Project - based Learning to Boost Speaking Skills in A2 Level Students

Aprendizaje basado en proyecto para mejorar las habilidades de expresión oral en estudiantes de nivel A2

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ABSTRACT

Developing oral communication remains one of the most persistent challenges for A2-level EFL learners in Ecuadorian public schools, particularly in socioeconomically vulnerable contexts where exposure to authentic language use is limited and teacher-centered practices dominate classroom instruction. This study examined the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PBL) as a communicative and experiential pedagogical framework for enhancing speaking competence among secondary students in Monte Sinaí, Guayaquil. Drawing on the principles of Communicative Language Teaching, the research employed a mixed-methods, quasi-experimental design that integrated a standardized oral proficiency assessment, a perception survey, systematic classroom observations, and semi-structured teacher interviews. Eighty first-year high school students participated in a six-week intervention in which collaborative projects were embedded into regular English lessons. The findings revealed consistent improvement in students' overall speaking proficiency, accompanied by noticeable gains in confidence, engagement, and interactional behavior during communicative tasks. Students demonstrated greater autonomy, increased use of English for meaningful exchanges, and more active participation in project-related discussions. Qualitative evidence further showed that PBL fostered an environment conducive to sustained peer collaboration, authentic language use, and reduced anxiety during oral activities. Teachers highlighted the positive shift in learners'

willingness to speak and their capacity to negotiate meaning in real-time interactions. Overall, the study provides empirical support for the pedagogical value of PBL in resource-constrained EFL settings and underscores its potential to operationalize communicative principles through purposeful, student-centered tasks. The findings suggest that integrating PBL into Ecuadorian EFL programs can strengthen oral communication skills while promoting learner agency, motivation, and meaningful engagement with the target language.

Keywords: project-based learning, communicative language teaching, oral proficiency, english as a foreign language, ecuadorian educational context

RESUMEN

El desarrollo de la comunicación oral continúa siendo uno de los desafíos más persistentes para los estudiantes de nivel A2 en las instituciones públicas del Ecuador, especialmente en contextos de vulnerabilidad socioeconómica donde la exposición a usos auténticos del idioma es limitada y predominan prácticas docentes centradas en el profesor. Este estudio examinó la eficacia del Aprendizaje Basado en Proyectos (ABP) como un marco pedagógico comunicativo y experiencial para fortalecer la competencia oral de estudiantes de educación secundaria en el sector Monte Sinaí de Guayaquil. Basado en los principios del Enfoque Comunicativo, el estudio adoptó un diseño mixto de tipo cuasiexperimental que integró una evaluación estandarizada de expresión oral, una encuesta de percepción, observaciones sistemáticas de aula y entrevistas semiestructuradas con docentes. Ochenta estudiantes participaron en una intervención de seis semanas en la que los proyectos colaborativos se incorporaron a las clases regulares de inglés. Los hallazgos evidenciaron mejoras consistentes en la competencia oral general de los estudiantes, junto con incrementos en confianza, participación y capacidad de interacción durante las tareas comunicativas. Asimismo, emergieron patrones de mayor autonomía, uso más frecuente del inglés con fines significativos y una participación sostenida en actividades colaborativas. La evidencia cualitativa mostró que el ABP generó un entorno propicio para la interacción auténtica, la negociación de significado y la reducción de la ansiedad ante actividades orales. En conjunto, el estudio aporta evidencia empírica sobre el valor pedagógico del ABP en contextos EFL con recursos limitados y sugiere que su integración en programas educativos ecuatorianos puede fortalecer la comunicación oral al tiempo que promueve agencia, motivación y un aprendizaje más significativo.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje basado en proyectos, enfoque comunicativo, competencia oral, estudiantes de nivel a2, inglés como lengua extranjera

INTRODUCTION

English Language Learning and the Ecuadorian Context

English has become the bridge connecting cultures, careers, and academic communities worldwide. This reality as a medium for intercultural communication, academic development, and professional advancement has prompted governments to weave English into the fabric of their national education policies (Council of Europe, 2020). Ecuador has embraced this global trend through curriculum reforms designed to align teaching practices with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Nevertheless, despite these substantial efforts, developing communicative competence remains a persistent challenge within the Ecuadorian educational landscape (Muñoz et al., 2018).

Young learners in public institutions face significant obstacles when expressing themselves orally, particularly at the A2 level, which corresponds to the Basic User descriptor of the CEFR. This proficiency level constrains students to simple structures for conveying basic needs, while their speech frequently reveals hesitation, limited vocabulary range, and diminished confidence (Council of Europe, 2020).

Across Ecuador's diverse provinces and educational landscapes, research consistently unveils concerning patterns of restricted speaking performance (Yánez & Cuenca, 2022). Beyond mere statistics, these learners grapple with speaking anxiety and error-related apprehension, often clinging to memorized phrases rather than venturing into spontaneous communication. Such limitations emerge from multiple factors: scarce exposure to authentic linguistic input, minimal opportunities for oral practice, and teacher-centered methodologies that favor grammar instruction over genuine communication (Ochoa et al., 2016).

Building on these observations, Álvarez et al. (2025) reveal that numerous English educators continue embracing traditional approaches emphasizing reading and writing, consequently relegating oral production to the periphery of language instruction. This reality underscores the urgent need to explore innovative, student-centered approaches that cultivate fluency, foster interaction, and promote meaningful language use in authentic contexts.

Theoretical Foundations of the Communicative Approach

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach revolutionized language education in the 1970s, challenging structuralist and grammar-translation methods that had left learners unprepared for authentic communication (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). At its core lies the development of communicative competence, a multifaceted concept initially introduced by Hymes and subsequently expanded by Savignon (2018), which seamlessly integrates grammatical accuracy with sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic components. Within this paradigm, CLT positions interaction as simultaneously the vehicle and destination of learning. Consequently,

classrooms transform into dynamic communicative spaces where meaning negotiation, constructive feedback, and contextualized practice take center stage (Nunan, 2004).

From this perspective, speaking emerges as a productive skill that weaves together linguistic knowledge with cognitive and affective dimensions. Bygate (1987) compellingly argued that cultivating speaking competence encompasses both motor-perceptive skills, including fluency, pronunciation, and articulation, and interactional abilities such as coherence, meaning negotiation, and turn-taking management. More recently, Ganta (2020) reinforced this view, asserting that effective speaking instruction must offer structured yet flexible opportunities for learners to articulate ideas, tackle problems, and engage in spontaneous interaction.

Contemporary research consistently validates CLT's effectiveness in enhancing students' oral performance, motivation, and classroom engagement. Alamri (2021), for instance, demonstrated how CLT principles significantly boosted Saudi students' confidence and willingness to communicate, while Indonesian researchers Fauzi and Ridwan (2022) documented substantial fluency gains among EFL learners immersed in communicative activities. Similarly noteworthy, Elmiwati et al. (2024) discovered that sustained implementation of communicative strategies, including pair work and contextual dialogues—yielded measurable improvements in both accuracy and fluency among A2-level students.

The Ecuadorian landscape presents equally encouraging evidence. Mantilla Cabrera et al. (2022) alongside Silva Valencia et al. (2021) documented how communicative tasks sparked increased student participation, refined pronunciation, and cultivated more interactive classroom dynamicsAdditionally, Yánez and Cuenca (2022), as well as Andrade-Molina (2024), demonstrated that the implementation of communicative activities not only reduced learners' anxiety but also strengthened their motivation to engage in English conversations in front of their peers. Collectively, these investigations underscore the transformative power of active and meaningful communication in EFL classrooms, establishing a robust theoretical foundation for integrating CLT principles with experiential approaches such as Project-Based Learning (PBL).

Project-Based Learning as a Pedagogical Framework

PBL represents a transformative instructional approach that positions learners at the heart of the educational process, cultivating autonomy, inquiry, and collaboration through meaningful project completion. Thomas (2000) characterized PBL as a systematic teaching method that immerses students in complex, real-world tasks demanding investigation, collaboration, and reflection. Expanding this foundation, Markham et al. (2003) highlighted how PBL bridges the gap between knowledge acquisition and performance, empowering students to demonstrate their learning through tangible products or compelling presentations. Within language education, this methodology resonates deeply with experiential and constructivist theories, as it transforms the target language from an abstract system into a purposeful tool for authentic communication.

Integrating PBL into EFL instruction yields remarkable benefits across multiple dimensions. This approach encourages learners to employ language not merely as a theoretical construct, but as a practical instrument for problem-solving and collaborative project completion (Nunan, 2004). Zhang (2020) discovered that project-oriented tasks significantly elevated both motivation and linguistic competence, a result attributed to sustained peer interaction and meaningful collaboration. In a parallel finding, Marzuki and Kuliahana (2021) revealed how project-based language games bolstered students' confidence while enhancing spontaneous speech production. Through this authentic connection between classroom learning and real-world contexts, PBL enables students to internalize vocabulary naturally, refine pronunciation organically, and develop fluency progressively—all while strengthening essential transversal skills including teamwork and problem-solving capabilities (Hao et al., 2021; Zou et al., 2021).

Furthermore, PBL implementation harmoniously complements CLT's communicative principles. These complementary methodologies share a fundamental commitment to promoting authentic language use alongside learner-centered instruction. Savignon (2018) compellingly argued that communicative competence flourishes most effectively when students actively participate in meaning construction. Through PBL, learners transcend mere communication practice, they harness language to strategize, investigate, and present their projects, thereby weaving together linguistic, cognitive, and social learning dimensions. This natural alignment between CLT and PBL reinforces the concept that project-based instruction can effectively serve as a practical model for strengthening speaking skills within EFL contexts.

Empirical Evidence from Ecuador and Latin America

Recent years have witnessed a surge in Latin American research exploring PBL's pedagogical and motivational dimensions. Guime and Cárdenas (2024) uncovered compelling evidence that project-based strategies implemented in Ecuadorian virtual classrooms substantially enhanced learners' participation and linguistic confidence. Echoing these findings, Méndez-Fernández and González-Cabrera (2025) documented measurable improvements in oral fluency, pronunciation, and communicative accuracy among secondary students, validating PBL's potential to foster deeper language engagement. In their comprehensive Ecuadorian investigation, Pavón et al. (2025) tracked significant gains in students' communicative competence following six weeks of project-based intervention centered on collaborative problem-solving tasks. Equally revealing, Tamayo et al. (2024) demonstrated through action research how experiential frameworks not only boosted learners' willingness to speak but also noticeably reduced their anxiety levels. Together, these investigations paint a promising picture: PBL adoption in Ecuadorian schools emerges as both a feasible and effective pathway toward enhancing students' communicative performance.

Despite these encouraging developments, challenges persist within the educational landscape. Álvarez et al. (2025) astutely observed that even with curricular reforms championing

communicative and task-based approaches, Ecuadorian educators still require sustained professional development to fully embrace learner-centered methodologies. This reality highlights a critical need for empirical studies examining how project-based pedagogies function within authentic classroom environments, particularly at foundational proficiency levels. While international literature provides extensive validation of PBL's benefits, localized research remains notably scarce—especially concerning A2-level learners, who occupy a pivotal stage in developing both oral competence and communicative confidence.

Research Gap and Objectives of the Study

While existing research has validated both CLT and PBL as powerful approaches to EFL instruction, empirical evidence remains limited regarding their integration for enhancing speaking skills among A2-level learners in Ecuadorian public schools. The majority of local investigations have concentrated on general communicative competence or written production, creating a significant gap in our understanding of how project-based strategies can systematically elevate oral expression at the basic-user level. Recognizing this opportunity, the present study endeavors to analyze the pedagogical impact of PBL as a communicative strategy for cultivating fluency, pronunciation, and interactive abilities in A2 students.

The general objective of this research is to analyze the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning in improving the speaking skills of A2-level EFL students in Ecuador.

The specific objectives include:

1. To diagnose students' initial oral performance before implementing PBL activities.
2. To evaluate PBL's influence on learners' fluency, pronunciation, and interactive capabilities.
3. To explore both students' and teachers' perceptions regarding PBL implementation as a strategy for enhancing oral communication in English classrooms.

This investigation contributes to the expanding body of literature on communicative and experiential language learning by positioning PBL within Ecuador's unique EFL context. Through strategic integration of CLT's communicative strengths with PBL's experiential power, this research offers an empirically grounded perspective on how project-based instruction can revolutionize speaking classrooms, nurture student autonomy, and bridge the persistent gap between theoretical curriculum design and authentic language use.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Research Design

This investigation adopted a quasi-experimental design integrated within a mixed-methods framework to examine how PBL enhances speaking skills among A2-level EFL students in Ecuador. The quantitative dimension featured a pretest-posttest design utilizing the Preliminary English Test (PET) speaking component from Cambridge English Qualifications as a standardized measure of oral proficiency, enriched by a five-point Likert-scale survey

administered both before and following the intervention. Meanwhile, the qualitative strand encompassed systematic classroom observations alongside semi-structured interviews with teachers, capturing participants' engagement levels, evolving attitudes, and perceived progress throughout the PBL implementation. This methodological triangulation fostered a comprehensive interpretation of learning outcomes, weaving together measurable performance data with rich experiential evidence (Chong & Plonsky, 2021; Tamayo et al., 2024).

Context and Participants

The investigation unfolded at the Unidad Educativa del Milenio "Marieta de Veintimilla Marconi," situated in the Monte Sinaí sector within northwestern Guayaquil, Ecuador. Monte Sinaí represents a rapidly expanding settlement marked by socioeconomic vulnerability and constrained access to educational and technological resources. National data reveals that this sector houses between 130,000 and 180,000 inhabitants, confronting elevated rates of poverty and extreme poverty (Ministerio de Inclusión Económica y Social, 2022). Inaugurated in 2018, the school serves approximately 1,100 students from economically disadvantaged families and has emerged as a cornerstone institution, substantially contributing to local educational advancement.

The study encompassed the entire universe of first-year high school students (*Primero de Bachillerato General Unificado*), comprising 80 participants distributed across two parallel A2-level classes—specifically, 43 female and 37 male students aged between 15 and 17 years. These groups followed the national English curriculum aligned with the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2020). The selection process naturally employed a convenience sampling approach, given that the researcher served as instructor for both groups, ensuring direct access to the complete population. Notably, these two classes constituted the entire A2-level cohort at the institution, thereby guaranteeing comprehensive internal representativeness. Institutional placement assessments confirmed comparable proficiency levels across all participants. Furthermore, three English teachers from the institution enriched the qualitative phase, offering professional insights regarding student performance, classroom dynamics, and methodological challenges encountered during the intervention.

The school administration granted formal authorization for the study's implementation. Researchers obtained informed consent from students' parents and guardians, while assuring participants of complete confidentiality and voluntary participation. Throughout the investigation, ethical standards for educational research remained paramount, following the *OECD Guidelines for Research Integrity* (2020).

Instruments

Oral Pretest and Posttest

Students' speaking proficiency underwent evaluation through the speaking component of the PET developed by Cambridge Assessment English, an internationally acclaimed examination measuring communicative performance at A2-B1 levels. The PET speaking section scrutinizes

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five essential criteria—fluency, pronunciation, interaction, accuracy, and vocabulary range—employing a structured format encompassing an interview, collaborative tasks, brief discussions, and extended turns where students describe visuals or articulate opinions on familiar topics. This instrument earned selection due to its status as a validated and standardized tool, universally recognized for reliably assessing oral communication. The pretest occurred prior to implementing PBL activities, while the posttest took place immediately following the six-week intervention. Two qualified English instructors from the institution independently evaluated each student pair utilizing the official *PET Analytical Speaking Scale*. When rating discrepancies arose, evaluators reached consensus through discussion, thus ensuring fairness and consistency throughout the assessment process.

Student Perception Survey

A carefully crafted 15-item Likert-scale questionnaire captured students' attitudes and perceptions toward the PBL intervention, measuring self-assessed progress in speaking abilities and engagement during project-based activities. The instrument explored five key dimensions: fluency development, vocabulary expansion, pronunciation confidence, active participation, and peer collaboration effectiveness. Response options spanned from *strongly disagree (1)* to *strongly agree (5)*. This survey drew inspiration from established studies examining communicative teaching within EFL contexts (Fauzi & Ridwan, 2022; Méndez-Fernández & González-Cabrera, 2025), subsequently undergoing validation by two applied linguistics specialists who verified both linguistic appropriateness and cultural relevance for Ecuadorian learners.

Two applied linguistics specialists evaluated the instrument to confirm its simple language and appropriate cultural material for Ecuadorian secondary-school students and its ability to fulfill their educational needs. The researchers made small changes to specific words in the survey to create content that matched the A2 language abilities of the students. The survey was distributed to students at two different times: during the diagnostic assessment in week 1 and after the PBL program in week 6. The pre–post assessment method enabled researchers to monitor student attitude development through their confidence levels and classroom participation and their self-assessed oral skills progress. The survey functioned as an additional data collection tool which combined with PET speaking test results and classroom observation and teacher interview data to create a complete picture.

Classroom Observations

Systematic classroom observations throughout the six-week implementation period yielded valuable qualitative evidence. Observation protocols drew from communicative and participatory indicators established by Richards and Rodgers (2014) and Savignon (2018), prioritizing student participation patterns, peer interaction quality, task authenticity, and sustained English use during collaborative work. Following each session, detailed field notes documented observable behaviors, interaction dynamics, and authentic English usage within communicative contexts.

These qualitative insights illuminated PBL's effectiveness while enriching the quantitative findings from both the PET assessment and perception survey.

Semi-Structured Interviews with Teachers

Upon completing the intervention, semi-structured interviews engaged the three participating English teachers, exploring their perspectives on PBL's effectiveness, observable transformations in students' oral performance, and challenges inherent in implementing this methodology within resource-limited, large-class contexts. Each conversation lasted approximately 30 minutes, taking place in quiet school settings conducive to reflection. With explicit consent, all interviews underwent audio recording and subsequent verbatim transcription. Thematic analysis of these transcripts revealed recurring themes surrounding motivation, collaboration dynamics, and language development patterns (Chong & Plonsky, 2021).

Procedure

The intervention spanned six weeks, strategically organized into three distinct phases: diagnosis, implementation, and evaluation. The opening week focused on establishing baseline measurements, with students completing both the PET pretest and initial perception survey to determine their current oral proficiency levels and attitudes toward speaking English. These diagnostic results informed the subsequent design of PBL projects, carefully tailored to align with students' interests, linguistic needs, and local realities.

Weeks two through five immersed students in project-based learning tasks seamlessly integrated into their regular English lessons. The PBL framework articulated by Thomas (2000) and refined by Markham, Larmer, and Ravitz (2003) shaped activity design, foregrounding inquiry, collaboration, and presentation skills. Working in small groups, students investigated topics resonating with personal or community significance, including environmental awareness, tourism promotion, and social responsibility initiatives, ultimately producing oral deliverables such as dynamic presentations, informative posters, and engaging short videos. Throughout this process, teachers transformed into facilitators, offering strategic scaffolding and constructive feedback while consistently encouraging English communication. The concluding week centered on comprehensive evaluation, during which students completed both the PET posttest and follow-up perception survey. Concurrently, researchers gathered teacher interviews and consolidated observation notes, completing the multifaceted data collection process.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data derived from the PET assessment and perception survey underwent rigorous analysis through descriptive and inferential statistics. Researchers calculated means, standard deviations, and percentages to illuminate changes in speaking proficiency and students' evolving perceptions. A paired-samples t-test revealed statistically significant differences between pretest and posttest scores ($p < .05$), providing empirical evidence of learning gains. All statistical processing utilized *SPSS version 26*, ensuring analytical precision and reliability.

Qualitative data emerging from observations and interviews received careful examination through thematic content analysis, a process involving systematic identification and categorization of recurring patterns surrounding motivation, participation, fluency development, and communicative confidence. Subsequently, insights from both quantitative and qualitative datasets converged, generating a nuanced understanding of PBL's impact on students' oral competence (Guime & Cárdenas, 2024; Chong & Plonsky, 2021).

Ethical Considerations

Every research procedure strictly adhered to ethical standards governing educational investigation. Researchers thoroughly informed participants about the study's objectives and voluntary nature, securing parental consent for all minors involved. Confidentiality remained paramount throughout the process, with unique codes assigned to each dataset while personal identifiers stayed completely protected. Prior to initiating data collection, the school administration provided formal institutional authorization. The investigation fully complied with academic integrity principles and participant protection protocols delineated in the *OECD Guidelines for Research Integrity* (2020).

RESULTS

Quantitative Findings

PET Speaking Performance (Pre–Post)

Students' speaking performance improved notably following the six-weeks Project-Based Learning (PBL) intervention. The global mean on the *Preliminary English Test (PET)* speaking component increased from 2.48 (SD = 0.42) to 3.15 (SD = 0.47). A paired-samples *t*-test confirmed that this difference was statistically significant, $t(79) = 10.62$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.75$, indicating a large and educationally meaningful effect. Table 1 presents the detailed results for each subskill evaluated.

Table 1
PET Speaking Scores by Subskill (N = 80)

Subskill	Pre M (SD)	Post M (SD)	Δ	$t(79)$	*p*-value	Cohen's *d*
Fluency	2.45 (0.59)	3.15 (0.64)	+0.70	9.74	< .001	0.73
Pronunciation	2.40 (0.55)	3.12 (0.60)	+0.72	9.88	< .001	0.75
Interaction	2.52 (0.52)	3.20 (0.61)	+0.68	9.41	< .001	0.70
Accuracy	2.46 (0.57)	3.05 (0.63)	+0.59	8.45	< .001	0.63
Vocabulary	2.58 (0.60)	3.21 (0.65)	+0.63	8.79	< .001	0.67
Global mean	2.48 (0.42)	3.15 (0.47)	+0.67	10.62	< .001	0.75

Note. Δ = mean difference (post – pre). All difference-score distributions met normality assumptions (Shapiro–Wilk *p* > .05). As a robustness check, nonparametric Wilcoxon signed-rank tests also confirmed significant improvements (*p* < .001 for all subskills).

The PET speaking results showed that all five subskills developed at the same level. Students achieved their most significant progress in fluency and pronunciation because their effect sizes reached d = 0.73 and d = 0.75, respectively. The students achieved a d = 0.70 effect size, which showed they had made substantial progress in their ability to speak continuously while keeping their sounds accurate. The students demonstrated improved interaction abilities through their d = 0.70 effect size, which showed their enhanced skills in managing turn-taking and correct responses and maintaining conversation flow during paired activities. The students achieved significant improvements in their accuracy (d = 0.63) and vocabulary (d = 0.67), although their gains were slightly lower than the other subskills. The students experienced a significant decrease in grammatical errors, and they demonstrated increased vocabulary usage after completing the intervention. The global mean score increased from 2.48 to 3.15 (d = 0.75), which shows a large effect size that proves all students made equal progress. The standardized measurement tool showed students made improvements in all assessment areas, which resulted in positive trends throughout the evaluation.

Student Perception Survey (Pre–Post)

Students' self-perceptions regarding their speaking ability and engagement in English classes also improved significantly following the intervention. The overall perception index from the 15-item Likert-scale questionnaire increased from 3.02 (SD = 0.48) to 3.66 (SD = 0.51). A paired-samples *t*-test confirmed that this difference was statistically significant, $t(79) = 9.84$, $p < .001$, d = 0.72, indicating a large and meaningful change in students' attitudes toward speaking English. Table 2 presents the mean differences across the five dimensions assessed in the survey.

Table 2
Student Perceptions by Dimension (N = 80)

Dimension	Pre M (SD)	Post M (SD)	Δ	*t*(79)	*p*-value	Cohen's d
Fluency (self-rated)	2.92 (0.74)	3.58 (0.68)	+0.66	8.75	< .001	0.70
Vocabulary use	3.05 (0.69)	3.62 (0.62)	+0.57	8.02	< .001	0.63
Pronunciation confidence	2.88 (0.77)	3.60 (0.70)	+0.72	9.41	< .001	0.75
Participation	3.12 (0.66)	3.74 (0.61)	+0.62	8.67	< .001	0.68
Peer collaboration	3.12 (0.71)	3.78 (0.64)	+0.66	8.81	< .001	0.70
Overall perception	3.02 (0.48)	3.66 (0.51)	+0.64	9.84	< .001	0.72

Note. Δ = mean difference (post – pre). All difference-score distributions satisfied normality (Shapiro–Wilk *p* > .05). Wilcoxon signed-rank tests verified equivalent significance levels (*p* < .001 for all dimensions).

The perception survey analysis revealed that students made steady improvements across all five assessment dimensions, which were evaluated using a 15-item Likert-scale questionnaire. Students made their biggest progress through their self-assessed fluency and pronunciation

confidence, which showed the largest improvement at 0.66 and 0.72 points, respectively. The students demonstrated improved participation and collaboration through their significant score increases of 0.62 and 0.66 points. The students achieved a +0.57 point increase in their vocabulary application throughout the assessment. The students demonstrated improved lexical understanding through their effective application of vocabulary. The mean perception index increased from 3.02 (SD = 0.48) to 3.66 (SD = 0.51) while showing a large effect size (d = 0.72), which supported the students' positive change in their speaking performance attitudes. The survey results demonstrate that students demonstrated steady growth in their understanding of all evaluated subjects.

Qualitative Findings

The classroom observations and teacher interviews produced qualitative data that supported the findings from quantitative research. The combined data showed how PBL affected student participation and their ability to communicate orally throughout the six-week program. The qualitative data showed students developed higher motivation levels and better teamwork abilities and English speaking skills through PBL which created an interactive learning space that focused on student needs.

Classroom Observations

The classroom observations showed teachers moving from traditional teaching methods to student-centered activities while students engaged in increasing dialogue with teachers throughout the six-week period. Students needed teacher assistance for guidance during the first two weeks of the program while they used Spanish to understand each other. Students started to lead their project work and English dialogue practice, plus presentation rehearsal activities during the middle phase of the intervention. Students improved their pronunciation skills through peer feedback during their natural conversations which lasted long periods while the teacher provided minimal support.

The research confirms Savignon (2018) because students build communicative competence by participating in real conversations instead of following pre-planned language activities. Students gained control of their learning activities through project work which produced actual results in the form of posters and short videos. The groups showed improved fluency and better turn-taking skills during their last sessions, supporting Nunan's (2004) claim about how authentic communicative tasks enable students to build language abilities and take charge of their learning.

The PBL structure enabled students to work together while learning from each other, according to observations that showed all students, including those who were initially uninvolved, became more active in their learning process. Students who initially avoided speaking in class started to take part in group discussions and rehearsals with greater frequency. The main emphasis of communicative methodologies, according to Richards and Rodgers (2014), focuses on student dialogue, which creates authentic classroom discussions. The research findings showed that

students developed their English spontaneous speech abilities through their increasing peer-to-peer interactions.

The rehearsal activities helped teachers notice that their students developed their oral skills to a significant extent. Students reduced their speech interruptions while creating extended statements, applying their project words naturally when speaking. The observed student development supports Pavón et al. (2025) who demonstrate that communicative projects deliver meaningful content which enables students to develop their language precision and fluent speaking abilities. The students proved their ability to apply English in real situations through their rising English usage when working together according to Guime and Cárdenas (2024) who analyzed Ecuadorian classrooms that used project-based learning to create extended opportunities for students to interact with the target language.

Teacher Interviews

The three English teachers shared the same opinion about PBL creating positive effects on students' oral communication abilities during their interview sessions. The teaching method, as all participants noted, created student engagement through meaningful English language usage, producing positive results. The teachers explained that PBL activities, which include presentation creation, interview preparation, plus short campaign development, enable students to use English for actual purposes, leading to better speaking confidence and reduced language anxiety. The teacher observed that students developed enough English speaking confidence to communicate without asking for correction during the last weeks of the course. The students developed better risk-taking abilities for communication, as Tamayo et al. (2024) explain, because experiential learning methods help students become more willing to speak and reduce their communication anxiety.

The teachers observed that students developed better skills in teamwork, responsibility, and time management during the course. Students needed to work together for project completion through task delegation, peer feedback, plus negotiation, which helped them develop better teamwork abilities and mutual responsibility. The essential learner autonomy components that PBL develops, as Méndez-Fernández and González-Cabrera (2025) indicate, include active meaning construction that enables students to move from receiving knowledge to creating knowledge.

The teachers agreed that PBL produced positive results, but they faced difficulties when implementing it in their large public school setting. Teachers faced three primary challenges during project work because they lacked enough time to finish tasks, team members worked at different levels, and digital tools for visual content creation were not available to everyone. The teachers maintained their positive assessment of PBL results despite facing these implementation challenges. The students maintained English language proficiency at a level higher than their previous year's English usage for six weeks. The research by Pavón et al. (2025) demonstrates

that PBL allows students to participate in extended communication tasks that traditional teaching methods restrict.

DISCUSSION

The research findings demonstrate that PBL led to significant enhancements in student speaking abilities and their classroom engagement. The quantitative assessment showed that students achieved substantial improvement in their fluency and pronunciation, and interaction abilities. The data indicated that students achieved better English speaking abilities through PBL because the method enabled them to develop language confidence and motivation. These results demonstrate that PBL functions as an effective teaching method that helps A2-level students in Ecuadorian classrooms build their oral communication skills through real-world learning activities.

The PET speaking scores showed substantial growth because students developed English skills through intentional language practice during their project work. According to Bygate (1987) and Nunan (2004), students develop better communicative abilities through purposeful language use and peer feedback during their speaking activities. The project presentation activities allowed students to enhance their pronunciation while they learned to create longer sentences and maintain fluent conversations. Méndez-Fernández and González-Cabrera (2025) confirm these results because students learn language through actual communication activities in project-based learning.

The data indicated that motivational development achieved equivalent levels for all participants. Students learned English through hands-on language practice, which built their confidence instead of treating English as a school obligation. EFL students need to develop motivation because they encounter limited opportunities to interact with their target language, as Guime and Cárdenas (2024) explain. The cooperative nature of PBL helped students gain enhanced teamwork abilities plus leadership qualities. Thomas (2000) also noted that projects allow students to build their autonomy and learner agency. The teachers observed students using English as their primary language during this period, surpassing all previous academic years. Pavón et al. (2025) studied project-based learning approaches in Ecuadorian public schools and found similar patterns.

The collected data revealed new information that helped us better understand these patterns. The classroom observations showed students move from needing teacher help to doing work alone and helping their peers, which supports Savignon's (2018) theory about communicative competence development via peer interactions. The teachers documented student progress through their work independence development, self-assessment capabilities, and classroom participation levels. The teacher observed student behaviors matching Richards and Rodgers' (2014) framework, where student interaction plus peer feedback serve as fundamental

components for communicative language teaching methods. The teachers observed students improve their pronunciation and building their self-assurance. Tamayo Almeida and Pillajo (2024) demonstrate that experiential learning helps students build confidence and reduce their speaking anxiety.

These findings show that PBL achieves its learning objectives by combining language education with cognitive development and emotional growth. The teaching approach helped students improve their speaking competence using actual classroom tasks, which actively involved students in educational learning processes. The outcomes confirm the principles of Communicative Language Teaching, which Richards and Rodgers (2014) established, and show how project-based learning makes these principles work in specific educational settings. Ecuadorian EFL programs that use PBL allow teachers to connect academic learning targets with students' actual communication abilities in real-life situations.

CONCLUSIONS

The research proved that PBL helps A2-level EFL learners in Ecuadorian secondary education develop their speaking abilities. The data showed that participants achieved better results in fluency and pronunciation, and interaction competencies according to quantitative analysis. These findings revealed that PBL creates authentic learning spaces that enable learners to use English meaningfully and transform classroom activities into real-life communication situations.

The teaching method achieved maximum efficiency through the combination of PBL with Communicative Language Teaching approaches. Teachers enabled students to enhance their oral abilities through projects which produced concrete results while providing learners with longer speaking practice and feedback opportunities and peer interaction time. The communicative learning environment led to better student performance results and simultaneously developed their willingness to participate and their self-assurance. This investigation demonstrates that PBL functions as a solution which links classroom language teaching to genuine oral communication needs in Ecuadorian educational environments.

The findings indicate that teachers need ongoing training about project-based teaching approaches to improve their instructional strategies. Teachers require training to build their capabilities for creating communicative projects which support large student numbers under restricted educational funding. The approach will achieve sustainability through educational institutions which dedicate specific time for teacher collaboration and offer digital resources to assist their work. These results show learners will develop effective communication competencies when teachers establish learning spaces which encourage student involvement through teamwork.

Future studies need to expand from this study by investigating PBL effects on participants' language preservation and by examining various skill levels and digital resources for enhancing

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student educational and online interactions. The investigation confirms that project-based learning approaches offer a useful and engaging method to help learners develop their communicative language competencies in EFL education.

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