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Effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies in enhancing oral Communication among EFL Primary students in Matagalpa, Nicaragua

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UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTÓNOMA DE NICARAGUA, MANAGUA
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Effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies in enhancing oral Communication among EFL Primary students in Matagalpa, Nicaragua

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A QUIEN CORRESPONDA:

Por medio de la presente, hago constar que he revisado de manera rigurosa y detallada la tesis titulada:

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de autoría de Henry Picado, como requisito parcial para obtener el grado de Maestro en Didáctica del Inglés.

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- Coherencia interna entre planteamiento del problema, objetivos, metodología, análisis y conclusiones.
- Sustento teórico actualizado y pertinente al campo de la enseñanza del inglés y del aprendizaje cooperativo.
- Aplicación adecuada del enfoque de investigación-acción y uso correcto de métodos cualitativos y cuantitativos.
- Presentación ordenada, clara y acorde a los lineamientos de estilo y formato académico.
- Aporte significativo al área de la didáctica del inglés en contextos de educación primaria en Nicaragua.

Por lo anterior, avaló la calidad académica de esta investigación y autorizo su presentación ante el comité revisor y, en su caso, ante el jurado para la defensa correspondiente.

Atentamente,

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Dedication

The present study is firstly dedicated God almighty, who is the only one that provides strength, health, mercy and kindness. To my family especially my parents, my wife and my son, because they have been with me along this exhausting and rewarding process. To my advisor and professors, who have devoted precious time to guide me, being patient, motivators and counselors at every step taken to achieve this goal. Finally, I want to dedicate this work to my students, their families, and school principal because this study could not have been possible without their important contribution

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Abstract

This action research study examined the influence of cooperative learning strategies on the oral communication of fourth-grade EFL students at colegio Público Tilburg, Matagalpa, Nicaragua. The study analyzes students' oral communication performance, implement cooperative learning activities to address identified challenges, and evaluate their influence on performance and attitudes. The intervention was carried out over two cycles with 8 students from a population of 33 and used a mixed-methods approach, incorporating pre- and post- tests, classroom observations, student surveys, and teacher journals. Findings revealed that students initially showed limited oral communication skills, especially in grammar and vocabulary, confidence, and English use. After the intervention, students showed improvements in fluency, pronunciation, participation, interaction and confidence. Qualitative data showed that students developed positive attitudes toward group work, became more motivated and responsible in group speaking tasks. The results suggest that certainty cooperative learning promotes a healthy and supportive environment for oral communication and is a viable pedagogical approach for primary EFL classrooms in the Nicaraguan context.

Key words. Cooperative learning, oral communication, EFL in primary education.

Resumen

Este estudio de investigación-acción examinó la influencia de las estrategias de aprendizaje cooperativo en la comunicación oral de los estudiantes de cuarto grado de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) del Colegio Público Tilburg, Matagalpa, Nicaragua. El estudio tenía como objetivo identificar las dificultades de comunicación oral de los estudiantes, implementar actividades de aprendizaje cooperativo y evaluar su influencia en el rendimiento y las actitudes de los mismos. La intervención se llevó a cabo durante dos ciclos con ocho alumnos de una población de 33 y utilizó un enfoque de métodos mixtos, que incorporaba pruebas previas y posteriores, observaciones en el aula, encuestas a los estudiantes y diarios de los profesores. Los resultados revelaron que, inicialmente, los alumnos mostraban habilidades de comunicación oral limitadas, especialmente en gramática y vocabulario, confianza y uso del inglés. Tras la intervención, los estudiantes demostraron notables mejoras en fluidez, pronunciación, participación, interacción y confianza. Los datos cualitativos mostraron que los estudiantes desarrollaron actitudes positivas hacia el trabajo en grupo y se volvieron más motivados y responsables en las tareas de expresión oral en grupo. Los resultados sugieren que el aprendizaje cooperativo promueve un entorno saludable y propicio para la comunicación oral y es un enfoque pedagógico viable para las aulas de inglés como lengua extranjera en la educación primaria en el contexto nicaragüense.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje cooperativo, comunicación oral, inglés como lengua extranjera en la educación primaria

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I. Introduction

The implementation of strategies and activities that enhance students´ listening and speaking skills has become a global priority. Well-developed oral communication abilities are now considered essential for academic and professional success, particularly in contexts where English is the dominant language (Hashemi, 2011). Responding to these worldwide demands, many countries have restructured their educational systems to prioritize communicative competence. Nicaragua joined this trend in 2018 by introducing English into education, using the common European framework of reference for languages (CEFR) as the guiding standard. The CEFR provides curricular orientations, assessment criteria, and pedagogical guidelines while describing the developmental process of language learning. It stablishes six levels of proficiency (A1-C2), ranging from basic to advance mastery. According to national policy, Nicaraguan students are expected to reach the A2 level by the end of primary education (MINED, 2018).

To achieve this goal, the ministry of education adopted the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, emphasizing meaningful classroom interaction and students' active participation in the learning process. Assessment policies were designed to be primarily formative, encouraging learners' natural language development while adopting unnecessary interruptions to the communicative flow. Teachers receive continuous support through monthly *Inter-Learning Pedagogical Encounters* standing for the Spanish *Encuentros Pedagógicos de Inter-Aprendizaje (EPI)*, where they collaboratively plan and refine the national syllabus. Despite these initiatives, significant challenges persist. Large class sizes, limited resources, and the lack of authentic English Exposure outside the classroom hinder the development of oral communication skills in many schools.

In this context, the search for methodologies that truly foster communication in young learners becomes necessary. Cooperative learning has emerged worldwide as a promising pedagogical approach because it engages students in structured group work, promotes peer interaction and creates opportunities for meaningful communication for example Namaziandost et al. (2019) and Hong et al. (2022) found that cooperative strategies significantly improve learners' speaking skills, motivation, and confidence.

National Studies in Nicaragua (Herrera Godoy et al., 2019; Talavera et al., 2016) also highlight the benefits of collaborative strategies such as role-plays, games, and discussions in strengthening students' oral performance.

However, despite its potential, research on cooperative learning in Nicaraguan primary schools remain scarce. Existing studies often focus on general methodologies, leaving a gap in understanding how cooperative strategies specifically influence children's oral communication. This lack of localized evidence makes it difficult for teachers and policymakers to evaluate whether cooperative learning can effectively support the national program's communicative goals.

Therefore, this study investigates the role of cooperative learning in enhancing oral communication among 4th grade EFL students at colegio Público Tilburg in Matagalpa, Nicaragua. By examining how cooperative learning strategies influence children's ability to speak English, the research seeks to generate practical insights for teachers, inform future educational policy, and contribute to the limited body of local research in this field. Ultimately, this study aims to strengthen the implementation of communicative methodologies and ensure that students not only meet national standards but also gain the confidence and competence to use English meaningfully in their daily lives.

II. Background information

The idea of cooperative learning is not relatively new in education, although it has been substantially brought to light in recent years through research and practice. The term refers to those techniques used in the classroom, where students work in small groups and where recognition and rewards are closely linked to the performance of individual group members and their performance as a team (Slavin, 1980). Oxford (1997) agreed with these ideas arguing that cooperative learning is understood as a set of highly structured psychologically and sociologically oriented techniques which contributes to teamwork in order to reach learning goals.

To gain a deeper understanding of this terminology, it is essential to refer to the theories that serve as the foundation for this approach. Jacobs and Seow (2015) in their article "Cooperative learning principles enhance online interaction" discussed and explained some of these theories, which are described next. **Sociocultural theory**; zone of proximal development or ZPD highlights the role of social interaction in cognitive development when Vygotsky posits that learners construct knowledge through collaborative dialogue and scaffolded learning experiences. Similarly, Shabani et al. (2010) explained that

"ZPD was understood by Vygotsky to describe the current or actual level of development of the learner and the next level attainable through the use of mediating semiotic and environmental tools and capable adult or peer facilitation. The idea is that individuals learn best when working with others during joint collaboration, and it is through such collaborative endeavors with more skilled persons that learners learn and internalize new concepts, psychological tools, and skills" (p. 238).

This supports the idea that working cooperatively certainly provides pupils the opportunity to acquire new knowledge, fostering the learning of new skills; however, they are required to be assisted along the process. Raj and Ismail (2022), agreed that through cooperative strategies students are able to gain a better understanding, they improve on their socialization skills, and build a strong relationship with others.

On the other hand, the **social interdependence Theory** seeks to explain why human beings help others; however, this help can be perceived as positive or negative. In the field of education, this reasoning has been used by educators to encourage learners to perceive other benefits as their own. Undoubtedly, this permits everyone to support each other, creating a sense of belonging and generating positive interdependence.

Jacobs and Seow (2015) also referred **to social constructivism, and multiple intelligences**. The assumption of students possessing diverse skills and abilities which might derive in aiding them building their own knowledge, merely through the interaction gained in the society. All of these theories Jacobs and Seow mentioned, seem to be significant to understand how cooperative learning is founded.

In cooperative learning guidance is provided it just when needed, therefore teacher's talking time is reduced, this permits students to assume an active role and giving them the chance to use the language effectively (Al-Mubireek, 2021). In contrast, Kakuka (2010, as cited in Muganga & Ssenkusu, 2019) argued that traditional learning is often characterized by a teacher-centered approach, where instructors serve as the primary source of knowledge, and students work individually to achieve their own goals.

2.1 At the international Level

Cooperative learning has gained significant attention worldwide for its effectiveness in fostering oral communication skills among EFL learners. Various international studies have demonstrated positive outcomes when conducting cooperative learning strategies in language classrooms. Referring to this, Tante (2024) argues that certainly cooperative activities provide students with opportunities to share their ideas, practice oral communication, and to receive feedback from teammates, he considers interaction patterns effective to help students develop their oral communication skills. Tante also affirms that empirical research shows a positive association between academic success, and strong oral communication skills, which highlights the importance of cooperation to develop these skills.

Adding to the discussion, Namaziandost et al. (2019) in Iran showed that when students were placed in both experimental and control groups, those in the experimental group, where cooperative learning strategies were applied, demonstrated a significant improvement in their speaking skills and intrinsic motivation. In a similar vein, Hong et al. (2022) conducted research in Taiwan and found that participants in cooperative learning environments showed enhanced oral proficiency, whereas those following traditional teaching methods did not exhibit the same level of improvement. In Iraq, Altun and Sabah (2020) highlighted the positive effects of incorporating multiple intelligences into cooperative learning strategies, reporting notable gains in learners' speaking abilities.

When referring to the teacher's role in cooperative learning groups, Gillies (2016) argues that teachers can facilitate interaction, ensuring student's sitting close enough to hear what others are saying, to be able to see each other's face and to be part of the discussion. The teacher structures groups, facilitates cooperation and interaction within the groups. Gillies (2007) supports this statement saying that teachers are responsible to ensure the well-structure of the groups, which allows students to cooperate and foster each other's learning, and that the task is relevant and accessible, requiring students to have a conversation in order to complete it and further discuss it. Johnson et al. (1999) affirms that a team productivity relies on the team members' abilities to work together, and the teacher is the responsible to decide if the teams will be homogeneous (similar characteristics) or heterogeneous (Different level of performance and interests). When selecting the type of teams, the teacher has to consider the opportunities students will have to think deeply and critically, and the availability to share their own opinions.

Another key role of the teacher in the team dynamics and flow is as "motivator". Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) affirm that student's motivation and achievement is directly impacted by teachers' motivation, because students who perceive their teachers as passionate and enthusiastic feel intrinsically more motivated, they also say that teacher's enthusiasm and passion can be important to encourage students' adaptive behaviors. They also affirm teacher's expectations about students learning potential is one important component in motivation, because it is closely related to a more general expectancy of success.

2.2 At the National Level

The primary English program in Nicaragua is relatively new. Developed in response to the need for citizens with linguistic skills and competences according to the 21st century demands. The common European framework of reference for Languages (CEFR) was adopted as the basis for the national curriculum (MINED, 2018). However, English language teaching (ELT) in primary education in Nicaragua continue to face several challenges that limit the development of oral communication skills. Large class sizes make it difficult to engage students in meaningful speaking activities. Another common issue is the lack of authentic materials and real-life exposure to English outside the classroom further restricts opportunities to practice and enhance oral proficiency.

In this context, cooperative learning emerges as a relevant and effective pedagogical approach. Studies conducted in Nicaragua, such as the one by Herrera Godoy et al. (2019), states that implementing cooperative learning strategies such as Leaper, Role-plays, and board games helped learners develop fluency, a positive attitude toward learning English, and increased motivation. Similarly, Talavera et al. (2016) found that implementing collaborative strategies such as games, simulations, Role-plays and discussions promote students´ confidence, improve speaking skills and reinforce knowledge. In the study "The Value of Participation in Oral Communication in the English Language Class", Dávila González and Barrera Ovando (2023) highlighted the importance of teamwork as the main activity that motivates learners to participate in English class and promotes better interaction among them.

2.3 At the Local Level

Referring to some local articles on the topic in Matagalpa city, González Flores and Mendoza Cruz (2007) suggested that working in group activities, such as interviews, outlines, and role plays, encourages students to participate actively through interaction.

Based on the teaching experience I have gained as a primary English teacher, I do agree with the learning activities suggested. Certainly, students have a positive reaction when they are instructed to work in teams, especially when this activity requires everyone in the team to have a specific task to accomplish.

III. Justification

Despite the worldwide adoption of cooperative learning techniques in various educational contexts, there is a noticeable lack of longitudinal studies that examine their impact on learners' oral communication skills over time. In addition, research focusing on different age groups, especially elementary school students, is limited.

Although the communicative approach has been officially adopted in Nicaragua since 2018, there is limited empirical evidence on how teachers' implementation of cooperative learning influences students' oral outcomes, particularly in rural public schools.

In Nicaragua, cooperative learning remains understudied in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Institutional reports from (MINED, 2024; UNAN-Managua, 2024) reveal that current studies tend to focus on general teaching methods, without investigating their specific influence on young learners' oral communication.

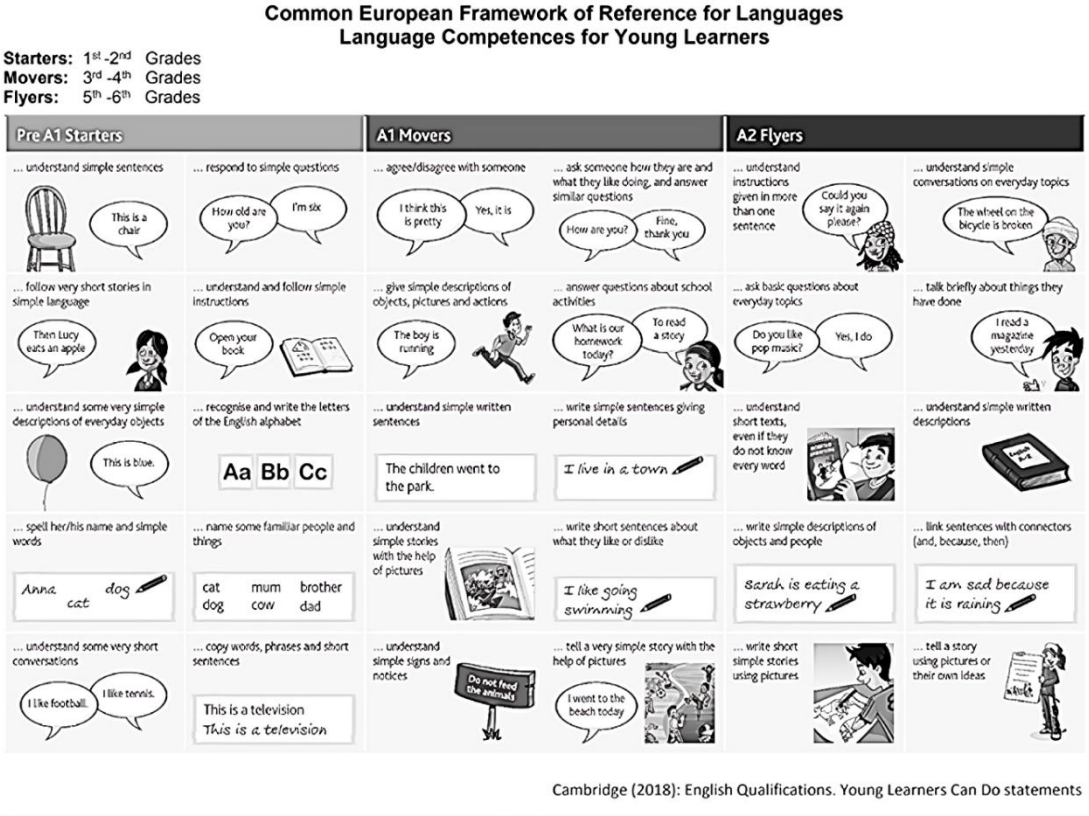
In order to fill the above-mentioned gaps, this study investigates the effectiveness of cooperative learning in enhancing oral communication among EFL primary school students.

Participants are 8 4th graders, one of the eight groups I teach every week as English teacher at colegio Público Tilburg in Matagalpa, Nicaragua, in three weeklies 45-minute lessons. The age of students Oscillates between 9 to 11 years old; they represent the older group and more accessible class for the teacher-researcher. This group of Students have been studying English for over four years, within a student-communication centered approach, intending students to reach the "Movers stage (A1) " according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, Language Competences for Young Learners which levels of descriptors are shown in Figure 1**,** although lack of localized research in Nicaragua further highlights the critical need for a study tailored to the country's unique educational environment, mainly when referring to oral

communication which is the principal English skill MINED (Nicaraguan Ministry of Education) promotes.

Figure 1.

Common European Framework of Reference for Language Competences for Young Learners



Note: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) levels for Young Learners adapted for the Nicaraguan English Program. Reproduce from *Programa Nacional de inglés en Educación Primaria* (Ministerio de Educación [MINED], 2018).

Referring to those aspects 4th grade students must be able to do at the A1-movers stage, such as asking for personal information, giving simple descriptions, and telling short stories with the support of pictures, it is essential to use the national primary English curriculum effectively and appropriately , although, despite the implementation of the communicative approach, many primary teachers continue to rely on teacher-centered instruction what is clearly violating the primarily the educational intention. This research addresses why cooperative learning an interactive, student-centered approach could fill this methodological gap and improve learners' real communicative competence.

By addressing these gaps, this study not only provides insights into the direct benefits of cooperative learning in developing oral communication skills in 4th graders, but also offers teachers with evidence-based recommendations for its implementation at various levels of education. Furthermore, the study has the potential to advance from classroom context to local and global educational practices and enrich the academic discourse surrounding EFL and cooperative learning.

IV. Research Problem

The development of oral communication skills in English as a foreign language (EFL) learners is a major challenge in Nicaragua, especially in primary education. Specifically, with regard to fourth grade students, it is evident that they have difficulty communicating orally, despite the efforts made to improve their speaking skills. This gap can be an obstacle to students' overall language proficiency, limiting their ability to participate confidently in spoken interactions.

Traditional teaching methods can hinder the creation of dynamic speaking environments, Both Karakas (2012) and Alrabai (2014) argued that traditional classroom practices can heighten speaking anxiety, limiting learners' willingness to participate in dynamic speaking environments. Considering this, creating cooperative spaces for students is important, because these spaces can be used for helping learners acquire the language. Recently, cooperative learning has been considered an effective approach to teaching a second or EFL language because it promotes active participation, individual responsibility, peer interaction, positive interdependence and collaborative dialogue. Nevertheless, within the Nicaraguan EFL primary education setting, studies exploring the impact of cooperative learning on oral communication skills are limited or inexistent. For this reason, the following questions is being set, how does implementing a cooperative learning approach influence EFL 4th grader´s oral communication?

Table 1.

Comparison Between Cooperative Learning and Traditional Teaching

Aspect	Cooperative learning	Traditional learning	Supporting authors
Learning Focus	Student centered-approach, promote interaction, collaboration and shared responsibility between students.	Teacher centered approach, students in a passive role, individually oriented.	Johnson, Johnson & Holubec (2014); Slavin (2015).
Role of the Teacher	Guider and facilitator, who structures activities within the groups and monitors students' interaction.	An authority figure, who is in charge of delivering content and focuses on student's performance.	Gillies (2007); Gillies (2016).
Student Interaction	High level of Peer-to-peer communication, input, problem solving group skills.	Student to student interaction is limited, focused on teacher to student and student to teacher information exchange.	Kagan (1995); Johnson et al. (1999); Johnson & Johnson (2009); Long (1996); Richards and Rogers (2001).
Assessment	Group and individual interdependence and accountability; Focused and oriented on team work process and cooperation.	Individual based-assessment; primarily focused on results accuracy and effectiveness.	Johnson and Johnson et al. (2014); Oxford (1997); Slavin (1991).
Learning Environment	Supportive, engageable, and socially interactive.	Passive, competitive, self-centered oriented.	Gillies (2016); Slavin (2015)
Development of Skills	Encourage communication, team work, critical thinking.	Promotes individuality and memorization.	Kagan (1995); Raj and Ismail (2022).

Note. Comparative features summarized by the researcher based on cooperative learning literature.

Table 1 makes a comparison of both cooperative learning and traditional learning, referring to punctual aspects such as: learning focus, the role of the teacher which varies depending on the approach, going from active, motivator and guider to a more authoritarian and content focused role. Another aspect presented is the student interaction, this goes from a high level of communication with others for giving solution to a problem to a more passive teacher-student and student-teacher centered interaction.

Regarding to assessment, while cooperative learning focuses more on group and individual interdependence highlighting the process that happens within the teams and cooperation, assessment in traditional learning is generally individual-based and focuses on results. On the contrary, learning environment and development of skills varies from cooperative learning to traditional learning transitioning from a more communicative and socially interactive environment to a passive, competitive and self-oriented environment, that promotes individuality and memorization, over team work and critical thinking development.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of implementing a cooperative learning approach on improving oral communication skills among 4th grade EFL learners. By examining the outcomes of cooperative learning strategies, this research aims to provide insights into more effective teaching practices that will ultimately contribute to the improvement of young learners' oral proficiency.

V. Research Question

Aspects described before are the base for the following question.

How does implementing a cooperative learning approach influence EFL 4th grader´s oral communication?

VI. Objectives

6.1. General Objectives

To analyze the influence of cooperative learning on EFL 4th graders' oral communication.

6.2 Specific objectives

1. *To Identify EFL 4th graders' communication skills*
2. *To implement cooperative learning strategies to foster 4th graders' oral communication*
3. *To Evaluate the influence of cooperative learning on 4th graders' communication skills*
4. *To propose a cooperative learning technique to foster oral communication*

VII. Theoretical Framework

7.1. Cooperative Learning

7.1.1 Definition

Davidson (2021) states, “The term cooperative learning began to appear in the literature about 1980. Prior to that time, terms such as “small group learning” were employed. But an earlier book by Alice Miel (1952) was entitled Cooperative Procedures in Learning” (p. 4). Slavin et al. (2003) reinforces this idea expressing “Research on cooperative learning is one of the greatest success stories in the history of educational research. Greatly accelerated in the early 1970s and continues today more than a quarter-century later” (p.177). Despite this, it is often compared with collaborative learning, being this one considered as an umbrella term and cooperative learning accepted as one of its subcategories, however, in practice it is hard to tell them apart, because they coexist (Yang, 2023).

Cooperative learning is defined as classroom techniques in which students work in small groups to maximize their learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Slavin, 1980). In this particular Dang Ngoc & Do Xuan (2023) affirms that cooperative learning is an approach to teach in which students make greater use of higher-level thinking skills. Considering these insights, it can be assumed that cooperative learning effectively helps students maximize their learning, because it provides them the opportunity to use their thinking skills at a high level.

7.1.2 Principles

Departing from what was stated before it is necessary to explore what are those principles that make this approach effective.

Table 2.

Principles of Cooperative Learning

1. Positive interdependence: Gains for one person are associated with gains for others; can be attained through structuring the goals, rewards, roles, materials, or rules
2. Accountability: Every person is accountable through individual grading and testing; the group is accountable through a group grade; improvement scores are possible
3. Team formation: Teams are formed in various ways—randomly; by student interest; by the teacher using specific criteria (heterogeneously, representing different characteristics such as aptitude or gender; or homogeneously)
4. Team size: Groups of smaller than 7 members usually work best
5. Cognitive development: This is often viewed as the main goal of cooperative learning
6. Social development: Development of social skills such as turn taking, active listening, and so forth can be as important as cognitive development

Note. From *"Cooperative Learning, Collaborative Learning, and Interaction: Three Communicative Strands in the Language Classroom"* by R. L. Oxford, *The Modern Language Journal*, p. 445 (1997). © 1997 by The Modern Language Journal.

Table 2 shows that cooperative learning is based on six main principles, which clearly suggest cooperative learning impact positively in the development of the ability of learners to associate their own gains with others within the group, responsibility toward their own and group grading and their opportunities of improving scores. In the team students also learn how to work with people from different backgrounds, characteristics and gender giving the change to share ideas enriching the group dynamics, since the groups are not larger than 7 members, they usually work better than in a larger group, in this context, students develop social skills that contribute their social development and cognitive development.

At this matter, Cook and Seow (2024) refers to *Heterogeneous* grouping which involves students organizing in cooperative learning (CL) groups with other students who are different from themselves. This permits everyone to get acquainted with the team dynamics as well as promoting identity awareness. Teaching collaborative skills is a principle that means devoting class time for students to learn about and reflect on their use of collaborative skills.

Soller (2001) states that students' learning potential is maximized when all of them are actively participating in the group's discussions, also increasing the concern that every member will learn the subject matter, and decreases the idea that just few students will understand the material, leaving the others behind. On the other hand, Cook and Seow (2024) affirmed that the group learning outcomes depend on the positive correlation and positive interdependence within the team, because this allows team members working for the same objective.

It can be inferred that positive interdependence not just benefits members individually but collectively, also impulses a strong commitment toward the cause, providing students with a high sense of belonging, responsibility and well-being.

"Students should be structured in a group through mutual goals, joint rewards, shared resources, or assigned roles so that they can positively interdependence on and actively cooperate with each other to maximize their own and each other's learning" (Guo, Jia & Stapa, 2021, para. 3). For interdependence to be effectively positive it is required for everyone in the team having the same goals, this permits resources being shared and roles being assigned, whilst active cooperation is ensured allowing, as mentioned before, to maximize individual and collective learning.

Guo et al. (2021) says that no one in the groupwork should or can freeride during cooperative learning activities, the author highlights promotive face to face interaction between students, they should get along together frequently to interact and provide their workmates with encouragement, praise, elaboration, and negotiation to finish the task assigned, another aspect Guo mentions is the interpersonal and small group skills, their aim is to facilitate the successful implementation of CL activities, here each student in the group should take certain responsibilities to support other team members to achieve their final goals.

7.1.3 Benefits in education.

"Working together to achieve a common goal produces higher achievement and greater productivity than working alone" (Gillies, 2016). Cooperative learning has become a key principle in social and organizational psychology, supported by thousands of publications and translated into more than 60 languages worldwide (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

Gillies (2016) also stated that in schools, giving students the opportunity to work on positive interdependence situations could probably be a better choice than working on situations when not independence or a negative one it is experienced. This clearly suggests that working cooperatively can certainly be beneficial for students' learning.

7.1.4 Challenges

"Teachers not only play a key role in structuring groups so that the key components likely to facilitate successful cooperation are evident, but they also have a role in promoting interaction among students, because research indicates that students rarely provide quality explanations or engage in high-level discourse, unless they are taught to do so" (King, 2002 as cited in Gillies, 2016, p. 39).

Here teachers' role is fundamental for not just making groups structure, but promoting and facilitating cooperation and interaction in groups, all of these based-on primary research. According to Gillies (2004) effective cooperative groups are characterized by learners who work collaboratively and consistently support one another. Within these groups, students are expected to take an active role, engage in meaningful dialogue, seek and provide clarification, and encourage peer contributions. Moreover, they are encouraged to exchange ideas, remain focused on shared goals, respectfully consider diverse perspectives, and articulate and defend their own viewpoints when necessary.

7.2 Key theories and models

7.2.1 Constructivism

Human beings have always been curious, trying to understand what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen, and this curiosity has led humanity to look for answers, usually found through research or simple deduction. This theory was put forward by Jerome Bruner in 1966. (Olorode & Jimoh, 2016) It is stated by the theory that ideas can be drawn and inferred by means of past or present experiences that students have lived. Relating it to education, Sardar (2023) expressed that in constructivism, the understanding of the world is created by prior knowledge and interaction experienced through learning, this idea is posed to make reference to the way pupils build their knowledge and perceptions while being exposed to the environment.

On the other hand, Mvududu and Thiel-Burgess (2012) argued that constructivism is not fully defined globally because it is understood as a theory of learning and teaching, even accepted as a theory of knowledge by different people. Adding to the discussion, Vera et al. (2020) recognized that through constructivism meaningful learning is created by learners through active participation and questioning, based on basic knowledge discovered by themselves.

Sardar (2023) in his article "constructivism in education: a comprehensive review of theory and research", enlisted some key principles of constructivism which are mentioned below: **Active Learning,** here knowledge it is constructed by learners when they play an active role in the learning process, **prior knowledge,** the new knowledge it is built from students existing knowledge, experiences and beliefs, **social interaction,** ideas, perspectives and meaning are obtained from the collaboration students have with peers, teachers and experts**, Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD),** it was proposed by Vygotsky, it focuses on student´s potential related to their current level of proficiency, in which a guidance from a more experienced person it is needed, **scaffolding,** when focusing on education it refers to the support received by pupils in order to connect their current knowledge with the target one, all of these supported by teachers or more knowledgeable peers, **contextual learning,** it sets that knowledge it is used in specific meaningful contexts, and **reflective thinking,** here connections, reflections and examination regarding students´ learning experiences and understanding are encouraged, considering their prior knowledge.

7.2.2 Cognitive development

Jean Piaget, a major and renowned contributor to cognitive development theory, studied children´s capacity to think. He explored how they connect prior knowledge with the new information through accommodation and, conversely, how they adjust new experiences to fit prior concepts through assimilation (Rabindran & Madanagopal, 2020). Departing from this idea it can be assumed that, in the accommodation stage children change what has been previously learned to fit with the new knowledge, and in the assimilation stage a child fits new concepts into an existing prior knowledge.

Piaget (1971) warns that generally elementary schoolers do not have the capacity to understand physics and logic principles" This can be interpreted as those age limitations they have, inferring that educators must be cautious when trying to teach content and concepts which go beyond pupils' developmental stage. On the other hand, Vygotsky (1978) suggests that children are able to step up on their developmental process if they are guided by adults or collaborate with more capable peers, defining it as the Zone of proximal development

Both ideas clearly contrast from each other, interpreting cognitive development as stage-limited, which means that this occurs in a predictable sequence of stages, stating that a child is not able to acquire concepts beyond his age or on the contrary, that sociocultural, dynamic, supportive and collaborative process provided by a more knowledgeable person which push children beyond their limits.

Slavin et al., (2003) adds that collaboration among children promotes growth, because some others´ zones of proximal development can be happening, provoking more advanced behaviors that the ones they could get individually.

This makes reference to the ZPD (zone of proximal development) proposed by Vygotsky, they also refer to Piaget's theory, noting that peer interaction can create cognitive conflicts which lead to a deeper understanding of concepts of morality, social rules learned merely through interaction. Ultimately, Darnis and Lafont (2013) argues that both cognition and social interaction have a reciprocal relationship, they are clearly making reference to Vygotskian and Piagetian theories, inferring that these perspectives are part of a developmental level of cooperative learning.

7.2.3 Slavin Team Model

According to Slavin (1987) the two levels of analysis in cooperative learning are reconciled in a unique framework. This suggests that, rather than being separated and independent two independent, multiple theories can be interwoven. As further discussed by Darnis and Lafont (2013), the connection between individual knowledge construction and interpersonal interaction is highlighted. In practice, students work in small groups where each member is responsible not only for learning the class material, but also helping groupmates to learn (Slavin, 1987).

Slavin (1987) also emphasized that “Cooperative learning is always fun; it almost always produces gains in social outcomes such as race relations; and it has never been found to reduce student achievement in comparison to traditional methods” (p.11). Thinking on both the social-psychological level and the cognitive processes at the individual level, and how these are linked rather than isolated, opens the possibility of contextualizing cooperative learning as a unified model of interaction and knowledge construction.

Slavin, (1991) statement “When people work together for a common goal, they gain in respect and liking for one another”, suggests that regardless of students' social, and racial identity or ethnic background, they are capable of achieving a common goal by respecting and motivating each other, which can even lead to friendship.

Slavin´s own method, **STAD (Student Teams-Achievement Divisions)** consists of five components:

1.Class Preparation: The material is introduced by the teacher throughout a lecture-discussion. Students are expected to pay attention to help them perform well.

2.Teams: Teams are formed with four or five students, and their main goal is to prepare every team member for the quizzes.

3.Quizzes: The quizzes are taken by the students individually after two periods of team practice and one or two periods of teacher-delivered material.

4.Individual Improvement scores: Students are given performance goals to reach. They contribute to the team score, by surpassing their previous quiz scores. Base scores are recalculated to motivate students to a higher level.

5.Team recognition: Students are recognized weekly, both individually and as a team, through a newsletter, special privileges or other kind or rewards (Slavin, 1991).

Ultimately, Robert Slavin's work has provided a unified model, which highlights how common goals can be achieved by students when working together. This fosters a positive classroom environment and enhances educational outcomes for everyone. His extensive research focuses on integrating both social cohesion and academic achievement, demonstrating these two support each other.

7.3 Oral Communication

7.3.1 Definition

Oral communication refers to the ability to convey ideas and information using spoken language (Humanidades,2023). Brown and Yule (2000, as cited in Tante, 2024) share this idea, defining oral communication as that ability to express oneself effectively, appropriately and fluently. Brown (2007) goes beyond this concept, claiming that meaningful communication requires a successful ratification by the receiver regarding the message shared by the sender, because if someone is not announced in their trials to communicate, there is minor reason to continue the process, similarly Fang et al. (2018) says that oral communication requires not only knowledge of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation, but also the ability to use knowledge strategically, in this case the author refers to EFL students, also it makes reference to mobile-based peer feedback which significantly improved EFL learner's oral communication, suggesting that cooperative work plays an important role in the development of speaking skills. Harmer (2004) joined the discussion a boarding CLT (communicative Language Teaching) activities in which students are typically included in real or realistic communication scenarios with the aim of achieving communicative tasks, being this one of the main strands of CLT, which focuses on the belief that if students engaged and participate in meaning-focused communicative tasks, consequently the language learning will be operated by itself. Harmer points out that for these activities to be indeed communicative, students should want to communicate something, and have an intention for communicating.

Based on the above, it can be interpreted that oral communication involves not just the simply act of talking to others or sharing ideas randomly, but having an intention behind the information transmitted and the desire to continue with the conversation. To understand how oral communication is compound its components are presented below.

7.3.2 Components

The main components of oral communication include vocabulary, fluency, pronunciation, and interaction.

7.3.2.1 Vocabulary. Vocabulary is an essential component of language production. Without a sufficient lexical repertoire, learners cannot form meaningful sentences or participate in coherent conversations (Escudero et al., 2020). Equally, Kendari (2015) states that vocabulary is a supporting factor for language users in both receiving and producing the language. Al Hosni (2014) further explains that vocabulary is often taught in isolation, a practice that contributes to learners' speaking difficulties. This highlights the importance of integrating vocabulary in speaking as a key element for enhancing students' oral production.

In this regard, it seems pertinent to mention fluency when communicating oneself ideas, considering its importance in maintaining the conversation flowing.

7.3.2.2 Fluency Oral Fluency can be understood as a multifaceted concept that involves cognition, aptitude, motivation, and experience in EFL language processing and performance (González Robaina & Diaz Larenas, 2020). These authors also distinguish between **fluency and accuracy**, defining accuracy as the correct use of the target language. In this sense accuracy refers to the appropriate implementation of linguistic norms and grammatical correctness, meanwhile oral fluency is more oriented to how students process and perform the language. Making this distinction is strictly necessary, when assessing either students' fluency or accuracy.

Despite demonstrating a good performance of the language, it is imperative to avoid changes in meaning or misunderstanding of the message, here is when pronunciation appears as a valuable element in communication.

7.3.2.3 Pronunciation. Pronunciation is key for meaningful oral communication. If a large number of words are mispronounced, listeners may face serious difficulties interpreting the message. Therefore, it is indispensable for students to acquire pronunciation skills to support effective communication in the target language. (Kendari, 2015) accordingly, Escudero et al. (2020) argues that learners need extensive exposure to spoken English, as this helps them develop better pronunciation and, consequently, stronger speaking skills. Escudero et al. (2020) also highlights the importance of listening, noting that poor listening practice reduces the value of a conversation since both listeners and speakers depend on their ability to understand and contribute effectively. Long (1996) sums up the importance of input in L2 acquisition, saying that simplification (simple isolated sentences) help to increase comprehension, although elaboration (longer and compound sentences) has been found more effective.

Relying on these individual skills, it is also essential to recognize the role of interaction, considering that communication does not happen separately but through meaningful exchanges with others.

7.3.2.4 Interaction. Interaction occurs in various contexts and modes, functioning as an assisted performance that facilitates learning. Certain forms of interaction, such as pair work and group work, increase both the amount and frequency of students' speaking time (Harmer, 2004). Similarly, Richards and Rogers (2001, as cited in Tante, 2024) support this argument by highlighting that interaction patterns emerge through strategies and techniques like pair work and group activities.

These approaches provide students with authentic opportunities to practice oral communication skills in real-life situations. Moreover, positive interaction patterns not only enhance participation but also encourage the overall development of oral communication.

7.3.3 Teaching EFL

EFL stands for English as Foreign Language. Harmer (2004) reflects on the distinction between EFL and ESL (English as a second language), in EFL students commonly study English in their home countries or in a foreign country for a short period of time with the intention of communicating with other English speakers such as tourists or business persons, opposite ESL students usually need the language to survive and prosper, doing renting, accessing to health service, buying food, etc., all of these happening in a target community such as: England, The USA etc.

7.3.3.1 Practices. *Best practices for teaching EFL to primary students.*

7.3.3.2. K-12 Students. Harmer (2024) affirms that young children in the age of nine or ten, learn differently from older children, adolescents and adults, they learn mostly indirectly, their understanding depends on what they see and hear, they need the teacher's approval and individual attention, their attention span is limited especially if activities are not engaging losing interest after ten minutes. This suggests that k-12 students have the necessity to be active, experiencing the language, through eye-catching, creative and energetic activities.

7.3.4 Importance

Importance of oral communication in EFL classrooms Significance Vs ESL Educational settings.

7.3.4.1 EFL and ESL Educational setting and Classrooms Significance. (Pinter, 2006) states that language settings rely on different aspects such as; the educational ministry in a given country on languages in general. This is oriented to the integration of English subject in the curriculum. It is important to mention that in young children motivation is key to learn, this is linked with the exposure they have to English. These levels of exposure vary from an ESL to an EFL classroom that is why creating spaces in the classroom where children are exposed to natural language and have opportunities to interact is relevant.

7.4 EFL and ESL in Primary School

7.4.1 Definition

Overview of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in primary education.

7.4.2 Young Learners' Language Acquisition

Pinter (2006) highlights the difference between young learners and adults. Adult learners are capable to analyze the language in an abstract way, which allows them comparing linguistic patterns with their mother tongue. On the other side, children's learning can be influenced by the input, all Babies and young children need to be talked to receive input to learn how to participate in interactions. Children learn their first language fairly effortlessly permitting them to be communicative in a familiar context up to 4 or 5 years old. 7.4.2.1 Foreign and Second Language acquisition. Characteristics of young learners who acquire a second language. The earliest possible chance to learn a second or third language starts at birth. Children that start learning a new language before 11 or 12 years old, in an immersed language environment, receive plenty of input and interaction in English environment (ESL), acquiring English to a close native language level, even without accent, on the other hand when children learn English in a not immersed English environment (EFL) have limited opportunities to practice the language outside the school lacking

of immediate need and motivation to use and English (Pinter, 2006, p. 30). Pinter discusses the advantages of acquiring a second and foreign language and challenges affirming that as younger a child starts learning English the better can be the results. On the other hand, Doman (2012) says that language learning and acquisition is done systematically understanding the language as a series of building blocks.

7.5 Cooperative Learning Strategies

According to Kagan, as cited in Etxebarria (n.d) cooperative learning requires structures which allows equal opportunities for students to interact and participate. Ones of the most known cooperative strategies to foster oral communication are: Role plays, simulations, oral presentations and small group discussions which are described below.

7.5.1 Roleplays and Simulations.

Urueña (2022) defines roleplay as a didactic strategy focused on the development of cognitive and attitudinal competences, which applies to any educational level due of its versatility. This idea expands the use of role playing considering it adaptable to students´ age and profiency. On the other hand, Ureña also expresses that simulation permits students to experience situations that they do not experience normally, training them to participate in a social group through limiting and understanding its tensions and dynamics. García Fonseca (2021) supports this idea expressing that making students assume the role of another person, help them to practice empathy and have another perspective.

Both authors highlight the importance of using role plays and simulations to encourage students' communication skills and sociability. Departing from these concerns it can be assumed that these activities are fundamental to develop students' ability to speak in English.

Harmer (2004) added up to the conversation that many students have derived positive benefits from simulation and roleplay, because these are used to encourage general oral fluency, they are fun and motivating, they permit students giving their opinions, and allow them using a wider range of language.

Talavera et al. (2016) similarly say that role play in the classroom is significant for students, because they simulate real situations and learners are able to recognize key words which are used in common situations. Role play and simulation are strategies that can benefit students´ abilities to communicate in real-like scenarios in a control environment, that allows repetition, knowledge assimilation and prepare students to a real-life situation where they need to use the language.

7.5.2. Small group discussion and oral presentation

Fauzi (2017) Says that "Small group could be an effective organizational medium for encouraging, clarifying, and guiding students' participation in planning classroom activities, both academic and social. In conducting a discussion group, a teacher presents the students with a problem to solve. In small groups, they discuss possible solutions, which they then present to the class for comparison or further discussion. During the small group interaction, the teacher acts as a facilitator and at the end may summarize group comments or give other possible solutions." (p.132). Although there are plenty of techniques in speaking skills, small group discussions seem to be effective not only to develop students' communicative skills, but to encourage participation, cooperation, critical thinking, decision-making and problem-solving skills. Fauzi (2017) added up that in small group students participate in discussions without feeling threatened, something that they couldn't do in a large group. Tan et al. (2020) similarly comments that when small group discussion are conducted effectively it permits students to have a real experience of speaking, also it can be a way to improve oral English performance.

Departing from the concern of oral language as a vehicle of communication besides small group discussion, oral presentation emerge as a complementary technique. Yundayani and Kardijan (2018) affirm that developing oral presentation skill in students is important and motivating, because this helps them to deliver a proper speech. It can be said that it not just telling students to stand in front of their peers and start talking, but providing them with confidence and enough practice. Kardijan (2018) links small group discussion with oral presentation affirming that students can change their thinking by interacting with others, permitting a more dynamic class because students push one another to understand and return the information.

This environment provides the elements mentioned previously referring to practice, talking time and motivation. Li (2018) affirms that oral presentation requires good knowledge of the topic to present, high levels of language proficiency, effective deliver skills and engaging the audience. Considering the stated above it is essential to know how to provide students with scaffolded activities, peer interaction, vocabulary practice and motivation when preparing and performing an oral presentation.

Any of the strategies previously presented, do not work independently, they require team work, and cooperation. They also support one another, students get organized in a small group to discuss a topic and come up with a role-play, simulation or organize an oral presentation with the intention of presenting a result. Knowing the benefits and challenges of using these activities, ensure how effective they will be. Undoubtedly, each of them gives students the opportunity to proof their communicative abilities, encourage participation, socialization and team work.

7.6. Proposed strategy

Adapted cooperative learning cycles with rotating group roles, peer support, and pre/post oral tasks, “The CSCM Cycle (“signature move”). The cooperative strategies were strategically adapted after each cycle results increasing or decreasing their level of complexity.

The cooperative strategies previously mentioned, role plays, simulations, oral presentations, and small group discussions were implemented.

The “ strategy” consists on a combination of the speaking strategies presented above, in stage 1, students were instructed to get organized and present a Role-play about a certain topic such as, **at the beach,** the teacher provided them with a situation in a dialogue form, students will have one class to get organized, one class to practice the pronunciation of the words and receive feedback, and finally one class to perform the Role-play, activities will varied after each intervention making them adaptable to the students’ proficiency level. Within the teams is imperative assigning roles such as: speaker, listener, vocabulary monitor among others. Also, students are motivated to perform the dialogues, solve the speaking tasks and ask and answer questions.

The teacher monitors and supports students by moving around the classroom to observe groups, takes notes and intervene based on common errors and given vocabulary for reinforcement.

VIII. Methodological design

The present study adopts an action research (AR) approach within an Explanatory Sequential Mixed-Methods design (QUAN-QUAL) consistent with the typology proposed by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), to investigate the effectiveness of Cooperative Learning to enhance EFL 4th graders´ oral communication at colegio Público Tilburg, in Matagalpa, Nicaragua. The operationalization of variables, including the specific indicators, items, and *measurement scales* for *each instrument*, is presented. Action research is a cyclical and reflective process naturally integrates the use of quantitative and qualitative procedures and interpretative modes of questioning and data collection by teachers, which enables educators to improve their own practices within specific educational contexts (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Kemmis et al., 2014). This methodology is particularly appropriate for the study because it allows the teacher-researcher to:

1.Identify a problem: The challenge of developing EFL learners´ oral communication skills.

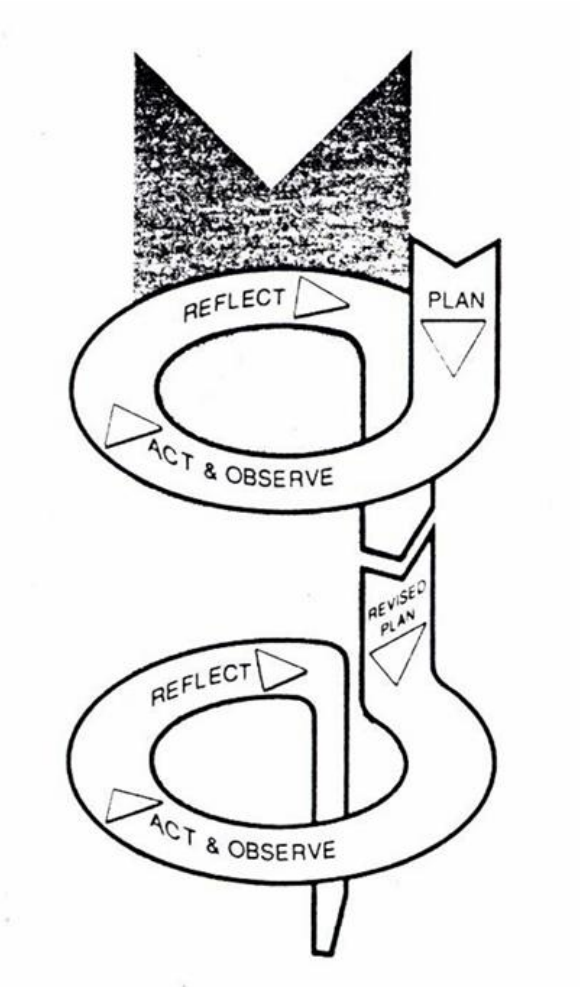
2.Implement a solution: Implement cooperative learning strategies as a classroom intervention.

3.Evaluate the results: Measuring the impact of this intervention on students´ speaking skills.

4.Reflect and revise: Use the results to improve future teaching practices.

Figure 2.

The Action Research Spiral



Note: From "The action research planner" by S. Kemmis, and R. McTaggart, The action research planner p.11. Copyright 1998 by Deakin University.

8.1 Action Research cycles

The study will be conducted through two action research cycles, each consisting of the following phases (Kemmis & McTaggart,1988; Kemmis et al., 2014).

8.1.1. Planning.

8.1.1.1. Define the research question: How does implementing a cooperative learning approach influence EFL fourth-graders' oral communication?

8.1.1.2. Select and adapt cooperative learning strategies appropriate for the students and classroom context.

8.1.1.3. Develop a data collection plan, including classroom observations, student work samples and pre/post-assessments.

8.1.2 Action

8.1.2.1. *Implement cooperative learning activities that promote oral communication such as: role-plays, simulations, short oral presentations and small group discussions.*

8.1.2.2. *Facilitate group work and provide ongoing support.*

8.1.2.3. *Monitor student engagement and performance during activities.*

8.1.3 Observation

8.1.3.1. Use checklists to document interaction and engagement. These observations will be done during each implementation cycle.

8.1.3.2. Collect oral communication samples (e.g., audio recordings and group presentations)

8.1.3.3. Administer pre-and post-intervention assessments. (T-tests)

8.1.4 Reflection

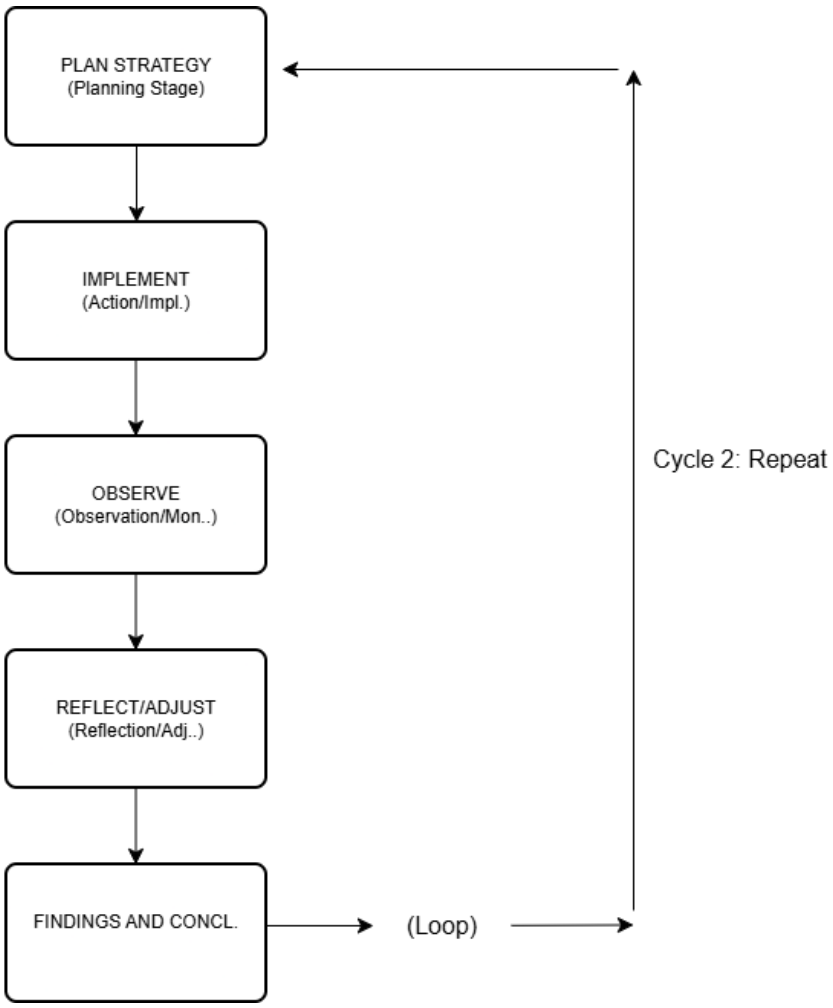
8.1.4.1. *Analyze data to identify patterns and trends.*

8.1.4.2. *Evaluate impact.*

8.1.4.3. *Revise strategies based on Reflection and* adjust data collection methods or instructional approach for future cycles.

Figure 3.

Two-cycle Research Design Flowchart



Note. The figure **3** was created with https://app.diagrams.net/ **to** illustrate the two-cycle action research process used to implement cooperative learning to foster oral communication among 4th -grade EFL learners.

As shown in the figure 3, each cycle consists on planning, implementing the cooperative strategy, observing outcomes (student's performance), reflecting on them and make adjustments for the next cycle.

Table 3.

Administration Timetable for Collecting Tools (Two Cycles)

Stage	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Tools Administered
Pre-Test	Week 1 (October 20th-october 24th) Day 1 (October 20th)	-	Pre-test (introductions, picture description, Favorite food dialogue) + Rubric
Action (Class Activity)	Week 1 (October 20th-october 24th) Day 3(October 23rd)	Week 3 (November 3rd- November 7th), Day3 (November 6th)	Cooperative learning activity (progressively complex)
Observation	Same day as Action	Same day as Action	Classroom Observation Checklist
Survey	End of Week 1	End of Week 3	Student Survey
Reflection	Immediately after class	Immediately after class	Teacher Reflective Journal
Post-Test	-	Week 4 (November 10th-November 14th), Day 1 (November 10th)	Post-test (same format as pre-test) + Rubric
Data Analysis	Ongoing after each cycle	Final after Post-test	Compare scores, identify themes, measure improvement

Note: Timetable organized by the researcher with specific actions to take in each cycle and data collecting tools used.

Table 3 details the process to follow including specific day and week. It also describes each collecting tool to use and how to use it.

8.2 Participants and setting

8.2.1 Participants

The participants were 8 fourth grade EFL students from colegio Público Tilburg school in Matagalpa, Nicaragua from a population of 33 students, the sample was composed by 6 female and 2 male students, it is crucial to mention that 7 of the 8 students selected has been studying together for 4 years in the same public school, but 1 of the students studied 3 years in a primary private school, were classes are smaller in size in comparison with Nicaraguan public schools classroom. This small sample aligns with the action research principles, highlighting the importance of a manageable group to implement and adjust the interventions. Moreover, "Students were grouped in two formal cooperative Learning groups, which consists on students working together for one or several class sessions to achieved shared learning goals and complete jointly specific tasks and assignments" (Johnson et al., 1998, p. 14), Johnson and Jonhson recommend 4-5 students per team, this allows optimizing cooperation and interaction. The students were selected through a non-proportional, convenience sampling, as they were accessible to the researcher and willing to participate (Cozby, 2009). Students were asked voluntarily to participate, although just 8 students from the class population were opened to work with the same team members during the 4 weeks research duration, also one of the principal aspects two consider was having the consent form signed, which was strictly designed for parents, students and school principal, besides the aspects already mentioned some other criteria was considered for selecting the participants:

1. To Be part of a fourth-grade class at Colegio Público Tilburg. Considering the whole population previously mentioned, the class is made up 19 female vs 14 male students, having a predominancy of female students over male students, 2.To Attend classes on a daily basis completing the schedule designed and assigned by the MINED (ministry of education in Nicaragua), this aspect was key for selecting the participants in terms of ensuring consistency at the moment of collecting data, ultimately as number 3, to be open to work in teams for a long period of time. Some students were reluctant to work with others, commonly because they do not feel comfortable to work with some classmates, or could not find their role within the work group.

All participants' families belong to low- and middle-class status, their parents work in service, industries and productive sectors as employees or owners of small locals such as: shops or minor entrepreneurship. Generally, these students show a common characteristic of 9–11-year-old child, they are interested in social networks, popular video games, unconcern regarding complex topics, such as: their parents' hard work or motivation to support their learning.

8.2.2 Teacher-Researcher Role

The teacher-researcher, who is also the classroom teacher, provides valuable insight into the students' learning content and facilitates all phases of the action research process. Within the AR approach, the researcher made a deep reflection, with the purpose of gaining self-understanding and judgments on those issues encountered daily in the classroom.

8.3 Data Collection Methods

It is considered pertinent to mention that the data collections methods were validated by a committee or experts in the field (**see appendix B: validation of instruments letter.)** They will be used to understand the impact of cooperative learning on oral communication.

8.3.1 Classroom Observations

Using structured checklists to document student interaction (Cohen et al., 2018).

8.3.2 Student work Samples

Audio recordings of group discussions, role plays, and presentations, as well as students' survey responses about their learning experiences (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). A validated Spanish version of the survey was created from the original English instrument and administered to all participants in the study. The Spanish version of the questionnaire can be found in the Appendix E (Pre-test transcript)

8.3.3 Pre/post Assessments

Administered using a rubric to assess progress in fluency, pronunciation, and overall oral communication.

8.3.4 Teacher reflective Journal

Daily documentation of observations, challenges, and personal reflections (Schön, 1983). Journal entries were written after each class. For each entry three elements were considered, first a short description of the activities performed, second, the technique or strategy implemented and third a short reflection on positive and negative aspects and future changes.

8.4 Data Analysis

8.4.1 Qualitative data

8.4.1.1. (Observations, work samples, journal entries, students' surveys). Thematic Analysis will be used to identify recurring themes related to students' speaking skills and engagement (Braun & Clarke, 2006)**.**

8.4.2 Quantitative Data

8.4.2.1 (Pre/Post assessments). Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) were used to assess changes in oral communication skills. Bui (2019) Refers specifically to paired-samples t-test, as well as giving a general overview of descriptive statistics, regarding paired-samples t-test she says that this type of tests are used to determine if the difference in mean scores on the dependent variable (oral communication) between two sets of related scores (pre-post intervention) is a real difference or one that is due a chance, she continues adding that despite these types of t-test samples are similar to independent t test samples, in paired-t test there is not a control group and scores are consequently related to each other.

Bui (2019) portrays this by describing a study that involves 30 bilingual high school students who completed pretests on English vocabulary by following a reading intervention which was administered daily for 10 weeks, at the end of those 10 weeks, they were administered the same test to measure their level of vocabulary as a posttest, at the end pre-test and post-test scores were related, because they come from the same group of students.

This closely relates with the research question, objectives, sample and approach, considering that the main inquiry is to know how cooperative learning strategies enhance oral communication in EFL 4th grade students, at Colegio Público Tilburg, in Matagalpa, Nicaragua. The example demonstrates how pre and post testing comparisons can reveal if an intervention or treatment caters measurable improvement.

8.5 Ethical considerations

The study will follow ethical guidelines in educational research. Informed consent will be obtained from school and parents. Students will be informed of their rights, including voluntary participation and withdrawal. Confidentiality will be maintained through pseudonyms and secure data handling.

8.6 Expected outcomes

This research aims to:

8.6.1 Improve EFL students´ oral communication skills through cooperative learning strategies.

8.6.2 Provide practical strategies for EFL teachers in primary schools.

8.6.3 Inform the future practice and professional development of teacher-researchers.

8.6.4 Contribute to the limited body of action research on cooperative learning in Nicaraguan classrooms.

Table 4.

Descriptor Matrix

Variables	Categories	Subcategories / Descriptors
1.Independent Variable: Cooperative Learning	1.1 Definition	-Concept -Principles: positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, group skills
	1.2 Benefits	-Higher student participation - Peer support and scaffolding - Motivation and teamwork
	1.3 Challenges	- Free-riding / uneven participation - Need for teacher guidance - Possible conflicts in groups

	1.4 Key Theories / Models	-Constructivism (Bruner, Vygotsky) -Cognitive Development (Piaget, Vygotsky ZPD) - Slavin's Team Model (STAD)
2.Dependent Variable: Oral Communication	2.1Definition	-Oral ability to convey ideas and interact using spoken language
	2.2 Components	-Vocabulary -Fluency -Pronunciation -Interaction & Participation - Confidence
	2.3 Importance	-Essential for EFL success Enhances classroom interaction -Builds confidence in learners
3. Connection: Cooperative Learning Strategies to	3.1 Strategies Applied	-Role-plays -Simulations - Oral presentations

enhance Oral Communication		-Small group discussions
	3.2 Proposed Strategy (Intervention)	Adapted cooperative learning cycle with rotating group roles, peer support, and pre/post oral tasks

Note: *EFL in Primary Education is contextual, not an independent or dependent variable.*

After describing the instruments which were used for data collection, it is important to present the descriptor matrix of variables, which resume the categories and descriptors aligned with the research objectives. Table 4 portrays how the independent variable, in this case *Cooperative learning*, and the dependent variable, *Oral communication,* are broken down into measurable constructs through the chosen tools.

IX. Analysis and Discussion of Results

After administering the collecting tools: pre and posttests, observations, students' survey and reflective journal, results are analyzed and discussed below cycle by cycle.

9.1 Pre-Test Data Analysis

Pre-test was administered using a rubric to assess prior knowledge regarding fluency, pronunciation, and overall oral communication.

Table 5.

Pre-test Results

Student	Fluency	Pronunciation	Grammar and Vocabulary	Interaction and Participation	Confidence	Interaction Quality
S1	4	5	3	3	4	3
S2	2	2	2	2	2	3
S3	3	2	2	2	4	3
S4	1	1	1	2	4	4
S5	3	2	3	2	3	3
S6	2	1	1	2	2	4
S7	1	1	1	2	1	2
S8	2	2	1	2	2	4
MEAN	**2.3**	**2.0**	**1.8**	**2.1**	**2.8**	**3.3**
MODE	2	2	1	2	4	3
MEDIAN	2	2	1.5	2	2.5	3

Level Classification		
Low = 1.0 - 2.9	**Medium** = 3.0 - 3.9	**High** = 4.0 - 5.0

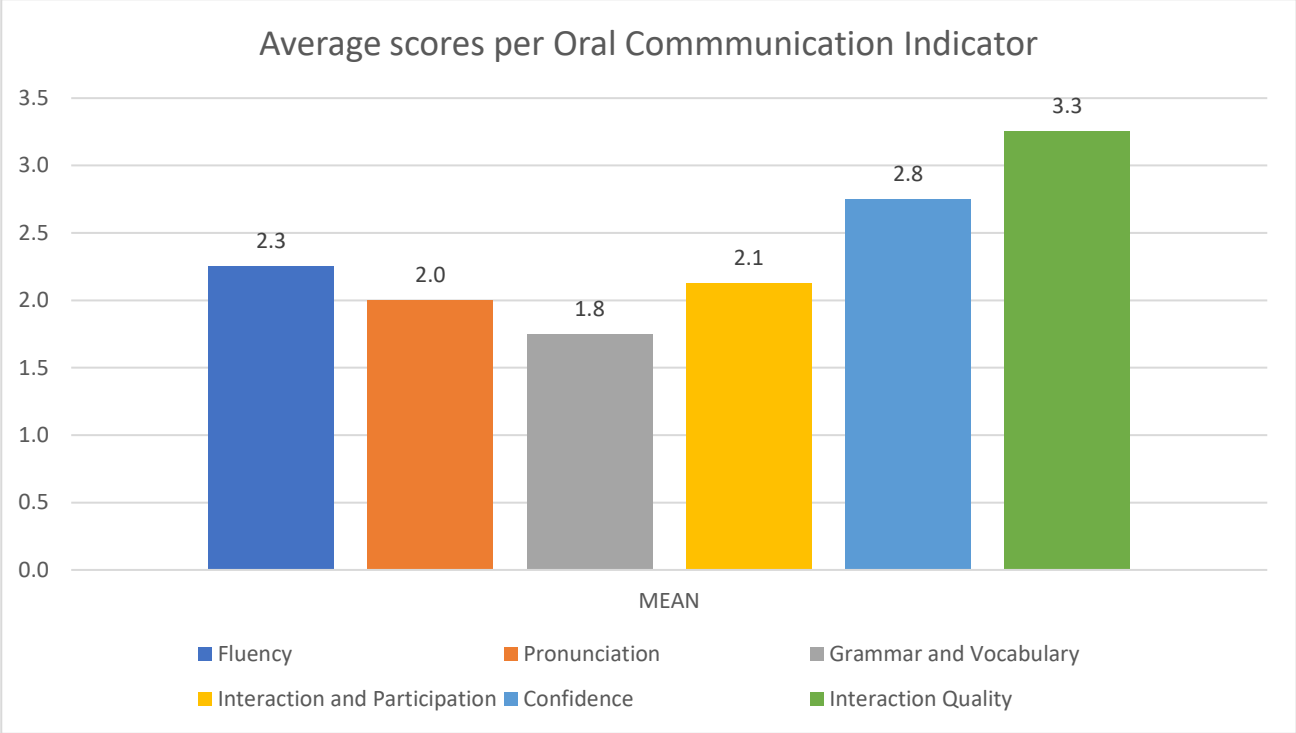
LEVEL DISTRIBUTION (%)	
Low	78.1
Medium	0.8
High	6.3

Note. Pretest results organized by the researcher based on cooperative learning.

Table 5 shows pre-test results mean, mode, median, level of classification and level of distribution, data is analyzed and discussed in figure 3, which is presented below:

Figure 4.

Average Score Per Oral Communication Indicator



Note. Data obtained after the pretest administration.

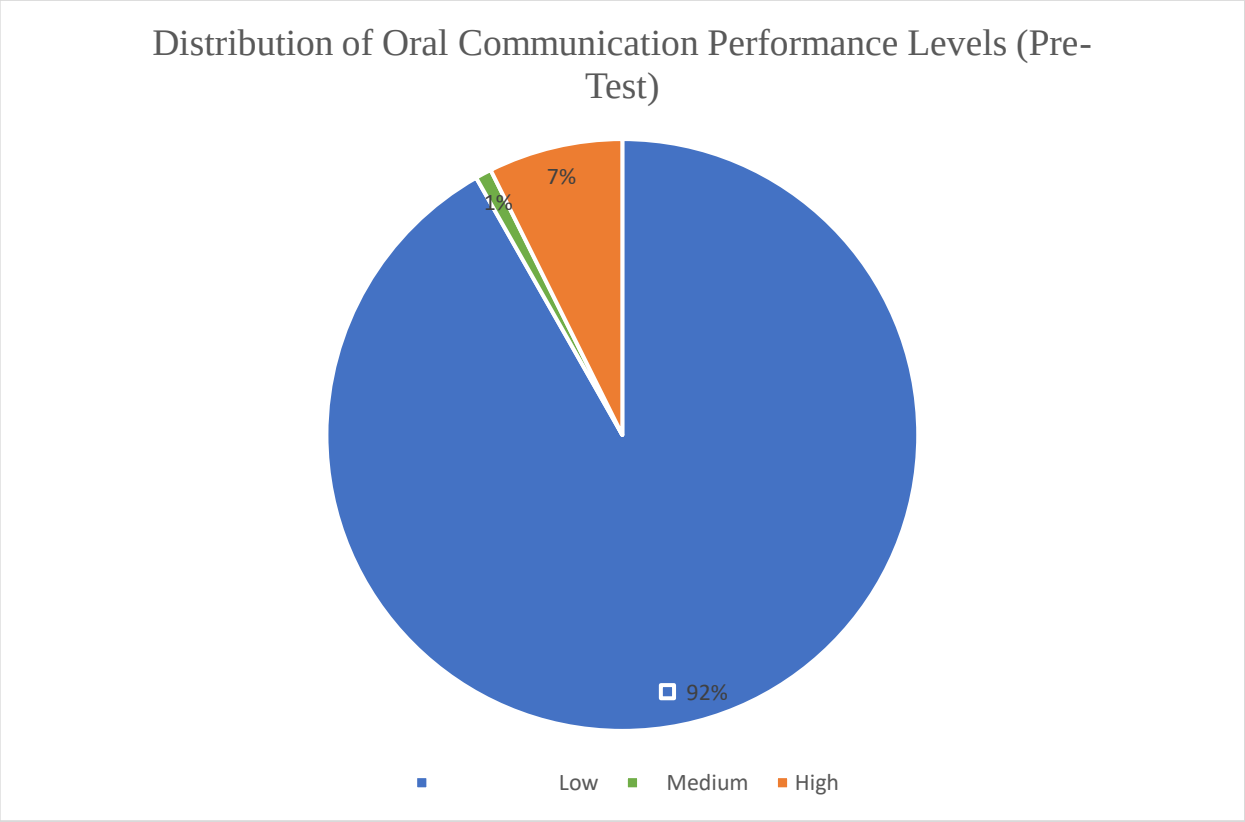
The pre-test results showed that student´s oral communication skills were generally low, having the overall mean scores of the indicators falling within the 1.0-2.9 range. As shown in figure 4, *interaction quality* had the highest mean (M=3.3), which suggests that students can perfectly engage with peers despite having limited linguistic proficiency. On the other hand, the lowest mean was obtained from *grammar and vocabulary* (M=1.8), followed by *pronunciation* (M=2.0), showing students difficulties when using accurate forms in speaking tasks.

Fluency (M=2.3) and *interaction and participation* (M=2.1) also got low scores, indicating that students had difficulties to maintain consistent verbal communication in English. These results confirmed the necessity of using cooperative learning strategies to motivate and foster active participation and oral production.

To portray the distribution regarding students' oral communication performance in the pretest, the figure below will be presented.

Figure 5.

Distribution of Oral Communication Performance Levels (Pre-Test)



Note. Level of distribution after the pretest administration depicts the general data behavior.

As shown in figure 5, 92% of the students were categorized in the *low* performance range, in contrast of the 7% of the learners that reached a *high level.* This clearly indicates that just few of the learners seem to be confident and linguistically competent in oral communication before the intervention. The small percentage of high-level performers suggests that just few of the students were able to express themselves effectively in English without depending on their first language. Therefore, pre-test results settle a clear need for implementing cooperative learning strategies aimed at enhancing fluency, pronunciation and overall communicative competences.

9.2 Cycle 1 “getting to work together to perform a short oral presentation”

Students were said to work in the assigned teams to prepare a short oral presentation about their favorite food. observation

9.1.2 Observation

The classroom observation objective is to identify how cooperative learning strategies influenced students' oral communication performance focusing on participation, individual accountability, use of English, peer interaction, confidence and respect during team’s activities. Table 6, presents the observation checklist results.

Table 6.

Observation Checklist Results

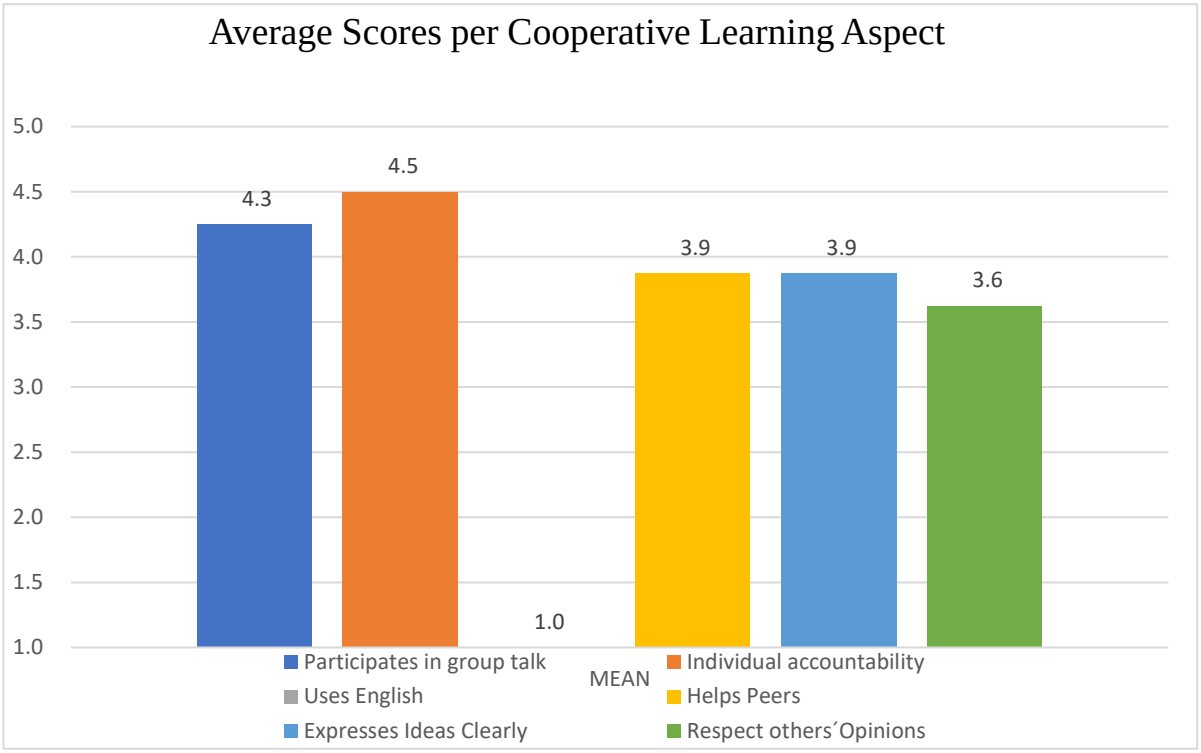
Student	Participates in group talk	Individually accountability	Uses English	Helps peers	Expresses ideas clearly	Respect other´s opinions	Comments
S1	5	5	1	5	5	4	Show a strong commitment to support others.
S2	5	5	1	5	5	4	Struggles when speaking in English
S3	2	4	1	3	1	3	Do not integrate itself in team activities
S4	5	5	1	5	5	4	Show commitment towards task completion and peer supporting
S5	5	5	1	5	5	4	It's committed with teamwork and task completion
S6	5	5	1	5	5	5	Manages roles within the team and gives constant support
S7	2	2	1	1	1	1	Clearly shows difficulties when working in teams
S8	5	5	1	2	4	4	Needs to work harder on helping others
MEAN	**4.3**	**4.5**	**1.0**	**3.9**	**3.9**	**3.6**	
Scoring guide:		1 = Never	2 = Hardly ever	3 = Rarely	4 = Sometimes	5 = Always	
Level Scale:	**Low = 1–2.9**		**Medium = 3–3.9**			**High = 4–5**	

Note. Report based observation of students working in cooperative strategies in teams.

To complement the table above, the following figure visually represents the averages scores per cooperative Learning Aspect.

Figure 6.

Average Scores Per Cooperative Learning Aspect



Note. Results obtained after administrating the quantitative survey to participants.

The results from the first observation revealed that students showed a high level of participation in group talks, with an average mean of 4.3. The highest mean score was obtained from "Individually accountability or student's role awareness" (4.5) which suggests that students are generally responsible and conscious of their role as individual within the team and how they support the group tasks completion. Oppositely, "uses English" received the lowest mean (1.0), indicating that students continue relying on their first language during cooperative activities.

Notes carried out in the classroom, supported these findings, they show that students depend of Spanish to communicate within the teams avoiding speaking in English even when they are just required to say short basic phrases such as "Do you need help?". However, peer support and individual responsibility was consistently observed, as students often assisted one another when completing oral tasks, showing a sense of interdependence. Overall, the observation results indicate that cooperative learning has started to foster positive interaction between team members and participation. Jacobs and Seow (2015), similarly express that through interaction in society, students gain diverse skills and abilities that help them building up their own knowledge. Although, it is necessary to implement strategies to promote the use of English and enhancing students' confidence when speaking, avoiding relying too much on L1 (Spanish). Therefore, in the next cycle, the teacher-researcher will integrate structured speaking tasks and language prompts to motivate and encourage oral production.

9.1.3 Teaching reflective journal

Daily reflection was conducted during the first intervention, in order to identify student's English proficiency in cooperative activities and taking action for next cycle (cycle 2). Table 7 shows main themes which appeared after reflecting upon the information obtained.

Table 7.

Daily Reflection Summary

Date	Activity / Strategy	Observation / Reflection	Emerging theme	Action for next cycle
Week 1 – Day 1	Organizing an oral presentation	Students were unmotivated at the beginning, but they changed they minds when they were said to work in teams. They discussed and decided the topic.	Positive reaction towards working in teams	Re-structuring teams can avoid misbehavior.
Week 1 – Day 2	Preparing visuals for the presentation	Most of the students assumed different roles in the team to help completing the task, such as motivator and helper, although they relied on Spanish for communicating.	Positive interdependence and accountability. English use avoidance.	Provide starters and implement short tasks.
Week 1 – Day 3	Oral presentation performance	Groups were ready to present; they shared the information in a clear and understandable tone. Although, there was evidence of lack practice.	Good team organization. Developing skills	Provide more time to practice and easy to follow examples.

Note. Daily Journal reflection table summarized by the researcher.

The journal reflection from week 1 illustrates how working cooperatively influenced in students' motivation and positive reactions to complete a task, going through an individual and collective awareness of the roles each one plays in the team and their common goal, although some students showed a negative attitude about using English to communicate within the groups, still requiring for vocabulary scaffoldings to express themselves orally. Cooperative roles helped reinforce peer support, and benefit students' ability to share clear and understandable information. Contrasting this information, Hong et al. (2022) affirm cooperative learning environments enhance oral proficiency.

9.1.4 Student's Survey

The student´s survey was administered to obtain students' perceptions regarding cooperative learning activities and their performance on speaking tasks. Table 8 summarizes main themes which emerged from students' open-ended survey responses, frequencies indicate how often theme appeared across participant's answers.

Table 8.

Frequency of Emerging Themes from Qualitative Survey

Theme	Frequency	Interpretation
Positive attitude toward group work	12	Most frequent theme, showing motivation and engagement in cooperative activities.
Developing language ability	10	Indicates gradual improvement and awareness of English use.
Peer relationships	4	less frequent but shows value of collaboration and friendship.
Positive self-perception	5	Students have a positive perception of their performance in speaking tasks.
Cooperative learning climate	1	Reflects a supportive and comfortable learning atmosphere.
Negative perception	1	Some students still feel insecure when performing oral tasks.
Decoding information	3	Some students have reported problems to understand some instructions or vocabulary.
Fear of making mistakes	1	Some students have reported feeling anxious about speaking incorrectly.
Teacher-student interaction	1	Shows the role of the teacher when providing feedback and motivation in promoting confidence.

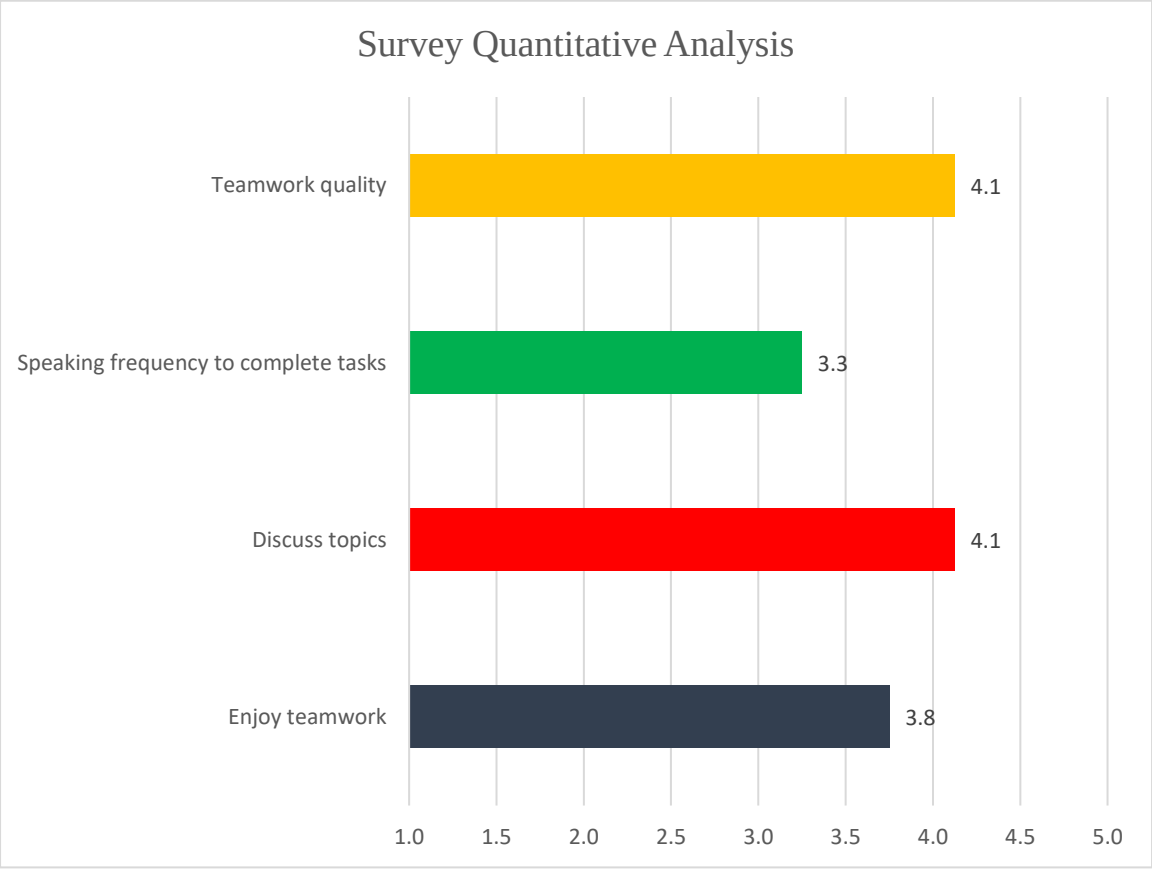
Note. Data collected from qualitative the qualitative survey section.

As shown in table 8, *Positive attitude toward group work* (f=12) and *Developing language ability* (f=10) were the most frequent themes, suggesting that students were highly motivated, engaged in cooperative activities, and aware of their progress in English. Some students expressed: "I like being with people". Another said: “I speak a lot”. Themes like *peer relationships* (f=4) and *Positive self-reflection* (f=5) reflected the social and affective benefits of working cooperatively. Less frequent themes which includes *Decoding information* and *fear of making mistakes* highlighted areas that still require teacher support and scaffolding, regarding this some student said: “I get confused”, referring to the complexity of understanding the instructions or vocabulary. To contrast these findings Al-Mubi reek (2021), says that in CL (Cooperative Learning) teacher’s talking time is reduced permitting students to assume an active role and use the language, although guidance can be provided when it is considered necessary.

To illustrate the quantitative section of the survey, figure 7 is presented.

Figure 7.

Survey Quantitative Analysis



Note. Data collected from the quantitative survey analysis.

As shown in figure 7, students reported highly positive perceptions of cooperative learning during cycle 1. The highest-rated items were *"Discuss topics"* (Mean= 4.1) and *"Team work quality"* (Mean= 4.1), illustrating that students felt comfortable exchanging ideas and working cooperatively to achieve common goals and accomplishing tasks. Similarly, *"Enjoy teamwork"* obtained a mean of 3.8, that indicates strong motivation and active participation in group activities. In contrast *"speaking frequency to complete tasks"* obtained a lower mean (3.3) showing that students valued teamwork, although some team members still participated less in oral activities.

Overall, these results indicate that cooperative learning fostered a positive atmosphere in the classroom, and collaborative relationships among peers, but some motivational strategies were needed to encourage oral production in English.

To sum up, cycle 1 results reveal that students enjoy teamwork, they get motivated and are conscious of their individual roles within the group to achieve a shared task, although some of them still need scaffolding and guidance, other aspect to consider oral participation, because it remains uneven. Related to the results found, Tante (2024) says that cooperative activities certainty gives students' opportunities to share their ideas, practice oral communication and receive feedback from peers, on the other hand Gillies (2007) talks about the teacher's role in the team's organization, because a well-structured team allows students cooperating and fostering each other's learning making the task accessible and relevant, permitting team members to have a conversation in order to discuss it and complete it.

Therefore, in cycle 2, additional scaffolding activities and vocabulary support were introduced to promote more consistent English use among every group member.

9.3 Cycle 2 "Getting to work together to perform a role-play"

For cycle 2, same data collection tools were used to keep consistency and making valid comparisons.

9.3.1 Observation

Observation checklist was used to look for improvement in participation, individual accountability, language use, peer support, expression and respect to other's opinions. Table 8 illustrates a comparison between cycle 1 and cycle 2 in observation results.

Table 9.

Comparison Table: Cycle 1and 2 Observation Results

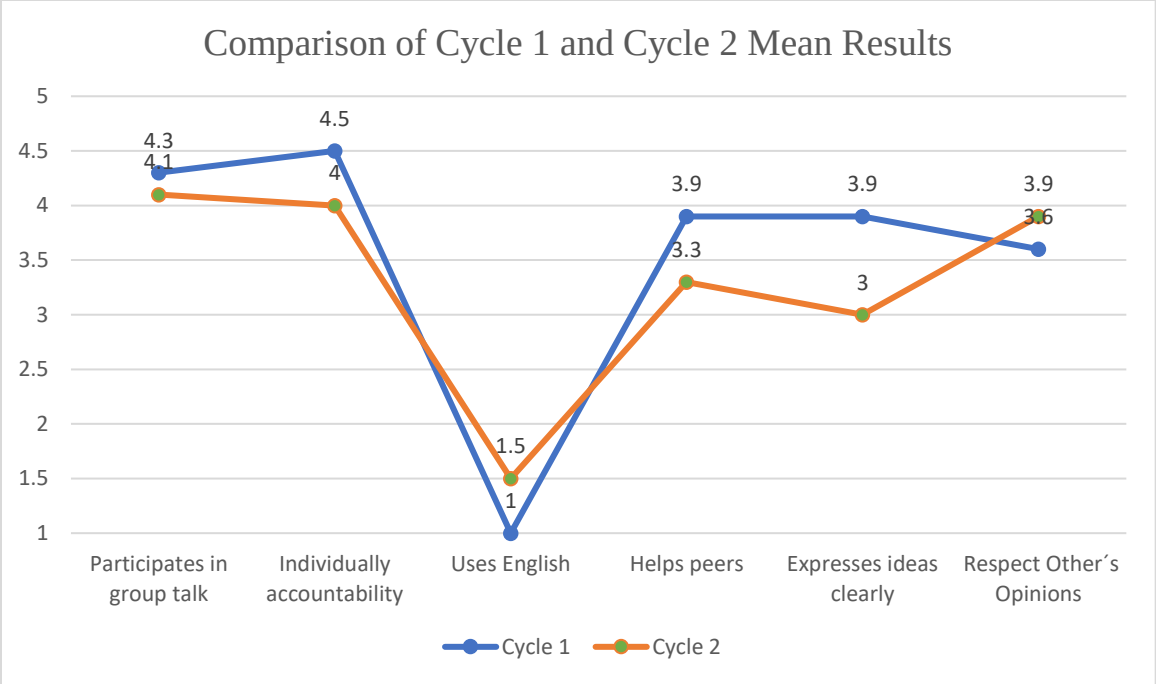
Indicator	Cycle 1 Mean	Cycle 2 Mean	Change	Interpretation
Participates in group talk	4.3	4.1	**-0.2**	Students were a little bit less opened to speak
Individually accountability	4.5	4	**-0.5**	Less awareness of their roles within the team, leading to negative interdependence
Uses English	1	1.5	**0.5**	Students felt more comfortable speaking English
Helps peers	3.9	3.3	**-0.6**	Less involvement in group work.
Expresses ideas clearly	3.9	3	**-0.9**	Student felt more insecure within the teams
Respect other´s opinions	3.6	3.9	**0.3**	Slightly change in students' perceptions toward others' opinions

Note. Data collected from classroom observations during two instructional cycles.

To complement the table above, the following figure illustrates the changes observed across the two instructional cycles.

Figure 8.

Changes Observed Across the Two Instructional Cycles



Note. Variations of results are better shown in a line graph.

As shown in Figure 8, students mean scores revealed slightly variations between cycle 1 and cycle 2. The most gained occurred in *Use of English* (+0.5) and *Respect for others' opinions* (+0.3), which indicates students' gradual awareness of using the target language (English) and their positive social interactions in the group. This aligns with the idea expressed by Vilaza & Valeska (2021), they expressed that participation is encouraged and fear is reduced in cooperative learning which allows a better development of oral communication skills.

On the other hand, modest variances emerged in *Participation in group talks* (-0.2), *Individual accountability* (-0.5), *Helping peers* (-0.6), and *Expressing ideas* (-0.9). These results suggest that while students became slightly feeling more comfortable and confident to speak in English, cooperative dynamics has decreased in some aspects, this possible occurs due to uneven role distributions, fatigue during second cycle or level of complexity of the task.

Overall, the results show partial improvement in oral engagement and attitudes, pointing the need for stronger scaffolding and clearer role in assignment.

Contrasting these results with the ones found by Gillies (2016) we can talk about the teacher's role because Gillies argues that in cooperative learning groups interaction can be facilitated by the teacher, having students sitting close enough to hear what others are saying, seeing each other's face and feeling part of the discussion, although Johnson et al. (1999) say that a team productivity relies on the team member's ability to work together. García Fonseca (2021), similarly says that peer learning is effective and student´s participation help to co-construct the knowledge.

9.3.2 Teaching reflective journal

Daily reflection was conducted during the second intervention, in order to identify student's English proficiency in cooperative activities and taking action for next cycle (cycle 3). Table 9 shows main themes which appeared after reflecting upon the information obtained.

Table 10.

Daily Reflection Summary Cycle 2

Date	Activity / Strategy	Observation / Reflection	Emerging theme	Final perception
Week 2 – Day 1	Organizing a short role play "at the party or at the restaurant"	Students were engaged and motivated, they communicate more. Students assumed an active role to complete the task, teams to work better although some members still relied on stronger peers for vocabulary support.	Role clarity; peer dependence	Reinforce English-only rules and provide role cards.
Week 2 – Day 2	Preparing Material for the role play	Students looked motivated, they were more participative, sharing opinions, respecting others' opinions, motivating and assigning roles to complete the task.	Positive attitude toward teamwork, peer support	Introduce group rewards system

Week 2 – Day 3	Role play performance	Students used English more frequently; they showed good pronunciation; vocabulary use and fluency, they transmit calm and security. Team organization was effective, although some students still rely on others to assume their roles within the team.	Increased English use; peer support; negative accountability	Continue scaffolding but reduce visual aids gradually.

Note. Daily reflection table summarized by the researcher

The teacher's journal entries during cycle 2 showed noticeable improvement in students' participation and use of English. Role assignment helped to encourage cooperation, and accountability. However, some students in the team still exhibited off-task behavior, and unawareness of roles, which suggests the need of self-regulation strategies, checking team configuration and projecting positive interdependence. Jacobs and Seow (2015) refers to this positive interdependence as the reasoning that encourages learners to perceive other's benefits as own, this permits everyone to support each other and creates a sense of belonging.

Vilaza and Valeska (2021) also highlights the importance of cooperative strategies in improving oral communication skills and relationships, permitting students overcoming communication problems.

9.3.3 Student's Survey

The student´s survey was administered once again to obtain students' final perceptions regarding cooperative learning activities and their performance on speaking tasks. Table 10 summarizes main themes which emerged from students' open-ended survey responses, and make a comparison with the results obtained from the first observation administration. Frequencies indicate how often theme appeared across participant's answers and the slow change regarding last cycle.

Table 11.

Comparison of Frequency Emerging Themes from Qualitative Survey in Cycle 1 and 2

Theme	Frequency /Cycle 1	Frequency /Cycle 2	Change	Interpretation
Positive attitude toward group work	12	13	**+1**	Still the most frequent theme with a slight increase, showing that students are still motivated and engaged when working on cooperative activities.
Developing language ability	10	10	**0**	Still a positive improvement in the use of English.
Peer relationships	4	4	**0**	Still less frequent but continues showing a sense of value about cooperation and friendship.
Positive self-perception	5	8	**+3**	Students show a stronger positive perception of their own performance in speaking tasks.
Cooperative learning climate	1	1	**0**	Maintains a supportive and comfortable learning atmosphere.
Negative perception	1	1	**0**	Some students still feel insecure when performing oral tasks.
Decoding information	3	2	**-1**	Less students have reported problems to understand some instructions or vocabulary which is positive.
Fear of making mistakes	1	0	**-1**	Any student has reported feeling anxious about speaking incorrectly in cycle 2, which reflects the positive effect of working in teams.
Teacher-student interaction	1	0	**-1**	This is a positive change, because shows how students are working more independently, relying more on their peers.

Note*. Data collected from the qualitative survey section in cycles 1 and 2.*

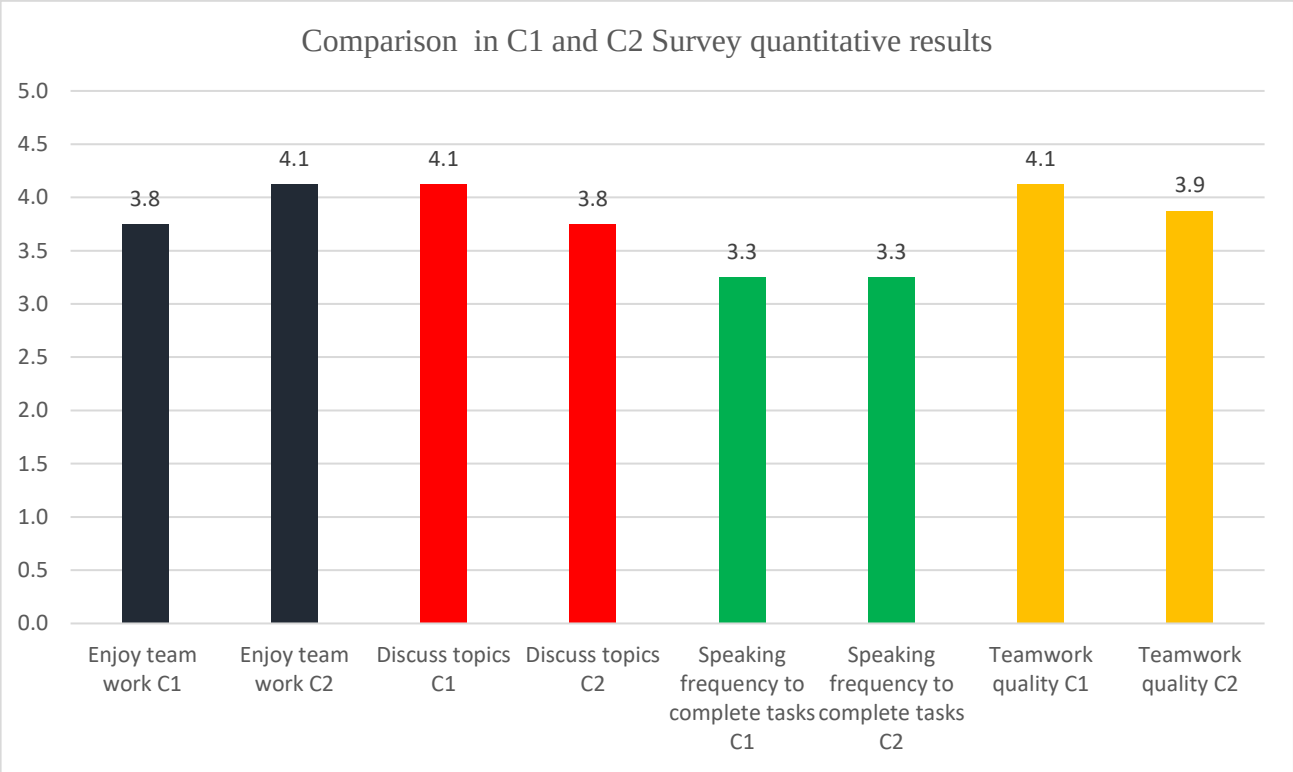
As shown in table 11, *Positive attitude toward group work* (change=+1) and *Developing language ability* (change=0) were the most frequent themes in cycle 2 as in cycle 1, suggesting that students are slightly more motivated, and engaged in cooperative activities as well as keeping awareness of their progress in English. Some students expressed: "it gets easier" referring to the advantage of working cooperatively to achieve a common goal. Another said: “I know how to speak a little of English”. This links to the results obtained by (Namaziandost et al., 2019; Hong et al., 2022) concluding that cooperative strategies improve learners’ speaking skills, motivation and confidence.

Themes like *peer relationships* (change=0) and *Positive self-reflection* (change =+3) add up to the discussion those social and affective benefits of working cooperatively. Raj and Ismail (2022) sustain this idea expressing that in cooperative strategies learners are able to gain a better understanding, improve their socialization skills and build a strong relationship with others. Themes which include *Decoding information* (change=-1), *fear of making mistakes* and *Teacher—student interaction* validate the conclusion made by Raj and Ismail showing a positive change regarding how learners understand better, speak more in English and rely on their peers not in the teacher after being exposed to cooperative strategies: one student expressed “I get confused”, referring to the complexity of understanding the instructions or vocabulary.

The following figure illustrates the changes in the quantitative section of the survey comparing learners’ answers in cycle 1 and cycle 2.

Figure 9.

Comparison of the Quantitative Survey Results in Cycles 1and 2



Note. Comparative analysis between cycle 1 and cycle 2 quantitative survey results.

Figure 9 illustrates that student´s perceptions of cooperative learning improved in cycle compared to cycle 1. The highest-rated items were *"Enjoy teamwork"* (Mean= 4.1) which represents a + 0.3 increase.

This suggests that students truly like working in teams and consider that interaction positive. This indicates a strong sense of encouragement, which permits learners to participate actively in group activities to accomplish tasks.

Oxford (1997) support these concerns expressing that cooperative learning contributes to teamwork in order to reach learning goals.

Team work quality" (Mean= 3.9) decreased slightly (-0.2) suggesting that although students like the idea of collaborating, they are more focused on completing tasks together than on the effectiveness of the process itself. In addition, *"Discuss Topics"* obtained a mean of 3.8 also decreased slightly (-0.3), which indicates that not all the students in the team are strongly motivated and actively participating in group activities, showing that they need further peer and teacher-assistance to participate actively. This aligns with Shabani et al. (2010) who highlights Vygotsky's ZPD: which describes the actual level of development of the learner and the next reachable level through the use of environmental tools and capable adult and peer facilitation to operate in a higher level.

Ultimately *"speaking frequency to complete tasks"* keep similar mean (3.3) showing that students valued teamwork, but some team members still participated less in oral activities.

Overall, these results indicate that cooperative learning kept on fostering a positive atmosphere in the classroom, collaborative relationships among peers, that students care more about completing the group tasks and to enjoy that teamwork more than focusing on how effectively they do it. Some learners still need being motivated and guided by the teacher and peers to encourage their oral production in English.

To sum up, cycle 1 and cycle 2 results reveal that students enjoy teamwork, they get motivated, most of the learners are aware of their individual roles within the group to achieve a shared task, learners speak more in English to share ideas, opinions and how to contribute to the group goal, although they still need additional scaffolding activities, vocabulary support and a system of reward to promote more consistent English use among every group member and a positive accountability.

9.4 Post-Test Data Analysis and Comparison

Post-test was administered using the same rubric implemented in test number 1 (see appendix G) to keep consistency and make a comparison with the results obtained in both t-tests regarding the variations in fluency, pronunciation, and overall oral communication after the two-cycle intervention.

9.4.1 Post test Results

The results obtained after the posttest administration are presented in table 12 including a comparison with the results obtained in the pretest. To illustrate this information in detail.

Table 12.

Pre-test and Post-test Administration Results

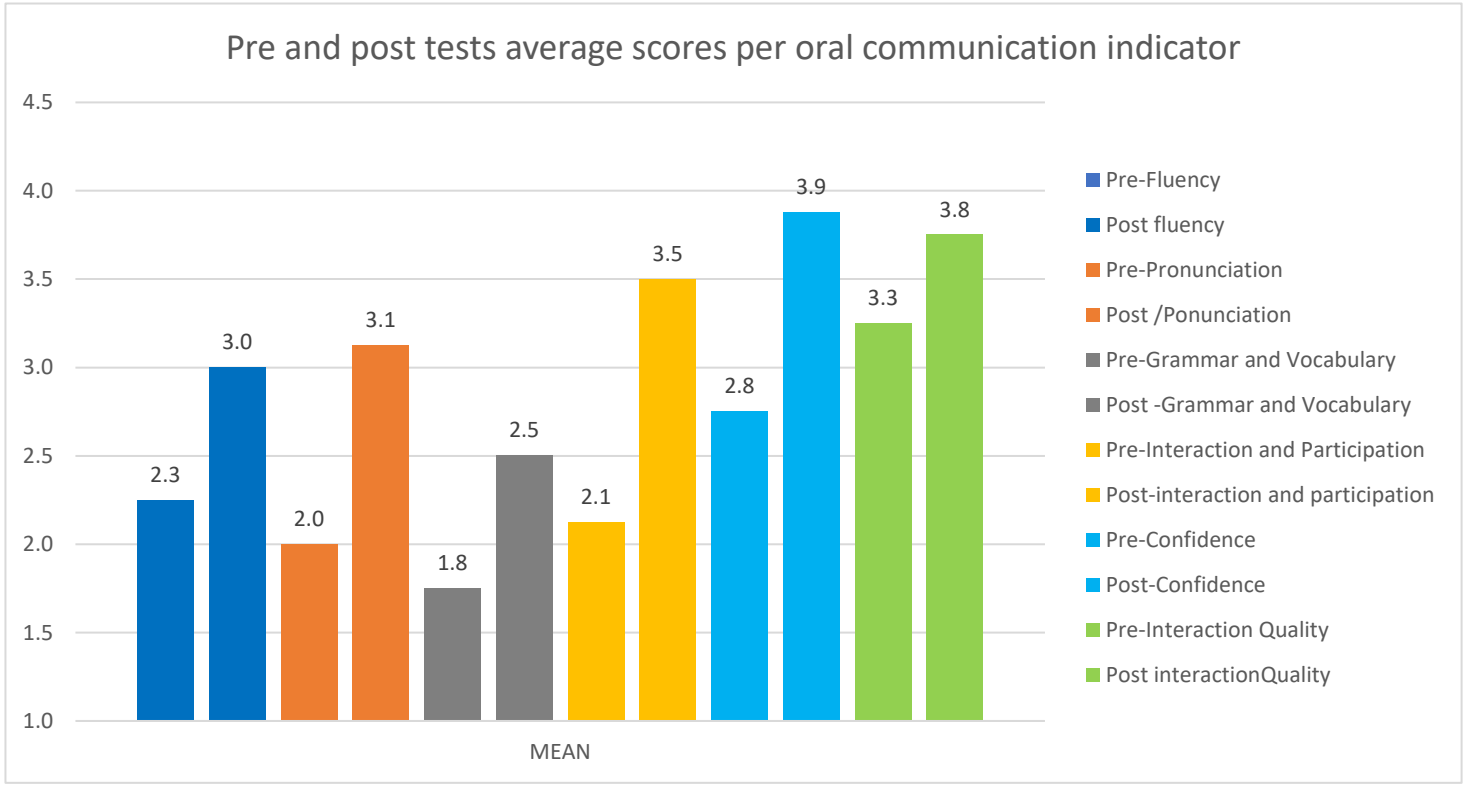
Student	Pre-Fluency	Post fluency	Pre-Pronunciation	Post /Pronunciation	Pre-Grammar and Vocabulary	Post - Grammar and Vocabulary	Pre-Interaction and Participation	Post-interaction and participation	Pre-Confidence	Post-Confidence	Pre-Interaction Quality	Post interaction Quality
S1	4	4	5	4	3	3	3	5	4	5	3	5
S2	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	4	2	4	3	4
S3	3	4	2	4	2	3	2	4	4	4	3	3
S4	1	3	1	3	1	3	2	4	4	4	4	4
S5	3	2	2	3	3	2	2	3	3	3	3	5
S6	2	2	1	2	1	2	2	3	2	4	4	3
S7	1	3	1	3	1	2	2	2	1	3	2	2
S8	2	3	2	3	1	2	2	3	2	4	4	4
MEAN	**2.3**	**3.0**	**2.0**	**3.1**	**1.8**	**2.5**	**2.1**	**3.5**	**2.8**	**3.9**	**3.3**	**3.8**
MODE	2	3	2	3	1	3	2	4	4	4	3	4
MEDIAN	2	3	2	3	1.5	2.5	2	3.5	2.5	4	3	4
SD	**1.04**	**0.76**	**1.31**	**0.64**	**0.89**	**0.53**	**0.35**	**0.93**	**1.16**	**0.64**	**0.71**	**1.04**
			Level Classification (optional):		**Low =** 1.0 - 2.9	**Medium** = 3.0 - 3.9	**High** = 4.0 - 5.0					
			LEVEL DISTRIBUTION (%)		**Low**	69.6	**Medium**	-10.7	**High**	48.2		

Note. Data collected by the researcher after administrating the pre and posttest.

The information presented in table 12 is described and analyzed throughout figure 10. The information represents the results obtained in the pretest (after the two cycles intervention) and the posttest results after the two cycles intervention, illustrates clear differences in mean and standard deviation from one another.

Figure 10.

Pre and Post-Test Average Score per Oral Communication Indicator



Note. Data collected by the researcher after the pre-test and post-test administration.

The post-test results showed that student´s oral communication skills increased significantly after the two-cycle pedagogical intervention, having the overall mean scores of the indicators falling within the 2.5- 3.9 range. As shown in figure 10, *confidence* had the highest mean (M=3.9), which suggests that students feel secure when talking and sharing their ideas within the team, making them less hesitant and insecure when speaking in English allowing them completing a task. Guo et al. (2021) supports these findings highlighting that students have to get along together to interact, encourage, praise, elaborate and negotiate to finish a task.

On the other hand, the lowest mean was obtained from *grammar and vocabulary* (M=2.5), followed by *fluency*(M=3.0), showing that some students still have difficulties when using accurate forms in speaking tasks, what suggest continuous peer feedback and opportunities to use the language, although these are positive results when comparing the same means with the pretest results from *grammar and vocabulary* (M=1.8) and *fluency* (2.3) respectively.

Pronunciation (M=3.1) and *interaction and participation* (M=3.5) also got better scores in the posttest, indicating that students can maintain consistent verbal communication in English without frequent long pauses and pronounce words clearer and more understandable avoiding misunderstanding and constants interruptions. Fang et al. (2018) says that oral communicating goes beyond vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation, because it also requires the ability of using knowledge smartly. Standard deviation ranging from 0.53 to 10.4 shows reduced variability in the post-test, indicating more consistent performance across learners. These results confirmed that using cooperative learning strategies to motivate and foster active participation and oral production was highly effective. These results are also sustained by some authors such as Gillies (2016) who ensured that using cooperative learning in schools provides students with the opportunity to work on positive interdependence situations.

(Slavin et al.,2003; Slavin,1991) also affirms that collaboration among children promotes growth regardless their background, permitting them achieving a common goal by respecting and motivating each other.

X. Findings

After the pre-test, two-cycle intervention and post-test administration here are the findings.

1.Student's oral communication skills improved after the cooperative learning intervention. The pre and post test results showed growth across the six indicators: fluency, pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary, participation, confidence and interaction quality.

2.Confidence and interaction were the strongest areas of improvement. Both areas reached a solid medium-high range (3.5-3.9). This reinforces the idea of cooperative learning to help creating emotional safe spaces where children are encouraged to take risks and talk a little more

3.Grammar and Vocabulary remains to be the weakest skills, even after improving. Despite the improvement of grammar and vocabulary from 1.8 to 2.5, it is still the lowest indicator. This showed that students still struggle with correct forms, what suggests more scaffolding in vocabulary as well as the need of structured language support.

4.Cooperative learning fostered positive attitudes, motivation and teamwork. Across cycles 1 and 2, the survey themes illustrated strong motivation to work with others, enjoyment teamwork, and growing sense of responsibility in the groups. Both, positive attitude toward group work and developing language ability were consistently the top themes.

5.Students depends heavily on L1 (Spanish) at the start but gradually increased English use. The observation data from cycle 1 showed the lowest score for English use (1.0). However, in cycle 2, students showed better participation, stronger peer support and cases of confusion and fear to make mistakes decrease.

6.Cooperative learning strengthened individual accountability and role awareness. Across cycles 1 and 2, students demonstrate responsibility within group roles (mean 4.5 in cycle 1). This suggests that cooperative learning helped structured teamwork and clarify expectation

XI. Conclusions

After the cooperative learning intervention, the conclusions are presented below.

1.Cooperative learning improved overall communication performance. The combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence, shows that cooperative learning led to meaningful improvements in student's speaking skills, especially in confidence, participation, and clarity when interacting with team members.

2.Cooperative learning enhanced motivation and engagement in speaking tasks. Along the intervention students showed enthusiasm for working with others, expressing positive attitudes in cooperative activities. Their improvement in oral communication relied on their motivation and willingness to participate.

3.Cooperative learning strengthened social and affective skills essential for communication. Students improved in their peer relationships, increased independence and supportiveness in interactions. All of this, contributed to better oral communication experiences and opportunities.

4.Despite improvements, some students still required structured and ongoing scaffolding to develop accuracy and consistency. The weakest areas were grammar and vocabulary, in future interventions more language explicit models, sentence starters (prompts), more vocabulary input and recycled oral practice (repetition, similar patterns) should be incorporated.

5.Cooperative learning is a viable methodology for Nicaraguan EFL primary classrooms. Due to the limited research in this context, this study provides evidence that CL strategies can surely help young learners reach the communicative goals established by MINED and the CEFR.

XII. Recommendations

1.Integrate cooperative learning as a regular strategy in English classes. Due to the improvement showed by students in fluency, interaction, participation and confidence, it is recommendable continuing using cooperative structures such as: roleplays, simulations, small group discussions and oral presentations, more systematically in oral activities.

2.Strengthen vocabulary and grammatical structures. These were the weakest areas even after the intervention. Using flashcards, prompts, answer models and guide practice before every communicative activity it is advisable.

3.To promote English as interaction language within the teams. Establishing team rules that motivate English use with cooperative expressions such as: “can you repeat?”, “what do you think?”, “Let’s try again”, reinforcing their use throughout a constant monitoring and positive feedback.

4.To assign cooperative roles in a more consistence way. The use of roles defined clear responsibilities and improved participation. It is recommendable to keep roles stable (a leader, secretary, etc.) and rotate them periodically to avoid dependence and foster autonomy.

5.To implement continuous feedback cycles. To guarantee a sustainable improvement, it is advisable to do brief self-evaluations and co-evaluations after every oral activity, focusing on aspects such as: clarity, participation, and peer support.

6.To create contextualized materials according to students’ level and age. Designing short oral activities, and dynamics adapted to a Nicaraguan context, adding familiar topics for students, with the aim of facilitating participation and reduce anxiety.

7.To train teachers in cooperative strategies to develop oral communication. Due to the planning and group management that cooperative learning requires, it is suggested to offer institutional workshops to strengthen teachers' pedagogical competences and promote collaborative practices in the school.

8.To Extend the application of this strategy to other grades. The positive results justify the implementation of cooperative learning in other primary levels to promote the progressive development of oral communication from a young age.

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Appendixes

Appendix A

Operationalization of Variables

Variable	Conceptual Definition	Indicators	Questions/Items	Scale	Instrument	To whom
Independent Variable: Cooperative Learning	A structured instructional approach where learners work in small groups, each with assigned roles, to accomplish shared academic goals (Slavin, 1980; Johnson & Johnson, 1999).	-Time on group work - Role distribution - Task completion - Peer support & scaffolding - Respect for peers' opinions	Survey: Do you enjoy working in a group? Survey: How often do you speak English in group activities? Observation: Do students share ideas, help each other, and use English during tasks?	Survey scale (1–5) Observation checklist (Never–Always)	- Survey - Classroom Observation Checklist - Teacher Reflective Journal	4th grade EFL students
Dependent Variable: Oral Communication	The ability to convey ideas and information using spoken language (Humanities, 2023; Tante, 2024; Brown 2007; Harmer, 2004).	- Fluency Pronunciation - Vocabulary - Interaction & participation - Confidence	Pre/Post Test: Introduce yourself, describe a picture, answer favorite activity Q, short dialogue.	Rubric scale (1–5) Survey Likert scale (1–5) Checklist (Never–Always)	- Pre/Post Test - Speaking Rubric - Survey - Classroom Observation Checklist	4th grade EFL students

	Survey: How confident do you feel when speaking English in groups? Observation: Do students participate and interact orally in group tasks?	- Audio Content Analysis

Appendix B

Instruments validation letter

Carta Resumen de la Validación de Instrumentos

Fecha: 9 de septiembre de 2025

Estimado Henry Wilner Picado Dávila:

Me dirijo a usted para entregar un resumen de la validación de los instrumentos de investigación diseñados para su tesis sobre el aprendizaje cooperativo para potenciar el desempeño oral en inglés. El propósito de esta validación es fortalecer la calidad y rigor de su investigación.

En términos generales, sus instrumentos son un **excelente punto de partida** y demuestran un claro entendimiento de las variables que desea medir. A continuación, presento las **fortalezas** y las **áreas de mejora** identificadas en cada instrumento.

Fortalezas Generales

- **Relevancia Teórica:** Los instrumentos están alineados con el objetivo de su investigación.
- **Diseño Coherente:** Las rúbricas y las listas de cotejo son lógicas y relevantes para evaluar el desempeño oral y la observación en el aula.
- **Lenguaje Apropiado:** La encuesta está redactada con un lenguaje claro y accesible para la población de estudio.

Áreas de Mejora por Instrumento

1. **Classroom Observation Checklist:**
    - **Fortalezas:** Los criterios de evaluación (participación, responsabilidad individual y colaboración) son pertinentes y directos para el objetivo del estudio.

- **Áreas de Mejora:** El último ítem de la lista de cotejo ("Students use English... for solving conflicts") combina dos conceptos en uno, lo que podría dificultar la medición. Se recomienda **separar estos criterios** para una evaluación más precisa.

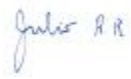
2. **Encuesta:**
    - **Fortalezas:** El instrumento es claro, con una buena introducción y una estructura lógica por secciones.
    - **Áreas de Mejora:** Es necesario **revisar las opciones de respuesta** en la Sección 2, ya que en algunas preguntas no son mutuamente excluyentes y pueden generar confusión. Adicionalmente, las opciones de edad en los datos demográficos se superponen, lo que podría afectar la clasificación de los participantes.
3. **Instrumentos de Evaluación (Pre/Post-Test y Rúbricas):**
    - **Fortalezas:** La "Speaking Rubric for Oral Communication" es detallada y proporciona una base sólida para medir la fluidez, pronunciación y gramática.
    - **Áreas de Mejora:** El Pre/Post-Test carece de especificaciones claras en algunas preguntas (ej. la pregunta de la imagen y el diálogo entre pares), lo que podría afectar la estandarización de la prueba. El "Audio Content Analysis Checklist" es demasiado básico y se recomienda **utilizar la rúbrica de speaking en su lugar** para un análisis más profundo de las grabaciones de audio.

Recomendaciones Finales

La implementación de las sugerencias mencionadas en este resumen fortalecerá la calidad y fiabilidad de sus datos. Con estos ajustes, sus instrumentos estarán mejor preparados para medir los constructos que desea investigar.

Quedo a su disposición para cualquier duda o para discutir estos puntos con mayor detalle.

Atentamente,



Dr. Julio César Roa Rocha

Docente de inglés de CUR-Matagalpa

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Appendix C

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Classroom Observation Checklist

Observer Name: _____

Date: _____ Grade Level: _____ Lesson Topic: _____

Instructions: Mark (✓) or write a code (S1: student1) in the appropriate box based on student behavior during cooperative learning activities.

Criteria	1=Never	2 =Hardly ever	3= Rarely	4= Sometimes	5= Always	Observations
Students actively participate in group discussions.						
Individual accountability: Each student contributes when working on the assigned task.						
Students encourage and help each other, playing an active role by explaining, discussing and even teaching.						
Students use English to communicate with peers by implementing active listening for solving conflicts.						
Students share ideas when completing tasks						
Students respect others´ opinions.						

Comments:

_____

_____

_____

Appendix D

Audio Sample Transcript

Key: S1 (student 1) T(teacher)

S1. Hello. Hello. Good morning. Good morning. My name is Monica. Monica. Monica and introduce yourself. T. You say your name is Monica and how old are you and your hobbies? How old are you? S1. How old are you? I mean 10, 11. S1.10 10. T. And what are your hobbies? What activities do you like to do?

S1. Playing. T. Okay, playing with friends or S1. And friends on family. And friends on family. S1.Okay, Monica, observe the picture and tell me what are they doing. What can you see? Yeah, these are the examples. These are examples. So, observe the picture and tell me what are they doing? S1. Um, um, ball.

T. Okay. Um. S1.I water. Mhm.

T. Okay. An umbrella? You can see an umbrella? S1.An umbrella. T. Okay. Nice. And Monica, and what is your favorite activity? And why? Um.

S1.Um, playing Yeah, T. or playing also or watching TV or something like that. S1.I come ball. T. Okay. And That's it. Okay. So, we're going to practice a dialogue. You're going to be A and I'm going to be B., Okay? So, when I count from 1 to 3, we'll start the dialogue.

One.

S1.Hi, how are you? Fine and you how are you? S1. One in win. Thanks, thank you. What do you have for milk break? T.I have cereal and milk and you what's your favorite food? S1.My favorite food is friend chicken and potato chips. It sounds delicious and what's your favorite drink?

S1.I like drinking lemonade and soda no healthy at all T. Nice talking to you. See you. S1.Bye. Bye.

Appendix E

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Encuesta Para el Estudiante

Tema de investigación: "Efectividad de las estrategias de aprendizaje cooperativo para mejorar la comunicación oral en estudiantes de primaria que aprenden inglés como lengua extranjera en Matagalpa, Nicaragua".

Querido estudiante, saludos.

El propósito de la siguiente encuesta es conocer cómo el trabajo en equipo con tus compañeros puede ayudarte a mejorar tu habilidad para hablar inglés. La información que brindes será usada solo con fines de investigación, y tus respuestas serán totalmente confidenciales.

Marca con una "X" donde corresponda.

Tu edad:

☐ 8 – 9 años

☐ 9 – 10 años

Género:

☐ M (Masculino) ☐ F (Femenino)

Sección 1: Hablando sobre el aprendizaje cooperativo

1. ¿Disfrutas trabajar en equipo?

_____

2. ¿Con qué frecuencia hablas en inglés durante las actividades en grupo?

_____

3. ¿Qué es lo que más te gusta del trabajo cooperativo?

_____

4. ¿Qué dificultades tienes cuando hablas en inglés con tus compañeros?

_____

5. ¿Te sientes más seguro(a) al hablar inglés después de trabajar en equipo? ¿Por qué?

_____

Sección 2: Trabajando en equipo durante la clase de inglés

Por favor, elige una de las opciones del 1 al 5 para cada pregunta. Si no entiendes una pregunta o alguna palabra, puedes pedir ayuda al maestro o maestra.

1) ¿Cómo están organizados los grupos de trabajo?

A. 1 (No está bien)

B. 2 (Satisfactorio)

C. 3 (Más o menos)

D. 4 (Bien)

E. 5 (Excelente)

2) ¿Con qué frecuencia hablan sobre los temas vistos en clase?

A. 1 (Nunca)

B. 2 (Casi nunca)

C. 3 (A veces)

D. 4 (Algunas veces)

E. 5 (Siempre)

3) ¿Con qué frecuencia hablas con tus compañeros de grupo para terminar tus tareas de inglés?

A. 1 (Nunca)

B. 2 (Casi nunca)

C. 3 (A veces)

D. 4 (Algunas veces)

E. 5 (Siempre)

4) ¿Qué tan buena es la calidad del trabajo de tu grupo?

A. 1 (Nada buena)

B. 2 (Satisfactoria)

C. 3 (Regular)

D. 4 (Buena)

E. 5 (Excelente)

¡Muchas gracias por tu respuesta!

Appendix F

Pre/Post-Test Template

Student ___ **Date: _____**

Please, mark with an ¨X¨ where appropiate

Your age

8-9 ◯

9-10 ◯

10-11 ◯

Gender

Female (F) ◯ Male (M) ◯

I. Self-Introduction (Giving personal information) (5)

1. Introduce yourself in English (name, age, hobbies).

e.g. *My name is Henry, I´m twenty-six years-old, I like playing at the park.*

II. Describe the Picture. Use at least 3 sentences. (5)

e.g., They are playing with water guns.

.



(Taken from the web)

III. Answer the following questions. (5)

a) What is your favorite activity and why?

IV. Perform a short dialogue with the teacher. (5)

A: Hi! How are you?

B: Fine, and you?

A: Very well, thanks. What do you have for breakfast?

B: I have, cereal and milk, and you? What's your favorite food?

A: My favorite food is fried chicken and potato chips.

B: It sounds delicious, and what's your favorite drink?

A: I like drinking lemonade and soda, no healthy at all.

B: Nice talking to you, see you.

Appendix G

Speaking Rubric for Oral Communication

Instructions: The rubric below was used to assess students' speaking performance during the pre and posttest as well as at the moment of participating in cooperative learning activities.

Criteria	1 (Unsatisfactory	2(Needs Improvement)	3 (Developing)	4 (Proficient)	5 (Excellent)
1.Fluency	Always hesitates and does not structure sentence them.	Frequent hesitation, long pauses, and difficulty forming sentences.	Some hesitation but can complete sentences.	Speaks smoothly with occasional pauses.	Speaks naturally with minimal hesitation.
2.Pronunciation	Extremely difficult to understand, most of the words are mispronounced	Difficult to understand, multiple mispronounced words.	Some pronunciation errors, but meaning is generally clear	Mostly clear pronunciation with minor mistakes.	Excellent pronunciation, clear and accurate.
3.Grammar & Vocabulary	Do not give an answer or give it incomplete.	Uses very simple or incorrect grammar and vocabulary.	Limited vocabulary and some grammatical errors.	Good range of vocabulary with mostly correct grammar.	Wide vocabulary and strong grammatical accuracy.
4.Interaction & Participation	No response given, avoids engaging in conversation.	Limited response, difficulty engaging in conversation.	Responds but with hesitation, needs prompting.	Engages in conversation with some effort.	Responds confidently and engages actively.
5.Confidence	Avoids speaking very low confidence.	Speaks choppy, clearly nervous.	Speaks reluctantly, some nervousness.	Mostly confident with occasional hesitation	Speaks clearly and confidently throughout.
6.Interaction Quality	Avoids taking turns, doesn't motivate others to complete the tasks.	Almost never takes turns or motivates teammates.	Rarely takes turns or motivates peers to complete tasks.	Takes turns and motivates others occasionally to complete the task.	Takes Turns, contributes actively and motivates others to complete the task.

Comments:

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Appendix H

Sample Teacher Reflective Journal Entry

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TEACHER JOURNAL

This journal is intended to collect general information that helps me knowing the level of English and possible difficulties in the process of learning the EFL (English as Foreign Language) in a group of 4th graders belonging to colegio Público Tilburg, located in Walter Mendoza neighborhood, in Matagalpa Nicaragua. The group of students that participates in the research is aged between 9 and 11 years old. They have three frequencies of 45 minutes of the English class weekly.

Tuesday, September the 30th 2025

Today class activities started 10 minutes after the approved schedule 11:00 to 11:45. The Nicaraguan Health ministry (MINSA) came to the school for a vaccination campaign.

Students were oriented to split into the assigned groups to work on the visuals for "My favorite food " presentation. Students brought materials such as: big papers/flip charts, scissors, glue stick, printed images, markers, color pencils and white sheets. Within the teams, students play some roles such as: helper, monitor, organizer, designer, counselor, etc. In order to accomplish the task. Most of the students motivated team members to work, although they didn't use English for communicating, designing small tasks or solving conflicts. At the end some teams could finish creating the material before the end of the lesson, but others will do it at home. Some misbehavior was observed, such as: hitting others with the big paper or cardboard, moving their peers while cutting, etc.

Working in teams, clearly is advantageous for some students, but not at all for others. Some tend to get distracted or relying on others' work and don't support their mates in the task completion time.

Next time, it's recommendable to warm students with such as bad behavior and letting them know the consequences, especially with the score given to them in relation with their peers' grade.

Appendix I

Rating Scale for Measuring Student Progress after cycle 2

Instructions: This scale was used to compare students' performance in the pre-test and post-test

Level	Description
1- No improvement observed	The student shows no significant changes in oral communication skills.
2- Slight improvement	Minor progress in fluency, pronunciation, or confidence.
3- Moderate improvement	Noticeable improvement in multiple areas of oral communication.
4. **Proficient improvement**	Strong and clear progress in fluency, vocabulary, interaction, and confidence.
5. Significant Improvement	Outstanding and very clear progress in fluency, vocabulary, interaction, and confidence.

Final Evaluation:



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