of all data sources.
- b. Identification of convergences and divergences.
- c. Strengthening the validity of interpretations.

7. Phase 7: Interpretation and Integration of Results

- a. Synthesis of triangulated findings.
- b. Analysis of cooperative learning's influence on oral production.
- c. Identification of affective and linguistic factors.

8. Phase 8: Conclusions and Implications

- a. Formulation of evidence-based conclusions.
- b. Pedagogical implications for teachers and institutions.
- c. Recommendations for future research.

Data collection procedures

This study was designed to provide an in-depth understanding of the impact of the Cooperative Learning Method. To achieve this objective, multiple qualitative instruments were employed to capture different perspectives and develop a comprehensive understanding of the impact of teaching strategies on students' oral production.

First, semi-structured interviews, carried out in Spanish to ensure clarity and accuracy of participants' responses, were carried out with students, the classroom teacher, and the two coordinators to explore their experiences and perceptions of the implemented instructional strategies. Second, questionnaires were administered to students to examine their perceptions of their confidence in oral production and the effectiveness of classroom strategies. The teacher completed a separate questionnaire reflecting on the implementation of Cooperative Learning. Third, participant observation was conducted to examine classroom dynamics, analyze the implementation of the methodologies, identify patterns of behavior and engagement in oral activities, and record students' participation during both face-to-face and virtual English lessons. Finally, selected recorded lessons were analyzed to evaluate students' oral production and examine how the teaching strategies influenced their language development.

To guarantee the credibility, validity, and reliability of the findings, this study incorporated a methodological triangulation process, combining data collection instruments. First, the semi-structured interviews with students, the English teacher, and the coordinators were analyzed and compared to obtain a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions, emotional barriers, and experiences.

This stage was complemented by questionnaires that captured the students' self-assessment of their oral performance, confidence, and engagement with the implemented strategies, while also gathering the teacher's reflections on classroom practices. Furthermore, participant observations provi-

ded first-hand evidence of classroom interaction, participation patterns, and the effectiveness of the pedagogical strategies in authentic contexts. These observations were further supported by the systematic analysis of recorded classes, which allowed a detailed examination of students' oral production, including vocabulary use, grammatical accuracy, fluency, and spontaneity, without the limitations imposed by real-time notetaking.

By cross-verifying the data obtained from these diverse instruments, the triangulation process reduced the risk of subjectivity and provided a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. Ultimately, this methodological strategy ensured that the findings were not dependent on a single perspective but reflected the convergence of multiple viewpoints, strengthening the study's contribution to the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching.

Data analysis

The collected data were analyzed as follows. First, the data were coded and categorized into emerging themes, such as didactic strategies, participation, and oral production. This process allowed the identification of recurring patterns across instruments while preserving the specificity of individual accounts. Next, these categories were organized into analytical tables and supported with textual excerpts, which provided a partial representation of each instrument. This movement from partial to general ensured the recognition of both convergences and divergences, thereby reinforcing the credibility and interpretative depth of the study.

RESULTS

Triangulation of results

The triangulation of results was carried out by comparing the information obtained from classroom observations, interviews with participants, and the questionnaires administered to students and the teacher. This process made it possible to identify clear consistencies across instruments, as well as meaningful differences that enriched the interpretation of the phenomenon under study.

To begin with, classroom observations and the analysis of recorded sessions revealed a predominant use of Spanish, limited participation, and uneven performance among students in terms of fluency, grammatical accuracy, and lexical range. A small group of learners contributed to most of the oral interactions, whereas the majority remained passive, often keeping their cameras and microphones turned off during virtual lessons. These patterns indicate persistent difficulties in sustaining oral production in English, even when cooperative strategies designed to promote interaction were implemented.

The interview data confirmed these tendencies. Students and instructors reported that fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and limited vocabulary were among the main obstacles to oral participation. Interviewees also noted that students with lower proficiency levels tended to participate less, even in group dynamics intended to create a supportive environment. Despite these challenges,

both students and teachers acknowledged that strategies such as Think-Pair-Share and Show and Tell were helpful in creating opportunities for interaction and oral practice.

The questionnaires reflected similar perceptions. Most students reported feeling anxious when speaking English, struggling to recall vocabulary during spontaneous tasks, and experiencing pressure when participating in front of their peers. However, an important contrast emerged when comparing the questionnaires with the classroom observations: while many students expressed motivation and willingness to participate, this intention was not always reflected in their actual behavior during class sessions. This discrepancy suggests a gap between declared willingness and observable participation, likely influenced by affective factors and the demands of the virtual learning environment.

Taken together, the triangulated findings show that students' oral production was shaped by the interaction of three key elements: the instructional strategies implemented, the emotional barriers present, and the linguistic limitations students experienced. Although cooperative activities generated opportunities for English-speaking practice, their impact varied widely due to anxiety, gaps in language proficiency, and low confidence among a significant portion of the group. These results highlight the importance of complementing cooperative learning strategies with intentional emotional support and linguistic scaffolding so that all students can participate more consistently and equitably.

To illustrate this, this section presents the results obtained from classroom observations and recorded sessions carried out during the intervention. The data are organized into four tables that summarize the main aspects observed in relation to didactic strategies, student participation, and the teacher's role in fostering oral production. Each table is followed by a brief description highlighting the most relevant information directly observable in the classroom context. The purpose of this section is to provide a descriptive account of the findings, which will be developed in the subsequent discussion.

As shown in [Table 1](#), during the October 27th remote class most students (15 out of 24) used Spanish while completing a descriptive activity focused on objects and related questions. The observation registered frequent errors in grammar structures, particularly in verb tense usage, along with limited and basic vocabulary. Only a few students attempted to use English, which contrasted with the majority who relied on Spanish. This pattern illustrates the challenge students faced in sustaining oral production in English during the task, despite the teacher's efforts to elicit responses in the target language. In the following session, participation patterns became more evident, as shown in [Table 2](#).

Table 1.

Analysis of the October 27th, 2021, remote class

Aspects Observed	Comments
Theme	Description of objects and questions regarding them
Use of the language in class	15 out of 24 students speak in Spanish

Grammas structures	Incomplete, wrong use of verb tenses
Vocabulary	Limited, basic
Questions to the teacher	“How often do you watch tv?”
Answers of student Y	“Depends, si es para ver tele o cuando hay partidos”

Note. This table shows the elements analyzed in the observation of the class of October 27th, 2021.

Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

Table 2.

Analysis of November 3rd, 2021, remote clas

Aspects Observed	Comments
Topic	Types of character, setting, and plot
All of the students	Show interest and motivation to the topic
9 out of 24 students	Show comprehension and participation during the session
20 out of 24 students	Keep their camera and mic. The lack of participation during the class

Note. This table shows the aspects analyzed in the distance learning class of November 3rd, 2021.

Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

Table 2 reveals that, although all students showed interest in the topic related to types of character, setting, and plot, only 9 out of 24 participated actively during the class. The majority of students (20 out of 24) kept their microphones and cameras off, which restricted their observable oral production. This contrast between general interest and limited active participation highlights the challenge students faced in contributing orally during the activity. The teacher attempted to elicit responses, but engagement was concentrated in a small group, while most students remained passive. To address oral participation in a different way, the following lesson included the Show and Tell activity, which offered students the opportunity to contribute more spontaneously, as shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3.

Analysis of the November 10th, 2021, distance learning class

Aspects observed	Comments
Sequence of the class	Greeting, take attendance, development of the activity: Show and Tell, feedback, farewell
Spontaneity	There is a lot of spontaneity. However, this is not always the case in English
Topic	Household objects, personal stories, anecdotes, and descriptions
Vocabulary	There is a great weakness in this area, with little vocabulary for the level
Grammar	Students do not know how to use the verb tenses: present simple and past simple

Note. This table shows the aspects analyzed in the class observed on November 10th, 2021.

Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

As observed in Table 3, the Show and Tell activity encouraged spontaneous participation among students, but this interaction was not consistently carried out in English. While some participants attempted to describe objects and share short anecdotes in the target language, others relied on Spanish when they lacked the necessary vocabulary. The observation also recorded frequent mistakes in the use of verb tenses, particularly in the present and past simple. These difficulties limited the accuracy of student responses during the activity, despite the teacher's guidance to keep the interaction in English. In addition to oral production, students' reading ability was also examined in the following class, as summarized in Table 4.

Table 4.

EFA Loadings – Writing Domain

Observed Aspects	Comments
Reading proficiency	One participant manages to read the text with no problem One student shows some difficulty but completes the task. A student shows great difficulty reading
Fluency	One participant manages to read the text fluently without pausing Two students tend to pause during the text; however, one of the participants takes longer to complete the reading of the text
Pronunciation	All three participants show pronunciation errors; however, the student with a basic level fails to identify the correct pronunciation of most of the words in the text
Reading comprehension	Only the first student can fully understand the content of the text

Note. This table shows the aspects observed with respect to students' reading ability.

Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

Table 4 shows that students demonstrated varied performance in the reading activity. One participant read the text fluently and showed complete comprehension, while another completed the task with some difficulty, and a third experienced great difficulty in reading. Differences were also noted in fluency, as only one student managed to read without pauses, whereas the others paused frequently, with one taking considerably longer to finish. Pronunciation issues were common to all three participants, and the student with the lowest level was unable to pronounce most words correctly. The teacher monitored the exercise and provided feedback, but the results revealed that only one student achieved full comprehension of the passage. These findings on reading performance complement the observations from the previous classes and help to contextualize the overall patterns identified in the study.

Altogether, the results in Tables 1–4 indicate that across the observed classroom activities students displayed limited use of English and frequent errors in grammar and vocabulary. Participation was heterogeneous, as a small group of students engaged actively while the majority relied on Spanish

or remained passive, often keeping their cameras and microphones off. The Show and Tell activity encouraged spontaneity, but difficulties with vocabulary and tense usage reduced the consistency of English production. Reading tasks also revealed disparities, with only one student demonstrating fluency and full comprehension, while others paused frequently and struggled with pronunciation. Throughout the sessions, the teacher prompted students to participate in English, but the challenges faced by many learners restricted their oral production and overall engagement..

DISCUSSION

Didactic strategies and their pedagogical implications

Strategies such as Show and Tell, Think-Pair-Share, and guided reading provided structured opportunities for students to develop oral production skills. Grounded in Cooperative Learning principles—positive interdependence, individual accountability, and promotive interaction (Kagan & Kagan, 2009; Cuitiño Ojeda et al., 2019; Chandía Cabas, 2015)—these activities fostered collaboration, facilitated the exchange of ideas, and engaged students in authentic communicative tasks.

This approach aligns with Richards (2017), who contend that oral communication develops best through meaningful social interaction rather than isolated repetition. For example, Think-Pair-Share allowed students to rehearse ideas with a peer before addressing the class, while Show and Tell encouraged spontaneous contributions in a more informal setting.

Although the cooperative learning (CL) literature often reports consistent benefits of these strategies, the present study found more variable outcomes. Student engagement varied and depended on learners' linguistic resources and emotional readiness. This contrasts with Chandía Cabas (2015), who observed uniformly positive participation in cooperative structures and suggests that, in contexts with linguistic insecurity, cooperative strategies alone may not suffice. These results also align with Al-Sobhi and Preece (2018), who emphasize that limited opportunities for meaningful communicative practice can restrict fluency and accuracy.

This highlights the importance of task structure interacting with learners' linguistic abilities. Kumaravadivelu (1994) underscores the need for context-sensitive pedagogy when innovating curricula. The current findings support adapting strategies to students' specific needs rather than applying them as universal solutions. The observed variability is closely linked to participation, where affective barriers and linguistic limitations intersect.

Student participation and emotional barriers

Student participation was inconsistent; while some learners expressed initial interest and sometimes engaged enthusiastically, the vast majority refrained from speaking, leaving a small group to sustain interaction. This pattern illustrates the influence of affective filters, as described by Krashen (1982). It also supports Derakhshan et al. (2020) claim that emotional variables affect willingness to

communicate. This observation aligns with [Salgado García \(2015\)](#) and [Corona Flores \(2015\)](#), who state that anxiety, fear of mistakes, and lack of confidence reduce willingness to participate. These constraints manifested as students' reluctance to activate cameras and microphones during virtual lessons, even when they appeared attentive.

Meanwhile, [Díaz-Barriga \(2013\)](#) and [Delgado Álvarez's \(2013\)](#) found that online environments tend to increase student passivity. However, unlike [Delgado Álvarez's \(2013\)](#) report of gradually declining engagement, this study found that most learners withdrew immediately. This highlights the severity of affective barriers in digital contexts. In addition, this disengagement was not solely emotional; linguistic gaps noted in Table 1 made matters worse. Students with insufficient vocabulary or grammar often remained silent, supporting the argument of [González Di Pierro \(2016\)](#) and [Valverde \(2015\)](#) that limited lexical repertoires undercut confidence. Thus, emotional and linguistic factors were closely linked, making oral production both psychologically and structurally challenging. Persistent difficulties with accuracy and pronunciation further demonstrate this intersection.

Oral production and pronunciation challenges

The results showed persistent weaknesses in oral production. Frequent verb tense errors, limited vocabulary, and recurring mispronunciations reduced the accuracy and intelligibility of student speech. These deficiencies lowered learners' confidence and their ability to sustain interaction. [González Di Pierro \(2016\)](#) and [Valverde \(2015\)](#) note that these difficulties are common among Costa Rican learners. The present study shows that these issues directly led students to avoid communicative tasks. These deficiencies align with [Nikleva and López-García \(2019\)](#) view of the fragile link between comprehension and oral expression: learners often understand a message but struggle to express it.

According to the CEFR ([Council of Europe, 2020](#)), learners at this level depend on formulaic language. The [Council of Europe \(2020\)](#) describes basic-level learners as relying on formulaic expressions, rehearsed turns, and simple structures. Performance matched these descriptors but showed further problems. Errors in tense usage and weak pronunciation often block communication, creating a cycle of insecurity and reluctance. Thus, weak oral accuracy was not isolated but drove broader disengagement. These challenges emerged in specific classroom episodes in which linguistic and emotional barriers intersected.

Anecdotal evidence as illustrative examples

Individual excerpts highlighted these dynamics. A student's hesitation—"It has here I don't know how to say it"—captured the struggle to retrieve vocabulary and construct a grammatical form under pressure. Such episodes exemplify what [Nikleva and López-García \(2019\)](#) describe as the fragile link between comprehension and oral expression, where learners understand but fail to produce. They also support [Barrera Benítez's \(2009\)](#) and [Moreno Rodríguez's \(2017\)](#) view that corrective feedback is essential for helping students overcome linguistic blocks and gain autonomy.

In this study, however, feedback was not always immediate or systematic. As a result, students often resorted to Spanish or withdrew from participation altogether. These micro-level struggles reinforced macro-level patterns: linguistic deficiencies and affective barriers compounded by one another, discouraging communication. Thus, while anecdotes illuminate individual difficulties, they also point to institutional responsibilities, since their recurrence reflects structural issues in language instruction.

Institutional relevance and implications

The findings affect students, teachers, and the institution. Students need explicit instruction in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation to build confidence and intelligibility. Teachers need professional development that uses cooperative strategies and addresses affective factors. The results of stress scaffolding aligned with Vygotskian principles, so students get support within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), as [Vygotsky \(1978\)](#) describes. Teachers must implement strategies such as Think-Pair-Share, anticipate emotional resistance, and provide corrective feedback that reduces anxiety ([Council of Europe, 2020](#)). At the institutional level, the findings align with the [Programa Estado de la Nación \(2021\)](#), which reveals ongoing gaps in foreign language education.

Unlike the broad national diagnosis, this study shows how systemic weaknesses appear in classroom behaviors: silence, reliance on Spanish, and uneven participation. Private secondary schools must prioritize oral production as a core curricular and institutional goal. To achieve this, they need to align resources, time, and teacher training to support oral competence. These steps address immediate challenges and ensure local practices align with wider educational goals. Together, these insights show how pedagogy, affective factors, and institutional support shape learners' oral production.

Triangulation of findings

Observational data showed limited English proficiency and frequent grammatical or vocabulary errors. Participation varied across activities. Student interviews confirmed these issues. They revealed that fear of mistakes and lack of vocabulary were key barriers to speaking. Survey results matched these findings. Most respondents reported anxiety and limited vocabulary as their main difficulties. Each instrument exposed different sides of the same problem. This highlights the need for integrated analysis. The consistency across instruments shows that these challenges are systemic, not isolated.

At the same time, triangulation revealed strong contrasts. Survey data showed students valued Think-Pair-Share and Show and Tell. Yet, observation showed that only a few students actively participated in these activities. This gap points to a divide between positive views of teaching methods and actual classroom behavior. Emotional and language barriers still limit participation. The differences between views and actions support [Kumaravadivelu's \(1994\)](#) idea. Pedagogy should respond to context, not use one-size solutions.

Overall, the triangulated analysis shows oral production depends on instructional strategies, emotional barriers, and language gaps. This view provides a more detailed view of the findings. It su-

ports the need for context-sensitive teaching (Kumaravadivelu, 1994). It also echoes wider concerns about inequality in foreign language learning (Programa Estado de la Nación, 2021).

In conclusion, the analysis shows that didactic strategies created meaningful opportunities for oral practice. However, affective barriers, such as fear and lack of confidence, and linguistic barriers, like deficiencies in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, limited their effectiveness. Fear and lack of confidence often inhibited participation. Linguistic deficiencies also limit oral production. Anecdotal evidence underscores these challenges. Institutional factors emphasize the need for systemic support.

Developing oral competence requires more than implementing strategies; it calls for scaffolding that addresses linguistic gaps, reduces affective barriers, and incorporates corrective feedback. Accordingly, responsibility exists at two levels. Pedagogically, teachers adapt strategies to meet both linguistic and emotional needs, while institutional schools allocate resources and provide training to establish oral production as a core curricular objective. This dual responsibility, in turn, informs the concluding section, which synthesizes the study's principal contributions, implications, and limitations.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the extent to which active and cooperative learning strategies fostered oral production among eighth-grade English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in a private school setting. The findings demonstrate that collaborative tasks and action-oriented activities provided meaningful opportunities for interaction, especially for students who actively participated in class. These learners improved their fluency, confidence, and willingness to communicate in English. However, participation was uneven, as many students remained passive or limited their contributions to Spanish.

The empirical evidence confirms that, although cooperative and communicative strategies can enhance oral production, their effectiveness is mediated by students' affective readiness, prior educational experiences, and willingness to take linguistic risks. Consequently, the findings reveal both the benefits and the limitations of these approaches. While oral practice increased among confident students, persistent challenges remained regarding grammatical inaccuracies, lexical gaps, and pronunciation difficulties.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, because the findings derive from a single classroom at a private school, the generalizability of the results may not apply elsewhere. Second, the teacher acted as both practitioner and researcher, which may have influenced classroom dynamics and data interpretation. Additionally, most lessons were conducted virtually, giving rise to technological and motivational issues outside the researcher's control. These factors mean that the study's conclusions are exploratory. Still, the study points to important ideas for practice and research. Schools should reinforce vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation while implementing strategies to boost oral participation. Likewise, the teachers should employ differentiated instruction, closely monitor

student participation, and adopt practices that reduce language anxiety. Future research could include more schools, larger samples, and face-to-face lessons.

In conclusion, fostering oral competence involves more than using communicative strategies. Teachers must also address emotional and structural barriers that affect participation. Recognizing these challenges can help educators design more effective interventions that enable all learners to achieve their oral production goals.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, this study suggests recommendations for classroom practice, teacher training, and research described as follows. For classroom practice, educators should prioritize the development of interactional competence by implementing cooperative tasks that are both culturally relevant and cognitively demanding. Simultaneously, they must ensure emotional safety is embedded in oral activities by providing opportunities for low-stakes practice prior to public performance. Technology should be leveraged not merely as a tool for content delivery, but as a resource to foster peer interaction, reflection, and multimodal communication.

In terms of teacher training and development, programs must provide preparation in cooperative learning theory, the role of affective factors in language acquisition, and the management of virtual classrooms. Furthermore, continuous professional development should emphasize reflective teaching, classroom-based research, and flexible lesson design that responds to diverse proficiency levels.

Future research should extend these findings by conducting longitudinal studies to examine the long-term effects of cooperative and action-oriented strategies across academic terms and grade levels. Additionally, comparative analyses of face-to-face, virtual, and hybrid modalities are needed to explore their specific affordances and constraints. Finally, further studies are warranted to examine how these strategies influence other communicative dimensions, such as listening comprehension, intercultural awareness, and pragmatic competence.

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