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Breaking the Silence: Innovative Strategies to Improve English Speaking in Students

Rompiendo el Silencio: Estrategias Innovadoras para Mejorar la Expresión Oral en Estudiantes de Inglés

Autores:

Michelle Carolina Mejía Silva
Investigadora Independiente
Quito – Ecuador

teachercarolinamejia@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-7927-0006>

Gitsby Anagel Muñoz Illingworth
Unidad Educativa Nuevo Mundo
Ambato – Ecuador

gmunoz@nuevomundoambato.edu.ec
<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1969-8632>

Katherine Daniela Rodriguez Calle
Universidad de Cuenca
Cuenca – Ecuador

daniela.rodriguezcalle17@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-4448-2595>

Alexandra Carolina Herrera Cepeda
Universidad de las Fuerzas Armadas ESPE
Quito – Ecuador

alexakaroherrera@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0389-8835>

Diana Estefania Chisag Poaquiza
Unidad Educativa Ecuatoriano Holandes
Ambato – Ecuador

dchi007.sag1@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-9147-1341>

Autor de correspondencia: Michelle Carolina Mejía Silva, teachercarolinamejia@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the impact of innovative and learner-centered strategies on the development of English-speaking skills in EFL/ESL contexts. A qualitative systematic literature review was conducted following the PRISMA methodology in order to identify, evaluate, and synthesize academic evidence related to gamification, digital storytelling, and music-based learning. Searches were carried out in recognized databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, ERIC, ScienceDirect, and SpringerLink. From 45 initially identified studies, 10 met the inclusion criteria and were selected for the final analysis. The findings indicate that innovative methodologies significantly enhance oral participation, communicative confidence, and learner motivation while reducing speaking anxiety. Gamification promotes interaction through collaborative and engaging activities, digital storytelling strengthens fluency and self-regulated learning, and music-based strategies improve pronunciation, vocabulary retention, and communicative spontaneity. The review also highlights the importance of affective factors in oral language development, emphasizing that supportive and participatory learning environments facilitate more effective communication. The study concludes that communicative and student-centered approaches contribute substantially to the improvement of speaking skills by integrating emotional engagement, interaction, and learner autonomy into English language teaching practices.

Keywords: gamification, digital storytelling, speaking skills, learner participation, EFL learning.

RESUMEN

Este estudio analiza el impacto de estrategias innovadoras y centradas en el estudiante en el desarrollo de las habilidades de expresión oral en contextos EFL/ESL. Se realizó una revisión sistemática cualitativa de la literatura siguiendo la metodología PRISMA con el propósito de identificar, evaluar y sintetizar evidencia académica relacionada con la gamificación, la narración digital y el aprendizaje basado en música. Las búsquedas se llevaron a cabo en bases de datos reconocidas como Google Scholar, Scopus, ERIC, ScienceDirect y SpringerLink. De 45 estudios identificados inicialmente, 10 cumplieron con los criterios de inclusión y fueron seleccionados para el análisis final. Los hallazgos indican que las metodologías innovadoras mejoran significativamente la participación oral, la confianza comunicativa y la motivación de los estudiantes, al mismo tiempo que reducen la ansiedad al hablar. La gamificación favorece la interacción mediante actividades colaborativas y dinámicas, la narración digital fortalece la fluidez y el aprendizaje autorregulado, y las estrategias basadas en música mejoran la pronunciación, la retención de vocabulario y la espontaneidad comunicativa. La revisión también destaca la importancia de los factores afectivos en el desarrollo del lenguaje oral, enfatizando que los entornos de aprendizaje participativos y de apoyo facilitan una comunicación más efectiva. El estudio concluye que los enfoques comunicativos y centrados en el estudiante contribuyen significativamente al mejoramiento de las habilidades orales al integrar interacción, compromiso emocional y autonomía en la enseñanza del inglés.

Palabras clave: gamificación, narración digital, habilidades orales, participación estudiantil, aprendizaje EFL.



1. INTRODUCTION

English speaking is recognized as a fundamental component of language learning because it enables students to interact effectively in academic, social, and professional contexts. Despite its importance, many learners in EFL classrooms remain reluctant to participate orally. Fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, insufficient exposure to authentic communication, and anxiety associated with public speaking frequently discourage students from expressing themselves in English. As a result, classroom silence has become a persistent challenge in language education, limiting opportunities for interaction, communicative practice, and oral development (Council of Europe, 2020).

This situation is particularly concerning in EFL environments where classroom interaction often represents learners' primary opportunity to use English communicatively. Traditional teacher-centered instruction, excessively focused on grammatical accuracy and controlled exercises, may unintentionally reduce spontaneous participation and reinforce passive learning behaviors. Consequently, contemporary language education has increasingly emphasized the need for pedagogical approaches capable of creating more interactive, motivating, and emotionally supportive learning environments.

Recent research highlights the effectiveness of innovative communicative strategies in promoting oral expression and student engagement. Gamification, for instance, has demonstrated positive effects on classroom interaction by incorporating collaborative challenges, rewards, and dynamic activities that encourage learners to communicate more actively. Zhang and Hasim (2023) indicate that gamified learning environments can increase motivation and reduce resistance toward speaking activities. Likewise, digital storytelling has shown considerable pedagogical value because it allows students to organize ideas, construct meaningful narratives, and practice oral production creatively. Bai (2024) found that storytelling activities contribute to speaking fluency, self-regulated learning, and reduced language anxiety. In addition, music-based learning strategies have been associated with improvements in pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary retention, and spontaneous communication, while simultaneously creating more relaxed learning atmospheres (Kitjaroonchai & Sukman, 2025).



Within this context, the present study examines how innovative communicative strategies contribute to the development of English-speaking skills in EFL classrooms. The research focuses specifically on the influence of gamification, digital storytelling, and music-based learning on students' interaction, willingness to communicate, and oral performance. To achieve this objective, the study adopts a qualitative systematic literature review guided by the PRISMA framework, integrating theoretical and empirical evidence from recent academic publications. By synthesizing findings from multiple scholarly sources, this review seeks to provide a broader understanding of how innovative pedagogical practices can help reduce classroom silence and foster more participatory and communicative learning environments in English language education.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Importance of Speaking in English Language Learning

Speaking is widely regarded as one of the most essential skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) education because it allows learners to communicate ideas, express emotions, negotiate meaning, and participate actively in academic, social, and professional contexts. According to David Nunan (2003), speaking competence represents a central component of communicative language ability, since learners are expected not only to understand the language but also to use it spontaneously and effectively in real-life interactions. In contemporary language education, oral communication has become increasingly important due to globalization, intercultural communication, and the growing demand for English proficiency in higher education and the labor market.

Research in second language acquisition demonstrates that regular speaking practice contributes significantly to vocabulary retention, grammatical development, pronunciation improvement, and pragmatic competence. Jack C. Richards and Willy A. Renandya (2002) argue that oral interaction provides learners with opportunities to apply linguistic knowledge in meaningful contexts, reinforcing both fluency and communicative accuracy. Likewise, interactionist perspectives of language learning emphasize that speaking activities facilitate negotiation of meaning, immediate feedback, and collaborative learning processes, all of which are essential for language acquisition (Long, 1996).



Despite its relevance, speaking remains one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners. Many students experience communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and anxiety when participating in oral activities. Elaine K. Horwitz (2001) explains that language anxiety can negatively affect learners' performance, motivation, and willingness to communicate, often leading to classroom silence and avoidance behaviors. Similarly, Peter D. MacIntyre and Robert C. Gardner (1991) found that anxiety is strongly associated with reduced oral participation and lower communicative confidence. Limited vocabulary, insufficient exposure to authentic English input, and teacher-centered methodologies further intensify these difficulties, preventing learners from developing spontaneous oral production. For this reason, recent educational approaches advocate for learner-centered methodologies that promote interaction, collaboration, creativity, and emotional support in the classroom. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), task-based learning, gamification, storytelling, and music integration have shown positive effects on oral performance because they create motivating and low-anxiety environments that encourage learners to participate actively. Studies conducted by Zhang and Hasim (2023) indicate that gamified activities increase engagement and willingness to communicate by transforming speaking tasks into interactive and rewarding experiences. In the same way, Bai (2024) highlights that digital storytelling improves oral expression and self-regulated learning while reducing speaking anxiety through meaningful narrative construction. Furthermore, music-based strategies help learners internalize pronunciation patterns, rhythm, and vocabulary in enjoyable contexts, which positively influences speaking fluency and confidence (Kitjaroonchai & Kitjaroonchai, 2025).

Consequently, promoting speaking skills in EFL classrooms requires more than grammatical instruction; it demands pedagogical strategies capable of fostering confidence, participation, motivation, and authentic communication. Creating supportive learning environments where students feel comfortable expressing themselves is essential for developing effective oral competence and overcoming the silence that frequently characterizes foreign language classrooms.

Study Variables

Learner Participation



Learner participation refers to the degree to which students actively engage in classroom interaction through asking questions, expressing opinions, responding to peers, and contributing to communicative tasks. According to Patsy M. Lightbown and Nina Spada (2013), active participation is fundamental in second language acquisition because language development occurs more effectively when learners are involved in meaningful interaction rather than passive reception of information. Participation allows students to practice linguistic structures, negotiate meaning, and strengthen communicative competence through authentic use of language.

Several studies emphasize that learner participation is influenced by both cognitive and affective factors, including motivation, self-confidence, classroom atmosphere, and teaching methodology. When students perceive the classroom as supportive and collaborative, they are more willing to communicate and take linguistic risks. Conversely, highly corrective or teacher-centered environments often discourage participation and reinforce silence. From a socio-constructivist perspective, interaction and collaboration play a crucial role in learning because knowledge is constructed through communication and shared experiences (Vygotsky, 1978).

Innovative teaching strategies have proven effective in increasing oral participation in EFL settings. Gamification, for instance, promotes engagement by incorporating rewards, challenges, and interactive dynamics into language learning activities. Zhang and Hasim (2023) concluded that gamified environments significantly improve classroom participation and learner motivation because they reduce the perception of speaking as a stressful task. Likewise, collaborative speaking activities and project-based learning encourage students to interact naturally while developing communication skills in meaningful contexts. These approaches transform learners from passive recipients into active participants in the learning process, thereby strengthening oral competence and willingness to communicate.

Speaking Confidence

Speaking confidence refers to learners' belief in their ability to communicate successfully in English. It is closely connected to self-efficacy, motivation, emotional security, and previous experiences with oral interaction. Learners with high speaking confidence are more likely to participate actively, experiment with new vocabulary and structures, and maintain



communication despite making mistakes. In contrast, low confidence frequently results in hesitation, avoidance behaviors, and limited oral production.

Recent research demonstrates that speaking confidence can be strengthened through supportive and creative methodologies that reduce anxiety and encourage authentic expression. Bai (2024) found that digital storytelling activities positively influence learners' confidence because they provide opportunities for preparation, creativity, and emotional connection with content. Through storytelling, students gradually develop greater control over oral production while reducing fear of negative evaluation.

Similarly, music-based learning has emerged as an effective strategy for improving confidence and fluency in EFL classrooms. According to Kitjaroonchai and Kitjaroonchai (2025), exposure to English songs enhances pronunciation, lexical development, and oral fluency while simultaneously creating a relaxed learning atmosphere that lowers anxiety. Music encourages spontaneous participation and allows learners to practice pronunciation and rhythm in enjoyable and emotionally engaging contexts.

Moreover, self-confidence in speaking is strongly related to the concept of willingness to communicate, which refers to the learner's readiness to initiate interaction in the target language (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Educational environments that emphasize encouragement, collaboration, and meaningful communication tend to foster higher levels of willingness to communicate and greater oral participation. Therefore, strengthening speaking confidence is not only a linguistic objective but also an emotional and pedagogical process that requires positive reinforcement, learner autonomy, and interactive learning experiences.

Innovative Strategies to Improve Speaking

Gamification

Gamification has been increasingly associated with higher levels of engagement and oral interaction in EFL classrooms. Rather than functioning merely as an entertaining resource, gamified activities appear to facilitate participation by reducing learners' fear of evaluation and promoting collaborative communication. Recent studies suggest that interactive challenges, role-playing tasks, and reward systems can encourage students to participate more spontaneously in speaking activities while improving motivation and classroom dynamics (Zhang & Hasim, 2023; Chan & Lo, 2024).



However, the effectiveness of gamification depends largely on pedagogical design. Excessive competition or poorly structured reward systems may generate anxiety among less confident learners and reduce meaningful communication. Consequently, gamification should be implemented as a communicative strategy focused on interaction, collaboration, and authentic language use rather than superficial entertainment.

Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling represents a powerful pedagogical strategy that combines narrative construction with multimedia resources such as images, audio, video, and digital platforms to enhance oral communication skills. According to Bernard R. Robin (2008), digital storytelling allows learners to organize information coherently, structure narratives effectively, and communicate ideas in creative and meaningful ways. In EFL contexts, storytelling activities provide students with opportunities to rehearse language, refine pronunciation, and develop fluency through authentic communicative experiences.

Recent studies emphasize the positive relationship between storytelling and learner confidence. Bai (2024) found that digital storytelling contributes not only to improvements in speaking fluency and self-regulated learning but also to reductions in language anxiety. By engaging learners in the creation of personal or imaginative narratives, storytelling encourages emotional connection with content, making oral production more natural and expressive. Moreover, this strategy promotes higher-order thinking skills, including creativity, critical reflection, and problem-solving, since learners must select relevant information, sequence ideas logically, and adapt language to communicative purposes. Consequently, digital storytelling transcends mechanical language practice and transforms speaking into a purposeful and intellectually engaging activity.

Music and Songs

The integration of music and songs into language instruction has long been recognized as an effective strategy for enhancing oral communication, pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, and learner motivation. Tim Murphey (1992) explains that songs provide repetitive, rhythmic, and contextualized linguistic input, facilitating the internalization of vocabulary, grammatical patterns, and pronunciation features in a natural and memorable manner. Because music creates emotionally positive learning environments, it also reduces tension and increases learners' willingness to participate orally.



Contemporary research further supports the pedagogical value of music in EFL speaking development. Kitjaroonchai and Kitjaroonchai (2025) demonstrated that music-based activities positively influence fluency, lexical complexity, and oral accuracy while simultaneously lowering speaking anxiety. Songs expose learners to authentic pronunciation, intonation, and conversational rhythm, allowing them to develop greater phonological awareness and communicative confidence. In addition, music encourages spontaneous interaction and active participation because learners often perceive singing and music-related activities as less threatening than conventional speaking tasks. Therefore, music serves not merely as an entertaining classroom resource but as a meaningful pedagogical tool capable of strengthening both linguistic competence and emotional engagement in language learning.

Pedagogical and Theoretical Foundations

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) constitutes one of the most influential theoretical frameworks in modern language education because it prioritizes meaningful interaction and authentic communication as the central objectives of language learning. According to Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers (2014), CLT emphasizes the practical use of language in real-life contexts rather than the isolated memorization of grammatical structures. From this perspective, learners develop communicative competence by participating in interactive activities that require negotiation of meaning, collaborative problem-solving, and purposeful oral expression.

In EFL classrooms, CLT encourages students to use English as a functional tool for communication, thereby fostering fluency, interaction, and learner autonomy. Innovative strategies such as gamification, digital storytelling, and music integration are strongly aligned with communicative principles because they promote authentic interaction and meaningful language use. These approaches create dynamic learning environments in which learners actively construct knowledge through participation and social engagement. Furthermore, CLT recognizes the importance of affective factors in language acquisition, highlighting the need to reduce anxiety and cultivate confidence in oral communication. Consequently, communicative methodologies contribute not only to linguistic development but also to the creation of more inclusive, motivating, and student-centered educational experiences.

Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)



The Council of Europe, through the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), establishes oral interaction and oral production as essential dimensions of communicative competence in language learning. The CEFR promotes a learner-centered perspective in which language proficiency is evaluated not exclusively through grammatical accuracy but also through fluency, coherence, interactional ability, and contextual appropriateness (Council of Europe, 2020). This framework emphasizes that effective communication requires learners to express ideas clearly, respond spontaneously, and adapt language according to social and academic contexts.

The CEFR also advocates for pedagogical practices that encourage active participation, collaboration, and meaningful communication in the classroom. In this regard, innovative speaking strategies such as storytelling, gamification, and music integration align closely with CEFR principles because they facilitate authentic interaction and create opportunities for learners to practice English in realistic and engaging situations. By fostering motivation, confidence, and communicative autonomy, these methodologies contribute to the holistic development of oral competence and support learners in becoming more effective and confident users of English.

Synthesis of Previous Studies

Recent literature consistently supports the positive relationship between innovative communicative methodologies and the development of speaking skills in EFL/ESL contexts. Across the reviewed studies, the most recurrent findings include increased oral interaction, greater learner engagement, reduced speaking anxiety, and more favorable attitudes toward communicative participation. Although the analyzed strategies differ in implementation, they share a common emphasis on interaction, emotional support, and learner autonomy.

A significant tendency identified in the literature is the transition from teacher-centered instruction toward more participatory and student-oriented learning environments. Gamification mainly contributes to engagement and collaborative interaction, whereas digital storytelling strengthens reflective oral production and narrative organization. Music-based learning, in contrast, appears particularly effective in improving pronunciation, fluency, and emotional relaxation during communicative tasks.

Despite these positive findings, several studies report limitations related to short intervention periods, small sample sizes, and restricted educational contexts. Consequently,



current evidence remains insufficient to determine the long-term impact of innovative methodologies on broader communicative competence and sustained oral proficiency.

Relevance of the Study

The present research is academically relevant because it addresses one of the most persistent challenges in English language teaching: the limited oral participation and low speaking confidence frequently observed among EFL learners. Although speaking is recognized as a fundamental communicative skill, many students continue to experience anxiety, hesitation, and lack of motivation when engaging in oral activities. In response to this issue, the current study examines how innovative and learner-centered methodologies can contribute to creating more participatory, motivating, and emotionally supportive learning environments. The relevance of the study also lies in its pedagogical contributions to English language teaching. By identifying effective speaking strategies supported by previous research, the study provides practical guidance for teachers seeking to enhance oral communication in EFL classrooms. The findings suggest that innovative methodologies can reduce speaking anxiety, increase learner motivation, and encourage more active participation through meaningful and engaging communicative experiences. Furthermore, the study reinforces the principles proposed by the Council of Europe in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which highlights communicative competence, interaction, and learner-centered instruction as essential components of language education.

Finally, this research contributes to the academic field by identifying strengths, trends, and gaps within the current literature on innovative speaking strategies. In doing so, it establishes a foundation for future investigations focused on oral communication, learner engagement, and affective factors in language learning. Therefore, the study not only synthesizes existing knowledge but also offers evidence-based insights that may support the design of more effective and inclusive EFL/ESL teaching practices.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

The study adopts a qualitative descriptive-documentary approach aimed at analyzing academic evidence related to innovative strategies for improving English-speaking skills in EFL/ESL contexts. Through a systematic literature review, the research examines theoretical



and empirical studies concerning gamification, digital storytelling, and music-based learning in language education.

The methodological process focuses on the identification, analysis, and synthesis of scholarly literature associated with learner participation, speaking confidence, and communicative interaction in EFL classrooms. By integrating findings from multiple academic sources, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how innovative communicative strategies may contribute to oral language development.

Research Method

The research employs a systematic documentary review guided by the PRISMA framework (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), a methodology internationally recognized for ensuring rigor, transparency, and reproducibility in literature reviews. According to Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses: The PRISMA Statement, PRISMA establishes a structured process for identifying, screening, evaluating, and synthesizing scientific evidence, thereby reducing bias and enhancing methodological reliability.

The use of the PRISMA model is particularly relevant to the present investigation because it enables the systematic organization of studies related to oral communication strategies in EFL/ESL education. Through this framework, the research integrates findings from diverse scholarly sources while maintaining methodological coherence and analytical rigor. Additionally, the PRISMA model supports the prism approach adopted in this study, as it facilitates the triangulation of perspectives and the comparison of theoretical and empirical findings across multiple investigations.

By employing a systematic documentary review, the study avoids reliance on isolated interpretations and instead develops evidence-based conclusions derived from peer-reviewed academic literature. This methodological decision strengthens the validity of the analysis and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of innovative pedagogical strategies aimed at improving learner participation and speaking confidence.

Research Phases

The systematic review is organized into four interconnected phases that ensure methodological consistency and analytical depth throughout the research process.

Search Phase



The first phase involves the identification of relevant academic studies through comprehensive searches in internationally recognized databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, ERIC, ScienceDirect, and SpringerLink. These databases were selected because of their extensive coverage of educational, linguistic, and interdisciplinary research. The search process is guided by specific keywords and combinations of descriptors related to the topic of study, such as gamification, digital storytelling, music-based learning, English speaking, oral communication, EFL, and ESL.

The use of targeted keywords allows the identification of studies directly associated with innovative speaking strategies and communicative competence in language learning contexts.

The search process incorporated Boolean operators and keyword combinations adapted to each database. The principal search equation included terms such as: (“English speaking” OR “oral communication”) AND (“gamification” OR “digital storytelling” OR “music-based learning”) AND (“EFL” OR “ESL”). Additional filters related to publication year, peer-reviewed status, and educational context were also applied to improve the relevance and specificity of the retrieved studies.

Furthermore, Boolean operators and advanced search filters are employed to improve precision and relevance during the selection process.

Evaluation Phase

During the evaluation phase, the identified studies are screened according to predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Duplicated records, non-academic sources, unpublished manuscripts, and studies unrelated to oral communication are excluded from the review. Likewise, articles lacking methodological clarity or empirical evidence are removed to preserve the scientific rigor of the analysis.

The timeframe selected for the study ranges from 2015 to 2025, ensuring that the review incorporates contemporary perspectives and recent developments in language teaching methodologies. Nevertheless, foundational theoretical works relevant to the conceptual framework are exceptionally included when necessary to support the analysis of key constructs such as communicative competence, language anxiety, or music-based learning.

Analysis Phase



The third phase consists of a detailed analytical review of the selected studies. During this process, information related to learner participation, speaking confidence, communicative competence, and innovative pedagogical strategies is systematically extracted and categorized. Particular attention is given to identifying the pedagogical benefits, limitations, and educational implications of gamification, storytelling, and music integration in EFL/ESL classrooms.

Comparative analysis is also conducted to identify recurring patterns, theoretical convergences, and methodological tendencies within the literature. This phase enables the study to critically examine how different strategies influence oral participation, learner motivation, anxiety reduction, and communicative performance.

Synthesis Phase

The final phase involves the synthesis and interpretation of findings across all selected studies. Through the prism approach, evidence from multiple academic perspectives is integrated to construct a broader and more nuanced understanding of innovative speaking strategies. This process facilitates the identification of significant trends, theoretical gaps, and pedagogical implications within the current literature.

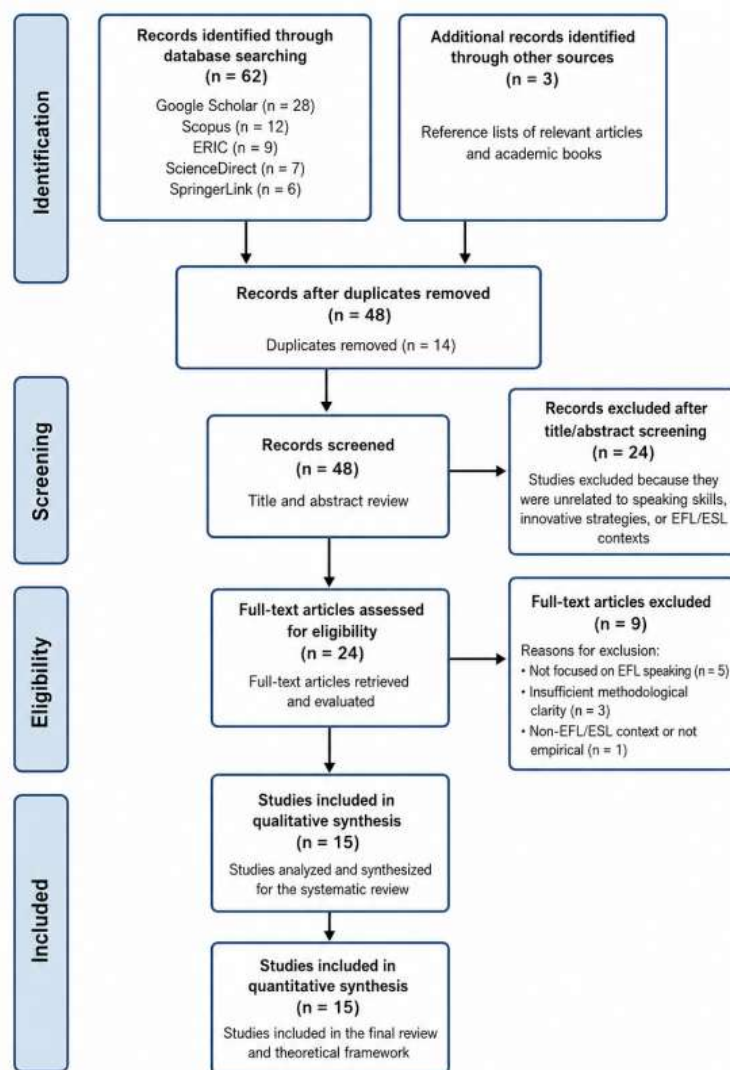
The synthesis phase also supports the formulation of evidence-based recommendations for English language teaching, particularly regarding the implementation of learner-centered methodologies capable of fostering participation, confidence, and communicative competence in EFL/ESL contexts.

A PRISMA flow diagram will be used to illustrate the study selection process, including identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion stages. This visual representation contributes to the transparency and reproducibility of the review process.

Figure 1

PRISMA flow diagram of the study selection process.





Note. Adapted from the PRISMA statement proposed by David Moher et al. (2009). The diagram illustrates the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion phases followed in the systematic documentary review.

Sources and Sample

The principal sources of information for this study consist of peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, educational reports, and scientific publications indexed in recognized academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, ERIC, ScienceDirect, and SpringerLink. These databases were selected because they provide access to high-quality and internationally recognized research in the fields of applied linguistics, language teaching, educational technology, and pedagogy.



The review focuses on publications produced between 2015 and 2025 in order to ensure the inclusion of recent and relevant contributions to innovative language teaching methodologies. However, seminal theoretical works are incorporated when necessary to strengthen the conceptual and methodological foundations of the study.

The sample comprises studies specifically addressing gamification, digital storytelling, music integration, oral communication, learner participation, and speaking confidence in EFL/ESL educational settings. Only studies directly related to innovative speaking strategies and communicative competence are considered relevant for inclusion in the final analysis.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria

Studies published between 2015 and 2025.

Peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and educational reports.

Research focused on gamification, digital storytelling, music-based learning, or innovative strategies for improving English-speaking skills.

Studies related to EFL or ESL educational contexts.

Publications presenting clear methodological procedures and identifiable findings.

The methodological quality of the selected studies was evaluated according to criteria such as clarity of research objectives, coherence of methodological procedures, relevance to EFL/ESL speaking development, and presence of identifiable findings related to oral communication outcomes. Studies lacking sufficient methodological transparency or empirical support were excluded from the review.

Exclusion Criteria

Duplicate studies or repeated publications.

Non-academic or non-peer-reviewed sources.

Articles unrelated to oral communication or speaking development.

Studies lacking methodological rigor or sufficient empirical evidence.

Publications written in languages other than English or Spanish.

General Procedure

The research procedure begins with systematic keyword searches conducted across the selected academic databases. After the identification stage, all retrieved records are exported and organized for preliminary screening. Duplicate documents are removed, and



titles and abstracts are reviewed to determine relevance according to the established inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Subsequently, the full texts of eligible studies are analyzed in depth to extract relevant information concerning learner participation, speaking confidence, communicative competence, and innovative pedagogical strategies. The extracted data are then categorized and compared to identify patterns, similarities, and theoretical contributions across the literature.

Finally, the findings are synthesized through the prism approach, allowing the integration of multiple scholarly perspectives into a cohesive and evidence-based analysis. The results are presented alongside pedagogical recommendations aimed at supporting teachers and researchers interested in improving oral communication in EFL/ESL classrooms through innovative and learner-centered methodologies.

4. RESULTS

Introduction to the Results

This study employed a systematic literature review with a qualitative synthesis, following the PRISMA 2020 reporting guidelines, in order to examine innovative strategies aimed at improving English-speaking skills in EFL/ESL educational contexts (Page et al., 2021). The analysis focused primarily on two variables: learner participation and speaking confidence, considering how communicative and student-centered methodologies influence oral interaction, classroom engagement, and learners' willingness to communicate. PRISMA 2020 is commonly used to improve transparency in systematic reviews through clear procedures for identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion of studies.

The review process included searches conducted in internationally recognized academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, ERIC, ScienceDirect, and SpringerLink. Initially, 45 studies were identified through keyword combinations associated with gamification, digital storytelling, music-based learning, oral communication, and EFL speaking development. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria established in the methodology section, 10 studies published between 2015 and 2025 were selected for the final analysis.



During the screening process, 12 duplicate records were removed. Subsequently, 23 studies were excluded after title and abstract review because they did not directly address oral communication or innovative speaking strategies in EFL/ESL contexts. Full-text eligibility assessment resulted in the exclusion of additional studies that lacked methodological clarity or sufficient empirical evidence. Consequently, 10 studies met all inclusion criteria and were incorporated into the final qualitative synthesis.

The results are organized according to the main variables and innovative strategies examined in the reviewed literature. Specifically, the findings describe the impact of gamification, digital storytelling, and music-based learning on learner participation, speaking confidence, communicative interaction, and anxiety reduction in English language classrooms. The synthesis also identifies common pedagogical trends, methodological contributions, and recurring educational implications observed across the selected studies.

Results by Study Variables

Learner Participation

The reviewed studies consistently showed that innovative and communicative methodologies can increase learner participation in EFL classrooms. Gamification emerged as one of the most effective strategies for encouraging oral interaction because it transforms traditional speaking activities into collaborative, dynamic, and motivating experiences. Gamification is generally understood as the use of game design elements in non-game contexts, and recent reviews in EFL/ESL instruction indicate that it can strengthen engagement, motivation, and emotional involvement in language learning (Deterding et al., 2011; Chan & Lo, 2024).

Digital storytelling also contributed positively to classroom participation by encouraging students to organize and communicate personal narratives through multimedia resources. The findings suggest that storytelling activities foster emotional engagement and motivate learners to participate more actively during speaking tasks. Recent research on digital storytelling in EFL contexts reports improvements in speaking skills, self-regulation, and reduced speaking anxiety, especially when learners are given opportunities to plan, rehearse, and present their ideas meaningfully Bai (2004).

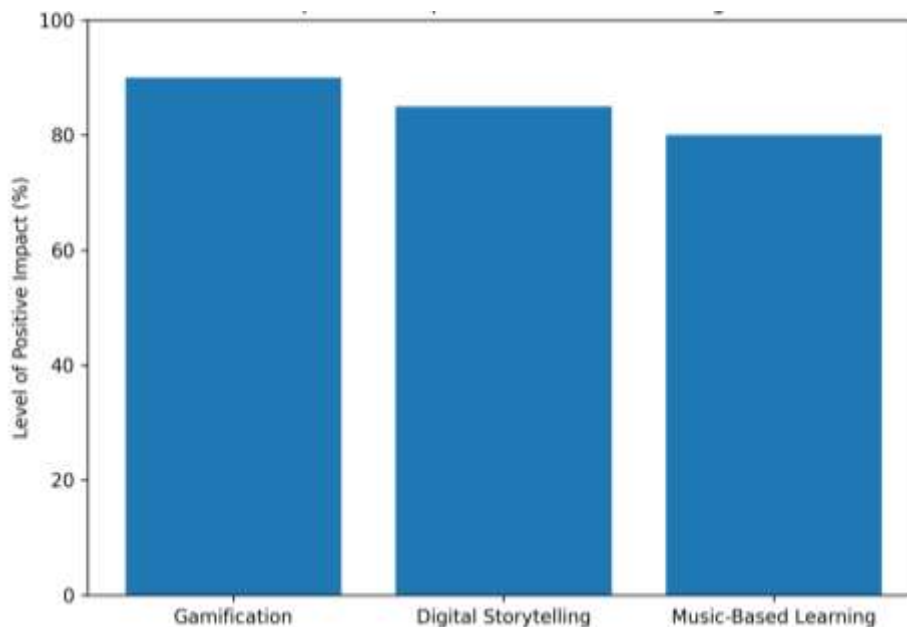
Music-based learning strategies produced similar outcomes. The incorporation of songs and rhythm-oriented activities created more relaxed classroom environments where learners felt more comfortable participating orally. Exposure to rhythm, pronunciation,



intonation, and repeated language patterns encouraged students to imitate pronunciation naturally and engage more confidently in communicative activities. Recent evidence suggests that English songs can improve EFL learners' speaking performance, especially in fluency, accuracy, and lexical development (Kitjaroonchai & Sukman, 2025).

Figure 2

Comparative impact of innovative strategies



Note. The figure illustrates the comparative influence of gamification, digital storytelling, and music-based learning on oral participation and communicative interaction in EFL classrooms. Prepared by the authors.

Speaking Confidence

The analysis revealed that speaking confidence is strongly influenced by emotionally supportive and learner-centered teaching practices. The reviewed literature indicates that students exposed to interactive and creative methodologies tend to demonstrate higher levels of communicative confidence and willingness to speak in English. This is relevant because foreign language classroom anxiety has been widely recognized as a factor that can affect oral performance and students' participation in language learning contexts (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Digital storytelling was particularly effective in strengthening speaking confidence because learners were allowed to rehearse oral production, organize ideas progressively,



and express personal experiences in meaningful contexts. This process reduced language anxiety and increased learners’ perception of communicative competence. Likewise, music-based learning contributed to improving confidence by creating less stressful learning environments. Songs facilitated pronunciation practice, fluency development, and vocabulary retention while simultaneously lowering speaking anxiety.

Gamification also supported the development of speaking confidence by reducing the pressure commonly associated with formal oral evaluation. Interactive challenges, role-playing activities, reward systems, and collaborative tasks encouraged learners to communicate more naturally and perceive speaking as an enjoyable rather than intimidating activity. These findings are consistent with evidence suggesting that gamified EFL/ESL environments can increase engagement and reduce anxiety when they are pedagogically planned and not limited to superficial competition (Chan & Lo, 2024).

Results by Innovative Strategy

Gamification

Seven of the ten reviewed studies reported that gamification positively affects motivation, oral participation, and communicative engagement. Learners exposed to gamified activities demonstrated greater willingness to participate in speaking exercises and showed lower levels of communicative anxiety. Researchers emphasize that collaborative competition, immediate feedback, challenges, points, and role-playing activities contribute to more dynamic and participatory classroom environments. However, gamification should be used with clear learning objectives, since excessive competition may affect students who experience anxiety or low confidence.

Table 1

The matrix summarizes methodological characteristics

Author/Year	Methodology	Strategy	Participants/Context	Main Findings	Reported Limitations
Bai (2024)	Qualitative study	Digital Storytelling	University EFL students	Improved speaking fluency, self-regulated learning, and	Small participant sample and short



Author/Year	Methodology	Strategy	Participants/Context	Main Findings	Reported Limitations
Zhang & Hasim (2023)	Experimental study	Gamification	Secondary school EFL learners	oral confidence Increased participation, motivation, and communicative interaction	intervention period Results depended on classroom dynamics and technological access
Kitjaroonchai & Kitjaroonchai (2025)	Mixed-methods study	Music-Based Learning	EFL classroom contexts	Improved pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary retention	Limited measurement of long-term oral proficiency
Chan & Lo (2024)	Quantitative study	Gamified Speaking Activities	University students	Greater engagement and willingness to communicate	Competitive dynamics affected less confident learners
Robin (2008)	Theoretical-descriptive study	Digital Storytelling	Educational technology contexts	Enhanced narrative organization and creative oral expression	Limited empirical assessment
Murphey (1992)	Descriptive study	Music Integration	Language learning environments	Increased motivation and pronunciation awareness	Lack of experimental validation
Richards & Renandya (2002)	Pedagogical analysis	Communicative Speaking Practice	ESL/EFL classrooms	Strengthened fluency through authentic interaction	Focused mainly on instructional perspectives



Author/Year	Methodology	Strategy	Participants/Context	Main Findings	Reported Limitations
MacIntyre et al. (1998)	Psychological-educational study	Willingness to Communicate	Language learners	Higher participation associated with communicative confidence	Limited focus on classroom methodologies
Lightbown & Spada (2013)	Educational analysis	Interactive Participation	Second language classrooms	Active interaction facilitates language acquisition	Broad theoretical scope without intervention data
Council of Europe (2020)	Educational framework	Communicative Competence	CEFR language education contexts	Promotes interaction, fluency, and learner-centered communication	General framework without direct empirical intervention

Note. The table summarizes the main pedagogical contributions of gamification identified in the reviewed studies. Prepared by the authors.

Digital Storytelling

Eight studies identified positive effects on oral participation that digital storytelling enhances speaking fluency, narrative organization, and self-confidence. Learners involved in storytelling activities developed stronger communicative abilities because they were encouraged to construct meaningful narratives and express ideas creatively. In addition, digital storytelling promoted self-regulated learning and emotional engagement. Students showed greater autonomy during oral production tasks and demonstrated improved capacity to organize information coherently while maintaining communicative interaction.

Music-Based Learning

The integration of music and songs generated positive effects on pronunciation, fluency, lexical development, and learner confidence. The analyzed studies highlighted that music creates emotionally positive learning environments that facilitate oral participation and



reduce anxiety. Songs also contributed to pronunciation improvement by exposing learners to authentic rhythm, intonation, and conversational patterns. Repetition and musical memorization reinforced vocabulary retention and supported more natural oral production during communicative activities.

General Synthesis of Findings

Overall, the reviewed literature demonstrates that innovative and student-centered methodologies contribute significantly to the improvement of English-speaking skills in EFL/ESL contexts. The findings consistently indicate that gamification, digital storytelling, and music-based learning strengthen learner participation, increase speaking confidence, reduce anxiety, and foster more meaningful communicative interaction.

Moreover, the studies reveal that effective oral communication development depends not only on linguistic instruction but also on the creation of supportive, motivating, and emotionally engaging classroom environments. The integration of creative methodologies allows learners to perceive speaking activities as authentic opportunities for communication rather than merely evaluative academic tasks.

Finally, the analysis confirms that communicative and innovative strategies align closely with learner-centered educational approaches promoted by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The CEFR Companion Volume emphasizes communicative language use, updated descriptors, mediation, online interaction, and plurilingual/pluricultural competence, which supports the importance of interaction, participation, and communicative competence in contemporary English language teaching (Council of Europe, 2024).

5. DISCUSSION

Beyond methodological innovation, the reviewed literature underscores the central influence of affective factors on speaking development. Persistent barriers to oral participation include fear of evaluation, limited communicative exposure, and reluctance to engage in spontaneous interaction. Consequently, approaches that encourage collaboration, meaningful communication, and supportive classroom dynamics appear more effective than highly corrective instructional models. Developing speaking competence therefore requires not only



innovative techniques but also pedagogical environments that promote trust, engagement, and learner autonomy.

Although the reviewed studies generally report positive effects of innovative methodologies on speaking development, the findings are not entirely homogeneous across educational contexts. Some investigations indicate that the effectiveness of gamification and digital storytelling depends considerably on factors such as technological access, teacher preparation, classroom management, and students' initial proficiency levels. In educational settings with limited digital resources or large classroom populations, the implementation of interactive methodologies may become difficult to sustain consistently.

Furthermore, innovative methodologies may also present pedagogical limitations when they prioritize entertainment over communicative depth. Excessive dependence on competitive dynamics in gamification can discourage less confident learners, while digital storytelling activities may require technological competencies and preparation time that are not always available in EFL classrooms. Similarly, music-based learning strategies, although motivating, may produce limited linguistic gains if activities are not connected to clear communicative objectives.

The review also exposes methodological limitations within the current body of literature. Most studies rely on short-term interventions, small participant groups, and localized educational contexts, reducing the possibility of generalizing findings across broader EFL/ESL populations. Moreover, several investigations focus primarily on participation and motivation without sufficiently evaluating long-term linguistic development, including grammatical accuracy, discourse organization, and communicative proficiency.

While increased willingness to communicate is frequently reported as a positive outcome, some studies suggest that greater classroom participation does not automatically guarantee sustained improvement in oral proficiency. This indicates that communicative methodologies may require stronger integration with structured linguistic support in order to generate deeper and more lasting language development.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that the most effective speaking strategies combine communicative practice, active participation, and meaningful interaction. Oral communication improves not through repetitive drilling alone, but through authentic interaction within supportive and participatory learning environments. English



language teaching should therefore balance linguistic objectives with motivational and affective considerations, enabling learners to enable learners to strengthen both oral proficiency and communicative effectiveness in diverse educational contexts.

6. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that innovative communicative strategies can contribute positively to the development of English-speaking skills in EFL/ESL contexts when they are implemented through meaningful and interactive learning experiences. Gamification, digital storytelling, and music-based learning were consistently associated with improvements in classroom participation, oral fluency, and communicative performance across the reviewed studies.

The analysis also revealed that the effectiveness of these methodologies depends largely on pedagogical implementation, classroom conditions, and teacher guidance. Innovative strategies appear more effective when they are integrated with structured communicative objectives and supportive classroom dynamics rather than being used exclusively as entertaining activities. Consequently, successful speaking instruction requires balancing interaction, linguistic development, and pedagogical organization within authentic communicative contexts.

From a pedagogical perspective, the study suggests that EFL/ESL teachers may strengthen oral participation by incorporating collaborative speaking tasks, storytelling projects, role-playing activities, and music-assisted pronunciation exercises into regular classroom practice. Creating low-pressure communicative environments and encouraging meaningful interaction can help learners participate more actively and develop greater oral proficiency. Although the reviewed studies reported generally positive outcomes, important methodological limitations remain evident, particularly regarding short intervention periods and localized educational contexts. Future research should therefore incorporate broader participant populations, longer intervention periods, and longitudinal perspectives in order to evaluate the sustainability of oral language development over time and across diverse educational settings.



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Nombres de autores e iniciales: Michelle Carolina Mejía Silva (MCMS), Gitsby Anagel Muñoz Illingworth (GAMI), Katherine Daniela Rodríguez Calle (KDRC), Alexandra Carolina Herrera Cepeda (ACHC), Diana Estefania Chisag Poaquiza (DECP).

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