



**CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY
OF SANTIAGO DE GUAYAQUIL
FACULTY OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES
SCHOOL OF PEDAGOGY OF NATIONAL AND FOREIGN
LANGUAGES-ENGLISH**

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**Development of EFL speaking skills through gamified
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in the city of Durán, scholastic year 2024-2025.**

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**SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR OBTAINING
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PROJECT ADVISOR

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We certify that this research project was presented by **Gutiérrez Álava, Ashley Mariela** as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the **Bachelor's Degree in EFL Pedagogy**.

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ABSTRACT

Interaction and communication are fundamental aspects of developing EFL learning. That is why, in this paper, much attention was paid to speaking skills. This project aims to explore how complementary material, applied through gamification, can help overcome learning challenges during the development of EFL speaking skills among seventh-grade students at a school in Duran in the 2024-2025 school year. Employing a mixed-method approach, the study combines qualitative and quantitative research tools. These tools include surveys to gauge the teacher and students' perceptions and attitudes toward oral communication, observation checklists to track information on teacher performance across speaking instructional areas, and observation notes to capture additional classroom interactions. Through the analysis of the data obtained, it is possible to state that the students involved in this research project experienced several speaking challenges, which can be mitigated through the use of gamified activities that promote engagement and enhance students' speaking performance. Based on these findings, an action plan was designed for classroom implementation, which includes applying seven gamified activities and regular monitoring of the process, to assess its effectiveness.

Keywords: EFL Speaking Skills, Gamification, Seventh Graders, Supplementary Materials, Mixed-Methods Research, Classroom Implementation.

INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, English has become a widely used global language, essential for communication in various fields such as education, business, and technology (Rao, 2019). That is why, becoming proficient in this language can help individuals have different opportunities. In the educational field, English is considered a significant tool for accessing academic content and higher studies.

As with any other language, English comprises four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Mastering these skills allows language learners to achieve fluency and full comprehension. However, speaking is often considered the most challenging skill to master (Paneerselvam & Mohamad, 2019). This can be evidenced in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners as they might not have enough exposure to speaking practices and real-life communication.

In the context of Ecuadorian education, speaking English is also considered an essential skill that many students struggle with. For instance, young learners in a private Ecuadorian school face meaningful challenges when developing English speaking skills. Despite the efforts of teaching the language using traditional material, these seventh-grade students still struggle with oral communication. This situation demands students' need for creative language teaching instruction. This project focused on studying information about the creation of complementary teaching materials, its application through gamification, and its benefits when helping seventh-grade students in their development of EFL speaking skills.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The selection of educational material in a class is one of the most significant decisions that teachers must make to provide a qualified and enjoyable educational environment. This choice becomes crucial when connecting it with the specific needs of students.

In an Ecuadorian school in the city of Duran, seventh-grade English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students are facing significant challenges in developing effective English-speaking skills. This seventh-grade class is divided into groups which consist of English levels. At the beginning of the school year, the students took a diagnostic test so that the English coordinator could know the English proficiency level of each learner, allowing the school authorities to create student groups, depending on their English level of knowledge.

The group of students that face more problems when practicing EFL speaking are the ones that are at the basic level. Despite years of English instruction, many of these students still struggle with oral communication. Their challenges are more noticeable compared to the other proficiency levels, and emphasize the necessity of intervention and accurate teaching strategies to address their needs.

These learners use an English textbook titled *Guess what! For Ecuador 6*, which provides exercises for developing various EFL skills. However, despite counting on these resources, the students continue to have problems. While the textbook includes several exercises aimed at improving oral communication, and these are implemented effectively in the classroom, challenges persist among the learners when it comes to practicing speaking skills.

The lack of complementary material for the English class might also be a factor that hinders the effective development of speaking skills. As noted by Toro et al. (2018), using complementary and enjoyable material is the key for developing EFL skills, specifically oral skills. It is also important to consider that the continuous use of the book and the same exercises can be repetitive for the student and may be boring for them.

Because of the issue stated, there is a need for additional teaching material provided by the English instructor, combined with innovative approaches to improve students' speaking skills.

Something else that must be considered in this matter is the age of the seventh graders. Most of them are 11 years old, and when it comes to teaching children that age, specific teaching techniques must be applied in order to capture their attention during the teaching process. Most students in the EFL class have a short attention span when it comes to focusing on the lesson.

An element that can be used as a technique for this situation is gamification. This can be used as something that can allow the teacher to transmit information in an attractive way by connecting it with additional teaching material. This offers elements that might tackle the situation, by creating immersive and interactive environments where students can be motivated to communicate, collaborate, and use the target language in meaningful ways.

This research aims to explore the specific challenges the seventh graders go through during EFL oral practices and to identify additional teacher material and gamification strategies for the development of English-speaking proficiency among EFL students.

JUSTIFICATION

This research focuses on gathering information about the challenges that seventh grade students go through when practicing EFL speaking skills. The information that this investigation searches is key to understanding why the learners are having trouble developing their English oral skills.

By understanding this matter, it is possible to build an academic proposal connected to additional teaching material. This type of material can help the students develop their speaking skills (Masuram & Sripada, 2020). Another factor that goes inside the focus of this project is analyzing the different components that gamification (combined with the additional teaching material) offers for teaching EFL speaking.

The outcomes of this project can allow the school authorities and EFL teachers to tackle the problems that the EFL students are going through. The research findings that come from the study of creating additional teaching materials for the development of speaking skills and the use of gamification, can work as a guide for aiding the English instructor and other EFL educators in the school, when coming up with ideas that can help the class.

It is also important to mention that developing students' speaking skills is essential because it allows them to consolidate their oral expression skills and become more fluent through time. However, many educational institutions use traditional teaching methods that do not attract students' attention or encourage their active participation.

In this context, gamification, which refers to the inclusion of game elements in non-playful environments, represents an innovative pedagogical alternative. This research also gathers data about gamification and how it allows learning to become a motivating and engaging experience for students. This data can help not only schools but also researchers who are investigating similar educational problems. When gamification is applied for the development of oral skills, it fosters an environment in which students feel more committed and willing to practice the foreign language without fear of making mistakes, which contributes to improving their skills.

Another essential aspect to consider is the age of the students. As stated before, gamification is a tool that creates playful environments; therefore, 7th-grade students (11 to 12 years old) are likely to engage in class activities based on curiosity and fun. Moreover, gamification can enhance cognitive development by involving strategic thinking and problem-solving, which will benefit these learners.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the challenges EFL students are going through during speaking practices?
2. How does complementary material, applied through gamification, help develop EFL speaking skills among basic-level seventh-grade students?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Main objective

To explore how complementary material, applied through gamification can help overcome learning challenges during the development of EFL speaking skills among seventh-grade students at school in Duran, in the 2024-2025 school year.

Specific objectives

1. To investigate the challenges EFL students go through, during speaking practices
2. To analyze the ability of gamification to improve students' fluency, pronunciation, and confidence in speaking English.
3. To identify key elements within gamification activities that can contribute to the development of EFL speaking skills in a classroom setting.
4. To develop an action plan, through the use of didactic games, that can help improve EFL speaking skills among seventh-grade students at school in Duran in the present school year.

LITERATURE REVIEW

EFL Speaking Skills Development

Speaking Skills in EFL

In language acquisition, speaking is considered a dynamic and interactive process based on the production of ideas. As Brown (1994) and Burns & Joyce (1997) stated, "Speaking is an interactive process constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information" (as cited in Florez, 1999, p.2). This skill is essential for effective communication in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It showcases the ability to express oneself clearly and fluently in the spoken English language.

Speaking is not just about using correct grammar and accurate pronunciation; it also requires going beyond technical skills, as successful interaction depends on several important elements (Kürüm, 2012). Based on this brief definition, it can be stated that speaking is the main ability used to convey messages through communicative language.

The importance of speaking skills in overall language acquisition

Oral communication or speaking skills play a fundamental role in language acquisition. According to Nazara (2011), speaking is often perceived as the most desired skill in EFL learning. This is because it portrays the knowledge that a language student possesses. This skill facilitates learners to participate in real-life communication, making it the most practical and desirable ability among the four language skills.

Rao (2012) stated that listening, reading, writing, and speaking are all important in language acquisition. These skills are taught and learned in quick succession; however, speaking or speech is the best introduction to other language learning skills due to its natural way of learning a foreign language (as cited in Hussain, 2018, p.14). Thus, speaking is considered a gateway to learning and mastering other language skills. For example, when language students practice speaking, they naturally engage with vocabulary and grammar in a situational context.

Furthermore, when practicing speaking, learners often need to provide an immediate oral response, which improves language acquisition by identifying mistakes and remedying them in real-time. This fosters better retention of the language and problem-solving abilities. In speaking practices, learners are challenged to think on their own, providing them with a more efficient and quicker learning process.

Key components for the development of Speaking Skills

As stated before, speaking skills are a fundamental aspect of EFL, permitting learners to communicate effectively and express ideas correctly. In the field of language teaching, there are research papers that explain the key components of speaking skills, which are commonly categorized into several areas. According to Nunan (2003), the key components can be divided as:

- **Pronunciation:** The production or articulation of sounds that are used to convey meaning in spoken language. It can include different elements such as individual consonants and vowels. It can also encompass language features such as stress, rhythm and intonation, which are essential for effective communication.
- **Fluency:** The ability to produce spoken language at a natural speed and confidently, with few hesitations or pauses. It mainly focuses on the flow and coherence of speech rather than grammatical accuracy.

Accuracy is also one of the key components of speaking. According to Brown & Lee (2015), for spoken language to be considered accurate, it must meet certain parameters such as clear articulation, grammatical correctness and the proper use of phonological language. All of these fundamental parameters have to be recognized in order to create effective oral communication in several contexts.

By understanding the whole concept of the speaking skills components, language teachers can focus on the important aspects of spoken language to apply them in the classroom. Additionally, by becoming proficient in these areas, language learners can foster meaningful conversations and

interactions, two things that are essential for a successful language-learning process.

Challenges in Developing Speaking Skills

As with any other language skill, learning speaking skills present several challenges among students in EFL contexts. These challenges can be different depending on the individual, as each student may have diverse proficiency levels and cultural and background knowledge.

One of the major challenges in developing oral communication skills is the overuse of written tasks in EFL lessons, which may limit opportunities for oral practice. Studies indicate that when English teachers emphasize reading and writing skills more than speaking, students tend to participate less in interactive communication, hindering their development of speaking skills. (Haji & Jejo, 2020). Similarly, a study showed that including oral communication assessments instead of depending on traditional written tasks, improves student involvement with the course material (McBain et al., 2016).

Common barriers in EFL classrooms

In the process of language acquisition, learners tend to face several challenges. According to Ratnasari (2020), these various challenges can be listed as:

- Lack of vocabulary
- Fear of mistakes and shyness
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of motivation

Definitions of common barriers in EFL classrooms

Lack of vocabulary: Language students may face difficulties on finding vocabulary items to express themselves in English when carrying out conversations. In some cases, students can only use basic words, limiting their ability to develop more complex chunks of language interaction. For instance, lack of vocabulary tends to make students overuse simple words as basic adjectives (Ratnasari, 2020).

Fear of mistakes and shyness: These barriers are psychological factors that impact the feelings of students when they wish to communicate in English. Many students worry about making mistakes because they do not want to be judged by their classmates, especially when using a foreign language. This fear may restrict their development in conversations or completely avoid speaking in English again. To overcome these challenges, teachers can create an engaging and non-judgmental environment, reducing the pressure that students may feel when practicing oral communication (Juhana, 2023).

Lack of confidence: It is indisputable that the lack or excess of self-esteem or the perception of themselves relatively influences the classroom or the participation of students, in the study of the foreign language for certain students it can be difficult to express themselves in a foreign language or the feeling of frustration when not achieving the required learning (Alejandro et al., 2024).

Lack of motivation: Motivation is the greatest impulse when teaching foreign languages because the absorption of what is taught and the correct learning of the language depends on the degree of motivation of the student or in some cases assigned to the image of leadership within the classroom, so that currently little interest, desertion and lack of motivation characterize the little performance within a classroom; which indicates that methodological strategies are needed within the system to increase the motivation of teachers and students (Ruiz et al., 2021).

Teaching strategies for enhancing speaking skills

Traditional methods

Traditional education, which originated from scholasticism, emphasizes order and method. In this approach, the teacher represents the bases, and the approval of knowledge, who draws up the educational plans on how or when they should be taught; Traditional teaching had, as its main support magistrocentrism (teacher-centered), encyclopedism and verbalism (Galván & Siado, 2021).

This is how traditional pedagogical approaches in English language education are defined by a solidified content and the stipulation of a centered curriculum; generally, traditional learning is applied along with books, translation of grammar, the natural approach, the direct method, the audiolingual method, the cognitive approach, and other traditional techniques that are classified into conversations that stimulate everyday speech, drills, playful exercises, dramatization and discussion of readings (Pérez & Akombo, 2019).

Transition to communicative and interactive approaches.

In the Communicative Approach, the aim is for the student to be able to communicate fluently using the foreign language in various contexts, with a special interest in the use of the second language from the initial interaction as a tool for playful and interactive communication. For this reason, the following parameters are established (Arvizu, 2021).

- Emphasis on the second language from the first contact.
- Have spontaneous conversations with real topics.
- Create spaces to think about the learning process and not just the purpose of the language.
- Make personal experiences relevant to contribute to the learning process in the classroom.
- It seeks to link everyday life with language.

With the implementation of communicative and interactive approaches within the classroom, an evolution of the traditional approaches based on theoretical grammar is demonstrated: descriptivism, psychological foundations, structuralism, functionalism, and traditional methodology when transitioning from one language to another, promoting the protagonism of the student and the role of the teacher as the facilitator (Alava et al., 2020).

Gamification

The concept of gamification is widely used in different areas. According to Robson et al. (2015), gamification is defined as the incorporation of game design principles into a non-gaming environment to influence behaviors. Moreover, gamification is a method of enhancement using playful components to boost value generation (Staller & Koerner, 2021).

Gamification in Education

Gamification in education can be defined as a strategy that contributes to increasing student participation, through incorporating game elements into the educational environment. Its main objective is focused on generating equal levels of participation that games produce. Gamification allows students to be involved in classroom activities, improve certain skills, optimize learning, contribute to behavior change and socialization, and incorporate objectives that contribute to learning. Various researchers have concluded that gamification in education generates favorable results such as cooperation, user retention, engagement, and knowledge (Smiderle et al., 2020).

It is also defined as a strategy that uses game mechanics in contexts that are not playful, providing a more engaging and entertaining learning experience for students, since aspects of games are incorporated into the teaching process (Ciuchita et al., 2022). Another concept is the one offered by Kapp, who considers that gamification is an integral strategy that involves playful thinking, aesthetics, and game mechanics (Pelizzari, 2024).

Gamification in Language Learning

From the perspective of pedagogy of foreign languages, gamification is endorsed by various studies and reinforced by results obtained from language teaching, through games and dynamics. This approach manages to stimulate the students' interest and acquire language retention more easily and effectively. By using gamification in the classroom, cooperation, enthusiasm, and teacher-student participation are encouraged, while reinforcing listening, writing, reading, and speaking skills (Moreno & Orcera, 2024).

Speaking is a relevant skill in instruction and one of the most difficult to develop, and by inserting gamification into the learning process, the speaking-listening skill can be strengthened, making communication effective through the recreation and familiarization of words (Rea et al., 2024).

Educational instruction combined with gamification enhances the understanding of the language taught. In addition, this method promotes interaction and active participation of the student, reflected in an increase in motivation and interest in the class and the development of their linguistic and soft skills (Ushiña et al., 2024).

Benefits of Gamification for EFL Students

The benefits of practicing gamification within the student framework and teaching are several; especially in language instruction where this technique allows interaction and the development of an interesting and fun academic atmosphere. This also promotes collective participation as well as motivation, integration, planning, commitment, and socialization (Briceño, 2022).

In addition to the benefits mentioned above, the implementation of gamification in the classroom helps to improve the student's experience when entering a new language or any student area, directly influencing the attention that the student gives to the study content, managing to encourage motivation, participation and school performance (Huamaní & Vega, 2023).

Increased motivation and active participation

The pressure that some students feel when they are forced to speak a different language in front of a group can be reduced through recreational activities and games that help to promote a calm and friendly environment, hence, gamification benefits the reduction of stress and the increase of confidence in the participants of a classroom (Peña, 2024).

Improved confidence and reduced language anxiety.

Likewise, through the collaborative development of the content to be taught, along with the games, and gamified material, students are allowed to develop and strengthen skills to increase their cognitive knowledge including their oral production in the English language, pronunciation, grammar, fluency and lexicon (Vergara et al., 2021).

Gamification in Language Teaching

Gamification as a Pedagogical Tool

Gamification is a strategy that involves games and dynamics to motivate teaching and study. This as a pedagogical tool has been used in various fields and situations. In this case, the educational field seeks to aim at this technique for the benefit of improving teaching procedures and assisting the trainer to modify the content of his subject in a more entertaining way (Saucedo et al., 2020).

Several studies have agreed that the games used in the education and training of languages (native and foreign) are well received by academic experts; their expiration in the classroom is indefinite and several inquiries corroborate the high pedagogical value and the positive effect they indicate in the school environment (Caperucci & Manzanares, 2022).

Gamification for EFL Development

In the development of EFL, gamification is definitely an ally tool when learning or teaching English. The processes involved in games, the challenge they imply, and levels of student achievement contribute to individuals wanting and becoming more interested in the study of the subject while making an effective acquisition of vocabulary and content that is reinforced through constant repetition; however, gamification must always be supported by adequate pedagogical planning with emphasis on correctly aligned study objectives (Quintero et al., 2024).

Its role in language teaching

Language teaching alone represents a great challenge in classrooms because on many occasions learning another language, a new vocabulary or grammar rules, is perceived as stressful or extremely sacrificial, that is where gamification plays an important role in the English teaching system because it helps promote active learning interest in the language, cooperation, and input in the classroom (Wulantari et al., 2023).

It can be deduced that the implementation of playful dynamics within the classroom plays the role of a complementary and supportive tool, that is, gamification alone without pedagogical support could not monopolize a complete foreign language curriculum; however, gamification is perceived as a teaching tool that supports the student to polish the language in a repeated, fun and progressive way (Mendoza & Saltos, 2021).

Contributions provided by gamification for the development of speaking skills

There are some contributions that gamification can provide to the development of all language skills, especially to enhance oral communication skills:

Enhancing fluency:

The use of games within the classroom can be recognized as a reliable tool in the process of teaching and learning oral skills, especially for components such as fluency and accuracy (Yaghoobi & Kazemi, 2023).

This can be confirmed through the study of Aal-Asheakh & Saud (2024), which emphasizes that gamification is efficient in overcoming the demotivation of students and boosting fluency when practicing speaking skills.

After collecting suitable data, a research project carried out by Jimenez & Gomez (2019) concluded that the use of gamification enables the strengthening of fluency in EFL classrooms by designing interactive and communicative spaces that promote the exchange of ideas and thoughts among students using English.

Enhancing pronunciation:

Speaking is an essential part of language learning, and incorporating engaging media items has been demonstrated to improve the experience of students in the learning process. For example, it has been shown that using cell phones equipped with pronunciation software may successfully engage students' English pronunciation by providing them with enjoyable opportunities to use the language (Ridhon & Sholihatul, 2023)

The application of gamified strategies in EFL classrooms has been proven to help students develop their pronunciation. For instance, a quasi-experimental study conducted in Japan demonstrated that by using gamified activities, learners significantly improved the production of English /r/ and // segments (pronunciation) and facilitated course management. (Barcomb & Cardoso, 2020). Similarly, a study by Castelo (2023) revealed a relevant improvement in learners' pronunciation when incorporating technological gamification strategies.

Enhancing confidence when speaking English:

Some studies have discovered that gamification helps learners to have better control of anxiety while boosting their confidence when speaking English, demonstrating the advantages of the use of gamified activities. For example, there is specific research that investigated how gamification affects high school students, in which it was reported that a significant 90% increase in their confidence when using oral communication (Ndayishimiye et al., 2024).

Similarly, to demonstrate the beneficial effects of gamification on learners' confidence, a further study found that 74.7% of students felt more confident about using their speaking skills after playing EFL games in the classroom (Huseinović, 2023)

Benefits: a context for authentic language use, cultural immersion, and creativity

In addition to all the benefits of gamification, this educational practice also helps to immerse the student in the cultural field of the language learned by

relating it to the topics seen in class and situated through dynamics, games, and images to promote creativity, critical thinking, and autonomy of students through playful activities (Caraballo, 2023).

Characteristics of Gamification: collaborative and interactive learning

Because gamification is to interactively implement games to enhance the practice of teaching and learning, 3 characteristics can be presented in this technique

Dynamics: These are the most general perspectives that govern practice, they are usually directly related to the motivations and requirements of the learner

- Restrictions.
- Emotions.
- Narrative.
- Progression.
- Relations.

Components: They are the most representative aspects of the game that guide the dynamics and mechanics. Among them, we find: achievements, stages, levels, prizes, winners, teams, etc.

Mechanical: Mechanics are identified as the set of rules that engage the user and motivate him to continue participating (UPM, 2020).

- Challenges.
- Opportunities.
- Competence.
- Cooperation.
- Rewards.

- Feedback.
- Winners.

Types of Gamification

The characteristics of gamification can be differentiated depending on the environment where the gamification takes place (UPM, 2020).

The following table points out information about the basic types of gamification, based on a gamification guide for educational purposes, issued by the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM) in the year 2020.

<i>Types of Gamification</i>	<i>Detail</i>	<i>Example</i>
<i>Plugged Gamification</i>	Recreational activities developed in virtual environments or with the support of technologies	Mobile apps, interactive games, interactive gaming platforms, virtual meeting rooms
<i>Unplugged Gamification</i>	Recreational activities developed in environments outside of virtuality.	Teaching material, posters, board games, cards, escape rooms, competitions are used recurrently

Table 1: Types of Gamification. Elaborated by the author

Integration Gamification into EFL Classrooms

Steps for incorporating Gamification into lesson plans

To gamify the classroom and relevant content in EFL, six essential phases are recognized (Molina et al., 2021).

- Set goals.
- To define attitudes and aptitudes of students.
- Description of the participants or players.
- Design the sequence of activities and the time allocated to each one.
- Design entertaining study strategies or techniques according to the group of students.

- Select and implement the appropriate set of tools for the level and available educational space.

Examples from case studies and research

Despite the relevance and frequency with which this teaching strategy is used, there is no diversity of examples of the integration of gamification in the classroom; however, a key example of this activity is the "Guess Who" game that is used in classrooms in Mexico to make it easier to learn and remember history. Overall, it includes all language skills to be mastered, especially oral communication skills (Verdín, 2022).

In the study "*The use of gamification to improve writing and foreign language learning in primary education*"; the implementation of gamification in virtual environments to increase language skills in second languages is critical.

The group that was studied involved students in the fifth grade of primary school. They demonstrated improvements in their oral production skills and a higher motivation towards language learning, likewise, research of the same line yields results aligned with the progress of skills and interest in teaching (Santos, 2023).

In the "*Research Gamification of English teaching: a didactic proposal for primary education*", the implementation of gamification was traced from scratch, creating the design, resources, and didactic materials. Each resource was adapted to the learning needs of the students, foreseeing the correct playful qualities. After the design stage, it was possible to insert the didactic station in the classroom where the educational gamified activities were carried out benefiting the study group with the use of technologies, collaboration, and the improvement of English language skills and becoming an educational success story. In addition, student participation was successful and showcased when practicing communicative practices in the EFL class (Moreno & Orcera, 2024).

Complementary Teaching Materials and Resources

Limitations of Current Textbooks

The teaching of the foreign language has several difficulties throughout instruction; however, textbooks, which are usually a support in the classroom, can also represent a significant disadvantage due to the continuous updating of trends, methodologies and teachings; The presence of English books in the classroom can often result in a methodological immobility that satisfies the teaching of reading comprehension of the language, but leaves deficiencies in the oral skills of the students (Correa, 2023).

Analysis of gaps in addressing speaking skills.

The projection or oral skill of the language is one of the skills that represents the most problems when developing, several studies find that students of the language have gaps in this skill due to various circumstances, such as the infrequency of the use of the language, misguided instructions, lack of motivation, an environment that does not benefit concentration or low vocabulary knowledge and finally, the lack of consolidation or familiarity they feel with the foreign language (Morales & Morales, 2022)

Need for Additional Materials

Importance of diversifying classroom resources

Teaching English is not easy to teach or understand, it entails highly theoretical aspects that are not complemented as the mother tongue. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the leading figure in the classroom can use different techniques and didactic elements to make a more active presentation and participation that authentically benefits communication (Torres & Estrella, 2022).

Examples of complementary materials for speaking practice

- Digital resources: Digital tools contribute significantly to the expansion of the student's vocabulary and actively encourage tutor-student interaction (Bernedo & Murillo, 2022).

- **Audiovisual Material:** Tools such as videos, movies, podcasts, etc., reinforce the instruction-learning relationship through sounds and visuals that cause the student a sense of recognition and maintain the stimulus of attention and comprehension in children (Cárcamo & Centeno, 2022).
- **Role-Playing:** Role-playing is a pedagogical tool that recreates everyday situations or cases where students use vocabulary and tests language fluency (Purizaca et al., 2024).
- **Board games:** Board games help to increase the number of times the oral production of the language is used daily in class, improving their language skills and strategic skills day by day (Belmonte et al., 2022).

Role of Teacher-Created Materials

The use of didactic materials in foreign language instruction is characterized by being an essential aspect when selecting effective strategies to present in the classroom in order to liven up and facilitate the learning process, but it is necessary to emphasize the importance of the teacher and the study group being involved first-hand with the elaboration and design of the educational resources to be used, thus providing didactic results according to the reality of the level of study, identifying content or aspects to be reinforced or enriched (Urbano & Rodríguez, 2018).

Gamification links the elements of the game to promote interactive learning among students, when teachers incorporate gamification into the practices, the student must be previously encouraged to engage with the class and must assume the role of trainer and provide the students with the selected resources so that the group can talk, Discuss and participate in the acquisition of knowledge (Lema et al., 2024).

Theoretical Foundations

Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky)

Vygotsky maintained that language skills and learning are developed in two ways, that is, children absorb words and speech first from what they hear in their daily listening and socio-cultural environment, after this cognitive maturation and language come together to govern a verbal mode supported by the culture itself; using language social interaction promotes communication (Magallanes et al., 2021).

In other words, the Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky highlighted the essential relationship between the socio-cultural circle and the preparation of people's criteria and learning. Vygotsky indicates that social connection is the key and a decisive element in the development of the intellect of the human being, although this information was published in the twentieth century, it was not until the sixties that it began to be present in the West (Junco et al., 2024).

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative language teaching (CLT) is the set of rules and foundations to give way to language teaching using classroom activities to facilitate the progress of communicative skills. The techniques of language teaching are: real communication in everyday life, allowing mistakes, creating spaces to improve oral production, learning the 4 criteria of the language, and ensuring that the student is able to identify grammatical rules (Barboza et al., 2022).

Communicative language teaching (CLT) has currently revolutionized the pedagogical field in language teaching, emphasizing fluency, assertive and meaningful communication ahead of common training that focuses primarily on grammatical criteria (Urgilés et al., 2024).

Game-Based Learning Theory

Game-based learning defines the use of games as instruments of support, comprehension or assessment, unlike gamification which is based on inserting game mechanics and didactic dynamics in educational lessons; however, both are based on gamification to encourage student interest. Although the Theory

of Learning Based on the Construction of Games is still little explored, it has been possible to implement it in the educational field, which has made it possible to compile literature that explains that teaching based on theory is entertaining, lively in cooperation with active and participatory students (Puig, 2024).

Several authors indicate that experiential learning subjects invite the student to direct interaction with the subject, capturing topics during the learning process within their daily lives. The experiential mode of education is considered essential in the training of the student to be able to devise active and entertaining enriched environments (Espinar & Viguera, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

The methodological chapter of this research is mainly based on information about the difficulties seventh-grade EFL students go through when developing speaking skills at a school in Duran. These students, especially those who are in the basic level of English, struggle with oral communication skills regardless of years of studying the language. This work investigates creative teaching approaches for the development of speaking skills, specifically the implementation of gamification techniques and extra material to tackle the situation mentioned. This study also intends to investigate how different strategies can encourage students to apply while improving their speaking skills in a dynamic learning environment.

This project is a mixed methods type of research. It explores qualitative and quantitative data that relates to how EFL students carry out their learning process when developing their English-speaking skills. According to Molina-Azorin (2016), “mixed methods research is the combination and integration of qualitative and quantitative methods in the same study” (p.37). This approach benefits anyone interested in this specific topic, as it captures not only numerical data but also the personal experiences of EFL students, helping to address the research questions in the project. Additionally, Dawadi et al. (2021) stated that using mixed-method research (MMR) can provide deeper insights into research phenomena than using just one single method. As it has more elements that might be taken into consideration for the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods.

In other words, the use of MMR can leverage the strength of both methods, helping understand key findings and addressing the objectives of a project with both depth and breadth (Enosh et al., 2014). This way, this project can be effectively carried out to answer and tackle the EFL issue shown by the language learners.

Moreover, this study is descriptive. It points out the details of the issues EFL seventh-grade students are going through when practicing oral communication in their English class. According to Siedlecki (2020), descriptive research is an investigation that describes individuals, conditions, or circumstances by

examining them in their natural environments. For example, this study monitors and records the speaking difficulties students encounter without changing the learning environment. Another study stated that descriptive research is widely applied in different fields, especially in second-language teaching and learning (Nassaji, 2015). The use of a descriptive research structure has been increasingly common in the educational field because it enables teachers to use class observations from the real world. Based on this, educators can modify their teaching strategies to better support and effectively enhance students' learning outcomes.

By using the information gathered, it was possible to understand and explore the details of why the students have problems developing EFL speaking skills. Therefore, the study follows an inductive approach, using class observations and surveys to identify the struggles of the language. Blackstone (2012) explains that the use of an inductive approach starts with a set of observations and from those specific experiences goes to a broader set of hypotheses. In other words, when an inductive approach is applied in research, the investigator must have data that can later help explain the causes of the observed patterns and provide potential solutions for the matter of the investigation. Furthermore, according to Azungah (2018), the inductive approach “involves working exclusively from the participant experiences that drive the analysis entirely” (p.391). This viewpoint emphasizes the importance of analyzing the experience of the participants to represent their challenges and perspectives. By applying this approach, it provides an understanding of the difficulties the seventh-grade EFL students face, when practicing speaking skills.

Description of the target population

A population in research is defined as “the complete set of individuals or items under observation” (Hossan et al., 2023). The chosen population for this research consists of seventh-grade learners from a private school located in the city of Durán, Ecuador. At the beginning of the school year, a placement test was taken by the students from fifth, sixth, and seventh grade to evaluate

their English proficiency. Based on the results of this test, the school divides the students into three levels: basic, intermediate, and advanced.

This research focuses on the student population that is placed at the basic level. These learners are between 11 and 13 years of age and are in their last year of primary school. They are going through considerable challenges in acquiring and developing oral communication skills, this matter is the main focus of the research.

In order to address the needs of this group, the entire 34 seventh-grade basic-level students were included in this study. Therefore, no sample was calculated to implement the research instruments as this investigation analyzed all the students. By including the whole population in the investigation, the possible errors from sample bias will be avoided. As stated by Bhardwaj (2019), “the main disadvantage of the sampling is chances of bias” (p.158). Additionally, the use of this method may show validity on the further conclusion of this study.

Research instruments

The research tools used in this study were carefully selected to gather reliable information on the development of EFL speaking skills. Each tool was selected to provide comprehensive data to understand the learning situation. This study used a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods and tools. Because of this, the process of gathering information was complete and ensured both numerical and contextual data. The tools that were applied for this research were the following:

Survey: As stated by Glasow (2005) in *Fundamentals of Survey Research Methodology*, surveys are a data collection tool mainly used to gather information from a sample of individuals.

This tool also helps gather information that lets the researcher answer research questions and reach the objectives of a project. According to Groves et al. (2011), surveys allow the researcher to gather data that can help answer the research questions of an investigation.

This instrument was applied in two different scenarios. The first one targeted students, aiming to understand their habits, ideas, and preferences regarding the use of their speaking skills. The survey for the students is an adaptation of the one created by Tuan & Mai (2015) in their research paper, “*Factors Affecting Students’ Speaking Performance at Le Thanh Hien High School*”, published in the “*Asian Journal of Educational Research*”.

This adaptation allowed the survey to connect with the context and objectives of the present study; however, the essence of the instrument was preserved. The data that it provided pointed out information of the learners’ needs when developing oral communication skills.

The second survey focused on the teacher, aiming to identify her opinion and teaching methods. It also helped obtain observations from the teacher regarding the students’ speaking skills. This survey was also adapted from the one developed by Solcova (2011) in their master’s thesis, “*English Language and Literature and Teaching English Language and Literature for Secondary Schools*”. To align the instrument with the circumstances of this study, modifications were made to it.

Both student and teacher surveys were initially created using Microsoft Word. However, once the teacher survey was conducted, this was transferred to Google Forms for digital administration. This transition allowed the teacher to complete the survey using the technological tool, facilitating easier data collection and ensuring efficient analysis through the visual charts provided by Google Forms.

Structured Observation Checklist: According to Hong et al. (2020), a structured observation checklist is a methodological tool used for assessing instructional strategies and student participation in a classroom.

Through this instrument, it was possible to gather information about how the learning process of the students was carried out when practicing English speaking and how often students had the opportunity to express their ideas through oral communication.

The checklist that was used, was an adaptation from one applied in a study done by Mahmoud M. S. Abdallah (2012) called “*EFL Teacher Evaluation/ Observation Checklist*”, which is based on a rating scale to assess the teaching performance when conducting an English class.

The adaptation of the tool was based on parameters that help collect information about the development of speaking skills of students in an EFL class. This checklist was created by using Microsoft Word and later printed to apply it in the classroom.

Finally, it is important to say that the use of structured observation checklists in the educational field is essential for capturing the complex interaction between teachers and students (Farah & Chandler, 2018). Since improving the teaching and learning process requires measurement and evaluation of effective teaching, structured observations serve as a valuable tool for evaluating teaching practices

Unstructured Observation Notes: Other information was also gathered during another class observation that was carried out for this research to obtain more details on the matter. According to Fetters & Rubinstein (2019), data collected through the use of unstructured observations involves the researcher’s descriptive language, to describe the phenomena while focusing on the research questions.

This method was essential as it complemented the structured observation checklist. It also offers comprehension of the attitudes and learning process of the students. Additionally, data that comes from an observation technique, can provide continuous analysis of a situation and information on non-verbal behavior and how participants interact with each other in their natural environment (Cohen et al., 2018).

The application of these tools guaranteed an effective understanding of elements affecting seventh graders’ development of EFL speaking skills.

Data collection procedures

In order to apply the research instruments for adding up information that can help this project, a formal request was issued to the school Director asking for permission to carry out the investigation at the school premises. The request was approved.

The student survey was applied face-to-face for 10 minutes thanks to the teacher, ensuring minimal disruption to the students' regular instruction schedule. The author of this study conducted this survey; however, the teacher was in the classroom to maintain order and provide clarification if needed. On the other hand, the teacher survey was performed digitally in Google Forms, giving flexibility and time stress-free for the participant to submit her responses.

Finally, the data provided by classroom observations (structured and unstructured) was also collected in person in the designated classroom of basic-level proficiency students, using structured checklists and unstructured notes without the students noticing it. These observations occurred twice a week from November until mid-December for 3 school hours, aligning with the students' schedule of six school hours per week (each lasting 40 minutes). Additionally, these observation tools aimed to collect detailed information on teaching practices and students' oral communication skills.

This methodological approach ensured that the research tools were used efficiently and in accordance with the goals of the study. Using mixed-method instruments and careful planning of data collection, the research was able to gather effective and applicable information.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis began with the organization of the data provided by the research instruments, which were designed based on previous studies. The collected responses were carefully compiled. The data was then transferred to Google Forms, which generated visual representations of the results in the form of statistical charts.

The teacher survey was done by Google Forms. The data provided by the English teacher was automatically stored for processing. The structured observations checklist was taken into the classroom to gather data about the students' speaking skills, classroom dynamics, and teaching strategies. The data was analyzed.

In contrast, the unstructured observation notes were written by hand, capturing specific classroom situations and non-verbal behaviors that were not mentioned in the structured observation checklist. The results could offer more information about the students' learning process when developing oral communication.

Adapted Survey for Students

All of the questions in the instrument are in Spanish. This helped the students answer them without any trouble. This also allowed the instrument to provide accurate results. The first question was about the student's gender.

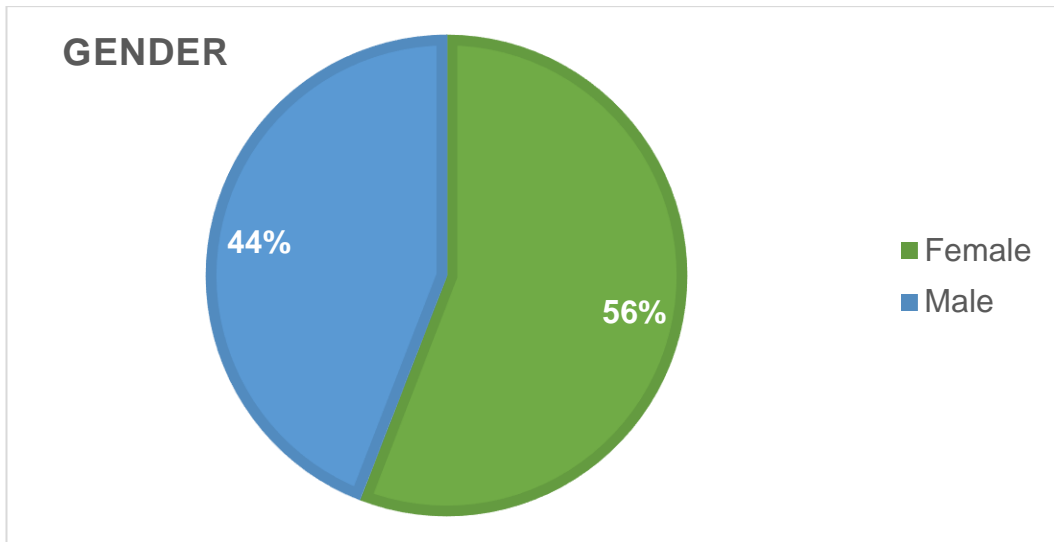


Figure 1: Gender of Students. Elaborated by the author

The student body gender was divided into 15 males (44.12%) and 19 females (55.88%), having a total of 34 participants. The higher number represents the number of female students in the class, meaning that there are more girls than boys.

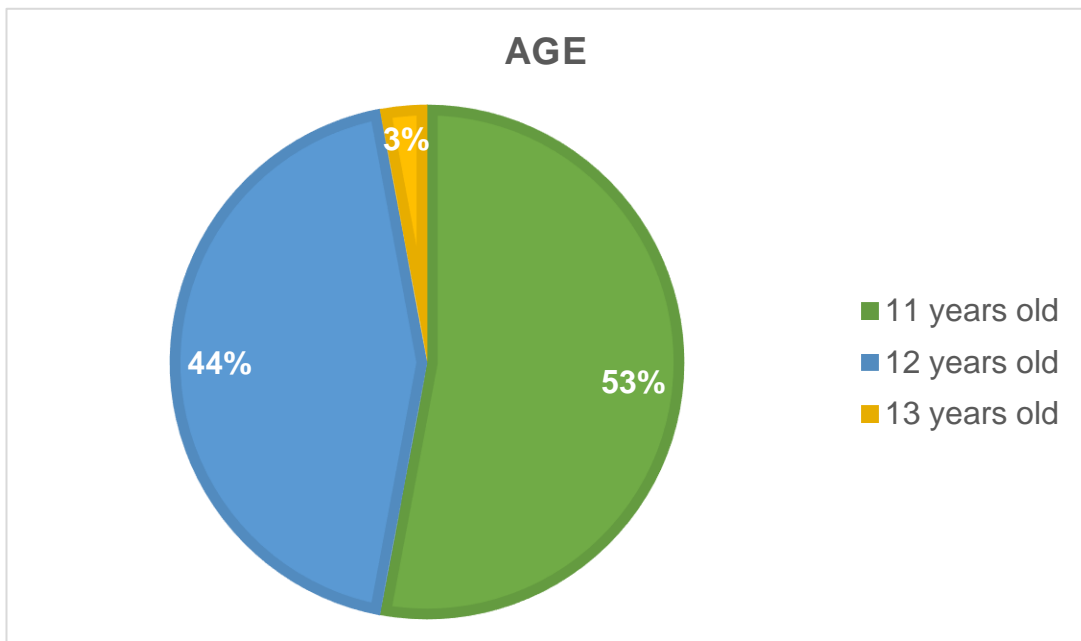


Figure 2: Age of Students. Elaborated by the author

The results about the age of the learners reveal a predominance of 11-year-old students, with 18 participants (52.94%), followed by 12-year-old students, comprising 15 respondents (44.12%) and only one participant (2.94%) is 13 years old. When developing EFL skills for students between the ages shown

in the results, it should be noted that young learners particularly respond to engaging and interactive learning methods, such as gamification (Luu, 2021).

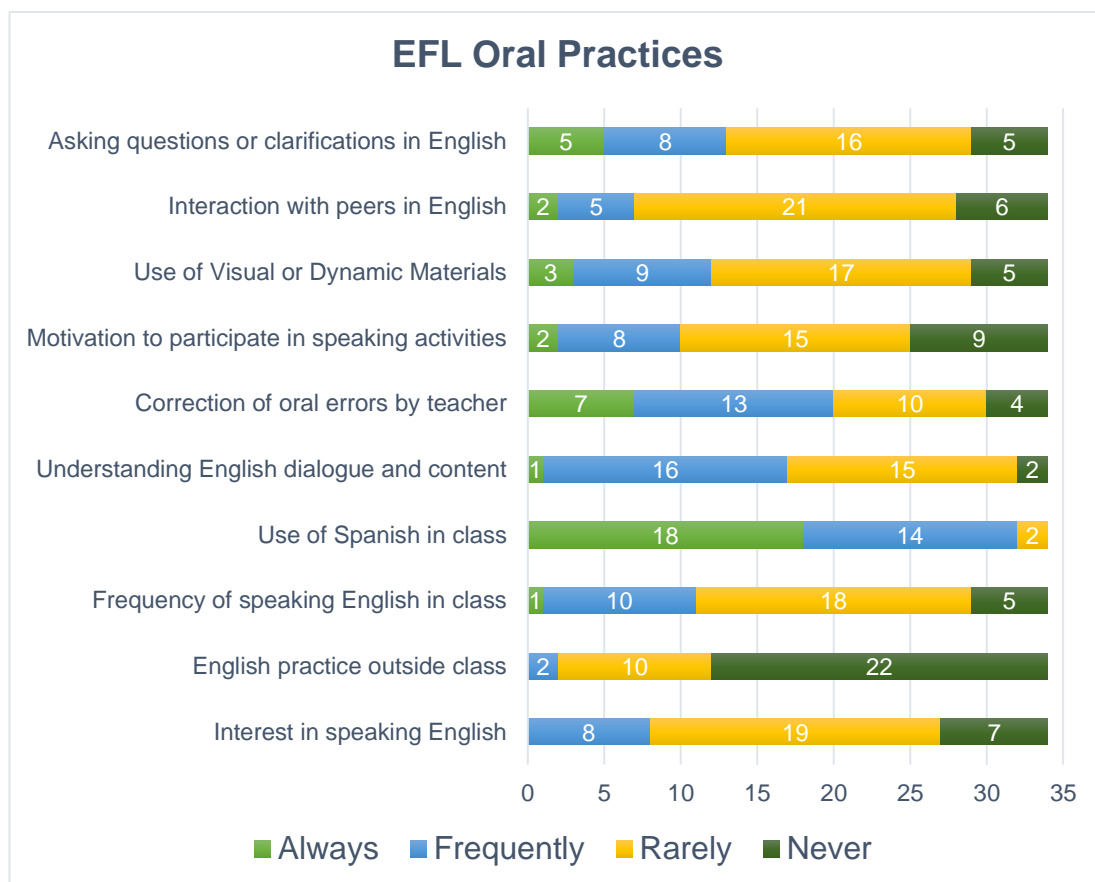


Figure 3: EFL Oral Practices. Elaborated by the author

The chart above shows results from closed-ended questions in which students indicate their level of agreement or frequency of behavior, related to the use of **EFL oral skills**, using predefined options.

This graph displays several significant trends regarding the speaking practices and perceptions of these seventh-grade students in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. The most important aspect shown in the graph is that a substantial portion of students demonstrated a lack of enthusiasm for speaking English; 26 out of 34 EFL learners indicated that they rarely or never enjoy speaking the language. Hence, lack of motivation can be one of the elements that make developing oral communication difficult for these students.

Another issue is the overuse of Spanish in the EFL class. This should be minimized; to promote more exposure to English however, data reveals that not using Spanish in the EFL class is a situation that does not happen. The

use of Spanish on behalf of the EFL teacher is something that students heavily rely on during lessons, with 32 students reporting frequent use of the native language. Furthermore, the graph highlights that most students (26 out of 34) rarely or never interact with their peers in English, indicating minimal opportunities for peer interaction in the target language.

Regarding the correction of oral mistakes, there are different views: While 14 students stated that it rarely or never happens, the remaining learners marked that the teacher “always and frequently” corrects their spoken mistakes. The use of regular feedback is essential as this can promote pronunciation and confidence among students.

Another trend that should be considered is the use of visuals and dynamic materials. When analyzing the data, 17 students indicated that the teacher rarely incorporates these types of material in the lessons.

In summary, the results indicate some obstacles that these seventh-grade learners must overcome to improve their oral communication skills and general language development.

Adapted Teacher Survey

Unlike the student survey, the teacher survey was written in English. This survey aimed to explore the educator's perspective on teaching speaking skills in the EFL classroom. The findings of the survey offer valuable information about the diverse difficulties teachers meet, the methods used in the classroom, and the general opinion on fostering students' oral communication skills.

Some survey questions focus on collecting background information about the educator such as prior teaching experience and opinion on the level of difficulty of teaching and practicing speaking skills.

Questions	Teacher's answer
<i>How many years of experience in teaching English do you have?</i>	More than 15 years
<i>Is teaching and practicing speaking skills difficult?</i>	Yes, it is very difficult

Table 2: Teacher's Background Information. Elaborated by the author

The teacher's answers show that despite years of experience, teaching oral communication is still quite difficult. Despite teaching for more than 15 years, she has faced several challenges when teaching EFL. This continues to raise concerns about students' acquisition of EFL speaking abilities.

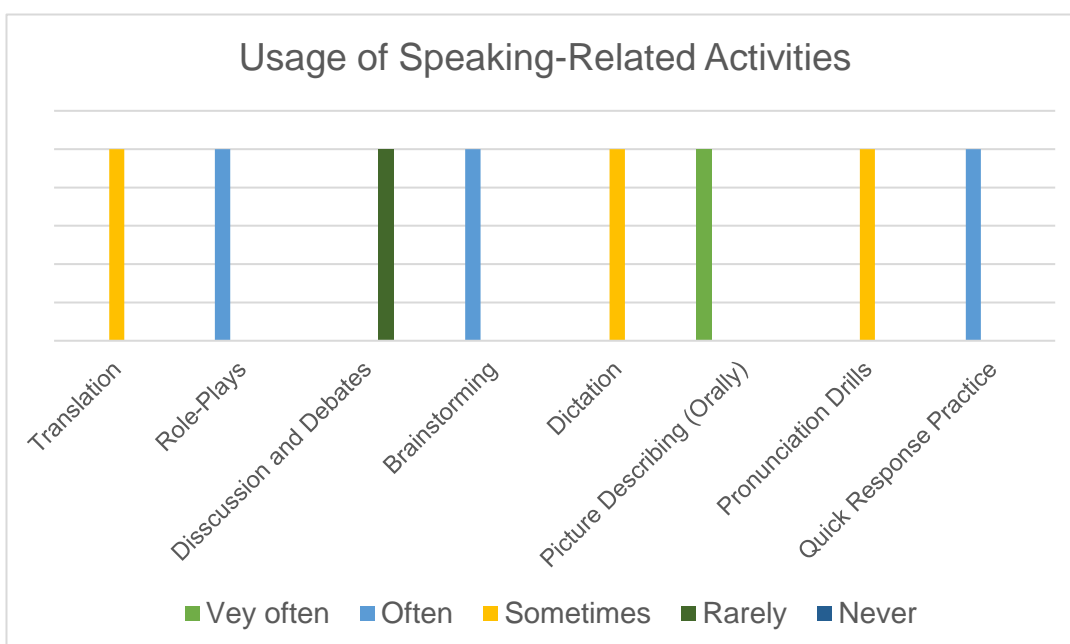


Figure 4: Usage of Speaking-Related Activities. Elaborated by the author

This question and chart are about the frequency of different speaking-related activities that the teacher uses in the classroom. This graph shows some patterns in the frequency of use of different activities employed by the teacher in class, to help students practice their English speaking skills. The fact that role-playing activities, brainstorming, and quick responses are marked as "often" in the survey, indicates that the teacher tries to use these activities to provide interactive lessons. Additionally, the teacher chose "picture describing

(orally)” as the recurring activity in the classroom; however, this data does not match the responses of the students in the previous survey. By analyzing the previous survey, most of these students indicated that they rarely or never use English in class, which means that they do not have enough opportunities or activities to practice their speaking.

On the other hand, activities like debates and discussions are rated as “rarely”, due to the complexity of the activities. Debates and discussions are most frequently used with older students who have a greater degree of fluency and confidence in speaking to successfully convey their ideas (Brown N. A., 2009).

Translation, dictation, and pronunciation drills are marked as “sometimes”, suggesting that while they are occasionally utilized, they are not essential to the teacher's EFL lessons. Nevertheless, the use of pronunciation drills is one of the most used techniques when developing a foreign language.

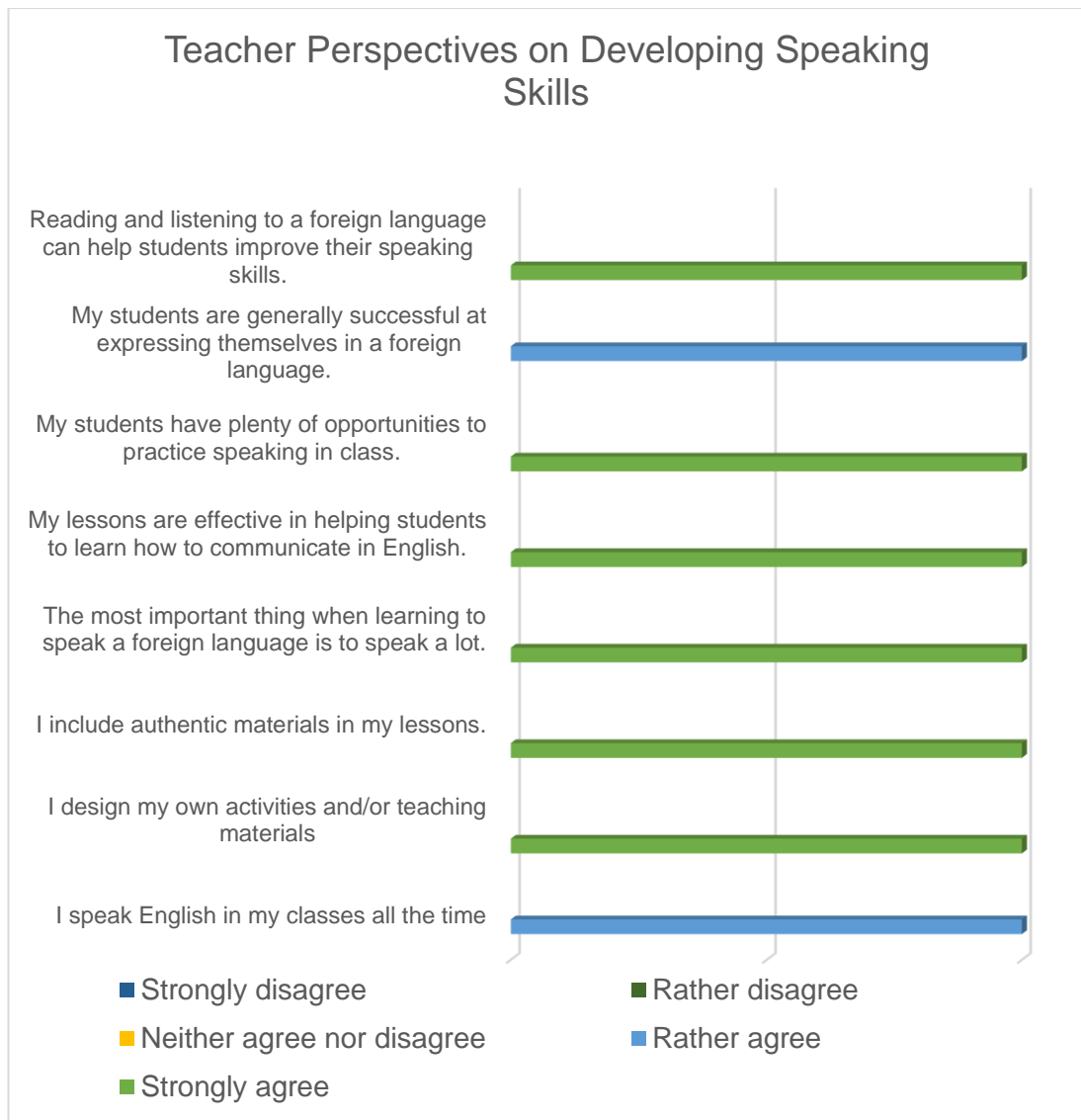


Figure 5: Teacher Perspectives on Developing Speaking Skills. Elaborated by the author

This graph shows data analysis of the insights or perspectives of the seventh-grade teacher when enhancing EFL oral skills in the classroom. The following analysis examines the answers to each statement:

I speak English in my classes all the time:

The educator marked the “Rather agree” option, which indicates that she frequently uses English in the class with occasional instances where Spanish is used; however, this answer does not match the observation notes taken by the researcher of this project.

I design my own activities and/or teaching materials:

Regarding the creation of teaching materials, the teacher ensured that she strongly agreed with the statement. This indicates that the educator has the initiative to modify the activities from the book or other resources to meet the specific needs of students.

I include authentic materials in my lessons:

For this statement, the teacher also indicated that the use of authentic material in the classroom is commonly applied to the learners. However, when analyzing the data provided by the student survey, the majority of respondents indicated that the teacher rarely uses visual and dynamic elements.

The most important thing when learning oral skills in a foreign language is speaking it.

When practicing oral skills to master the language, the teacher strongly agreed with the prompt above. This highlights the belief that frequent speaking practices are crucial for developing students' proficiency. Nevertheless, the collected data from the students' survey emphasized that most of the time, students do not use the language. This can be reaffirmed by the observation notes taken throughout this research.

My lessons are effective in helping students learn how to communicate in English

My students have plenty of opportunities to practice speaking in class.

As both statements are related, they were marked as "strongly agree." The teacher emphasized the importance of creating an environment where learners could practice and obtain confidence. However, as mentioned before, the data provided by the students' survey showed another perspective. This highlighted that students do not have enough opportunities to use the language. Additionally, the data provided by other research instruments applied in this project pointed out that learners struggle with developing speaking skills, which creates a disparity between the teacher's perspective and the experience the students go through.

Reading and listening to a foreign language can help students improve their speaking skills.

From the teacher's perspective, the use of receptive skills can also be applied to develop oral communication skills in the learning process.

This idea meets the principle that language skills are interconnected and mutually reinforced (Nan, 2018).

Adapted structured checklist

The data gathered using the adapted structured checklist provides important information about how well the teacher performed in several instructional areas, helping to understand the struggles in acquiring EFL speaking skills among students.

Criteria	Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good
<i>Clear instructions in English.</i>		X			
<i>Effective verbal/nonverbal communication.</i>			X		
<i>Engaging warm-ups.</i>	X				
<i>Varied questioning techniques.</i>			X		
<i>Teaching vocabulary and grammar well.</i>		X			
<i>Efficient task management, especially speaking.</i>		X			
<i>Clear pronunciation.</i>		X			
<i>Engaging tone.</i>			X		
<i>Commands for discipline.</i>				X	
<i>Encouraging speaking.</i>	X				
<i>Positive reinforcement.</i>		X			
<i>Level-appropriate language.</i>			x		

Table 3: Teacher Effectiveness Evaluation Checklist. Elaborated by the author

The analysis highlights specific strengths. The most notable strength of the teacher is that she maintains discipline among the students using effective commands, demonstrating her vast experience in classroom management, however most of the time the teacher uses Spanish to maintain discipline. Another strength is the use of engaging tones. This teacher's ability is implemented to successfully hold students' attention.

Nevertheless, significant weaknesses were also identified. There was a considerable deficit in promoting students' speaking chances. In almost all the observed lessons, the students did not have opportunities to use oral communication as the lessons were based only on written exercises. In the same way, the use of positive oral reinforcement was not widely implemented by the teacher as most of the scale was rated "Poor", indicating limited success in creating a supportive environment. The teacher's pronunciation was another significant issue seen in the class. All the ratings in this area were marked as "Poor", emphasizing the need for improvement.

The use of warm-up techniques was also something close to non-existent because the teacher did not use this type of technique. The only way that she tries to recall information among the students is by asking them about what topics were approached in the previous class. After that, she continued with a new topic. This indicates that there is a critical lack of efficient methods for stimulating and engaging learners at the beginning of lessons.

This analysis provides a better understanding of the way the English lessons are carried out, specifically during oral communication practices with the students.

Unstructured Observation Notes

This observation tool was applied during regular lessons taught by the seventh-grade English teacher (basic level). This tool aimed to identify and observe real-time classroom speaking interactions among the students to gather additional information.

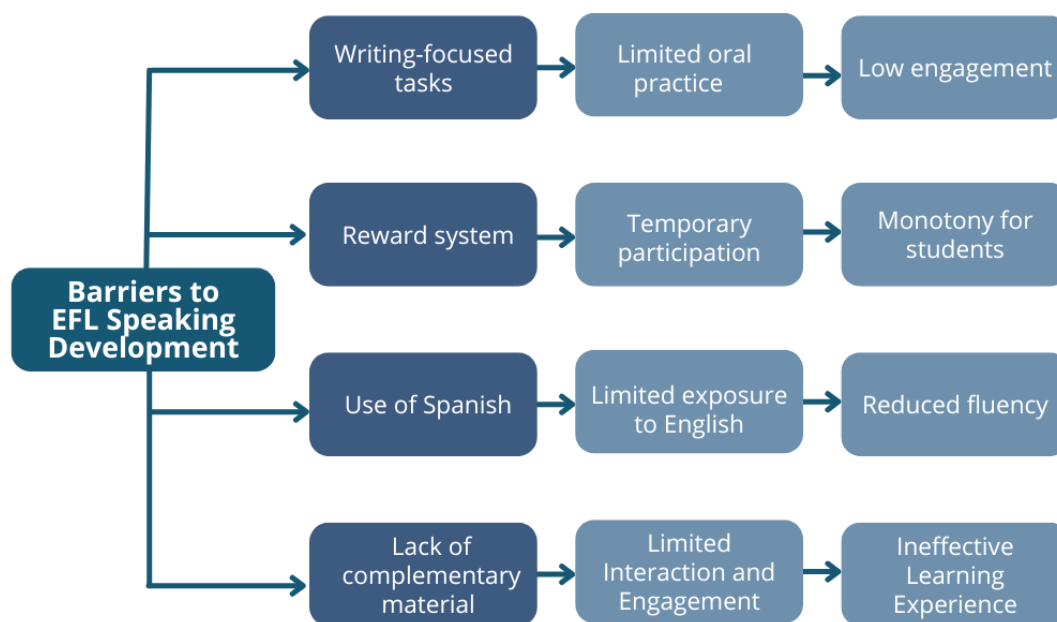


Figure 6: Barriers to EFL Speaking Development. Elaborated by the author

These qualitative observations allowed a clear understanding of the context and helped the analysis of the data. The most relevant observation was the level of student engagement in the EFL lessons. Most students were unmotivated because the majority of activities implemented by the teacher were focused on writing, which provided limited opportunities for oral practice and interactive learning. Students seemed not to enjoy the lessons and often focused on their surroundings instead of the class. However, the teacher attempted to capture their attention by addressing them directly and using commands in Spanish.

The English teacher also used different strategies to engage the students, such as giving clear instructions using both languages (English and Spanish) for better comprehension, as well as providing grade rewards for participation. For instance, the latter strategy was implemented during book tasks. The

teacher assigned specific pages for students to complete. After finishing the exercises on the assigned pages, each student was required to approach the whiteboard and write the correct answers to receive a grade.

In some instances, students made mistakes, prompting the teacher to ask them to reconsider their answers and assist them in reaching the correct one. This activity aimed to reinforce the knowledge of students and provide a means of assessment. However, because the main task was to complete book exercises, this method could have been monotonous for the learners. Furthermore, improving the students' oral communication skills is the main necessity that this approach failed to provide.

Another notable pattern observed was the teacher's frequent use of Spanish. In almost all lessons the teacher used translation to talk with students and often Spanish was the only language used in the classroom. As noted in the analysis of the student survey, more than 75% of students never or rarely speak English among them. This could be a consequence of the lack of exposure to the language during lessons, as well as the limited opportunities to use the language orally. The heavy reliance on another language instead of the target language may unintentionally discourage students from developing fluency in English (Brevik & Rindal, 2020). Eventually, this approach could students to rely only on their mother tongue, making communication in English more difficult.

In addition to these issues, the lack of complementary material is another critical factor. According to the observation notes, the teacher did not use any additional resources to complement the learning process. The resources used by the teacher were the book, the notebook, and extra exercises provided by the book. This can be confirmed by noticing that it reduces the interaction among students and fails to address different learning styles, as it focuses on more general learning instruction. The use of different activities might better engage students to have effective learning experiences.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information found in this research, it was identified that the students are going through various challenges in their learning process when practicing EFL speaking. These challenges that the students go through are not related with their background knowledge regarding EFL speaking.

After going through the related literature and accurate data analysis, this project concludes that:

- According to the situation showcased in the research results, where the use of Spanish is excessive during EFL classes, and English is practically absent, it could be said that it is difficult for the learners to develop their speaking skills correctly. The information obtained by the literature connected to the development of speaking skills points out that constant use of English within the classroom is crucial for developing EFL language skills, especially speaking skills. This allows the student to be immersed in the language and have opportunities to use their oral skills in real-life situations, as this increases their exposure to English and helps them build fluency
- Although the teacher skillfully used engaging tones and classroom management strategies, it was seen that one of the main challenges these students faced when developing their oral skills, was the lack of integration of visual and interactive tools. This can also be combined with missing enthusiasm for speaking English. This information was evidenced when using observation techniques.
- Gamification is an option that can significantly contribute to students' speaking skills, as they motivate them to use collaborative learning, which enhances their pronunciation, fluency and confidence. This is shown through secondary information gathered during the development

of this research project and pointed out in the literature review of this document.

- During the observation techniques carried out in the classroom, little to no type of EFL speaking practices were identified. Most of the time, the teacher implemented exercises related to completing sentences and choosing correct answers in writing exercises, provided by the book. Heavily relying on written tasks can hinder the development of oral skills, as they offer few chances to practice speaking.

Although writing skills are useful for improving grammar and vocabulary, they do not encourage active language use in conversational situations. When carrying out the observation technique, it was seen that the English classes relied a lot on tasks related to writing skills but not speaking skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Upon obtaining the research findings, some recommendations are offered to develop the speaking skills of these students and address their specific needs.

- The collected data and the conclusions of this research project suggest a need to incorporate engaging and interactive teaching resources to support the process of acquiring the language, specifically when developing speaking skills for seventh graders. In this way, the application of gamification in the learning environment is highly recommended, as it encourages spontaneous speaking while making learning engaging and fun. This approach promotes motivation and engagement in the class by aligning with the age and interests of the students.
- The teacher should provide additional opportunities for students to use oral communication during casual classroom interactions by minimizing the use of Spanish in the EFL class. Although occasional translation can be beneficial, these language learners ought to be encouraged to understand and communicate in English as much as possible.
- The integration of additional visual and didactic tools into the classroom, such as videos, flashcards, and digital resources, is also something that needs to be added to the teaching process. This helps enhance the pronunciation, fluency, and confidence of students when practicing speaking.
- Reducing written tasks and incorporating more speaking-focused activities in the classroom is another recommendation to address the issue that these students have, as it can provide an accurate balance of activities.

- Finally, it is recommended to apply the gamification-based approach proposed in this research, as it has been specifically designed to address the students' needs and significantly improve their speaking skills in English.

PROPOSAL

The findings provided by the research tools offered valuable information that guided the construction of a pedagogical plan for practicing EFL speaking through gamification techniques, to improve seventh-grade students' oral communication skills through interactive methods.

General Data

Project Title:	Speak Up! Gamification Strategies for EFL Success			
Team members:	Ashley Gutierrez			
Main Objective:	To develop and implement seven digital and non-digital gamified activities to enhance speaking proficiency among EFL seventh-grade basic-level students within 3 months.			
Specific Objective:	1. To identify students' specific strengths and weaknesses in their speaking skills.			
	2. To integrate innovative gamified tools that promote speaking skills development in EFL.			
	3. To monitor students' progress after each unit by assessing the impact of using gamified activities.			
	4. To conduct a final evaluation that analyses the effectiveness of the implemented interactive teaching materials.			
Execution time:	Starting:	May 19 th , 2025.	Ending:	August 1 st , 2025.
Evaluation time:	Starting:	August 4 th , 2025.	Ending:	August 8 th , 2025.
Project Description				
This project aims to improve oral skills in EFL for basic-level proficiency students in the seventh grade. This will be accomplished through seven gamified tasks using digital and non-digital resources. These interactive activities are designed to be applied in the classroom, to develop students' speaking skills.				



Execution Matrix						
Objective (number)	Activity	What will be done	Expected Outcomes	Resources	Time	Responsibility
S.O.1	Identification of students' specific strengths and weaknesses in their speaking skills.	Students will take a speaking diagnostic test to help the teacher gain a detailed understanding of areas that need improvement.	Identification of details that need assistance, related to the students' speaking skills (pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computer • Printed paper 	1 session	Teacher
S.O.2	Implementation of gamified tools to enhance speaking skills.	The teacher will incorporate seven gamified activities to encourage student participation and speaking practice.	Students will increase engagement and develop speaking skills.	Seven gamified activities	7 sessions	Teacher
S.O.3	Monitoring students' progress while working with gamified activities.	Students will be tracked after each unit through observation techniques and informal assessments.	Students will improve their pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary use.	Teacher notes (observation sheets)	3 sessions	Teacher
S.O.4	Final evaluations for analyzing the	A final speaking evaluation will	Development of students' speaking skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computer • Printed rubrics 	1 week	Teacher

	effectiveness of interactive teaching materials.	be conducted to assess students' improvement. The teacher will take notes throughout the week to evaluate the effectiveness of gamified activities.	and essential insights into the effectiveness of gamification in the classroom.	• Observation sheets		
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	Strategy	Starts	Ends						
				January	May	June	July	August	
Initiation									
1	Define goals of the proposal	1/6/2025	1/7/2025	■					
2	Conduct further studies	1/8/2025	1/10/2025	■					
3	Start developing the proposal	1/13/2025	1/14/2025		■				
Planning and design									
4	Create different gamified activities	1/14/2025	1/19/2025	■	■				
5	Create the execution matrix	1/20/2025	1/22/2025		■				
6	Describe each activity	1/23/2025	1/26/2025			■	■		
7	Develop budget	1/27/2025	1/29/2025				■		
Execution									
8	Diagnostic test	5/19/2025	5/19/2025						
9	Analyze the result of the test	5/21/2025	5/24/2025			■			
10	Unit 1: Tic Tac Toe Game (digital)	5/28/2025	5/28/2025				■		
11	Unit 1: Mining Box (non-digital)	6/4/2025	6/4/2025					■	
12	Monitor progress	6/9/2025	6/13/2025				■		
13	Unit 2: Jeopardy Game (digital)	6/18/2025	6/18/2025					■	
14	Unit 2: Hot Potato (non-digital)	6/25/2025	6/25/2025						■
15	Monitor progress	6/30/2025	7/4/2025					■	
16	Unit 3: Board Game (digital)	7/9/2025	7/9/2025						■
17	Unit 3: To the supermarket! (non-digital)	7/16/2025	7/16/2025						■
18	Monitor progress	7/21/2025	7/25/2025						■
19	Extra: Map Quest (non-digital)	7/28/2025	7/28/2025						■
Evaluation									
20	Project Assessment	8/4/2025	8/8/2025						■

Activities

Activity #1: Tic Tac Toe Game (digital)	
Objective	To enhance students' speaking fluency and reinforce vocabulary and grammar related to camping.
Resources	Computer Interactive projector
Link to the activity	https://shorturl.at/gjsnv
<p>Description:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Students will be divided into 2 groups. Each group will be assigned a token. The teacher will project a 4x4 Tic Tac Toe grid on the whiteboard. Each square will contain a speaking challenge related to the vocabulary and grammar of Unit 1. Groups will take turns choosing a square. To claim a square, a group member must complete the speaking challenge correctly. The first group to match four squares in a row, column, or diagonal, wins the game. 	

Activity #2: Mining Box (non-digital)	
Objective	To develop speaking skills, practice vocabulary related to action verbs and the correct use of verbs in past simple.
Resources	Crafted mining box Action verbs and boom flashcards
Description:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students will be divided into 5 groups. 2. One member of the group will pick a card from the box filled with action verbs and boom cards. 3. They will perform the action verb on the card while their team guesses it. 4. After the correct guess, they must transform it into its past simple form for a point. 5. If a "Boom" card is picked, the team loses a point, and their turns end. 6. At the end, the team who has earned the most points will be the winner. 	
	
	

Activity #3: Jeopardy Game (digital)

Objective	To develop students' ability to form complete sentences and express ideas through speaking-based questions across various categories.
Resources	Computer Interactive projector
Link to the activity	https://shorturl.at/KsK3X

Description:

1. Students will be divided into 4 teams.
2. The teacher will project a Jeopardy board with categories and point values.
3. Teams will take turns selecting a category and point value.
5. A team member answers the question or completes the challenge.
6. If the answer is correct, the team earns the points. If not, the other team gets a chance to answer.
7. The game continues until all questions are answered, and the team with the most points wins.

	Vocabulary	Grammar	Who's Better?	Mixed Practice	Fun Facts	What would you rather...?
Team 1 200	100	100	100	100	100	100
Team 2 300	200	200	200	200	200	200
Team 3 0	300	300	300	300	300	300
Team 4 0	400	400	400	400	400	400
	500	500	500	500	500	500

Who is the worst at doing cartwheels: you, your teacher, or your friend?

Activity #4: Hot Potato (non-digital)

Objective

To enhance students' speaking skills by encouraging them to respond to prompts quickly and creatively, while promoting teamwork and active participation in a fun and engaging environment.

Resources

2 Small balls
Printed prompts

Description:

1. Students will be divided into two groups and seated in two circles.
2. Different printed prompts will be placed face-down in the center of each circle.
3. Each group starts passing the "hot potato" (the ball) around while the teacher sings the hot potato song.
4. When the teacher stops singing, the two students holding the ball in each circle will pick a prompt from the center.
5. The two students will take turns responding to the prompt. They will have 10 seconds to do so. If it is an image, the student will create a sentence based on it; however, if the prompt is a question, the student will simply answer it.
6. If the student cannot respond, they will be taken out of the circle and will join the teacher in singing the song.
7. The game ends when there are no more prompts to answer. The team with the most members remaining in the circle will be the declared winner.



Activity #5: Board Game (digital)	
Objective	To improve vocabulary usage and speaking fluency of students while playing an interactive game.
Resources	Computer Interactive projector
Link to the activity	https://shorturl.at/Kzic0
Description:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students will be divided into small groups. 2. The teacher will display a digital board game featuring spaces with speaking prompts and challenges. 3. Each team will choose one token to begin playing the game. 4. Students take turns rolling a virtual dice to move their piece on the board. 5. The student must complete the associated speaking task when landing on a space. They can collaborate with their group, they will no more than 1 minute to respond. If they fail to respond in the limited time, they must return to the initial point. 6. If the token landed in the (!) space and (?) space, they have to take a card respective deck to complete a special challenge or face a penalty. 7. The game ends when all teams reach the finish line, and the group that reaches first wins. 	

Activity #6: To the supermarket! (non-digital)

Objective	To enhance students' speaking skills through real-life vocabulary practice and encourage collaboration.
Resources	Printed refrigerator and shelves Printed shopping lists Printed play money Printed pictures of food items Printed paper with the prices of each food item. Tape

Description:

1. The teacher will attach a printed refrigerator and shelves full of different food items to the whiteboard.
2. Students will be divided into pairs.
3. The teacher will provide each pair with an empty shopping list and printed play money.
4. Each pair must complete the shopping list with ingredients to prepare their favorite international food, which they studied in the previous sessions.
5. The teacher will act as the seller and will have a paper with the prices of each food item.
6. One pair at a time will come to the front and pretend to shop for ingredients to prepare their favorite international dishes.
7. Students will take turns "shopping," choosing items from the list and practicing speaking by describing the items in English. The teacher will inform them of the price as they select each item.
8. Once all items are selected, students will gather their ingredients, count them, and describe what is in their basket. As they are in pairs, each must take turns speaking and describing the items.

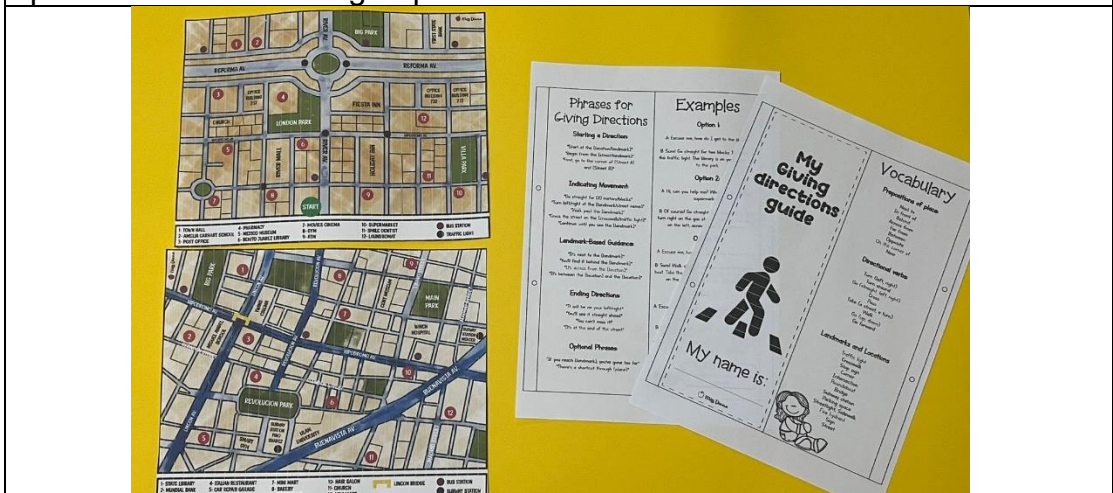


Activity #7: Map Quest (non-digital)

Objective	To develop students' speaking skills by practicing how to give and ask for directions with suitable vocabulary and structures, while promoting teamwork.
Resources	Printed maps Paper sheets of vocabulary and examples for giving directions Pens or pencils Timer

Description:

1. Students will be divided into five groups and given two sheets of paper with vocabulary and examples for giving directions to recall the information and use it if needed.
2. The teacher will give each group a printed map with landmarks and pathways and necessary information to complete the task. There will be two different maps distributed among the 5 groups.
3. Students will have 10 minutes to read all the information, prepare 6 questions for asking directions, and practice with the provided map.
4. Once the time ends, two groups with the same map will come to the front and ask each other questions. Each team member will take turns asking and answering questions about directions (going from point A to point B), using the vocabulary and structures practiced.
5. After both groups have completed their exchanges, they will return to their seats, and the next pair of groups with the same map will take their turn.
6. The activity continues until all groups have had a chance to ask and answer questions with another group.



Integration Levels and Badges

To boost student engagement and motivation in learning a language, this proposal introduces Levels and Badges/Achievements as extra gamification features. These elements are intended to promote a feeling of advancement, and achievement, which can result in enhanced involvement and better speaking abilities in the EFL classroom.

The implementation of a level-based progression system will allow students to monitor their progress using a visual progress bar. It will gradually fill, indicating their movement through different level after completing each gamified activity. This system encourages continuous participation and provides a clear and measurable representation of progress.

To enhance student motivation, badges and achievements will be given according to performance in gamified tasks. These badges act as acknowledgment of achievements. The badges will be attractive and will be allocated according to established criteria, such as Gold Badge (1st place), Silver Badge (2nd place) and Bronze Badge (3rd place).

Resources Used to Develop 7 Gamified Activities

To develop gamified activities, both digital and non-digital resources were utilized. For digital activities, a website called “Flippity” was employed, as it offers several teaching resources that can be adapted to meet the specific needs of students. This platform provides structured templates for different interactive activities to integrate gamification into the learning process.

For the non-digital activities, some teaching materials were acquired from the website “Materiales Didacticos Miss Diana,” with the explicit authorization of the creator, these materials were used. They were adapted to meet the goal of the project and the needs of students. On the other hand, other materials were designed from scratch based on research and pedagogical considerations.

Budget

Name Project	Speak Up! Gamified Activities for EFL Success		
Responsible	Ashley Gutierrez		
Institution	Private institution located in Duran		
Diagnostic phase		UNIT COST	SUBTOTAL
	Equipment		
	Laptop	\$0.00	\$0.00
	Printed documents	\$0.25	\$8.50
	Traveling spendings	\$10.00	\$10.00
Implementation phase	Material Resources		
	<i>Digital Tools & Equipment</i>		
	Computer	\$600.00	\$600.00
	Interactive projector	\$450.00	\$450.00
	<i>Materials for Non-Digital Activities</i>		
	Printed material	\$0.25	\$45.00
	Clear adhesive contact paper	\$2.00	\$4.00
	Decorative poster board sheet	\$2.00	\$2.00
	Reused cardboard box	\$0.00	\$0.00
	Markers	\$1.25	\$3.75
	Printed play Money	\$0.25	\$4.25
	Tape	\$0.50	\$0.50
	Timer	\$2.50	\$2.50
	Glue	\$2.00	\$2.00
	Craft foam sheets Roll	\$1.00	\$3.00
	Ball	\$1.00	\$2.00
	Hot glue gun	\$4.00	\$4.00
	Hot glue stick	\$0.10	\$1.20
Evaluation phase	Material Resources		
	Laptop	\$0.00	\$0.00
	Printed paper	\$0.25	\$8.50
	Subtotal	\$1,077.35	\$1,151.20
	Contingency reserves	5%	\$157.56
		TOTAL	\$1,308.76

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APPENDICES

Certificado de Solicitud

Duran, 25 de noviembre de 2024
Lcda. Carmen Ojeda León, MSC.
Directora
Unidad Educativa Federico Gonzalez Suarez

Yo, ASHLEY MARIELA GUTIERREZ ÁLAVA, con cédula de identidad 0940525934, como estudiante de la Universidad Católica Santiago de Guayaquil, solicito amablemente su autorización para realizar observaciones y encuestas a los estudiantes y al profesor(a) de 7mo de Básica de la Unidad Educativa Federico González Suárez, en el marco de mi proyecto de investigación titulado: **"Development of EFL Speaking Skills through Gamification in a Seventh-Grade Classroom in a School in the City of Duran, School Year 2024-2025."**

El propósito de esta investigación es identificar necesidades y estrategias que permitan mejorar las habilidades de expresión oral en inglés de los estudiantes de la institución. Las actividades a realizar están diseñadas bajo principios éticos, garantizando la confidencialidad de la información recabada y el respeto hacia los estudiantes y su entorno educativo.

Agradezco de antemano su atención y quedo a la espera de una respuesta favorable.

Saludos cordiales,


Ashley Gutierrez-Alava


Lcda. Carmen Ojeda León, MSC.


Universidad Católica de Santo Domingo de Guayaquil
FACULTAD DE ARTES Y HUMANIDADES

Lcda. Stanley J. Gonzalez U. M. Ed.
DIRECTOR CARRERA PEDAGOGIA EN INGLÉS

Observation Checklist

Date: _____ Hours of class: _____

Specific Teaching Aspects/ Skills	Rating Scale					Comments (if necessary)
	Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	
Teacher's giving of instructions (e.g., giving clear instructions before going through an activity; making sure that all learners understand exactly what they are required to do) using English.						
Teacher's use of both verbal and nonverbal communication appropriately.						
Using appropriate warm-up techniques/activities that stimulate and engage learners at the beginning of the lesson.						
Using various questioning and answering techniques.						
Presenting new language items (i.e. vocabulary and grammar) effectively and properly.						
Dealing with the various types of language-learning activities/tasks within the lesson, especially speaking						

activities efficiently and properly.						
The teacher speaks clearly, with proper pronunciation, making sure all students can understand instructions, explanations, and discussions based on student's proficiency						
Teacher uses engaging tones to capture students' attention.						
Teacher uses phrases and commands for directing activities and maintaining discipline.						
Teacher encourages the use of oral communication in the classroom.						
Teacher uses oral positive reinforcement to foster a supportive environment.						
Teacher uses suitable spoken English in the class, according to the level of proficiency of students.						

Teacher Adapted Survey

Survey Retrieved from Master's thesis: English Language and Literature and Teaching English Language and Literature for Secondary Schools (Solcova, 2011)

Do you currently work as an English teacher?

- yes
 no

How many years of experience in teaching English do you have?

- less than 2 years
 2 - 5 years
 6 - 10 years
 11 - 15 years
 more than 15 years

Is teaching and practicing speaking skills a difficult thing to do at school?

- Yes, very difficult.
 Yes, somewhat difficult.
 No, it's OK.

Other:

How often do your students practice English through the following activities? Rating: 1 = very often, 2= often, 3= sometimes, 4= rarely, 5 = never.						
English practices	1	2	3	4	5	I don't know what this category stands for
Translation						
Role plays						
Discussions and debates						
Brainstorming						
Dictation						
picture describing (orally)						
Pronunciation Drills						

Do you agree with the following statements?					
Statements	Strongly agree	Rather agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Rather disagree	Strongly disagree
I speak English in my classes all the time.					
I design my own activities and/or teaching materials					
I include authentic materials in my lessons.					
The most important thing when learning to speak a foreign language is to speak a lot in the language.					
My lessons are effective in helping students to learn how to communicate in English.					
My students have plenty of opportunities to practice speaking in class.					
My students are generally successful at expressing themselves in a foreign language.					
Reading and listening to a foreign language can help students improve their speaking skills.					

Student Adapted Survey

Survey retrieved from Journal Article: Factors Affecting Students' Speaking Performance at Le Thanh Hien High School (Nguyen & Tran, 2015)

Género:

Masculino

Femenino

Edad: _____ (escribir solo el número)

Escribe un visto (✓) donde usted crea que es correcto.

	Siempre	Con frecuencia	Rara vez	Nunca
¿Le gusta hablar en inglés con frecuencia?				
¿Practica inglés fuera del salón regularmente?				
¿Con qué frecuencia usted habla en inglés en su clase?				
¿Usa español durante la clase de inglés a menudo?				
¿Comprende bien los diálogos y contenidos cuando el profesor habla en inglés?				
¿Su profesor/a corrige sus errores en la producción oral de inglés de manera frecuente?				
¿Con qué frecuencia se sientes motivado/a para participar en actividades de producción oral en inglés durante las clases?				
¿Su profesor utiliza materiales visuales o dinámicos para apoyar las explicaciones en inglés?				
¿Cuánto interactúa en inglés con sus compañeros durante las clases?				
¿Con qué frecuencia hace preguntas o pide aclaraciones en inglés cuando no entiendes algo?				



DECLARACIÓN Y AUTORIZACIÓN

Yo, **Gutiérrez Álava, Ashley Mariela** con C.C: # 0940525934 autora del trabajo de titulación: **Development of EFL speaking skills through gamified activities among seventh-grade students at a private school in the city of Durán, scholastic year 2024-2025** previo a la obtención del título de **Licenciada en Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros-Inglés** en la Universidad Católica de Santiago de Guayaquil.

1.- Declaro tener pleno conocimiento de la obligación que tienen las instituciones de educación superior, de conformidad con el Artículo 144 de la Ley Orgánica de Educación Superior, de entregar a la SENESCYT en formato digital una copia del referido trabajo de titulación para que sea integrado al Sistema Nacional de Información de la Educación Superior del Ecuador para su difusión pública respetando los derechos de autor.

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Guayaquil, **12 de febrero de 2025**

f. _____

Gutiérrez Álava, Ashley Mariela

C.C: 0940525934



REPOSITORIO NACIONAL EN CIENCIA Y TECNOLOGÍA

FICHA DE REGISTRO DE TESIS/TRABAJO DE TITULACIÓN

TÍTULO Y SUBTÍTULO:	Development of EFL speaking skills through gamified activities among seventh-grade students at a private school in the city of Durán, scholastic year 2024-2025.		
AUTOR(ES)	Gutiérrez Álava, Ashley Mariela		
REVISOR(ES)/TUTOR(ES)	Hoyos Hernández, David Eduardo, Mgs.		
INSTITUCIÓN:	Universidad Católica de Santiago de Guayaquil		
FACULTAD:	Facultad de Artes y Humanidades		
CARRERA:	Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros-Inglés		
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ÁREAS TEMÁTICAS:	Teaching Materials, Integrated Curriculum, Vocabulary, Bilingual Education.		
PALABRAS CLAVES/KEYWORDS:	EFL Speaking Skills, Gamification, Seventh Graders, Supplementary Materials, Mixed-Methods Research, Classroom Implementation.		
RESUMEN/ABSTRACT (150-250 palabras):			
Interaction and communication are fundamental aspects of developing EFL learning. That is why, in this paper, much attention was paid to speaking skills. This project aims to explore how complementary material, applied through gamification, can help overcome learning challenges during the development of EFL speaking skills among seventh-grade students at a school in Duran in the 2024-2025 school year. Employing a mixed-method approach, the study combines qualitative and quantitative research tools. These tools include surveys to gauge the teacher and students' perceptions and attitudes toward oral communication, observation checklists to track information on teacher performance across speaking instructional areas, and observation notes to capture additional classroom interactions. Through the analysis of the data obtained, it is possible to state that the students involved in this research project experienced several speaking challenges, which can be mitigated through the use of gamified activities that promote engagement and enhance students' speaking performance. Based on these findings, an action plan was designed for classroom implementation, which includes applying seven gamified activities and regular monitoring of the process, to assess its effectiveness.			
ADJUNTO PDF:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SI	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	
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