

Promoting Student Motivation in an EFL Classroom: The impact of role play activities to Foster the Development of Oral Skills of First Semester Students in a Foreign Languages Program.

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Trabajo de grado para optar por el título de Licenciadas en Lenguas Extranjeras con Énfasis en Inglés

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Bucaramanga

2025

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to Professor Daniel Calderón, our thesis advisor, for his valuable guidance, constant support, and committed mentorship throughout this entire process.

His direction not only strengthened the academic quality of this project but also encouraged us to move forward with dedication and confidence. We especially appreciate his patience, timely feedback, and his willingness to listen and support us, even during the most challenging moments

We would also like to express our immense gratitude for his patience, encouragement, and unwavering belief in us and our project. His guidance was always marked by respect and kindness, and has been a constant source of motivation. We sincerely thank God for placing him in our path and inspiring us to choose him as our director from the very beginning. We truly could not have asked for a better leader.

Thank you for being a fundamental part of the completion of this meaningful stage in our lives.

Dedications

Nazly Alexandra Gonzalez Quintero

To God and the Virgin, who give me mental and spiritual strength and always guide me on the best path, who put in my life the opportunity to pursue my dream career and accompany me every step of the way. To my parents, whom I thank for shaping me with a foundation of love, respect, and values that I still apply today, for always striving to be present for me, for giving me their constant support, for every sacrifice they've made throughout my life, and which I hope to repay with achievements and victories. And most importantly, for believing in me even when I doubt my abilities, and loving, and understanding me so much. I hope you feel as proud to be my parents as I am to be your daughter; I would choose you in a thousand more lives, and I love you with all my heart. To my brother, Jerónimo, for always breaking my cycle of stress and making me smile every day, for being my motivation to improve as a person every day, because I hope to be a good example for you, and because I want you to feel proud of your sister when you're older and can read this; I love you. To Lucas, Sasha, and Azul, my earthly angels, who have seen me grow and are my eternal companions through countless late nights; I love you with my soul. Thanks for your constant companionship; this is also for you; I love you. To my university friends, thanks for making this stage of my life the best. For the countless laughter, incredible moments, and anecdotes you've given me, and for making this journey much more enjoyable and bearable; I carry you in my heart and in my life forever. And to all the people who were part of and contributed to making this chapter of my life so special, an experience I'll carry in a piece of my heart and life forever; this also belongs to you.

Marlyn Jhuliana Rodriguez Parra

To my precious and beloved family: my parents and my sister. For working hard, every single day of their lives, so that I could reach the point where I am today. To them, who, without needing a professional degree, have been the best parents and the best sister anyone could ever have. Thank you for your unconditional love and support. To my cat, Vivi, for being the best companion anyone could ask for, and for all the years by my side. To my college friends, who made this whole experience pleasant, enjoyable, and meaningful—and who, in my memory, will always be part of the best moments of my life. To Alexandra, for her friendship and support throughout this process and for never leaving me alone. Lastly, to myself: for not giving up, for staying strong, for moving forward despite everything, and for learning, once again, to see the bright side of life.

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RESUMEN

Title: Promoting Student Motivation in an EFL Classroom: The impact of role play activities to Foster the Development of Oral Skills of First Semester Students in a Foreign Languages Program*

Autoras: Nazly Gonzalez y Marlyn Rodriguez**

Palabras claves: Juego de Roles, Estudiantes Tímidos, Habilidades de habla, Motivación, Clase de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera, Enfoque Colaborativo del aprendizaje.

Descripción:

Este estudio de investigación en acción tenía como objetivo evaluar el impacto de las actividades de juego de roles (role-play) en el desarrollo de las habilidades orales y la motivación de los estudiantes en un grupo de alumnos de primer semestre matriculados en un programa de Lenguas Extranjeras. En el estudio participaron 16 estudiantes y se utilizaron notas de campo, un cuestionario previo, grabaciones de vídeo y entrevistas como herramientas de recopilación de datos. Los resultados revelaron un aumento significativo en la motivación de los estudiantes, especialmente entre los más tímidos, que se sintieron más seguros para participar gracias a la naturaleza colaborativa de las actividades y al apoyo de sus compañeros. Además, un ambiente positivo y emocionalmente seguro en el aula desempeñó un papel clave en la reducción de la ansiedad comunicativa y en el fomento de la participación oral activa. El estudio concluye que las actividades de juego de roles, cuando se combinan con estrategias de enseñanza creativas y empáticas, pueden ser una herramienta eficaz para fomentar las habilidades orales y la participación de los estudiantes en el aula de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera.

*Trabajo de grado

** Facultad de Ciencias Humanas, Escuela de Idiomas, Director Daniel Calderón

ABSTRACT

Title: Promoting Student Motivation in an EFL Classroom: The impact of role play activities to Foster the Development of Oral Skills of First Semester Students in a Foreign Languages Program*

Authors: Nazly Gonzalez and Marlyn Rodriguez **

Keywords: Role-play, Shy students, Speaking Skills, Motivation, EFL Classroom, Collaborative Learning Approach.

Description:

This action research study aimed to evaluate the impact of role play activities on the development of oral skills and student motivation in a group of first-semester learners enrolled in a Foreign Languages program. The study involved 16 students and used field notes, a pre-questionnaire, video recordings, and interviews as data collection tools. The findings revealed a significant increase in students' motivation, especially among shy learners, who felt more confident to participate thanks to the collaborative nature of the activities and the support of their peers. Additionally, a positive and emotionally safe classroom environment played a key role in reducing communication anxiety and encouraging active oral participation. The study concludes that role play activities, when paired with creative and empathetic teaching strategies, can be an effective tool to foster speaking skills and student engagement in the English as a Foreign Language classroom.

*Bachelor Thesis

**Faculty of Human Sciences, School of Languages, Director Daniel Calderón

Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, the effective learning and acquisition of a second or foreign language remains a pivotal objective. The primary aim for many learners is to attain a level of proficiency that allows for effective communication. While communication can manifest in various forms—non-verbal, verbal, and written—this research specifically zeroes in on verbal communication. Among the four core skills assessed in language learning, this study emphasizes the oral skills of shy students within the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom.

The impetus for this research stems from personal experiences as students and researchers in a Foreign Language degree program. During the initial years at university, we encountered significant discomfort when interacting in English due to our inherent shyness. This personal challenge not only hindered our communication abilities but also adversely impacted our academic performance in oral evaluations. The resultant low grades exacerbated our anxiety and stress, raising our affective filters and diminishing our classroom participation.

Through these experiences, we observed that EFL classrooms often cater predominantly to a specific learner archetype—those with self-confidence, extroversion, and a willingness to speak despite potential errors. Such an environment can be particularly daunting for shy students, whose personality traits make verbal participation a stressful and unpleasant endeavor. Recognizing this disparity, our research aims to explore didactic activities, specifically role-play, to enhance the oral skills of shy students and evaluate the efficacy of these activities in improving their performance in the EFL classroom.

1. Statement of the problem

One of the objectives when learning a second or foreign language is to be able to communicate. However, communication can be developed in different ways, for example, non-verbal, verbal or written. Nevertheless, in this research, we will focus on verbal communication. Therefore, of the four skills of which the learning of a foreign or second language is evaluated, special emphasis will be placed on the oral skills of shy students in the EFL classroom.

From the whole scenario and experiences described above, we as researchers were able to observe how the EFL classroom was designed for a specific type of learner, which should be someone with enough self-confidence to not be afraid of making mistakes, a person who likes to talk and who to a greater extent is extroverted to be able to express his opinions, desires and likes. Basically, the opposite of what a shy person cannot do because of their personality traits, which makes the experience of learning a new language stressful and unpleasant for the student.

From all the above, our research aimed to look for didactic activities, in this case role-play, not only to foster shy students' oral skills, but also to evaluate whether the implementation of these activities help students to perform in the EFL classroom.

2. Justification

As future teachers of English as a foreign language, it is important to change these experiences that may have a negative impact for students with shy personality traits in the EFL classroom, in order to ensure that classrooms are a safe environment for all types of students. Similarly, it is necessary to keep in mind the importance of assessing the different skills that the student possesses, so the assessment of oral proficiency should not be left out. However, it is crucial to offer the shy student opportunities such as: getting to know the

classroom environment, his/her classmates, and learning to coexist with them, and with the language. It is also crucial to create a solution based on pedagogy, with which they can have the possibility to begin their process of active participation in class, allowing them to develop their communicative competence in a natural way and without pressure. This solution is proposed under the name of role-play situations. When we were in the first two semesters of our career, the methodology used in the English course was book-based. Because the classes were virtual due to COVID-19, there was little opportunity for more personal interaction with our classmates, resulting in an unfamiliar relationship.

For this reason, when the face-to-face classes returned, it was difficult for us, shy people and students, to establish a familiar relationship with our classmates and sometimes with our teachers. Also, since the virtual classes were book-based, there were not many opportunities to practice and improve our oral skills, which caused us to distrust our communicative competence and avoid participating.

However, in face-to-face English classes, we began to use role-play for oral activities, which although at first we were embarrassed, with time and the support of our classmates it became easier and easier for us to participate in these activities. When we participated in the role-plays, we were no longer students, we were then fruit sellers, or tour guides, we acquired a new personality. Likewise, by having to speak out loud, we became more aware of our mistakes and those of our classmates, which helped us to correct them and try harder not to make them again. Over time, this meant that participating in oral activities was no longer a cause of concern for us.

Reviewing and consulting different Colombian research journals on language issues, we found that it seems there is scarce information and studies on role-play as a tool to promote students' communicative competence. However, several investigations were found in

which a cooperative, collaborative and content-based learning model was used to motivate interaction among students, but no mention was made of role-play in any of them (see for example Gómez, 2018; Bolaños et al., 2018; and Parga, 2011). Similarly, little or no research was found on shy students in the EFL classroom, which suggests that this has not been a topic of great relevance for research in Colombia. Thus, research was found that marked the preferences of activities in the English class for high school students, the results showed an inclination to participate in activities that involve receptive skills and even grammar-based activities in the EFL classroom (Herrera, 2013; Samperio, 2017).

Taking into consideration that there seems to be scarce studies on the use of role play to facilitate the development of speaking, and especially to shy students, the present work is justified because it seeks to propose role play as a tool to facilitate the work of speaking in shy students. From this arises the interest in initiating this type of research, which will allow new researchers to delve deeper into these issues in the future and contribute actively and significantly to this type of topics to present new solutions that can be applied to different generations of students, not only in Colombia and Bucaramanga, but also in the whole world.

3. Objectives

Considering our research concern, as investigators and pre-service teachers, we would like to propose the following objectives that will shape our study. These objectives are presented as follow:

On one hand, the general objective is to evaluate the impact of role play activities in an EFL classroom to foster the development of oral skills and motivation of first semester students in a Foreign Languages program.

On the other hand, the specific objectives established for this research are:

1. To design and plan activities through lesson plans to use role play activities in the EFL classroom, especially aimed at shy students.
2. To implement a series of role play based activities to foster the oral participation of shy students in the EFL classroom.
3. To assess the impact of these activities on shy students' oral performance and attitudes.

In order to achieve the above research objectives and as future teachers, the following question is proposed to guide our research project:

What is the impact of using role play based activities in an EFL class with first semester shy students of a program in Foreign Languages teaching?

4. Literature review

In this section we present the previous studies on shyness in students, anxiety when learning a foreign language and finally the use of role-play in foreign language classrooms that form this research. The first part deals with the possible causes of shyness in the language classroom. In the second part, we will discuss if there is a relationship between

students' shyness and anxiety when learning a new language. Finally, we contextualize role-play as a strategy in the language classroom.

4.1 Shyness and its detonating moments within the EFL classroom

Personality is an important factor in language learning, as it affects how learners receive and respond to what is learned. Personality can affect everything: both the decisions one makes when choosing strategies for learning (Citra & Zainil, 2021), and how it can negatively alter learning opportunities for students (Rofi'i, 2017). Therefore, it is important to understand how personality differences can alter the learning process.

Shyness could be confused with other concepts such as social anxiety, introversion, and even antisocial personality disorder. However, shyness is a common form of social behavior and is usually temporary, forming part of the personality and manifesting itself as a response to new situations. It can also be understood as a state in which there is excessive concern about being evaluated, which leads the shy person to avoid social situations in which he or she feels singled out (Readi, 2021).

Moreover, if a person, especially a shy student, is brought into a context such as the EFL classroom where the person will inevitably be observed and evaluated, it seems most likely that the shy person will feel at risk and avoid being the center of attention so as not to be judged. In addition, if this pressure is compounded by having to speak or express oneself in an unfamiliar language, it can lead to non-participation on the part of the shy learner in order to avoid feeling uncomfortable. This could be due to the fact that shy students may experience particular stress in schools that may lead to intensified feelings of social anxiety, since in these environments the student must interact with peers and teachers often unfamiliar to them and are required to produce more verbally (Rubin et al., 2009).

Finally, for us, the concept of shyness takes on significant importance because this research project focuses on helping students with this personality trait improve their oral skills in the English classroom. This section allowed us to understand that shyness is not the same as anxiety, even though they may appear similar at first glance. We now recognize that although shyness and anxiety may share certain characteristics, they are distinct concepts.

Besides, we have come to understand that shyness is not a constant state, but can manifest itself at specific times, especially when the student feels evaluated by others. This understanding has allowed us to distinguish between occasional shyness and persistent anxiety, which has led us to adopt a more targeted and effective approach to addressing the needs of students in the English classroom.

By recognizing the difference between shyness and anxiety, we can implement strategies that help improve their oral communication skills. By creating a supportive and understanding environment, we can foster students' confidence and participation, allowing them to realize their full potential in English language learning.

4.2 Foreign Language Anxiety: A concept with many perspectives.

Foreign language anxiety is a reality that can be faced by anyone, it can be defined as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (Horwitz, 1986, as cited in Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019, p. 310). Nevertheless, in the literature, different studies can be observed to look for a relationship between the concepts of shyness and foreign language anxiety.

For example, in a study conducted by Bashosh et al. (2013) where they sought to analyze the relationship between shyness, and foreign language anxiety, it was found that

there was no relationship between these two. However, in a research conducted by Chu (2008) where the use of strategies to learn English, motivation and anxiety of a foreign language was analyzed, 364 students, of which 44% of them were shy and 56% were classified as not shy, it was observed that the shyness and anxiety of students before foreign languages (in this case English) was moderately positive, since these two concepts tend to overlap.

It is also important to recall the natural approach of Krashen and Terrel (1988) which addresses the affective filter and indicates that "performers with certain types of motivation, usually, but not always "integrative" and with good self-images do better in second language acquisition. Also, the best situations for language acquisition seem to be those which encourage lower anxiety levels" (p. 38). Therefore, it is important to make the shy student feel comfortable with his/her environment so that in the process of acquiring the foreign language, his/her affective filter is not raised.

It is also important to consider the study of Viáfara (2016) in the Colombian context where he explains that not only English students may feel anxiety about the foreign language, but it is also the case of several pre-service English teachers who feel that way. This feeling that they are missing something or feel that their level of English is not that good, is due to prejudice and the native speaker myth, where pre-service teachers feel pressure to sound like a native speaker in order to be considered really good.

For us, the study of anxiety in the context of foreign language learning is of paramount importance because of its influence on learners' performance and well-being. Although we have distinguished between shyness and anxiety, it is important to recognize that these can be interconnected, and that foreign language anxiety can manifest itself in a variety of ways, even in individuals who are and are not naturally shy.

Foreign language anxiety is a reality for many students, pre-service teachers, and learners, and can be exacerbated by factors such as one's accent, social prejudice, and the native speaker myth. In the particular case of Colombia, this myth is ingrained in society, which can contribute to increased levels of anxiety among learners of English and other languages.

Therefore, it seems fundamental to us to address foreign language anxiety in the educational setting by providing coping strategies to students. By better understanding the factors that contribute to language anxiety and encouraging an inclusive learning environment, we can help students overcome their fears and develop greater confidence in their language skills.

4.3 Role-play: A powerful teaching tool to trigger speaking skills

According to Porter-Ladousse (1987, as cited in Abdessallam et al, 2023)., "role-playing activities range from highly controlled scripted conversations at one end of the scale, to improvised theatrical activities at the other; from the simple performance of rehearsed dialogues, to highly complex simulated scenarios" (p. 4). Learning a foreign language involves not only the acquisition of grammatical knowledge and vocabulary, but also the development of communicative skills that enable the learner to express him/herself fluently and naturally in the target language. Nonetheless, as Duong (2014) points out, the possibilities of using the target language are scarce, so learners have difficulties in improving their communicative skills.

This issue is particularly pronounced for students who are shy or lack confidence, as they may feel anxious or self-conscious when speaking the foreign language in front of others. In such cases, employing role play techniques can be extremely beneficial. According

to Duong (2014), role play provides a comfortable environment for learners to practice speaking while also enhancing their communication abilities.

Role play creates a safe and controlled environment where students can practice everyday situations or hypothetical scenarios, adopting different roles and personalities. This allows them to engage in authentic conversations without the pressure of being judged for their mistakes, thus fostering confidence and fluency in foreign language use. In addition, as Rofi'i (2017) highlights, by speaking in public, students have the opportunity to learn more in communicating with English naturally, they will recognize their mistakes in pronunciation or grammar, or they can get corrections from their friends who are fluent in English.

The present research will allow us to explore in depth the analysis of the potential benefits and limitations of implementing the role play technique in the teaching-learning process of a foreign language to shy students. Through the critical review of various academic articles and empirical studies carried out by different authors specialized in this subject, we will seek to show the advantages and disadvantages that this didactic methodology could represent in different educational contexts. This inquiry will make it possible to contrast the perspectives and findings of different researchers in order to obtain an impartial view of the suitability and scope of role play as a tool to facilitate the acquisition of linguistic and communicative competences in foreign language students.

Our main insights from this literature review

To summarize, this literature review has addressed three fundamental issues related to foreign language learning: shyness in students, anxiety in foreign language learning, and the use of role-playing in the language classroom. First, we have explored how shyness can affect students' oral performance in the English classroom, recognizing that shyness and anxiety are distinct concepts, although they may be interconnected in certain cases. In addition, we have

highlighted the importance of creating an inclusive learning environment that fosters student confidence and participation.

Second, we have examined anxiety in foreign language learning, identifying its causes and manifestations, as well as its relationship to shyness. We have highlighted the need to address language anxiety in the classroom through strategies that promote a safe and emotionally supportive learning environment for students.

Finally, we have learned about the potential of role-playing as an effective tool for improving students' communication skills and overcoming shyness in the language classroom. We have highlighted how role-play helps to create and provide a controlled environment where students can practice everyday or hypothetical situations, developing confidence and fluency in using the foreign language, through creativity.

To conclude, this section helped us to understand and have a comprehensive view of the challenges in learning a foreign language, as well as effective strategies to address them. By recognizing the importance of creating an inclusive learning environment and promoting the use of pedagogical techniques, we can help students reach their full potential in mastering English as a foreign language.

5. Legal framework

The present research project proposal responds to what is proposed by the Educational Project of the Program (PEP) in the Degree Program in Foreign Languages with Emphasis in English. This is due to the fact that our population to carry out this research work are students of the same academic program. Taking into account that it is argued that the degree “is oriented to train teachers with high competence in the humanistic, pedagogical areas and linguistic science applied to English as a foreign language” (PEP, 2016, p.6) and

“competently use the English language for professional, academic and social purposes.” (PEP, 2016, p.33). Our research is covered under the PEP, since in this work we want to help and contribute to the training of teachers who have a good knowledge and use of the language, as well as to focus on their oral skills. Likewise, this work is justified with “the demand for competent English teachers both in the knowledge and use of the language, as well as in the pedagogical and didactic knowledge for its teaching, has increased significantly in various countries in recent decades” (PEP, 2016, p.14).

On the one hand, it is important to emphasize that if at any time any participant/student wishes not to be part of the research, even if it has already begun, the participant or student has the right to abandon it and no longer be part of it. On the other hand, as stipulated in the curricular guidelines of the Ministry of National Education, our research seeks to contribute to the improvement of educational quality and to respect the rights of the participants. Finally, one of our priorities as researchers will be to enforce Law 1581 of 2012 (Personal Data Protection Law) which establishes that any handling of personal data must be done with the prior, express and informed consent of the data owner or participant.

6. Methodology

This section encompasses the methodological underpinnings that we will consider for carrying out this pedagogical intervention. For the sake of a future projection and implementation of our research project, and in order to meet our main objective, which is to evaluate the effectiveness of role-play activities to promote oral competence and motivation in shy students, the following instruments were proposed to carry out the research in an effective and efficient manner.

6.1 Research approach

This study follows a qualitative approach to analyze the impact of role-play on the speaking skills and motivation of shy first semester students of the educational program of Foreign Languages at the Universidad Industrial de Santander. This approach was used since according to Sampieri et al. (2014) in this type of research “techniques are used to collect data, such as unstructured observation, open interviews, document review, group discussion, evaluation of personal experiences, recording of life stories, and interaction and introspection with groups or communities” (p. 9). Similarly, due to the type of instruments that were designed and used, it can be said that it is an applied research since it “aims to generate knowledge with direct and medium-term application in society” (Lozada, 2014, p.35).

6.2 Description of the setting and participants

This project considers first-semester students of the bachelor’s in Foreign Languages with an Emphasis in English at Universidad Industrial de Santander. These were planned to be the possible participants, since from our personal experience, the first two semesters of the degree were especially difficult to socialize and actively participate in class for several reasons. First, as mentioned above, our first two semesters were virtual due to COVID-19 which allowed for little interaction with our classmates and we did not have the opportunity to create close bonds and create a comfortable environment to participate. Moreover, the change of environment from high school to college was a major event in our lives and even for our classmates, which led us to be more cautious when interacting in class. With the above in mind, this project had the special focus of its implementation to first semester students within the Pre-intermediate English classroom of our degree program.

For data collection, first, observations of the pre-intermediate English class were conducted during three sessions. Then, a questionnaire was applied to the students to find out

their level of English, identify whether they consider themselves shy, and explore their motivations for studying the language career. Subsequently, an interview was conducted with the teacher to learn about her perception of role-play as a teaching strategy.

Next, three intervention sessions were implemented in which role-play activities were applied in class. Finally, interviews were conducted with two students previously identified as shy in the questionnaire, in order to deepen their experience and perception of role-play in the development of their oral skills and motivation.

6.3 Research instruments

6.3.1 Field journal

The field journal can be considered as a tool for recording procedural information. This instrument is based on “various data collection techniques to understand reality, explore new developments in the situation addressed, give continuity to a research and intervention process, and provide information for subsequent evaluation” (Valverde, 1993, p.309). It was decided to use a field diary as a data collection instrument to carry out a series of observations in the pre-intermediate English class of the students participating in the research. These observations were carried out during three sections and each section lasted two hours. The purpose of using this tool was to observe the students within the regular setting of the English class. As Sánchez & Suárez (2018) point out, this type of instrument also serves to “identify and describe social interactions beforehand” (p.78).

This instrument allowed us to obtain previous information about the classroom and, in the same way, to know the dynamics, environment and level of proficiency in English of the students, in order to carry out the design of the role-play activities in the future.

The format used in the field journal (see Annex #1) to carry out the observation was divided into two parts. The first part was based on an analytical rubric, it was defined as an analytical rubric since in this kind of rubric “different skills or characteristics of the product are evaluated individually” (Cordero et al., 2015, slide 10). The criteria sought to be evaluated lay in:

- The role of the teacher in student participation.
- The use of language.
- Student activities and participation.

The rating scale that was handled was divided into:

- Generally
- Sometimes
- Almost never
- Not evaluated

The second part of the format that was handled was a free space to write more specific comments or observations about what could be obtained and analyzed from the class and the attitudes of the students that were not completely expressed in the rubric.

Figure 1

Field Journal

Field Journal						
Date:		Professor:				
# of students		Observer:				
Conductas a observar			Criterios de evaluación			
I ROL DEL PROFESOR EN LA PARTICIPACIÓN						
1	The teacher's general attitude favors good communication with students.	GENERALLY	SOMETIMES	ALMOST NEVER	NOT EVALUATED	OBSERVATION
2	Instructions for activities are clear and precise					
3	Participatory learning is promoted in the students					
III LANGUAGE USE						
1	English is used as the primary language of communication between teacher and students and among students.					
2	There are corrections by the teacher when a student has a grammatical or pronunciation error.					
IV ACTIVIDADES Y PARTICIPACIÓN						
1	In the classroom there are activities where the main objective is to reinforce or practice the students' oral skills.					
2	The activities or strategies used by the teacher work on the active participation of the students.					
3	There are role-play activities in the class					
4	Students have a positive attitude towards the class and the activities.					
5	Students feel or look confident in speaking and participating using English.					

Figure 2

Field Journal

Comments

6.3.2 Pre-questionnaire

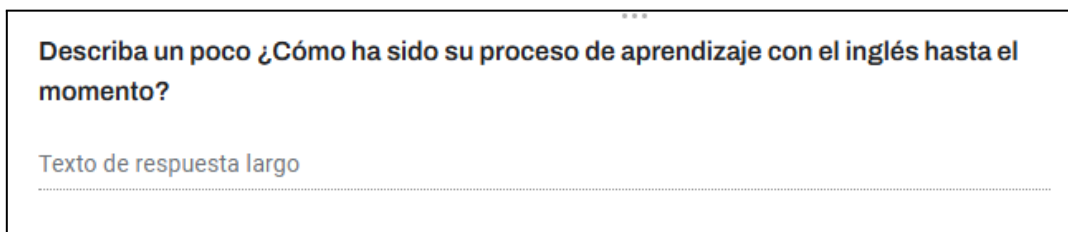
While classroom observations and the field journal are valuable tools for gathering data on the class environment and students' attitudes, it is also important to consider students' own perspectives—specifically, how they perceive the activities in the pre-intermediate English class, as well as their personal experiences from a more intimate point of view. For

this reason, it was determined that administering a pre-questionnaire would be the most beneficial approach for the study.

The questionnaire (see Annex B) consisted of 29 items and followed a mixed-format design, defined as “one that incorporates both closed- and open-ended questions” (Casas et al., 2006, para.16). The open-ended questions were intended to provide deeper insight into the students’ previous experiences with learning English and to explore their opinions on role-play as a didactic activity.

Figure 3

Open-ended questions



Describe un poco ¿Cómo ha sido su proceso de aprendizaje con el inglés hasta el momento?

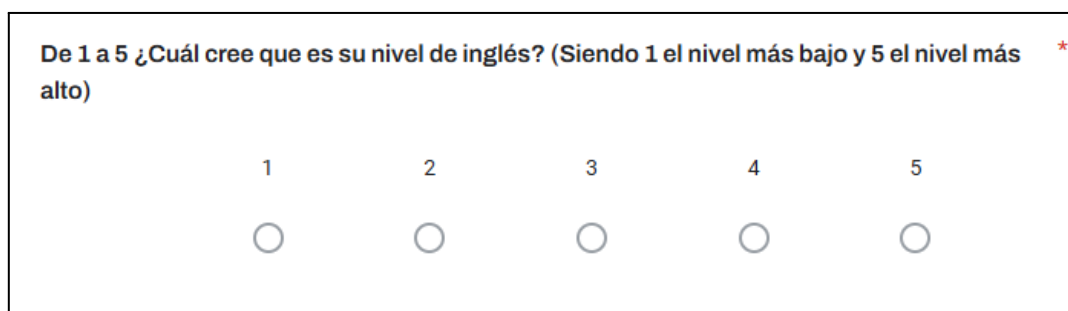
Texto de respuesta largo

.....

In the case of the closed-ended questions, these were designed using ordinal scales (with numerical values).

Figure 4

Closed-ended questions



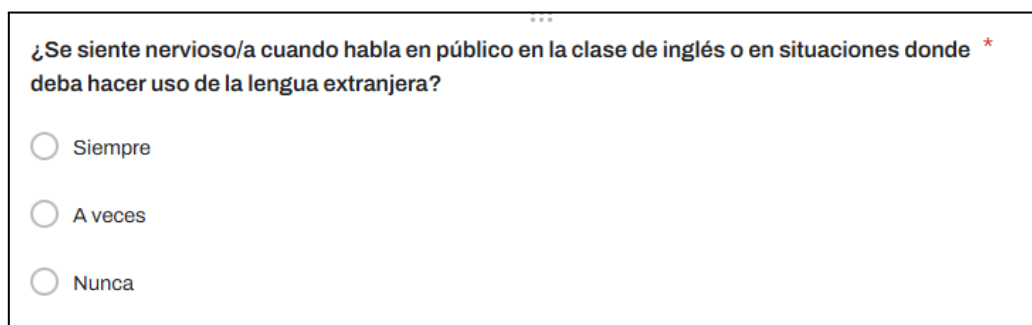
De 1 a 5 ¿Cuál cree que es su nivel de inglés? (Siendo 1 el nivel más bajo y 5 el nivel más alto) *

1 2 3 4 5

Additionally, it was necessary to include closed-ended questions based on nominal scales for certain items, depending on the nature of the information being sought.

Figure 5

Closed-ended questions (nominal scales)



¿Se siente nervioso/a cuando habla en público en la clase de inglés o en situaciones donde *
deba hacer uso de la lengua extranjera?

Siempre

A veces

Nunca

6.3.3 Design of the role-plays and classroom intervention

From the beginning of this research, it was clear that it would be necessary to implement role-play activities in order to understand how they affected the classroom environment and how students felt when taking on a role. Therefore, it was essential to carry out activities in which students actively participated.

For this part of the research, both classroom observations and the pre-questionnaire were taken into account. Similarly, in order to design and plan the activities to be implemented in the classroom, the materials and lesson plans of the group's main professor were considered, since the role-play activities were created as a complement to the class, intended to serve as a tool for developing and practicing students' speaking skills.

According to the English professor in charge of the first-semester students' comments and what was observed, first-semester English classes were being taught using the third edition of the *Cutting Edge Pre-Intermediate* textbook. The topic they were working on was

related to talking about future plans, and predictions. Therefore, for the first two activities, the decision was made to focus on the grammar of *will* and *will not*, while for the last activity, the grammar structure *going to* was chosen at the professor's request.

Three interventions or activities were designed in total (see Annex #3), each with a duration of approximately 30 to 40 minutes. The activities were as follows:

The first intervention was themed around a "Future teller" Students worked in pairs; one of them took the role of the tarot reader and the other was the client. The idea was for the client to ask the tarot reader three questions about their future, and the tarot reader would "read" the cards. The students acting as tarot readers were given cards with pre-written predictions, but they were free to decide how to develop the story.

The theme of the second intervention was a "Newscast of the Future." Again working in pairs, students had to pretend to be reporters who had just returned from a trip to the future, where they would describe what the world would be like in 50 years. Each pair received a card with a specific topic. The topics included: entertainment, transportation, education, food, environment, and daily life.

For the final intervention, the chosen theme was a "Travel Agency of the Year 2080". Students worked in groups of four and were given a template to fill out with the information for their travel agency and the tourist package they were offering. The tourism plans were categorized as: time travel, deep-sea travel, and space travel. Since all types of travel were considered possible, students were encouraged to be creative with their travel plans, including transportation, accommodation, and other travel-related details.

6.3.4 Interview with the professor and participants

As part of the data collection process, individual interview spaces were arranged for both the professor and two students who had identified themselves as shy in the pre-questionnaire. The interviews were designed differently for each group (professor and students), in accordance with the specific objectives of the research (see Annex #5).

The interviews were classified as *structured*, as this type of interview involves defining in advance the kind of information to be obtained. Based on this, “a script is created and followed sequentially. The interviewer adheres to this script, and the questions are designed to be answered briefly while still addressing the objectives of both the interview and the research” (Folgueiras, 2016, p.3).

The purpose of the interviews varied according to the participants. In the case of the professor, the aim was to explore her teaching experience, her perception of role-play activities in the classroom, and the types of activities she considered effective for developing students’ speaking skills. This interview included a total of 10 questions.

In contrast, the interviews with the students who considered themselves shy aimed to explore their personal context and previous experiences with English, both at university and in high school. The intention was also to determine whether their shyness was an innate personality trait or if it became more prominent in environments where they were required to use a foreign language. Each student answered 14 questions in an individual interview, in order to ensure their responses were not influenced by one another.

6.3.5 Videos and Observations of the activities

During the implementation of the role-play activities, notes were taken (see Annex #4) and videos were recorded of the students’ participation. This was carried out not only to

provide evidence that the interventions were real and actually took place, but also to allow for a later evaluation of both the students' attitudes and their performance during the activities.

Although the notes taken during the sessions were valuable, they were not entirely sufficient. In the heat of the moment or due to the excitement generated by the activity, it was possible to miss important details or fail to capture the full picture of the students' behavior and engagement, which could lead to biased interpretations. For this reason, it was also decided to record video samples of the activities—particularly when students were working in pairs and performing their role-play scenes in front of the class.

7. Data analysis

7.1 Field journal and observations

This field diary compiles the observations carried out during three English class sessions in an intermediate-level university course. The main objective of these observations was to analyze the classroom environment, participation dynamics, the use of the foreign language, and the activities implemented, with special attention to how these variables may influence students' willingness to participate in oral tasks, particularly those involving role-play.

From a qualitative perspective, this field journal aims to offer a detailed and reflective view of the participants' behaviors and interactions, as well as the pedagogical strategies used by the teacher. Each session was documented through narrative descriptions and comments that allowed for the identification of patterns, attitudes, and relevant elements for the research. Additionally, a thematic coding process was applied to organize and analyze the collected data.

This instrument, beyond being a descriptive record, becomes a key tool to understand the educational context in which the research took place and to interpret the results obtained from the student surveys. In this sense, the field diary not only contributes to the data analysis, but also offers a window into the everyday life of the classroom, allowing us to appreciate the role that emotions, interpersonal relationships, and active methodologies play in foreign language learning.

7.1.1 Classroom environment

Throughout the three observations carried out on different days, it became evident that the atmosphere in the English classroom was notably positive and welcoming. Both students and the teacher appeared comfortable and confident within the space, contributing to an environment that fosters participation and emotional safety. There was a strong sense of camaraderie among the students, as well as a genuine concern for one another's well-being and academic progress.

Interactions between students were marked by mutual respect and collaborative spirit; they frequently asked questions, supported one another, and demonstrated patience throughout the learning process. There were no incidents of conflict or misunderstanding observed, and overall, the classroom felt like a safe space in which students could make mistakes, learn from them, and grow.

This perception is supported by an excerpt from the field notes, in which the observer wrote: *“Overall the classroom atmosphere felt positive. They get along well with each other and help each other, and even the professor is quite friendly and tries hard to make sure everyone understands.”* (Initial Field Journal, Marlyn Rodriguez, #1) Such details reinforce the idea that the learning environment was not only academically supportive, but also

emotionally nurturing—a factor that plays a crucial role in language learning, especially when developing oral communication skills.

7.1.2 Activities implemented

A total of three activities were observed, one on each observation day.

On the first day, students participated in a role-play activity titled “*The Millionaires’ Ball.*” The objective of this activity was for each student to adopt the role of a millionaire attending a ballroom event, where they would meet and interact with other millionaires. The students were encouraged to ask each other questions about their fictional businesses or how they had become wealthy. There were no pre-established questions or scripts, which led to highly spontaneous and creative interactions among participants.

The second activity also targeted speaking skills but through a different format. Rather than a role play, students engaged in a board game. They were grouped into teams of three or four, and each group received a printed game board, along with dice and tokens provided by the teacher. What made the game particularly engaging was that each square on the board contained a question or prompt that encouraged students to share anecdotes or interesting facts about their lives. In doing so, they were prompted to communicate personal information using English as a foreign language.

Finally, on the third day, the focus shifted to reading and writing skills. The professor introduced an activity titled “*Exquisite Corpse*”. For this task, students sat in a round-table arrangement and each began writing the opening of an invented story on a piece of paper. After one or two minutes, they folded the paper to hide their writing and passed it to the next person. Without reading what had been written before, each student continued the story,

adding their own imaginative twist. At the end, when the papers returned to their original authors, the professor invited several students to share the final stories aloud with the class.

All three activities were notably creative and collaborative—offering a refreshing contrast to the more traditional, grammar-heavy language classes typically experienced during the early semesters of language learning. Rather than relying solely on textbooks and repetitive drills, these tasks created opportunities for meaningful interaction among peers and promoted the development of communicative competence in a dynamic and enjoyable way.

7.1.3 Students' Participation

During the three observation sessions, students' participation was uneven, though not disorganized or excessively unbalanced. In fact, it was possible to identify certain patterns that remained consistent across the different classes. For instance, while some students stood out for their active participation—helping the class flow naturally without awkward silences—many others showed hesitation before engaging, even within a classroom environment that was harmonious, collaborative, and emotionally safe.

In the first session, during the “*Millionaires' Ball*” activity, some students chose to keep to themselves and did not actively seek interaction with their peers. This tendency to remain on the sidelines may be related to personal factors such as shyness, a lack of confidence in using the foreign language, or simply a low willingness to be in the spotlight.

In the second session, during the board game activity, participation was more evenly distributed within small groups. Students interacted, shared anecdotes, and responded to the prompts on the game board. However, when asked to share some of these stories with the entire class, there was once again a noticeable decrease in voluntary participation. This

pattern suggests that while students may feel comfortable communicating in more private or low-stakes settings, there is still some reluctance to speak in public.

Finally, in the third activity, titled “*Exquisite Corpse*,” all students participated in writing, as required by the structure of the task. Nonetheless, when it came time to share the results aloud, only three students read their stories. As noted in the field notes: “*only 3 students were able to share their story which again, they are the most participatory and I would say they are extroverted.*” This comment reaffirms that within the group, there are students who are more inclined to participate orally and who also tend to be more extroverted and self-confident.

In conclusion, classroom participation—though present in various degrees and formats—appeared to be influenced by personal factors such as extroversion, linguistic self-confidence, and the nature of the task. While the overall classroom environment supported interaction, a noticeable barrier to whole-group oral participation remains, which should be considered when designing pedagogical activities aimed at promoting equitable engagement among all students.

7.1.4 Use of foreign language

This section of the analysis focused on observing and reflecting on the actual use of English as a means of communication among students in the classroom. It was considered important to include this item, since one of the main goals of foreign language teaching is to promote its use not only as an academic tool but also as a vehicle for spontaneous social interaction within the school environment.

Throughout the three observed sessions, English was consistently used as the language of instruction. The teacher conducted the entire class in English without resorting to

Spanish, which indicates a clear pedagogical intention to immerse students in the target language. In the same vein, when students were asked to participate orally or speak in front of the group, they also did so in English.

However, despite this formal use of the language, it was noted that spontaneous interactions between students—especially those not directly mediated by the teacher or a specific task—tended to take place in Spanish. This suggests that English, although present in academic discourse and in teacher-directed responses, has not yet been fully adopted by students as a language of socialization or casual peer communication.

An interesting case was observed during the second session, in the board game activity. In this context, where students were required to share personal anecdotes within small groups, English was used more naturally. This indicates that when activities are designed to encourage language use in more authentic and relatable contexts, students show a greater willingness to use the foreign language actively.

In summary, English is consistently present in formal interactions with the teacher and in structured activities, but its use among peers remains limited. This finding highlights the importance of creating more genuine communicative spaces within the classroom that promote English not only as an academic tool, but also as a natural means of interaction among students.

7.2 Pre-questionnaire

The pre-questionnaire designed for this research consisted of a total of 29 questions. As previously mentioned, some of these questions were open-ended, while others were closed, incorporating both nominal and numerical scales. This methodological combination

aimed to gather more detailed and nuanced information regarding the participants' perceptions, experiences, and characteristics.

The questionnaire was administered virtually through a digital platform (Google Forms), which allowed for easy distribution and access. The corresponding link was sent to the teacher in charge of the participating group, who then shared it with the students via the class's WhatsApp group. This strategy was intended to facilitate access to the instrument and ensure a higher participation rate by using a familiar and effective communication channel within the academic setting.

The questionnaire included a specific section for informed consent, in which the participants' rights, the objectives of the study, and the way the collected data would be used were clearly explained. Additionally, it was emphasized that participation was entirely voluntary. Students were asked to confirm their agreement by selecting the option "Yes, I accept," thereby providing their consent to participate in the research.

Regarding its structure, the questionnaire was organized into several thematic sections, with the aim of obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the students' profiles. The main sections were as follows:

- Demographic data
- Previous experience with the English language and motivations for choosing the university program
- Self-assessment of language skills
- Personality traits
- Knowledge and previous experiences with role-play activities

The selection of these sections responded to the need to deeply understand both the academic and personal context of the participants, as well as their background regarding the language and teaching methodologies. This information was considered essential for the development of the study and the interpretation of the results obtained.

It is important to highlight that the questionnaire was designed and administered in Spanish. This decision was mainly based on two reasons: first, at the beginning of the research, there was no precise information regarding the participants' English proficiency levels, which could have hindered their understanding of the questions if they had been written in English. Second, the aim was to ensure greater comfort and clarity for the students while answering the questionnaire, thereby avoiding potential biases caused by linguistic misunderstandings. In this way, participants were encouraged to express themselves more freely and accurately, which undoubtedly enhanced the quality of the data collected.

7.2.1 Demographic data

This section of the questionnaire did not collect a large amount of information, as demographic data was not the main focus of the study. However, it was considered appropriate to include some basic variables in order to contextualize the general profile of the participants and provide a clearer picture of the population involved in the research.

The most significant finding from this section was the participants' age. Most of the students were 17 years old or younger at the time of completing the questionnaire. Additionally, it was observed that none of the participants were over 20 years old, which confirms the youthful and relatively homogeneous nature of the group in this regard.

Besides age, this section included a specific request: participants were asked to choose and write a nickname that could be used throughout the writing of this paper. This

strategy aimed to protect the students' identities, ensuring their privacy and confidentiality in accordance with the ethical principles that guide research. The use of nicknames facilitated the organization and analysis of the data without compromising the participants' personal information, which was particularly important given the nature of some of the questions included in the questionnaire.

7.2.2 Previous experience with the English language and motivations for choosing the university program

This section aimed to explore, on the one hand, the students' backgrounds regarding English language learning, and on the other, to understand the motivations behind their decision to enroll in the Foreign Languages academic program. To this end, five questions related to these topics were formulated, and their responses are analyzed below.

The first question directly addressed the reasons why the participants chose to enroll in the Foreign Languages program. Although it was an open-ended question—allowing students to freely express their motivations—certain common patterns were identified in the responses, which were then grouped and tabulated to facilitate analysis.

Firstly, one of the most recurrent patterns was an interest in learning or communicating in other languages. Five out of the fourteen students mentioned this reason, reflecting a natural inclination toward language learning. A representative example from this group is the response by the participant identified as Juan Esteban, who stated: *“I had it in mind because in school I was very good in English and in general I like to learn about how people communicate through English expressions.”* (Pre-questionnaire, Participants' response, Question #5)

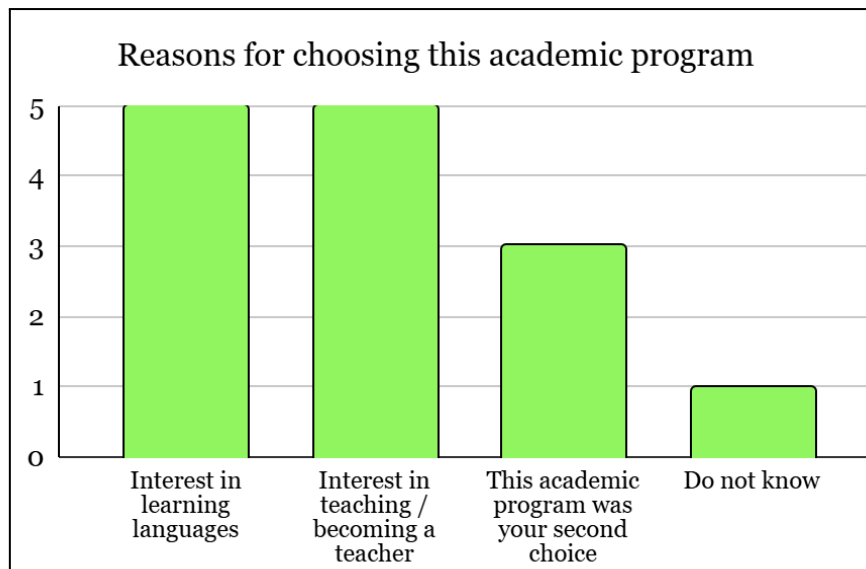
Secondly, an equally frequent pattern was the desire to teach or an interest in education as a life project. Five students indicated they chose this career due to their aspiration to become teachers or their affinity with pedagogical practice. For instance, the participant Majo expressed: *“I decided to choose this career because I’m interested in culture, language, and I find the practice of teaching and the impact behind it appealing”* (Pre-questionnaire, Majo, Question #5).

A third reason, which was also significant though less frequent, was mentioned by three students who indicated that the Foreign Languages program had not been their first choice. Although this may seem surprising, it is understandable given the admission system at the Industrial University of Santander, which allows applicants to apply to two academic programs by purchasing a PIN. If not admitted to their first choice, their eligibility for the second option is evaluated based on their score on the SABER 11 test. In this regard, the participant identified as Camilo stated: *“Because I didn’t get into medicine”* (Pre-questionnaire, Camilo, Question 5).

Finally, one student responded that they were unsure about the reasons for choosing this academic program. This highlights how, in some cases, vocational decisions may be influenced by external factors or by guidance processes that are still undefined.

Figure 6

Reasons for choosing the academic program



The remaining four questions in this section focused on the participants' previous experiences with the English language. The next question used a closed-ended format with a numerical scale from 1 to 5, where students were asked to self-assess their level of English (1 representing the lowest level and 5 the highest). Overall, the results were quite positive and concentrated.

The most selected rating was 3, chosen by eight participants, which could be interpreted as an "average" level. The second most frequent response was 4, which would correspond to a "high" level. Only one participant selected 2, which in this case would indicate "below average" performance.

Next, an open-ended question asked about the participants' language learning process. In contrast to the previous question, the responses were quite diverse. Many participants reported learning through video games, music, or videos in the foreign language. Some described the experience as difficult, while others found it comfortable and enjoyable.

Examples of positive responses:

Participant Majo: “My learning process has been a very pleasant experience, in which I’ve had excellent teachers and very good academic memories that have supported my learning. I’ve been studying English for about three years and I notice progress every day.” (Pre-questionnaire, Majo, Question #7)

Participant Migue: “It’s been very good and entertaining, especially thanks to the teacher and classmates” (Pre-questionnaire, Migue, Question #7)

Examples of negative responses:

Participant Daniela: “It hasn’t gone badly, but not completely well. Sometimes I feel intimidated by the level of English my classmates have, and I lose confidence in what I know, which causes me to shut down.” (Pre-questionnaire, Daniela, Question #7)

Participant Sancho: “I’m now learning the most basic rules and structures that I had never seen before, but when it comes to speaking, it’s still a bit shaky”
(Pre-questionnaire, Sancho, Question #7)

Examples of responses mentioning learning tools:

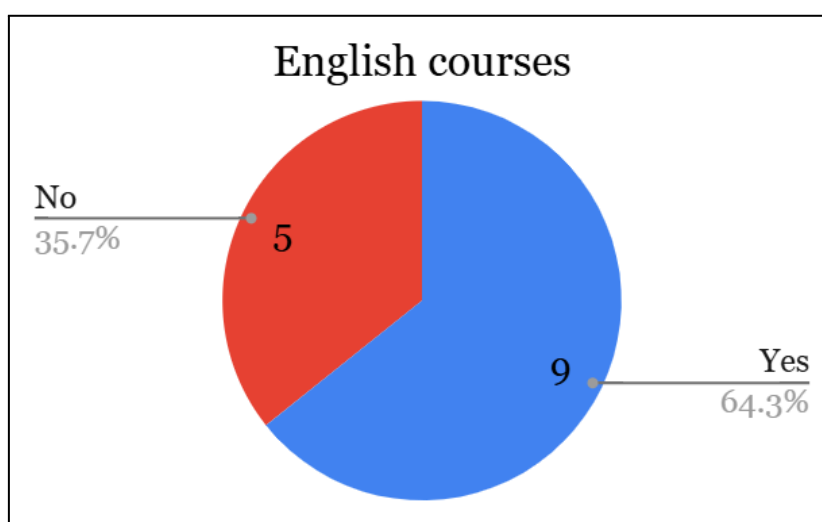
Participant Lili: “Well, I think I’ve mostly learned by listening to music, playing video games, and watching videos in English” (Pre-questionnaire, Lili, Question #7)

Participant Sebastián: “My learning process has always been tied to video games, because when I was little, most of the games that arrived in Colombia were in English, so I had to learn the language if I wanted to play and understand them. From there, I gradually expanded my knowledge so I could use English in my daily life.”
(Pre-questionnaire, Sebastián, Question #7)

The last two questions in this section were related to whether the participants had taken any extra English courses or classes, and how long they had attended those programs. Out of the fourteen responses collected, it was found that nine participants had taken additional classes, while the other five had not.

Figure 7

Have you ever taken an extra English class?



The duration of time students spent in these courses was relatively balanced. Five of the participants who attended these courses did so for six months or less, two for more than a year, and another two for over two years.

7.2.3 Self-assessment of language skills

This section aimed to explore students' self-perception regarding their own language abilities, with a particular emphasis on oral competence (speaking skills). However, to avoid making the questions too direct or predictable, it was decided to inquire about the four skills traditionally assessed in standardized foreign language exams: reading comprehension, listening comprehension, speaking, and writing.

The strategy used to gather this information was relatively simple yet effective. Each student was asked to complete a self-assessment using a numerical scale from 1 to 5, where they indicated how they perceived themselves in each of the aforementioned skills. A score of 1 represented a very low level, while 5 indicated outstanding proficiency. A score of 3 was considered the midpoint, or "average" level.

Table 1

Performance criteria

Criteria	
1	Low
2	Below average
3	Average
4	High
5	Superior

Overall, the results were positive and relatively homogeneous; however, certain relevant patterns can be identified and are worth highlighting. First, the skill with the lowest self-perceived competence was writing. Four students rated themselves below the average criterion (score 3), suggesting that this is the skill they find most challenging in their learning process.

In contrast, the skill in which students expressed the highest level of confidence was reading. This category had the greatest number of scores at level 5 (superior), and only one response was rated below 3, indicating a generally high perception of competence in this

area. Listening came next, which, despite receiving one score at level 1, obtained twelve scores above average, reflecting a generally positive self-perception.

With regard to speaking, three responses were below level 3 and eleven above it. While these figures reflect a favorable perception in most cases, they also indicate slightly more insecurity compared to the receptive skills.

Figure 8

Self perception of listening skills

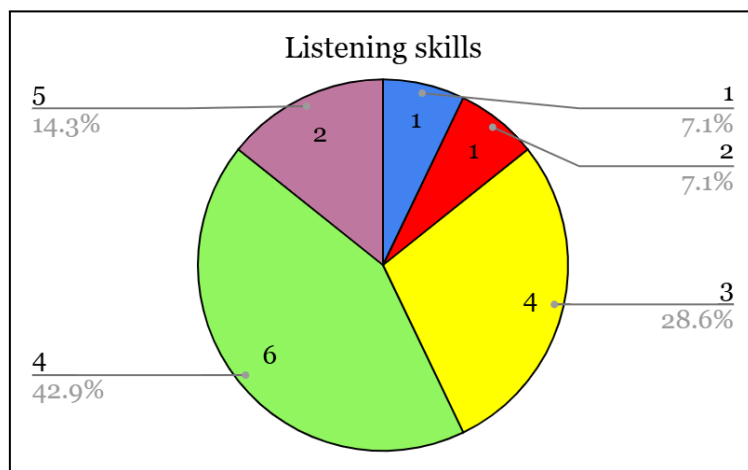


Figure 9

Self perception of reading skills

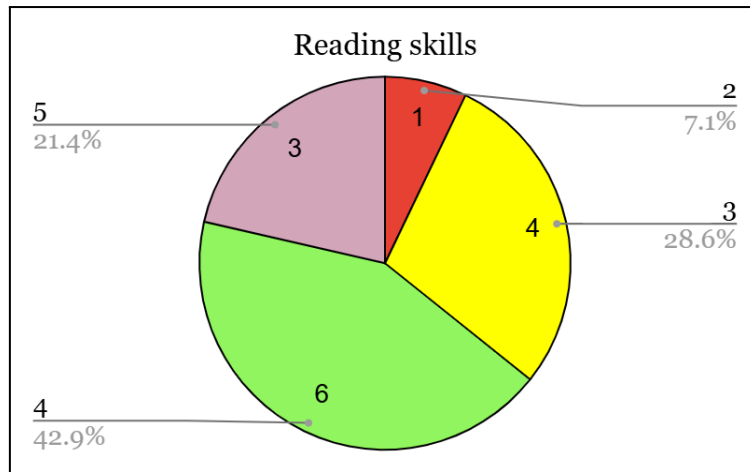


Figure 10

Self perception of writing skills

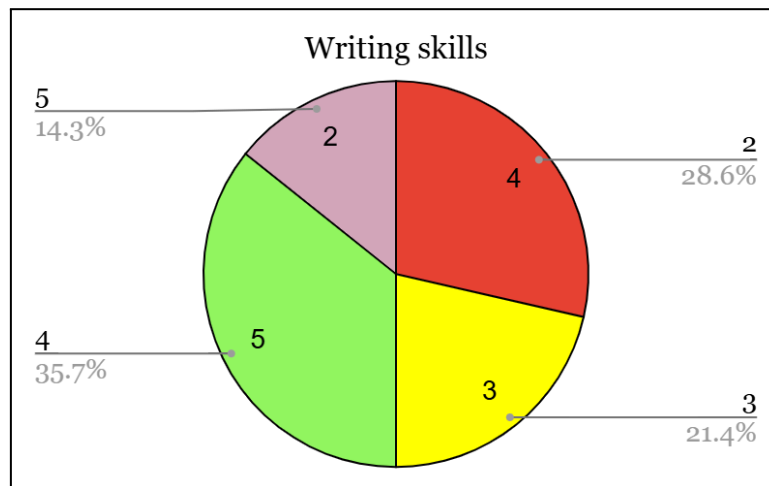
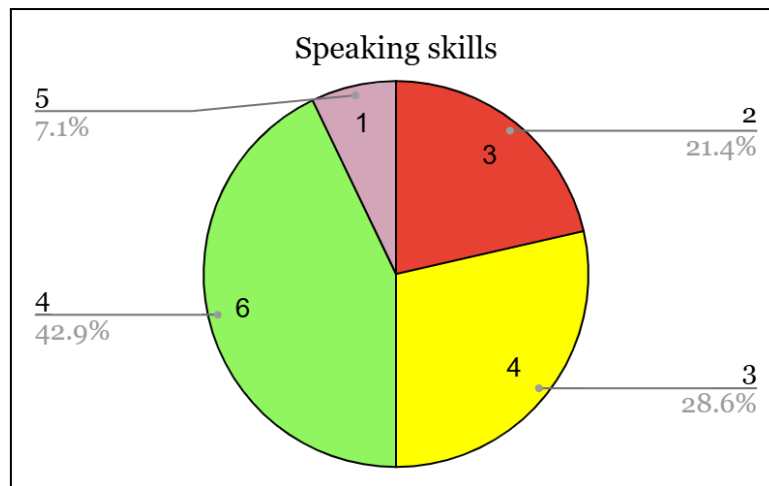


Figure 11

Self perception of speaking skills



In summary, the order of skills based on the level of confidence or comfort expressed by participants was as follows:

1. **Reading skills**
2. **Listening skills**
3. **Speaking skills**
4. **Writing skills**

This result is particularly interesting, as it highlights a common trend in foreign language learning processes: students tend to feel more confident in receptive skills—reading and listening—than in productive skills—speaking and writing. Understanding these perceptions allows educators to identify areas of opportunity for strengthening competencies and for designing pedagogical strategies that better align with students' needs.

7.2.4 Personality traits

The purpose of this section was to explore students' personality traits, with a particular emphasis on those associated with shyness and the emotions that may arise in situations where a person becomes the center of attention. This line of inquiry is especially relevant, as the study focuses on students who exhibit traits of shyness, with the aim of

analyzing how this characteristic may influence their participation and performance in specific pedagogical activities, such as role-play.

To this end, ten closed-ended questions were formulated using a nominal response scale. Some of these questions were directly related to the core objectives of the study, while others were designed as distractors, in order to prevent participants from easily identifying the focus of the research, which could have influenced the sincerity of their responses.

One of the most direct questions was: “Do you consider yourself a shy person?” The responses were relatively homogeneous. Six students selected “maybe,” four stated they were shy, and four said they were not. This distribution suggests that although not all students identify themselves as shy, a significant portion acknowledge experiencing certain levels of shyness in specific contexts.

Figure 12

Do you consider yourself a shy person?

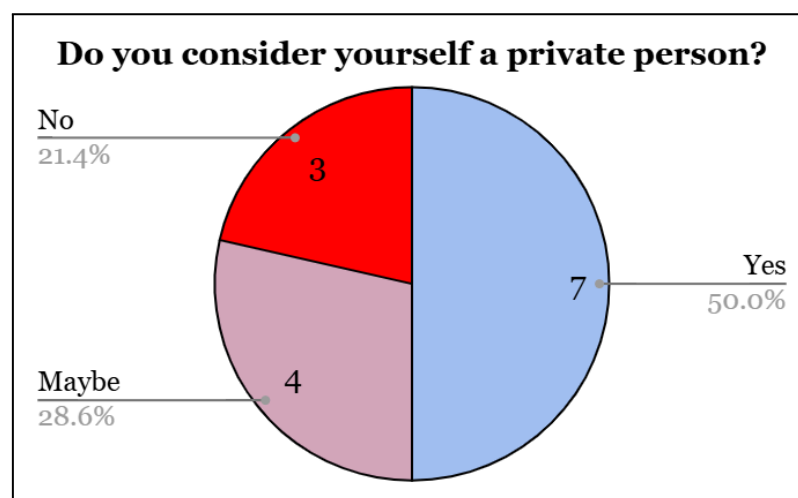


The following question was: “Do you consider yourself a reserved person?” In this case, seven students responded affirmatively, four selected “maybe,” and three indicated they

were not. The inclusion of this question aimed to distinguish between being reserved and being shy, as although the two traits may be related, they are not synonymous. A person may be reserved about their private life but still feel comfortable in social settings, whereas shyness implies a degree of anxiety or discomfort in interpersonal interactions. The difference between introversion and shyness can be understood as that the shy person may feel some degree of anxiety towards social interactions; while an introverted person may not be very comfortable in social situations that demand socialization, but they do not feel anxiety towards these (Farooqi, 2021).

Figure 13

Do you consider yourself a private person?

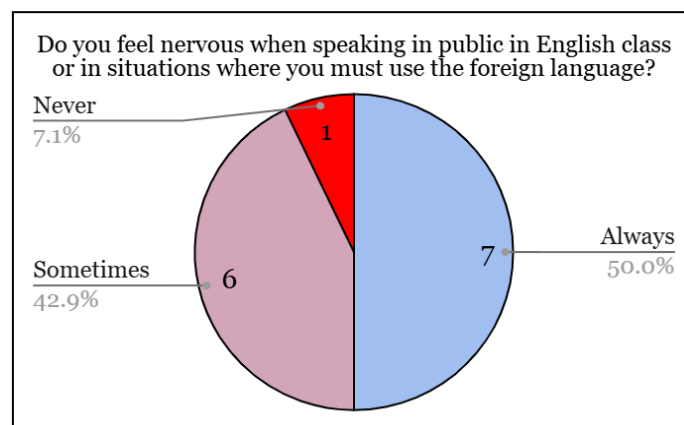


Subsequent questions focused on participants' emotions when using the foreign language, particularly in situations requiring public speaking. One of the questions was: "*Do you feel nervous when speaking in public in English class or in situations where you must use a foreign language?*" Half of the participants responded affirmatively, while the remaining half stated they "sometimes" felt nervous in such situations. Only one student reported not feeling nervous when speaking English in public.

This result reveals a potential general tendency toward insecurity or anxiety when using the foreign language in oral communicative situations, which may be related to shyness or low self-confidence in their language abilities.

Figure 14

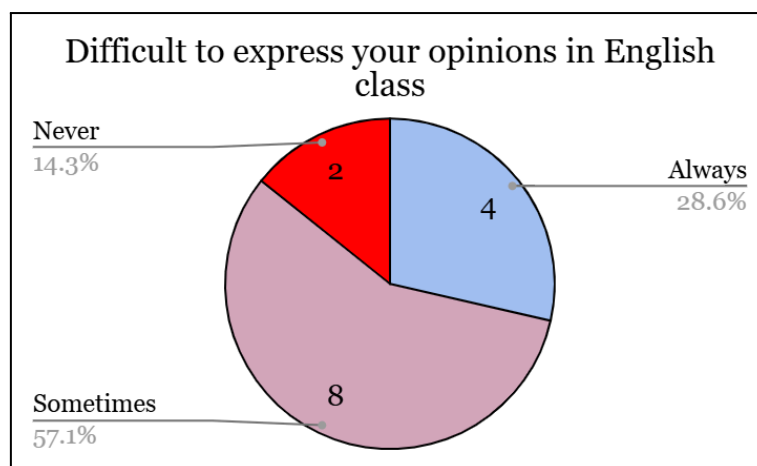
Do you feel nervous when speaking in English in public?



Another relevant question in this regard was: “Is it difficult for you to express your opinions in English class or when you must speak in the language?” Eight students responded that “sometimes” it was difficult for them to do so, while four stated it was “always” a challenge to express their opinions in English. Only two students indicated they did not find it difficult. This information complements the previous results, reinforcing the idea that a considerable portion of the group may experience barriers when it comes to participating orally in class.

Figure 15

Difficulty to express opinions in English



In addition to the questions focused on shyness and English usage, other questions were included to better understand additional personality traits. For instance, it was found that most students prefer working in groups rather than individually, which may be associated with a desire for social support or reduced individual exposure in academic settings. Moreover, several students expressed discomfort when becoming the center of attention, which reinforces the profile of learners who may experience anxiety in public exposure situations.

Taken together, the data collected in this section provide a preliminary profile of the group, highlighting the presence of students with traits of shyness, potential communication anxiety, and a certain degree of insecurity regarding the oral use of English. Poor performance in oral skills may manifest through difficulties when speaking in public, such as reduced fluency, inappropriate pauses, speech blocks, or disorganized discourse. These behaviors can affect students' self-confidence and generate anxiety, contributing to the avoidance of such situations and limiting the development of this and other related skills (Maldonado et al., 2022).

These findings are essential for understanding the impact that pedagogical strategies focused on oral production—such as role-play—can have on the development of language skills in students with these specific characteristics.

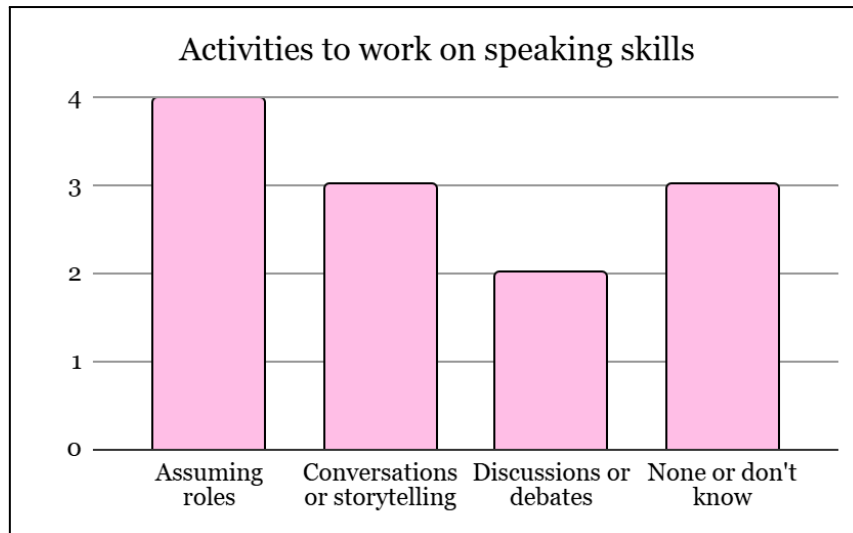
7.2.5 Knowledge and previous experiences with role-play activities

This was the final section of the questionnaire and included five questions, two of which were closed-ended and three open-ended. The purpose of this section was to explore the participants' prior knowledge of role-play activities and whether they found them enjoyable or engaging.

The first question asked students about the types of activities they would like to use to improve their speaking skills. Although this was an open-ended question to allow participants to respond freely, clear patterns emerged from their answers. As shown in the graph, three types of activities stood out as the most frequently mentioned. Role-playing was the most commonly suggested activity, receiving four mentions. This was followed by storytelling or sharing personal anecdotes, with three mentions. Lastly, debates were proposed by two participants. It is also important to note that three students either did not know how to respond or expressed no interest in any particular activity.

Figure 16

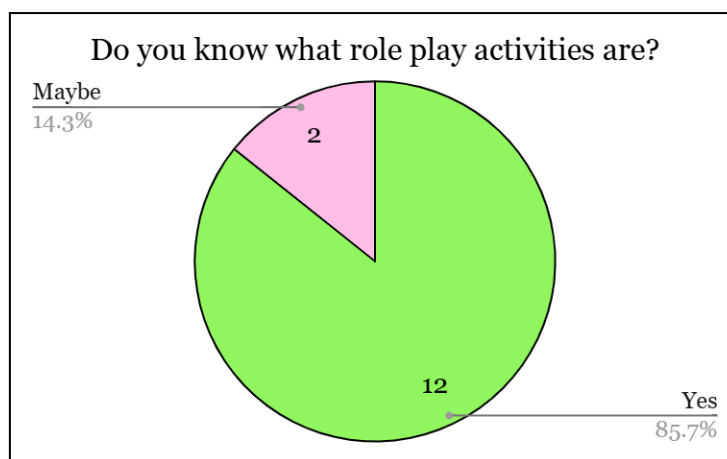
Activities to work on speaking skills



When asked whether they knew what role-play activities were, the majority of participants (85.7%) responded affirmatively, while 14.3% said they were somewhat familiar with the concept but not entirely sure.

Figure 17

Do you know what a role-play activity is?



Participants were also asked to provide a brief definition of what they believed role-play activities involved. The responses were generally similar and captured the essence of what role-play typically entails.

Examples of participant responses:

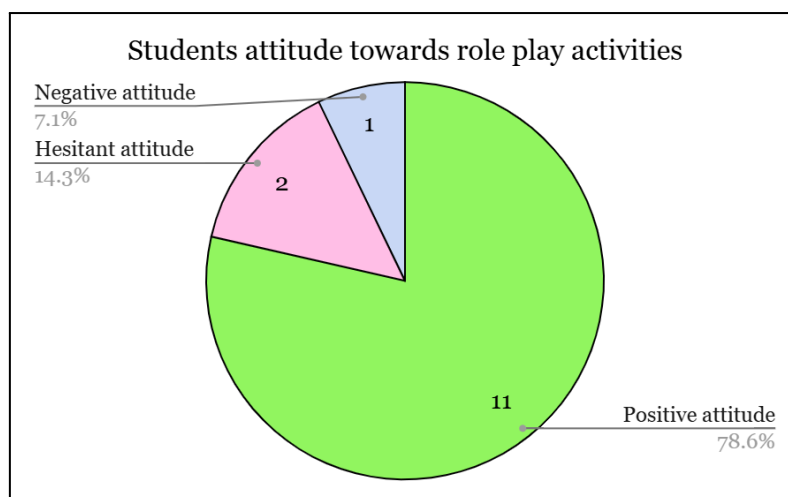
- **Mayra:** “Acting as a character in a specific situation.” (Pre-questionnaire, Mayra, Question #27)
- **Majo:** “The concept I have of role-play is an activity in which we adopt a different identity for a specific context.” (Pre-questionnaire, Majo, Question #27)
- **Sancho:** “Being part of a performance where we play roles assigned by both sides.” (Pre-questionnaire, Sancho, Question #27)

Another question in this section aimed to determine whether students were interested in participating in role-play activities during English class. The majority of responses were positive, with only one student expressing disinterest. Participants were then invited to justify their answers in an open-ended question. Although the reasons given were quite diverse, they were categorized according to the general attitude conveyed by each response.

As shown in the corresponding graph, 78.6% of participants demonstrated a positive attitude toward role-play activities in English class. 14.3% expressed an uncertain attitude, stating they were unsure of how well they would perform in such tasks. Finally, one participant (7.1%) showed a somewhat negative attitude, explaining that they did not consider themselves charismatic enough to perform well in that type of activity.

Figure 18

Students attitudes towards role play activities



7.3 Class Intervention, Videos, and Observations

The following section discusses both the activities that were designed and implemented, as well as the videos recorded and the notes taken to evaluate the students' attitude and motivation during the development of the role-play activities.

The students had already received a good amount of input and prior explanations on the topic from the professor, so a grammar explanation was not necessary. Additionally, the activities were implemented in the middle of the class—not at the beginning, because they would have lacked the necessary input, nor at the end, as role-play activities tend to take a considerable amount of time. In total, three activities were carried out, each one planned and designed based on the professor's lesson plans and the grammar topic they were working on during those days. Below is a description and analysis of each activity, along with the related videos and classroom observation notes.

7.3.1 *Future Teller Role-Play*

As previously mentioned, the professor's lesson plans were taken into consideration when designing the activities. On this day, March 20th, the class was working on making predictions and talking about the future. The grammatical structure being used was will and

will not. It was decided that a fitting context for practicing this topic would be a fortune-teller's office. This theme seemed both interesting and creative, which was exactly the goal—creating activities that were not too monotonous or conventional for the participants.

For the character preparation, students were paired up and given bandanas and accessories for those who were going to play the role of the fortune teller. In addition to these props, handmade cards with random predictions were also used. The topics varied greatly, including love life, luck and money, health, and more.

The idea was that the person drawing the cards would act as the fortune teller and had to create a prediction based on the cards drawn and the questions asked by the “client,” always paying close attention to the correct use of will and will not.

Once the character preparation was completed, each pair was asked to come to the front of the class and begin performing their roles and acting out the scenario.

7.3.1.1. Observations and video analysis. Observations were taken by one of the researchers while the other recorded videos of each performance. The analysis of the activity was carried out collaboratively, drawing from both the field notes and the audiovisual material.

7.3.1.2 Creativity. One of the most remarkable aspects highlighted in both sources was the students' creativity. Despite having limited information (two cards with a prediction and three client's questions), participants managed to build coherent, original, and entertaining stories. The observation notes explicitly emphasized this point: “There is great ability on the part of the participants to create stories with little information. The stories and predictions they make are coherent and quite amusing, both for the pair performing the role-play and for the classmates who are watching”. (Annex D)

Figure 19

Class intervention 1. Group 1.



Note: Group 1 video. If you watch the video you can hear how the participant playing the role of the fortune teller creates a very creative story about the love life of the participant playing the role of the client.

7.3.1.3 Language use. Regarding language use, it became evident that the students' level of English was aligned with what is expected of a pre-intermediate course. Most students were able to express themselves fluently, use appropriate vocabulary, and communicate their ideas clearly. Interestingly, some students even attempted to imitate the accents of certain English-speaking communities. As noted in the observations: "They have a great level of English overall. They are very good at expressing themselves. You can tell they have a strong command of the language and have received a lot of input. They even use accents—one boy imitates the accent of African American women, and another that of an Indian person." (Annex D.)

Figure 20

Class intervention 1. Group 2



Note: Group 2 video: Throughout the video, the participant can be heard imitating the accent of an African-American woman.

Despite this strong performance, a number of grammatical and lexical errors were identified. However, these did not interfere significantly with communication and are considered a natural part of the learning process. It is believed that these errors may stem from students' desire to perform well, from fossilized mistakes, or from the fact that, for many of them, this was one of the first times they had to use English continuously in a realistic interaction. Notably, some students were able to self-correct while speaking, which demonstrates a high level of linguistic awareness and the ability to go beyond simple grammatical memorization.

Figure 21

Class intervention 1. Group 3



Note: Video of group 3. Second 35 and 36. The participant corrects himself, since when referring to a person he said “Something” and then rectified himself by saying “Someone”.

7.3.1.4 Classroom environment and participation of shy students. Another fundamental element to highlight is the classroom atmosphere and how it influenced student participation, especially among those who had previously been identified as shy. Before the activity began, the energy level in the classroom was quite low. Students were quiet and focused on writing activities. This may have been due to the early morning schedule of the class, which likely made them feel sleepy or less alert.

Nevertheless, their attitude changed significantly once the activity was introduced and they realized that there were props like bandanas and fortune cards to help them perform their roles. This seemed to awaken their interest and enthusiasm. During the character creation phase, students engaged in conversations, supported one another, and demonstrated a strong willingness to work in pairs. Later, during the performances, the students who were observing showed genuine attention and involvement, often laughing and enjoying the moment.

Figure 22

Class intervention 1. Group 4



Note: Group video 4. Second 3:06 to 3:10. All students are excited by the prediction that one of the girlfriends will be unfaithful to another with a man.

This positive atmosphere even encouraged participation among students who were usually more reserved. While their performances may not have been as theatrical or humorous as those of their more extroverted peers, these shy students were able to complete the task successfully and seemed to enjoy the experience as well. None of them appeared reluctant to participate, which indicates that they felt safe and motivated to take on a more active role. It is also believed that working in pairs played a key role in reducing pressure, as it allowed them to share responsibility and count on their partner as a source of support during a situation in which they were the center of attention.

Figure 23

Class intervention 1. Group 5.



Note: Group 5 video. Second 40 to 44. The fortune teller tells the client that he will be unfaithful to his girlfriend, everyone acted surprised, helping to create a more immersive atmosphere in the role play.

7.3.2 Newscast of the future

For the second classroom activity on March 26th, students were invited to create a newscast set in the future. In this dynamic, they pretended to have traveled to the year 2080 and returned to the present to report on future events. The central premise of the activity was that the future can still be changed based on actions taken in the present, so they had to share predictions that would serve as warnings or relevant news for their audience — their classmates.

The choice of this topic was aligned with the need to continue practicing the future tense with *will* and *will not*, which was the grammatical focus of the unit at that time. Thus, the activity not only had a clear linguistic goal, but also provided students with a

communicative context that allowed them to express themselves in a creative and meaningful way.

For the preparation stage, students were once again paired up and received a random card with a category upon which they had to base their news report. The topics varied and included fields such as education, the environment, entertainment, food, or daily life. They were given ten minutes to plan their news from the future, and afterwards, they volunteered to present their reports in front of the group.

After each presentation, their classmates — now acting as the audience — were encouraged to ask questions related to the topic. The pairs of "future journalists" had to respond using the grammatical structures they were practicing, acting as expert informants from the year 2080. Overall, the activity lasted approximately 32 minutes, including the preparation time, the presentations, and the question-and-answer sessions.

7.3.2.1 Creativity. The creativity shown in this second activity was just as remarkable as in the first one. Although some topics were more difficult to approach in a fun or light-hearted way, all the news reports were developed in inventive ways, and the students paid close attention to the requirement of using the *will* and *will not* structures. Several students managed to include humorous or surprising elements that captured the audience's attention. One of the observers noted: "The level of creativity of the students is incredible. They are quite resourceful in finding the funny and entertaining side of any activity or topic presented to them" (Annex D). This observation confirms that creativity remains as one of the group's strongest assets.

However, among the three activities that were developed among the participants, it seems that this was the one they found least motivating or to their liking. One of the researchers commented in the notes: "It seems that the newscast theme, being very common

for them or something they see in daily life very often, does not seem so interesting for them to interpret” (Annex D).

Figure 24

Class intervention 2. Environment group



Note: Environment group video. Throughout the video, participants were very creative in presenting their news story, making their peers laugh and creating a more relaxed atmosphere.

7.3.2.2 Language use. During this session, more difficulties in language use were observed compared to the previous activity. Some students seemed hesitant when they could not find the right words to express their ideas. This difficulty did not seem to be related to shyness, as even the more outgoing students struggled. It is believed that this was largely due to their lack of familiarity with the specific vocabulary of the topics they were assigned, which limited their ability to improvise.

Figure 25*Class intervention 2. Daily life group*

Note: Daily life group video. Second 9 to 14. The participant was blocked and did not know how to express her idea, however, the participants who acted as audience helped her to finish her idea.

Additionally, during the audience participation phase, several students forgot to apply the future tense correctly, which led one of the researchers to intervene. This intervention was not intended as a punitive correction, but rather as a gentle reminder to guide the group back to the linguistic focus of the activity. After this clarification, a noticeable improvement was observed in the use of *will* and *will not* among the participants.

Figure 26*Class intervention 2. Food group*



Note: Food Video. Second 24 to 30. A participant from the audience asks a question but does not use the structure they were asked to use, so the researcher corrects the question. The participant says, “Can I print Bandeja Paisa?” and the researcher guides the participant by saying, “Will I be able to print a Bandeja Paisa?”.

Despite these challenges, working in pairs proved to be a key source of support. Students encouraged one another and stayed connected throughout the activity. Even classmates who were part of the audience offered spontaneous help, demonstrating a high level of solidarity and empathy. The researcher wrote: “They are very kind to each other. You can tell they are not trying to outshine one another, but rather to learn together. They don’t try to make others feel bad when someone doesn’t know something.”

7.3.2.3 Classroom environment and shy students. As mentioned in previous analyses, the classroom environment remains highly positive. Respect and collaboration among students are evident, fostering a safe and supportive learning space. Additionally, the creativity shown during the presentations helped to lighten the atmosphere, creating moments of shared laughter and enjoyment.

Figure 27*Class intervention 2. Showbiz group*

Note: Showbiz video: second 45 to 59. All the students laugh at the news article of the participant who talks about the upcoming tour of an American singer at the university accompanied by the president of Colombia.

However, it was observed that this activity generated slightly more tension than the previous one. Regardless of whether they were shy or outgoing, several students showed signs of nervousness, especially when they felt limited by their knowledge of the vocabulary. Although all students were able to complete the task, some did so with more caution, suggesting that the cognitive load of this activity was greater. Nevertheless, having a partner by their side seemed to provide meaningful emotional support, allowing them to remain engaged and overcome difficulties.

A noticeable difference between shy students and those who are not was the way they reacted to their mistakes. Shy students tended to become quieter or more thoughtful before speaking again after making an error, whereas more outgoing students would often laugh at

themselves, apologize naturally, and continue acting with ease. This difference highlights how personality influences emotional management during the communicative process, although in all cases, students showed respect, effort, and a willingness to participate. The researcher noted: “It seems this activity made them feel more insecure because several of them made mistakes. Interestingly, their reactions didn’t depend on their personality—when they made a mistake, they became more careful with their words. Despite this, everyone was able to complete the activity.”

7.3.3 Travel Agency 2080

On March 26th, this was the final activity implemented as part of the project, and it consisted of designing a futuristic travel agency set in the year 2080. The main objective of this task was to practice the use of the future tense with “*going to*”, following the specific request of the main course teacher. To carry out the activity, students were organized into groups of four to encourage collaborative work in building their agencies.

Each group received a worksheet with clear instructions, where they had to specify details such as the type of accommodation, transportation, trip duration, activities included, and the price of their travel package. Additionally, they were asked to choose one of three futuristic categories as the agency’s specialty: time travel, deep-sea travel, or space travel. Students had around ten minutes to organize and write down the information for their agency, making sure to meet all the required criteria.

After the preparation phase, each group presented their travel plan to the rest of the class. Then, the remaining students —playing the role of demanding clients— had the chance to ask questions, raise concerns, or pose hypothetical situations. The travel agents had to respond and persuade these potential buyers to purchase their travel plan. At the end of the

activity, the class voted for the most convincing and innovative proposal. The whole activity lasted approximately 30 minutes.

7.3.3.1 Creativity. Once again, creativity stood out as one of the group's strongest assets. Every presentation was marked by originality and clever thinking. None of the agencies came up with a predictable or repetitive travel plan, and even the payment methods were surprisingly creative. For instance, "Chikito Travel" proposed that their trips could only be paid for with years of one's life: a one-week trip to the past would cost one year. Meanwhile, "Go Diego Go" offered a tour to Jerusalem during the time of Jesus of Nazareth, which could be paid for through Catholic prayers. These ideas sparked laughter, curiosity, and interest among the "clients," making the activity both dynamic and thoroughly enjoyable for everyone.

Figure 28

Class intervention 3. Go Diego Go travel agency



Note: Go Diego Go travel agency video. The creativity of the group made everyone feel comfortable in this video and they were able to present their tour plan in a fun way.

7.3.3.2 Language Use. This time, a more natural and accurate use of “*going to*” was observed. Students appeared to be more familiar with this structure, which resulted in overall better linguistic performance. Their interventions were spontaneous and fluent, with no major grammatical or vocabulary issues. The support material (the worksheet with prompts) proved to be a valuable tool, helping students express their ideas clearly and coherently. This highlights the importance of providing visual aids or structured guides during role-play activities to enhance students' oral expression.

Figure 29

Class intervention 3. Chikito Travel Agency



Note: Video Chikito Travel Agency. Throughout the presentation of their tourism plan, it can be heard the fluency and clarity in the way they express their ideas.

As for the audience participation, students also demonstrated good command of the language while taking on the role of demanding clients. The questions asked were relevant and challenging, requiring the travel agents to use English strategically to persuade others.

Unlike previous sessions, students appeared more confident when speaking and embraced their roles with greater ease.

7.3.3.3 Classroom Environment and Shy Students. Throughout this activity, the overall classroom atmosphere remained positive, collaborative, and respectful—just as in previous sessions. Students participated actively and enthusiastically in both roles: as travel agents and as clients, showing they are increasingly comfortable with this type of dynamic. However, a minor incident occurred that is worth noting: one student made a pronunciation error during her presentation, and a peer corrected her in a rather unkind manner. Fortunately, the situation did not escalate or repeat itself. The rest of the class maintained a respectful attitude, and the general tone of support and kindness quickly returned.

A particularly interesting and meaningful aspect was that, by coincidence, all the students who considered themselves shy ended up in the same group for this activity. This offered a unique opportunity to observe how they face challenges and how they support one another when speaking in public. Compared to the other groups—whose performances were more expressive, theatrical, and spontaneous—this group’s presentation was quieter and more reserved. However, that didn’t make their work any less valuable or creative; on the contrary, they successfully fulfilled all the task requirements and presented a clear, coherent, and well-thought-out proposal.

The most remarkable part was how these students supported each other throughout the entire activity. They organized themselves so that everyone had a chance to speak, gave gentle cues or reminders during the presentation, and offered encouraging words or gestures when someone seemed nervous. This constant collaboration allowed each student to feel supported and confident enough to participate, despite their shyness.

Figure 30*Class intervention 3. Sub-Ocean Network Express*

Note: Sub-Ocean Network Express Video. Throughout the video it be can seen how participants help and support each other.

This situation highlights the importance of teamwork and the crucial role interpersonal relationships play in the classroom. In contexts where speaking in front of others can cause anxiety or insecurity—especially for more reserved students—the support of their peers becomes an essential emotional tool. About this aspect, the observer said “even if they were shy or more extroverted, they all created amazing travel plans, some of them were surprising and made everyone, even the teacher laugh” (Annex D).

Moreover, this experience shows that when placed in a safe and empathetic environment, even the shyest students are capable of achieving meaningful and successful outcomes in communicative activities.

7.4 Interviews

This section presents the analysis of the interviews conducted with the professor in charge of the selected first-semester group of the Foreign Languages program with an emphasis on English, as well as two students from the same group. The data has been organized into categories to facilitate a more in-depth analysis.

7.4.1 Professor Danna

7.4.1.1 Teaching Strategies and Shyness/Insecurity. This section highlights the moments during the interview when the professor shared the strategies she uses in class to encourage student cooperation and consistent engagement. In section 8 of the interview, she discusses the importance of moving away from using slides and instead focusing on keeping the class dynamic and conversational, as if talking to a friend. According to her, this method helps maintain students' attention during the lesson.

This same strategy is also mentioned in section 9 regarding which method she finds most effective for explaining grammar to students.

An important point related to our research topic appears in section 13, where the professor stresses the importance of providing strong input on the lesson topic before presenting a role-play activity. This helps avoid student frustration during the activity.

To conclude this section, it is worth mentioning that we decided to merge these two themes into one, as in section 15 the professor points out the importance of letting students know they have the right not to know something or to make mistakes. This is especially helpful for students who struggle to participate in class due to fear of making errors, as it allows them to work with the teacher in a more comfortable and trusting environment.

7.4.1.2 Impact of Role-Play and Collaborative Work. We chose to group these two topics into a single section because, in section 11 of the interview, the professor first mentions the effectiveness of role-play. She highlights that it gives students the opportunity to talk about topics they are interested in with classmates. This, combined with other games she introduces in class, serves as an excuse to learn about various topics indirectly—through play. She also notes in section 13 that, although the students are only in their first semester, role-play activities work in an effective way due to their good level of English.

7.4.1.3 Motivation. Building on the previous section, motivation plays an important role here. In section 6 of the interview, the professor mentions that due to the students' strong language skills, it is necessary to add a bit of difficulty to class activities. This encourages students to stay motivated and attentive during class. Additionally, throughout the interview (sections 15 and 18), she emphasizes the importance of reminding students that her class is a safe space where they can make mistakes and participate without fear of being judged. This is especially important in this class, where low participation is a challenge she seeks to address through constant motivation.

7.4.2 Students' Interviews

During these sections, the interviews of both students and their different points of view were taken into account. They will be referred to as Student D and Student S.

7.4.2.1 Shyness and Language Difficulties. In this first section, both students agreed on item 6, identifying themselves as shy individuals who have difficulty socializing with others and participating in class. A common factor was that both mentioned feeling this way especially when they have to speak in English.

Furthermore, Student S stated in item 10 that they feel panic when having to speak English in front of others. According to their explanation, since English is not their native

language, they feel the need to plan everything ahead before speaking, and the fact that an audience is focusing on them makes it even harder. On the other hand, Student D commented in the same item that her shyness mainly stems from the fear of making mistakes or not reaching the same level of English as her classmates. She also said that the dominant feeling when speaking in front of the class is nervousness or fear of being judged for not being understood in the way she expects.

Both students also mentioned feeling pressure regarding their classmates, as they believe their peers have a fairly good level of English, which makes them feel more judged.

To expand on this, we will take the case of Student D, who shared in item 14 that she feels as if others have a higher level of English, even though they are all at the intermediate level. The fact that her classmates use complicated phrases for a not-so-advanced level of English makes her feel like she doesn't have the same command of the language and needs to improve.

Regarding the issue of shyness in relation to becoming a future teacher, Student D commented that this personality trait will not affect her teaching career at all. She believes that the 10 semesters of her degree will be enough to overcome her fear and shyness, as it's not a feeling that predominates in her daily life throughout the program. On the other hand, she feels that what she truly needs to work on is her fear of public speaking—a point on which Student S agrees.

7.4.2.2 Transition from High School to University. Student D stated in item 18 that the transition from high school English to university English has been easy, as the topics studied in school (e.g., the verb "to be", English basics) are very simple, and having previous experience in an English course has made it even easier. In contrast, Student S said that it has been a long time since they finished high school, and although they don't remember the

experience very well, they do recall that the methodology regarding working with a textbook is similar. Finally, Student D mentioned feeling much more confident in her English and herself during her school years than now at university.

7.4.2.3 Motivation and Previous Experience with Role Play. In these sections, both students expressed having previous experience with English. On the one hand, Student D mentioned being good at the language during her school years and always being interested in languages. On the other hand, Student S said they were exposed to the language through their job at a bilingual call center.

Another important aspect regarding motivation was mentioned by Student S, who stated that on occasions when a classmate made a mistake during participation, other students were always there to offer help.

As for role play, both interviewees knew what it was, as they had previous contact with this type of activity. Student D mentioned having done basic presentations with role play at school. Student S explained that, although they didn't encounter role play in school, they did come across it during the first days at their current job. The objective was to assess the employees' skills in performing their tasks.

Both agreed that role play is a strategy that has provided a fun and pleasant space to improve their language skills and become more creative. Regarding this last aspect (creativity), Student D stated in item 38 that although she enjoyed the activity and found it funny, she struggled with having to improvise a dialogue. Meanwhile, Student S said that the most challenging part of the activities was the fear of interacting properly with the audience, but overall, they felt that the activities were easy to do.

8. Discussion and results

8.1 The Importance of Input and Prior Knowledge

This research identified that the effective development of role-play activities largely depends on students having adequate input and sufficient prior knowledge. In other words, one cannot expect a fluent interpretation of a character if students lack the necessary linguistic foundations, such as functional vocabulary and useful expressions in English. According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, learning occurs when students are exposed to comprehensible input—language that is slightly above their current level (A Review of Krashen's Input Theory, 2024).

This theory is supported by teacher Danna's interview, where in section 13, she states that when students are pushed into a role-play activity without a prior socialization or vocabulary-building task, they might feel intimidated when speaking because they will not know what to say or how to say it. This shows that prior preparation is a key and essential element for the success of activities that involve this learning strategy.

8.2 The Relationship Between Environment, Collaborative Learning, and Role-Play Performance

One of the most relevant findings of this research was the close relationship between classroom environment, students' collaborative work, and their performance in role-play activities. Throughout the observation process and the implementation of these activities, it became clear that the emotional and social context in which these dynamics develop has a direct impact on how students express themselves and participate.

When students feel they are in a safe environment—where they are not negatively judged or exposed—they are more willing to speak, improvise, and take on roles, even those that challenge them to step out of their comfort zones. In the words of Liu and Ding (2009), in their study on the use of role-play in English classes, “quieter students get the chance to

express themselves in a more forthright way” (p. 143). This was reflected in the class sessions, where students who were shy at the beginning eventually participated actively and enthusiastically.

Additionally, the nature of role-play itself, including humor, spontaneity, and character creation, helped transform the classroom environment. In one of the most significant sessions, titled *The Future Teller*, the tone of the class became lighter and full of laughter as students developed characters with comedic elements. Field notes recorded the following:

"Everyone is very creative when creating stories, quite witty, and they always try to introduce humorous elements in some way; this makes their partner and the other students who are not performing the role-play laugh, which lightens the classroom atmosphere."

This relaxed and fun environment not only fostered emotional well-being but also became a favorable condition for learning and oral expression. As Krebt (2017) states, role-play activities not only improve students' confidence but also reduce anxiety when speaking English—likely because the focus is on the character rather than on immediate correction or linguistic accuracy.

Conversely, collaborative work was a fundamental component in the development of these activities. In Robayo's words (2017), "cooperative learning approach helps to reduce students' anxiety and shyness. Success depends less on working alone, and more on working taking into account classmates" (p. 63). Doing role-plays in pairs or groups allowed students to feel emotionally supported. Instead of facing the challenge of speaking in a foreign language alone, they could rely on each other, provide friendly corrections, and build dialogues together. In the interview with student S, he shared that thanks to the camaraderie

among classmates, he felt free to make mistakes without being judged, which matched the climate observed during all the sessions.

Furthermore, the teacher's role also proved to be key. From the beginning of the process, initial observations already highlighted a positive classroom environment. In her interview, the teacher mentioned that she constantly tried to create a space where mistakes were seen as part of learning rather than something negative.

Together, these elements—emotional environment, teamwork, and the teacher's role—created a scenario in which students could experience the language in an authentic, creative, and effective way. Beyond linguistic goals, the learning experience fostered language as a tool for interaction and expression, which are fundamental pillars in the meaningful process of learning a foreign language.

8.3 Motivation and Creativity: Key Elements in Role-Play Performance

Another significant finding of this study was the role motivation plays when students are faced with novel, creative, and unusual situations outside their everyday context. Through the implementation of role-play activities, it was observed that participants' interest and engagement increased when they were presented with unusual characters or scenarios that pushed them beyond their comfort zones. These types of activities not only sparked their curiosity but also stimulated their imagination and motivated them to participate actively.

Rojas and Villafuerte (2018) state that role-play “allows opportunities to learn English naturally and meaningfully focusing on topics that are interesting and motivating for learners” (p. 730), which aligns with the findings of this research. When students were involved in more creative situations—such as acting as a fortune teller or becoming time-travel tour guides—they showed greater enthusiasm, expressed themselves more fluently, and participated more spontaneously. In contrast, when the activity was based on

more familiar contexts, such as the newscast (where they acted as reporters), although the activity was completed successfully, a lower level of energy and commitment was observed both in their expression and group dynamic.

This finding contrasts with what Liu and Ding (2009) propose in their research, where they recommend that role-play activities be based on everyday situations to facilitate connection with functional language. However, this study showed that, at least for this group of students, extraordinary and imaginative scenarios were more effective in terms of participation, creativity, and motivation. This suggests that cultural context, group characteristics, and their willingness to play are important variables to consider when designing this type of activity.

Although it was not possible to formally measure the impact of role-play on the development of oral skills—through grades, diagnostic tests, or comparative pre- and post-evaluation—a qualitative improvement in students' willingness to communicate in English was observed. Previous studies support this perception. For example, studies such as those by Krebt (2017) and Liu (2010) compared speaking post-test results between groups that used role-play and those that used traditional methods. While no significant differences were found in speaking accuracy or fluency between the two groups, there was a notable increase in motivation among those who participated in role-play activities.

This difference in motivation is key, as it implies that even if linguistic progress may not be immediately measurable, the emotional and attitudinal impact of role-play promotes a positive relationship with English learning. Students feel more involved, less anxious, and more willing to participate in class.

In this regard, authors such as Liu (2010) and Rojas and Villafuerte (2018) agree that role-play boosts motivation precisely because it allows students to break from routine and

address topics of interest to them. By introducing creativity and imagination, these activities turn language learning into a more meaningful, emotionally engaging experience that aligns with students' interests.

8.4 Reflection on the fulfillment of objectives

After analyzing the findings of this research, it is possible to reflect on the achievement of the stated objectives. Although this study focused on a qualitative approach, based on observation, interpretation, and direct classroom experience, the collected data shows important progress toward the initial goals.

Regarding the general objective—to evaluate the impact of role-play activities in the EFL classroom to promote the development of speaking skills and motivation in first-semester students of the Foreign Languages program—it can be said that it was partially fulfilled. Although it was not possible to carry out a formal assessment using rubrics, grades, or a diagnostic test, the evidence gathered through observations, interviews, and session analysis indicates that students participated more actively, were more motivated, and, above all, lost part of their fear of speaking English. The proposed dynamics helped create a positive environment that encouraged spontaneous oral expression.

In relation to the first specific objective—designing and planning activities using role-play in the EFL classroom, especially targeting shy students—this was successfully achieved. The activities were designed to include all participants, especially those who were quieter or less willing to speak in public during the initial observations. Unusual characters, out-of-the-ordinary contexts, and dynamics that promoted collaborative work were included, which generated greater enthusiasm among the students.

The second specific objective—implementing a series of role-play activities to foster shy students’ oral participation in the EFL classroom—was also achieved. Evidence collected during the sessions showed how shy students gradually began to get more involved, contribute ideas, interact with peers, and build dialogues with greater confidence. One of the most helpful aspects in this process was teamwork and collaborative learning, as it allowed more reserved students to lean on classmates with greater initiative or public-speaking confidence. This mutual support enabled these students to participate without feeling all the pressure was on them, resulting in more successful and natural performances. A clear change was noticed in their willingness to speak and participate, especially in activities where the role or context was far from everyday situations, such as “the future teller” or “time-travel guides.”

Finally, the third specific objective—evaluating the impact of these activities on shy students’ oral performance and attitudes—was partially fulfilled. Although a formal evaluation system to compare progress before and after the activities was not used, interviews and observations revealed a significant change in students’ attitudes toward using the language. Most participants became more open to making mistakes, expressing themselves without fear, and reported enjoying the activities, reflecting a positive impact on both their motivation and their confidence in speaking English.

9. Conclusions

One of the main findings of this research is that the success of role-play activities for developing motivation and participation in the English classroom does not depend solely on lesson planning or students’ language level, but rather, on the emotional environment that is built in class. When students—whether shy or not—perceive that they are in a kind and non-judgmental space where effort is valued more than perfection, they feel more willing to

participate and experiment with the language. Emotional safety, then, becomes a key factor that encourages students to speak in English, even if that means making mistakes.

Moreover, teamwork proved to be a fundamental element in fostering active participation, especially for shy students or those with less confidence in their speaking skills. When role-play activities are developed in pairs or small groups, students do not face the challenge of speaking in another language alone; instead, they have the support and encouragement of their peers. This collaborative dynamic not only facilitates the co-construction of the dialogue but also strengthens the bond between classmates, helping to create a more relaxed and supportive learning environment.

Therefore, when the creation of a welcoming atmosphere is prioritized and collaborative work is encouraged, role-play activities can become a highly effective tool to boost motivation and participation in class—particularly for those students who are more reserved or hesitant to engage. Feeling emotionally and socially supported encourages them to express themselves more freely, which improves their willingness to learn and use the language in real or simulated contexts. Thus, beyond teaching grammar structures, role-play allows students to connect with English through lived experience, interaction, and creativity.

Another relevant aspect of this research was the crucial role of the teacher as a mediator in the learning process. From the beginning, it is the teacher who sets the tone in the classroom and creates the conditions for students to feel safe, valued, and free to express themselves without fear of making mistakes. When the teacher openly communicates that making mistakes is part of learning, anxiety is reduced and students adopt a more positive attitude toward speaking in English. This empathetic and understanding approach helps build an environment where learning happens in a more natural and meaningful way.

In addition to this emotional role, the teacher is also responsible for designing engaging and appealing activities. It is not enough to assign just any role-play; it is essential to choose themes that capture students' attention, spark their curiosity, and invite them to use their imagination and creativity. This research showed that the more original and unexpected the activity was—with unusual characters or out-of-the-ordinary situations—the more enthusiastic and voluntarily involved the students became. These creative dynamics not only motivated the participants but also encouraged them to speak more spontaneously and fluently.

In this sense, the teacher's creativity and sensitivity to students' emotional needs are key elements for the success of role-play as a teaching strategy. The teacher is not only a guide in the learning process but also an inspiration and a source of confidence for students. By combining empathy with innovative activities, a more enriching learning experience is made possible—one where students, regardless of whether they are shy or not, can explore the language with freedom, motivation, and purpose.

10. Limitations and considerations for further studies

One of the main limitations of this research is the specific profile of the participants. The study was conducted with university students enrolled in a degree program in foreign languages, who already had a good level of English as a requirement for admission. This condition may have influenced the way they approached the role-play activities, as they were likely more comfortable using the language in different contexts. Therefore, it would be necessary to investigate whether these types of activities would be equally effective for students with a lower level of English, such as beginners or school-aged learners. This would help better understand to what extent language proficiency influences participation and motivation during role-plays.

Another important limitation is related to the small size of the group involved in the study. The classroom consisted of only 16 students, which made time management, close teacher guidance, and the proper development of each role-play activity more feasible. However, in contexts such as public education in Colombia—where classrooms often have between 30 and 40 students—time management and logistics can pose significant challenges. Character preparation, performance, and individual feedback require time and attention that may not be viable in larger groups without adjustments to the methodology.

Finally, a significant methodological limitation in this study was the absence of a pretest and posttest that could measure the impact of role-play activities on the development of speaking skills in a quantitative way. Due to time constraints, it was not possible to apply these tools before and after the implementation of the activities, which limited the ability to make a more precise assessment of changes in student performance. Although the results obtained were compared with findings from similar studies, it would have been ideal to have collected first-hand data that could clearly show whether or not there were concrete improvements in students' oral production.

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