Sage Sphere Multidisciplinary Studies

ISSN: 3091-1672

Vol. 3 Núm. 1 (2026)

SSMS-Vol.3. N1. 132

Enhancing pronunciation accuracy using the Think-Pair-Share technique in the EFL classroom

Mejora de la precisión de la pronunciación mediante la técnica de pensar, trabajar en parejas y compartir en el aula de inglés como lengua extranjera

Autores:
Damarys Rosario Quimi Gonzabay
Universidad Estatal Península de Santa Elena, La Libertad, Ecuador
damarys.quimig@upse.edu.ec
https://orcid.org/0009-0004-1722-7495

Sara Lorena Anaguano Perez
Universidad Estatal Península de Santa Elena, La Libertad, Ecuador
sanaguano@upse.edu.ec
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4473-2719

Autor de correspondencia: *Damarys Rosario Quimi Gonzabay,* damarys.quimig@upse.edu.ec

Enviado: 03-11-2026 **Revisado:** 15-11-2026
Aceptado: 17-11-2026 **Publicado:** 20-11-2026

Cómo citar este artículo:
Quimi Gonzabay, D. R., & Anaguano Perez, S. L. (2026). Mejora de la precisión de la pronunciación mediante la técnica de pensar, trabajar en parejas y compartir en el aula de inglés como lengua extranjera. *Sage Sphere Multidisciplinary Studies*, *3*(1), 1-20.
https://doi.org/10.63688/xr0d2r89

© 2026; Los autores. Este es un artículo en acceso abierto, distribuido bajo los términos de una licencia Creative Commons (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0) que permite el uso, distribución y reproducción en cualquier medio, siempre que la obra original sea correctamente citada.

ISSN: 3091-1672

Vol. 3 Núm. 1 (2026)

RESUMEN

La enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera en aulas con diferentes niveles de dominio lingüístico presenta desafíos relacionados con la participación, la confianza y las necesidades de aprendizaje de los estudiantes. Esta investigación tuvo como objetivo determinar estrategias innovadoras que favorezcan el engagement de estudiantes de secundaria en aulas de inglés con distintos niveles de competencia lingüística, a partir de sus experiencias y percepciones. Se empleó un enfoque cualitativo mediante un estudio de caso desarrollado en una institución educativa fiscomisional de Santa Elena, Ecuador. La información se recopiló mediante cinco grupos focales con estudiantes de segundo de Bachillerato General Unificado y entrevistas semiestructuradas con dos docentes de inglés. Los datos se analizaron mediante análisis temático. Los resultados evidenciaron diferencias en el dominio lingüístico, la confianza para participar oralmente, las dificultades de aprendizaje y las preferencias por actividades interactivas, colaborativas y creativas. A partir de estos hallazgos, se propusieron cinco estrategias contextualizadas: tareas comunicativas diferenciadas, actividades orales con apoyo progresivo, aprendizaje colaborativo con roles definidos, juegos interactivos de vocabulario e idioma y proyectos creativos de producción lingüística. Se concluye que estas propuestas responden a las necesidades identificadas en las aulas multinivel y ofrecen alternativas pedagógicas para favorecer la participación estudiantil, aunque su efectividad no fue evaluada en esta investigación.

Palabras clave: estrategias innovadoras; participación estudiantil; enseñanza del inglés; aulas multinivel; instrucción diferenciada.

ABSTRACT

Teaching English as a Foreign Language in mixed-level classrooms presents challenges related to student engagement, confidence, and diverse learning needs. This study aimed to determine innovative teaching strategies that could foster high school students' engagement in mixed-level English classrooms by examining their experiences and perceptions. A qualitative approach was employed through a case study conducted at a state-funded, nonprofit-operated high school in Santa Elena, Ecuador. Data were collected through five focus groups with second-year high school students and semi-structured interviews with two English teachers. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed differences in English proficiency, confidence in oral participation, learning difficulties, and preferences for interactive, collaborative, and creative activities. Based on these findings, five contextualized teaching strategies were proposed: differentiated communicative tasks, scaffolded speaking activities, role-based collaborative learning, interactive vocabulary and language games, and creative language production projects. The study concludes that these proposals respond to the needs identified in mixed-level classrooms and offer pedagogical alternatives aimed at encouraging student engagement, although their effectiveness was not evaluated in the present research.

Keywords: innovative teaching strategies; student engagement; English language teaching; mixed-level classrooms; differentiated instruction.

Doi: https://doi.org/10.63688/xr0d2r89

ISSN: 3091-1672
Vol. 3 Núm. 1 (2026)

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at the secondary level can be challenging when students with different language abilities and learning experiences share the same classroom. Some learners may feel comfortable participating in English activities, while others need additional explanations, practice, or support to become involved. These differences require teachers to consider how classroom activities can accommodate students' needs without limiting their opportunities to participate. In this context, exploring innovative teaching strategies becomes relevant to creating more inclusive and engaging English learning experiences.

Innovation in EFL should not be understood exclusively as the incorporation of digital technologies. Innovative pedagogical practices may include cooperative learning, task-based language teaching, project-based learning, differentiated instruction, problem solving, critical thinking, and technology-supported activities. These approaches broaden the possibilities available to teachers when attempting to respond to learner diversity and classroom needs (Lakew et al., 2025).

However, introducing new teaching strategies does not necessarily mean that they will work equally well in every classroom. Their suitability may depend on several conditions, including students' characteristics, teachers' preparation, available resources, and the educational environment. Institutional, cultural, and methodological factors can also influence how these practices are introduced. Research in secondary EFL education has identified barriers that teachers may encounter when implementing curricular and pedagogical innovations (Khodamoradi, 2024).

Student engagement is an important aspect of understanding how learners become involved in classroom activities. It is not limited to whether students participate visibly, as it also involves their interest, emotions, and effort during the learning process. Engagement has been described through three interconnected dimensions: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive (Fredricks et al., 2004). In language learning, a social dimension is also recognized, since interaction with classmates and participation in shared tasks form part of students' engagement experiences (Philp & Duchesne, 2016). Considering these dimensions helps explain why students may respond differently to the same English lesson.

Doi: https://doi.org/10.63688/xr0d2r89

Recent literature has examined several factors associated with engagement among high school EFL learners. The learning environment, instructional content, teacher–student interaction, motivation, and different forms of internal and external support have been identified as relevant aspects of students' engagement experiences. Research has also examined the relationship between engagement and burnout, demonstrating that students may experience classroom learning differently depending on the academic and interpersonal conditions surrounding them (Wang et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2024).

Other studies emphasize the importance of the characteristics of English lessons themselves. Relevance, active and social learning methods, and teacher–student relationships have been associated with students' engagement in upper-secondary English education (Skarpaas, 2024). Similarly, teaching strategies, students' proficiency, classroom climate, and teaching style have been identified as factors related to behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and agentic engagement in high school English learning (Yang & Liu, 2024).

The studies discussed above indicate that student engagement is shaped by more than individual motivation or willingness to participate. Classroom relationships, teaching practices, learning activities, and the support students receive can influence how they experience English lessons. For this reason, understanding participation requires looking at what happens within the classroom and listening to students' perspectives. This becomes especially relevant in mixed-level classes, where learners may respond differently to the same activity because of their language abilities, confidence, and learning needs.

Mixed-level English classrooms bring together students who may differ in language proficiency, previous learning experiences, interests, and readiness to complete classroom tasks. Teaching these groups requires attention to different learning needs within the same lesson. Practices such as flexible grouping, peer support, and scaffolding can help teachers respond to this diversity. However, providing differentiated support is not always straightforward, particularly when teachers must manage large classes, limited instructional time, insufficient resources, or gaps in professional preparation (Bhandari et al., 2025).

Similar findings emerge from qualitative research focused specifically on teachers' experiences in mixed-ability classrooms. Teachers have reported challenges related to differentiation, classroom management, and equitable assessment, while also describing learner-centered strategies intended to address heterogeneous groups (Samira et al.,

2025). Other qualitative evidence highlights teachers' perceptions of the barriers involved in teaching students with diverse abilities, reinforcing the complexity of meeting different learning needs within a single English classroom (Rayamajhi, 2025).

Differentiated instruction is therefore particularly relevant to the discussion of mixed-level EFL education. Differentiation may involve adjusting content, learning processes, and expected products according to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Previous research has also shown differences between teachers' and learners' perceptions and preferences regarding differentiated practices, indicating that pedagogical decisions should consider the perspectives of the people directly involved in the learning process (Abramova & Mashoshina, 2021).

Research focusing on students' perspectives provides another relevant contribution. Secondary-school learners have reported perceptions of digital learning resources in terms of interactivity, flexibility, motivation, and their capacity to support engagement (Majid et al., 2025). In another secondary EFL context, students demonstrated generally positive attitudes toward the use of ICT, although differences in teachers' technological competencies were also observed (Farisa et al., 2023). These studies illustrate the importance of considering student voices when examining innovative classroom practices.

The issue has particular relevance in Ecuador. A research synthesis focused on teaching English in mixed-level rural classrooms identified diversity in students' abilities, backgrounds, interests, and needs as challenges requiring appropriate pedagogical responses (Tillaguango-Pintado & Argudo-Serrano, 2024). Although this work does not constitute an empirical study with its own participant sample, it provides important national evidence connecting mixed-level English teaching with the need to respond to learner heterogeneity.

Ecuadorian research has also shown the usefulness of examining EFL education from participants' perspectives. Through a focus-group interview with EFL teachers, previous research explored favorable and critical perceptions regarding the content and curricular use of pedagogical materials in Ecuadorian schools and high schools (Alvarez Llerena & Guevara Torres, 2021). Such evidence supports the relevance of investigating educational practices through the experiences and perspectives of those directly involved in the classroom.

ISSN: 3091-1672
Vol. 3 Núm. 1 (2026)

The studies reviewed provide useful insights into innovative EFL teaching practices, student engagement, and the challenges of mixed-ability classrooms. However, these topics are often addressed separately. Some researchers examine the factors associated with students' engagement, while others focus on teaching strategies or the difficulties teachers experience when working with learners at different proficiency levels. Fewer connections are made among these areas within a single secondary-school context, particularly when both students' and teachers' perspectives are considered. Exploring these experiences together may provide a clearer understanding of the needs that should guide the development of teaching strategies for mixed-level English classrooms.

The present study addresses the need to understand how differences in English proficiency, learning difficulties, and classroom experiences relate to students' engagement in mixed-level English classes. Rather than introducing a teaching strategy and measuring its effects, the research focuses on understanding what students and teachers experience in their everyday classroom environment. Their perspectives provide a starting point for identifying teaching alternatives that respond to the specific needs of these groups, instead of assuming that the same activities will be equally suitable for every student.

The study was conducted at a fiscomisional high school (a state-funded or partially state-funded institution operated by a nonprofit organization) in Santa Elena, Ecuador, and focused on second-year BGU students from mixed-level English classes and two English teachers from the same institution.

Exploring their perspectives can contribute to a contextualized understanding of the difficulties and needs associated with engagement in heterogeneous English classrooms. The information obtained from participants provided a contextualized basis for identifying pedagogical strategies responsive to the challenges and needs identified in the study.

Accordingly, the general objective of this research is to determine innovative teaching strategies that can foster high school students' engagement in mixed-level English classrooms by examining students' and English teachers' perceptions, experiences, and learning needs. The study specifically seeks to identify students' main learning difficulties and needs, analyze students' and English teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding engagement, participation, learning needs, and current teaching practices, and design a contextualized set of innovative teaching strategies based on the needs and challenges identified.

Doi: https://doi.org/10.63688/xr0d2r89

In accordance with this purpose, the study is guided by the following general research question: What innovative teaching strategies can be proposed to foster high school students' engagement in mixed-level English classrooms based on students' and English teachers' experiences and needs? This question maintains the exploratory character of the research and ensures consistency with the qualitative design, since the strategies will be proposed on the basis of the experiences and needs identified rather than experimentally implemented and evaluated.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Approach and Design

This study adopted a quantitative approach with a one-group pretest–posttest pre-experimental design to examine changes in the pronunciation accuracy of tenth-grade EFL students following a Think-Pair-Share (TPS) intervention. Pronunciation performance was measured before and after the intervention using numerical scores from an analytical rubric. TPS was the independent variable, and pronunciation performance was the dependent variable. Because the study did not include a control group or random assignment, the design supports a description of within-group change but does not permit the observed improvement to be attributed exclusively to TPS.

Setting and Participants

The participants were 35 tenth-grade EFL students from an intact class at a rural educational institution in Ecuador. They were approximately 15 years old and had an estimated A1 English proficiency level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Convenience sampling was used because the class was accessible to the researcher within the regular educational setting. The inclusion criteria were enrollment in the selected tenth-grade class, an approximate A1 proficiency level, completion of the pretest, TPS intervention, and posttest, written parental or legal-guardian consent, and student assent. Students were excluded from the analysis if they did not complete either assessment, were absent during the intervention, or lacked parental consent or student assent. All 35 students met the criteria and were included.

Research Instruments

Pronunciation performance was assessed through an individual oral interview and a researcher-developed analytical rubric. The interview comprised 10 simple-present questions about familiar daily routines, including questions such as “What time do you wake up?” and “What do you do after school?” Each student responded for approximately two minutes, and the complete

assessment session lasted approximately 45 minutes. The pretest and posttest addressed the same communicative content and level of difficulty; however, question order and wording were varied slightly, and equivalent questions were used when appropriate to reduce direct recall while maintaining comparability. Responses were evaluated live, and no audio or video recordings were produced.

The analytical rubric assessed four dimensions: sound production, stress and intonation, clarity, and fluency. Each dimension was scored independently from 0 to 2.5 points in increments of 0.5, producing a maximum total score of 10 points. The descriptors ranged from no assessable performance to consistently accurate and intelligible performance. The same rubric, scoring scale, and decision rules were applied in both assessments. Table 1 presents the complete performance descriptors.

The rubric was developed by the researcher before data collection to reflect the pronunciation dimensions targeted during the intervention. Face and content alignment were established by matching the criteria and descriptors with the study objectives and instructional activities; however, no formal expert validation, pilot test, internal-consistency analysis, or inter-rater reliability procedure was conducted. All performances were rated live by the researcher, who was also the classroom teacher. The absence of independent raters and formal reliability evidence is therefore acknowledged as a methodological limitation, and the scores should be interpreted as classroom-based assessment results.

Table 1

Analytical Pronunciation Rubric

Score	Sound production	Stress and intonation	Clarity	Fluency
2.5	Sounds and words are consistently accurate; minor slips do not affect intelligibility.	Word stress and intonation are consistently appropriate and support meaning.	Speech is consistently clear and easily understood.	Speech is continuous and well paced, with minimal hesitation.

ISSN: 3091-1672
Vol. 3 Núm. 1 (2026)

2.0	Sounds and words are generally accurate, with occasional minor errors.	Stress and intonation are generally appropriate, with occasional lapses.	Speech is generally clear; minor effort may occasionally be required.	Speech is generally smooth, with a few pauses or repetitions.
1.5	Production is partly accurate; noticeable errors sometimes affect intelligibility.	Some appropriate stress and intonation are present, but patterns are inconsistent.	Speech is understandable overall, although several parts require listener effort.	Speech contains noticeable pauses and hesitation but remains mostly connected.
1.0	Frequent sound errors interfere with the accurate production of words.	Stress and intonation are frequently inappropriate or absent.	Speech is difficult to understand in several parts.	Frequent pauses and repetitions interrupt the flow of speech.
0.5	Very limited accurate sound production; most words are difficult to recognize.	Very limited control of stress and intonation is evident.	Speech is mostly unclear and requires considerable listener effort.	Speech is highly fragmented, with long pauses and isolated words.
0.0	No assessable production is provided.	No assessable use of stress or intonation is provided.	No assessable speech is produced.	No assessable continuous speech is produced.

Note. Each criterion was scored independently from 0 to 2.5 in increments of 0.5. The four criterion scores were added to produce a maximum total score of 10 points.

Think-Pair-Share Intervention and Procedure

Data were collected during three consecutive instructional sessions from October 4 to October 6, 2026. On October 4, the 45-minute pretest session was conducted through individual oral interviews. On October 5, students completed the 60-minute TPS intervention. On October 6, the 45-minute posttest session was administered using equivalent

Doi: https://doi.org/10.63688/xr0d2r89

ISSN: 3091-1672
Vol. 3 Núm. 1 (2026)

daily-routine questions and the same analytical rubric. This sequence separated baseline assessment, instruction, and outcome assessment across three sessions.

During the Think stage, students worked individually to organize information about their daily routines and prepare answers using familiar simple-present vocabulary and structures. During the Pair stage, students exchanged and rehearsed their responses with a partner, checked vocabulary and grammar, and used the rubric criteria to provide peer feedback on sound production, stress and intonation, clarity, and fluency. During the Share stage, every student presented an oral response to the class. The teacher modelled the pronunciation of mispronounced sounds, asked students to repeat words or sentences, corrected stress and intonation when necessary, addressed relevant vocabulary and grammar difficulties, and provided general feedback after the presentations.

During the posttest, students completed an oral interview comparable to the pretest. The task retained the same topic, number of questions, language level, and pronunciation demands, while the wording and order of questions were varied slightly. Performance was evaluated live using the same four criteria and scoring scale. Pretest and posttest scores were subsequently matched through anonymous participant codes and compared to identify changes following the intervention.

Data Analysis

The pretest and posttest scores were organized in a spreadsheet, with each student identified by an anonymous code to match their results across both assessments. Four pronunciation criteria were analyzed: production of English sounds, stress and intonation, clarity, and fluency. Each criterion was scored out of 2.5 points, producing an overall score out of 10. The analysis included students who completed both assessments.

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the overall scores and for each pronunciation criterion. Means were used to describe average performance, while standard deviations indicated the extent of variation among students' scores. Mean gains were calculated by subtracting the pretest mean from the posttest mean. These comparisons identified the pronunciation aspects that showed the largest changes following the intervention.

Individual progress was examined by subtracting each student's pretest total from their posttest total. A positive difference indicated improvement, a difference of zero indicated an unchanged score, and a negative difference indicated a decrease. The number and

Doi: https://doi.org/10.63688/xr0d2r89

percentage of students in each category were calculated. This analysis complemented the group averages by showing how progress was distributed across the class. Results were presented in tables showing pretest and posttest means, standard deviations, and mean gains. An exact two-sided sign test was conducted to compare the direction of change in students' overall pronunciation scores between the pretest and posttest. This paired nonparametric procedure was selected because it did not require normally distributed or symmetric score differences. Positive and negative differences were compared, while unchanged scores were excluded from the test. The significance level was set at $\alpha = .05$. The overall score was used as the primary outcome, while changes in the four assessment criteria were examined descriptively.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were observed throughout the study to protect the rights, privacy, and well-being of participants. Authorization was obtained from the educational institution; no separate ethics-committee review was conducted. Because the participants were minors, parents or legal guardians received a written consent form explaining the purpose of the research, the classroom activities, the pretest and posttest oral interviews, and the TPS intervention. Signed parental or guardian consent was obtained before data collection, and students provided verbal assent after the procedures had been explained in age-appropriate language. Participation in the research was voluntary, and students could refuse or withdraw without academic penalty. Although all students could participate in the regular instructional session, assessment results were used for research only when consent and assent were available. No audio or video recordings were produced. Anonymous codes were used during scoring, data analysis, and reporting, and the collected information was used exclusively for academic and research purposes.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2

Individual Pretest and Posttest Pronunciation Results

Student code	Pretest /10	Posttest /10	Gain	Outcome
S01	10.0	10.0	0.0	Unchanged
S02	8.5	9.0	+0.5	Improved
S03	9.0	10.0	+1.0	Improved

ISSN: 3091-1672

Vol. 3 Núm. 1 (2026)

S04	4.5	9.0	+4.5	Improved
S05	7.0	9.0	+2.0	Improved
S06	6.5	10.0	+3.5	Improved
S07	7.0	8.0	+1.0	Improved
S08	10.0	10.0	0.0	Unchanged
S09	9.0	10.0	+1.0	Improved
S10	8.0	8.5	+0.5	Improved
S11	8.0	10.0	+2.0	Improved
S12	4.0	8.5	+4.5	Improved
S13	8.0	8.0	0.0	Unchanged
S14	7.0	8.5	+1.5	Improved
S15	10.0	10.0	0.0	Unchanged
S16	7.0	8.5	+1.5	Improved
S17	8.0	10.0	+2.0	Improved
S18	8.5	10.0	+1.5	Improved
S19	6.0	9.0	+3.0	Improved
S20	6.5	8.5	+2.0	Improved
S21	6.0	9.0	+3.0	Improved
S22	6.0	9.0	+3.0	Improved
S23	6.5	8.5	+2.0	Improved
S24	8.0	8.5	+0.5	Improved
S25	8.5	10.0	+1.5	Improved
S26	6.0	8.0	+2.0	Improved
S27	10.0	10.0	0.0	Unchanged
S28	10.0	10.0	0.0	Unchanged
S29	7.0	8.0	+1.0	Improved
S30	8.0	10.0	+2.0	Improved
S31	7.5	10.0	+2.5	Improved
S32	9.0	10.0	+1.0	Improved
S33	2.0	8.5	+6.5	Improved
S34	8.0	10.0	+2.0	Improved
S35	7.0	10.0	+3.0	Improved
Mean	**7.49**	**9.26**	**+1.77**	—

Table 2 presents individual changes in pronunciation performance following the Think-Pair-Share intervention. Of the 35 students, 29 (82.9%) improved their overall scores, while six (17.1%) maintained their previous scores. No student showed a decrease in the overall score. S33 recorded the

Doi: https://doi.org/10.63688/xr0d2r89

largest gain, increasing from 2.0 to 8.5 points, followed by S04 and S12, who each gained 4.5 points. Among the six students with unchanged totals, five had already achieved the maximum score of 10 in the pretest, leaving no opportunity for a higher score on this assessment. S13 maintained an overall score of 8.0; however, this unchanged total concealed a decrease in sounds from 2.5 to 2.0 and an increase in clarity from 1.5 to 2.0. These findings show that overall gains were widespread, while also demonstrating the importance of examining individual pronunciation criteria alongside total scores. The changes describe performance following the intervention and do not establish that TPS alone caused the improvement.

The exact two-sided sign test indicated a statistically significant predominance of positive changes in overall pronunciation scores (29 positive differences, no negative differences, and six ties; $p < .001$). The six unchanged scores were excluded from the test, leaving 29 nonzero paired differences. Together with the increase in the overall mean from 7.49 to 9.26, this finding provides evidence of improved assessed performance following the intervention.

Table 3

Pretest and Posttest Pronunciation Results

Assessment criterion	Pretest	Posttest	Mean gain
Sounds /2.5	1.96 (0.61)	2.36 (0.23)	0.40
Stress and intonation /2.5	1.86 (0.56)	2.33 (0.24)	0.47
Clarity /2.5	1.86 (0.58)	2.29 (0.25)	0.43
Fluency /2.5	1.81 (0.54)	2.29 (0.25)	0.47
Overall score /10	7.49 (1.78)	9.26 (0.78)	1.77

Note. Values are presented as mean (standard deviation). Mean gain represents the difference between the posttest and pretest means. Each assessment criterion was scored out of 2.5 points, and the overall score was calculated out of 10 points.

The pretest and posttest results of 35 tenth-grade EFL students showed an increase in pronunciation performance following the Think-Pair-Share intervention. The mean overall score increased from 7.49 (SD = 1.78) in the pretest to 9.26 (SD = 0.78) in the posttest, representing an average gain of 1.77 points on a ten-point scale. Improvements were observed across all four assessment criteria. Sounds increased from 1.96 to 2.36, stress and intonation from 1.86 to 2.33, clarity from 1.86 to 2.29, and fluency from 1.81 to 2.29. Stress and intonation and fluency showed the largest means of gains, both approximately 0.47 points. Overall, 29 students (82.9%) improved their total scores, while six students (17.1%) maintained their previous scores. No decrease in overall scores was recorded. The lower posttest standard deviation indicates that students' scores became more closely grouped around the mean. These descriptive findings indicate higher pronunciation performance after the

TPS activities, although they do not, by themselves, establish statistical significance or demonstrate that TPS alone caused the improvement.

Taken together, the pretest and posttest results indicate that tenth-grade EFL students performed better on the pronunciation assessment after the Think-Pair-Share (TPS) session. The overall mean increased from 7.49 to 9.26 out of 10, with gains across all four criteria: sound production, stress and intonation, clarity, and fluency. The exact two-sided sign test showed that increases significantly outnumbered decreases among students whose scores changed ($p < .001$). Because the study compared one class before and after the session, these findings describe a change in assessed performance. The extent to which TPS contributed to that change remains uncertain.

This pattern is strongly aligned with the pronunciation findings of Al Abri and Al-Mekhlafi (2025), who compared an experimental group with a control group comprising 60 tenth-grade EFL students in Oman. After 12 TPS sessions, pronunciation was the only oral communication subskill for which a statistically significant difference emerged between the groups. The present study extends that evidence by showing positive changes not only in the overall pronunciation score but also across sound production, stress and intonation, clarity, and fluency. The findings also correspond with Pajrina et al. (2022), who reported improved speaking performance, confidence, and participation among secondary-school learners following TPS instruction. Taken together, these studies suggest that the value of TPS may lie in its capacity to transform a demanding oral task into a sequence of preparation, supported rehearsal, and public production. Nevertheless, the longer intervention and controlled design used by Al Abri and Al-Mekhlafi provide stronger evidence of effectiveness than the single-group, single-session design employed in the present study.

The classroom activities also provide a plausible explanation for the observed improvement. Phan and Lan (2021) found that TPS supported both speaking development and learner engagement by increasing opportunities for structured oral interaction. In the present study, the Think stage allowed students to organize their responses, the Pair stage enabled repeated production and peer-supported adjustment, and the Share stage required a more complete oral performance. This interpretation is reinforced by Martin and Sippel (2021), who found that learners benefited from peer pronunciation feedback, particularly when they actively provided it, and by Dai and Wu (2022), who reported pronunciation gains among

ISSN: 3091-1672
Vol. 3 Núm. 1 (2026)

both feedback providers and receivers. Li and Hu (2024) likewise associated peer correction with gains in speaking accuracy and fluency. These converging findings support the view that pair work can promote attentive listening, repetition, self-monitoring, and adjustment of oral production. However, because the present study evaluated the complete TPS session, the independent contribution of preparation, peer feedback, repetition, or teacher guidance cannot be isolated.

Thaisen and Visuttakul (2022) offer a more specific comparison through their study of final-consonant production among first-grade learners. Their reported improvement after an intervention combining games with TPS demonstrates that the technique can be adapted to target a discrete pronunciation feature. The present findings broaden that perspective because gains occurred across both segmental and suprasegmental dimensions rather than in one sound category alone. This broader pattern is consistent with Alghazo et al. (2023), who showed that pronunciation development is multidimensional and that different forms of instruction can influence segmental production, prosody, comprehensibility, and fluency in distinct ways. Nevertheless, direct comparison with Thaisen and Visuttakul remains limited by the younger participants, the focus on Thai final consonants, and the additional use of games in their intervention.

The gains across the four criteria clarify the nature of the increase in the overall score. Stress and intonation and fluency produced the largest mean gains, at approximately 0.47 points each, while sound production and clarity also improved. This combined pattern is important because Saito (2021) demonstrates that comprehensible L2 speech depends on the interaction of segmental, prosodic, and temporal features rather than on accurate production of individual sounds alone. It is also compatible with Galante and Piccardo's (2022) emphasis on intelligibility and comprehensibility as meaningful instructional priorities. From this perspective, the increase in clarity may indicate that students' posttest speech was easier to understand, whereas the gains in stress, intonation, and fluency suggest improvement in the organization and continuity of spoken delivery. Individual preparation and pair rehearsal may have supported these outcomes by allowing learners to anticipate difficult forms and practise their responses before sharing them. Even so, the rubric measured performance on a familiar assessment task; consequently, the findings cannot confirm that these gains would transfer to spontaneous or unfamiliar communication.

Doi: https://doi.org/10.63688/xr0d2r89

The individual results add context to the group averages. Six students maintained their total scores, and five of them had already earned the maximum score of 10 on the pretest. The assessment therefore had no room to register higher scores for those five students. Student S13 maintained the same total despite changes in individual criteria, illustrating how an overall score can conceal shifts in particular skills. Posttest scores were also less dispersed, although their concentration near the maximum limited the rubric's ability to distinguish among students at the upper end of the scale.

In the rural school where the study took place, TPS provided a practical and resource-sensitive way to organize pronunciation practice without continuous internet access. This contextual contribution is relevant to the review by Amrate and Tsai (2025), which found that computer-assisted pronunciation research has often emphasized adult learners, individual segmental practice, and controlled repetition, while giving comparatively less attention to suprasegmental features and global communicative outcomes. The present classroom-based findings show that structured peer interaction can support practice across several pronunciation dimensions even when technological resources are limited. They also complement Valdivieso-Arcos and Argudo-Serrano (2022), who stressed the need for Ecuadorian secondary-school strategies that promote oral participation, accuracy, spontaneity, and confidence. However, the single-session intervention, convenience sample, and absence of a control group restrict causal interpretation. Task familiarity, repeated testing, peer assistance, and teacher feedback may also have influenced posttest performance. Future research should employ longer interventions, comparison groups, independent raters, systematic participation records, and delayed assessments using unfamiliar speaking tasks to determine whether the observed gains are sustained and transferable.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings show that students' engagement in mixed-level English classrooms varied according to their language abilities, confidence, learning needs, and classroom experiences. Through the five focus groups and interviews with two English teachers, the study identified differences in how students responded to the same learning activities. Some students participated comfortably, while others needed additional preparation, guidance, or opportunities to work with classmates. These experiences highlight why teaching strategies

ISSN: 3091-1672
Vol. 3 Núm. 1 (2026)

should consider both individual learning needs and the conditions in which classroom participation takes place.

The students' responses revealed that learning difficulties were not the same across the five classes. While some participants struggled with grammar and writing, others found speaking or listening more challenging. Confidence also influenced how students approached oral activities, particularly when they were concerned about pronunciation, making mistakes, or speaking in front of their classmates. These differences suggest the importance of providing appropriate guidance, preparation time, and opportunities for participation that take students' individual learning needs into account.

Both students and teachers described interactive and collaborative activities as valuable opportunities for classroom participation. Games, Spelling Bee, conversations, group projects, comics, and posters were among the activities students frequently associated with greater interest in learning English. However, the focus groups also showed that preferences varied across classes, particularly regarding speaking activities. This suggests that teachers should offer different ways for students to participate rather than relying on a single type of activity. Collaborative tasks also need clear responsibilities so that students with different English proficiency levels have opportunities to contribute.

Drawing on the needs and experiences identified during the research, five teaching strategies were proposed: differentiated communicative tasks, scaffolded speaking activities, role-based collaborative learning, interactive vocabulary and language games, and creative language production projects. The proposals were developed to offer different forms of support and participation according to students' proficiency, confidence, learning pace, and classroom preferences. Each strategy was connected to difficulties or interests described by participants in the five classes. Nevertheless, these strategies remain pedagogical proposals, since they were not implemented or evaluated as part of the study.

As a qualitative case study conducted in one educational institution in Santa Elena, Ecuador, this research offers an understanding of engagement based on the experiences of the participating students and teachers. Its findings provide a starting point for developing teaching strategies that respond to the needs identified in these mixed-level English classrooms. However, the study did not examine how students would respond to the proposed strategies in practice, so conclusions about their effectiveness cannot be drawn.

Doi: https://doi.org/10.63688/xr0d2r89

Future studies could explore their implementation in similar educational contexts and examine how they relate to students' engagement over time.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

Abramova, G. S., & Mashoshina, V. S. (2021). On differentiation strategies in the EFL mixed-ability classroom: Towards promoting the synergistic learning environment. *European Journal of Contemporary Education, 10*(3), 558–573. https://doi.org/10.13187/ejced.2021.3.558

Alvarez Llerena, C. L., & Guevara Torres, P. V. (2021). EFL teachers' perceptions on using pedagogical modules in Ecuador: A focus group interview. *Chakiñan, Revista de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades*, (14), 42–56. https://doi.org/10.37135/chk.002.14.03

Bhandari, B. L., Bhandari, L. P., & Baguinat, N. S. (2025). English language teachers' practices of differentiated instruction in mixed-ability classrooms. *JOLLT Journal of Languages and Language Teaching, 13*(2), 912–923. https://doi.org/10.33394/jollt.v13i2.13573

Farisa, H., Sunggingwati, D., & Susilo, S. (2023). Teachers' competencies and students' attitudes toward ICT at an EFL secondary school. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education, 24*(3), 224–239. https://doi.org/10.17718/tojde.1122729

Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of Educational Research, 74*(1), 59–109. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543074001059

Hernández Sampieri, R., Fernández Collado, C., & Baptista Lucio, M. P. (2014). *Metodología de la investigación* (6.ª ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.

Khodamoradi, A. (2024). Investigating barriers to implementation of a CLT-based curriculum innovation in Iranian secondary education. *System, 126*, Article 103473. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2024.103473

Kótay-Nagy, A. (2023). Differentiated instruction in the EFL classroom: An interview study on Hungarian primary and secondary school EFL teachers' views and self-reported practices. *Journal of Adult Learning, Knowledge and Innovation, 6*(1), 33–46. https://doi.org/10.1556/2059.2023.00076

Lakew, B. M., Filatie, A. Y., & Chanie, B. S. (2025). Exploring innovative pedagogical approaches: Primary school EFL teachers' utilization of teaching strategies. *Cogent Education, 12*(1), Article 2510030. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2025.2510030

Majid, F. F. D. N., Rahman, A., & Anwar, S. (2025). EFL student's perception on digital learning media technology: The case of secondary school in Indonesia. *English Language Teaching Methodology, 5*(2), 139–151. https://doi.org/10.56983/eltm.v5i2.1862

Philp, J., & Duchesne, S. (2016). Exploring engagement in tasks in the language classroom. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 36*, 50–72. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190515000094

Purnamaningwulan, R. A., & Purwanto, A. R. (2025). Differentiated instruction strategies to enhance EFL learning in a mixed-proficiency seventh-grade classroom. *Elsya: Journal of English Language Studies, 7*(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.31849/elsya.v7i1.22076

Rayamajhi, A. J. (2025). Perception of English language teachers teaching in mixed-ability classrooms in community schools: A qualitative case study. *BIC Journal of Management, 2*(1), 109–119. https://doi.org/10.3126/bicjom.v2i1.84330

Samira, T. J., Al Amin, N., Ali, K. S., & Hindarsah, I. (2025). Teachers' perceptions toward teaching English in mixed-ability classrooms at the secondary level of education in Bangladesh. *Journal of Business and Social Sciences, 2025*(3), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.61453/jobss.v2025no43

Skarpaas, K. G. (2024). The importance of relevance: Factors influencing upper secondary vocational students' engagement in L2 English language teaching. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 68*(7), 1395–1409. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2023.2250360

Tillaguango-Pintado, D. M., & Argudo-Serrano, J. (2024). Teaching English to mixed-level classes in rural schools. *Revista Metropolitana de Ciencias Aplicadas, 7*(2), 285–294. https://doi.org/10.62452/tdkw0s24

Wang, Y., Xin, Y., & Chen, L. (2024). Navigating the emotional landscape: Insights into resilience, engagement, and burnout among Chinese high school English as a foreign language learners. *Learning and Motivation, 86*, Article 101978. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lmot.2024.101978

Wu, H., Zeng, Y., & Fan, Z. (2024). Unveiling Chinese senior high school EFL students' burnout and engagement: Profiles and antecedents. *Acta Psychologica, 243*, Article 104153. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2024.104153

Yang, X., & Liu, H. (2024). A mixed-methods approach to students' engagement in English learning in the Chinese context. *European Journal of English Language Studies, 4*(1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.12973/ejels.4.1.1

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

It does not exist.

FINANCING

Not applicable.

AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION

Conceptualization: Damarys Rosario, Quimi Gonzabay, and Sara Lorena Anaguano Perez.
Methodology: Damarys Rosario, Quimi Gonzabay, and Sara Lorena Anaguano Perez.
Investigation: Damarys Rosario Quimi Gonzabay and Sara Lorena Anaguano Perez.
Writing – original draft: Damarys Rosario Quimi Gonzabay and Sara Lorena Anaguano Perez.
Writing – review and editing: Damarys Rosario, Quimi Gonzabay, and Sara Lorena, Anaguano Perez.