

## **Exploring Changes in Self-Reported Speaking Confidence Following a Collaborative Dialogue Activity among A2-Level EFL Students in Quito**

*Explorando cambios en la confianza autoinformada al hablar tras una actividad de diálogo colaborativo entre estudiantes de EFL de nivel A2 en Quito*

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### **Abstract**

This study investigated changes in the self-reported speaking confidence of 30 A2-level EFL students from a public school in Quito, Ecuador, after participating in a structured collaborative dialogue activity. A quantitative one-group pretest–posttest design was employed. Information was gathered using a 10-item Likert-scale questionnaire administered before and after the activity and a structured observation rubric applied during the task. Because the questionnaire data were ordinal and paired, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to compare the pretest and posttest results. The total speaking-confidence score increased from a mean of 29.60 (SD = 4.41) at pretest to 48.77 (SD = 1.33) at posttest,  $Z = -4.79$ ,  $p < .001$ , with a large effect size ( $r = .88$ ). Observation results also showed high levels of participation, engagement, cooperation, motivation, and enjoyment. Nevertheless, a small number of students continued to display some anxiety or a less confident tone of voice during the activity. The findings should be interpreted cautiously because the study did not include a comparison group and relied mainly on self-reported confidence measured immediately after the intervention. These limitations restrict causal interpretation and generalizability. Overall, the results suggest that structured collaborative dialogue may be a useful classroom strategy for providing A2-level EFL learners with less pressured opportunities to participate in oral interaction, receive peer support, and strengthen their perceived confidence when speaking English.

Keywords: A2 learners; collaborative dialogue; EFL; peer interaction; speaking confidence.

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## Resumen

El estudio permitió investigar lo que cambió en la confianza autopercebida para hablar inglés de 30 alumnos de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) para el nivel A2 de una escuela pública de Quito, Ecuador, después de participar en una actividad estructurada de diálogo colaborativo. Se utilizó un diseño cuantitativo de un solo grupo con pretest y postest. Los datos se recopilaron a través de un cuestionario de 10 ítems con escala de Likert, aplicado antes y después de la actividad, y una rúbrica de observación estructurada utilizada durante la tarea. Debido a que los datos del cuestionario eran ordinales y pareados, se aplicó la prueba de rangos con signo de Wilcoxon para examinar como difieren las puntuaciones del pretest y del postest. La puntuación total de confianza al hablar aumentó de una media de 29,60 en el pretest a 48,77 en el postest,  $p < .001$ , con un tamaño del efecto grande ( $r = .88$ ). Los resultados de la observación evidenciaron altos niveles de participación, involucramiento, cooperación, motivación y disfrute. Un pequeño número de estudiantes continuó mostrando cierta ansiedad o un tono de voz menos seguro durante la actividad. Los hallazgos se deben interpretar con prudencia, debido a que el estudio no incluye grupo de comparación y se basó principalmente en la confianza autopercebida, medida inmediatamente luego de la intervención. Los resultados indican que el diálogo colaborativo estructurado puede constituir una estrategia útil en el aula para brindar a los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera del grupo estudiado.

Palabras clave: Estudiantes de A2; diálogo colaborativo; inglés como lengua extranjera; interacción entre pares; confianza al hablar.

## Introduction

English language education within Ecuador's public school system has moved steadily toward communicative approaches over recent years. The national curriculum includes constructs for learning English with respect to the Competences in the Common European Framework for Languages. It lays out competence standards for instruction in oral communication, reading, writing, cultural appreciation, and use of language in the arts (Ministerio de Educación, 2016). Just because communicative learning objectives exist does not mean students enter the classroom prepared to speak. Students are expected to use language in real time, to be responsive, to manage the exchange of verbal and nonverbal cues, and to be comfortable with making mistakes in front of an audience. For learners at the A2 level, the challenges of spoken communication are especially pronounced because students are working to expand their language repertoire while developing their own communicative self-efficacy.

According to the CEFR Companion Volume, basic users are people who, with the assistance of a more skilled communicator, are able to complete simple, routine communicative tasks (Council of Europe, 2020). This is useful because A2 students can most likely construct a complete sentence and understand a simple question but may still be able to remain completely silent when asked to do something unexpectedly. Because of this, oral production cannot be considered a technical skill, of which grammar and pronunciation are the only metrics.

It is also an affective and social experience shaped by classroom atmosphere, the degree to which students trust their own abilities, peer support, and whether the task creates pressure or a sense of safety.

Recent studies have begun to understand the emotional aspects of learning to speak a second language. Alqarni (2021), identified that speaking anxiety has an inverse relation with students' willingness to speak. However, enjoyment and supportive classroom environments yield positive results and promote students' willingness to speak. Wang et al. (2021) identified the classroom's social climate and students' emotional experiences together with their language mindset, as the most significant predictors of students' willingness to speak a foreign language. Botes et al. (2020), identified a relationship of perceived language ability with enjoyment and anxiety. The evidence reviewed indicates that helping students develop a sense of ability to speak in a foreign language is not simply motivational, it is pedagogical as well. These studies validate a teacher's informal observation. When students choose not to participate in class discussions, it's most likely due to a low level of confidence and a lack of support from their peers, as well as a lack of low-pressure opportunities to speak.

Collaborative dialogue addresses this issue. When students participate in collaborative dialogue, they work as a group, create context, support the generation of their own language, identify breakdowns and gaps, and construct verbal responses that are collaborative. This view is consistent with Vygotsky's (1978), sociocultural theory, which maintains that learning is socially constructed and that interaction serves as the impetus for growth. It also connects to Swain's (2000) formulation of collaborative dialogue as a form of language-mediated problem solving, where language serves not only as a tool for communication but also as an object of joint reflection. For A2-level students particularly, having a peer alongside can reduce the emotional weight of speaking and provide a meaningful intermediate step between private preparation and public oral performance in front of the whole group.

There is some existing research about the difficulties of oral communication in the context of Ecuadorian public schools. Guevara-Peñaranda et al. (2024), stated that despite the resources afforded to them during school, graduates of Ecuadorian public secondary schools struggle with oral production, listening comprehension, and fluency in speaking. Research of this nature underscores the need for teachers to adopt approaches that offer students more opportunities to perform oral tasks and strengthen their confidence in communication. The need to develop communicative confidence and skills mandates the use of practical strategies. Among those strategies are cooperative and collaborative ones, which place the responsibility of speaking on the students, as these strategies take the focus away from the instructor and maximize the student's interactions with their peers (Johnson & Johnson, 2019; Keramati & Gillies, 2022).

The review of literature indicated that although collaboration has been of interest in second language acquisition research, there is little research on perceived confidence of speaking practice among A2 learners in public schools in Ecuador or on confidence as an affective factor of speaking performance. As well, there is a lack of research utilizing sociocultural theory to provide speaking practice in large, possibly reticent classes with limited instructional time.

The focus of this study is to observe the immediate effects on classroom oral participation students experience from the collaborative dialogue activity, including willingness to speak, fear of mistakes, peer interaction, perceptions of speaking tasks, and speaking-confidence scores. This study does not examine the long-term effects on oral proficiency. In order to address the aforementioned aim, the study considers the following guiding questions:

1. How does collaborative dialogue support speaking confidence and participation among A2-level EFL learners in Quito?
2. What are the students' perceptions of collaborative dialogue to foster oral production in the EFL class?"

This study analyzes the paired scores of questionnaires and structured observations in this context, bringing classroom data into this under-researched context of public schools in Ecuador to contribute to the creation of low-pressure speaking activities for A2-level students.

### ***Theoretical foundation: sociocultural learning and collaborative dialogue***

Sociocultural theory outlines the advantages of utilizing collaborative dialogue in education. Language learning, or “crawling,” as Vygotsky describes it, takes place when students are active participants in mediated social practices (Vygotsky, 1978). Instruction in foreign languages does not involve isolated cognitive processes. Forming concepts of a foreign language is predicated on interaction with socially mediated practices. The sociocultural mediated speaking practices of the language classroom are fundamental to acquiring a foreign language. The idea of a mediated practice in the language of the classroom can be described in a different way by employing Vygotsky's (1978), concept of the “zone of proximal development.” A gap separates what a student can accomplish independently from what is possible with the assistance of others. Practicing spoken language can be aided by the teacher but can also be aided by classmates in the form of collaborative word production, pronunciation modeling, or the structuring of a language response.

The value of peer interaction is found in the goal-oriented and supportive nature of the target language learner population. There are limits to the support an instructor can provide in a large instructional setting. Because of this, Sato and Ballinger (2016), believe that peer interactions foster the use of language beyond the textbook. It also has the potential to be a therapeutic space. This notion is supported by Poehner and Leontjev (2023), who argue that this space is a construct of the way the task is designed and the teacher's role in framing the task and providing a safe space for the learners to engage in true collaboration. Pairing students is not a goal of collaboration. Task design, the framing of the interpersonal conditions, and the degree of guidance towards a productive interaction will foster collaboration and dialogue.

According to Swain (2000), the use of language to mediate learning is possible. With the aid of language, learners are able to articulate, hypothesize, and most importantly fill the gaps in their understanding as a group. Language and learning go hand in hand. In a less threatening context,

such as working with a classmate, students have opportunities to practice their ideas and their language, receive support, and make adjustments before presenting them in a large group.

Johnson and Johnson (2019), conceptualize cooperative learning as a combination of 5 interdependent constructs: positive interdependence, accountability, face-to-face interaction, interpersonal skills, and group processing. Each of these constructs is relevant for speaking tasks, as they encourage learners to depend on each other as well as take responsibility for the work they accomplish. Jacobs and Chau (2021), combine cooperative learning and positive psychology. They argue that the supportive interaction of the students promotes not only the academic achievements of the students, but also their motivation and emotional well-being. For instance, these factors may be more vital as opposed to a grammar lesson in convincing A2-level students to be more verbal when they speak in class.

Current empirical work continues to reinforce collaborative and cooperative work in language learning. Gökçe (2020) studied cooperative learning with Vygotskian concepts in mind, placing social interaction at the core of participation. Keramati and Gillies (2022), discussed the positive aspects and real challenges of cooperative learning in diverse cultures, stating that results are highly dependent on appropriate planning. In Ecuador, Pérez-Cañar and Troya-Sánchez (2023) recorded favorable opinions from students about cooperative learning in EFL secondary education, and though their focus was on writing, the results are valid for other skills. If tasks are carefully constructed to encourage equal participation, this tendency is widespread in collaborative learning frameworks.

Research has found that collaborative task-based dialogue develops oral skills. In the case of Shirazifard et al. (2022), task-based collaborative dialogue improved learners' EFL speaking skills and enhanced learners' attitudes towards EFL speaking. At the university level, Al Jawad (2023) reported that EFL speaking performance improved through cooperative learning. Furthermore, whether conducted face-to-face or online, collaborative learning settings helped to reduce speaking anxiety (Bozkurt & Aydin, 2023). These findings suggest that the ability to speak confidently and competently may be related to creating the conditions and environment that make learners feel more comfortable and, therefore, more willing to speak, particularly those learners with lower language proficiency.

### ***Speaking confidence, anxiety, and willingness to communicate***

Speaking confidence can be understood as students' perceived capacity to express their thoughts through speech and to react calmly to errors. Speaking confidence is not the same as grammatical confidence, because a student could feel confident about grammar rules but may not want to speak in class for fear, uneasiness, or embarrassment due to negative feedback. Speaking confidence is a crucial factor for A2 students who are expected to begin communicating independently. Speaking confidence may also contribute to continued class participation and taking turns to ask for or offer assistance.

Language anxiety has also been a common reason for the lack of participation in speaking activities. Alnahidh and Altalhab (2020), cite the fear of making mistakes and missing vocabulary, the expectation of negative judgment by classmates, and an overall lack of speaking practice as behaviors which many EFL students are likely to associate with speaking. An inverse association between anxiety and L2 performance is stated in the meta-analytic review by Teimouri et al. (2019). Most recently, Lee (2020) linked the enjoyment of a classroom and the persistence to a likeliness to communicate, and MacIntyre (2020), argued that the likeliness to communicate should not be viewed as a constant personality trait, but should be a variable that changes based on the situation with the given person and the perceived classroom environment.

Collaborative dialogue can help anxious students. Restructuring the conditions under which students speak is the primary way this is achieved. Speaking to one classmate instead of the entire thirty-member audience helps shrink the audience. Shrinking the audience also brings the classmate closer as a source of support. Bashori et al. (2021), showed that even without technology presence, anxiety is often the result of the amount of communicative pressure. When communicative pressure is relaxed, and support is present, students are more likely to participate.

According to Hiver et al. (2024), language learning entails engagement as a construct of behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions. Framing is imperative to language engagement. Collaborative dialogue has the potential to engage the aforementioned dimensions, as students are required to listen, respond, and work to find and negotiate meaning, as well as stay connected to the learning task. Zhang et al. (2021), showed that enjoyment and emotion regulation contribute to the development of speaking confidence in online collaborative language learning. Confidence is not a personality trait that some individuals have and others do not. Particularly, the quality of classroom interactions and the emotional surroundings and supports brought to the task influence the confidence of the classroom learners and shape the perceptions.

In the context of this study, collaborative dialogue is a peer talking activity designed for students to ask and answer questions, take turns, listen to their partner, and assist a partner experiencing difficulty during the activity. This was designed with A2-level students in mind, meaning that simple exchanges were prioritized because demanding participants' fluency would have been out of reach for many of the students. The rationale was simple. Learners who are given speaking opportunities with a purposeful partner engaged in the task with them often will speak more, are more likely to project their voices, participate, collaborate, and are more likely to have a more positive experience with the English language.

## Methodology

This research utilized a quantitative inquiry approach with a pre-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design, along with an in-class observation tool (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). A questionnaire and a pre- and post-test observation rubric served to gather data on classroom behavior. The observation tool measured the ordinal behavior of students as they participated in

the task, and the questionnaire measured ordinal data on students' self-reported confidence levels at two points in time. Both the instruments should provide a complementary quantitative data set on the change in confidence and observed classroom behaviors resulting from completing the collaborative dialogue task.

Comparison of the speaking-confidence ratings from the pre- and post-activity responses of the same students was possible due to the one-group design. Causality or long-term language change could not be demonstrated with the absence of a comparison group, so the study examined change in confidence as it occurred ostensibly within the group, as well as participation, interaction, and attitudes during the in-class activity. For a study, which was to investigate a specific group of A2-level learners in a real teaching context, this design was entirely appropriate.

### ***Setting and participants***

The participant group consisted of thirty A2-level students, 17 male and 13 female, between 15 and 16 years old from an English class at a public school in Quito, Ecuador. Only non-probability convenience sampling was possible because the study was done with a real classroom group that already shared the same instructional context. For inclusion in the sample, students were required to regularly attend English lessons, be of A2 level, agree to take part in the activity, and have parental consent where applicable. No student withdrew from the study, and they all complied with the inclusion criteria. The sample size also worked for this type of descriptive classroom study because the teacher-researcher could see all the students in the classroom, allowing the teacher-researcher to track all students and their interactions during the pair and group work.

Ecuadorian public school EFL classrooms face time constraints, needs that are not uniform from student to student, and almost an overwhelming focus on grammar, vocabulary, and written work. While these aspects are important, they can push out time for classroom speaking practice. This study focused on a strategy that does not demand many resources or technology. This approach is important for public education in Ecuador, because the national curriculum demands at least some level of communicative competence from students. At the same time, teachers need options to enhance students' oral practice that are not outside the realities of everyday classroom limitations (Guevara-Peñaranda et al., 2024; Ministerio de Educación, 2016).

### ***Collaborative dialogue activity***

This task asked students to exchange real information from their classmates rather than produce specific sentences or complete a set of drills. The activity occurred in three different days of 15-minute sessions conducted during three consecutive English lessons. Students worked in pairs outside the classroom, using a die that they had constructed with an information question on each face. One student rolled the die, asked the question, and their partner responded. At the command of "switch" from the teacher, students in one line moved a space to the right and paired up with

a different classmate. Students worked in pairs before performing as a class to decrease the strain associated with speaking before the whole class. Students were required to participate in the activity by taking turns, listening, responding, and cooperating with their partner. The design of the task demonstrates positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, and social support, which are integral components of cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2019; Jacobs & Chau, 2021).

### ***Instruments***

Two instruments were used to collect data. The first is an observation checklist rubric (Annex A) that is divided into three sections: Confidence in Speaking, Collaborative Dialogue, and Students' Attitudes and Perceptions. The observation checklist has 10 indicators: Speaks confidently during the dialogue, Maintains the conversation without long silence, Responds spontaneously to questions, Listens to their partner, Asks questions related to the topic, Maintains the interaction using English expressions, Uses appropriate vocabulary for the topic, Uses basic grammatical structures correctly, Pronounces words clearly and understandably, Shows interest and a positive attitude during the dialogue. Each item is rated on an ordinal scale, and the data is reported in the High and Good categories because all the students observed fell in those two categories. The teacher/researcher used the observation checklist rubric to record observations during the collaborative dialogue activity. Because of the lack of a second observer, an inter-rater calculation for reliability was not possible, and observer bias could be a limitation.

The second instrument was a 10-item speaking confidence questionnaire comprised of three sections (see Annex B). A five-point Likert response format was applied, and this instrument was given twice, the first time as a pretest prior to the collaborative dialogue activity and the second time as a posttest immediately following the collaborative dialogue activity in order to assess paired responses from the same students. The neutral response was retained since this is a student self-assessed response, and students may feel unsure about answering some of these questions about confidence and fear of making mistakes (Kankaraš & Capecchi, 2025). The questionnaire items were aligned with the three dimensions assessed in the study.

Content validity evidence for the questionnaire was reviewed by two specialists in the area of Applied Linguistics and English Language Teaching to give their ideas about item clarity and relevance, coherence, and appropriateness of each questionnaire statement for A2-level learners. The experts recommended simplifying the wording of Items 2 and 4, clarifying the response instructions, and replacing unfamiliar vocabulary with terms appropriate for A2-level learners. The corresponding items and instructions were revised accordingly. To check the clarity of instructions and items as well as the time needed to complete the questionnaire, it was piloted with 8 A2-level EFL students from another class of the same school who were not part of the study sample. These changes were made to the wording of some items on the survey to clarify the meaning of the items, as well as a modification in the directions for responding to the survey to indicate that students should choose one response for each statement.

For the speaking confidence questionnaire having 10 items, internal consistency was carried out by calculating the Cronbach's alpha. The analysis showed a total coefficient of .881, where the subscale coefficients were .887 for speaking confidence, .874 for collaborative dialogue, and .907 for attitudes and perceptions. These results provide good internal consistency suggesting appropriate reliability of the instrument at hand.

### ***Data analysis and ethical considerations***

Data from the questionnaires were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. As the data were paired measurements, and the data derived from the Likert-scale questionnaire are ordinal level data, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was applied to evaluate paired observations by contrasting the participants' pretest and posttest results and determining whether the corresponding mean ranks differed. Data were collected by assigning values to the participants' responses in the range of 1 to 5 for each item. Scores for each item were summed to compute a score for each section of the questionnaire, as well as a total questionnaire score. Significant differences were accepted at  $p < .05$ . To supplement the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, the effect size ( $r$ ) of the difference between pretest and posttest measures was reported. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for each level of rubric items for observations. A distribution of scores for the observation of the students' participation, confidence-related behaviors, collaboration, and attitudes during the activity was interpreted.

There was a strong focus on the ethics involved. Students were informed clearly, in advance, of the reason why they were being asked to take part in this activity and how the information they provided would be used. There were no names in any of the data tables or manuscript. This questionnaire was applied to all students. There was an institutional authorization and also a written informed consent. The study actively avoided any method that may potentially negatively impact an individual student or impact students' grades. The collaborative task was incorporated in a routine way into normal classroom practice, and the design of the task intended to ensure that the task was experienced by students as being supportive rather than potentially being seen as being evaluative.

### **Results**

The results from the observation checklist rubric and the speaking-confidence questionnaire are presented in this section. The results of the observation checklist rubric include a pretest-posttest comparison as well as the distribution of each item for the posttest. Each table is followed by a restatement of the frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and test statistics in an objective summary.

Table 1. Observation checklist rubric: confidence and collaborative participation (n = 30)

| Dimension                 | Indicator                                                   | High n (%)  | Good n (%) | Interpretation                                                    |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Confidence in speaking    | Speaks confidently during the dialogue.                     | 30 (100.0%) | 0 (0.0%)   | Students spoke voluntarily and confidently during the task.       |
| Confidence in speaking    | Maintains the conversation without long silence.            | 28 (93.3%)  | 2 (6.7%)   | Most students appeared relaxed; two still showed mild hesitation. |
| Confidence in speaking    | Responds spontaneously to questions.                        | 27 (90.0%)  | 3 (10.0%)  | Most students used a clear and confident voice.                   |
| Collaborative dialogue    | Listens to their partner.                                   | 30 (100.0%) | 0 (0.0%)   | All students remained engaged in the collaborative task.          |
| Collaborative dialogue    | Asks questions related to the topic.                        | 28 (93.3%)  | 2 (6.7%)   | Most interactions were related to the topic.                      |
| Collaborative dialogue    | Maintains the interaction using English expressions.        | 28 (93.3%)  | 2 (6.7%)   | Most students respected turns with few difficulties.              |
| Attitudes and perceptions | Uses appropriate vocabulary for the topic.                  | 30 (100.0%) | 0 (0.0%)   | All students showed high knowledge of the topic.                  |
| Attitudes and perceptions | Uses basic grammatical structures correctly.                | 30 (100.0%) | 0 (0.0%)   | All students used grammatical structures correctly.               |
| Attitudes and perceptions | Pronounces words clearly and understandably.                | 30 (100.0%) | 0 (0.0%)   | All students pronounced words well.                               |
| Attitudes and perceptions | Shows interest and a positive attitude during the dialogue. | 30 (100.0%) | 0 (0.0%)   | All students showed enjoyment of the activity.                    |

Source: own elaboration based on field data, 2026.

As shown in Table 1, all 30 (100.0%) of the students were rated High for Speaks confidently during the dialogue, Listens to their partner, Uses appropriate vocabulary for the topic, Uses basic grammatical structures correctly, Pronounces words clearly and understandably, Shows interest and a positive attitude; 28 (93.3%) were rated High and 2 (6.7%) were rated Developing for Maintains the conversation without long silence, Asks questions related to the topic, Maintains the interaction using English expressions; 27 (90.0%) were rated High and 3 (10.0%) were rated Moderate for Responds spontaneously to questions.

Comparison of the pretest and posttest observation checklist rubric scores was made using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test. The checklist rubric has an overall scoring range of 10 to 50, where a higher score indicates a higher level of self-reported confidence in speaking. Section scores were also tested for confidence in speaking, collaborative dialogue, and attitudes and perceptions.

Table 2. Pre-test and post-test comparison of speaking-confidence scores (n = 30)

| Measure                                     | Pre-test M (SD) | Post-test M (SD) | Mean difference | Wilcoxon result              | Interpretation          |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Confidence in speaking (3 items; 3-15)      | 8.60 (1.72)     | 14.23 (0.87)     | +5.63           | Z = -4.74; p < .001; r = .87 | Significant improvement |
| Collaborative dialogue (3 items; 3-15)      | 8.83 (1.64)     | 14.77 (0.43)     | +5.94           | Z = -4.78; p < .001; r = .87 | Significant improvement |
| Attitudes and perceptions (4 items; 4-20)   | 12.17 (2.30)    | 19.77 (0.57)     | +7.60           | Z = -4.79; p < .001; r = .88 | Significant improvement |
| Total questionnaire score (10 items; 10-50) | 29.60 (4.41)    | 48.77 (1.33)     | +19.17          | Z = -4.79; p < .001; r = .88 | Significant improvement |

Source: own elaboration based on field data, 2026.

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; r = effect size.

According to Table 2, the total questionnaire score averaged 29.60 (SD = 4.41) at pretest and 48.77 (SD = 1.33) at posttest, with a mean difference of 19.17. The total score for the posttest was significantly higher than the pretest score,  $Z = -4.79$ ,  $p < .001$ , and the effect magnitude was large ( $r = .88$ ). At the section level, confidence in speaking increased from 8.60 (SD = 1.72) to 14.23 (SD = 0.87), collaborative dialogue from 8.83 (SD = 1.64) to 14.77 (SD = 0.43), and attitudes and perceptions from 12.17 (SD = 2.30) to 19.77 (SD = 0.57). The largest mean increase occurred in attitudes and perceptions (+7.60), while all three sections showed significant improvements with similarly large effect sizes ( $r = .87$  to  $.88$ ;  $p < .001$ ). The results indicate a significant increase in confidence in speaking, collaborative dialogue, and attitudes and perceptions. Without a comparison group, alternative explanations cannot be ruled out.

Table 3. Speaking confidence questionnaire: section 1, confidence in speaking, post-test (n = 30)

| Item                                                      | Strongly agree n (%) | Agree n (%) | Neutral n (%) | Disagree n (%) | Strongly disagree n (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------|---------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| I feel confident when I speak English in class.           | 19 (63.3%)           | 9 (30.0%)   | 2 (6.7%)      | 0 (0.0%)       | 0 (0.0%)                |
| I am not afraid of making mistakes when speaking English. | 23 (76.7%)           | 7 (23.3%)   | 0 (0.0%)      | 0 (0.0%)       | 0 (0.0%)                |
| I believe my speaking skill is improving.                 | 27 (90.0%)           | 3 (10.0%)   | 0 (0.0%)      | 0 (0.0%)       | 0 (0.0%)                |

Source: own elaboration based on field data, 2026.

Table 3 shows that 19 students (63.3%) strongly agreed and 9 (30.0%) agreed that they felt confident speaking English in class, with 2 students (6.7%) selecting the neutral response. Twenty-three students (76.7%) strongly agreed and 7 (23.3%) reported that making mistakes did not

frighten them. Twenty-seven students (90.0%) strongly agreed and 3 (10.0%) agreed that their speaking skill was improving.

Table 4. Speaking confidence questionnaire: section 2, collaborative dialogue, post-test (n = 30)

| Item                                                          | Strongly agree n (%) | Agree n (%) | Neutral n (%) | Disagree n (%) | Strongly disagree n (%) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------|---------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| Collaborative dialogue helps me improve my speaking skill.    | 29 (96.7%)           | 1 (3.3%)    | 0 (0.0%)      | 0 (0.0%)       | 0 (0.0%)                |
| I feel more confident when I speak English with a partner.    | 27 (90.0%)           | 3 (10.0%)   | 0 (0.0%)      | 0 (0.0%)       | 0 (0.0%)                |
| I feel supported by my classmates during speaking activities. | 27 (90.0%)           | 3 (10.0%)   | 0 (0.0%)      | 0 (0.0%)       | 0 (0.0%)                |

Source: own elaboration based on field data, 2026.

As noted in Table 4, 29 students (96.7%) strongly agreed, and 1 (3.3%) agreed that collaborative dialogue assisted them in developing their speaking skill. Twenty-seven students (90.0%) strongly agreed, and 3 (10.0%) agreed that they felt more confident when speaking with a partner. Twenty-seven students (90.0%) strongly agreed, and 3 (10.0%) agreed that they felt supported by their classmates when speaking.

Table 5. Speaking confidence questionnaire: section 3, attitudes and perceptions, post-test (n = 30)

| Item                                                                        | Strongly agree n (%) | Agree n (%) | Neutral n (%) | Disagree n (%) | Strongly disagree n (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------|---------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| I participate actively in pair or group speaking tasks.                     | 28 (93.3%)           | 2 (6.7%)    | 0 (0.0%)      | 0 (0.0%)       | 0 (0.0%)                |
| I ask and answer questions in English during pair work.                     | 27 (90.0%)           | 3 (10.0%)   | 0 (0.0%)      | 0 (0.0%)       | 0 (0.0%)                |
| I feel motivated to participate in speaking activities.                     | 30 (100.0%)          | 0 (0.0%)    | 0 (0.0%)      | 0 (0.0%)       | 0 (0.0%)                |
| I speak more English during collaborative activities than individual tasks. | 28 (93.3%)           | 2 (6.7%)    | 0 (0.0%)      | 0 (0.0%)       | 0 (0.0%)                |

Source: own elaboration based on field data, 2026.

Table 5 illustrates that 28 of the students (93.3%) strongly agreed and 2 of the students (6.7%) agreed that they participated actively in speaking tasks with a partner or group. Twenty-seven of

the students (90.0%) strongly agreed and 3 (10.0%) agreed that they asked and answered questions in English when working in pairs. All of the students (100.0%) strongly agreed that they were motivated to participate in speaking activities. Twenty-eight of the students (93.3%) strongly agreed and 2 of the students (6.7%) agreed that they spoke more English when they worked with others than when they worked alone.

Both instruments recorded predominantly High ratings for participation, cooperation, motivation, enjoyment, and predominantly Agree and Strongly Agree responses to the Likert items following the activity, with speaking-confidence scores statistically higher at the posttest. A few students received a good rating rather than a High rating for fear/anxiety, tone of voice, working with a partner, and taking turns, and 2 students circled the neutral face to the question on how confident they feel speaking English in class.

Because most of the posttest scores were close to the maximum possible score and because the standard deviation of the posttest scores was low, the results suggest that a ceiling effect may have limited the ability of the instrument to discriminate among those participants reporting strong confidence following the activity. A further limitation may have resulted from the timing of the posttest, which was administered immediately following the activity; at this time, any enthusiasm for the activity or desire to please the teacher may have had an exaggerated influence on students' responses.

## Discussion

This research aims to understand the perceived relevance of collaborative dialogue to speaking confidence and participation in EFL learners at A2 EFL programs and schools in Quito and the perceived usefulness of collaborative dialogue to foster oral production from the students at those programs. The higher scores in the posttest of confidence level, the abundant levels of participation and collaboration, and the benefits perceived from the peer support all seem to indicate that this activity promoted a conducive, low-stress environment for speaking. These results answer both research questions at a shallow descriptive level and with short-term implications due to the characteristics of a one-group design.

In answer to the first question, collaborative conversation promoted speaking confidence and participation by providing each student opportunities to use English with a partner. In a traditional teacher-centered lesson, only a few students actually participate, and the rest of the class is passive. With collaborative dialogue, every student has a speaking partner. This explains why the observation checklist showed a 100% full participation rate, and why 93.3% of the students surveyed agreed that they speak more English when engaged in collaborative dialogue than when they work individually. In support of this quantitative evidence, Sato and Ballinger (2016), described this as an increase in available pedagogic space for second language acquisition.

The data fit the concept underlying the Zone of Proximal Development as offered by Vygotsky (1978). It is likely that a student too fearful to speak in front of the class to answer a question would do it if he/she/they had a classmate next to him/her/them, with slight encouragement, and he/she/they spoke out first. This is exactly what interaction has been shown to do. Mediation of this type is likely what caused the majority of the respondents to speak out. The results of the questionnaire corroborated the inference; 90% of respondents believed they gained plenty of support from others in class during the tasks.

These findings for the first research question are consistent with previous studies. Shirazifard et al. (2022) showed task-based dialog had a positive effect on both EFL speaking and student perceptions. Al Jawad (2023), showed speaking performance improved under cooperative learning and Bozkurt and Aydin (2023), showed that speaking anxiety decreased across varied instructional settings with the use of collaboration. This inquiry investigates A2 level students in Quito. Because no control group was included, the statistical improvement should be interpreted as evidence of change within this classroom group rather than as definitive causal proof. Even with this limitation, the general concept is that collaborative interaction grows confidence and engagement, a pattern documented across several studies.

On the second research question, student perceptions of the collaborative dialogue were positive for motivation, cooperation, enjoyment, participation, and peer support. The observation results concurred with the students' perceptions for motivation, cooperation, enjoyment, and participation with the highest ratings. Students were not merely doing as instructed for the completion of a task; these interactions appeared to provide something meaningfully positive. In the case of A2 learners, for example, if students get the chance to enjoy speaking English with no negative repercussions, then the chances of them doing it again the next day are significantly higher. This positive experience may increase students' willingness to participate in future speaking activities.

This explanation aligns with the ideas of Jacobs and Chau (2021), who emphasize the role of cooperative learning in fostering motivation and positive emotions, and Zhang et al. (2021), who highlight the influence of enjoyment and emotional control on learners' confidence in cooperative language learning. The Ecuadorian context warrants particular attention. Guevara-Peñaranda et al. (2024) determined that graduates of Ecuadorian public school's experience difficulties in oral communication. Evidence of systematic initiatives to address this issue remains limited. Collaborative dialogue may represent a feasible approach, because it can be implemented using resources already available to teachers. For instance, the teachers can ask simple questions, or do role plays, information-gap activities or even problem-solving, and all this can be done with little or no change to the normal lesson plans that the teachers have.

It is noteworthy that the bulk of responses to the posttest were near the top score, although a few students still expressed anxiety or a less confident voice. Particularly enthusiastic responses may be due to compensatory speaking practice rather than an actual development of oral proficiency. This study also does not show advancements in pronunciation, grammar, fluency, retention, or any other factors. The research draws from a limited single classroom cohort of 30

students. Collaborative dialogue will not address every speaking need, but it can help create the confidence students need to progress.

Teacher preparation is far more important in this case than others may assume. Poehner and Leontjev (2023), stress that productive dialogue is not guaranteed by doing a simple pair work activity. Usually, students require a lot of preparation and support, to the point where they actually do listen to, and respond to, the contribution made by their partner. The activity's design and the observation criteria most likely dictated the positive impacts this research saw. Pair work often gets dominated by the more confident student unless there is a strong structure in place. Assigning roles, monitoring pair work, and providing a structure to the dialogue are highly important factors to support collaborative work.

Small portions of the data showed that not all of the participants achieved peak levels of confidence. Two students registered good (not excellent) levels of anxiety. Three students demonstrated the same variation in voice tone. Two students chose the neutral option when asked if they felt confident talking English in class. These instances illustrate that the confidence of the participants is not (or cannot) be completely affected by the single activity. Participants need more of the right mixture of large-to-small group activities, more sentence and contextual support, more scaffolding, and slow feedback, and they may then feel they are ready for English. Dialogue is best continued as a regular, systematic, and active component of the work.

The use of both the questionnaire and the structured observation provided methodological corroboration of the findings, as both tools measured aspects of the students' experiences via self-report and observed behavior. The pretest–posttest comparison measured change in score via the questionnaire, while the rubric assessed participation and interaction-related behaviors during the activity. Taken together, the data from these two quantitative sources provided a more comprehensive description of the short-term outcomes in the classroom than either instrument used alone. Together, these findings indicate that collaborative dialogue may be employed by classroom teachers as a low-resource classroom practice to promote speaking opportunities and confidence, with the aid of clearly defined roles, scaffolding, and vigilant monitoring by the teacher.

## Conclusions

Overall, the findings show evidence of willingness to speak, active participation, peer engagement, and collaboration (which were all accompanied by enjoyment of the task), as well as an increase in motivation, in all 30 of the studied A2 EFL students from Quito, through the use of collaborative dialogue. The pre-test and post-test comparison also revealed a statistically meaningful rise in speaking-confidence scores, from 29.60 to 48.77 points, which supports the conclusion that students' self-reported confidence improved after the collaborative dialogue activity. As there was an increase in each observed category, it can be said that all students were essentially equally

successful in participating in the activity, and responses to the questionnaire indicated that all students felt more motivated and confident when they were engaged in a collaborative activity. Overall, the use of collaborative dialogue is more likely to allow A2 students to engage more in speaking and take more speaking risks. It is able to reduce the emotional pressure placed on students to verbalize their thoughts and allows students to practice/rehearse, respond, and work with and support their peers, which they need in order to eventually be able to work and speak independently.

Building speaking confidence involves addressing both linguistic and affective aspects. A supportive environment is critical as students will not use the language without a safe environment. Teachers in public-school environments, with large classes and resources that are limited, can use this strategy without any real preparation costs. This strategy is applicable for all topics and proficiency levels. Speaking activities using pairs and groups should be implemented in all instruction from the beginning. Gradually, lessons should begin to include more independent oral work. Continuous feedback on such work should be framed in positive and encouraging terms rather than pointing out the mistakes made.

Limitations of this study included the sample size of 30 students, selected by convenience sampling from one classroom in a public school; lack of a control group; use of self-reported confidence immediately following the activity; potential ceiling effect; and use of one observer. Subsequent research would benefit from using a control group and assessing speaking performance before and after the intervention in terms of fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation, and interactional competence using validated instruments. Furthermore, a study that tracks the longer-term effects of sustained collaborative practice would also be useful. It would also help to examine the different types of activities, which might include peer interviews, role plays, information-gap activities, or problem-solving discussions, in order to help teachers choose among the activities. Given its constraints, the current study argues reasonably that collaborative dialogue is both a functional and a promising methodology to help A2 students to speak more confidently and more actively.

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